Faithful knowledges: the mediation of plural collectives in an interfaith charity

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Deborah Grayson, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date:

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Abstract

Interfaith initiatives have grown rapidly in the UK since the 1980s, but have been little researched. This thesis presents an organisational ethnography of London-based interfaith charity 3FF (Three Faiths Forum), with whom the author conducted two and half years of fieldwork as part of an ESRC collaborative studentship. Founded in 1997 to bring together Muslim, Christian and Jewish faith leaders, 3FF has since opened up its remit to those of 'all faiths and nonreligious beliefs', and primarily delivers education works to young people. The organisation is unusual within the interfaith sector, but expressive of broader shifts in religious and other forms of collective identities (Woodhead, 2012).

Theoretically, this thesis attempts to adopt a non-modern (Latour, 1993) and non-secular approach to knowledge production, arguing that this is necessary to conceptualise processes of collective building that are inclusive of those of different faiths and beliefs, and which do not re-enact racialised hierarchies and coloniality. Chapters trace the mediation of different forms of knowledge, including the mediations of media technologies, from a number of angles. The empirical material covers the complexities of everyday coexistence between faiths; how the organisation navigated high profile 'faith-inflected media events' taking place during the fieldwork period; data practices within the internal workings of the organisation; and a theorisation of the organisation's practice with participants as involving tacit and embodied knowledges, alongside a critique asking where accountability lies when central aspects of the work remain unspoken.

The thesis conclusion outlines some of the lessons that can be drawn from this ethnographic case for constructing a 'plural collective' on a decolonial basis, which can challenge inequality despite fundamental disagreements about the nature of knowledge and the agencies at play in the world, and which is "open to contingency but still able to act" (Hall, 1987, p. 117).

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Chapter 1
Introduction: faithful knowledges

Today's Britain is home to a historically unprecedented diversity of people. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the capital, where a dizzying array of backgrounds, cultures and ways of life can be witnessed cohabiting with varying levels of ease and friction. This diversity is less apparent elsewhere in the UK – with London to an extent indicating a different political culture, especially when compared to the rest of England, in recent elections.[1] However, the closeness of the Brexit vote almost everywhere across the country indicates that significant social fissures and differences in political imaginaries are widespread, and areas outside of London are far from homogenous. Almost two decades ago, Hall (2000) noted that the "massive internal diversification of social life" means that "Britain is a 'multicultural diverse society', long before one begins to consider the impact of post-migration multi-ethnic communities" (2000, p. 230), though the latter often act as "symbolic bearers of complex patterns of change" (ibid). Such trends have only intensified since then.

This symbolic weight is increasingly carried by those defined as *religious* minorities. London is significantly more religious than elsewhere in the UK, in terms of both identification and practice.[2] It also serves as a hub for minority faiths[3] and the presence of this diversity is a palpable feature of everyday life, even for those Londoners, like myself, with minimal personal faith practice. As I move my boat around London's canals, I see Hasidic families passing by on cycle rides in Hackney, groups of young women in hijabs by the towpath at Three Mills, or elderly Sikh men watching the swans in Southall. West Africans can be seen in their boubous on a Friday night, or in their Sunday best as they make their way to Pentecostal churches on industrial estates, passing revellers just heading home. The Church of England remains a solid presence, running food banks and collections for migrants in Calais, though my peers and I are more likely to enter church halls to engage in less institutionalised forms of spirituality – the now ubiquitous yoga and meditation classes, or the daily rituals of twelve-step meetings.

Coexistence between these groups is marked by highly contradictory patterns, reflecting the broader contemporary societal ambivalence about religion (Dinham, 2015). While London is

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[1] London, Scotland and Northern Ireland were the only three UK regions/nations to have a majority Remain vote in the 2016 EU referendum (BBC, 2016).
[2] 67% of Londoners belong to a religion compared to 48% outside (NatCen, 2016).
[3] 31% of Londoners belong to a non-Christian religion, compared to 4% outside the city (NatCen, 2016). 2011 census figures showed that London was home to 38% of Britain's Muslims, 52% of Britain's Hindus and 56% of Britain's Jews (ONS, 2011).

the only place in the country where church attendance is rising (Brierley, 2013), amongst the white British population the disconnection with religious institutions is deep-seated and growing (Davie, 2015). Day-to-day engagement with people of different backgrounds is inevitable, but often passive and distant, with Londoners slightly *less* likely to have social networks mixed by age, class and ethnicity[4] than elsewhere in the country (Social Integration Commission, 2014). The city has seen an increase in terrorist incidents and Islamophobic hate crimes (Dodd & Marsh, 2017), and our free newspapers regularly litter public transport with 'clash of civilisations' headlines,[5] while the experience of daily life is of a million Muslims living peaceably alongside non-Muslim neighbours. Faith-based differences are both present and implicit, fetishised and poorly understood – with our current media context heightening their visibility, facilitating the spread of misinformation, and also providing new channels for the sharing of personal and spiritual knowledges (Knott & Mitchell, 2012).

This thesis considers some of the questions raised by differences of faith through an organisational ethnography of the London-based interfaith organisation, 3FF (Three Faiths Forum). The organisation was founded in 1997 to bring together Jewish, Christian and Muslim faith leaders, and now primarily delivers education work to young people from a range of faith backgrounds. My long-standing relationship with 3FF began in 2007 when a university friend, Esther, began working there. This became closer in 2012 when I wrote my Masters dissertation about their fifteenth anniversary celebrations, which led on to me conducting two and a half years of ethnographic research with them with them as part of an ESRC-funded collaborative studentship.

The research I conducted for my Masters dissertation confirmed that there was something extremely interesting going on in 3FF's work relating to the status of knowledge. The organisation's stated mission during my time there was to 'build understanding and good relationships between people of all faiths and nonreligious beliefs'. As will be described in the empirical chapters, the kind of 'understanding' their practice aimed to produce was rather different to objectified knowledge *about* religious others, primarily being expressed in embodied and emotional ways of relating rather than the accumulation of detached facts about religious traditions or practices; their informal and conversational style of working also differed markedly from theological or Scripture-based approaches to interfaith.

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[4] This study did not look at faith identities within social networks, but given the strong overlap between religious minorities and ethnic ones their findings can probably be taken as indicative of segregation along faith lines.

[5] The Evening Standard's coverage of the Sadiq Khan's 2016 election campaign, for example, included a number of Islamophobic headlines linking him to 'extremists' (Steerpike, 2016).

In addition, 3FF's active inclusion of people of *nonreligious* beliefs and the assertion that these beliefs could and should be understood in equivalent terms to religious ones, implied a significant challenge to the premises of Enlightenment empiricism, which presumes a fundamental divide between (religious) pre-modern and (secular) modern people. Their work was thus neither 'religious' in the sense of allied to a particular faith tradition, nor 'secular' in this empiricist sense of distancing itself from the knowledge held within religious traditions, an approach which I am terming here 'non-secular'.[6]

Interfaith work has been little researched, especially compared to intercultural work. Of particular interest is how this non-secular approach might enable a 'plural collective' to coalesce, that is, a collective in which differences do not have to be suppressed in order to find common purpose and act in solidarity. This is no small task if these differences are taken to include fundamental ones about the nature of knowledge and authority, and the agencies at play in the world, which are highlighted when attempting to build interfaith relationships. These questions are becoming increasingly urgent in the current context in which not only are collectives being encouraged to fracture along lines of faith, but where the foundations of knowledge appear increasingly precarious – exacerbated by the media technologies which expose the instability of facts and multiplicity of knowing on a daily basis.

The organisational practice of 3FF, including its media practices, might therefore help to explicate highly relevant questions about how to go about politics in the contemporary moment – a moment defined by growing xenophobia and racism in the wake of Brexit and Trump, unsustainable extractive capitalism and its accompanying environmental disasters and 'expulsions' (Sassen, 2014), and the biggest movement of refugees since the Second World War (UNHCR, 2015). As I will expand upon below, my approach to this research has been informed by my political commitments and my experiences as a campaigner and activist, and a central goal of this process has been to facilitate building a movement capable of addressing these huge challenges. Some possibilities for putting the thinking presented here into practice are outlined in the thesis conclusion, where I outline a series of 'decolonial options' (Mignolo, 2011) for collective building rooted in the learning from my fieldwork.

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[6] There is of course an enormous literature on 'the secular' (e.g. Asad, 2003; Arweck et al. 2013; Berger, 1979; Fitzgerald, 2007a; Catto & Martin, 2012), and what I mean by 'non-secular' will be explored later in greater detail, but in broad terms it is closely related to Latour's (1993) term 'non-modern'. Just as the latter seeks to highlight that modernity (in the sense of a fundamental break between a pre-modern past and a modern present) never took place, 'non-secular' describes approaches which attempt to sidestep a division between religion and the secular, understood as categories which emerged simultaneously within the colonial encounter as part of that same project of modernity (Fitzgerald, 2007).

This introduction situates 3FF politically and historically, first by outlining the current faith landscape and how this has changed since the 1950s, and then by tracing the emergence of interfaith as a field, and as an object of public policy, within wider debates about multiculturalism and the relationship between the state and civil society. An organisational history of the Three Faiths Forum and its evolution into (the rather different) 3FF is provided, followed by discussion of the relationship between these changes and media technologies. I then explore some of the broader questions of diversity, pluralism and politics, drawing out the central preoccupations of this thesis around difference, knowledge production and mediation. I close with a brief overview of the thesis and a conclusion indicating some of my personal commitments and what is meant by 'faithful knowledges'.

Faith, belief, religion and change

Religious and faith identities in the UK have diversified enormously over the past century. As academics such as Woodhead (2012) and Dinham (2009) have argued, religious change has been inseparable from developments in the state and the market. The welfare state, Woodhead recounts, began as a joint initiative of church and state. Not only were many of its architects active Christians, but religious bodies contributed vast amounts of infrastructure by handing over control of schools and hospitals, without which a national framework would have been impossible. However, this religious contribution subsequently became much less visible, and was largely forgotten or ignored particularly by the left, who recast the welfare state as the achievement of secular social democracy (Woodhead, 2012, p. 15).

This loss of visibility, alongside sharp declines in formal participation in religious institutions (most obviously declining church attendance from the 1960s), appeared to provide powerful evidence of secularisation – the theory that religion was inevitable long-term decline (e.g. Berger, 1979). In fact, the decades after the Second World War witnessed a more complicated set of shifts in religious forms and practices. Migration from the Caribbean, and later from sub-Saharan Africa, led to the growth of black majority churches, mainly Pentecostal, as well as a small but visible Rastafarian presence. Non-Christian faiths joined the longstanding Jewish minority, with Sikhs establishing themselves in West London and the Midlands from the 1950s, Hindus arriving largely from East Africa from the mid-1960s, and the small Muslim population formed in the late 19th century swelled by arrivals from the Indian subcontinent (Brown, 2006).

Within the white majority changes were also underway. Disaffiliation from the Church of England and other established religious institutions sat alongside the growth of New Age

spiritual practices and white converts to Buddhism (Brown, 2006). In the Christian churches change was also afoot with the evangelical wings of Protestant churches growing in strength, including within the Church of England. When this religious plurality started to receive more public attention again from the late 1980s this was taken as evidence of desecularisation – of a previous religious decline going into reverse. Woodhead claims however that it is more accurately understood as religion becoming more visible within the public sphere, albeit in very different forms, rather than having gone away and then returned (2012, p. 11). An additional complication was that 'the secular' had also emerged as an actor – as a fiercely defended academic concept, in institutions such as the British Humanist Association, and in the high profile New Atheism associated with Richard Dawkins. Weller (2005) describes the resulting religious landscape as 'three-dimensional', being simultaneously Christian, secular and religiously plural (2005, p. 117).

This renewed visibility of religion has been related to neoliberal economic transformations, and their impacts on both social forms and state structures. What the different threads of the current religious landscape described above have in common, Woodhead argues, is that they are "characteristically entrepreneurial, democratised and individualised… plac[ing] higher value on consumer choices than on planning by experts, elites or even representative bodies" (Woodhead, 2012, p. 19). For example, the rapid growth of Christian outreach programme the Alpha course since the 1990s carries many of these hallmarks – distinctive branding, a strong focus on individual salvation and charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit, and a network structure delivered by those at the grassroots (Hunt, 2005). While the course has largely been delivered within the hierarchical structures of the Church of England and Roman Catholic churches, the very fact that it has successfully presented itself as compatible with both indicates a very different organisational form to previous types of Christian outreach.

At the state level, from the 1980s the Thatcher government (and its marginally more socially democratic New Labour successor) oversaw the reformulation of the state away from the provision of welfare as public goods to services delivered via competitive markets (Crouch, 2004). An alliance between these new religious forms and neoliberal patterns of governance then developed in the UK from the 1990s, with faith communities increasingly drawn into the mixed (and competitive) provision of services, with faith being seen as "useful, and, moreover, 'usable' by the state and civil society" (Dinham & Jackson, 2012, p. 272). The Conservative-led governments since 2010 have followed through on the neoliberal implications of this, treating voluntary initiatives – often administered by religious groups – as replacements for the welfare state, most starkly in the food bank system established by Christian charity the Trussell Trust

(BBC, 2012). *Interfaith* initiatives have had a particular role here in serving agendas relating to minority groups and 'community cohesion', as will be discussed next.

Multiplicity, multiculturalism and multi-faith

Before talking about interfaith specifically, its status as an object of *public policy* needs to be situated within the history of multicultural policy-making in the UK. Rather than try and determine what is or is not multiculturalism, I will follow Hall (2000) in discussing different *types* of multiculturalism, using his open definition of "the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity" (2000, p. 209). During the 1950s and early 60s, the UK subscribed to a form of 'conservative multiculturalism', that is, a discourse of assimilation by minorities into the traditions and customs of the majority, but with little in the way of explicit policy. In the mid-1960s and 70s, the state began to take on a more active role, aiming to integrate cultural groups via individual citizenship – which Hall calls 'liberal multiculturalism' (2000, p. 210). Minorities received some protection from discrimination in new legislation such as the 1968 Race Relations Act, and specialist services such as English classes began to be established.

The late 1970s and 80s saw very different kinds of strategies being pursued in different areas and by different institutions. Although at the national level Thatcher's government took an authoritarian line which demonised minorities, at the local and city government level this was a period of rapid innovation, with institutions such as the Greater London Council (GLC) pushing policy developments around antiracist education, equal opportunities in employment, and the promotion of 'ethnic minority arts', alongside public information campaigns about racism (Gilroy, 2002). One strategy the GLC pioneered was providing public funding for groups organised around race and ethnic identities, as part of a wider approach of funding the voluntary sector. This support generated huge amounts of tabloid hostility (Curran, 2005, p. 67), although it quite quickly became common practice. New Labour took it up as a strategy for service provision, although without handing over control or fostering participation in the way that institutions such as the GLC had attempted to do (Wainwright, 2000).

The 'identity groups' seeking support from the state in the late 1990s mobilised using a variety of kinds of identification, organising along racial, ethnic or national lines – or increasingly, as faith groups. A more extensive discussion of the emergence of faith within political discourse is traced in Chapter 3, but to summarise it briefly here: in the 1970s and 80s, faith differences were to an extent suppressed within antiracist organising as part of the project of 'political

blackness', the attempt by black and Asian migrant communities to construct a common identity in a British context (Brah, 1992). The fracturing of 'political blackness' not only saw splits between black and Asian groups, but also within communities from the Indian subcontinent along faith lines. The Asian Youth Movement, for example, was founded in 1978 as a pan-Asian group but "did not survive the return, in the late 1980s, to community consolidation around separate Hindu, Sikh and Muslim identities" (Lewis, 1997, p. 129). Many of these tensions crystallised in the furore around the publication of the Satanic Verses in 1988 which left Britain's Muslim population feeling increasingly under attack, a sense further exacerbated by the first Gulf War. Importantly, these trends were already underway for over a decade before 9/11 and the launch of the War on Terror.

Multiculturalism became a focus of public debate after the 2001 riots in Northern towns, with the publication of the Cantle report (2001) and the beginning of an official discourse of 'community cohesion'. Though touted as a rejection of 'multiculturalism', the multiculturalism in question was not defined and had never been official policy. In practice, it amounted to criticisms of policies on housing and education, as well as single group funding, which (it was claimed) had led to 'segregation' and 'parallel lives', particularly between white and Asian (Muslim) communities. In relation to funding, the Cantle report recommended "the creation of an ethos, which constantly promotes joint work and collaboration", which "would make it very doubtful as to whether any community group, exclusively promoting the interests of one culture, race or religion" (Cantle, 2001, p. 38) should be publicly funded. Among the types of organisations the report thought could "draw together the different communities and promote common interests", thereby creating community cohesion, were interfaith groups (ibid).

The Cantle report coincided with other critiques of multiculturalism in the early 2000s attacking it from a number of angles. For Goodhart (2004), increasingly visible differences in ways of life, particularly the presence of those of different races and ethnicities, would undermine support for the welfare state in the long-term, as people are less likely to want to collectivise risk with those living very differently to them. At the more belligerent end, the 'new realists' depicted multiculturalism as having gone too far in permitting the separate development of communities, particularly Muslim communities, leading ultimately to radicalisation and terrorism against overly liberal host nations (Lentin & Titley, 2011). But multiculturalism was also criticised from more radical positions, too, with Kundnani (2009), for example, asserting that single group funding not only reified identities but enforced competition by pitting minority groups against one another.

What is of interest here is not so much the rights and wrongs of 'multiculturalism' (however defined) but the different types of collectives implied by them. For Cantle, Goodhart and the 'new realists', the ideal society is one in which differences are curtailed, for if excessive diversity is permitted it will result (at best) in a decline in support for social security and (at worst) in violent acts of terror. From this perspective, single (religious) group funding is a cause of segregation and antagonism, and interfaith work that crosses over faith lines is a means of achieving sufficient similarity to have harmonious social relations.

But we can also see a more radical perspective expressed by Kundnani, in which divisions between groups, increasingly constructed as differences of faith and reified through funding models, are part of what is preventing the formation of a plural collective capable of exercising power and challenging the status quo. Here, interfaith work might represent unique opportunities to investigate and practice forms of building trust and solidarity between minorities who experience oppression in a variety of ways, without suppressing the differences between them. In practice, how the field and its potential impacts are conceived depends to some degree on how the history of its emergence is told.

Interfaith: three histories

Interfaith work in the UK can be traced back over a century. A common starting point is the 1901 Congress bringing together twenty-one religions under the rubric of the 'International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers' (Graham et al., 2012). Subsequent decades saw the establishment of a number of organisations such as the World Congress of faiths in 1936, the London Society of Jews and Christians in 1927, and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) in 1942 (Whitney, 2015). From its beginnings, interfaith has been inextricably linked to histories of migration, diaspora and Empire, and has often emerged at points of conflict.

Interfaith in its contemporary form emerged in the 1970s and 80s, and gathered pace in the twenty-first century. It is conventionally distinguished from 'multifaith', with the latter indicating simply that a variety of groups are present, while 'interfaith' "points more to the relationships between religions and people who belong to them" (Weller, 2001, p. 80). Common practices for forging these relationships include dialogue about theological principles and differences, or taking joint action – labelled by former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks 'face-to-face' and 'side-by-side' interfaith (DCLG, 2008, p. 17). Today there is a varied ecology of organisations and initiatives, some specialising in dialogue (such as the Christian-Muslim Forum), others organising social action (such as Mitzvah Day) or delivering educational

workshops (such as All Faiths And None), and convening bodies like local interfaith councils coordinate activities in their local areas (Graham et al., 2012).

This patchwork of organisations has grown substantially – the number of local interfaith bodies alone expanded from around thirty in 1987 to 240 by 2010 (Graham et al., 2012). At the national level a number of bilateral organisations have emerged, such as the Christian-Muslim forum founded around 2002, and the Hindu-Christian forum in 2011, as well as local chapters of international organisations such as the Tony Blair Faith Foundation established in 2008. The majority of these bodies are connected through the Inter Faith Network (IFN), which was founded by an ex-civil servant in 1987 "not just to link existing inter faith initiatives but also to draw the major faith communities into closer engagement with one another and with inter faith[7] work" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 151).

This growth has been connected to the increased availability of public funds for interfaith initiatives in the early twenty-first century. Following on from the Cantle report (2001), the Commission on Integration and Cohesion produced *Our Shared Future* (2007) which also included interfaith in its recommendations (2007, pp. 158, 87), and the next year the Department for Communities and Local Government published *Face to Face and Side by Side* (2008) which outlined the strategy in detail. Again, the rationale for interfaith was linked to critiques of single group funding. A significant investment in interfaith was made by the New Labour administration, including the Faith Communities Capacity Fund (£13.8 million between 2006-8) and Faiths in Action (£7.5 million from 2009-2011), along with £50 million for local interfaith bodies.

The official rhetoric at this point positioned community cohesion as uncontroversial common sense, and the involvement of faith communities a logical consequence of their commitments to "core values around peace, tolerance and helping others" (IFN, 2002). *Face to Face and Side by Side* (DCLG, 2008) asserts that "[t]he major faiths all share a core belief in the value of positive social action" (2008, p. 17), and in its foreword Hazel Blears MP talks about the "practical acts of social concern" enacted by many people of faith such as "supporting young men leaving prison, or renovating a much-loved public garden" (2008, p. 5). This view of interfaith as essentially about good people doing good things makes it appear harmless, though perhaps not that effective at achieving substantive change. Mayblin et al. (2016) conclude that interfaith encounters of the kind they evaluated (an interfaith cricket project)

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[7] The IFN has used 'inter faith' as two separate words since its inception, which Brian Pearce in Graham et al. (2012) explains was meant to signal that engagement was "between different, distinct faith traditions each with their own integrity and that these are not merged or subsumed in a new entity characterised as 'interfaith'" (2012, p. 155n). The compound 'interfaith' was always used within 3FF, which is why I have used the single word everywhere except when talking specifically about the IFN.

"will only have limited impact, unless they can be embedded into longer term, structural policy interventions" (2016, p. 221).

The context has changed since the end of the New Labour era (Dinham, 2012). Although the Coalition from 2010 was more willing to explicitly 'do God' than its predecessor, and the then-Prime Minister David Cameron spoke of Britain as a 'Christian nation' (O'Toole, 2013), funding for faith communities was substantially cut as part of the Government's commitment to austerity. Since 2011, public support for interfaith has been through the Near Neighbours programme administered by the Church of England, the church being seen as a "big actor" with "buildings, staff and volunteers in every neighbourhood" – though it has been pointed out that "[t]his may be a nostalgic view" (Dinham & Jackson, 2012, p. 278). Unlike previous funds which accepted applications from single faith groups so long as the activities engaged those of other faiths, Near Neighbours only accepts joint applications from multiple faith groups, and requires the countersignature of the local vicar whether or not the church is to be involved in the project.

This increasing enforcement of collaboration on terms dictated by the (white, Christian) establishment indicates a second, parallel history of interfaith. In this narrative the state is far from benign, beginning to fund faith groups in the first instance not out of respect for minority beliefs and practices of organising, but because faith leaders were seen as able to exert control over young people within their communities and to curb their more radical demands for equality. The Bradford Council of Mosques, for example, was institutionalised after the Brixton and Toxteth riots, apparently "based on an understanding that it was religious institutions that were best placed to control the younger generation and stop them from rioting in the streets" (Samad, 1997, p. 248). When the Rushdie affair made it clear that "all this policy had achieved was mobilisation on the basis of religious identity" (1997, p. 249) the BCM lost the support of the city council.

Muslims were increasingly constructed as a problem following 9/11 and the London bombings in 2005, becoming the focus of the Preventing Violent Extremism security agenda. This at least partly informed the New Labour government's interest in multi-faith and interfaith work – as one person at 3FF put it, "interfaith had its golden age because of Muslims". Amongst practitioners, this focus on Islam has been argued to undermine the principles outlined in *Face to Face and Side by Side* (Dinham, 2012, p. 518), though few interfaith organisations have avoided connection with it. 3FF education work was initially funded as part of Prevent, and more recently the organisation has provided support and training for projects being run as part of Near Neighbours, itself an outcrop of Prevent.

Kundnani (2009) and Khan (2009) highlight the problems created by the Prevent agenda, both for Muslims, who have felt targeted unfairly and subject to state surveillance and oppressive practices, and for other minorities, who have often resented their relative lack of access to funds. This contemporary focus on Muslims to some extent replaces concerns about other minority faiths – particularly Jews and Catholics – who have historically been seen as disloyal to the Protestant state and prone to terrorism (Nye & Weller, 2012). It has also seen the experiences of other minority faiths somewhat side-lined, which may account for the relatively low participation of those from Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu backgrounds within interfaith work, which I often heard commented upon during my fieldwork. The latest round of Prevent has seen additional duties placed upon schools and universities, and whatever firewall existed between the community and security agendas essentially disappear. This is playing out in the interfaith sector, with Near Neighbours now having to include discussion of 'shared values' – though it is unclear what those values should be and what the consequences will be if (Muslim) participants do not agree that they share them.

A third and rather hidden history of interfaith is one I came across by accident, through an unrelated personal project looking at the Greater London Council of the 1980s (GLC Story, 2017). Through this project I discovered some materials on interfaith produced as part of antiracism year in 1983, which struck a very different tone to the work I was familiar with, explicitly talking of interfaith as a means of bringing people together to fight systemic injustices and racism. This work seems to have been more community-based, and to have involved more black (African heritage) people, who were also generally underrepresented in the interfaith spaces I encountered. The absence of this kind of interfaith from accounts of its origins such as Graham et al. (2012) and Ahmed (2015) reflects a wider erasure of this period of left politics in the UK, which arguably represent the most concrete attempts to construct radically plural collectives which could wield state power. Interestingly, this third history was also basically unknown at 3FF, despite the organisation in many ways evolving in this direction over the past decade.

From Three Faiths Forum to 3FF

The Three Faiths Forum was founded in 1997 by Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Sheikh Zaki Badawi and Rev Marcus Braybrook, initially intending to bring together Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith leaders. Of the three founders, it was Sir Sigmund[8] who was the driving force, with the

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[8] Sir Sigmund died in 2016. His son Michael chairs the Board of Trustees at 3FF, and his son Noam chairs the Board of Trustees of the Sternberg foundation, which remains 3FF's major donor.

Forum operating at first as a branch of his philanthropic trust, the Sternberg Foundation, and he himself being one of two staff members in the early years. He had been heavily involved in the formation of the Inter Faith Network, and was a trustee for the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) prior to founding the Three Faiths Forum. Its activities in this early period largely consisted of meetings with dignitaries and elites – government officials, foreign ambassadors and royalty – and public talks about the importance of interfaith, alongside founding local groups where faith leaders could come together for trilateral dialogue.

The elite orientation was consistent with the kind of interfaith that Sir Sigmund and his cofounders were steeped in at the time. By this point in the mid-90s, for example, the IFN was part of the Lambeth Group which was helping to plan the 'Faith Zone' at the Millennium Dome, alongside royalty and the Archbishop of Canterbury (Gilliat-Ray, 2004). The 'Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment' held in Parliament on the third of January 2000 also marked the relationship between IFN and New Labour becoming closer (Graham et al., 2012, p. 150). These links towards the British establishment are still fostered today, with the IFN encouraging members to take part in interfaith social projects as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Year of Service (IFN, 2012, p. 14). The Three Faiths Forum, however, has had a different trajectory.

In 2004, Stephen Shashoua became the third member of staff, and soon voiced concerns that working solely with faith leaders did not lead to change within wider communities, and in particular that young people felt little connection to these apparent representatives or to interfaith as an endeavour. In this he was not alone, with Paul Weller (an academic closely associated with IFN) noting that "the question of 'generational change'" and the absence of young people within interfaith spaces "is one that is often raised and about which there is often considerable concern" (2009, p. 78). Stephen's greater awareness of this issue compared to others at the Three Faiths Forum was perhaps unsurprising, given that he was at the time in his twenties and his colleagues were in their seventies and eighties. His suggestion that a new approach should be tried working with young people directly coincided with the first public funding becoming available for interfaith work. The Three Faiths Forum put in a successful bid to develop educational workshops for Muslim, Christian and Jewish schoolchildren, marking the beginning of the organisation's programmatic work.

This work rapidly expanded over subsequent years. School workshops were joined by faith school linking in 2007, a programme bringing together young people from pairs of schools, each with a different faith ethos; a leadership programme called Parliamentors working with university students also launched in 2007; and interfaith arts events beginning in 2010. Initially, this work was under the 'youth wing' but they soon became the core work of the

organisation, formalised when Stephen became director in 2007 on Sir Sigmund's retirement, at the age of 86. The staff had grown to around 17 when I began my fieldwork.

The organisation which is the topic of this ethnography, 3FF (as it was rebranded in 2009) was thus substantially different to the Three Faiths Forum in its first iteration, and also different from other interfaith bodies such as the IFN and CCJ. It worked with a much younger demographic, with the majority of staff and participants in their twenties and below. The feel of its programmes was largely drawn from youth work, emphasising participation, personal sharing and emotional connection. Rather than engaging in sociological or theological discussions of religious difference, participants were provided with opportunities to meet and learn from each other's experiences – a distinctive form of 'encounter-based religious literacy' that is the topic of the empirical chapter *The Spirit of Encounter*.

3FF also encouraged broader definitions of faith and belief, and of who could and should participate in interfaith work. Unlike other organisations who have had continued battles over whether for example, Pagans or humanists should be involved (Weller, 2009), at 3FF the decision was taken in 2009 to open up the work to those of 'all faiths and nonreligious beliefs', rather than just Muslims, Jews and Christians.[9] The active encouragement of participation from atheists, agnostics and humanists, including those unaffiliated with institutions such as the British Humanist Association, made the organisation something of a rarity in the field.

There was also comparatively little discussion of religious concepts and doctrines, being more concerned with personal experiences of 'lived religion' or 'lived belief' (Mcguire, 2008; Ammerman, 2007; Hall, 1997).[10] Indeed, one dimension of the organisation's attempts to be more inclusive was to acknowledge the wide variety of relationships to faith identities, rather than assuming that they would be paramount for all participants. One of the critiques frequently made within 3FF of 'traditional interfaith' organisations was that they operated on a reductive representative model which focus solely on a single dimension of difference, that of membership of one of the nine 'world religions'. 3FF's looser language of working with people of 'different faiths, beliefs and cultures' was intended to capture a more complex terrain, in which individuals might differ not only by their denomination or mode of practice, but also in how important their faith identity was to them.

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[9] The move to using the acronym '3FF' was intended to signal that the organisation had moved away from working with 'Three Faiths', but this was a persistent point of confusion during my fieldwork and the organisation has ongoing plans for a full name change.

[10] For this reason, this thesis will use 'religion' and 'faith' somewhat interchangeably, as those within 3FF did. For a discussion of the differences within a New Labour policy context, see Allen (2011).

The exact role of religion within their work was therefore a constant source of debate: as Stephen wrote in an article for the New Humanist, 'interfaith' was a rather narrow descriptor for the work which was "not primarily about faith at all" (Shashoua, 2012). At the same time, most of those within the organisation remained attached to the interfaith label – albeit often in compound formulations such as 'interfaith and intercultural' – arguing that the secular assumptions in the dominant culture meant that faith identities tended to be side-lined if they were not explicitly named as a topic or focus. The unusualness of the organisation posed challenges for me as I tried to describe and analyse their practice, given that there is little literature on 'mainstream' interfaith let alone their version of it, and my decision to describe it as a form of 'religious literacy' (Prothero, 2007) is itself an approximation of what staff or participants understood themselves to be engaged in.

3FF's journey from its initial elite orientation to its current focus can be seen as encompassing a number of shifts that are reflective of broader changes within the overall faith landscape. These could be crudely characterised as: a move from leaders to followers; from participants accessed through institutions to those unaffiliated with institutions; from older people to young people; from those whose faith identities were paramount to those with more equivocal or uncertain relationships to faith; and from a strict division between the religious and nonreligious to a more nuanced sense of their continuities. In many respects, these changes have similarities with those which have taken place in the realm of media, and these parallels are explored in the next section.

Changing faith, changing media

So far, transformations in the religious make up of Britain have been considered primarily in relation to neoliberal economic changes since the 1980s. This economic ideology has affected social forms, with the emergence of a diverse ecology of faith groups and practices within a 'spiritual marketplace', and also relationships between state and nonstate actors, with religious organisations often providing services formerly delivered by the state (Woodhead, 2012). These transitions have of course not taken place in isolation, and are also deeply connected to globalisation and neocoloniality which has driven migration to Britain (Diamond, 2010), and geopolitical shifts since the end of the Cold War leading to the increasing focus on Islam as the principal enemy of 'the West' (Huntington, 2002). Here I want to draw out a further element which is crucial for this thesis: the parallel changes in media technologies and the implications of this for the construction of plural collectives.

For many scholars within religious studies, changes within media technologies have been strongly implicated in transformations in the religious landscape. Woodhead asserts that for the kind of entrepreneurial and individualised religious communities which have thrived since the 1980s, "a whole range of media, particularly the internet and new social media" have provided the means for them to "promote themselves, gather support, offer resources and forge new alliances" (Woodhead, 2012, pp. 19–20). This intuitive relationship between digital media and new forms of religious organisation is evident not only in the literature expressly addressing 'digital religion' (e.g. Campbell, 2012) but throughout contemporary religious studies, as will be discussed more in Chapter 3.

If new media have implications for faith communities, they also have implications for interfaith – and the transformation of the Three Faiths Forum into 3FF can be seen as related to such changes in media technologies. This has a number of dimensions, but here I want to highlight three: changes in the character of publicity, changes in organising related to digital technologies, and changes in ideas of authority and leadership.

First, there is the question of publicity. Interfaith organisations have always sought media coverage, seeking to influence community relations via a public display of unity. Historically, the focus has primarily been on newspapers, particularly local ones (DCLG, 2008, p. 43). Interfaith work has tended to receive *national* news coverage only at moments of crisis. After the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices in early 2015 the Guardian reported on a joint conference at Regents Park mosque which brought together "[l]eading members of Britain's religious communities" (Gani, 2015) – an event which would have been unlikely to be seen as newsworthy had it not been related to a high-profile news story at the time. The empirical chapter *Faith in Crisis* will look in more detail at the mediation of faith-based conflict, as well as attempts to achieve publicity for 'happier' relationships between those of different faiths.

Within 3FF, the shift from elite-focused forms of traditional interfaith to their current more individualised orientation, was sometimes described as a rejection of this approach to publicity. In an article written by Stephen in the Huffington Post after the murder of Lee Rigby, he stated that "leaders releasing statements and taking part in photo ops do have a key role to play, as it's important to display unity across communities in tense and troubled times", but argued that "the personal touch locally" is what "really makes an impact and will bring about lasting change" (Shashoua, 2013). Implicit in this statement, I would argue, is a sense that the public display of unity presented within 'photo ops' was not having the desired influence, particularly on young people amongst whom newspaper readership is very low (Ofcom, 2017). The disconnection between faith leaders and their supposed followers, which led to 3FF seeking to approach individuals directly rather than via representatives, was thus paralleled by

a disconnection between media institutions and their presumed audiences. The changing conditions of publicity – not least the very rapid loss of local newspapers – altered the terrain in which 3FF was operating and its practices for navigating it.

Secondly, there have been changes in relation to organising. Across the sector (in some ways pioneered by 3FF) there has been a shift from theologically-based dialogue to jointly delivered social action – 'face-to-face' interfaith to some extent being replaced by its 'side-by-side' forms (DCLG, 2008). This means that practices of organising are no longer confined to those such as 3FF who are *convening* the participants, but have become a central part of what those participants are themselves doing together. The empirical chapter *Dead Data, Living Knowledge* explores the ways in which organising itself is now inescapably digital, and influenced by the affordances and logics of these technologies – for example, the data deluge resulting from the default setting to 'keep everything' (Dumbill, 2012). While the focus of that chapter is on 3FF's internal practices, the challenges and ambiguities faced by the organisation also have to be navigated by their participants, particularly teachers and those on the Parliamentors programme, where relationships and understanding between those of different faiths and beliefs could stand or fall in part on the basis of how email or project management software was used.

Thirdly, shifts in ideas of authority and leadership have had implications for the sector. Many within religious studies have argued that the greater access to different forms of theological interpretation via digital media is implicated in changes underway within faith communities. Graham et al. (2012), for example, claim that "blogs are democratising knowledge" for young British Muslims who are able to therefore challenge the religious authority of local teachers (2012, p. 120), while Knott and Mitchell (2012) highlight the role of media technologies in allowing previously hidden injustices, such as child abuse within the Catholic Church, to be "electronically exposed". This is paralleled by work produced by media scholars emphasising the tendency of such technologies to undermine traditional sources of authority – Couldry (2012), for example, links the information saturation of the digital age to a decline in trust across many political and social institutions (2012, p. 129). The disconnection between adherents to particular faiths and their traditional leaders, facilitated by digital platforms, therefore makes it less likely that interfaith work which seeks to connect with adherents via faith-based institutions will be effective.

Changes in the media landscape, and changes in faith practices, are therefore tied up with one another in a number of ways as both are implicated in the formation of collectives. Interfaith work, as a particular kind of collective building, has always required mediation – and without assigning causality in any straightforward sense, is seeing its approaches evolve in tandem with

new communications technologies and practices. The next section develops the political implications of exploring these complex interrelationships between knowledge, technology and interfaith work.

The plural collective – how different can we be?

This thesis draws on concepts from Science and Technology Studies and Actor Network Theory, both of which have faced critiqued from some media scholars. As will be discussed in the theoretical framework, criticisms of ANT often characterise the literature as apolitical (Couldry, 2008), leaving it unclear "what is at stake" (Benson, 2014). Given that my own attraction to and use of concepts from these fields *derives* from my political commitments, this section seeks to make clear what I see being at stake in the questions addressed here.

In the mid-twentieth century, a number of large-scale institutions, including the labour movement and the Catholic and established churches, were able to challenge capital and partially reverse its inequalities through wage gains and the introduction of the welfare state. These collectives have been steadily fracturing since the Second World War, in part due to their failures to respond to internal differences. The formation and growth of majority black Pentecostal churches, for example, gained much of its impetus from the disaffiliation of Anglican Caribbean migrants from the Church of England when it failed to welcome them and address racism within the church (Walton, 2016). Similarly, the growth of the women's movement was largely precipitated by experiences of sexism and patriarchal behaviour within political parties and the wider labour movement – as socialist feminists have been rejoindering for decades in response to accusations that they are 'splitting the left' (Littler et al., 2015).

The resulting ecologies, in terms of both faith communities and left organising, provide more avenues for individual self-expression and the validation of minority identities. However, their sum total does not add up to a whole capable of challenging the power of financial capital and its hold on the institutions of the state (Fenton, 2016). The question of how to create a collective capable of wielding the kind of power seen in the mid-twentieth century while acknowledging internal differences has haunted the left since the 1960s. Reflecting on the New Left in 1990, Stuart Hall wrote of the other social movements of the post-war period that they posed:

> *"the problem of how to articulate these new impulses and social forces with the more traditional class politics of the left; and how, through this articulation, the project of the left could be transformed. The fact that we had no greater success than the left has*

had since in trying to construct a 'historical bloc' out of such heterogeneous social interests, political movements and agendas, in building a hegemonic political practice out of, and with, these differences, does not negate the urgency of the task." (Hall, 2017, pp. 140–1)

For Gilbert (2013), part of the problem of constructing this 'historical bloc' is conceptual. The mass institutions of the early twentieth century, he argues, were conceived of as 'meta-individuals' – groups made up of basically similar indivisible, unitary and coherent individuals. While this was always to some extent a convenient fiction, it did coincide with an era of mass Fordist consumerism, a period in history when people's lives looked more similar than at any other time before or since. The collective as a 'meta-individual' is neither desirable nor remotely possible in the current context given the "massive internal diversification of social life" (Hall, 2000, p. 230) since that period. However, the 'meta-individual' idea retains a deep hold on our political imaginaries, not least because of its largely unquestioned status within liberal political thought (Gilbert, 2013, p. 37). What is needed, Gilbert argues, are alternative visions of collectives in which identities and interests are conceived of as contingent, able to be connected and transformed in novel ways, in which differences do not have to be suppressed in order to create alignment and unity of purpose – which I am terming 'plural collectives'.

Interfaith work has wider implications for the construction of Hall's 'historical bloc' because it highlights that the challenges we face in constructing plural collectives are at least in part *epistemological*. A crucial aspect of collective building manifested within interfaith is that our disagreements will include *how knowledge might be produced and validated*, and the *agencies and entities* at play in the world. As will be argued in the theoretical framework, a founding premise of secular modern thought is that whatever differences we may have, we can nonetheless agree on how the world should be known (through rational scientific procedures) and what entities it is made up of (nature – which is amenable to such ways of knowing – rather than the supernatural).

This empiricist premise enacts epistemological oppression (Dotson, 2014) since it excludes people of faith from contributing to knowledge, and furthermore perpetuates *coloniality* (Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2000, 2011), that is, "the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilisation" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 2) in which Western superiority is constructed through the suppression of other knowledge systems. Where interfaith work attempts to develop innovative practices for mediating between 'alternative truths' (Bergin, 2001) rather than subsuming them within a universalising framework for knowledge, it might be considered a testing ground for decolonial practices of collective building.

The questions I am attempting to address are not new – indeed, how we can construct persuasive and collective truths on a different foundation to Enlightenment empiricism has been one of the central preoccupations of techno feminists (Haraway, 1988; Stengers, 2010), academics within Science and Technology Studies (Latour, 1993; Law, 2004), black feminists such as Collins (2008), and cultural studies scholars such as Hall (2000). But they have taken on a new visceral intensity in the contemporary context, where criticism of such empiricism is no longer marginal to public debates. The Leave campaign in the EU Referendum and the Trump presidency have been dominated by suspicion of elite forms of expertise, and the rhetorical forms of conspiracy in which all facts are suspect and "nothing is what it appears to be… because of hidden interests" (Finlayson, 2016). So far, in the UK at least, it is xenophobic and racist populism which has been most successful at mobilising in this context, with the left often still clinging to informational and scientistic approaches which fail to address the inadequacies of these ways of knowing.

This heightened awareness of epistemological uncertainty in everyday life is tied up with contemporary media technologies and changing patterns of mediation. The constant, apparently global potential for connectivity afforded by these technologies has not "usher[ed] in a world of better understanding and more inclusive citizenship" (Morley, 2007, p. 8) as the more utopian narratives promised. Rather, profound differences and "irreducible moral disagreements" (Couldry, 2012, p. 182) have been brought to the fore, since media "do not reduce or resolve this disagreement: on the contrary, they bring it into view" (ibid). Arguably, one of the shifts underway is greater acknowledgement that multiple epistemologies and ways of knowing exist and cannot simply be subsumed within a singular scientistic logic. This provides a potential opportunity to address long-standing epistemologically oppressions, including those experienced by many people of faith. However, while acknowledging that such disagreements exist is a *starting* point for epistemological justice, building a plural collective capable of acting in such circumstances requires much more than this – to go beyond *de*constructing the facts to develop decolonial practices for *re*constructing and *co*-constructing knowledge that might be trusted by multiple communities.

This is where the practices being developed within interfaith work might have something to teach the wider left, particularly the importance of understanding ourselves as embodied entities who do not simply operate on conscious levels, or solely learn through conscious means. As I will argue in the thesis conclusion, neoliberalism has in some ways accommodated tacit and embodied dimensions of human knowledge, in part through its incorporation of some of the critiques of capitalism made by the social movements of the 1960s (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). But it also thrives on the widespread mistrust of institutions and expertise,

and in the vacuum created by the left's failure to conceptualise alternative sources of authority on different epistemological grounds. The thesis conclusion tries to draw some lessons from both the successes and limitations of 3FF's work for imagining forms of practice which might resist deeply embedded neoliberal habits and ways of being, and open up new imaginaries in which a plural collective might coalesce.

The research questions this thesis aims to answer are:

- *How is the work of 3FF impacted upon by the "omnipresence of media culture" (Hepp, 2012, p. 11) and what does this mean for organisational practice?*
- *How does 3FF create and evaluate knowledge about its work with people of different faiths and beliefs? What roles do media technologies play and with what results?*
- *How are rationality and subjectivity constructed and understood in 3FF's work, and how do they relate to the concepts of non-modernity (Latour, 2010) and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988)?*
- *What can 3FF's work tell us about human and non-human agency, including the agency of media technologies? How do power and accountability operate within this context?*

An overview of the structure of the thesis now follows.

Thesis overview

Although it is common for a chapter on literature and theory to come after a thesis introduction, Chapter 2 outlines my methodology – in keeping with my overall approach in which my ethnographic material led to my theory rather than vice versa. This also reflects the unusual structure of my PhD, which was conducted as an ESRC-funded collaboration, in which I was required to spend a quarter of my time with 3FF undertaking a mixture of activities which would serve both my research interests and the organisation's needs.

The chapter outlines the methodological challenges and opportunities of the intense engagement with an organisation required by the collaborative studentship model. While it is acknowledged that the design of such studentships has problematic neoliberal overtones, the chapter argues it is possible to conduct these collaborations in ways that meet the formal requirements while retaining academic and ethical integrity. Given that knowledge production is a central concern of the thesis, it situates my own methodology reflexively within the epistemology which will be explored in the subsequent chapters – as inescapably political and

reality-producing, in which we "become answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

The theoretical framework on *Race, religion and modernity* then follows, addressing the evolution of contemporary racisms which have simultaneously come to be defined as 'cultural' and 'faith-based'. The chapter traces the relationship between these forms of prejudice and exclusion and the constructions of nature and culture which underpin modern thought, tying together racial and religious hierarchies with singular and universalising accounts of science which perpetuate coloniality. An alternative 'non-modern' (Latour, 1993) epistemology drawn from Science and Technology Studies (STS), which is as applicable to the 'hard sciences' as to other kinds of knowledge production, is argued to be an appropriate theoretical basis for challenging faith-based racisms.

In this epistemology, bringing the mediations involved in producing knowledge into view is seen as an important step towards its democratisation; this also involves the specific mediations of media technologies. My non-secular approach to looking at media technologies is outlined with reference to different literatures such as those on media practice (Postill & Brauchler, 2010), media rituals (Couldry, 2003, 2015) and habituation (Chun, 2016). It is argued that concepts from Actor Network Theory (ANT), such as nonhuman agency, can help to navigate this terrain in productive ways, while needing to be combined with a critical approach informed by feminist principles such as that provided by Star (1991).

The empirical material begins with *How Can We Live Together?*, which continues the themes of the theoretical framework. An extended analogy between Mol's (2003) ethnography of the disease atherosclerosis and 3FF's interfaith practice attempts to illustrate the value of bringing terms from ANT for understanding religious pluralism. 'Multiple realities' are argued to be a more accurate way of conceiving of difference than 'multi-cultures', and material from my fieldwork is analysed in relation to concepts such as 'holding realities apart' and 'interference', this latter concept being used to show how media technologies enable and disable forms of coexistence across faith lines. My understanding of interfaith work as a form of 'partial connection' contiguous with internal practices within faith groups closes the chapter.

Chapter 5, *Faith in Crisis*, is a discussion of how 3FF navigated the many 'faith-inflected media events' that took place over the course of my fieldwork, such as the attacks in Paris in November 2015, or the shootings in Copenhagen earlier that year. These high-profile events profoundly shaped the space in which 3FF's interfaith encounters took place, and the chapter explores various kinds of organisational response: producing statements on the organisational blog, attempting to provide positive messages outside such moments of crisis, and bringing

groups together for face-to-face encounters. The analysis highlights the limitations of the digital tools currently to hand, and argues that where 3FF was most effective at negotiating 'faith-inflected media events' was in creating reflective spaces in which the emotional toll could be collectively acknowledged in embodied and nonconscious[11] ways.

The third empirical chapter, *The Spirit of Encounter*, expands on these themes of embodied knowledge, arguing that 3FF's approach can be seen as a distinctive form of 'encounter-based religious literacy' which seeks to foster the sharing of tacit and unspoken knowledges through nonconscious means. This is differentiated from two other kinds of religious literacy (RL), sociological and theological RL, which are both more common and easier to describe through explicit verbal means. The epistemologies underpinning these three kinds of RL are outlined, highlighting differences in the ways that they conceive of knowledge as 'situated'. The difficulties of speaking of a practice in which tacit knowledge is central are then discussed, both in relation to the organisation's practice and my own struggles to describe their work ethnographically. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of media technologies within this work and some of the contradictory patterns at play as the organisation attempted to build trust with and between participants.

