

I Know You Are But What Am I: A Brief Evaluation of the Aglisti Socio-Cultural Influence in a Post-Terran Society

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Abstract

In the late 2070s when the Terran Government passed the ALIEN Act, humanity implemented a diplomatic and political relationship with the Aglisti people. In the years since, Terran society and culture have changed significantly—directly because of the impact the Aglisti culture, technology, and economy has brought to Earth. There have been several papers in the literature examining these global-level changes, but few have examined the effects of mingling with an alien race on the individual, human level. Using a mixed-methods evaluation that combines interviews with Terran (i.e., human) individuals and qualitative analyses, we offer an evaluation of the existential effect on human individuals race pre- and post-ALIEN Act.

Keywords: Aglisti, post-Terran, human, socio-cultural, ALIEN Act

1. Introduction

Although there are many recently published peer-reviewed articles evaluating the economic and technological changes resulting from the AgListi –Earth Negotiation (ALIEN) Act (e.g., McLeod et al., 2077; O’Neill, 2081), one need only look outside for evidence of the social and cultural changes that the Aglisti have brought to Earth: their influence on food, clothing, music, and art can be seen on almost every body and almost every street corner (Anderson & O’Neill 2081; Cutler et al., 2082; Thomas, 2081). However, few studies have explored the individual-level effects following lived experience in a post-terrestrial society—essentially, none have asked the question, how have people reacted to living in a society changed by an alien culture? Thus, this qualitative study aims to understand the psychological fallout on an individual level of living in, and ultimately belonging to, a post-Terran society.

2. Methodology

To build the base for this evaluation, we first developed a survey with questions broken into three categories: religion/philosophy, identity and relationships, and existential dread. Questions were structured as a combination of open-ended text fields and Likert-scale response options (one being the lowest; five being the highest). We then posted recruitment ads to a series of online forums.

Recruitment criteria included being ages 18 to 99, human, planet-born, and able to consent.

We screened 21,527 potential participants for eligibility; 4,318 were ineligible (i.e., non-human, outside age range, station-born) and were excluded from the study. The remaining 17,209 participants were interviewed by a trained data collection staff member who recorded their responses verbatim. After completion, participants received a gift certificate in the currency of their choice (equivalent to P15 Terran Dollars) and a thank you card. Eligible participants who did not complete the survey received a follow-up prompt but deemed ineligible after two non-responses and their participant IDs were invalidated.

All survey questions were written in Terran Common linear-b (i.e., the authors’ native language) and then auto-translated into the participant’s preferred language through proprietary software.

2.1 Laser Guidance System

No laser guidance system was used in this study.

3. Results

Below, we present our findings and analysis of the survey results alongside representative participant quotes.

3.1 Religion/Philosophy

The first survey category comprised questions relating to participants' views on religion and philosophy and how these have changed before and after the introduction of the ALIEN Act. The purpose of this question set was to evaluate whether participants' religious or philosophical worldviews have changed in a post-Terran culture (i.e., the introduction of aliens into a Terro-centric worldview). Overall, 27% of respondents identified as a practicing member of any registered religion, whereas 72% self-selected as agnostic or atheist. If they were already a practicing member of an existing religious tradition, participants' religiosity was more likely to decrease (68%); few participants said they became more religious after 2070. Among the 72% of participants who had no strong religious affiliation pre-ALIEN Act, most were likely to feel that their religious worldview was no different in either a pre- or post-Terran society (20%).

When asked why they felt their religious worldview was different, selected participants responded in anger (quotes have been edited for minor grammar, clarity, and professionalism):

"Well...I mean isn't it obvious? What's the point in believing anything anymore. The Aglisti came in and turned everything upside down. None of that was in any so-called Good Book I've read" (P318).

"You've got to be [expletive] kidding me. I spent years praying to a God that created my world only to find out that the whole made in my image thing isn't universal. What a joke. What a waste. Those orange [expletive] came down from the heavens when it wasn't supposed to be them. It was supposed to be Him" (P11,891).¹

"I guess it's fair to say I'm less religious than I was before, but like, it's like going from a 1 to barely above a 0. Like, I wasn't really all that religious before, didn't really go to church ever or buy into prayer or anything. Mostly I went because my mom wanted me to go? It made her feel better. But she died a few years before, you know, everything. So I had stopped anyway. I do feel bad for people who really liked that stuff though, because it's gotta be hard. Knowing it isn't really real, after all that effort" (P1,999).

Of those who responded more positively, many claimed their worldviews had expanded or changed for the better: "You know, my synagogue never really lost much attendance. Sure, a few folks, whatever. At the end of the day though, it was never about what's out there but what we do here that matters" (P404).

"It's wild! I never thought about like God or Jesus or any of that before. Like not even a little, except to get high and laugh about it. Now, though, I actually quit smoking because reality came out banging. I don't need to mess with that stuff

anymore. I gave it all over to the highest higher power I could find" (P19,051).

"Everything belongs to the Kingdom of God, and that includes the Aglisti even if they don't know it. God bless" (P2,222).

In general, participant views seemed to divide along these two main themes. Participants who felt strongly about a religious or philosophical worldview rated themselves as highly believing (mean: 4.8 out of 5) whereas those who avoided belief in any god, deity, higher power, cosmic entity, or general spirituality rated themselves at an average of 0.4 (out of 5) on the Likert scale. A statistically insignificant number of participants rated themselves neutral or questioning.

