Theography and postsecular politics in the geographies of postchristendom communities

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Signature...

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ABSTRACT

Studying the overlaps between religion and politics in human geography is no longer a niche pursuit. Now, a plethora of literature in the discipline covers various facets of the topic, analysing the role of religion in contexts ranging from welfare contracts to geopolitical imaginations. Furthermore, investigating the religion/politics interface has been enhanced in recent years by increasing theoretical innovation in religious geography, incorporating poststructural epistemologies into the subdiscipline. This shift has directed geographers to the fluid construction of practices and places through the everyday lives of religious subjects and communities.

Despite these developments, I argue that studies at the religion/politics interface still lack an epistemology that can adequately comprehend emerging empirical work in geography and associated disciplines that highlights the blurring of religious praxis into activism. Geographers have rarely represented the mechanisms that produce the heterogeneity of religious involvement in politics, putting the new poststructural epistemologies in the subdiscipline to work by categorising religious subjects and communities as homogeneously progressive or regressive, or focussing instead on the affective atmospheres and internal dynamics of faith communities. In this thesis I argue that in order to understand religious involvement in activism, geographers of religion need to begin to blend poststructural epistemologies that attend to the everyday fluidity of religion with epistemological work on networks in activist geographies. This is necessary work because these two realms are beginning to intermingle on the ground, consequently highlighting the production of religious subjectivities between religious and activist practices.

In response to this gap between theory and empirics, I turn my attention to faith communities that embody elements of a postchristendom ethos, flattening religious hierarchies, welcoming difference, and engaging beyond themselves through social justice activism. By addressing this context I can underscore the knowledges that geographies of the religion/politics interface have missed so far, examining the multiple factors at play in the formation of faith community *raison d'êtres,* the accommodation of difference in faith communities, and how religious subjects negotiate their praxis between religious and activist spaces. By drawing attention to these issues and developing an epistemology to deal with them, this thesis develops more nuanced ways of producing knowledge about religious subjectivities and communities as they relate to activism.

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PREFACE: MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES

Whilst I was at university as an undergraduate two formative processes in my life coincided; I became a Christian and I was trained as a human geographer. Whilst learning about Christianity, I was being taught that God was love and that in being a committed Christian I should also be working towards becoming a more loving person. Simultaneously, lecturers in the geography department were highlighting the ways in which people and the planet are being treated with contempt. People are still discriminated against because of their race, gender, ability, and sexuality, those who are the most vulnerable are treated like pawns by governments and corporations, and resource-intensive lifestyles are promoted for profit despite the ecological damage that this causes.

If God is love and the world is sorely in need of loving, I reasoned that the Church - which I was now a part of - would be an active agent in resolving the injustices that I was being alerted to in my geographical education. This reasoning proved not to be airtight. As a member of an (Evangelical Presbyterian) Church of Scotland in Glasgow, I encountered little discussion that framed social justice as a matter of theology and this was mirrored by an equal lack of activism. I was baffled and frustrated by this, and these feelings were intensified when I began reading-up on the reams of theology that directly address social justice (Beckford, 1988; Gutiérrez, 1988; Talvacchia et al., 2014; Williams, 2013). Moreover, I discovered much of this theology was developed by people who were at home within both the Church and social movements, a position I was detecting scant evidence of in my own faith community (Day, 1997; Roberts, 2005; West, 1993).

At university, I was learning that activism was a potential antidote to the injustices that my lecturers were simultaneously flagging up. However, I was also alerted to the fact that activism was a contested term. As Hoofd (2012) points out, activism is not necessarily associated with liberation and social justice; conservatives and reactionaries can also be activists. White (2016) argues that an activist is simply someone who focuses on external acts; that believes action rather than contemplation leads to change. However, as Maxey (1999) and Routledge (2009) highlight, activism in geography is associated with

resisting injustices and empowering the marginalised. This is the meaning that I want to associate with activism as I discuss it throughout the rest of the thesis. It is also useful to keep in mind that this notion of activism - particularly the aspect of resistance - can often be associated almost exclusively with very public direct action tactics such as road-blocks, marches, occupations, and rioting (Chatterton, 2006). Maxey (1999) argues that this notion of activism constructs the ideal activist as able-bodied, male, and economically secure enough to take the time to go to actions and risk prison sentences. This excludes the notion of activism that I would like to use in this thesis, which emphasises that activism pervades the whole of life. As we construct the social world through our day-to-day actions, reflecting critically on how we live our lives - from the most mundane choices ("What will I eat?"), to the most extraordinary ("Will I impede the progress of this bulldozer?") - is itself a form of activism. Some have even argued that it is imperative to connect the inner contemplative life with the outer active life (McIntosh and Carmichael, 2015; Rohr, 2011). Reflection encourages the activist to consider how to live in a liberated way and bring liberation to others with the limited resources that they have, sometimes even refusing to act because paradoxically, this would be a more effective catalyst for change (White, 2016; Žižek, 2008). When I refer to activism therefore, I mean critical reflection upon the whole of life, so as to engender change for the liberation of the self and others from oppression, whether in thought, day-to-day tasks, or spectacular public interventions.

When I extended my studies in geography as a masters student at Glasgow, I used the opportunity to research whether my deflating experience of the relationship between the faith community I belonged to and activism might be bettered by other congregations in the city. I interviewed leaders in a range of denominations (Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland) and found that there were various levels of commitment to and organisation regarding activism. However, I managed to identify two common problems shared by clergy that I interviewed (Sutherland, 2014). Firstly, they were afraid to lead or guide their congregations regarding activism because they thought that this would show political partiality, spiralling their politically heterogeneous congregations into conflicts between radical and conservative factions. Secondly, the hierarchical organisation of the institutions

and the spatio-temporal choreography of church gatherings conspired to diminish opportunities for congregants to begin self-organising as an activist as well as a religious community.

However, the project also included some interviews with congregants in churches whose leaders I had spoken to. These conversations highlighted that despite there being a broader culture of political passivity in many churches, some of their members were finding ways to subvert this hegemony. They argued that despite the unsupportive atmosphere that they found themselves in at church, the engagement with theology and worship that these spaces convened inspired them to get involved in activism, and so they practiced solidarity with refugees and the homeless, and protested against militarism. What I found additionally interesting was the multiple ways in which these Christian activists framed this connection. Conversations with these people highlighted the strenuous effort of reflection that they had undergone to respond to the context of being caught between religious and activist identities. They spliced different theological and activist influences in order to blend religious praxis into activism, highlighting a plethora of ways of theologically rationalising and practicing their traversing between religious and activist spaces.

I felt an affinity with these subjects because I also struggled with the destabilising environment that my faith community generated as I tried to reconcile my identity as a Christian and an aspiring activist. Not only did I feel unsettled in church as my nascent, piecemeal imagination of the links between religion and activism were marginalised, I also felt uncomfortable in activist settings (largely pro-refugee protests) because I was nagged by a faint sense that - according to the predominant theological reasoning of my faith community - there was a chance I was not supposed to be there. I would have liked a mentor, or some sort of affinity group to help me make sense of the connections between religion and activism, enabling me to convoke a co-productive relationship between these two sites of differing practice. However, not only were these resources absent, sometimes the message from the minister and elders at church seemed to suggest that being a Christian *and* an activist was not possible. I did not feel like I had the confidence or theological resources to forge a praxis between religion and activism that I would be comfortable with

but I was not satisfied with this conjuncture. I felt that there must be ways to make sense of being a Christian and an activist simultaneously and that there must be faith communities which helped their members to fashion a praxis that combines these two identities.

I undertook this thesis because I wanted find communities that were manifesting different ways of helping religious subjects to think-through and practice the connection between religion and activism. In the knowledge-creation process of this thesis I completed fifteen interviews with prominent individuals in Christian organisations that addressed social justice issues, were heavily involved in activism themselves, and were involved in schemes aimed at encouraging Christians into activism. I also conducted three extended placements involving participant observation and autoethnography in three different Christian communities that I had identified as being less hierarchically organised (none of them were affiliated with institutional or established churches) and geared towards encouraging their members to blend religious praxis into activist practice. I anticipated that these methods of creating knowledge would give me access to settings in which I could analyse a variety of means by which religious subjects were being helped to develop a religious praxis that enabled them to feel comfortable in both religious and activist spaces. I wanted my analysis to achieve three things:

1) During my masters research I had met people who were hybridising their religious identity in order to feel comfortable blending their religious praxis into activism. Although I had managed to recognise that subjects were enacting multiple subversions of the predominant religious identities that were being projected onto them by their own faith communities, I did not feel that I had garnered enough knowledge about this process in order to begin doing it myself. I had not yet reflected on which kinds of subversion I preferred and why, and how they might relate to my own context. I wanted to learn more about the theology and practice of alternative forms of Christianity so that I could make informed decisions about how to transform my own praxis in a way that would edify the way I related to both religion and activism. I hoped that by writing about my own negotiations between religious

and activist space, as well as the experiences of others, I could generate a useful resource for people struggling with similar tensions.

2) My masters research directed me to ministers and congregants who were frustrated with institutional models of church. I wanted to produce knowledge that would help people who were involved in the practice of creating and organising faith communities to begin to think through how to forge alternatives to the politically passive and hierarchical modes that I had seen people struggle with as a part of institutions. How did alternative models of faith community fare in their particular context and how did they both help and hinder religious subjects blend their religious praxis into activism?

3) Human geography has a growing literature focussing on the connections between religion and politics. Geographers are having conversations about faith based organisations and welfare contracts, religious geopolitical imaginations, and the conflicts of producing sacred space (Dittmer, 2008; Elander et al., 2012; Vincett, 2013). However, these literatures can often resort to crude assessments that categorise the religious actors in these geographies as progressive or regressive entities (Megoran, 2013). This often emerges from a determination to defend the radical tradition in geography, which has always kept one eye on praxes that can change the world for the better (e.g. see the recent addition of praxis-abstracts to the radical journal *Antipode's* articles which address the implications of an article's contribution to praxis). Assessing potential allies in radical praxis is easier when you simplify your analysis by pigeon-holing religious agents as progressive or regressive, disengaging with the complex and muddy production of religious subjects and communities. However, a number of geographers of religion have turned their attention to the processes and networks that produce difference and multiplicity in religious praxis, focussing-in on the lived practice of religious subjects (Dittmer, 2007; Olson et al., 2013a). This new focus on the subjective has produced literature that highlights the ways in which religious subjects handle the intermingling of broader political cultures and imaginations in their lives (Gökarīksel and Secor, 2009; Megoran, 2010; Olson et al., 2013b). Despite this development, little knowledge has been created so far that hones in on the way religious

subjects negotiate between religious and activist spaces and the impact that their faith community has on their activism. Nonetheless, as the literature on religion and politics expands, some geographers have recognised that the messy subjective production of religion is increasingly blending into activist spaces (Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Conradson, 2008; Muers and Britt, 2012; Williams, 2015). Literature that spurns simplistic classification through progressive and regressive blocks in this development is necessary because despite the distaste that some geographers harbour for religion, it is already intertwined with radical political praxis. More fine-grained analyses of the dynamics that guide religious subjects and communities into praxis is vital in order for human geography to be relevant to current activist contexts. I wanted to produce knowledge on this topic so as to demystify religious involvement in activism, increasing understanding for geographers and activists in order to better identify the opportunities and challenges presented by the involvement of religious subjects and communities in activism.

For these three reasons, in this thesis I aim to lay-out an appropriate epistemological framework for understanding the complex negotiations that religious subjects encounter as they extend their religious praxis beyond their faith community into activist practice, leading to a detailed analysis of subjects and communities that blend religious and activist practices.

CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUALISING THE RELIGION/POLITICS INTERFACE

Introduction

Some of the most prevalent literatures regarding the interconnections between religion and politics in recent years have been those that have focussed on faith communities' (hereafter referred to as FCs) contribution towards producing civically engaged citizens and enthusiastic volunteers (Birdwell and Littler, 2012; Dinham, 2008; National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2007; Ravat, 2004). However, these literatures often represent FCs as organisations which sit comfortably within neoliberal structures of governance so as to be utilised for cheap welfare provision and the building of social capital (Barrow, 2013; Kington, 2012). Human geography has addressed this neoliberal representation of FCs in two ways. One stream of literature - although critical of neoliberalism more generally - reaffirms the neoliberal view of FCs, depicting them as useful partners in roll-back neoliberal strategies (Peck and Tickell, 2002) and in the reproduction of the individualist subjectivities that neoliberal ideologues promote (Hackworth, 2010a/b). However, a second stream of literature has begun to illustrate that assuming that FCs are able to deliver on the policy outcome of building social capital may be a mistake. Social capital is outlined by Field (2003) as the building up of trust between subjects that enables them to carry-out shared objectives, often within networks of people with shared values. However, this definition has often been used to paper-over the conflicts and power struggles that can be perceived from more in-depth study of collectives that are co-opted or endorsed by governance for their social capital (Fine, 1999; Furbey et al. 2006). Dinham (2010) and Chapman and Hamalainen (2011) point out that neglecting these power struggles can lead to the breakdown of relationships between governing bodies and FCs, and can even despoil the original capacities that the FC had to improve the conditions of its locality. Winkler (2008) highlights the inefficacy of the "faith sector" (p.2099) in South Africa to deliver on government policy through its supposed social capital. Instead of binding people together, FCs exclude needy individuals from care due to their religious affiliation, engage in turf-wars with other FCs, and lack any real capacity (despite government funding) to enact the self-help that is supposed to arise from building social capital. These two strains of human

geography literature on FCs outline the politics of FCs in terms of misguided ventures into neoliberal co-option and refrain from challenging the neoliberal consensus regarding the political potential of FCs. However, they also point to a complexity in FCs that bubbles beneath the surface of these representations, in the frustration of neoliberal governance to cleanly assimilate them. Could it be that more in-depth exploration of the complexity of FCs - particularly those not explicitly involved in neoliberal policy delivery - might reveal alternative religio-political performances?

Olson et al. (2013a) have pointed out that religious geographies have - over the last twenty years - been moving away from the broad categorising of religion (as is evident in the neoliberal literatures mentioned above) towards greater exploration of what it is to be religious through the everyday practices of religious people. They develop the notion that not only has the discussion of religion in human geography moved beyond making general comments about large blocs of religious adherents, but that complex theoretical discussions are beginning to revitalise debates about what religion *is*. They argue that postcolonial, poststructural, feminist, and postsecular critiques have begun to deconstruct "systematic means" (p.5) of studying religion (for example, means that follow Durkheim's (1976) explanation of religion as having exclusively social pertinence). The effect of these critiques has been to reinsert subaltern experiences of religious practice into geographic analysis, reframing monolithic categories of religion as multiple, contextual, partial, dynamic, and varied across scale, thus re-infusing religious geographies with the notion that smaller-scale religious spaces and subjects are also sites of political struggle.

The way that I want contribute to these new geographies pertains to two strands of literature emerging from these contemporary debates. One strand of this literature is concerned with how FCs extend solidarity to various marginalised groups (Beaumont and Nicholls, 2007; Cloke et al., 2012; Davelaar and Kerstens, 2012; Ley, 2008; Megoran, 2013; Pacione, 1999; Pears, 2013; Sutherland, 2014; Thomas, 2013). A second strand is concerned with how FCs are creating new forms, processes, and rationales for gathering together that eschew opportunities to reproduce a particular set of dogma, but rather create space for subjects to reflect upon, explore, and be challenged on their particular

understanding and practice of religion in a democratic and empathetic forum (Conradson, 2013; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Moody, 2012). These avenues of study direct scholars to these strands as separate issues, but some geographers are beginning to question whether there might be a connection between the two, asking whether it is possible that increased openness to theological difference in religious place-making can lead to a heightened *sense for* and *ability to express solidarity with* the other (Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Megoran, 2010). In this thesis I want to question whether this connection is valid by studying FCs that incorporate commitment to solidarity with the marginalised *and* an openness to theological difference in their *raison d'être.* Firstly, I want to investigate why different degrees of each strand might be embedded in the ideals of these FCs. Secondly, I want to examine the complexities involved in maintaining whatever degree of openness. Thirdly, I want to assess how this degree of openness affects the political subjectivation and praxis of the community members.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I want to outline the ways in which human geography has begun to explore new epistemologies, scales, and communities pertaining to the intersection of religion and politics. Firstly, I will outline the original aims, methods, and questions I started out with in the project and then describe how the incipient empirical outcomes of the research began to shift my understanding of the project and remodel my research questions. Secondly, I evaluate the literature on the relationship between religion and society, foregrounding arguments that in recent years Christian praxis has undergone a partial shift from privatism towards engagement in ethics and politics in the public sphere. This prompts me to evaluate epistemological work in religious geography regarding how geographers should conceptualise religion and secularism as there are an increasing number of settings of academic interest in which the two seem to be co-produced. Thirdly, I will assess the different epistemologies that have existed so far in human geography for thinking through religious overlaps with politics, discerning whether they can adequately equip me to respond to my empirical context and the theoretical nuances of contemporary theory in the geography of religion. Finally, I will argue that there is a need for a new epistemology for interrogating the religion/politics interface, suggesting that a fruitful conversation could be

had with activist geographies and the network epistemologies they have developed (a conversation I will undertake in chapters two and three), as the empirical worlds of religion and activism begin to mesh together.

The project's transforming identity and research questions

As I outlined in the preface, I undertook this thesis in order to produce knowledge that could help religious subjects think through the issues raised when blending religious praxis into activism, highlight new structural possibilities for FCs that are striving to direct their members towards activism, and enable geographers and activists to better understand how religious subjects approach activism. Therefore, this project began - in terms of its aims - as a study about Christian subjects weaving social justice praxis into their lives and how they understood the connection between praxis and theology. In talking to these subjects I wanted to uncover the route they had taken to stabilising an identity and praxis which held religion and politics together, and what processes, relationships, and communities they had found to nourish that subjectivity. I carried out the research in two stages. The first stage was an extensive programme of interviews with individuals that were on staff - often in a leading role - with Christian organisations, as well as clergy that I had become aware of (through their writings) who incorporated a significant amount of activism into their job but were not professionally obligated to do so. These individuals were associated with a variety of social justice issues that I had been introduced to through studying human geography. These issues included fighting climate-change, fighting austerity, pacifism, community organising, feminism, prefigurative community, and anti-consumerist activism. The aim of these interviews was partly to illustrate the variety of 'left-leaning' Christian political expressions, in order to balance-out a fixation within human geography on right-wing Americanist evangelicalism (Agnew, 2006; Sturm and Dittmer, 2010). However, I also wanted to know about the journeys people had been on to come to their combination of identity and practice. Had they struggled with crises of identity and what processes had helped them through that? The second stage of the research consisted of an intensive ethnographic study of different Christian FCs that incorporated and developed social justice praxis in different ways. This involved (i) spending a month with a community who lived

together in order to reduce consumption and encourage and empower further activism, (ii) participating - over a three year period - in a church that was experimenting with new ways of highlighting and engaging with activism in their place-making and organisation, and (iii) participating in conferences for networks of young Christians that were focussed on providing space and provocations to facilitate subjects in reconciling their religious and political identities, as well as providing opportunities to learn about, plan, and practice ways of blending religion and politics that resonated with their emergent identities. These spaces would enable me to create an account of the processes of FCs, looking at how subjects were nourished by spaces which were encoded with Leftist religio-political norms.

Based on these aims, I formulated this set of research questions:

• What factors create difference between Christian groups engaged in Leftist politics?
• What discourses, spaces, and practices help reproduce Leftist identities in Christian communities?
• What are the dominant discourses in shaping political imaginations and praxis?
• In what way are the groups under study creating and created by postsecular spaces?

The final question - regarding postsecularity - was formulated out of a desire to examine the experience of Leftist Christian groups in political networks beyond their sphere of faith-motivated action. My first three questions largely pertained to FCs and religious subjects within the context of FC-convened spaces. However, I wanted to question whether religious subjects were able to transfer a faith-motivated performance of social justice into settings where people did not share their understanding of what they were doing. What I meant by 'postsecular spaces' was the following; spaces in which religious subjects and groups could contribute to decision-making and action with others who did not share their faith but accepted the authenticity and usefulness of faithful analyses and tactics. How had spaces to create mutual understandings opened

up in the midst of political action as the FC opened up its 'boundaries' to work with non-faithful others?

For the most part, these original aims and questions are still core to what the project is about. However, in conducting the research, the questions that I wanted to ask were nuanced by the encounters that I had. In doing the interviews it became apparent that many of the people that were very politically active often felt lonely and wearied by their particular performance of Christianity. They were stressed out by the tension that they felt between their passion to engage in activism and identifying with a faith that tied them to a range of FCs; some supportive of their activism, and some far less so. Far from being part of an homogenous Left-wing bloc of Christianity (something my initial research questions suggest that I am looking for), subjects moved through a range of spaces in which they encountered multiple framings of their identity and praxis, creating flux and uncertainty. However, many of my interviewees suggested that the stress that encountering conflicting framings of themselves inflamed was eased when given space to reflect and mull the tension over with others, without being pressured into making final decisions about their beliefs and praxis. They indicated that this process was an empowering one. Because I wanted to know how FCs could empower political subjectivities, I wanted to explore what this process - in which an openness to explore the theological together is convened - was like. Furthermore, I wanted to know what it was like for people who had no guaranteed outlet for praxis as many of my interviewees that were part of faith-based activist organisations did. I wanted to know about the efficacy of different techniques that FCs used to convene an openness for threading political material into the event-spaces of FCs. What kind of politics does this openness encourage and does it engender change in the subjects' political identity and praxis?

In investigating these spaces, I carried out participant observation and autoethnography. This helped to solidify a second set of questions around how openness is maintained in these spaces and to what extent subjects are able to experiment with their beliefs and spiritual practices in these spaces. My interviews prompted the thought that these spaces are havens for those trying to work through difficult tensions in their faith and politics. I expected to feel an

affinity with others in these spaces. However, I was shocked that in some of them, the converse was true. This was driven - in part - by my own positionality. Although cognitively ascribing to the openness that these spaces created, sometimes they inadvertently unfolded my conservative, Presbyterian background into the present. I reacted strongly against (what I might once have called) 'liberal' theology; picking holes in what people said, and I felt frustrated with content that I felt - at the time - privileged the political over the theological. Although I wanted to examine how the political structure of FCs enabled people to carry out their own exploration of theology and belief, my own struggle with these kinds of spaces made me want to ask about the difficulties that this openness can create. Should there be limits on that openness? What tensions arise between people because of this openness? How are these tensions (un)resolved?

Whilst undertaking the research, the emerging issues of the thesis were: (i) how political material might become more of a focus in the life of a FC through creating space for its members to explore their personal spiritualities, and (ii) the inherent fragility of this open-space. However, I also wanted to explore the hegemonies, meta-narratives, and institutions that these communities were setting themselves against. In my initial set of research questions I wanted to explore "the dominant discourses in shaping political imaginations and praxis". I thought that this would help me to discern the "spaces, and practices [that] help reproduce Leftist identities in Christian communities". However, as was apparent from my own experience of these communities and of my respondents - there was little cohesive 'Christian Left' to be found. Furthermore, there was little deliberate drive to reproduce this collective identity[1]. What I largely encountered was a plethora of improvised techniques deployed by slowly accreting communities that were trying to figure out new ways to be Christian together. These new ways of being together incorporated a freedom to address questions to the religious identities that had been made available to them through institutions. However, these institutions that were being thrown off were still a significant part of the *raison d'être* of these organisations - being that these new communities were reflective of something that was either problematic

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[1]   Despite the existence of an organisation called 'Christians on the Left' (www.christiansontheleft.org.uk).

about institutional Christianity or missing from it. Most consistently these missing or repressed elements that were reflected in the FCs that I encountered were openness to question theology and the ability to apply theology to political praxis. Therefore I wanted to explore the context that the FCs emerged from, this is important as it creates different weights of importance on openness versus solidarity. It also affects the way decision-making is done in the community (does it have a self-appointed leader or a more democratic form of leadership?) and colours what is important about the community to the people who join (because the communities represent something they *are not* as much as something that they are). It also highlights the reasons for people joining the community and perhaps the disjunctures between what they feel it offers them as a place to perform their faith (in terms of openness or solidarity) and what emerges as taking greater collective priority in reproducing the community's identity and values.

As the process of undertaking the research began reflexively to transform the core concerns of the thesis, it also began to shift my understanding of postsecularism and the interpretive role the concept might play in my analysis. In my original research questions I asked , "[i]n what way are the groups under study creating and created by postsecular spaces?" I hoped to explore how the FCs and religious individuals that I was working with expressed their religious identity in partnership with those who did not share their religious worldview in order to work towards a common aim. My understanding of postsecularism was in terms of spaces that helped people of conflicting worldviews (mainly of faith and no faith) to sideline their differences and work together on a particular issue. However, people who have thought through how these alliances across difference work have developed two slightly different ways of understanding postsecularism. One body of work has begun to examine how people with different worldviews can work together to address issues such as homelessness, debt, addiction, and economic injustice (Cloke et al., 2010; Cloke et al., 2016; Muers and Britt, 2012; Williams, 2015). This literature has highlighted the role of "crossover narratives" (Cloke, 2011b, p.249); discursive constructs spliced from existing identities and ideologies, and from new possibilities for framing and tactics that emerge from dialogue. These crossover narratives are created by activists with competing worldviews and bind a

diverse group together with new discourses about what they are doing and why. This allows geographers to talk about *postsecular spaces* or *postsecular movements* that engender conditions for crossover narratives to come about. A second body of work has focussed on postsecularism in terms of an ethos. Coles (1997; 2001) in particular frames postsecularism as an ethos marked by generosity and commitment to liberation. Generosity points to a subject needing to be aware of the ways in which their worldview can be harmfully exclusive - even if that worldview claims to be universally redemptive - and be ready to listen to other ways of seeing the world and countenance a transformatively reflexive response (see also Button, 2005). Commitment to liberation, in that even though a postsecular ethos must exhibit generosity to difference, the information gathered from a generous listening posture must pass through a polyvocal filter that asks whether the difference encountered opens up greater possibilities for liberation or oppression. If the openness to difference allows for greater possibility for liberation, then the subject needs to find ways reflexively to transform themselves to accommodate this difference. Undertaking the research made me more interested in this second meaning of postsecularism because this meaning of postsecularism seemed relevant to all three of my emerging research questions. My empirical observations highlighted the practice of reflexive change and generous listening by religious subjects both within and beyond their FC, rendering ever more subjective and hybrid religious -activist subjectivities. Therefore when I refer to postsecularism henceforth, this will be the meaning I will be referring to; postsecularism as subjective ethos. This understanding shifted postsecularism out of my research questions and into a recurring theme throughout all of the 'findings' chapters (chapters five, six, and seven) of this thesis.

Based on these transformations in the research process, the questions that this thesis will endeavour to answer are:

• What balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?
• What are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within the community?

- How does this degree of openness affect the political praxis of community members?

Religion/society geographies

Above, I have explained the personal and incipient empirical themes that partially shape the line of questioning in this thesis. However, as Cloke et al. (2004) point out, ideas regarding the dominant themes of a research project are also stimulated by the theoretical, moral, and political preferences that a researcher develops as they engage with academia more broadly. In line with this observation, I want to recognise in this subsection that the direction of questioning in this thesis has also been shaped by a desire to be relevant to the shifting landscape of religion-society relations in the UK, with a particular focus on Christianity. Therefore, I want to work through some of the key shifts regarding this relationship, giving some background as to how this process has generated new expressions of Christianity. These expressions share continuity with - but also significantly reinvent - older, more institutional forms. A key feature regarding the transmogrification of Christianity's relation to society is that it has challenged the received wisdom regarding the supposed private/ public boundaries enrolled within this relation. Religion more broadly is currently perceived to be of increasing relevance to civil society (Eder, 2006; Habermas, 2006; 2011), and Christianity has its own specific ways of navigating this re-engagement (Guest et al., 2012; Woodhead, 2012). Furthermore, this crisis in the imagining of the private/public boundary has meant that new epistemologies are emerging so as to help analysts as they try to grasp what and where religion *is* if it will not allow itself to be consigned to the realm of private pursuits. This thesis not only responds to the empirical observation of religion's purportedly revitalised participation in the public sphere but also seeks to situate itself among these new epistemologies. By highlighting the new objects of study that these epistemologies steer methodologies towards, I further underscore the relevance of my research questions to broader societal issues before addressing how they move contemporary conversations about the intersection of religion and politics onwards.

In the introduction to her comprehensive edited book with Rebecca Catto regarding religion in modern-day Britain, Linda Woodhead (2012) argues that some of the most significant context to be considered - before regarding religion more generally - is found in evaluating the changing form of British Christianity. Woodhead opines that it is now incontestable that institutional Christianity's influence has plummeted in Britain. As others have pointed out (Bruce, 2002), fewer people attend or are members of churches, fewer children go to Sunday school or are baptised, and fewer people are married by clergy. What are seen as 'traditional' Christian values are also in decline (Woodhead references values such as duty, modesty, and chastity), as well as belief in God as He is outlined by the New Testament. These developments have been paired with a shrinkage in the influence of high-ranking clerics as they are channelled by the media, and in their interactions with parliament. This is due in part to increasing religious pluralisation as well as patterns of secularisation. However, Woodhead (and others such as Davie (2002) and Casanova (1994)) has pointed out that although Christianity has lost its religious, moral, and political predominance in Britain - due largely to the significant diminution of its institutional expressions - on the ground, there are signs of vitality. This has - since the 50's - been expressed in (i) the growth of a disparate, largely Pentecostal movement bolstered by immigration from Africa and the Caribbean, (ii) the growth of conservative and charismatic evangelical churches which are often less accountable to hierarchical institutions, and (iii) more recently in the connecting up of these less institutionally-anchored churches through loose national federations (such as the Evangelical Alliance [www.eauk.org]) and transnationally via the internet (Guest et al., 2012; Knott and Mitchell, 2012; also see the Nomad podcast (www.nomadpodcast.co.uk)).

However, it has also been noted that new forms of Christianity are coming about, which are distinguished in part by a focus on social outreach (Cloke et al., 2012). These are often connected to the aforementioned charismatic and evangelical revivals in their enterprising break with institutionalism. Subjects with a focus on social outreach often begin their experience and expression of Christianity in these churches and yet are becoming increasingly differentiated both theologically and practically from these extra-institutional pioneers (Bell, 2006; Boren, 2010; Wright, 2010). Many of the theorists, documentarians, and

practitioners emerging from this movement are characterised by a frank acceptance that the current relationship of the Church to society has entered a postchristendom phase (Bartley, 2006; Frost, 2006). The Church can no longer rely on the State to uphold its interests, and a significant portion of citizens are divesting themselves of respect for the conservative moral positions that have been traditionally upheld by prominent church-folk. There is little sense now (as there would have been in the 1950's) that it is normative for a British person also to be a Christian (Woodhead, 2012).

Postchristendom is - however - a term which changes in its meaning depending on the context to which it is applied. I use the term in this thesis to refer to both American and British contexts and so it is important to clarify what I mean when I refer to the FCs I study as postchristendom communities. Murray defines postchristendom as "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence" (2011, p.19). As Davie (2002) points out - this historical meaning of postchristendom can be identified in Europe, but not in the USA. Davie (2002) suggests that the USA is as religious as ever, to the point where there is a significant narrative in American culture that posits that in order to be truly American, someone has to be a Christian. However, as Frost (2006) and Van Steenwyk (2013) argue, there has been a rich seam of Christian tradition that has never been comfortable with being co-opted into Christendom. Van Steenwyk (2013) highlights in particular Anabaptist traditions such as the Mennonites who have demonstrated throughout their history not so much a response to a postchristendom context as a practicing of postchristendom attitudes that reject the interlocking of State and Church and of religious conversion by cultural or military domination. This attitude reconstitutes the universal Church as a spiritual movement, committed to values such as hospitality, prayer, and speaking truth to power, prioritising fluid and freeform organisational expression rather than being constrained by institutional administration and asset-protection. I argue that this postchristendom *attitude* is common to the FCs I examine in this thesis, despite the differences in their religio-geographical context. All of them were inaugurated due to frustration with expressions of the Church that minimise communal participation through

professionalisation and hierarchy, and minimise a sense that church should be encouraging people to be activists in their local community.

As both a postchristendom context and postchristendom attitude has grown in prominence in the West, the profusion of independent models of church - sometimes federated and usually scantly policed - highlights a confidence in rejecting institutional hierarchies, and the instability of these hierarchies' influence within the establishment elicits no hand-wringing from many Christians. The perceived disintegration of multiple Church-State overlaps is seen as a freeing rather than a debilitating development in Church history (Frost, 2006). Some have celebrated this as a chance to recover some of the social-justice-centred sense of purpose that can be attributed to the earliest precursors of the Christian movement, a significant part of which involves unravelling the Church's identity and practices from its imperial privilege (Van Steenwyk, 2013; Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008). It is perceived that institutional models of church - although they have been periodically networked into broader social-justice campaigns (Harries, 1986; Reuver, 1988; Roberts, 2005) - have at points restrained their members' participation in insurrectionary and anti-establishment activity (Carey, 2011; Graeber, 2013; Müntzer, 2010).

This tension between institutional and less-hierarchical or nonconformist churches has been a theme throughout Christian history. As Rousseau (2002) points out, churches have debated about how hierarchical their organisation should be and how (or whether) they should engage in politics - particularly State politics - since early-on in Christianity's existence. As the Roman Empire began to fragment in the 4th Century AD under the pressure of numerous invading forces, various Roman Emperors tried to unite the Empire under the one Christian God. If those in charge of the Emperor's territories were Christian - like the Emperor - then they were obliged to treat the Emperor as the rank above them in the chain of command, extending and defending his territory in the name of Christendom. If someone in charge of a territory was not a Christian, then they could cut loose from the Emperor's control, perhaps defending the territory for themselves, or brokering a deal with local non-Roman powers. In this situation, religion was a label that was chopped and changed by those in charge of Roman territories in order to suit their desire to hold on to or

extend their own political influence. Politicians', Generals', and prominent churchfolks' treatment of religion as a bargaining chip was - in part - what sparked the debate in churches over hierarchical organisation and involvement in State politics.

Rousseau (2002) identifies two basic schools of thought in this debate. One school of thought argued that the Church could not maintain its integrity and cooperate with the State by becoming the Church of the establishment. Church-State overlaps were judged to encourage Christian leaders to act in unchristian ways; boasting about their wealth and influence, and conflating imperial ambition with God's mission. Moreover, how could Christians trust that their leaders were guiding them in godly ways if they were not sure whether people in positions of leadership held those offices because of their desire to serve the Church or to get a grip on State power? The opposing school of thought adopted a more sanguine approach regarding the integration of the Church into Roman structures of power. Thinkers of this persuasion contended that although there were drawbacks to the partnership, the ultimate outcome would be a proliferation of the Christian message and culture - on the back of Roman administration - that missionaries could only dream about achieving under their own steam.

Although being tweaked by different contexts, this debate has emerged time and again in Christian history. Some movements have sought to flatten Church hierarchies, hold its leaders to account, and missionally reinvigorate it - often refocussing it on serving the marginalised (see Pelagius in the 5th Century, the Diggers in the 17th Century, and Dutch Anabaptists in the 19th Century (Christoyannopolous, 2009; Marshall, 2009)). Nonconformist movements like these have had varying success. Some have disappeared into obscurity or been violently quashed, such as the South American base ecclesial communities of the Liberation Theology movement (Oakley, 2007). Others have maintained their numbers and become an established fixture in the religious landscape, standing for values such as social justice and non-hierarchy. Admittedly, these longstanding nonconformists (such as the Quakers or the Methodists (Angell and Dandelion, 2013; Yrigoyen, 2010)) often adopt some institutional qualities, like salaried administrative teams. As these movements

have fluctuated, established churches have ticked-over. Sometimes established churches, with their significant resources - such as leadership structures, finance, volunteers, contacts, and social capital (Smith, 2006) - have proved to be a valuable resource in serving the marginalised that the more movement-like churches argue that they too frequently ignore. Davie (1994; 2000) and Beaman (2012) argue that in certain cases the established church, rather than quashing dissenting religious voices has made space for them, whilst simultaneously helping to guide the public imagination of religion away from fanaticism. However, the established churches have also played their role in what many Christians would interpret as problematic lock-stepping with the State. For instance, see the suppression of gay rights and the annexation of Crimea which the Russian Orthodox Church and State co-sponsor and religiously legitimate, or the German churchmen who upheld Nazi policy during the Second World War (Denysenko, 2013; Metaxas, 2010).

Whether coming from nonconformist or established roots, the Church has had a long and heterogeneous history of involvement in political activism, each intervention lying on a different point between conservatism and radicalism, authoritarianism and libertarianism, institutionalism and anti-hierarchy. For example:

(i) Sixteenth century Anabaptists have fought for the right to commonly held land (Müntzer, 2010).

(ii) The Southern Christian Leadership Conference demanded civil rights in the 1960's; the same decade that the Christian CND was founded to protest nuclear disarmament (Reuver, 1988; Roberts, 2005).

(iii) In the 19th Century, slavery was tackled in Britain by social reformers such as William Wilberforce (Prochaska, 2006).

(iv) In the 1980's the Church of England's *Faith in the City* report denounced Thatcherite austerity (Dinham, 2008)

(v) And since the 1930's, the Catholic Worker Movement has practiced Christian Anarchism through its hospitality houses and protests against militarism (Day, 1997).

However, in this thesis, I want to turn my attention to a current movement within Christianity that represents a partial reanimation of enthusiasm for less

hierarchical organising and a greater focus on social justice. Although the case studies I develop in the thesis mirror previous non-hierarchical, social justice focussed movements in the church (e.g. anti-imperial factions in 4th century churches, Anabaptism, or base ecclesial communities), there are important differences that they evidence within themselves and in their connection to society due to their historical and geographical context. It is important to recognise these differences as they influence the potential that this current movement is able to have on present and future church/society relations rather than repeating mistakes of previous movements of their kind, such as fading into obscurity or recreating some of the problems they set out to solve (Arthur, 1999; Williams, 2002).

As Davie (1994) points out, religion has been significantly affected by the impact of postmodernism on Western society. By challenging both secular and religious authority and metanarratives, postmodern thought has eroded faith in institutions as well as the desire to be a part of them (see also Cloke et al., 2016). Simultaneously, religion has been reframed as a mode of self-actualisation rather than an institution that someone belongs to and does their duty to as a member. This has led to the emergence of new types of theology and practice within the Church (as Christian theology is stretched by postmodern thought (Caputo, 2006; Critchley, 2012; Vattimo, 2002; Žižek, 2000)) - and beyond it (as Christianity is spliced with other kinds philosophy and activism both by people who identify as Christian and those who do not (McIntosh and Carmichael, 2015; Rollins, 2006; White, 2016)). This has led to new models of Christian gatherings that range from the informal but traditionally-flavoured (such as meeting to barbecue on a beach and read liturgy), to those which push the envelope in terms of gatherings that could recognisably be called 'church' (such as performance art or protest spaces) (Frost, 2006; Howson, 2011; Moody, 2010; 2012). The case studies that I examine in this thesis reanimate the long debate in the Church over how it should relate to its own hierarchy and political activism. However, they do this in a new postmodern context that encourages a self-reflexive, anti-institutional, and structurally innovative way of performing Christianity. My case studies represent the re-emergence of a long-standing tension in church organising regarding hierarchy and politics that has been altered significantly by its

historical and geographical context. They require new solutions-to and thinking-about the tension that grapple with the complex intersection of its historical roots and its contemporary milieu.

The case studies I present differ historically - for instance - from Rousseau's (2002) articulation of the problem with hierarchy and politics in the early church. The FCs in my case studies are concerned with hierarchy professionalising the Church, closing down the possibility of lay people's contribution to community organising, rather than the problem the early church had with hierarchy, which was that it allowed for the prideful aggrandisement of powerful individuals. Simultaneously these postmodern FCs have a problem with the Church not being outward focussed enough - towards the marginalised - with too much focus on keeping the institution going, whereas the early church was *composed - much more so than the current Western church - of marginalised people.

Geographically, two of my case studies are based in the UK and one is based in the USA. These two settings have very different religious histories, which impacts the way the FCs I examine position themselves in Church-Society relations as they reanimate the debate over hierarchy and politics in the Church. As Davie (2002; 2007) has argued, whilst Europe has become more secular as it has modernised, in the USA this has not been the case. The USA is almost as religious as ever despite displaying the technological advances associated with modernity. Although Europe maintains historical links between Church and State (albeit with significant national variations), rather than this relationship upholding the Church's prominence in public life and the normativity of citizens identifying as Christian, adherence to religious institutions has declined. However, Davie (2000) also points out, that this does not necessarily mean that Europe has become as significantly unreligious as some theorists posit, highlighting that indices of belief in the supernatural or a higher power are still high. Despite high indices of belief, people no longer feel compelled to be part of an organised religion for that belief to influence their life. This privatisation of religion has - however - had the effect of creating a sense in the media and policy making that it is normative for citizens to take a secularist standpoint, generating poor understandings of how society and religion interact in the public sphere (Davie, 2010). In the USA, religion - particularly Christianity - has

maintained its prominence as modernisation has occurred. Connolly (1999) - following Tocqueville (1969) - points out, that although Church and State have always been separate in the USA, the power of the Church in the secular sphere has been sustained because even though religious reasoning is formally disqualified from secular discourse, Christian mores dominate public logic, morality, and politics. As Connolly (1999) puts it, secular government is "contained within Christianity" (p.24); a bubble in a Christian landscape. As Davie argues (2002) - as well as Connolly (2008) and others (Dittmer and Sturm, 2010; Van Steenwyk, 2013) - this creates a situation where national and religious identity can be conflated; to be American is to be a Christian. Although the dynamic of public debate about religion in America is totally different to Europe (i.e. in America it is normal to be a Christian and in most of Europe it is not), this is also a distortion of reality that impairs a more accurate rendering of the relationship between religion and society.

It is important to acknowledge these two different framings of religion/society relations in different geographical and historical settings because they shape how different FCs reanimate the debate about hierarchy/politics and express their postmodern religious mores. Although having different religious histories, Christianity in both Europe and America has been affected by postmodernism and inspired by historical movements that challenge the hierarchy and political praxis of the Church. It is important to notice how this contemporary, Western condition of Christianity plays out in different geographical contexts due to the different histories of those regions and the different priorities this generates.

A commonality between the UK and USA that Baker (2013) and Frost (2006) point out, is that growing frustration with the Christian establishment (whether that is the State churches or major denominations in the UK, or the Christian Right in the USA) is resulting in an increasing number of Christians finding their expression of faith through engagement in the public sphere. Rather than focussing exclusively on convening spaces in which to concretise dogma, Christians are finding spiritual fulfillment through a mixture of ritual performance and social action (Davie, 2000). Baker identifies that this social action is coming through in forms of practice which are infused with an attitude of openness to other epistemologies encountered when interpreting sociopolitical issues. (This

is in contradistinction to applying ill-fitting biblical allegories - drawn from institutionally sanctioned theology - to a context in the interest of arguing for the correctness of a supposedly distinctive Christian approach). He argues that this attitude is paired with church methodologies far more concerned with listening to the injustices affecting their locales, followed by a theological praxis which aims to *be* the body of Christ as a collective in context, living alongside the disadvantaged, speaking with (rather than for) them, and seeking to highlight and heal their sores (see Brueggemann, 1978; 2012; Ward, 2009). This represents an increased leakage of the supposedly private practice of religion into the public sphere. Indeed, some of these expressions of religion can only define themselves as religious *by engaging* with the public sphere.

As Woodhead (2012) highlights, this requires a reappraisal of how to demarcate the religious and the secular, being that people frequently content themselves with the erroneous assumption that religion and secularism are synonymous respectively with private and public spheres. Devine et al. (2015) argue that for a long time the secularisation thesis has shaped the interpretive status-quo in the social sciences; the secularisation thesis being Peter Berger's (1969) development of Weber's (2003) work, in which he claims that as society modernises, religion will be pushed from the public to the private sphere and eventually fade out. However, with the contemporary sense that religion is increasingly pertinent within the public sphere and possesses surprising resilience and fluidity (Eder, 2006; Habermas, 2006; 2011), Olson et al. (2013b) have argued that the secularisation thesis has come under scrutiny due to its deficient explanation of religion's changing form and dynamics. However, rather than argue that religion is 'making a comeback' (which perpetuates a myth that one day either religion or secularism will wipe the other out), Woodhead (2012) argues that it is more productive to perceive the relationship between religion and secularisation as a "complex set of ongoing competitions for power between different groups in society associated with different ideologies, interests and employments" (p.12). Geographers have produced a significant amount of theory to help analysts begin to understand these power struggles - particularly how these struggles can help to define religion in some sort of a way - and it is to these which I now turn.

One interpretation of the relationship between religion and secularism has been Tse's (2014) theory of "grounded theologies" (p.201). Tse re-presents Eliade's (1959) 'homo religiosus' theory. Eliade's idea is that all human's retain some "sense of transcendence despite the advent of modernity" (Tse, 2014, p.205). The argument goes that even in the most militantly secular regimes, theological ideas persist. For instance, Tse quotes Sopher (1967), who opines that Stalin's atheist administration was legitimated by a teleology that was heavily influenced by Christian theology (see also Boer, 2014). Tse argues that the primary factor in struggles over the making of places are clashes in 'grounded theologies'; he references Yeoh (1996), who gives the example of "Singaporean cemeteries as the product of contestation between the sacred imaginations of Chinese populations and a colonial British technocracy that privileged urban functionality" (Tse, 2014, p.207). Tse reasons that the approach to governance by the British - although purportedly utilitarian - was itself based on a notion of how theology should (not) play out on the ground. British secularism was dependent on a Christian theology that was at home with the idea that religion can largely be performed in private - allowing the public sphere to be dominated by secular government. Although the government eschewed 'religion' from the public sphere, this mode could only avoid resistance so long as 'religion' meant quietist Christianity. Quoting Asad (1993), Tse points out that this erases other conceptions of what religion might be, such as a community with a theology that requires public expression in order to make it sensical. Tse argues that since even secularity is constructed by a reaction to particular religious ideals, any power-struggle can be analysed for its clashing 'grounded theologies'.

However, I argue that this characterisation of theology as an element threaded into every power struggle is not a particularly helpful epistemology for understanding religious subjectivity or theology. Tse makes an archeological point, following the approach of Foucault in *Religion and Culture* (1999), and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005) (see also Martin et al., 1988), to illustrate that buried deep within the presuppositions, worldviews, and philosophies that legitimate contemporary secularism, is an accommodation of a particular brand of Christianity (see also Connolly, 1999). Therefore - often unwittingly - secularising mores are influenced by Christianity (and therefore religion) in that their partitioning of religious from secular space commits a

semantic fallacy of letting Christianity define religion more broadly. So, when 'secular' and 'religious' impulses clash, it is in fact a clash between a broader understanding of religion and an understanding of religion as a politically neutral Christianity. Tse manages to bolt secularism on to religion by suggesting that it is compatible with certain forms of Christianity, pointing out that the process of ridding the public sphere of religion is itself theologically inflected. However, this is problematic - particularly when paying attention to religious subjectivation - because it assumes that theology is a fixed set of tenets that a subject selects and then 'grounds' and not a subjective process that is open to transformative experiences *of* and new knowledges *about* transcendence (for more on this see Chapter 3). As Holloway (2003, p.1971) points out - quoting Varela (1992, p. 382) - theology can lead to "[n]ew modes of behaving [that]... correspond to microbreakdowns that we experience constantly". These 'microbreakdowns' are what Lane (2002) refers to as qualitative distinctions that those with a religious sensibility perceive as they move between spaces and places. Certain spaces and places 'possess' people in ways that others do not and in ways that are beyond their comprehension (Luckmann, 1990); they become aware of something else, a presence, or an affect. Dewsbury and Cloke (2009) and Holloway (2013) argue that a sensitivity to the numinous disparities between places is built up through a process of theological internalisation involving ritual, contemplation, and affective and theoretical interpretation which constitutes a praxis; a recursive sensing, interpreting, searching-out, and responding to the transcendent. This is not to say that Tse's process of 'grounding' does not occur in religious expression as well. Most religious subjects draw on tradition, orthodoxies, and institutions too. But their performances are a hybridisation between 'grounding' and a more fluid, interpretative, subjective process in which theology is redefined as praxis. Secular theology can only really be defined as religious if all religion conforms to secular theology's relatively static, top-down framing of the relation between transcendence and space and its definition of theology; which sees theology as *content* rather than a *mixture* of content, process, and experience (Gutiérrez, 1988; Howson, 2011; Sutherland, 2016). Tse siphons this more hybridised notion of theology off from his definition of Christianity in order to demonstrate that as secularism connects to Christianity it forms part of the spectrum of religiosity. He therefore has a partition, with secularism and Christianity on one side, and the "world religions" (Tse, 2014, p.

207) on the other. The only difference to Tse between secularism and Christianity and 'world religions' is theological *content*. However, he negates the fact that there is a theological process that all religious subjects engage in at least partially - including Christianity - that is not accessible to the subject who wants to practice in a way inspired by secularism. As Ley (2011) argues, Christianity has never fully left the public sphere; does this not suggest a split between secularism and Christianity (along with the rest of religion) in their approach to spatial practice and transcendence, despite the inversion of a partial representation of Christianity that secularism is based upon? As I have illustrated with reference to Baker (2013), the split between secular and religious geographies is very apparent at the moment, through the vector of a public Christianity. By recognising Christianity as religion in this way (embodying a hybrid and publicly performed notion of theology) and secularism as substantially discrete from it, the possibility opens up for not only 'world religions' but also Christianity to join in critiquing secular governance's (and some secularisation theory's) mistaken assumptions about religion as a private activity (Olson et al., 2013b; Devine et al., 2015). Connolly (1999) and Habermas (2011) have both argued for this, demanding that state administrations increase their religious literacy and make accommodations for an increasingly pluralised and socially engaged sphere of religion whilst maintaining a helpful impulse to screen religious bias from governmental decision-making.

As I have pointed out, religion and secularism can no longer be respectively synonymous with private and public spheres. This makes bounding religious and secular spaces difficult; as Mahmood (2009) argues, the two co-produce each other's geographies. This has been exemplified convincingly in the plethora of material regarding the complicated entanglement of FBOs as contracted by, and filling-in for the state (Conradson, 2008; Elander et al., 2012; Williams, 2015), which describes the contestations, compromises, and coping mechanisms that FBOs and the state deploy as they work with and challenge one another. Although Tse has tried to break down the secularism/religion binary in order to define religion as a more pervasive category, many other geographers of religion are examining the everyday experiences of religious people in order to make more sense of what religion *is* and *how it is co-*

produced across public and private spheres. These seek to capture the complexity of lived religion as a theological process rather than theological content alone.

Prominent amongst geographies that represent attempts to better define religion has been Holloway's (2003; 2006; 2013) work. In his 2003 paper on New Age spirituality, he shows how religion is practiced by wrestling the sacred/ profane binary from its tight association with the private/public binary. One of his main points in the paper is that "sacred space-time is the relational outcome of an embodied labour of differentiation with the nominally profane" (p.1967). He makes this point via a departure from Eliade's (1959) sacred/profane binary, in which Eliade argues that the sacred is a hierophany, the notion of the in-breaking of a higher reality which is self-evidently apart from the homogeneity of the everyday, this everyday homogeneity being the profane. Holloway deconstructs this definition by arguing that Eliade does not do enough to emphasise that the everyday and homogenous is in fact replete with opportunities for engagement with the sacred. Moreover, mundane spaces are vital to processes that help the subject to construct sacred space-times. For instance, a living room provides a still space in which to perform a ritual, a seat on a bus - although surrounded by noise - is not so swamped by distractions so as to prevent it from becoming a place of meditation. In creating sacred space-times, subjects appropriate these spaces and the subjects/objects within them in order to encounter some kind of transcendence. Although mundane, these 'profane' items and places are crucial in enabling the subject to experience the sacred. This definition of sacred space is different to that as portrayed at one point in Kong's (2001) work as the "social practices of the communities which revere it and the identities generated by those activities" (p.214, quoting Bowman, 1993, p.432), which ties sacred space to broader communal and historical processes. Holloway emphasises the broad range of spaces which become enlisted in the practice of "unofficial" (Kong, 2010, p. 756) religion. As such, is it appropriate to call the mundane elements of the everyday 'profane' if in fact they are pregnant with the possibility of bringing forth the sacred? Probably not. The division can be made, but Holloway (2003) attributes all power to do this distinguishing to the subjects he interviews in conjunction with the agency of the materials that they appropriate in the convening of their

sacred space-times. He emphasises that the naming of a place as sacred or profane is contingent upon the embodied experience of the subject. This embodied element is underscored in his paper on séances (Holloway, 2006), where he argues that what is crucial to the naming of spaces as sacred/profane are the felt sensations or states of consciousness experienced by the individual in a particular space-time. Additionally, Holloway (2003) impresses on his readers that this sensing does not always come about from a conscious decision on the part of the subject to ritually sacralise a space. Rather, this in-breaking that Eliade (1959) speaks of - a fissure in the homogeneity of mundanity - is also determined by the subject as a qualitative difference between variegated degrees of interruption in their daily practice. "Practice is... continuous interruption, a series of events, as we (sometimes precariously) carry on. Moments that are unexpected and perform a caesura in continuity... are to a degree the norm" (Holloway, 2003, p.1971). It is therefore in the parsing of differing qualities or potency of a particular interruption that subjects sense the sacred. These constant interruptions and the work of interpreting them further highlight how the sacred is of the mundane and not separate from it.

Holloway's work pays close attention to how religious subjectivities are cultivated and religion is practiced in the day-to-day. He illustrates how spaces which may be presumed to be under secular rule are regularly appropriated by religious subjects as sites for the production of their religious identities and bring forth interruptions which can be interpreted as moments of close contact with the spiritual. As Gökarīksel and Secor's (2009) work on the veiling fashion of Muslim women in Turkey shows, such performing of religious identity in and with supposedly secular space, generates public debate regarding the co-existence of secular and religious life. This can mean conflicting ideas regarding the appropriateness of public behaviour rise to the surface (see Olson's (2013) work on the French state's policing of Muslim citizens). This contentiousness is frequently recognised in the co-productive relationship between religion and secularism. However, it is possible to identify co-productive relationships which diminish this antagonistic characteristic. There are different ways in which subjects with differing priorities and beliefs can come together to co-produce spaces and identities. This has given rise to a new epistemological movement in religious geography; postsecular geographies.

Postsecular geographies attempt to take seriously the differences that subjects perceive between one another and to examine the ways in which subjects can hold on to their ir/religious uniqueness whilst simultaneously creating means of public life together. As Cloke and Beaumont (2013) put it, the focus of postsecular geographies are collectives that enable the "mutually reflexive transformation of secular and theological ideas" (p.27), often in the context of "offer[ing] care, welfare and justice to socially excluded people" (p.27). Postsecular geographies therefore chart the spread of a postsecular attitude which kindles a process of attentive listening across perceived alterity; a readiness to search the intentions and rhetorics of those radically different to the self for resonances which may not seem obvious at first due to the unfamiliar ways in which they are framed. Postsecular geographies acknowledge the interpretive, praxis-based and fluid nature of religious (and secular) life, recognising that this can open subjects up to change as they encounter difference. But change is not inevitable. Holloway (2013) (and Dewsbury and Cloke (2009)) recognises that as religious subjects engage in the process of parsing sacred from secular space, the ability to do this parsing is motivated and enabled by the fostering of belief through individual and communal meditation, ritual, and discipline. Some forms of belief can be recalcitrant towards difference and there is a topography regarding the will and ability to evidence a postsecular attitude. It is crucial to understand religious subjects in this way in order to examine the spatial reproduction of belief (in private/public, official/unofficial religious spaces) as well as how this spatiality can also open or close subjects to instances of reinterpretation prompted by confounding encounters with difference. It is also crucial to realise that this process is on a spectrum between dogmatic and postsecular approaches to belief; different degrees of ability to simultaneously deconstruct the self - admitting to the overextension of certainty - whilst holding on to a certain amount of a principled or faithful disposition. Geographies of religion-society relations benefit immensely from attention to postsecular dispositions, values, and organising. Postsecular theory helps geographers to recognise the ways in which very real felt differences - that emerge between religious and secular ways of being in the world and between the myriad subjectivities that can emerge from such a fluid and embodied process of naming the sacred - are negotiated. In the later chapters five, six and seven of this thesis, I will examine

how a postsecular attitude enables religious subjects to transform their practices, form more diverse FCs, and negotiate a religious praxis between religious and activist spaces.

Religion and politics

The aim of this thesis is to examine Christian FCs' involvement in politics, particularly with a view to exploring narratives which contest the neoliberal, governmental co-option accounts which have at points dominated literature on the religion/politics interface. Baker's (2013) account of an increasing proclivity for social-justice praxis in Christian communities provides one such counter-narrative. However, this narrative must be couched in the context of the factors that I have worked through so far. How should I think about emerging religious activism in the rest of this thesis in response to (i) my incipient empirical concerns which focus on the complicated politics of FCs that are experimenting with modes of organising that are less dogmatic and hierarchical, (ii) one of the core epistemological concerns of religious geography being the everyday reproductions of religious communities and subjectivities, and (iii) religious subjectivation blurring sacred/secular divisions? I will review the two dominant ways in which the religion/politics interface has been dealt with so far in human geography, pointing to some of the gaps that I would like to address in these literatures which are highlighted by the three contextual points that I have outlined in the previous sentence. Following this, I will suggest how I might compose an epistemology of FCs and religious subjects that allows me to produce knowledge about their involvement in activism in a way that enhances understandings of the negotiations this involves.

Top-down epistemology

As Brace et al. (2006, p.29) claim, "aspects of religion... intersect with geography at every turn: from... bodily practices... to unpicking the complex relationships and politics of institutional space and place at a regional or national level". One of the key concerns of human geographers is how religion operates at the macro scale that Brace et al. mention; that of institutions and governance. Megoran (2013) points out that this has not always been the case.

For a long time, social scientists showed scant interest in the connection between religion and politics, particularly at the scale of governance and geopolitical conflict. This is no longer the case; as Agnew (2006) has said, "religion is the emerging political language of the time" (p.183). However, Megoran (2013) has also highlighted that at this scale there has been a skew towards producing material regarding the unsavoury behaviour of some Evangelical Christians, particularly in supporting aggressive foreign policy (Sturm and Dittmer, 2010). Megoran (2013; quoting Harding, 1991) further explains that this has made a "repugnant cultural other" (p.142) of Evangelical Christians more generally by using the actions of a handful of high-profile and amusingly wacky individuals to represent a politically variegated movement (see Wallis, 2005; Wallis, 2012). This literature often focusses on describing the collaboration between the media, the super-rich, the Republican Party, and Evangelical leaders in the USA, moving on to generate empirical representations of how the hegemony of these dominant agents presents itself at more local scales (Connolly, 2008; Dalby, 1990; Dittmer, 2008; Ó Tuathail, 2000). Devine et al. (2015) have argued that this has been a problem for some time in geographies of religion that encompass the macro-scale; that religious labels which represent a wide range of people (e.g. Evangelical/Muslim/Hindu) are used as simplistic devices to predict practice. This way of producing knowledge evidences an attentiveness to the influence of the structure side of the structure-agency relationship (Faier, 2011). This has resulted in narratives that naturalise the connection between evangelicalism and neoliberalism, eliciting political concern and prioritising a top-down polemical epistemology that is promoted as a bulwark against the furthering of oppressive religion/ governance crossovers, being that they have such power to sculpt the broader religio-political terrain (see Hackworth, 2010a/b). This is the first of the dominant ways in which the religion/politics interface has come to be analysed; as constituted largely by the transmission of a narrative from the top tier of religious and governmental institutions, down to religious subjects 'on the ground'.

This way of analysing the connection between religion and politics provides a valuable perspective. It would be damagingly myopic to ignore knowledges about the connections between elites and the broader scope of more everyday

factors involved in the reproduction of religion/politics crossovers. However, I argue that this way of perceiving the religion/politics interface needs to be tempered in three ways when considering the context that I am addressing.

Firstly, the frequent recurrence of representations which draw such straightforward connections between macro and micro scales have been questioned in terms of how representative they are of the mechanisms of quotidian religious life. It has been suggested that the mounting-up of evidence that Evangelical Christians are unquestionably *other* creates a convenient straw man for critical analysts to position themselves against, enabling the analyst to perform themselves through their critique as modern and progressive (Harding, 1991). As Faier (2011) argues, when hegemonic narratives are embodied by people on the ground, they are always subject to resistance. There is an increasing demand in religious geography for evidence of how the macro-scale is both influential *and contested* in the day-to-day practices of FCs and religious subjects (Dittmer, 2007; Holloway and Valins, 2002).