The next chapter, *Dead Data, Living Knowledge*, turns to questions of organisational practice and digital cultures. This looks at how knowledge was produced within 3FF, especially in relation to the monitoring and evaluation work I undertook with the teams as part of the collaboration, and the effects of digitisation and computerisation on these activities. It is argued that in the context of current practices digitisation often impedes the production of knowledge, because of the overwhelming volume of data, because of the pressure to produce knowledge at high-speed, and because of an intolerance to multiple kinds of rationality, all of which are in tension with the core tenets of 3FF's pedagogy. It closes with a discussion of my own attempts to design a cross organisational evaluation framework operating on different principles, suggesting that agency may be better reclaimed by those without much technical expertise through practices such as strategic deletion rather than software solutions.

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[11] Throughout this thesis I have opted to use the term 'nonconscious', referring to the "'body knowledge' of habits, reflexes, the proprioceptive system, the many functions of the automatic nervous system, including the enteric nervous system or 'gut brain', and the myriad of sub- threshold experiences, or micro-perceptions" (Massumi, 2015, p. 210). My approach follows many scholars within the affect literature, who tend to use 'nonconscious' rather than the more psychologically laden 'unconscious' (Blackman, 2010, p. 177). My use of it is a remnant of my exploration of this literature which I ultimately decided not to pursue in this thesis (see Chapter 3). The relative unfamiliarity of the term 'nonconscious' I consider to be beneficial since it to some extent sidesteps the misleading mind/body thinking/feeling dualisms implicit in more common terms such as 'cognition' or 'rationality'.

The empirical material ends with Chapter 8, *Counting and Accountability*. This unpacks some of the potential limitations of 3FF's practice, and issues of knowing and mediation which these limitations raise. Taking the metaphor of 'metrics' and 'fluids' from Law and Mol (1998), it examines the relationship between explicit and codifiable elements of organisational practice ('metrics') and unspoken and tacit elements ('fluids') as they played out in a controversy at 3FF: the failure of those in positions of power to address the fact that the organisation's interfaith choir, the Mixed Up Chorus, was almost entirely white. A series of tactics used to avoid accountability are discussed, and different ways of understanding these failures in 'metric' and 'fluid' terms are suggested. I then relate this back to questions of knowledge, suggesting how a system of monitoring and evaluation might have been able to rectify the "meta-blindness" (Medina, 2011, p. 28) demonstrated by senior staff, and the kinds of metrics and fluids that would be necessary for an organisation to be more accountable.

The conclusion returns to the questions raised in this introduction about plural collectives, organising and mediation, with a much sharper focus on how lessons from my empirical material might enable a plural collective to coalesce capable of challenging neoliberalism and coloniality. This recognises that 3FF's practice was ambivalent, in some ways reinforcing neoliberal "forms of action and dispositions" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 10), while in other ways acting to challenge embedded forms of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Quijano, 2007). Some 'decolonial options' (Mignolo, 2011) rooted in the successes and limitations of 3FF's work over the course of my time there are then suggested, followed by reflections on the potential for research itself to act as a decolonial means bringing different worlds together.

Conclusion: what are faithful knowledges?

This introduction has introduced interfaith as a field, and 3FF as a unique organisation within it, situating them within the broader contexts of increasing diversity under neoliberal and neocolonial capitalism, and the multicultural policies used by the state to manage that diversity. It has argued that the techniques used, and challenges faced, by 3FF and other interfaith organisations have lessons for others within the left who wish to construct plural collectives, which are capable of exercising power without suppressing internal differences in oppressive ways. While those within interfaith would often not even describe the work as political, let alone radical, the work they undertake – particularly at 3FF – constitutes a good case study of how such plural collectives might be built, because of the questions they raise

concerning diversity and identity, and because the collective cannot be achieved through rationalising and conscious means alone.

To close this chapter, I want to speak more personally about the origins of the questions that this thesis seeks to address. This can perhaps best be told through summarising my 'faith journey', the narrative I wrote after receiving 3FF's Telling Your Story training, which was used to train speakers to go into schools for a workshop called Encountering Faiths and Beliefs. This involved two or three people from different faith backgrounds telling the story of their faith journey and being asked questions.

I began my story by describing growing up as a committed Christian in a Christian family, but questioning my faith as a teenager. Although I never regained my beliefs as an adult, I did experience a dramatic change after university: having been quite socially disengaged and disinterested in politics, I ended up in a conversation one day about climate change and the imminent loss of the Arctic sea ice. Although I had known about climate change most of my life, on this occasion I paid far more attention – I began to do a lot of research, and to really take on board that we were putting at risk all life on earth, which was extremely overwhelming and frightening. I came to realise that although I wasn't a Christian I did think that life was sacred and should be protected, and this led me to make a number of changes in my life. I stopped flying and eating meat, and got involved in politics and activism, initially around the environment, and then later on other issues such as racism and migrant rights.

This personal narrative indicates what for me is at stake in gaining a better grasp of the relationships between different forms of knowing. In the years since the conversation about the Arctic sea ice, I have so often wondered what it was that moved me from an intellectual understanding of climate change to an engaged moral commitment, and the connections between my Christian upbringing, my loss of faith and political disengagement, and renewed sense of connection with the sacredness of life through reading climate science. This experience was 'mystical' (James, 1958), or at least trans-conceptual (Bartunek & Moch, 1994), triggering a 'third order change' in which I was "exposed to a source of meaning beyond that which can be conceptually grasped and understood" (1994, p. 25), on the basis of which I profoundly changed my life.

When engaged in radical politics around climate change, this connection between the spiritual and the scientific seemed lacking, and our response to climate deniers that they should just accept 'the facts' produced by hierarchical (white, male) scientific institutions inadequate and in conflict with our democratic aspirations. My attraction to STS stems in large part from the

exploration of precisely this problem in Latour (2004), and may account why for me this quite abstract theoretical approach has always seemed deeply practical.

The title 'faithful knowledges' is taken from Haraway (1988), indicating my debt to the feminist thinkers who have been considering similar questions of knowledge and multiplicity for many decades. The 'faithful knowledges' of the title are threefold. First, they are 'faithful' in the sense of 'inclusive of religion', or rather, non-excluding of religious ways of knowing *as knowledge*. This is an non-secular position, in that it rejects an *a priori* division between (rational, modern, scientific) knowledge and (irrational, traditional, religious) belief, instead focusing on the procedures and practices through which knowledges are generated. Without such a position, as will be argued in the theoretical framework, the plural collective will perpetuate coloniality and exclude most people of faith and the racial and ethnic minorities they closely overlap with. In terms of climate change, this means taking seriously, and incorporating into scientific practice, the understandings of human and nonhuman relatedness and responsibility held and transmitted through faith traditions, rather than seeing those insights as needing to be purged in order to know the world 'objectively'.

Second, they are 'faithful' in the sense of 'truthful', or at least reaching towards truthfulness. To speak of multiple knowledges is not to adopt a relativist position, for some kinds of knowledge must be more persuasive than others if the collective is to cohere in meaningful ways. If anything, it calls for a more intense engagement with truthfulness, since it requires a deeper attunement to the different ways that good or bad knowledge can be produced. Nowhere is this search for truthfulness more urgent than in our attempts to understand the degradation of our habitat, and its future consequences for life – and it is imperative that we do not conceive of scientific rigour as inherently in conflict with value commitments. In the context of this thesis, while my treatment of the empirical material does not claim to be a straightforwardly factual account of 3FF in a representational sense, I hope nonetheless that it has the ring of truth to it.

Finally, they are 'faithful' in the sense of 'hopeful', of looking towards the future with some degree of optimism that the 'historical bloc' Stuart Hall failed to see in his lifetime is able to emerge. My PhD has coincided with a period of considerable worsening of tensions along ethnic, national and religious lines, and the sharpening of xenophobic and racist sentiments from those in power in post-Brexit Britain is deeply frightening. Meanwhile, climate change is thoroughly underway: large areas of the world are on the brink of unprecedented famine, regions are reeling from super hurricanes of recent years, and the President of the United States is tweeting that global warming is a conspiracy theory created by the Chinese (Marcin, 2017).

In the UK, the fractures by region, class and age reflected in the Brexit vote have exposed the many challenges in creating a united left. While at the time of writing there seems to be more hope of a plural collective cohering around the Labour Party than previously, there are still painful political identity-based divisions to be navigated witnessed in rows over anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. Overcoming these divisions, and avoiding slipping into despair, will require 'leaps of faith' on all sides that solidarity and empathy are possible and can be transformative, opening up paths forward which cannot be seen today. Whether or not the source of such faith is labelled as 'religious' or 'spiritual', an "optimism of the will" (Gramsci 1994, p. 299) is certainly necessary in these darkening times, when "pessimism of the intellect" (ibid) is so pervasive. I hope the thinking presented here can contribute to holding our collective faith in a brighter and more just future.

Chapter 2

Ethnographically informed action research: the politics and ethics of collaboration

In 2011, the London Social Sciences Doctoral Training Centre (DTC) was launched, offering a number of ESRC studentships between Queen Mary and Goldsmiths colleges. Twenty percent of these are reserved for students conducting collaborations with non-academic organisations, in which students spend three months per year over three years with their partner organisation[12] (ESRC, 2014a). As discussed in the thesis introduction, I successfully developed a proposal to conduct one of these collaborations with 3FF.

This chapter argues that an appropriate methodology for answering the research questions provided in the introduction, while fulfilling the ESRC's criteria and meeting the needs of 3FF, was 'ethnographically informed action research'. After introducing the organisation, giving a brief flavour of office life and outlining the work they did, I outline the literature on ethnography, particularly the ethnography of organisations. I argue that the kind of holistic and open-ended research that ethnography entails was well-suited to my research interests, and congruent with the extended timescale of the collaboration. However, the level of intervention I was obliged to undertake by the ESRC pushed my work towards action research (AR), a methodology with similarities to ethnography as well as key differences. The history and development of two strands of action research are discussed, and the AR element of my research situated within them.

Some of the difficulties of combining ethnography and action research are then explored, such as differing conceptions of participation, academic distance and writing between the two methodologies, along with my attempts to reduce these tensions. Additional questions about the politics of the collaborative model and the dangers of furthering the instrumentalisation and marketisation of the charity sector through my work are also acknowledged, though collaboration is still argued to be a productive approach given the 'para-ethnographic' (Holmes & Marcus, 2005) quality of 3FF's work. A discussion of my feminist commitments and their relationship to power, ethics and validity within my research closes the chapter. Since the character of the organisation was itself key to the argument for my methodology, I will begin by providing a sense of working life within 3FF through an event early on in my fieldwork.

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[12] These studentships are offered as +4 scholarships, meaning I had a funded academic year to write up after the end of the collaboration.

Strategy Day, November 2013

A month into my fieldwork I attended the staff strategy day, a whole working day for the teams to present and discuss their three-year strategic plans. The 'officers' (entry-level staff) themed the whole day as a children's birthday party, decorating the room with balloons and bunting. This took place in the training room, a medium-sized space across the corridor from the main office. This room was always rather dark, with vertical iron bars on windows hemmed in by the surrounding buildings and the arches of a train line. Every few minutes the London Overground glided smoothly by, and a couple of times an hour the room filled with the clanks and screeches of rail freighters.

We were put into groups for competitive icebreakers and energisers, and our first task was to choose a name, logo and motto. My group called ourselves the 'Faith Invaders' but were beaten by the 'Intergalactic Unicorns'. By the end of the day the unicorns had won overall by some way, matching the most people with their baby photos, guessing which stories about staff and interns were true or false, and getting the most points in Taboo.

The arts and culture department began the presentations. Until this point, they had been focusing their energies on curating an annual art exhibition exploring questions of faith, culture and identity. Their strategy for the next three years was largely focused on expanding their year-round activities, including the newly-formed interfaith choir and women-only events. Each team had a theme for their presentation and so this plan was delivered entirely in verse.

Next, we heard from the mentoring programme, who had rearranged the room into two sets of chairs facing each other: their theme was 'Parliament style'. They began by explaining the programme as it had been running until then – forty-five students in mixed-faith groups of three who would run a social action project and receive mentoring from an MP. However, the following year (2014-15) would need some changes, as it would be harder to recruit MP mentors in an election year. They divided us into two parties and gave us each a 'manifesto' with some options for the programme – should it be adapted to run with a smaller number of students, or radically changed to promote, say, social enterprise? Each team made their case and everyone got into the drama, cheering and booing. ("Are we supposed to be behaving

like people in the House of Commons?" someone said apologetically "because I wouldn't really have booed you".)

In the break one of the interns asked about the notes I was making. "Are you a spy for MI5?"

The internship programme manager then set up to present. Interns were normally attached to the organisation for three days a week, unpaid, for three or six-month periods. Her theme was 'boot camp', which was why she was wearing an explorer hat and her slides used military language ('rallying the troops', 'heading into battle'). At times the link was tenuous: she brought up a slide with a 'star of quality' and said "imagine it's an explosion. High-quality warfare." A ripple of laughter. "It's a difficult metaphor for our work."

Finally, it was the schools team, 'classroom style'. The schools 'coordinator' (an intermediate position, between officer and manager) put on a mortarboard; she used to be a primary school teacher and easily inhabited the role. She immediately confiscated the pair of huge pink glasses (sometimes used in training sessions) being worn by Tiana, a schools' interns playing one of her 'pupils'.

"Can anyone tell me why the school's work is facing a problem?" She asked.

One of the team waved his hand and said childishly "because that bad man Michael Gove!" Changes to RE under Gove as Education Minister had negatively impacted their work.

As with Parliamentors, the team described the current schools work. One part of the schools' work consisted of workshops, giving students opportunities to meet people from different faith backgrounds and ask them questions (Encountering Faiths and Beliefs) and skills to prepare them for these encounters (Art of Asking, Art of Empathy). Alongside this, the school linking programme worked with pairs of primary and secondary schools, usually with a faith ethos, supporting them to have positive interactions with students from different communities. Tiana, in a lilting Bajan accent, talked about developing resources to make their work more relevant to young people - "now give me back my shizz and get some music going on!"

As this example indicates, 3FF was engaged in a wide variety of activities in schools and universities, and arts and culture work. Aside from the strands presented that day, during the period of my fieldwork 3FF also ran training on faith awareness, facilitation and controversial issues, and commissioned policy work, mostly around RE. There was also 3FF Middle East which ran interfaith training with medics in Jerusalem, replication of some of the schools' programmes taking place in Sweden, and a 'sister' organisation doing similar work in New York, although none of these was very present within the London office.

The strategy day also gives a sense of what 3FF office life *felt* like. There was a rather playful and informal atmosphere, partly because the people there were relatively young – heightened by the fact that up to two fifths of the people in the office at any time were interns, usually just out of university. There was also a conscious construction of '3FF-ness' which pervaded everyday practice, along with a gentle self-mocking of it. Throughout the day elements were highlighted with a sense of amusement, including their right-on politics ("that bad man Michael Gove"), dislike of conflict ("it's a difficult metaphor for our work") and sometimes excessive politeness ("I wouldn't really have booed you").

My own role in the organisation, agreed at the outset of the collaboration between myself and the directors and formalised with a Memorandum of Understanding, was as 3FF's 'research coordinator'. (The term 'coordinator' was chosen arbitrarily – it was only later that this became an intermediate position between officer and manager in the organisational hierarchy.) When I first arrived, there were a number of outside researchers working with 3FF, and part of my role was to communicate with them, to look for possible areas of collaboration and to ensure a level of coordination so that work wasn't being unnecessarily replicated. In fact, most of these relationships were time-limited and the majority of my time as research coordinator was spent supporting the delivery teams on monitoring and evaluation.

This rather instrumental side of my work with 3FF was only part of my relationship with the organisation, however. My attendance at the strategy day, for example, had no obvious 'purpose'. I already knew most of the informational content that was communicated by the teams and its link with my research questions was not obvious. This was the case for a good deal of my time with them, from going to staff socials to attending weekly choir rehearsals for a year. At the same time, it was through extended participant observation, and an openness to recording and analysing a wide variety of 3FF's practices and activities, that my research questions were clarified and new lines of enquiry emerged. It is exactly this open-ended research strategy that characterises ethnography.

From traditional ethnography to organisational ethnography

'Ethnography' is a term used in in a number of disciplines and is closely associated with social or cultural anthropology. The core features of ethnography as a methodology are firstly, that its methods should involve "direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives" (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 3); secondly, that research design should be iterative and evolve as the project develops rather than addressing a fixed question or hypothesis; and thirdly, that through reading and relating findings to a broader body of theory and empirical work, researchers will develop more complex understandings of the settings they are studying (Campbell & Lassiter, 2014, p. 7).

Although ethnography can involve a wide variety of data gathering techniques, including interviews, photography and analysis of documents, the central method is participant observation, first defined by the Chicago sociologists in the interwar period (Ocejo, 2012) though it had previously been practised by figures such as Malinowski (2014). Participant observation has slightly different meanings across the disciplines, with sociologists more likely to undertake short-term or intermittent visits to 'the field' and to combine these findings with other techniques like surveys (Okely, 2012, p. 81). Within anthropology this contact is usually far more sustained, with fieldwork typically lasting at least a year. This model carries with it the legacy of early anthropologists such as Malinowski (2014) and Evans-Pritchard (1976) who studied 'exotic' rural people, far away from their own home cultures and institutions, where the line between being in and out of 'the field' appeared relatively straightforward.

Participant observation invites the researcher to use "the self... as the instrument of knowing" (Ortner, 1995, p. 173). Through participating, the tacit, embodied and experiential forms of knowledge can be accessed; through observing, this knowledge is explicated and made communicable to others, ultimately through writing. Some have argued that the two elements exist on a continuum, from 'pure participation' to 'pure observation', with 'participant observation' and 'observant participation' in the middle (Gold, 1958). For Okely (2012) this is misleading, since it "presumes that participation, as active body, entails switching off intellectual capacities. On the contrary, the anthropologist as participant also learns cerebrally in action" (2012, p. 80). For O'Reilly, participant observation is "an oxymoron… a concept with an inherent tension" (2009, p. 157) but argues that this tension "is exactly the point… Participating enables the strange to become familiar, observing enables the familiar to appear strange" (ibid, p. 160). As will be argued in Chapter 6, embodied knowing is central to 3FF's

own practice, and thus it was appropriate, and indeed necessary, to have a methodology in which those dimensions of knowledge were encompassed and recognised.

Ethnography as a methodology for examining *organisations* also has a long heritage. Projects such as the Hawthorne studies (Mayo, 2010) challenged the idea that bureaucratic organisations were best understood through their formal or rational characteristics. In fact, workplaces (as with other kinds of social formations) also turned out to depend on a 'non-work' commons of personal relationships and cultural practices. Yanow et al. (2012), describing the history of the field, argue that although ethnographic techniques were popular in the early decades (e.g. Whyte, 1948; Dalton, 2013) they began to be eclipsed in the 1950s by new statistical and survey methods. A return to ethnography began in the late 1970s, led by those such as van Maanen (e.g. 1979, 1988), and has been followed by a wide variety of ethnographies of both private and public sector organisations (e.g. Dubinskas, 1988; Collinson, 1992; Stein, 2004; Dubois, 2010).

More recent work has engaged with the changes within workplaces associated with post-Fordism and neoliberalism, in which the growing interest in 'corporate culture' within corporations themselves has created both new opportunities and ambiguities for ethnographers. Holmes and Marcus (2006) coined the term 'para-ethnography' to describe the quasi-anthropological practices of knowledge production practised by many organisations, in their case the Federal Reserve. Krause-Jensen (2013), working in the HR department in a major Danish company, describes the examination of corporate culture as "an ethnography of lay ethnographers" (2013, p. 55). These developments have made the anthropologist less alien to these kinds of working environments, but also throw up new intellectual and ethical challenges, as will be explored below (e.g. Fleming, 2013).

Organisational ethnographies have similarities with other ethnographic texts as they attempt to understand organisational cultures as lived and practised, but they also have some interesting differences. Czarniawska (2004) identifies a number of problems for traditional ethnography when the topic at hand is organising. These include differences around *time*: while conventionally fieldwork involved "shared residence and twenty-four hours a day presence for total participation and joint living" (Okely, 2012, p. 84), this kind of total immersion into the world of 3FF was not possible, since it did not exist outside office hours. Czarniawska also identifies differences relating to *space*. As Yanow et al. (2012) note, "the settings of traditional ethnography… were relatively bounded [locations] – or appeared that way" (2012, p. 342), while modern organising moves around in "a net of fragmented, multiple

contexts" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 15), thus requiring similar kinds of 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus, 1998) to studies of urban areas and mobile communities.

This instability of time and space has led to calls for a shift from looking at 'organisations' to 'organising' (Weick, 1979): to see organisation as "an accomplishment rather than a state and a quasi object" (Nicolini, 2009, p. 120). With 3FF, the tendency to reify and naturalise it was considerably reduced because the organisation changed considerably while I was there, including eighteen members of staff leaving. That said, the conventions of anthropological writing mean that this account inevitably freezes and objectifies it; while to some extent this is inevitable, I have attempted to maintain an awareness of the timeframe I am referring to and that this is not an account of what 3FF 'is' for all time.

Czarniawska (2004) also identifies additional problems in relation to observation and participation. Much of what occurs within organisations is difficult to observe, particularly, she argues along with Barley and Kunda (2001), the silences of computer work. In fact, in my own research I found the digital traces produced on and by computers a very productive way of making organising visible, and ethnographic methods well suited to the "non-mediacentric form of media studies" (Morley 2007, 200) approach I wished to take to media technologies. Finally, participation has a different character in traditional and organisational ethnographies, with the latter requiring certain kinds of technical skill which have particular impacts when there is a strict division of labour: "participation in a dance differs from… participation in a top management emergency meeting" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 14). Like Krause-Jensen (2013), Rogrvik (2013) and MacDonald (2001), I was able to create a role for myself within the organisation I was studying *as a researcher*, avoiding a glaring skills gap.

As touched on above, my time with 3FF involved a wide variety of activities, many of which were quite tangential to my research coordinator role. To draw boundaries around this involvement, I kept a log of my hours with 3FF, ensuring that I spent the required amount of time there (412 hours each year of my PhD[13]) while still leaving enough time for my academic work. Some of this time was spent in the routine elements of office life: attendance at team and managers' meetings, planning and debriefing sessions, as well as away days and shadowing specific members of staff. I also observed and participated in the 3FF programmes, including being a member of the interfaith choir for a year, attending the arts exhibition in

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[13] The *Good Practice* (ESRC, 2014a) guidelines specified that I should spend 25% of my time with the non-academic partner. ESRC studentship guidance (2014b) calculates that full-time student should spend 1650 hours a year on their PhDs.

both 2013 and 2014, observing trainings for the mentoring programme and school link days, and attending dialogue events hosted by 3FF.

As my research questions became more focused and I began to write my fieldwork chapters I started incorporating other methods such as interviews and group discussions on my specific topics of interest. This is in line with the 'funnel' approach suggested by Agar (1996), in which the ethnographer first of all casts a wide net which then narrows in focus over time. Interviewees included staff members, former interns, school speakers and Parliamentor alumni, and I also instigated group discussions and feedback, as will be discussed more in the section on ethics and validity.

The data was analysed through an iterative process of reading back over fieldnotes and other materials, allowing categories to emerge by creating mind maps. This process was repeated multiple times over the course of my fieldwork, allowing older materials to be re-analysed in the light of later developments in my thinking. For each chapter, I created new documents which combined my notes from the relevant categories so that the data could be contemplated in relation to each other. These were then brought together with literature and theory, and examples and insights selected which were best able to explore the complexities of the arguments I was constructing.

Interviews and group discussions were primarily used to add further depth to the topics that had been identified through this process of coding my fieldnotes – for example, having established that 'faith-inflected media events' were an important feature of organisational life, I arranged to interview a number of stakeholders specifically on their views about 3FF's media communications at moments of crisis. Transcripts of these conversations were however also analysed in a more open fashion to find unexpected connections between their content and other areas of interest. Overall this process of data analysis allowed for a multilayered approach, so that by the final stages of writing my thesis I was able to look back at coding and categorisation from several years before and reflect both upon the continuities and developments in my understanding over this time.

Intervention of some kind is often reported by organisational ethnographers – but it is arguable that the sort required by the collaborative studentship model is of a different kind. While Krause-Jensen (2013) found his organisational diagram becoming the basis of the official one, and Moeran (2009) came up with an advertising slogan that won a big account for the company he was studying, both of these were arguably routine outcomes for the organisations in question, and incidental to the main thrust of their research. By contrast, the *Good Practice*

for Collaborative Studentships (ESRC, 2014a) document requires students to "contribute to the successful creation, development and application of new techniques or ways of working" (ESRC, 2014a). While the research should have "wider relevance" than simply meeting the needs of the outside organisation, and the tasks undertaken should be integral to the resulting thesis, they should also produce "real measurable benefits" for the collaborative partner. It was this requirement for me to actively change the organisation I was studying through my research activities that tipped my organisational ethnography over into action research.

Taking action

The term 'action research' (AR) refers to a family of methodologies which involve "joint or participatory research processes oriented towards action" (Sykes & Treleaven, 2009, p. 215). AR has a "long and complex history" (Hearn et al. 2008, p. 11), tracing its lineage from at least two starting points. The first, associated with Lewin (1946), is primarily aimed at achieving a particular *goal* (James et al. 2012, p. 4). This form of AR generally occurs within organisations and focuses upon organisational change, often through quite formalised cycles of problem identification, diagnosis, planning, intervention and evaluation (Wolfram Cox, 2012, p. 372).

The second strand, grounded in Freire's work on critical consciousness (e.g. 1970) and feminist activism (Maguire, 1987; Martin, 1994), focuses on empowerment: the value of participating in the research process is not so much measured by its contribution to explicit and external change, but by the transformation of the relationship between participants and knowledge. This strand is often known by the acronym PAR for 'participatory action research'. While social hierarchies and gendered inequalities may be challenged through the process of validating the knowledge systems of dominated and oppressed groups, the desired outcomes are processes of conscientizing, and not reducible to achieving instrumental goals (Dinham & Shaw, 2011).

Although the varying definitions of action research can be seen as falling into these two strands, there is also considerable overlap. Lewin (2005) himself was always interested in the broader implications of social interventions, rather than narrowly focused on immediate problems, and as Wolfram Cox points out, 'participatory action research' is often "hard to distinguish from 'normal' AR when participation is the defining feature" (2012, p. 374). There are also a number of other closely related approaches such as 'action enquiry and community development' (Stringer, 2013), 'action learning' (Revans, 2011) and 'appreciative enquiry' (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The basic parameters of AR involve the research subjects being repositioned as co-researchers, who jointly formulate the research questions, design the methods for answering them, analyse or at least engage with the results, and take up the insights produced in action. This is intended to produce a form of collaboration where the power dynamics between the 'knowing' researcher and the 'known' researched can be redressed, the politics of knowledge production can be actively incorporated into the research process, and the researcher retains a level of responsibility and accountability for the changes that stem from their involvement. An AR approach for looking at public services, for example, would seek to involve staff at all levels, as well as service users, in defining the terms and aims of the study itself – and would be likely to produce substantially different findings from an evaluation directed by management.

Criticisms of more goal-oriented kinds of AR note that the methodology can slide into puzzle solving and becomes "indistinguishable from mere action" (Checkland, 1999, p. 400), and some examples given in AR textbooks seem to reduce the method to evaluation or consultancy. The practicalities of research funding within university contexts places limitations on academics who wish to genuinely involve non-academics in the formulation of research questions and methodology design – researchers are often torn between the conflicting demands of academia and the communities they work with (Cancian, 1993).

On the other hand, the Freirian approach has also been criticised from a number of angles. Some have suggested that it is naive to think that power imbalances between researchers and researched can simply be overcome by labelling the latter 'co-researchers', particularly if the work undertaken will only result in academic qualifications for one of the participants (Byrne Armstrong, 2001). Furthermore, acknowledging that academics do not have a monopoly on writing good questions does not necessarily mean that non-academics are in a better position to identify them, particularly at the beginning of the research process. It was in order to address these concerns that I combined action research with ethnography, although this also threw up new difficulties.

In practice, the action research elements of my project were primarily linked to my work on monitoring and evaluation, and were more closely aligned with the problem-solving oriented version of AR. When I arrived at 3FF, there was a generalised concern about a lack of organisational coherence, with staff feeling there was a lack of communication between the departments.[14] As I began providing monitoring and evaluation support, it became clear that

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[14] The staff strategy day mentioned at the outset was among a number of institutional processes set up to try and address this problem, alongside team meetings, regular updates and steps to encourage cross team collaboration.

these processes of knowledge production were also contributing to this lack of organisational coherence, as the programmes were measuring different things using different tools and according to different criteria.

A large part of my role involved addressing this internal problem through developing new processes for evaluation. As described in Chapter 7, *Dead Data, Living Knowledge*, a lengthy process with the teams to collect and analyse their data according to a new set of organisational outcomes culminated in my producing two cross-organisational evaluation reports, in March 2015 and March 2016. Although I did not use a formal AR cycle, this process could be seen as involving the different stages identified by Wolfram Cox (2012): identifying the problem (lack of organisational coherence), diagnosis (disparate evaluation measures), planning (auditing the data), intervention (constructing the 2015 report) and evaluation (reflecting on the 2015 report). This was then repeated the following year in March 2016; my work with the individual departments also passed through similar cycles.

Although an AR element drawn more from the Freirian or feminist traditions would have been a valuable addition to my methodology, it was not possible to incorporate them into the PhD With the internal evaluation work, positioning the staff as 'co-researchers' was straightforward – they were after all already engaged in the data collection, as well as being educated professionals like myself. Building in a dimension more focused on conscientizing and empowerment would have had to involve a wider set of perspectives, for example, by working directly with young people from marginalised communities who receive 3FF school workshops. Although ideas to do this were discussed at various points – primarily in an abortive proposal to develop a new workshop around media and religion – it was not an organisational priority and did not come to fruition. While my inability to incorporate this into my methodology was primarily due to restrictions on my time, had I pushed forwards with it this may also have raised ethical issues relating to my position as a researcher, a point which will be expanded on below.

So far, I have presented the 'ethnography' and 'action research' elements of my project as relatively discreet entities. In practice, of course, they were intertwined and often inseparable. The next sections will look at the relationship between ethnography and action research, which did not always sit easily with one another, and then at the politics of the collaborative model designed by the ESRC and my attempts to mitigate its potential to contribute to the marketisation of the charity sector.

'Ethnographically informed action research': a contradiction in terms?

The various AR approaches have similarities with traditional ethnography, particularly in the importance given to researcher participation as an inalienable part of the knowledge produced (Sykes & Treleaven, 2009). However, participation often has a different quality within AR and ethnography. Tensions between these different kinds of participation were sometimes very palpable in my role as research coordinator. A good example of this was a meeting in early 2014 with two outside researchers who had donated a few days consultancy to 3FF, and who had used this to scope out an 'economic narrative' for the organisation based on a Social Return on Investment (SROI) model. This involved estimating the impact of the organisation's work in cash terms, such as calculating the value of police time saved if their interventions reduced faith-based hate crime.

The resulting conversation was extremely interesting to me as an ethnographer concerned with different forms of knowledge: the comments recorded in my notes, such as "is it about numbers, or about understanding?" and "it's a relative measure but it gives more objectivity", raised pertinent questions about the relationship between quantification and other ways of knowing. However, I was not just an observer in the meeting but a participant, and beyond that an action researcher with a remit to address research within the organisation. I was expected to give an opinion, and my opinion was that the process was at best facile, at worst damaging, given my understandings of neoliberalism as being furthered by just such procedures. At the same time, I recognised that my opinion reflected *my* politics, rather than the politics of the organisation itself.

In fact, the relationship with these particular researchers fizzled out and the SROI was dropped. If it had continued, my role as 'research coordinator' would have made me a key point of contact with 3FF, since part of my role is to liaise with and coordinate external researchers. In this case, I would not only have been asked to *comment* on an activity being undertaken by 3FF, but to *coproduce* the very process I had a problem with, creating both an ethical and a research dilemma. Had it happened, the full SROI could have been a key case study in my thesis, revealing crucial insights about the work achieved by quantification – but perhaps at the expense of the integrity and values of the organisation I was studying. Either way, in facilitating or impeding the process, I would have been implicated in the outcome.

Further tensions between the ethnographic and action parts of my research arose in my attempts to balance the competing demands being made of me. While the monitoring and evaluation support I provided was relevant to my research questions, focusing on it too heavily

curtailed the open approach required by ethnography, where the researcher needs to avoid assuming from the outset they know what is relevant (Leach, 1967, p. 87). In fact, it was noticeable that at times when my instrumental activities became my primary forms of contact with 3FF, the quality of my field notes declined along with my sense of being able to navigate my data, while when I engaged in more wide-ranging and often ad hoc observations patterns became clearer and insights emerged.

One way of trying to lessen the tensions between ethnography and action research was to pace the intensity of the action, becoming steadily more proactive over the course of my research, with the AR side of the collaboration culminating in the evaluation framework in my third year. (This has similarities with the shift Moeran describes "from participant observation to observant participation" (2009).) I also built in an ebb and flow to my time in the field, spending two or three months with them more intensely and then taking a month or two out to write and reflect on my experiences. In my third year, I front-ended my hours so that my work was completed by the end of March 2016 (rather than spreading out the hours to the following August) so I would have longer to write up without having to participate.

One key way that my methodology was 'ethnographically informed' was its timescale, extended engagement being one of the four 'commitments' of ethnography identified by Miller (1997). AR is often criticised as short-term and often tacked onto the "jet-set consultancy world" (Richards, 1995, p. 2). (For similar criticisms in the anthropology of organisations see Neyland (2007) and Bate (1997, p. 115).) To an extent, these criticisms may be targeting bad practice rather than problems with the methodologies per se. Nonetheless, and despite the complexities of time within organisations noted by Czarniawska (2004), the ethnographic sensibility I have been able to bring to my PhD is qualitatively different for having spent two and a half years in the field rather than a few months. This open-endedness enabled me to develop my research questions, for example, from rather abstract ones concerning the evaluation of 'truth claims' I had at the outset, to the simpler and more grounded research questions in the introduction.

A final difference between ethnography and action research concerns the processes of theorising and writing. Many conceptions of AR do not seek generalisability and theory construction, whereas a distinguishing characteristic of ethnography is that theory is "a precursor, medium, and outcome of ethnographic study and writing" (Willis & Trondman, 2002, p. 396). However, there are still choices to be made by the ethnographer as to *how* theory might be approached and used within the text. Hammersley and Atkinson note the paradox that although participant observation requires the "principle of interaction and the

reciprocity of perspectives", the rhetorical conventions of ethnography orientalise and 'other' the objects of research (2011, p. 256). The strong authorial voice of ethnography has been criticised as overly theoretical, distancing researchers from their data, with feminists arguing that empiricist forms of ethnography still dominate despite many decades of criticism (Naples & Gurr, 2013, p. 16).

Mosse (2006), argues that the integrity of anthropological knowledge is based in the act of writing alone, away from informants; as temporal or geographical distances recede, it is primarily through writing that the ethnographer makes their 'exit'. Without reaffirming the "Malinowskian boundary between the field and the desk" (Mosse, 2006, p. 948) he claims that the researcher cannot really create ethnography, which requires them to make the leap from particular relationships to *generalisations* about wider systems. Although this was largely written alone, I maintained contact with my participants, feeding back ideas, and taking their comments and reflections on board as I wrote – and therefore have perhaps not reached the level of abstraction that Mosse believes is necessary. But as I will argue later, it is precisely because my 'field' is itself a 'desk', and because organisational life within 3FF strongly mirrored my own methods and techniques, that this kind of division between the researcher and researched is unnecessary and undesirable.

While combining ethnography and action research is not straightforward, there are a number of similar approaches to be found in the literature. Eden and Huxham (2013) advocate 'research oriented action research' (RO-AR) where the action agenda and the research agenda "are conceived as interdependent but separate" (2013, p. 392). They explicitly recognise the relationship between RO-AR and ethnography: "*Action ethnography* is, in many respects an attractive descriptor… because it takes from ethnography the notion of building theory from naturally occurring data but emphasises that the data follows from action-oriented interventions" (ibid). Flyvbjerg's 'phronetic organisational studies' is another example occupying the border between the methodologies (2013, p. 377), and Ghorashi and Wels' 'engaged ethnography' (2009), and Torbert's (2001) 'third person AR' also have similarities to the methodology I have described.

In any case, the existence of apparent contradictions within a methodology can be the source of productivity and creativity rather than insuperable problems. Harding (1993) argues that it is precisely when researchers occupy dual roles – as 'women scientists', 'liberal feminists' or 'Islamic feminists' – that new insights can be generated that expose and challenge culture-wide assumptions (1993, p. 66). Of course, what is produced from this standpoint can never be the "consistent and coherent" (1993, p. 63) knowledge demanded by empiricism, but rather

knowledge that treats its subject as much as its object as "multiple, heterogenous and contradictory" (1993, p. 66) – an epistemological position that will be explored in later chapters.

This section has explored some of the ways I tried to balance and accommodate the tensions between ethnography and action research raised at moments such as the SROI meeting. Next, I will look at a further set of complexities relating to participation – the potential dangers of marketisation and instrumentalisation which are arguably built into the collaborative studentship itself.

Collaboration as marketisation?

The ESRC collaborative studentship model is part of a growing number of awards offered by funding bodies for collaborations with non-academic partners, as universities seek to address funding cuts by bringing in extra income from corporate sponsorship, cultural partnerships or hiring academics out as 'consultants' (Bailey, 2011, p. 97). The Research Council's *Good Practice* guidelines (ESRC, 2014) suggest that in some circumstances a financial contribution to both the university and student should be made by the non-academic organisation. This was not expected in my own case working with a charity seeking social goods, yet the push towards marketisation here was arguably more subtle and insidious.

The neoliberal underpinnings of the collaborative studentship model are highly apparent in the language used in the *Good Practice* guidance. The ESRC is described as "contributing to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom", and proposals are advised to emphasise "the envisaged intellectual *as well as* commercial benefits" (ESRC, 2014a my emphasis), as though doctoral candidates might neglect to mention the former. The injunction to develop new forms of working which improve the "effectiveness and efficiency of individuals and organisations" (ibid) is also far from neutral, aligning the guidance with the New Public Management of public services characterised by outsourcing, privatisation and attacks on worker rights, where 'efficiency' usually equates to "less staff doing more work for less pay" (Fenton, 2011, p. 106).

The design of the collaborative studentship model can be seen as reflecting the broad changes within British academia over the last three decades, with a growing emphasis upon market-like behaviour and demonstrating educational 'value for money', exemplified in regimes of audit such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which is widely resented by academics (e.g.

Couldry 2011). The requirement that I should produce "*real measurable* benefits" (ESRC, 2014a my emphasis) for my collaborative partner shows that these studentships train PhD candidates for just such systems of audit, and indeed the 2014 REF assessed for the first time the 'impact' of research on the economy, health and the environment, despite substantial criticism that such measures are inappropriate for judging the quality of work within the humanities (Collini, 2009). The recently launched ResearchFish portal, which all Research Council funded academics now have to use to report their 'outputs', also asks about 'nonacademic impacts' – a section that was probably far easier for me to complete than most other social science students.

Such neoliberal trends have not been confined to public institutions, and within the third sector there is also increasing pressure to 'instrumentalise' activities in ways which may be distorting of their social mission. Rooke notes that evaluations of the social impact of community arts often foreground individualistic and "compliant and conservative" ideas of citizenship (2013), while Dinham and Shaw (2011) remark that the critical edge of faith-based social action may be reduced by having to 'demonstrate' their contribution, and advise organisations and evaluators to "measure with caution" (2011, p. 14).

Understood in this way, collaboration might seem intolerably compromising to academic independence and the core values underpinning ethical research. However, there are other ways to conceptualise collaboration, and I would argue that it was in fact an appropriate approach for 3FF itself. As with many ethnographers going into contemporary organisations, I was struck by the 'para-ethnographic' (Holmes & Marcus, 2005) similarities between the activities of my object of study and my own investigation. Like me, 3FFers were concerned with identity and culture, group dynamics, social roles and understanding their own influence on events; like me, they created written inscriptions, in my case fieldnotes, in theirs, debriefing documents and observation reports. As Krause-Jensen remarks, the challenge for organisational ethnographers is not separating ourselves from the immediacy of participation in order to conduct analysis, but understanding our role given that "the experience and the organisational life of the employees is radically reflexive and theorised" (2013, p. 55).

This similarity in itself implies a more collaborative approach to research. Marcus highlights the way such para-ethnographic activity on the part of technical experts transforms the relationship between ethnographers and informants, who are repositioned as "in some sense counterparts of the investigation rather than purely 'other' to them" (2012, p. 77) and should lead to "a stronger sense of collaborations with expertise" (ibid, p. 78). This is echoed by Rogrvik who describes organisational anthropology as de-colonial, since those being studied

can't be so readily primitivised, and argues that this kind of ethnography must then be "recast as a study *with*, not *of*" (2013, p. 85). These writers imply that participant observation within organisations has a particular quality because organisational anthropologists gain many of our insights from *the similarities between our research activities and the activities of those we are researching*.

Three features of 3FF in particular made a more collaborative and participatory approach to research a reasonable methodological choice. First, the kinds of reflexivity which were already built into organisational life made a more collaborative relationship easier to build and overcame many of the difficulties that researchers can face when, for example, trying to feedback analysis to informants who are uninterested or find this a further imposition (Skeggs, 2007). Second, 3FF's work, like action research, could be seen as involving the Aristotelian concept of phronetic knowledge, "a sense or a tacit skill for doing the ethically practical" (Flyvbjerg, 2013, p. 372) in which knowing and doing are not conceptually separated. Since staff were attempting to learn phronetically, trying to understand the effects of their activities as they did them, I was able to gain insights into the challenges they faced by also trying to understand what I was doing while I was doing it. And third, since 3FF was highly collaborative, with almost everything they did delivered in partnership with others, to have a researcher who was not trying to collaborate would have gone against the ethos of the organisation.

My concerns about the neoliberal underpinning to the design of my PhD research were particularly acute because my role internally was explicitly concerned with measurement. The monitoring and evaluation work conducted for 3FF was entirely about demonstrating the organisation's own impact, just as my research has had to demonstrate *its* impact on the organisation. What made this especially complicated was that if there was any pressure on me from senior management from within 3FF, it was to be (in my own terms) *more* reductive and marketising, rather than less. The final section of this chapter considers the complexities of power, ethics and validity within the research collaboration, in both organisational and personal terms.

Power, ethics and validity

The methodology I deployed for this thesis drew from ethnography and action research, but it was also informed by feminist commitments to challenging structural inequalities, and to understanding of dynamics shaped by identity markers such as race, gender and class. In this section, I will talk more directly about this feminist approach, and the relevance of concepts

such as standpoint theory (e.g. Harding 1993). Standpoint theory not only asserts the situated-ness of all knowledge but also the limitations of understanding the world from the perspective of dominant groups, since significant elements of the lives of marginalised social actors are invisible to them.

Harding (1993), argues that positivist objectivity can correct for subjective bias *between* groups of researchers repeating the same experiment, but the biases that they share – because of their gender, class or race – will persist unless the views of marginalised people are actively included within the processes of knowledge production. This implies that in order to take a feminist stance within my research strategy, I needed to think carefully about the different dimensions of power at play and whose versions of reality were being centred or marginalised as a result, and to incorporate rigorous checks in order to produce knowledge which was both valid and ethical.

The actual and potential power dynamics in my relationship with 3FF had a number of dimensions. These included my position within the formal and informal hierarchies within 3FF; my power and that of the organisation relative to participants on the programmes; and the mutual vulnerabilities between myself and the organisation created by the formal collaborative studentship. In all these contexts my own identities were highly relevant, as a white, middle-class, ambiguously spiritual, queer woman from a Christian background, and they form part of my reflections here. Aside from these more sociological categories, it should also be said that I fitted neatly with the dominant personality type within 3FF, being diplomatic, verbally articulate and deeply conflict averse – traits which are commonly associated with white middle-class women.

In terms of internal dynamics within 3FF, I was something of an anomaly within the hierarchy: I attended managers' meetings throughout most of my fieldwork, and in practice I was generally treated as one of the managers despite not managing anyone or having that level of decision-making power or responsibility. This was partly a result of my close relationship with Esther, my original point of contact, whose trust in me meant that I immediately became part of her informal network which was predominantly made up of fellow managers. It was also related to my age, given that almost everyone over thirty within the organisation was a manager. Overall, my insider status was solidified by the very high turnover of staff, meaning that rather than being seen as an interloper I quickly became one of the more long-standing presences, and a repository for organisational memory.

The perception of me as a manager raised ethical issues, especially given that hiring anthropologists to study organisations has been described as a means of increasing managerial

control (Fleming, 2013). My feminist commitments, as well as the AR elements of my methodology, placed responsibilities on me to ensure that less powerful voices in the organisation were able to participate and be validated within knowledge production (James et al., 2012). While I rarely engaged in explicit 'advocacy' on behalf of more junior members of staff or in the context of organisational tensions and disputes, I did attempt to maintain channels with all levels of the organisation and to use my role to facilitate communication between them. In the context of the internal work on evaluation, I tried to build in a sense of the realistic limits to organisational 'productivity' in order to avoid my interventions contributing to a culture of overwork. However, while I did form relationships with staff at all levels over the course of my fieldwork, undoubtedly there were aspects of organisational life visible to junior staff that did not get communicated to me because the majority of my close friendships were formed with managers.

Alongside the complexities internally, in many ways the more difficult dimensions of power lay in the dynamics between the organisation and their participants, some of whom were from extremely marginalised and disadvantaged communities. It is arguable that the extent to which I fitted in quite unproblematically to the culture and set up of 3FF was a measure of its distance from these communities – the staff generally coming from similar demographics as myself, in contrast to the black and Asian school pupils who were often the recipients of school workshops. Here, my race, class and faith identities placed me in an unavoidable relationship of power with these participants.

In terms of ethics, the fact that their perspectives are generally missing from this thesis is certainly problematic, and a more robust AR approach would have involved me looking outside of the organisation and seeking to create opportunities for participants to collaborate in producing knowledge. As touched upon earlier, this was considered at various points during my fieldwork, particularly in discussions about developing a conscientizing AR project with young people which might lead to a new workshop on media and religion. The barriers to doing so were largely practical – the schools' team had little spare time to devote to it and ultimately it was not an organisational priority for 3FF. In any case, involving school pupils as co-researchers would have faced both timetable pressures and limitations on how participatory it could have been given the hierarchies which structure the school environment. Eliciting their perspectives badly, and without due consideration of how difficult it is to foster more equal interactions, would also have been an unethical research strategy.

A final dimension of power pertained more directly to my role as a researcher, where there was a high level of mutual vulnerability. On the one hand, the organisation could have

impeded the research process, or at worst ended the collaboration, if its 'products' were not to their liking; on the other, 3FF placed a great deal of trust in me and provided a very high level of access given the potential reputational damage I could have caused – and could still go on to cause – through my critiques. This vulnerability was particularly acute given that the uniqueness of the organisation's approach made it impossible to anonymise, and although the identities of staff and participants have largely been concealed[15] they are likely to be recognisable to those who know the organisation well. After completing my fieldwork, this vulnerability became more one-sided as 3FF no longer had the same leverage on me. The ethical issues raised here have included a desire to avoid harming the organisation, while not compromising my political commitments which have informed my more critical observations of the organisation's practice.

For some ethnographers, these crosscutting dynamics produced by the collaborative model would invalidate the knowledge produced. Hammersley and Atkinson (2010) state that "the exclusive, immediate goal of all research is, and must remain, the production of knowledge" (2010, p. 15) since findings may be distorted by "what it would be politic for others to believe" (ibid, p.17) if the researcher is also pursuing instrumental or political goals. However, from a feminist perspective having more directive engagement informed by explicit political commitments can in fact be the basis for *greater* validity, if this is accompanied by a sensitivity to the interplay between power dynamics, standpoints and knowledge. Lather (1986) provides some practical guidance for how to go about this by proposing a range of "self-corrective techniques that will check the credibility of our data and minimise the distorting effect of personal bias" (1986, p. 65) – validity checks which have been deployed in varying ways in my methodology. (Similar validity checks are suggested within AR, e.g. Greenwood and Levin (2007), Eden and Huxham (2013).)

First, Lather (1986) suggests triangulating between multiple sources and methods and theoretical schemes. Producing this thesis involved a variety of methods, such as participant observation, interviews and group discussions, as well as a wide range of theoretical resources adopted from Science and Technology Studies/Actor Network Theory, religious studies, media studies and feminist research practices. Secondly, Lather suggests researchers should pursue 'construct validity', ensuring data are able to challenge and transform theory and systematised

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[15] Pseudonyms have been used everywhere except when quoting published statements (mostly by ex-director Stephen). The decision to anonymise staff was made late in the process, since I had initially thought they would be so easily recognisable there was little point. With the passage of time and the turnover of staff pseudonyms made more sense, and in any case, my style of writing shifted towards being vaguer about the individuals involved in the empirical chapters produced later on (5, 6 and 8).

ways – an approach arguably built into the extended timescale of ethnography, in which my research questions and analytic categories developed over the course of my fieldwork.

