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Chapter 14: Whose Cohesion? What Cohesion?

Liberative Theological Reflection on Young People and Faith-Based Organisations

14.1   Introduction

This book provides a window into understanding youth marginalisation and how FBOs engage with it in the two vastly different contexts of South Africa and the Nordic countries. The geographical differences are also reflected in our choice of the theologies through which we interrogate the research process and findings in this chapter; we reflect critically on the nature of the whole study process leading to this book as well as on the findings themselves, drawing on the traditions of liberation and diaconal theologies. These traditions were selected because they focus on the marginalised and oppressed in society and also because they represent theological debates in which the authors of this chapter participate. Liberation theologies in general and given diaconal theologies do theology in light of the experience of grassroots communities, and acknowledge the influence of wider societal structures on the lives of individuals and communities. As justified below, in this chapter we use the term "liberative theologies" (De la Torre: 2015) as an umbrella term that covers liberation theologies in general and those diaconal theologies that resonate with the liberationist aims and methods (Nordstokke: 2012).

In Chapter 2 the authors pointed out differences between the South African and the Nordic conditions of youth marginalisation. To relate as an FBO to marginalised youths within a developed Nordic welfare state is very different from responding to the same challenge in a context where welfare services and benefits are not as readily available, such as in South Africa. However, both in South Africa and in the Nordic countries theology has a very similar task of understanding, motivating and justifying FBOs' varying relationships with marginalised youth. In the case study chapters in this book, the focus was on the views and experiences of young people. In this chapter we would like to bring the voices of the youth, or the lack thereof, into critical conversation with predetermined academic discourses.

We attend to questions raised in the chapter on social cohesion (Chapter 4), with regard to the relationship between FBOs and marginalised youths: Do FBOs' interactions with the youth contribute to shaping, maintaining or strengthening mutual trust and youths' willingness to help and cooperate with other people? Do

they enhance tolerance, respect for diversity and a shared sense of belonging and identity?

From a liberative perspective, we specifically need to interrogate whether the cohesion imagined is co-determined by young people themselves, and so we ask: What cohesion? Whose cohesion? In addition, the liberative perspective that we have opted for considers the nature of the emancipatory elements in the research process itself, or lack thereof, in particular with reference to the social and political participation of the research participants, in this case marginalised youths.

Ideally, we would like to begin to imagine a theology that takes its cue from the experience and thinking of marginalised youths. From a liberative theological perspective, as this is defined below, such a theology would give the participation, agency and voices of young people a central place in co-constructing hopeful alternatives for themselves, for FBO engagement and for society at large. This would constitute a shift in power relations between the FBOs and the young people. This does not imply that all the young people the different research teams spoke to were religious or wanted to be actively involved with FBOs: rather a liberative theology would take the experiences of the youths both in and outside of FBOs seriously in reimagining the world.

14.2 Liberative Theological Lens on Social Cohesion and Conviviality

We employ a liberative theological lens in this chapter as the overarching framework within which we discuss both the research process and the findings. De la Torre (2015) leans strongly on the liberation theological tradition in defining what liberative theologies are, but also emphasises that liberative theology is a broader term than liberation theology, the former not being necessarily rooted in Christian faith, unlike the latter. De la Torre's reasoning behind the choice of the term liberative theologies resonates with other scholars' choice to speak of liberation theologies in the plural (Cooper: 2013; Phan: 2000) or emphasising the method of doing theology as a key to defining liberation theologies (Frostin: 1988; Phan: 2000; Vellem: 2012; West: 2009).

These semantic moves discussed above make space for the inclusion of a variety of theologies under the umbrella of liberative theology, as long as they demonstrate a preferential option for the marginalised. In this chapter we include both diaconal and liberation theologies in liberative theological perspectives. We understand diaconal theology as theological reflections of Christian practice and human encounters in the face of vulnerability. Recent approaches claim an eye-level relationship between receivers and providers of services (Albert: 2010; Dietrich: 2014; Nissen: 2012), envision churches as other, heterotopical, diaconal spaces (Wyller: 2016) or interpret diaconal research and diaconal theology as the development of

systematic knowledge that is inspired by liberation theology and action research and combines commitment, action and participation (Stålsett et al.: 2018). Simply put, liberative theologies include and are in line with liberation theologies, and this chapter opts for the term in order to further emphasise the same issue that the plural liberation theologies also point to, namely that not all liberative theologies are the same, even if they do share the same method.