Secondly, literature focussed on a critique of the secularisation thesis is beginning to point to the necessity of breaking up top-down narratives of hegemonic discipline as the primary motivator of religious practice. Devine et al. (2015) argue that another factor contributing to the prevalence of a focus on top-down religio-political narratives is that the secularisation thesis was so widely prevalent in social sciences. This advanced a general sense that it was not worth examining religious life in great detail because it would be decreasingly relevant to everyone. Although numerous statistics indicate that religious adherence is declining in the West, this has largely been measured in terms of the rejection of its institutional forms (Bruce, 2002). However, by distancing the large-scale patterns of institutional decline (and its domineering activities) from critique based on the processes of lived religion, the secularisation thesis engenders a failure in knowledge production to capture the various meanings behind the changing expressions of religious practice and what they in turn might mean for the relationship between secularisation and religion (Olson et al., 2013b). This is in part what postsecular theory is trying to remedy, encouraging academics to take note of the pertinence of religion's muddy involvement in public life as a community of care and interpretation

(Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Habermas, 2011), particularly in the realm of grassroots political organising and the provision of welfare (for examples, see Barclay, 2013; Beaumont and Nicholls, 2007; Burbridge, 2013; Cloke et al., 2012; Cloke et al., 2016; Epstein, 2002; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Ley, 2008; Muers and Britt, 2012; Sutherland, 2014; Tosi and Vitale, 2009). Paying attention to the way in which religion bleeds into the public sphere improves understandings of religion itself and also of the ways in which new forms of welfare, care, and activism involving variegated degrees of religion operate in a way that top-down conceptions of the religion/politics interface cannot.

Thirdly, and most importantly for this thesis, this method of analysing the religion/politics interface does not speak directly enough to my research questions. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, some of my empirical work involved interviewing high-profile activists that criss-crossed a network of FCs and FBOs and were trying to stir-up activism around a plethora of issues including austerity, climate-change, pacifism, and community organising. Many analysts (Graeber, 2013; Müntzer, 2010; Roberts, 2005; Van Steenwyk, 2013) have pointed out that institutional Christianity has often tried to stifle such anti-establishment activists within its ranks. Research by Conradson (2013), Frost (2006), and Heelas and Woodhead (2005) has highlighted that one response that activist-types have had to this suppression has been to eschew institutional forms of Christianity by engaging with spaces that create an openness in which subjects can discuss, reflect upon, and transform their different religious expressions. My research focuses on such spaces in order to further unpack why people are engaging with them and why they have been started up in the first place. Therefore, my research is partially about how subjects are trying to resist a top-down way of defining Christian praxis. This requires an epistemology that can take resistant agency into consideration and explore the new ways in which subjects are blending religion and politics beyond and against hegemonic governance (something I will explore in greater detail in chapters two and three). However, I do not want to throw-out any debate about the relations between hegemonies and resistance altogether because I want to explore how the *raison d'être* of the FCs I researched has come about (in line with my first research question). This will necessitate a discussion about how their values have been constructed as a subversive reaction to institutional

conceptions of Christianity, and how certain characteristics of this institutional framework that do not invite their criticism might be reproduced in new FC forms and processes. For instance, although moving from listening to a preacher to forming discussion groups, FC event space might still be discursively rather than praxis focussed, narrowing opportunities for subjects to engage with the affective and practical aspects of religion. However, I will be focussing more on how subjects generate new forms of religion and politics in this context rather than directing my attention to how they reproduce institutional characteristics.

Place-making epistemology

A dissatisfaction with top-down epistemologies of religion is widespread in human geography. As I mentioned previously, Olson et al. (2013a) argue that over the last twenty years, finer-grained explorations of quotidian religion have begun to increase, offering an alternative to blockier, macro-scale accounts. There are (at least) two drivers behind the production of these literatures: (i) a desire to produce more detailed description of religious life at a smaller scale in order to highlight subaltern religiosities, and (ii) a desire to temper narratives which portray religion as lacking any intrinsic content and acting merely as a barometer for broader socioeconomic forces (see Ley and Tse, 2013). These two drivers have produced two according strains of literature. Firstly, that which focusses on the coming together of religious subjects and institutions in the convening of event-spaces and the theological encoding of place. These literatures examine the struggles between the micro (subject) and macro (institution/hegemony) in the production of the meso (local sacred space). For instance, MacDonald (2002) analyses the wrestle between a church's leadership and a parishioner over the appropriateness of decorating a church building, underscoring the struggle over the theological meanings encoded in the space. Secondly, there are those literatures which focus on the embodied and affective elements of religious life, which significantly impact subject formation and place-making. For example, Holloway's (2003) work on New Age practicioners highlights the way in which affective experiences of the spiritual are accessed through embodied ritual practice. This embodied practice attempts to appropriate space in order to function (e.g. arranging a space so it is comfortable enough and quiet enough to enable concentration on prayer).

Whether or not a space allows an encounter with the spiritual to transpire profoundly affects the subject's perception of whether a space is sacred or profane.

These literatures have enriched the landscape of religious geography by promoting understandings of religion that help to fragment top-down imaginings of the relationship between religious institutions and religious communities, especially if this relationship has been imagined in purely socioeconomic terms. They highlight that attributing religious meaning to place causes power struggles within communities and that maintaining the affective and ritual efficacy of religion are a key part of the struggles in the forming FCs and their crafting of event-spaces. These factors help to generate a second way of looking at the religion/politics interface by painting a more detailed picture of the internal politics of FCs. However, I argue that this view of religion/politics fails to address the context that I am interested in.

Much of the work that focuses on the politics of attributing religious meaning to place attends to this struggle in the context of institutions (see Kong, 2001; Ley and Tse, 2013; Southern, 2011). This mimics one of the problems with top-down epistemologies, because although it offers an alternative way of analysing the politics of FCs - highlighting how top-down ordinances are contested - it still couches this within relatively hierarchical FCs. When considering the context of less hierarchical FCs, it is important to think how this different form of FC alters the way in which geographers should think about the religion/politics interface (Megoran, 2010). Conradson (2013) highlights that the relationships convened by these less hierarchical religious spaces are less about struggling over how to encode the space in which they meet and more about creating space for different religious perspectives to be shared and constructively challenged. He provides the example of the Othona Community in Dorset, which claims a rooting in Christianity but also that it is "open to the widening future" [2] (p.190), evidencing this by running courses which are about spirituality more generally. Othona's courses encourage collective processes of religious performance and reflection such as discussion, meditation, and contemplation, as well as 'taught'

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[2] Taken from Conradson (2013), quoting the Othona website: www.othona-bb.org.uk.

elements which are designed to challenge and provoke rather than instruct. The community provides an environment for subjects to explore and question their religious identity without fear of institutional reprimand. This greater openness in FCs, redefines them as spaces in which differing religious subjectivities converge, allowing for subjective transformation through dialogic processes, rather than spaces in which to enforce religious governance. Therefore, there needs to be a way of thinking about the religion/politics interface in these spaces that is less about an antagonistic wrestle over the meaning of a space, and more about a mutual challenge to reflect upon identity and the barriers it can create to forming a community permeated by difference.

There needs to be a consideration of how these FCs deal with this degree of openness when situated in the context of religious involvement in care, welfare, and politics, highlighted by postsecular literatures and literature on the emergent turn of Christianity towards social justice praxis. These literatures highlight that subjects form their religious identities in a negotiation between a panoply of spaces associated with both progressive and conservative ethico-political proclivities and spaces of ritual and religious communion (Bartley, 2006). What happens when extremely opposed religio-political subjectivities that emerge from muddy sacred/secular co-production meet in these more open settings? For instance, a hawk (see Grudem, 2010) and a pacifist (Reuver, 1988) may both be pursuing a less institutional space in which to explore and question their religio-political identity but are probably going to come to an impasse regarding how to form solidarities beyond the FC in order to address injustices. In this context the religion/politics interface emerges as concerning not the enforcement of a top-down politics, or as a place in which to wrestle for control of a dominant religious discourse, but constituted by subjects who are negotiating a range of networks in which different religious and political ideologies are entangled in highly variegated ways. This frames less hierarchical FCs as spaces in which resources are provided for subjects to reflect upon the practice of their religion in order to reach beyond the FC into the day-to-day performance of their religious subjectivity though ethical and political activity. This idea of forming a religious subjectivity through daily labour across both sacred and secular space has been advanced by literatures that focus on the embodied and affective elements of religious life. These literatures

often highlight the "unofficial" religious spaces that subjects use to form their religious identity. Some of Lane's (2002) work centres around transforming his Christian identity though experiencing the divine in encounters with the wilderness. However, although this work highlights the ability for experiences of the divine in the mundane to reorient the subject's relation to their surroundings, blurring the boundary between secular and sacred space, its focus has been primarily on affect and conversions of seeing. So far this epistemological innovation in religious geography has not yet worked through what these reorientations might mean in terms of impact the on social and political issues, and what role a less hierarchical FC might have in this process. Work that connects this sense of constituting a religious identity across sacred/secular spatial boundaries with a sensitivity for religious involvement in politics and the role that different FC forms and processes can play in negotiating this connection is necessary. It could provide a new way of looking at the religion/politics interface that wrestles it away from a top-down obsession with Americanist evangelicalism and away from a sense that resisting institutional power only has an impact on the interior of FCs or on individual's affective orientation in the day-to-day, rather than them being related to broader networks of ethico-political action.

This way of contextualising the religion/politics interface - in FCs where a broad mixture of religio-political positionalities collide, are negotiated, and extend beyond the community - raises new questions about how FCs reconcile a desire to be open to allow room for religious differences, allowing people to explore their identity, whilst at the same time orienting themselves towards addressing injustices. What FC forms and processes can allow for an accommodation of such difference whilst at the same time forging solidarities? How do the internal politics of FCs change when they are connected up to a broader political landscape?

Faith communities, politics, and networks

As I have demonstrated, I am interested in FCs that create opportunities for subjects to explore and expand their own spirituality and the complexities that arise when FCs try to implement processes that enable this exploration.

However, I am also interested in the impact that this has on the ability of FCs to develop and empower subjectivities that have a propensity towards demonstrating solidarity with the marginalised. As I mentioned in the introduction, there is a growing literature regarding how FCs forge these solidarities. For example, Beaumont and Nicholls (2007) explore the ways in which churches in the Netherlands form loose networks with unions and humanist organisations in order to protest the rise in poverty resulting from neoliberal retrenchment. Alternatively, Cloke et al. (2016) examine the ways in which the Occupy movement in London and New York provided an opportunity for FCs to oppose the bailing out of banks during the financial crisis. Some of the faith-based activists that can be found in these political movements will be associated with particular FCs. How do the forms and processes of the FCs that they are associated with empower (or hinder) their political activism? This is the question that I would like to ask regarding the FCs that I have studied for this thesis; particularly with reference to openness and theological experimentation. Do the forms and processes that enable people to transform their theology in a safe space also facilitate encounters that undergird a political subjectivity that is motivated to show solidarity with others?

Jamoul and Wills (2008) analyse a FC that builds in processes to their communal life which encourage people to encounter difference and reflect upon their beliefs and associated practices. Their paper's narrative begins with the FC in question already engaged in a living wage campaign, and then they go on to argue that the introduction of a 'small groups' model within the FC itself reinforces this praxis of solidarity. These small groups (regular meetings of five or six parishioners in a group involving the same people every week) supplemented the regular Sunday worship, building in practices of discussion and reflection, and shifting the practice of church into the more mundane spaces of the home. This increased individuals' sense of responsibility for their own understanding of their faith as well as a sense that faith was pertinent beyond the church building, in the spaces they inhabited on a daily basis. By being involved in the living wage campaign and reflecting on the connection that faith might have to political action, the parishioners faith praxis was transformed. Jamoul and Wills quote a few of them, who communicate that it would be unimaginable to go back to a model of faith that was disengaged from

social justice practices. Being politically active had provoked their imagining of their faith and the small groups had provided a process for which to make sense of and respond to that provocation.

This draws a positive connection between building broad solidarities and less hierarchical models of FC space. By connecting social justice issues to spaces of discussion regarding religious praxis, rather than spaces of top-down instruction, religious subjects can begin to connect the issues raised in open discussion groups to practical outcomes 'on the ground'. However, this is within the context of a community organising model, which still utilises a significant amount of institutional power to persuade its members to mobilise alongside other institutions on a common issue (Alinsky, 1971; Bretherton, 2010). Is it that easy to draw such positive and clear connections between greater openness in FCs and political outputs more broadly? Especially considering that when FCs take this more open approach to organising their event-spaces, it opens them up to negotiations of a wider network of religious, political, and ethical organising? I have already outlined that FCs that rely less on hierarchies to organise their congregations raise questions about how to accommodate religio-political differences, especially when thinking about how to practice a politicised faith beyond the confines of the FC, and how to organise collectively to address a particular injustice. How can different FC *raison d'êtres* and models for accommodating difference affect how FCs overlap with activism? What do different FC models do for subjects negotiating between FC spaces of religious difference, and broader ethico-political networks to inform their religious praxis?

So far there has been little thinking about FCs as part of broader religious and political networks. When geographers turn their attention to them as part of an landscape of activism it is increasingly necessary to think about them in networked terms. Activist geographies have consistently attended the ways in which activist communities negotiate their *raison d'être*, accommodate difference, and make an impact beyond themselves - all issues that I have highlighted as affecting the FCs in my research - and core to thinking through these negotiations has been a network epistemology (Blühdorn, 2006; Cumbers et al., 2008; Nicholls, 2007; Tarrow, 2011). In the next chapter I will interpret the

network epistemologies that have emerged in activist geographies so as to help me to ask more specific questions about how FCs blur religious and activist geographies. I will also use it to begin to draw examples from writers on religious activism to highlight how problems underscored by activist geographies are already being identified in more open, activist FCs, arguing the necessity of more work on how FCs and religious subjects are blurring their religious praxis into activist settings.

CHAPTER 2: NETWORK EPISTEMOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed how this thesis developed its core research questions by overlapping experiences in the field, literature on the changing relationship of Christianity and society, and a desire to develop new lines of enquiry at the religion/politics interface. In this chapter I want to explore literature in the geography of activism and begin to think through a transposition of this literature into a religious context. Literature on the changing relationship between religion and society is beginning to highlight the increasing presence of activism in religious contexts (Baker, 2013; Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Muers and Britt, 2012). One of the central issues that I want to explore in my empirical chapters is how blending religion and activism can cause tensions in FCs between being open to difference and taking action to show solidarity with marginalised people. This is an issue that has already received some attention in activist geographies. However, emerging geographies of religious activism have not yet begun to work through how this issue is expressed in a religious context.

So far, human geographers have approached the study of religion in a way that has limited nuanced discussion of the intermingling of religion and politics. Those who have addressed religio-political content have tended to focus on critiquing Americanist Evangelical Christianity for its collaborations with neoliberalism and hawkish foreign policy. Counter to this approach have been analyses of religion that have sought to foreground its lived realities, developing understandings of what is important to religious people in the day-to-day, subverting narratives that reduce it to a socioeconomic pawn. They have thought through how religious subjects form their religious identity whilst traversing supposed sacred/secular divides and engaging in debates over how communal religious spaces should be theologically encoded in order to enhance spiritual encounters. However, this way of producing knowledge has not yet lead to more nuanced analyses of religion/politics crossovers, rather highlighting the content of religion that distinguishes it from political concerns, particularly affect and ritual. This has had the effect of producing analyses that

either lambast religion for its political regressiveness or laud it for its demonstration of creativity and inventiveness in crafting affect. For a long time, religious commentators have been forging a path between these two extremes; problematising religion 'from within' - not being afraid to make a committed ethico-political assessment of particular religious forms - whilst simultaneously appreciating both its complexities and potentialities. I want to work on transposing this attitude into a geographical key in this chapter in order to point to the complex ways in which religion and politics overlap within networks of subjects negotiating their religious identity between spaces convened by FCs and spaces of ethico-political engagement. Therefore I will work through the activist literature in geography, focussing on how activist groups negotiate the tensions between their *raison d'être*, accommodation of difference, and political outputs. This allows me to point to religious contexts in which similar complexities are arising and argue that the network epistemology of political activism is necessary for thinking through how FCs relate to politics because the complexities revealed in activist literatures are paralleled in discussions of religious ventures in activism. This will create a platform for chapter three which develops a theory of how to begin thinking through the complexities of developing a religious subjectivity as subjects traverse between FC event-spaces and arenas of political activism.

Activist geographies and religious analogies

In chapter one I finished by articulating that I wanted to find a way of thinking about FCs and politics that differed from the predominant models that have existed so far in the geography of religion. The first of these is concerned with how FCs respond to top-down governance. The second is concerned with the internal politics of religious place-making; the contestations of encoding religious space. The new way of looking at FCs and politics that I want to imagine, conceives of FCs as networked, related to other religious and political spaces. I want to imagine the FC as a porous space, convened by a network of subjects; spaces in which difference is given variegated margins of room to breathe, where people's religious experiences are shared and challenged, and which sends subjects back out - changed - into the day-to-day of religious praxis. This networked way of thinking about FCs offers a way of seeing the

religion/politics interface as negotiated by religious subjects in the day-to-day and in multiple, connected space-times. The FC has a role in shaping these subjects whilst also being shaped by them as they seek to perform their religious subjectivity through it.

A great deal of thinking about networks has been undertaken in activist geographies. Therefore firstly I will work through this literature and what it has to say about networks, organisation, and subject formation. Secondly, I will begin to look at how literature on networks has nuanced geographers' thinking on political associations, and the complexities of activists beginning to work together to create a collective space and/or joint purpose. Whilst exploring these literatures, I will underscore how these issues might be relevant to religious geography, and offer a new way of thinking about FCs.

Networks and identity

Agnew (1997, p.1) describes political geography thus:

Political geography concerns the processes involved in creating and the consequences for human populations of the uneven distribution of power over the earth's surface. This power is manifested geographically in the definition of boundaries between states or other political-territorial units, in the control exerted by powerful states and empires over less powerful ones, and in the material and emotional connections people make between themselves and the places or territories that they inhabit, thus limiting access of others to them.

However, he goes on to argue that since the 1960's, political geography has broadened its reach to encompass analyses of "the spatial organization of politics and the political organization of space" (p.1), defining "the term 'political' beyond the limits of 'official' politics" (p.3). The turn towards 'unofficial' politics has included a significant upturn in knowledge production regarding activism. This literature has advanced understandings of how activist movements - political organising beyond governmental and corporate institutions - form themselves and execute their objectives (Nicholls, 2009). Regarding formation, two of the prominent concepts that geographers have worked with and

developed in order to understand this process have been *networks* and *identity* (Cumbers et al., 2008). I shall explore how these concepts help geographers to understand the formation of activist movements.

Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue that until the early 1980's, the formation of activist groups was frequently conceptualised in terms of 'collective identity'. Activism arose through historical, hierarchical organisations (e.g. unions, religious groups, guilds) in which people had a strong 'collective identity'. However, collective identity is a contestable term (McDonald, 2002). It was conceived of - pre 80's - as a reified entity. Institutions would project an identity that subjects could sign up to. Subjects took on the collective identity of the institution and were able to exercise power through it by assimilating into a collective of individuals that uniformly accepted a homogeneous set of values and demands. However, it is no longer possible to conceive of collective identity in this way (Melucci, 1996). Significant political moments like the Seattle protests of 1999, the World Social Forum (WSF), and Occupy, evidence a confluence of activists that does not fit the pre-80's conception of mobilisation via collective identity. Rather than being dominated by historic institutions, these mobilisations have been characterised by the coming together of multiple 'affinity groups'. Affinity groups are small bands of people with a common interest which might be a political ideology (socialism, pacifism), hobby (gardening, knitting), or identity (religion, race, sexuality). They are characterised by close friendship and trust, and are not defined by a desire to have any impact external to the group. A confederation of affinity groups and individuals has been what has characterised mobilisations like Seattle, the WSF, and Occupy.

These large mobilisations represent impermanent unions that allow large numbers of activists to work together before disaggregating (into the more mundane rhythms of individual and affinity group life) because the movement has lost cohesion or momentum, has achieved its aim/s, or has marginalised some of its participants. This unity of purpose through impermanent togetherness demands a new way of situating the notion of identity within activism. Collective identity as institutional allegiance still exists amidst these movements but cannot explain the capacious solidarity they evidence, which

encompasses a great number of disparate identities (Tarrow, 2011). This mode of political organising allows for clusters of affinity groups and individuals to collaborate around common causes before splitting off and joining in with other clusters around different issues, or even withdrawing from activism altogether. This frames activism as an activity through which individuals and groups can express the complexity of their identity through political praxis with a diverse set of others without having to toe the line of performing an institutionalised collective identity (Graeber, 2002; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). This has infused political campaigning with a greater diversity, enabling subjects to mobilise around issues that matter to a broad constituency whilst representing and advocating for additional concerns within the wider body. This has enabled the flourishing of political activity around issues of race, sexuality, and disability for example (Chesters and Welsh, 2006). Affinity groups that refuse to disassociate these matters from their political identity not only demand that a wider body is attentive to these issues within itself, but act as nodes around which solidarities can develop to address intersecting societal injustices rather than ascribing undue privilege to one.

Häkli and Kallio (2014) highlight that being sensitive to this variegation within activist movements is to be sensitive to the way in which subjects interact with politics, which - they argue - is to be part of a topology. What they mean by this is that "political agency does not exist simply as a continuous physical space – a location, place or region in which the agency takes place – but rather it is a space constituted, held together and performed by relational intensities configured by what is significant or important for those involved" (p.190). This conceptualisation resonates with the idea of networks. One of the main contributions that the network concept brings to political geography is the idea that subjects engage in activism as part of a broader set of relationships and processes of identity formation (Blühdorn, 2006). When a subject is taking part in politics (including the kind of activism I have been discussing) they bring - folded within themselves - a network of connections (economic, emotional, professional, familial) that command differing levels of allegiance to parties within and beyond the time-space they are participating in. This highlights the complex negotiations that subjects have to engage in when they participate in spaces that are geared towards forging solidarities across a variegated

constituency, as other's political ideals may grate against their wider network of relationships (Routledge, 2003). However, these connections also allow for resources (emotional, material, symbolic, economic, informational) and new possibilities to flow into a burgeoning political alliance (Nicholls, 2009). I want to focus my attention at the subjective level that Häkli and Kallio (2014) draw attention to so as to begin a discussion regarding the negotiations that subjects have to undertake when trying to square the networks they are a part of with forming solidarities. This conceptualises the complex politics that subjects engage in as bridging between emerging political solidarities and their broader network of relationships.

The complications of network-style politics

As Blühdorn (2006) points out, negotiating a topology of relationships is pertinent to the subject in all settings that they find themselves in. Wherever the subject is, they have "matters of importance" (Häkli and Kallio, 2014, p.183) to decide upon, making choices about who to identify and act with. Should they enact the solidarity asked of them by a group if this would involve betraying other important relationships? For example, should they act in solidarity with a group on class issues despite that group's inability to address its own structural sexism (see Penny, 2013)? This is a political choice that exceeds the setting of activism. It arises in any setting where the subject is invited to identify with a larger unit. For example, Häkli and Kallio (2014) highlight that children make this choice when a family takes-on step-parents. Does the child allow themselves to be subjected to the step-parent's jurisdiction?

In this section I want to prove that this subjective decision making also occurs in a religious context, highlighting the need for work that analyses the topologies that FCs and religious subjects are caught up in. I will draw on geographies of activism because they have analysed - more than any other geographic subdiscipline - the tensions that arise when subjects try to negotiate between the network they convene in constructing their identity and the networks that characterise decentralised political organising. Activist geographies focus on these contestations, which are fraught with decisions for the subject to make about when to offer or withhold solidarity (Featherstone, 2003). By providing

accounts of analogous contestations regarding FCs from religious commentators, I intend to illustrate that geographers of religion need tools (which I provide in Chapter 3) for analysing how religious subjects navigate the networks they find themselves participating in, and what role their FC plays in facilitating that navigation.

One of the core discussions regarding networked ways of doing politics has been around how such diverse confederations of activists make decisions about how to take action together. In particular, discussions around decision making via consensus have been prominent due to its popularity within notable mobilisations such as Occupy and the Seattle protests of 1999 (Epstein, 2002; Graeber, 2011; Read, 2011). Consensus decision making is supposed to enable everyone in a group to take responsibility for a decision, allowing space for the inclusion of marginal concerns whilst aiming for the agreement of most participants (Burton, 2012). Some grassroots activists champion consensus because not only does it allow for decision making to be paired with high levels of accountability, but it prefigures a way for politics to operate beyond the alienating hegemony of party-political democracy (Sullivan, 2005). As Chatterton (2006) argues, moving political decision making beyond the purview of political parties (and other institutions) shifts the focus of political decision making away from toeing the party line towards direct discussion with whoever has turned up to declare their interest in a particular issue. Routledge (2003) states that this can convoke extremely diverse groups of people, creating a "convergence space" (p.345) where activists bring their different goals, ideologies, and strategies together to try and act in solidarity for change. Consensus and convergence spaces are separate phenomena but some theorists have touted their overlap as an ideal for political organisation. They have lauded the participative democracy across difference - that consensus and convergence co-constitute - as enfranchising and empowering a broad constituency of subjects and groups affected by an issue. Supposedly, it enables participants to find innovative ways to work together, softening unnecessarily recalcitrant political subjectivities in order to exercise the collective solidarity required to effect significant change (Coles, 2001; Connolly, 1999).

However, this is an idealistic depiction of the merging of consensus and convergence spaces. Often, making decisions via consensus in the presence of such a wide scope of differing ideals about what should be achieved - and how it should be achieved - can lead to the shutting down or artificial acceleration of discussion, the exclusion of valid but outlying differences, recourse to oppressive norms instead of inclusive solutions, and group disbandment (Burton, 2012; Sullivan, 2005). These problems have sparked discussion between those who celebrate convergence spaces as places where even the unlikely possibility of extreme differences being reconciled is countenanced (Chatterton, 2006; Della Porta, 2005; Juris, 2005) and those who argue that they need clear codes of conduct and incontestable core values (Clough, 2014; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Routledge, 2003). Those who call for greater openness in political organising to maximise the chances of drawing in the greatest number of lateral partners argue that imposing a set of norms or values on people can be a slippery slope that erases difference within a movement, therefore reproducing some of the injustices that it was supposed to address (Coles, 2001). They also argue that it is difficult to get people to join a movement if you try to impose its values on them from an assumed moral high ground, rather than engaging in dialogue to find common ground (Maxey, 1999). However, as Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) point out, this openness is itself based on a set of values that people have faith in over others. For instance, one popular view amongst these types of political networks is that collective decision making can deliver on a universal human desire for a society that is organised without coercion (Ward, 2004). Those who would argue for clearer limitations on participation, argue that this is evidence that it is impossible to 'leave our values at the door' - since that injunction itself contains a value judgement - and therefore there should be less hand-wringing about excluding people who do not harmonise with the core aims of a group. If a group accepts *anyone*, then disagreement could spiral on indefinitely and no decisions would ever be made (Gutman and Thomson, 1996; Rawls, 1996). Group expansion comes about by effectively convincing others of the correctness of the group's core values rather than dialoging with difference in order to find ways of acting together that are more inclusive.

These two different ways of seeing things (radical openness versus strong core values) often collide in social movements (Tarrow, 2011). Although this seems like it would lead to an impasse, activist-theorists have written empirical accounts of how this can work out in practice. Sullivan (2005) and Juris (2005) both argue that social movements often tend to have a strong core that can exclude difference. This core can even involve some institutions (unions, parties), which dominate things by guiding discussion, hurrying decisions, and disengaging alternative ideologies. For example, Sullivan (2005) argues that indigenous affinity groups with non-secular world views often struggle to be heard in the World Social Forum, with Western, secular, and modern ways of analysing problems given precedence. However, beyond this core (which certainly can organise large numbers of people into successful political action) there is often a margin in which a greater openness can be experienced. Although smaller and less coherent, Sullivan (2005) argues that this margin is where networked ways of doing politics are really happening. It exists beyond the official discussion spaces of the Forum in parties, meal times, musical performances, and rituals, allowing radically different groups to mingle informally and take the time - without the pressure of decision making - to practice different ways of relating to one another. This is where Sullivan argues that subjects can begin to develop the innovative solutions together that networked politics and consensus is supposed to develop; ways of protesting, modes of civil disobedience, and prefigurative community that wrong-foot and overcome oppressive power structures. Although large social movements fall short (for those who bemoan their exclusions), this disappointment is alleviated by their accidental convening of a vibrant fringe in which the work of a more authentically networked politics can be done.

Religious analogies of (and ventures into) networked politics

This problem of deciding on the margin of openness towards engaging difference in the midst of 'getting stuff done' has a clear parallel in religious literature. It runs a spectrum from writing concerned with making religious gatherings more accessible to 'seekers' (Claiborne, 2006; Davie, 2000; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) and those engaging with religion for formal purposes such as mourning, weddings, state occasions (Beaman, 2012; McLean and

Linsley, 2004; Megoran, 2006), through to writing on more activist configurations of religion (Craig, 1992; Howson, 2011; Van Steenwyk, 2013). Given that the subject of this thesis are these emerging activist religious expressions, I will focus on these literatures here to highlight that the mixing of religion and activism involves similar complexities to activism itself and that paying attention to these literatures can make geographers sensitive to how these complexities have clear precedents in religious settings and can help better assess the potential that FCs have to participate in activism.

Some religious people who have an activist bent perform in ways - whether formally or informally - that have very specific religious intentions behind them. This excludes a great number of people from participating in these actions alongside them. For instance, Epstein (2002) talks about Christian affinity groups she encountered during the 1999 Seattle protests. These activists were keen to put their lives and careers at risk - sometimes earning themselves jail sentences - by forming flotillas to stop Trident submarines from docking. Epstein recounts that these actions emerged from a strong impulse within these groups to take the suffering of the world into their own bodies and exercise personal responsibility for addressing injustice. These affinity groups involved small groups of people and were inaugurated with the express purpose of taking action against nuclear armaments. They had clear values which would probably have discouraged many people from joining. Many Christian commentators have written critique about churches lackadaisical approach to social justice and in the process have attempted to set down clear values regarding what FCs should get involved in. For instance, Brueggemann (1978; 2012) outlines the Church's purpose in exclusively prophetic terms; in his opinion it should ruthlessly critique imperial power and be seen to be building an alternative society in the shell of the current one. However, Yoder (2001) is keen not to let the power to define the church end up in the hands of a few gatekeepers, even if they do have ideas about social justice that align with his own. As Boren (2010) and Claiborne (2006) point out, overbearing leadership in FCs can crush creative solutions to addressing social injustices by building on abstract normativities rather than collective praxis.

Moody's (2012) work focuses on FCs that claim to eschew practices that enforce normative values, instead convening event-spaces in which to trouble people's identities. These spaces are largely focussed around performance art that seeks to challenge people's judgement on those who are different to themselves, engineering situations in which people are confronted by the other. People are challenged to be open to these encounters by 'leaving their values at the door', which is supposed to lead to personal transformation and an enhanced ability to feel affinity with those who they may once have found threatening. However, this does not prepare subjects for the difficulties of actually forging ongoing relationships with the others that an art piece triggers a new-found empathy for. Rather than handing down values from top-down structures, or 'avoiding' values altogether, Rieger and Pui-lan (2012) suggest that FCs constitute a set of values around activism through collective praxis; collectively reflecting upon attempts to practically demonstrate core truths (particularly core truths such as: God has a bias for the poor (Gutiérrez, 1988)). Values are arrived at by reflexively negotiating a blurred scared/secular boundary of religious performance, extending solidarity beyond the faith community out towards marginalised groups. Boff (1985) argues in concert with this, claiming that theology is not about pinning-down a perfect theory of the transcendent, but about finding a way to enable the church to effectively communicate central truths. For example, divine indignation at injustice. Theology is therefore action, communicating divine indignation through engaging in the fight for social justice.

However, because 'core truths' can have a vastly different meaning even within one FC (see Brown, 2015a; Dittmer, 2010), praxis can be a tricky field to negotiate, particularly in churches. Work that I carried out in Glasgow (Sutherland, 2014) highlighted the complexity of this negotiation. Many churches swerved the issue altogether, because - although passionate about social justice - some leaders in these churches felt that they could not galvanise their congregations around particular issues because this would ostracise certain members. These leaders felt that people attended their church not because of political leanings but because of theological preference, which - they argued - allowed leeway for people from a wide spectrum of political preferences to feel affinity with the church. Leaders felt that if they took an

overtly political stand then this would be too divisive. However, others took a less cagey approach. Rather than treat church as an event-space in which to inculcate participants with a set of 'core values', or privileging the theology of a permanent preacher to stop people from fighting over theological disagreements, church meetings were set up as spaces in which people could share their experiences and stories about how they were living out their faith. The idea behind this model - expressed by the leaders of these churches - was to create space in which people could begin to own their faith more, rather than constantly take the lead from charismatic and dominant authority figures. Church could act as a space for people to begin to network their theology, their experiences, and resources, so as to begin to form an affinity-group style of politics as described by political geographers, where like-minded people are able to find each other and do praxis together. This did not lead to uniformly social-justice directed practices in these groups, some of them filtering out into more social pursuits such as baking, sewing, reading groups, or even political conservatism that opposed gay marriage and abortion. However, some did begin to build sets of values together and get involved in various arenas of activism such as refugee solidarity, ecology, and fairtrade consumption. This probably has the most in common with Sullivan's 'fringe' politics; allowing different ways of performing faithfully to emerge.

Concluding remarks

By working through some examples of how applying a network epistemology to political organising can highlight the complexities and difficulties it generates, I have been able to draw across analogous concerns from activist religious literatures to illustrate a parallel sensitivity towards the difficulties of activism within FCs. It follows that geographers of religion should engage with this critical 'insider' voice so as to produce more accurate cultural geographies of religious activism, finding a way between affect-focussed epistemologies and those that are sceptical of the ability of FCs to have any productive engagement with politics. However, this is not to say that there are not additional complications that should be added to an epistemology of FCs. Although in structural terms, it is possible to talk about values and organisation by simply swapping in 'religion' for 'political ideology' when it comes to activism, as a few geographers

have pointed out it would be wrong to reduce religion to a system of ideas about socioeconomics, robbing it of any other content (Holloway, 2006; Ley and Tse, 2013). Here it is right to turn to some of the poststructural explorations in the geography of religion and further religious literatures to explore some of the extra negotiations that religion brings to its nexus with activism. This question will be explored in some of my 'findings' chapters: what resources does being part of a FC provide that helps/hinders religious subjects as they try to make sense of their religious praxis across supposed scared/secular divides? However, geographers also need an epistemology to help themselves think through how religious subjects undergo this negotiation. Constructing this epistemology is the role of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THEOGRAPHY: SUBJECT, THEOLOGY, AND PRAXIS[3]

Introduction

As I outlined in Chapter 1, there are two ways in which geographers have tried to interrogate the religion/politics interface so far. Firstly, by paying attention to values reproduced at a variety of scales, having been received from institutionally protected hegemonies, and secondly by paying attention to the ways that top-down religious politics is contested at the local level through struggles over the encoding of religiously appropriated space. However, I have argued that these ways of looking at religion/politics do not sufficiently address the context that my research is couched in; that of FCs that are intentionally blurring the boundaries between so-called sacred and secular realms, attempting to engender more activist approaches to faith, and experimenting with FC forms and processes that hold together - rather than erase - difference. At the end of chapter one I argued that as FCs are increasingly and intentionally connected up to activist geographies and that some of the issues that have been explored by activist geographies are beginning to be identified in the religious realm. This necessitates the consideration of FCs through a network epistemology because this has been one of the key intellectual technologies that geographers have used to understand the complications that are present in activist circles, and parallel complications are presenting themselves in FCs as they venture into activist territory.

Some of the examples that I have provided of religious approaches to activism in Chapter 2 illustrate that there are a variety of ways in which religious subjects perform their faith, emerging from a shifting network of different religious affects and discourses. Wink (1988) argues that protest and ritual - although they draw on different discourses, convene different affective atmospheres, and are composed from different communities - are both integral to religious life, and both must inform the becoming of religious subjectivity. Religious subjects move between spaces which have different levels and intensities of religious

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[3] This chapter is an edited version of a paper I have had published in *Progress in Human Geography* entitled *Theography: Subject, theology, and praxis in geographies of religion.* The manuscript for this paper can be found in Appendix A.

significance which change for the subject as they traverse between them, trying to make sense of their connection or lack thereof. The postsecular theory that I mentioned in chapter one underscores this networked and recursive production of religious identities. Religious people undergo subjectivation and praxis through an ongoing conversation between official and 'unofficial' (Kong 2010) religious spaces, including - as pointed out by Baker (2013) - spaces of activism. Religious subjects convene a network of relationships between differing religious significances - affects/discourses, progressives/conservatives, duty/ritual, production/consumption - that is capable of throwing up all sorts of tensions that subjects have to negotiate.

How do religious subjects negotiate this complex landscape variegated religious significance? There has been a drive examine the everyday lives of religious subjects (Holloway and Valins, 2002) in order to better understand the reproduction of religious subjectivities and organisations. Religion is increasingly perceived as a malleable phenomenon (Ivakhiv, 2006), composed of "systems of meaning derived from cultural resources by active agents, who come to affectively embody those meanings" (Dittmer, 2007, p.738). One of the foci of this shift has been the religious *subject* (Gökarīksel and Secor, 2009; Olson et al., 2013a; Vincett, 2013), emphasising the ways in which subjects struggle with various power relations in order to understand and perform their religious identity. A concern emerging from these subject-focussed religious geographies is that deficient understandings of theology have undermined attempts to generate nuanced knowledges regarding religious subjects (Korf, 2006; Pabst, 2011). This chapter seeks to advance religious geographies of the subject by unpacking the relation of the religious subject to theology through praxis. Firstly, by drawing the connections between disparate notions of what theology is into a complex concept that disperses more of the power to define theology away from hegemonies. Secondly, by unpacking how - through praxis - the subject redefines theology and its relevance to spatial imaginations. Working through these issues will indicate the theoretical space into which I will introduce the concept of *theography* as a tool which can help geographers to analyse subjective interactions with theology, and how this process engenders difference and change, creating hybrid religious subjectivities.

In the rest of the chapter I will illustrate that theography is an important concept for geographies of religion by reviewing various strands of thought relating to the subject and theology. These expositions will highlight how theography draws on and extends existing thought on religious subjectivities before going on to illustrate what it can help geographers of religion to better understand. I will explore two models of subjectivity, drawn from Badiou (1997; 2009) and Levinas (1952; 1969; 1978) in order to demonstrate the connections between theology and praxis that theography brings together. Attention to these models will highlight the important analytical practice of recognising variance between the subjective framings of transcendence inherent in theology due to these variations' distinct influence on spatial imagination and praxis. I will follow this with a discussion of how theography can begin to reframe the way in which geographers imagine space shaping and being shaped by religious subjects. This will draw on examples from the geography of religion and related disciplines to illustrate how the subjective reproduction of theology is deployed as a technique of self that enables the subject to both dissent from and conform to religious hegemonies. Hence, theography presents itself as a concept which can help geographers of religion to make sense of the fluidity of marginal and mainstream religious practices by advancing a coherent understanding of how subjects produce theology instead of recourse to crude analysis that consigns subjects to 'progressive' or 'regressive' blocs.

The religious subject, theology as praxis, and theography

As I mentioned in chapter one, Olson et al. (2013a) have pointed out that religious geographies have been moving away from explaining broad religious categorisation towards greater exploration of what it is to be religious through the everyday practices of religious people (see also, Devine et al., 2015). Subaltern readings of religion have been reinserted into geographic analyses, representing religion as fluid and produced by struggle. Both Ivakhiv (2006) and Dittmer (2007) have argued that in order to understand religion more clearly there needs to be a shift in "focus from the object of religion to the subjects who contextualise it" (Dittmer, 2007, p.737). As Kong (2001) points out, studying religious subjects helps geographers to attend to the flaky edges of communities, highlighting how subjects construct their religious identity in the

day-to-day through processes that break from hegemonies, embodying difference and change.

Subjects make religious meanings by deconstructing, splicing, and reproducing cross-currents of mainstream and marginal religious affects and discourses. An example of this kind of change can be drawn from Megoran's (2010) work on an evangelical "Reconciliation Walk" (p.382) along the route of the First Crusade. During the walk, public apologies were offered by Christians for the actions of 11th Century Crusaders with the intention of healing relations between middle-eastern Muslims and the Church and opening up the possibility of proselytisation. However, Megoran reports that in encountering the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli oppression, the leaders of the walk experienced a troubling clash between their cognitive assent to Zionism and an affective solidarity that they felt with oppressed Palestinians. Megoran writes that this forced the walk's organisers to reflect "on the consequences of the premillenial Christian Zionist position" (p.390). This reflection prompted them to reframe their theology, adopting a different view of the Christian God from which Zionism was cut off. After changing their theology, some of these people continued to work with the organisation that promoted the walk - continuing to identify as evangelicals - but by using their subjective agency, reconfiguring their theological outlook. They subverted the dominant Zionist discourses that they had previously taken for granted, generating a hybrid religious identity by splicing mainstream evangelicalism and anti-Zionism.

Concurrent with the emergence of small-scale and subject-focussed modes of knowledge production has been an increase in the number of geographers generating theory regarding the nature of theology. Korf (2006) identifies this as a welcome trend because many geographers have tried to understand religion without understanding its theological underpinnings (see Pabst, 2011). Ley and Tse (2013) suggest that analysts have often done "categorical violence" (p.156) to religious communities by constraining explanation of theologically inspired performances to include only socioeconomic factors (Holloway, 2006; Kong, 2010). However, conceptualising theology is not straightforward because there are competing notions about what it is. So far, in geographies of religion there exists a vague sense across the board that theology is about framing 'the

transcendent' (Tse, 2014). 'The transcendent' is referred to in the broadest sense here; as something that exceeds the subject's comprehension and accentuates the limits of their perception and ability to control things (Luckmann, 1990). But there are different theories as to how the subject comes to frame transcendence, which form two loose epistemologies - both of which have given geographers of religion new lenses through which to examine subjective interactions with theology.

Firstly, there are those who focus on what Olson (2006) calls the "power of ideas" (p.885) in religious geographies and how "place-making [is] informed by understandings of the transcendent" (Tse, 2014, p.202). Much of this work has focussed on how hegemonic religious ideals and discourse are transmitted by institutional technologies (hierarchies/creeds/traditions - purportedly rooted in foundational texts) to subjects who go on to manifest an embodied response to these top-down religious imaginations (Olson et al., 2013b; Sturm, 2013). This approach to theology has allowed geographers of religion to explore the ways in which different representations of transcendence - conceived of largely in hegemonic or institutional terms - clash in the subject's life (Tse, 2014). This draws attention to the reproduction and "reanimation" (Olson, 2013, p.149) of different discursive framings of transcendence and the ways in which their competing narratives converge upon the subject's embodiment. Gökarīksel and Secor (2009) illustrate this by examining the clashing Islamic narratives regarding women's veiling fashion (the development of hair-covering fabrics, colours, and designs for women) in Turkey. On one hand, Islamist critics argue that veiling fashion is incompatible with Islamic values because it resonates with hedonism and consumerism. On the other hand, those who promote the garments claim that they enable wearers to remain distinctively Muslim whilst simultaneously making Islamic ways of life relevant to an increasingly modern Turkey. Turkish women are caught up in these clashing narratives about Islam which means that the choices that they make about their clothing also say something about what kind of Muslim they are; how they frame transcendence. This infuses their decision making about clothes with a tension between the complex religious identity that they are trying to project and the stifling categories that are presented to them by Islamic conservatives and the fashion industry.

Secondly, there are those who focus on the affective presence of the transcendent as the realm of theology. In this second sense, theology is not doctrinal knowledge but the ability to sense the transcendent in the body; the ability to recognise the presence of the sacred. This work has focussed on how embodied sensations are entangled with belief (Holloway 2003; 2006), suggesting that belief is more of a felt preference for certain tenets rather than cognitive assent to them. This brand of theory posits that believing in a particular set of religious tenets is bolstered most effectively by them being associated with a numinous affective experience. There is a cycle of mutual reinforcement between affect, ritual, and discourse - each often triggering the other and creating the conditions for belief (Dewsbury and Cloke, 2009). However, central to this way of framing theology is the idea that without a notable affective experience, the cycle of mutual reinforcement would falter. For example, Holloway's (2003) work with New Age practitioners highlights that "the body makes (belief) as much as or possibly more than, it is made (to believe)" (p.1967). Through crafting affect via ritual, and being open to the possibility of serendipitous encounters with the transcendent, New Age subjects define the sacred through "an embodied labour of differentiation with the nominally profane" (Holloway, 2003, p.1967). Sacred space is identified as that which enables an embodied sensation of the transcendent and profane space is that which does not (see Buttimer, 2006; Lane, 2002). Therefore, theology is the embodied process of making this differentiation, not worrying over which doctrines most accurately represent the will or nature of the divine.

I acknowledge that these two epistemologies are often theoretically open-ended. When they recommend their take on theological discourse or affect they are sensitive to the gaps in knowledge creation that the other 'camp' could help to fill in. For instance when Holloway (2013) writes about religious hopefulness, although he wants to underscore the nonrepresentational aspects of religious hope, he does not present hope as purely pre-cognitively constituted; doctrine is frequently intermingled with affect in a dynamic, co-productive relationship. However, two problems emerge if things are just left at the stage of each 'camp' tipping its hat to the other.

Firstly, little work has tried to imagine how these two very different conceptualisations of theology might imbricate in subject's lives. Many religious subject's consider both affect *and* discourse to be legitimate sources of knowledge about the transcendent, drawing the subject into a process of negotiating between the two. For example, studies of charismatic Christians reveal that their theological imaginations convene a delicate balance between the embodied sensing of the Holy Spirit and regulation of this affective openness by stringent doctrine (Guest et al, 2012; Harvey and Vincett, 2012). Moreover, these affective and discursive elements do not always complement one another. Work done in churches in Glasgow has illustrated the tension that subjects encounter between a transcendent presence that they feel when working alongside the marginalised and the predominant conservative theology in the church communities they identify with (Sutherland, 2014). This theology engendered suspicion of religious expressions that were oriented towards social justice practices and less towards generating opportunities to preach to people (see also Cloke et al. 2012). This example illustrates that subjects might struggle to fully commit to either a purely discursive or affective guiding of their religiosity and are caught in a balancing act between the two factors, sparking a recursive process of review and reconsideration of their religious expression (see Dittmer, 2010; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Megoran, 2010). Furthermore, the example highlights that religious subjects are produced by their movement between spaces. Many religious ways of life are characterised by a mixture of experiences convened in different spaces. There are spaces of ritual, conviviality, duty, and decision-making. All of these spaces are of religious import to the subject and yet constitute a variegated network of affective experiences and discursive framings. How do religious subjects make decisions about what affects and discourses are of religious import when they constitute such a wide scope of difference? Surely reducing theology to either discursive or embodied knowledge acquired in one particular space eschews the ability to analyse the networked complexity of religious subjects?

Recognising this reduction highlights a second problem. Both affective and discursive approaches to theology frame a particular factor that affects the subject's religious practice. However, they do little to outline how the subject might respond to these factors apart from acquiescence or simply to be plagued

by tension. Both emphasise the structure side of the struggle between structure and agency (Faier, 2011). If we view theology from a primarily discursive or affective perspective, it is framed as a structure that is out of the subject's hands. But this is out of line with the new literatures on religion which stress that it is through the subjective agency of religious people that theology is reproduced in increasingly hybrid forms (Dittmer, 2007; Holloway and Valins, 2002; Olson et al., 2013a). Theology is not solely a top-down matter, but something that the subject can interact with in the day-to-day in order to make sense of and formulate a response to their circumstances, interacting with both the affective and the discursive resources of religion. This frames the subject as a decision-maker regarding theology as they encounter a plethora of differing qualities of affect and discourse relating to the transcendent.

In response to these two problems, how can theology be conceptualised as (i) responding to both discursive and affective material between spaces, and (ii) something that the subject negotiates and makes decisions about in the everyday? Citing Freire (1970), kinpaisby-hill (2011) points out that a useful way to think about subjects negotiating both affect and discourse and making choices about how best to practice in response to this negotiation is through the concept of praxis; practice under reflection. The concept of praxis emphasises that subjects have ideals about their circumstances and how they should respond to them, and they have experiences of trying to implement these ideals. The ideal and the implementation often misalign, and subjects reflect upon how best to solve these misalignments, which may involve changing their ideals and/or practices. Deciding on how much to change ideals or practices and to commit to acting upon these changes is facilitated by reflexivity (Bonnington, 2015). In the context of politics, kinpaisby-hill (2011), argue that subjects are actively reflexive, retheorising their political ideals and practices, negotiating between discourse, affect and emotion generated during practice, and the efficacy of practice in manifesting ideals and desirable affect. A similar reflexive retheorisation as part of praxis can be identified in religious subjects' lives as they attempt to frame transcendence in the tension between discursive and affective registers and make choices about effective practice. Religious reflexivity is a theme in the work of both Connolly (1999) and Foucault (2005; see Martin et al., 1988), who foreground it as a politically relevant technique for

transforming the self; refining the subject's ideals and desires. Religious subjects apply reflexive effort to their frame of transcendence in response to tensions between discourse and affect so as to practice with reference to transcendence in a way that aligns with their emerging theorisation of it. They generate performances that are a result of a recursive relationship between action and reflection. I argue that this is a better way of conceptualising the relation between the subject and theology in the geography of religion; theology as praxis.

Framing theology as praxis underscores the importance of reflexivity so that religious subjects can negotiate a theory of transcendence from a contradictory and variegated cocktail of religious affect and discourse, making choices about how to practice in response to it. Moreover, Foucault's (2005) work on religious reflexivity highlights the religious subject better preparing themselves to put their ideals into practice, using religious practices as 'techniques of self' to transform themselves (e.g. contemplation, confession, solitude, endurance), resisting contrary desires and ways of being. As Connolly (1999) puts it, Foucault's work on religious reflexivity examines "experiments in the art of self... these practices are about shifting... sensibilities", disciplining the self so as to perform in a way that better represents allegiance to a particular frame of transcendence. I call the process by which religious subjects reflexively negotiate between affective and discursive framings of the transcendent and then work upon the self to reflect that framing through practice, *theography.*

Theography is a reorientation of the subject's reflexivity towards transcendence; it is a partial and deliberate form of reflexivity practiced by religious subjects that I identify to emphasise that subjects cannot read their theology - their framing of transcendence - off of a particular discursive or affective grid. It is framed by theographic work; negotiation between different potential sources of knowledge about the transcendent. It is distinct from a more general reflexivity as it refers specifically to the subject making choices about how to frame transcendence and working upon the self - writing this frame *into* the self - in order to carry out actions that they feel represent that frame. (This is opposed to less purposeful forms of reflexivity; what Archer (2003) has called "fractured reflexivity" (p.362), which has no practical outcome). Theography is distinct from theology (often

associated with academic scriptural interpretation, or - as I have outlined above - a praxis) and liberation theology (which emphasises the importance of praxis for theology, but concerns reconstructions of Christianity by marginalised people and not a more general religious process (Gutiérrez, 1988; Howson, 2011)). Theography goes beyond both of these concepts, highlighting the reflexive aspect of theology-as-praxis in which religious subjects engage in recursive theorising of transcendence, negotiating between discursive and affective registers in order to make choices about and changes to practice. As religious subjects encounter new (and evaluate old) discourses-regarding and affective experiences-of transcendence, reflection upon and retheorisation of transcendence are prompted, leading (potentially) to altered practice. I identify theography as a crucial process within theology-as-praxis and an influential factor regarding decision-making and changing religious practices.

Framing transcendence, praxis, and space

Before discussing how theography can edify the analyses of geographers of religion, I want to flag-up why it is important to consider how subjects frame transcendence when thinking about space and praxis. Although theology has begun to garner attention regarding its effect on spatial imaginations, particularly in geopolitics (Megoran, 2006; Sturm, 2013; Wallace, 2006), there has been little work focussing on how subjects reproduce theology in a more quotidian way, and the effect this has on spatial imagination and practices. Given that religion is regarded as increasingly pertinent, permeating an increasing number of spheres of life (Kong, 2001; Tse, 2014), even possibly becoming "the emerging political language of the time" (Agnew, 2006, p.183), human geography can increase its broad salience with increasingly detailed understandings of the ways in which subjects reproduce religion. In this section I will illustrate how different frames of transcendence must be paid close attention to because of their distinct impacts on the spatial imagination of the subject and their praxis. I will compare the work of Badiou and Levinas in order to show how different frames of transcendence are crucial to the subject's spatial imagination and creating parameters of legitimacy regarding action. Although both of these writers work with "secular" (Moyn, 2005, p.182) notions of transcendence, comparing them provides an effective proxy for illustrating

the differences that emerge in theologically-inflected ways of life by highlighting how two different ways of framing transcendence legitimate different responses to a common problem. For Badiou and Levinas the common problem is how to respond to the other.

Badiou's (1997; 2009) theory of transcendence[4] reorients the subject towards the other by severing the subject from the symbolic order. He suggests that in order to be receptive to the other, the subject must overcome its way of understanding the world - and its according marginalisations - by reducing their identity to fidelity to *the event*. Rather than the self being informed solely by immanent factors and folding its past experiences over into the present to practice in ways that seem 'new' - but are in fact contextual - Badiou argues that *events* exist in which something happens that exceeds what has gone before. These events disturb the subject's relation to their perceived reality so as to create an opening for them to rewire their values and perceptions. Badiou argues that the clearest example of the subject using an event to transform their relation to the other is found in St.Paul's Christian theology. In St.Paul's writings, the Christian subject is defined as someone who severs connections to all of their identifiers by privileging fidelity to the resurrection event. Badiou uses this as a model, arguing that by breaking the strength of other identifiers over the subject, fidelity to an event renders the subject indifferent to the perceived differences caused by unevenness in intersubjective identities. This sets the subject against oppressions that are incommensurable with the event's reframing of reality, a reframing which generates new ways of conceiving what is possible without the availability of explanatory tools for those possibilities in the hegemonic symbolic order. In proclaiming the event and refusing to comply with the dominant order, the subject undermines the legitimacy of that order by exercising solidarity with those who have been labelled 'other' by it.

Badiou's theory encourages the subject to conceive of transcendence as located in an immanence-breaking event. Fidelity to the event should initiate a

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[4] Badiou himself is not comfortable with the notion of transcendence. He has tried to form a theory that can explain the transformation of the subject emerging from an ontology of pure immanence (McLennan, 2011). However, arguments about transcendence cannot but dog Badiou's philosophy due to his theory of the event representing an apparent break in immanence (Fowl, 2010; Holsclaw, 2010; Phelps, 2008).

cycle of praxis that discerns tactical ways in which to undermine the hegemonic order and challenge allegiance to what is immanent with reference to an irruption in its continuity. Praxis should also include an active promotion of the event's reframing of what is possible. Therefore with regards to space, it is the responsibility of the Badiouian subject to recognise that the event changed the spatial reproduction of othering relationships, and deduce how an analogous shift would look now. First century Christians' commitment to the resurrection event caused them to shift the geography of their living arrangements, selling land and property in order to live in community and provide for the material needs of believers, addressing divisions between rich and poor (Claiborne and Campolo, 2013; Hengel, 1974). The Badiouian subject does not simply follow this example but tries to create parallels in terms of societal change by asking: how are social divisions that the symbolic order tells me are impossible to overcome reproduced spatially? How might I reverse these spatialities so as to undermine them and witness to the possibility of an alternative? In Badiou's philosophy, undermining the symbolic order and promoting something that contradicts it, are both demonstrated by practicing solidarity with those who are oppressed by the dominant order; seeking to legitimate their claim to better representation and enhancing their representation in spaces from which they are actively excluded. This has profound geographical implications as the subject seeks to most effectively eradicate spatial inequalities maintained by the dominant order that - for example - exclude homeless people from commercial areas (Davis, 1990; Mitchell, 1995) or refugees from asylum (Gill et al., 2014). A Badiouian praxis would seek to shift the subject's spatial imagination so that homeless people would not seem out-of-place in public parks and shopping centres and so it would seem sensible that people from war-torn countries could move to wherever they feel most safe.

In contrast, Levinas (1952; 1969; 1978) reorients the subject towards the other as the route to rather than subject to transcendence. Levinas argued that there can be no subjective encounter with transcendence without the other. The transcendent is located in the Messianic Age - a non-oppressive sociality - which can only be reached through ethics; an engagement with the other. This engagement involves letting the other delegitimise the subject's symbolic order (Eagleton, 2009). In trying to fit the other into their symbolic order the subject

does violence to the other and so in order to reduce oppression the subject gives up their symbolic order to the other for critique (Caygill, 2002). This is a transformative process; Levinas wrote that "[t]he subject, whilst preserving itself, has the possibility of not returning to itself" (1978, p.165). By submitting to the will of the other, the subject sacrifices their symbolic order (see Marcel, 1927). The other makes the illegitimate oppressiveness of the subject's symbolic order clear to the subject through their ethical encounter, after which the subject returns to themselves with a transformed way of ordering the world. It is by repeated transformative encounters with others (ethics) that the subject follows a route to transcendence.

Levinas conceived of this process as tied to Jewish religion. He rejected theories of God/transcendence as a presence or an encounter (for which he critiqued Kierkegaard (1992)). All that the subject can do is follow a trace of transcendence through ethics, which Levinas argued was expressed most accurately by a moralistic Judaism that favoured a "Talmudic science" (Levinas, 1952, p.2) over numinous encounters with transcendence. Levinas recommended a praxis informed by studying the Talmud, a book belonging to Jewish tradition and the basis for Jewish law. It includes expositions of and meditation upon the Torah by many Jewish commentators, in order to discern properly Jewish ethics and philosophy. To Levinas, the Talmud was the recorded process of distilling the ethical essence of the Torah. In the absence of the jarring presence of a transcendence, transcendence is sought by studying and developing a process of ethical reasoning that has evolved over the centuries. Aided by the Talmud, the subject must engage in ethical relationships with others in order to overcome oppressive social orders (Moyn, 2005).

Levinas' frame of transcendence sets up a rigid praxis; studying the Talmud and face-to-face dialogue with the other are the only acceptable endeavours. However, Howitt (2002) argues that although adopting a Levinasian ethics is rooted in the place of the face-to-face encounter with the other, it also requires a broad spatial imagination, particularly regarding scale. He posits that the subjective symbolic order that the other challenges also includes a "visual ideology" (p.301). This visual ideology stretches across scale, defining spaces and places that are valuable to the subject but also crucial to the nourishment of

the other. If these places are imagined in a way that impedes the other's nourishment, then - according to Levinas' ethics - this imagination must be overthrown. If responsibility for the other is to be exercised, a sense of interdependence regarding place - that places are interconnected across space as a network of nourishment for the other - must also be allowed to challenge the subject's symbolic order. When the subject recognises what is required - (i) that places must have space for plurality beyond their own symbolic order, and (ii) that they form part of a set of interconnections that must be maintained - if the other is to be nourished, this shapes a more political approach to place that has an anti-colonial tenor (Howitt, 2002). Place can no longer be defined as a resource to be appropriated but should be marked by the coming together of deep social interaction in order to produce creative solutions to the intertwining of different needs. This opens up a praxis that involves a politics of place, building fluid and generous fellowships, based on the findings of their ethical endeavours and commitment to a frame of transcendence that is located in a Messianic future.

Comparing Badiou and Levinas' work highlights that different frames of transcendence give rise to different spatial imaginations and legitimate options for praxis. Badiou's event-based transcendence splits space into tactical arenas of antagonisation (re: the symbolic order) and solidarity (re: the other). Levinas' Messianic transcendence, engenders an anti-colonial politics of place through the ethical transformation brought about by encountering the other. However, both thinkers set up static notions of transcendence. The notion that praxis may change the subject's frame of transcendence, helping to work out some of the impracticalities that may arise from purely Badiouian or Levinasian praxis are not factored into their theories. Although their thought alerts geographers to the importance which different frames of transcendence have for praxis, it is important to remember the reality of theography for most religious subjects. Religious subjects reframe their notion of transcendence in the midst of the reiterative process of praxis. It is unlikely that in empirical work, the geographer will come across an archetypal Badiouian/Levinasian subject. The theographic subject, may try to put Badiou or Levinas' model into practice, but will encounter transcendent norms and experiences that will challenge that model. Practice under reflection interferes with these static notions of

transcendence and it is this fluidity in religious praxis that I want to explore in the following section by thinking through the different ways in which theography enables the subject to change their religious practice.

Theography and changing religious praxis

So far, I have defined theography as a new way of looking at religious subjectivation; it is a reflexive process of theorising transcendence couched in praxis, based on a negotiation between cognitive and embodied knowledges regarding transcendence, and geared towards transforming the subject in line with this theorisation. I have also - by comparing two contrasting frames of transcendence regarding a common problem - illustrated how this theorisation has an impact on spatial imaginations and decision-making. Now, I want to give some grounded examples of how theography affects religious praxis, particularly how it enables subjects to change their praxis. They will be used to highlight that theography can be used to change the subject as a Foucauldian technique-of-self in two contrasting ways. Firstly, to redefine theological praxis and challenge mainstream ways of being religious as a poststructural act of subversion (Dempsey and Rowe, 2004; Foucault, 2005), and secondly to act upon themselves in order to conform with preexisting theological praxes (Foucault, 1991). I will look at three different ways in which religious subjects change their praxis. The first two will highlight how religious subjects use theography to explore new ways of being religious by (i) creating what I call questioning communities, and (ii) extending their praxis in order to alter their relationship with their institutions. The third one will underscore how religious subjects use theography in order to subject themselves to institutional discipline.