Third, Lather talks about 'face validity', recycling analysis past participants and incorporating their reactions into the text. A number of channels were used for this while I was still in the field, including informal conversations, slots at team meetings and lunchtime presentations on two empirical chapters. Following the end of my fieldwork, I ran a workshop with staff which went on to inform my approach to Chapter 6, incorporated reflections from Tara on Chapter 5 after we did a joint conference presentation, and elicited feedback on the collaborative relationship. I also ran a knowledge exchange session with Tara and Esther in November 2017, who had by this point both left 3FF and set up a business together, which is discussed in the thesis conclusion.

Finally, Lather suggests researchers pursue 'catalytic validity', that is, enabling participants to transform their circumstances through the knowledge produced. This took its most explicit form in the AR element of the collaboration, in which the monitoring and evaluation processes I worked on with the teams enabled them to reflect upon the strengths and limitations of their work, and to plan improvements for their programmes – although as Chapter 8 will discuss, this was not always successful. Furthermore, one major attempt to prompt catalytic validity – a session with managers a year after I finished my fieldwork in which I gave detailed feedback on some of the persistent organisational problems that had become apparent during my time there – seemed to result in no change or uptake at all. However, catalytic validity may also have had more diffuse 'outputs'. The conversations I participated in and encouraged internally around race and faith may have contributed to greater emphasis being placed on this by the organisation more recently, for example a blog series on the topic produced for Black History Month in 2017.

The deployment of any methodology will be limited, whether by time, resources or relationships. As discussed above, my failure to include perspectives from the organisation's young participants is a significant weakness. Had I not been in a formal collaboration with 3FF I could have adapted my methodology in a more conscientizing direction as addressing this gap became increasingly important, and in this sense the collaborative studentship placed restrictions on my research strategy. On the other hand, my integrated role within the organisation did afford me an unusual level of access, and the detailed character of this organisational ethnography is a valuable contribution given the lack of literature on practices within the interfaith sector.

A further limitation that could be identified is an overreliance on getting feedback from and recycling analysis past the members of staff I formed close personal relationships with – it is arguable that I could have sought out a wider variety of perspectives or done so more systematically. That said, it is not incidental that the closest relationships I formed were with women of colour. While these friendships were not pursued instrumentally on the basis of their racialised identities, centring their views did fit with the principles of standpoint theory it was necessary to seek out points of view that were less visible to me (it is interesting in retrospect to note that I did *not* form such close friendships with other white queer people in the organisation). While of course to some extent these relationships have made me 'biased' towards their perspectives, as I will discuss in Chapter 8 it was only in the context of developing trusting, loving relationships with embodied others that certain aspects of their experiences of marginalisation could become known to me. In centring their views, others are inevitably decentred – an inevitable trade-off, and one I can only be honest about and accountable for.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my methodology, 'ethnographically informed action research'. From ethnography, it takes the open-ended approach to developing research questions, the extended timescale, and commitment to theory building. With action research, it adds goal- and change-oriented participation on the part of the researcher, and attempts to reposition participants as co-researchers.

I have argued that this methodology provides a way of answering my research questions while fulfilling the criteria outlined by the ESRC. Although there are tensions between the two methodologies being put together, such as differing understandings of participation, these were reduced through techniques such as pacing the intensity of the action and ensuring a substantial amount of time out of the field to write up my thesis. A further set of concerns around the collaborative studentship model relates to its possible contribution to the instrumentalisation and marketisation of the third sector. This was particularly relevant to my own case as so much of my role within the organisation was concerned with measurement and impact. However, my response to this dilemma was not to retreat from collaboration, but to conduct it with an awareness of these dangers and constant reflexivity about how and when these pressures could be resisted. Indeed, the character of 3FF would have made a non-

collaborative research project inappropriate, and key insights about their work harder to access.

As I complete this thesis, I can see that the period of my PhD has coincided with something of a transition point in the structure and funding of research training, with fully funded scholarships like the one I received becoming increasingly rare, and studentships involving collaborations with outside organisations becoming ever more common. While the terms on which I conducted my fieldwork was thus unusual in the period in which it was conducted, it may well become the norm in the coming decade. Being uncommon, formal assessment of collaborations had yet to be introduced: there was no auditing of the collaborative side of the studentship, and while the ResearchFish portal has begun asking PhD students to specify any non-academic impacts, this so far has no bearing on the success or failure of the PhD which is still determined by the traditional forms of examination.

This afforded me a degree of freedom, since I was able to experiment with the terms of collaboration while knowing that the quality or extent of the impact of my own work would not endanger my future academic prospects. I was able to explore, for example, how to measure improvements to 'effectiveness and efficiency' in ethical ways, safe in the knowledge that should those attempts begin to distort the organisation's values – or my own – I could call them to a halt or refocus my energy on 'products' which were non-measurable or intangible. This was arguably a greater degree of freedom than many researchers at later points in their careers possess as they chase funding which requires them to demonstrate 'impact' in reductive terms. And it also may be more freedom than students engaging in this kind of collaborative work will be permitted in future, since the direction of travel is towards ever tighter regulations – for example, it seems highly likely that ResearchFish submissions will become part of the PhD assessment for at least some students.

One contribution of this thesis, then, is methodological. By building in these explorative and experimental elements within my own work, and within collaborative PhD studentships more generally, appropriate methods can be developed, assessed and communicated to the wider academic community. This comes at a crucial moment in the emergence of these formalised relationships between universities and outside organisations, and may enable future doctoral students, for whom instrumentalising and marketising elements of their research training are entirely normalised, to take a more critical approach to the terms on which they collaborate. As such, the thinking presented here may provide valuable lessons for others who are trying to resist the encroachment of neoliberal values into higher education through the 'impact' agenda.

Chapter 3

Theoretical framework: race, religion and modernity

The previous chapter introduced 3FF as an organisation, and argued that 'ethnographically informed action research' was an appropriate methodology for exploring its organisational practices. Here, I outline a theoretical framework for thinking through the roles of mediation and media technologies in interfaith work, drawing on concepts from Science and Technology Studies (STS), Actor Network Theory (ANT) and media studies. These concepts are used to navigate the complex issues relating to race, faith and knowledge raised when considering coexistence in religiously plural societies, arguing that a non-modern (Latour, 1993) epistemology is necessary – an epistemology which refutes the divide between nature and culture, and asserts that fact and values always co-construct one another, in the 'hard' and 'natural' sciences as much as in any other kind of knowledge production. Without such an approach, I will argue, it is difficult to challenge faith-based racisms, since these are premised on narratives of modernity and progress which are underpinned by understandings of Western scientific rationalism as the only source of true knowledge; these theoretical foundations ground the discussions of interfaith work in my empirical chapters.

The chapter begins by revisiting the Rushdie affair in the late 1980s – the first of many public rows over Muslim difference which have played a role in the growth of the interfaith sector – exploring the issues concerning 'cultural racism' and ethnicity which it raised. Since one element of controversy related to whether it was in fact racist at all, it is worth clarifying how racism is being understood here. Following critical race and decolonial theorists such as Gilroy (2002), Allen (1994) and Quijano (2007), modern racism is considered to be qualitatively different to the 'heterophobia' of precapitalist societies. Race as we know it today emerged as a system of classification of human groups in the 1600s (Hatch, 2016) initially as a justification for the slave trade; it then spread around the world with European colonial expansion, gaining new energy after the formal end of slavery from the scientific practices Gilroy terms 'raciology' in the 19th century (Gilroy, 2000).

There are two key points to be taken from this historical perspective. First, in its uneven and contingent global expansion, racism took on many guises, which are now at play in highly diverse contexts like London and Birmingham where 3FF conducts the majority of its work. Amongst these multiple racisms are those based on faith, of which the most visible and virulent in the current context is Islamophobia, which needs to be understood as having similarities with other forms but also "its own specific features" (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 2004). Where secular antiracist organisations have often struggled

to address it (Bodi, 1999; Khan, 1999), interfaith work can be seen – at least in principle – as a means of responding to the particular challenges of faith-based racisms.

Second, rather than being a hangover from a premodern 'tribal' past, racisms have always been tied up with scientific knowledge and Western economic expansion – and faith-based racisms are particularly tied to the secular premises of narratives of modern progress and the epistemological exclusions (Dotson, 2014) resulting from a hard divide between scientific 'knowledge' and religious 'belief'. Since these narratives are founded on a particular conception of science, rethinking scientific knowledge on different terms is an essential element of challenging faith-based discrimination and marginalisation, a rethinking provided through a brief tour of the field of Science and Technology Studies and its crossover with studies of race. A subsequent section on the colonial origins of 'the secular' links racialised hierarchies with religious ones, situating the category of religion itself as a historical construct emerging from the colonial encounter, and intimately tied up with the division of nature and culture which underpins modern thought.

The 'non-modern' (Latour, 1993) epistemology informing this thesis is then outlined, as a theory of knowledge which sees facts and values as inseparable and knowledge as 'reality-producing', and seeks to address epistemic oppressions by welcoming multiple ways of knowing. A key aspect of this epistemology is the emphasis on bringing the mediations involved in knowledge production into view in order to democratise them – 'mediation' being understood here as "a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical" (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. xv) in which disparate elements are transformed through their interconnections (Stolow, 2013).

The chapter goes on to consider the relationship between mediation and media technologies, and how different conceptions of human and nonhuman agency relate to the earlier discussions about knowledge, the secular and faith-based racisms. Theoretically, there is a shift from STS to Actor Network Theory (ANT), an academic approach closely related to STS but more commonly used for topics such as media technologies. As noted above, ANT is often criticised by media scholars as lacking politics (e.g. Benson, 2014; Couldry, 2008b) – limitations which I have attempted to address, following Star (1991), by combining it with a feminist sensitivity to power differentials.

Finally, I outline the approach to media technologies used within my empirical work, which emphasises embodied practice, and pays attention to the mythic and ritualised elements of 'media imaginaries' (Barassi, 2015) – drawing on literatures including media practice (Morley,

2007; Postill & Brauchler, 2010), media rituals (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998), and media myths (Couldry, 2003, 2015). This is argued to be a non-secular approach to technology, both in the sense of attempting to avoid the 'Modern divide' which places religion and media in conflict with one another, and in encouraging attentiveness to the aspects of our relationships with media that exceed our conscious awareness (Bartunek & Moch, 1994). In sum, this chapter intends to establish a framework which can encompass the complexities of thinking and writing outside of dominant narratives of modern progress, situating the significance and challenges of engaging in non-secular organisational practice within 3FF.

Cultural racism and ethnicity in the Rushdie affair

As discussed in the thesis introduction, the growing preoccupation with Muslim difference has been a major factor in the growth of the interfaith sector since the 1990s. A key moment in this was the 'Rushdie affair': the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, and the subsequent violent protests and attempts on Rushdie's life, in which what Modood terms the "Christian-led interfaith movement"[16] (Modood, 1992, p. 13) played a key role in managing the conflict. The affair, which marked the first time that interfaith work received significant public attention, has been described as a watershed moment for Muslim identities in the UK (Thomas, 2011, p. 140), being the first major mobilisation of British Muslims on the basis of their faith (rather than on the basis of being 'Pakistani', 'Asian' or 'black'). It also constituted a very high profile and painful incident in the fracturing of British political blackness, described by some as having sounded its "death knell" (Alexander, 2002, p. 563). In many ways it was an expression of, and impetus towards, the "new phase" (Hall, 2000b, p. 253) of theorising around race that took place over the 1990s, which moved away from a unitary black cultural politics and towards an engagement with ethnicity-based differences (2000b, p. 257).

The affair prompted intense discussion about the character of racism and antiracism, in which taken for granted divisions between progressive/conservative and left/right were called into question, and unusual alliances of feminists, fascists and anti-fascists appeared on both sides (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). A key question at the time was whether the backlash against those who objected to *The Satanic Verses* was in fact racist at all. While for some the affair solely concerned religion, defined as conceptually distinct from race – with Paul Boateng for

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[16] This is the only reference I have come across describing it as Christian-led – which is not to say this is not the reality on the ground, especially since the introduction of Near Neighbours administered by the Church of England.

example saying that it had "nothing to do with black discourse" (quoted in Modood, 1992, p. 29) – for others the concepts of race and racism needed to be expanded if they did not encompass the negative stereotypes being deployed against Muslims as irrational, violent[17] and ultimately incompatible with modern Western societies (ibid, also Lewis, 1997; Rattansi, 1992).

The failure of antiracist perspectives to recognise this Islamophobia *as racism* was attributed - at least by those convinced that it *was* a form of racism - to an overemphasis on 'biological' or 'skin colour' racism and devaluing of inequalities structured on the basis of 'culture' and 'ethnicity' (Modood, 1994; Parekh, 2000b). As stated in the opening of this chapter, race is understood as a system emerging in the 1600s "to classify individuals into so-called races based on presumed biological differences" (Hatch, 2016, p. 3), while ethnicity emerged in the 1920s as a system for classifying humans into 'ethnic groups' "based on presumed differences in culture, geographic origin, and ancestry" (ibid). The two terms have a complex interrelationship: on the one hand, ethnicity was a response to critiques of biological race, but on the other, it so often mapped onto racial categories (such as African American) that in practice it has often operated as a code for race rather than a critique of it (ibid).

In the wake of the Second World War and the horrors of Nazi eugenics and raciology, official denunciations of biological racial categories were accompanied by the promotion of ethnicity as an alternative, and non-hierarchical, basis for categorising human groups. This is what Barker (1983) refers to as the 'UNESCO tradition' of antiracism, which sought to counter the 'science of racism' in its own terms by demonstrating that differences between human beings could not be attributed to biological differences in "genetic potential" (UNESCO, 1968, p. 270). Differences between groups were instead attributed "solely to their cultural history" (ibid) – this cultural history being what constitutes 'ethnicity', with the idea of racism now replaced with ethnocentrism (Lévi-Strauss, 1952).

Although intended to *challenge* inequalities, within a short time these ideas of cultural difference had been co-opted by, for example, the National Front to *perpetuate* them. Barker (1981) describes this shift in discourses among self-declared fascists and mainstream politicians in the post-war period. Rather than claiming that white people were biologically distinct from, and superior to, other races, he argues that by the 1970s anti-immigrant

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[17] Such stereotypes are closely related to, and have strong continuities with, Orientalism as defined by Said (2003) – characterisations of people from Arab lands (and elsewhere in the 'East') as irrational and barbaric used to justify colonial rule. Discussion of continuities and differences between contemporary Islamophobia and Orientalism can be found in Meer (2014).

prejudice was being justified on the grounds of cultural distinctiveness, and the right of the 'indigenous' white cultures of Britain to protect themselves from outsiders. These separatist arguments based on culture were what he termed the 'new racism' (Barker, 1981).

While Barker's periodisation has been questioned – Hall (2000a), for example, argues that denigration of 'other' ways of life have always formed part of racist discourse – the particular form of *antiracism* which emerged in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s did tend to focus upon structural inequalities between white and 'black' (that is, nonwhite) populations, and paid less attention to cultural or religious marginalisation. Indeed, this was an explicit part of the project of political blackness in which "the enemy was ethnicity" (Hall, 2000, p. 151) as black and Asian migrant communities tried to construct a common identity in the context of Britain in which they were commonly categorised as undifferentiated 'coloured people' (Brah, 1992), to some extent actively suppressing differences between them. The Rushdie affair exposed deep divisions between these groups and left those Muslims who were offended isolated and embittered about the lack of solidarity, both from African-heritage and Sikh and Hindu Asian communities (Lewis, 1997).

Positioning himself as a key commentator on both the affair and Islamophobia more generally, Modood has written extensively about the relationship between 'cultural racism' and the experiences of Asian Muslims (Modood, 1992, 1994, 2005). The underlying premise of his critique is that, not only did assigning race to biological or natural differences fail to *end* racism, it actually *facilitated* the development of new racisms with particularly pernicious implications for Asian Muslims. And these new racisms were not limited to the far right or establishment politicians, but were also at work within antiracist organising itself.

In the case of the Rushdie affair, Modood argues that part of the problem was that race theorists couldn't understand why a question of religious honour was of such importance to Muslims, and why they were mobilising around a depiction of the Prophet rather than the social deprivation and racist harassment that most endured on a daily basis (1992, p. 29). By insisting that their own 'objective' categories of meaning, such as poverty, were a legitimate basis of political mobilisation, whereas 'cultural' matters of religious offence were at most a secondary concern, antiracists reproduced the very narratives of Muslim irrationality that form the basis of Islamophobia. Parekh (2000b), writing later, concurs that "most race equality organisations are broadly secular" and "frequently appear insensitive to forms of racism that target this aspect of religious identity" (2000b, p. 237).

The focus here has been on Islamophobia rather than other forms of faith-based racism, of which the best documented is anti-Semitism. This reflects the differing histories of Jewish and Muslim minorities within the UK, and particularly the fact that, following the Nazi Holocaust, it was widely accepted in law and in wider society that Jewish people were a race and prejudice against them constituted racism. Similarly, while Sikh activism to challenge restrictions placed on turban wearers was in some ways the model followed by Muslim activists (Modood, 2011), Sikhs were accepted in law as an ethnic group covered by the Race Relations Act, whereas Muslims were not (Abbas, 2005). Thus while Parekh (2000b) states that the insensitivity of race equality organisations to faith-based racisms is felt by a range of religious communities, he also acknowledges that the most vocal criticisms have tended to come from Muslims (e.g. Khan, 1999; Bodi, 1999).

Islamophobia as a form of prejudice thus raises questions such as: what is discrimination and racism, how can we know it, and what epistemology underlies these claims to knowledge? For secular antiracist organisations to deny Muslims the right to define prejudice and discrimination for themselves – indeed, to vilify them as irrational and *unable* to know them, if they did not mobilise around the material deprivation that secular antiracists thought should take priority – was to enact a form of universalising erasure that could itself constitute a form of racism. The Rushdie affair and outpouring of anti-Muslim prejudice which followed demonstrated a 'hermeneutical injustice', "a gap in collective interpretive resources [which] puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experience" (Fricker, 2007, p. 1) – an injustice which the subsequent coining of the term 'Islamophobia' (Runnymede Trust, 1997) was intended to address. The fact that there was less resistance to grasping the significance and meaning of this within interfaith circles than within secularist antiracist organisations indicates the relevance of epistemology in the struggles to comprehend contemporary and evolving racisms.

As will be argued in subsequent chapters, 3FF can be seen as being engaged in a distinctive form of education which attempts to address faith-based discrimination and prejudice, and which starts from very different premises to secular antiracism. Developing a theoretical framework for analysing their practice requires us to unpick some of the thorny questions raised by the Rushdie affair about the relationship between secularism, an emphasis on 'natural' racial differences over 'cultural' ones, rationality and knowledge production. The emergence of new cultural and faith-based racisms out of the UNESCO declarations that were meant to end race by discrediting its basis in nature, shows that that "a division between biology and sociology that was once helpful may lose its earlier power… it no longer does the political work it was called in to do, which is to counter racism" (Mol, 2003, p. 18).

This quote highlights that it is not simply 'race' or 'ethnicity' that are constructions, but also the disciplines of 'biology' and 'sociology' through which those categories have been explored, debunked, and made more or less meaningful over time. Countering racism today, when it is so powerfully culturalised and articulated with religious difference, requires us to revisit this division and the split between the natural and the cultural underpinning it.

Science, modernity and race

The relationship between race and science has many dimensions: racial classifications have not only been created through scientific procedures, and scientific knowledge produced through the exploitation of racialised bodies, but the theoretical premises of science have also been constructed through the exclusion and destruction of other forms of knowledge produced by racialised groups (Quijano, 2007). While these other dimensions will be explored in more detail below, my argument embarks from a discussion of the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), since this provides resources for constructing a more fine-grained understanding of what is meant by 'Western science' itself.

The origins of STS are commonly traced to sociological analyses of scientific practice such as Fleck (1981) and Kuhn (1962). Sociologists in the 1970s took from Kuhn the insight that "science is a kind of craftwork… a way of living and being" (Law & Singleton, 2013, p. 486), rather than solely existing as abstract theory. Consequently, science could be studied and analysed as a form of human practice using the methods, such as ethnography, developed by social scientists to look at other human 'cultural' practices. By redirecting methods developed to look at non-Western, colonised subjects towards the archetypal institutions of modernity, early practitioners aimed to develop a new form of 'symmetrical anthropology' (Latour, 1993).

The core insights of STS emerged in the 'laboratory studies' conducted in the 70s and 80s, such as Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* (1986). This tells the story of the two years Latour spent observing (and occasionally participating) at Roger Guillemin's laboratory at the Salk Institute in the mid-1970s, focussing on the embodied practices of scientists such as filling pipettes, working machines, noting down measurements, and discussing papers with colleagues. These laboratory studies acted as an intervention in the key debates taking place in the studies of science at the time: were scientists simply discovering 'natural laws' independent of any human intervention, or were scientific facts entirely the product of particular social formations, such as militarised Cold War societies?

When seen as *practice*, Latour and Woolgar argue, neither the naturalised nor the socialised accounts of scientific knowledge seem very credible. If scientists are only discovering 'natural laws', then it is hard to account for the painstaking human work that it takes to construct the graphs and tables by which those laws are known. On the other hand, if scientists are simply reflecting social forces then it is equally difficult to account for the many ways in which 'nature' refuses to conform to human expectations. Latour and Woolgar suggest that scientific practice is better understood as a process of translation which creates new connections between humans and nonhumans, and which exercise agency through those relationships. A substance like the hormone somatostatin, which was isolated and defined in Guillemin's laboratory, does indeed 'exist', but "it cannot jump out of the very network of social practice which makes possible its existence" (Latour & Woolgar, 1986, p. 183).

If the division between nature and culture is implausible, why does it persist? Latour's answer in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) is because it underpins the 'Modernist Constitution', which he traces back to Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and Robert Boyle (1993, p. 15). These thinkers conceptually split science/nature from politics/culture, but, Latour argues, this very act of division began to produce, at an unprecedented scale, hybrids which were neither purely natural nor purely cultural. The innovation of the Moderns was the creation of a form of doublethink, whereby nature and culture were entirely separate, even as the products of science (accurate compasses, deadly weaponry, industrial factories) resulted in new political forms, and the products of politics (property rights, limited companies, state banks) transformed human interactions with the material world. Because these hybrids are denied, however, Moderns can avoid responsibility for them and the destruction they cause.

Latour was my own entry point into STS, and concepts from his work underpin this theoretical framework. Indeed, to borrow a commonly used term in the field, he acts as something of an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon, 1986) in narratives of its origins. Other origin stories could be told, however, which focus on the feminist roots of the field – centring scholars such as Haraway (1991, 2008), Star (1991) and Stengers (2008, 2010). Here, the nature/culture split is more explicitly linked to masculinist ideals of domination and extraction, promised by the absolute knowledge of nature that Modern science claims to provide. The quest of feminist STS is to "give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while that we will be hoodwinked... [since] we are not in charge of the world" (Haraway, 1988, p. 99). Here, ethical interventions are both paramount and also contingent upon the circulation of agency between humans and nonhumans: "the point is to 'change the world not to understand it' but... this

implies giving the world the power to change us, to 'force' our thinking" (Stengers, 2008, p. 57).

Decentring Latour is particularly important when considering the conjunction of 'race' and STS. As Todd (2014) argues, Latour can be faulted for giving inadequate credit to indigenous communities and scholars who have developed concepts and knowledge systems that he draws upon, for example about the agency and status of the climate. This mirrors an absence more generally in the 'nonhuman turn' (Grusin, 2015), of which STS can be considered part, of the work of black thinkers for whom deconstructions of Euro-American categories of thought and the nature/culture divide have been pivotal and long-standing (Jackson, 2015).

While tracing similar ground to Latour's Modernist Constitution, such scholars have emphasised the central role of the racial hierarchies embedded within modern thought. Eze (1997), for example, catalogues the explicit racism of Locke, Kant and Hegel, while Jackson (2016) charts the ongoing influence of the Hegelian archetype of the African as unable to achieve distance from nature and thus being an eternal "animal-man' (Gilroy (2000) covers similar ground). Elsewhere, black feminists have considered the intersections of race and gender in the development of categories of nature and culture (Collins, 2008), and how the hypervisibility of black female bodies excludes them from being seen as producers of objective knowledge (Nkweto Simmonds, 1997). Decolonial thinkers have also explored the impact on colonised peoples of being constructed as objects that only European subjects can possess knowledge of (Quijano, 2007), and the relationship between colonial violence and the perception that since "the West invented science… the West alone knows how to think" (Césaire, 2000, p. 19).

The importance of racial hierarchies in the development of scientific *practices*, as well as their conceptual underpinnings, has also been discussed by many black academics and people of colour. Spillers (1987) has written about enslaved people acting as a 'living laboratory' available for scientific experimentation – establishing a pattern of exploiting black bodies for 'medical improvements' which rarely benefit black recipients continued in the Tuskegee syphilis experiment and the ongoing controversies over the financial rewards deriving from the HeLa cell line (Doucet-Battle, 2016; Harvey, 2016). Similar patterns of a scientific exploitation of people of colour have been recorded in relation to the use of Puerto Rican women in the early trials of the contraceptive pill (Beal, 1970) and continued in the present with the developing market using Indian women as surrogates (Rudrappa, 2015). Accounts such as these provide a highly sceptical starting point for assessing the alleged benefits of scientific

and technological progress, and for examining the ethics and values embedded within mainstream science.

What STS offers these critiques is a means of thinking in detail about scientific practices, treating them as multiple and open to reformulation and therefore contributing to more nuanced understandings of how they might further or challenge racisms. This stands in contrast to work within the social sciences and humanities which often treats knowledge production within the natural sciences as a 'black box', focussing solely on inputs and outputs rather than internal processes.

As an example, Gilroy's *Against Race* (2000) argues that developments within molecular biology and genetics provide an opportunity to move towards the abolition of race as they demonstrate the fictitious nature of biological racial groupings and move attention away from external markers for truth claims about the body. However, the book largely treats genetics as a singular field rather than a diverse collection of practices with varying implications for antiracist work. His audience are encouraged to make use of the knowledge provided for them by molecular biologists, not to develop their own understanding of the different means by which it might be produced – and it does not address how biologists themselves might start to imagine new techniques and ways of knowing that are better aligned with antiracist aims.

Just such an approach is taken by Kim Tallbear, a tribal citizen of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate in South Dakota, who works on the implications of genetic testing for Native Americans and other indigenous peoples (TallBear, 2007, 2009, 2013). While her work is highly critical of many current practices and their potential to override and distort indigenous understandings of kinship and belonging, she also argues that disengagement from the politics of genetic testing is not an option – rather, the ability of indigenous peoples to exercise sovereignty into the future will depend in part upon the ways in which they engage with and deploy bioscientific knowledge.

Much of her work involves helping indigenous groups and decision-makers to acquire the expertise needed to make choices about how this engagement will take place; in addition, she has helped form a network of indigenous scientists who explore how concepts from their own cultures and languages might provide avenues for new scientific practices. She has written, for example, about the similarities between ideas of 'multi-species ethnographies' now emerging in anthropology and indigenous thinking, but also that these should be further broadened to include beings not considered 'living' in Western thought, drawing on Dakota ontologies of a life force which animates entities such as lightning, wind, water or frost (TallBear, 2011).

Rather than polarising the debate into purely positive or negative views of science, she asserts that "[s]cience and technology are central to nationbuilding and… need to be made more democratic" (2007, p. 43).

In an interview, Tallbear notes that "[s]cientists have not been much better than the church sometimes in that they assume they just need to save us from our own backwardness" (in Clancy, 2016). This quote indicates the relevance of her work on science and technology for interfaith practice and 3FF, since the project of scientific and economic imperialism was also one of cultural and *religious* hegemony. The next section further explores the relationship between questions of religious difference and the approach to scientific practice discussed above.

We have never been secular?

Science and Technology Studies is perhaps a counterintuitive field to look to for insights about religion. However, this is less surprising when we consider the religious orientation of many of its key figures. Latour has always been a practising Catholic and has written extensively on religious themes (2002, 2010; 2013). Haraway has talked of the philosophical importance of the "sacramental consciousness" endowed by her Catholic upbringing, which has influenced not just her philosophical approach but her methodology – she has credited the development of the concept of 'figurations' to her Catholic origins (2007). Law also has a Christian background, being a member of a Quaker meeting for many years (Law & Mol, 1998).

The preoccupation with modernity, and attempts to conceptualise the practices of the sciences outside of the lens of the 'Modern divide' lends the field towards a reconsideration of religion. Narratives of modernity have always been tied up with assumptions about secularisation – assumptions which are deeply embedded in the social sciences given the foundational importance of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, all of whom considered religion to be a fading force in modern societies (Giddens, 1973). In Latour's terms, secularisation can be related to the division of nature and culture in the 'Modern constitution', where what defines moderns is their ability to correctly assign agency to pure nature or pure culture rather than mixing them up like pre-moderns: disease is spread by 'natural' germs rather than through witchcraft, Kings rule because of a 'social' contract not by divine right. The development of knowledge through scientific methods therefore renders religion unnecessary, or at most a matter of private salvation with nothing to say about 'the world': "religion had to become a

mere culture so that nature could be a true religion – that which brings everyone to assent" (Latour, 2002, p. 19).

The reference here to religion as 'mere culture' indicates the problem with seeing religious pluralism as a kind of 'multiculturalism'. If such multiculturalism is premised on 'mononaturalism' then "[c]onflicts between humans… remains limited to the representations, ideas and images that diverse cultures could have of a single biophysical nature" (Latour, 2002, p. 6), and differences will therefore "never cut very deep; they could never be fundamental since they did not affect the world itself" (2002, p. 7). This is the position taken by Habermas, who in the past decade has reversed his previous secularist assumptions and granted that religion may have useful functions in a 'post-secular' society (Portier, 2011). However, Habermas still reserves to science the knowledge we should use for public reasoning, stating that religion should always be subordinate to "the institutionalised monopoly of modern scientific experts" (2006, p. 14), and that "a strict line between faith and knowledge" (2006, p. 16) must be maintained. 'Religion' is allowed into debates over cultural symbols, but it is 'science' (understood in singular and universalising terms) that will settle disputes about reality.

For people of faith themselves, this constitutes a form of epistemic oppression, that is, a "persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production" (Dotson, 2014, p. 115), and may well be experienced as a profound distortion of the realities they inhabit. For Native American communities, for example, labelling their land-based cosmologies as 'spiritual' has been a means of denying substantive claims for control of territory (Cox, 2007; Smith, 1998), constituting what decolonial thinkers have termed 'epistemicide' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), the killing off of other ways of knowing by inhibiting the material conditions for them to be properly practised. The fact that multiculturalism is implicitly premised on 'mononaturalism' also accounts for the inconclusiveness and circularity of the debates about 'cultural' and 'natural' racisms in relation to faith; it is the division of nature and culture itself, underpinned by a particular account of scientific practice, that reduces religious belief to 'representations, ideas and images' and marks those of faith out as irrational if they believe they have anything to say about 'the world'.

This caricature of religious belief, of course, does not apply equally to all religions or all people, but is deeply linked to the racial hierarchies discussed previously. Denigration of non-Christian religious practices were intrinsic to the racist caricatures drawn by Enlightenment thinkers. Hegel, for example, linked accounts of Africans worshipping "natural forms" (Hegel, 1997, p. 129) and not recognising God as "a supreme being" (ibid) to their supposed cannibalism and

acceptance of slavery (1997, p. 134). Kant similarly considered the widespread "religion of fetishes" (Kant, 1997, p. 55) among 'Negroes' to be evidence of their inferiority to white people, and Indians to be weak and indecisive and therefore idolatrous and prone to superstition (1997, p. 64).

This argument can be taken further by bringing in scholars from within religious studies who have engaged in 'deep reflexivity' (Lynch, 2012) about how the meaning of religion itself has been culturally constructed. Masuzawa (2005), for example, traces how the idea of 'world religions' developed in the nineteenth century, with Westerners coming to understand belief systems such as Islam in the image of their own constructions of Christianity. It was in the context of the colonial encounter where what we now understand as 'religion' (or 'culture') came to be understood as entities "with any distinction whatever from other human phenomena" (Arnal, 1999, p. 31) and counterposed to 'the secular':

> *"the colonial aspect is crucial because the idea of a 'secular' realm of natural reason, scientific knowledge, civil society and the nation state is inseparable from the development of constitutions, world trade and capitalist markets. These in turn have a symbiotic relationship with the development of a generic concept of 'religion' and 'religions' based on Protestant Christian origins but projected universally"* (Fitzgerald, 2007a, p. 9).

Following this argument, 'religion' is as much a construction as 'race'. This is not to say that identifications with religious categories are not meaningful, but rather that the clustering together of heterogeneous practices and beliefs under categories such as 'Islam', 'Christianity' or 'atheism' need to be seen as historical and ongoing processes not dissimilar to the clustering that comprises a scientific field like genetics. This understanding of religion as primarily a question of practice rather than belief has similarities with the 'lived religion' approach that will be returned to below (Hall, 1997; Lynch, 2012) and is well suited to the emphasis on fluid identities and experiences of faith within 3FF's work. In the next chapter, *How Can We Live Together?*, this approach will be used to think through some of the questions about collective identities encountered in my fieldwork, and to suggest a theorisation of interfaith as a form of 'partial connection' (Haraway, 1988; Strathern, 1991).

Chapter 5, *Faith in Crisis*, will also explore the *work* that the category of 'religion' does in the context of intensely mediated narratives of conflict between faiths which deeply impacted the context in which 3FF operated. Here, I want to expand briefly on how this category contributes to racialised exclusions, and the relationship between this and the epistemologies

underpinning secular scientism. Feminists and writers of colour have talked of how marginalisation and oppression operate through designations of what is 'normal', and thus what is a deviation from the norm (e.g. Bhavnani, 2001; Puwar, 2004). In the contemporary British context, one of the ways this operates is through rendering the Christian heritage of much of the hegemonic nonreligious white culture invisible. While our calendars, public holidays, language, food and drink, and so on carry the indelible marks of our Protestant Christian histories (Tomkins, 2012), these go largely unnoticed, while the unfamiliar practices of minority faith communities (such as halal methods of slaughter) are considered highly noticeable intrusions of 'religion' into 'secular' life.

This association of the secular with specific cultural forms, while often denying that they are particular rather than universal, allows hierarchies of ways of life to operate through positioning *either* Protestant Christianity *or* secular scientism as superior depending on what is most politically expedient. The slippage between these modes of argument is in many ways exemplified by Richard Dawkins: while his highly publicised pronouncements on the irrationality of religious belief have been underpinned by a universalising account of science, more recently he has come to describe himself as a 'cultural Christian' (BBC, 2007) while making increasingly Islamophobic pronouncements and expressing support for far-right politicians (Ohlheiser, 2013). Such slippages have a long history – as Mignolo (2011) writes, secular racism displaced earlier forms based on Christian theological foundations, with the agents of knowledge in both cases being "mostly white European males" (2011, p. 9) embroiled in the project of coloniality. Dawkins can thus be seen as a bearer of a long-standing logic of white supremacy, albeit taking particular forms in the context of contemporary Islamophobia.

Addressing contemporary faith-based racisms, I would argue, requires efforts to denaturalise and decolonise the category of 'religion' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 62), to investigate the ways in which the discourse of religion has operated as a discourse of othering since the inception of the World Religions Paradigm (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 20), and thus to deepen our understanding of how its definition serves to entrench the hegemony of the dominant white culture. Importantly, what is *not* being argued here is that the way to disrupt this hegemony is a more thorough secularisation, as if purging the dominant culture of anything considered 'Christian' will by itself address exclusions. Rather, what is being emphasised are the nonconscious and embodied aspects of the transmission of all cultures through time, which often persist even in the face of their explicit rejection – for example, the rhetorical forms adopted by the New Atheists closely mirroring those of Protestant theologians (Woodhead, 2012). The ethical

obligations this places upon nonreligious people to become better attuned to the ways these unspoken cultural forms may serve to further white supremacy will be returned to in the conclusion to this thesis.

The claim 'we have never been secular' is therefore not an abstract philosophical point, but tied up with who occupies dominant positions within British life and globally, and the routes by which a more egalitarian society might be sought – a project that 3FF's non-secular practice could be seen as engaging in. An alternative account of knowledge production which might enable such hierarchies to be challenged follows.

A non-modern epistemology

Here, I outline the non-modern epistemology which underpins this thesis – 'non-modern' being taken from Latour (1993) as preferable to anti- or post-modern, both of which imply that modernity and its division of nature and culture has taken place. This approach sees knowledge production as an indeterminate practice through time involving mediations between humans and nonhumans; understands all knowledge as situated, partial and value-laden; is inclusive of multiple of ways of knowing; and seeks truth through more democratic procedures.

To begin with, it is a material practice involving mediations between humans and nonhumans – there are no abstract facts or laws of nature which can be separated from the networks of humans and nonhumans which produce and sustain them. The national census, for example, is a huge assemblage involving thousands of human workers, millions of paper pamphlets, several Acts of Parliament, and of course tens of millions of participants. It is a function of the power of this assemblage that the resulting knowledge is often presented as independent of it, for example 'the population of Portsmouth is x' rather than 'those who conducted the 2011 Census claim that…' A fact which appears to 'stand alone' is simply one in which part of the work of the network is to make itself invisible (Latour, 1988).

As a material practice, knowledge production is also indeterminate and takes place through time as humans and nonhumans reformulate one another in the 'mangle of practice' (Pickering, 1995). When 72% of the British population chose to identify themselves as Christian on the 2001 census, this took almost everybody by surprise. One theory for the high response rate related to the materiality of the census form, and the decision on the English and Welsh versions to place the question of religion immediately below the question on ethnicity – levels

of Christian identification were lower in Scotland where the two questions were spatially separated (Day, 2011). Rather than considering this contingency to invalidate the knowledge produced, it highlights the care needed to construct a material apparatus capable of receiving the right 'signal' from the surrounding 'noise' (Law, 2004, p. 116).

Since all practices of knowledge production are enacted through particular bodies, techniques and materials, what results is always situated and partial (Haraway, 1988). This includes the knowledge produced by the hard or natural sciences: the durability of their assemblages is in large part a function of the enormous cost of the technologies they involve (body scanners, supercomputers, Hadron Colliders) and the resources available to translate and reproduce those techniques. In any case, the difficulties of translating between disciplines such as geology, biology and particle physics demonstrates their partial character. There is no 'view from above', only "locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connection called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (Haraway, 1988, p. 191). These "partial connections" constitute the kind of feminist objectivity discussed in the ethnography chapter, which promises "knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organised by axes of domination" (1988, p. 192).

Following on from this, there can be no value-free knowledge: values are embedded within the questions asked and the techniques deployed to create, record and disseminate it. The inclusion of the question 'what is your religion?' on the 2001 census was the result of campaigning by Muslim civil society organisations and the interfaith movement throughout the 1990s (Sherif, 2011) – a campaign which was resisted by secular and humanist groups. When over 80% of the population chose a religious affiliation on the form, this strengthened the case for public funding of faith-based activities and for academic research into religious identities such as the Religion and Society programme (Woodhead, 2012).

This was precisely what secular groups such as the British Humanist Association (BHA) had feared, claiming that the wording of the question overstated the importance of religion within contemporary British life, since many of those responding were presumed to be referring to a loose affiliation rather than any kind of active practice (BHA, 2011). For the BHA, Britain *was* secular and therefore *should not* have collected data on religious affiliation – at least not in a form which allowed it to be conflated with practice – since through this act the country was made *less* secular. The production of knowledge about religion produced a reality in which religion became more important. Values are embedded within the facts and facts within values, and all knowledge production is also reality-producing since it "*works not simply by detecting but also by amplifying a reality*" (Law, 2004, p. 116 original emphasis).

The focus on practices rather than the abstractions which are the end result of (successful) knowledge production also highlights the multiplicity of ways of knowing. Rather than conceiving of the world as divided between Moderns who know the world objectively through science, and pre-moderns who still cling to irrational religious beliefs, the multiple and contradictory ways of knowing the realities that we *all* inhabit are stressed. Highlighting that even 'hard' scientific practices involve embodied learning and craft draws attention to the nonconscious aspects inherent within all forms of knowledge production, and many scholars explore the complex and blurry relationships between 'facts' and 'fictions' in the enactment of realities (Latour, 1996; Kember, 1998; Jackson, 2015).

It follows that this is a non-secular view of knowledge, which does not have to exclude 'the religious' from its epistemology in order to distinguish true facts from mere beliefs – and thus one which might be able to address the overlapping epistemic oppressions experienced by religious and racial minorities. In Chapter 6, this will be linked with the role of embodied knowledges within 3FF's practice of 'encounter-based religious literacy', with reference to Polanyi's (1966) work on tacit ways of knowing. The thesis conclusion will suggest some practical routes forward for mediating between these ways of knowing on decolonial terms in order to construct "another rationality which may legitimately pretend some universality" (Quijano, 2007, p. 177), premised on acceptance of "the fact of ontological pluralism… that needs ecologies of knowledges to understand" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 15).

Finally, this epistemology seeks better and more objective knowledge about the world through democratisation. Rather than conceiving of knowledge production – particularly that of the natural sciences – as an expert system which is necessarily separated from non-experts, the involvement of a wider range of people in the practical craft of science, particularly those directly affected by the issues in question and generally marginalised within mainstream discourses, is valued as a good in itself. Examples such as AIDS patients redesigning the early trials of antiretrovirals (Epstein, 1995), and families of the disappeared in Mexico helping one another to test human remains to confirm whether they are family members (Ferrero, 2014), all demonstrate the capacity of 'laypeople' to participate in complex scientific processes and to develop considerable levels of practical skill. They also demonstrate that passionate involvement in the outcomes of knowledge production does not impede truth-seeking; on the contrary, nobody was more invested in getting an accurate answer to whether antiretrovirals were an effective treatment for AIDS than those who were HIV-positive.

However, a hard division between experts and non-experts is reinstantiated when the focus on science as practice is lost, and once knowledge production is returned to an abstract

theoretical system. Bringing the mediations involved in knowledge production into view is therefore a precondition of democratic participation, since this highlights the contingent and messy elements of practice in which choices might be made and agency exercised. A further exploration of the concept of mediation, and the specific role that media technologies play within it, is the topic of the next section.

Mediation, media technologies and nonhuman agency

The concept of 'mediation' is central to the non-epistemology outlined above, and it is also a key and contested term within the field of media and communications. My own understanding of it is in broad terms as "a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical" (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. xv), in which formerly separate elements are connected in ways which transform them both (Stolow, 2013).

This conceptualisation differs from others within media studies. Davis (2007), for example, sees mediation in structuralist terms as a process by which 'the media' negotiate between elites and ordinary people, while Silverstone (2002) describes it as the uneven "dialectical process in which institutionalised media of communication… are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life" (2002, p. 762). Silverstone's definition is further developed by Couldry (2008) who seeks to emphasise its nonlinearity, seeing mediation as the "variety of dynamics within media flows…. flows of production, flows of circulation, flows of interpretation or reception… [which] flow back into production or flow outwards into general social and cultural life" (2008b, p. 8).

These latter uses of 'mediation' are premised on a view of 'media' and 'the social' as distinct entities which then interact. These definitions treat mediation as a process specific to 'the media', with media technologies *preceding* mediation. For Kember and Zylinska (2012) on the other hand, there is a different relationship between mediation and media technologies: "mediation is the originary process of media emergence with media being seen as (ongoing) stabilisations of the media flow" (2012, p. 21), that is, that media technologies are one kind of stabilisation among many other technological and social forms resulting from mediation. This understanding is the more useful one for our purposes as it allows us to link together the concept of mediation within knowledge production with the specific mediations involving media technologies. It also fits with the ethnographic approach to media practices in which media are not the starting point for analysis, but rather situated within everyday life.

Attempting to think about the relevance of insights from Science and Technology Studies to studies of media requires a move from STS to Actor Network Theory (ANT). The latter emerged out of STS, and indeed has been described as "an approach so close to [its] heart that they are sometimes taken to be synonymous with one another" (Passoth & Rowland, 2013, p. 466). ANT shares the same core interests in networks of humans and nonhumans, 'relational materiality' ("things are what they are in relation to other things, not because of essential qualities" (Christopher Gad & Jensen, 2010, p. 58) and performativity or enactment ("things are what they are because they are done that way by actors relating to other actors" (ibid)).

Its key practitioners resist its characterisation as a theory or method, preferring to describe ANT as a 'sensibility' (Law & Singleton, 2013, p. 486), 'attitude' (Gad, 2013) or 'disposition' (Jensen, 2004). The principal differences between ANT and STS are the topics covered: while those describing themselves as STS scholars have tended to remain focused on the 'natural' sciences and 'hard' technologies, those associated with ANT span a wide range of disciplines including anthropology (Strathern, 1991), education (Verran, 1999; Fenwick & Edwards, 2012), and international relations (Austin, 2015; Cudworth & Hobden, 2013).

Despite shared interests in relationships between humans and technologies, ANT is only popular within certain areas of contemporary media studies. There has been a growing trend towards drawing on its insights within discussions on 'new media' (e.g. Lister et al. 2008; Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Krieger & Belliger, 2014), media technology (Loon, 2007; Gillespie et al., 2014), and digital sociology (Lupton, 2015). However, the more common response is the kind of critique found in Silverstone (1994), Couldry (2008) and Benson (2014): namely, that the emphasis on technological agency side-lines the role of human meaning making. Early on, Silverstone rejected the decentring of human agency, arguing that when trying to understand socio-technological systems academics can "still privilege the social; indeed one must do so, since the natural, the economic and the technical… have no significance except through social action" (1994, p. 85). Couldry (2008), while more welcoming of some of the insights from ANT for its anti-functionalism, still asserts that it needs to be extended from "a sociology of networks into… a sociology of action and interpretation" (Couldry, 2008, p. 103).

Concerns about the role of nonhuman actors in ANT can be seen as a reflection of the polarised character of debate about technological agency within media studies. Lister et al. (2008) summarise these debates as swinging between technological determinism, exemplified by Marshall McLuhan (1994), and social constructionism, exemplified by Raymond Williams (2003). Where the former was interested in the materiality of media technologies, the latter was primarily concerned with the content produced and interpreted by humans.

Lister et al. (2008) simplify both McLuhan and Williams – the latter, Loon (2007) argues, cannot have been entirely a social determinist since he believed that technology places limitations and is therefore an actor (2007, p. 62). However, the ensuing *debate* between these two kinds of determinism, as Kember and Zylinska put it, has had this all-or-nothing quality, in which "technology is seen as either having major social effects, or none at all!" (2012, p. 7). Within British cultural and media studies, the humanism and constructionism of Williams has dominated, with questions of technology sidelined, although European and North American media research remained more McLuhanite (ibid). In general, Lievrouw (2014) asserts that communications scholarship remains 'tilted' "toward the social/cultural side of the sociotechnical duality" (2014, p. 24).

Sterne (2014) provides another perspective on why debates about determinism have been so persistent within media studies: the work of middle-class academics has been "marked by an often quite explicit reaction to the broader, commercial, technical culture" (2014, p. 122) surrounding them, as they confronted "a particularly virulent form of digital utopianism" (2014, p. 123) in their personal lives, institutions, and among colleagues and students. Although by the early twenty-first century the argument had been thoroughly made, hard technological utopianism has continued to be critiqued because of these cultural and commercial trends. Despite presenting arguments to some extent settled in the early 1990s, "dissertations of communication technology still commonly [rehearse] the debate between determinism and constructivism… and then take a position somewhere in between" (ibid) – a pattern evidently repeated here.

The key point to stress here are the political implications that scholars within media studies have often argued inevitably flow from adopting an ANT-like 'sensibility'. Couldry, for example, states that the discipline tends to focus on how networks are assembled, neglecting "the long-term consequences of networks for the distribution of social power" (2008a, p. 101) and suffering from "political quietism" (2008a, p. 107). Similarly, Benson (2014) challenges the 'new descriptivism', of which ANT is a part, for simply describing phenomena without aiming for explanation, thus resulting in an extreme relativism where "nothing is better or worse than anything else", and making it difficult to know "what is at stake".