Liberative theologies opt for "the poor", broadly understood, or the most vulnerable or marginalised in society (De la Torre: 2015; also see Cooper: 2013; Gutiérrez & Groody: 2014; Frostin: 1988). In our analysis we particularly emphasise two key liberationist aspects that are also shared by liberative theologies: interlocution and action. Interlocution refers to the choice of marginalised or oppressed groups as the dialogue partners (interlocutors) whose questions theology aims to answer (see e.g. Frostin: 1988; Vellem: 2012). This choice translates into an imperative to know the world from the perspective of the interlocutors (Gutiérrez: 2013a, 27–30; Gutiérrez: 2013b, 154–157). In other words, the lived experiences of marginalised people are acknowledged and placed at the centre as valid sources of knowledge and understanding. The rationale for this choice is the need to understand, and undo, unjust power hierarchies in society and communities (Cooper: 2013, 6). Importantly, it is not only the privileged but also the marginalised themselves who are called upon to choose the preferential option for the marginalised as a tool to reach towards an alternative world (Gutiérrez: 2013b, 156–157).

The second aspect that we emphasise in defining a liberative perspective – action – is closely related to the choice of the poor/marginalised/oppressed as interlocutors. Liberation theologians understand liberation theology as "both action and reflection that aims to liberate marginalised peoples from oppression, to act" (Cooper: 2013, 1). In the same way, liberative theologies encompass "(j)ustice-based praxis, engaged in transforming society" (De la Torre: 2015, xxii). To recap, the liberative perspective, in concrete terms, means to view and assess society through the lenses of the marginalised and to make space for their voices to be heard. It involves an analysis of the systemic forces that contribute to their marginalisation as well as a deliberate fostering of a critical consciousness in relation to marginalised people's agency in their own liberation. Moreover, it translates into discerning the appropriate forms of action to be taken in the direction of integral liberation, integral liberation referring to "liberation … as something comprehensive, an integral reality from which nothing is excluded" (Gutiérrez: 1988, xxxviii; also see Castillo: 2017).

A liberative approach also requires one to engage critically with social cohesion as a concept, at the same time uncovering whose agenda and terms determine the vision or definition of social cohesion (see Desai: 2015; Fitzpatrick & Jones: 2005). The approach entails exploring the extent to which social cohesion is just a matter of concealing practices and policies that enforce social conformity to the dominant constructs or visions of society, to the detriment of those who are marginal. If we

adopt the language of social cohesion, it is necessary to ask whether this cohesion is sought through social control, meaning coercion and assimilation, or whether it is sought through social justice, which requires deeper forms of integration, working for equality and equity, and redressing the historical legacies that marginalised certain groups to start with (De Beer: 2014; Fitzpatrick & Jones: 2005). Moreover, this latter approach to social cohesion would allow space within which those who are marginalised could critically engage with the very concept and goals of social cohesion, assessing to what extent it serves to advance their own liberation and inclusion, or to what extent it serves to further marginalise them. This invites an inquiry into whether social cohesion in any given context is a goal contributing to the integral liberation of those who feel excluded.

Towards the end of the chapter we tap into the discussion on convivility to explore what this notion can add to our understanding of social cohesion, in particular in the context of religious diversity. Conviviality was first introduced as a concept into theological discussion in the 1980s by Theo Sundermeier, whose main concern was that people must find new ways of co-existing (Sundermeier: 1986). He formulated a new model called the "hermeneutics of difference". Indeed, conviviality was first launched as a term to describe what was seen as an ideal situation of co-existence between Jews, Christians and Muslims in medieval Spain (Novikoff: 2005). Conviviality encompasses sentiments associated with the art of coexisting in diversity and focuses on positive encounters with diversity, which is discussed in the Lutheran World Federation document "Seeking Conviviality" (Addy: 2013). This document has provided an important opening for a liberative approach in Europe and has been influential both in grassroots community work and academic discussion (Haugen: 2015; Lapina: 2016; Siirto: 2015; Vähäkangas & Leis Peters: 2018). The concept of conviviality has also raised interest in South Africa, where the discussion focuses on spatial differences (Lategan: 2015; Nyamnjoh: 2015).

Hans Morten Haugen, in the context of present-day international diaconia discourse, has recently reformulated the concept of conviviality to encompass the promotion of coexistence in the midst of unequal power relations in a way that resonates with liberationist sentiments. In his analysis of the "Seeking Conviviality" document Haugen states that conviviality is more critical of social power structures than theories of social capital or social cohesion are. He argues that social capital and social cohesion both share rather positive premises on how nations can work towards ending inequalities and combatting poverty (Haugen: 2015). Haugen points out that the stronger the ties that bind local communities, the greater the potential for social, racial or religious conflict between them. He bases his argument on Kearns and Forrest, similarly as was done in Chapter 4, and stresses that social cohesion at the neighbourhood level is not necessarily a good thing, because very close communities may be intolerant of religious diversity (Haugen: 2015; cf. Kearns

& Forrest: 2000). The neighbourhoods studied in this book varied in terms of the levels of social cohesion and closeness in community.