Questioning communities are often focussed around convening spaces of collective questioning and discussion, the aim of which is the transformation of the subject's religious praxis through reflection, negotiating the subject's dissatisfactions with previous or ongoing experiences of religious discourse, affect, and practice (Conradson, 2013). These questioning religious communities make accepting spaces for people's queries whilst simultaneously challenging their theological blind-spots. They represent an attempt to give the

subject space and time to exercise their agency through theography, allowing them to reframe transcendence and endorsing experimentation with new religious meanings, affects, and practices (Bell, 2006). These spaces convene encounters with difference and encourage subjects to develop a proclivity for questioning and testing their frame of transcendence. An example of this can be drawn from Moody's (2012) work with the Ikon community in Northern Ireland. Their practices are centred around "transformance art" (Moody, 2012, p.189), art performances that seek to question and destabilise people's religious identities through encounters with the other[5]. These performances are supposed to force reflexivity and reevaluation, and represent an attempt to push through to a religion "beyond belief"[6] (Moody, 2012, p.192). For example, one of the performances involved an actor reading out what an interviewee describes as a "gorgeous" (p.194) sermon. Then, the original recording of the sermon was played as delivered by the politician and evangelical minister Ian Paisley, troubling listeners by attaching an ominous set of political resonances to the words. This jarring experience links with one of the key provocations that Ikon put forward, inviting people to reflect not just on "right beliefs" but "believing in the right way" (p.194). Questioning communities represent an attempt to redefine theology as praxis, emphasising the healthiness of change and difference, acknowledging that subjects engage in their own reframing of and attempts to understand transcendence through questioning and experimentation, critiquing past discourse, affect, and practice. However, they can also expose the subject to difference - rather more forcefully asking the subject to reconsider their frame of transcendence and reapply it - transforming their praxis through a transformed relation to the other. This requires theographic techniques, not just to reflect upon potentially conflicting theological information but to act upon this to transform and alter the self, changing desires, outlook, and practice.

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[5] The other being framed here as that which undermines the subject's religious praxis by highlighting its exclusivity or oppressiveness.

[6] This religion beyond belief is characterised by questioning dogma and structure (including but not limited to religion) that gets in the way of forming a collective marked primarily by love and justice.

However, not all subjects working through dissatisfaction with their previous religious experiences join questioning communities. Some maintain links with institutional forms of religion, but extend and redefine their praxis in ways that alter their relationship with their institutions. An example of this is found in Vincett's (2013) work with Christian feminists. Vincett interviews women who struggle with going to church because their church's discourses and practices are misogynistic. However, they also want to be part of these institutional church spaces because they feel it joins them to something universal and because they feel responsible to represent and welcome women in the church (Leming, 2007). As a response to this tension, these women extend their religious performance in ways that break with the institutional theology, creating "parallel churches" (Vincett, 2013, p.178); additional gatherings outside of normative church times and spaces. These spaces do two things. Firstly, they provide space for women to reflect upon their dissatisfactions with church and imagine new women-affirming theologies together. Secondly, they give women the opportunity to connect with God in ways that they cannot in church, blending their new theology into reimagined ritual practice. For instance, women set up a communion altar on the boundary between the official church sanctuary and the room they are given to hold their parallel church in. This subverts normal church practice, allowing women to experience communion in a way that resonates more with their framing of God, but also symbolically critiquing the church by emphasising their marginalisation, affectively emboldening women in their preservation of women-inclusive spaces. Women reflect upon and tweak institutional theology and praxis to find a way of being religious that deals with conflicting theological impulses; the desire to be part of the universal church versus the desire to have a woman-affirming theological praxis. The emboldening effect of this reflexivity - enabling women to feel that they are equally connected to God as men despite the way that men exclude them from church activities - is used as a technique of self to "hold church to its catholicity" (Leming, 2007, p.86). This is a good example of the reframing of transcendence and working on the self in accordance with that reframing that constitute theography. Taking part in parallel churches makes women feel more entitled to representation in institutional church space. Despite experiencing subordination in institutional spaces, they feel compelled to inhabit them and to act as a welcome to other women and a critical voice towards institutional

misogyny whilst also feeling like they are maintaining a connection to a universal church.

The examples of theography-facilitated change that I have given above pertain largely to what would be perceived to be subversive poststructural practice. Subjects use theography in these examples to thwart hegemonies, resist norms, and imagine new ways of framing the transcendent. However, theography does not necessarily have to be used in such dissident ways. It can also be used to enable subjects to conform to preexisting theological praxes. This may be because they are trammelled towards conformity to a religious discipline, or it could be that they use the discipline of a religion to resist another type of governance, for instance, to be a consumer, or to be law-abiding, or to be respectable (Foucault, 2005; Martin et al., 1988; Sullivan, 2005). Foucault (2005) and Connolly (1999) both foreground various reflexive practices in religion as ways of enacting a resistant micropolitics. However - although they highlight this as a technique of self that can help the subject to resist other systems of governance (see Luz (2013) for an example of how building up Muslim identity helps Palestinians resist Israeli imperialism) - this religious resistance can also be exercised against the temptation to dissent against institutional religious norms, enabling subjects to tend towards institutional conformity.

Foucault gives an example of the religious subject using reflection to negotiate between their thoughts about practice and frame of transcendence - i.e .do theography - in order to suppress their dissident tendencies (Martin et al. 1988). He identifies monastic contemplation in particular as a way of reinforcing the subject's commitment to a particular frame of transcendence. He argues that Christian monks used contemplation to screen their thoughts for selfishness and deception, reflecting on them to assess whether they turn them towards or away from God. The idea behind this was to purify thought, shifting the subject's focus away from themselves to God, altering decision-making and actions. This self-examination was always done with an abbot (the head of a monastery) so as to conform the monk's thoughts to an institutionalised framing of transcendence and produce obedience. This kind of theography illustrates the subject submitting in advance to a particular frame of transcendence and then

using their agency to constrain their deviant thoughts and feelings with institutional discipline. This requires repeated and increasingly extensive attempts to shift thinking and feeling towards a norm - based on a framing of transcendence - despite contradictory desires. Foucault mines ancient texts on monastic practices to explore how subject's willingly submit to and apply discipline to themselves but this is also a more contemporary concern for religious subjects. Olson et al.'s (2013b) work with young Christians in Glasgow illustrates how the subject can often struggle to hold to an ideal regarding transcendence when coming up against spaces in which alternative readings of their religion are projected onto them. Although keen to perform an "authentic" (Olson et al., 2013b, p.1422) brand of Christianity, these young people come up against spaces where they find it difficult to perform their faith with integrity. Sometimes they receive sectarian slurs, which they struggle not to react against despite claiming an identity that supposedly transcends sectarian divisions. At university, they feel as if being honest about their faith would be looked down on, and so are less open and enthusiastic about their religiousness. Although Olson et al. (2013b) do not explore the coping mechanisms that their research subjects deploy in response to these conflicts, their research does highlight a gap for the type of reflexive activity that Foucault talks about in religious life. Olson et al. highlight that the body is the site where the conflicting frames of transcendence need to be reconciled and Foucault's work on monasticism suggests a process by which this reconciliation could be carried out.

Although I have outlined ways in which subjects either dissent or conform to religious hegemonies, the reality for many religious subjects is that there will often be a mixture of both dissent and conformity in their praxis. Dittmer's (2008; 2010) work on American evangelical reading groups and internet forums is a good example of this. He identifies various hegemonies in the groups and forums, with subjects in these settings forming geopolitical ideas from a mixture of biblical and para-biblical writings on the end times; for example that apocalyptic events will be based on the notion of a vengeful God. However, there are a range of ways in which subjects play with different ideas within this hegemony, sometimes even teasing at the edges of it. Sometimes debate focusses around the particularities of exactly who the USA should direct its

military aggression at (another hegemony being that US military action is seen as a righteous force for God's justice). However, there also those who hold a painful tension of desiring God's justice whilst also having relatives in the armed forces. Dittmer leaves space here to wonder whether these subject's might be constructing subaltern theologies that reconcile their devotion to Christ with a less bloody fate for those that they love. This is a complex situation in which people are reproducing their religious subjectivity between different spaces and ideas of religious import. The reading group is where scriptural truth is sought for, but the home is where the notion that each human life is transcendentally valuable is intensified by familial affection. Theography represents a way that subjects can negotiate this networked religious experience of differing affects and discourses which spread themselves across space.

Conclusion: How theography enhances my analysis

The above discussion has illustrated the usefulness of theography for the geography of religion. As a concept it foregrounds the importance of framing transcendence upon subjects' spatial imaginations and praxis, and illustrates more clearly how the subject produces this frame of transcendence without over-reliance on top-down affective or discursive structures. I have also explored how theography can offer new understandings of how space shapes and is shaped by religious subjects, explaining through this that subjects expend just as much theographic effort to conform as they do to dissent from religious governance. Theography foregrounds how subjects form a frame of transcendence by drawing on different affective and discursive knowledges that are encountered in different times and places. Religious ways of being are not formed out of homogeneous affect and discourse but a plurality. For example, a New Age practicioner does not encounter the same affect when they perform a ritual compared to when they experience a sudden break from their habitual practices (which indicates that the transcendent is guiding their path towards a more spiritual way (Holloway, 2003)). However, each of these experiences are as religiously significant to the subject as the other and contribute to the way in which they frame transcendence. This underscores that there must be a process of discernment that subjects undertake in order to enable them to classify what is religiously significant affect/discourse and what is not, even

whilst participating in a variety of seemingly disparate religious spaces and encountering contrasting ways of framing transcendence. Theography can give geographers of religion a view onto how religious subjects make sense of this plurality - convening a network of difference - and how this making-sense has an effect on their future decisions regarding religious practice and change. Theography is a helpful analytical lens then for the context that I am interested in. It can help me to understand the formation of religious subjectivities as they traverse a network of religiously significant spaces of ritual, decision-making, and activism as they move back and forth across supposed sacred/secular divisions. It helps to make sense of the religious subjectivities which co-construct landscapes that geographers of postsecularism are interested in. It highlights the reflexive negotiations that enable religious subjects to begin to more happily participate with others towards common political ends. It can also help to explore what the limits to this increased receptivity might be.

Theography also speaks into the 3 research questions that I set up on pages 21 - 22 of this thesis, which were:

(i) What balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?

(ii) What are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within the community?

(iii) How does this degree of openness affect the political praxis of community members?

Regarding research question (i), theography enables me to explore what networks of religious experience and reflexive processes lead to the instigation of a particular *raison d'être* of the communities in which I did participant observation. What balance of openness to difference and getting involved in activism were they exhibiting, and how was that changing as more people got involved? What previous religious experiences are they trying to build on, extend, or move away from? What reflexive processes have enabled them to begin to imagine different religious praxes?

Regarding research question (ii), theography enables me analyse how a space in which religious difference is brought together is negotiated by religious subjects. These spaces of greater openness expose religious subjects to a broader plurality of religious discourses, affects, and praxes. Do tensions arise as a result of this plurality? How are these tensions negotiated by religious subjects? How does the variety of religious experiences that are being brought to the table shape the ongoing balancing act between openness and solidarity? Does ongoing theography within the community shift the *raison d'être*? Theography highlights that postsecular negotiations - that is shifting of religious praxes in response to difference - goes on not just as a response of religious subjects to non-religious ones, but between religious subjects even within an single FC. Theography can help explore what affects religious subjects' receptivity (or lack thereof) to difference and change.

Regarding research question (iii), theography helps me to recognise how religious subjects blend organisational structures, affective experiences, and discourses within their FC with activism beyond the FC. This enables me to look at the religious resources that shape their approach to and experience of activism, and the effects that engaging in activism throws back into their FC event-spaces. How do attempts to get involved in activism affect the degree of openness that the FC is able to convene? How does maintaining a certain level of openness affect the ability to mobilise people within the FC towards activism? How does theography help subjects to begin to form political outputs by navigating a praxis between religious and activist spaces? This offers a new way of examining the politics of religious spaces by highlighting their porosity, with hybrid religious subjectivities constantly filtering through and altering them, whilst also being a crucial space in which religious subjectivities are negotiated, having a distinct impact on the nature of their engagement with spaces beyond the FC.

Summary and connection to next chapter

In chapter 1, I explained the empirical and theoretical context that my research addresses before suggesting that so far in the geography of religion, the analytical frames for how religion and politics intersect do not appropriately

address my research context. I followed this in chapter 2 by highlighting that as FCs blend into geographies of activism, this necessitates using activist network epistemologies to understand how religious subjects and FCs are negotiating activist territory. I simultaneously provided evidence of how the complications of activism are already manifest in FCs. In chapter 3, I have provided an analytical frame for understanding how religious subjects - as part of complex networks of relationships including activism - form a recursive and changing praxis through a reflexive process that helps them to balance, make sense of, and respond to differing religious experiences. In chapter four I will discuss how I put this epistemological frame to work in the knowledge creation process of carrying out the research.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROGRESSION

Introduction

Following on from the contextual, theoretical, and epistemological contributions that the three previous chapters make, this chapter will underscore the methodological approach that I took to address this context, theory, and epistemology. This chapter will outline with greater specificity the knowledges that I was trying to create, how I practically went about this, and the how interplay between my process of knowledge creation and my epistemology caused them to shift recursively throughout the research process. I will guide the reader in a more-or-less chronological fashion through the development of this research. I will begin by outlining the epistemological framing of the project, explain why certain methods were chosen, and then move on to an account of the deployment of these methods.

Shifting epistemology

In chapter one of the thesis I indicated the context that this thesis addresses; FCs and subjects that are becoming increasingly (or are already) open to activist practices as part of their religious praxis, and more democratic, non-institutional forms of organising. These subjects and FCs reflexively negotiate and alter performances of religion that blur sacred/secular boundaries which are formed by networks of relationships that cross this supposed boundary and are suffused with a highly variegated plethora of religious affects and discourses. I suggested that so far in the geography of religion, there was not a sufficient epistemology for analysing this complexity. I argued that since there is a growing sense that religion and activism are blurring, it might be helpful to look at what activist epistemologies can illuminate regarding FCs as they bleed into activist arenas, deal with activist issues, and take on activist forms of organisation. In chapter two, I argued that activist geographies have recently been dependent on network epistemologies in order to analyse the various issues that activist communities have to deal with. To prove that FCs are taking on activist behaviours, I drew parallels between issues discussed in activist literature and those being discussed by religious (specifically Christian)

activists, providing examples from religio-activist literatures. Drawing these parallels illustrated that a network epistemology can help analysts to understand FCs better as they mimic activist geographies, getting to grips with both the potentially regressive and progressive elements of religious involvement in politics without resorting to characatures that are artificially vulnerable to polemic or focussing on studies of affect that are centred around the possibilities of embracing the virtual. In chapter three, I outlined theography as way of conceptualising how religious subjects form a religious praxis by reflexively negotiating the complex networks that FCs are connected to. This negotiation is particularly complex as these networks connect individuals to a variety of other subjects and communities that embody and represent different ways of framing transcendence through practices (e.g. ritual or practical compassion), affective or discursive biases, and political preferences (e.g. within one subject's network there can be those relating the same religion to both anti and pro capitalist stances (Youtube, "Christian Responses to Poverty": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52nCgezeDjU).

This theographic epistemology developed alongside the new RQs that were emerging as I conducted and processed the research. It can better analyse the new contexts (i.e. activism) and forms (i.e. more open) that the current literature argues that religious life is found in, and that was emerging as a reality through my research. It recognises, (i) the networked way in which the religious subjects that I encountered formed their identities across supposed sacred/secular divides and connected to a wide range of sometimes contradictory religious experiences, (ii) the greater openness to influences beyond religious hierarchies that FCs are taking seriously, and (iii) the nuances that this more networked way of performing religion brings to forming community, forming subjectivities, and religious involvement in activism. These three epistemological points underpin my three key research questions and they helped me to clarify what knowledges I wanted to create and what were relevant knowledges in the context that I was addressing.

My key research questions are as follows:

- What balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?
- What are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within the community?
- How does this degree of openness affect the political praxis of community members?

However as I outlined in chapter one, my original research questions and epistemology were slightly different to the ones that I have now. These original research questions and epistemology significantly guided my basic research methods, which changed very little over the course of the research. As bullet-pointed below, my original research questions were:

- What factors create difference between Christian groups engaged in Leftist politics?
- What discourses, spaces, and practices help reproduce Leftist identities in Christian communities?
- What are the dominant discourses in shaping political imaginations and praxis?
- In what way are the groups under study creating and created by postsecular spaces?

These original research questions have different epistemological biases to the ones that will guide the analytical sections of this thesis from the point of view of the geography of religion. They assume the presence of a 'Christian Left' bloc and collective identity and have a bias towards discourse. However, the research methods that these original questions gave rise to were based on epistemologies of knowledge creation that were continuous between the original geography of religion epistemology and the new one. This allowed me to remain interested in the same groups that I worked with throughout the research, and keep the same research methods, simply changing the way in which my sampling, methods, and processing were applied as the process of creating knowledge shifted my initial geography of religion epistemology.

The methods that I originally planned were interviews and ethnography which included participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research. These were organised in order to get access to identity formation and praxis in spaces that maintained or encouraged 'Christian Leftist' subjectivities, and to hear about the broader political networks these activists were drawn into and examine how those relationships were negotiated. One of the original aims of the research was to break-up what I perceived to be the predominance of problematising americanist evangelicalism in writings on the geography of the religion/politics interface. I wanted to evidence the presence of religious groups and subjects (focussing on Christianity, given that is the tradition I am familiar with and could have an impact on) whose political praxis might resonate with people with some grounding in radical geography and are concerned with the influence of religious involvement in politics. This was out of a political desire to highlight the possibility of greater political collaboration across sacred/secular divides that I felt the overabundance of material on the troubling aspects of religious politics might foreclose.

However, due to my own journey of emerging from a conservative religious background and moving towards a reconciliation between my religious identity and political concerns (significantly shaped - in part - by radical geography), my - at times unconscious - epistemological focus when gathering data was often on stories of how subjects and collectives had journeyed to their religious identity or *raison d'être.* This way of creating knowledge was intended to show that even from within supposedly conservative 'blocs', more progressive religious politics could emerge, based on particular religious resources (largely discourse) and the reflexive capabilities of the subject. It necessitated delving into subjects' and collectives' pasts and their stories of *processing* religious content in order to form identities and praxes which differed from or countered the politics of conservative evangelicalism (even if that was the context from which they emerged). Highlighting the possibility of these alternative identities drew me to the epistemology of Dittmer (2008; 2010), whose work on evangelical reading groups highlights the way in which subjects "performatively consum[e]" (2010, p .118) the cultural resources they inherit through their context. Dittmer argues that instead of simply reproducing or uncritically accepting the narratives that powerful cultural hegemonies provide, subjects

participating in that culture appropriate parts of it to create subcultures. My original research questions relied heavily on this epistemology, looking for ways in which Christians appropriated the resources of the culture they were in (theopolitical discourse being the main resource I focussed on) and hybridised it to create subcultures, creating difference and flux in identity, bringing about the possibility of a different religious politics to the evangelical conservatism that geography had so far devoted much attention to.

Dittmer's (2010) epistemology exhibits a postmodern approach to researching culture. It recognises subjects' performance as related to but not wholly derived from broader cultural trends, seeking to challenge and deconstruct metanarratives (Creswell, 2007; Faier, 2011). It also resonates with poststructural ideas about how culture is reproduced, taking seriously the power of subjects to co-produce and not simply be affected by their social world (kinpaisby-hill, 2011; Rose, 1997). These meta-epistemological biases within Dittmer's epistemology of cultural production played a role in my selection of methods and in shifting my own geography of religion epistemology and RQs over the course of the research. I included interviews in my methods due to their purported ability to let interviewees represent an imagining of their lived experience and break down common perceptions regarding the formation of religious identity (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Shurmer-Smith, 2002). I also adopted ethnographic methods including participant observation, autoethnography, and action research. These techniques have been used in the past to deconstruct hegemonic knowledges, by forcing the researcher to resocialise themselves through critical reflection upon their sometimes oppressive theories and assumptions about their participants by allowing their respondents to challenge them (Besio and Butz, 2004 a/b; Cloke et al., 2004; Emerson et al., 1995). In particular, autoethnographic reflection upon the transculturation between researcher and researched in the co-production of religious praxis enabled me to challenge my own assumptions about the religion/politics interface (Berg, 1989).

I initially wanted to challenge metanarratives about the religion/politics interface by positing that through performative consumption of even conservative religious contexts, expressions of Christian Leftism could come about. However,

my research illustrated that this is a rather easy point to make and that by making it, the complexity of religious collectives - particularly those most involved in activism across sacred/secular boundaries - are covered over. Capturing the complexity of how these collectives organise themselves and their *raison d'être* also enables a more faithful rendering of the complexity of how religious subjects form their identity as part of a broader network of relationships of religious significance. Although instances of strong theopolitical 'Leftism' are present in these spaces and subjectivities, preserving or defending that particular theopolitical position is often not the central concern of these subjects or spaces.

Although I was influenced in part by a postmodern epistemology, enabling me to challenge metanarratives about the religion/politics interface, adopting ethnographic methods - paired with a partly poststructural epistemology - introduced an element of self-critique to the research. Autoethnography in particular challenges the researcher to reflect upon the power relations that exist between themselves and their subjects, and a poststructural theory of the subject takes seriously the subject's ability to deconstruct and resist the culture around them (Belsey, 2002; Berg, 1989). Through the self-critique of autoethnography, I realised that by trying to argue that there was an identifiable 'Christian Leftist' collective identity and a set of mechanisms that were in place for maintaining it would be to impose an ill-fitting representation of the knowledge I was creating with my research participants. This meta-epistemological bias towards postmodernism and poststructuralism meant that the ethnographic methods that I was using throughout the research did not need to be changed, and neither did the context that I was researching. Rather it was about allowing the empirics to guide what would be the most appropriate analytical frame and geography-of-religion epistemology - emerging from more meta-epistemological concepts - instead of trying to squeeze the new knowledges I was creating into a pre-determined narrative guided by my desire to argue for the potential of sacred/secular political crossovers on the Left.

I still think this political goal is achieved in this thesis, just not by connecting broader activist geographies to a monolithic 'Christian Left'. Over the course of the research I focussed less on 'how a Christian Leftist is made' and more on

how particular phenomena - (i) more open forms of organising and (ii) connections to a variety of activism (both of which are recognised in a wide range of literature as contemporary concerns at the religion/politics interface) - overlap. As I work through the methodology, giving an account of how I conducted the research, I shall provide examples of how the meta-epistemological elements inherent within my methodological choices and the empirical material generated helped to shift my geography of religion epistemology and shape my analysis.

Dramaturgy

Before moving on to a discussion of my methodology and the epistemological/ analytical shifts it engendered, I want to take note of a concept that helps me to frame more clearly the kinds of knowledge that were generated through the relationships between myself and my respondents. As I mentioned previously, the poststructural influences upon my epistemology drew my attention to the ways in which metanarratives are broken down by reflecting on the power relations between myself and my respondents. The interviews and ethnographic methods I used created scope for self-challenge in how I was framing the conversations and encounters I was having, highlighting that I was asserting my power as a 'knowing' researcher by framing conversations and addressing subjects according to my initial epistemological and political preferences. This did not always sit well with or make sense to my subjects. The more research I did, the more Berg's (1989) idea - that one-to-one encounters represent unique co-creative performances, triggered by the both party's emotions, comportment, and preconceptions - resonated with me. One-to-one encounters create opportunities to highlight disjunctures between each party's understanding of the interaction as well as moments of transcultural translation and reconciliation. Berg (1989) refers to conversations as "dramaturgical" (p.101), and I argue that the dramaturgical knowledges produced by my one-to-one research encounters - the gaps in understanding and opportunities for reconciliation they evidenced, as well as the reflections they prompted - were particularly key to challenging my epistemology and analytical frame through the research. They constituted a source of challenge to the metanarratives that I imposed upon the research

(e.g. the existence of a 'Christian Left' or the centrality of discourse in religious decision making).

To expand, Berg (1989) argues that both researcher and respondent act for an audience. The staged interactions of research are supposed to allow the respondent - accurately and in detail - to convey the bits of their lived experience that the researcher is interested in knowing about (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Ideally, the interviewer acts in such a way as to create space and time for the respondent to open up, and the respondent reciprocates by divulging lucid stories that are pertinent to the research questions. However, the dramaturgical process is not this straightforward. Berg (1989) points out that research interactions (particularly interviews) are a string of moments in which both researcher and researched are managing their and the other's expectations of appropriate practice. Van Hoven and Meijering (2011) argue that the way in which researcher and researched act towards each other is related to their assumptions about how they should interact based on similarities or differences in age, race, religion, dress, gender, or profession. Their responses are also based on body language, intonation, the appropriateness of questions, and continuity between what has been agreed or understood about each other previously and the ways in which the other is now performing. This continuity has to be managed over various stages: making contact with a respondent, acquiring interest and consent in participation, participating in an encounter, and any post-encounter contact. The researcher must be critically reflexive about the performances they co-create with their respondents at all of these stages in order to explain what kind of knowledge was co-produced during the encounter and how the encounter itself perhaps alters any preconceived notions about how it should be interpreted.

By 'being critically reflexive', I mean being meticulously analytical about any connections (and gaps) the researcher draws between their identity and that of their respondents and how they perform together (Besio and Butz, 2004a/b; Rose, 1997). In doing this the researcher can deconstruct their own assumptions about why their respondent's have acted in a particular way, based on reflection about how they as researcher have performed in the interview, keeping this in tension with any theoretical narratives that may be helpful (or

not) for explaining the various mis/understandings generated over the course of the encounter (Appadurai, 1988). The researcher must be careful not to position themselves as perfectly self-knowing, reflexive subjects. This can be aided by keeping track of their performances in the interview and using these dramaturgical notes to reflect on the perhaps unexpected slivers of themselves that appear in response to their respondent, the power dynamic these actions create, and what it was about the social situation that caused this dynamic to transpire (Rose, 1997). These notes often include logging of "'full-channel' communication" (Berg, 1989), including body language, intonation, countenance, repetition's, and pauses. Reflection on the dramaturgy of my research encounters and their knock-on effects to both the further performance and interpretation of the research will be help me to illustrate throughout the rest of the chapter the ways in which doing the research helped to shift my epistemological approach to analysing the research.

Pre-research ethics

All of the analysis that I provide in this thesis has been anonymised. This was an agreement that was reached with my respondents as we organised their participation in the research, along with the understanding that once I had finished processing and writing up my transcripts and diaries, they would be destroyed. The only caveat I attached to these agreements, was a covert ethical agreement with myself that if any of my respondents were perpetrating injustices, then I would have an ethical responsibility to address that. I could do this by publishing named details of their malpractices or, depending on the severity of the situation, alerting law enforcement. I entitle this sub-section 'pre-research ethics' (as opposed to just 'research ethics') because the ethics of agreeing with my respondents upon what information would be available for analysis is different to the ethical work - building up a trusting relationship based on mutual understanding and shared expectations - that emerges through the dramaturgical doing of the research, challenging and shifting the researcher's epistemological baggage. Pre-research ethics frame the work, and I tackle them now to frame what knowledge I will be sharing. Research ethics play a role in shifting the researcher's epistemological stance in the doing of the research.

Therefore I will deal with them in the rest of this chapter in amongst explaining how my methodology shifted my epistemology and research questions.

I raised the issue of anonymisation with the respondents before the interview via email and then followed up at the beginning of the interviews. I also stated at both these junctures that the interviewees could withdraw themselves from the research at any point. I still have all of the emails from respondents, consenting to participate. Should anything go wrong and any of my participants attempt to sue me or the institution I am funded by, I have their written consent, along with this written account of how I have tried to protect them to show I have made efforts to follow an ethical procedure. Gaining further written consent at the time of interview was sometimes not feasible due to the interviewee being on Skype or the phone. When I met respondents in person, to put them at ease as swiftly as possible, build rapport, and create a conversational environment I postponed discussions about ethical protocol to the end of the interview. Concluding the interview was used as an opportunity for me to restate my intentions regarding the recordings of the interview and to allow my interviewee to raise any worries they had, and to ask me questions or to make a request of me. Hence, I gave my respondents the opportunity to feel that the interview had been an empowering experience and not that they had merely been exploited for information and not get whatever they might have wanted out of the interaction (Berg, 1989). This gave my respondents an opportunity to redact any of the information that they had shared with me, allowing them to exercise some control over what knowledges we were co-creating and protect themselves or others from any harm the information might be able to do. Regarding conferences and placements, the kind of work I would be doing was discussed thoroughly with gatekeepers to the events and communities in order to gain consent. Also, I was open in these environments in my identity as a researcher to give people the opportunity to decide what to share with me, whether to continue to engage with me, or perhaps consult the gatekeepers I had contacted about the process of consenting to my presence as a researcher.

Anonymising the knowledge I created and giving participants opportunities to ask for certain information to be framed in particular ways or left out of my

analysis puts limits on and directs my analysis, but this approach emerged from various ethical concerns regarding who I wanted to be involved in the research and the kind of knowledge I wanted to create. There were various ways in which my respondents were already vulnerable and ways in which the process of research heightened or engendered vulnerability. Anonymisation and encouraging my participants to engage in a higher degree of co-creating the research, were tactics that I employed because I valued the work that many of my participants were involved in (Hay, 2010). I wanted to protect this work from any harm that could be done by making sensitive information available to those who might use it against them and from any potential harm that could be done if I misrepresented them. I mention two ways in which my respondents were vulnerable and in need of an ethics of representation below.

Firstly, some of my respondents were vulnerable in relation to broader structures. Many were part of movements that had an anti-establishment tenor to them and I did not want to threaten these marginal practices (van Hoven and Meijering, 2011). Many had taken part in anti-austerity activities, some even being prominent organisers of this in their part of the country, and a few had been a part of direct-action (blockades, breaking into military facilities, 'vandalising' government property) against the UK government's preparation for wars and environmental degradation (see Table 1, below). Some people I encountered were not vulnerable because of their activities but because of their status. In particular, some of the members of the community I stayed with in the USA were undocumented migrants. My own ethical judgement is that I do not want these participants to be identifiable in my analysis - so as to protect them from deportation - therefore I have taken action to make the community and their members anonymous.

Secondly, the kind of knowledge I produced through the methods I was using - in conjunction with my epistemological concerns - has the potential to render many of my respondents increasingly vulnerable. At conferences I used participant observation to explore the ways in which they provoked subjects to exercise their theographic agency. However, although I was quite open about my researcher identity in these event-spaces, I could not provide a full explanation to everyone I talked to of who and what I was recording and how I

would be using that knowledge. At one conference (Conference #3; see Table 4, below) I took part in a workshop that led to some participants sharing content concerning motherhood - either from their perspective as mothers or regarding their own mothers. They shared stories of their mothers passing away, abandoning them, worrying, stifling, as well as loving, caring, nurturing. Also - although I worked with gatekeepers to get consent to these spaces, it was not always possible to make everyone aware of my researcher identity in these spaces. Therefore, I need to be respectful with the knowledge I generated, evaluating what it can tell me about the space but does not clamp down too critically upon individuals with whom I could not work that closely as there is a risk that my ethical distance from them could lead to gross misrepresentation. In the community I was a part of in Exeter, there was an aspect to the research which modeled participant action research approaches, this was in order to develop deep understandings of working through problems, building understanding, trust, and engendering helpful environments for religious praxis. As Maxey (1999) points out, doing research as a 'full member' in a community can often lead to the people around you forgetting (or actively minimising) your identity as a researcher. You develop interdependent relationships and people often fail to consider the impact that sharing certain bits of their life with a researcher might have on them if the researcher were to be tempted to make the information public. They may - in an attempt to deepen their relationship with the researcher - share things that they feel they cannot with anyone else; their fears, weaknesses, and prejudices. (They may even think that these bits of themselves may be of no concern to the researcher's interests despite the researcher's best attempts to communicate the research aims to their respondents). These methods (participant observation, participant action research, but also interviews) and the knowledge created by them render subjects increasingly vulnerable by developing narratives which frame them in ways that could be used - by those who are opposed to the activism woven through these spaces - to bully or upset them. One of the epistemological threads that runs through both settings and methods was a desire to capture some of my subjects representations of their theography and the spaces that enabled subjects to do theographic work. This thread is directed at reflexive, deeply personal processes - creating knowledge that subjects might only reveal to people that they trust will treat it with respect and gentleness.

Respondents were generally very relaxed - saying "That's fine," or "Yeah, whatever," - when I tried to talk through my ethical approach to the research. I often expressed sympathy with their causes which may be one explanation as to why they were so trusting. Also, perhaps the topics tackled in the interview were ones that they were really interested in and so were perhaps more forthcoming with information about themselves than they may have wanted to be purely due to excitement and enthusiasm for the conversation. However, because I knew what I was going to be asking about, I made it clear to them at the outset that I would be anonymising their responses. This protects my respondents - should any of my transcripts be used in material that enters the public realm in journals, chapters, or blogs. It not only protects them from any abuses that the personal information discussed could be used to inflict, but also, should they decide in the future that they would like to prevent that information from becoming public, this eventuality has already been catered to (Kimmel, 1988).

Two-tier research design

The research design consisted of two tiers; one tier of extensive research, and one tier of intensive research. During the extensive tier, I carried out a programme of fifteen to twenty interviews which covered a wide range of Christian activists. This tier also included attendance at three conferences which began as an opportunity for networking with potential interview participants but emerged as useful research contexts in themselves in which I carried out autoethnography and participant observation. During the intensive tier, I participated in two ethnographic placements composed of participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research. One placement consisted of four to six weeks with an intentional community in the USA, and the other was a three year period of knowledge creation with a church community that I was already a part of in Exeter.

For the extensive tier of the research, interviews were chosen as the core method because they could help me gain access, not only to people's worldview and beliefs but - by trying to guide the respondents through a reflexive process - reconstruct past events which composed a history of their

identity formation (Arksey and Knight, 2009). Reflexivity was a practice I was keen to investigate, being that it was a core concern of both my old and new research questions. As I argue in chapter three, reflexivity provides a lens on to how religious subjects process complex networks of religious significance and synthesise a praxis related to it. I could only really create knowledge about this by talking to respondents, asking them to help me understand something of what reflexive processes they utilised to negotiate a praxis, and the network of places, relationships, and experiences that they convoked in this negotiation. Interviews - of course - have limitations, such as the distance between what people can say about their experience and the reality of their situation, as well as the limits of recall, the warping effect of time on memory, and the interpretive and social baggage the interviewer brings to the constructed social situation of the interview (Berg, 1989; Harrison, 2009). However, interviews are a great way to capture the reasons behind people's actions, allowing them to be reflexive and to remember, creating a forum in which to create knowledge concerning the biographies that influence past and current actions and opinions (Hitchings, 2012).

For the intensive tier of the research (and the extensive part of the research spent at conferences), ethnographic methods of participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research were selected as the core methods because they could help me to begin to reflect upon the representations that my interview subjects had given me of blending religious and activist geographies, as well as my own preconceived notions of what it would be like. By embedding myself in the context of religio-activist geographies, and engaging in the self-reflexive work of ethnography - challenging the power relations between researcher and researched - I could begin to create knowledges that deconstructed, not only the metanarratives that dominate religion/politics studies, but the epistemological baggage I brought to the project and the way in which my interviewees had so far framed the terrain. Many of my interviewees worked out a lot of their political faith praxis through their organisations, as part of organisational positions. Although their subjectivities drew on a wide range of religious experiences and places - the same as any other religious subject - there was a sense in which they had an exceptional vehicle for their religio-political expression, which sometimes

required fitting in an organisational structure rather than being more exploratory. I wanted to create knowledge about how openness to less hierarchical or structured forms of religious significance, networked ways of forming religious identities/collectives, and the complications of these coming together were worked out in the mundane and ongoing rhythms of religious life. By co-participating in these spaces with my respondents I could begin to map more deeply and extensively the networks across space and time that affect these activities, assessing what they mean for religious praxis and making detailed analyses of their flows in a way that could not be captured by interview material. Hoggart et al. (2002) argue that this is one of the core benefits of ethnography, getting to grips with differences that exist between representations of social relations and how they actually are. This knowledge is created in conjunction with reflection upon the power relations that structure (i) respondents' linguistic framing of their sociality, (ii) the researcher's own ideas about how to frame the research context, and (iii) the power relationships that construct the resonances and dissonances between these two framings.

I will now go through my research chronologically, highlighting how my methods addressed and altered my research questions.

Researching extensively

The extensive phase of the research involved fifteen interviews with individuals who were part of explicitly faith-based organisations that had, as part of their raison d'être, a focus on activism. I wanted to capture how these individuals had come to blend their religious identity and activist practices. I also wanted to know how - as part of complex networks of contradictory religious significance - they maintained this activist religious praxis, how their religious identity was negotiated between 'official' and 'unofficial' religious spaces, and the postsecular crossovers that they participated in (Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Kong, 2010). I largely interviewed people in management roles in the organisations that they were a part of, assuming that they had been in the process of negotiating their complex religio-political identity for longer (because they were in a position of seniority) and therefore have a wealth of experience to discuss.

By having a broad range of subjects involved in research, I mitigated against the limitation of a narrower sample of organisations and individuals. If I had focussed on a small number of subjects, supposing one or two decided they no longer wanted to be involved in the research, the depth of understanding I would have worked for with those people would have been for nothing. I would have been left with very little apart from my own auto/ethnographic accounts from the intensive part of the research, and although auto/ethnography is a key part of the research (exploring my own negotiation of networks, praxis, and theographic agency, as well as observations about how different communities were setting themselves up to enable their members to do this to a certain degree), I wanted to use the interviews to burrow down with some individuals into their theographic processes. This was not always possible in some of the intensive parts of the research.

As an unplanned addition to the research, this extensive part also included attending and making ethnographic and autoethnographic notes at three conferences. I attended these conferences as a sampling technique, hoping to speed up the research process by encountering potential respondents (who had been advertised as speakers at or organisers of these conferences) face-to-face and securing a number of interviews all at once. By participating in these events-spaces in an attempt to encounter potential respondents, it became clear to me that they were pertinent phenomena to the research themselves. These spaces drew me into a series of discomfiting co-performances of worship, workshops, prayer, debate, listening to lectures, protest, and casual chat. Even though many of the organisations participating in these activities were ones that I wanted to interview in the fashion mentioned above, participating in the co-creation of conference spaces with them gave me an opportunity - through participant observation, note-taking, and autoethnography - to reflect and recognise that these event-spaces were geared towards transforming religious praxis; key sites that blended religious and activist geographies within and beyond themselves. This realisation was highly pertinent to my old research questions and played a role in forming my new ones and their according epistemology.

Interviews

Below is a schedule of the interviews that I carried out in the intensive part of the research:

Table 1: Activist Interviews			
Interview No.	Date	Where?	Who?
1	29/11/2013	Phone-call.	Pensioner, white, male. Former industrial chaplain and founder of an organisation that fights cases and campaigns on behalf of people unable to pay rent-arrears. Now heading up a grassroots organisation of working-poor folks based on the assertion that tax-payers who depend on benefits should not be the victims of reduced government spending.
2	2/12/2013	Phone-call.	Late 30's, white, male. Church of England vicar. Blogger. Organiser of conferences on Christian Anarchism. Co-founder of a non-London based Citizens UK group. Involved in non-violent direct action (involving symbolic protest and trespassing) both as an individual and as part of affinity groups. Holds a position in his diocese to provide education to his church and other churches in the area about social justice issues. This role also involves him trying to bring together different churches and secular organisations to collaborate on social justice projects.
3	9/12/2013	Cafe near respondent's home in southern England.	Late 30's, white, male. Youth worker in Methodist church and chairman of national network that promotes sharing of radical theological ideals and expressing solidarity with radical Christian activists by providing resources for conferences. These ideals are largely aimed at reconceptualising the role of the UK Church in the post-christendom era, reorienting it towards an anti-establishment position.
4	12/12/2013	Respondent's home in a major southern English city.	Mid 40's, white, male. Co-director of a Christian think-tank geared towards (amongst other things) affirming positive approaches to immigration, challenging unequal models of economy, and promoting the Church as a political community.
5	17/12/2013	Skype.	Late 30's, white, female. Theological director for a Christian conservation charity. As well as being involved in food politics through transition town and co-op movements, she writes theological resources for and co-ordinates a team of speakers that visit churches, giving lectures on the connections between environmental issues, theology, and praxis.
6	16/1/2014	Phone-call.	Late 30's, white, male. Director of social work at a Christian homeless shelter, member of and conference contributor to Christians on the Left, and blogger on the connections between social justice, theology, and praxis.
7	21/1/2014	Respondent's office in major northern English city.	Mid 40's, white, male. Director of Christian social justice charity committed to tackling poverty in the UK. The charity runs campaigns, putting politicians under pressure regarding policy and also runs projects influenced by community organising principles in a few northern English cities.

Table 1: Activist Interviews			
Interview No.	Date	Where?	Who?
8	4/2/2014	Cafe near respondent's home in Scotland.	Pensioner, white, female. British rep. and volunteer for international Christian movement centred around the process of peacemaking. They are involved in different countries across the globe, training and organising teams to prepare them to work with local activists to promote peace, accompany vulnerable civilians, and keep accounts of human rights abuses in areas beset by war. Teams go on placements that last from a week long to two or three months.
9	24/3/2014	Respondent's office in major southern English city.	Mid 50's, white, male. Co-ordinator of community organising programme as part of Christian organisation in a major southern English city. The organisation trains activists, carries out action research, and works with churches to conscientise and mobilise their parishioners, particularly in deprived areas.
10	28/3/2014	Respondent's home in major northern English city.	Mid 40's, white, male. Church of England vicar. Blogger. Organiser of alternative, horizontalist practices of church that run alongside his running of traditional services as part of his CoE job description. Organiser of liberation theology conferences. Involved in non-violent direct action both as an individual and as part of affinity groups.
11	10/4/2014	Skype.	Late 20's, white, male. Director of an international movement centred around the process of peace-making (different organisation to that of interview no.9). They train activists practically and theologically to live in, and understand from a Christian perspective, approaches to conflict. They gain access to areas of tribal/gang violence by being invited by local activists from both sides of a conflict, forming a team with them, and moving permanently into the area.
12	14/4/2014	Respondent's home in a major southern English city.	Mid 20's, white, female. Member of network of Christian activists involved in non-violent direct action, largely to oppose the austerity policies of the current UK government.
13	16/4/2014	Cafe in Exeter.	Mid 20's, white, female. Intern at an organisation geared towards resourcing and training Christians who are studying at university to develop - in a multi-denominational environment - an approach to faith that is praxis-centred. This is facilitated through theological discussion and encouraging groups affiliated with the organisation at different universities to form partnerships with other campaign groups pursuing social justice at their universities.
14	22/4/2014	Skype.	Mid 20's, white, female. Outreach co-ordinator of a Christian organisation promoting non-violent resistance and protest against war and its preparation. Involved largely in encouraging people to start local groups affiliated to the organisation but also in organising protests in her local area.

Table 1: Activist Interviews			
Interview No.	Date	Where?	Who?
15	30/4/2014	My home in Exeter.	Early 30's, white, female. Member of a Christian organisation focussed on inspiring and providing a network of support for young Christian activists to oppose injustice. Maintains links with other secular and faith-based organisations heavily involved in social justice campaigns. Respondent was responsible for maintaining links between the organisation and a broader network of activists interested in limiting the impact of climate change.

Contact was made with interviewees in a variety of different ways. I got in touch with some of them by getting their personal email from their organisation's website (Table 1, #4/5/6/8). Some of them I was put in touch with after using a 'get in touch' box, or an admin email on their organisation's website (Table 1, #1/2/3/7/9). Others I managed to network with at conferences and get their email to set up a good time to meet or Skype/phone (Table 1, #10/11/12/13/14) and one was already a friend of mine (Table 1, #15). These initial interactions were an opportunity to establish good rapport between myself and my prospective respondents. The key ground that I tried to build this rapport upon was that myself and my respondents had common interests as religious activists. Van Hoven and Meijering (2011) recognise that common identity traits can act as a bridge between people, leading to a more open conversational stye. As such, when emailing individuals or organisations, I would often tailor the message a little to include some detail regarding work that the organisation was involved in or perhaps something I had read by or about the individual that I was getting in contact with, expressing comradely admiration. When networking with people at conferences, common interests could often be expressed prior to any direct conversation with the respondent. Some of the conferences I attended included workshops or discussion groups. By participating in these alongside people that I wanted to interview, I demonstrated knowledges that I had developed by wrestling with similar issues and situations that were being addressed in the group. For instance, interviewee #14 was approached after participating in a workshop she was running on Christian attitudes to law-breaking (in the context of anti-war activism). In this workshop I was able to engage its leader and others in the group directly in debate, representing parts of my own theography - as well as

learning from them - and showing solidarity with them in navigating together between normative Christian approaches to activism, rhetorical situations, and accounts of praxis. When I approached interviewee #14 at the end of the workshop with the intention of securing an interview, she began by asking me questions about some of the claims I had made during the group discussion. Thus, when asking about an interview, she was extremely enthusiastic to participate. Another tactic that was deployed to ensure agreement upon an interview and good rapport between myself and the interviewee was allowing them to choose when and where it would be most comfortable for them to meet. As you can see in Table 1, meeting places were in respondent's homes, my home, cafés, respondent's offices, and via Skype or phonecall.

The way in which I approached the interviews was somewhere between what Kitchin and Tate (2000) would call a "structured-open-ended" (p.213) interview and an "interview guide approach" (p.214). According to Kitchin and Tate, a structured-open-ended interview utilises questions that are not geared towards yes/no answers. It lets respondents create answers in their own words which - catering to the poststructural/ethnographic approach I was taking to knowledge production - created the option for my respondents to subvert any narratives that I may have wanted to slot them into (Arksey and Knight, 2009; Cloke et al., 2004; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). However, an interview guide approach is supposed to have a more conversational feel. From my transcripts, it is obvious that my interviews contained elements of both these styles. Adopting this more conversational style at points was a tactic that fulfilled certain methodological goals (creating natural gaps and space in the conversation to allow respondents to offer additional detail and information as they felt led and for me to explore/ understand potentially subversive narratives as they cropped up) and ethical criteria (allowing me to be sensitive to the emotional dynamics of the conversation, being respectful and attentive to my respondents when they were particularly candid or open)[7].

For the researcher, there can be tension in interviews between the information they expect their interviewee is able to give them, the way the interviewee

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[7] For an excerpt of one of my interview transcripts, see Appendix D.

responds to their attempts to elicit this information, and the ethical inclinations of the researcher as to how deferent they should be towards their interviewee's response to the interview situation (Berg, 1989; Hay, 2010). As Cloke et al. (2004) state, researchers should be ethical in this regard because they *want* to be and not just because someone is making them. However, a genuine desire to be ethical can make the interview process involuted when trying to create rapport and sensitive dialogue *and* get the information that the researcher would like. Arksey and Knight (2009) point out that in order to negotiate this tension, good interviewing is less like playing music from a chart and more like jamming, in which musicians improvise together with respect for each other's idiosyncrasies, whilst creating music that makes some sort of overall sense. Improvisational tactics have to deployed in the interview to balance varying expectations and ethical standards. Because there were often very personal stories being shared in the interview, or because some complex topics were being covered, jamming was a key skill that I had to try and deploy frequently. I had to be sensitive, encouraging, and empathetic, because I felt that my interviewees were vulnerable for a variety of reasons; their candidness, sharing of perceived weaknesses and fears, or marginality. I needed to be alive to the dramaturgy of the encounter and adopt a caring and attentive demeanour. I tried to model this in interviews, and one of the 'jamming' tactics that I deployed was using 'probe' questions/statements such as: "why do you say that?" "did you find that difficult?" "do you want to say anything more about that?" "thanks for sharing that..." (Berg, 1989). I initially used this tactic to communicate to subjects that I valued their personal stories and appreciated the difficulty that they maybe had in sharing them, giving them an opportunity to work through some of the emotions that came up for them and to feel listened to. Although this was a tactic deployed to manage the atmosphere of the interview and to make my respondents feel cared-for and at-ease, the stories that people volunteered as I attempted to be caring towards them provided diversions from my 'official' question schedule, creating knowledge that began tease at my epistemological framing of the project.

For example, Interviewee #4 was very open about the difficulties of forming a religious praxis that facilitated his desire to be involved in politics, being torn between different communities that provided contrasting degrees of theological

and practical support for this endeavour. This came about from my improvising during the interview; going back over stuff he had said in a long reply to one of my earlier questions. I stitched together bits of an 'official' question with some of his reflections on his fragmented identity, not knowing exactly what I was driving at but essentially asking him to expand on his previous reply. I did this, not only in response to the intriguing, epistemologically subversive material he was sharing but also because of the difficult emotions that I felt he maybe wanted to express a bit more of:

Callum: Em, you talked about, kind of that, kinda two-way pull that was happening to you at a certain point of [your life]... it's not as simple as [being caught between the political] left and right, but let's call it left and right. What were the kind of spaces or resources or people or relationships or whatever that kind of nourished that em....

Interviewee #4: None. It was barren, really barren. I mean Workshop [8] was one space, the Anabaptist Network maybe, London Mennonite Centre maybe, but all of them there is this tendency not to be too political, there's a tendency to be more theological; seeing that as having political expression but not be campaigning political. So it was very hard and there was support but it felt very lonely indeed, incredibly lonely, and it's been a long journey over the last ten, eleven, twelve years to find allies...

I assumed that Interviewee #4 would have key relationships and communities that underpinned what I perceived to be his Christian Leftist identity (see Appendix D for an excerpt of this interview). The above excerpt provides a snippet of our conversation, which revealed that in fact he had many sources to draw nourishment from, but also long-standing relationships, and emotional baggage that were less than supportive of his current praxis. His current praxis was a result of deep reflection upon and wrestling with these various sources of religious significance. This was a significant moment early on in the research when I began to realise that I could not write simplistically about the coming about and maintenance of a monolithic Christian Left. I had to find a way of thinking about religious subjects (Interviewee #4 in particular) as they navigated a morass of contrasting religious significances, recursively making sense for themselves of the contexts they found themselves in, and seeking out -

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[8] Workshop is a course for those trying to form a practical theology, geared towards activism (www.workshop.org.uk).

sometimes impermanent and pop-up - means of finding support for this tiring theographic work. Had I stuck stringently to the question schedule that I originally composed, this realisation would not have come about. The ethical and poststructural inclinations of the research, adopting a more conversational and caring interviewing style opened up the possibility of this very important bit of knowledge being created.

Below, in Table 2 is a typical question schedule along with Table 3 which gives examples of the probe-type questions I used to alter the atmosphere of the interview. These are composites, because my question schedule shifted a little almost every time I did an interview in order to represent my shifting epistemology and sometimes address more specific questions I had for people based on what I knew about their praxis.

Table 2: Typical Interview Schedule
What is your role at (insert organisation)?
What do you get up up to in a typical week/meeting/action?
[Often took opportunity here to take a quote from their website that summed-up their raison d'être or a particular campaign they were focussing on, and ask them to explain, probing for the connections between theology and praxis.]
What other organisations do you partner with? What do those relationships look like?
Do you feel your performance of your faith changes as you engage with different organisations?
What strengthens your Christian identity?
What challenges your Christian identity?
Have these always been the main challenges and strengtheners or have they changed a lot over time?
Do you think what you do is political?
What would you say is political?
Does theology play a big role in shaping your identity and actions?
Is reflection a big part of your praxis?
During a particular action (e.g. protest/civil disobedience/community organising), do you think your faith plays a role in your performance, or are you just trying to execute a planned action efficiently?

Table 3: Probes and 'Extra' Questions
Do you have a favourite story about that?
Why do you like that particular idea?
Is there a theology behind that or something else?
Do you feel your faith-based contribution is valued in that interaction?
Why did you choose that tactic to tackle that problem?
Did you see that action as a success? Why?
Do you have a process for reflecting on your actions? (If so) What have been some of the outcomes of that?
What is it that made you enthusiastic about that?

As I have demonstrated, being aware of the dramaturgical nature of interviews and responding practically in the process of researching led to knowledges being created (material created in the course of the interview, the dialogic part of my transcripts) that helped to shift the epistemology of my research. However, recognising the dramaturgy of interviews also led me to making notes about how the interview went; why did I feel it was a success or a failure? What felt uncomfortable? What did I do that I felt disappointed about? Why was a particular interview enjoyable? Reflecting on these types of questions and my notes about "full channel communication" (Berg, 1989, p.34) after the interview got me to think about the environment created during the interview situation and what that said about the power relationships between myself and my interviewees; hidden assumptions or prejudices that guided the interview below the radar of deliberate decision making. These reflections were just as important for shifting my epistemology as the discursive material raised in the interviews.

For example, after finishing talking to Interviewee #6 I noted down that out of all of the interviewees I had talked to so far, he was the one who I had felt the greatest affinity with. However, I was shocked when reading the transcript later on that he was probably the one who I disagreed with the most politically. In particular, I baulked at the quote below when reading back the transcript, which

was accompanied by a selection of other statements that made me feel uncomfortable about how I thought the interview had gone:

Interviewee #6: Tony Blair captured it really brilliantly with this line before he even became Prime Minister, that we're gonna be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. And that was genius I think really in terms of a political ideology that kind of makes sense.

That statement is of course taken out of context and it was qualified with his assurances that he did not think Tony Blair was in any way unimpeachable. However, as I mentioned, this quote - joined with others that gnawed at my political sensibilities - illustrated a clear tension between my dramaturgical notes and my transcript. The jovial and earnest manner in which he had spoken during the interview had left me with the impression that we had a lot in common. He was also much more forthcoming than other respondents in talking about how his faith and his actions were connected. However, it was not just the ease with which I could get him to talk about this that made the interview enjoyable. Much of my most cherished experiences in FCs have been when the connections between faith and practice have been discussed openly, when there is an atmosphere that encourages sharing, trust, empathy, and solidarity. Our interview reminded me of that atmosphere. Recognising this was a crucial moment in terms of my epistemology, particularly in building my theory of theography. This moment flagged clearly for me the tensions and contradictions that can often exist between a subject's discursive and affective framing of transcendence. Although there was a clear clash between our theopolitics, there was something spiritual - I felt - about the enthusiastic, yet peaceful and comradely conversation that we had, leaving me with an affect not unlike that accessible through prayer. This highlighted clashing sources of religious significance to me, particularly that of affect, which - up until that point - I had not included sufficient reflection upon in my emerging theory of theography. Creating knowledge *about* the dramaturgy of the interview (as opposed to knowledges created *through* the interview) were crucial in nudging my epistemological framings of the project onwards in this way.

Conferences

Below is a schedule of the conferences that I participated in during the intensive part of the research:

Table 4: Conferences Descriptions			
Conference No.	**Date**	**Location + Organisation**	**Purpose**
1	14/02/2014 to 16/02/2014	Christian conference centre in the northern English countryside. Conference put on by organisation geared towards resourcing and training Christians who are studying at university to develop - in a multi-denominational environment - an approach to faith that is praxis-centred. This is facilitated through theological discussion and encouraging groups affiliated with the organisation at different universities to form partnerships with other campaign groups pursuing social justice on their campuses.	Firstly, to involve activists in discussion, workshops, and lectures regarding a variety of political issues including Israeli occupation of the Gaza strip, nuclear armaments, immigration, and civil disobedience. Also to introduce activists to the organisations involved in these arenas of politics. Secondly, to encourage theographic reflection through facilitating various forms of worship drawn from across the denominational spectrum of Christianity. Thirdly, to draw the political issues and theological issues together into a dialectical tension. Fourthly, to involve this tension in a reflection upon past and future praxis.
2	28/02/2014 to 02/03/2014	Arts space in a major southern English city. Conference put on by Christian organisation focussed on inspiring and providing a network of support for young Christian activists to oppose injustice. Maintains links with other secular and faith-based organisations heavily involved in social justice campaigns.	Similar to the description of conference #1 but also an opportunity to highlight some particular campaigns that the organisation is backing in particular.
3	28/03/2014 to 30/03/2014	Church of England church in major northern English city. Conference put on by Church of England vicar. Blogger. Organiser of alternative, horizontalist practices of church that run alongside his running of traditional services as part of his CoE job description. Involved in non-violent direct action both as an individual and as part of affinity groups.	Similar to the description of conference #1 but particularly focussed on liberation theology. Less about presenting issues and theology separately but exploring different liberation theologies as pertaining to blackness, ecology, and feminism. Specifically about listening to theological interpretation that comes from the margins. Less of a focus on future praxis, a more specific focus on issues around who gets to write theology.

As outlined above in Table 4, the conferences I took part in were events composed of a variety of discussion groups, panels, workshops, lectures, sermons, and various forms of worship and ritual. They stirred together a

panoply of religious significances and political issues, encouraging and stimulating participants into reflection upon religious praxis. I found these spaces interesting in ways related to both my older geography of religion epistemology (concerned with finding spaces that supposedly reproduced Christian Leftism) and the newer one that was emerging through the course of the research (concerned with networks of religious subject formation and less hierarchical religious spaces). I gained access to Conference #1 because an organisation I was trying to do an interview within was organising it and they invited me to come along not only to do the interview but to "see what we're about" (email correspondence - Sally, Conference #1 co-organiser (see Appendix B #1[9])). I gained access to Conference #2 because I was invited interviewee #15 (Table 1) - a gatekeeper of the organisation - and for Conference #3, I was invited by one of the speakers at Conference #1 and #2 that I had spoken to about my research.

The key research methods that I deployed in these settings were participant observation and autoethnography. As Spradley (1980) points out, participant observation is a staple of ethnographic research approaches, which involves the researcher taking notes as they try to create a detailed picture of a culture by resocialising themselves into that culture (Emerson et al., 1995; Hoggart et al., 2002). The way I used this method was by participating as fully as I could in the conference settings whilst staying alive to and noticing the ways in which the space was assembled and interacted with, the ways people were relating to each other, and what my own performances, thoughts, and feelings were. I converted these into notes as quickly as possible. This can be difficult for researchers depending on the setting they are in (e.g. at a protest it is not always easy to make detailed notes when marching, dancing, chanting, or holding placards). However, the conference setting was conducive to this process being that a lot of it could be participated in whilst sedentary. Once the conference proceedings were over for the day, I used these notes to create a

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[9] Appendix B is a table that lists quotes that I have taken from respondents that are not in Table 1 (which documents my interviewees). This appendix lets the reader know when I have quoted people whose responses I have noted down in my field diaries when casually chatting with them or conducting less formal interviews that have been done without recording equipment. It provides a description of the person I was talking to, the date, place, situation, and document that the quote is taken from.

chronological story in order to help jog my memory when reading the notes back during coding.

In the process of creating this narrative I interspersed the observational content with autoethnographic reflection. Autoethnography rose to prominence as a form knowledge creation in postcolonial geographies in order to underscore the politics of researcher-researched relations, recognising the researcher's positionality as integral to representing the research process (Besio and Butz, 2004a/b). Besio and Butz (2004a/b) proffer that autoethnography involves the researcher allowing the cultures they encounter to challenge their assumptions about and rework their relation to the culture with which they are creating knowledge. This new way of conceptualising research and what is to be researched prompts Cloke et al. (2004) to state that creating ethnographic knowledge is about the process of extending our social networks and critically reflecting upon the socioeconomic relations and assumptions that that enfolds. We must consider how the process of doing research changes both us and our participants (Hyndman, 2001; Katz, 1994). Reflections upon how I was integrating in the conference spaces (or not) were core to the narratives that I created, this included noticing the limitations on the knowledge I was able to create caused by the crises of representation of participant observation (such as oscillating between full participation and a more stand-offish observation of proceedings (Herbert, 2000)). However, autoethnography also enabled me to reflect upon *why* I felt able, could choose, or wanted to participate more in certain spaces and less so in others.

I approached the conferences with preconceptions largely based upon my older geography of religion epistemology, looking to generate knowledge about how Christian Leftist identities were reproduced. However, by deploying participant observation and autoethnography - charting my resocialisation in these settings and reflecting upon why it was more or less difficult for me to feel 'a part of' these settings - I was able to generate knowledges that played a role in shifting this epistemology towards recognising the networked nature of these spaces. I will now look at how aspects of participant observation and autoethnography prompted this shift.