3.2 Identity

Questions in this section concerned how respondents self-identify, with sub-questions on humanness, alienness, belonging, and relationships. The most relevant themes and quotations are provided below.

When asked whether they identified as Terran, most (88%) responded yes. However, when probed about whether this was a stronger identity than a sub-identify, such as that of a country or smaller Terran geographic sub-region, only 4% responded yes. Many participants struggled to see themselves as predominantly belonging to a global community:

"So, I get it. Like we're all one Earth, one culture, but it's a lot easier to relate to people right next door to me than someone across the planet. Even if that person next to me is Aglisti" (P55).

"I was born American and I'll die American. Nothin' gonna change that" (P6,121).

However, many participants said they welcomed the shift to a global community and found it easier to identify as human when given a concrete notion of an alien race, and uniting in their humanity was a common theme discussed by participants:

"For the first time, I feel connected to something bigger than myself. It's not about some little stupid infighting because I can see that we're actually a great big blob of sameness against what else is out there, and that's a beautiful thing, I think" (P2,180).

3.3 Relationships

When asked about relationships (e.g., platonic, sexual, romantic), participants almost unanimously said they would consider a sexual or romantic relationship with an Aglisti (97%). The remaining 3% cited reasons of otherness, asexuality, concerns about alien sexually transmitted diseases, and already being in a committed monogamous

¹ This participant was later removed from the study.

relationship. Of the 97% who said they would be open to exploring a sexual or romantic relationship with an Aglisti, the most common reasons cited were a thrill-seeking attitude, lack of stigma among Aglisti about such relationships, and bad luck among Terran peers.

“Uhm, is that even a question? Of course I’d [expletive] an alien, those [speciesist slur] are [expletive] hot.” (P15,781).

Interestingly, fewer participants were interested in forming platonic relationships (66%). Among the reasons given for the lack of interest in platonic Terran–Aglisti relationships was the language barrier, their predilection for uncooked foods that “should be cooked” (e.g., hotdogs, eggs) and distaste for ketchup,² and their cultural norm of not wearing Terran clothing, making casual conversation uncomfortable (see the previous discussion on romantic and sexual relationships).

3.4 Existential Dread

Finally, the last theme we explored was existential dread. Respondents followed the same five-point Likert scale for these questions but were also given the opportunity to provide free-form responses.

Participants in the 70–99 age range cited more existential dread than respondents ages 18–69. Interestingly, self-selected religious identity was not correlated with feelings of existential dread; age was a more significant factor.

Most (73%) participants rated their existential dread as a 4, with the average among all participants rating as a 3.7 out of 5. When asked to explain how they chose to rank their feelings of dread, one participant responded as follows:

“Well, it’s not at full blast. Sure, I’m panicking every moment of every day, but I’ve learned to live with it so instead of a 5 I went with a 4, if that makes sense?” (P388).

Perhaps most surprising is how few participants rated their dread at a 1 or a 2. Of the 17,209 total participants, less than 175 rated their dread as minimal, or 0.01%. The majority rated their feelings of existential dread as a 3 or higher. Although not within the scope of this study to investigate further, this seems to suggest an increase in feelings of dread among the general Terran population since before the ALIEN Act was passed and implemented (Ryker et al., 2068).

When asked to describe their dread, one participant responded as follows:

“It’s nuts. Nuts nuts nuts nuts nuts. Am I nuts? Maybe. But all of a sudden after decades of cover-ups the government just comes out and makes a treaty with some little green men? I mean, sure, yeah, I know they aren’t

actually green. Or men, whatever, if you want to get technical. But that’s the crazy thing, you know? Who isn’t full of dread at what the government is actually still keeping from us if they told us about this, you know?” (P17,209).

Similarly, one participant (P6,555) described feelings of anxiety:

“My anxiety is at, like, an all-time high. How am I supposed to feel chill when people are literally going to space for vacation now. And I can’t even like, go because that [expletive] is expensive, so how am I supposed to feel when everything is so expensive and I’m stuck here on Earth while everyone else is posting moon pics? Tell me how I’m supposed to feel being trapped in a way that no one else in history has ever been stuck” (P15,404).

Future studies should consider examining these feelings of dread among the general population.

4. Conclusion

Although, no other papers to date have attempted to examine the individualistic fallout of a post-Terran identity crisis, this study had a few limitations. Firstly, all of the participants and researchers are Terran. Therefore, it is possible the study is biased against Aglistan culture despite our best efforts to avoid introducing bias into the study. Second, the sample size of 17,209 participants was limited and should be expanded to provide a more accurate representative sample. Future studies could also survey Aglistan participants for comparative results.

Overall, the survey results show that Terrans have mixed feelings about life in a post-Alien Act society. It is difficult to accurately capture and distill the human experience into homogenous themes, as was attempted here. Although the feelings of dread, anxiety, hope, and longing surrounding our newfound post-Terran society share common themes, our study seems to show that each individual reacts differently and, often, unpredictably. Emotional responses range from radically angry, to radically optimistic. The true breadth needs a much more comprehensive study, and much more funding, to understand.

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² The authors note that these are outdated stereotypes; however, that is not within the scope of this study to explore. See Pryor et al. (2101).

6. Disclaimer

The authors received funding from the Terran Government for this research, but the views discussed here are not necessarily representative of any official government point of view.

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