My own use of ANT here attempts to combine it with a feminist perspective, following Star (1991) and Bauchspies and Bellacasa (2009), using some of its resources and concepts while attempting to retain a sensitivity to power differentials – particularly in Chapter 8 in my critique of 3FF's organisational practice. If this proves successful, then perhaps this demonstrates that Benson (2014) is incorrect when he says that the 'flatness' he objects to

within ANT is an inevitable result of its epistemology. In fact, his 'ANT takedown' speech itself ends on a more conciliatory note, calling for "heterodox" interpretations and uses of theory within both ANT and institutional/field studies that can open up dialogue, which he asserts is preferable to "staying inside our churches and speaking only to our co-religionists" (2014). Fittingly, this positions my own attempts to articulate and translate between ANT, media studies and feminist research practices as a kind of interfaith work.

Religion, rationality and non-secular technology

This final section sketches out the resources I am drawing upon from the media studies literature to understand the mediations of media technologies within the context of 3FF, outlining my non-secular theoretical approach. Like other branches of the social sciences, media studies has been marked by the secularist legacies of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, and in the early days of media studies scholars rarely considered religious identities and practices. The sea-change within the field generally referred to as the 'cultural turn' (Roseneil & Frosh, 2012) opened up greater space for religion within the discipline. This increased interest in faith practices occurred earlier in the US than the UK, partly due to the influence of James Carey within US media studies' cultural turn, Carey being a practising Catholic for whom religion played a foundational role in his thinking (e.g. Carey, 1975). In the UK, religion was largely ignored until the 1990s (Murdock, 1997, p. 89). Since then, however, we have seen a number international conferences and key texts looking at the conjuncture of religion, media and popular culture (Hoover & Clark, 2002; Hoover & Lundby, 1997; Mitchell & Marriage, 2003), and the launch of both the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* and the *Journal of Media and Religion* in 2002.

Within religious studies there was something of a simultaneous move towards thinking about the significance of media. Here, the 'cultural turn' expressed itself as an interest in media and popular culture alongside the growing emphasis on 'lived religion' (Lynch, 2012). This approach moved away from thinking of religion primarily as professed beliefs that could be measured through survey methods, to a focus on microlevel practice. Works such as Hall (1997) suggest "that practice may have much greater significance in lived religion than belief" (Lynch, 2012, p. 81), while Mcguire (2008) and Ammerman (2007) explore experiences of the sacred within everyday life. This has dovetailed with a move towards thinking of media in terms of practice (Postill & Brauchler, 2010). However, this disciplinary conjuncture is still to an extent one-

sided, with media far more embedded within religious studies than religion is within mainstream media and communications research.[18]

My approach here, which clearly does not see religion as outside of the bounds of legitimate scholarly enquiry, is thus non-secular in the sense of refuting the modern divide. Morley describes the binary implied between "tradition, culture, ritual, and irrationality… [and] modernity, economics, functionality and rationality – which is often seen as inscribed in these [media] technologies" (Morley, 2007, 3). Such a divide places religion and media in different time frames and presumes a conflict between them - a 'religion versus technology' position Stolow (2013) identifies in some of the literature.

It is also non-secular in a second sense, drawing on Bartunek and Moch's (1994) definition of secular phenomena as those which "do not transcend human cognitive capabilities" (1994, p. 25), which they counterpose to trans-conceptual or mystical phenomena which do. In terms of media technologies, this means paying attention to the ways in which they engage more than just our conscious awareness. This requires us to think outside of dominant narratives which focus on their functionality, and the deeply embedded association between media technologies and forms of calculative rationality which have led digital technologies to be taken as exemplars of modernity since their inception (Morley, 2007).

This involves "tak[ing] seriously the 'marvellous' dimension of new technology" (Morley, 2007, p. 3), understanding that they are "replete with symbols" (2007, p. 323) with communications technologies in particular often acting as "symbolic or totemic objects for their users" (ibid). My non-secular approach to media technologies within my empirical chapters begins with media practice (Couldry, 2004; Postill & Brauchler, 2010), focusing on the embodied, the habitual and the everyday. Within 3FF, this meant looking at organisational life and seeking to understand how media were being used within that context rather than beginning with the media themselves. The focus on embodiment entails cultivating an attunement to the non-informational aspects of media and their potential to "express knowledge using a wider range of our senses" (Bowker, 2014, p. 108) than just via text. In Chapter 4, for example, there is discussion of how images produced by a selfie stick at a wedding conducted embodied social energy, while Chapter 5 looks at the affective[19] dimensions of 'faith-inflected media events',

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[18] The mediatisation literature is an exception here, with religion being a central concern of key figures such as Hjarvard (2009, 2011), Hepp (2012) and Clark (2009).

[19] The literature on affect is not brought into this thesis directly, although my explorations of it have left traces such as in my use of terms such as 'nonconscious' (see Chapter 1). Earlier drafts of Chapter 5 used elements of the literature (e.g. Blackman & Venn, 2010; Carsten & Knudsen, 2015; Clough & Halley, 2007) but these sections were removed, since I found I did not have the space to properly explicate how

and how the content circulating via mainstream and social media enabled or disabled the flow of feelings of terror or peacefulness. This again highlights the importance of taking 'mediation' to be a term which includes a wide range of processes, such that the continuities between the mediations of media technologies and the mediations of our bodies can be traced.

Attentiveness to the nonconscious aspects of our relationships with media faces methodological and descriptive challenges, but can be cultivated by looking at habitual and ordinary practices – "things that remain by disappearing from consciousness" (Chun, 2016, p. x) but which can help us to conceptualise "the creepier, slower, more unnerving time of 'new media'" (ibid) which persists through time. *Dead Data, Living Knowledge* tries to focus in on aspects of data practices and their impact on organisational life which are often difficult to notice because of their ubiquity within both white-collar workplaces and personal lives, such as the default setting of most technologies to 'keep everything' (Dumbill, 2012) which results in ever expanding and overwhelming backlogs of data.

That chapter examines how guiding principles and norms associated with 'big data' have become embedded within material practices, and how they relate to the mythic qualities attributed to big data as a source of knowledge and value (boyd & Crawford, 2012). These mythic dimensions of media are also drawn upon within Chapter 5, where I suggest that Couldry's 'myth of the mediated centre' (2003) and 'myth of us' (2015) might be being joined by another which shapes our interactions with social media platforms, 'the myth of distributed digital agency'. This chapter also refers to the literature on media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998) and media rituals (Couldry, 2003) – a ritual approach to media being one which refutes a sharp divide between a secular present and traditional societies governed by ritual (Baker, 2014; Sumiala, 2012).

All of these non-secular approaches to media technologies have similarities with ANT, being broadly semiotic materialist and attempting to conceptualise the relationship between technologies, embodied practices and the "media imaginaries" (Barassi, 2015, p. 41) which shape how these play out in different contexts. Importantly, my use of these approaches attempts to avoid providing a secularising account in which I appear to have become fully knowing of the nonconscious aspects of media use myself, seeking to maintain an awareness

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I wanted to use it, and in particular to ensure that my usage was being understood as post-psychological, rather than in the more reductive ways that affect is often adopted within work across the humanities (Blackman, 2010).

for the reader of my own partial and locatable perspective, and the complexities of trying to think *about* media while intensely embroiled *with* them in the production of this thesis itself.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to outline a theoretical framework suitable for looking at 3FF's interfaith practice. It has argued that a non-modern epistemology is necessary: one which refutes the divide between nature and culture, which sees facts and values as inevitably intertwined, and which is as applicable to the 'hard' sciences as to other forms of knowledge production. Such an epistemology has been argued to be important given the ways in which narratives of modernity and progress, underpinned by secular scientism, have furthered overlapping racial and religious marginalisation. This epistemology is both non-modern and non-secular, allowing faith-based practices access to 'reality' rather than assuming we share a singular nature known through science.

A starting point of this chapter has been that racisms are intrinsic to modernity, and also future-oriented and evolving in relation to wider social and political trends (Jackson, 2015). A key way in which racism has evolved in the past thirty years has been through increasingly virulent strains of anti-Muslim prejudice, which play a geopolitical role for those who believe in a 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington, 2002), justifying military interventions in the Middle East and increased surveillance and securitisation in the domestic context of the UK. Conceptualising Islamophobia as racism has posed a challenge to secular antiracist organising practices, as the discussion of the Rushdie affair highlighted. In that context, it was the interfaith movement which provided a more effective form of solidarity and allyship, indicating that there were crucial elements of the epistemic injustices Muslims were facing that were difficult to conceive of within a secularist framework.

The mediations of media technologies have played a crucial role in these conflicts – it was, after all, the publication of a *novel* that instigated the first public mobilisations of Muslim communities on the basis of their faith. Given the stereotypes about Muslim 'backwardness' used to further Islamophobia both in the Rushdie affair and since, it is important that our analyses of media do not replicate a 'religion versus technology' position (Stolow, 2013) and seek to recognise not only the 'modernity' of racialised and religious others, but also the persistence of the 'magical' within the very technological objects which are meant to signal the divide between premodern and modern people. This recognition entails attentiveness to

embodied practices, habits which have disappeared from conscious awareness, and the mythic symbolism embedded within communications technologies.

One of the struggles I have encountered throughout writing this thesis has been forging the connection between the rather abstract conceptual work that the topic has seemed to require, and the concrete consequences of this thinking. Chapter 4 continues the rather philosophical tone of this theoretical framework, while attempting to draw the principles and concepts taken from ANT into direct conversation with the empirical material from 3FF, framed around the central question of this thesis: how might sustainable coexistence between immeasurably different people, such as those of different faiths and beliefs, be achieved, and *How Can We Live Together?*

Chapter 4

How Can We Live Together? Coexistence and non-modernity

"An entirely new set of questions has now emerged: 'Can we cohabit with you?' 'Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?'" (Latour, 2005, p. 30)

"Who am I? Who are we? Where do we live? How do we all live together?"
The Four Key Questions which structure 3FF's Faith School Linking programme, derived from The Schools Linking Network

The question of how to live together is a question about difference: how to think it, negotiate it, and coexist with it. This chapter attempts to explore the consequences for coexistence when a non-modern and non-secular approach to difference is taken. Following on from the argument of the theoretical framework, this means avoiding talking about differences of faith and culture as if these can be separated from a singular nature which we all share, accessed through science. To do so it uses concepts developed to think about differences commonly categorised as 'natural', by drawing an extended analogy with Mol's medical ethnography *The Body Multiple* (2003).

I begin with an example of interfaith-in-practice, by describing some of the complexities encountered by one of the 3FF staff, Simone, when marrying someone of a different faith and cultural background. Mol's ethnography is then described, introducing her concept of 'multiple worlds' within medical practice, and distinguishing it from the dominant use of 'multi-cultures'. The relevance of the concept of 'distribution' (or 'holding realities apart') is argued both in relation to 'traditional' interfaith practice, and 3FF's own attempts to navigate the impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict on communities in the UK. However, a controversy about a student involved with 3FF who had been critical of Israel on Twitter shows that such 'holding apart' doesn't always work, and that media technologies are shifting the terrain on which coexistence is taking place – a process analogous to Mol's concept of 'interference'. The new forms of inclusions and exclusions facilitated by media are explored further by returning to Simone's weddings, looking at how different technologies (a projector, selfie stick and social media) enabled and disabled connection and togetherness.

To end the chapter, I look at some of the innovative practices I encountered within faith traditions to argue that religions might be better thought of as 'fractional objects' rather than

either static blocks of belief or entirely personal practices. This leads to a theorisation of interfaith work as a process of 'partial connection', a form of collective building that involves subtle shifts in identifications – which may be embodied and nonconscious – rather than absolute transformations such as religious conversions. I conclude with some reflections on why this kind of approach to faith differences is both difficult and necessary in a contemporary context where coexistence feels increasingly precarious.

A tale of three weddings

A common trope within 3FF was that it attracts those with 'hyphenated identities', and in this respect Simone, the training manager over most of my fieldwork,[20] was an exemplary 3FF-er. A childhood spent in rural Botswana and teenage years in Belfast, she is the daughter of a black Motswana[21] mother who converted to Catholicism, and an atheist white British father from a Protestant background. Over the course of my fieldwork, she added to cultural and religious mix by marrying a British Indian man from an observant Hindu family.

How to create a Setswana-Hindu-British-Protestant-atheist-Indian-Catholic family? In Simone's case, it involved a lot of weddings. The first was an engagement party in Botswana, which stood in for a wedding for her Batswana family who couldn't afford to travel to England. The second was a *havan*, a Hindu fire ceremony organised by her husband's family which took place at a temple near his parents' Midlands home. The third was a half-hour civil ceremony in a nonreligious venue, planned by Simone and her husband, followed by a reception. These three weddings will form a refrain throughout this chapter, along with other incidents from my fieldwork, as examples of the challenges of living with diversity.

For there amongst the hyphens there were some significant differences; some of the biggest of these concerned cows. Cattle are very important in Botswana, and traditionally the bride price, or *lebola*, would be negotiated by the woman's family and paid by the groom's. In Simone's case, however, arranging this ran into some difficulties. As she explained: "obviously his family being on this side of the world that was an impossibility, and also I believe it works the other way round in Indian culture". Not only was the groom's family in another country, making a bride price difficult to pay in cattle, but if there was going to be some transfer of wealth in the

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[20] From June 2014 to December 2015.

[21] Simone explained in a note on a previous draft: "Identity and language is very complex in Botswana but if you want to write accurately, the rules are as follows. Botswana – the country; Setswana – when referring to the language or the culture; Motswana – when referring to one person from Botswana (i.e. singular); Batswana – when referring to two or more people from Botswana (i.e. plural)"

context of an Indian wedding, it would be more likely that the bride's family owed the groom's a dowry.

And this is before taking into account the widely diverging ideas about how those cows should be treated. Like many Hindus, Simone's in-laws considered cows to be sacred. Most of them were vegetarians, but eating beef was particularly taboo. Cattle are also a major part of life in Botswana, but these are bred to be eaten: beef is the main export and national dish. Although no *lebola* was paid, Simone's uncle, as the senior male in the family, did donate a cow to the party. At Simone's African wedding to a Hindu man, this gift was "dispatched" on the family farm and served up to the guests.

This convergence of differences is common in 3FF's work – and the "interfaith blunder" made an amusing contrast with Simone's working life, where considerations around food sensitivities were a feature of every event 3FF organised. In fact, the incident passed without conflict: her husband's "attitude has always been 'when in Rome' – so when he comes to Botswana, even though he doesn't typically eat beef, he will", understanding that "giving a cow would be considered the highest form of respect".

In this chapter, I will explore these every day clashes between, and accommodations with, differences in beliefs, ethics and practices. This approach tries to resist the temptation to reduce the tensions between, say, the husband-who-eats-beef and the husband-who-doesn't to the 'merely cultural' premised on a singular nature, and to think of them instead as enactments of *different realities*. I will also situate media technologies within these enactments, as entities (like other technologies) which straddle common-sense understandings of the cultural and the natural.

The characterisation of some kinds of difference as 'merely cultural' implies that *it doesn't really matter* whether Simone's husband eats beef or not; and the corollary of that is that there are other kinds of difference, those which actually affect reality, which do matter. The assumption is that it would be another story if it was a matter of life or death, say, if he was in hospital. In a medical setting, there would be one way of doing things, one rational answer grounded in science. Or would there?

Multiple worlds, fractional objects: coexistence within medical practice

In *The Body Multiple* (2003), Mol presents an unusual ethnography, not of the group or culture, but of a disease. This disease is atherosclerosis, a vascular condition of the legs. The ethnography traces the way atherosclerosis is known, not as an abstract concept, but as a

material entity embedded in a series of practices. These enactments of the disease include reports of pain on walking; pressure differences between ankles and arms measured by a duplex Doppler scan; slides of arteries prepared by pathologists after amputation; and many others. This approach reflects the core themes of ANT: the emphasis on action and practice, and the concern with 'relational materiality', seeing what things *are* as emergent rather than grounded in essential qualities (Law, 1999).

Mol's central argument is framed as a challenge to the philosophical dominance of perspectivalism. Early work within social sciences looking at medical practice found a place for patients' perspectives by distinguishing between the physical reality of the *disease* (known by doctors) and the social reality of the *illness* experienced by the patient. However, over time social scientists "started to worry about the power of that strong alliance with physical reality grants to doctors" (2003, p. 9), noting that physicians also interpreted the world according to social logics and cultural norms. Doctors' perspectives were added to patients' perspectives, but now neither was really in touch with the disease itself. The metaphor of perspectives "multiplies the observers – but leaves the object observed alone" (2003, p. 12). Mol, on the other hand, wants to find a way of touching the object itself, arguing that:

> *"it is possible to refrain from understanding objects as the central point of focus of different people's perspectives. It is possible to understand them instead as things manipulated in practices. If we do this – if instead of bracketing the practices in which objects are handled we foreground them – this has far reaching effects. Reality multiplies."* (Mol, 2003, pp. 4–5)

Thinking of reality as a multiple makes space for the times when the different enactments of atherosclerosis do not align, such as when a patient has pain but no pressure difference between the ankles and arms. It also invites an attendance to the times when techniques exclude one another: the atherosclerosis known as pain-free walking distance in walking therapy cannot also be known by pathology slides after amputation. Yet at the same time, atherosclerosis is not *plural* – its different enactments hang together somehow. *The Body Multiple* (2003) charts how its different forms are coordinated, included, distributed and translated to create an object which is "more than one but less than many" (Strathern, 1991, p. 35; quoted in Mol, 2003, p. 82).

Others within ANT have considered these questions of multiplicity (see also Gad & Jensen, 2010). In *After Method*, Law (2004) describes Euro-American metaphysics as swinging between singularity and pluralism or relativism, forcing a choice: "[e]ither there is one, one reality, one ethics, one politics, or there are many. There is nothing in between." (2004, p. 63). This

dualism can be linked with multiculturalism based on mono-naturalism and its attendant problems – as if the only alternative to singular universal knowledge is multiple cultures, none of which have any claim to access 'reality'. The problem is that this dualism is so fundamental to categories of thought, particularly within much of academia, that it can be extremely difficult "to think the in-between" (ibid). Law, like Mol, looks to Haraway and Strathern, who employ terms such as 'partial connection' (Haraway, 1991) and 'fractionality' (Strathern, 1991). Interfaith work, as I will argue, can be seen as a way of trying to think this 'in between'.

As well as challenging perspectivalism, Mol is also countering the tendency within ANT and STS to focus on controversies in which there is an ultimate victor. Within the hospital setting, Mol acknowledges that differences can be resolved through a hierarchy of different knowledge practices. In some contexts, doctors will say that duplex scans are *always* better than angiograms, and in time some procedures may disappear altogether – there will be no need for vascular surgery if an effective drug treatment is developed. Yet whatever the shifting patterns and relationships between practices, there will never come a time when a single way of knowing obliterates all the others. Scans and angiograms are *both* performed, alongside epidemiological studies, clinical interviews and dissection of corpses, despite their tendencies to conflict, and without any of them triumphing over the others: the different realities produced by these practices *coexist*.

Mol's liberal use of the term 'coexistence' provides a first bridge from her ethnography into mine: it is frequently used within interfaith, and this image could be found on a noticeboard in the 3FF office.

Image 1: the symbols are the crescent moon for Islam, the peace symbol, the symbol for male/female, the Star of David for Judaism, the Wiccan pentacle, the yin yang for Confucianism and the cross for Christianity. The origins are unclear but a simpler version of the graphic using just the 'Abrahamic' faiths symbols was commissioned by the Museum on the Seam in Jerusalem in the early 2000's (Hutchinson, 2005)*.*

Coexistence brings us back to the quote from Latour which opened the chapter: "'Can we cohabit with you?' 'Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?'" (2005, p. 30). In a very practical sense, Simone's multiple weddings shows what living together without eliminating contradictory interests and passions might entail. She and her husband neither gave in to his family's preference for a big Indian wedding ("we would have ended up not having a day we felt happy with"), nor dismissed their desire to contribute, by giving them the havan to organise and taking their social and familial needs into account throughout. A process which could have created rifts and fault lines if it had been approached as a binary question– Indian or not-Indian, secular or not-secular – was instead able to bring two very different families together by thinking in more creative and less dualistic ways.

The idea of coexistence is a good starting point for the relevance of Mol's concepts in my own work, which is not a straightforward argument to construct. Her medical case study is carefully chosen to demonstrate her ontology, and she repeatedly emphasises its localised and contingent character. Nonetheless, this chapter will make the case that the concepts she has developed to think about medical practice, such as distribution and interference, can be usefully translated into the field of cultural and religious difference.

Coexistence by distribution: holding realities apart

Mol's discussion of controversies-which-do-not-come-to-a-close looks outside of the literature on medical care to that of political theory. In contrast to texts on differences within sciences which tends to assume one party ultimately wins over another, in politics "unresolved conflicts come as no surprise" (2003, p. 105). One source she looks to which also discusses multiplicity rather than pluralism is Mouffe (1993), who Mol says argues that difference should be taken more seriously "not as a pluralism that fragments society into isolated individuals, but as a tension that comes about inevitably from the fact that, somehow, we have to *share* the world. There need not be a single victor as soon as we do not manage to smooth all our differences away into consensus" (Mol, 2003, p. 114).

The "small, esoteric example" (2003, p. 106) Mol chooses to elaborate is Lijphart's (1968) analysis of Dutch social politics from World War I to the late 60s. Here, differences between communities – Protestants, Catholics, liberals, socialists – were handled by dividing the population into non-overlapping 'pillars', with contact between them managed by their

respective elites. The 'tops' of the pillars met in Parliament and elsewhere, while "the pillars' bottom never met and were thus kept from joining forces" (2003, p. 107). Mol mentions this to show that the concept of 'distribution' may be a particularly Dutch idea, but also to highlight its potential political consequences: Lijphart later associated pillarisation, in positive terms, with South African apartheid (2003, p. 108).

'Distribution' – keeping different communities or ways of being or knowing separate from one another except on the terms provided by elites – is therefore a way of managing difference which might serve to minimise conflict, but which can also be antidemocratic by preventing groups who have shared interests (such as working-class people) from building lateral relationships. This has parallels with the account provided by Kundnani (2002) on multicultural policy in Britain. After uprisings of ethnic minority communities in places like Brixton, Tottenham and Bristol in the early 1980s:

> *"A new class of 'ethnic representatives' entered the town halls from the mid-1980s onwards, who would be the surrogate voice for their own ethnically defined fiefdoms. They entered into a pact with the authorities: they were to cover up and gloss over black[22] community resistance in turn for free reign in preserving their own patriarchy. The result was that black communities became fragmented, horizontally by ethnicity, vertically by class."* (2002)

Kundnani's description of communities becoming fragmented 'horizontally by ethnicity, vertically by class' is very similar to Lijphart's idea of pillarisation, in which the bottoms of different pillars (in this case, working class Sikhs, Muslims, Afro-Caribbeans and so on) were kept from joining forces by elite patriarchs who took on the roles of 'ethnic representatives' in the institutions of the state. While Kundnani's is not the only take on multiculturalism (for others see e.g. Uberoi & Modood, 2013; Hall, 2000), it does bear a strong resemblance, along with Lijphart, to the kind of 'traditional' interfaith described in the introduction, associated with the Interfaith Network, the Council of Christians and Jews, and indeed the Three Faiths Forum in its early days, which focus on bringing together elite 'representatives' of faith communities. (This similarity is unsurprising given that Kundnani is recounting the fracturing of 'political blackness', which was a fracturing along faith as well as ethnic lines – see Chapters 1 and 3.) By contrast, those within 3FF emphasised their relatively unique position working with grassroots and individuals rather than with established and institutional leaders. In Mol's terms, this could be as a response to the inadequacies of pillarization, and a political response that the bottom of the pillars need to meet, not just the top levels.

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[22] Politically black, i.e. nonwhite.

This is not to say that distribution was not taking place within 3FF's work – as we will see below, the idea of enabling coexistence by holding realities apart is a productive one for understanding many aspects of my ethnographic material. To return to Simone's husband eating beef at their African wedding: the two realities of the husband-who-doesn't-eat-beef and the husband-who-does did not have to come into conflict because they were geographically distributed. So long as one reality was enacted in Botswana, and the other was in England, there did not have to be a controversy. And the question "is he a beef eater?" is not impossible to answer, so long as what it is 'to be' a beef eater (or not) is understood in the relational sense that Mol uses for medical practice: "the new 'is' is one that is situated. It doesn't say what atherosclerosis is by nature, everywhere... *To be is to be related*" (2003, p. 54). In England, in relation to his own Hindu upbringing, what he *was* was subtly, crucially different to what he *was* in Botswana, as a new member of an African family.

Avoiding controversy at 3FF

Distribution was particularly apparent at 3FF in relation to Israel-Palestine. The broad organisational stance was primarily one of deliberate non-engagement, reflecting the general caution about responding to international events that will be discussed in the following chapter. The non-engagement with Israel-Palestine was, however, more explicit and specific than with other international conflicts, and its particular status as a fault line for conflict was perhaps inevitable given 3FF's roots in working with Christians, Muslims and Jews.

A common justification for this position was provided by Esther early in my fieldwork. The organisation's experience, she told me, had been that when Israel-Palestine was up for debate, it tended to overshadow other issues. Since 3FF's focus was on interfaith relations on the ground in the UK, they found that they could work most effectively by bracketing off Israel-Palestine in their own work, encouraging people to use specialist organisations if they wanted to look at that issue. In Mol's terms, we can see a form of *organisational distribution* at work. Coexistence was managed between the different stakeholders in 3FF's world by distributing one of the most contentious issues to other interfaith organisations. The term 'distribution', however, is too neutral – *somebody* was undertaking the distribution, in this case 3FF's senior management by making it organisational policy. The term I will use is 'holding realities apart', since it draws attention to the deliberate act of 'holding'.

But this organisational division of labour was not the whole story. The list of programmes on 3FF's website included a link to a page called '3FF Middle East',[23] "a groundbreaking project… for improved intercultural relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews in Israel". The work here was undertaken with medics and hospital staff in Israel. Their end of year report quoted a participant, a final year medical student:

> *"we did something so simple and so profound as peoples in conflict: we sat and talked… I shared my Muslim Scriptures… I listened to the others, and in the space of two hours, gradually began to erase the hatred that I, and all of us, have been taught to feel."*

Clearly one part of 3FF did talk about Israel-Palestine. Here was a second form of holding apart – like Simone's husband at his African wedding, this was geographical. In Britain, the issue was parcelled out to others, but in Jerusalem 3FF addressed it head-on.

Other forms of distribution were also at work. On the 3FF blog, there was a post from July 2014 entitled 'A call for an end to violence', which began "As the violence in Gaza and Israel continues, we must work toward peace, wherever we are" (3FF 2014). This was 3FF, in Britain, talking about Israel-Palestine! The holding apart at work here was *temporal*. The blog was dated July 30th; the Israeli state's violent operations in Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, had been underway for three weeks. The decision to make a public statement had taken some time, but by this point the crisis was so severe that it was impossible to hold these realities apart. (The next chapter will talk more about the felt pressure internally to 'respond' to such events via blog posts.)

And there was a fourth kind of distribution, this time involving roles and personnel. In the Encountering Faiths and Beliefs workshop, for example, the young people could ask any question and Israel-Palestine was often raised. The schools team had produced guidance for this, '3FF Guidelines on Talking about the Middle East', which (among other things) reiterated that speakers should emphasise that they were expressing a personal point of view, rather than representing any group they were part of. This was particularly subtle and important when the speaker was in fact a 3FF staff member, who under other circumstances was contractually obligated to avoid public statements about Israel-Palestine as long as they worked there (another kind of temporal distribution). In this case, those who spoke about Israel-Palestine are able to do so by being not-3FF at the time.

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[23] One of 3FF's first employees in London founded this branch of the work when she moved to Israel.

What did these many acts of holding apart enable? Here's an example from a report on the mentoring programme:

> *"Dinah came to [the programme] as someone who was very self-assured and experienced at organising entirely within her own faith community, but had less experience of working outside of her community and with people who have different views to her. While participants in her team initially clashed, through encounter and working collaboratively on their social action project they were united in a common goal. Dinah and [Christine, another person on the programme] who share very different views on international events now consider themselves friends."*

Dinah, who had been president of her campus Jewish society, and Christine, active in her university's Palestine solidarity group, realised at induction that they had opposing views on 'international events' and assumed that they would not like each other. Indeed, it may well have been the anticipation of exactly this kind of antipathy that had stopped Dinah from working with people outside of her faith community beforehand. Yet by the end of the programme she and Christine had become friends. By providing an opportunity for them to interact without reference to Israel-Palestine a relationship was created which may otherwise have been impossible.

This kind of holding apart may not be uncommon around the issue of Israel-Palestine. A rabbi who visited the 3FF office commented that teenagers in her Synagogue said they had Christian and Muslim friends but "just don't talk about Israel". And here is another incident from my fieldwork:

> *A group of students from Haifa University's Model UN society were in London and came to visit 3FF. The society, like the city of Haifa, had a mix of Arab and Jewish Israelis, although only one of the students we met was Arab. How did they handle differences in the group? "We don't talk about our conflict" they said. Instead, they had debates on climate change or environmental problems, building relationships in which they could handle disagreement. "And it's working" another said, by which they meant: they kept winning Model UN competitions.*

I mention this to make it clear that there is no normative claim being made about the kind of coexistence that is enabled by holding realities apart. Dinah and Christine becoming friends, or the Haifa University students winning competitions, were not necessarily the *best* realities that could be enacted. They were simply *different* realities to the ones that would come into being if views on Israel-Palestine were not held apart from these interactions. And in those

differences lay ethical choices about the kinds of realities which were desirable for an organisation like 3FF to enact.

Media technologies as interference

Holding realities apart is clearly not the end of the matter. In order to take place, it requires coordination – between different departments in a hospital, or between different organisations in the interfaith field. And where realities conflict, decisions have to be made about what course of action to take. Mol calls this 'interference', and outlines a complex set of procedures within the medical care of atherosclerosis to make those decisions. Sometimes one way of knowing the disease simply 'wins' over another; sometimes results are added up to create a composite measure; sometimes new techniques are translated into more established ones; sometimes two practices each include the other. All of them are ways of managing difference.

Interference is another useful concept for thinking through my data. To continue with a discussion on Israel-Palestine: we've seen the different ways that 3FF tried to manage the coexistence of stakeholders with very different views through holding various kinds of realities apart. However, sometimes this didn't work. Take this article from the Jewish Chronicle in 2011:

> *An LSE student who called for a third intifada against Israel has been selected by the Three Faiths Forum for its parliamentary leadership training. […]*

> *On Twitter, Ms de Carvalho is vocal about her support for Palestinian leader Raed Saleh. She supports a violent uprising against Israel, and urges people to boycott the country, tweeting: "If I lost everything I had at the hands of Israel, I would become fearless. Most dangerous predator. Palestine, realise your strength."* (Elgot, 2011)

3FF defended their choice to appoint and keep her on the Parliamentor programme, where she would be working with people from other faiths and beliefs to do a social action project and be mentored by an MP:

> *Stephen Shashoua, 3FF director, said the Forum was not informed of Ms de Carvalho's views, expressed on Twitter, but insisted that she would be allowed to stay on the programme. "Her views are her own and we do not endorse them. […]*

> *Mr Shashoua said: "The views are shocking, but I hope they can be confronted in a healthy way. I hope we will not see any more of this, but if it continues we will review if she is right for the programme".* (Elgot, 2011)

For Stephen, having a participant who had strong views on Israel-Palestine did not have to be in contradiction with 3FF's own attempts to maintain neutrality. "Her views are her own" he said, although he also hoped "we will not see any more of this" and if she continued to make these statements they would "review if she is right for the programme". Here he was trying to hold apart two realities which, in his view, did not belong together – opinions she had expressed elsewhere did not have to interfere with 3FF so long as these were not expressed *on the programme*.

But this was not convincing to the student group StandforPeace (or by implication to the Jewish Chronicle, who considered this a story) whose director stated that "[e]very aspect of her beliefs conflicts with the interfaith values that the Three Faiths Forum promises to espouse" (Elgot, 2011). In the director's view, these beliefs could not be distributed over different sites or associated with different identities – the student on the programme could not be kept apart from the student whose Twitter feed contained messages such as "Israel: someone should tell you. You were founded on stolen land, ethnic cleansing, village demolition, and massacre." (ibid) They interfered with one another.

And what was it that enacted that interference? It was a media technology, specifically the microblogging platform Twitter. The student did not just say these things to her friends or even at a public meeting for the Palestine Society. She expressed her views on a platform with a particular set of affordances: a limited number of characters[24] that is notorious for lacking nuance, a default visibility to a global public, and a preserved written record into perpetuity unless the trace is deliberately erased. Furthermore, the discovery and fallout of this interference of a Twitter-self and 3FF-self itself then became part of the digital record: years later, the article was still the top Google search result for the terms '3FF Jewish Chronicle'. As a result, this story continued to be made present within the organisation – a cautionary tale that was raised reasonably frequently in the office during my fieldwork – in a manner which seems unlikely to have been the case if it had only appeared in print.

We can see from these examples that because coexistence involves holding realities apart, and because media technologies tend to shift or disrupt what is held apart or brought together, the mediation of coexistence is taking on new forms. One aspect of this in relation to digital media is the collapsing of time and the possibility of bringing things which would have previously

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[24] Twitter increased the character limit from 140 to 280 shortly after my fieldwork finished.

been temporarily separated into the same timeframe – affordances which will be discussed in more detail in the empirical chapter 'Dead data, living knowledge'. For now, I simply want to highlight the political character of what held apart and brought together via digital media. As seen in the Labour party's anti-semitism row in 2016,[25] the collation of social media content – some of it several years old – and its redistribution in a single moment has become an overt tactic for the generation and evidencing of controversy. And while in theory this tactic is available to all who have access to the internet, in practice the technical and human resources required to trawl massive datasets are considerable, and highly unevenly distributed (Tufekci, 2014) – creating new forms of inequalities regarding who controls how and when multiple realities are kept separate or made to interfere with one another.

This argument about the role of media in coexistence is very close to Couldry's *Media, Society, World* (2012) which explores the ethical implications of globalised media systems. He, too, highlights the capacity of platforms such as YouTube to place previously disconnected kinds of content next to each other (for example as search results), and therefore to create new relationships between them as "acts that *coexist* in the same public space of interconnection" (2012, p. 48 original emphasis). Although he doesn't quite draw out the implications of this 'interference' (as I am terming it), the overall message of the book is geared towards answering the question "how can we live *sustainably* with each other through media" (2012, p. 182), given that media "do not reduce or resolve [irreducible moral] disagreement: on the contrary, they bring it into view" (ibid).

While our arguments do resonate on this point, there is a key difference. In all of his discussions of human needs, Couldry never addresses the practices of scientific institutions, and thus leaves himself open to the charge of ultimately reducing moral disagreements to 'cultural differences' which do not disturb the single nature we inhabit (i.e. multiculturalism based on mono-naturalism). While he does talk about truth production in relation to journalistic practices, emphasising that journalists have an ethical duty to research and present a "complex and multi-sided truth" (Couldry, 2012, p. 191), the production of facts by the pre-eminent institutions of modernity – scientific laboratories – remains uninterrogated. This is despite frequently referring to climate change and environment degradation as areas of global and mediated contention, which are precisely issues in which the conflict lies not simply in how the facts are presented, interpreted or publicised, but in how we can know that we have

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[25] This controversy involved allegations of anti-Semitism amongst Labour Party members and representatives which made newspaper headlines over succession of weeks in the spring of 2016. It led to the Chakrabarti Inquiry into anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and the publication of the Chakrabarti Report (2016) which concluded that these various racisms were not endemic within the party, but there was an "occasionally toxic atmosphere" (Chakrabarti, 2016, p. 1).

an urgent problem which threatens our coexistence in the first place. Consequently, he leaves the reader with the impression that whatever moral differences we may have, they do not touch the common nature that we share. By rooting this analysis in concepts developed to think about the 'natural' sciences, I hope to counter that tendency here.

Mediating a Setswana-Hindu-British-Protestant-Indian-Catholic marriage

As outlined in the theoretical framework, my understanding of mediation is as "a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical" (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. xv), in which formerly separate elements are connected in ways which transform them both (Stolow, 2013). It is therefore highly relevant term for thinking about the long process of Simone getting married and for situating the role of media technologies within this process. The concepts I have taken from Mol for negotiating differences were also relevant in this context. 'Holding apart' was at work in the ethics of dealing with cows discussed earlier, where differences were managed through geographical separation. The three ceremonies also allowed different identities and practices to be expressed, at different venues and at different times. Even at the third, legal wedding, when the families were finally brought together, many acts of holding apart were still underway. Most of Simone's family remained in Botswana; religious symbolism was excluded from the civil ceremony; and the guests were also stage-managed.

Like many weddings, some people were invited to the whole day, and others (including her colleagues from 3FF) were only invited to the evening reception. But in addition, Simone explained, "we had people who came from the very beginning of the day, of whom twelve left after the ceremony […] some people who weren't comfortable being around meat and alcohol". The ceremony was meat free and alcohol free, while the dinner and reception were not, and inviting a dozen family members only to the early part of the day was intended to be respectful of their religious practices (although in fact it caused additional tensions).

Media technologies were very present throughout the ceremonies, sometimes with unexpected results:

> *Simone raised the lid of her laptop and clicked through to the folder containing pictures from the havan. She had put them together to show the office at a lunch 'n learn the week before – an event she had found slightly embarrassing, "it's a very personal thing to share at work".*

The first photo showed half a dozen people sat in a row, most of them cross-legged on the floor. It took me a moment to recognise Simone, wearing her mother-in-law's red sari, hair pulled back into a tight bun beneath a shawl. The lino-ed community hall they were sat in was the mandir that had been booked out near her parents-in-law's home.

The next photo showed Simone, her partner and his brother, each with their palms pressed flat against each other, parallel with the floor. She pointed to the coloured piles in front of them – nuts, ghee, petals – and explained the ceremony. "It involves sitting round a fire, and it's about making offerings, it wasn't made explicit to who or what those offerings were made as part of the ceremony… but you pour things on the fire and it takes, you know it was a good three-hour process of sitting round this fire. It was very hot!"

She clicked again and now we were looking at a shot of the 'priest' – in fact, a doctor who officiates ceremonies in his spare time. He was slightly bent over, microphone in his hand; on the wall behind him the corner of white box, a projector screen. "I didn't expect to have any idea what was going on" Simone said, but in fact:

"they had a projector at the front of the room and they had translations of everything in multiple languages, so that at every stage people knew what was happening. And what I found really interesting about that was that after the ceremony, so many members of his side of the family said "oh it's so great that you've come into the family because all my life I've been going to these havans, and going to the mandir, and I had no idea what any of this stuff meant*". I mean, his father said that to me!"*

Here we can see how media and media technologies – writing, the projector – shifted the patterns of the explicit and implicit, and thus who was able to connect with the ceremony. This created new inclusions, not just for Simone but also for the Hindu family, for some of whom "this was the first time [my in-laws] were connecting with the practices and the actions they were performing". But new exclusions were also created in the process. Moving from embodied and gestural understanding to a more verbal one has class implications. There may be parallels here with the marginalisation felt by working-class Catholics when services entirely in the vernacular became common in the mid-twentieth century, "overpowering a non-verbal liturgy with which plebian Catholics had identified for generations (a rich liturgy of 'holy time', bells, gestures, kneelings and crossings)" (Brown, 2006, p. 312). Along with new exclusions created by the projected words based on literacy, inclusion also depended on vision. Simone's brother-in-law was visually impaired, and could not connect in the way that others in the room did with the written text.

At the reception after the civil ceremony – which I attended along with four other staff members – photography was not only a means of documentation but also structured parts of the event.

The room was light and high ceilinged; Simone and her husband were about to cut their wedding cake.

"Alright everyone" said their friend on the mic, acting as Master of Ceremonies "you can have two minutes to take your own photos."

A crowd of people moved into a semicircle, pulled out smart phones and began taking pictures while the couple posed behind the cake. Then it was the official photographer's turn, and then somebody produced a selfie stick, so the semicircle capturing the scene were now themselves in the frame. This immediately invited a much more dramatic kind of pose – arms out, mouths open – from Simone and her husband and the guests behind.

The photographer climbed up onto the balcony and we assembled down one end of the room for the group shot. The selfie stick was produced and again there was a more dramatic and elaborate performance of being photographed. Then the music started up for the first dance. A dozen people took out their phones and started filming the couple.

The selfie stick was an unexpected hit – "we did not expect it to become the feature that it did" – but in fact it played a very literal role in 'bringing people together'. As Simone said when interviewed:

"One of the things I really enjoyed about the wedding is I felt that, even looking back at the pictures, that was one of the things that made me happiest, was that people who didn't even know each other… were talking, and getting on, and taking selfies with the selfie stick […] People I would not expect to see together standing next to each other in a photo, it's just, it's really interesting, because when I look at those photos they seem so natural together, they seem so comfortable together, and I know they only met a matter of hours earlier, or maybe in some cases minutes."

Alongside photography, they invited their guests to use social media, with signs saying 'if you're on social' and a hashtag that could be used to tag any content uploaded. In fact, there was minimal online participation in the evening itself (perhaps due to poor mobile phone signal) although this hashtag was also used afterwards by Simone on her Facebook and Instagram accounts. Through the tagging feature of Facebook additional connections were

discovered via these images – an old work colleague of Simone's turned out to know her photographer, for example. Photography at the wedding, and the selfie stick in particular, "didn't only bring people together then, it brought people together beyond that".

The presence of media at these weddings is unsurprising, with mediated imagery of 'the perfect wedding' implicit within many, perhaps a majority, of contemporary ceremonies (Bird, 2010). Photography in particular is deeply embedded, both in the form of the 'official' photographer, and via the guests' own "personal media… including cell phones and other digital devices" (ibid, p. 93). The production and circulation of these images again rewrites the lines of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, distant family and friends can experience a real-time 'live' connection with far off events; on the other, the lines between those who are 'here' – present, invited – and those who are not is clearly and perhaps painfully drawn through the public display of togetherness. One feature of the use of digital devices is that this public display is now relatively uncontrolled, at least by the couple getting married. If the Hindu family members excluded from the parts of the celebration with meat and alcohol, for example, were confronted by instant joyful pictures at the reception on their social media, this would have had very different dynamics to the carefully staged 'showing of the wedding album' that accompanied pre-digital image making.

There is an additional significance here that many of the images that featured heavily were those taken using a selfie stick. The literature on selfies is very recent, and tends to focus on those taken without prosthetic aides which are usually of a single person (e.g. Frosh, 2015; Murray, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2015; Wargo, 2015). While this literature refutes claims within mainstream media that selfies are "an expression of narcissism… [or] a consequence of profound loneliness" (Murray, 2015, p. 491), the selfie *stick*, as Perriam (2017) notes, is in any case almost never used to take pictures of individuals.

Looking back at the wedding photographs with Simone, and remembering the moments when they were taken, we both remarked on the aesthetic and experiential differences between the images where the photographer remained out of the frame, and those self-produced by the group via the selfie stick. In the former, the crowd was smiling but comparatively staid, while in the selfie stick shot, the group was leaning together, mouths open, with several people pumping fists or waving hands in the air. Frosh (2015) describes the selfie as "a gestural invitation to distant others" (2015, p. 1621), and as a kind of kinaesthetic image which conducts embodied social energy "among users of movement-based digital technologies" (2015, p. 1623). This kinetic quality was particularly apparent when looking back at these images because the official photographer had taken shots of the moments in which the selfie stick is lined up, capturing the build-up of energy and dynamism in the crowd.

Murray (2015), critiquing the characterisation of selfies as primarily the domain of privileged young women, notes such characterisations often contain "a menu of cliched anxieties about technology's uncanny ability to make fools of us all" (2015, p. 492). Perhaps one of the most powerful affordances of a technology such as the selfie stick is this reflexive experience of foolishness – a collective and explicit breaching of the normalised boundaries of adult behaviour which can enable new kinds of togetherness across lines of difference.

'Religion' as a fractional object

What are these lines of difference? So far in this chapter we have primarily focused on differences *between* faiths and cultures. But what about differences within them? One of the distinctive aspects of 3FF's practice was an open acknowledgement of *intra*faith as well as *inter*faith diversity. This was expressed in a more open attitude towards self-identification than can be found in other settings, and a set of strong norms around avoiding generalisations about faith communities, including those the speaker may have been part of. Volunteers who did the school workshops, for example, were instructed to emphasise practices which may have contrasted with what they did personally – that not all Hindus believed in reincarnation, or that not all Jews kept kosher, even if they believed or did these things themselves.

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, 3FF's approach was strongly aligned with the 'lived religion' approach to the academic study of faith practices associated with Hall (1997), Orsi (2003) and Mcguire (2008), where the 'truth' of what a faith consists of is seen to reside not in the theological diktats of elites, but in the everyday practices of adherents. This approach was often referred to within 3FF, for example in a report on its schools' work (Shaw, 2014) in which their approach was argued to "promote the idea of culture as a process, which immediately enlivens religion and presents it as 'lived' rather than primarily past, 'other', exotic, or tradition" thus helping school-based "RE to move away from the teaching of religions as static 'blocks' of belief and practice" (Shaw, 2014, p. 8).

However, at times the way that lived religion was talked of within 3FF seemed to run the risk of re-homogenising religion, imagined now not as internally identical beliefs and practices (i.e. 'this is what Christians do') but as entirely personal experiences that are equivalent across faiths. This would not only be a distortion of the beliefs of many people – there are few Christians who would say they could just as easily call themselves a Muslim without that changing something fundamental about their faith – but also flattens out the complexities of

managing intrafaith differences, which have significantly different features in the various traditions present in contemporary London.

Here, the concept of the 'fractional object', which is "more than one but less than many" (Strathern, 1991, p. 35), can be usefully deployed to think about how faith traditions 'hang together' – a process which is here understood as an *achievement* which may or may not be successfully enacted, rather than the natural expression of the 'essence' of a particular religion. To illustrate this, we can draw on two examples of innovative forms which are attempting to bridge divides within faith communities. Within Muslim practice, this innovation was evident at an all-female event that 3FF's Arts and Culture team helped coordinate, held at a West London Muslim community centre in autumn 2014:

> *"Are you feeling the love? Turn to the person next to you and hug them." Anar beamed at us from beneath her turban-style hijab, her tone both jokey and genuine. I turned to Tara, sat cross-legged next to me on bright cushions covering the floor. Like me, she was barefoot – we had both removed our shoes when we entered. At the back of the room there was a small kitchen; there were plastic slippers by the entrance to the toilet, and small jugs of water inside for ablutions before prayers.*

> *As host for the night, Anar introduced the performers. There were two storytellers: a white woman in a green headscarf with gold trim who told some Muslim folk stories, alongside a Jewish woman with a tale from Eastern Europe. Then a musician, Middle Eastern, sang with her guitar "some day, every day, will be a holy day". Anar performed some poems, one about the women in her family, another about forgiveness. Another poet and singer, tall with her head wrapped in a blue and gold scarf, sang about being "a child of Africa" and talked about having family "from all over" – Nigeria, the Caribbean, Java. Then two sisters, one on djembe in a striking green patterned dress, the other on guitar, presented songs about the mercy of Allah, and a setting of a poem by a Pakistani Sufi mystic, sung in English as their "Urdu isn't very good".*

> *Several of the performers began with a prayer in Arabic, audience members who knew the words singing or mouthing along; most said "bismillah alhamdulillah" before each song or poem, one explaining that this rooted her and helped her to handle her nerves; each performance was greeted with a chorus of "ameen", with Anar calling for peace and blessings.*

The collective of female performers who welcomed us that night was very mixed in terms of ethnicity and nationality. When I spoke to the Muslim storyteller at the end of the event she

confirmed that this was unusual as most Muslim spaces catered primarily to people from one ethnic background, and that the creation of a more mixed space had been the intention of the Sheik who founded the community centre. This was likely to have been particularly significant for the black converts in the collective, for whom entering predominantly Asian Muslim spaces could be an alienating experience. Tarlo's (2010) research, which includes interviews with British Caribbean women who have converted to Islam, recounts the criticism some faced from Asian men in religious spaces, and their struggles to develop styles of clothing true to their own backgrounds in the face of normative expectations about modesty based on South Asian dress (2010, p. 86).

The practices used within the community centre to create a sense of togetherness across established community lines were artistic: their obvious joy at each other's performances indicated that creating and sharing work together was enabling new forms of identification and belonging. The influences for these performances could be traced across the world. The sisters who sang for us were of British Caribbean heritage, but combined South Asian poetry and West African drum beats with a vocal style drawn from African-American soul music. Arabic also formed a common thread in both the performances and their reception, in a mixed group where almost none of them would have grown up being exposed to it, indicating a widespread and serious engagement with Islamic study despite the lack of explicit theology in what was presented to us that evening.