As we reflect in this chapter on how liberative theologies could provide an alternative framework for both researching and understanding/living social cohesion and apply a liberative lens to the research process and findings, we acknowledge that the case study chapters were not formulated in the light of liberative theological work. Hence, the liberative perspective here rather holds a mirror up to the completed study and, in doing so, also offers a self-critical perspective on the broader research project. Against this background, the aim of this chapter is to review the research process and findings through a liberative theological lens. We also reflect self-critically on the potential of the design and methodology of a research project such as this one to be more deliberately emancipatory were it to consider liberative theological assumptions more intentionally upfront.

14.3   Reflection on the Research Process

In this section we consider the actual research process self-reflexively from a liberative perspective. This is important, as the actual research methodologies used with marginal young people, and vulnerable populations at large, need to be constantly scrutinised to determine the extent to which they are facilitating emancipation or freedom, but also the extent to which the methodologies themselves could be more emancipatory in their design (cf. Swartz & Nyamnjoh: 2018).

14.3.1   Interlocution, Power and Representation

The aim of the case study chapters in this book is, amongst other things, to gauge the impact of FBOs on social cohesion in their respective neighbourhoods as perceived through the lens of marginalised young people, or NEET youth. One of the aims of qualitative research is to know the world through the eyes of the research participants (Bryman: 2012), a criterion which the researchers consciously strove to meet in the case study chapters. Based on thematic analysis by the researchers, selected verbatim sections from the interviews with research participants were presented and highlighted in the case study chapters. However, from a liberative theological perspective, we also need to interrogate how interlocution, power and representation featured in the research process.

In liberative methodology the interlocutor and, in particular, the agency of the interlocutor or local communities in their own liberation are given equal centrality. With regard to the role of the researcher, the liberative idea of action not only implies conversing with the interlocutors and writing about their struggles, but it usually also requires the researcher to be involved in concrete action in one way or

another as a participant in the struggle for a more just future with the particular interlocutory community. In relation to research practice, this would also entail the possibility that the interlocutor or local community can demand changes to the way in which the research is being done (cf. Browning: 2013; Swartz & Nyamnjoh: 2018).

It is in this regard also part of our self-critique to interrogate how far marginalised young people have served as interlocutors in our research. If we assume that an interlocutor should be seen as a co-constructor of knowledge, they would also in many instances, on the basis of mutual trust, have been more than research participants (subjects) and rather have acted as co-researchers in an active sense of the word. Interlocution is then understood as more than a "correct" posture on the side of the researcher, but requires a fundamentally different research methodology. The liberative perspective raises the question about whether the interlocutor should not be a constant participant in the (de)construction of liberating knowledge at different stages of the research process and the researcher a participant in the struggle in ways that go beyond listening, interpreting and writing. In the light of the useful continuum of research approaches as proposed by Swartz and Nyamnjoh (2018), it appears that the research presented in this book is probably based on interactions with marginalised youths, in some cases even allowing them to become research participants. But it is most likely, however, that the research did not incorporate the marginalised youths as emancipated interlocutors. While there may be different ways of answering the question raised above about the joint (de)construction of knowledge, emancipated interlocution would be in line with the liberative outlook.

As is obvious by now, in the case studies reported on in this book, as often in academic research, the researchers held power over what was represented and how this was done. Although the actual words of the young people were used, it was the researchers who selected which portions of the interviewees' words were used and how their words were analysed. This underscores the lack of emancipated interlocution, as described in the previous paragraph, and therefore a reinforcement of societal power dynamics in the context of our research rather than a contribution towards undoing hierarchical power structures.

This is not to say that the youths who participated in the research were completely powerless. They exercised power over whether they would agree to participate and what they wanted to tell us and how. In some cases – based on the declared limitations by our research team members about what this research project could realistically deliver – some research participants opted out of the process. In Riverlea, for instance, a young interviewee asked direct and valid questions about what would be done with the research and, in particular, how it might contribute directly to change something in her own life context, therefore calling for accountability from the researchers in that case. This is a good example of a research participant practising agency. In doing so, she no longer assumed the position of a participant,

but now of a "partially emancipated interlocutor", to use the terminology of Swartz and Nyamnjoh (2018). Yet even though this young person practised agency in her insistence that the research make a difference in the researched community itself, the ultimate power to ensure the research becomes relevant to the community – or other communities beyond the immediate context of the research – remained largely in the researchers' hands by virtue of how the research process was designed. In other words, in a way not uncommon in academic research, the overall design of the project did not require the involvement of interlocutors in the data-analysis phase or further stages of the research process.