Firstly - as Herbert (2000) points out - during participant observation, researchers flit between a variety of identities and performances. Amongst other performances, they exhibit varying degrees of participation and observation; at points immersing themselves in an activity and generating notes about it once it is over and at others taking a bit-part role in an activity, watching what is going on from the sidelines and noting down proceedings as they happen. I noticed that particularly between Conference #1 and Conference #2 there was a distinct difference in my notes in terms of what knowledge I had managed to generate during the conferences, based on different levels of participation and observation between them. At Conference #1 I produced far more observational notes; noticing the composition of the main conference space, picking up on verbal exchanges that I perhaps did not understand, and my variegated ability to engage with different activities. This was interspersed with lots of autoethnography, reflecting on why I had noticed these things and what it said about how I was perceiving the space. At Conference #2 my notes contained more content on what I had got out of the activities - such as the decisions that they were pushing me towards regarding my own religio-activist praxis. These notes concentrated more on how I experienced *participating* less self-consciously in the conference activities. My reflections on Conference #1 prompted me to assess the assumptions that my previous theographic work led me to have about the space; how was the way I was responding to the conference a reflection of my preconceptions? My reflections on Conference #2 were more about the theographic work I was doing in the space; less notes about stuff that I was noticing about the space but what the space was enabling me to do. The difference in the content of my notes, created by the process of participant observation, highlighted differences between the conferences that prompted a shift in my epistemology.

By highlighting my tendency towards more observation or participation, I was prompted to reflect upon why this difference existed in my methodological process. As I mentioned in chapter one, part of this research was to find connections with people that were blending activism and religion, constituting part of a broader Christian Leftist movement. I had assumed that although I did not feel a part of this supposed movement as yet, that the conferences would be a place that I felt at home quickly - that I would rapidly attain a degree of

cultural competence and sense of camaraderie with my fellow attendees. However, the difference in my notes (Conference #1: more observational/ Conference #2: more participative) was generated, not only by the chronological order of the conferences as I became more culturally competent in that kind of setting, but based partly on differences in their religious performativity. At a superficial level, I felt that Conference #2 had a more sincere approach to the religious content that it threaded through the conference, whereas in Conference #1, it felt like the religious aspect was at points a little tagged-on and referred to ironically. For example, at one point in Conference #1 there was a 'Beer & Hymns' session where people gathered in the bar area of the conference centre to have a few drinks and enjoy belting out a few classic hymns. However, although I went into the session acknowledging it was meant to be light-hearted - more about enjoying the bodily and communal act of singing (*à la* football chants) than evoking the ethereal - the histrionic performance of the hymns by some participants felt like it went a bit too far, as if to mock the notion that these songs might also be precious tools in the construction of some participants spiritual lives. This discomfort meant that I felt less able to fully participate in activities at Conference #1, being that I was worried that my approach to blending religious and political performances would be undermined for being too sincere. On the other hand, Conference #2 seemed generally to treat religious performances with a greater reverence. The difference between the conferences - and my level of comfort within them - partially illustrated to me that there was no monolithic 'Christian Leftist' collective identity to slot into. Not only did I observe multiple religious and political praxes in the conferences - spinning off into very different geographical locations and types of organising - but I realised that even the minutely different ways of blending religious and political material that the conferences convoked had an effect on what I was willing to participate in and get on board with. This difference in my fieldnotes helped to flag-up my own religio-political particularity and that I had a lot to critically reflect upon regarding where my levels of dis/ comfort came from, that I needed to figure out how this reflection would affect my own praxis, and how that had little to do with being part of a 'Christian Leftist' movement and more to do with figuring out my place in overlapping religious and political networks that the conferences convened. This was a crucial shift in my epistemology, moving my thinking on from the conferences as

solidifiers of 'Christian Leftist' identity toward being spaces at the confluence of a huge number of networks; the coming together of which - in different configurations - produced highly variegated religious performativities. This has a distinct effect on the ability of participants to feel 'a part of' proceedings and causes them to reflect upon how their praxis relates to religio-political configurations they are already or perhaps wish to be a part of.

Secondly, although differences in my fieldnotes between conferences were reflected upon to create knowledge about why I was responding differently to the different settings, autoethnography helped to direct my attention during the proceedings of the conferences towards the power relations unfolding between myself and my fellow attendees as they were happening. As I mentioned, my fieldnotes shifted my epistemology regarding an homogenous Christian left, but autoethnography - directed towards the same problem (a lack of feelings of solidarity at Conference #1) - was able to utilise this emergent epistemological shift (towards recognising the networked nature of the space and those co-creating it) into thinking through one of the findings from my interviews. This finding was that less-hierarchical spaces that were open to reflexive questioning of religious praxis were helpful for religio-political activists that were struggling with an identity that was stretched across networks of religious significance.

The striking issue that autoethnography highlighted for me at Conference #1 was my own lack of affective solidarity with some of the activists I was encountering at the conference. Many of my gut reactions - not so much to the discourses espoused, but institutional identities embraced (Roman Catholic/ Anglican/Methodist/URC) - indicated an unconscious othering that I was performing, and problematised my rhetorical enthusiasm for the ecumenical ends of the event-space. I felt - at an affective level - an inability to accept certain people's subjectivities, maintaining a sense of being apart. This was perhaps an unfolding of deeply visceral notions of 'correct' and 'incorrect' theology (and the according assumptions these carry about other denominations) engrained from my past experiences in communities that heavily policed their preeminent theological discourses (Sutherland, 2014). However, this discomfort might also have derived from my own religious preference to reject institutional labels. The clash between how I felt in a space

marked by difference and my rhetorical desire to participate more fully in it prompted me to take a few time-outs over the conference to critically reflect upon this contradiction.

These time-outs had a profound effect on how I experienced the rest of Conference #1. For example, upon realising the contradiction in my response to the event-space, I felt very focussed upon these issues in dedicated times of reflection and prayer. Whilst fully participating in the activity of praying, I used it as an exercise to deconstruct past and challenge future subconscious responses to the event-space. This helped me to contextualise and prepare cognitive counteractions to further negative responses I had to conference material. This is an example of theography helping me negotiate a space populated by difference by altering my praxis within it.

Hence, my autoethnographic notes highlighted two things to me. Firstly, that the less-hierarchical spaces mentioned by my interviewees in which difference in religious praxis was accepted and could be reflected upon in a supposedly non-judgemental atmosphere, were not straightforwardly empowering spaces for subjects from the margins. They were also spaces of discomfort, tension, and strain. This helped shift my research questions towards recognising traits in FCs other than their ability to reproduce a 'Leftist' identity and praxis. It made me want to explore how the differences even within relatively small FCs are negotiated within the community, how they are set up to deal with this difference, and how these negotiations and structures affect the praxis of religious subjects. Secondly, my autoethnographic notes highlighted my encounter with contrasting sources of religious significance (i.e. my rhetorical embrace of ecumenism vs. my affective discomfort with its expression drawn from religious preferences), and that I needed an epistemology that could help me access and make sense of subjects' reflexive process; how they made sense of religious contrasts, and how they practiced out of this negotiation. This nuanced my development of the concept of theography and helped me to make sense of how subjects practiced as they convened the overlapping of various religious and political networks.

Researching Intensively

The intensive parts of the research involved two placements in different FCs doing participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research. Firstly, I participated for a month in a community called Ezra House (pseudonym) in the USA that defined itself as part of the New Monastic movement. New Monasticism is a movement largely within Christianity towards building FCs that have a high degree of interdependence between their members (often sharing accommodation and money), a communal rhythm of prayer, a focus on housing and caring for the vulnerable (such as migrants, the homeless, women fleeing domestic abuse), living frugally and sustainably, engaging in protest and civil disobedience (against, e.g. economic inequality, war, environmental degradation), and being based in marginalised neighbourhoods (Claiborne, 2006; Simpson, 2011; Stock et al., 2006; Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008). The community I stayed with lived together largely in the same house and exhibited many of the marks of New Monasticism that I have just outlined. Secondly, I worked with a church that I was a member of in Exeter (Exeter Church (pseudonym)), allowing a long-term study over three years. The church was part of a broader network of evangelical churches but did not exhibit the classic evangelical practice of having a fixed preacher that members tried to attract unconverted friends to come and listen to each week. Instead, the church was more about developing deep relationships between its members, engendering a sense of journeying with each other as they question what it is to be a Christian and emphasising the development of a praxis, not just of evangelisation, but of a more all-encompassing Christian character. Questions of praxis extended particularly into the realm of how to respond to social injustices such as the refugee crisis and local poverty.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, using the ethnographic techniques of participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research were useful in these settings for building a picture of these cultures as I tried to resocialise myself within them. These techniques helped me challenge the preconceptions that I had of these cultures, creating knowledges that my interviews struggled to represent, particularly the distance between how my interviewees described communities they found were helpful places to work out

their praxis in and what they are actually like (Harrison, 2009). However, these communities were picked in particular for their own distinctive characteristics. The community in the USA was picked because of its explicitly activist *raison d'être.* Although my interviews were with people in FBOs with an explicit bent towards activism, these people were in a less radically open setting than the people in the community in the USA that I stayed with. My interviewees were in the setting of an established organisation that they had joined or applied for a job within and their praxis had some flexibility but was kind of set towards whatever the organisation was focussed on; economic justice, opposing war, promoting environmentalism. In the community I stayed with, although there were some foundational aspects to their praxis (see Appendix C) - many of them linked to their identity as New Monastics - lots of decisions about how they practiced as individuals and as a group were up for discussion, challenge, and change. Exactly how should they share their resources with one another? Which issues to protest on and how to approach them? The openness to different praxes and theologies that the community exhibited gave me the opportunity to see what it was like for people in a FC to work on and change their praxis over time. What processes, structures, and relationships facilitated this?

My placement within the FC in Exeter was integrated as a case study within the research for many of the same reasons as the placement in the USA, however it was also included because as I participated in it, it began to reveal to me one of the key tensions emerging from my interviews, the conferences, and my placement in the USA. This was the tension between openness to religious difference within an FC and a desire to reach out to form solidarities with marginalised people. Trying to be good at both of these things at the same time takes a considerable amount of effort, and leads to a process of problem solving regarding how to balance these two demands within a community. Being in this setting and being a full member allowed me to take part in this FC in an action research capacity, working through these problems in a group setting, including my participants in the process of knowledge creation, and developing ideas about how FCs can work through these tensions. This placement also enabled me to write autoethnography about how my own religious praxis was

being changed in the day-to-day as part of this FC, inserting an in-depth account from the inside of this openness/solidarity tension into my methodology.

I shall now give an account of what I did in these settings and how this shifted my epistemology and honed my research questions.

Placement 1 (USA) - Ezra House

The Ezra Community was located in a low-income, post-industrial city in New England. It was made up of a mix of middle-class professionals, single parent families, people struggling to find employment, and illegal immigrants. It was spread across three houses in different locations throughout the city (one of which was Ezra House, where I stayed), and was made up of around eighteen people in all. The gatekeepers of the community - through whom I organised the placement - saw their living together as an exercise in downward mobility, reducing consumption, sharing resources, curbing atomism, and acting as a training-ground for people interested in community living and New Monasticism. The city that the community was based in was facing a number of issues including homelessness, gun crime, drug addiction, poverty, and food deserts. Responding to these issues had led the community to form some of its own projects and also to partner in a variety of interventions with other religious and non-religious activists within the city.

The community was founded by a couple - Ron and Barbara (pseudonyms) - with a deep interest in Anabaptism (Arnold, 2000; Arnold and Merton, 1995), the Catholic Worker Movement (Day, 1997; Maurin, 2010; Zwick and Zwick, 2005), and New Monasticism, and was related to a capacious set of theopolitical engagements within the city. This ranged from running what was effectively a housing co-op, to the prefigurative politics of reduced consumption, sharing and sustainability, and the resistance of campaigning and translocal protest. This was paired with a desire to infuse the community with a strong Christian identity. This was expressed through spiritual disciplines of bible-study, prayer, worship, and sharing of meals. Drawing all the residents into a shared sense of purpose and participative democracy was also important to Ron and Barbara, along with forming strong communal relationships that enabled an increased sense of

togetherness, interdependence, and an ability to welcome others. Additionally they hoped that the community would act as a signalling station to visiting activists and local churches, assisting them in exploring their politics through Ron and Barbara's relationships with the whole gamut of political and charitable organisations in the city.

I created knowledge about Ezra House through informal conversations with community members, participant observation, and autoethnography. The informal conversations I had with people built up an account of the different religious subjectivities and praxes within the community, the variety of ways in which community members framed their relationship with the community, and their ideas about its *raison d'être*. Due to the different schedules of people in the house, quite often my conversations would be one-to-one, being that I was frequently in the house with no work to do. I often had plenty of time in which to finish a conversation, then go and make notes on what had been discussed without fear that I would be missing out on something. This allowed for quick recall and ample time in which to be reflexive, factoring in abundant autoethnographic material regarding how I was integrating into the community and an account of my time with them.

In terms of influencing my research questions, participant observation was an extremely useful method in this context. As I outlined in the first couple of paragraphs of this section, the people who founded the community (Ron and Barbara) had some broad, yet - as I found out through chatting to them - cherished ideas about the community's *raison d'être.* Observing their interactions within the community was core to helping me to develop some of the ideas around my current first research question; what balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?.

An incident that I recorded in my fieldnotes was central to setting-off my thinking around how a subject's perception of a community's *raison d'être* might be important. One community rhythm was praying every weekday morning at 7am. Often, people in the house did not make this gathering, although a core group (myself, my wife, Ron, Barbara, Tim) always convened downstairs in the living

room to read some liturgy, a psalm (or a passage from *The Imitation of Christ* (2003) by Thomas à Kempis), and pray for whatever people felt like praying for. One morning, the lack of people present became too much for Barbara, and she burst out: "Where is everyone anyway?!". She scrunched her brow and flopped her arms on her seat in exasperation before slowly shaking her head in indignant disbelief. After a moment, she recomposed herself. However, she maintained - for a number of minutes - a countenance that I read as concerned frustration. I felt for Barbara; I knew from my conversations with her that upon starting the community, the minimum she wanted from people - in terms of community practice - was to turn up to prayer times. From my conversations with other people in the house it was clear to me that although people often felt a little guilty about missing this daily rhythm, the lack of motivation to change their routine came from a lack of their sense of investment in the idea of being a community. For Ron and Barbara - and some of the people affiliated with the community, but based in other nearby houses in the city - the idea of building a New Monastic community was what they were committed to for the foreseeable future, and a communal prayer life was seen as a crucial building-block within this. Many of the people actually living in Ezra House did not share the same level of commitment. Although supportive of Ron and Barbara and enthusiastic about the aims of the community, they did not see themselves as being part of it long-term. I could not be sure from my time there whether these disjunctures were out-on-the-table within the house, however, it was clear to me - through Barbara's outburst - that the subjective relation to the *raison d'être* of the community was an important topic to think through. Differences in this relation within the community had a considerable effect on the affective atmosphere that morning, and - based on conversations with Ron and Barbara - was perhaps going to have an effect on the functioning of the community in the future. These reflections on the importance of the community's *raison d'être* were triggered by my observational notes of Barbara's emotional outburst, underscoring the importance of the participant observation method in shifting my line of enquiry within the research and epistemology. This shift was away from assuming that there were FCs with solidified collective identities, towards recognising that these were sites of struggle. Even when founded with a clear *raison d'être,* the communication and maintenance of these values raised all sorts of tensions, caused by community members highly differentiated subjectivities and their

preconceptions of the community's reason for being, drawn in turn from a broader context of experience and narratives to do with faith and practice.

Placement 2 (UK) - Exeter Church

Exeter Church was founded by two couples who moved from Luton who, through a complicated web of events, felt a strong desire to start a church in Exeter. One of the main reasons for starting the church was that they were acting out of an energy engendered by positive experiences at their former church in Luton. The characteristics of the Luton church included the building of a strong yet open community, a major contribution to the political life of the town, and a sense of shared purpose in and ownership of church activities, whether that be creating spiritual event spaces, putting on events to bind their neighbourhoods together, or intervening against injustices. Out of these experiences grew a desire to replicate this commitment-demanding and communal model of church in another small city. However, the church was also started based on a desire to create safe spaces for vulnerable individuals who were cautious of FCs to have a place in which to figure out their identity in the context of a community exploring Christian praxis. This was partly achieved by framing the community in early discussions about vision and values as a place to explore Christianity, where everyone's experiences and stories were listened to and respected, and where difference is lived alongside and not suppressed. The desire was to welcome people into a community whose members were exploring their Christian praxis, building interdependence, and sharing stories of engagement beyond the walls of the church.

This part of the research blended participant observation and autoethnography whilst incorporating aspects of participant action research. According to kinpaisby-hill (2011), participant action research seeks to subvert the traditional hierarchies inherent in researcher-researched relationships by asking questions about who benefits from the processes and outcomes of a research project. Hoggart et al. (2002) posit that these traditional hierarchies mirror imperialism, with the researcher exploiting the researched for information and then representing the researched back to a privileged group in ways which undergird the privileged group's superiority. Participant action research seeks to

disassemble these power relations by challenging the researcher to adopt more collaborative relations with the group they are researching (Routledge, 2003b). In solidarity, the researcher asks ethical questions about how to represent the group they have been involved with. This involves seeking to bring about social change by creating knowledges with the researched that enfranchise the marginalised by involving the researched in the creation of knowledge so that they are developing empowering understandings of their social relations, and by involving the researched in decisions about how to represent themselves to others.

In keeping with the ethos of participant action research, consent to research was attained through group conversations, where I explained what my research was about, why the church was of political and academic interest, and what my methodology would involve. Over time these topics were revisited with everyone, so as to remind folks of my mixed identity when taking part in group activities. As well as underscoring my position to the group, I tried frequently to share analytical trajectories I was following in terms of representing the community. This had the benefit of being a way of researching more ethically, by being open about how I wanted to represent the group in a professional forum and giving them ample opportunity to challenge my choices about how (and whether) they were to be represented. This also meant that the knowledge I was creating could be used by the group to solve problems, that an empowering, and conscientising process was in place. However this also enabled me to take seriously the analytical capabilities of fellow members of the church. By bringing my partial analyses to the group as a formal update as to how the research was going (in addition to our collective ruminations on group dynamics, collective actions, and the meanings enrolled within these), my analyses highlighted some of their blind spots, as well as being subject to straightforward disagreement, foregrounding different interpretations of the group from different individuals within it.

Participant action research was a crucial method for shifting my epistemological focus and research questions towards recognising the core of my research; namely generating knowledge about how religious subjects negotiate between FCs which incorporate more democratic forms of organising across difference

and spaces of activism. This core concern is what my three research questions are based upon: (i) what balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?, (ii) what are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within the community?, (iii) how does this degree of openness affect the political praxis of community members? As kinpaisby-hill (2011) points out, one of the core practices of participant action research is co-working with research participants to solve problems in the group as a member with an equal degree of investment in the outcomes of the problem solving. This problem solving process highlighted - both in my own attempts to function within the group and make sense of what it was about and in the group discussions we often had that concerned the church and its functioning - that the overlapping of democratic church forms and attempts to branch out into activism was not an easy circle to square. This was something that was constantly cropping up in conversations and being reviewed over and over again through praxis over the course of my participation in the church. By its frequent cropping up as a topic of conversation and as something I frequently found my attention drawn to in my own praxis as part of the church I was able to begin to develop my epistemology and research questions based on this finding.

Processing

Processing all of the knowledge that has been created in a research project has the purpose of forming an analytical framework of the social spheres that the researcher has been a part of, ready to then be re-interpreted into a feasible narrative of commonsense reality (Spradley, 1980). However, as Appadurai (1988), Gallaher (2011), and Jackson (2001) note, this process is made fraught with representational difficulty by the coming together of the desire to speak into theoretical conversations, political goals, and the meshing of disparate encounters into a coherent narrative. All this has to be brought into tension with a method for making sense of the accounts that is in some way systematic; that lets the stories speak in a way that perhaps undermines these various agendas (Jackson, 2001). This tension is expressed in the ethnographic research ethic, that seeks detail rather than generality and is ready to reconfigure the relationship of empirics to theory, all the while recognising the politics of the

researcher's relationship to their respondents (Creswell, 2007; Faier, 2011). Regarding qualitative data, after the creation of interview transcripts and collation of field diaries, the process for creating this analytical framework is usually coding; the labelling of words in order to form categories for discussion (Seale and Kelly, 1998).

The process of creating transcripts involves making choices about how to turn the interview encounter into a document that evokes particular meanings. I tried to complete transcription as quickly as possible after each interview. This was so as to minimise the effect of my evolving memory of the interview as it began to merge with the analytical narrative I was creating in my head to make sense of the combined knowledges accrued during the research (Hoggart et al., 2002). When creating transcripts, I made notes on dramaturgical performances as well as the discursive content of the interview (Berg, 1989). The logging of performance follows Rose's (1997) call to practice a critical reflexivity that examines the sometimes unexpected performances we co-create in social interactions. These empirical surprises are recognised by a poststructural fluid-power paradigm and can be read alongside analyses of more hegemonic power gradients evident in the interviews (kinpaisby-hill, 2011). Notes on these performances were written around the conversational material of the transcripts, logging (as recommended by Arksey and Knight, 2009) mood, affect, body language, repeats, and tics. This was sometimes followed by my thoughts and impressions of the interview at the foot or in the margins of the document. I wrote reflexive notes about the potential challenges the empirics were beginning to level at my theoretical biases, as well as how they responded to (and challenged the assumptions latent within) my research questions. The same kinds of notes on performance and position were apparent in my field-notes and autoethnographic reflections.

When coding, remembering that I had undergone this process of critical reflexivity was crucial for counteracting some of the doubts about my research documents as I read them back, sometimes months after they were written. My reflections on the transcultural interactions between myself and other faith-identified activists sometimes shocked me when I read them, because they revealed a gap between how I remembered the event and what I had written at

the time. By reflecting on what happened after writing down my initial responses to the event, my memory of how I responded to it changed. However, I was also surprised by what I had written because it seemed to me that I often played down the tensions that the event had thrown up and had become more pressing for me to think about afterwards. These jarring encounters had become more significant in my memory than the majority of what had occurred at the events which I had reported as being enjoyable or even inspiring. This makes me wonder if I can trust my research documents. Was I possibly playing the positive side up because I was afraid or unable at the time to plumb the darker parts of myself, and tackle the otherings in which I was complicit? Did this cause me to write an account that was not that true to how I was feeling? Perhaps I was writing the account in such a positive way in order to try and tackle my otherings; to deliberately cast events in a positive light despite urges to be savagely critical or cynical? Even though these questions mean I have to be very careful in interpreting my research documents as I read back through them, reflecting on them has made me more alive to the ways in which the subject participates in but can equally deconstruct their process of othering through reflection. When reading through my ethnographic observations and autoethnographic reflections, I have to take seriously my critical writing choices at the time, whilst also reading for telling silences in my phrasing or diplomatic wordings I that used to conceal a tension that connects to future reflections and analyses of these events which unpacked these silences and tensions. When coding, I tried to be sensitive towards these writing choices whilst being aware of the concealed conflicts that became more significant as I began to process the power-relations and deconstruct the unfoldings of my self that clashed with my identity and the political environment I was in. In my analyses I will explore the epistemological, ethical, and theopolitical reasons for my writing choices and the ways in which the thoughts they sparked scaled up into more interpretive analyses.

Jackson (2001), directs his readers to two types of codes that can be used to interpret qualitative research. These are *in vivo* and constructed codes. *In vivo* codes come from a quantitative approach to coding. By marking the frequency of particular words or phrases as they appear in a document, those which appear more frequently can be isolated as the important issues raised by the

encounter. Constructed codes are abstracted from the researchers theoretical and political interests and are used more like lenses on the text. For instance I could have used codes like Theography, Praxis, or Identity Formation; issues that my research questions were geared towards. I could simply have used these constructed codes to identify instances of each of these phenomena. However, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue, it would be ridiculous to try to apply purely *in vivo* or constructed codes. To create an analytical framework from which to form a narrative, researchers have to base their reading of a text on the questions they want to ask. This necessitates a degree of construction in any coding scheme. However, it is also important not to manipulate interpretation via codes that create factual incommensurability between the research documents and analytical narratives. It would be wrong for me to write a great deal about othering based on two quotes amongst two hundred pages of research, unless of course those quotes acted as real turning points in the narrative. Much more obvious patterns would be the key issues to tackle as long as they were relevant to the research questions.

Therefore, whilst coding my own research documents I used a mixture of *in vivo* and constructed approaches. However, I began with codes that were formed in part by a combination of laziness and naivety. I thought that I had a fairly good memory of what had happened over the research and that I had an idea of how that had addressed the political and academic conversations in which I am interested. Therefore I came up with this list of codes: Praxis, Theography, Postsecular Encounters, Postsecular Ethos, Limitations of Praxis, Nature of the Political, Theopolitics, Identity Formation, Contradiction, Othering, and Beyond Right/Left. However, whilst using these codes on the document, I felt that many of the recurrent issues connected to these codes but that perhaps some different concepts might capture the patterns of the research better. Therefore I started keeping a log of these separate issues in a notebook whilst I continued with the constructed codes I had begun with. This prompted me to do as Gallaher (2011) suggests and reevaluate both my epistemological and political concerns and how they relate to what my research accounts said. The process of doing research moves our understanding along as we carry it out, and this understanding is formed by a progressive agglomeration of reading, reflection, analyses, and experience. Therefore when we come to code we are at a certain

point in a journey, where these readings, reflections, analyses, and experiences have a variegated prominence in our conception of the project. To retread this journey in a more compact time frame, readjusts our interpretation of it, folding events and interpretations in on top of one another and opening up new ways of connecting them, whilst still cognisant of the analytical progression which has now been wound up upon itself. Because I had not considered this before creating my first list of codes, as Jackson (2001) suggests, I had to go back through the data again, amending the coding scheme.

The way I did this was following what Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue is a traditional way of coding, moving from *open* to *axial* codes. Open codes are formed from a dialogue between the research questions, political and academic concerns, and the research documents themselves. Axial codes form before a second pass of coding, in order to ask more detailed questions of the original codes. For instance, an open code may be 'Activism', whereas an axial code may be 'What makes an effective activist?'. This led - as Creswell (2007) notes is often the wont of an ethnographic epistemology - to relatively weighty concepts emerging from the research. These new open codes were: *raison d'être*, democracy/openness, activism/solidarity, and theography. They seemed much more able to create what Coffey and Atkinson (1996) call a "pathway" (p. 45) through the research. Using these concepts, different events could be connected to each other in ways the first set of codes could not. Axial codes then opened up underneath these after noting down little snippets of quotes or stories that exhibited difference within the meta-codes but could be bound together by particular questions. These questions included: "Why are people attracted to this FC?", "What is causing conflict here?", "What is this person's rationale for getting involved in this kind of activism?", and "How is theography changing this persons approach to praxis?".

Conclusion

In chapter one I highlighted various shortcomings in the epistemological apparatus that geographers have in addressing the empirical context of Christian FCs overlapping with activist geographies. I argued that by focussing (from both institutional and more place-based perspectives) on the struggle

between religious institutions and their associated FCs, geographers have not developed a sophisticated enough way of thinking about FCs that have formally broken-off from or subvert the domination of institutions. Current epistemologies in the geography of religion are not useful for making sense of FCs experimenting with flattening hierarchies and blurring sacred/secular divisions through their communal and everyday practices.

This methods chapter has demonstrated that the practice of particular methods underscored the need for an epistemology that can grapple with the complexities that became apparent through the research. Some of these complexities included:

• My interviews highlighting that there was no solid 'Christian Left' that was orchestrating a shift towards greater social justice practices in FCs. Most individuals found their work with social-justice and activist-focussed FBOs difficult and at times lacked reliable support. Their religio-activist praxis emerged from a network of relationships with un/supportive individuals and communities that they had to traverse and negotiate. The interviews also highlighted that this network was composed of sometimes seemingly contradictory arrangements of religious significance, coming from both affective and discursive sources. Sometimes spaces that felt comfortable, welcoming, and spiritually harmonious could be created by groups within which there was significant opposition to my interviewees religious praxis. Equally, groups in which a greater discursive resonance with the subject was apparent could often have a threatening or hostile affect.

• The conferences I attended highlighting that the spaces in which many of my interviewees said they were more comfortable - spaces in which religious hierarchy could be suspended - were not necessarily spaces that built solidarities between people. These spaces could often be sites of conflict and contestation.

• The long-term placements that I took part in highlighting that overlapping flatter hierarchies and activism are two values that are difficult to hold together in a FC. How these two values are manifesting themselves requires constant review through practices of communal problem-solving. The way in which the FC sets itself up - its *raison d'être* - is often infused with these values,

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frequently as a response to their absence in more institutional settings, attracting members that may hold in esteem one or both of these values. However, this *raison d'être* is often reviewed through praxis, altering the weighting that each one is given in the community at any moment. This is significant because it can reveal disjunctures between the group's practices, and understandings of the group and its aims that particular members might have. Recognising these tensions begins to unravel the complex biographies and networks of relationships that shape members attraction to the community.

These empirical complexities have been key factors in shaping the epistemology that I developed through chapters two and three, and my research questions. They have highlighted the need for a network-style epistemology that addresses the complexities of FCs approaching the realm of activism. Geographers of religion need to consider how religious subjects negotiate a network of competing religious significances across supposed sacred/secular divides, and work upon themselves to change their praxis and subjectivity to respond to this environment. Moreover; how do they do this in a FC where openness to religious difference is encouraged? What measure of generosity to difference can be practiced in a context that also aims to formulate some sort of collective activist practice, necessitating - at some point - committed solidarity?

Therefore, the research questions that I shall be responding to in the following chapters are:

• What balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?
• What are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within the community?
• How does this degree of openness affect the political praxis of community members?

My response to these questions will be carried out through the lines of enquiry developed at the end of chapter three. The three themes I will be using to

explore these questions will be centred around, (i) how theography highlights the complexity and changing dynamics of the FCs that my research questions address, (ii) to what extent theography helps subjects to exhibit a postsecular ethos towards subjects both within and beyond the FC, (iii) to what extent subjects use religious affect, discourse, and practice to help them in their theographic negotiations across sacred/secular divides.

In order to address my research questions through these themes, I will largely illustrate my analysis with the material that I generated through my participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research rather than quoting the transcripts that I developed after interviews. The interviews were crucial to forming the epistemological lens through which I could analyse the FCs that I spent time with. In flagging-up how subjects form their praxis by negotiating between different religious significances, religious rituals, and techniques of self, they sensitised me to how subjects were constructing their praxis between their FC and activist spaces. However, by focussing more on the material that I worked-up with the FCs, I can tell stories that represent patterns in their structure, their relationship to activism, and the way subjects negotiate that relationship. The depth to which I explore the structure and processes of the FCs that I worked with and how subjects interact with them is a crucial part of my analysis in the later chapters of this thesis. Although my interviewees were able to tell me what they got out of different FCs and could tell me in general terms what these FCs were like, I could not tell stories that spoke directly into the interrelationships between FC, subject, and activism, because I was not creating my own knowledges about the communities they were referencing. In focussing on the three FCs that I encountered in the research (the Ezra Community, Exeter Church, and the Conferences) I can compare and contrast how different FC structures lead to different ways of blending horizontal modes of organising and activism, the different effects this has on subjective praxis, and the ways in which theography helps subjects to negotiate and hybridise their praxis and speak back into their FC. This creates a sense of continuity through chapters five, six, and seven, showing how my three research questions interconnect to illustrate the overlaps between FC, subject, and activism. To use the interview material would unhelpfully break-up this narrative and also be using the knowledge I created in an inappropriate way by

speaking into analyses of subject/FC interactions by using examples from outside of the specific context I am examining. Therefore in these next three chapters I will use my participant observation, autoethnographic, and participant action research material to answer my three research questions through a theographic lens to address the themes I developed at the end of chapter three, analysing the interrelations between FC, subject, and activism.

Furthermore, by focussing on the overlap between FCs, subjects, and activism - rather than FCs on their own - I can produce useful knowledges for both geographers and practitioners interested in the postchristendom trend of FCs that are adopting greater openness to difference and an increased desire to extend solidarity beyond themselves. As I mentioned in chapters two and three I have developed an epistemology that can address this context, something that I argue in chapter one has been missing from human geography so far. In the following chapters I analyse FCs, their connection to activism, and the ways that religious people negotiate and mediate this relationship, producing nuanced and complex knowledges that seeks to represent the challenges, opportunities, problematics, and possibilities of postchristendom FCs.

CHAPTER 5: PRODUCING THE *RAISON D'ÊTRE* OF POSTCHRISTENDOM COMMUNITIES

Introduction

In this chapter I will be addressing my first research question: what balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why? This question is intended to help me to deconstruct the dominant ways in which the religion/politics interface in FCs has been analysed so far. The politics of FCs has been analysed by studying either: (i) how FCs take, rework, or resist political cues from resonances between religious and political elites or (ii) by studying how FCs create tensions by trying to collectively encode religious space. These ways of analysing the religion/politics interface have produced two predominant epistemological attitudes regarding FCs and politics which have swayed the research agenda. Analysing the effect of top-down religio-political resonances has resulted an attitude of defensive suspicion regarding religious involvement in politics, leading in particular to a focus on the deleterious effects of Americanist evangelicalism (Agnew, 2006; Sturm and Dittmer, 2010; Hackworth, 2010a; 2010b). Focussing on the politics of co-producing religious space has resulted in a tendency to focus on the religious relationship between subject and space; exploring novel subjective transformations through embracing the virtual and retreating from analysis of the more wide-ranging political impacts a FC might have (Dewsbury and Cloke, 2009; Holloway, 2003; 2006; Lane, 2002).

I argue that both of these frameworks lack nuance in their assumptions about why FCs exist in the first place. The focus on critiquing Americanist evangelicalism is not an unworthy cause, but the epistemology that much of this work rests on resonates with an anticlericalism that takes for granted the interweaving of FCs and the establishment (Doyle, 2001). A cursory glance at some of the history of religious radicalism debunks this assumption (Craig, 1992; Guzman, 1969; Roberts, 2005; West, 1993). Equally, focussing on embracing the virtual over-emphasises the palliative qualities of FCs for subjects seeking resilience in the midst of coping with life. Literatures regarding religious subjects embracing the virtual highlight the transformation of the

subject and their way of relating to the world, but not so much how a FC might be structured so as to change the political landscape beyond itself. Both of these epistemologies evidence a wariness regarding the overlapping of religion and politics which is healthy, because coalitions of religious and political elites have upheld injustices. However, neither epistemology broaches the issue of how religious forays into politics might contribute to outcomes that might appeal to a wide sweep of radical geographers, such as the emergence of the UK Labour movement, active pacifism, racial justice, and liberation theology (Bellah, 1992; Cloke et al.; 2016; Flessati, 1997; Gutiérrez, 1988; Semmel, 1974). If FCs are to be recognised as existing not just at the behest of oppressive institutions or as resource-banks for the individual trying to cope with life's difficulties, how might we begin to think through their reason for being? What epistemology might we use to make sense of the political heterogeneity of FCs?

The context that my research covers - nascent postchristendom FCs - highlights the paucity of thinking that exists regarding how politics and religion overlap in the *raison d'être* of FCs. The FCs that I worked with during the research - having broken from the oversight of institutions - frequently reflected upon their *raison d'être*. The knowledge that I generated in exploring these reflections with them underscored religio-political desires that sought consciously to undermine the assumed *raison d'êtres* of institutionalism and virtual embrace. The theological underpinnings of their *raison d'êtres* pointed them towards being more democratically organised than institutional FCs and more engaged in solidarity with the marginalised than FCs which might prioritise the virtual. By setting out - as I will argue below - successfully to undermine institutional and virtual-focussed modes of being, their *raison d'êtres* are evidence that religious geographers need a new epistemology in order to think through what the *raison d'être* (and practices) of a FC can be.

I suggest that by studying the *raison d'êtres* of the FCs that I worked with, as I will in this chapter, I can point the way to a better approach to analysing FCs, using a theographic epistemology that helps geographers to understand the political potentialities of FCs in a way that incorporates a hopefulness about their political potentials whilst remaining critical (as has been the attitude taken

with geographies written about many other social movements (Chatterton, 2006; Chesters and Welsh, 2006; Featherstone, 2003)). By using theography to dissect the formation of emergent postchristendom FCs, I intend to highlight how they compose their *raison d'être* from a selection of religious significances which hybridises, splices, transforms, and exceeds so-called progressive and regressive ideas and practices. I intend to highlight that although all of the FCs that I worked with rejected institutionalism to various degrees, they all remained related to it in some way. This might be in terms of actual relationships or in terms of theological resonances or residues. I argue that this highlights the networked nature of FCs across supposedly progressive and regressive spheres and that it is important to attend to the process of how they understand and work upon this network of relationships in order to understand how they produce political outcomes. By focussing on the reflexive praxis of forming a *raison d'être*, this chapter can help geographers to understand the sometimes baffling heterogeneity of religion in terms of its political flexibility. By highlighting a different epistemology for framing the *raison d'être* of FCs that generates hope about their political practices whilst remaining aware of the various ways in which this can be compromised, I hone in on how a heterogenous array of religious significances are negotiated and framed by subjects.

In this chapter I look at how the concepts of openness and solidarity are balanced within the *raison d'être* of each FC that I worked with. This is not only to show how their *raison d'êtres* need a new epistemology to be understood because they undermine previous epistemological frames that human geographers have used to understand them. Jamoul and Wills (2008) and Megoran (2010; 2014) have all tried to argue that when FCs become more open to difference and are run more democratically, this foreshadows a progression to solidarities with the marginalised. My empirics (and many writers in political and anarchist geography) suggest that when communities (religious and otherwise) try to blend greater democracy and openness to difference with increased solidarity with marginalised groups, the positive connection Jamoul, Wills, and Megoran make between the two values silences various tensions that the simultaneous application of those values engenders. There are difficulties to overcome in the relations between openness and solidarity which are contingent upon the different ways in which openness and solidarity can relate

to one another. I would like to push into the hopefulness that Jamoul, Wills, and Megoran express, but draw in the complexities that my empirics and anarchist geographers highlight in order to produce more nuanced knowledges about FCs blending openness and solidarity. It is right to be hopeful, but not in a simplistic way that thinks because a commitment to openness and solidarity are represented in a FC that this necessarily means that desirable political practices ensue. For a start, these two values are often balanced very differently in FCs' *raison d'êtres*, with greater commitment to one expressed over the other.

I argue that working through how FCs have come to balance these two values in their *raison d'être* through theographic work illustrates both a new way to think about FCs' *raison d'êtres* - setting up a more nuanced view about what political possibilities are open to them - and can produce knowledges that detect reasons for political hopefulness within the practices of FCs without being naive or becoming an uncritical celebrant (Ferber, 2006; Gold, 2002). By using theography to work through the *raison d'être* of the FCs I worked with, I can get out from under the epistemologies that have dominated the subdiscipline so far. It moves my analytical frame away from one that reduces FCs to institutional puppets or reservoirs of coping mechanisms to one which can critically imagine a realm of political hopefulness regarding FCs. This helps me to understand with greater nuance what the political potentials of the FCs might be, and opens up a new realm of possible conclusions in chapters six and seven which look at how the practical application of openness and solidarities play out in different contexts. If I better understand the drivers behind why the FC exists in the first place then I can better understand how its political practices are being worked out.

Therefore, this chapter links the three kinds of FC that I worked with three different ways in which openness and solidarity were balanced in their *raison d'êtres*. I argue that the Ezra Community had a greater emphasis on solidarity, the conference spaces blended openness and solidarity more evenly, and that Exeter Church had a greater emphasis on openness. I use theography as an analytical lens to explain how their *raison d'êtres* came about, focussing on how the founders of the communities synthesised the religious significance bound up in their relationship with institution(s) with alternative sources of religious

significance in order to form their *raison d'être*. This enables me to show how new political possibilities come about through a theographic process in a context of greater openness and solidarity (which Jamoul, Wills, and Megoran are keen to underscore). However, theography keeps in mind that FCs are wired into a whole network of relationships which can include problematic elements (represented here by institutions[10]) which they have to stay mindful of, reflect upon, and process in order to find a desirable praxis. Therefore, in the rest of the chapter, I work through each FC in turn, first describing the different balance they have reached between openness and solidarity in their *raison d'être* and then working through how their theography brought them to that balance. Working through their theography allows me to show how these communities are attempting to live-out different kinds of critique of institutional Christianity. It looks at how they practice different blends of what they perceive to be institutionalism's diminished values of openness and solidarity by creating new structures and affirming institutionally marginalised experiences of transcendence (creating different problems to solve and opportunities to be had). However, theography also allows me to recognise the way in which institutionalism - with its connections to less progressive elements - has been hybridised and/or leaves residues in the new *raison d'être*. This means that my analysis recognises what these new FCs need to be cautious about, limiting any triumphalism about their nascent propensity for openness and solidarity. This in-depth analysis can show how the weightings towards openness or solidarity in the FC have come about and how particular mixtures of religious significance bring about very different political imaginations and possibilities. This adds nuance to the conversation that Jamoul, Wills, and Megoran have started in human geography about where to find hopefulness in religion/politics overlaps.

Once I have worked through the *raison d'être* and emergent theography of these three different settings, it may be obvious to some readers what political

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[10] I acknowledge that institutions themselves also hold tensions between and exceed progressive/regressive categorisation. However, for the FCs I encountered, breaking from institutions was a culmination of a significant amount of theographic work which they perceived would open up a whole new set of possibilities. Their hopefulness about what they could go on to achieve was set against certain parts of institutionalism but was also facilitated by institutions in some measure. Working through the theography that leads to leaving an institution shows in what ways the new FCs *raison d'être* is tied to past experiences with institutions, creating hybridisations of institutional practices and discourses but also sometimes being limited by them.

possibilities it would be reasonable to be hopeful about regarding these FCs. However, some may still be sceptical and so I want to connect my analysis to another emerging strain of thought in human geography that is beginning to imagine how geographers might be hopeful about religion/politics overlaps. In order to show a way forward for thinking hopefully about these spaces at the religion/politics interface, I want to finish the chapter with a further analyses of the FCs' *raison d'êtres*, drawing on postsecular theory.

Some of the scepticism regarding the participation of FCs in political life has centred around the issue of whether FCs can be a source of solidarity beyond themselves without strings attached (Hauerwas and Coles, 2008). How can they help subjects to participate in society more broadly without creating conditions in which women or LGBTQ+ people or people who are not of the same religion are demeaned or excluded because of discriminatory religious cultures or traditions? Postsecular theory argues that an ethos can be fostered in the subject which makes them willing to transform religious praxis so as not to discriminate in such a way. A postsecular subject maintains a religious distinctiveness and approaches activism without having to hastily create divisions of worthy/unworthy by kindling a process of attentive listening across perceived alterity. A postsecular subject is ready to search the intentions and rhetorics of those radically different to the self for resonances which may not seem obvious at first due to the unfamiliar ways in which they are framed.

Finding traces of this ethos, and spaces which foster it are cited by postsecular theorists as reason to be hopeful about the political outputs of FCs. I argue that theography is a way in which subjects are able to work through these transformations in praxis, by taking seriously the thought that the framing of transcendence that the religious subject is working with at any given time might be flawed or inhibiting more just praxis. The reflexive nature of theography allows the subject to begin to question their framing of transcendence and work through how other sources of emerging or potential religious significance may help to make sense of a religious praxis that is beginning to be unsettled. This questioning of the religious/secular boundary - emphasising the co-production of the two spheres - is one of the core concerns of postsecular theory. Therefore, to round off this chapter, I want to identify evidence of a postsecular

ethos in the theographic formation and the content of the FCs' *raison d'êtres*, to underscore reasons to be hopeful about their political potentialities despite the work that must go into bedding this postsecular ethos into the communities. The complexities of how this ethos and hopefulness find their expression in praxis will be worked through in chapters six and seven.

Ezra House: Christology and prioritising solidarity

Ezra House is the largest and most populated house of the three that make up the Ezra Community, which is located in a low-income, post-industrial city in the New England region of the USA. I stayed in Ezra House for a month with Ron and Barbara (a middle class, middle-aged couple who founded the community), Tim (an unemployed, middle-age man), Pauline and Tara (two young single mothers and their respective children, Roberta and Jason), plus Laura and David, and their son Chris (a family that had come from the Caribbean and were living and working in the USA illegally). Over the course of my time there, I had many conversations with the founders of the community - Ron and Barbara - about what they imagined the purpose of the community to be. Ideas about openness to difference within the community and solidarity with marginalised people were crucial to Ron and Barbara's inauguration and ongoing formation of the community. These conversations form the basis of my analysis in this section. I argue that the Ezra Community present a way of imagining and manifesting these values that emphasises solidarity over openness more so than the other FCs that I researched with.

This emphasis on solidarity is not - as some political theorists argue it can be (Coles, 2001) - a result of ressentiment; of feeling that openness to otherness should have a certain cut-off point so as to foreclose the possibility of too much difference clouding discussion about the group's purpose. Rather, exploring the Ezra Community's *raison d'être* with Ron and Barbara illustrates that the commitment to solidarity that they promote within the community has emerged from a co-productive relationship with otherness, formed out of a long theographic praxis, resulting in a religious *raison d'être* that hones in on solidarity and yet has a double-relationship with openness to difference. Firstly, as a propeller of action that - through a selection of religious experiences and

discourses - drives a radically Christological[11] approach to praxis, and secondly as a call to sensitivity and care for those within the community that zealous political discourse and practice might exclude or harm. The religious way in which Ron and Barbara imagine the community's *raison d'être* does not include an option to exclude either radical solidarity or openness to difference. However, I would argue, that more than the other FCs that I worked with, solidarity is privileged in the way that Ron and Barbara imagine its relationship to openness through their representations of their theography.

In the rest of this section I will explain how Ron and Barbara see the Ezra Community as an expression of anti-institutionalism, and why they prioritise openness and solidarity in the community's *raison d'être*. I will explain, by analysing Ron and Barbara's representations of their theography, how theographic reflexivity has fleshed out the community's *raison d'être* and how theography has formed the unique relationship that Ron and Barbara perceive between openness and solidarity. I will then go on to demonstrate how a postsecular ethos has been operationalised in the formation of and is valued within the community's *raison d'être*, illustrating the sensitivity in the community to the networks that the theographic subject must negotiate.

Ron and Barbara emphatically conceive of the Ezra community as addressing a malaise within institutional church models. In one of our earlier conversations, Ron said:

"We're just trying something different, cos something new has gotta happen. The Church has gotta change or people just aren't gonna be interested in it any more... People - especially young people - want something that makes a difference in their lives and at the moment the Church doesn't. It's just a social club with moral policing. We need to be more radical and active and making a difference; making it as much about social justice out in our communities as it is about going to church on a Sunday..."
- From research diary: notes on meeting in UK before placement in USA; Appendix B #2

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[11] This theological term will be unpacked further-on in this chapter.

This is one of the many passionate statements that Ron and Barbara made whilst discussing with them the reason for the Ezra community's existence. Within it, three key points of the community's *raison d'être* are expressed.

"It's just a social club with moral policing."

Firstly, an openness to difference. Ron and Barbara expressed a great deal of tiredness with the personal moral stringency exemplified by many of the churches that they had been involved with over the years. They felt that practice within these churches often privileged middle-class, heterosexual, white, conservatism, calling into question the moral and spiritual integrity of those who did not aspire to those categorisations. In voicing this concern, Ron and Barbara seemed to be speaking about their personal experiences of church across time and location. Although seeing the Ezra Community as the day-to-day expression of their faith, on Sundays they went to separate congregations in the city, and both - although often expressing reasons to be hopeful about these churches - voiced their concern about the dominance of middle-class, white, hetero conservatism within them. This was a pattern that they argued had been prevalent since they had started going to church (around thirty-five years ago) and that it diminished the possibility of more theologically and socially diverse congregations arising.

On this topic, Ron said:

"For instance, take the issue of accepting gay folks in relationships into congregations or leadership. Of course there are a lot of different theologies about whether that's OK or not. But it's a secondary issue, I think there are just bigger fish to fry. We need to be welcoming gay folk and having a conversation, then addressing the big issues like y'know economic inequality. We're only holding ourselves back from being what the church should be by being so rigid around something that's not that important..."
- From research diary kept whilst at the Ezra Community; Appendix B #3

Ron and Barbara saw the Ezra Community as inaugurating relationships where openness to difference and dialogue are valued over demanding assent to a particular theology and set of practices. As Pauline (single mother, resident in Ezra House), put it:

"That's what I like about it here. I think that even though my politics might be a bit more conservative than Barbara's or Tim's [another resident in the house], we can talk about it and respect our differences and maybe even we can like change each others' opinions a little bit. But so many people don't have that. Like my Mom follows this guy who just hates people who are more liberal because he thinks they're stopping America from getting God's blessing. I've got so little time for that. I think it's called dominion theology[12]."
- From research diary kept whilst at the Ezra Community; Appendix B #4

"We need to be more radical..."

Secondly, a Christological politics. Although Ron and Barbara see the community as a place to welcome different religious praxes, they were simultaneously trying use it to promote a Christological or Incarnational politics (see Thomas, 2012). The theological current they were trying to insert into their praxis draws on the Gospels in the New Testament, underscoring instances in these books where Jesus heals people and confronts religious and political elites regarding their maintenance of structural injustices. A line is drawn from these characteristics to the New Testament writing of St.Paul, where the church is defined as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Christological/ Incarnational politics says that if the body of Christ (the Church) is to be authentic, it should do as Christ does in the Gospels; it should heal people and confront injustices. However, Ron and Barbara connected the notion of being the body of Christ - not just at the Incarnational level of a Gospel-informed praxis - but to an eschatology. Their eschatology utilises the notion of 'shalom', a Hebrew word, the meaning of which roughly equates - in English - to 'peace' (Moules, 2012). More specifically, shalom-peace is defined as the restoration of healthy relationships between God, humanity, and the earth. The restoration of these relationships is the end-goal of history, and Christ - at a more cosmic level - is bending the arc of history towards this. To have a Christological politics then is to conceive of the Church as participating in this grander scheme, drawing together a commitment to prayer (restoring relationship with God), ending social injustices (restoring human relationships), and ecology (restoring relationships with the earth). Valuing prayer, tackling

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[12] Dominion theology is a branch of Christian theology that advocates theocracy.

social injustice, and restoring earth systems were very much a part of the *raison d'être* of the Ezra Community (see Appendix C). Ron and Barbara both contended that one of the reasons that they started the community was in order to create a space for themselves and others to explore a praxis connected to these values, that they felt was not fostered within churches, and could not be broached as a nuclear family.

"The Church has gotta change..."

Thirdly, assuming the role of prophet towards more established models of church. As Brueggemann (1978) points out, the role of the prophet is not so much that of clairvoyance but of reminding the Church of the role it is supposed to fill. The Ezra Community's *raison d'être* resonates with this notion and sets up an intriguing relationship with the institutions that the Ezra Community often set themselves against to form the substrate of their emerging *raison d'être* and that populate their network of relationships. Stuart Murray defines postchristendom as "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence" (2011, p.19). Although in the USA, Christian institutions have not lost their influence on culture to the extent that they have in Europe, Ron and Barbara still clearly perceived a 'decline in influence' of Christianity (Bruce, 2002; Connolly, 2008). However, for them this decline is not about the Church's capacity to play power politics - frequently in concert with the Republican Party - but in its ability to attract people to itself by encouraging alternative modes of life that resonate with notions of shalom. Although the Ezra Community stands as a critique of institutional churches, it does not present itself as a model for the whole of the Church to dissolve into. Rather they see the Ezra Community as a challenge to churches to stop idolising the attainment of wealth to protect the nuclear family. They wanted to be a voice in their churches, encouraging folks to live in solidarity with the marginalised through living in community, creating opportunities to accommodate people whose lives are precarious, and creating more space for and empowering activism (Claiborne, 2006; Simpson, 2011). Although Ron and Barbara were vociferous critics of institutional churches, their aim was not so much to break up the model

of large numbers of people showing up on a Sunday to sing songs and listen to a sermon (as some FCs are trying to do (Frost, 2006)). Rather they wanted to use this model as a useful place to speak into - even as sometimes marginalised dissenting voices - in order to encourage more radical Christian praxes.

However, I found it interesting that they maintained relationships with these more conservative churches, when there are churches in the States that are definitely more traditional in their model, and yet exhibit a greater openness to theological diversity and have more structured programmes for showing solidarity with the marginalised (e.g. http://www.judson.org/index.php, or http://www.houseforall.org). I will explore this more in the following section through Ron and Barbara's representations of their theography, but it seemed from discussing these spaces with Ron and Barbara, that they still felt - despite everything - profoundly at home in these churches, needed them even. Ron said of being in the more conservative church he attended: "It's good for me to go there. Because even though I struggle with how depoliticised it is, it reminds me often about some of the core stuff that being a Christian is about. That I need God and that I can't do all this political stuff on my own," (Appendix B, #3). There was a sense that to leave these spaces would be arrogant, would be turning their back on the spaces in which they had come to faith and through which God had called them to a more radical way of life. These were spaces in which they still had affective experiences of the Holy Spirit, and challenged them to critically review their politics through a theological lens, which to them, often felt like holding their particular views and decisions about praxis in tension with God's sovereign will.

Ezra House: Theography and *raison d'être*

Theography played a key role in the formation of the Ezra Community's *raison d'être* and is also (though not in so many words) a practice that is honoured in the community's *raison d'être*. Foucault's (2005) focus on religious reflexivity highlights particular practices that religious people use to decide how to respond to varying sources of information with religious significance and transform their selves in order to respond to that discernment with integrity. The

docile body is predisposed to yield to hegemonic power; the religious bodies that Foucault writes about pioneer ways of working upon the body that can enable them to better resist or conform to hegemony (Foucault, 1991; 2005; Martin et al., 1988). Religious rituals that Foucault mentions include - for example - confession (verbalising secret, uncomfortable, and vulnerability-inducing thoughts), withdrawal (a meditative state that tries to shift the subject's focus away from pressing troubles), and concentration (another meditative practice of trying to increase a sense of oneness with a principle or belief). In the Ezra Community, prayer was a key theographic practice for enabling Ron and Barbara to transform their selves and discern between different sources of religious significance. Prayer therefore helped to form the community's *raison d'être* and was touted as a core principle within the community's *raison d'être*.

When talking about the community's *raison d'être* with Ron, he revealed that forming the community was the product of a long and changing approach to faith praxis:

"When I came to faith, it was in a really conservative church. I mean I was pretty liberal before then...um...my politics were pretty y'know particularly socially liberal and I wasn't really into big businesses and stuff but then I became a Christian and like all there was there was this super-conservative politics so I just thought that was what it had to be. I wasn't that comfortable with it but I just got on board y'know, voted Republican and all that and for me that just became the norm..."
- Appendix B, #3, Notes on informal conversation with Ron

However, despite persisting in relatively conservative churches all his life, various affective experiences that Ron had in these churches enabled began to trouble his imagining of what possible praxes (and theologies) he could accept:

"One time I reluctantly went on one of the mission trips that the church that we were at at the time organised to go help build a school in South America and I really wasn't expecting to get much out of it but it just broke me. The poverty we saw there was just appalling. The Holy Spirit just totally changed my whole perspective on things. I felt so aggrieved and convinced that we had to do something about it that my perspective totally shifted. I couldn't think that God didn't care about the poor anymore."
- Appendix B, #3, Notes on informal conversation with Ron

Ron argued that enrolled within his deeply affecting encounter with poverty was an encounter with the Holy Spirit. It is easy to be sceptical of this spiritualising of what might seem to be a very common human experience which probably happens to any number of people when watching a WaterAid or a UNICEF advert. However, what Ron seemed to be trying to explain by referencing the Holy Spirit was that something more than a momentary sadness or frustration overcame him when he encountered poverty on this particular trip. Something happened to him that fundamentally upturned his way of interacting with the world that he felt came from decidedly outside of him. When Ron returned from his trip to 'normal life' he said that despite this shift, it was very difficult to work out how to respond to this experience because of the conservative environment he was in. However, despite beginning to feel uncomfortable with the mode of church that he was engaging with, the church Ron was a part of still provided moments of religiously affective significance that - paradoxically - led Ron to be ever more critical of the culture that the church created. This was done through prayer. Prayer, for Ron was a way of reconnecting to what he called the Holy Spirit, and which he experienced as a nagging but controlled rage that persisted and fostered a discontent, despite his attempts to participate with the space on its own terms.

This rage is what moved Ron to begin exploring alternative theologies, particularly those that heavily critiqued churches that did not have a commitment to addressing economic inequality (Arnold, 2000; Holland, 2015; Stock et al., 2006). This is what began to form Ron and Barbara's Christological approach to politics and nuance their ideas about praxis, pushing them towards starting an intentional community based on social and ecological justice. However, although prayer and its connection to the Holy Spirit fostered this deep dissatisfaction with social injustice, it was also key to the community's *raison d'être* because it was perceived as a mediator of what was seen as the potentially destructive rage that focussing solely on a morally demanding Christological politics could engender. As Barbara said at one point:

"If we do nothing else as a community, we should always be praying together."
- Appendix B, #5, Notes on informal conversation with Barbara

The Holy Spirit - for Ron and Barbara - was not purely framed as a source of wrathful energy. At various points they also referenced it as a "warmth that oozed" from people and a "weight" of deep peacefulness. Although Ron and Barbara spent considerable energy and time working out how to perform a Christological praxis, based on reading theology, the history of radical Christian movements, and assessing what was most needed in the neighbourhoods around them, a *phenomenology* of the Holy Spirit was an equal influence upon their praxis. Theography for Ron and Barbara often looked like reviewing and weighing up the importance of what they thought praxis should look like going forward against affective encounters of the Holy Spirit, which they said could often feel like an unexpected intensifying of affection for other community members perhaps even in the midst of disagreeing with them about something. In response to feeling this tension between the Spirit and a desire to push through a particular expression of Christology, Ron and Barbara often used prayer - not just as a practice through which to encounter an affective presence - but through which to try theographically to transform themselves and their desires. Often Ron and Barbara prayed for unity and for blessings on other members of the community when what they perhaps wanted was to argue their corner, getting the community to act as one, in step with what they thought would be more effective political practice. Prayer in the community therefore acts as both a spiritual sensitiser and a practice through which to try to theographically alter the self.

Conferences: Provocation and biblical solidarity

I attended three conferences as part of my fieldwork. Common to these conferences was that they were all framed as spaces to encourage students (Conference #1 and #3) and young people (Conference #2) to integrate a concern for social justice into their faith praxis. These conferences blended together workshops, lectures, singing, discussion groups, prayer, and times of contemplation to begin to encourage participants to think through how they might forge connections between practicing Christianity and social justice. I argue that - between the three different spaces that I present as postchristendom forms of church in this thesis (Ezra Community/Conferences/ Exeter Church) - the Conferences exhibit the greatest commitment to balancing

concern for openness and solidarity 50/50 in their *raison d'être*. It could be argued that the *raison d'être* of the conference spaces could simply be drawn from the *raison d'être* of the organisations that organised them. However, I argue that these are highly co-produced spaces where, although longer-term notions of why the organisation exists influence the space, this more historic *raison d'être* is reworked and reviewed to produce what seems like a relevant conference event-space for the immanent spatio-temporal context. The *raison d'être* of the conferences are co-produced by participants who perhaps have more specific expectations about what the conference should provide, clashing with and/or providing nuance to the 'official' *raison d'être*. Therefore, my exploration of how commitment to openness/solidarity is balanced in the *raison d'être* of the conference will be examined through a composite of conversations with conference organisers, their performance and reference to the conference *raison d'être* during the conference (as well as some of the official conference materials produced), and statements made by participants at the conference.

One of the overarching ideas that frequently emerged whilst exploring the *raison d'êtres* of all of the conferences was the notion of empowerment or equipping. The conferences were spaces in which people could come to be revivified for the more mundane work of living out a faith praxis. The conferences were meant to be a uniquely energising event-space; the word "inspiration" was frequently used by the conferences' organisers, and was found in the welcome booklets to all of the conferences as part of describing their purpose. This expressed itself in two ways, enrolling notions of openness and solidarity into the conferences' *raison d'êtres*: (i) provocations, and (ii) biblical reflection. I argue below that despite being very respectful of people's different faith backgrounds (particularly their denomination), these event spaces represented a critique of the shortcomings of institutional churches. However, they laid the ground for a different structural approach to overcoming these shortcomings to the Ezra Community, by providing a marginal and network-dependent identity and practice for conference participants to begin to feel attached to and use to begin to live out their faith praxis in more social justice oriented ways.