The collective drawn together in that space could be seen as creating new cultural forms – but forms which were also specifically *Muslim*. This is not to say that their practices were straightforwardly accepted as such by other Muslims, especially as women performing music for mixed gender audiences is considered controversial in some parts of the community (Göle, 2014). Accommodations to certain norms, such as those concerning modest dress, then became part of the argument for why their practice *did* belong within an Islamic tradition – the sisters who performed stating on another occasion that they prefer to perform sitting down so they don't move in immodest ways to their own music, for example. In any case, to look at such innovations solely in terms of personal practice is to miss the importance of the collective experience of connection to one another and to a broader tradition and history, and the political work of trying to have that connection recognised by others.

While this distinctive form of Muslim practice was trying to bridge fault lines which were primarily ethnic and national, for London's Jewish population it is denominational and sectarian differences that predominate. The diversity within contemporary Jewish practice was highlighted in a 'lunch n learn' held at 3FF about the Jewish festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This had been organised by Rebecca, one of the Jewish staff, who structured the

presentation around a slideshow she had found online containing "the more RE textbook things you might want to know". However, the content of almost every slide was contested in some way by the Jewish people present. The slide showing an apple covered in honey, for example, was explained by Rebecca as a traditional food for Rosh Hashanah with the apple symbolising the circle of life – but as she herself was allergic to apples she would eat grapes instead. Another slide showed a picture of a shofur, saying that this was the ram's horn blown "a hundred times in two days", but another staff member clarified that in the UK Orthodox Jews celebrate the festival over two days, while Liberal and Reform Jews just do one day.

The lunch 'n learn highlighted the multiplicity of contemporary Jewish practice, with many variations happening on denominational, geographical and individual lines. Yet these variations were not arbitrary. Rebecca couldn't eat apple, but what she replaced it with was something sweet and circular; retaining something of the symbolism mattered to her. A more extensive version of this relationship between tradition and innovation was raised another Jewish staff member, who explained that for Yom Kippur this year she had gone to the service run by Grassroots Jews. At the service, different kinds of Jewish practice had been accommodated, for example by providing a mixed section where men and women could sit together, as well as separate sections for men and women, and saying the prayers in Hebrew but with English translations. Through careful attention to the needs and desires of people coming from different denominations it was hoped that the innovations would enable a space which could bridge sectarian divisions.

Grassroots Jews, which describes itself as a 'post-denominational Jewish collective', is run by volunteers including Debbie, a former 3FF staff member. In a video of the talk she gave about her journey to becoming involved (Danon, 2013), she speaks about seeking an "authentically Jewish spiritual experience" after struggling to connect her spiritual life with synagogue or schul. Innovations she mentions being used within Grassroots Jews services include having booklets with poetry and art work on the themes of renewal and forgiveness that people can contemplate if they get lost in the service; resurrecting the practice of *hitbode,* going outside and speaking aloud to God; and asking the congregation to remove their shoes during the reading of Leviticus 18 ("man shall not lie with a man as he lies with a woman") as a sign of humility and a commitment not to collude with the homophobia the verse is often used to justify. This latter idea was inspired by the practice in the Pessach Seder where red wine is poured into a bowl to symbolise the blood of the Egyptians – the ritual subverting the meaning of the text and turning a potentially triumphant moment into a sobering one.

Again, this is not to say that such innovations are uncontested or universally accepted as 'authentically Jewish', but to argue that it *deeply matters* to those within Grassroots Jews that

there is a resonance with the tradition and that this resonance is felt and validated by others within their community. Like the disease atherosclerosis, new forms of knowing or enacting realities must be attached to those that predate them, they must demonstrate that they are translatable, and they must be accepted by a community of practitioners – whether medical professionals or coreligionists – if such enactments are to gain a sturdier purchase on reality by entering into collective life. Religion, as a fractional object, is both solid and open to reformulation and change.

This conceptualisation can be connected to the discussion in the thesis introduction about the nature of collectives. Gilbert's (2013) 'meta-individual' bears a strong resemblance to the way that faith communities have been imagined within the World Religions Paradigm, which has historically dominated the field of religious studies. This paradigm is "a particular way of thinking about religion which organises them into a set of discrete traditions" (Cotter & Robertson, 2016), conceiving of faith communities as unitary, internally homogenous and absolutely different from one another – essentially, as meta-individuals. The 'lived religion' approach which emphasises the heterogeneity of practices enacted by adherents, can be seen as an attempt to reimagine faith communities as plural collectives. The value of thinking of them as 'fractional objects' is that it draws attention to the practices by which they hang together as collectives, mitigating against the risk that lived religion might be understood solely in individual terms, or as a view "that subjective interpretations of individuals or local communities are what *really* matters, as opposed to history, tradition, etc" (Cotter & Robertson, 2016).

Whether those adhering to religious traditions are imagined as meta-individuals or as plural collectives has significant implications for interfaith work. In the former case, differences between religions are seen as either insurmountable, or breachable only through conversion, imagined in the manner of St Paul on the road to Damascus as "radical transformations… sudden and absolute" (Velho, 2007, p. 68). However, if religions are seen as fractional objects, internally plural collectives which hang together through sociomaterial and embodied practices, then interfaith looks rather different: it becomes contiguous with internal practices, rather than alien to them. This point echoes Barnes and Smith (2015) in their account of inter-religious literacy, who assert that it requires "a measure of reflection not just on the cultural and historical roots of difference, but on the processes internal to a community that enable the continuing translation of ancient practices into new forms" (2015, p. 80).

Interfaith work, in this conceptualisation, can be seen as a form of 'partial connection' (Haraway, 1988; Strathern, 1991), where change may manifest in many forms, including embodied and nonconscious understandings of the 'other' – and this chapter has contained

many examples of these kinds of changes in action, where identities, beliefs or practices did not have to be abandoned in order to form new attachments across lines of difference. As Shoemaker and Edmonds (2016) write, despite interfaith organisations assuring participants that if they arrive as a Buddhist they'll leave as a Buddhist, "the experience inevitably shapes and transforms myriad identities of self-understanding" (2016). Velho (2007), writing about indigenous conversions to Christianity – which he says are often dismissed because they do not match up to a Pauline ideal of absolute and irrevocable change – suggests that these are "transformations that sometimes appear closer to a model of 'awakening' possibilities contained in networks and (network-) persons than the strong model of conversion" (2007, p. 83). Interfaith work, in this account of it, can be seen as more along the lines of awakening possibilities than explicit or even consciously identified change.

Importantly, interfaith practices are likely to be at their most effective when they mirror the sociomaterial mechanisms which allow innovation to take place within faith traditions: embodied practices such as making music and praying, or ritualised forms of sharing or using language, whose success or failure can never be fully accounted for in explicit or conscious terms, but is nonetheless essential for the hanging together of the fractional object. These themes of embodiment and nonconscious knowing are picked up again in Chapter 6 as I seek to theorise 3FF's 'encounter-based' approach to interfaith, arguing that it is underpinned by an epistemology which recognises the necessity of tacit and unspoken forms of knowledge, and seeks to develop techniques by which these knowledges might be shared between faith traditions. Highlighting these continuities thus takes a non-modern approach to the field. For while interfaith work – particularly when it includes the nonreligious – does raise new challenges, I would argue that it is a feature of modern thought that it presumes that differences between faiths, or between those of faith and without, must necessarily be more substantive and harder to bridge than those *within* faiths.

Conclusion

This chapter has been about living with difference. The examples outlined here of interfaith coexistence in practice – Simone's weddings, controversies on the Parliamentors programme, innovation within faith communities – have tried to do so outside of the 'habit of mind' that we live in a world of multi-cultures but a single nature, accessible through the universal knowledge practices of science. Whatever account we develop of difference has to be applicable to the institutions of science, which is why this chapter has drawn an extended analogy with an ethnography of medical practice (Mol, 2003). Concepts such as 'multiple

worlds' and 'fractional objects', developed and fleshed out by writers within science and technology studies and ANT, have been argued to provide a means to think difference in ways that acknowledges other realities – realities which coexist in messy, indeterminate and irresolvable ways.

These are enacted through material and semiotic practices, including the use of communications technologies. As the examples above have shown, fractional objects clash, cohere and hang together in part through our embodied, gestural interactions with media technologies – writing, image making, sharing. This does not necessarily make coexistence any easier, since it may make differences more explicit and acute, but it does mean that living together requires us to learn how to "live *sustainably* with each other through media" (Couldry, 2012, p. 182). In line with my non-secular approach to technology, this means taking seriously the nonconscious dimensions of our relationships with media and the affective possibilities they enable and disable. One advantage of adopting terms and concepts from ANT is that we do not have to distinguish between the natural and the cultural aspects of these technologies, between form and content, between, contra to Hepp, the 'second order media' which carry speech and the mediums themselves (Hepp, 2012, pp. 3–4).

This affinity between concepts developed within ANT and interfaith work has been explored relatively uncritically here, although I have tried to address some of the 'flatness' of the language, for example by substituting 'distribution' with 'holding realities apart' to draw attention to *who* might be engaging in the act of 'holding'. Later chapters will address questions of power more explicitly, particularly in *Counting and Accountability*, where the need for a feminist attentiveness to power dynamics will be emphasised.

Rethinking religious change within traditions, and between them, as 'partial connection' rather than absolute conversions requires some conceptual work to undo modern assumptions about what is possible – to chart a course between "one reality, one ethics, one politics [and] many" (Law, 2004, p. 63). While a modern ontology asserts that "[t]here is nothing in between" (ibid) universalism and relativism, in practice the 'in between' is being enacted all the time – and I would argue that 3FF could be seen as trying to assemble a collective in this interstitial space, while struggling (as we are all likely to) to *think* it. As discussed in the theoretical framework, it is in this non-modern and non-secular terrain that a plural collective might be formed which avoids repeating racialised faith-based exclusions and epistemological oppressions; by identifying and analysing the philosophical and conceptual barriers within the ethnographic context of interfaith work, I hope to provide some of the epistemic resources necessary for decolonial collective building on these terms.

These epistemic resources are only a starting point for responding to the political challenges afoot. As I will argue in the thesis conclusion, there are strong resonances between 3FF's practices and those offered by contemporary capitalism. There is nothing inherently anti-neoliberal about Simone's 'hyphenated' family, nor the development of relationships between Muslim and Jewish students on the Parliamentors programme – indeed, they could be taken as demonstrations that a neoliberal system is best placed to enable diverse ways of life to coexist. At the same time, these capitalist forms create the conditions of widening inequality which allow the powerful to ruthlessly eliminate "contradictory claims, interests and passions" (Latour, 2005, p. 30) where these conflict with the extraction of wealth. As we develop tools for mediating our differences we need to be alert to the ways in which neoliberalism simultaneously enables and closes down multiplicity and its capacity to co-opt practices by translating them into market logics, as we seek to build a power base capable of challenging unaccountable capital and coloniality. For the question of whether we can all "survive together" (ibid) in this context already has the brutal answer for many of 'no'.

Chapter 5

Faith in Crisis: media, religion and conflict in everyday life

Mid November 2015, a youth centre in Islington. It was the first Interfaith Summit, organised by alumni from 3FF's Parliamentors leadership programme; around a hundred people, mostly in their twenties, filled the room. This was a recognisably, visibly 'diverse' group – white and Asian and a smaller number of black people, people in turbans, hijabs and jilbabs, performers in Indian clothing. Having timed the event to be part of national Interfaith Week, it had come four days after the bombings and mass shootings in Paris by attackers who had pledged their allegiance to ISIS.

Tara, the manager of the programme, climbed up onto the stage and the room quietened down. In her welcome address she spoke of the atrocities in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad in the previous week, "the pain around the world", and the need to rise up "and refuse to be separated along lines of faith". We were then led in a moment of reflection; throughout the evening these events were a refrain in every discussion.

As the previous chapter showed, coexistence between those of different faiths and beliefs, including nonreligious groups, was central to 3FF's organisational message and practice. The period of my fieldwork, however, was punctuated by events such as the attacks in Paris discussed above, which directly undermined their message of peaceful coexistence across faith lines. This chapter will introduce 3FF's ways of negotiating and navigating these moments, exploring the questions of mediation and media agency that they raise, and situating the organisation in a specific time and place.

My fieldwork began in October 2013, a few months after Drummer Lee Rigby was murdered in Woolwich, precipitating a wave of far-right protests and racist attacks on Muslims and Islamic places of worship. By the time I had finished at 3FF in April 2016, this pattern of intensely mediated and high-profile tensions across faith lines had been repeated numerous times, becoming threaded through the activities of the organisation. These included the heightened violence in Gaza in summer 2014 described in the previous chapter; the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices, shootings in Copenhagen and the series of beheading videos produced by ISIS in

early 2015;[26] the 'refugee crisis' when it hit the headlines later that year and Paris shootings that November;[27] followed by further attacks in Nice and Brussels.[28] While such incidents had many differences, each constituted what I am terming a 'faith-inflected media event', in which conflict between groups defined as religious was the major theme.

The chapter begins with the lived experience of such events for 3FF participants and staff, depicting the emotional toll they exacted – a toll which was widely felt but particularly affected those of Muslim background. The 'faith-inflected media event' is then defined more precisely with reference to the literature on media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998; Couldry, 2003) and the crises of multiculturalism (Lentin & Titley, 2011), as times when narratives of inevitable conflict between faiths are rehearsed and become hegemonic, in part through their ritualised and repetitive forms. In this sense, while 'interfaith' as a field is relatively niche, the 'faith-inflected media events' which continually shape the space interfaith is operating play a very prominent part in mainstream culture.

3FF's organisational practices are then situated within this context, discussing three kinds of response I encountered during my fieldwork: statements published on their blog, positive messaging about the programmes on their social media channels, and face-to-face encounters such as the summit described above. While both the blog statements and social media content are argued to have been limited in their reach and impact, there was nonetheless a pressure to use them; the idea that digital tools must afford individuals and organisations some kind of power to challenge mainstream media institutions, despite their general lack of efficacy, is theorised as 'the myth of distributed digital agency'.

Following Fiske (1994), Couldry and Hepp (2010) and Kember and Zylinska (2012), I consider the 'faith-inflected media event' to be constituted *through* its mediation: "a discursive event… not a discourse *about* an event" (Fiske, 1994, p. 2). This perspective is *performative*, and runs counter to dominant narratives of media as producing representations (which may be more or less accurate) of pre-existing and unaffected realities (see Barad, 2007). Within the 'faith-

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[26] 12 people died in the shootings at the Charlie Hebdo offices by gunmen affiliated with a branch of Al Qaeda, which was followed by two further days of attacks (BBC, 2015a); two victims were killed in two different incidents in Copenhagen, one of which was outside a synagogue, with the perpetrator pledging allegiance to ISIS (Witte & Adam, 2015). ISIS began releasing videos of hostages being beheaded in summer 2014 but became front page news in the UK in early 2015 after identity of the British militant nicknamed by the press 'Jihadi John' was revealed – see BBC (2015b).

[27] The 'refugee crisis' refers to the increase in migrants and refugees trying to enter Europe from 2015, which became headline news that summer (Park, 2015); the Paris attacks described in the chapter opening were a series of bombs and mass shootings which killed 130, claimed by ISIS (BBC, 2015c).

[28] In Nice, 85 people were killed when a cargo truck drove into a large crowd during Bastille day (BNO News, 2016); in Brussels, 32 were killed in bomb attacks at the airport and a rush-hour train (Fioretti, 2016). Both attacks were claimed by ISIS.

inflected media event', it is argued, we see not just commentary on religion but its active construction, in which the relationship between faith and violence is precisely what is being contested, and in which religion may in fact be *becoming more conflictual*. Media practices should therefore be seen as constituting part of the 'fractional objects' of faith traditions, enabling and disabling the possibilities of them 'hanging together', or fracturing dramatically.

This raised difficult questions for 3FF as they wrestled with the performativity of their own mediated communications – and is also difficult to think, or to express in an academic text which inevitably tends towards the representational. But it is arguably becoming more apparent with digital media as our own participation in moments of crisis takes on explicit and traceable forms in the things we post, share, like and comment upon. However, this traceability can also be misleading, as the discussion of face-to-face interactions hosted by 3FF in the wake of 'faith-inflected media events' shows. Here, ideas of reflectiveness, silence and more embodied and less verbal forms of understanding the event were emphasised, all of which may be invisible from the perspective of the digital trace. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this for media researchers.

Living through the crisis

What do 'faith-inflected media events' *feel* like, and where did they make themselves felt within 3FF? Over the course of my fieldwork, I saw a range of ways that such events shaped the organisation's work. The Parliamentors leadership programme, which attracted politically engaged students, was a part of 3FF's work where the impact of 'faith-inflected media events' was often apparent. A number of student groups over the years chose to do their social action projects in relation to high-profile and topical issues, such as the refugee crisis or female genital mutilation. The interfaith summit organised by alumni included discussions of recent events in both years it took place, including the Paris attacks in 2015 (described in the opening example) and Brexit in 2016.

The 'impact' on the young people, however, was not limited to the choice of topic for the social action project or for conversations at events, but was visceral and emotional. One group of Parliamentors students attended a discussion about the refugee crisis held at the 3FF offices in late 2015, where the felt seriousness of the issue was apparent in the contributions coming from them and others:

We were sat in a circle of chairs in the training room; it was early evening and the November sky was dark and cold outside the barred windows. A local councillor talked about the difficulties of getting refugees resettled in London because of the high cost of housing. Camden would be taking four families before Christmas, a largely symbolic gesture without national government support. "Probably the next crunch point will be when we see people freezing to death on mainland Europe."

One of the students on the Parliamentor programme introduced himself as Nasim, saying that he was from Lebanon which had now taken one and half million refugees, "we have no choice. Lebanon is a hundred and thirty times more in debt now than anywhere else in the world."

Barbara, a woman from a local residents' association spoke up – she'd been so angry this week thinking about what was happening and where it could lead. "I've been wearing my poppy, 'lest we forget', but they've already forgotten".

Another student from the same Parliamentor group explained the social action project they were hoping to do as part of the programme – organising sports sessions with children from the Syrian families and other local kids. "We want to try and integrate them into London, and Camden into them as well, it's a two-way process."

The overall tone of this occasion was of a policy discussion, but the conversation was underpinned by feelings of helplessness, horror and injustice. While few spoke as personally about their emotions as Barbara, painful feelings were palpable in many of the contributions. Although Nasim didn't name his anger, it was implicit in the contrast between Lebanon's position in relation to Syrian refugees – having "no choice" but to become indebted taking millions of them in – and that of the British government prevaricating over granting asylum to a few thousand. The local councillor, meanwhile, moved from a discussion of housing policies and safeguarding practices to evoking the human suffering of "people freezing to death". While these feelings had prompted various kinds of action, there was also a sense that the actions available – sending supplies, housing a handful of families, offering opportunities for refugee children – were very small in the face of the scale of the problem.

Similarly, 'faith-inflected media events' – high profile and intensely mediated events relating to conflicts between faiths – also impacted on 3FF's schools work in both practical and emotional ways. Practically speaking, such events were often an impetus for schools to connect with 3FF asking for interventions. This included several schools that had been involved in the Trojan Horse controversy in Birmingham, the school attended by Mohammed Emwazi ('Jihadi John')

after his identity was revealed, and a Catholic school in south-east London who joined the faith school linking programme in the wake of the Woolwich attack in 2013 after teachers became concerned about the Islamophobic views being voiced by students. Events could also lead to disconnection with the organisation, with a Muslim school withdrawing from linking during the violence in Gaza in 2012, and a number of school links being postponed due to security concerns after the Paris attacks in 2015.

In addition, the emotional impact of 'faith-inflected media events' on students was often reported back by 3FF staff. The most popular workshop that 3FF offered, Encountering Faiths and Beliefs, involved two or three speakers of different faith backgrounds telling the story of their faith journey and then being asked questions by the students. These questions often referred to such events directly or obliquely – from "how do you draw strength at difficult moments?" to "what do people think of us?" (from a Muslim pupil in Birmingham). One year eight Muslim pupil in London asked "you're not Muslim, Miss. When you walk down the street, do you think people think I'm a terrorist?" Teachers were clearly aware that their students were being affected, and often contacted the organisation, as one of the team explained, for "support when there are things going on in the media that they are nervous about discussing with students".

For 3FF staff themselves, concerns about the impact on participants and working relationships were generally foregrounded, but the personal toll was evident on those staff members with whom I had close relationships. Team discussions about difficult feelings raised did happen after the shootings at the Charlie Hebdo offices, and the Paris attacks – but at other times conversations did not take place or were significantly delayed. The organisational line mentioned in the previous chapter that 3FF didn't talk about Israel-Palestine *publicly* translated into a reticence to discuss it *internally*, and during the violence in Gaza in 2014 it was a number of weeks before the team had an opportunity to share their feelings about it. During this time, it was only in the context of private conversations – a Muslim colleague telling me on a walk out of the office about raising money as a community and praying for Palestine every day of Ramadan, for example – that the painful emotions surrounding it had space to be expressed.

Social media played a pivotal role in the sense that these events were an unavoidable part of everyday life. The ways that the 2014 Israeli shelling in Gaza were mediated on Twitter and Facebook have been argued to have made the violence more immediately apparent to a global audience than on the previous incursions in 2009 and 2012 (Mason, 2014). And not only were distressing images and first-hand accounts "all over Facebook", as a staff member and I

discussed in another private conversation, but so too were bitter arguments, recriminations and public acts of 'defriending'. These both made the importance of the organisation's work apparent, but also highlighted the scale of the challenge and the depth of the feelings held by different communities in relation to the conflict.

While the intense focus on the issue of Gaza was superseded, the pattern of social media platforms being dominated by a particular story in successive waves was repeated many times – in September 2015, for example, a staff member commented that "my Facebook feed is all refugee stuff now". This was experienced by at least some staff as a barrage of negativity which seemed to offer little opportunity to process what had happened in constructive ways. After the Paris attacks two months later, one person remarked that "at times in the last few months my Facebook timeline has been unbearable", and said that she had switched off her phone in order to detach from it.

Although it was almost impossible not to have an awareness of these events and some kind of reaction to them, there was also an understanding that not everyone was being affected equally. International connections made certain events or issues more salient to certain people, such as Nasim's particular understanding of the refugee crisis due to his Lebanese nationality. Above all, Muslim staff and participants had an unavoidable sense of connection and vulnerability – the centrality of Muslim difference being one of the key factors in how these events will be theorised.

Theorising the crisis

Here, 'faith-inflected media events' will be theorised first by situating them within the media events literature (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998; Couldry, 2003), and then by linking them to Titley and Lentin's (2011) discussion of the 'recited truths' that multiculturalism has failed. 'Media events' as initially formulated by Dayan and Katz (1992) drew on a neo-Durkheimian model of ritual theory to argue that, just as pre-modern people had been 'integrated' through face-to-face rituals, modern societies were brought together through extraordinary televised events such as the moon landings or the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. In these instances, "[a]ll eyes are fixed on the ceremonial centre… Social integration of the highest order is thus achieved by mass communication" (1992, p. 15).

Dayan and Katz (1992) originally distinguished between 'news events' and 'media events' by associating the former with conflict and the latter with reconciliation. This distinction was

questioned by Liebes (1998) who introduced 'disaster marathons' as an additional type of media event, using the seventy-two hours of live broadcast following the terror attacks in Jerusalem in March 1996 as her case study. Where Dayan and Katz's original formulation[29] had stressed that media events were always preplanned, Liebes (1998) highlighted the disruptive character of the disaster, and the importance of analysing television's role within these kinds of crises.

Her political conclusions were informed by the dynamics of Israeli politics at the time, where the terror attacks – coming very shortly after the assassination of President Rabin – were seen as undermining the Oslo peace process. In this context, the peace process was identified with the Israeli establishment, with Hamas (who claimed responsibility for the attacks) and right-wing Israeli groups who opposed the process seen as anti-establishment – both of whom, she argues, had their position strengthened by the way in which the attacks were mediated. From this she concludes that, whereas in the celebratory media events described by Dayan and Katz "the political establishment takes over the media (and the public)", during a disaster "oppositional forces… take over the media (and the public)" (Liebes, 1998, p. 73). These operate through both professional journalistic norms and economic pressures on the networks, which "all work in the direction of acting in the service of the establishment in the first case, and against it in the second" (ibid).

From this liberal starting point, it is assumed that, not only is it possible for us to be 'integrated' by media events, but that this is what 'the establishment' intends to achieve in the first place. Following Couldry (2003), my own use of ritual theory is post- rather than neo-Durkheimian, assuming that "we are *not* gathered together by contemporary media" (2003, p. 7) in any straightforward way, and that ritual functions to mediate conflict and reinforce hierarchies as much as create positive feelings of collectivity. The faith-inflected media events in question certainly do not foster 'integration' in any holistic sense, but neither are they anti-establishment – rather, they offer opportunities to rehearse narratives of conflict *which are themselves hegemonic*.

The relevance of a ritual approach to the concept of the 'faith-inflected media event' lies in their *repetitive* character. Take the following quotes:

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[29] Though "disruptive events such as Disaster, Terror and War" (Katz & Liebes, 2010, p. 33) were later recognised by Katz as media events.

> *"When things like this happen, the first thing I think is 'please don't let it be a Muslim'.*
> *And then it is a Muslim. There are multiple levels of anger, at the terrible thing that has*
> *happened, and then at the backlash…"*

Muslim participant at an adult Encountering Faiths and Beliefs session

> *"When Charlie Hebdo happened I was in America, and my first instant reaction was 'oh*
> *no not again'. And it's just, it's just a feeling of, oh we're going to have to go through*
> *all of this, this whole commentary all over again."*

Muslim speaker from 3FF's school speaker programme

In these quotes it is clear the speakers are aware of a formula for "this whole commentary", and of a predictable and painful "backlash" targeted at Muslims – and that this constitutes 'the event' for them just as much as, if not more than, "the terrible thing that has happened". Couldry (2003) argues that it is the repetitive form of rituals that allows them to "reproduce categories and patterns of thought in a way that bypasses explicit belief" (2003, p. 24), emphasising that in the context of ritual "*wider* patterns of meaning are recognised as being enacted" (ibid) without necessarily being named. It is these wider patterns of meaning that are encoded in the term 'faith-inflected'.

'Faith-inflected media events' are very similar to what Titley and Lentin (2011) term 'recited truths' about the apparent failure of multiculturalism. While Titley and Lentin are not focused on narratives of tensions between faiths per se, it is arguable that faith-based conflict is usually implied in critiques of multiculturalism given the centrality of Muslims as a racial category operating as the "metonymy for undesirable nonWestern migration, for bad diversity" (2011, p. 35). This "narrative of multicultural crisis has been pegged to a litany of transformative events" (2011, p. 13) which conventionally include the 2001 riots in Northern cities, the attack on the Twin Towers, bombings in London and Madrid, the murder of Theo van Gogh and Jyllands Posten cartoons (2011, p. 20). This 'indexing' of international events to the theme of 'Muslims being violent' produce what Titley and Lentin (2011) call 'recited truths'.

Just such a recitation was in evidence when I administered a questionnaire in a Catholic boys' school in March 2015, which asked about their knowledge of their own beliefs and those of others. After they had completed the questionnaire, the teacher agreed I could have a conversation with them and I asked what had been in the news recently about different religions. The response was immediate: Islamic State, 'Jihadi John', Boko Haram, terrorists wanting to target Westfield shopping centre. The Islamophobia was undisguised, with students openly offering comments such as "it's all Muslims" and "Muslims are violent" – although

when one boy eventually said "it's all stereotypes" the others did seem to agree, indicating there was something of a performance of controversy taking place for my benefit.

This example shows the high salience and penetration of Titley and Lentin's "recited truths'. These were 14 and 15-year-old boys, mostly of African or Afro-Caribbean heritage, largely from working class families. In terms of class, age and ethnicity, they were not from demographics associated with high levels of engagement with current affairs and politics (Henn & Foard, 2014; Preston, 2015). Yet my question immediately prompted a list of quite disparate examples from around the world, from 9/11 conspiracy theories and West African militants to a possible terrorist threat to a local shopping centre. While the exact role of 'religion' had specificities in each case, for these teenage boys the relationship was obvious: they were linked together because in each case they showed that "Muslims are violent". What makes these events 'faith-inflected', then, is not a particular religious quality but rather the way in which the events become part of the 'recited truths' that peaceful coexistence is threatened by religious others, primarily Muslims.

This chaining together of events emerges in a particular ideological and political climate, but Titley and Lentin also link it to changes in media technologies and the conditions of news production. Their analysis bears a resemblance to Liebes (1998) writing about the mid-90s, who linked the characteristics of the 'disaster marathon' to changes within Israeli media at that time as "the monopoly of public broadcasting [gave] way to a multiplicity of fiercely competing channels" (1998, p. 72). Titley and Lentin also highlight the importance of speed, instantaneous coverage and rolling news, citing "[t]he imperative of increasing the flow of news in a continuous real-time news environment, where stories are never complete but roll on and piggyback on related stories and sources" (2011, p. 145). Despite the proliferation of platforms and 'limitless' space of the Internet, the news environment is in many ways marked by greater homogenisation (Fenton, 2009), especially when 'all eyes are fixed' on an object of violence and tragedy. At these points the recited truths can become ubiquitous and themselves hegemonic, rather than opportunities for 'anti-establishment' counter narratives to gain publicity.

Drawing on Cronin (2004), Titley and Lentin (2011) employ the phrase 'circuits of belief' to refer to the "'invested understandings' that come to shape the engagement of different bodies and actors" (2011, p. 145), arguing that in the context of the mediation of multicultural crisis these provide a shortcut to ready-made explanations about irresolvable cultural differences; again, this is linked in their view to the "conditions of continuous, instantaneous and remediated news" (ibid). Circuits of belief, they write, are currently driven by "elective

affinities between culturalized repertoires, and the indexical logic of informational production shaped by speed and increased contiguity with the events being mediated" (2011, p. 146). In other words, there are features of the current media context which lend themselves to such narratives of cultural and faith-based clashes, in which discrete events from vastly different contexts are "hailed and constructed" (2011, p. 132) as part of a single overarching story which excludes non-cultural interpretations (2011, p. 146).

The 'faith-inflected media event', then, refers to a set of intense mediations which link a specific incident or issue to a hegemonic narrative of inevitable conflict between those of different faiths and beliefs, most commonly linked through the recited truth that 'Muslims are violent'. This is a rather different use of the term 'media event' in the existing literature in terms of the place of conflict within it. For Dayan and Katz (1992), media events preclude conflict; for Liebes (1998), conflicts may be rehearsed but as an anti-establishment position; while for Couldry (2003), media events mediate and suppress conflicts. In my theorisation, by contrast, 'faith-inflected media events' place conflict centre stage – rather than achieving (or claiming to achieve) 'social integration of the highest order', they seek to effect social *dis*integration along faith lines.

These gain their power through ritualised forms – their repetitive character being understood both by those who 'believe' the overall narrative (such as the Catholic students) and by those who wish to resist going "through all of this whole commentary all over again". The oppressiveness of the *commentary* highlights the performativity of the event, and the intrinsic role of mediation in generating the crisis. For an organisation such as 3FF, this raises difficult questions about the ways in which we all potentially co-create the 'faith-inflected media event' through producing and circulating such commentary; how they navigate such questions will be explored in the rest the chapter.

Responding to the crisis 1: "so far we've blogged"

So far, we have looked at the impact of 'faith-inflected media events' on interfaith work, arguing that they have become a persistent part of lived experience the people in the UK today, and an unavoidable context in which an organisation like 3FF is operating. The rest of the chapter will examine 3FF's organisational practices in relation to these events, looking at three kinds of responses: public statements, positive counter narratives, and convening face-to-face interactions.

The most common kind of 'response' was a written piece from a senior person within the organisation published on 3FF's blog. However, the production of such statements was neither straightforward nor uncontroversial. The concerns raised about how and when the organisation should respond to major news events had similarities to that outlined by the Inter Faith Network in their policy on public statements (IFN, 1994). The policy states that "[o]nly in exceptional circumstances" (1994, p. 1) would statements be made, citing concerns about their "agenda… becom[ing] dictated by the media" (1994, p. 2), and of being seen to prioritise some countries and regions over others, given that all Britain's faith communities have links overseas. In addition, since members within the network are coming together precisely because they have deeply held and opposing views on some issues, gaining agreement on a common statement may be extremely difficult, and there is "limited value in statements which… are confined to platitudes" (ibid).

At 3FF, too, the challenges of making organisational statements while maintaining relationships with stakeholders coming from vastly different political positions were often commented upon. Staff involved in the organisation's communications emphasised the difficulties of saying something "interesting enough" while not breaking trust, and stated that "if [we] became a bit more risky in [our] statements it would jeopardise [the programmes]". The question of location and what was perceived as 'close to home' was raised by Simone when she questioned why attacks in Nigeria and Kenya had *not* received an organisational response when attacks elsewhere had. And concerns about following a media agenda and "just adding to the clamour of everybody else", or appearing "mawkish or opportunistic" were also mentioned in a number of meetings on the topic. This hesitancy was explicitly named in a blog before the EU elections 2014, which said that "3FF tend not to make statements whenever issues arise which move us farther away from our vision… We tend to focus on building understanding and better relations on the ground instead." (Shashoua, 2014)

However, despite these concerns over the course of my research 3FF *did* produce a number of public statements, some specifically addressing particular events, and others taking a more exploratory approach to current issues. While exactly what 'counts' as a response to a faith-inflected media event is not necessarily straightforward,[30] what is clear is the direction of travel, that is, increasing responsiveness over time. From 2011 to 2013, one statement was

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[30] For example, the blog about refugees was about an ongoing crisis rather than a singular event and the role of faith was particularly ambiguous. However, I have included it here as the presence of large numbers of Muslim refugees arriving in Europe was subsequently 'hailed' as part of the recited truths discussed earlier, for example, in the poster produced by UKIP as part of the Brexit campaign.

made each year[31] and in 2014 two statements[32] were made; in 2015 and 2016 five[33] and four[34] blogs respectively were produced relating to current events. In addition, a number of meetings were held internally about how such responses should be managed, and new organisational processes were developed.

In fact, looking at the website of the Inter Faith Network the same pattern of increasing responsiveness is also visible, with one statement posted in 2013, two in 2014, four in 2015 and five in 2016, mainly around similar events to 3FF. The explicit policy of IFN, and stated cautiousness at 3FF, are at odds with the practices seen at both organisations. And there is an obvious reason for the gap between IFN's policy and practice. Despite sitting next to each other on the same web page, they are in fact decades apart, the policy not having been updated since 1994 – before the organisation had a website at all.

What I want to draw out is the sense of increasing *pressure* to speak publicly – and the relationship between this pressure and the media technologies available. In a series of interviews I conducted with members of the 3FF community about its responses to international events, there was a clear expectation of a response. One ex-intern, after saying that the statements were "quite repetitive", still said that if 3FF stopped making statements "I wouldn't be happy about it, I would find it a bit strange coming from 3FF". Another ex-participant from the Parliamentors programme said that policies of nonresponse "were valid at some point", but no longer were "now, in an age that everything gets responded to and everyone should have a voice". If they didn't respond to things which were on the front pages of the newspapers, "then what's the relevance of the organisation?"

Internally, too, there was a sense of a 3FF community looking at what the organisation was doing – or not doing – and expecting public communications as high-profile incidents took place. This was particularly the case around 3FF's Twitter feed, which was considered to be the platform where the organisation could most easily respond to a wide range of events, as opposed to other responses which would have to be narrower in their scope. After the Paris attacks in November 2015, communications manager Andrew said he put something on social media outside of work hours so "it didn't look like we had been caught unawares" – 'caught',

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[31] After the Anders Breivik shootings in 2011, during the violence in Gaza in 2012 and following the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013.
[32] Responding to the xenophobic rhetoric around the European parliamentary elections, and again during violence in Gaza.
[33] Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the Copenhagen shootings and the attacks in Paris in November, as well as in the run-up to a vote on bombing Syria and in response to refugees arriving in Europe.
[34] Addressing the EU referendum, counter-narratives to ISIS/Daesh, the French burkini ban and Trump's election.

presumably, by 3FF stakeholders. The idea that an audience would notice the *absence* of communication was also referred to when Andrew was on holiday and 3FF's social media posts were all pre-programmed, meaning that nothing had been said about refugees when this became the dominant news story; in a meeting, someone commented that "it's a little bit strange that we've sort of ignored it". While no audience research was conducted to establish whether such absences were noticed, the expectations voiced in the interviews I conducted indicated this may have been the case.

What was clear was that if 3FF was still using the communication channels which dominated prior to 2008 – a newsletter issued three or four times a year – these conversations would have been very different. Without a blog or a Twitter account (or similar platforms) stakeholders and staff would not have the same expectations; it would not have been possible to look to the organisation in the same way for a response, or to draw the same conclusions about the absence of a response. The media technologies, as used and embedded within organisational practice, helped to shape the context in which 3FF operated. And they drew the organisation into the *performance* of the media event, in ways that often sat uneasily with organisational norms and established principles of working.

Constructing faith *as* crisis

In the previous section, we came across a number of concerns raised about potential negative consequences of making public statements about high-profile media events, including alienating stakeholders with divergent political opinions and seeming to prioritise some areas of the world over others. There was further concern, however: that by centring the role of religion within these events, religion itself was becoming increasingly associated with conflict, and that by commenting on an issue 3FF would be contributing to such narratives of 'faith as crisis'.

As touched upon in the introduction to this thesis, 3FF was ambivalent about the centrality of faith within their own work. However, its public profile did emphasise its expertise around faith, and thus it was generally accepted that by commenting on a topic this would be understood by outsiders as to some extent a 'faith-based issue'. The potential problems of this was raised by an ex-intern I interviewed about the organisation's public communications. After being asked what she thought the organisation should or shouldn't respond to, she said:

"they're all, you know, they're all seen as religious conflicts… of course the Paris attacks had a religious… uh… background to them, um, but then what about bombing Syria you know, does that count as a religious war, or political war, do you respond to that?... Because then if you address bombing in Syria, for example, then you're saying it is about faith – but then you're reproducing the main discourse about ISIS and faith. Which is a question, is it about faith?"

The paradox she identified was the ambiguity of the 'religious background' in these events. For 3FF not to speak publicly about the British government's vote on bombing Syria might be perceived as ignoring an issue that many of the organisations' stakeholders, particularly Muslims, deeply cared about. On the other hand, by naming it as of direct relevance to an interfaith organisation, they would be contributing to a narrative that centred the religious elements of the conflict, and thus perhaps inadvertently accepting ISIS' own claims to being an authentic expression of Islam – or at least implying that their actions were connected to Muslim communities within the UK.

A reticence to respond to events for fear of labelling them as faith-based sometimes extended to internal discussions. In an interview with two members of the school's team in summer 2015, they mentioned the Trojan Horse scandal of the previous year, where governors of a number of Muslim majority schools were accused of plotting to bring in an extremist Muslim curriculum. Within 3FF, they explained, they had "waited a long time before [they] had a conversation about it", since they "didn't want to make out that this was a faith issue". For one of them, centring faith misrepresented the problem which as she saw it was "a power issue almost, this is having terrible, you know, bad management, it's not necessarily a faith issue'."

Subsequently, some of the schools involved in scandal had approached 3FF for workshops, and the organisation agreed to deliver them. The staff on the schools' team took a pragmatic approach to creating suitable interventions, taking it as an opportunity to forge new relationships with schools and gain access to students. However, both the team members I interviewed voiced discomfort with being invited as a result of a "media spotlight" which had defined the problem as one of faith, when they considered it to be more appropriately understood in terms of governance.

A third area where these issues arose was in relation to Israel-Palestine. As discussed in the previous chapter, despite the general discomfort with addressing the topic public statements were made during the heightened violence in Gaza in both 2012 and 2014. The resistance to making these statements not only concerned possible reactions from stakeholders, but that

they would undermine the organisational message elsewhere that the conflict should be seen as *political* rather than faith-based. Guidance for speakers in schools asked them to emphasise this distinction, and a sample answer used in the Art of Asking workshop from one (Muslim) speaker said that although conflict in the Middle East "is sometimes portrayed as Jews and Muslims... it's a political conflict rather than a religious one".

Underpinning these examples were concerns that by explicitly linking their work with 'faith-inflected media events' the organisation would be contributing to the interpretation of such events as 'about faith'. Thus, even while trying to produce statements advocating peaceful solutions or develop workshops promoting coexistence between faiths, they would to some extent be reinforcing the inclusion of such events within the mainstream media's 'recited truths' that different faith groups could not live together without conflict.

Furthermore, this association between religion and conflict within media narratives, it was feared, was becoming increasingly powerful as knowledge about religion from other sources declined – a widespread lack of religious literacy (particularly among the young) being substantiated in reports on religious education (e.g. OFSTED, 2013) and in academic research (e.g. Dinham & Francis, 2015). Thus, as one staff member put it, education about religion was "being controlled more by the media than other things" – with another participant voicing concerns that "increasingly with social media... you've got an exaggerated sense of the role faith groups play in things around the world".

Part of the struggle here was to conceptualise the performativity of the 'faith-inflected media event', particularly its implications for a loose, deconstructive approach to religion and faith. If these categories are simply what we say they are, then what happens when a very wide range of actors, including governments, terrorist organisations and media institutions, say that they are fundamentally incompatible worldviews that must inevitably lead to a 'clash of civilisations'? And how can such narratives be challenged without resorting to essentialised notions of 'religion', in the process of trying to distinguish what is 'politics', 'governance', or 'conflict over land'?

Edmonds and Shoemaker (2016), talking about interfaith work in the US, highlight the emphasis on peace and peaceful inter-religious coexistence within interfaith events, and the concomitant desire to distance 'religion' from conflict – leading, for example, to frequent statements that groups such as ISIS were not really religious. Similar sentiments were expressed by 3FF participants at times, for example in comments such as "the idea that religion encourages violence is just a mask", or saying that acts of terror are "not about

religion [but] about lust for power… religion is just what they use to justify their whole idea". However, such an approach is difficult to reconcile with 3FF's broader messages. Not only is there no stable answer to whether or not the gunmen who attacked the Charlie Hebdo offices were 'really' acting in the name of Islam, the lack of a stable answer is itself a key part of the 3FF narrative, in as much as it emphasises intrafaith diversity and the importance of not making generalisations about faith groups.

And for those who take seriously the claims that the category of 'religion' is a historical construct, enacted through material practices involving humans and nonhumans, this raises the possibility that through these events religion is in fact *becoming more conflictual*, in part because of the economic and cultural dynamics of media. The decisions of 3FF to speak publicly – or not – therefore literally performed the religious, in ways that were uncomfortable to acknowledge for an organisation which often stressed its role as a neutral convener for others, rather than an actor making some versions of religion 'more real' than others. This need for some aspects of their work to remain implicit will be explored more fully in the following chapter when we look at their organisational practices in their programmes.

To link this back to media rituals, we can see the 'faith-inflected media event' as moments where the association between religion and conflict is being forged – and in which the power of media institutions to shape and define religion in the contemporary context is both contested and acutely felt by those harmed by this association. These events highlight something of a gap within the media rituals literature, where engagement with religion itself tends to be rather cursory. Couldry (2003), for example, falls into essentialism while distancing his analysis from previous work which saw the media operating 'like religion', asserting that religious ritual is "usually enacted against a complex background of explicit and shared beliefs", as opposed to media rituals which "are not played out in an even, consensual space" (2003, p. 87).

This misses the fact that whether beliefs are in fact shared between, say, young British Muslims and ISIS militants, is precisely what is at stake in the 'faith-inflected media event' – and where the imbalances of power between those with differing views on *what religion is* are made highly apparent. As was argued in the previous chapter, one way of thinking of religious change is to see faith traditions as 'fractional objects', with a wide range of actors constantly attempting to persuade others that innovative ideas and practices rightfully belong within the tradition. The present discussion suggests that the category of 'religion' operates in a similar way, with its meaning and content constantly being contested through sociomaterial practices – including media practices, as well as acts of violence such as beheadings and bombing

campaigns. One way to resist the association of religion and conflict, then, might be to attempt to emphasise other more benign meanings of 'the religious'. The desire to associate faith with other, happier things will be addressed in the next section.

Responding to the crisis 2: "happy diversity"

In a number of discussions about 3FF's responses to international events it was suggested that they could create alternative narratives to those focused on conflict by showcasing the programmatic work and promoting positive stories. There was a recognition that the events set a particular tone and timeline, and that 3FF's vision had to be articulated during the "in between moments", not just at moments of crisis. This mirrors developments elsewhere in the third sector and moves towards 'constructive journalism' which highlight the solutions offered by charities (Green, 2016).

Like most organisations, 3FF's communications strategy involved press releases to legacy media, and they did achieve some coverage over the period of my fieldwork from mainstream media institutions like the BBC, or more commonly from local press and faith-community publications such as the Jewish Chronicle. However, there were difficulties gaining coverage given how far the organisation's activities fell from fitting with dominant news values such as unexpectedness, reference to negative events or conflict (Harcup, 2009). At times, even the religious press failed to see 3FF's activities as newsworthy. One arts project, I was told by one of the staff running it, was critiqued by a journalist from a religious new service for focusing on the expression of faith identities through the arts rather than having what they considered to be a 'real' religious or interfaith component.

It was on social media, therefore – primarily Facebook and Twitter[35] – that the organisation was most able to mediate its own message about the possibilities of harmonious coexistence between different faith groups. As part of the research I conducted with 3FF for my Masters dissertation in 2012, I analysed the communications of the organisation's 15th anniversary celebrations, a day of workshops and school links involving 500 children across London. The tone of the social media output around that day was entirely positive – on Twitter, the hashtag

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[35] My most thorough engagement with 3FF's social media platforms was during the research for my Masters dissertation in 2012, and I only looked at them in a cursory way during my fieldwork precisely because of the disconnect between their off-line activities and online presentation discussed in this section.

#3FFday (mostly used by the organisation, staff members or other interfaith initiatives) included tweets such as:

> *"just in from RE teacher: 'really looking forward to #3FFDay tomorrow!" Hope Lord Mayor of Westminster who is coming along is just as excited"*
>
> *"Great welcome at St M- C of E school for #3FFDay @threefaiths"*
>
> *" 'it's all about asking what you wanna know, but without offending' #interfaithwisdom #3FFDay at G- School"*

On Facebook, the six posts over the day were mostly photographs of the reflection postcards the children were asked to fill in saying 'I met 3FF and...'

Image 2: posted on the 3FF Facebook page in June 2012, with the caption "A student from a #Muslim school reflect [sic] on taking part in Faith and Football with 3FF! #3FFDay". This image was also tweeted.

These posts did not garner controversy, but neither did they gain much visibility, with the most popular post on Facebook only gaining nine 'likes'. And they faced similar problems to those encountered in producing public statements. As touched on above, such statements were felt by some staff to be "vanilla" or banal – "the importance of humanising and relationships, blah blah blah"– or, as one of my interviewees put it, "sometimes it feels like... female competitors in beauty pageants like, tacky". Similarly, the genuine moments of connection and transformation which I and other staff members felt we witnessed within 3FF's programmes did not seem to be very communicable via their social media channels.

The potential 'tackiness' of such messages, I would argue, is related to the strong association between positive messages in digital space and commercial branding. A stark example of the way the online engagement with interfaith can resemble a corporate marketing campaign was seen during Interfaith Week in November 2015, when Near Neighbours invited people to use the hashtag #InterFaithmeans, explaining the concept in a blog:

> *For Interfaith Week this year, Near Neighbours wants to celebrate all that is great about such cross-faith encounters in our country!... Tweet using the hashtag #InterFaithMeans... [and finish] off the sentence in your own way, e.g. '#interfaithmeans that lunch will always be tasty!' or, a little more seriously, '#interfaithmeans that our communities are stronger and friendlier.'*

> *…Maybe you want to take an interfaith selfie? Maybe you want to see how many people you can get in an interfaith selfie? Maybe you want to have more people in an interfaith selfie than any interfaith selfie before? ...Maybe just tell your interfaith story through emoticons?* (Burton-Jones, 2015)

Near Neighbours, the interfaith fund administered by the Church of England, was here inviting participation in terms virtually indistinguishable from other kinds of marketing prevalent amongst both large NGOs and private companies. The call for engagement through 'interfaith selfies' echoes the #nomakeupselfie campaign which raised £8 million for cancer charities in 2014 (Guardian, 2014), itself almost identical to Lancôme's #bareselfie campaign the previous year to promote its new skin toner (Golding, 2015). The organisational brand was promoted through tweets saying how many people had benefited from their projects, with the most popular tweet on the hashtag (from Archbishop Justin Welby) reproduced as an image complete with the Near Neighbours logo.
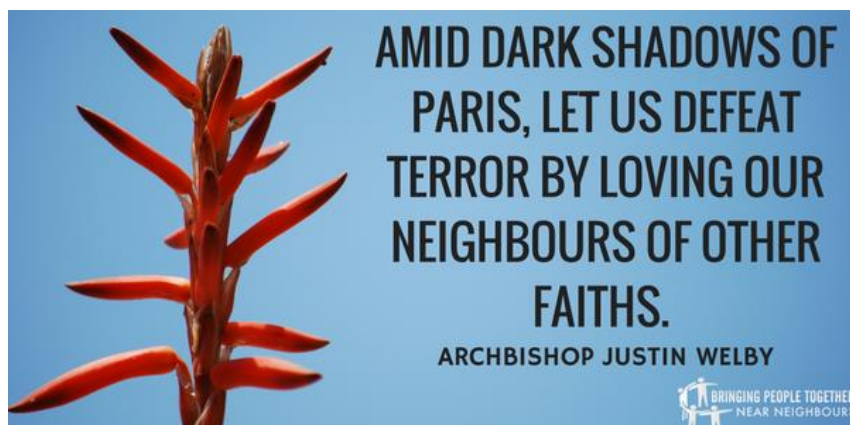
Image 3: tweeted by the Near Neighbours account in November 2015. The tweet read "Very important words from @JustinWelby #InterFaithMeans". This was retweeted 18 times, compared to 450 retweets for the original message.