Questions such as the one on accountability above should have prompted us to explore whether our understanding of ethical research needed to be deepened. On the one hand, researchers were mindful not to offer what we could not deliver, not to create false expectations, and to allow research participants the freedom to choose whether they wanted to engage in the process, on the agreed upon terms, or not. As such, the research presented in this book sought to ensure that it was conducted ethically. On the other hand, the question is whether such projects, in their very design, should not deal more deliberately with issues of interlocution, power and representation. The lack of deliberate, upfront reflection on these issues could promote a minimalist understanding of what constitutes ethical research, instead of considering how research contributes to freedom, in a much deeper sense (cf. Swartz & Nyamnjoh: 2018).

The Oslo case study (Chapter 7) raises an additional and important question related to interlocution and representation. It forms an exception among the chapters, concerning the pivotal focus on the voices of NEET youth. In that chapter the emphasis was placed on youths on the streets, but the young people who were described as part of this category were not research participants in either the interviews or the focus groups. Instead, young people who were "insiders" in FBOs participated in the research and described young people who are "on the street" – for example, refugees or youths involved in gangs – on the insiders' own terms. The voices of the youths on the streets remained unheard because of the difficulty of the team getting access to these young people.

Overall, the question we need to ask, from a liberative perspective should perhaps be whether the research process contributed to self-critical reflection, new insights and possibly even new practices, on the part of FBOs, (marginalised) young people and/or other audiences, serving as a catalyst for new forms of consciousness, agency and engagement. If there is little evidence of that, the question arises as to whether the greatest beneficiaries of the research were in fact, as often appears to be the case, the researchers themselves and not young people on the margins, or even the participating FBOs, either in the local communities where these FBOs were based or elsewhere.

14.3.2   Young People's Views and a Liberative Approach: Aligned or Not?

Liberative theologies imagine the undoing of the status quo as it is, and a radically different society, structured in a way that would be inclusive of everyone, displaying high levels of participation, equality and justice. In this regard, we are asking whether the views of young people as they were expressed in the case study chapters were aligned to such a radical, alternative vision of society, or not.

From the results it appears that for many of the young people the problem was not firstly with the way society functioned, nor with how society should change, but the problems they expressed were more in terms of their own location – or exclusion – from society. In Franschhoek, Pretoria and Riverlea research participants seemed to have lamented the fact that they could not participate better in society. Thus the emphasis was less on transforming society than on the challenges related to their own ability, as youths from underprivileged contexts, to participate. South African participants, for instance, spoke about the ways in which drugs or having a child at a young age held one back from fulfilling expectations related, for instance, to employment. On the other side of the globe, the Lammi youths' perception was that the church was for those who had fallen through the cracks, to support them to participate in society.

Reviewing the case study chapters in this book suggests that the aim for many research participants seems to have been integrating into mainstream society, that is, the very system that a liberative theological perspective might suggest as the reason for their exclusion or lack of participation to start with. The hopes of young people expressed in the case study chapters revolved around joining society in a more privileged position than their current social and economic location has allowed. In many cases, they deemed this possible through education or employment. In other words, it seems as if young people – represented in the case study chapters – aspired to be included into a society the nature of which was determined by the powerful of society, and in which they as young people had little say themselves.

The discussion on alternative spaces (FBOs as providing an alternative to harmful activities) or future alternative stories (FBOs being part of an alternative future trajectory) in the different case study chapters provides a slightly different vision, contrasting with the general trend observed above. Here, alternative spaces and activities were emphasised by the young people as a possible positive contribution by FBOs to address youth marginalisation, and to help prevent involvement in negative youth cultures or destructive behaviours. Moreover, one could argue that such spaces provide a lot of desirable bonding capital, without which young people may come to experience marginality more directly. However, the possible exclusionary nature of such alternative spaces, creating the possibility of "us" and "them" scenarios, was also cautioned against in the Riverlea case study. A form of social cohesion created inside the FBO space, although creating a safe space of

belonging, at the same time runs the risk of creating social exclusion and social differentiation. While "insiders" participate in something cohesive, "others" may choose to, or feel like they have to, find spaces to belong elsewhere. In the light of the threat of reinforcing exclusionary boundaries, FBOs – generally, but also in the case studies represented here – need to consider, quite deliberately, how to also forge bridges between "insiders" and "others". When thinking of this, it is furthermore significant to acknowledge that young people on both sides make choices, and, in other words, "others" may not want to participate in the FBO space.

Even though many of the young people who participated in the research might not have embodied radical views of an alternative society, or of social justice, their views – because of their social location and marginalisation – provide important knowledge on which to base a liberative theological analysis (cf. Hankela: 2015, 206–207). Regardless of whether their views are aligned with liberative theological visions, they embody an important understanding of what it means to live on the underside of privilege. Additionally, if liberation theology – and by extension liberative theologies – is true to the logic of its own methodology, deep insertion in such social locations should be the starting point of a liberationist praxis, instead of theoretical or dogmatic constructs that want to pass as liberationist. On the one hand, the general views of young people, as we read them from the case studies, challenge the orthodoxies of liberation and liberative theologies, and serve as a sobering reminder that liberationist and liberative methodologies must always start with deep insertion, in which we carefully listen to those experiencing marginalisation.