Provocation

At Conference #2, all participants were given a conference programme. On the first page inside the booklet was this quote:

"As a network we value participation and diversity, and celebrate the huge range of perspectives in our workshops and sessions. You are likely to encounter people, ideas and practices that you disagree with (indeed - we hope you do!) Feel free to graciously question, challenge and discuss these things with each other, but please make sure it's always in a spirit of love and humility."
- Appendix B, #6

Although there is an air of cautiousness embedded in this quote ("please make sure it's always in a spirit of love and humility"), there is a real recognition that the conference organisers want the space to be open to difference. This was reflected in the *raison d'êtres* of the other conferences as well. As their organisers said:

"...other people are very valuable because you can spend time playing stuff off of each other...having other people is so important because it would be very easy to draw parallels [between a particular interpretation of the bible and a social situation in which you want to act], where it should be challenged and we need that person to say 'weeeeell, I don't know, the situation's a bit different here' or whatever." (Conference #1)
- Appendix B, #7 - Informal interview with Fran, co-organiser of Conference #1

"You've got to be listening to people on the margins. You need different voices to do good theology. Theology is just living your life whilst listening to God and trying to make Him relevant to as many people as possible..." (Conference #3)
- Appendix B, #8 - Notes on talk given by Ken - organiser of Conference #3 - stating the aims of the conference

The above quotes highlight that the desire for difference was due to the praxis-focussed nature of all of the conferences. All of the conferences that I attended were focussed on empowering Christians to *practice* their faith, something that has been perceived to be lacking in many churches, with the fine-tuning of belief often taking precedence (Cloke et al., 2012). Many of my interviewees (from the extensive part of my research) backed this claim up, claiming that they

had endured long, confusing, and lonely journeys to find sources of inspiration and empowerment that helped them to make sense of their desire to perform faithfully and also address social justice issues.

The conferences were designed to provoke people in order to flag-up their own self-reflexivity to themselves by getting them to rub shoulders with others that espoused very different concerns and takes on faith praxis. Engaging with this plethora of difference not only provided lots of possible discourses and practices for people to begin to explore their religious praxis through (e.g. signing up to organisations that gave presentations, copying a method for addressing a particular issue, reading a bit of scripture in a new way), but it helped people to recognise that it was possible to overcome the impasse that many felt between their faith and desire to engage in social justice. The conferences often presented contrasting perspectives on theo-political issues side-by-side (as well as this being part of discussion between regular participants). For instance at Conference #2 there was a panel discussion between different people on the notion of 'power'. Within the discussion extremely different views were put forward about how to use power. For instance, one activist said that in order to bring about positive change, people should engage with the current system of parliamentary democracy, whereas another argued that change could only come about by subverting such systems. These moments in which lots of different views were put forward were intended as provocations, to get people to think through how they saw things, recognising that there was a huge spectrum of different possible religious praxes and that they needed to think and engage in discussion in order to make sense of it for themselves. However, by instigating these provocations, the conferences also provided space in which subjects could take hope from the fact that certain individuals and groups had managed to integrate their religious praxis and concern for social justice. Although often clashing with the subject's religious praxis, these provocations also highlighted a parallel story for subjects to take hope from; that it is possible to find ways to practice faith and social justice simultaneously, even coming from a not particularly supportive background. As one workshop convener at Conference #2 said:

"It was difficult for me for a long time. The CU [Christian Union] were suspicious of me cos I kept going on about social justice, and Earth First were suspicious cos I told them I went to church. But this is what this weekend is about. It's about trying to bring these things together and help each other to work out how to do that. You absolutely don't all have to do what I do [working for a well know Christian campaigning organisation], but there is something you can all get on board with to make change."
- Appendix B, #9 - Notes on conversation with Toby in the midst of him leading a workshop on getting churches interested in eco-theology

Additionally, by foregrounding difference and provocation, these conferences tried to forge spaces that communicated to participants that they were accepted as part of a Christian community regardless of their particular theology or praxis. This was intended to make people feel safe to exercise their self-reflexivity, to do theography, explore, and not be condemned. This was supposed to stand in contrast to the marginalisation and alienation many of the conferences attendees had felt in institutional settings.

Biblical interpretation and reasonable hope

The way in which the conferences manifested a priority for solidarity in their *raison d'être* was by creating frequent opportunities for people to hear speakers arguing the case that the bible could be interpreted in such a way that it inspired concern for the marginalised. There was an understanding at all of the conferences that although the bible could also be used to justify oppression, biblical interpretation is a practice that is profoundly connected to practicing Christianity and that simply not doing it because it has been done problematically is not an option (Dittmer, 2008; 2010). Rather, the conferences - through provocation - accentuated that biblical interpretation should be approached with an attitude that recognised its plural outputs (Brown, 2015a; Megoran, 2013). This recognition of plurality engendered a context in which alternative readings of the bible that inspired solidarity with the marginalised were recognised as legitimate. This practice was instigated in order to begin to help conference participants to start to feel a deep resonance between exercising solidarity with the marginalised and the biblical narratives that were entangled in their identity. This was meant to do something for participants beyond the provocations that nudged them towards a recognition that they

could work out a praxis for themselves. These reinterpretations of the bible were intended to foster passion (although moderated by the humility that recognising plurality brings); a sense that if it felt like the decision to act was not being made rashly and was geared towards solidarity with the marginalised, it was good to feel empowered, bold, and that the action was a genuine expression of faithfulness. There was a sense that although no-one can interpret the bible one hundred percent authoritatively, that as long as a subject is not hostile to questioning, and that they have engaged in strenuous theography, it is right take inspiration from the interpretation of biblical narratives to empower action. To have reasonable hope that - in trying to execute a praxis in line with biblical interpretation - the transcendent presence that is supposedly at work in a biblical narrative may also be at work in the midst of the subject's praxis. The quotes below show how some speakers tried to encourage folk to connect biblical interpretation and passion for activism:

"I've used this story [from the Old Testament book of Isaiah] about God's vision for humanity because it comes about by peacemaking. If Christian's don't talk about peacemaking in the public sphere then we have nothing to say!"
-Appendix B, #10 - Notes on talk by Pete at Conference #1

"Often the story about the widow's mite [Mark 12: 41-44] is told as an example that we need to give all of our money to the Church. But Jesus is furious after seeing the widow put in all she had to live on into the offering when rich folk can give more and look good in public but have exploited the poor to get that wealth. We should mirror that anger at systems that force inequality on people."
- Appendix B, #11 - Notes on talk by Ken at Conference #2

There was - of course - an overarching theological bias itself that was written into the conferences *raison d'êtres*; that showing solidarity with the marginalised in the most general sense is a genuine expression of faithfulness. However, at the conferences the biblical interpretations often highlighted particular marginalised groups, underscoring a blend of activists' experiences of injustice and the interpretation of scripture to empower them to address those concerns. Giving a platform to these activists biblical interpretations was intended to move participants from a general sense of marginalisation being a religious concern to entwining religious praxis with a deep concern for particular struggles. These

included active pacifism, LGBTQ+ rights, postchristendom approaches to church, climate change, economic inequality, neocolonialism, and ethical consumption.

One example of this took place during a workshop at Conference #3 where the group leader worked through a feminist reading of the story of Jesus at the wedding at Cana, the story in which Jesus performs His first miracle of turning water into wine. The group leader argued that the role of Jesus' mother, Mary, is frequently overlooked in this story. She argued that in most English bible translations, Jesus does not seem to be particularly interested in miracle-making, but Mary encourages Him and He goes ahead with it. This detail is often skipped over in order to highlight Jesus' divinity, arguing that Jesus must have been testing Mary by pretending not to be that enamored with his supernatural abilities. The workshop leader questioned whether in fact Mary might have had a stronger sense for the right thing to do in the situation, based on her deep understanding of Jesus and His strengths, being that she was his mother. She was also a prophet, who had been entrusted with messages from God prior to Jesus' birth (Luke 1:26-37). The workshop leader argued that this story highlighted that (for better or worse) women are often the care-givers within a community and therefore privy to some of the most intimate knowledges about people, including their potential and where they most need support to exercise their gifts. Additionally, it highlights that God often acts through a multiplicity of people at once, not just those who seem to have been most uniquely gifted to practice expressions of His love, which - particularly in institutional churches - are often identified as professional clergy, who are often men. A feminist reading of the story suggests that interdependence is crucial for effective Christian praxis and that women must be included and consulted as equals and as sources of patriarchy-subverting perspective based on their experiences. This connects Christian praxis to feminist struggles, arguing that the Church, in order to be fully open to transcendence, needs to create spaces in which women are given equal rights, respect, opportunities, and empowerment.

Conferences as offering an alternative identity

Again, theography was a key feature of co-constituting the conference spaces as a postchristendom FC. Something that many of the conference attendees I chatted to highlighted was their frustration with their more mundane, weekly experiences of church:

"It's hard when people have a very fixed understanding of their faith to convince them that even small changes are in their interest, or tied to their faith. People don't see themselves as change-makers. It's hard to stay motivated to stand up for these issues. "
-Appendix B, #12 - Notes on informal conversation with Jane, an attendee at Conference #2

"It's really difficult. I care about unity, I want the Church to be somewhere for everyone but I also really want to make certain issues really important, like pacifism. It's really tricky to know what to do sometimes."
 -Appendix B, #13 - Notes on informal conversation with Max, an attendee at Conference #1

"I wish I had a mentor in my church to help me with this stuff."
-Appendix B, #14 - Notes on informal conversation with Steve, an attendee at Conference #2

These quotes highlight the limitations of theography. Theography can be used to change the subject into a resistant or a docile body. However, it can also lead subjects down dead-ends, hamstrung by their attempts to reconcile conflicting sources of religious significance and with little idea about how to act upon this conflict in order to change themselves or the world around them. This gives a sense of going back and forth between different ideas, feelings, and practices, without being satisfied by any of them, or feeling like they lend meaning or purpose to life. This tense theography of the weekly grind of faith praxis is one of the reasons that the conferences existed. Chatting to conference attendees, they shared that these weekly rhythms can often feel cyclical and tiring, and that one of the major attractions of coming to the conferences was to get help in breaking out of these impasse-like cycles. This is one possible reason why the conference organisers foregrounded 'inspiration' as one of the key purposes of the conferences, because they too sometimes struggled with these tensions. Although the provocations and multiplicity that the conferences represented, might seem as if they could just confuse subjects further, they often had the

effect - as one Conference #2 attendee told me - of being a "shot in the arm". The conferences are a vital resource for many religious subjects for helping them to move past, or at least feel hopeful about moving past their theographic deadlocks.

This highlights the way in which the conference organisers viewed their relationship with institutional FCs. In conversation with many of the conference organisers, and reading through some of the material they handed out in terms of framing the conferences' *raison d'êtres*, there was a recognition that although it was important to be involved with an FC regularly - week to week - that the wellbeing of individuals should be prioritised over the smooth functioning and betterment of religious institutions. This is in contrast to the Ezra Community, which saw itself as critical of - yet also responsible for - institutional FCs to which it was connected. People at the conferences recognised that the conferences were safe spaces for those who were struggling with their religious praxis (particularly when trying to connect it to social justice issues), and that the conferences could foster networks of relationships that could continue to act as encouragement to those trying to connect their regular experience of their FC to a faith praxis that was relevant beyond that FC. There was a paradoxical effect that the conferences had; although they deliberately convened encounters across difference, one of the things that I heard frequently from conference attendees was that it as nice to be with people who were "like-minded". This was even to the extent with some people identified their faith as being distinctively in line with the organisations that ran the conferences: "Yeah, I go to a Methodist church, but I've always been an Ecumenist[13]-type Christian." Identifying with the organisations that ran the conferences was less about a denomination or a wide-ranging set of tenets. It was more about a collectively inspiring praxis that recognised plurality and was geared towards social justice and was no more specific than that. The space was set up for theography and for assessing a response to context. This was intended to have an effect on a broader network of FCs but was not in service to it. Rather it was about creating moments in which new faith praxes could come about, and new relationships

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[13] Pseudonym for organisation that ran Conference #3.

could be forged, extending networks and creating the possibility to prophesy to institutions but also - perhaps - move past their necessity.

Exeter Church: Creating space[14]

Exeter Church is a church in Exeter in the UK that was started in 2012. For the first year of its existence it met in members' homes before starting to rent spaces throughout the city for its main Sunday meetings. For a couple of years it met in an old school owned by the Church of England before moving to a smaller venue, a re-vamped barn owned by a mental health charity, where it still meets on Sundays now. It also meets on Wednesday evenings. Although this started as a practice where the whole church met together, after a year - once a few more people had joined the church - this split into small groups of around four people each. Towards the end of researching with the church, this was about to break into a model of around three small groups of around seven people.

On a Sunday, the church cycles through four types of meeting with different names: (1) Journey, which is most like a traditional church service, where there is usually an extended period of singing together, followed by a talk by one of the members of the church (although sometimes an outside speaker will be invited) usually as part of a series of topics that have a sense of continuity. Time for reflection is also often include. Early-on, the topics of talks at Journey

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[14] As I pointed out in chapter four, the position a researcher takes up within the setting they are investigating has a distinct effect on the knowledge they are able to produce. Often, when a researcher is better socialised within a particular group, their fieldnotes may naturally slide to reflections about how they are participating, how they are interacting with the group, rather than observing the effect the group is having on other people (these notes are often autoethnographic). In participant action research the knowledge produced changes yet again as the researcher takes a 'full member' position in the research setting, working with the group on how to overcome political problems. This is the nature of the knowledge I produced in my work with Exeter Church and although I also intersperse this reflection with more observational and autoethnographic reflections, it is worth noting that the tone shifts between my reflections on the Conferences and Ezra Community, and Exeter Church. My critical reflections on the Conferences and Ezra Community comes from an outside perspective, evaluating them in terms of their religious and political contribution through the lens of activist theory. However, my reflections on Exeter Church exercise the idealism of theory whilst also taking into consideration what were helpful knowledges for us to develop together as a community. As Katz (1994) points out, this is the point of participant action research, to produce knowledges that are critical so as to help communities improve their praxis rather than being critical to show up their weaknesses and make them vulnerable to outside forces that would like to curtail their activities. This mode of analysis is present in chapters five, six, and seven.

focussed on the church's *raison d'être* (split into a bunch of sub-values), but more recently talks have been bound together by questioning more deeply the purpose of some of the more taken-for-granted practices of Christian life such as prayer and reading the bible. (2) Share, which involves eating a meal together and letting someone share a story about how they work out their Christian praxis in the day-to-day. (3) Follow, where there is a short (between five and ten minutes) talk at the start that outlines a bible passage, but then the bulk of the meeting is responding to questions the speaker has prepared about the passage. These questions are geared towards asking how the passage might help us to think through our Christian praxis in various contexts and in response to various issues. (4) Encounter, where the aim is to experiment with various 'spiritual disciplines' that have been developed by various Christian communities and individuals over the centuries including silence, Lectio Divina[15], the Examen[16], Taizé chanting[17], appreciation of nature, liturgy, and iconography.

Over the three years that composed the research for this thesis, church membership grew from seven to around twenty-four people, including kids. I did participant action research with Exeter Church over about three years, from a few months after the church had started in 2012 until around the middle of 2015. During the first year that I was part of the community, there were lots of conversations about its *raison d'être*. Much of this time was taken up listening to everyone share their representations of their theography, but there was a particular focus on listening to the two couples who moved from Luton to start the Church (Dean and Sarah, and Teddy and Laura) whilst they shared how their previous experiences of religious praxis shaped what they thought the *raison d'être* of Exeter Church should be. Again, openness and solidarity were core topics in these conversations. However, I would argue that in the case of Exeter Church, openness was emphasised over solidarity. I will explore how this

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[15] A practice of reading a small passage of scripture over and over until one line or sentiment stands out, the idea being that God is speaking through the passage, rather than divining a meaning of the passage from exegesis. The stand out phrase is then meditated upon.

[16] A practice of reviewing a day and trying to notice - retrospectively - the presence or absence of God within it.

[17] A way of combining singing with meditation.

leaning is justified and how it has been affected by the theography of the community's founders in the following sections.

At Exeter Church, commitment to openness and solidarity in the *raison d'être* was conceptualised through two practices that the founders of the church valued: shared leadership and engagement.

Shared leadership

Shared leadership is a core value of Exeter Church. One of the reasons the church exists is to model a different way of structuring church leadership, giving people a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the church's organisation and direction. However, the church has one paid 'leader', a leadership team of five people which rotates every year, three small group conveners, and four teams of two people who convene the four different types of Sunday gathering. The church is also part of a network of around twenty churches that describes itself as a "family of churches and ministries", rather than a denomination.

This structure does seem like it could be susceptible to hierarchy, but the various relationships within (and beyond) the church had been conceptualised in a way by its founders so as to try and mitigate this. This meant that the church founders were cognisant that as they worked out how to form a new FC - although their *raison d'être* was built on some core principles (shared leadership and engagement) - they would develop new ideas and practices that redefined what they thought a church could be. As the church developed, many of the conversations I had with people were about their changing thoughts about what church could be, as they worked out - through praxis - how to start one, and how it could meet the needs of those that belonged to it. For example, Teddy - one of the founders of the church - said about the way that it was developing:

"We never really started out to be a place where folk who have been hurt by church can come and feel safe and begin to work out how they might relate to God again. But it's become about

that a little bit just now, and that's cool. I'm delighted that it's like that and I'm glad we've had the freedom to be able to be that for people."
- Appendix B, #15 - Notes on informal conversation with Teddy

Regarding the 'leader' of the church (Dean) and their relation to everyone else in the community, at one point Dean said to me:

"I don't see me being the 'leader' *makes inverted-comma gesture* of the church in hierarchical terms. I would say we're all equals and although I'm taking greater responsibility for organising things and have more time to think things through and come up with suggestions, we're really just peers doing this thing together. I'm massively grateful I get to do this as a job but I want us to have a culture where everyone feels like what they have to say is important."
- Appendix B, #16 - Notes on informal conversation with Dean

The leader role is a paid one, made up from monthly donations that members of the church make, and donations from other churches in the network. Dean sees his job as an organising/planning role, working with the leadership team, holding meetings (often breaking the four-meeting cycle, called Direction) in which the whole church can participate, and meeting one-to-one with most of the members of the church at various points to have a chat about how church is going. Although Dean often took responsibility for organising people and often initiated processes of change by chairing communal discussions (for instance about whether to create a new small group, whether the four-weekly rhythm of meetings is helpful for everyone, or what topics people wanted tackled in Journey meetings), he aimed always to be doing this whilst consulting widely throughout the church and thinking about how it could better meet everyone's needs.

The leadership team was the main forum in which decisions were made regarding the church. They had regular, fixed monthly meetings, rotated every year, and aimed for a balance of gender, with five people usually on the team. This team often sketched out the structure of a year (how often to do Direction meetings, whether to have a whole-church weekend retreat, what themes would give a sense of continuity between Sunday gatherings), reviewed finances, and fed-back to the rest of the church about how decisions were being made.

This shared leadership structure is not just a practical solution for making church gatherings happen in time-poor lives, but is intended to communicate to people in the church that their contribution is sought after. The intention is to make everyone in the church feel valued and important and like what they have to say matters. However, this structure of shared leadership was just one way of achieving a greater value. The structure is supposed to make this a version of church where the way in which people relate to one another is more important than other measures of church 'success'. The success that is prioritised considerably less than transformed relationships usually means growth in church numbers, impressive/affective gatherings, and 'solid' doctrine. Impact beyond the community is also a type of success that is given less privilege than intra-church relationships; although the community values impact (or engagement) much more highly than numerical growth or impressive gatherings. One of the phrases that is often mentioned at various formal and informal church gatherings is:

"Our measure of success is the quality of our relationships."
- Appendix B, #15 - Notes on informal conversation with Teddy

What is more important than other measures of success (growth/affective events/doctrine/impact) is creating a structure in which everyone has an equally valued voice, and where people feel supported in working out their religious praxis through and beyond the community. The differences that this working out of praxis throw up are not to be silenced or marginalised, but engaged with and listened to. Church gatherings can be places of challenge, questioning, and debate, but it is not a place for enforcing a particular line on what someone's praxis should look like or what beliefs they should hold. What is more important is that everyone is committed to being in community with one another and is committed to making the church a safe space in which people can be honest about how they are navigating their religious praxis and honest about how church gatherings are or are not aiding them in that process. These spaces are supposed to create (as well as being created by) a deep sense of mutual affection. Although there is not a homogenous meaning of love within the community; this mutual affection, and fostering of it (through ethically intensive 'deep' relationships) is certainly one of the prominent ways in which many

people in the community frame love. Love - creating spaces in which people feel safe to share and be challenged on their struggles with religious praxis, which are undergirded by commitment, mutual affection, openness to difference, and shared, aspirationally democratic leadership - plays a key role in the conceptualisation of the church's *raison d'être*.

Engagement

Engagement is a core value that is also a part of the church's *raison d'être*, despite it having a less privileged position than shared leadership. In conversations with the founders of the church not long after its genesis, one of the key values that was communicated was that the church had not been started for the sake of itself. The whole point was to release people to be able to implement their religious praxis without being burned out by running church events or admin. The environment created by the prioritisation of shared leadership was meant to act as a space in which to be both emboldened and challenged so that subjects could reflect upon their praxis. It was to act as a hub where people could share and work though their stories about how they lived out their faith, as well as being gently challenged. The church could be used as somewhere to invite others to get involved with whatever a subject was working on (members were involved in activism including subvertising, working with refugees, and homelessness solidarity) but it was not a place from which to set a uniform agenda for activism.

The majority of the founders of the church had been involved with churches before in which people got tired out by feeling that the main way that their faith was practiced was through fulfilling church functions like children's work, musicianship, or admin. Additionally, they had been in churches where the only outwardly-focussed work that was supported was official church programmes with the church's 'label' on it and often geared towards creating situations in which church members could openly proselytise. The founders of the church - right from the start - made it clear that they were not interested in that model. The church was to function as a community and a hub, with a network of relationships to various realms of activism within the city. This network of relationships is to be explored and put on show (as well as questioned and

remoulded) in church gatherings, so as to be a building up of novel connections that could effect change in the city as well as being a signalling station into different realms of activism and faith praxis for people using the church as a place to think through different possibilities for their praxis.

This model was partly inspired by a 'kingdom theology' - a theology popularised in the UK by N.T.Wright (2003; 2015; and others, Newbigin, 2004), which emphasises various points in the New Testament where Jesus says things like "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15). The idea behind this theology is similar to the shalom concept that the Ezra Community tried to live out. The kingdom of God looks like properly functioning relationships between humans, the earth, and God. However, a kingdom theology says that rather than the complete burden of this being fulfilled through the Church, God Himself is already bringing this about, and is often doing so in spaces beyond the Church. Church therefore does not have to be solely about proselytising and it does not have to be about finding things that church members can all do together so has to have their label on something and attract more members. It is about getting on board with what God is already doing, and working through how that looks for the individual through strenuous theographic effort. This often looks like getting involved with what seem like redemptive activities that are already happening in a place, rather than starting something with a church label on it (this might look like joining non-church-affiliated volunteering, charity, and political organisations). This does not mean that collective activity is ruled out - either as a church, or as clusters from within the church - but it does have an individualist slant on it and it is open to lots of different kinds of relationships that may not necessarily seem to be that invested in solidarity with marginalised groups. This is why I argue that Exeter Church has a greater emphasis on openness and aspirationally democratic community than it does on solidarity.

Exeter Church and theography

The founders of Exeter Church (Dean, Sarah, Teddy, and Laura) met and came up with their plan to start Exeter Church at their previous church in Luton. Some of their desire to start the church in Exeter was kindled by their experience of

being in church together in Luton. When talking about their experiences of church before Luton they talked about a selection of positive and negative episodes. These ranged from happy memories of having their participation in church valued and given a chance to develop through to difficult encounters where church seemed to be moulded around the idea that the most effective way of encountering transcendence was through (at times) disingenuous feeling histrionics. At church in Luton they felt like they encountered a new way of framing transcendence. The Luton church opened up spaces that took seriously that God could be encountered through relationship with others. Where trust, honesty, and understanding was present between people, God was also present. The work of generating these conditions was paired with intensified emotions of mutual affection and gratitude, which were also seen as a marker of the presence of God.

Commitment to engendering these relational and emotional conditions seemed to take precedence in the *raison d'être* of Exeter Church over - for instance - generating intensely affective rituals or practices such as sung worship or spoken prayer. However, this was not to say that there was not an openness to these types of things happening in Exeter Church. At many meetings throughout the time I researched with Exeter Church, markers of the kinds of churches that focus more on these affective atmospheres were present. People prayed using glossolalia, raised hands during worship, and shared prayers that used pictures and visions that suggested God speaking directly to the group through imagery. However, this was not the priority of the spaces that were convened. At Luton, creating discussion spaces marked by trust and honesty allowed people to do theography. By airing their previous experiences and the way they had been theologically framed in a group, allowed previous experiences and theologies to be questioned, troubled, or extended in their possible meaning. Great value was perceived in this, because it threw up new ways of encountering God (through trusting relationships), but also created a process through which to explore ever newer ways of framing and connecting with the transcendent, including rewiring the self's relationship to past experiences. This process allowed the church founders to work through what was important in their *raison d'être* (shared leadership and engagement) without throwing out the potentially helpful theologies from their previous church

experiences that perhaps had negative resonances. This resulted in an *raison d'être* that prioritised the openness that was experienced in these settings because demanding that the church hit certain targets (affective meetings/'solid' doctrine/politically impactful) could close down the opportunities for encountering God in honest an open relationships by engendering fear of undermining a programme of 'successful' outputs. This had allowed the founders of the church to feel able to be open about some of their past experiences of church and their theological or ritualistic preferences, and allowing the church to be mobile on how to respond to some of these preferences without privileging anyone's preferences over anyone else's. Facilitating this process of open discussion was carried over into the *raison d'être* of Exeter Church.

I personally found the theographic spaces that Exeter Church opened up very helpful. Having become a Christian in a conservative Presbyterian church, I - much like Ron at Ezra Community - felt uncomfortable with the politics that were displayed by that FC. However, the affecting nature of my conversion experience was tied up with that conservative presbyterian culture which included a theological politics of misogyny, homophobia, and activism-as-(only)charity; so I repressed my misgivings, conflating that what I perceive to be God's action in my life as part of that culture with the whole culture itself. Studying critical geography and political theology began to unpick this conservative Christian identity, and since then I have sometimes had a scorched-earth policy regarding any theology or practices that resonate with my memories of my time as part of that conservative Christian culture. One of the theologies that reminds me of that culture is one that goes like this: "Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection cannot be politicised. Christians are not to challenge political authority. Rather, the pattern of death and resurrection has a spiritual analogy where we give up trying to change things (we die to our ambition) and God fills us with the new life (resurrection) to do what He wants us to do." In the conservative culture I was a part of, this was often presented as a theological justification for forgetting about confronting injustice (what some conservatives pejoratively call a 'social gospel') and focussing on making people believe Jesus is the Son of God so that they do not go to hell. When a fragment of this

theology[18] came up in a talk that Teddy gave one Sunday, time to do theography with conversation partners was crucial to try and rehabilitate this theology to myself and rework my relationship with the church. Part of me feels that the last line of how I've summarised this theology has been true in my own life; stopping worrying about what I want to get done often helps me to feel more capable to engage with stuff I am passionate about when it comes across my plate. However, I was worried when this theology was shared in a talk because I assumed - because of my previous experience - that this meant that everyone would be following the depoliticised, conservative version of it. Voicing this to a discussion group was hugely helpful. Firstly, it assuaged my fears that this was the case in Exeter Church. People in my group were appreciative that I wanted to warn them of how useful this was as a depoliticising discourse, but they did not want to depoliticse it at all. They wanted to take hold of the liberatory potential this theology has for the individual who feels they need to appease God by achieving things, by illustrating that He wants to work through humanity and will do it on His own terms (and that this links well with a kingdom theology; we should be attentive to our political/ethical desires but careful not to crush them under an over-inflated sense of personal responsibility). Secondly, working through this in the discussion group helped me to take hold of the liberatory potential of this theology myself, to be aware and attentive to my concerns, but not over-extend my sense of responsibility so that it makes me fearful and defensive with church people, or burned out by thinking that I alone am carrying the desire to connect faith with social justice practices within the community.

Through their model, Exeter Church had a relationship to institutions that was not prophetic (like Ezra Community and the Conferences), but was rather using its critique of institutional church (with its focus on Sunday service and 'successful', church-labeled programmes) to create a church that related to the world and the rest of the global Church in a different way. Although the Ezra Community and the Conferences both prioritised solidarity with marginalised groups more than Exeter Church, they also spent some of their energy on

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[18] ...the pattern of death and resurrection has a spiritual analogy where we give up trying to change things (we die to our ambition) and God fills us with the new life (resurrection) to do what He wants us to do.

influencing existing churches to change their practices. Exeter Church was more concerned on creating a church space that was what people wanted it to be like in the first place, rather than sticking up for particular principles within a larger structure. It was more concerned in creating a church that displayed justice in itself as a community, rather than trying to force unwilling fellow worshippers into getting stuck into social justice practices beyond the community. Despite that, the supportive spaces that it created aimed to help participants to think through and work on their religious praxis. This often meant that working through past experiences in institutions were analysed, seeing what might be good to keep or rewire, and what was not helpful any longer for making sense of all of their religious experience. Also this sometimes resulted in joint attempts to support each other in various realms of activism, whether it be going together to a protest, designing a subvertising campaign, or providing bodies to help a bit of volunteering or charity work go smoothly.

Postsecularism

By analysing the *raison d'êtres* and the formative theographies of the FCs that I worked with, I have demonstrated the work that the founders of the FCs put in to transform their religious subjectivities and then represent discourses and implement structures in their nascent FCs that demonstrated their valuing of openness and solidarity. I have shown how FC members are embroiled in an ongoing reworking of their relationships with institutionalism and new sources of religious significance. Additionally, I have shown that the FCs I worked with have communal processes built-in to their *raison d'être* in order to self-reflexively highlight this reworking and to create a supportive environment for this strenuous task. This environment is supposed to enable religious subjects not just to make (partial) sense of their belief but also to be empowered in praxis. I have argued that these non-institutional FCs' *raison d'êtres* provide reason to be hopeful because they represent new ways of framing FCs as places that aim to energise and support solidarity with the marginalised whilst honouring - to variegated degrees - differences in praxis. However, I want to underscore a further reason to be hopeful about the *raison d'êtres* of these FCs; which is the presence of a postsecular ethos within their formation and their content.

Postsecular theory has been expounded by human geographers and writers in related disciplines as a tool for imagining how subjects might transform themselves in order to co-create ethical and political movements inspired by a melee of motivational frames (Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Coles, 1997; Habermas, 2011; Holloway, 2013; Williams, 2015). Coles (1997; 2001) in particular has argued that social movements have often been too exclusionary in their practices, embodying the liberal democratic theory of, for example, Gutman and Thomson (1996) and Rawls (1996) which emphasises that strict boundaries should be applied to political decision making processes. Coles argues that these strict boundaries needlessly limit who is able to take part in a movement - often the most marginalised, who most need the empowerment of a liberation movement and are most aware of the intricacies of oppression - recreating the injustices that it started out to overturn and inhibiting nuanced, effective, and just insurrection (Juris, 2005; Sullivan, 2005). What is required to create more just and effective ethical and political movements that draw the support of a wide constituency of difference is a heightened ability to bear-with alterity. This requires processes and subject positions within a movement that make space for, and can listen to, difference and allow it to change itself. There must be evidence of a self-reflexivity that is attentive to the pain of the marginalised which - instead of asking them to get with the established programme - looks for creative solutions that treat that difference with equality.

Habermas (2011) has argued that in social movements and in society more widely, religious people have often been marginalised because the establishment within these polities has presupposed the irrelevance and/or malevolence of religious analyses and tactics regarding ethical and political action. Habermas argues that this closes down opportunities for fruitful co-creation in grassroots political activism that blends religious and secular motivations and discourses to produce something more broadly accessible, can fight for common political ends, and engenders solidarities across cultural divisions that political and economic elites often try to maintain. He suggests that secular citizens rationally critique religious claims whilst concurrently - as Cloke and Beaumont (2013) put it - remaining receptive to "religious utterances, various semantic meanings and personal intuitions that cross-over more easily

into their secular discourses" (p.36). Habermas wants citizens who identify as secular to appreciate the profundity and helpfulness of religiousness, if not its facticity. Simultaneously, he asks religious citizens to embrace scientific reason and egalitarianism.

I argue that the postsecular subjective ethos that both Coles and Habermas contend for is apparent in the FCs that I worked with. However, the way in which Coles and Habermas want to put their postsecular theory to work is within the context of social movements; convocations that address a particular issue or set of issues. I argue that a postsecular ethos helps subjects in the FCs that I worked with to stretch their religious praxis across the imagined boundary of the FC, reworking their praxis through theography and bringing new sources of theological difference into the FC, as well as developing solidarities with difference beyond it. However, I also argue that the FC itself is a place in which a postsecular ethos is exercised and that the commitment to openness that these FCs exhibit provides a training ground for practicing postsecular relationships and is a resource for subjective transformation towards a posture of attentive listening to difference rather than ressentiment.

Therefore, a postsecular ethos is not just important for movements - as Coles and Habermas are keen to emphasise - but also for communities that wish to welcome difference; bodies which are less about addressing an external issue but about creating relations of belonging and collective practices. By looking at the theography in the formation of the FCs' *raison d'êtres* and the way that allowances for theography are written into the *raison d'êtres*, I can show how religious subjects - provoked by difference - are prompted to change their religious subjectivity. This change may be prompted by religious difference, urging direct reflection upon their framing of transcendence, or a non-religious difference, directing reflection to the intelligibility of their position and the reception of their praxis in more diverse settings. This self-reflexivity is at the heart of postsecular subjectivity, questioning and transforming the self so as to be able to co-create ethical and political spaces with subjects that represent alterity. I argue that this is applicable not only to social movements but to prefigurative communities. This is represented by the different settings that I worked in, with their values of solidarity (like social movements, with their focus

on a more honed set of political goals) and openness (like prefigurative communities, with their focus more on building a community based on new ways of relating to one another). Therefore, I want to highlight instances of this postsecular receptivity to difference and willingness to engage in subjective transformation as it is woven through the theographic formation of the FCs' *raison d'êtres* and their content.

Postsecular attitudes in faith community formation

1) Regarding the Ezra Community, I argue that Ron's willingness to allow what he called an experience of the Holy Spirit when encountering poverty to so radically alter his faith praxis is an example of postsecular subjectivity. I argue that through this encounter, Ron began to alter his frame of transcendence in order to nuance and make sense of his praxis, so that he could begin to practice in greater solidarity with marginalised (particularly poverty-stricken) people. I argue that that is at the core of a postsecular ethos; a willingness on the part of the subject to transform themselves so as to begin working alongside difference. Ron shifted his praxis from a top-down, charity-based view of social justice to one of listening to and working to empower marginalised people. This is all the more extraordinary given that Ron's charitable disposition - before he began to change - was connected to a theology that framed the space in which he had his life-changing experience as thoroughly profane. Holloway (2003) highlights that as religious people try to make sense of their experience, they often retrofit these experiences into a set of beliefs. He argues that experiences of spaces in which unexpected affect occurs help to bolster belief (either by underscoring how the affect harmonises with the belief system, or finding a way to write it off as insignificant). This helps subjects to recognise spaces as sacred (allows affect and belief to resonate) or profane (does not allow affect and belief to resonate). However, Ron's story seems to attest to a more dialogical process going on between his frame of transcendence and his experiences. He did not used to consider relationship with the poor as a source of religious significance. Hence, heading into spaces where the poor could be encountered were in no way - in his imagination - set up to offer a way of encountering the sacred. His spiritual/affective experience in

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encountering poverty posed a challenge to this framing of transcendence. Through reflexive work[19], he reframed his notion of transcendence and praxis so as to respond to the idea that the divine had surprised him by puncturing the sacred/secular boundaries that he supposed demarcated the presence of the transcendent. Although mediated by theography - Ron now perceiving the transcendent to be accessible in the presence of the poor and not just ritualistic spaces, or spaces populated mostly by other Christians - I argue that this is an example of postsecular subjectivity. Ron did not give up his Christian distinctiveness, but he allowed something that his previous frame of transcendence identified as a troubling (maybe even deviant) source of deep alterity - namely a spiritual experience in a secular setting - to trouble and change him, allowing him to practice in a way that he would once have found too different.

2) Regarding the conferences, I argue that the people who co-created these events - both the organisers and the participants - were driven by a belief that encountering difference was productive. Again, I argue that this is evidence of a postsecular ethos. By focussing on praxis, the conference organisers and participants recognised that encountering difference was an enriching element in terms of nuancing their Christian praxis. By encountering different ways of framing the overlap between Christianity and activism, participants could begin to think through how they were currently practicing and how that might be changed or refined. This was represented - particularly at Conference #2 - by talks and workshops from activists that identified with other or no faith, challenging participants to think through how they could work on common issues alongside people with different motivations and ideals and treating the knowledges that these other and non-faith activists had produced through their praxis with respect. However, this encounter with difference was not only a challenge to transform overtly political practice but could help participants to rewire with their more mundane faith praxis. By

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[19] This reflexive work consisted of a mixture of prayer, reading alternative theologies, and seeking out further solidarity with people experiencing poverty. These practices were used in order to further explore the notion that his spiritual experience in the face of poverty may have held religious significance, taking seriously that his previous theological framing may have been needlessly exclusive. By using these practices he let go of his religious mooring points in conservative evangelicalism to dialogue with those that challenged its boundaries.

encountering difference, some of the deadlocks that participants felt were a part of their week-to-week praxis could be broken. By encountering difference they could find new ways to make sense of their praxis. As one participant said at Conference #3: "Sometimes it can be confusing, to know exactly how to work out my faith in political terms... to the point where I just do nothing. But I think coming here has helped me to make sense of the fact that God doesn't need us to understand everything - we can't, we're too limited - but if we embark on something we're passionate about, even if it seems like it might not work, God can work through that," (Appendix B, #17 - Informal conversation with Dave, attendee a Conference #3). Many of the people that formed the *raison d'être* at these conferences saw encounters with difference as crucial to healthy faith praxis. Not only in terms of nuancing their political practices - making them more just by attentive listening to difference - but also in helping them to break repetitive patterns of faith that were beginning to lose their meaning. Practicing attentiveness to difference and embedding this in the *raison d'être* of the conference was also crucial in upholding the space and making it safe enough for these two things (nuancing political praxis and revivifying stultified faith praxes) to be able to happen. These spaces agitated the part of subjects' faith praxis concerned with social justice, whilst providing the tools, not only for transformation into more immediately emboldened activists, but into a subject position that was attentive to difference at the confluence of faith and activism; ready to be transformed again so as to work alongside ever-changing difference. This recognition that dialogue with difference is essential for just practices, whether that difference comes from the same faith background as you or not, and being ready to co-create with that difference - involving change - evidences strong postsecular leanings.

3) Regarding Exeter Church, I argue that the shift in theology that the founders went through before they started the church - becoming more open to the idea that God could be encountered through 'deep' relationships - evidences a postsecular ethos. This theology differed greatly from ones that they were more used to that framed God as present in enthralling affect or solid doctrine. By bearing with the difference that this presented to them, not seeking out other forms of church but staying to listen and to try and

understand this new way of doing things, they evidenced a receptivity to difference and willingness to change so as to practice differently with others. This receptivity to difference and change nods to a postsecular ethos, but I also argue that by reframing the transcendent so as to include the notion of God being found in deep relationships began to shape their practices into more a concretely postsecular mode. Exeter Church leaned towards valuing openness over solidarity with the marginalised, represented by their value of shared leadership. This was supposed to make people feel valued, equal, and able to offer their contribution despite their difference. However, various power-relations criss-cross this ambition. It is easy to *say* that everyone is equal, but if you represent difference (through class, gender, sexuality, race, or theology), it can still feel scary contributing in a setting where perhaps many people are the same in a way that you are not. This is why deep relationships were also valued at Exeter Church. By seeking to create a safe and supportive space where everyone could contribute and where a plethora of difference was welcome, one-to-one ethical work was encouraged. This often meant members sharing the most difficult parts of their life experience with one another so as to develop deeper understandings as to how to make the space safe for everyone. I argue that in working through these deep differences, and finding new ways to do community together, this acted as a training ground for dealing with difference beyond the church. The ethical work that people did with one another in church not only sensitised members to ways in which they had to change in order to make the space more just and enable a fully shared leadership but also flagged-up different ways of framing the transcendent. This working with plurality therefore not only helped members to create new ways of relating to one another that involved dialogue and mutual change but helped them to be practiced in this when embodying the FCs value of engagement. By doing theography within the community, it helped them to know how better to do this beyond the community as well. I argue that this is evidence of the development of postsecular subjectivities in the formation of and content of the FCs' *raison d'être*.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to illustrate how FCs balanced openness and solidarity in their *raison d'être* and explore how that balance had come about through theography. This was in order to provide a new way to start looking at FCs that could allow hopefulness about their political potential whilst remaining cautious on two counts. Firstly, by dealing with naive assumptions that just because a FC has a commitment to openness and solidarity that this necessarily means their practices will be progressive. And secondly, that just because a FC takes a critical stance towards institutionalism, does not mean that they are not still in some way related to it and working through that in the formation of their *raison d'être*. I argued that by looking at the theographic work that the people forming the *raison d'êtres* of these FCs did I could explore how the content and reflexive tools that they used in their theography produced different ways of balancing openness and solidarity and mediating (past) relationships with institutions to produce very different *raison d'êtres* and political potentials. I also wanted to illustrate how the theographic work woven through the formation and content of the *raison d'êtres* of the FCs that I worked with gave further reason for hopefulness about the political potential of these FCs by evidencing a postsecular ethos.

All three *raison d'êtres* of the FCs that I worked with had very different ways of encouraging their members into activism. The Ezra Community tried to model a radical Christology of correcting relations between humans, God, and the earth. This looked like living in community and solidarity with the marginalised, living more sustainably, and practicing spiritual disciplines together. This was a relatively fixed model that directed people to their way of life as a model for activism. The conferences tried to encourage people into activism through their *raison d'être* by aiming to help people to forge connections between biblical interpretation and particular social struggles. They also wanted to demonstrate that it was possible to move past impasses in faith praxis by flagging participants' reflexivity up to themselves and providing resources to help them to begin to invent new modes of praxis. Exeter Church tried to encourage people into activism by aspiring to create a supportive environment in which

people felt encouraged, validated, and empowered in their faith praxis and also by creating a structure and a *raison d'être* based on kingdom theology. This represented a hope that people would find ways to practice their faith in broader 'secular' society, including but not limited to political activism.

These different ways of supporting activism were all mediated by the different balances between openness and solidarity in the FCs' *raison d'êtres*, which in turn was mediated by different theographic processes and resources that the FCs sought to provide. These theographic resources and process also negotiated the FCs' orientation towards their (past) relationships with institutions. In the Ezra Community, prayer was used as both a source of peacefulness and of stoking righteous anger. It connected them to affective experiences of anger associated with a desire to do justice through Christological praxis as well as to experiences of affection and peacefulness found through communion with Christians within and beyond the community that perhaps did not share their same level of activist passion. Prayer helped them to feel passionate about further pursuing solidarity with the marginalised but also wary about creating a model that was not open enough to accommodate some difference regarding praxis. In wanting to be open, they maintained relationships with institutional churches, but in a prophetic and agitative way, rather than submitting to institutional structures and doctrine. At the conferences, their alternative *raison d'être* provided an identity for subjects to take hold of and feel empowered by as they went back into their more quotidian faith praxes. This helped subjects to feel a kinship with others who were asking questions about how they could practice differently, and how to connect this to activism. This meant trying hard to influence institutions to be more open and forge more solidarities but knowing there was a safe space to retreat to if that proved too painful or difficult, somewhere to be recharged or begin to think through new ways past institutional religion. In Exeter Church, discussion spaces acted as a way create a supportive environment for a plethora of different faithful subject positions, as well as helping subjects to be challenged to nuance their praxis. This allowed space for discussions about, invitations to, and collective planning regarding activism but also made space for people to develop deep relationships and more horizontal organising structures. These deep relationships and discussions often involved sorting

through previous religious praxes, separating out the helpful and unhelpful bits so as develop a new religious subjectivity that utilised theologies and practices learned in an institutional setting but beginning to remove their institutional resonances.

I also argued that woven through the FCs' *raison d'êtres* and their formation was evidence of a postsecular ethos; where religious subjectivities were transformed through theographic in order to work more closely alongside difference. This looked like reframing a relationship of solidarity with and listening to those in poverty as part of faith praxis (Ezra House), seeking out voices that expressed difference in order to nuance praxis (conferences), and forging deep relationships so as to begin to work through differences and create ever safer spaces for community members (Exeter Church). What these all highlighted was that a postsecular ethos is not only needed across sacred/ secular divides but also within FCs themselves in order for them to function more justly. I argued that in setting up FCs that gave opportunities for or even encouraged the practice of a postsecular ethos, these could act as training grounds for further reflexive transformation beyond the boundary of the FC. That these spaces could install a generosity and a receptivity in subjects, a notion that by developing understanding across difference - instead of trying to maintain supposed divides - new subjective positions could become possible whilst still holding on to some sense of religious distinctiveness without recourse to boundary policing and maintenance of supposedly inviolable divides. Certain theological positions emerged - such as shalom or kingdom theology - that enabled subjects to work alongside both religious and non-religious difference in the common work of building community and/or activist partnerships.

These stories illustrate that written into the *raison d'êtres* of these FCs is evidence that undermines the current epistemologies the human geographers utilise when analysing FCs. Although related to and affected by institutions, they are not dominated by them, and although providing experiences that embrace the virtual, they also provide resources for political and collective action. I have shown that by using a theographic epistemology to analyse the formation of these FCs and their *raison d'êtres*, human geographers can begin to - with greater nuance - perceive how it is possible to be hopeful about the political

potential of FCs. This political potential varies greatly depending upon the way openness and solidarity are balanced within the *raison d'être*, and the theographic processes and content that the FC has to work with in order to form ideals about FC structure and practice. Furthermore, I argue that theography helps to identify praxes through which religious subjects can transform themselves so as work alongside difference, a crucial element in identifying postsecular ethos and subjectivities.

CHAPTER 6: THEOGRAPHY AND NEGOTIATING OPENNESS

Introduction

In this chapter I am going to address my second research question: what are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within [a faith] community? The previous chapter represents an attempt to analyse the *raison d'êtres* of FCs through the lens of theography. I did this to prove that theography can help to produce knowledge about FCs that simultaneously incorporates criticality and hopefulness regarding the political potential of FCs without sliding into cynicism or sentimentality. I argued that many researchers in human geography concerned with the political practices of FCs have exhibited cynicism or sentimentality in their work because they have assumed that FCs *raison d'êtres* are tied either to institutionalism or to palliative affect. In this chapter I want to use my second research question to begin to pick apart another strain of literature on FCs incorporating activist traits and to again create a space in which to offer a more nuanced, theographic analysis.

The strain of literature that I want to begin to pick apart is that which has been produced as a reaction against some of the writing on religion and politics that spotlights religious coalitions with economic liberalism and social conservatism. This writing has tried to evidence that if practices of openness can be fostered in FCs - democratising leadership, affirming theological plurality, partnering with organisations beyond the FCs - this can lead to more just FCs with greater political impact (Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Megoran, 2010; 2013). I agree that greater openness *can* yield these outcomes, but I feel that so far the studies that have put forth this argument have covered over the complex work of producing and maintaining this openness. They have not considered how attempting to produce this openness may go awry, fail, or need to be reconstituted. It is important to produce representations of FCs that analyse the tricky processes through which greater openness is negotiated in order to advance both geographical and activist knowledges in this area.

As many political writers have pointed out, when communities or organisations try to become more open by horizontalising their leadership and welcoming

greater difference, this can often generate conflict (Coles, 2001; Juris, 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Routledge, 2003a). Clashing values or ideals can lead to the replication of exclusions and oppressions that a group originally started out to eradicate. Connolly (1999), posits that striving to foster postsecular subjectivities within a movement is a way of overcoming these clashes in values and ideals. He argues that modern political philosophers have studied religious practices in order to gain deeper understandings of how to transform the self. He values this work on self-transformation because he sees it as essential for developing understandings of how to enable the self to work better alongside difference, a core principle in constructing the postsecular subject. Connolly says "[e]cclesiastical practices of ritual are translated by Nietzsche and Foucault as experiments in the art of self, and Deleuze as a micropolitics of intersubjectivity - these practices are about shifting... sensibilities... working on thought-imbued intensities behind conscious thoughts that can forge a politics of becoming and can install generosity and forbearance in a world of multidimensional plurality" (1999, p.28).

In this chapter I want to explore Connolly's proposition - that 'ecclesiastical ritual' can help people to self-transform so as to better deal with difference - in the context of the FCs that I worked with. My own experience of the FCs that I worked with was that building greater openness - aspiring to horizontal leadership and receptivity to difference - was a difficult thing to create the conditions for and to maintain. Conflict arose and the community had to find ways to deal with it, maintaining and sometimes truncating their commitment to openness. Jamoul and Wills (2008) and Megoran (2010; 2013) explain the structures put in place in FCs that enable them to be more open but do not examine the collective and subjective processes by which that is maintained. By testing Connolly's argument in the context of my research, I can begin to examine how religious subjects use religious practices in attempts to create and maintain openness.

The religious practices that Connolly refers to are a kind of theography; a reflexivity that negotiates between different sources of religious significance and works to transform the self in response to that negotiation. By drawing attention to this reflexive process, I argue that theography can help me to analyse two

things in the FCs that I worked with. Firstly it can help me to identify whether openness in religious communities creates instances of conflict that are different to political communities. Is it simply disagreements about political ideas that create conflict in FCs, or does a religious excess play a role? In what ways does participating in collective religious practices in a context of heightened difference generate conflicts in a way that might not arise through straightforwardly political practices? Secondly, theography enables me to understand how religious practices help subjects to deal with conflict within the community. What are the different ways in which religious practices enable subjects to work upon themselves? Can they work upon themselves to be more open, or do they use religious practices to marginalise conflict or even harden themselves in their own position?

Therefore I want to go through this chapter in three sections. Firstly, looking at conflicts that have arisen in the FCs I worked with as a result of their commitment to openness. Secondly, looking at how subjects and communities have tried to resolve these conflicts. Finally, looking at how the FCs have started to change in response to conflict and alter or refine their approach to openness.

Conflicts

In this section, I will go through two different types of conflict in order to demonstrate the different kinds of conflict that can arise due to a commitment to openness. The examples I present will focus on how conflict can emerge through processes that FCs have tried to instigate in a spirit-of and to encourage openness. The examples will demonstrate how - despite trying to create an atmosphere in which everyone can feel welcome - exclusions and divisions can still arise due to the intermingling of difference. I will look at how theography - drawn in a couple of instances from my autoethnography - can clarify the nature of these conflicts, before looking at how it can help subjects to work upon them in the next section of this chapter.

Blending openness and ritual

In this section I want to demonstrate how FCs opening up to greater difference can generate conflict by convening spaces for religious ritual. These conflicts can highlight contradictions in subject's theography and force them to be reflexive about their praxis and the role that ritual plays within that. I explore how theographic processes can help subjects to reassess their praxis in relation to ritual spaces as performed by an array of different religious subjects and begin to shift their sensibilities in order to show generosity towards spaces of religious difference.

At Conference #1, provocation was one of the key values expressed in their *raison d'être* and enrolled within that value was a deep commitment to openness sought through affirming and engaging with difference. This found its practical analogue in ensuring that many different stories of faith praxis were given air-time during the conference. However, in terms of practices that the conference drew people into, one of the key ways it aimed to facilitate expressions of commitment to openness was through the practice of ecumenism; ecumenism being the promotion of solidarity between different Christian denominations and celebrating diversity (O'Gara, 2014). An opportunity to practice ecumenism was generated by convening various worship spaces lead by people of different denominations, moulding the space in the way that they were normally accustomed to and inviting all to take part. There was Greek Orthodox liturgy, Catholic Mass, Quaker practicing of silence, and extended periods of singing familiar to a variety of Protestants.

Arriving at the conference, I was excited to embody this ecumenism by showing solidarity with other expressions of faithfulness and participating in to some of these alternative forms of worship. For a long time I had been trying to counter sectarianism in some of the conservative FCs that I had been affiliated with during my time in Glasgow, and to participate in something that had begun to erode the privileging of a homogenous way of performing faith was compelling to me. My sense of anticipation was heightened when I first entered the main hall of the conference venue and was met with a plethora of signifiers of activism and ecumenism mixed together in the space from the outset. There

were tables littered with white poppies and books about nonviolent resistance, a craft corner with provocative quotes on the wall (a mixture of bible verses and facts about the arms trade), and right across the back of the hall, a massive blanket made up of squares covered in messages promoting peace. There were two Franciscan monks chatting and strolling about, some women from a Christian communist movement doing some artwork in the corner, and a band rehearsing around a piano.

What I found most interesting about this space was the way that the song the band were rehearsing began to stand out and shape how I was feeling. It was a song that I knew, one that had frequently been played in some of the conservative FCs I had been involved with in Glasgow. I had struggled with these FCs due to their narrow political vision. However, instead of instilling me with a sense of trepidation, the song acted to make me feel at home and at ease. I noted this down in my research diary because I thought it was strange but I did not really know what to make of it. There was some time before the conference proper began, so I left the hall for a bit to stretch my legs.

When I returned, it was time for the conference to officially begin, and after a brief introduction, the first collective activity was singing together. Again, the songs were ones I knew, but instead of feeling at ease I felt like I could not participate fully. The atmosphere was distinctly flat. People were not really singing with much enthusiasm and this continued for the extent of the session. When the session ended, I left feeling disconnected and out of place. Instead of staying to chat and meet new people, I went back to my room. The excitement I felt when I first entered the venue had dissipated as the solidarities that I had expected to feel instantaneously grew distant to me. My dissatisfaction with this situation compelled me to try and figure out exactly what my problem was and how to deal with it. Leaving the hall was partly about feeling my enthusiasm for the conference drop but I was also keen to remove myself from the activity of the conference space and reflect on what had happened there. The main aim of this time of reflection was to do what I have been calling theography.

Whilst reflecting, it struck me that what had occurred was a clash between my theoretical and embodied theologies; two different sources of religious

significance. Regarding my theoretical theology, I realised that even though I was not consciously doing this at the time, I had reacted to the worship space as if I was disappointed because not everyone was performing it in the way I had expected them to. I considered that this reaction was not particularly in line with what my theoretical theology of worship was. Did I think that everyone, from every denomination should respond in the same way to a practice that was relatively confined to a particular brand of protestantism? Of course not. Their minds and bodies are not trained to be receptive to the ecstatic in the same way as mine's is. And that's good. To me, this diversity reveals the hypernonymity of the divine, meaning that it is so excessive it has an infinite number of ways of revealing itself to the infinitely diverse individual (Rollins, 2006). In my experience, acknowledging this plurality has enriched the praxis of my faith by making me more knowledgeable about and receptive to difference.

However - regarding my embodied theology - in hearing a familiar song when I first entered the conference space, I was primed with certain expectancies of what it would engender in the group experience. I felt comfortable because I presumed that something familiar was being prepared. I had struggled with the churches I had previously been in that used this music. However, in using this music these previous churches had - despite my misgivings - created affective environments that I had really enjoyed. They had enabled me to practice what Julian Holloway (2003) - quoting Massumi (1997) - calls *collective individuation* (p.1967) - where the surrounding environment is enlisted by a religious individual in order to craft their experience of transcendence. Although struggling with these churches, they had also been places where - through the music - I had felt my own connection to something unexpected and perhaps in excess of immanence. I argue that because of these experiences, I was still holding on to a half-suppressed thought that even though I had problems with these churches, they must have been doing *something right* to enable me to experience these numinous feelings and that everyone should fall into line with that.

But it is not that the spaces where I had these experiences before had been doing something *right*. They provided an environment in which I had learned to discipline myself to be open to something excessive in a particular way. This

environment made it seem as though whatever affect was being crafted by the music was having a similar affect on all participants. In fact, the affect which - although experienced personally - was supposedly happening *to* the congregation, was in fact equally created *by* the congregation through their enthusiastic participation in sung performance.

In doing theography, I was able to analyse my own autoethnography and recognise a conflict that can happen in religious spaces. Although difference can be rhetorically embraced, certain religious languages and practices do prepare subjects to fall into previous patterns of behaviour. Although subjects may discursively affirm the presence of difference, practicing alongside discursive and affective difference still has the ability to unsettle and to test the limits of the subject's commitment to generosity towards alterity in spirit and practice. The space may be framed as an arena for dialogue and mutual transformation but this does not prepare subjects for the visceral desire for the space to do something *for them.* People come to spaces that are framed as religious expecting something, whether that be to hear discursive theology that resonates with their own, or to be enveloped in a particular affect. Continuing to be open to an environment that does not provide this familiarity requires self-transformative effort. It takes concerted self-reflexivity to identify the nature of discomfort and to challenge that discomfort's legitimacy. The presence of alterity can highlight the self's own lack of privilege in a space committed to openness, challenging the self to reflexively transform alongside difference, finding new ways to engage with the sacred together. That is difficult if the subject's engagement with the sacred has never been de-naturalised before.

This illustrates that FCs convening spaces of religious ritual, whilst embracing openness and difference, simultaneously demand the personal self-transformation of subjects. Theologians have highlighted that collective practice of religious ritual is not supposed to be about making everyone feel comfortable (Bolz-Weber, 2013; Moody, 2012); that it is about highlighting how to work on the self and transforming it to create unity, despite difference. FCs exhibit different ways of manifesting openness, but all will at some point convene spaces of ritual which involve using particular practices that subjects may or may not have engaged with before, unfolding different expectations in different

subjects of what the space should evoke. In order to make these particular practices open to difference, either the FC dialogues collectively about how these practices can be changed so as to be more welcoming (such as re-writing liturgy to be more gender inclusive (Vincett, 2013)), and/or individuals will have to recognise that not everyone can perform the space as they would at first expect. Making it evident that this high level of self-transformation will be demanded in these spaces is crucial if they are to be truly open to difference. In being open to difference these FCs also ask of participants, as they convene ritual practices, to be open to the space and the difference it throws up in turn.

In my experience at Conference #1, the difficulty that I had in engaging with the space alerted me to the fact that not only did the conference organisers need to highlight that participants should show respect in *conversations* with difference, but that in engaging with *practices of ritual,* generosity was also core. Conference organisers - who directed proceedings from the front - did say that people could opt in or out of ritual spaces, but did not underline the conditions of engagement. My disappointment with the initial worship space led me to feel confused by the tension between my enthusiasm for many of the political goals that I knew the organisation responsible for the conference stood for and the lack of solidarity I felt due to my experience of the worship space. It is therefore crucial that FCs that are trying to foster openness and solidarity think through all aspects of their practice and be clear about how they are asking people to engage. What does creating a space of openness ask of them? It is not just in discussing theography or in listening to stories about variegated faith praxes or in planning political actions together that openness needs to be exhibited but also in the convening of ritual spaces. Negotiating this difference is also part of fostering openness.

I want to add a critical note here regarding my analysis. My main point is that FCs incorporating greater openness need to make clear that in ritual spaces, people must apply reflexive energy to respond receptively to those performing the ritual in a different way. However - to interpret the underside of this point - it may seem that my reading of the way others used the space at Conference #1 was in some way disrespectful or unwittingly marginalising. This is not my interpretation. I argue that most of the people in the space - although appearing

to me to be disengaged or disinterested - were probably opting into the space in an effort to exhibit the solidarity that I was also trying to express whilst unconsciously expecting some sort of collective reciprocation of in the worship space. I would argue against responsibilising people to perform a ritual space in the way that someone who has performed it many times before, appearing to be fully participating in the spirit of the event. At Conference #3, I made a hash of participating in an High Anglican Mass, looking - at different points - confused, perturbed, and amused throughout. Rather I would say that those used to a practice must - in a context of openness - write into their reflexivity an acknowledgement of the possibility that although people may seem like they are being aloof in a worship space, in fact their very presence there is an expression of a receptivity to experiencing the divine in new ways through diverse practice and in communion with difference.

Openness, structure, and planning solidarity

In this section I want to look at an example from my experience with Exeter Church to examine the difficulty of creating structural openness in a community that also has an eye on engendering solidarities beyond itself. I argue that FCs have to labour to develop consensus among their members as to exactly how the relationship between solidarity and openness is structured through community processes. This connection must be clearly articulated because - as I will illustrate - there must be a justification for when ideals regarding solidarity are occasionally sidelined. In the case I analyse below, sidelining particular ideas about how to express solidarity happened because it threatened the way in which openness was upheld in the community. This sidelining can create confusion and defensiveness, eroding a culture of openness as members begin to hold back their honesty and candidness due to their misunderstanding of how their contribution to discussions about solidarity should be made. Being the most open of the three communities, I have looked at Exeter Church in order to demonstrate how this conflict can arise. I use my autoethnographic notes to explain the dynamics of this kind of conflict.

I joined Exeter Church because I was drawn to it for two reasons. Firstly, because its founders evidenced a greater democratic trust in ordinary church

members to run things and shape discussions about theology and collective praxis. Secondly, because they voiced a desire to extend their faith practice into socio-political action. They spoke about their experiences of their church in Luton; how the practices of the Luton church had spilled over into things like starting a small charity to work with children experiencing poverty and addressing corruption in local government. They expressed a great desire to have a similar impact in Exeter. There was a sense however, that it would take some time in Exeter to figure out what the church's contribution to political action in the city would look like.