The tweets themselves echoed the tone of those using #3FFDay, such as:

> *"well done @nearneighbours! #InterFaithWeek #InterFaithMeans bringing out the best of all communities… collectively"*

> *"#InterFaithMeans coming together with open hearts and minds so we can make life better for all"*

While the promotional blog suggested that celebrating interfaith for the 'tasty lunches' was 'not serious', quite a number of tweets included pictures of food or adverts for events involving such as cake sales.

Images 4 and 5: The tweets read respectively: "This is happening on Sunday afternoon #StirUpSunday #InterfaithMeans pudding making!" and "Delicious vegan buffet - incredible hospitality of @CofEWorcester retreat house Holland House #InterFaithMeans"

In both these examples from Near Neighbours and 3FF, there was a strong emphasis on *happiness*, on interfaith mixing as opportunities for positive social relations, presented as an alternative to dominant narratives of inevitable conflict. As stated above, this appeal to good feelings was often indistinguishable from other kinds of branding, and in line with the shifts

Chouliaraki (2012) charts elsewhere in the third sector, who argues that humanitarian aid appeals are "increasingly relying on the marketing logic of the corporate world" leading to "the celebration of the neoliberal lifestyle of 'feelgood' altruism" (2012, p. 4). For Chouliaraki, this shift towards personal feelings as a basis for solidarity is partly in response to changes in communication technologies, which have "facilitated an unprecedented explosion of public self-expression, thereby changing the premises on which solidarity is communicated" (ibid).

What could have been questioned here was the logical leap between countering hegemonic narratives of conflict and appealing to positive emotions – essentially, the denial that any conflict was taking place at all. As Ahmed (2010) writes, an emphasis on happiness itself may be oppressive, if it contributes to imagining the nation "as happily diverse, or as being happy with its diversity" (2010, p. 131) in ways which obscure the historic and ongoing unhappinesses of colonialism and racism. For many people involved in these interfaith programmes, especially Muslims, faith-based conflict was palpably taking place, especially in the context of 'faith-inflected media events'. But the possibility of mediating a more sophisticated or nuanced response, in which conflicts could be acknowledged and reframed rather than simply suppressed, was precluded in part by the structure of the available media technologies themselves.

This is not to say that the Near Neighbours initiatives during Interfaith week, or events on 3FF Day, did not involve exchanges which went deeper than a simple command to ignore persistent conflicts and be happy; however, at the level of the mediated communication on Twitter it was not possible to tell the difference between superficial and more meaningful interactions. At 3FF, there was a strong awareness of appearing to just be doing "handholding, Kumbaya interfaith" and a desire to distance themselves from it – as one staff member said, "it's not just about bringing people together for tea and biscuits, it's about more than that, it's about the action stage".

My sense throughout my fieldwork was that whatever they were doing that was 'more than tea and biscuits' was very difficult to communicate via the digital tools available – yet there was a pervasive feeling that these tools *should* be adequate. This notion of constantly frustrated potential will be explored in the next section, as an expression of some of the mythic qualities attributed to digital networks.

The myth of distributed digital agency

Myths about media are long-standing within modern societies, with new mediums for communication, like other kinds of technology, having a tendency "to take on a transcendent role in the world beyond the banality of [their] role in everyday life" (Mosco, 2014, p. 5). Here, I outline an emergent myth in relation to digital media, 'the myth of distributed digital agency', in which the 'communicative autonomy' afforded by these technologies is seen as directly leading to 'social and political autonomy' (see Castells, 2009), fulfilling the mythic promise of the internet to "realise, with little effort, those seemingly impossible dreams of democracy and community" (Mosco, 2005, p. 30). This myth, I will argue, was apparent during my time at 3FF and underlay the impetus to respond to faith-inflected media events via public statements or by self-mediating positive stories, despite the limited evidence that these were having the desired effects.

The mythic qualities of media have been extensively explored by scholars such as Mosco (2005, 2014), Morley (2007) and Couldry (2003, 2005, 2014, 2015). The mass media which developed in the twentieth century, Couldry (2003) argues, propagate what he terms 'the myth of the mediated centre' – the idea that television, radio and mass circulation newspapers provide privileged access to the 'centre' of society. This in turn serves to naturalise inequalities between those 'in' and 'out' of the media, and makes it hard to imagine how a collective could be formed or experienced which is not organised around these institutions. Media events are those ritualised times when this 'centrality' is rehearsed and reified – by turning to mass media at heightened moments of celebration or crisis, this reinforces our expectations that when turn on the TV or open a newspaper day-to-day this will tell us 'what is going on'.

More recently, Couldry (2015) has argued that a further myth is emerging specifically relating to digital networks, including social networking sites. 'The myth of us' propagated here is similar to 'the myth of the mediated centre', in that these commercial platforms are narrated as constituting "a new site of the social" (2015, p. 620). This is "particularly seductive" (ibid) because media institutions seem to drop out of the picture: the 'we' that is brought together on a platform like Facebook is presented as a natural expression of human sociability, obscuring the infrastructure which is of course shaping these interactions in specific ways to generate data and profit. This could be linked with Couldry's previous work on media events – just as people turning to mainstream media at moments of crisis reinforces the 'myth of the mediated centre', the default sense amongst my participants that social media platforms were where to look to tell them 'what was happening' probably worked in a similar ritualising way to cement their centrality in everyday life.

To these myths I would add 'the myth of distributed digital agency'. Put simply, this is the assumption that having access to digital platforms *in itself* affords a level of political agency. This agency is distributed and the amount held by any individual is small. However, digital platforms can aggregate this agency, and therefore (at least potentially) enable collectives with equivalent power to those assembled by long-standing institutions. For example, so the myth goes, a hashtag that goes viral on Twitter might end up with as big an audience as a story put out by the BBC, or might raise the same level of awareness of the political issue as a major political party campaigning on it. Importantly, the myth holds that this ability to precipitate the aggregation is itself widely shared amongst participants in the digital network; such networks are therefore positioned as inherently democratising by making "the tools necessary for empowerment… equally available to all" (Mosco, 2005, p. 31), enabling new kinds of mass collectives in which small actors have unprecedented agency. In the context of faith-inflected media events, this myth suggests that individuals and small organisations should be able to counter the repetitive, ritualised narratives of faith-based conflict emanating from mainstream media institutions *through* their access to digital tools.

If 'the myth of us' has the infrastructures disappear from view, here they are hyper-visible, fetishised in their most crude forms in the reduction of entire political movements to particular platforms, such as the Arab Spring's supposed 'Facebook and Twitter revolutions' (Hempel, 2016). Both myths serve the interests of the corporations in question, reinforcing their symbolic centrality – and both have also heavily influenced academic work on digital networks. For Castells (2009), the "creative autonomy" afforded by the internet, whereby the self-produced messages of individuals can potentially reach global audiences, has significant emancipatory possibilities, such that "the construction of communicative autonomy is directly related to the development of social and political autonomy" (2009, p. 414). It is this equivalence between communicative autonomy and its social and political forms, as if nothing else is required, that constitutes the myth of distributed digital agency – a myth that can be seen as 'magical' in the sense that Gell (1988) defines it "as a means of securing a product without work cost that… [this normally] entails" (1988, p. 9).

Within 3FF, the most explicit articulations of this myth highlighted the democratising potential of social media and their apparent ability to foster less hierarchical social forms. When a member of senior management said, in the context of a discussion about leadership, "social media has devolved power and given everyone a voice", this strongly echoed the techno-utopianist narratives of horizontality which has been a repeated feature of academic work on digital networks (Fenton, 2016). Similar sentiments were expressed at an event the arts and culture team were involved in, where one of the speakers said that "the world of Facebook

and Twitter have been a defining moment in terms of the little person", before talking about challenging patriarchy and creating social forms which were not based on "one-person ruling". In each of these quotes, communicative autonomy was assumed to lead directly to social and political autonomy.

However, the myth also structured actions within the organisation in less explicit ways. For students on the Parliamentors programme, for example, it was apparent that digital tools were seen as an inherent part of 'taking action'. Discussions about their social action projects often focused on the digital platforms they intended to use, rather than content or audiences, and groups demonstrated a strong desire to use the tools available regardless of their suitability for the issue in question. In a presentation about their social action project, one Parliamentors group talked about challenging stereotypes about homelessness by encouraging people to contribute to a hashtag on Twitter. While they were gently advised by someone in the audience that "social media is the less useful tool when reaching out to homeless people", the incident demonstrated that for these young people there was an instinctive and unquestioned link between 'taking social action' and 'using social media'.

Internally at 3FF, I would argue 'the myth of distributed digital agency' underpinned the felt pressure to respond to faith-inflected media events by producing public statements, or by self-mediating positive stories about their work despite the superficiality of the platforms available. Although nobody in the organisation seemed under the illusion that their own communications could amass a more substantial audience by 'going viral', their ongoing use of the platforms despite the lack of clarity about who was reading these communications, or what effects they were having, indicated a belief at some level that they must be contributing to a counternarrative that could potentially rival mainstream 'recited truths' of faith-based conflict.

Whatever utopian ideals might have been attached to digital networks in their early days, it is now manifestly clear that there is nothing inherently progressive about them, with both pro-Trump and pro-Brexit content dominating social media in their respective elections (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Waterson, 2017). The theory that the internet would facilitate a diversity of smaller audiences adding up to larger total audience than that captured by mainstream providers (the 'long tail') has been questionable for a decade (Hindman, 2008), and more recent data shows that when it comes to online news in the UK, for example, there is increasing concentration of audiences towards legacy media rather than diversification (Media Reform Coalition, 2017).

While the small-scale agency afforded by digital networks to share and circulate content is not non-existent, it is increasingly obvious that the ability to aggregate this agency is very unevenly distributed, and most likely to be held by those who are already powerful; even if social media were to have given "everyone a voice" the vast majority would still be very far from being heard. Yet the pervasive sense that these technologies *must* make some kind of intervention possible puts the onus on individuals and organisations – if our digital agency doesn't seem to get us very far, that must be our own failing for not being smart or creative enough to capture the attention of significant numbers of people. At 3FF, a series of inconclusive communications meetings where ideas such as online campaigns or TED-style videoed talks were considered and discarded were another expression of this frustrated search for the 'right' way to deploy the available tools.

In general, the organisational responses mediated by media technologies were understood internally to be limited in their impact. There was however a third kind of response of convening face-to-face interactions which arguably *was* more effective, and will be addressed in the next section.

Responding to the crisis 3: bringing people together

Throughout discussions about 3FF's response to these events, there was a persistent emphasis on 'coming together' in mixed groups. This was the central message of the most of the statements produced on the blog (e.g. Cass, 2015; Champain, 2015, 2016), typified by this section from one of Stephen's statements:

> *"In times of turmoil, it's only natural to feel the urge to retreat back into our own communities… We encourage people to resist this urge and instead come together, seek to understand each other and work towards peace."* (Shashoua, 2014)

Similar views were also emphasised by participants. Sami, an ex-Parliamentor I interviewed, asserted that it was better to come together at difficult times rather than following the impulse to "go back to our own community and vent off [which reinforces] the division whether we are conscious or not". 3FF hosting such face-to-face interactions thus constituted a third kind of response to 'faith-inflected media events'. As well as mention of these events being threaded through the pre-existing programming, groups were convened specifically in response to moments of crisis a number of times over the course of my fieldwork. This included a film screening and discussion in January 2015, a dialogue evening hosted at the

office in March 2015, and the meeting with local groups in Camden to talk about the refugee crisis in November 2015 mentioned earlier.

The dialogue event in March 2015 was for members of the '3FF community' – those who had had quite a high level of engagement with 3FF's programmes such as artists, volunteer speakers in schools, current and former Parliamentors, and members of the choir. Although the event was initially conceived of as a response to the Charlie Hebdo shootings specifically, by the time it took place two months later a number of other violent incidents had occurred. As a result, the framing question for the event was "how are you responding to reports of religiously motivated violence in 2015, and the debate surrounding these events? For example, but not exclusively, Charlie Hebdo, Copenhagen, Chapel Hill."

> *It was early evening in the training room. The space was set up with groups of six or seven around octagonal tables, each of the set of envelopes. We had just had a short welcome, and then Joanne from the schools team had set a 'safe space', a set of rules about how we were going to interact generated collectively by the group.*
>
> *As the facilitator on my table, I tipped out the contents of the first envelope which were a set of abstract pictures – a mouse peering out of a cup, bees on honeycomb, a mask. The first exercise was selecting a picture that reflected how we were feeling about recent events.*
>
> *Birgitte, a Buddhist speaker on the schools' programme, chose the bees; they made her think of what's underlying these problems, we focus on the events but what is the deep thing linking them together? Robert, another schools' speaker, chose a picture of a glass of water. The events get everyone agitated and he wanted to emphasise calm, to take a step back and not get caught up in the aggravation, "you get to a point where you can't come back from".*
>
> *Later we had feedback from the different tables. Joanne's group had talked about their responses to views they disagreed with on social media: strategies like not trying to convince people they were wrong, but perhaps posing a question that would give them something to think about. A Muslim woman from the Parliamentors programme talked about being an example in the world, "it's not always about arguing but sometimes about* being *something different".*

Planning meetings for this session had focused on trying to create a space in which people were able to reflect on recent events together and hear a range of personal views and

experiences. As facilitators, we were advised to guide the group away from more distanced responses such as "I feel this group is doing blah blah" – and it was also decided that we should share our own views in keeping with the desired open tone. By using abstract pictures as a stimulus rather than obvious images of conflict, it was hoped this activity would help people move beyond pre-prepared intellectualised responses to more emotionally open ones.

During planning meetings, the space was explicitly contrasted with mediated spaces, particularly people's personal social media platforms. Here, it was felt, negative affects were being shared but in ways that tend to reinforce divisions – as one person put it, "social media is a place where people can vent but not connect". The mindset and emotional register fostered by social media was seen as linked to a kind of unreflectiveness where "sometimes people don't think do they, or they don't read the whole of the post, they just forward it." On another occasion a member of the schools team, reporting the challenges teachers said they were facing, highlighted the *speed* of information as a factor, as students heard about events on social media and spread rumours "like wildfire", saying that staff wanted tools for the classroom to bring "students out of that panic mode". In the dialogue session, the need for reflection was expressed by both Birgitte and Robert, in trying to understand the deeper currents linking events, or stepping back from the "aggravation" of the crisis.

The importance of embodied and emotional reactions highlights that the performativity of the 'faith-inflected media event' resides not just in what is written and shared in verbal forms, but also in the affects generated within and circulated by bodies. As ex-Parliamentor Sami remarked in his interview, "terror isn't the act, terror is the feeling *after* the act"; the terrorist aims to pull the population into participating in the event by *feeling terrified*, relying on media to spread these feelings through, for example, rolling news coverage and 'disaster marathons' (Liebes 1998). A genuine "antiterror" strategy, Sami went on, couldn't take the form of a witchhunt which would further demonise Muslim communities and create more fear, but rather "you need to feel that warmth, neighbours coming together".

This cultivation of different kinds of feelings, such as feelings of peacefulness, is what 3FF hoped to achieve through bringing people together at moments of crisis. The distinctive elements of its practice, as I will argue more thoroughly in the following chapter, lay in its acknowledgement that since the circulation of negative affects was largely occurring nonconsciously, addressing them could not be achieved solely through explicit and conscious means. There was therefore a need for affective and embodied techniques: practices such as ensuring the right mix of people in the room, setting a 'safe space' in a ritualised manner, and using creative methods such as a stimulus of abstract images. While rarely explicitly named as

'spiritual', these techniques had many similarities with those employed by faith communities, albeit here divorced from any specific tradition and designed to be inclusive of nonreligious participants as well.

This brings us to an alternative role for faith within the context of the 'faith-inflected media event', as a *way of knowing* the performativity of the event, and our own role within it, as we circulate not just articles and commentary on social media, but positive and negative affects through the nonconscious workings of our bodies. Performative rather than representational understandings of events are difficult to conceptualise, particularly in explicit verbal forms – this text is, after all, unavoidably representational. In a discussion of Bergson, Kember and Zylinska (2012) note that his critique of representation is linked to his critique of intellect, and highlights the role that he suggests for intuition in generating "an instant of insight in which the temporality of the event, it's happening, is properly apprehended" (2012, p. 43). They suggest that while the role of media is "transformative as much as it is informative... *this metamorphic role is first of all something we sense rather than something we see*" (2012, p. 69). Techniques derived from faith practices may enable us to engage in this kind of 'sensing' of mediation and its place in the flow of life, and to connect with kinds of understanding that require "less intellect and more intuition" (ibid).

Such ways of knowing are inherently tricky to incorporate into academic writing, but might be gestured at through ethnographic examples. At the opening of the Interfaith Summit discussed at the beginning of this chapter, for example, the moment of reflection about the Paris attacks of the previous week took place something like this:

> *After Tara's introduction, a woman from another interfaith organisation took her place on the stage at the front. She invited us to take this as a reflective space, to close our eyes, to pay attention to the feelings in our hearts.*
>
> *After a short silence, she read a poem off the bright screen of her phone:*
>
> *"later that night*
> *i held an atlas in my lap*
> *ran my fingers across the whole world*
> *and whispered*
> *where does it hurt?*
>
> *it answered*
> *everywhere*

everywhere

everywhere"[36]

After a few more breaths of silence, she closed with some warm hopeful words which I didn't record. I had stopped taking notes.

In writing about this I am highly aware of how inadequately it expresses a moment which I found personally moving, and the most fitting and meaningful 'response' at that period of time. I cannot describe it in detail in part *because it was successful* at pulling me into a kind of presence that was incompatible with making a written record. The women in question is a committed Sufi whose religious practice is an integrated part of her working life, and her ability to create and hold a deep and affecting stillness was noted by others at 3FF who worked with her. Her embodied presence was essential, as was the fact that the room sharing this moment together was so mixed.

One dimension of this diversity was the presence of both Muslims and non-Muslims, with those of other faiths and beliefs indicating their solidarity in the context of a crisis which would have negative repercussions specifically for Muslim communities. Just as significant may have been the participation of nonreligious people, not only signalling solidarity but also that everyone – including those who could be considered 'secular' – was affected, and had a need for this kind of quasi-spiritual reflectiveness in the face of the grief, anger and helplessness generated by the 'faith-inflected media event'.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to depict some of the lived experience of the 'faith-inflected media event', defining such events as ones where hegemonic narratives of conflict between faith groups are rehearsed in repetitive, ritualised ways. Various organisational responses from 3FF have been explored, including public statements on the blog and positive communications on social media, highlighting a pressure to use the digital tools available, and a pervasive sense that they *should* afford the agency to counteract negative mainstream narratives. This has been analysed as a new kind of media myth, 'the myth of distributed digital agency', which

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[36] Extract from *What They Did Yesterday Afternoon* by Warsan Shire (see Agodon, 2016) which was widely shared on social media at the time.

reinforces the centrality of such digital networks in ways which are favourable to 'big tech' corporations, while affording limited political efficacy.

Throughout, we have seen tensions between *representational* and *performative* conceptualisations of media events – for example, as 3FF wrestled with their own potential contribution to the association of religion and conflict through their public statements. This performativity was also linked to the circulation of affects. If the 'happy' feelings mediated via digital tools were inadequate as a response because they came across as superficial, 'tacky', or akin to corporate marketing, peaceful feelings (i.e. anti-terror) were generated through quasi-spiritual techniques which encouraged reflectiveness and a more intuitive connection with the media event. Given the frenetic pace of the social media platforms we have to hand, such techniques may still rely on face-to-face encounters – and it was in convening these, I would argue, that 3FF created its most effective 'response' to 'faith-inflected media events'.

To conclude, I want to identify some of the issues that this analysis of media events raises for academics as we seek to understand emerging technologies and their role in lived experience. One important factor is that the most widely used platforms are structured so that argumentative, assertive and quickly produced content is *what will be most visible*. It was notable that the practices suggested at the dialogue event for handling disagreements on social media were not necessarily ones that would leave the most obvious digital trace. Posing a rhetorical question and leaving someone to think about it – off-line – makes the interaction less visible within that platform than engaging in heated debate; refusing to argue but just "being" something different may be even less visible.

Our research practices, therefore, need to heed Couldry's (2015) warning against taking the new traceability of social media for 'the social', and to situate what is made visible on those platforms within a broader understanding of everyday practices which may or may not be mediated by media technologies. This is particularly important given the sense of pressure felt by individuals and within organisations to use the digital tools available, even when there was limited evidence of their effectiveness. If 3FF did manage to create valuable responses it was probably within their programmatic work and face-to-face encounters which were largely taking place without leaving a public digital trace – and which would not have been apparent to me had I not been engaged with the organisation ethnographically.

This analysis of 'faith-inflected media events' has also highlighted the ongoing, disproportionate power of legacy media institutions to shape public discourse and stigmatise minorities in ways that are deeply damaging to those groups and social relationships more

broadly. While as academics we are rightly sceptical of straightforward narratives of 'media effects', we perhaps do not do our participants (or ourselves) a service by stressing resistance and agency without giving full weight to the pain caused by headlines screaming about 'Muslim atrocities'. To acknowledge the nonhuman agency of images and text, that we are 'affected' by newspapers giving the same message of inevitable conflict day after day, is not to deny the possibility of resistance but to more fully situate ourselves as emotional, embodied beings, affected by and affecting the world around us both consciously and nonconsciously.

Practices and ways of knowing held by faith communities are well placed to 'sense' this circulation of agency – a point that will be expanded on in the thesis conclusion, where spiritual practices such as hijab are argued to be a decolonial starting point for developing sustainable ways of being with media. A crucial element of hijab (as with many other spiritual practices) is submission to a higher authority, giving up dreams of total mastery and seeking to exercise agency through learning new ways of relating to human and nonhuman others which become inscribed in the body as habit. In the context of 'faith-inflected media events', where the habits encouraged by the dominant communications technologies often serve to escalate conflicts and generate terror, these wisdom traditions may have much to offer us as we seek to develop and share techniques for resisting fear and aggravation, and cultivating peacefulness.

Chapter 6

The Spirit of Encounter: trust and embodied knowledge at 3FF

My empirical chapters so far have looked at some of the conceptual issues raised by interfaith coexistence, and discussed one particular aspect of internal organisational practice at 3FF, that of navigating 'faith-inflected media events'. Here, I turn to the organisation's work with participants. This thesis is centrally concerned with questions about knowledge production and the mediation of knowledge, using the interfaith practice of 3FF as an ethnographic case. As explored in the theoretical framework, interfaith as a field raises some particularly complex questions in relation to knowledge, as it challenges the secular assumptions underpinning accounts of modernity (Latour, 1993). This chapter builds on the previous analyses of how the organisation sought to bring worlds together on different terms to those provided by secular scientism, focusing on the pedagogy which underpinned their programmes, workshops and trainings.

One of the curious things about the choice of 3FF to examine these questions is that people within the organisation often said that their work was *not* about knowledge. Descriptions of the work from staff stated that they were concerned with 'humanisation' rather than "myth busting or added knowledge", referred to workshops as "experiential information sharing rather than [being] knowledge-based", and said that the training programmes were about "communication skills – knowledge comes later". This chapter explores what kinds of knowing are at work within the organisation's practice, arguing that such disavowals are related to the centrality of embodied and tacit knowledges within this approach to interfaith – mirroring the kinds of practices used by faith groups themselves, as outlined in Chapter 4.

One of the difficulties in writing this thesis is that not only is interfaith itself a little-known niche, 3FF is also highly unusual within interfaith work. There is little literature on what could be called 'mainstream' interfaith practice, let alone 3FF's version of it, and consequently it has been a struggle to situate it academically. Here, I have chosen to explicate the organisation's practice in relation to the concept of Religious Literacy (RL), a term which has entered the discourse among policymakers, academics and practitioners in the past decade, particularly since the publication of Prothero (2007). In the UK, arguments have been made for an increased focus on this area across a wide range of policy settings including central and local government (DCLG, 2008; James, 2008), the criminal justice system (Metropolitan Police, 2014) and health and social care (Crisp, 2015). While the literature on it remains small (e.g.

Moore, 2006; Dinham & Jones, 2010; and the chapters in the edited volume Dinham & Francis, 2015), it provides a starting point for this discussion.

The dominant definitions of RL tend to echo that in the Department for Communities and Local Government's 2008 policy paper, describing it as "the skills and knowledge required to engage in an informed and confident way with faith communities" (DCLG, 2008, p. 33). However, as Thakrar Walker (2015) points out, this is only one type of RL – a kind she labels 'sociological' – which she argues can be distinguished from two others within the literature, 'theological' and 'encounter-based', the latter being closest to 3FF's approach. This tripartite typology structures the first half of the chapter, as I use ethnographic examples from 3FF's work to illustrate the differences between its approach and sociological and theological religious literacy, and the distinctive features of their practice that constitute encounter-based RL. In the process, I hope to demonstrate the unique features of the organisation for those unfamiliar with the field, in part by exploring what 3FF is *not* doing.

I then address the question of knowledge: what are the underlying epistemologies of these different kinds of religious literacy? While all three in some respects try to embed ideas of 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988) within their pedagogies, this situatedness is imagined in varied ways. What does it really mean in the context of faith-based knowing? My own interpretation of what is distinctive in encounter-based RL is explored through a discussion of the literature on knowledge and trust (e.g. Hardwig, 1991; Kalman, 2013), arguing that the practice aims to provide opportunities to communicate the tacit and embodied dimensions of knowledge through nonconscious means.

This can be considered rooted in a non-secular epistemology since it refutes a divide between rational, secular moderns and irrational, premodern people of faith, instead asserting that we all "know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4 emphasis removed), and must attend *to* the world *from* positions which cannot be brought to consciousness. The difficulties of speaking of this kind of knowledge are then discussed, both in relation to the experiences of staff and my own struggles to produce academic writing about the organisation.

One strategy for paying attention to the unspoken within organisational life is to focus on the mediations of media technologies, since they constitute moments in which established patterns of what is made explicit or left implicit are redrawn. Some brief examples of this within my fieldwork are outlined, such as the essential role of embodied and gestural communication illustrated by the use of video within school workshops, and the importance of emergent learning made palpable in the tensions around the use and sharing of slides. The

conclusion draws out some of the lessons from this ethnographic case for organisational ethnography and for media scholars.

3FF in practice: not sociological

What did 3FF do in its work with participants? The first half of this chapter seeks to outline not only the key features of the organisation's practice, but also their significance and distinctiveness, by differentiating their work from other kinds of religious literacy through ethnographic examples.

The first of these comes from 3FF's schools work. Alongside one-off workshops, the organisation ran a school linking programme, matching pairs of schools, each with a different faith ethos,[37] and facilitating teachers to run a series of link days for their students over the course of an academic year. I observed one of these link days between two girls' secondary schools, one Catholic and one Muslim, which took place at the East London Gallery where the arts and culture team were running an exhibition entitled 'Navigations'.

> *The gloomy basement smelt of school trips and packed lunches. Twenty teenage girls were sat on the plastic chairs that had been pulled up around trestle tables, half in white shirts and green skirts, the others in black hijabs and mauve tops. They had only met that morning for the first of their link days and were mostly sat with others in the same uniforms as they ate lunch.*
>
> *The loudest voices in the room with those of the teachers, Mary and Tasneema, sat next to each other in the middle of the group; Tasneema was telling Mary about going to an Arab wedding where the convention was that women didn't dance, and how different that was to South Asian weddings. She laughed as she described the music playing and having to sit in her seat while her body wanted so much to dance, showing the feeling by moving her shoulders under her long black jilbab. Mary, engaged and smiling, asked a question about differences between Muslim cultures that Tasneema gave an amused answer to, evoking laughter from them both. Although the pupils didn't say much they were clearly paying attention.*
>
> *A while later, the students trooped up the narrow stairwell to the brighter space on the ground floor of the gallery where they were surrounded by the artworks. The exhibition*

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[37] The programme originally only worked with schools with a Muslim, Jewish or Christian faith ethos, then opened up to community schools when the organisation expanded beyond the three faiths. However, they found that links between faith and non-faith schools were not that successful and by the time I finished my fieldwork they had reverted back to only recruiting new faith schools.

was open to the public for three weeks, though it was closed to passing traffic that day so that school visits could take place. One of the artists, an English gypsy woman, showed them her installation, 'Witch Hunt', and then invited the students to make their own artworks reflecting on their identities using images cut from magazines.

As they worked in groups of four or five, a mix of girls from each school, I stood a little awkwardly at the side, chatting to the 3FF staff and looking round at the art on the walls. It didn't feel right to join them, and I made my notes discreetly as they presented their creations back to the group. As they tidied up to leave the mood was excitable, the girls getting out their phones and taking selfies with the artist and with students from the link school.

This example gives a flavour of 3FF's education work with school students: while links and workshops varied, the general format and tone was participatory, conversational, and relatively informal. Although 3FF's schools' work was most commonly seen as a form of Religious Education, with links often run by RE teachers and workshops usually taking RE slots in the timetable, there was a qualitative difference to mainstream RE lessons. Sessions almost never involved textbooks or information sheets, and although some links involved more explicit learning about the other school's faith than in the case above (for example, having a tour of the other group's place of worship), these were embedded within a participatory encounter rather than presented as information 'about' another faith.

The pedagogical model underpinning mainstream school Religious Education resembles what Thakrar Walker (2015) terms 'sociological religious literacy'. Moore (2006) describes this as requiring "a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of the world's religious traditions" (2006, p. 1). While Moore does stress the importance of diversity *within* such traditions, the World Religions Paradigm she draws upon tends to reify the categories, implicitly giving the impression that they are both strongly differentiated and internally homogenous (Cotter & Robertson, 2016). This is reflected in school-based RE, where religions are often taught "as static 'blocks' of belief and practice" (Shaw, 2014, p. 8). 3FF schools team member Claire – who joined the organisation after being an RE teacher – criticised this teaching model for treating religions as "boxed off" and looking at them "theoretically one at a time".

The kind of broad overview of religious implied by Moore – e.g. summarising core beliefs and practices in Islam or Judaism, or the major festivals celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs – almost never featured in 3FF's work. This was linked to the strong emphasis on intrafaith diversity

embedded within the organisation's approach discussed in earlier chapters. In the context of school links, this often involved stressing the differences *within* each group, and thus the multiplicity of similarities and differences *between* the groups. A teacher I interviewed from a Catholic school, involved in a different link with a Muslim school, described how her students had assumed all the Muslim girls would be actively practising, when in fact both groups had students on a spectrum from observant to non-observant. One pupil described what she had learnt on the programme as: "I learnt that we are all the same, that we all have similarities and differences" i.e. that both groups were internally differentiated.

The sociological approach to religion – treating it as a 'thing' knowable through informational learning – has arguably become more embedded within school RE in recent years. A number of critical reports about RE were produced over the course of my fieldwork (Conroy et al., 2013; OFSTED, 2013; APPG, 2013). For Conroy (2015), widespread practices of 'teaching to the test' have limited the space to address issues in any depth, leading RE teachers to "elide difficult or challenging questions" (2015, p. 174), and often making religion as taught in the classroom unrecognisable to students of faith (2015, p. 179). Conversely, 3FF's workshops were sometimes criticised by both teachers and students for failing to provide obvious learning points that could be translated into an examination context.

If 3FF's work could be considered a form of religious literacy, then, it was not of the sociological kind. As this is the most prevalent pedagogical model within both school-based and adult learning it was sometimes taken as the only form that 'religious literacy' could take. I would argue that this is what 3FF staff members meant when they said things like, for example, "our approach isn't as simplistic as attending a religious literacy class" – the RL in question being understood as reproducing a 'world religions' depiction of faith traditions as internally homogenous blocks of beliefs and practices, knowable through objectifying means. However, as Thakrar Walker (2015) notes there are other types of RL identifiable within the literature; the next section considers 3FF's work in relation to a second kind, grounded in theology.

3FF in practice: not theological

The second ethnographic example I will use to explore the organisation's practice occurred at the induction of one of the Parliamentors cohorts, in early September 2015. Parliamentors was

3FF's leadership programme, where forty-five[38] students from different universities[39] delivered social action projects in mixed faith groups and received mentoring from a local MP over the course of an academic year. The programme began with a weekend residential where students received training about the practical elements of delivering social action projects, as well as exercises from 3FF's faith awareness and controversial issues trainings to help them navigate the challenges of working in mixed groups.

> *I arrived during an icebreaker, the room buzzing with chatter. The facilitator clapped and told them to move on to a different partner, "the last icebreaker question is 'when do you feel relaxed?' Right, you have two minutes." I caught Tara's eye and walked over to the empty chair next to her. She said she felt relaxed in silence, "it's where you find God, it's always profound for me".*

> *Simone was leading on the next exercise and took charge of the room. "We're now going to do something we call 'sorting statements' – we're going to read you a list of statements, and we want you to stand in a line depending on whether you think the statement is helpful or unhelpful for continuing a dialogue – or a bit of both." She put a slide up on the screen to explain what they meant by 'helpful'.*

Image 6: slide from Faith Awareness Training

> *She read out the first statement: "it's only really extreme Sikh women who wear a turban". Most of the students moved to the 'unhelpful' end of the room; Simone asked them to explain why they had gone there. "The word 'extreme' is not PC in this political*

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[38] This number was reduced to 30 for the 2014-15 cohort as the team anticipated finding it harder to recruit MPs in an election year.

[39] When I began my fieldwork, the programme worked with fifteen groups of three, which was later changed to nine groups of five. An additional change over my time there was to expand to non-Russell group and post-1992 institutions to broaden the class base of participants.

environment", said a woman in patterned hijab. A guy with waist length blond dreadlocks suggested it could be rephrased as "only deeply religious Sikh women wear a turban" but someone else objected that "just because someone doesn't do one aspect doesn't mean they're any less religious".

Simone asked one of the few people in the middle why they thought it could be both helpful and unhelpful. "I agree with the problems, but I think what the person was trying to say wasn't bad, they just used the wrong word" said a slim man with an Arabic accent. Simone nodded, "you've highlighted something that's important for us at 3FF, you assumed good intent".

With the next statement, 'as an atheist I personally think belief in God is irrational, but I can totally understand why some people do', the students moved all along the line. Again, Simone elicited their responses – some thought it was helpful for opening the door for dialogue and "showing there's two sides", while others thought it was mixed "it's a two-perspective statement, but doesn't justify why they think it's irrational".

In the unhelpful group, the responses were very critical: "he contradicts himself, to understand something you have to see the logic in it", "I felt like he was speaking from a position from above", "this could easily affect someone really badly".

In the feedback afterwards, the students reflected on what the exercise had shown them.

"With some statements I thought 'oh that's definitely unhelpful' but when I heard other people's perspectives it challenged my views" – a woman in a bright red dress with a shoulder length black weave.

"It showed how powerful one word can be, and how the tone and who is there is important" – a freckled guy with an Irish lilt.

"It sort of visualised a massive range of viewpoints, it shows you can't see people's thoughts" – a young man in a purple turban, matching braces and fashionable ankle length trousers.

Simone summarised what she learnt from doing the exercise in different trainings: "People have different thresholds on different issues, people move around and don't go where you'd expect based on where they went for previous statements. And they always give perspectives I haven't heard before, I always learn something new when I do this."

This example illustrates how 3FF's methods were used in the context of adult learning rather than a school setting. As with the school link, the training involved participatory and conversational techniques, frequent use of icebreakers and energisers, and movement-based activities to get the group mixing and to bring similarities and differences to the fore in perhaps unexpected ways. Again, this was a non-sociological approach to religion: as the slide reproduced here shows, there were active efforts to avoid participants treating faith or belief as informational ("don't worry if you don't know whether a statement is factually accurate or not"), instead focusing on the relational aspects of communication about differences of faith and belief.

A second distinction can also be drawn – 3FF's approach was quite different to the kind that might be taken in a theology class. One *similarity* with a theological approach was the overt acknowledgement of religious commitments among the participants. Theology and religious studies is unusual within the academy for disrupting assumptions that the people within universities are broadly secular in outlook. Similarly, discussion of God, core beliefs or sacred texts were integrated into the exercises at 3FF, not as propositional statements but as elements of life to which people in the room might be deeply committed. (It is hard to imagine many other work contexts where a colleague might speak so openly about 'finding God in silence'.)

As the responses to the atheist statement showed, there was no default assumption that belief in God would be seen as irrational, and students were able to acknowledge the emotions such assumptions might evoke ("it could easily just affect someone really badly"). However, where this *differed* from a theological approach was that within 3FF such beliefs were framed as personal and exploratory rather than normative or intellectual: in the example, the statement about Sikh women wearing turbans was not used to prompt a discussion about the meaning of the turban or gender roles within Sikhism, but to consider how different kinds of communication might enable or disable a meaningful dialogue between people with differing views.

3FF's approach, then, can be differentiated from what Thakrar Walker (2015) calls 'theological religious literacy'. This kind of RL starts from the premise that those coming into the learning context are themselves speaking from a religious standpoint, and wish to learn about each other's traditions and beliefs from that standpoint. The key difference with 3FF is the form this sharing takes: while the theological approach tends to be intellectual and text-based, at 3FF sharing was more emotional and conversational.

The most common practice within theological RL is the joint study of religious texts termed Scriptural Reasoning, which was developed in the mid-1990s and it is strongly associated in the UK with the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme. This involves small group discussion of Jewish, Christian and Muslim Scriptures (and sometimes texts from other traditions) which explore connections and differences between interpretations. These texts, write Ford and Higton (2015), "are intrinsic to literacy in these traditions, and the practice of joint study and conversation around them contributes to broadening and deepening understanding, not only of the scriptures of others, but also of one's own" (2015, p. 51).

In fact, 3FF's first education workshop, Tools for Trialogue, was an adaptation of the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme's Scriptural Reasoning practice for schoolchildren. However, they found that the pedagogical model developed for theology undergraduates did not translate into the school environment, with students lacking sufficient background understanding of the traditions to be able to engage meaningfully; the workshop was rarely being delivered when I began my fieldwork and had essentially been discontinued by the end.[40] This confirms Francis and Dinham's (2015a) observation that theological approaches are "by their nature, limited in scope to those trained, interested and willing to engage at that intellectual level" (2015a, p. 267).

An additional reason for 3FF's move away from theologically rooted pedagogy was related to its expansion from working with the 'Abrahamic' faiths to all faiths and nonreligious beliefs, since Scripture-based techniques are hard to translate beyond the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions. This more flexible approach to religious identifications, and the inclusion of nonreligious people, also constituted a distinctive element of 3FF's practice. As Shoemaker and Edmonds (2016) note, it is common within interfaith sessions is to begin with introductions from participants which state their religious affiliation, such as 'I'm Jacob and I'm Jewish'. This practice, combined with underlying assumptions that religious identities are the most important ones for those present, can make it hard for nonreligious or unaffiliated people to take part. Conversely within Parliamentors, although students were recruited on the basis of religious identity labels, these were intended to be revealed gradually to others in the group through their interactions, and were not necessarily assumed to be paramount for all participants.

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[40] When discussing the variety of contexts in which scriptural reasoning is now practised, Ford and Higton (2015) claim that "the Three Faiths Forum has been running a schools programme reaching around 5,000 students in 70 schools each year" (2015, p. 51) – failing to mention that all of these were receiving encounter-based workshops, rather than Tools for Trialogue.

As these sections have shown, whatever 3FF was doing with its participants was qualitatively different to either sociological or theological versions of religious literacy. But there is a third kind of RL identified by Thakrar Walker (2015) which does closely resemble 3FF's work: a religious literacy rooted in encounter.

3FF in practice: doing encounter

To draw together the core features of 3FF's practice, I will introduce a final example – an event which took place in February 2016, during LGBT history month. As the theme that year was 'religion, belief and philosophy', 3FF staff had decided to host an adaptation of their Encountering Faiths and Beliefs workshop for a public audience in the training room at the office. This began with a welcome from a gay staff member who said this was the first time the organisation was explicitly acknowledging that many of those involved in their work were LGBT.[41] Then Joanne from the school's team took over:

> *Joanne came to the front and wrote 'Safe Space Agreement' on a piece of A3 flipchart paper. She asked the room what we thought the agreement should include and wrote down the answers: 'be respectful', 'active listening', 'don't judge', 'open-mindedness'. When there was a pause in the responses she wrote down 'confidentiality' and then said "we are live tweeting this – the hashtag is #3FFLGBT – but we won't be saying names and the focus will be on what we're learning in the room".*

> *We then heard stories from four different people: a Muslim gay man who described learning different interpretations of the Qur'an from feminists in his home country of Malaysia; a bisexual atheist who talked about his alienation from ideas of community; a bisexual Methodist woman who said she felt distanced from her church as she discovered her sexuality, but never felt distanced from God; a non-binary trans person who talked about gender transition and discovering reform Judaism where "I learnt to be a proper Jew", then laughed and added "well at least for me".*

> *In a short discussion about what we'd heard on my table, a middle-aged man in a dog collar pointed out that the stories were very brief, suggesting we should "think of the hinterlands" behind each one. Later we learned he was the Malaysian speaker's partner, who laughingly said he hadn't mentioned being in a relationship with an Anglican vicar and*

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[41] Four of the staff through most of my time at the organisation were openly LGBT (including the deputy director and operations manager) making it a straightforward environment for me to be out as a queer academic.

spending lots of time with the Church of England: "sometimes I wonder am I Muslim? Am I Anglican?"

Some of the questions for the speakers focused on their faith identities ("why do you identify as an atheist?"), some on gender and sexuality ("what are the differences for male and female bisexual people?"), and others on the intersections of the two ("how did you find ways into Judaism that were LGBT friendly?") While a few questions were more challenging – asking why the speakers didn't seem angrier, or whether it was ok for people with conservative interpretations to be against gay relationships – most were explorative and supportive. Somebody highlighted the unusual character of the event and asked what people within interfaith and faith communities could do to support LGBT people. The Muslim speaker replied "we need more chances to encounter meaningfully" and described the event as "cathartic – I was promoting it like crazy on Facebook!"

For the final reflection, I asked my table a series of questions. Had anything been surprising or challenging? Two Malaysian women on the table said that they hadn't thought about people becoming atheists, coming from a country where everyone is raised in a faith. One of the men said he found it challenging that the speakers didn't have "more fire" in their responses and were so accepting of the difficulties; a woman countered that she had learnt they got good things from both sides of their identities, and couldn't just give up one part of themselves.

This adaptation of Encountering Faiths and Beliefs, along with the previous examples, illustrates some of the essential features of a '3FFy' event. First, it was a *facilitated safe space*, both participatory and highly structured: the speakers had been trained and supported in developing their stories, and both the whole group and table discussions were facilitated by 3FF staff or interns. The setting of safe space agreements was an almost ubiquitous feature of workshops and trainings, the significance of which I would argue was less about whether the resulting space was 'really safe' or not, but more about establishing a participatory tone for the event, acting as a ritualised means of setting apart the space from everyday life.

Second, it involved *staging an unusual encounter*, an embodied interaction between people who might not otherwise meet or share in such a personal way – the LGBT event was seen as unique for being a mixed faith environment in which to think about sexuality, and its unusual character was commented on by several participants. Similarly, for teachers and parents at faith schools, the linking programme was seen as a valuable opportunity to expand the students' relationships beyond those of their faith group, and the premise of the Parliamentors

programme was that many young leaders were developing their leadership within relatively homogenous settings, and may not otherwise learn to work successfully in more mixed groups.

Third, techniques were used to encourage *embodied and emotional learning* – at the LGBT event, primarily through the modelling of personal disclosure by the speakers, but also in the use of icebreakers such as telling a partner about the story of your name, and in the kinds of prompt questions in the table reflections. In school linking, the relationships between teachers was seen as essential to the success of links, and close friendships such as that between Mary and Tasneema were recognised as powerful models both for their students and for other teachers on the programme. Creative methods such as the artist workshop in the school linking example were often used, as well as performances of music or poetry, as a means of enabling less intellectualised forms of sharing.

Finally, the majority of the content was provided by participants, with the core learnings *emergent from their interactions* rather than predetermined by those who had created the event. While the Muslim speaker's story in the EFB above focused on his Islamic upbringing and discovery of feminist Islam, the questions elicited the 'hinterlands' – other facets of his life such as his relationship with the Church of England. The idea that something surprising might happen in the context of those interactions was often mentioned by facilitators, as when Simone highlighted that "people move around and don't go where you'd expect" in sorting statements, and that she always learnt new things when she ran the exercise.

These four elements can be seen as constituting the third kind of RL identified by Thakrar Walker (2015), 'encounter-based religious literacy'. This "emphasises the development of skills and knowledge through a dynamic and transformative process of active encounter, interpersonal engagement and critical self-reflection" (2015, p. 37). One of the few academic sources to describe something resembling 3FF's is Barnes and Smith's (2015) 'Religious literacy as *lokahi'*. Drawing on the Hawaiian concept of *lokahi*, which roughly translates as 'harmony through diversity' (2015, p. 78), the authors describe a form of religious literacy that involves "active engagement with difference" (2015, p. 84) beginning with "an attitude of respect for the *diversity and complexity within ourselves* as much as those around us" (2015, p. 82). This is illustrated with examples taken from the work of the Lokahi Foundation,[42] including trust building between Muslim communities and police, and delivering training in post-conflict Rwanda.

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[42] The similarities between the approach taken by the Lokahi Foundation and 3FF are unsurprising given the crossover of personnel – Jonathan Smith who authored the chapter has worked as a 3FF facilitator, and at least one member of staff moved to 3FF from a role at Lokahi.

The ethnographic example above already indicates some of the potential limitations of encounter-based RL. As Thakrar Walker (2015) writes, the dependence on facilitation and specially curated spaces "means there is a risk of engineering and artificial space – one curated in order to be low-risk (or 'safe" rather than 'brave')" (2015, p. 38). Barnes and Smith (2015) emphasise that the practice is concerned with creating opportunities for "positive relational encounter" (2015, p. 83) and at 3FF there was a similar tendency to elide conflict in favour of ensuring positive experiences – potentially sliding into Ahmed's (2012) 'happy diversity' critiqued in the previous chapter. At the LGBT EFB this was reflected in the lack of 'fire' in the stories, and it was noted in the final group reflections that none of the invited speakers was a queer person who had chosen celibacy as a way of reconciling their faith and sexuality – which would have significantly altered the tone of the event. A more detailed critique exploring these implications within 3FF's approach will be the subject of Chapter 8, *Counting and Accountability*.

The differences between 3FF's encounter-based RL and sociological and theological versions can help explain why people within the organisation often asserted that their work was *not* concerned with knowledge. Implicit within this disavowal, I would argue, was a comparison with either sociological or theological RL, both of which involve explicit, verbal claims about what religion is – claims which were generally absent from looser, emergent explorations of faith and belief at 3FF. My own reading of this is that encounter-based RL *does* involve a form of knowledge, though of a different kind to the sociological or the theological; the epistemologies underpinning these three kinds of RL and their implications for organisational practice are outlined next.

The epistemology of encounter

As the term implies, *embodied interactions* between those of different faiths and beliefs are central to encounter-based RL. Barnes and Smith describe the *lokahi* approach as "focused on the *face-to-face* encounter of individuals and communities" (2015, p. 88 my emphasis), while 3FF's practice also hinged on the kinds of learning that could take place through embodied encounters, in contrast to other kinds of learning. As then-director Stephen wrote in a report about the organisation's educational work:

> "[3FF's] founding premise is that belief is something that is 'lived'... We therefore focus less on textbooks and abstract theological debates and instead prioritise the simple act of bringing people of different faiths and beliefs together" (quoted in Tretheway and Menzies 2015, 4, my emphasis).