At the same time, however, should the logic of liberative theological methodologies be taken seriously, one should perhaps admit that the research design of the YOMA project itself precluded a more emancipatory research approach, one that would have included: deliberate co-production of knowledge, shifts in power relations, and the co-construction of a theology of youth marginalisation, articulated together between researchers and young people. That was not the purpose of the project, the findings of which are now represented in this book. Nevertheless, a liberative lens would propose a consideration of deepening journeys with youths from underprivileged neighbourhoods in which their agency could transform our knowledge, and our collaborative journeys deepen their agency, in an ever-deepening, ever-widening cycle of becoming free, together.

14.4   Liberative Theological Perspectives on the Roles of FBOs and the Youth in Imagining Social Cohesion

We now move from methodological and research ethical questions to an analytical discussion of the findings that the case chapters produced on the notion of social cohesion. In line with our theoretical lens, the following two questions inform this

analysis: Whose term is social cohesion, and on whose terms is the meaning of social cohesion defined? Does the claimed goal of social cohesion contribute to the integral liberation of marginalised people?

Asking these questions vis-à-vis the case chapters in this book, one senses that perhaps young people from marginal groups lacked agency in creating alternative futures. Or, alternatively, the ways in which interviews were conducted, including the choice of questions, may not have adequately allowed for evidence of young people's own agency to surface. Placing the emphasis on investigating how FBOs contribute to mediating social cohesion may have meant that not sufficient attention was given to the question of the agency of young people themselves. For instance, there is no evidence in any of the case study chapters of youth-led FBOs or youth movements from below seeking to overcome marginalisation, or of deep solidarity between FBOs and marginal youths – although it should be noted that some young people were clearly active members in their FBOs and/or involved in youth groups within their FBOs (see the chapters on Oslo, Lammi, Riverlea and Pretoria Central). While one acknowledges that this might be a consequence of the researchers' methodological choices and representation of the data, the case study chapters do indicate that marginal young people and FBOs frequently found themselves not to be on the same side, or even on the same page.

The case study chapters suggest that the lived experiences of young people, who found themselves in marginal situations in their cities or towns, did not contribute much to shaping FBOs' agendas. This may be related to the ways in which some FBOs are structured not actually to invite their agendas to be shaped by those who do not belong. For example, the interaction between FBO youths and street youths discussed in the Oslo case study suggests that this might have been the case. Similarly, in Lammi many of those young people who actively participated in the activities of the local church were secondary school students, while those more critical of the church – from a distance – all belonged to the NEET category. Despite the popularity of confirmation camps in Lammi, like in much of Finland, the authors of this case study conclude that in general the symbolic walls of the local majority church were "too high" for most youths. In these images, marginalised young people seem to be little more than coincidental parts of the contextual décor of FBOs. That said, there were perhaps exceptions as well: the experiences of young people who were active members in their FBOs, such as those young people in Riverlea who had specific responsibilities in their churches, challenge us as researchers to dig deeper as we consider the picture of young people as contextual décor.

The seeming lack of agency or ownership by marginalised youths in relation to FBOs could also be related to the young people's broader context or personal relationship with religion. Some young interlocutors in Emakhazeni addressed a lack of initiative among the youths in general. In Lammi young people indicated an appreciation for the diaconal role, social practices or pastoral counselling that

the church offered. However, the same young people did not see these services as beneficial to themselves, but rather as potentially helpful to others. One young person in Lammi described the church as the last place where people would seek support or assistance if they did not find it elsewhere. It seems as if when these young people spoke of FBOs, they spoke as "outsiders" or "onlookers" and hardly as agents shaping the agendas, expressions or futures of FBOs. In a similar way, although interaction with young people in Franschhoek suggested a strong FBO presence, the conclusion of the researchers was that there was only a "superficial connection" between the interviewed young people and FBOs.

If viewed from the perspective of a liberative epistemology, the limitations discussed immediately above could perhaps, speculatively and partially, be ascribed to FBOs' failure to place marginal youths at the centre – similar to the failure of our research to position the youths as emancipated interlocutors, discussed earlier in this chapter. We still practised a research methodology that was largely focusing on extracting data from the experiences and insights of young people, without young people helping to make sense of, discerning, assessing and organising the data, and then asserting possible alternative futures based on the emerging understanding of the situation. Similarly, the young people's perceptions of many of the FBOs featuring in this research did not evince the kind of liberative praxis that would insist on young people's ownership of the shaping of future agendas, and on understanding the interlocution of marginalised youths as a key for developing liberating local ministry practices.