My own desire for the direction of the church's political activity was more crystallised, and significantly shaped by my experiences of researching churches in Glasgow, by anti-racist and anti-capitalist theology, and the writing of New Monastic[20] practitioners (Beckford, 1998; Claiborne, 2006; Kalu et al., 2011). Based on these influences, my ideal for the church would have been to follow a model not unlike how I described the Ezra Community in the previous chapter; living in community in a marginalised neighbourhood, developing relationships with the people there in order to help them fight for and build a better quality of life. I knew I could not impose this particular way of doing things on the people in the church because I knew the church was not set up to have one person dictate how things should go. So I spent approximately a year at church trying to pick up on people's political preferences and ideals.

During various discussions over the year, one of the key ideas that kept recurring - and that various people were passionate about - was that of hospitality, particularly involving food. Cooking for people, inviting people into our homes, or even hiring space somewhere in the city and providing free food. This idea was pitched as something to invite anyone to, but also as being more directly geared towards various marginalised groups such as people dependent on foodbanks or homeless folk. Food was not something that I had thought of as a political topic before (apart from reducing meat consumption), but since it had been raised by people at church, I began to notice that it was a core topic

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[20] New Monasticism is a movement largely within Christianity that is drawing on monastic traditions of community living, contemplation, and commitment to social and environmental justice (Claiborne, 2006; Stock et al., 2006; Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008).

in the New Monastic literatures that shaped much of my political theology as I revisited them (Maurin, 2010; Holland, 2015; Youtube, 2012, *The Simple Way*). These literatures overlapped a desire to welcome marginalised folks into community through the act of providing hospitality - in the form of preparing food for and eating with people - with sustainability and mutual aid, looking to organically produce and give away food for free. After not really understanding how food matters could dovetail with my ideals about faith praxis, spotting the imbrication of New Monastic literatures and the political desires of my friends at church made me begin to think about how to do collective action regarding food. New Monastic communities in the US have reclaimed unused land and begun to cultivate it, providing food for free in areas with little access to nutrition, cooking meals for their whole neighbourhood, and increasing community cohesion in areas of increased violence through working towards a common goal. I thought that it would be a good idea if we could do something similar, given that it seemed to speak to the interests of many people in the church, and could be a concrete expression of the church's value of engagement. I thought this provided a way for me not to impose my own ideas on the group but to be a creative way to practice together whilst meeting common desires and goals for practice.

The church leadership team have regular meetings at which various things are discussed - such as finances or a programme of themes for the next few Sunday meetings - but there will always be an A.O.B. section at the end of any meeting. I used to be on this leadership team, and at a meeting approximately a year after the church was started, I thought it would be a good time to make a case for perhaps finding some land to meet the various goals around food and politics that had been voiced by various people at church. To my surprise, this idea did not gain any traction amongst other people on the team. The rest of the team felt that this would be too labour intensive, having the result of pulling everyone in the church into one expression of politics in one area of the city. Being that we were still small, the rest of the team felt that this practice would send an exclusive message to potential future members, that if they wanted to be part of our church they had to be involved with this kind of action.

At the time, I did not understand this decision. I expected that engaging with the structure of the church in the way I had would at least create a discussion around my suggestion for action. I thought that the openness that had been convened was a place for dialogue to engender creative approaches to collective political action. I thought, that by listening to people's different stories of faith and representations of their theography and trying to do my own theography - shifting my framing of transcendence just slightly in order to find a way to work alongside these folk who had different passions to myself - I had used the space of openness for its intended purpose and responded appropriately. It turned out that despite my listening, thinking, and shifting of sensibility, there was something that I had misunderstood. This made me retreat for a while. In discussion spaces, I became much more withdrawn because although I wanted to contribute to many of the conversations we were having, I felt that what I had to say might not be welcome. I still had a strong sense of how I was framing transcendence (and its connection to forging solidarities) but I was not sure how that was supposed to translate into a practice through this nascent church, or what its commitment to openness was for. I had come up against some sort of boundary that I could not yet comprehend.

I thought at first that the situation was due to a clash of ideals regarding how to work out a faith praxis. Maybe the rest of the team had no interest in thinking about a different way to work out their praxis in a way that blended with mine, perhaps they saw the open space as a place where they would fight for their ideas about praxis rather than blend them with others'. As I began to become dissatisfied with my retreat from discussion spaces, I began to reflect upon this clash, and do some theography again. It was in this reflection that I recognised that the clash was not about different ideals regarding praxis. Although I had drawn up plans for acting upon certain aspects of the church's *raison d'être* (openness is for building relationships and nuancing praxis, this refines and empowers the practice of solidarities), had my suggestion gone ahead - as the team said - this would have draw the whole church down a very specific line of praxis. Although I did not understand this initially, this represented a homogeneity of practice of which there was an implicit rejection in the church's *raison d'être*.

The founders of the church wanted the open space to be somewhere that represented diversity, that showed many trajectories of faith practice were possible. If we had taken up the gardening idea, then creating an environment where people could see this in practice this would be difficult because everyone would be focussed on an already existing collective project. The open space was to be a space in which to work through ideas about potential collective praxis, but this should not lead to the privileging of any one type of action. An additional value that was being protected in rejecting my gardening idea was that it would do little to aid the deconstruction of sacred/secular divides that the church wanted to focus on. It would not connect the church to other realms of activism and organisations in the city, modelling a dynamic and varied faith that demands theographic effort to be fluid, relevant, and yet distinctly faithful. I realised that for myself to engage with the church, that although the open space was crucial for being a reflexive space for praxis, I also had to think of it as an invitational arena for people to join in with things that people were *already* doing in the city to forge solidarities. Collectivity could emerge from this, with groups of people being inspired by each others actions and joining in with one another in various realms of activism, but collectivity was a by-product of this space that was hoped for, rather than being structurally underwritten.

This conflict illustrates the difficulty in creating structures that uphold openness and yet at the same time seek to engender solidarities. Regarding political movements, Sullivan (2005) has argued that in trying to forge solidarities they often shut down opportunities for openness. What happened in the conflict I have just worked through is the inverse. A potential plan for solidarity - even though it seemed to cater to the difference that the space held at the time - was rejected in order to protect future opportunities for diversity. This is an interesting finding for communities with political and religious intentions because it shows that it is possible to put in structural protections against the overwhelming desire to get something done. You can create an environment in which solidarities are forged but new ways of relating to one another and subjective change also come about. However, this does seem to underscore a point that many have made in the literature on political convergence, that when people forming a political community or movement have a clear idea as to its purpose, this will create exclusions (Clough, 2014; Pickerill and Chatterton,

2006; Routledge, 2003). Sullivan (2005) argues that when a political group reaches unity, it throws openness to the fringes. But what happened in this conflict is the converse of that. Solidarity is what became liminal, fluid, plural, and experimental. Later on, when everyone in the church started to embrace and understand this model better and pursue their own ideas - both as individuals or little clusters in the city - it made the church like a hub of affinity groups. When discussing things together as individuals and clusters the open space did eventually become a space where unity could be reached, but a unity that was understood as temporary and not as a catalyst to political calcification.

This conflict also highlights something about theography. Creating space for theography can lead to subjective change which nuances praxis; this is a desirable outcome of the coming together of difference in a convergence space. However, if this level of openness to change is not reciprocated, this can lead to a breakdown in group function. It can lead to withdrawal from dialogue, defensiveness, and ressentiment. In the narrative I have recounted here, it is important to note that the reason for my withdrawal was partly because I had not fully understood the nuances of the *raison d'être* that the founders had communicated to me. This was because their narratives about openness and solidarity resonated with politicised models that I had encountered before, leading me to assume that Exeter Church would parallel their practice. When I realised that the open structure was more about encouraging theography, breaking sacred/secular divides, and showcasing diversity (rather than being a forum for finding a praxis for the whole collective), I was able to reconfigure my praxis again to fit the model.

However, what happens when there is less of a focus on theography and openness and a greater desire to address particular solidarities in a FC? How is conflict dealt with in a situation when people with strong ideas about praxis clash (this is a particularly important issue for FCs which have no set left or right political ideology to attract people to)? How is openness protected, when even in a community that prioritises theography as highly as Exeter Church, clashes happen due to misguided expectations of a certain kind of reciprocity? These are important questions for communities convening difference and trying to

horizontalise power structures. The next section looks at how religious ritual finds its way into attempts to find resolutions to these questions about conflict.

Religious techniques of self and resolving conflict

Theography is a reflexive negotiation between different sources of religious significance that helps subjects to make sense of and make decisions about their religious praxis. It pairs this reflexive effort with techniques that work through this negotiation in order to alter the self and its praxis, shifting subjective positions-on and associations-between religious discourse, affect, and practice. It can be utilised as a technique for subverting institutional discipline but can also be used as a tool to resist broader cultural influences and conform to institutional dictates. I argue that Foucault (1991; 2005; see also Martin et al., 1988) addresses the technique-focussed part of theography when he writes about religious practices that enable the subject to apply religious discipline to themselves. He mentions practices such as confession and meditative techniques that shift the subject's focus away from misguided anxiety or towards a sense of oneness with a principle or belief. Connolly (1999) marshals Foucault's thought on religious techniques of self to argue that they can be used as a way of enabling the subject to evidence a postsecular subjectivity; a discipline of openness. Religious techniques can be used to work on recalcitrant parts of the self, shifting belief and defensiveness over particular tenets or practices and enabling the subject to begin to open up to new ways of practicing with difference. This shift towards openness - lowering the guard to be generous towards alterity - so as to credit the possibility of mutual transformation and becoming something new without obliterating distinctiveness is evidence of a postsecular ethos.

Connolly and Foucault mostly discuss techniques that the subject uses in isolation, removing themselves from a collective to reflect and work upon themselves. However, I argue that the FCs that I worked with convened *collective* practices that subjects could transform themselves through to enable them to address conflict as a result of openness to difference in the community. I contend that these practices have two outcomes; one that can help subjects to become more open to working through difference and one which does not. In

terms of failing to create more openness, religious practices can give the impression of having dealt with conflict without actually resolving it by symbolising unity and affectively neutralising or reversing felt discord. However, they can also be useful in shifting recalcitrant positions; by being collective and practice-based they confront subjects with practical unity in alterity, forcing reflection on and deconstructing marginalising practices. Below I give an example of religious practices leading to each of these outcomes.

Ethical solidarity/Political division

The Ezra Community is made up of three households in a low-income city in the New England region of the USA. So far I have focussed largely on the founders, the forming of the community's *raison d'être*, the network of relationships that shapes this, and some of the relationships within Ezra House (the biggest of the three households and focus of the community's hospitality work; hospitality meaning providing cheap/free accommodation and board to people experiencing precarity). However, the community is not solely made up of people residing in Ezra House; two other households are also part of the community. These two households are made up of one family each. Their role in the Ezra Community consists of taking part in decision making processes that intersperse dialogue and prayer, and eating dinner together with the whole community every two weeks.

When I asked Ron and Barbara about the role that the other households played in the community, they expressed misgivings about their role being limited to decision-making, praying, and eating. They wanted a more radical level of commitment from these households. Ron and Barbara's vision for the Ezra Community was that it would become a network of hospitality houses that held a common purse. Community members - apart from those receiving hospitality - would contribute a significant proportion of their incomes to a common fund for the purpose of supporting hospitality work (subsidising food/mortgage or rent payments/house repairs and improvements/medical and education bills). In addition to this, by taking up strategic positions in marginalised neighbourhoods, hospitality houses would be well placed to listen to and recognise the issues affecting these areas, enabling community members from

different households to begin to work collectively on salient campaigns, protests, or additional prefiguration in order to begin improving quality of life for people on the margins. However, in discussions with Ron and Barbara, although they said they felt hopeful for the community in the long-run, they seemed exasperated with the situation as it stood. People in the other households did not seem to be in a position (or have the will) to deepen their commitment to developing the hospitality model Ron and Barbara had in mind. On top of this, a project the community was running together (a cafe that provided free snacks, drinks, materials, and space in which to create art for homeless people) was beginning to lose viability due to it falling ever lower in people's priorities. Various reasons were cited for these disappointments; busy jobs, other ongoing activism, having potentially volatile guests in the same house as children, disagreement over effective political models and goals. When talking about these issues, Ron and Barbara expressed sympathy for their fellow community members' concerns, but this ran parallel to a feeling of frustration. When I talked to them about the lack of progress they felt was being made, this frustration was visibly manifest; they sighed, grimaced, and threw their hands up in the air as they seemed to underscore the incommensurability of holding the community together. However, although there were clear differences about how to proceed, these were not all out on the table. I wondered whether airing these differences and beginning to constructively address this conflict would have helped the community to shift its praxis, but it seemed these differences were being suppressed. I argue that a practice that aided this suppression and stultified praxis, was the community's communal times of prayer.

Times of prayer in the community were often interspersed with the reading of liturgy. Reading liturgy involved everyone gathered having a sheet with regular and bold text on it. A leader would read all the text, with the rest of the congregation only reading the bold text. This text can be traditional prayers, bible passages, creeds, or more modern and imaginative ruminations on faith and theology. When I asked why this was a part of proceedings, a variety of people from the community answered that although it was quite prescriptive and impersonal, this practice helped them to begin to feel comfortable in the space because they knew how to participate. It helped them to feel that the space was

safe and could open up to the possibility of sharing requests for prayer and praying aloud themselves in ways that revealed some of the more intimate details of their lives. Ron told me that this was purposely how these spaces were constructed, to be safe for people to share the most meaningful parts of their lives and to bond the community together as they began to more deeply understand one another. This reasoning made sense to me, as I have known this to be true in many FCs that I have participated in. Praying and sharing prayer requests together often lets you into the deeper parts of people's lives and builds a sense of solidarity in a group. Ideally, respect and affirmation is given to people as they make themselves vulnerable and a sobering level of trust is felt in return, generating an atmosphere of mutual care and responsibility. An affect of solidarity is also engendered by collectively responding to this mutual care in spoken prayer; as if you - as a group - are together doing something about what you have shared with one another.

Talking to people in the Ezra Community, I got the sense that this development of solidarity was going on there too. However, although this space was used to share deeply affecting material, this material often fell into two categories; personal issues (parents are unwell/workplace makes me anxious/safety for long journey) and general prayers with a political tone for the city (help the new sheriff crack-down on police brutality/protect affordable housing in city from predatory capitalists/homeless shelter would get grant they have applied for). There was little praying about the actual community, and the political differences that it was bringing together. Instead, this communal practice served to create a sense of common purpose and mutual affection. When talking to Ron and Barbara about the affect that this created they ascribed it religious significance, saying that it was a 'Holy Spirit' thing; the increased sense of unity and intimacy. This quelled the frustration they felt with the lack of commitment of other community members to their desired model of community living and hospitality.

This created a difficult tension in their theography. They wanted to be attentive to this source of religious significance, feeling sympathetic towards and wanting to deal gently with their fellow community members, but this seemed to push down a desire to tackle the political differences in the community head-on. It was as if frustration was building to a breaking point and then would settle again

after praying together, rising and falling but never getting to the point where people would open up and talk about the most productive way forward for everyone. The community did not seem to be able to move past this religious and political tension, and prayer - although creating a space with the potential for profound ethical proximity - seemed to be a source of religious significance which complicated Ron and Barbara's political desires by obfuscating tension that needed to be dealt with - for a spell - before it became apparent again. Although the prayer space was a transformative religious technique for shifting sensibilities, this shift did not help the community to overcome conflict, but rather enabled it to roll on, deflecting from political difference by inflaming affective attachments to ethical solidarities. By incorporating the openness engendered in times of prayer into their *raison d'être*, the community had exacerbated a conflict that it was struggling to resolve.

Deconstructing divisions

To return to my experience of Conference #1, I talked in a previous section in this chapter about how it brought to light differences between my embodied and theoretical theologies. I was able to recognise through my own theographic reflection, that an unexpected affect - generated by openness to difference and the variegated competence in a collective performance of worship that that brought - had undermined my ability to embody my cognitive commitment to embracing difference. The jarring effect that this clash had on my ideals about my own practice was one of the reasons that I felt compelled to do theography; to overcome a contradiction in my own praxis. However, the ability to be open to recognising this contradiction and negotiating between these different sources of religious significance was spurred on by another ritual wrapped into the worship experience.

At the end of the singing, those guiding the session from the front encouraged everyone to 'share the peace'. Sharing the peace usually involves going around the room shaking hands with or hugging people and saying 'peace be with you' to them. This is supposed to incorporate people being reconciled to one another, working through conflicts or forgiving one another, being an active outworking of pacifism. In reality people rarely take the time to do this during a

service. Also I recognise, before I recount my experience of it at Conference #1 that sharing the peace can be a traumatic experience for people as it can involve non-consenting invasion of personal space and can also feel like another ritual that signifies and yet fails to tackle conflict head-on. This can be particularly upsetting if a subject is marginalised in their FC due to their identity (gender/race/class/sexuality). To marginalised people, sharing the peace can seem like a way for people of privilege to shirk responsibility for dealing with exclusions because they have reconciled symbolically.

When it was announced that we should share the peace after the worship session, this was the last thing that I wanted to do. I was frustrated with myself and the environment because the affinities that I had expected to feel instantaneously did not emerge. When people started to share the peace, I stood up and shook hands with the people immediately around me. This is partly because this is how I had experienced this ritual before (I had never seen people travel far from their seat) but also because I had little desire to engage; I wanted to stew in my discontent. However, when I looked around it seemed as if everyone was trying to hug everyone else in a room of approximately a hundred and fifty people. Observing the excessiveness and joyfulness of this collective act began to erode the annoyance that I was clinging to. It struck me as a powerful theological symbol; it was a visible manifestation of the desire to perceive everything as interconnected, a recognition of the networked nature of the subject and of a desire to be attentive and caring towards the relationships which both wittingly and unwittingly sustain it[21]. Although I could feel my emotions slowly shifting in response to this, there was a more sudden shift in thought and affect within this more gradual drift. Layered within my response to the ritual was a sudden thought - that came with clarity and a sense of stillness - that, more than just being a pleasing symbol, this ritual was facilitating an authentically spiritual moment; that something transcendent was at work in the space. I am personally hesitant about connecting ritual with transcendence, because the affect that rituals can conjure is a mysterious excess that can so readily emerge from the blending of completely immanent actors (the effect of music on a worship space is a prime example). However, when I experience

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[21] For a theological exploration of the interconnections between people, earth, and God, see Brueggemann (2012).

moments of such sudden alteration in my affective and cognitive stream - although I hold off from making quick judgements about them - they usually prompt me to reflect upon what they might say about my frame of transcendence and what that means for my future praxis.

I had not shifted completely from my anger and frustration, but this moment of religious significance was a key factor in shifting me towards theographic reflection. When reflecting, as well as recognising that there were contradictions in my embodied and theoretical theologies, this moment - whether it was made of transcendence or not - was crucial in highlighting to me that despite my own sense of distance from what was going on, I might be missing out on something worthwhile. It also highlighted to me that even if the collective was practicing in a way that I did not fully understand, that did not preclude the possibility of the space being able to bring forth affective or discursive material with religious significance. If I did not find ways to deal with felt differences between myself and the bulk of people at the conference, the theo-political affinities I had imagined would *just happen* never would, because building community (especially one in which different religious and political praxis are present) requires the work of intervening in your own felt antipathies.

This realisation helped me to begin to question the legitimacy of my unexpected knee-jerk distaste for some of the ecumenical mixing that the conference convened. These reflexive conclusions helped me to apply a more responsive reflexivity when bumping up against ecumenical differences during the rest of the conference (e.g. reciting liturgy that contained what I perceived to be 'slack' theology) in an attempt to cut-in on my own reactionary responses to difference with a hopeful posture. When I say 'hopeful' I mean that without fully understanding the way people were practicing in the space, I tried to participate wholeheartedly, recognising that just because I did not 'get' what was going on, something significant could still come out of it. The theographic work that the worship space prompted generated a significant change in my religious praxis during the conference (and beyond) and helped me to perceive practicing ritual alongside difference as a way of deconstructing sectarian divisions. By stumbling upon an excess of religious significance through sharing the peace, I had been forced into theographic reflection. This reflection had led me to

recognise some of my own internal contradictions and respond differently to the experiments in ecumenism that the conference convened. I deployed a micropolitics of hopefulness in foreign-feeling religious environments by opening up to deeply felt difference in order to see whether there might be opportunities to form a new and more nuanced theological praxis.

Coda: Ritual, change, and faith community structure

As I have illustrated, religious ritual is an important element in negotiating conflicts in FCs. However, although my examples confirm Connolly's (1999) argument that religious rituals can enable a postsecular micropolitics - helping the subject begin to manifest a generosity towards difference and imagine new ways of relating to alterity - they can also hamper progress in conflict resolution. Additionally, they not only enable subjects to both negotiate or mismanage conflict, they can even be a source of conflict themselves.

Although religious rituals change subjects through both generative and obfuscatory theographies, it is important to note that the role they play is significantly mediated by the structure of the FC that they are being performed within. For instance, the clash of communal ethics and competing political visions I described in the Ezra Community would have been less of an issue in Exeter Church and the conferences. As my examples show - although it was still difficult and required a lot of personal theographic work - the priority of ethics through joint theography at Exeter Church and the conferences provided the space for subjects to begin to work through their frustrations with the differences the FCs enhanced commitment to openness brought to light. Due to the prioritisation of political outputs in the Ezra Community, the space to work through difference seemed less apparent and therefore ritual compounded this difficulty rather than resolved it.

I acknowledge that the differences that I have picked out of my research underscore quite nuanced religio-political differences. This has been done to highlight how even at this fine-grained level, threading-through religious differences and desires adds a significant layer of complication to communities with political ambitions. However, I recognise that these examples were more

representative of the FCs I worked with because although they contained and engaged with marginalised folks, a lot of the people involved were downwardly-mobile white, middle-class folks. Perhaps the change that I was able to work upon myself was due to the relatively gentle challenges that I was being confronted with. An interesting area of further research would involve analysing FCs with a leaning towards openness in their structure but with a greater array of members with their theologies more tightly knotted to their political identities through - for example - commitment to black, feminist, or queer liberation theologies. Is theographic change as easy or acceptable to the subject whose political and theological identities are more strongly bound up in one another? Is it as acceptable for the open space to be a fluid hub of affinity groups, or is it a place for the member dealing with marginalisation to begin to vehemently voice directives for political solidarity?

Reconstituting openness

By structuring a FC to be more open to difference and horizontal in its decision-making - so as to involve subjects from differing perspectives in dialogue about and the practice of common purpose and processes - conflict can arise. However, accommodating openness can also create opportunities for subjective change and new kinds of intersubjective relations within and beyond the community. When FCs look to increase openness in their structure and practices they generate spaces through which subjects do their theography. They provide space for subjects to enact and think through their religious praxis and trigger new perceptions and qualities of religious significance. So far, I have assessed how these spaces change and are changed by subjective praxis. However, as the subjects that compose these spaces change - and as they begin to perceive more clearly what the FC does, how it is structured, and how it affects them - I argue that there is a demand for the FC structure and collective practices to be engaged in an iterative process of transformation as well. Collective engagement with a structure that is used to nuance subjective praxis can reach a point - or be presented with a decision to make - where there is a broad sense among members that the FC structure would be more useful if its structural commitment to openness was nuanced or reconstituted.

I will provide an example of structural interventions regarding openness from each type of FC that I worked with. This will underscore the complex framing of openness that exists in FCs and that this requires significant work to maintain, generating various conditions upon and changing styles of openness. This also illustrates how that in finding a way to make openness work in FCs, certain practices and levels of commitment are demanded; although a religio-political community can set-up to be welcoming to difference and affirming of horizontalism, this does not mean that exclusions (though they may be soft and implicit rather than hard and explicit) do not arise.

1) In the Ezra Community, in response to the conflict between those wanting a deeper commitment to developing a network of hospitality houses and those less dedicated to this idea, Ron and Barbara were reconfiguring the relationship of their desire for openness to the processes of the community. They maintained a desire to be open to difference (in terms of identity, political goals, and theology) and to have democratic decision making processes. However, they began to pair this desire for openness with more stringent conditions of membership; openness would be available, but only once potential members had been theo-politically vetted. Not long before my time with the community ended, Ron told me that he had started talking to his connections in more established New Monastic communities to get their ideas on how to begin formulating a clearer, more checklist-style membership agreement. This was to replace the 'working document' that the community had at the moment - which expressed various characteristics of a shalom-theology lifestyle - with a more defined vision of what the community was supposed to achieve and how they would go about doing that (see Appendix C). The conditions of membership that were being outlined in this new document were fine-grained. For example, in one of the last conversations I had with Ron he explained to me how finances would be restructured in the community. A high percentage of people's income would be demanded in order to provide for the needs of a network of hospitality houses. He was also developing various clauses so that there was procedure regarding fair reimbursement should someone decide to leave the community. Hence, the kind of openness that the community was aiming for was still relatively radical, Ron and Barbara were clear that they did not think that their praxis

would stay the same indefinitely. Democratic decision making processes and shifts in collective praxis would be part of the future of the community. However, they felt that in order to begin addressing the issues that concerned them both within their neighbourhood and the church, there needed to be a clear, common starting point to begin harnessing the power of collective action. It strikes me that this is a move to an anarchist or affinity-group model of organising where an issue or action around which to mobilise is usually identified in advance and is what draws participants into a group (such as climate change, ad-busting, or squatting) (Chesters and Welsh, 2006; McDonald, 2002). Openness to difference and democracy are prized values in these groups and although people may not be formally excluded, there is a process of soft exclusion where people not interested enough in the core issue will probably work out the group is not for them and leave. However, the Ezra Community add a relatively hard exclusion process to this anarchist model by presenting potential members with a list of demands before allowing them to become part of the group's processes.

2) At Exeter Church, change in response to conflict was less apparent in mundane structural terms. The processes of relating to one another through the rotating leadership structure, the encouraging of one-to-one relationships, and the prioritisation of group discussion as both a religious and political act remained staple practices. However, the conflicts that arose through these processes - like the confusion over exactly what openness serves to achieve in the community - began to hone the way in which spaces that the church convened were talked about and framed. For instance, much of the material that I have written about the church in this thesis, which analyses its *raison d'être*, practices, and outputs has been presented to the leadership team and discussed with the church as a whole and through individual relationships. The conflicts that I have experienced or observed created opportunities for me to produce language that I could disseminate through the community, changing expectations regarding the practice of the community's commitment to openness. This input did not come solely from myself however. For example, an opportunity to observe the reframing of the church's conception of openness was found through communal decision-making processes regarding the relationship to the broader network. It had become apparent -

due to the network leadership's interactions with another church in the network - that the network leadership was keen to see new ways of being church come about but had a point at which they would end relationships with churches over doctrinal differences. Given that members of Exeter Church's leadership team perceived the relationship as being one of support, dialogue, accountability, and safeguarding rather than one of doctrinal enforcement, a whole-church discussion was convened regarding whether Exeter Church should remain part of the network. The discussion helped to hone an idea of what Exeter Church's model was set up to achieve and why this meant that coming under the jurisdiction of doctrinal enforcers was problematic. A church in the network had been asked to leave because a woman in their leadership team was gay and in a relationship. Although many members of Exeter Church were aggrieved that the network had excluded someone for being gay, this was not the core idea that emerged from the whole-church discussion as a reason to think about leaving the network. The main reason to think about leaving stemmed from reaching a realisation collectively that Exeter Church was a space through which to do theography and that the aim of the space was to be a supportive place to do that. The network leaders were saying that for a FC to remain distinctly Christian, it had to enforce a set of beliefs. If the church would not, then the network leadership would, and if this was met with dissent then sanctions would follow. In the discussion at Exeter Church there was agreement that enforcing belief would lead to a small group taking responsibility for communicating the particularities of these beliefs. This would have the effect of alienating people from their faith praxis by erasing practices of mutual reflection and discussion from the church in favour of preaching. This would make the church a less safe place through which people could reflect upon and share their praxis honestly. By clarifying the kind of openness that the community wanted to foster - a safe space in which trusting relationships allowed members to work through their faith praxis - Exeter Church had to consider severing connections with a network that showed signs of wanting to control belief and practice.

3) Regarding the conferences, I am less able to make an assessment regarding how the approach to openness was structurally changed in these settings. To

do this effectively I would have to go to them the year after and have access to planning meetings where structural changes would be discussed, as well as engaging in participant observation amongst participants to see how they co-produced the space. However, I can comment on the effect that earlier conferences had on changing my approach to (and understanding of) how I might co-produce the openness in these event-spaces. This highlights ways in which other subjects ideas regarding the co-production of these event-spaces might change and impact on their practices in the co-production of openness at conferences. The theographic work that Conference #1 enabled me to do, meant that I approached Conferences #2 and #3 with a different attitude. Conference #1 had highlighted two things to me: (i) religious affect produced by embodied theologies could have a significant impact on the ability of a participant to take part in a space that convened difference, and that negotiating between embodied and discursive theology was needed to find ways to become open to the differences represented in the space, and (ii) that in practicing alongside difference - despite an initial sense of distance - it was possible that new religious affects and discourses could be produced unexpectedly. By recognising these two factors regarding the coming together of difference to co-produce religio-political spaces, it is possible for the subject to move from a pessimistic stance on the ability of a gathering marked by difference to build community (and/or activist affinities) to one of hopefulness. None of the conferences that I attended had systematic ways of encouraging activism beyond the conference space, rather they encouraged people to forge connections with others who were local to them or interested in similar issues. So it is crucial that an attitude of hopefulness and of being energised by the possibilities of the space be fostered so as to enable the connections that begin to form community, affinity groups, and movements to come about. The conferences would not have had this effect on participants uniformly, many people at the conferences that I spoke to still voiced confusion and a sense of loneliness regarding how to find a praxis after the conference that blended their faith and political concerns. Perhaps for some people the conferences left them totally disillusioned with faith and activism (although I did not have any conversations in which this sentiment was voiced unequivocally). Moreover, the hope-engendering changes the conferences enabled me to make to my own subjectivity were not by any

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means a final and conclusive representation of how people responded to difference at the conference. Each subject there would have been negotiating their own theographic negotiations. However, the conference spaces contained the ingredients for changes that could help subjects to nudge it towards it being both a more radically open, or a more closed configuration that had a more direct approach to producing political outputs, depending on how these myriad co-productions converged.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that I would be using theography as a lens through which to critically examine the way that FCs frame, maintain, and alter practices of openness that welcome difference and that bring difference together in the co-creation of religious ritual and horizontal decision-making. This analysis would highlight the ways in which practicing openness in FCs is complex and that although democratising leadership and affirming plurality could lead to greater justness in and political impact through FCs, openness also engenders clashes in praxis which need to be resolved. By evaluating these clashes and attempts to resolve them, I could explore Connolly's (1999) contention that religious practices can be used to enable the practice of a postsecular subjectivity; one that can alter itself in order to work more harmoniously alongside difference. I argued that what Connolly (1999) desires from religious practices is theography - an ability to critically reflect upon praxis and to shift that praxis by using techniques such as meditation or prayer. By analysing theographic practice in the context of the FCs that I worked with I could assess whether Connolly's lauding of religious practices was justified; did they help subjects to resolve the clashes that come about from increased practice with difference? In addition to assessing the efficacy of religious techniques for shifting praxis and resolving confrontations, I could ascertain how religious practice might add complications to a community that also had ambitions in manifesting political solidarities beyond itself. To conclude this chapter I shall firstly reflect on what my analysis revealed about the nature of theography and what it can enable the subject to do. Secondly, I will go on to suggest what this means for the generation of postsecular subjectivities and the practicing of a postsecular ethos in FCs. Finally, I will examine how theography

highlighted the different ways in which a religious excess is evoked through different FC structures and how this affects their political practice.

1) Regarding theography, the way in which it emerged as a practice through the various contexts and events that I recount in this chapter highlighted that it can be applied to the subject so as to shift their sensibilities in at least two different ways:

(i) Theography can be used as a reflexive practice as part of the relatively isolated, withdrawn techniques that Connolly (1999) and Foucault (1991; 2005; see also Martin et al., 1988) highlight in their work on religion. Theography can simply involve the subject reflecting on competing sources-of, relationships-between, and framings-of religious significance - in a space unrelated to the context of their religious practice - so as to come to a new understanding of how their praxis should look, or how they should re-engage a context to which a faith praxis is pertinent. This can involve little-to-no religious ritual, although it can certainly overlap with it. For instance, once the subject has done their reflexive negotiation between different sources of religious significance, they may engage in techniques that Foucault (2005) would label as 'concentration'. These might involve trying to increase a sense of oneness with a principle or belief through a repetitive mental rehearsal of a new way of thinking about religious significance, or by creating and/or repeating a mantra. This kind of theography emerged in my negotiation in Exeter Church, when I twice shifted my position on how I could interact with the way in which the open space was constructed. These shifts were largely achieved through my own reflexive processes, sitting alone and thinking about the different framings of religious praxis in play until I could see a way in which I could make sense of the space and re-engage it. I did not seek to involve practices of concentration in the way that Foucault frames them, but once I had come to my conclusions, I wrote them down in my research diary. Writing or journalling may represent a kind of concentration; corralling my thoughts into connected sentences so as to undergird a sense of certainty that my shift in sensibility was worthwhile. Returning to this writing (as I did on a few occasions) to re-read it and try to understand afresh what I understood the FC space and its relation to my praxis to be may also count as a kind of concentration. Reviewing this writing helped me to feel confident in

feeding back to the community more broadly about how I felt the FC was developing its collective praxis and enabled me to feel less closed to further iterative shifts in praxis because I had organised thoughts to return to and work upon. This type of theography is done periodically and in isolation, perhaps as a planned, recurring activity as part of a broader religious praxis or perhaps reactively, in response to religious significances which disturb the subject's praxis. It may not be done immediately once the subject has experienced a dissonance in their religious praxis, but may take some time to be engaged with as the subject slowly becomes more aware of something happening below the radar of their consciousness that grates in the midst of their religious praxis. The overlaps with religious practice - bonding the subject more tightly to a particular framing of, or way of sensing religious significance - may be extend beyond practices of concentration and into things like prayer or singing. This can be seen in the example I gave of the Ezra Community, as they allowed the practice prayer to shape the resonance they felt between community unity and an experience of the Holy Spirit.

ii) Theography can also involve a more conscious engagement with practice itself. Although based on reflections made apart from a group, theography can also be used to intervene in the subject's practice as it is happening, usually in group practices of discussion or ritual. This type of theography is typically deployed when the subject has committed to altering their practice despite the fact that more habitual modes of being are difficult to break out of and jar against new ideals regarding praxis. This may involve letting go of anxieties about the subject's integrity, or trying to shut-down trains of thought that are based on unsubstantiated assumptions about difference. For example, in my experience at Conference #1, I practiced this type of theography after my initial experiences on the first evening of the conference unsettled my preconceptions about what the worship space would do for me. After reflecting upon the inconsistencies between my theoretical and embodied theologies that the worship space raised, I tried to cut-in on the embodied responses I continued to have regarding religious difference during the rest of the conference. This involved an internal conversation, restating the inconsistencies that I had uncovered to myself and bearing with the discomfort that many following spaces caused. I worked to sideline negative thoughts about what was going on around

me and practiced with others in various workshop, discussion, and ritual activities so as to embody unity with the difference that the space represented. This type of theography is done in an attempt to be open to the possibility that the space might bring forth unforeseen religious significances. It is usually done to address a well-defined source of dissonance that is identified through the more isolated, self-reflexive theography I have already mentioned as the subject seeks to negotiate between conflicting sources of religious significance.

By recognising these different ways of practicing theography, I have pointed out that theography has both limitations and benefits for FCs. Limitations include the draining labour-intensiveness of its iterative nature, the lag between identifying dissonance and reflection upon that dissonance, and the way in which it can obfuscate and/or calcify conflict. It can direct subjects to a potentially confusing array of religious significance, particularly by highlighting the potential for religious significance to arise both within (religious ritual and deep relationships) and beyond a FC (theological imperative to political solidarities), creating sometimes seemingly impassable tensions. However - beneficially - it can help to resolve conflict and enable subjects to engage with sources of religious significance in ways that exemplify a hopefulness, opening them up to unexpected desires that shift and reframe their praxis. Nevertheless, I have largely recognised the possibilities of theography in the context of FCs that want to open up to greater difference and democratic processes. Theography is used - to varying degrees and with variable success - to explore and sometimes undergird these practices of openness[22]. An interesting way to further explore the implications of theography as a concept would be to unpack how it plays out in FCs that are less amenable to its poststructural epistemological implications. How does theography play out in communities that are not striving towards openness to difference an democracy? Although I have shown it can be used as a calcifying technique, this is done largely unwittingly in the contexts that I examine. What about if it was more deliberately used as a

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[22] Although I did not ask whether my research participants would call what they did theography, when I explained the conceptual role theography played in my work, many of them seemed to understand why I was using the term and largely accepted theography's epistemological connotations revealed significant processes that were at work in their community structures and relationships. I would argue that many of them consciously built theographical processes into their FC structure without calling it theography.

way of engendering divisions whilst suppressing recognition of its inherent deconstructive epistemology in order to legitimise these divisions? On a more hopeful note; ways of opening more recalcitrant FCs up to difference have historical precedent, FCs and religious institutions have been persuaded away from oppressive political overlaps that aligned faith with the denial of civil rights or the support of slave-holding (Craig, 1992; Reuver, 1988; Roberts, 2005). What role can theography play in these changes? In the previous chapter I explained the positions that the Ezra Community and the Conferences took-up so as to engage with a broad network of FCs that included politically conservative elements. What - practically - do the relationships look like between FCs (such as the ones I have worked with) or even FBOs as they try to reach out to less hospitable expressions of faith in order to broker wider transformations through faith networks towards practices of openness and solidarity? How does theography play a role in these negotiations and to what extent can they begin to persuade more fundamentalist quarters that there can be a margin of fluidity in faith praxis that theographic practices can enable them to explore?

2) These hopeful ruminations on theography underline its ability to generate postsecular subjectivities. However, the evaluation of conflicts that I have carried out in this chapter also highlights the importance that FC structure - and the values this instills - can play in the construction of postsecular subjects. I argue that the focus of writing on postsecularism from authors such as Connolly (1999) and also Coles (1997; 2001) has been the subject. These theorists, although highlighting the need for the subject to be open to difference and to reject divisive identifiers, also argue that a level of openness that leads to passivity in the face of injustice is unacceptable. Rather, they seem to argue that at the heart of a postsecular subjectivity is a kernel of anger against injustice and an awareness of the complex interconnectedness of the world that drives the subject forward to test out unexpected partnerships in order to learn better ways to create just communities. The content of this kernel - as far as it is outlined in theory - can often be vague. However, in practice it can be constituted in a variety of different ways, leading to different capacities, spaces, and moments for postsecular ethos to be practiced. For instance, for the founders of the Ezra

Community this kernel was constituted by a wide range of expectations; hospitality, frugality, neighbourliness, and interdependence were prized and were to be practiced *alongside* a desire to be democratic and open to difference. However, in Exeter Church this kernel was more about refusing to demand that the other should meet the expectations of the majority, with less coherent ideas about how to practice justice both within and beyond the community; a fundamental commitment to being non-fundamental about religion. The different religious rituals that were blended with these kernels showed how theography and postsecular subject-building can overlap in FCs so as to create a myriad of approaches to and conflicts within the introduction of openness and horizontalism. It also showed the way that religious subjects work upon themselves so as to work better alongside difference by using religious practices[23]. Postsecular subjectivities *can* be produced in FCs and through ritual, but there must be close analysis and good epistemological tools in order to discern how blending ritual and structures of openness can also go awry and lead to hardening of divisions - or the realisation of new ones - that more open FCs are trying to avoid. Theography is good for analysing the way subjects manifest postsecular values to navigate the complex religious geographies that they shape and are shaped by. But what about settings in which postsecular values are being performed in a different way? So far I have looked at the value of subjective transformation in order to create *communities.* These communities also have a commitment to political intervention and to exploring the possibilities of religious praxis. What about the ways in which postsecular values are being framed slightly differently in more directly political and ethical movements (Burbridge, 2013; Epstein, 2002; Tosi and Vitale, 2009)? How does theography help religious subjects to either leave certain religious excesses at the door in order to focus solely on a political issue (Wills, 2006)? How does it help them to join with activists who have different motivations to co-create a temporary, bricolage identity or set of values that addresses particular political or ethical concerns?

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[23] This underscores the need for a theory of religious practice that exceeds the more affect-focussed framing of 'collective individuation' as it illustrates the way in which subjects can use ritual in conjunction with self-reflexivity rather than as a tool to entrench extant belief.

3) In all of the FCs that I interacted with, religious excess - by which I mean an affect, discourse, or practice that was framed as being a source of transcendence - had different predominant framings. At the Ezra Community, the sense of affection and unity that Ron and Barbara had for other community members was attributed to transcendence; it was attributed to the presence of the Holy Spirit, an affect brought about by the divine. At Conference #1, I experienced a sudden change in my state of consciousness and although I did not directly attribute it to a source of transcendence, it was certainly an excessive event generated through religious ritual that led me to reconsider my religious praxis. In Exeter Church, an affective excess was generated when engaging in the ethics of the open-space, creating a space that felt safe, through which the transcendent could alter praxes as they extended beyond the community. Although all of these excesses are very different, they all point - to varying degrees - to the intervention of some sort of transcendence in space. This is important because attributing religious significance to different events, affects, and practices has varied implications for praxis (although the gravity of these implications is tempered in conjunction with negotiation of their importance in different spaces and times with other sources of religious significances that the subject encounters). For instance at the Ezra Community, attributing the feeling of unity to the Holy Spirit held up processes that would have fast-forwarded Ron and Barbara's political aspirations. They considered this affect at least as important as their own political plans at the time that I was with them. This shows that religious excess is extremely important in shaping the praxis of a political community on top of straightforward political dialogue. Theography is again useful for exploring this as it shows how as the reframing of religious excess changes - through negotiation between different sources of religious significance - so too does praxis. This is significant when considering the array of spaces in which subjects practicing a very open theography are negotiating between sources of religious significance both within and beyond their community, blurring the construction of the religious subject across sacred/secular boundaries. As FCs blur sacred/secular boundaries, this practice raises questions about the point of FCs; are they about preserving a set of beliefs, or are they about helping subjects find a holistic praxis? Future research could hone-in on how FCs are finding a way between those two possible

purposes and how they deal with the question of distinctiveness within their tradition. If a FC is about helping people to relate to the transcendent in a way that makes sense to them - which can take an almost infinite number of forms - what does it mean for that FC to be part of a particular religion?

CHAPTER 7: ACTIVISM AND SUBVERTING FAITH COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

Introduction

In this thesis, I have sought to challenge ways of framing the religion/politics interface that overbalance academic enquiry towards top-down religious institutions and power struggles at the local scale over the encoding of religious space (Connolly, 2008; Hackworth, 2010a/b; MacDonald, 2002; Vincett, 2013). In chapter five I analysed how religious subjects are forming new communities that seek to subvert the hierarchy of institutions and in chapter six I demonstrated that the politics of FCs are not just dominated by dialogue over encoding religious space, but shaped by broader ideas about praxis that extend beyond the boundary of the FC. I have used theography in both cases to illustrate how religious subjects - as they negotiate between different sources of religious significance drawn from both within and beyond their FC - embody a practical deconstruction of the religion/politics interface framed as being exclusively related to institutions or the construction of worship spaces. My critique of these conceptions of the religion/politics interface is based on an epistemology - drawn from political geography and buttressed by my empirical work - that positions the religious subject as part of a network of relationships that includes but extends beyond their FC (Dittmer, 2007; Ivakhiv, 2006; Sutherland, 2016). I argue that the subject forms and acts upon their religious praxis through this network, drawing religious significance from, and performing in deliberately religious ways in spaces beyond those convened by their FC. Commentators on the practice of religion argue that as institutional models of Christianity subside, it is becoming apparent that an increasing number of postchristendom FCs are finding ways to encourage their members to extend their network of relationships into the realms of activism and incorporate activist practices and spaces into religious praxis (Baker, 2013; Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Frost, 2006).

In this chapter I am going to address my third research question: how does [a] degree of openness [in the structure of a FC] affect the political praxis of community members? I want to examine how the structure of FCs affect the

practices of their members as they endeavour to blend their religious praxis into activist spaces beyond the FC, engaging a broader network of relationships, focussing particularly on those of political solidarity. The subject is caught up in a network of relationships which they must negotiate in order to decide upon their political praxis; who to show solidarity with, and how best to manifest that solidarity (Blühdron, 2006; Häkli and Kallio, 2014)? I want to appraise the way in which religious praxis blends into and shapes that political process and how the connection to a FC - its structures and resources - affects the partial activist orientation of religious praxis. In sum, I want to assess how religious praxis blurs into practices of activism and how FCs might guide and assist this process as well as examining the ways in which subjects theographically rework the trajectories of practice that FC structures intend to send them on.

In order to conduct this assessment, I want to speak into the debate in human geography concerning postsecularism. I want to engage this debate because it has been argued that postsecular movements have enabled FCs to buttress solidarities beyond themselves by creating an opportunity for religious subjects to embody a critique of institutional religion's "preoccupation with delimiting sacred space" (Cloke et al., 2016, p.508), blending religious praxis into activist networks. Identifying spaces or movements as postsecular can be problematic because - as Coles (1997; 2001) points out - postsecularism is more accurately defined as a subjective practice or ethos (I have expanded postsecular theory in both chapter five and six). Coles defines postsecularism as an ethos that enables the subject to embrace a fluidity of identity, unlocking a radical self-criticality regarding their ideological entanglements, and opening up new ways for them to frame and practice justice in forums which convoke significant plurality. A postsecular ethos entreats the subject to exercise fidelity towards their anger at injustice and to the other that undermines their praxis at the same time[24]. However, analysts examining movements in which a plurality of religious and secular actors coalesce describe them as postsecular based on the idea that a modicum of postsecular ethos has eroded the recalcitrance that can be redoubled by felt difference and misrepresentation in order to allow unlikely partnerships to happen. Partnerships that represent a/religious plurality are

[24] I have explored this idea more fully in both chapters five and six.

conducive atmospheres for the emergence and identification of a postsecular ethos because they present opportunities to reconcile or transcend jarring identities and ideologies.

By analysing the relation between FC structure and subjective praxis, I aim to produce knowledge about the most effective ways to enable religious subjects to forge solidarities beyond the FC and the role that the FC can play in this. Conducting this analysis through the lens of the debate on postsecularism permits me to ask whether the partnerships and spaces that have been identified as arenas for the emergence of a postsecular ethos and as effective outlets for religious involvement in activism are necessarily what FCs should orient themselves towards. When religious praxis blurs out beyond the FC, subjects can sometimes be reticent to give up a performative religious element to their praxis. For instance, whilst the Occupy movement occupied space next to St.Paul's Cathedral, one of the events they held there was the Sermon on the Steps. As Cloke et al. (2016) highlight, this gave religious subjects an opportunity to discourse sincerely on the religious significance of the occupation whilst simultaneously generating a space to represent a critique of the economic and political establishment to which the wider gathering of occupiers subscribed. The Sermon on the Steps represents a moment in which a broad movement including multiple actors and a contested but nevertheless comprehensive goal - undermining neoliberalism - allowed distinctly religious practices to form something of the texture of the collective praxis of the broader movement. This enabled religious subjects to practice in a distinctively religious way as they extended their religious praxis across the boundary of their FCs into a more public forum. However, holding to religious performativity can also lead to breakdown in collaboration. As Tosi and Vitale (2009) note, collaboration between Catholics and Marxists in movements against nuclear armaments broke down when Catholic activists refused to use more violent methods of direct action. So is it always possible or desirable for religious subjects to blend their praxis into spaces that generate the possibility for postsecular praxis? Moreover, by being religiously distinctive, are religious subjects blending their praxis into activist arenas always a welcome and helpful element? Are there ways that religious activism beyond the FC can look distinctly un-postsecular?

Therefore, in the rest of this chapter I want to analyse four different FC structures and how a different type of activist practice emerges from each one. Although none of the FCs evidenced only one of the four activist practices that I outline - most blended two or more - the pairings of FC/practice that I have arranged are selected to highlight the disjunctures that can emerge between the trajectories of practice on which FC structures are supposed to send subjects and the practical outcomes that subjects produce through their theographically-inflected praxis. This is to underline the need for theographic analysis at the religion/politics interface regarding the role that FCs play in shaping subjective praxis beyond the FC, and the ways in which subjects negotiate these structures, sometimes undermining expected results. The four FC/practice pairings I will examine will be; the Conferences/existing affinity groups, Exeter Church/"leave-at-the-door" assimilation, the Ezra Community/politics of place, Institutional Church[25]/subversive leadership. Within this discussion of FC structure I will evaluate how the structure emerges from a founding bias of being open or closed towards blurring religious boundaries. I will assess how this bias and structure overlaps with community members' ability to evidence a postsecular ethos and desire to perform in distinctively religious ways. Examining how subject's theographic negotiation of these factors produces different kinds of activism will enable me to reflect upon how effectively FCs are helping subjects to engage in activism and how the trajectories they intend to send subjects on might be reimagined so as to hone the relationship between FC structure and subjects' activism. To conclude, I will reflect upon how there are multiple ways to extend religious praxis beyond the boundary of the FCs, and how comparing and evaluating the complexities and outcomes of these different approaches to activism might help religious subjects and communities to better think through the practicalities of forging solidarities beyond the boundaries of FCs.

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[25] I have included the Institutional Church as a FC in this chapter because I met quite a few people at the conferences whose practices overlapped with the institutional church and whose praxis was more significantly shaped by that community. Also, it provides more examples of interesting disjunctures between institutional structure and intention, and subjects' praxis.

Exeter Church and the Conferences: Constraints in 'organicism'

In this section I want to analyse the structures of Exeter Church and the conferences together before I proceed to examine the ways in which different activist practices emerged from them. I want to analyse them together because I argue that both attempted to maintain a model that prioritised openness and horizontality and conceived of this model, not only as a way of subverting marginalising institutional hierarchies - highlighting religious praxis as multiple and iterative - but as a way of encouraging and supporting activism. Also, the founders and organisers of these spaces thought that this model would help subjects to disassemble institutional models of religious space as being trapped within church buildings, generating co-creative relationships between the FC space and activist practice in forming a religious praxis. Some political theorists have advocated for this kind of model for communities and movements, arguing that flattening hierarchies and sidelining top-down leadership helps to engender forms of activism that are more inclusive and sensitive to the marginalised groups that they intend to reach out to (Della Porta, 2005; 2009; Juris, 2005; Sullivan, 2005). However, with FCs there is another level of complexity to consider when creating a community structure that can encourage activism beyond the boundary of the FC. Many political communities and movements are issue or solidarity orientated; the specific group they want to reach out to or issue they want to address is predefined. Tackling a specific issue or evidencing solidarity with a particular group is more clearly written into their *raison d'être* although there may be contestations over the specificities of praxis. This is not so frequently the case with FCs. Because the priority in Exeter Church and the conferences was less about focussing activist practice on a particular issue and more about creating a safe space through which people could discuss and develop their praxis, they attracted a variety of members - all with different ideas to one another as to what sort of activism they wanted to be involved in (or not). For example, at the conferences, activist concerns ranged from protesting austerity, to combatting climate change, to direct action against arms fairs. I argue that this range of different interests in both FCs, along with a lack of process and structure for helping subjects to move from discernment to decision-making and practice, presented the rotating leadership of these FCs with a complicated task in developing the activist practices of members. Before

going on to talk about the ways Exeter Church and the conferences managed to help subjects develop activist practices, I want to look at how their structures created some constraints in this regard.

Both Exeter Church and the conferences operated on an invitational model regarding activism. Space was convened for members to talk about their experiences of activism or their thoughts about praxis and invite others in the FC to join them in what they were doing, but the space was convened with the expectation that no-one would be pressured into practicing in a way that they were not comfortable with or able to do. The organisers of these spaces hoped that participants would be doing theography out-loud together and that as transformations of self and praxis emerged in individuals, this would spread - through dialogue - to others in the space, creating clusters of affinity. Exeter Church and the conferences were supposed to be factories for religio-political affinity groups, not only helping individuals to transform and make sense of their religious praxis but creating micro-communities within the community that would focus on co-created, experimental religious praxes that extended into activist practice. However, the processes of dialogue that I experienced in some of these spaces sometimes seemed limited in their ability to create a sense of affinity and common purpose. For example, at Conference #1, on the last day there was a session for planning actions that might come out of the conference. There was a series of stations all around the hall that were given different discussion titles and participants were invited to join whichever one they wanted. I joined one called 'Changing Unjust Power Structures'. Only about thirty minutes was given for the discussion and within that time nothing came out from the group as a specific issue to tackle or a suggestion for a particular campaign or form of protest or direct action. There were some vague things written down on a piece of paper such as "Give the marginalised a voice" and "Smash the kyriarchy". There were no personal details (i.e. email addresses, phone numbers, facebook pages) shared so as to keep the discussion going between the nine or ten of us who had gathered at the station after the conference. Similar sessions - with similar outcomes - were held at Conferences #2 and #3, and a few times in the first couple of years of working with Exeter Church as well.

Exeter Church and the conferences were trying to create spaces not dissimilar to those convened by the social movements studied by della Porta (2005; 2009), Juris (2005), and Sullivan (2005). These writers state that social movements have been experimenting with collective processes that are less concerned with coercing everyone into a stringent ideology and more about finding common concerns and co-creating new, impermanent, ends-oriented political identities and praxes. Sullivan (2005) in particular argues that these new kinds of identities and praxes come out of collective processes that include discussion - although this is not formally programmed into proceedings - mixed in with an organic upswell of parties, meals, musical performances, and rituals. Although perhaps more structured or programmed, all of these practices were also part of the FCs that I worked with, blending discussion about action in with other ways of relating to one another and building a sense of community. However, other political theorists have argued that these more 'organic' approaches to developing activism can lead to an interminable lack of decisiveness regarding action, arguing that core values, clear leadership, and organised processes are necessary in order to engender effective activist practice (Clough, 2014; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Routledge, 2003a). I would argue that although different kinds of activism did emerge from both Exeter Church and the conferences, at times it could seem that they were not terribly effective in generating a torrent of activism. Whilst talking to Dean, the main leader of Exeter Church, he said:

"Probably, compared to our ability to create a welcoming atmosphere and make people feel included we are maybe a bit weaker on that, yeah. It would be nice to see that side of things develop though, it would be good to see some concrete issues emerge that little groups of us are working on together and supporting each other in. I would hope that it would become clearer to people what they wanna do and we'd start having some maybe more tangible impact."
- Appendix B, #16

In both Exeter Church and the conferences, there were understandable mitigating factors in this regard. At the conferences, a lack of unified activist direction emerged - in part - from the fact that they were attracting people from all over the UK, meaning regular meetings and co-ordination on action was difficult. At Exeter Church, the small size of the church and the fact that the

majority of the members were involved in running church meetings at various times - as well as a number of them being parents to young children - meant that many of those involved were time-poor and did not always have the energy to instigate discussion about activism. Therefore, participants in the open, organic space for putting forth ideas about activism, did not always have the energy or the will to begin generating momentum around an issue and branch out beyond the FC. This shows there are limitations to the ideas that Della Porta (2005; 2009), Juris (2005), and Sullivan (2005) put forward regarding the need for more organic spaces of activist fomentation. Resonating with my account of the Conference #1 discussion group (the one called 'Changing Unjust Power Structures', where no concrete decisions regrading action were made), removing formal structure from discussion about activism can sometimes result in the discussion being a vacuum rather than a space of creation. This does not always have to be the case - sometimes a more freeform gathering can help generate activist practices[26] - but without a process or structure such as a chair, or vibe-spotters, or voting, things can sometimes get off track, and people can use the space to vent their opinions or frustrations without harnessing the diversity of the group in a co-creative way to hone in on a plan of action.

However, introducing a mite of structure and process does not have to mean increased hierarchy, or stringent debating rules, or ideological unity, as some theorists have argued (Gutman and Thomson, 1996; Rawls, 1996). At Conference #2 I met some participants who had come over from Brazil, and were part of a sister organisation to the British one that was organising the conference. They had a very similar *raison d'être* to the British organisation but in terms of their activities they were less focussed on creating safe spaces in which people could experiment with their praxis, and much more concentrated on organising people as part of big campaigns. These campaigns involved direct action, protest, and lobbying on land rights, police brutality, and agribusiness. They described themselves as a network of networks, with

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[26] For example, at Exeter Church my wife and myself used one of the open-spaces created by the church to put a call out, asking if anyone wanted to join us at a large anti-austerity protest in London. One friend did join us and said whilst we were in the bus en-route to the protest: "It's so great that I feel like I can do this and this is part of Church life and that God's in it all....that I can feel brave enough to be myself and enjoy it and know I'm not going to be judged, even though not everyone is totally into the whole protest thing."
-Appendix B, #18, informal conversation with Lisa, member of Exeter Church

decisions about potential actions and praxis being discussed in seventeen local groups before being debated - largely online - at a national level in order to galvanise the whole network around a particular issue. They prized democracy and consensus decision making, aiming for the agreement of all participants whilst also addressing marginal concerns. This is much more like the anarchist organising that Graeber (2002; 2011) and Burton (2012) write about, that seeks to welcome diversity and difference whilst also channeling discussion towards decisions regarding the nature of action. This type of organising has been criticised for the ways it can be manipulated by those who choose to dominate it (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012), but it does show a different way past the difficulties that the spaces had in increasing their activism. In addition, they also incorporated some of the more 'organic' practices that Della Porta, Juris, and Sullivan champion but used them to compliment and co-create the more organised spaces rather than being the exclusive activity of the group. Concerning the groups I was working with however, subjects were finding ways - different to both consensus models and total organicism - in order to negotiate the structural faults in their FCs and blend their religious praxis into activism, which I shall examine in the next two sections.

The Conferences and existing affinity groups

At the conferences, the main way that the organisers hoped that they would steer participants into activist practices was by convening space that would enable affinity groups to form, coalescing around issues and locales, and emerging from informal, 'organic' dialogue. They had modest success in this endeavour. At Conference #2 there were talks from a couple of 'home-grown' affinity groups; one that was focussed on direct action against arms fairs, and another that had come together to address what they could do in Sheffield, and had begun to tackle food poverty in the area. Both had formed after meeting at Conference #2 over previous years. However, subjects at the conferences were also finding ways to blend their religious practice into activism by joining with organisations, movements, or affinity groups that existed independently of the conferences, but were incorporated into the conference spaces as provocations. Part of the provocative element of the conferences was to invite speakers and workshop leaders that were experienced activists - of different

faiths and none - to draw conference participants' attention to different social justice issues and activist tactics. However, many of these speakers represented a particular organisation or movement and were able to use the space, not only as a opportunity to raise awareness but also to recruit. Therefore, the conferences did not just act as a place to think through individual praxis and find a safe space in which affinity could be built with others through dialogue - co-creating new forms of religious activism - but also as a place for subjects to join-up with established activist collectives. By talking with some of the activists who were working out their religious praxis beyond the conferences like this, I was able to understand how they were negotiating their own ways of blurring their religious praxis into activist arenas that subverted the trajectory that those organising the conference space expected them to follow. It also helped me to analyse the process of reworking the boundaries of religious space that subjects went through, highlighting the theographic work that went into this and the uneven expression of a postsecular ethos that this led to.

At Conference #1, I met Mary, who was part of an organisation that was involved in active pacifism in Palestine, advocating for and accompanying people who had been made vulnerable by Israeli occupation. When I asked her how her faith motivated her activism, she said:

"It's not clear really, but if I was pushed I probably would say that my activism motivates my faith. I'm not that sure what the point in having a faith would be if I wasn't dedicated to the issue [of contesting Israeli aggression against Palestine]. That's not how it's always been - it's not what attracted me to coming to church - but it's how it is now."
- Appendix B, #19, informal interview with Mary, participant at Conference #1

When I asked to her to explain a bit more what she meant by her activism motivating her faith, she said that she saw her activism as lending meaning to her faith practices. Her religious performances of praying, attending church, and reading the bible were a source of inspiration and made space for her to reflect on her activism. However, divorced from a cause to undergird, these practices would lack any point. In other words, she did not find these practices religiously significant in themselves, they were tools that empowered what she perceived to be God's work; which - as she explained - is liberating oppressed people.

This configuration of praxis was not where many of the participants I talked to at the conferences felt they were at. Many of them had prayed about and discussed social justice issues a lot, but felt that dialogue in their church (and even at the conferences) was not bringing them closer to blending their religious praxis into activism. When I asked Doreen - an activist who was part of another pacifist organisation that was focussed on protesting the UK's stockpiling of nuclear weapons - at Conference #1 what she liked about the organisation that she was part of, she said:

"I think what is really important is being with people I know and trust and who are really experienced."
- Appendix B, #20, informal interview with Doreen, participant at Conference #1

Her comment on being with other experienced activists illustrated something that was missing from the organic, open space-making that the conferences generated and was provided by extant organisations, movements, and affinity groups that emerged outside the conferences. This was namely guidance, mentoring, more structured organisation, and a more tangible way of converting faith praxis into activism. As I talked to a few people at the conferences who had become involved with other activist organisations through the conference space, they argued that these organisations had helped them to get caught up in a stream of practice that was already happening, flipping their relation to the conference space on its head. Instead of being a place from which co-created activist practice could emerge from religious reflection, the conferences became a place where ongoing activist practice could be recontextualised and honed through religious reflection. By joining these organisations, subjects were able to make a cleaner transition from being Christians, frustrated with a lack of activism in their praxis, to being religious activists. This shift transposed the performative, ritualistic, and dialogic elements of the conferences from being ends in themselves - or simply the extent of what could be classed as religious practice - to reflexive tools in an religio-activist practice. They became points of religious significance in a larger constellation of practices, blurring religious praxis across the FC boundary and co-constituting praxis between activist and reflexive spaces.