For Barnes and Smith, the importance of physical encounter is connected to the underlying epistemology of this kind of RL. Implicitly contrasting their own approach to more sociological ones, they stress the importance of "not just learning *about* the other, but learning *from* and *with* the other" (2015, p. 80), where knowledge itself is conceived of "as relational, as mutual disclosure" (2015, p. 88). Working together in this kind of way across lines of difference, they claim, can enable change and transformation through "grappl[ing] with the various levels of 'otherness' that exist both within and between [people]" (2015, p. 94).

An epistemology which emphasises relational knowing and mutual disclosure can be seen as a way of embedding a conception of faith-based knowledge as *situated* knowledge (Haraway, 1988). However, it is worth further unpacking what situated knowledge really means in this context, since those advocating a more sociological kind of religious literacy *also* refer to situated knowledges. Moore (2015), for example, references Haraway (1988), and states that the method she advocates "assumes that all knowledge claims are 'situated' in that they arise out of particular social/historical context and therefore represent particular rather than universally applicable claims" (Moore, 2015, p. 31). At the same time, the rhetoric and form of her chapter presents religion in such a way that it implicitly endorses a sociological view of religion "as a self-evident analytical category, as if sociologists know what religion really is" (Horii, 2015) – and as if sociologists can view faiths and beliefs from a distance rather than always being implicated within them. For example, Moore never identifies her own faith background or mentions other relevant identity markers.

The theological approach advocated by Ford and Higton (2015) could also be considered 'situated', but with a different character to encounter-based religious literacy. Their chapter speaks from a self-consciously Christian perspective, and in doing so the authors do disrupt secular assumptions that religious knowledge is something that can be gained by looking at faiths and beliefs from the 'outside'. However, by assuming that a model of religious literacy grounded in a particular form of (Protestant) Christianity is applicable to other faith traditions, or even other Christian denominations, they fail to recognise that the format of learning they propose is itself highly specific.

For example, they place a great deal of emphasis on the idea of 'argument', suggesting that learning "patterns of fruitful interaction… involves learning how religious communities argue, and how to join in with those arguments" (Ford & Higton, 2015, p. 52). What is missing here is a recognition that, while disagreements clearly exist in all faith communities, the means by which such disagreements may be understood, contested or resolved often do not take the form of 'reasoning' that can be easily verbalised – and that even when they do it is generally

only a minority within those communities with a particular kind of theological and educational training who can 'join in' in the first place. The encounter-based approach, at least ideally, makes space for multiple forms of knowing and for sharing that knowledge, rather than prioritising text-based and intellectualised modes of learning.

For reasons that will become clear, the epistemology of encounter is inherently difficult to articulate; one way of exploring it is through looking at the role of trust within encounter-based RL. Barnes and Smith (2015) emphasise trust building within the work of the Lokahi Foundation, and at 3FF trust was described as "the most important thing" for the organisation, with a lot of internal discussion about how to maintain trust with the wide range of stakeholders involved in the work e.g. when making public statements around international events as outlined in the previous chapter.

The relationship between trust and knowledge[43] has been explored by academics such as Hardwig (1991), Strathern (2000) and Kalman (2013). While some conceptions focus on explicit trust, for example looking at trust within scientific research teams as a form of strategic cooperation (Adler 1994), others emphasise that it has both "a cognitive and noncognitive dimension"[44] (Crease 2010, 96) in which an implicit element is intrinsic. Hardwig (1991), for example, asserts that "trust, in order to be trust, must be at least partially blind" (1991, p. 693), and that this blindness is inherent in all kinds of knowledge – including that produced by the 'hard' sciences – since we must rely on the testimony of others to know things we cannot find out first hand.

This implicitness made it difficult to articulate what it was that 3FF were doing or what their claims to knowledge were: as Kalman (2013) writes, "[m]ost accounts of trust agree on one point, namely that trust and distrust are self-reinforcing, and that you do not invite trust by talking about it" (2013, p. 70). She discusses Lagerspetz (1997), for whom trust is *necessarily* tacit, something that can be visible to observers but not from a first-person perspective, as if one would "ask oneself whether trust was possible… then one cannot be said to be trusting. Rather one is distrustful, as one engages in doubting" (Kalman, 2013, p. 69). Within the context of 3FF, to begin a school link by highlighting the lack of trust within the room, or to ask Parliamentor participants to rate how trusting they felt of their group at regular intervals

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[43] I have focused here on one section of the literature on trust and knowledge, but there are many others – for literature on the topic within organisational studies see Politis (2003), Usoro et al. (2007), Koskinen et al. (2003); within epistemological oppression see Fricker (2007), Dotson (2011), Medina (2011); within citizen science see Callon et al. (2011), Epstein (1995).

[44] The language around 'cognition', 'consciousness', 'rationality' etc. varies across disciplines – for consistency of terms here I would prefer to express this as having both "a conscious and nonconscious dimension" rather than talking about cognition.

during the programme, would be likely to encourage doubting by bringing the potential absence of trust to conscious attention.

Trust as a form of unspoken knowledge can be linked back to embodiment. In Polanyi's (1966) essay, *Tacit Knowing*, he talks about knowledge as extending beyond our consciousness, so that "*we know more than we can tell*" (1966, p. 4). These nonconscious dimensions are held in the body as a kind of position or inhabitance: tacit knowing occurs when "we incorporate it into our body – or extend our body to include it – so that we come to dwell in it" (1966, p. 16). This indwelling is then a position *from* which we attend *to* the world trustingly, and is intrinsic to knowledge production – for example, this thesis would be impossible without my trust that both I and my reader can comprehend written English.

Polanyi's work on scientific knowledge was influential on thinkers such as Kuhn and Popper, and therefore on Science and Technology Studies; it is unsurprising, then, that ideas of embodied and tacit knowledge outlined in his work are congruent with the non-modern epistemology outlined in the theory chapter. But this conception of trust can also be linked to religious faith, and illuminates some of the problems of taking a sociological view of religion as something that can be known through explicit informational means such as through detailing the beliefs and practices of particular groups. Rather, if religious faith is seen as a position *from* which we attend *to* the world, which has elements which are necessarily tacit but have come to dwell in us as embodied beings, then communicating this knowledge requires bodily interactions in which we come to perceive the place *from which* others experience the world. While this can never be fully explicated or brought to conscious attention, encounter-based RL is premised on the belief – the faith – that such embodied knowledge can nonetheless be shared, and it is this sharing that I would argue 3FF's techniques are trying to achieve.

To speak of communicating this knowledge highlights the collective character of tacit knowing – that such forms of knowledge are always held and shared by particular communities, whether academic ones relating to particular fields, communities of faith, class-based ones and so on. In Chapter 4, it was argued that conceiving of religion as a 'fractional object' could help to conceptualise processes of innovation and change within internally heterogeneous faith communities, and thus to see interfaith as a practice contiguous with such forms of innovation rather than external to them. The present discussion of tacit knowledges builds on this analysis: if faith practices are understood as techniques by which embodied, nonconscious and non-verbal forms of knowing can be shared collectively and transmitted through time (McGuire, 2008), and we do not subscribe to a view of absolute and unbridgeable differences between faiths, then it follows that interfaith would mirror and incorporate such techniques.

As has been emphasised throughout this thesis, the purpose of utilising concepts and ideas from STS to discuss faith-based differences is to demonstrate that there is no modern divide, and no group of 'secular' people who are outside this kind of knowing. The position of trustingly attending to the world associated with religious faith is therefore not exceptional, but a universal condition of human knowledge, including scientific knowledge (Hardwig, 1991; Polanyi, 1966). Within 3FF, the inclusion of nonreligious people within their work, and frequent assertion that 'we all have beliefs' can be understood as referring to an epistemological claim that we *all* attend to the world from positions that can never be fully brought conscious attention.

The epistemology of encounter-based RL is therefore based on an account of the situated character of knowledge that is both non-modern and non-secular. This can be differentiated from sociological RL, in which 'situatedness' is conceived of in relation to a set of knowable characteristics, as if the grounds from which we attend to the world can be fully explicated through reference to our class, race, gender etc – an operation which I would argue serves to secularise the knowledge in question. It can also be differentiated from a theological 'situatedness', which while transporting an embedded sense that the knower comes from a position they cannot fully comprehend or speak of, tends to simultaneously reinforce a religious/secular divide by using pedagogical forms and techniques which are difficult for the nonreligious to participate in.

Encounter-based religious literacy can be seen as attempting to take situatedness seriously, recognising that building understanding and trust across differences of faith and belief requires the embodied sharing of ways of knowing which have come to dwell in us. There are of course significant potential problems within this approach: if elements of a practice have to remain implicit, how can we avoid this being used to camouflage where power lies? How can we hold ourselves and others responsible for the consequences of our actions if elements of what is taking place cannot be spoken of? These questions will be addressed in Chapter 8 and the thesis conclusion; in the next section, I want to highlight some of the difficulties for organisational practice when core activities are acknowledged to have dimensions which cannot be brought to conscious attention.

What cannot be spoken

The centrality of tacit, embodied knowledge within 3FF's encounter-based interfaith practice raised particular challenges when the organisation had to ascertain or demonstrate success. How could they know if their work was effective if its most important dimensions were

happening nonconsciously? The difficulties this caused for staff was apparent during an interview with Joanne from the schools' team, as she tried to describe a workshop that she felt had not gone very well:

> *"It just didn't feel that* [speaking slowly] *intimate and spe-cial, that kind of magic that I sometimes see, a lot, I see a lot, it just didn't feel like the students were opening up… There was just something in the atmosphere that maybe I was picking up on that I didn't – maybe I'm over-analysing, it could be a misreading but… Yeah, that really sort of open atmosphere… I don't know, it must be body language or something that I'm picking up on, I don't know what it is, the sense that people in the room were not just listening but were really feeling something, erm... it's about feeling a genuine… human… connection. I don't know if I have the language to describe it"*

This quote indicates what Joanne believed 3FF often *did* achieve in its workshops: a 'magic' 'special' atmosphere in which 'genuine human connection' is taking place. While she could to some extent identify her knowledge of its presence or absence as an embodied form of knowledge ("it must be body language or something"), in the process of verbalising it she also began to doubt this knowledge ("maybe I'm over-analysing", "it could be a misreading"). Her pauses and stumbling as she tried to express it in words showed how hard it was to bring this tacit knowing to consciousness, eventually saying she might not have "the language to describe it".

A similar problem in trying to account for the success or failure of the work through language occurred when I spoke to Esther about an incident that occurred in a training some years earlier. From my memory of it, something controversial had come up in the course of the discussion and Esther had paused the normal flow of the training to unpack that moment of tension; I wanted to write about it as an example of how unanticipated issues arising from the interactions of participants could serve as key moments of learning. When I asked her what had happened, she said she could visualise the layout of the room and where people were sitting, her feeling of "being on the edge of something" and "pulling ideas together" – as she said this she gestured grasping with each hand, pulling them in towards her. However, she *couldn't* remember the explicit content of what had been said; the memory was clear in embodied and emotional terms, but could not be easily expressed in words.

The problems of what can and cannot be spoken can also be illustrated by a third, counterfactual example. Some of 3FF's school workshops have been replicated in Sweden, and on one occasion programmes manager Tara visited and took part in a version of their most popular workshop, Encountering Faiths and Beliefs. This involved her, a Muslim who practices

hijab, telling the story of her 'faith journey' as she had done many times in British schools. Afterwards, she told me "one of the Swedish people said to the whole room "the thing is, now that I've heard your story, it's difficult to hate you"."

In some respects, the statement encapsulated a central tenet of the organisation's practice: that sharing personal stories could build empathy and reduce prejudice, particularly against stigmatised groups such as Muslims. Yet for a participant to state it so explicitly – to publicly announce that shortly before they may have been full of 'hatred' for somebody present – was not only highly unusual, but arguably showed a continued lack of sensitivity towards Tara and the impact that the statement might have on her. Not only would it be unexpected for the kind of learning 3FF was aiming for to take place on a conscious level, for it to be spoken aloud to third parties in this manner may well have been an indication of its failure.

If speaking about the practice was a problem for 3FF, it is also a problem for me. The conventions of academic writing necessarily privileges conscious and representational modes of knowing, in ways that sit uneasily with my experiences within the organisation. Examples in previous chapters have tried to describe times when I thought the methodology was working, for example at the Interfaith summit following the Paris attacks in November 2015, or at the arts event at a Muslim cultural centre described in Chapter 4. However, there has been a persistent sense that the verbal descriptions of these events have been inadequate for capturing the essence of what was going on at those times. Furthermore, the kinds of practices commonly used by academics to capture what was happening around me, such as taking notes or making recordings, were most inappropriate precisely at those times when an 'intimate and special' atmosphere was being created, since they were an indication that I was not emotionally present within the space – as suggested in the ethnographic example of the school link that opened the chapter, where I felt awkward making fieldnotes.

It is also not incidental that this chapter is among the last sections of the thesis to be written, nor that I have struggled so much to articulate what it was that 3FF were doing: my knowledge of it has been through the body and has been extremely difficult to bring to conscious attention. Three years into this project my supervisors asked what was the most important thing I wanted to communicate in this thesis, and I responded that there were times when it felt like 3FF had found ways to build relationships across lines of difference that seemed to be missing from many political organising spaces. My supervisors noted that I had not at that point written about this at all, or even spoken of it explicitly in my conversations with them – which took me by surprise because this intuition of their success was so embedded within my entire approach to my research. That is, in some sense my faith that 3FF's practice could be

effective in a unique way was the position *from* which I attended *to* the organisation, trustingly, and as such could not (and to some extent still cannot) be spoken of.

As a researcher and ethnographer, attempting to write about practices where tacit and embodied knowledges play a central role poses serious methodological challenges – this chapter has been extremely difficult to write, and has required many drafts and redrafts, stops, starts and dead ends. One approach has been to take this difficulty as a topic in itself. For example, Esther being unable to remember the content of the incident at the training meant I couldn't use that moment to illustrate what I had wanted to say about indeterminate learning, but I have been able to incorporate it into the text as an example of something else – the difficulties of verbalising embodied knowledge.

Another approach is to look at the mediations of media technologies, since they disrupt patterns of the implicit and explicit and so can reveal aspects of the practice that might be difficult to 'see' otherwise. In the following section, I look at two particular technological practices – the use of video in workshops, and the use of slides within trainings – to further explore the status of tacit and embodied knowledges in a digital context.

Media technologies within the encounter

Can tacit knowledges be shared digitally? The approach being taken to media technologies within this thesis emphasises practice, that their use is always embodied, and involves nonconscious, symbolic and affective dimensions. This is a non-secular approach, in that it acknowledges that our relationships with media extend beyond our conscious awareness, and indeed may have most impact on us through our repeated, ritualised habits rather than through their explicit content. In this sense, there is clearly a strong alignment between the kinds of mediations facilitated by media technologies and the epistemology of encounter outlined above, with its emphasis on tacit knowing. However, there are also some strong contradictions and tensions which are explored here through looking at video and slides in the work.

The Art of Asking was a 3FF school workshop which could be delivered as a stand-alone session, or used to prepare students for the Encountering Faiths and Beliefs workshop with volunteer speakers. The purpose of The Art of Asking was to encourage participants to reflect upon how their use of language might enable or disable dialogue, and how to ask sensitive questions of people who are different to them. Part of the workshop used video clips of volunteers from the speaker programme responding to questions. First, students could see

people responding to what 3FF considered to be 'unhelpful' questions, such as "why do Christians hate gay people?", "don't you think it's unfair that Muslim girls have to cover their hair?" and "is it true that not as many Jews died in the Holocaust as they say?" Then they were given a tool for rephrasing 'unhelpful' questions into 'helpful' ones, and shown videos of speakers responding to rephrased questions such as "why do some Muslim women cover their hair?" and "as a Jew, what does the Holocaust mean to you?"

The video clips enabled students to see embodied reactions to different kinds of language. Responses to the 'unhelpful' questions, as Joanne explained in an interview, "tend[ed] to show people not looking comfortable, being upset by the questions, in general not giving a very detailed answer", while 'helpful' ones elicited responses which were "much more positive, lots more detail, positive body language, [the speaker] looking happier to engage in conversation". The embodied aspect was key – the schools' team had a slide presentation 'in case of video failure' which showed pictures of the speakers and their answers as text, but the main lesson that students took from seeing the answers written down was that the first set of answers were short and the second were much longer. The emotional impact of the unhelpful questions was far harder for students to grasp without the visuals.

What the video technology enabled was the sharing of the embodied knowledge of *harm*. Joanne stated that "they can see why someone might respond in a particular way… They're able to see 'oh I think they seem hurt, and that might be because this word's aggressive'". From an organisational point of view, what was important was that this knowledge of harm could be shared without actually hurting somebody present. At schools where she had been told that the students were unfamiliar with diversity Joanne strongly encouraged Art of Asking before an Encountering Faiths and Beliefs session as "it's safer in a way, because it's just the facilitator… because you can unpack those questions without the fear of upsetting a speaker in the room". In any case, if such questions did arise in EFBs then the facilitator would step in and rephrase them – nobody expected speakers to perform offence 'live', even though the video tools showed that this demonstration of harm was an effective pedagogical tool.

When successful, video allowed the tacit knowledge of the speakers to pass directly into the bodies of the students. However, this also encountered resistance. For example, students would sometimes ask whether the videos were scripted, questioning the authenticity of what they were being shown. When this came up in sessions she was facilitating, Joanne would reassure participants that the videos were authentic. In fact, the videos *were* scripted, but she said that she didn't feel that she was lying since the speakers had written and performed their 'real' responses. By asking these questions, students demonstrated an awareness of the

tension within 3FF's practice between the codified, repeated elements, and the need to allow for a certain degree of spontaneous learning through time. The video clips ensured a certain kind of emotional content within the workshop, yet by being predetermined the videos also called into question their own authenticity and efficacy.

One thing highlighted by the example is that the sharing of embodied knowledge via digital tools is possible, but only when those tools are approached in a spirit of trust. Without their belief in the authenticity of the emotional performance within the videos, the students' bodies would become resistant, unwilling to learn the lesson the workshop was intended to teach. Whether they would believe Joanne's reassurances that the videos were authentic would then depend on how they interpreted her own bodily performance, as well as the wider conditions, for example their trust in their classroom teacher, in the overall institution of the school, and so on. Here, trust had to *precede* the sharing of embodied knowledge via digital means.

A contrasting example can be seen in the use of slide-based software within training sessions. These were often used in contexts such as the Parliamentors induction discussed above, as well as in trainings with adults and in workplaces. However, staff often voiced discomfort about using them since they conflicted with one of the key principles of the pedagogy: that the core learnings would be emergent from the interactions between participants, rather than predetermined by the facilitator. As demonstrated by the sorting statements exercise the Parliamentors induction, slides were generally used as a way of communicating instructions – the actual learning came from the group pooling their perspectives on what it meant to characterise female turban-wearing Sikhs as 'extreme' or people who believed in God as 'irrational'. The pre-prepared slide could never have contained the content of the discussion in advance, and furthermore, it would have significantly disrupted the emotional engagement of those copresent in the room if the facilitator had been typing up the conversation as they spoke in order to *make* the slide contain the content.

Knoblauch (2012) talks about 'powerpoint' as a genre of performance involving a laptop, projector, slide software (which may or may not be Microsoft PowerPoint) and human presenter. He argues that powerpoint performances enact both the 'knowledge society' and the 'information society': the slides (information) have to be contextualised, delivered and understood through the live performance (which turns them into knowledge), but can also be extracted from the live performance and collapsed back into information. This oscillation had particular relevance within 3FF, where they often had difficulty explaining what it was people were supposed to end up knowing as a result of their encounter-based sessions, especially

when people were expecting sociological religious literacy with more informational content 'about' faith.

Because the key learnings within sessions were emergent from the interactions between participants, the slides extracted from the embodied event were meaningless in informational terms. Nonetheless, Esther and Simone both reported strong expectations from those receiving workplace training that not only would there be slides used in the session, but these would be emailed to them afterwards. When I asked Simone what she thought participants were *doing* with the slides, she suggested that they might be using them as prompts to recall the embodied experience of the training, but also said that in almost every session she was asked whether these materials could be shared with others i.e. treated as informational, even though they were particularly informationally thin.

I would suggest that the slides therefore did have meaning, but not necessarily in the location being explicitly pointed at by participants. As stated above, the affective dimensions of media use are often transmitted through repeated, ritualised habits. In this context, the ubiquitous expectation and desire for 'the slides' indicates that they have become *signifiers of learning*, and may be especially important in contexts where the more meaningful dimensions of this learning might be impossible to bring to conscious attention. When 3FF facilitators met their participants' expectations and requests for slides, this built trust that something had taken place through their interaction even if it was difficult to verbalise it.

The slides then became the thing that could be spoken of, the sign that the training was good quality, artefacts that could be revisited and perhaps ritually shared with others, not because they contained the relevant information but because they gave some kind of physical form or expression to learning which was otherwise hidden. Whereas the video technologies had to be contextualised within an atmosphere of trust to 'work', with the slides they were an essential part of *building* the trust which opened people up to nonconscious and affective learning.

This was not without cost. In the thesis conclusion I will talk more directly about neoliberal transformations within the digital workplace, and the role of media habits in perpetuating forms of coloniality. By capitulating to the desire for the slides, 3FF arguably facilitated a preference for the informational amongst its adult participants, that is, a hierarchical relationship between different ways of knowing in which the embodied and experiential were constructed as subordinate to the codified and informational. The desire for authenticity in the video clips also had a shadow side, an implicit demand that the speakers had to show *real* hurt in order for the young people to believe that they *were* hurt. These ambivalent features of the technologies are unsurprising – they do not, after all, act alone but within complex

sociotechnical networks which include the affective, the imaginary and symbolic. Since they shift the terrain of the implicit and explicit, analysis of their use might enable us to 'see' the unspoken dimensions of organising; conversely, the attentiveness to the nonconscious within 3FF's practice might enable the unspoken hinterlands of the technologies themselves to be made apparent within academic research.

Conclusion: traceable and untraceable mediations in non-secular knowledge

This chapter has tried to depict 3FF's practice for those unfamiliar with interfaith work, situating its rather unique approach within a little-known sector. This analysis has distinguished their 'encounter-based' approach from sociological and theological forms of religious literacy to situate it in the field, although of course in reality these distinctions are not clear-cut. Theological RL, for example, may in fact largely 'work' through the encounters between its participants, rather than through the explicit propositional statements they exchange about their beliefs.

To conclude, I want to tie together the present discussion with the non-modern/non-secular epistemology outlined in the theoretical framework, which emphasised the importance of tracing the mediations that produce knowledge in order to democratise them. This is particularly important when it comes to the knowledge produced by the hard sciences, as it is their detachment from their origins that makes them appear as naturalised facts, unamenable to democratic contestation. These mediations can be opened up by conceiving of knowledge production as a practical skill rather than a question of abstract thought.

However, the present discussion about embodied and tacit forms of knowing adds another dimension to this, since some of the mediations will be on nonconscious levels that *cannot be traced*. For example, knowledge production within laboratories always involves learning physical gestures or techniques such as when to fill the pipettes, how to discern significant readings, and so on. While the importance of such elements of 'craft' could be better included within scientific accounts, they can *never* be fully verbalised. The purpose of becoming more attentive to them is not to rid scientific practice of its embodied dimensions, but to more effectively design the craft of scientific practice in the service of including previously excluded groups and working towards collective liberation.

While this liberation will require the recognition and validation of embodied knowledge, I am not arguing that such recognition is sufficient in itself to rectify inequalities. Chapter 8, *Counting and Accountability,* explores some of the dangers of recognising the unspoken within

organisational practice if this is not combined with sufficiently careful consideration of power dynamics –embodied, tacit and emotional forms of knowledge can just as easily be deployed in oppressive ways as explicit and objectifying kinds. Furthermore, as will be discussed in the thesis conclusion, the shift from Fordist to neoliberal working practices can be seen in part as an incorporation of tacit and relational ways of knowing into forms of capitalist organising, through its accommodation to the forms of critique made by the social movements of the 1960s (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). Chapter 9 will explore the ways in which 3FF's working practices might be seen as highly neoliberal, and its 'encounter-based religious literacy' potentially congruent with, rather than challenging to, contemporary forms of capitalism – which is not to dismiss the valuable lessons to be taken from their work, but to more fully understand the conditions under which these serve to reproduce or challenge coloniality.

One of the struggles of speaking of embodied knowledge is to avoid reducing it (or secularising it) by positioning myself as the person who now fully knows or is conscious of something that others are unaware of. The language we have to hand is problematic – terms such as 'awareness' or 'consciousness' imply that the end goal and highest form of knowledge is that which is codifiable or speakable. In this account, I have tried to constantly gesture outside of the text to the things that I still cannot say, and will never be able to say. In addition, the use of ethnographic examples has attempted to evoke the feel and the situatedness of the organisation's work, in the hope that *something else* might be transported through this text, carried from my own nonconscious to yours.

Above all, what I hope has been transported is my deep care and concern for the organisation, its staff and participants, such that my critique might be heard in the tonality I intend. It is from this standpoint of care – the grounds from which I attended to 3FF over two and half years of fieldwork – that I have developed my analysis of the limitations of the practice outlined in Chapter 8. If I have been successful, then this critique will be received as an attempt not just to *de*construct but to *re*construct and *co*-construct more effective and responsible techniques for staging meaningful encounters, in the service of enabling plural collectives which cross lines of faith-based difference.

Chapter 7
Dead Data, Living Knowledge

This chapter shifts the focus from 3FF's work with participants to its internal practices within the organisation, specifically those relating to how data was produced, manipulated and transformed by staff. These activities included the monitoring and evaluation procedures used by each department, as well as a wide range of other practices such as the creation of spreadsheets and databases, passing on knowledge to new staff through handover notes, and attempts to organise and reorganise 3FF's data holdings. Producing knowledge in contemporary organisations is inevitably a question of digital technologies and large amounts of digitised data. These ever-increasing backlogs of data contain the *potential* for new kinds of knowledge to be revealed, but also create new *barriers* to knowledge. This chapter explores what it takes for meaningful knowledge to emerge in this digital context.

These ways of knowing have significant tensions with the epistemology of encounter outlined in the previous chapter. If organisational life is becoming ever more dependent on digital practices, how did this 'back end' support or subvert a form of interfaith which involves the sharing of embodied, tacit knowledges through face-to-face encounters? As briefly discussed in the introduction to this thesis, this was in fact not just a question for 3FF internally (although office practices are the focus of this chapter) but also a question for 3FF's participants, such as students on the Parliamentors programme or teachers running school linking, for whom digital organising constituted part of their interfaith encounter.

I begin by exploring definitions of 'data', how they relate to the concepts of 'information' and 'knowledge', and some of the debates and claims in the literature on 'big data' (e.g. Hand & Hillyard, 2014; Couldry & Powell, 2014; Kitchin, 2014). This leads to an outline of my own broad definition of the term, as difficult to distinguish from 'information', and as reality-producing rather than 'raw' (Gitelman & Jackson, 2013). Data practices within 3FF are then discussed, showing how digital space is imbued with ideas emerging from, and serving the interests of, big tech companies, in the default setting to 'keep everything', in the pressure towards immediacy (Barassi, 2015b; Tomlinson, 2007), and in the ideals of a single rational knowledge system: principles which run counter to the organisation's pedagogy with participants.

I then discuss my work on monitoring and evaluation for 3FF, and the cross-organisational system I designed which attempted to embed an alternative set of principles: 'keep what matters' instead of 'keep everything', 'timeliness' instead of immediacy, and 'multiple

rationalities' instead of a single rational system. These can be seen as attempts to articulate the forms of embodied knowing emphasised in the previous chapter with the more explicit and rationalised kinds of knowledge that dominate formal monitoring and evaluation procedures. They can also be seen as ways of extending my non-secular approach to technology, in which the emotional and affective dimensions of our relationships with media are emphasised. I conclude with some personal reflections about the process of constructing this chapter, itself an exercise in transforming data into knowledge.

Data, information, knowledge: defining terms

The past decade has seen the volume of data being produced increase exponentially, through a combination of greater storage capacity, increasing numbers of 'sensors' producing data (including mobile phones, the internet of things and social networking sites), and greater recognition that data have or might come to have value. Data have thus become a topic of concern within academia, alongside (and sometimes supplanting) more established interests in the 'knowledge economy' (Kember & Zylinska, 2012) 'information age' (Castells, 2000) and 'information society' (Lash, 2002). However, data remain relatively under theorised compared to the philosophical attention devoted to both 'information' and 'knowledge' (Kitchin, 2014, p. 1).

A conventional way of conceiving of data's relationships with these other terms is as the base of a knowledge pyramid, as developed by information scientists such as Ackoff (1989) and Adler (1986):
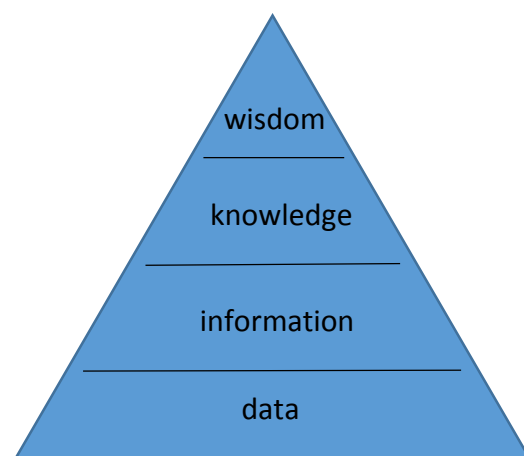

Image 7: the knowledge pyramid.

Here, each "layer of the pyramid is distinguished by a process of distillation (reducing, abstracting, processing, organising, analysing, interpreting, applying) that adds organisation, meaning and value" (Kitchin, 2014, p. 9). While the hierarchy is generally accepted, as well as the general principle of 'distillation' going up the layers, the levels are defined very differently depending on the context and discipline, and are in addition often defined in relation to one another, leading to a certain circularity (Liew, 2007). This messiness in defining the terms, and their relationships, is made more acute by the *new* implications for knowledge claimed in discussions of 'big data'.[45] boyd and Crawford (2012) write that big data is "a cultural, technological and scholarly phenomenon" resting on the interplay of technology (maximising computation power), analysis (identifying patterns and large datasets) and mythology (2012, p. 663). These mythic aspects can be seen as another dimension of the media myths introduced in Chapter 5.

What is considered 'big' depends on the source. Most definitions make reference to the 3 'V's of huge *volume*, high *velocity* and diverse *variety* (Laney, 2001); Kuiler (2014) straightforwardly defines 'big' as data sets exceeding a terabyte (2014, p. 312); while McNeely and Hahm (2014) give a pragmatic definition of datasets "whose size is beyond the analytical capacities of most database software tools" (2014, p. 305). A more contextualised definition is provided by Jacobs (2009), who considers it relative to the IT infrastructure available, saying that it "should be defined at any point in time as 'data whose size forces us to look beyond tried-and-true methods [of storage and manipulation] that are prevalent at the time'" (2009, p. 44).

The key claim is that the size of these datasets enables a step change in the kind of knowledge that can be produced: "more data doesn't just let us see more… [It] allows us to see new, it allows us to see better" (Cukier, 2014). At their most extreme, big data mythologisers have claimed that such techniques can replace "every theory of human behaviour", with "correlation supersed[ing] causation" leading to "a whole new way of understanding the world" (Anderson, 2008), a viewpoint that Crawford (2013) refers to as 'data fundamentalism'.

Critics of such claims have pointed out that, far from automatically producing a "precise and accurate type of knowledge" (Barassi, 2015a, p. 139), big data brings with it new kinds of bias and inaccuracy. Data may be abundant, but much of it is 'thin' (Boellstorff, 2013), decontextualised and 'unmoored' from its origins making it difficult to interpret (Gitelman & Jackson, 2013). It is also prone to errors and requiring large amounts of 'data cleaning' (boyd &

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[45] From here on, I will use big data without quotation marks, and also without capitalisation, following Boellstorff (2013) in "treating big data as a common noun, vulnerable to reconfiguration" (2013).

Crawford, 2012, p. 668). These concerns are well founded and will be returned to later, but it should be noted that even critics of big data mythology do accept that the 'data revolution' is real (Kitchin, 2014, p. xv), that the new methods do have wide-ranging consequences (Couldry & Powell, 2014, p. 2) and that it might "change the meaning of learning" (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 666). There are therefore implications for knowledge of the increasing volumes of data being produced, though not necessarily of the kinds being claimed by big data 'fundamentalists'.

For the purposes of this chapter, 'data' will be used in a very broad sense to refer to both the outputs of evaluation, HR monitoring and so on, and to the digital content created and stored in the course of 3FF's working practices. While others within the literature have created typologies of different kinds of data (e.g. Kitchin 2014), or distinguished between 'datafication' and 'digitisation' (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier 2013), these categories did not make sense in the ethnographic context of 3FF. As the examples explored below will show, data was both highly present within organisational life and also little considered, with systems for navigating it largely emerging ad hoc rather than being consciously designed. As nonspecialists using standard software packages without much technical skill, the lack of attention data received meant that the types tended to blur into one another – and the frustrations this generated was of greater ethnographic interest to me than trying to 'tidy up' this messiness through the imposition of precise categories.

This chapter will also not spend much time addressing the question of 'information', as distinct from 'data' or 'knowledge', first because what constituted information or data within 3FF was highly context-dependent, and second because the shift towards discussing data is relatively recent. The literature from ten years ago tends to talk about 'information management', 'information systems' and the 'information society' (e.g. Lash, 2002; Geoffrey C. Bowker & Star, 1999), when what they are referring to is a *combination* of what would now be called data and information. While the catchall term I am opting for is 'data' since this enables it to connect with contemporary debates, I am using the term with an awareness that 'information' would have been the term of choice until relatively recently.

A final comment to be made is that I am not approaching data as a 'raw' substance, in the way that big data enthusiasts tend to – as "pre-analytical and pre-factual… A sensor has no politics or agenda" (Kitchin, 2014, p. 19; discussing Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013). Like Bowker (2005) and Gitelman and Jackson (2013), I consider data to be always at least partially 'cooked', shaped through complex social and material processes. Data are "more than 'scrapes' of reality – they are part and parcel of that reality and imminent in the human condition" (Boellstorff, 2013), and go on in turn to shape their surroundings: "if data are somehow subject

to us, we are also subject to data" (Gitelman & Jackson, 2013, p. 2). The following sections will show how data practices within 3FF negotiated and reflected current digital cultures.

Data practices 1: digital traces and 'too big data'

Early on in my fieldwork, Esther – my close friend and original link with 3FF – agreed to let me shadow her for a few hours. As the training manager a lot of her work took place outside of the office, but I was particularly interested in seeing some of her desk-based tasks.

> We sat side-by-side at her desk, she focused on her laptop screen, me with my notebook. There was server trouble that day causing problems with the shared drive, so Esther started with jobs using other applications – filing receipts in a series of Dropbox folders she shared with her associate trainers, adding examples to bank of training resources she had put together on Evernote.
>
> She then worked through a series of emails, replying to someone she was mentoring, contacting a student union. After that, a tweet about an upcoming training session, and a quick exchange with the schools' manager sat opposite. They had developed a habit of emailing rather than speaking about non-urgent matters (Esther explained later) so as not to interrupt each other's workflow.
>
> Esther's intern, Olga, and schools' officer Tamanna, wheeled their chairs round to the desk for a meeting about an upcoming visit of teachers from Eastern Europe who were coming to learn about inclusive education. The team were trying to arrange visits to local schools but it was proving hard to make contact during half term. They agreed on a strategy of email introductions, chasing emails and follow-up phone calls. This was made more complicated by the fact that both Esther and Olga were about to go on holiday. Olga offered to call in from abroad but Esther was firm: "I won't be logging on from Turkey, don't log on from India". The meeting broke up and Esther turned back to her laptop.
>
> Next, she opened a Word file with a budget for the Eastern European partnership she had been working on. After trying to add another column in the clunky Word table she switched application, copying the data into Excel and then creating formulae to calculate costs. Although recreating the document from scratch took a bit of time, it was worthwhile "because it's not something I put together I have to put in a form I can understand". She saved it under a new name in "the warren of the s- [shared] drive", then emailed the link to senior management with a short line in the email body about

> *learning from this for future projections. There was a slight pause before she pressed send.*

This unremarkable account of everyday office life contains a range of data practices. To start with the obvious, media technologies such as computers and phones were essential to Esther's work. When she was not bodily interacting with media technologies, she was discussing how to use those technologies effectively. Other forms of communication still took place – Olga and Tamanna wheeled their chairs round to have a face-to-face meeting – but these were interlaced with mediated and digitised communication, as most face-to-face meetings at 3FF resulted in typed notes and actions that involved emails and the creation of documents. Importantly, it's hard to imagine how Esther's job – and perhaps most other jobs in contemporary organisations – would be possible at all without a device that allowed the analogue elements of work to be digitised, and to be circulated in digital form; that is, without a computer. Contemporary organising is not reducible to the digital, but it has to 'pass through' a computerised, digital realm.

The term for this within actor network theory is the *obligatory passage point* (Callon, 1986). Hamilton (2012) defines this as "a node or nexus in the network where there are especially dense connections that can fruitfully be explored to eliminate the workings of power and network development" (2012, pp. 43-44). The term retains a sense of contingency about the power of the passage point, which is not inherent but a result of its position within the network. Discussing the power of mass media institutions, for instance, Couldry (2008) contrasts static and reified ways of characterising their apparent 'centrality' to contemporary societies with that provided by the concept of the obligatory passage point, saying that the latter "avoids functionalism and remains fixed on the materiality of flows" (2008, p. 99). The power of the obligatory passage point is clearest when for some reason it is no longer possible to 'pass through' – when most of the computers in the 3FF office were upgraded substantial planning was needed to ensure that work could continue without them, while on another occasion when the office internet stopped functioning work almost ground to a halt.

A second point to draw from the example above is the heterogeneity of the technologies and platforms Esther used – in line with Hepp's assertion that "any one media technology is itself a 'bundle' of the most varied techniques" (2012, p. 59). In the space of an hour or two, she used email, a social networking site, the 3FF intranet that was current at the time, the cloud-based application Dropbox, as well as her 'personal' versions of Word and Excel installed on her laptop. Each of these elements of the 'bundle' had different affordances; they were able to do different things. Some of them could calculate sums (Excel); some could reach an audience of indeterminate size (Twitter); some allowed others to respond to communications at a

convenient time (email). Here I want to focus on a particularly common kind of digital affordance: the creation of a trace.

Most digital applications and platforms are geared towards saving and storing content – to the extent that applications which encourage erasable content, such as the messaging services Snap Chat and Telegram, are considered remarkable (e.g. Alba, 2012). As the cost of data storage has dropped, and the time required to manage the volumes of data being produced has increased, the result has been an ever-expanding trail of data "with the deletion of old files virtually unnecessary" (Kitchin, 2014, p. 85).

This traceability may not always be desirable, perhaps especially in the context of an interfaith charity. As discussed in Chapter 4, coexistence between multiple worlds often depends on them being held apart – and Chapter 6 outlined the painstaking procedures by which 3FF tried to bring different realities together in constructive rather than destructive ways through carefully staged encounters. Examples in previous chapters of showing how the publicness of digital platforms, such as the Twitter accounts of Parliamentors participants, brought realities together in much more uncontrolled ways that often conflicted with the organisational ethos. Other instances of such concerns raised in previous chapters have included the circulation of selfies taken by students in school linking programme, or the sharing of slides used in training sessions, all of which extended 'the encounter' outside of the facilitated safe space with unpredictable results.

What the examples in this chapter demonstrate is that such concerns were also at play in the 'private' domain of internal organisational practices. The slight pause before Esther sent her email to senior management hints at some of the anxieties created by this constant 'presencing' – the sense of having to take into account not only how an immediate audience might interpret written text (in the absence of bodily cues) but how a potentially unlimited future audience might react as well. Her daily email traffic with the schools' manager also contained attempts to control and erase the trace created by digital written text (rather than ephemeral speech) as they used a particular subject line to denote messages which should be deleted immediately after they were read – a way of trying to maintain privacy given that their interns had access to their work emails.

This default for keeping rather than deleting digital traces is a design choice. Dumbill suggests that an underlying principle behind big data is "when you can, keep everything" (2012, p. 7) – a principle that it became apparent over the course of my fieldwork had become normalised for both organisations and individuals, even though most are unable to benefit from the purported advantages of big data. The contents of the 3FF shared drive, of course, nowhere

near approached the formal definitions of big data provided earlier, such as holdings exceeding a terabyte. However, if we take Jacobs' (2009) definition of "data whose size forces us to look beyond tried-and-true methods [of storage and manipulation] that are prevalent at the time" (2009, p. 44) then they could perhaps be considered 'big' within the context of the organisation, since they exceeded their capacity to handle them. Long before it becomes big data, the outputs of even quite a small organisation become 'too big data'.

'Too big data' as a concept is deliberately emotive: while describing data as 'big' carries a set of positive, progressive connotations, 'too big' tries to capture something about how overwhelming and unmanageable it can feel to be so entangled with data-producing machines. This entanglement of course does not stop at the office door, extending (especially for middle-class and white-collar workers) into the personal worlds of social media, email, messaging applications and so on, making the 'data deluge' a perennial feature of everyday life. 'Too big data' thus pervaded not just the practices of 3FF as an organisation but also the personal lives of 3FFers.

This raises the question of who exactly it is that is benefiting from the widespread experience of "drowning in data" (Zikopoulos et al, 2012). Certainly the solutions proposed by the tech industry invariably involve additional software, which are likely to exacerbate the problem, requiring upkeep and producing yet more data. While of course we might look forward to a time when small non-specialist organisations will be able to crunch their own numbers and perhaps produce novel insights from their data sets, in the meantime data analysis for those outside of the high-tech world is largely dependent on poorly understood and inflexible off-the-shelf analytic tools (Couldry & Powell, 2014, p. 2). The idea of producing or keeping less data in the first place is notable by its absence.

Data practices 2: Time and the handover note

The role of digital documentation within 3FF could be seen most clearly when it was a primary source of knowledge about the organisation's practices for new members of staff. The first eighteen months of my fieldwork saw a very high level of turnover, with twelve staff leaving the organisation, some of whom had no contact at all with their successors. Given the centrality of embodied and tacit ways of knowing and the practice, this raised a problem: how could this be passed on if the bodies of staff did not encounter one another? Handover notes and guidance documents therefore 'stood in' for this lack of physical contact, playing a vital role in ensuring the continuity of organisational memory. In summer 2015 I facilitated a

conversation at a team meeting about handover notes which revealed a number of strategies and ambiguities around these processes.

Good handover notes were generally welcomed and spoken of positively; one person who didn't have any said that "it was really challenging", and that having to glean information from handover notes from others in the team "on reflection wasn't a particular good way to work out what my role was". Handover notes were thought to be most successful at outlining processes and daily activities, and a way of avoiding "annoying people" with simple questions or "having to badger [my manager] all the time". Other documents that helped smooth the transition included old email conversations; archive folders with documents from previous trainings or events; a document I put together on the history of the schools' team; and comments about personalities and relationships stored in spreadsheets, often in hidden columns.

A clear theme that emerged was the role of these kinds of notes and documents for enabling the job to be picked up *at speed*. One person whose predecessor had left comments about how to communicate with other staff noted that "I would have discovered that, like, after a couple of weeks myself, but it kind of got the ball rolling quicker I think"; another said that the extensive notes left for a new member of her team allowed her to "come in and choose the things that she wanted to think about straight away". Personal remarks about a group of volunteers were helpful to one staff member as "having to figure it out would have taken another year to really get to grips with who they were".

However, this collapsing of time was also treated with some caution. When one of the interns said that the personal remarks about the programme participants on a spreadsheet meant that "you don't have to get to know them to find out what they're like", this was met by laughter and joking comments about his aversion to personal contact.[46] Clearly, the idea that a set of written traces could replace the experience-through-time of establishing relationships with participants was seen as at odds with the core work of 3FF, where 'understanding' others was so bound up with physical encounter.

There are strong echoes here of Barassi's work on 'internet time' (2015a, 2015b), which she characterises as based on a temporal context of 'immediacy'. She draws first on Tomlinson (2007), who understood 'immediacy' as built on notions of instantaneous contact and immediate fulfilment; and secondly on Hassan (2007) who argues that the Internet provides

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[46] This echoes Geertz, who in the 1970s was already unimpressed with claims that "computer engineering, or some other advanced form of thought is going to enable us to understand men without knowing them" (1973, p. 30).

the perception of connecting with distant events and people in 'real time', creating "the shared impression that we live in a continuous present, a *hyper now*, where past and future are subservient to the logic of the present" (Barassi, 2015b, p. 78).

While Barassi is concerned with social media and its use within political activism, she sees this as fundamentally rooted in the political and economic realities of contemporary capitalism, such as the shift from working routines "dictated by 'clock-time' like in the factory" to "a self-regulating flexibility and… the deconstruction of the boundary between labour-time and leisure time" - a shift "made possible by the increased pervasiveness of internet technologies in our lives" (2015b, p. 76). As she found in her fieldwork with activists across Europe, the pressure to reproduce immediacy through replying to emails as fast as possible, and constantly posting and commenting on social media, was a pervasive feature of activist practice, and a source of considerable anguish when people failed to keep up (2015a, p. 109).

3FF had many differences, but working practices there were also shaped by the pervasiveness of digital technologies and the neoliberal capitalist context. As we saw with the example of Esther earlier, the fact that it was *possible* to make contact while on holiday in India or Turkey created a new fault line for managing the boundaries between labour time and leisure time – perhaps especially within the third sector and other kinds of 'conviction' work where there is a strong alignment of personal values and ideals (as she said during this discussion, "this is the problem with charities, we're all so passionate about our work we want to do it on holiday"). These themes will recur in the thesis conclusion as characteristic of the 'passion' for work demanded in neoliberal workplaces (Couldry, 2008).

Capitalist temporalities played out in the discussion on handover notes in a number of ways. First, the very rapid turnover of staff which made these processes so important itself reflects shifts away from long-term working commitments and jobs for life towards short-term contract and portfolio working, which are characteristic of contemporary capitalism (Overell, Mills, Roberts, Lekhi, & Blaug, 2010). Second, this turnover exposed some of the tensions between immediacy and the building up of expertise through experience, in which digital documentation was often relied upon to 'stand-in' for or sometimes even replace learning-through-time, and to enable new workers to "get the ball rolling" and establish themselves in their roles "straight away". This constructed the process of learning organisational roles as informational, sidelining the importance of emotional sensitivity and the kinds of attunement that could only come through embodied experience.

Third, there was a tendency for people to talk about digital production in a way that erased the labour required. In the handover notes discussion, one of the senior managers recommended

that people write "as you're going through processes" creating "a live document you're working on rather than waiting till you've handed in your notice". This seemed to present the constant production of 'live' instructions as something that would not require significant investments of time for already overstretched delivery teams.

As with the principle of 'keep everything', we can see these features of organisational practice as containing the echoes of the rhetoric around big data, which at their most hyperbolic attribute it the power to replace experience and expertise altogether:

> *"[E]xpertise is like exactitude: appropriate for a small data world where one never has enough information or the right information, and thus has to rely on intuition and experience"* (Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013, pp. 142–3).

> *"[T]hroughout the business world today, people rely too much on experience and intuition and not enough on data"* (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2012).

Quite aside from the overblown status being given to data in these quotes, they also serve to erase where the locus of expertise and experience has shifted to – towards the years of training required to analyse and interact with data effectively (Manyika et al., 2011, p. 10). Again, we might ask who is benefiting from the depiction of data management as something which should be done with ease by anybody, rather than something which requires expensive equipment and extensive training. While this erasure is more obvious in relation to white-collar work, Downey (2014) notes that it is a long-standing feature of narratives of communication technologies to ignore the human labour necessary to keep them functioning. The army of Telegraph Messenger Boys who were intrinsic to the telegram network, for example, was long seen as "unworthy of attention and unable to tarnish the reputation of the 'lightning lines'" (2014, p. 149), both by historians and the firms themselves.

With immediacy we not only lose time and labour, but also the indeterminacy of development-through-time. Within academia, debates about 'audit culture' within the university sector (e.g. Back, 2014; Strathern, 2000) have criticised the presumption that knowledge production – and learning – can be reduced to predetermined outputs. The reduction of learning to the transfer of information was particularly jarring in the context of 3FF, where the pedagogy of their encounter-based approach relied on interactions between participants which could not be known before the event. In addition, time was seen as essential for the core work of building relationships – as one staff member commented, "we live in an era of instant everything, but you can't manufacture instant trust". The importance of time for producing genuine insight, and the difficulties of resisting pressures towards immediacy, will be addressed in the discussion of the evaluation framework below.