This leads us to the normative questions of what social cohesion in our societies could look like from a liberative perspective and, in particular, what the role of FBOs could be in fostering such social cohesion in the case study settings. Mikko, one of the participants in Lammi, expressed quite an aggressive stance towards the church in different respects, one example being his view on the church tax. This young man said: "There is no need to pay the church tax because I don't give a shit about the church. It has no meaning to me." His criticism raises critical questions about (i) whether, and how, young people's understandings of churches (or FBOs more broadly) are shaped by the dominant discourses in society; (ii) how far churches perpetuate dominant discourses or provide alternative imageries of "church"; and (iii) how churches understand themselves and the role they are to play in a secular(ising) society. A liberative theological posture would listen carefully to this young man's criticism and others like him, allowing their views to critique the irrelevance of current ecclesial structures in secular(ising) societies – such as seems to be the case in Mikko's view.

From a liberative theological perspective, the discussion on FBOs and marginal youths in this chapter, and in the case study chapters, also shows how the two highlighted aspects of liberative theologies, interlocution and action, raise different questions in different contexts. While Mikko's views have been reflected upon as one

perspective on the Nordic realities, a liberative theological stance in South Africa would highlight the critique on the possible complicity of the church in maintaining a status quo that is not on the side of marginal people in general or marginal youths in particular. The importance of targeting structural issues in society in order to strengthen social cohesion among marginalised youths was explicitly articulated in the South African case studies. The authors of the Emakhazeni case study highlight that FBOs did not pay enough attention to the broader societal issues; on the other hand, the municipal Integrated Development Plan did not include FBOs as role players in youth development either. In the Pretoria Central case study chapter, a young man spoke about the church as "somewhere you should go to uplift your faith, that's all." He understood this to be the church's main function and not providing jobs, even though he lamented that they had no jobs. In Riverlea the FBOs were seen to provide alternative spaces, some sort of safe havens, in which youths could stay out of trouble, but as the authors of the chapter indicate, this relates more strongly to the social relations aspect of social cohesion than social justice. Two young people from Riverlea also explicitly urged FBOs to play more concrete roles in relation to accessing educational opportunities.

Whether state or church theologies (see Kairos Theologians: 1986) are adequately prepared to engage not only in structural analyses, but also in developing alternative imaginaries of how youth marginalisation can be overcome and what roles FBOs could play, remains an open question. Without a prior "option for the poor" – here expressed as standing with marginal young people wherever they find themselves – structural change that could break cycles of marginalisation will probably remain elusive. Then the social and pastoral work of FBOs, which interviewees in different case study chapters also acknowledged and appreciated, would largely maintain the status quo and provide temporary assistance or relief. In this regard, Natasha from Riverlea was critical of FBOs "spoon-feeding" people instead of working towards longer-term empowerment, and young people in Emakhazeni, while they did express appreciation of the intangible assets provided by FBOs such as hope and respect, portrayed FBOs as irrelevant to meeting their tangible needs. Spoon-feeding cannot integrate young people in ways that are comprehensively liberating – at best it can invite the young person to participate in a society that is defined by others.

Following from these sentiments, listening to the young people in the case study communities allows one to identify the various issues that are to feature in a the-ology of liberation for marginalised youths. One of these issues is socio-spatial justice. In the Riverlea chapter the researchers focused on social cohesion inter-nal to that neighbourhood, but in a striking way also described the disconnect between Riverlea and the resource base of Johannesburg at large. Structurally and spatially, the young people from Riverlea were still looking in from the margins. Likewise, marginalised young people in Pretoria Central were eking out a living in

the proximity of a concentration of private and public resources and government headquarters, while they themselves could not access any of them. This highlights the reality of socio-spatial structural exclusion that, we argue, prevents deep forms of social cohesion.

However, a danger of liberative theological discourse is that it too can get trapped in intellectualising and stereotyping issues of poverty and marginalisation without actualising alternative imaginaries concretely. A liberative approach should not just concentrate on doing critical socio-spatial analyses of society or prophetically naming the structural exclusions or injustices that prevent deep forms of social cohesion. Rather, a liberative approach would also concern itself with mediating concrete forms of access to services and opportunities that could break cycles of poverty and marginalisation more fundamentally. Without that, one can hardly speak of liberation. In Pretoria Central specific young people conveyed their positive experiences of FBOs. But a conclusion the researchers came to, after assessing information from both young people and FBO leaders, was that there was a lack of a central contact point focusing on youth. Such a central contact point could have served to provide bridging capital between where the young people find themselves and the available resources and opportunities of the city. If research such as this could help mediate bridging capital in concrete ways, through the way that research findings are shared and built upon, it would already be more emancipatory. In other words, a liberative research practice – in FBOs or academia – should not become paralysed by analysis but thrust into actions that can embody alternatives to the status quo. In academia the kind of research approach and methodology that can facilitate such action and solidarity does exist, even if it did not inform the way that the research project on which this book is based was conceptualised or operationalised.