Despite the main aim of the conferences - creating a space for co-created affinity groups - being subverted a little, the conferences had still succeeded in creating a structure through which subjects could find a way to blur their religious praxis into activism, undermining institutional attempts to box sacred space within church buildings. Subjects were co-producing their religious praxis between (at least) two sources of religious significance; a theologically framed arena of activism (with other organisations), and a space of reflection, ritual, and affective spiritual experiences (at the conferences). Although some activists perceived the religious significance of this relationship to be skewed towards activism - rendering ritual practices meaningless without it - some had a more balanced approach in which the space of reflection was still very influential. As one activist said to me:

"I totally struggle with the idea of faith without activism. I think without activism we'd be missing out such a huge bit of what it means to follow Jesus. But then I also don't want to lose that aspect of prayer. In fact I think without prayer we can do a lot of damage, our activism can become very unloving, or we can burn ourselves out really easily, or lose perspective. I don't really want to be involved in anything unless I've prayed over it, tried to understand what the Bible might be saying about it, reflected for a long time on it to see if it's the right thing..."
- Appendix B, #21, informal interview with Harriet, participant at Conference #2

For these activists, the relationship between activism and the conference space was negotiated through strenuous theographic activity. Activism was often done with little reflection built-in; the focus was often on getting the job done. But the religious experiences and reflexive spaces of the conferences were crucial spaces for the emergence of alternative religious significances and framings that could reorient the subject as they took a break from activism. These religious experiences had to be considered for their meaning - and once that was decided upon - responded to accordingly, often writing what sometimes felt like challenging or conflicting reorientations towards the transcendent into the self. The quotes below illustrate this point:

"Sometimes when you're praying you just feel like God is asking you to wait, to not go ahead with a particular action for the minute. Or maybe He plants an idea in your head for something to do but you're really scared of it, but you know its the right thing..."
- Appendix B, #21

"Sometimes activism is scary, but prayer is a really great tool to help us discipline ourselves, so that when we come up against stuff that we are frightened of, we can follow through on what we know is right." [This activist was referring specifically to how she overcame her fear of police when taking part in direct actions such as die-ins or road-blocks so as to upset arms-fairs, or the transport of weapons].

- Appendix B, #22, notes on informal conversation with Imelda, a workshop leader at
  Conference #1

The conferences had succeeded in creating a way for subjects to subvert institutional delimiting of sacred space, helping subjects to blur their religious praxis into the realm of activism by connecting them to established activist collectives. This has been heralded as a way of buttressing solidarities beyond FCs, and as a marker of postsecular practice (Cloke et al., 2016). However, if postsecularism is defined as an ethos that the subject exhibits in order to reflexively transform themselves so as to better work alongside difference, there are two levels at which the conferences can be said to be succeeding or not in fostering this ethos:

1) A postsecular ethos was being exercised by many of the subjects joining with organisations outside of the conferences by being willing to combat anxiety over theological 'soundness' in exchange for theology-as-praxis. As Cloke et al. (2012) argue, one of the problems of contemporary Christianity is that certain expressions - particularly evangelicalism - have had a phobia of praxis. This phobia is partly constituted by an apprehension that as Christians try to accommodate activism into their praxis, their praxis becomes more politically distinctive than it is religiously distinctive. This has lead to a recalcitrance in religious praxis, with those who share this apprehension often walling their praxis off from activism, constraining it to prayer and proselytisation. Many of the activists I talked to at the conferences were working upon themselves to do away with this anxiety, acknowledging that it was part of their upbringing and that they had to combat it. However, in combatting it, they showed a willingness to work upon themselves in order to find new kinds of praxis that prioritised action over protecting a narrow vision of religious distinctiveness. They decided that they would rather run the risk of offending more conservative theological sensibilities than do nothing. They wanted to do theology as praxis - trying things out, getting it wrong, reflecting

on and praying about mistakes, trying something else - in the hope that they would do something good, forging solidarities beyond the FC, rather than being inactive and theologically 'sound' for fear of doing something bad. They were prepared to transform themselves by wrestling with their anxieties - which were sometimes fed by the churches they went to - in order to be able to better work alongside difference beyond the FC.

2) However, one of the noticeable things about the organisations that conference participants were joining with was that they were often the faith-based rather than the non-faith activist collectives that populated the conferences as provocations. These faith-based collectives seemed to take up the role of carrying out actions that had a performatively religious element or resonated heavily with biblical narratives. For example, one activist told me about an action they participated in, in which they whitewashed a UK government building, referencing Matthew 23:37, where Jesus says that the religious establishment in first century Palestine are like "whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of...everything unclean." This was to emphasise that the government department in question produced spin to make it seem like it was combatting climate-change whilst actually promoting regressive environmental policy. These religious activist collectives often carried out these actions on their own, sometimes as part of a broader movement of protests that had been organised, but sometimes completely independently; the whitewashing protest was one of these independent types. As Epstein (2002) points out, Christian activists can often separate themselves out from broader coalitions of affinities groups and organisations because they have faith that by prophetically speaking truth to power in poetical but often risky ways - attracting jail time for civil disobedience for instance - they are taking the personal responsibility necessary to undermine unjust power structures. Other activists can often see these radical actions as disruptive and unpragmatic within social movements that rely on collaboration. I could not find out whether some of the more religiously poetical actions (often in legal grey-areas) had been cause for division from bigger movements, but the people carrying them out definitely evidence a determination to carry them out whether they were part of a broader movement or not. This kind of action illustrates how different expressions of a postsecular ethos are worked out through subjects who are

generating their praxis between the conference spaces and spaces of activism with religious activist organisations, creating layers of negotiations in order to enact a postsecular ethos. A postsecular ethos is exercised in the conference space as the subject opens up to religious difference and is transformed by it. This significant experience of religious change reframes arenas of activism as religiously significant, unblocking an impasse and freeing the subject up to practice in a way that they have hoped for but has seemed as-yet inaccessible. Sometimes the excitement and feelings of empowerment drawn from the fresh connection forged between religious and activist arenas - the enthusiasm for being able to honour both religious and activist impulses - can lead to activist practices being replete with religious resonances (like the whitewashing protest). These are important for the religious subject as they seek to bear witness to a religious distinctiveness. This religious enthusiasm is sometimes accommodated by broader movements, co-creating space between secular and religious ideals. The Occupy Movement was filled with these instances, from convening the Sermon on the Steps to adopting imagery in protest banners and symbols such as the Golden Calf, resonating both with anti-capitalist sentiment and religious critique of idolatry (Cloke et al., 2016; Rieger and Pui-lan, 2012). This co-creative element evidences a postsecular ethos by setting aside a preference for ideological homogeneity in order to imagine temporary political identities, tactics, and demands. However, this inventiveness and accommodation is not always possible or desirable. As Wills (2006) argues, living wage movements have been made up of a great diversity of organisations - with religious resonances and none - and that the most effective way of organising them has been to leave discussions about motivational difference at the door. This mode of organising might be said to be postsecular in that it allows subjects to suspend their misgivings about their partners in search of pragmatic political means, or it might be argued to be a way of suppressing difference and upholding injustices for the sake of faster decision-making. However, in showing that a postsecular ethos can drive a variety of attitudes or approaches to activism, I argue that figuring out the best way to blend religious praxis beyond the FC is fraught with negotiations over how to be both religiously distinctive and postsecular.

Exeter Church and "leave-at-the-door" assimilation

In terms of forging activists' practices beyond the FC, Exeter Church took the same structural approach as the conferences; they set up spaces in which subjects could do theography out-loud, working through and sharing their frustrations and hopes regarding praxis, and making the FC a co-creative space for affinity groups to emerge from within. I argue that - as with the conference spaces - subjects within Exeter Church found a way to subvert this model. They did this by allowing a modicum of more direct leadership to be exercised through their 'small group' model. As Dean shared with me:

"You know we totally want everyone to be involved in making decisions, we want people to be able to explore and experiment, but if nothing's happening and you want to make something happen - as long everyone's comfortable - then use small group to try and do that."
- Appendix B, #16

Although the aim of the small groups (clusters of the same 4-7 people that met in the evenings midweek) was to be an extension of the spaces convened on a Sunday, informal acknowledgements were made by various members that small groups were easier places from which to begin planning actions beyond the FC. As a small group convener, I found this to be the case in my own praxis. With fewer people and less diversity of opinion, broaching the topic of activism felt less daunting in small group. Therefore, there was more regular discussion about activism and common interests did begin to arise in a relatively organic way from discussion. However, in order to convert an emerging sense for common activist interests, someone had to take responsibility for organising everyone or exercising leadership. As a small group convener I took up this role, which involved chairing and framing discussions as well as deciding what the outcome of a discussion would be.

We had talked many times in small group about how it would be great for activism to be an outcome of our midweek gatherings, but up until a point little had happened because out of a desire to be as democratic as possible (and perhaps also due to time-paucity or a lack of energy), no-one had imposed targets for decision-making or discussed implementation. At a small group

meeting one Wednesday, we watched a video and prayed about the refugee crisis, and everyone in the group voiced that it would be good to do something to show solidarity with refugees. I asked everyone whether they would like to make responding to the refugee crisis the focus of our small group meetings for the next little while and everyone agreed. So I planned out a programme for a few weeks into the future. On the first week we would have a discussion about what possible tactics we could use and would feel comfortable with. On the second week we would invite a friend in our church (but was in another small group) who had worked with refugees before to share what their experiences had been and to chat through what we had come up with the week before to get her opinion on our nascent plans. On the third week, we would make a decision about what we were going to do and allocate jobs to people in order to implement it. I presented this plan to the small group and it was approved.

After the third week, a selection of actions were decided upon - including creating and fly-posting some subvertisements to counter-act what we perceived to be the mainstream media whipping-up fear about refugees arriving in Britain. However, one of the main things we committed to was to monitoring a facebook page that had been created to network efforts to help refugees in Exeter (called Exeter Refugee Response (pseudonym - henceforth ERR)). We would repost various shout-outs for help on this page to other Exeter Church members as well as producing a quick digest of these every week for brief discussion at small group, deciding on what additional resources we could commit to events that various affinity groups and organisations were holding throughout the city. As a result of this, as a small group we;

- Organised a collection of clothes and food to send to refugees from our own church and transported it to a city-wide collection point. We then provided labour to sort and package these supplies.
- Had some of our members open their house and cook pancakes to fundraise transport costs for the supplies.
- Turned up to a number of vigils protesting the UK government's current policy on the war in Syria and refugees generated by that conflict.

I argue that the kind of activism that we got involved in as a small group was akin to the "leave-at-the-door" assimilation that Wills (2006) talks about regarding living wage movements. We did little - apart from the odd informal conversation with people - to flag up that we were religious whilst we lent our support to the various actions that came about through the ERR page. All we did was ask people and groups how they would like to be helped and got on with it. When engaging beyond the FC, talk of motivations and worldviews were left at the door of activist spaces, focussing purely on achieving a common end.

However, this did not mean that there was no co-productive connection between the ritual and discursive spaces of Exeter Church and the activism that we ended up getting involved in as a small group. Exeter Church's *raison d'être* was inspired in part by 'kingdom theology' - emphasising that God uses the Church to bring peace (despite the Church sometimes evidencing the contrary) beyond itself, but also that God is involved in restorative action beyond the Church, without the Church ever needing to be involved. I argue that the ritual and discursive spaces of Exeter Church worked to elicit belief in this theology, framing the activism that subjects were getting involved in as a thing to be celebrated, regardless of a performative or poetical religious element. I argue that this helped to create a more open-ended relationship between Exeter Church and activism. Church was a space to theologically reflect on activism - for instance, considering the religious significance of protest - but not so much to think about how to be more religiously distinctive in activist spaces. This is because the predominant theology framed what was going on in those spaces as religious enough in the first place (see Youtube, "Explaining Emergent Churches" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef7Rfs1T96c, featuring philosopher/theologian Peter Rollins). Theography in Exeter church was therefore more about working on the self to build enthusiasm for activism, drawing on affective and ritual settings to undergird this enthusiasm rather than trying to sense different religious significances that altered the subject's approach to activism. As Aisha, a member of Exeter Church said:

"Obviously we don't want to do something without praying and going over the theology of it y'know. I think it's good to be wise and to take things slowly. But at the same time I don't really think we can do anything, like theologically wrong. I think there comes a time when even if you

don't know *exactly* how God wants you to act, just do something. God's not gonna be angry cos you're too eager to fight injustice. I think we do a lot at church to make us feel really angry about injustice and, like, hopeful as well about what we can do y'know, but you've gotta just get on and do it."

- Appendix B, #23, Notes from informal conversation with Aisha

By subverting the model a little - exercising leadership in small groups - subjects at Exeter Church were finding ways to blend their religious praxis into activism. They did this blending by offering their support to other non-religious organisations in the city that were already involved in activism, without trying - unlike some of the subjects at the conferences - to add extra religious distinctiveness to their practices within that. This required a framing of religious space as not contingent upon their embodiment of religious presence through practices that used religious symbols or rituals. I argue that despite a lack of desire to be performatively religious in activist arenas, this more effectively helped subjects to blend their religious praxis beyond the FC and allowed them to be more open to learn from and be changed by activist practice. This framing of transcendence allowed subjects in Exeter Church to practice a more postsecular ethos than some of the activists at the conferences - who were trying to bring a religious distinctiveness to their activism - because it framed the activism that they were lending their support to as already religiously distinctive enough. This allowed a stronger activist influence on the co-production of Exeter Church members' praxis, evidencing an enhanced ability to suspend anxiety over religious distinctiveness, in order to transform the self and to work better alongside difference. Saying that, the listening, leave-at-the door position that these subjects took up meant that the co-creative spaces that scholars of postsecularism have often focussed on were less apparent. They were not co-creating spaces where subjects of faith and none were negotiating new identities together, both suspending their ideological baggage temporarily in order to practice under a new identity in the hope that more a liberatory mode of activism will emerge. Again, this shows different ways in which a postsecular ethos can be utilised to drive different approaches to activism, and can be exercised differently within different frames of transcendence.

The Ezra Community and politics of place

The Ezra Community provides a contrast to the conferences and to Exeter Church because although its members were equally concerned with engendering solidarities beyond the FC, they were less concerned with creating the intentionally theographic spaces that the conferences and Exeter Church were. In the conferences and at Exeter Church, space was convened so as to encourage subjects to do theography, provoking subjects with alternative sources of religious significance, and inviting them to discern what would be appropriate praxis. Individuals were entreated to discern how religious experiences cropped up within and beyond the FC, presenting a plethora of possible religio-activist praxes that had to be considered and applied contextually by participants in these spaces. Theography and activist decision-making were to be held in a co-creative relationship, with the emphasis on an iterative reflexivity to sift through religious significances, seeking the transcendent as it was perceived to traverse religious and activist spaces. The Ezra Community was not opposed to theographic experimentation - indeed as religious activists they necessarily underwent this process - but space was not intentionally carved out for it, and it was not expressly agreed upon by members of the community as a common aim.

Members of the Ezra Community acknowledged that their religious praxis had to be able to be challenged. As I illustrated in chapter six, negotiating between different sources of religious significance - such as a Christological framing of political praxis and increased affection, generated through prayer, for those in the community who disrupted this framing - was a core feature of how Ezra Community members generated their religious praxis, and they voiced the importance of being open to changing their praxis.

"It's so important to be open to what God is saying. We shouldn't be doing anything that's not been covered in prayer first."
- Appendix B, #5, Barbara, Ezra Community co-founder

However, in the way that it was structured and set-up, the community accommodated a much narrower scope of difference between its members'

praxes. Although the community had members with different opinions about what the community's praxis should be like, they had already achieved some of the aims of its founders by investing significant resources in setting the community on a particular path. They had bought a large property - Ezra House - in a poor neighbourhood and had formed a prefigurative community. They pooled money to pay-off the mortgage, lowering housing costs for the vulnerable people who lived there. Simultaneously, they were making friends with their neighbours, who - being in a poor area of the city - were flagging up various injustices, that those in the community were beginning to organise against in a show of solidarity. The Ezra Community was committed to this way of organising, and although there could be some leeway in how solidarities were extended beyond the FC, because they were rooted in place (and needed to pay the mortgage on the house), there was only so much wiggle-room for difference in praxis. Differences in praxis were achievable however. For instance, one of the members of the community was - at times - more involved with campaigning at a national level against US imperialism than in local politics. Nonetheless the Ezra Community were considerably less interested in creating spaces that provoked different approaches to faith praxis and courting different sources of religious significance. They were more interested in finding ways to do what they were already doing better.

Their lack of creating spaces to think through praxis in the way that the Conferences and Exeter Church did was - in part - due to their less subversive approach to institutional religion. Although many of the members of the Ezra Community told me about their frustration with institutional religion because of what they perceived to be its cosy relationship with the right-wing political establishment, they also perceived the community as having a role in redeeming institutional religion. They wanted to be a prophet to the institutional Church in order to change its message about how Christians should live, shifting the focus from affluence and the nuclear family towards a more radical vision of sustainability, hospitality, and interdependence. Although keen to transform the practices of Christians so as to be more involved in the public sphere, they were less focussed on doing away with more hierarchical models of church in favour of new ones that blurred the boundaries of religious space.

Indeed they saw these hierarchical modes of leadership as providing needed leadership in order to shift the conversation and praxis within the church:

"We need leaders. There has to be big change and we need important people in higher positions in the Church to be driving that. The message needs to change and we need people to show the way. That's one of the reasons we go to different churches, to try and get the ear of people in charge. It doesn't always work but we've had some encouraging conversations sometimes."
- Appendix B, #3, Ron, Ezra Community co-founder

In addition to this, their structure was influenced by founder, Ron's notion of the connection between space and transcendence. Like some of the subjects at the conferences, Ron's praxis was based on the notion of an embodied connection between the transcendent and space. Ron believed that as religious subjects spread the presence of the transcendent by channeling it through their actions:

"The gospel isn't just spread by words, we've gotta live it. We gotta understand the repercussions of the gospel and then connect that up to life. It's not just about turning up to Church, praying, and reading [the Bible], you gotta live it too. That's why we're passionate about reducing inequality and being more sustainable. People 'get it' more when you live it and then they'll start to live it too."
- Appendix B, #3, Ron, Ezra Community co-founder

This was Ron's vision for the extension of the influence of God beyond Sunday church services and is a more limited envisioning of religious space, contingent on the presence of and practices of Christians. This vision of religious space is less about blurring the boundary between sacred and profane and more about reclaiming social justice as a religious praxis through which religious institutions extend their influence. As a result of this spatial imagining of the transcendent, it would be easy to assume that theology might be over-privileged when trying to engender activist practices that reach out beyond the FC, perhaps even bringing in overt proselytisation or an over-eagerness to be religiously distinctive that might break-up potential partnerships with non-religious actors. In reality, the distinctively religious practices that the community evidenced were restricted largely to the daily activities of Ezra House, including prayer in the morning and evening, and periodic Bible studies. When it came to engaging beyond the FC, the way that the community got involved in other social justice

issues was much more like the "leave-at-the-door" activism that Exeter Church were involved in. By setting themselves up so firmly in place - in a marginalised neighbourhood - the idea behind this was that they would be embodying a transcendent presence in a part of the city that had been abandoned by both political and religious establishments. However, because they conceived of their embodiment of transcendence as rooted in place, they set themselves up to listen to people in their neighbourhood to better understand the issues that were affecting them in their day-to-day lives. They did not seek to address a particular issue that they felt would give them an opportunity to perform in a distinctively religious way - for example, through spectacular protest - they sought to embody the transcendent in a particular place by tackling injustices particular to that place. Therefore they had to understand and become familiar with their neighbourhood, taking up a more receptive mode of praxis that listened to the concerns of those around them, rather than seeking ways to forge a sense of continuity between religious and activist spaces. Although their praxis was framed in religious terms (and there were instances to question whether the issues or tactics that were pertinent to their locale were compatible with their religious praxis), there was much more room within their praxis to accommodate a greater variety of activist practice because their religious praxis was so centred around solidarity with their locale. Barbara illustrated the nature of their praxis, saying:

"For example, take this neighbourhood. There are no big stores within a walkable distance here. Nowhere to get affordable or, like, nutritious food. It's a food desert. So you can't get vegetables or fruit in the convenience stores here, it's all just processed garbage that's really expensive. But people don't have the time or don't have a car to get out to the big grocery stores on the edge of town so they don't have any options. And they work full-time but they don't get paid enough to feed their kids properly. So that's like one of the main issues here and we work with a lot of different people on that. People from schools, some guys from the local Mosque, people from the neighborhood who are just interested. And some people from church can be a bit funny about it because its not like a 'Christian' project - especially when you tell them you're working with Muslims - but if you want to do social justice stuff in the city and really make a difference you've got to work with whoever y'know. [Church] people don't always get that the gospel is about more than just making the Church look good all the time. It's about making life better for everybody."
- Appendix B, #5, Barbara, Ezra Community co-founder

Barbara was referencing a project that she and a few other members of the community had been involved in called Gardening the Neighbourhood [pseudonym]. Gardening the Neighbourhood was a project that petitioned the city council to hand vacant lots back to the neighbourhoods that they were in, in order to turn them into food gardens. Volunteers worked on the gardens, producing fruit and vegetables and then distributing the produce to families that were struggling with food bills. They also raised money so that in the summer, they could employ young people in the neighbourhood to distribute the food, keeping them away from gang culture, and ran workshops in their various reclaimed lots, teaching people how to convert their own small patches of garden into places to produce food.

I argue that this model of activism that Ezra House operated illustrated a similar kind of postsecular attitude to Exeter Church. They exercised a postsecular "leave-at-the-door" attitude, in that they worked out most of their activism through a politics of place rather than seeking out a performatively religious activist practice, or co-creating new forms of activism and identities that spliced together religious and non-religious influences. This allowed for a more co-creative relationship between activist practice and religious praxis, because addressing place took precedence over religious distinctiveness, despite a more embodied theological framing of praxis than Exeter Church. However, it is important to note that on top of this, the religious space of Ezra House brought together a much greater diversity of subjects in terms of their identity politics. Whereas Exeter Church was composed of largely white, middle class members, the Ezra Community included many more people of colour and working class people. This meant that there was not just a postsecular theological generousness being evidenced - as in Exeter Church - but a receptivity to working through the political power relations that criss-crossed the community. For instance, when doing liturgy together, resources (such as *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (Claiborne et al., 2010)) were used that recognised the theological issues wrapped up in the struggles of working people and people of colour, instead of the more traditional liturgies some of the members were used to in Church that gloss over the experiences of these subjects. This was key for transforming community members attitudes towards

racism and classism as their activism extended from within the prefigurative community beyond, into their neighbourhood.

The Institutional Church and subversive leadership

Although the institutional church has not been one of my foci in this thesis - I have focussed on new forms of postchristendom FC - I want to analyse it here because the way that subjects relate to the institutional church highlights in starker contrast the subversive practices that theography enables. By focussing on subjects in the institutional church, I can illustrate how theography helps subjects to blend their religious praxis into activism, even when they inhabit a culture of opposition to this framing of praxis. There are many examples of churches that are part of bigger institutions such as the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church that have shifted their structure to begin to internalise what they feel are legitimate postchristendom critiques of hierarchy and political passivity (Baker, 2013; Boren, 2010; Sutherland, 2014). However, there are also many churches that are part of institutions that have been resistant to changing their structure in order to encourage activist practices (Bloomquist, 2012; Dinham, 2008; Howson, 2011). I want to use this section to show that just because a subject is a part of an institution that is hostile to their praxis, they can still find ways to blend their religious praxis into activism through theography and by using the profile and structures of the institutional church against itself.

The people I want to focus on in this section are largely priests or people employed by the Church of England (henceforth CofE) who had found the hierarchy of the CofE limiting to their activism. As one priest - Ken - said:

"I was talking to a Catholic guy about this. He's been trying to mobilise the Church against war for years and it's just been such a struggle. We both were saying that it seems to have been that when activists are getting something decent going and getting a few more people at church interested, the hierarchy - deans and bishops and stuff - has always come along and shat all over it. Like, in the parish I was at before this one, I started a meeting that ran at another time to the main service so that people could discuss the Bible but be talking about how it related to social justice as well and loads of stuff was coming out of that - we got people going to anti-austerity marches, and protesting tax evasion, and helping out the free Palestine lot - but the

bishop didn't like it cos it was too political and it pissed off a lot of Tories in the church and councillors and stuff. So he was always trying to bully us and threatening me with the sack."
- Appendix B, #8, Ken, organiser of Conference #3

Ken said that even now - at his new job - the most senior priest had made him feel uncomfortable when trying to set up a similar meeting. However, hierarchical opposition has not stopped Ken and others like him from subverting the church structure and stirring-up activism. These priests argued that the CofE was structured in such a way as to attribute the power to define religious praxis in the community entirely to priests, who were concerned with performing ritual services (e.g. morning prayer, evensong, eucharist), and representing the interests of the congregation in local politics. They argued that this closed-out the possibility of subjects being able to make connections between the affects and discourses that they encountered on a Sunday and an activist praxis, because some priests enjoyed being part of the local political establishment and maintaining the status quo.

In order to subvert this, the priests I talked to at the conferences had set up what Vincett (2013) calls "parallel churches" (p.178), spaces that help subjects to maintain their connection to the institutional church, whilst generating space for alternative religious experiences that make up for the shortcomings and oppressions of institutional spaces. These were often closely modelled on the base ecclesial communities pioneered by South American liberation theologians and included communal discussion of a Bible passage or of a political issue, often encouraging subjects to read the Bible through their own experiences of oppression (see Cone, 1997; Gutiérrez, 1988; Oakley, 2007; Talvacchia et al., 2014; Williams, 2013).

Ken organised an example of this at Conference #3, where he gathered all the participants in a circle to listen to a talk by a local artist, who had done some work with university students as part of the local university's celebration of diversity. As well as bringing together groups of students to think about the meaning of other religious festivals, he had done a workshop with them to think through the meaning of Easter and create a piece of art. The piece of art that they created was a cross (which Ken - who was also the university chaplain -

had taken possession of and dubbed "The Liberation Theology Cross") that had twelve panels on it - representing the twelve disciples - all containing a depiction of a struggle that the students perceived was salient at the present moment. These included cyber-bullying, Islamophobia, and poverty. Ken invited the conference participants to share what they would have put on the cross; something that was affecting them, or someone close to them, or that they were passionate about. He argued that although the cross is a representation of oppression - of religious and state violence against those that challenge the status quo - it also points to the hope that comes after it in the biblical narrative, of resurrection and the healing of injustices. In addition, he argued that it also points to the pain and hard work of accomplishing a new world, and so we were encouraged to pray, mourning the oppressions that we had experienced, and committing ourselves to working to overcome them.

These parallel churches illustrate how, in order to subvert the way in which the institutional hierarchy tried to limit resonances and practical overlap between religious praxis and activism, the institutions own resources and - to an extent - aims could be used against itself. In a time when institutional church attendance has plummeted (Brown, 2015b; Brown and Woodhead, 2016; Bruce, 2002), lots of initiatives have been started by institutional churches to reverse this trend, whether it be alternative kinds of church service in existing church buildings, or 'planting' new churches with more charismatic worship and marketing aimed at young people (Davie, 2000; Sherwood, 2016; see also http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk). Although the priests organising these parallel churches said that life had often been made uncomfortable for them by institutional hierarchies, they argued that what they were doing was bringing more people into church and that the hierarchy could not really be seen to be standing in the way of that. So they were allowed to use buildings, could use the church's profile to advertise their events widely, and even when they were pressured into toning down their political rhetoric, they still found ways to begin to move participants imaginations regarding the separation of religion and activism. As another priest - Olly - explained:

"It's interesting - I've learned - call something a prayer meeting...[and it's] not a problem. [The hierarhcy say,] 'Brilliant, that's more like it.' And you tell them you're going to pray for all the

people suffering through wars and they are totally on board with that. All you need to do is introduce a few questions to prompt people's praying and people join the dots themselves. Why is this war happening? Where are the weapons coming from? How could it be stopped? If we're praying for God to stop something should we not expect that He might ask us to be that change? I did the same with food at Harvest. Again, everyone is comfortable with a meal to celebrate, churches have done that for years. But get people to try and bring something they've grown or that they know hasn't travelled more than ten miles and they start thinking critically about food systems."

- Appendix B, #24, Notes from informal conversation with Olly at Conference #2

This is evidence of people tinkering with traditional church rituals and processes to begin to introduce a theographic element to it, encouraging participants to reflect upon how these religious processes connect to broader political issues. These priests were doing this to try and highlight to their congregants that religious issues blurred out beyond the boundaries of Sunday gatherings. They recognised this, not just in terms of discursive framing but in affective terms as well. Their own personal theography, negotiating between religious significance in rituals and services and 'unofficial' religious spaces was part of what drove this. Ken, and Micky, another priest I chatted to at one of the conferences commented on how powerful affective religious experiences beyond the ritual church space had been in their lives:

"There's a spiritual aspect too though, I went for a few jobs in a bunch of different cities but when I came [here - a city in North East of England], it just felt right. When I was praying at each place, looking around... I like places that are a bit beat up that could do with a bit of love. But after praying it just felt really right, I thought "OK God". When I was walking around I just felt like He was really saying this was the place."

- Appendix B, #8, Ken, organiser of Conference #3

"One of the things I really enjoyed was praying in front of what used to be called the Defense Export Services Organisation, DESO, about the kind of involvement of the British government in exporting arms across the world.... being involved in that, despite being freezing cold, it felt like a very spiritual kind of act to be involved in."

- Appendix B, #25, Micky, Notes from informal interview at Conference #1

Although encouraging subjects to blur their religious praxis into activism, modelling this themselves, and challenging institutional delimiting of religious space; these Church employees also engaged in independent expressions of

direct action with heavy religious connotations. For instance, on Ash Wednesday, some Christians choose to have their foreheads marked with ash to symbolise repentance and mirror a number of Old Testament stories in which people covered themselves in ash as a sign of repentance and mourning (Job 42:6; Lamentations 2:10; Jonah 3:5). However, Ken had gone out by himself on Ash Wednesday 2013 and painted a large cross in ash on the front of a branch of Starbucks not long after it had been revealed that they had been paying no corporation tax for the previous three years. Olly - at Easter - threw fake blood all over a Total petrol station, covering himself in the process, in order to highlight Total investment in Burma, where the government were violently oppressing the indigenous Rohingya population. He did this not only for political reasons but also to highlight that risking arrest by causing a disturbance (in order to address an injustice) had resonances with Jesus' arrest as he upset the religio-political status quo in first-century Palestine (John 18). These symbolic actions were often paired with a savvy approach to the media, making sure they were covered in the local press:

"I always have press releases ready, they're really politically useful for shifting the conversation locally. Particularly if you are campaigning on an issue involving the city council or whatever, it's good to be a step ahead."
- Appendix B, #24, Notes from informal conversation with Olly at Conference #2

In terms of evaluating the postsecular ethos evident in this practice, this type of action might seem similar to the religiously resonant actions of some of the conference attendees. Although the action helps the activist forge continuity between their religious and activist practices, sometimes this can act to distance them from broader activist movements. In addition - in the case of the Church employees I have focussed on in this section - by drawing attention themselves as celebrity activists, it could be argued that they intensify the split between regular FC members and professional clergy. However, these priests argued that the opposite was true and that they were using their profile to change the narrative about faith and politics more broadly in their locale, not only highlighting activist issues and practices that grabbed the attention and enthusiasm of parishioners, but signalling to other local activist groups that the Church was somewhere to look for allies. As Ken argued:

"When people see the church doing stuff, they want to get on board. They see a relevant faith where people are drawing strength from their beliefs and then getting stuck in and they are inspired by it. You need to be out there making connections with other kinds of activists, Christian or not. I mean faith's not pointless without activism but to me it seems a bit lifeless without it..."

- Appendix B, #8, Ken, organiser of Conference #3

By using local media and the profile of the more established churches that they were a part of, these priests were seeking to change the culture of activism - not just within the church - but in their locales more broadly by creating a weight of expectation upon the established church to respond to the marginalised. By trying to change the culture, or altering the narrative about faith and activism through the local media and their parallel church practices, these priests were both exhibiting and trying hard to encourage subjects to exercise a postsecular ethos. They were challenging people to begin taking the limits off of their religious praxis, to think through how it might be lived out in relation to the marginalised, and how responding to that may involve joining with people and engaging in practices that they were not used to associating with religion. People were beginning to think through how they might transform themselves and their praxis in order to create a heightened sense for difference as well as how to practically accommodate difference. However, by changing the narrative about faith and activism in their locales and creating pressure upon their institutions to respond (and ensuring this call-and-response was covered in the media), they also sought to generate a greater sense in their locales that FCs could be valuable to broader political movements and should be regularly approached as potential political partners. This opened up opportunities for the kinds of co-creative postsecular practices that characterised the Occupy movement (Cloke et al., 2016), splicing together different narratives, discourses, identities, and tactics in order to create impermanent political tools for a range of different activists to mobilise behind. For example, Olly said:

"Cos I've been so active locally, I was asked to be part of a group to organise this campaign to keep the library open cos the Tory council were going to cut it and then open a new one in a nicer area so we wanted to do like a big protest to embarrass them and we were thinking maybe we could do a mock funeral for it or maybe - I suggested - a crucifixion, which felt a bit specifically religious, but they all went with the crucifixion... and we sang 'were you there when

they crucified our library?' . So you've got all these people, some of them Christians, some of them not, from this little council estate doing really good theology - totally getting what it means, drawing on that Rene Girard[27] scapegoating thing - and without that Christian narrative they wouldn't have had a voice to express their anger... but it's not about converting them, it's about giving them a voice."
- Appendix B, #24, Notes from informal conversation with Olly at Conference #2

In contrast to the postchristendom FCs that I have been analysing in the majority of this thesis, the relations between the Church and activism that these priests forge are not contemporary. As some critics of postsecularism have argued, these kinds of networks and practices have been around for a long time (Kong, 2010; Ley, 2011). However, by highlighting the subversive theographic work that these priests do, it highlights other ways in which religious subjects can begin to blend their religious praxis into activism and begin to evidence and encourage a postsecular ethos. However, whether this is the most effective structure through which religious subjects can find ways to connect their religious and activist practices is debatable, being that religious hierarchies often work to stifle these moves. They also interact with the media, producing a narrative which closes down imaginative possibilities for religious and activist overlap, and generating their own cultures which evoke resonances between religion and quietism rather than politics. Frustration with these hierarchical practices is often why subjects have sought to form alternative FCs in the first place, in order to better live-out a faith praxis between different sources of religious significance which are spread across FC and activist space.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at how four different types of activism emerge from four different FCs, showing how the theography of subjects subverts the structure that these FCs put in place to try and influence subjects' activism. These subversions revealed disjunctures between the FCs structural approach to activism and the actual political performances of religious subjects as they

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[27] Girard was a French philosopher/theologian, who wrote about the nature of religion and sacrifice, arguing that Christianity inverts the normal scapegoating function of religion to sacrifice someone or something in order to draw a line under an ongoing antagonism by telling the story from the point of view of the innocent victim (Cloke, 2011a; Girard, 1979; 1989; Žižek, 2010).

sought to forge solidarities beyond the FC. Exeter Church and the Conferences set themselves up as democratic, horizontalising spaces in which subjects were to be provoked into theography, discussion, and the organic emergence of affinity groups. This was subverted by subjects seeking out or creating micro-forms of more structured organisation or leadership. Additionally, although these democratic spaces saw themselves as a place from which to begin blending religious praxis into activism - undermining institutional siloing of religious space - sometimes the praxis this space partially gave rise to could be problematically over-religious in its performativity, potentially separating out religious activists from broader movements. Paradoxically, the Ezra Community, which was more closed in its approach to blurring religious space and less interested in opening up space for theography, generated praxis where subjects' political concerns were more significantly shaped by and co-produced with political partners beyond the FC, blending their religious praxis effectively into the activist networks of their locale. Additionally, although the institutional church is often framed as the nadir of ring-fencing religious space (Graeber, 2013; Müntzer, 2010), by using its profile against itself, subversive agents within it were able to change the broader narrative about faith and activism in their locale. This began to generate an imagination both within and beyond the church of its practice being related to activism rather than cloistered piety.

These subversions are important when considering the role of the FC in co-creating possibilities for subjects to evidence a postsecular ethos. As subjects seek to hybridise the trajectory that their FCs are set-up to encourage, they do so as a means to find a way past the tension between creating space for religious difference and community, and simultaneously seeking to practice solidarity beyond that community. In the conferences and Exeter Church, the postsecular ethos practiced within community can act as a training ground for an ethos of generosity; allowing subjects to reflect on their praxis in a safe environment whilst also being provoked to transform their framing of transcendence. However, the energy it takes to form spaces of community, maintain them as safe spaces for difference, and expunge hierarchical relations can sometimes distract from forging broader solidarities by leaving a gap where a unifying plan-of-action might be. Therefore, subjects subverted these spaces by seeking out alternative forms of organisation. Conversely, in the Ezra

Community and more institutional church settings, the reduced level of dialogue within the community can lead to unresolved tensions regarding differences in praxis, causing relational breakdown.

This tension between different spaces of generosity (community vs. solidarity) needs considerable reflexive and dialogical work to overcome; something that has been recognised by a number of commentators on political mobilisation (Clough, 2014; Häkli and Kallio, 2014; Routledge, 2003a). Decision-making processes can be divisive because certain constituencies within a diverse movement sometimes feel that their concerns are erased in favour of a hegemonic mode of action or way of being (for instance, Sullivan (2005) highlights the sidelining of indigenous concerns in favour of a modern, Western way of organising in the World Social Forum). Regarding the postchristendom FCs that I have been analysing: how can they connect the religious questions that the community creates space to work through (Is this experience of affect religiously significant? How do I conceive of the transcendent?) and political questions (Who deserves our solidarity? What tactic is most effective?), without recourse to over-performative religiosity (like at the conferences), failing to tackle matters of organisation by leaving it to 'organic' processes (like Exeter Church), or closing down dialogue about how praxis might be variegated (like the Ezra Community and the institutional church).

I would argue that there are two ways of potentially overcoming this tension between maintaining community as a safe, diverse space, and mobilising subjects towards forging particular solidarities. Firstly, I would argue that theological framings of space are crucial to distancing an over-performative religiosity from activist partnerships and forming a generous space within religious praxis for activist experimentation with those of differing and no faith. I argue that the conferences enabled subjects to frame the connection between their religious praxis and space through an embodied theology that identified spaces that lacked the presence of the transcendent and sought to enact that presence through their activism. This left less space for co-producing their religious praxis with those who did not share their religious identity, diminishing opportunities for relationships that forged unity across difference in activist circles. However, at Exeter Church the acknowledgement that activist spaces

did not need their presence to sacralise them - engendered by a theology that framed these spaces as sacred already - led to religious subjects' whose praxis was more significantly co-produced by relationships with activists beyond the community. This theological framing enabled subjects to engage with activist communities without seeking to religiously colonise them, whilst also engaging with spaces their FC convened that enabled them to question the religious significances of their activist partnerships. In these FC spaces, they could also provoke fellow members to think through the religious significance of activist practice by sharing their experiences of activism.

Secondly, I would argue that recognising the partiality of postsecular practices could be useful for encouraging and guiding discussion in FCs about how to encourage activism. Although I have talked about particular activist practices emerging out of particular FCs, these were chosen to highlight the shortcomings that these FCs had in their structural approach to activism and how subjects subverted their structure in order find ways to blur their religious praxis into activism despite these shortcomings. In reality, the kinds of praxis that were emerging from the FCs were multiple and fluid. I encountered various strains of postsecular practice in all of the communities; co-creating affinity groups through reframing religious praxis within FCs/immersing subjects in activist settings they did not fully understand but were willing to engage in the hope their religious praxis would develop to make sense of/engaging in "leave-at-the-door" style activism that enacted a politics of place/co-creating new identities and with diverse others in protest movements. Often within one FC, I could recognise more than one of these practices. For instance, although the conferences were co-producing subjects who were joining religious activist organisations and immersing themselves in a new realm of activism, these subjects were also engaging in broader protest movements through these organisations, co-creating new identities and narratives with a diverse range of others.

However, in all of the FCs that I encountered there was little direct discussion about how these different ways of practicing postsecular religion might be phased in and out tactically to suit spatio-temporal context and to better bridge the gap between creating safe spaces for community and encouraging activism.

FCs may be able to function better, if they could get a view onto different ways that communities and subjects are navigating the tension between community and activism, and treated these different approaches like a religio-activist toolkit, rather than models that command loyalty and permanence (Dempsey and Rowe, 2004). For instance, the Ezra Community may have benefitted from some time away from focussing on their locale and relationships beyond the community in order to open up theographic spaces to work through the difficulties that some members were having in committing more fully to their activist goals. As some activist geographers have argued, praxis can be improved by organised and iterative dialogic processes such as spokescouncils and consensus decision-making (Burton, 2012; kinpaisby-hill, 2011). By raising the issue of the community/solidarity tension and the transient use of different models in regular meetings, needs and means of meeting them could be identified. Are we as effective in our activism as we would like to be? Do we need time out to reflect on the difference between our theologies? FCs may be able to better help subjects overcome the tensions in their religious praxis as they bridge religious and activist space by advocating the implementation of the diverse range of postsecular practices that have become apparent in the analysis of this chapter. A number of these practices could be held together within one FC or the FC could switch its focus in order to respond to its changing context by foregrounding one particular approach to postsecular politics for a time before reapplying scrutiny to the tension between communities of openness and connections of solidarity.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Before assessing the contribution that this thesis has made to the geography of religion and political geography and addressing some of the broader questions and implications that my discussion has foregrounded, I will provide a chapter-by-chapter overview of the thesis, providing a summary of what new knowledge the thesis has added to the discipline.

Ch1: In chapter one I argued that, so far, the epistemological approaches of geographers attending to the interface between religion and politics have focussed on the domination of religious subjects by top-down religious institutions (as well as the relation of these institutions to societal hegemonies) and the politics of reproducing sacred space. However, in the context of an increasing number of religious subjects working out their religious praxis between religious and activist spaces, neither of these epistemologies have captured the complexity of religious subjects who are forging their praxis across traditional sacred/secular divisions. Although postsecular geographies are beginning to attend to this complex production of subjects between religious and secular spaces, I contended that what was needed was for geographers of religion to begin transposing literatures from political geography regarding networks into a religious key. These network epistemologies could help geographers of religion by challenging them to conceive of the subject as produced by multiple sites of religious - instead of political - significance.

Ch2: In chapter two I highlighted that political geographers have illustrated the complex negotiations that subjects have to undergo in order to form their political praxis by discerning where, when, and how to express loyalty to the different poleis to which they belong (e.g. family, workplace, affinity group, identity politics, social movement). This negotiation is mediated by different structures of organisation, ranging from organic social connections, to consensus processes, to stratified leadership. I highlighted that religious subjects had to contend with parallel complexities in the formation of their religious praxis, underscoring literatures from religious activists that exemplified

this mirroring. I ended this chapter by asking how geographers of religion were to epistemologically comprehend the production of religious subjectivities that are emerging through a network of relationships between religious and activist spaces that induce negotiations similar to those spotlighted by political geographers' discussion of activist subjects.

Ch3: In chapter three I responded directly to the final passages of chapter two by developing the concept of theography, a new way of thinking through the production of fluidity and difference in religious subjectivation. I highlighted how religious subjects undertake reflexive work in order to frame transcendence, negotiating between multiple discourses and affects that are strewn across space. This reflexive work is then continued into techniques of self, which shift the subject's religious sensibilities and praxis. This is a process that recurs throughout a subject's life and emerges in both religiously liberal *and* religiously conservative settings enabling subjects to traverse between practices of subversion and compliance.

Ch4: In chapter four I outlined how the process of conducting the research led me to develop my theographic epistemology, and to tweak my original research questions. I underscored how using interviews, participant observation, autoethnography, and participant action research presented certain challenges and opportunities that were crucial to producing my re-centred epistemology and research questions. These shifts helped me to produce knowledge through conversations with seasoned Christian activists and participation in postchristendom FCs facilitating an analysis of the variety of means by which religious subjects are being encouraged to develop a religious praxis between religious and activist spaces through new forms of FC. I laid out my research questions, which were: (i) What balance between openness and solidarity is embedded in the community's *raison d'être* and why?, (ii) What are the complexities of maintaining a degree of openness to theological exploration within the community?, and (iii) How does this degree of openness affect the political praxis of community members?

Ch5: In chapter five I explored how FCs were forming new *raison d'êtres* which sought to blend openness to difference within the community with practices of

solidarities beyond it. The formation of this *raison d'être* involved balancing different levels of commitment to openness and solidarity, engendering different FC structures. I examined the way in which theographic processes shaped this balancing and how this process was shaped by a reaction against certain constraints that the founding members perceived in institutional religion. I argued that as this process of forming a new *raison d'être* was being undertaken, the subjects involved were manifesting a postsecular ethos through their desire to begin working alongside people that their institutional background framed as 'too different', both within and beyond their nascent FC.

Ch6: In chapter six I evaluated how horizontal organising and the subjective co-production of these less hierarchical FCs engendered dialogue across difference within these FCs. This dialogue often foregrounded differences in opinion regarding the structure and practices of the FC, which had the potential to lead to relational tension. I highlighted theography as a way of enabling subjects to transform their religious practices, and therefore helping subjects to resolve these tensions. However, I highlighted that it could also sometimes exacerbate tension. I argued that this was particularly noticeable through the affective environments that religious subjects convened and engaged in order to work upon their framing of transcendence and relation to their FC. I argued that the different ways in which openness was predominantly framed in different FCs pointed to different ways in which postsecularism could be practiced. When a community seeks to prioritise generosity to difference, this generosity is tested by a desire to practice it in more than one direction (e.g. making the community a safe space in which to be different versus priming community members to reach out beyond the community to manifest particular political goals). I argued that by analysing how subjects use ritual to navigate the tensions that arise between their preferred framing of postsecular politics and their community's framing of politics, geographers could get a view onto how theography both opened and shut-off the subject's ability to address this tension.

Ch7: In chapter seven I assessed how the structure of the FC and its processes affected subjects' activist practices. I contended that all of the FCs that I spent time with were struggling with the tension between maintaining their community as a space for subjects to feel safe experimenting with their religious praxis and

also as a space that encouraged subjects into activism. The consequence of this was that subjects were subverting the structures that the FCs were putting in place to influence their activism, finding alternative ways to reach out beyond the FC. One of the ways that subjects were subverting the structures put in place by their FC was by drawing on alternate framings of religious space in order to frame and execute their praxis. Another way was by recognising the multiple ways in which a postsecular ethos could be reframed and operationalising that reframing through their subversive praxis.

What this thesis has added to political geography and the geography of religion is a new set of knowledges which enable geographers to think through the sometimes confusing heterogeneity of religious involvement in politics by focussing attention on the ways in which religious subjects frame, reproduce, and respond to transcendence. It has highlighted that in the fluidity of framing transcendence lies the possibility for models of religion that can incorporate a generosity towards difference. This generosity enables the formation of communities that rely less on dogma for cohesion and that can begin to think of their impact in terms that exceed proselytisation, engendering dialogue that hybridises religious praxis so as to work alongside difference. However, these possibilities are produced through strenuous engagement between different political priorities within a FC, sometimes resulting in subjective subversions of the FCs *modus operandi.* These subversions are constituted by subjects' negotiation between different sources of religious significance and application of this reflexive work to praxis. As such, this often means negotiating with institutions, whether in an effort to change them, or in an attempt to escape some of their shortcomings.

These knowledges provide useful context for religious activists trying to make sense of their praxis as it emerges from between religious and activist space. However, they also provide a fine-grained analysis that helps religious subjects and other activists and organisations with no religious persuasion to make sense of how religious subjects form a praxis between religious and activist spaces. This is useful not only for religious subjects, opening up new possibilities for them, but enables activist geographers and non-religious activists to begin making sense of the blurring that is already going on between

religious and activist geographies. I hope by partially demystifying the processes by which religious subjects blend their praxis into activism, sensitive dialogue can be initiated in circles of both activists and geographers that manifests better discernment of religious routes into activism. Recognising when greater generosity can be exercised towards seemingly impenetrable difference and the multiple ways in which this generosity can be practiced are potential outcomes of the knowledge generated in this thesis and are valuable for activist praxis.

These knowledges were largely produced through the lens of theography, the more specific contribution of which I will explore in the following section.

Theography, political praxis, and religious significance

Theography was an epistemological tool that I developed for this thesis and was used to help me to analyse the context that I was examining of postchristendom FCs in their formation, maintenance, and outreach. Using this tool enabled me to highlight that religious subjects formed their praxis by negotiating between different sources of religious significance across space, blurring supposed religious/activist and sacred/secular boundaries. This negotiation was mediated by various individual and communal religious techniques (e.g. group theological reflection, prayer, singing). These techniques were also used by subjects as techniques-of-self, shifting their framing of transcendence in order to forge a praxis between religious and activist spaces. These theographic techniques proved to be influential in all of the FC processes that I examined; *raison d'être* formation, maintenance of a space that is open to difference, and forging solidarities beyond the community.

By attending to the theography of religious subjects, I intended to highlight how important it is for analysts of religion to recognise that religious praxis is produced by religious subjects' negotiation between discourse and affect. Religious discourse (sacred texts, the utterances of religious leaders and commentators, books, articles and blogs on theology) and affect (atmospheres, numinous experiences, sudden conversions of seeing), being the dominant prisms through which geographers have come to understand how religious

subjects' frame transcendence. However, in conducting this research I have recognised two extra layers of discussion that need to be addressed in order to develop a more nuanced account of how religious subjects use theography to blend their praxis into activism by directing knowledge production to particular sources of religious significance.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that religious discourse is split into various areas of concern. If you open a theology textbook, there are various topics of discussion; for example, soteriology (theorising salvation), ecclesiology (church structure), and christology (the role of Christ) (McGrath, 2007). When considering the praxis that a subject might forge out of these different discussions, it is important to assess whether or not they interrelate, how these narratives correspond to subjects' imagining of space (or particular places), and what are the most important narratives that are shaping praxis as the subject traverses space. In the context that I was examining - subjects negotiating their religious praxis between postchristendom communities and spaces of activism - I identified three key theological debates that most significantly affected religious praxis, by shaping subjects' framing of sources of religious significance:

(i) *Church structure and the balancing of openness and solidarity.* In all of the FCs that I worked with, openness to difference and solidarity with the marginalised within church structure were issues of theology-as-praxis. By introducing greater openness and solidarity into church structure, subjects would be better equipped to respond to the alternative sources of transcendence that had be ignored by institutionalism. However, this was partially shaped by a reaction against institutional modes of religion, sometimes unwittingly carrying institutional baggage into the new community despite making up for some of the shortcomings of institutional religion. Not only were previous institutional sensibilities unwittingly reproduced, but in some cases a relationship with institutional religion was maintained in order to speak back to it, or because of the spiritual or affective resources that the institution could provide that postchristendom FCs could not. Making sense of the relation between the new, postchristendom FCs and the institutions they have broken from (and what this relation means for the way openness and solidarity are practiced in the new FC) was an important negotiation

between different potential sources of religious significance for subjects and their communities to undergo in the formation of their praxis and processes.

(ii) *The theological framing of openness.* In chapters five, six, and seven, I explained how religious subjects were outworking a postsecular ethos in different ways, applying techniques-of-self in order to live better alongside difference both within their FC and within their extensions of religious praxis into activism. However, the way in which this generosity was framed theologically was core to how it was practiced, shifting priorities between openness within community and solidarity beyond the FC. For example, at Exeter Church, a postsecular attitude was partially demonstrated in its creation of a safe space for subjects to be honest about their struggles with praxis, forming a prefigurative community that framed transcendence in an affect of acceptance and care. There was an non-fundamental approach to practicing religion, encouraging dialogue-about, provocation-of, and challenge-to subjects' praxis without coercing them towards a particular template of praxis. Conversely, in the Ezra Community a postsecular ethos was cultivated by encouraging members to listen attentively to the concerns of people in their neighbourhood. This framed transcendence as emerging in ability to engender social relations that erased inequality and encouraged sustainability by performing an embodiment of Christ. Negotiating between these different theological framings was a concern for subjects within the FCs, despite the FCs having been founded with particular priorities and a particular theological framing of the generosity they wanted to exhibit. I illustrated this in chapter six when I described the clash of theologies that came about in Exeter Church when my own imagining of how a postsecular ethos should be practiced (something closer to the Ezra Community's framing) came into tension with the priorities of others within the community. This negotiation was a core area of theological discernment for subjects, creating tensions in how to frame and respond to transcendence.

(iii) *The theological framing of space.* In chapter seven I explored the different ways in which subjects perceive the relation of transcendence to space. This largely emerged in two modes; transcendence as being brought to a space by the embodiment of ritual and activist practices, and transcendence as an independent entity that can emerge in a space regardless of the presence of religious subjects and practices (transcendence is nevertheless perceived to

be having an impact on spaces and subjects through a process of discernment, drawing subjects' attention to that space). These different theological framings had a significant impact on subjects' practices by shaping belief about how to relate to the transcendent through space. Thinking that there was a need to presence the transcendent often led subjects to focus more on reaching out beyond their community, whereas perceiving transcendence as possessing agency itself, lowered the level of urgency with which subjects sought to engage in distinctively religious ways beyond the FC.

These three key deliberations were important in the framing of transcendence, detecting and generating religious significance in the FCs that I worked with, and had the greatest impact on subjects' praxes. By analysing the interrelations between these three debates geographers can generate understandings about the theological rationales that motivate subjects and communities to practice their relation to activism in the particular ways that they do. It is in the different ways that these debates interrelate that difference in religio-activist practice is generated. For example, at the conferences I encountered subjects that were blending a sense that the transcendent needed to be embodied by them with a structure that was very open to religious difference rather than forcing them into a particular praxis. This resulted in subjects that sometimes practiced in ways that were so distinctively religious that it separated them out from broader political movements. However, at the Ezra Community, the same sense of transcendent embodiment was tempered by a structure that prioritised a particular kind of placed solidarity, leading to more generous listening to activist partners beyond the FC. The ways in which these narratives overlapped and were negotiated by subjects to produce difference in praxis was also apparent in the subversions that religious subjects carried out within their own communities, hybridising the constellation of these three theological debates that their community was supposed to represent. For example, although some of the members of Exeter Church bought-into the imagining of space and the relation to institutionalism encoded in the church's *raison d'être*, their subversion of the theological framing of openness propounded by the founding members of the community revealed a tension between a desire to be open to

all sorts of different praxes and a desire to express this openness in a willingness to act with and listen to activists beyond the FC.

Theography highlighted that the overlapping of these three key debates regarding sources of religious significance is central to how subjects make sense of their praxis. However, it was not just these variegated discursive elements that were crucial to subjects' theography, but affective and processual ones as well, which is the second layer of discussion that needs to be considered when analysing the formation of religio-activist praxis. Variegation in affect pointed to alternate sources of religious significance that were a crucial consideration in theographic negotiation and reflexivity. However, the way that affect was folded into the collective practices and rituals of the FCs highlighted these processes as an additional facet in the shaping of a subject's theographic negotiation between religion and activism. I identified two matters of affect and process that I argue are important to tackle when assessing how religious subjects blend their praxis into activism:

(i) *Experiences of transcendence connected to activist settings.* Experiences of what was perceived to be religious affect in settings connected to activism were crucial to shifting religious subjects' praxis towards activism. This could be a sense of a numinous presence at a demonstration, or a notably deep sense of peace in the midst of direct action, or a sudden break in thought or feeling during a provocation regarding social justice in the setting of their FC (or not) which they attribute to God. These affective atmospheres or shifts prompted subjects to reframe transcendence, drawing them towards the activist settings with which these affects were associated. By connecting activist practice and religious affect, religious subjects considered these experiences as a facet for reflection, resculpting their framing of and response to the transcendent through techniques-of-self and practical action.

(ii) *Engaging religious affect as a technique-of-self.* Affect began to overlap with process when subjects used the affective environments that their FCs convened as a tool through which to shift their framing of transcendence. For example, at the Ezra Community, they framed transcendence as being present in the affect engendered by practices of prayer. The affect raised in this setting shifted their sense of frustration with fellow community members over disagreements regarding practice. However, they returned to this

intentionally, shifting the way they felt about their fellow community members because they attributed the reconciling effect of this to the transcendence. This mediated the overall political praxis of the community by delaying conversations about what values the community was really trying to embody. It is therefore crucial to analyse how affective atmospheres are overlapping with techniques-of-self in an FC as it has a distinct impact on the political praxis of its subjects. This is of particular importance when considering the postsecular potentialities of FCs. How did they create atmospheres in which it felt safe to represent religious alterity? Did this atmosphere also help people to adopt a posture of openness to changing in response to difference?

These layers of nuance in detecting sources of religious significance became apparent by using theography as an epistemological tool to analyse religious subjects blurring their praxis into activism. Recognising these different key sources of religious significance is key to producing knowledge at the religion/ politics interface and has been an important set of contributions that this thesis has made to the geography of religion and political geography.

In addition to these contributions, this thesis also highlighted some further gaps and asked some broader questions of geographies at the religion/politics interface. I want to look at these now, pointing to their implications for praxis and future research.

Implications for praxis

Having produced a lot of knowledge about new kinds of FC that seek to be open to difference and forge solidarities beyond themselves, subverting institutional models of religion, I feel prompted to ask the question: is it worth the hassle that these communities are putting themselves through? Do they contribute enough to religion and politics to justify breaking from institutions? Especially when there has been a long tradition of religious involvement in activism despite the obstacles put in the way by institutions. As I illustrated in chapter seven, being a member of an institution affords determined activists in these settings a platform, resources, and a public profile that can be used

against hierarchical political passivity. Moreover, lifting hierarchical control off of religious space creates clashes between subjects who have different religious and political priorities, *and* institutional churches have a wider reach across the country, being a place where anyone can go for help (McLean and Linsley, 2004).

However, despite some of the good that institutional churches can do, the practices that these new postchristendom FCs are manifesting pioneer far more effective ways of blurring religious and activist space. Politics criss-crosses everyday life whether religious institutions like it or not, and the invaluable discursive, affective, and processual resources that FCs can provide subjects with to reflect upon their praxis are often cut-off from them by the hierarchical structure and political 'impartiality' of religious institutions. When postchristendom FCs open these resources back up to people by forming alternative communities, they create places in which religious and activist praxis can be connected, helping subjects to feel more empowered, and challenging members to begin to think through the implications that their faith has for their practice beyond the community. This helps subjects to take greater responsibility for their own imagining of faith and empowers them to engage with it in politically productive ways. I would argue that this is a far greater gain and a more effective way of connecting FCs up to solidarity with those who most need it rather than hoping for leaders with a social justice agenda to rise to the top within institutions. Maybe there are ways that conversations can be had between these new FCs and institutions, where institutions begin to tinker with their structure in order to reconnect with the margins in a meaningful way?

These new FCs have something to learn from institutions too. The tradition and participative ritual practices of institutions provide safe spaces for those not yet ready to speak out in a faith setting about theology or its connection to praxis. Dialogue, reflection, and vulnerability whilst sharing can be daunting to many people of faith who nonetheless benefit from a traditional service, drawing strength to cope with the difficulties of everyday life. However, I would contend that at the very least these postchristendom communities provide processes that are sorely missing in many institutions and deserve a prominent place in a mixed landscape of religious practice, as well as inclusion in any discussions

regarding religion and praxis. Regarding broader political landscapes, in their openness to difference these new FCs provide an invaluable place for subjects, not just to encounter, but to have to listen to and form community with those who are different to them, finding ways to make safe spaces for those who have been marginalised and gaining new understandings of their political condition. This is an invaluable resource for transforming subjects' political sensibilities and generating new political desires so as to show solidarity with those they are in community with. However, this benchmark for praxis does ask questions of these communities regarding how they begin to reach out to those who are marginalised. What processes can be put in place to ensure that these communities reach their potential of creating unity across difference and not just attracting the same kinds of people who started the community in the first place?