14.5   Examining Cohesion through the Lens of Conviviality

Religious diversity is a reality in the lives of youths in various contexts in South Africa and the Nordic countries. In the Nordic context the phenomenon of religious diversity is more recent than in South Africa, which led the Finnish and Norwegian teams to focus more on it. In the following paragraphs we evaluate young people's experiences of social cohesion using Haugen's distinction. Haugen identifies three key aspects of conviviality: respect, relationality and reciprocity. Haugen writes: "the three 'bases' for conviviality have a certain practical potential for applicability: … the relational nature of human beings; respectful views of others; and reciprocal relationships with others" (2015, 161). All three of these aspects enable the whole community to be more accommodating towards diversity. Conviviality thus emphasises the importance of a community characterised by dynamism. Moreover,

it emphasises that it is not necessary to group people into insiders and "others", but rather to continue to live together in spite of differences. Thus, the goal is not that people should become similar, but that they would live together and learn from their differences. In this way, it differs from social cohesion as a goal, which is oriented around the view that people should become somewhat similar in order to live cohesively together.

Youths in both the South African and Nordic case study communities seem to have had a basic respect for youths from different faith traditions. When inspecting the results more thoroughly, though, some intolerance of otherness becomes evident. Intolerance was often not explicitly spoken about, but when youths in Lammi were gossiping about others, for instance, it often reflected disrespect for a different faith. These feelings of disrespect related to diversity were not necessarily a question of, for example, Christian youths' views of Muslim youths, but also involved relations between different Christian denominations, as was seen in Riverlea in Nico's comment about Christians fighting Christians, or in Franschhoek where Christian churches had difficulties cooperating with each other. Respect thus requires more than mere tolerance.

The issue of respect also came up in Emakhazeni, where the young people expected the church to teach people to respect one another. The focus of this discussion was basic respect for differences, without focusing on respecting those of a different faith. The Oslo case study team in turn included an important reflection on social cohesion in Chapter 7 (7.9) when they wrote: "Only one of the FBOs reached out to street youths to help them and integrate them into to the organisation. This FBO acted to bridge the social divide between 'us' and 'them', even though the activities did not aim to reach beyond the borders of the religious community." Shaping religious identities was thus seen as a precondition for developing self-respect and respect for diversity, as well as for social trust. This is very important when we discuss the notion or idea of conviviality, the art of living together in spite of differences.

Our findings indicate that many of the young people did not know their own faith traditions very well, which made encounters with youths from other faiths more challenging. This was demonstrated, for example, in the difficulties of encounters between Lammi-born youths and asylum-seeker youths in Finland.

Reciprocity as a term has already partly been included in the discussion on relations. If something is relational, it should be reciprocal as well. Still, relationships can also be very oppressive and not reciprocal. Actually, reciprocity was harder to find, for example, in the Oslo city district studied (Chapter 7). Even though they knew each other and talked positively about each other, Muslim and Christian young people did not seem to spend much time with each other. It therefore seems that the youth in Oslo did not actually practice conviviality, at least not in its full range, as Haugen describes it. Rather, they lived next to one another without proper

encounters, were not involved in interreligious dialogue, and did not get to know the religious practices of other youths.

Reciprocity often manifested within the parameters of a faith community, as was explained by the youths in Riverlea who, while they spoke of family as the main social support network, also portrayed FBOs as an important additional support structure. This was seen in, for example, the narratives of the four young women who emphasised the nature of their church as a support network for people that they could go to when they needed help, thereby reflecting a strong sense of reciprocity and trust between members of the church. The reciprocal relationships and feelings of belonging to a faith community were seen by these women as important channels of support for young people. The church as a space was furthermore seen by them as assisting youths to survive in a challenging environment as eligible members of a broader society. However, the wider results of our study reveal that very few of the youths had reciprocal experiences with youths from other faiths. This shows that the third "R" of Haugen's model, reciprocity, seems to be the element that was really lacking from the experiences of youth. This finding indicates that social cohesion was more easily found in small communities where like-minded members of those communities could experience feelings of belonging.

The term conviviality was used in situations of unproblematic encounters of diversity (Addy: 2013; Novikoff: 2005). The findings discussed above from the lives of young people reveal that they often experienced religious diversity negatively, that is, not as respect, relationality and reciprocity, but rather as disrespect, isolation and lack of reciprocity. That said, there were some traces of hope as well, but many of those expressions of hope focused on economic prospects for a better life. Those positive experiences of respect, relationality and reciprocity were usually examples of situations where a young person got to know and became friends with someone from a different faith, as was the situation of some of the Lammi-born young people with regard to the migrants in the community. In a situation where people met only once, as in the case of the meeting that was organised by the Lammi Lutheran parish for asylum seekers (Chapter 11), real conviviality was not possible. Meeting only once did not help the local and asylum-seeker youths to get to know each other well enough to build lasting relationships.