When these FCs showed flickers of unity across difference, they exhibited a variety of different ways of exercising a postsecular ethos. However, I have argued that there are multiple ways of performing a postsecular ethos, sometimes skewing the practices of a FC towards protecting the openness of the community, whereas others were drawn towards ensuring that the FC was reaching out beyond itself. Paradoxically, this could highlight differences within the community and increase tension. When tension arose, sometimes spaces in which to do theography were convened so as to create opportunities for reflexive transformation, engendering an iterative contemplation upon the *raison d'être* of the FC. These techniques had mixed success, but showed a way of facilitating reflection upon the multiple sources of religious significance that were influencing subjects' praxes in both individual and group contexts as well as crafting affective atmospheres in which subjects could share, or begin to shift their sensibilities. Regarding praxis, this is a notable development, not just for religious movements, but also political ones. Sullivan (2005) points out that often in western political contexts new ways of organising movements and doing dialogue are often sidelined, with representational models of democracy taking precedence, even in movements that try to be more open to otherness. What practices that tap in to different psychological and affective registers could political movements begin to employ that help subjects to reflexively transform themselves as a way of improving processes of dialogue and community and be

more open to otherness (such as meditation/confession/singing)? What, in this thesis' focus on religious communities, might emerge as transferable knowledge? This might be the basis for some participatory action research in the future; how would introducing 'religious' practices help political movements to be open to new ways of organising, be more open to difference, and be more willing to evaluate whether they are fulfilling their *raison d'être* whilst also evaluating its limits?

In the next section I will expand upon what implications this thesis might have for future research.

Implications for future research

In this thesis I have examined how religious subjects form their religious praxis from between different sources of religious significance, and how different models of FC influence this process. I have looked at how different sources of religious significance affect subjects and how they negotiate between these sources of significance in order to develop their praxis. I have illustrated how subjects have shifted their praxis within and beyond their FC in order to practice in a way that *they* think better demonstrates a postsecular ethos. When considering the activist setting, in which my research participants have worked with others, I have analysed how they detect and negotiate with sources of religious significance such as affect in activist settings, or discourses which frame activism as religiously significant. However, I have not included as much discussion from the side of those working with them as they shift their practice. How are they being perceived by others and are their negotiations successful in improving their ability to be co-creative in their praxis? Have there been tensions in this postsecular reaching-beyond that need to be attended to? How would the voices of those FCs and religious subjects who are trying to build partnerships alter an assessment of their theography?

If there was more discussion on how these negotiations were being undertaken, there might also be more scope to explore how the effects of practicing beyond the FC are feeding back to the community. Although I included accounts about how framing partnerships beyond the community as religiously significant were

spoken back into the community and given room to develop as far as individual praxes were concerned, how do theographic negotiations that take place beyond the community in activist settings begin to feed back into the community and change the structure of the community itself, even if only temporarily? How do knowledges developed beyond the community about, for instance, better ways to hold communal dialogue or about the urgency of a particular issue in the area feed back into the community and change its structure? With the knowledges I have developed about the different ways in which a postsecular ethos can be practiced (e.g. co-creating affinity groups in religious space or "leave-at-the-door" politics of place), is there a way of taking a postsecular (or a theory-as-toolkit (Dempsey and Rowe, 2004)) approach to the predominant ways in which a FC outworks its postsecular ethos? What I mean to ask by this is; can FCs, by listening to those who they are partnering with, begin to change their structure in response to these partners, exhibiting not just a willingness to self-transform, but transform the collective function of the FC? It could be the case that this is not happening, or that FCs do not have the resources or energy to be so fluid and dynamic, however, this is a discussion that has not been had yet.

A final area of discussion I want to highlight is the challenge that I think this thesis poses to analyses of non-religious postsecular subjects. Theography has enabled me to excavate the dynamics of how subjects shift their framing of transcendence in order to work better alongside difference. I argue that Coles' (1997; 2001) demonstrates in his work that although practicing a postsecular ethos enables subjects to reflexively shift their sensibilities in order to find ways to be generous to difference, this is not to be at the expense of a kernel of anger at injustice that drives a sense for the other and the seeking out of the marginalised to offer them solidarity. As I argued in chapter six, this kernel is framed in different ways by different subjects, sometimes being stripped back to its bare minimum (leading to the creation of a safe space for all, through ethical dialogue), but sometimes involving a set of political demands (working towards economic equality, creating a community that is greener and more sustainable). For religious subjects, this kernel is framed - at least in part - in terms of transcendence, their negotiations between different sources of religious significance leading to a notion of how to address injustice. By directly

addressing the formation of a frame of transcendence, theography generates an epistemology that begins to analyse how this kernel is constructed and how it might be shifted. What alternative frames of transcendence, techniques of self, or communal processes might help subjects shift the framing of this kernel in order to manifest their postsecular ethos in different ways? These knowledges are helpful because they can help religious subjects and communities begin to reflect upon how they might reconfigure their sensibilities and praxis so as to better show solidarity with marginalised people. They also begin to demystify the process by which religious subjects come to develop their praxis and blur it into activism, increasing understanding for those of no religious persuasion who are interacting with them in activist settings. However, what would be interesting to begin to develop are similar knowledges that begin to unpick how non-religious subjects construct their postsecular subjectivity. Without tapping into the core issue of transcendence that frames this kernel of anger at injustice, how do geographers begin to identify key processes and "matters of importance" (Häkli and Kallio, 2014, p.183) for secular subjects that begin to help them see how they can begin analysing and shifting this kernel so as to manifest different expressions of postsecular ethos. The network epistemology is in place for this within political geography (Blühdorn, 2006), as well as a deep interest in subjectivation (Sullivan, 2005), but there are yet to be studies of non-religious subjects that really probe into the construction of postsecular subjects in the way that this thesis does for religious ones.

These future research avenues would all contribute to more nuanced analysis and just praxis at the interface between FCs and activism. I hope that that has been the overall contribution of this thesis, which has explored the challenges and potentialities of practicing in places where religious subjects and FCs are blending their praxis into activism.

APPENDIX A: MANUSCRIPT OF PAPER *THEOGRAPHY: SUBJECT, THEOLOGY, AND PRAXIS IN GEOGRAPHIES OF RELIGION* **(SUTHERLAND, C. FIRST PUBLISHED ONLINE 4/5/2016 IN** *PROGRESS IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY***)**

I INTRODUCTION

In geographies of religion there has sometimes been a tension between radical critique and nuanced analysis. Some geographers - exasperated by the seeming imperviousness of certain religious subjects to reason - have employed broad brush strokes in the portrayal of religious cultures in order to instate a moral divide, as noted by Holloway (2013) and Megoran (2013). This mode of analysis at its worst places large swathes of religious traditions and theologies into 'progressive' and 'regressive' blocs. This masks religious ways of being that confound both of these generalising monikers and depicts religious subjects within impenetrable structures, negating their capacity for subversion.

There is a move within geographies of religion away from these simplistic categorisations, towards interpreting the construction of religious meanings and processes (Ley and Tse, 2013). Religion is increasingly perceived as a malleable phenomenon (Ivakhiv, 2006), composed of "systems of meaning derived from cultural resources by active agents, who come to affectively embody those meanings" (Dittmer, 2007, p.738). One of the foci of this shift has been the religious *subject* (Gökarīksel and Secor, 2009; Olson et al., 2013a; Vincett, 2013), emphasising the ways in which subjects struggle with various power relations in order to understand and perform their religious identity. A concern emerging from these subject-focussed religious geographies is that deficient understandings of theology have undermined attempts to generate nuanced knowledges regarding religious subjects (Korf, 2006; Pabst, 2011). This paper seeks to advance religious geographies of the subject by unpacking the relation of the religious subject to theology through praxis. Firstly, by drawing the connections between disparate notions of what theology is into a complex concept that disperses more of the power to define theology away from hegemonies. Secondly, by unpacking how - through praxis - the subject redefines theology and its relevance to spatial imaginations. Working through these issues will indicate the theoretical space into which I will introduce the concept of *theography* as a tool which can help geographers to analyse subjective interactions with theology, and how this process engenders difference and change, creating hybrid religious subjectivities.

In the rest of the paper I will illustrate that theography is an important concept for geographies of religion by reviewing various strands of thought relating to the subject and theology. These expositions will highlight how theography draws on and extends existing thought on religious subjectivities before going on to illustrate what it can help geographers of religion to better understand. I will explore two models of subjectivity, drawn from Badiou (1997; 2009) and Levinas (1952; 1969; 1978) in order to demonstrate the connections between theology and praxis that theography brings together. Attention to these models will highlight the important analytical practice of recognising variance between the subjective framings of transcendence inherent in theology due to these variations' distinct influence on spatial imagination and praxis. I will follow this with a discussion of how theography can begin to reframe the way in which

geographers imagine space shaping and being shaped by religious subjects. This will draw on examples from the geography of religion and related disciplines to illustrate how the subjective reproduction of theology is deployed as a technique of self that enables the subject to both dissent from and conform to religious hegemonies. Hence, theography presents itself as a concept which can help geographers of religion to make sense of the fluidity of marginal and mainstream religious practices by advancing a coherent understanding of how subjects produce theology instead of recourse to crude analysis that consigns subjects to 'progressive' or 'regressive' blocs.

II THE RELIGIOUS SUBJECT, THEOLOGY AS PRAXIS, AND THEOGRAPHY

Olson et al. (2013a) have pointed out that religious geographies have been moving away from explaining broad religious categorisation towards greater exploration of what it is to be religious through the everyday practices of religious people. They argue that postcolonial, poststructural, feminist, and postsecular critiques have begun to deconstruct "systematic means" (Olson et al., 2013a, p.5) of studying religion that utilise broad categories (e.g. Evangelical/Muslim/Hindu) to produce undifferentiated explanations about the performances of diverse groups of people (Devine et al., 2015). The effect of these critiques has been to reinsert subaltern religious practice into geographic analyses, reframing monolithic categories of religion as multiple, contextual, partial, dynamic, and scalar, thus re-infusing religious geographies with the notion that religious spaces and subjects are sites of struggle. Both Ivakhiv (2006) and Dittmer (2007) have argued that in order to understand religion more clearly there needs to be a shift in "focus from the object of religion to the subjects who contextualise it" (Dittmer, 2007, p.737). As Kong (2001) points out, studying religious subjects helps geographers to attend to the flaky edges of communities, highlighting how subjects construct their religious identity in the day-to-day through processes that break from hegemonies, embodying difference and change.

Subjects make religious meanings by deconstructing, splicing, and reproducing cross-currents of mainstream and marginal religious affects and discourses. An example of this kind of change can be drawn from Megoran's (2010) work on an evangelical "Reconciliation Walk" (p.382) along the route of the First Crusade. During the walk, public apologies were offered by Christians for the actions of 11th Century Crusaders with the intention of healing relations between middle-eastern Muslims and the Church and opening up the possibility of proselytisation. However, Megoran reports that in encountering the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli oppression, the leaders of the walk experienced a troubling clash between their cognitive assent to Zionism and an affective solidarity that they felt with oppressed Palestinians. Megoran writes that this forced the walk's organisers to reflect "on the consequences of the premillenial Christian Zionist position" (p.390). This reflection prompted them to reframe their theology, adopting a different view of the Christian God from which Zionism was cut off. After changing their theology, some of these people continued to work with the organisation that promoted the walk - continuing to identify as evangelicals - but by using their subjective agency, reconfiguring their theological outlook. They subverted the dominant Zionist discourses that they had previously taken for granted, generating a hybrid religious identity by splicing mainstream evangelicalism and anti-Zionism.

Concurrent with the emergence of small-scale and subject-focussed modes of knowledge production has been an increase in the number of geographers generating theory regarding the nature of theology. Korf (2006) identifies this as a welcome trend because many geographers have tried to understand religion without understanding its theological underpinnings (see Pabst, 2011). Ley and Tse (2013) suggest that analysts have often done "categorical violence" (p.156) to religious communities by constraining explanation of theologically inspired performances to include only socioeconomic factors (Holloway, 2006; Kong, 2010). However, conceptualising theology is not straightforward because there are competing notions about what it is. So far, in geographies of religion there exists a vague sense across the board that theology is about framing 'the transcendent' (Tse, 2014). 'The transcendent' is referred to in the broadest sense here; as something that exceeds the subject's comprehension and accentuates the limits of their perception and ability to control things (Luckmann, 1990). But there are different theories as to how the subject comes to frame transcendence, which form two loose epistemologies - both of which have given geographers of religion new lenses through which to examine subjective interactions with theology.

Firstly, there are those who focus on what Olson (2006) calls the "power of ideas" (p.885) in religious geographies and how "place-making [is] informed by understandings of the transcendent" (Tse, 2014, p.202). Much of this work has focussed on how hegemonic religious ideals and discourse are transmitted by institutional technologies (hierarchies/creeds/traditions - purportedly rooted in foundational texts) to subjects who go on to manifest an embodied response to these top-down religious imaginations (Olson et al., 2013b; Sturm, 2013). This approach to theology has allowed geographers of religion to explore the ways in which different representations of transcendence - conceived of largely in hegemonic or institutional terms - clash in the subject's life (Tse, 2014). This draws attention to the reproduction and "reanimation" (Olson, 2013, p.149) of different discursive framings of transcendence and the ways in which their competing narratives converge upon the subject's embodiment. Gökarīksel and Secor (2009) illustrate this by examining the clashing Islamic narratives regarding women's veiling fashion (the development of hair-covering fabrics, colours, and designs for women) in Turkey. On one hand, Islamist critics argue that veiling fashion is incompatible with Islamic values because it resonates with hedonism and consumerism. On the other hand, those who promote the garments claim that they enable wearers to remain distinctively Muslim whilst simultaneously making Islamic ways of life relevant to an increasingly modern Turkey. Turkish women are caught up in these clashing narratives about Islam which means that the choices that they make about their clothing also say something about what kind of Muslim they are; how they frame transcendence. This infuses their decision making about clothes with a tension between the complex religious identity that they are trying to project and the stifling categories that are presented to them by Islamic conservatives and the fashion industry.

Secondly, there are those who focus on the affective presence of the transcendent as the realm of theology. In this second sense, theology is not doctrinal knowledge but the ability to sense the transcendent in the body; the ability to recognise the presence of the sacred. This work has focussed on how

embodied sensations are entangled with belief (Holloway 2003; 2006), suggesting that belief is more of a felt preference for certain tenets rather than cognitive assent to them. This brand of theory posits that believing in a particular set of religious tenets is bolstered most effectively by them being associated with a numinous affective experience. There is a cycle of mutual reinforcement between affect, ritual, and discourse - each often triggering the other and creating the conditions for belief (Dewsbury and Cloke, 2009). However, central to this way of framing theology is the idea that without a notable affective experience, the cycle of mutual reinforcement would falter. For example, Holloway's (2003) work with New Age practitioners highlights that "the body makes (belief) as much as or possibly more than, it is made (to believe)" (p.1967). Through crafting affect via ritual, and being open to the possibility of serendipitous encounters with the transcendent, New Age subjects define the sacred through "an embodied labour of differentiation with the nominally profane" (Holloway, 2003, p.1967). Sacred space is identified as that which enables an embodied sensation of the transcendent and profane space is that which does not (see Buttimer, 2006; Lane, 2002). Therefore, theology is the embodied process of making this differentiation, not worrying over which doctrines most accurately represent the will or nature of the divine.

I acknowledge that these two epistemologies are often theoretically open-ended. When they recommend their take on theological discourse or affect they are sensitive to the gaps in knowledge creation that the other 'camp' could help to fill in. For instance when Holloway (2013) writes about religious hopefulness, although he wants to underscore the nonrepresentational aspects of religious hope, he does not present hope as purely pre-cognitively constituted; doctrine is frequently intermingled with affect in a dynamic, co-productive relationship. However, two problems emerge if things are just left at the stage of each 'camp' tipping its hat to the other.

Firstly, little work has tried to imagine how these two very different conceptualisations of theology might imbricate in subject's lives. Many religious subject's consider both affect *and* discourse to be legitimate sources of knowledge about the transcendent, drawing the subject into a process of negotiating between the two. For example, studies of charismatic Christians reveal that their theological imaginations convene a delicate balance between the embodied sensing of the Holy Spirit and regulation of this affective openness by stringent doctrine (Guest et al, 2012; Harvey and Vincett, 2012). Moreover, these affective and discursive elements do not always complement one another. Work done in churches in Glasgow has illustrated the tension that subjects encounter between a transcendent presence that they feel when working alongside the marginalised and the predominant conservative theology in the church communities they identify with (Sutherland, 2014). This theology engendered suspicion of religious expressions that were oriented towards social justice practices and less towards generating opportunities to preach to people (see also Cloke et al. 2012). This example illustrates that subjects might struggle to fully commit to either a purely discursive or affective guiding of their religiosity and are caught in a balancing act between the two factors, sparking a recursive process of review and reconsideration of their religious expression (see Dittmer, 2010; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Megoran, 2010). Furthermore, the example highlights that religious subjects are produced by their movement between spaces. Many religious ways of life are characterised by a mixture of

experiences convened in different spaces. There are spaces of ritual, conviviality, duty, and decision-making. All of these spaces are of religious import to the subject and yet constitute a variegated network of affective experiences and discursive framings. How do religious subjects make decisions about what affects and discourses are of religious import when they constitute such a wide scope of difference? Surely reducing theology to either discursive or embodied knowledge acquired in one particular space eschews the ability to analyse the networked complexity of religious subjects?

Recognising this reduction highlights a second problem. Both affective and discursive approaches to theology frame a particular factor that affects the subject's religious practice. However, they do little to outline how the subject might respond to these factors apart from acquiescence or simply to be plagued by tension. Both emphasise the structure side of the struggle between structure and agency (Faier, 2011). If we view theology from a primarily discursive or affective perspective, it is framed as a structure that is out of the subject's hands. But this is out of line with the new literatures on religion which stress that it is through the subjective agency of religious people that theology is reproduced in increasingly hybrid forms (Dittmer, 2007; Holloway and Valins, 2002; Olson et al., 2013a). Theology is not solely a top-down matter, but something that the subject can interact with in the day-to-day in order to make sense of and formulate a response to their circumstances, interacting with both the affective and the discursive resources of religion. This frames the subject as a decision-maker regarding theology as they encounter a plethora of differing qualities of affect and discourse relating to the transcendent.

In response to these two problems, how can theology be conceptualised as (i) responding to both discursive and affective material between spaces, and (ii) something that the subject negotiates and makes decisions about in the everyday? Citing Freire (1970), kinpaisby-hill (2011) points out that a useful way to think about subjects negotiating both affect and discourse and making choices about how best to practice in response to this negotiation is through the concept of praxis; practice under reflection. The concept of praxis emphasises that subjects have ideals about their circumstances and how they should respond to them, and they have experiences of trying to implement these ideals. The ideal and the implementation often misalign, and subjects reflect upon how best to solve these misalignments, which may involve changing their ideals and/or practices. Deciding on how much to change ideals or practices and to commit to acting upon these changes is facilitated by reflexivity (Bonnington, 2015). In the context of politics, kinpaisby-hill (2011), argue that subjects are actively reflexive, retheorising their political ideals and practices, negotiating between discourse, affect and emotion generated during practice, and the efficacy of practice in manifesting ideals and desirable affect. A similar reflexive retheorisation as part of praxis can be identified in religious subjects' lives as they attempt to frame transcendence in the tension between discursive and affective registers and make choices about effective practice. Religious reflexivity is a theme in the work of both Connolly (1999) and Foucault (2005; see Martin et al., 1988), who foreground it as a politically relevant technique for transforming the self; refining the subject's ideals and desires. Religious subjects apply reflexive effort to their frame of transcendence in response to tensions between discourse and affect so as to practice with reference to transcendence in a way that aligns with their emerging theorisation of it. They

generate performances that are a result of a recursive relationship between action and reflection. I argue that this is a better way of conceptualising the relation between the subject and theology in the geography of religion; theology as praxis.

Framing theology as praxis underscores the importance of reflexivity so that religious subjects can negotiate a theory of transcendence from a contradictory and variegated cocktail of religious affect and discourse, making choices about how to practice in response to it. Moreover, Foucault's (2005) work on religious reflexivity highlights the religious subject better preparing themselves to put their ideals into practice, using religious practices as 'techniques of self' to transform themselves (e.g. contemplation, confession, solitude, endurance), resisting contrary desires and ways of being. As Connolly (1999) puts it, Foucault's work on religious reflexivity examines "experiments in the art of self... these practices are about shifting... sensibilities", disciplining the self so as to perform in a way that better represents allegiance to a particular frame of transcendence. I call the process by which religious subjects reflexively negotiate between affective and discursive framings of the transcendent and then work upon the self to reflect that framing through practice, *theography.*

Theography is a reorientation of the subject's reflexivity towards transcendence; it is a partial and deliberate form of reflexivity practiced by religious subjects that I identify to emphasise that subjects cannot read their theology - their framing of transcendence - off of a particular discursive or affective grid. It is framed by theographic work; negotiation between different potential sources of knowledge about the transcendent. It is distinct from a more general reflexivity as it refers specifically to the subject making choices about how to frame transcendence and working upon the self - writing this frame *into* the self - in order to carry out actions that they feel represent that frame. (This is opposed to less purposeful forms of reflexivity; what Archer (2003) has called "fractured reflexivity" (p.362), which has no practical outcome). Theography is distinct from theology (often associated with academic scriptural interpretation, or - as I have outlined above - a praxis) and liberation theology (which emphasises the importance of praxis for theology, but concerns reconstructions of Christianity by marginalised people and not a more general religious process (Gutiérrez, 1988; Howson, 2011)). Theography goes beyond both of these concepts, highlighting the reflexive aspect of theology-as-praxis in which religious subjects engage in recursive theorising of transcendence, negotiating between discursive and affective registers in order to make choices about and changes to practice. As religious subjects encounter new (and evaluate old) discourses-regarding and affective experiences-of transcendence, reflection upon and retheorisation of transcendence are prompted, leading (potentially) to altered practice. I identify theography as a crucial process within theology-as-praxis and an influential factor regarding decision-making and changing religious practices.

III FRAMING TRANSCENDENCE, PRAXIS, AND SPACE

Before discussing how theography can edify the analyses of geographers of religion, I want to flag-up why it is important to consider how subjects frame transcendence when thinking about space and praxis. Although theology has begun to garner attention regarding its effect on spatial imaginations, particularly in geopolitics (Megoran, 2006; Sturm, 2013; Wallace, 2006), there

has been little work focussing on how subjects reproduce theology in a more quotidian way, and the effect this has on spatial imagination and practices. Being that religion is regarded as increasingly pertinent, permeating an increasing number of spheres of life (Kong, 2001; Tse, 2014), even possibly becoming "the emerging political language of the time" (Agnew, 2006, p.183), human geography can increase its broad salience with increasingly detailed understandings of the ways in which subjects reproduce religion. In this section I will illustrate how different frames of transcendence must be paid close attention to because of their distinct impacts on the spatial imagination of the subject and their praxis. I will compare the work of Badiou and Levinas in order to show how different frames of transcendence are crucial to the subject's spatial imagination and creating parameters of legitimacy regarding action. Although both of these writers work with "secular" (Moyn, 2005, p.182) notions of transcendence, comparing them provides an effective proxy for illustrating the differences that emerge in theologically-inflected ways of life by highlighting how two different ways of framing transcendence legitimate different responses to a common problem. For Badiou and Levinas the common problem is how to respond to the other.

Badiou's (1997; 2009) theory of transcendence[28] reorients the subject towards the other by severing the subject from the symbolic order. He suggests that in order to be receptive to the other, the subject must overcome its way of understanding the world - and its according marginalisations - by reducing their identity to fidelity to *the event*. Rather than the self being informed solely by immanent factors and folding its past experiences over into the present to practice in ways that seem 'new' - but are in fact contextual - Badiou argues that *events* exist in which something happens that exceeds what has gone before. These events disturb the subject's relation to their perceived reality so as to create an opening for them to rewire their values and perceptions. Badiou argues that the clearest example of the subject using an event to transform their relation to the other is found in St.Paul's Christian theology. In St.Paul's writings, the Christian subject is defined as someone who severs connections to all of their identifiers by privileging fidelity to the resurrection event. Badiou uses this as a model, arguing that by breaking the strength of other identifiers over the subject, fidelity to an event renders the subject indifferent to the perceived differences caused by unevenness in intersubjective identities. This sets the subject against oppressions that are incommensurable with the event's reframing of reality, a reframing which generates new ways of conceiving what is possible without the availability of explanatory tools for those possibilities in the hegemonic symbolic order. In proclaiming the event and refusing to comply with the dominant order, the subject undermines the legitimacy of that order by exercising solidarity with those who have been labelled 'other' by it.

Badiou's theory encourages the subject to conceive of transcendence as located in an immanence-breaking event. Fidelity to the event should initiate a cycle of praxis that discerns tactical ways in which to undermine the hegemonic

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[28] Badiou himself is not comfortable with the notion of transcendence. He has tried to form a theory that can explain the transformation of the subject emerging from an ontology of pure immanence (McLennan, 2011). However, arguments about transcendence cannot but dog Badiou's philosophy due to his theory of the event representing an apparent break in immanence (Fowl, 2010; Holsclaw, 2010; Phelps, 2008).

order and challenge allegiance to what is immanent with reference to an irruption in its continuity. Praxis should also include an active promotion of the event's reframing of what is possible. Therefore with regards to space, it is the responsibility of the Badiouian subject to recognise that the event changed the spatial reproduction of othering relationships, and deduce how an analogous shift would look now. First century Christians' commitment to the resurrection event caused them to shift the geography of their living arrangements, selling land and property in order to live in community and provide for the material needs of believers, addressing divisions between rich and poor (Claiborne and Campolo, 2013; Hengel, 1974). The Badiouian subject does not simply follow this example but tries to create parallels in terms of societal change by asking: how are social divisions that the symbolic order tells me are impossible to overcome reproduced spatially? How might I reverse these spatialities so as to undermine them and witness to the possibility of an alternative? In Badiou's philosophy, undermining the symbolic order and promoting something that contradicts it, are both demonstrated by practicing solidarity with those who are oppressed by the dominant order; seeking to legitimate their claim to better representation and enhancing their representation in spaces from which they are actively excluded. This has profound geographical implications as the subject seeks to most effectively eradicate spatial inequalities maintained by the dominant order that - for example - exclude homeless people from commercial areas (Davis, 1990; Mitchell, 1995) or refugees from asylum (Gill et al., 2014). A Badiouian praxis would seek to shift the subject's spatial imagination so that homeless people would not seem out-of-place in public parks and shopping centres and so it would seem sensible that people from warn-torn countries could move to wherever they feel most safe.

In contrast, Levinas (1952; 1969; 1978) reorients the subject towards the other as the route to rather than subject to transcendence. Levinas argued that there can be no subjective encounter with transcendence without the other. The transcendent is located in the Messianic Age - a non-oppressive sociality - which can only be reached through ethics; an engagement with the other. This engagement involves letting the other delegitimise the subject's symbolic order (Eagleton, 2009). In trying to fit the other into their symbolic order the subject does violence to the other and so in order to reduce oppression the subject gives up their symbolic order to the other for critique (Caygill, 2002). This is a transformative process; Levinas wrote that "[t]he subject, whilst preserving itself, has the possibility of not returning to itself" (1978, p.165). By submitting to the will of the other, the subject sacrifices their symbolic order (see Marcel, 1927). The other makes the illegitimate oppressiveness of the subject's symbolic order clear to the subject through their ethical encounter, after which the subject returns to themselves with a transformed way of ordering the world. It is by repeated transformative encounters with others (ethics) that the subject follows a route to transcendence.

Levinas conceived of this process as tied to Jewish religion. He rejected theories of God/transcendence as a presence or an encounter (for which he critiqued Kierkegaard (1992)). All that the subject can do is follow a trace of transcendence through ethics, which Levinas argued was expressed most accurately by a moralistic Judaism that favoured a "Talmudic science" (Levinas, 1952, p.2) over numinous encounters with transcendence. Levinas recommended a praxis informed by studying the Talmud, a book belonging to

Jewish tradition and the basis for Jewish law. It includes expositions of and meditation upon the Torah by many Jewish commentators, in order to discern properly Jewish ethics and philosophy. To Levinas, the Talmud was the recorded process of distilling the ethical essence of the Torah. In the absence of the jarring presence of a transcendence, transcendence is sought by studying and developing a process of ethical reasoning that has evolved over the centuries. Aided by the Talmud, the subject must engage in ethical relationships with others in order to overcome oppressive social orders (Moyn, 2005).

Levinas' frame of transcendence sets up a rigid praxis; studying the Talmud and face-to-face dialogue with the other are the only acceptable endeavours. However, Howitt (2002) argues that although adopting a Levinasian ethics is rooted in the place of the face-to-face encounter with the other, it also requires a broad spatial imagination, particularly regarding scale. He posits that the subjective symbolic order that the other challenges also includes a "visual ideology" (p.301). This visual ideology stretches across scale, defining spaces and places that are valuable to the subject but also crucial to the nourishment of the other. If these places are imagined in a way that impedes the other's nourishment, then - according to Levinas' ethics - this imagination must be overthrown. If responsibility for the other is to be exercised, a sense of interdependence regarding place - that places are interconnected across space as a network of nourishment for the other - must also be allowed to challenge the subject's symbolic order. When the subject recognises what is required - (i) that places must have space for plurality beyond their own symbolic order, and (ii) that they form part of a set of interconnections that must be maintained - if the other is to be nourished, this shapes a more political approach to place that has an anti-colonial tenor (Howitt, 2002). Place can no longer be defined as a resource to be appropriated but should be marked by the coming together of deep social interaction in order to produce creative solutions to the intertwining of different needs. This opens up a praxis that involves a politics of place, building fluid and generous fellowships, based on the findings of their ethical endeavours and commitment to a frame of transcendence that is located in a Messianic future.

Comparing Badiou and Levinas' work highlights that different frames of transcendence give rise to different spatial imaginations and legitimate options for praxis. Badiou's event-based transcendence splits space into tactical arenas of antagonisation (re: the symbolic order) and solidarity (re: the other). Levinas' Messianic transcendence, engenders an anti-colonial politics of place through the ethical transformation brought about by encountering the other. However, both thinkers set up static notions of transcendence. The notion that praxis may change the subject's frame of transcendence, helping to work out some of the impracticalities that may arise from purely Badiouian or Levinasian praxis are not factored into their theories. Although their thought alerts geographers to the importance which different frames of transcendence have for praxis, it is important to remember the reality of theography for most religious subjects. Religious subjects reframe their notion of transcendence in the midst of the reiterative process of praxis. It is unlikely that in empirical work, the geographer will come across an archetypal Badiouian/Levinasian subject. The theographic subject, may try to put Badiou or Levinas' model into practice, but will encounter transcendent norms and experiences that will challenge that model. Practice under reflection interferes with these static notions of

transcendence and it is this fluidity in religious praxis that I want to explore in the following section by thinking through the different ways in which theography enables the subject to change their religious practice.

IV THEOGRAPHY AND CHANGING RELIGIOUS PRAXIS

So far, I have defined theography as a new way of looking at religious subjectivation; it is a reflexive process of theorising transcendence couched in praxis, based on a negotiation between cognitive and embodied knowledges regarding transcendence, and geared towards transforming the subject in line with this theorisation. I have also - by comparing two contrasting frames of transcendence regarding a common problem - illustrated how this theorisation has an impact on spatial imaginations and decision-making. Now, I want to give some grounded examples of how theography affects religious praxis, particularly how it enables subjects to change their praxis. They will be used to highlight that theography can be used to change the subject as a Foucauldian technique-of-self in two contrasting ways. Firstly, to redefine theological praxis and challenge mainstream ways of being religious as a poststructural act of subversion (Dempsey and Rowe, 2004; Foucault, 2005), and secondly to act upon themselves in order to conform with preexisting theological praxes (Foucault, 1991). I will look at three different ways in which religious subjects change their praxis. The first two will highlight how religious subjects use theography to explore new ways of being religious by (i) creating what I call questioning communities, and (ii) extending their praxis in order to alter their relationship with their institutions. The third one will underscore how religious subjects use theography in order to subject themselves to institutional discipline.

Questioning communities are often focussed around convening spaces of collective questioning and discussion, the aim of which is the transformation of the subject's religious praxis through reflection, negotiating the subject's dissatisfactions with previous or ongoing experiences of religious discourse, affect, and practice (Conradson, 2013). These questioning religious communities make accepting spaces for people's queries whilst simultaneously challenging their theological blind-spots. They represent an attempt to give the subject space and time to exercise their agency through theography, allowing them to reframe transcendence and endorsing experimentation with new religious meanings, affects, and practices (Bell, 2006). These spaces convene encounters with difference and encourage subjects to develop a proclivity for questioning and testing their frame of transcendence. An example of this can be drawn from Moody's (2012) work with the Ikon community in Northern Ireland. Their practices are centred around "transformance art" (Moody, 2012, p.189), art performances that seek to question and destabilise people's religious identities through encounters with the other[29]. These performances are supposed to force reflexivity and reevaluation, and represent an attempt to push

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[29] The other being framed here as that which undermines the subject's religious praxis by highlighting its exclusivity or oppressiveness.

through to a religion "beyond belief"[30] (Moody, 2012, p.192). For example, one of the performances involved an actor reading out what an interviewee describes as a "gorgeous" (p.194) sermon. Then, the original recording of the sermon was played as delivered by the politician and evangelical minister Ian Paisley, troubling listeners by attaching an ominous set of political resonances to the words. This jarring experience links with one of the key provocations that Ikon put forward, inviting people to reflect not just on "right beliefs" but "believing in the right way" (p.194). Questioning communities represent an attempt to redefine theology as praxis, emphasising the healthiness of change and difference, acknowledging that subjects engage in their own reframing of and attempts to understand transcendence through questioning and experimentation, critiquing past discourse, affect, and practice. However, they can also expose the subject to difference - rather more forcefully asking the subject to reconsider frame of transcendence and reapply it - transforming their praxis through a transformed relation to the other. This requires theographic techniques, not just to reflect upon potentially conflicting theological information but to act upon this to transform and alter the self, changing desires, outlook, and practice.

However, not all subjects working through dissatisfaction with their previous religious experiences join questioning communities. Some maintain links with institutional forms of religion, but extend and redefine their praxis in ways that alter their relationship with their institutions. An example of this is found in Vincett's (2013) work with Christian feminists. Vincett interviews women who struggle with going to church because their church's discourses and practices are misogynistic. However, they also want to be part of these institutional church spaces because they feel it joins them to something universal and because they feel responsible to represent and welcome women in the church (Leming, 2007). As a response to this tension, these women extend their religious performance in ways that break with the institutional theology, creating "parallel churches" (Vincett, 2013, p.178); additional gatherings outside of normative church times and spaces. These spaces do two things. Firstly, they provide space for women to reflect upon their dissatisfactions with church and imagine new women-affirming theologies together. Secondly, they give women the opportunity to connect with God in ways that they cannot in church, blending their new theology into reimagined ritual practice. For instance, women set up a communion alter on the boundary between the official church sanctuary and the room they are given to hold their parallel church in. This subverts normal church practice, allowing women to experience communion in a way that resonates more with their framing of God, but also symbolically critiquing the church by emphasising their marginalisation, affectively emboldening women in their preservation of women-inclusive spaces. Women reflect upon and tweak institutional theology and praxis to find a way of being religious that deals with conflicting theological impulses; the desire to be part of the universal church versus the desire to have a woman-affirming theological praxis. The emboldening effect of this reflexivity - enabling women to feel that they are equally connected to God as men despite the way that men exclude them from church activities - is used as a technique of self to "hold church to its

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[30] This religion beyond belief is characterised by questioning dogma and structure (including but not limited to religion) that gets in the way of forming a collective marked primarily by love and justice.

catholicity" (Leming, 2007, p.86). This is a good example of the reframing of transcendence and working on the self in accordance with that reframing that constitute theography. Taking part in parallel churches makes women feel more entitled to representation in institutional church space. Despite experiencing subordination in institutional spaces, they feel compelled to inhabit them and to act as a welcome to other women and a critical voice towards institutional misogyny whilst also feeling like they are maintaining a connection to a universal church.

The examples of theography-facilitated change that I have given above pertain largely to what would be perceived to be subversive poststructural practice. Subject's use theography in these examples to thwart hegemonies, resist norms, and imagine new ways of framing the transcendent. However, theography does not necessarily have to be used in such dissident ways. It can also be used to enable subjects to conform to preexisting theological praxes. This may be because they are trammelled towards conformity to a religious discipline, or it could be that they use the discipline of a religion to resist another type of governance, for instance, to be a consumer, or to be law-abiding, or to be respectable (Foucault, 2005; Martin et al., 1988; Sullivan, 2005). Foucault (2005) and Connolly (1999) both foreground various reflexive practices in religion as ways of enacting a resistant micropolitics. However - although they highlight this as a technique of self that can help the subject to resist other systems of governance (see Luz (2013) for an example of how upbuilding Muslim identity helps Palestinians resist Israeli imperialism) - this religious resistance can also be exercised against the temptation to dissent against institutional religious norms, enabling subjects to tend towards institutional conformity.

Foucault gives an example of the religious subject using reflection to negotiate between their thoughts about practice and frame of transcendence - i.e .do theography - in order to suppress their dissident tendencies (Martin et al. 1988). He identifies monastic contemplation in particular as a way of reinforcing the subject's commitment to a particular frame of transcendence. He argues that Christian monks used contemplation to screen their thoughts for selfishness and deception, reflecting on them to assess whether they turn them towards or away from God. The idea behind this was to purify thought, shifting the subject's focus away from themselves to God, altering decision-making and actions. This self-examination was always done with an abbot (the head of a monastery) so as to conform the monk's thoughts to an institutionalised framing of transcendence and produce obedience. This kind of theography illustrates the subject submitting in advance to a particular frame of transcendence and then using their agency to constrain their deviant thoughts and feelings with institutional discipline. This requires repeated and increasingly extensive attempts to shift thinking and feeling towards a norm - based on a framing of transcendence - despite contradictory desires. Foucault mines ancient texts on monastic practices to explore how subject's willingly submit to and apply discipline to themselves but this is also a more contemporary concern for religious subjects. Olson et al.'s (2013b) work with young Christians in Glasgow illustrates how the subject can often struggle to hold to an ideal regarding transcendence when coming up against spaces in which alternative readings of their religion are projected onto them. Although keen to perform an "authentic" (Olson et al., 2013b, p.1422) brand of Christianity, these young

people come up against spaces where they find it difficult to perform their faith with integrity. Sometimes they receive sectarian slurs, which they struggle not to react against despite claiming an identity that supposedly transcends sectarian divisions. At university, they feel as if being honest about their faith would be looked down on, and so are less open and enthusiastic about their religiousness. Although Olson et al. (2013b) do not explore the coping mechanisms that their research subjects deploy in response to these conflicts, their research does highlight a gap for the type of reflexive activity that Foucault talks about in religious life. Olson et al. highlight that the body is the site where the conflicting frames of transcendence need to be reconciled and Foucault's work on monasticism suggests a process by which this reconciliation could be carried out.

Although I have outlined ways in which subjects either dissent or conform to religious hegemonies, the reality for many religious subjects is that there will often be a mixture of both dissent and conformity in their praxis. Dittmer's (2008; 2010) work on American evangelical reading groups and internet forums is a good example of this. He identifies various hegemonies in the groups and forums, with subjects in these settings forming geopolitical ideas from a mixture of biblical and para-biblical writings on the end times; for example that apocalyptic events will be based on the notion of a vengeful God. However, there are a range of ways in which subjects play with different ideas within this hegemony, sometimes even teasing at the edges of it. Sometimes debate focusses around the particularities of exactly who the USA should direct its military aggression at (another hegemony being that US military action is seen as a righteous force for God's justice). However, there also those who hold a painful tension of desiring God's justice whilst also having relatives in the armed forces. Dittmer leaves space here to wonder whether these subject's might be constructing subaltern theologies that reconcile their devotion to Christ with a less bloody fate for those that they love. This is a complex situation in which people are reproducing their religious subjectivity between different spaces and ideas of religious import. The reading group is where scriptural truth is sought for, but the home is where the notion that each human life is transcendentally valuable is intensified by familial affection. Theography represents a way that subjects can negotiate this networked religious experience of differing affects and discourses which spread themselves across space.

V CONCLUSION: THEOGRAPHY AND NETWORKED RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHIES

The above discussion has illustrated the usefulness of theography for the geography of religion. As a concept it foregrounds the importance of framing transcendence upon subjects' spatial imaginations and praxis, and illustrates more clearly how the subject produces this frame of transcendence without over-reliance on top-down affective or discursive structures. I have also explored how theography can offer new understandings of how space shapes and is shaped by religious subjects, explaining through this that subjects expend just as much theographic effort to conform as they do to dissent from religious governance. Now I want to draw attention to some new lines of enquiry that theography might help geographers of religion to explore.

Firstly, further investigation can develop out of theography's foregrounding of how subjects form a frame of transcendence by drawing on different affective and discursive knowledges that are encountered in different times and places. Religious ways of being are not formed out of homogeneous affect and discourse but a plurality. For example, a New Age practicioner does not encounter the same affect when they perform a ritual compared to when they experience a sudden break from their habitual practices (which indicates that the transcendent is guiding their path towards a more spiritual way (Holloway, 2003)). However, each of these experiences are as religiously significant to the subject as the other and contribute to the way in which they frame transcendence. This underscores that there must be a process of discernment that subjects undertake in order to enable them to classify what is religiously significant affect/discourse and what is not, even whilst participating in a variety of seemingly disparate religious spaces and encountering contrasting ways of framing transcendence. Theography can give geographers of religion a view onto how religious subjects make sense of this plurality - convening a network of difference - and how this making-sense has an effect on their future decisions regarding religious practice and change. It illustrates the possibility of reflecting with the subject on how they are receptive or non-receptive to different ways of framing the transcendent as a result of their own religious praxis being constructed through a gamut of space-times that are themselves constructed from different mixtures of affective atmospheres and discursive norms (e.g. space-times for ritual, conviviality, duty, and decision-making). How does theography mediate the differences in religious experience and interpretation so as to result (or not) in the coming about of religious hybrids and hegemonies? What factors contribute to the subject choosing to dissent from or conform to broader religious movements?

Secondly, discussion regarding levels of receptivity and non-receptivity to difference have been key to debates regarding postsecular geographies (Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; Coles, 1997; Habermas, 2011; Holloway, 2013; Olson et al., 2013b; Williams, 2014). This emerging branch of geography has been primarily concerned with ethical and political movements that resist classification as secular by accepting and drawing inspiration from religious motivation, metaphor, and interpretation without adopting a definitively religious or secular identity (See Barclay, 2013; Cloke et al., 2015; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Muers and Britt, 2012). However, little has been done to explore how religious people make sense of their participation in broader ethical and political movements without recourse to fundamentalist zeal. How do they reconcile the religious resonances in mixed-motivational ethico-political settings to previous religious affects and discourses? Where is the limit of a subject's reworking of their religious subjectivity in order to remain part of a movement (see Epstein, 2002; Tosi and Vitale, 2009)? Theography provides a way of examining these questions within postsecular geographies.

Thirdly, the politics of religious spaces has tended to be conceived of in two ways; either as a reaction to the top-down governance (Brace et al., 2006), or as an internal struggle over the theological encryption of religiously appropriated spaces (MacDonald, 2002). Theography recognises that subjects form their religious subjectivity in the gaps between institutional religious space and "unofficial" (Kong, 2010, p.756) religious spaces. This offers a new way of examining the politics of religious spaces by highlighting their porosity, with

hybrid religious subjectivities constantly filtering through and altering them. How are the spaces beyond the religious community - which the subject is also drawing on to form their religious subjectivity - affecting the co-creation of religious space? Religious subjectivities are co-created by a mixture of hegemonic religious governance (Agnew, 2006; Connolly, 2008), and religiously significant resources with more subversive resonances (e.g. many South American Catholics tied their theology to anti-capitalist movements - seeing Christ in the faces of the poor - despite orders from the Vatican to desist (Kirk, 1980)). How do congregations of religious subjects organise themselves to be more or less receptive to the plurality of religious ways of being? Are there limits on how much difference can be tolerated in order to maintain a sense of purpose or collective identity? What effect does it have on subjects' praxis when their religious communities become more or less open to difference?

To sum up, theography can help geographers of religion to further explore: (i) more complex assessments of how religious subjects differentiate between religiously significant and non-significant affect/discourse and how this affects their receptivity to religious difference and change, (ii) how their level of receptivity to difference has an effect on postsecular partnerships, and (iii) how the politics of religious spaces address the reality of religious difference even within a particular congregation. The new lines of enquiry will help geographers of religion to understand - in more nuanced ways - the constitution of religion through subjective participation in the intricate theographic dynamics of shifting religious praxes.

APPENDIX B: TABLE OF RESPONDENTS QUOTED OUTSIDE OF FORMAL INTERVIEWS

Respondent	Description	Research document material drawn from	Context in which research document created	Document/Date
#1 Sally	Conference #1 co-organiser	Email correspondence	Email correspondence	7/2/2014
#2 Ron	Co-founder of Ezra Community	Research diary	Meeting in UK before placement in USA	6/11/2013
#3 Ron	Co-founder of Ezra Community	Research diary	Informal interviews and casual conversation at Ezra House	31/5/2014 - 1/7/2014
#4 Pauline	Resident at Ezra House	Research diary	Casual conversation at Ezra House	31/5/2014 - 1/7/2014
#5 Barbara	Co-founder of Ezra Community	Research diary	Informal interviews and casual conversation at Ezra House	31/5/2014 - 1/7/2014
#6 Welcome booklet at Conference #2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
#7 Fran	Conference #1 co-organiser	Research diary	Informal interview at conference #1	16/3/2014
#8 Ken	Conference #3 organiser	Research diary	Notes on talk Ken gave to open conference #3 as well as casual conversation over the course of the conference	28/3/2014
#9 Toby	Workshop leader at conference #2	Research diary	Notes on exchange during workshop on churches and ecology	2/3/2014

Respondent	Description	Research document material drawn from	Context in which research document created	Document/Date
#10 Pete	Speaker at conference #1	Research diary	Notes on talk Pete gave on active pacifism in Northern Ireland	15/3/2014
#11 Ken	Speaker at conference #2	Research diary	Notes on talk Ken gave on combatting austerity	2/3/2014
#12 Jane	Attendee at conference #2	Research diary	Informal conversation	1/3/2014
#13 Max	Attendee at conference #1	Research diary	Informal conversation	15/3/2014
#14 Steve	Attendee at conference #2	Research diary	Informal conversation	1/3/2014
#15 Teddy	Co-founder of Exeter Church	Research diary	Informal conversation	11/2012-11/2015
#16 Dean	Co-founder of Exeter Church	Research diary	Informal interviews and casual conversation	11/2012-11/2015
#17 Dave	Attendee at conference #3	Research diary	Informal conversation	29/3/2014
#18 Lisa	Member of Exeter Church	Research diary	Informal conversation	11/2012-11/2015
#19 Mary	Attendee at conference #1	Research diary	Informal interview	15/3/2014
#20 Doreen	Attendee at conference #1	Research diary	Informal interview	16/3/2014
#21 Harriet	Attendee at conference #2	Research diary	Informal interview	1/3/2014
#22 Imelda	Workshop leader at conference #1	Research diary	Informal conversation	16/3/2014
#23 Aisha	Member of Exeter Church	Research diary	Informal conversation	11/2012-11/2015
#24 Olly	Attendee at conference #2	Research diary	Informal interview	1/3/2014
#25 Micky	Attendee at conference #1	Research diary	Informal interview	3/3/2014

APPENDIX C: EXCERPT FROM EZRA COMMUNITY "WORKING COVENANT"

The Ezra Community Working Covenant: A Work in Progress

By the grace and power of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the people of the Ezra Community covenant to be or strive to become a people....

- Reconciled to one another: "First go and be reconciled to your sister or brother, then come and offer your gift." Matt. 5:24b. Before we can offer anything to one another in community, Jesus tells us to be reconciled to one another first. A difficult command from Jesus, but so essential in the life of a community of believers...
- Called to a Place: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." Jeremiah 29:7. God often calls us to places we don't want to go. We're reminded of Gary's [a friend of the Ezra Community, who had settled in the city they were based in a while before] testimony of being sent by God to [here]. We are striving to become a people who are obedient to God's call on our lives to be in a particular place...
- Of sustainable living: "I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." Psalm 50:9-12. We are stewards of all that God has placed here. We must strive to become a people who show through our lives that we are responsible for these things, these creatures of God...
- Who are generous with each other and our neighbours: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." Acts 2:44-45. It seems to us that as we become a people of rejoicing, Sabbath, and sustainable living, we will become more generous. As we become more convinced of God's provision for us, we will not hold so tightly to what we have...

APPENDIX D: EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH INTERVIEWEE #4

Callum: No problem! But I'll kick off with a question, so em, just why, why start [the campaigning organisation that you work for now]?

Int #4: Personal journey really. So always wanted to play in a band so left school to play in a band. Series of...so I grew up in an Anglican evangelical family, em, series of events led me to then after I'd done a year with the band go off to Hawaii with YWAM, Youth With a Mission, and so I was based there, went out to Malaysia, Thailand, India, Nepal. Came back at the end of that quite right-wing quite tea-party in my politics and very much wanting, wanting to apply my faith but seeing the right as a political expression of my faith and had a university place and I got deferred, at the London School of Economics so I went there to LSE to do a 3 year degree in social policy and started trying to work out my theology in that context so did a dissertation on the idea of citizenship which was gaining a lot of currency in the early nineties at the time and looked at citizenship in the kingdom of God compared to political citizenship now, the two cities and all that stuff, and second year started doing a course called Workshop, has anyone mentioned that yet?

C: Yeah, yeah...

Int #4: OK so that was the major catalyst for me for change so I came into contact with this anabaptist view and did the workshop course in my second year and that kind of started to inform me and that started a huge faith journey, a huge political journey trying to work that stuff through. So I finished the degree, thought "how can I apply this?", joined, went to work in the house of commons - d'y'know [conservative Christian campaigning organisation]?

C: Yeah...

Int #4: Through their internship programme, so I was the first kind of proper year of... interns - worked with a Tory MP and then started to work with a number of different MPs and after that year I started to run the... internship programme but

all the times my views were going off in one direction and [organisation I was working for] were in another. So this was very interesting... I worked with John Major when he was prime minister in 95 as part of his leadership campaign against John Redwood... all the time my views were changing and evolving and heading in a very specific direction away from what I had held from the Right... and then got very burnt-out. It was emotionally very difficult because you've got a lot of people pulling you in one direction but your kind of heart and journey is going in a completely different direction. And so went off to do a dotcom, charity dotcom for a year, something completely different and then at the end of that it just felt there is a space in public life the no-one is filling and there are all these views like, alternative approaches to criminal justice, restorative justice, alternatives to prison, what about, what about the abolition of the prison? Let's think creatively y'know?! Where is the active commitment to peacemaking? We spend all this money on underwriting commercial arms sales, university departments geared up towards study of war and ministry of defence..... So looking at Christian peacemaker teams and what about active peacemaking, y'know, public policy, the whole economic agenda so this is before the whole economic crisis, this was 2001-2002 looking at co-operatives, looking at alternative models, the whole green agenda was starting to get very big, christians aren't really engaging with that and then there's the whole religion and public life agenda, things post-christendom changing very very rapidly. Where are the christians standing for a level playing field and not defending the privileges of the house of lords and faith schools. So I thought, lets start [left-wing christian campaigning organisation]! So I did, registered the domain name, set up a web page and started producing a kind of Christian perspective on the news using a lot of the stuff that had come from the dot com, this was 2001 so suddenly the dotcom has gone very big, it seemed a very low-cost way of engaging so I very quickly.... I did a paper at the London Mennonite Centre looking at nonviolent regime change in Iraq and the possibilities, so everyone was saying "either you do nothing about Saddam or take him out with the militarily" and Jim Wallis was doing some stuff in the states with Sojourners, it was about non-violent regime changes and decided to work with the ideas, got a little debate going on radio 4 about it.... [through that met another guy who got on board] and the organisation has grown organically since then

C: Em, you talked about, kind of that, kinda two-way pull that was happening to you at a certain point of, it's not as simple as left and right, but lets call it left and right, what were the kind of spaces or resources or people or relationships or whatever that kind of nourished that em....

Int #4: None, it was barren, really barren. I mean Workshop was one space, the anabaptist network maybe, London Mennonite Centre maybe but all of them there is this tendency not to be too political, theres a tendency to be more theological and not necessarily, seeing that as having political expression but not be campaigning political. So it was very hard and there was support but it felt very lonely indeed, incredibly lonely, and it's been a long journey over the last ten, eleven, twelve years to find allies and even, so Jim Wallis would come over every so often and we'd have lunch and we'd chat about stuff and he'd say.. "you have to have a constituency". And he very much works at, he has his constituency, so what he does in the US, and it's bridging that gap about being pragmatic so I think as [we've] grown and as it's matured we've become more pragmatic and rightfully I think in the past we've been accused of being smug and pious *laughs* and naïve and I think there's some validity in those criticisms but the challenge is to not give up those principles but to find pragmatic ways of applying them and the challenge is to engage and not withdraw so to engage with the structures of the church of england and engage with the political - party political. But there are these lies and they are very very strong which are from Christians involved in the houses of commons and in parliament and political groupings y'know "you've gotta play the game, you've gotta be involved in the political parties". So you've got these y'know Conservative Christian Fellowship, LibDem Christian Forum, Christian Socialist Movement, there are some nice people involved but they come to very different positions and actually there isn't a great deal between them and there's a very specific ideology with all of them. And when you actually look at how effective they're being *sigh a little* y'know they're effectively often used by their parties as tools to engage and y'know as apologists for their parties to the various, to the churches. So there was the "Listening to Britain's Churches" exercise run by William Hague and Tim Montgomerie, now known as a blogger was *something* and now the times but he was then spearheading that for William Hague, they were really in bed and the listening to britain's churches exercise, christian socialist movement have

done a similar thing, they are nice people but there is a real poverty of thinking and thought and certainly not where we're coming from. So yeah, very lonely. Even y'know the charities and the organisations. I mean we've seen huge progress, a part of [our] influence has been to create space for organisations to merge but I mean...but I'll give you an example, my heart leapt yesterday when I saw a press release from Operation Noah who were challenging the Church of England over its investment in fossil fuels. Now we were doing this ten years ago and there was no-one else doing it and we produced a report and everyone said "stop criticising the churches y'know, the churches are under attack - defend them, why are you always criticising the churches?" and no-one was supporting it and I had a meeting with Andrew Brown, secretary to the Church commissioners about their investments in fossil fuels and he said "well look, we'd take these issues a bit more seriously if anyone ever raised them but no-one raises these issues at synod in the Church." now you've got a group like Operation Noah with y'know a former bishop really involved pressing it forward and we're seeing change and I think [we] laid a lot of that ground work and put the issues on the agenda and we're a [campaigning organisation], we're a catalyst for change, we can't bring about the change ourselves, it does need alliances particularly in post-christendom and I talk about this in the book, it is about finding these movements, chucking out the ideas, seeing who bites making the alliances and connections and suddenly you find people saying "yeah actually I believe this, this resonates" and people catching a vision and movements change, you can't control it, nor should you control it but there is a place for being strategic working out where the gaps are, what the issues are that are important and y'know things have happened over the last 10, 12, 13 years, it's been quite anarchic *laughs* with no planned strategy I've definitely seen things happen and things have moved in the right direction although for people like me it's very frustratingly slow....

C: Yeah, yeah, ah! So many questions when I hear you talk and I can't keep control of all of them! That's brilliant...

Int #4: I mean I could go on and just talk at you for an hour

C: Yeah yeah

Int #4: *laughs* Do feel free to ask anything..

C: Yeah yeah, you talked in their about poverty of thought. Thought for me is really interesting in terms of faith and faith practice because for me thought's a big part and I think for other people thought is supposedly a big part as well and yet.... Yeah so just expand that poverty of thought thing, what are you feeling....

Int #4: yeah, there's there's two areas. One there's the policy thought and then there's the practice thought and the way we engage and think about the way we engage. So you get this from local politicians here y'know "stop protesting, come and join the party, get involved and then you can really change things" and actually things don't change unless your really out there protesting, they really aren't. It was like Tony Benn, he said "I'm leaving the House of Commons to concentrate on politics" y'know and what he meant was when you retire, that movements change things and actually the real politics happens outside and actually politicians are set an agenda and they can operate within that agenda but the agenda is set by the movement that changes the culture and the thinking and the politicians respond. And I think electoral politics and the thinking about electoral politics is absolutely fascinating and I finally, reluctantly got involved in electoral politics.... But the challenge for me in terms of the way we think about electoral politics, let's just talk about that, is to do it with a different set of values. So you're doing it not to get elected, now that seems like a paradox and an oxymoron but I will give you an example at the local level. Doing a campaign here in this ward to, in the run up to the council elections in May. The key thing for me is not whether I get elected or not although it would be great and we're coming from fourth place, it's a massive thing y'know, but what we've done is we've gone around and we've got the pavements made accessible so we've gone to the council and got ramps, about 20 ramps put in, we've got potholes fixed for cyclists, we've got the crossing times extended on the high road so older people and y'know people have more time to cross. We've worked with other parties to keep the transport links going through, we've saved the sheltered housing round the corner. 50 old people, got to know them, they've done really well, they were going to knock the whole thing down and rebuild it and we did a big campaign with petitions and we won. And so whether we get elected or not, in that 2 years we've actually made a huge difference to

the local community and actually there's an authenticity in that, it isn't just about winning an election. Now I've been involved with the big parties and what it is, is no-one does anything for 3 and a half years and then the council elections come up and in the last 6 months they go around, stuff a lot of literature through people's doors, claim to have done things that they haven't done and then try and get people to vote for them and then they say, once I'm a councillor I'll do the job. And then of course they become a councillor and think "well actually to have real influence I'm probably gonna need to become a cabinet member in the council" and so they toe the party line and don't really do anything and then they get to cabinet level, and then they think "well perhaps really to make a difference I need to become an MP" so they try and get on the party's list, find a safe seat, y'know the area doesn't really matter, you just find a safe seat somewhere around the country and I've got friends that I was working with in the house of commons that have done this y'know. They haven't necessarily got a connection to the local area, they just apply for a load of seats around the country and the important thing is not the people, the important thing is that they get into parliament and then they'll look after the people. So, and then, I've met MPs, we all have, who say well I just need to get a junior ministerial position or I just need to get on the front bench opposition and then I'll make a difference. And by the time, as you come to the end of your political career you actually haven't done anything. And its such a small number of people that get to that level - and even when they get to that level they realise that they've got a very small number of choices *laughs* cos the agenda is actually set by the movement and the wider cultural forces so it's about rethinking the way we do electoral politics as Christians and y'know there's the idea of, it's a cliche, but being faithful not successful and even if you don't get elected you can make a difference in shifting the agenda you can make a difference in y'know changing the local area and really y'know, helping people, and I don't think, that's not a cop-out, that is good solid political engagement but it's like laying down your desire to be elected. If you get elected, great, fantastic, get on with the job but the engagement is the primarily not about getting people elected. Now you can go to the Christian groupings in the parties, they're no different, they're thinking exactly the same way, it is about getting elected and getting power, so that anabaptist kind of, that's challenging for me, that kind of powerlessness but not withdrawing, engaging. It's like... I talk a bit about y'know the faithful witness -

you're free, you're actually much freer to say what you think, to think creatively because you're not thinking all the time about how all this will be perceived and sometimes, y'know it's the way of the Cross, sometimes you're crucified, OK, that's not a failure, y'know it's completely, it's that challenge to rethink the way we do electoral politics is huge. Then in terms of policy agenda there is a real challenge and that feeds in to those that are elected politically because it's very hard to get up and say in this kind of climate "we love migrants, migrants are great." y'know "we want to see more migrants we want to open up borders." y'know everyone thinks your nuts. And it's not a politically acceptable message. And you can apply that to all sorts of other areas - who wants to forgive the vilest offenders - who really wants restore...people might accept restorative justice now for robberies but they think it's naïve for any major crimes and prison is still seen as the major response. So there's, but there's a way to kind of think, not naïvely but maturely about how you get these messages across and how you present these values, these alternative values in a way that actually, it's about, I think being skilled in communication, and I'm not for one second saying that we've managed to do this - it's what we should be aiming for - is to and Noel Moules who runs Workshop is very good at this, engaging with evangelicals, he managed to meet them where they were and just move them on a bit and it's about doing that, so having the big picture - we know we want people to love migrants - OK so where are people at? And how can we start to move them in that direction? Policy makers. Civil servants. Party politicians. People in their local area. Choose a policy area, work out where you're at, work out where you wanna be, decide how you're gonna start to move people in that direction - that's a real challenge in terms of thought. But there's a whole other area of thought which is - people just aren't thinking in those terms. There is a very... I think the majority of people who are in churches on a Sunday from both evangelical and liberal and high and low traditions and across the denominations aren't thinking creatively about politics - still don't see politics as a natural expression of their faith. It's moving slowly in the right direction but it's a huge journey and you have to go some way to actually meet people where they're at and kind of take them on one stage further if that's not too patronising...

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