One challenge of conviviality pertained to competition between churches; this was recounted, for example, in Franschhoek. The authors of Chapter 9 (9.4.4) write: "The majority of young people interviewed were critical of the lack of cohesion and cooperation between FBOs, especially amongst churches … They felt that the churches were in competition with one another and rarely worked together." This competition between churches meant that they did not work together for the benefit of young people in the community. These experiences show that the goals of conviviality should extend to learning to live in interdenominational as well as interfaith situations.

Yet the reality of interfaith dynamics was more actively discussed in the Nordic context than in South Africa. The recent multicultural and multi-faith presence of young people in Norway and Finland seemed to promote lively discussion on interfaith issues. However, the presence of youths from diverse religious backgrounds was also a reality in the South African context, especially so in the very diverse community of Pretoria Central, but it was not discussed as much as in the Nordic context.

The discussion above has focused on youths living in situations of religious diversity. The results of this research indicate that these youths' living environments were also spatially divided or segregated, as was found in the results of nearly all case study locations. As these divisions were addressed in Chapter 13, we will not delve further into this aspect here. That said, conviviality, learning to live together, only becomes possible when spatial divisions are at least minimised. Some authors speak of conviviality across differences (e.g. Nyamnjoh: 2015), which would mean that racial and religious divisions might not be such crucial hindrances while trying to learn to live together. The various contexts studied in this book indicate that, in fact, young people lived amid several divisions that made the creation of social cohesion very challenging. Therefore, the early idea of conviviality as the hermeneutics of difference might be more applicable than trying to create cohesion across differences (Sundermeier: 1986). In practice, this would mean, for example, organising possible meeting places where youths from diverse backgrounds could take part in activities together and while doing so, learn to relate to each other with respect and reciprocity.

14.6   Concluding Remarks on Multiple Margins

This chapter has reflected theologically on youth at the margins. We looked critically at the methods and theories adopted in the research for this book. In retrospect, based on our learning experiences from the whole research process and in considering possible future collaborative research with vulnerable young people as the central focus, we would like to conclude our reflection by imagining how such research could be shaped in the future. But before doing this, two further remarks are important.

The first has to do with defining social cohesion and marginalisation. Although statistics might show high numbers of NEET young people in South Africa, among migrants in Oslo or among rural youths in Lammi, what we heard when listening to young people themselves often differed. Many young people "labelled" by the research as "marginal" did not necessarily see themselves as such. They might have experienced various hardships and challenges in life, but they did not necessarily feel like outsiders. It is important therefore to interrogate notions such as marginal-

isation, social cohesion and exclusion, and ask critical questions about whose terms they are defined in.

The second remark has to do with FBOs seeking to work with young people, their roles and relationships with young people, and, in a sense, their own marginalisation. Both the Lammi and the Oslo case study chapters showed that the majority of young people did not think that FBOs had anything to offer them. Instead, they would rather recommend that "other people" with needs or problems go to the FBOs for help and support. In this sense one could conclude that not only some young people, but also the FBOs seemed marginal from the perspective of the majority of young people. This question of marginalised organisations could perhaps be explored more in future research.

Now let us return to considering what similar research could look like in future, should a more emancipatory or liberative research agenda or methodology be adopted. For research to be truly emancipatory or liberative, one should perhaps acknowledge that such a research agenda would already look and feel different in the initial design stage. Without a deliberate agenda – or objective(s) – for the research to contribute to the agency and holistic liberation of the young people being researched, any signs of this would probably be mostly coincidental. In contrast, a deliberately emancipatory research design would be considerably more purposeful about the participation of co-researchers (youths or faith-based organisations) in every phase of the research. Instead of merely acting as research participants, young people would become co-researchers – interlocutors, indeed. The possibility of becoming co-researchers also emphasises the need for the co-production of knowledge and pays attention to the ways in which new knowledge or insights would be disseminated or shared in communities to strengthen an agenda in the interests of vulnerable young people.

Lastly, such a design would highlight the envisaged actions, processes or policies that could be informed by the research. In doing collaborative research with such a deliberate agenda and clear objectives from the outset, the likelihood of deepening mutual solidarity between the researchers, vulnerable young people and faith-based practitioners, and of research findings informing on-going actions – projects, processes, strategies or policies – seems to us to be much higher. With our limited involvement in the diverse case studies presented in this book, these goals do not seem to have been reached.

However, in as far as the research project reflected in this book reached the goals it set for itself at the inception, it has produced significant findings and raised important questions. The challenge now is how these findings and questions get shared with the host communities and how they can be built upon in the future.