Data practices 3: rationalising the warren

"The warren of the s-drive", as Esther described it, was a central organising platform for 3FF's work. When I first arrived the shared drive was hosted on an office intranet, and only accessible out of the office by calling up the provider in advance and asking for an access code, of which a maximum of two could be released on any one day. Many of the teams had worked around this by using alternative applications, such as Google Docs, sometimes resulting in significant confusion and data loss. Part way through my fieldwork 3FF shifted onto the cloud-based Microsoft Office 365 system, which now allowed remote access to editable documents.

While the new system was generally welcomed as an improvement, it also generated novel problems. All of the embedded links to documents created on the intranet no longer worked, and in addition, a large amount of metadata had been lost in the transfer, as all documents on the system at that point now said they had been created by Andrew (the communications manager who oversaw the IT change) in January 2015. Where these documents did not contain names or dates to indicate their provenance, or were not placed in folders that provided some clues, it could sometimes be extremely difficult to work out if they were recent additions or a number of years old, and hard to assess their relevance. The collapsing of time and "the past [which] appears to be permanently accessible" (Hand, 2014, p. 28) here could become an impediment to meaningful knowledge, as the lack of context made it hard to see how the documents related to one another and which ones should be taken into account at any time.

My own adventures within the shared drive largely took place through my work on monitoring and evaluation support with the different teams. This incident occurred when I was helping the schools' team:

> *I spent a day in the office putting together a document to track evaluation data from the schools' programme over a number of years. As the feedback forms had changed several times, the first thing I had to do was map out the equivalent questions, and trawling the shared drive for the relevant files took some time. The folder names were confusing – should I be looking in the one called 'old evaluation forms' or 'evaluation forms previous', sitting next to each other in the folder labelled 'Archive'? I found a guidance document showing the data flow over the school year with embedded links to all of the evaluation forms at the time, but none of these worked on the new IT system. The data were all in Excel spreadsheets but in a wide variety of formats, some using*

> *functions I didn't know how to work around or undo; in the end, I had to calculate some*
> *of the numbers on paper by hand.*

This incident highlights the importance of classifying and labelling data. Despite the common use of the word 'archive' to label old documents within the shared drive, they are more accurately described as 'data holdings'. "Archives are formal collections of data that are actively structured, curated and documented, [and] are accompanied by appropriate metadata" (Kitchin, 2014, p. 30) whereas "a data holding is an informal collection of data… [which] maybe organised and tended, but largely without rigour " (ibid, p. 31).

Turning an organisational data holding into an archive may be desirable, yet practically impossible. In fact, the data holding contained the traces of many previous attempts to categorise the documents piling up into useful groupings, but attempts to reorganise documents tended to sit *alongside* alternatives rather than replace them ('old evaluation forms', 'evaluation forms previous'). And in addition, creating a single overarching way of creating categories, or a single overarching way of laying out spreadsheets, could in itself distort aspects of organisational practice. Here is another example from the evaluation work, this time involving Ruth, who ran the internship programme:

> *Ruth looked back through the reports she had written for the trustees, searching for*
> *the ones for the financial year 2014-15. She had labelled them by calendar year, but as*
> *the financial year cut across from April to the following March some of the files were*
> *irrelevant, and others were missing. Maybe it would be better to re-categorise them?*
> *She started renaming the files from '2014' to '2014-15', then stopped herself. "The*
> *more I play with it, the more broken it's going to be."*

Both these examples – Ruth looking up trustee reports, my investigations of the schools' data – demonstrate the importance of *circulation*. There was nothing about data generation that would automatically result in knowledge; without opportunities to pick up and re-purpose it into living knowledge, it simply languished as dead data in the warren of the shared drive. These opportunities were sometimes missed because of time pressures, but they were also missed because of the multiplicity of platforms and systems which coexist within computers. On more than one occasion, evaluation data was rendered inaccessible because of a lost login to programmes such as Survey Monkey, again exacerbated by the turnover of staff.

One response to this problem of multiplicity is to attempt to bring all of the information together into a *single* system of ordering and classification. This is a long-standing project within Euro-American thought (Bowker, 2014) and coloniality (Mignolo, 2011) and indeed the foundation of cybernetics was part of this quest for a "new universal discipline [that] could

subsume others", with the computer imagined as "a new technology that spanned all of knowledge" (Bowker, 2005, p. 84). Again, the hyperbole around big data carries echoes of this, such as when Anderson (2008) suggests we can do away "with every theory of human behaviour, from linguistics to sociology" since data and applied maths can "replace every tool".

Yet even within the micro-example of classifying documents on the shared drive by time it was impossible to create a single system. At 3FF, there were three overlapping 'years': the standard calendar year from January to December, the financial year running from April to March which determined when the programmes had to produce annual reports, and the academic year running from September to August which regulated the schools and mentoring programmes. Providing some kind of timeframe for documents certainly helped to navigate among them, but then which timeframe? There was no way to choose once and for all one kind of 'year', and to impose it on the others, since all three existed and were relevant in their own context. In addition, renaming documents altered their relationship with others (e.g. making embedded links elsewhere useless) and sometimes had the effect of making the whole system "more broken".

Similarly, a number of examples here have shown that because there was no single way to achieve a task or do a job, it could not be reduced to a single set of instructions, a single 'rational' way of working. My own struggles with the schools' data were similar to Esther's comment as she reformatted a document from Word to Excel when I was shadowing her: *"because it's not something I put together I have to put in a form I can understand"*. There was nothing 'irrational' about the previous document she was looking at, and yet it was only by reshaping its contents that the knowledge it contained became apparent to her.

These dynamics can be understood as a consequence of the multifunctionality of computers. Lister et al. (2008), discussing Simondon (1958, 2007) talk about the "inactualised capacities [which] are the *real virtualities* of the machine" (Lister et al., 2008, p. 390) – that is, that multifunctional machines are always doing less than they could be doing at any one time, making "the actual… an abstraction from the virtual" (ibid). This creates a kind of complexity that goes in the opposite direction to the ideal of a single system that can draw together all forms of knowledge. On the one hand, as almost all of organisational life has to take some kind of digital form it does become part of a 'single language' of binary code. On the other, precisely because computers are multifunctional we see a proliferation of platforms and programmes, leading to new kinds of differentiation, and new difficulties as these systems struggle to 'talk' to one another. This is particularly the case as few are especially skilled at using the applications we tend to interact with, leaving considerable hinterlands of 'inactualised

capacities' which may then interfere in unpredictable ways, such as the Excel functions I could not undo.

This argument, like the one made in Chapter 4, is therefore about living with difference. It highlights that even within the apparently singular rational context of computer work multiplicity will always exist, just as within the apparently singular context of biomedical treatments of atherosclerosis there are myriad differences. Returning to Mol (2003), she remarks with regards to rationalisation within health care that "there are so many *rationalities*, in practice, in the plural, mixing with one another" (2003, p. 164) that not only is it impossible to override them with a single mode of ordering, but that attempting to do so may be actively harmful. Instead, she proposes that multiple systems and ways of knowing should be more clearly acknowledged and given space to coexist.

In the thesis conclusion I will return to this tendency to flatten differences and assert universality as a key component of the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), and suggest some decolonial options for bringing worlds and practices together on a different basis. Among these options will be the development of sustainable media practices which push back against the dominant principles embedded within the most commonly used digital tools. My approach the organisation's evaluation framework involved some preliminary experimentation of this kind, as the final section of this chapter describes.

Assembling knowledge

As outlined in the methodology chapter, my role within 3FF evolved over time into one primarily focused on providing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) support. Formal M&E within organisations as a means of assessing the impact of interventions dates back to the 1940s, becoming a part of mainstream welfare and social programs in the 1960s and '70s (Squirrel, 2012, p. xi). Its development from broadly positivistic methods of comparing control and experimental groups, to more constructivist approaches in the 1980s, and into managerial performance-related measures in the 1990s and 2000's (ibid, pp. xi-xiii) mirrors developments within the social sciences more generally.

As with other kinds of research in the current climate, there is a widespread sense that time pressure and resource constraints tend to impede the quality of the knowledge produced (Bamberger, Rugh, & Maybry, 2013). While undoubtedly connected to wider transformations in neoliberal culture, it is worth noting that such concerns in relation to monitoring and evaluation are long-standing, with Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1978) already complaining that good research design was undervalued and that "evaluation often occurs as an afterthought"

(1978, p. 13). The association of monitoring with managerialism often leads to negative perceptions and the sense of being policed – Walker et al. (2000) quote a community worker saying "[t]he history of evaluation is one of fear" (2000, p. 8). Efforts to resist such top-down processes have led to the development of participatory monitoring and evaluation, drawing on many of the principles of action research (Estrella, 2000).

There is, as yet, little academic research on the role of *software* in organisational monitoring and evaluation and audit processes. The literature which exists is principally directed at practitioners (e.g. Ellis, 2013; Sanfilippo, 2009) and takes digitisation for granted rather than addressing it as a specific element of evaluation. However, in line with other aspects of audit culture we would expect the widespread use of computers to be bound up with, and to some extent further, the use of metrics to assess the value of work (see Back, 2014). Certainly the marketing for monitoring and evaluation software tools can be found explicitly linking digitisation with reaching instrumental goals – mandeonline.com, for example, claiming that "*there is a need for automation* to attract Big Donors" (M&E online, 2016 my emphasis).

Tensions between the organisation's core work and the demands made in terms of monitoring and evaluation were often palpable. As discussed in Chapter 6, 'success' at 3FF was often difficult to articulate could not necessarily be explicitly named or consciously identified by participants, since it largely took tacit forms such as 'open atmospheres' or 'feelings of trust'. Procedures such as asking students to fill in feedback forms after workshops were understood as reductive, and often disconnected from the embodied cues that facilitators relied upon as indicators of good or less good encounters.

At the same time, not only did the organisation need to make success visible and speakable for outside funders or supporters, there was also a strong internal need to find ways of articulating the strengths and weaknesses of the different programmes in order to facilitate organisational learning – as Chapter 8 will show, a failure to 'count' through high-quality evaluation could be as problematic as too much metrication. This part of my fieldwork therefore involved navigating a number of complex issues including the concerns about 'impact' outlined in Chapter 2, the difficulties of speaking of embodied knowledge discussed in the previous chapter, and the issues relating to data practices raised here.

Over my first year with 3FF, the M&E support was somewhat ad hoc, but from the summer of 2014 I was tasked with developing a new cross-organisational framework for evaluation. 3FF's programmes had largely developed in response to opportunities, and, to quote the report I produced in March 2015:

"as these programmes developed quite independently of one another, with different funders and audiences, many of the staff felt there was a lack of cohesiveness within the organisation and a lack of clarity over how the programmes fit together… Evaluation until now has been focused on whether the teams are delivering individual programme aims; this report is a first attempt to look at that data in order to evaluate how well 3FF is meeting its organisational aims."

The desire for an overarching framework for knowledge chimes with ideas of a 'single rational system' or universal language we saw from within the origins of cybernetics. Yet even as I was tasked with producing the single framework, other attempts were also ongoing. When I arrived, Esther had been developing a set of measures called the Standard 7 that were intended to perform a similar integrative function, and over this period senior management began working with consultants to develop a strategy impact map with similar aims. Having come up with five indicators myself independently of either of these processes (based on the team strategy documents), I ended up discarding my version and deferring to the indicators on the map produced by senior management. Even at this point, multiple knowledge systems were sitting alongside and interfering with one another.
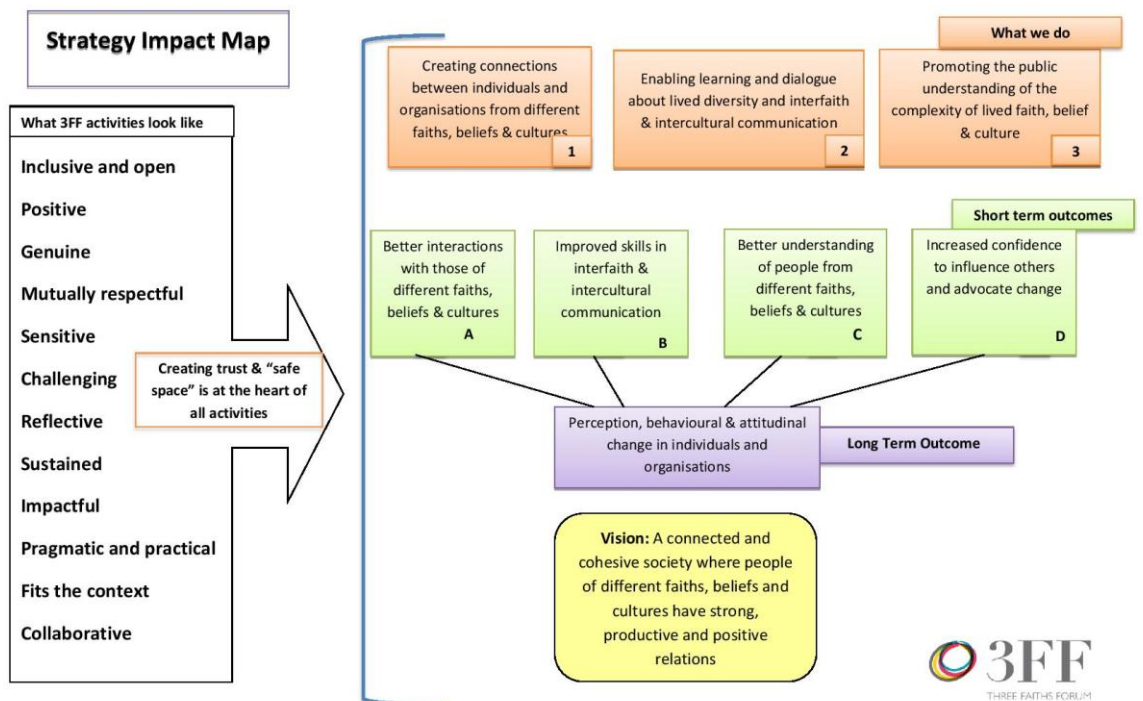
Image 8: the 3FF Strategy Impact Map. The five indicators which become the basis for cross organisational evaluation by delivery teams are the short-term outcomes (A-D), plus 'trust and safe space' on the left-hand side of the diagram.

The process for the 2014-15 report began with a data audit – the identification and retrieval of relevant files. This was followed by coding, as I worked my way through the available data and tried to work out what was relevant to each of the five measures. The next stage was analysis – a meeting with each of the teams, lasting a couple of hours, in which we looked at the data I had assembled, talked about their relevance and identified gaps. Finally, this was re-presented and summarised in a 15,000-word report which the teams were able to read, comment on, and use to plan the next cycle of activity. With some changes, this process was repeated in the final year of my fieldwork, culminating in a second 15,000-word report in March 2016. This work was informed by the thinking presented in this chapter, and can be seen as building resistance to big data principles identified, and attempting to integrate embodied and tacit knowledges into the framework to some degree. The following sections outline my alternative principles: instead of 'keep everything', 'immediacy' and the 'single rational system', I proposed 'keep what matters', 'timeliness', and 'multiple rationalities'.

Keep what matters

In the 2015 report I took a maximal approach to the data, trying to assemble as much evidence as possible. This involved redefining some of the organisation's data holdings collected for other purposes as potential sources of evaluation. The social action reports produced by those on the mentoring programme, for example, had never been used for this purpose before although some contained very rich reflections on the programme's impact. However, handling and analysing these qualitative reflections was extremely time-consuming, especially as evidence of the different indicators had to be disentangled from one another.

Rather than trying to draw together as much data as possible, the 2016 report took a more targeted approach: 'keep what matters' involved placing limits around the data and designing elements *out* of the cycle. The paper workshop evaluation forms, for example, had two open questions at the end asking students what they enjoyed about the session, and what would have made it better. As these comments had largely contained the same content over many years, the team and I agreed that it was no longer necessary to spend time typing them up. Instead someone would flick through them, recording a handful and ignoring the rest.

(Although the paper sheets were not thrown away, the assumption was that they would never be looked at again.) This both reduced the burden of digitisation and cut out a potential source of evaluation data for the whole organisation that in practice had not been contributing to the overall picture in a meaningful way.

Feedback from the teams was positive about this more limited approach – as Tara put it, "we needed someone to say it's fine to draw a line under that", allowing delivery teams to focus on gathering *enough* data rather than as much data as possible. Situating data collection within a wider cycle of analysis and knowledge production also underlined this. Tara again, referring to the school's work, pointed out that while of course they could be collecting data for a dozen researchers, this would have been pointless without having external people able to spend the time on analysis as "what would get done with it?"

The design of the evaluation framework sought to resist the assumption that data collection is some kind of good in itself, rather than meaningful only if it would be looked at, considered and taken up again at a later point. Data collection and analysis were thus understood as embodied, material practices requiring labour and time to become knowledge, rather than instantaneously constituting knowledge by themselves. Embedding the principle of 'keep what matters' attempted to reduce some of the overwhelm associated with 'too big data', allowing the teams to "draw a line" at the point at which data was 'big enough'.

Timeliness

Questions of time and immediacy were a constant source of tension within the framework design. Early on in providing M&E support, I realised that the changes would have to take place in a piecemeal fashion: as delivery was always ongoing, and my own time as much as anyone else's had its limits, evaluation would never be able to be overhauled in one go. However many meetings we scheduled we were always overtaken by events, with teams continuing to use badly designed forms, or failing to deliver evaluation at all, in the rush to deliver. The school linking programme beginning in autumn 2015 was the first time that a complete evaluation process and content had been created *before* a programme was already underway. This was after several months of working closely with the programme officer, and two years after my first conversations with those delivering linking.
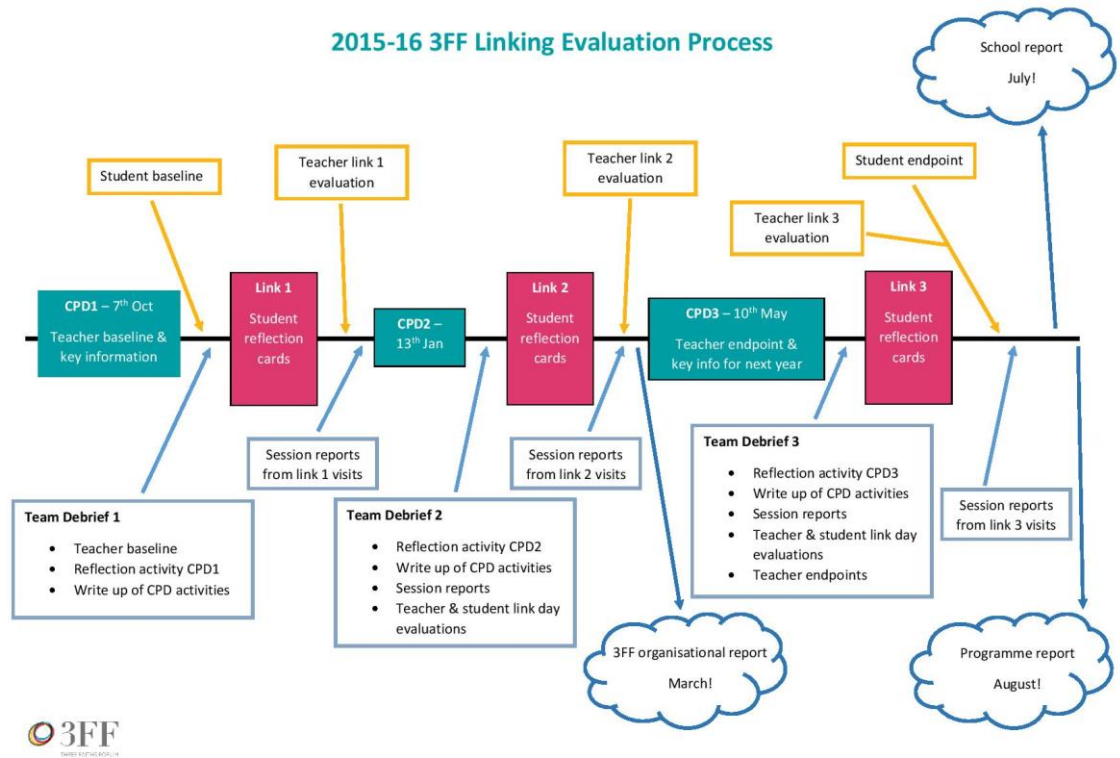
2015-16 3FF Linking Evaluation Process

Image 9: the school linking evaluation cycle. The timeline in the middle shows the major milestones across the year (three Continuing Professional Development training sessions with the teachers, three link days with students) while the boxes above the line show evaluation expected from teachers and the boxes below the line show the inputs from 3FF. The cloud shapes show the outputs – individual reports for each link at the end of the school year, plus 3FF's internal reports in March (organisational) and August (for the programme).

Mapping out the evaluation cycle for each programme was intended to enable more efficient ways of identifying the data that was needed for each stage of reporting. Similarly, ensuring that the content of the evaluation was more clearly aligned with the five indicators made it easier to pull together the relevant data for the 2016 report compared to the 2015 one. The Parliamentor social action project write-ups and team debrief forms, for example, were redesigned to include specific sections for the relevant indicators.

This part of the framework was informed by concerns about the burden on overstretched teams, trying to eliminate redundancy to ensure that I was not contributing to unreasonable workloads. In this sense, it could be seen as in line with ideas of 'immediacy', trying to find ways to access and assemble data in as little time as possible. Yet this was only one side of the process; producing knowledge and learning once the data had been coded and assembled was also understood as inherently requiring time and contemplation. It was by spending time with

each data-stream for the 2015 report, fleshing out the codes in an iterative fashion, that I came to notice patterns across the organisation's variety of outputs.

Additionally, the form of the two hours spent discussing with each team was much more of a free-flowing conversation than an agenda-led meeting. This allowed new areas of thinking to open up, gaps in the data to be identified, and the unwritten and unrecorded understandings of the teams to be accessed. For the 2016 report, the conversation was the centrepiece of the process and something I felt more confident to insist upon the teams making time for, even though it coincided with a busy delivery period. Although this was not how I understood it at the time, having subsequently recognised the importance of embodied and tacit knowledges within the organisation's practice, I could reinterpret these conversations as accessing and eliciting the embodied understanding of the work held by the teams. This then facilitated the sharing of embodied knowledge between staff members who did not physically share spaces with one another and participants, either because they were in the organisation at different times, or because they worked on different programmes.

This combination of speed (in accessing and assembling data) and carving out space for a slower pace of thinking is what I am terming 'timeliness'. Early on in my fieldwork I realised that the principal value I was contributing to the teams was enabling them to create thinking space (as one person put it, discussions with me were "when they [got] to talk in detail"). However strong the push towards short-circuiting knowledge production, and whatever the promises of speed of contemporary media technologies, real learning required space for contemplation and conversation.

Multiple rationalities

Finally, the evaluation framework tried to resist the more reductive approaches that I have been calling the desire for a 'single rational system'. Although the cross organisational indicators did allow for a kind of translation across very different kinds of activities, the process of writing the March 2015 report highlighted the incommensurability of the many things 3FF engaged in. A one-off school workshop could not be assessed in the same terms as the intense in-house experience of the internship programme, for example. One suggestion for the 2015 report was that each of the teams could be rated on each indicator, either by a number or on a scale ('could do better', 'good', 'excellent'). Yet not all the indicators were primary for every piece of work; some departments (arts and culture, training) were looking at six or seven separate strands of activity while others were looking at a single multifaceted programme

(linking, Parliamentors). In general, there were too many differences within the work to make this reduction to a number very meaningful, and at worst it could have been actively harmful by fostering a competitive atmosphere between staff.

The compromise I reached for the 2015 report (and replicated in 2016) was to present the data for each programme, broken down by indicator, with a short discussion about 'what went well' and 'even better if'. While this was necessarily brief, it at least allowed all of the data to be given some context, and therefore for the multiple rationalities of the different strands of work to be retained, and to provide a degree of comparability while not introducing inappropriate metrics. This also ensured that more critical feedback was always discussed, and weaknesses and areas for improvement explored even where the evaluation data was overwhelmingly positive. Another dimension of acknowledging multiple rationalities was to retain awareness of the differences between the uses that the data would be put to – that the needs of funding applications and marketing materials were quite different to those of internal organisational learning which enabled staff to cultivate bodily sensitivities, and that the latter should not be subsumed beneath the logics of the former two.

The desire for a software solution was raised at times, and at one point I was asked to investigate M&E software options for the organisation, although in fact this was not pursued. This avoided a potentially compromising situation in which I could have been asked to advocate for software which I suspected would exacerbate the reductiveness of the outputs. Questions from senior management such as "can we get to a point where we can input the data and it [the computerised system] will spit out an answer?" implied bringing in yet another not very well understood software package to add to the myriad that were already in play across the organisation. In my time at 3FF, I hoped to avoid this tendency impeding meaningful knowledge production by emphasising the fact that the real value of the process lay in the conversations which took place around the data, rather than decontextualised numbers – and by asserting that multiple forms of knowledge should be enabled to coexist, within the organisation's data practices as much is in its work with participants.

Postscript

The bulk of this chapter was written in the autumn of 2015, and updated after I wrote the second cross-organisational report the following spring. The narrative presented here is a true account, but a partial one. In particular, it omits the impact of changes in personnel between the first and second reports, with the director being replaced and the deputy director going on maternity leave. At the time of the second report, those in senior management roles in the

organisation had neither commissioned the process nor seemed to value it. As I was leaving, a new system for creating Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was being investigated which covered very similar ground to my own, with almost no reference to the work I had been undertaking with teams over the previous two years. While the monitoring and evaluation procedures developed with the different teams I believe have continued at the programme level, the organisational analysis did not survive my exit from 3FF.

Somewhat ironically, the reports I produced are now themselves 'dead data' on the shared drive, unlikely to have continued life through circulation. The fact that the organisation did not continue with the specific process I developed is not particularly significant. As the next chapter will highlight, there were limitations to the monitoring and evaluation work as I conceived it at the time – in hindsight, I can see how it failed to address systemic blindspots or imbalances of power, and was often too narrow in the questions asked or the stakeholders it involved. Partly out of concern for overstretched delivery teams, I largely worked within the parameters of the existing evaluation, and did not take more radical steps to rethink the overall terms of what data was being collected and from whom.

However, the thinking behind the evaluation framework and the spirit I attempted to embed within it did have some merit: by centring the process around conversations which critically interrogated the data, emphasised less positive feedback and imaginatively explored areas for improvement, there was at least an attempt to use evaluation as a means of making the organisation accountable to its participants. In contrast, the proposed system of KPIs as I was leaving was primarily intended to produce knowledge for funders and trustees, reinforcing an approach to evaluation as a mechanism for managerial control rather than as a tool for critical organisational learning.

These reflections might help us link these data practices back to the non-modern epistemology outlined in Chapter 3, which highlighted the embodied and nonconscious dimensions of all forms of knowledge production. Even the most rationalising practices (such as asking participants to fill in feedback forms) can be animated by different 'spirits' – whether they further a reductive managerial approach or help to address inequalities will depend on how they circulate, the uses to which they are put, and the attitude with which they are approached. In line with my non-secular approach to technology which highlights the affective, mythical and symbolic dimensions of our relationships with them, this suggests that a degree of emotional engagement is required to transform 'dead data' into 'living knowledge'. Unlike the myths peddled by 'data fundamentalists' (Crawford, 2013), data can not only not speak for themselves, but require attention and care if they are to be able to speak to us and answer genuine questions through which we might become accountable to others.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined 3FF's internal organisational practices, focusing on the production of data and its transformation into knowledge. A range of examples have been drawn upon, including the production of handover notes, the categorisation of data holdings within the shared drive, and the everyday struggles to navigate the volume of data produced even within a relatively small organisation. Throughout, principles related to big data have been argued to be embedded within the structure and affordances of the media technologies we have available, for example, in their default setting to 'keep everything'. The cross-organisational monitoring and evaluation system I developed has been presented as a potential way that forms of resistance to these principles might be built into organisational practices.

Much of the thinking presented here could be applicable to many other organisations in the third sector and beyond. What the particular setting of 3FF highlighted perhaps more starkly than in other contexts were the deep and mounting tensions between ubiquitous and normalised data practices and their core work with participants, given that their pedagogy was so heavily focused on forms of tacit and implicit forms of embodied knowledge. My monitoring and evaluation system could be seen as an experiment in reconciling these different ways of knowing, but deeper thinking which more fully engages with the coloniality of current media practices and their implications for nonconscious ways of knowing is presented in the thesis conclusion.

The construction of this text has had a confusingly reflexive dimension. In Chapter 2, it was argued that the traditional ethnographic distinction between the 'field' and the 'desk' is inherently challenged when the field *is itself* a desk. This is particularly acute when the objects of study are the media technologies which take pride of place on the desks of both the researcher and the researched. As media scholars have noted, there is no 'outside' position from which to analyse these technologies (Hepp, 2012). We are always implicated within them, and in fact have a particularly intense relationship with them as white-collar workers on the 'right side' of the digital divide. It therefore seems fitting to conclude this chapter with some auto-ethnographic reflections on the process of trying to produce knowledge about the production of knowledge, about data, about software and digital traces – all of which were essential to the assembly of this text.

One of the challenges of producing this chapter was that it involved denaturalising parts of the taken for granted digital environment of which I am a 'native'. Understanding 'keep everything' as a specific design choice, rather than a taken for granted feature of computers, was an

insight which took many weeks to emerge, since it involved calling into question aspects of my daily lived experience such as the ever-expanding inbox in my Gmail account. On the other hand, some aspects of the materiality of digital culture have been apparent to me from my situated and embodied position as a long-standing sufferer of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), who has needed a particularly elaborate apparatus to digitise this text, including a headset, voice recognition software and private space. The fact that breakdowns in this apparatus significantly impeded my ability to *think* drew attention to the interplay of cognition and technology as I produced this thesis, in ways that would perhaps not have been so obvious to the able-bodied.

A final reflection: throughout this chapter, I have tried to capture some of the sense of stress and anxiety that pervades contemporary organisational life. (While there were circumstances specific to 3FF, this has also been the case in all of my own previous working experiences, and those of most of my peers.) These anxieties have a number of causes, but among them is our entanglement with, and dependence on, machines that we barely understand, which are capable of doing so much more than we know how to utilise, and in relation to which we are often actively deskilled. Rejecting the nature/culture divide is to reject the idea that we will either find our liberation through a crude techno-utopianism, or by throwing off the machines altogether (see Haraway, 1988). Instead, it means conceiving of a world "in which our very ability to become free depends on our ability to design it into our technologies" (Kelty, 2014, p. 218).

I would add to Kelty that while this is certainly about software and hardware, whose current direction of travel is primarily in the direction of being less malleable, fixable and comprehensible (Jackson, 2014), it is also about practices and media imaginaries – how we think about data, how we value labour, what we keep, delete, care for and love. Vis (2013) writes that big data mythology acts to obscure the limitations of current arrangements of data storage and structures, shutting down imaginative possibilities about how they might be otherwise. This chapter has been an exercise in trying to bring some of these limitations into view, and imagining new ways of rendering data into knowledge within the contemporary media environment.

Chapter 8

Counting and Accountability: the metrics and fluids of equality

A persistent theme of this thesis has been the relationship between spoken, explicit and codifiable ways of knowing and unspoken, tacit and embodied knowledges. This chapter highlights some of the absences and difficulties in the organisation's work with participants, as well as its internal culture. These different aspects of organisational practice are argued here to be equivalent to Law and Mol's (1998) metaphor of 'metrics' and 'fluids' – terms they used to refer to the division between *"metrication and narration on the one hand and that which cannot be counted or told on the other"* (1998, p. 22 original emphasis). While 'metrics' and 'fluids' form a refrain through this chapter, my argument extends Law and Mol's by considering the interrelationships and tensions between these elements, and what happens when there are disagreements concerning what should or should not be spoken.

The analysis is centred on a single example: 3FF's interfaith choir, the Mixed Up Chorus, which for the duration of its life within the organisation had an almost entirely white membership. This was perceived as problematic by many people both within and outside the organisation, particularly people of colour, but never addressed.[47] This chapter uses the organisation's failure to be accountable for addressing the racial homogeneity of the choir as a way of exploring the potential pitfalls of its approach. Early sections explore different avoidance tactics deployed. One was to deny that counting the membership in such terms was a relevant metric; another was to frame the success of the choir in terms of the enjoyment of the membership, positioning those who spoke of its limitations as "killjoys' (Ahmed, 2012); and a third tactic involved fostering a lack of clarity over how the choir was meant to effect change, making it hard to demonstrate why racial diversity was a necessary part of the practice. In each case, a failure to narrate or count enabled a problematic programme to persist and those with power to evade responsibility for it.

The chapter then returns to the idea of non-secular knowledge as outlined in Chapter 6, *The Spirit of Encounter*. If validating implicit, unspoken and uncodifiable forms of knowledge, and

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[47] As will be discussed later, a wide variety of people could be considered to have had some level of power in relation to the choir, including myself, other choir members, the whole arts and culture team, and the trustees. However, from my observations it appeared that those in a small number of roles – director, deputy director, arts and culture manager and choir conductor, which were filled by six different people over the relevant period – had the most power to rectify the problem, and were the biggest blockage to others wishing to do so. When I refer later to 'those with the power to change the situation' or 'senior management and those running the choir' I primarily mean those in the four roles specified here.

finding ways to include them within our academic work, is a crucial part of challenging the secular premises of the Academy, how can this critique avoid being simply another 'reveal' of hidden power relations that are being masked through the emphasis on embodied and emotional learning? To address this, the problematic character of the choir's racial homogeneity is revisited, this time not as a question of 'metrics' – a matter of counting and revealing in explicit terms – but as involving 'fluids', that is, the embodied knowledges of oppression and marginalisation inhabited by black and people of colour. My relationship to the choir as a white person and as a member for the first four terms is then discussed as an example of how conscious awareness was not sufficient for me to move into active allyship – rather it required an emotional alignment in which I became attuned to and responsive to the tacit knowledges held by those with differing embodied standpoints.

The chapter then analyses the failure to be responsive to these embodied standpoints as a form of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) or epistemic exclusion (Dotson, 2014), in which more powerful people within 3FF demonstrated "meta-blindness" (Medina, 2011, p. 28), being unable to recognise the limits of their own knowledge. My additional culpability in this as someone with a degree of influence over the monitoring and evaluation system is acknowledged, and some alternative principles for evaluation suggested which might have enabled this meta-blindness to be corrected.

The argument ends by considering the question of power and marginality, querying what marginality means in the context of interfaith work where a wide variety of groups might claim a degree of outsider status. I emphasise the importance of articulating tacit, embodied and spiritual knowledges with forms of 'macro' knowledge production such as statistics on structural disadvantage, suggesting that the non-modern epistemology outlined in the theoretical framework might enable these to be connected. Finally, I relate the material in this chapter to my personal politics, and how my journey towards developing the knowledge to become accountable might itself be considered a kind of spiritual and decolonial practice.

Introducing the choir

My relationship with the Mixed Up Chorus began just as I was starting my fieldwork in October 2013, which coincided with the choir being founded. Having a background in classical music and looking for opportunities to participate in 3FF's programmes, I became a member of the choir for the first four terms. This involved attending weekly rehearsals in 3FF's training room and participating in public performances, including singing in Euston station to raise money for the organisation, and performing at an awards ceremony for MPs. The discussion in this

chapter is primarily based upon my experiences during this time, although it continued to be run in-house until summer 2017.[48]

The Mixed Up Chorus was popular and very large for a community choir, starting with around forty members and growing to over seventy in its first year, a size it maintained for the duration of its time within 3FF. As the name suggests, the concept was for the membership to be 'mixed up', and this was emphasised in choir materials – for example, blogs on the 3FF website about the choir often referred to it as "uniting people from different faiths and backgrounds" (e.g. 3FF, 2016). However, for many people encountering the choir the membership appeared remarkably undiverse. Throughout its time within 3FF, there were no more than three or four members at a time who were not white-presenting, and at many rehearsals and performances only a single person of colour participated – or none at all.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the relationship between constructions of the categories of 'race' and 'faith' are highly complex and shifting terrain. While some of this will be explored later, the central focus of this chapter is how accountability for addressing the whiteness of the choir was avoided. Regardless of whether people were 'correct' to take issue with its racial homogeneity, the fact was that a great many people, both within the organisation and amongst audiences who saw the Mixed Up Chorus perform, *did* find it deeply problematic to be presented with a "sea of whiteness" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 35) in an interfaith choir – especially one that claimed to be 'diverse'. This point of view was being fed back consistently to senior management and the team running it over the years it was part of 3FF, yet at no point was any meaningful action taken to address it.

The first half of this chapter explores a series of avoidance tactics – the means by which those with the power to change the situation justified their continuing inaction. The vision for what the choir was meant to achieve was generally vague but promotional materials frequently made reference to the claim that "if we sing next to each other we'll live well next to each other" (e.g. 3FF, 2013, 2016). This claim raises a number of questions in relation to knowledge. Who is the 'we' who needs to be singing 'next to each other' and therefore what aspects of identities might need to be recorded? How can 'living well next to each other' be known? And what is the relationship between 'singing' and 'living well' and how might we know if one is resulting in the other?

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[48] The choir has now spun out from the organisation, although it has retained the name and is still being run by most of the same team.

As the organisation grappled with each of these questions, I will argue that appeals to the centrality of embodied and tacit knowledges within 3FF's practice enabled the avoidance of accountability. To think further about the interrelationships of different forms of knowledge in their organisational practice, I will use the metaphor of metrics and fluids from Law and Mol (1998).

Metrics and fluids in organisational practice

Previous chapters have highlighted different kinds of knowledge within 3FF. Some of these were spoken, explicit or codified, such as data in forms and spreadsheets or session plans. Others were unspoken, implicit or embodied, such as the sense of an atmosphere being open or closed, the flow of feelings of trust or distrust, or affects of peacefulness or terror. Law and Mol's (1998) paper *On Metrics and Fluids* uses this metaphor for thinking about the relationship between these kinds of knowledge by comparing two apparently very different kinds of meetings, the first in a scientific laboratory, the second in a community of Quakers.

The example from the laboratory is a management meeting convened to discuss the flagship 'second Wiggler project'. The head of the laboratory had discovered that the project had fallen behind schedule – that only 11 person-years of effort had been put into it, rather than the eighteen person-years outlined in the project plan. This discrepancy had become visible via the newly instituted 'manpower booking system', comprised of a form filled in once a month by every employee describing how he or she had spent each half day of their working time. This assemblage of forms, spreadsheets and calculations made an invisible reality apparent, which otherwise might only have been detected 18 months later when the project was due to be completed.

The Quaker meeting also involved an assemblage, but comprised of different entities. Quaker services are not centred on hymns and sermons, as in other Christian traditions, but in sitting in a particular kind of silence through which the Holy Spirit might be made to 'flow'. Here, it was the layout of the chairs, the taking of minutes, the provision of childcare, the processing of balance sheets and so on that created the possibility for the right kind of silence in which the 'signal' of the spirit can be detected.

In both cases, Law and Mol argue, the meetings performed "the division between *metrication and narration on the one hand and that which cannot be counted or told on the other*" (1998, p. 22). In the Quaker case, the ungraspable and unbiddable Holy Spirit was enabled to flow more easily through the material 'technology' of the meeting: "the fluid of the Spirit cannot do

without that which is measurable, discreet and countable" (1998, p. 29). In the laboratory, it was the 'flow' of work, and its inefficiencies, which was being grasped through the manpower booking system, and this knowledge allowed management to direct the flow in new ways.

Within 3FF, practices discussed in previous chapters which would be considered 'metrics' have included the production of blog statements after terrorist events, the categorisation of files, and the collection of feedback on forms handed out after workshops. What Law and Mol (1998) call 'fluids' have included intangible practices such as the building of trust within relationships and deepening of understanding across lines of faith and belief. 'Fluids' are therefore closely related to what I have called embodied or tacit knowledges – "that which cannot be counted or told" (1998, p. 29 emphasis removed), or to return to Polanyi (1966), the things we know that we cannot tell, but which might be shared through mirroring each other's embodied indwelling of that knowledge.

The use of the metaphor of metrics and fluids is appropriate for looking at interfaith because it speaks across the faith line. The striking thing about the comparison made by Law and Mol (1998) is that religious practice and the quintessentially 'secular' work of a scientific laboratory are discussed in the same terms: both involve seen and unseen elements, and material arrangements which enable or disable the immaterial. Importantly, this is presented without any scepticism towards the 'reality' of the Holy Spirit. If there is a similarity between the laboratory and the Quaker meeting, it is not because the meeting has been reduced to an arrangement of chairs or taking of minutes; on the contrary, the metaphor brings out the necessity of there being elements of *all kinds* of organising that cannot be brought to conscious attention. Rather than secularising Quaker practice, it is scientific and organisational practice which is 'spiritualised'. This makes the metaphor non-secular in the terms provided by Bartunek and Moch (1994), since it gestures beyond "human cognitive capabilities" towards elements lying beyond what "can be conceptually grasped and understood" (1994, p. 25).[49]

However, while Law and Mol's metaphor is the starting point for this chapter, my analysis seeks to go further in exploring the *interrelationship* between metrics and fluids. To note that they both exist and have a similar level of 'reality' within organisational life is only the start of the matter. What happens when they are in tension with one another, or when there is disagreement about what should be counted or narrated? This is not simply a question of efficiency in organisational life, but also one of ethics and responsibility. What happens to

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[49] This is also why the language of metrics and fluids seems more appropriate for this case than the language of 'organisational culture' which, while exploring much the same territory, has strong associations with management literature which tends to construct this culture as knowable and controllable through rationalising means (e.g. Schein, 1992; Deal & Kennedy, 2000).

accountability when things cannot be counted, or accounted for? And what happens to knowledge when these different forms of knowing legitimise or delegitimise one another, in ways that serve to exclude certain groups from contributing to this knowledge?

These tensions, I will argue, underlay the difficulties in addressing the whiteness of the Mixed Up Chorus. The choir, like all forms of organising, involved both 'metrics' and 'fluids': explicit and codified elements such as regular rehearsal times, printed sheet music and demographic data collected from members, along with intangible 'fluids' such as the growing relationships between choir members or feelings of togetherness while singing. In the following section I will examine three different avoidance tactics which became apparent over the course of my fieldwork, all of which can be understood as involving contestations over what should be counted or told, and what should be left unspoken.

Three routes to avoidance: what can and can't be counted

The most explicit tactic used to avoid accountability for the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the choir's membership was to shift the terrain of measurement. When this was raised, it was often sidestepped by pointing to other indicators, such as the range of ages and nationalities present among the members. Sometimes the differing musical abilities or variety of musical traditions that the repertoire was drawn from were also referred to as signs of the choir's 'mixed up-ness'. In the process, inaction on the memberships' racial homogeneity was justified on the grounds that the 'we' singing next to each other was in fact *already* sufficiently diverse.

Such slippage between indicators of difference has been noted by others who have written about 'diversity work' more broadly, and reflects the "elastic and baggy" (Hunter & Swan, 2007a, p. 403) status of the term. As Hunter and Swan state (2007b), the "turn to diversity" has also been a turn *away* from something: from the more confrontational approaches of "equal opportunities and affirmative action" (2007b, p. 378). This shift has had the effect of depoliticising such work (as discussed by many feminists of colour (Alexander, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Puwar, 2004)), creating a discourse of "benign variation" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 193), which "bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism" (ibid). This depoliticising move, I would argue, also serves to construct various kinds of difference as equivalent to one another, facilitating the kind of slippage between indicators described in the choir. If all kinds of difference were stripped of their histories and patterns of power then it was difficult to argue that diversity of age or nationality should *not* be able to replace that of race or ethnicity.

Tellingly, the range of *faiths* within the choir was rarely raised as an indicator that the membership was already sufficiently diverse. The membership was predominantly Christian, Jewish and nonreligious – although when the faith diversity was described it was usually done in the form of 'the choir contains X number of faiths' which overstated the spread as there were generally only one or two people from any other group. The range of faiths may not have been deployed as a means of sidestepping the choir's whiteness because this would have drawn attention to the lack of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim members overlapping with the lack of ethnic minorities.

The irony here was that diversity *was* being 'counted': demographic data was collected from choir members each term. However, the resulting data did not 'count' in the sense of being taken as a form of metrication or narration that could direct the organisational flow. Whatever the answers on the forms, they were always taken to confirm the diversity already present, rather than exposing absences which could then be addressed through targeted recruitment of specific groups, for example. In the process, diversity was constructed as something that *could not be measured*: if everyone had unknowably complex and multi-layered identities then any group could be as diverse as any other. This avoidance tactic could thus be seen as a contestation between those who considered diversity countable and narratable, and those who considered it part of the unspoken.

This first form of avoidance involved explicit engagement with the problem – shifting the metrics was used when challenged *directly* about the lack of racial diversity within the choir. The second kind was more subtle and pervasive, and involved framing the purpose and success of the choir in terms of the personal enjoyment of its members, without more in-depth or explicit analysis of the impact that 'singing next to each other' was having.

As a participant in the choir, my embodied experience was that membership was highly enjoyable. A playful and informal atmosphere was cultivated by the conductor, and it was highly satisfying to hear the repertoire steadily improve over each term. Relationships between choir members were largely friendly, and the shared silliness and effort of weekly choir rehearsals generally seemed to foster good relations. If the primary purpose of the choir was for members to have an enjoyable experience, therefore, it appeared largely effective.

However, the emphasis was very much upon musical skills and general interactions, with little discussion at weekly rehearsals about personal identities or the significance of coming together across lines of faith, belief or culture. In fact, when more overt interfaith elements were incorporated into sessions, there were a number of members who grumbled that they disliked this as they had joined the choir to sing rather than talk. Many members seemed

confused about 3FF and about the relationship between the programme and the wider organisation.

One way of interpreting this is to see the markers of 'living well together' as part of the unspoken. 'Singing together' was explicit and codifiable: getting the notes right or wrong, or giving a higher or lower energy performance, were openly critiqued or praised at our weekly rehearsals. 'Living well together', on the other hand, was generally ascertained by those running the choir on the basis of unspoken positive affects – the enjoyment and happiness of the members being shared and communicated through embodied cues such as smiling, laughing, remaining focused in rehearsals, and so on.

What was absent here was more in-depth engagement with what 'living well together' might entail, or more critical exploration of how the programme could improve on this, which might have exposed why it was problematic that the membership was almost entirely white. For example, there was no effort made to understand the particular experiences of people of colour within the choir, or to elicit their feelings about being a visible minority. At the same time, minimal work was done to establish whether members harboured problematic views about those of different faiths, beliefs or cultures, and when such views did surface (as will be discussed below) they were not treated as fundamental challenges to the structure and design of the programme, but as subordinate to the priority given to members having positive experiences.

The choir therefore strongly resembled the kind of 'happy diversity' (Ahmed, 2012) discussed in Chapter 5, in which positive ideas of multicultural mixing are used to bypass questions of power, conflict and racism. Ahmed has also written extensively about the role of the 'killjoy', the figure who is seen as disrupting the happiness of others by naming oppressive dynamics as sexist or racist (2010, 2012, 2017). As stated above, the second avoidance tactic was not so much used when explicitly challenged about the racial homogeneity of the choir, but worked more subtly to position those who raised critiques as killjoys along Ahmed's lines. If the members were manifestly enjoying themselves, and had *less* enjoyment when they were required to talk rather than sing, then to name the choir's demographics as a problem was to disrupt the happiness of its seventy-plus members. And furthermore, if the primary purpose of the choir was for its members to enjoy themselves, then to kill joy in this way was to make the choir *less* effective. Again, this can be seen as a disagreement over whether 'living well together' should be known through explicit, codified metrics, or left as unspoken fluids.

The final avoidance tactic was even more difficult to identify and pin down, since it existed in an absence: the absence of a strategic vision for the choir or an explicit theory of change. The

origins of the Mixed Up Chorus were happenstance: some money was donated for 3FF to do a project involving music, and the choir was the result. This followed a pattern of programme development described to me many times by staff of taking opportunities without fully exploring how they fitted with the organisation's strategic aims. While there is a substantial amount of evidence that collective musicmaking can be a powerful way of building relationships by facilitating embodied sharing (e.g. Slachmuijlder, 2005; Djanie & Cohen, 2004), within 3FF this literature was never (to my knowledge) referred to.

Absences are inherently difficult to evidence, but this could be traced through ambiguities and inconsistencies in internal conversations. As discussed above, the purpose of the choir was largely framed in terms of the enjoyment of its members. However, at other times *audiences* at performances were also described as recipients, and as being impacted by the choir's apparent demonstration of diverse people 'living well together'. No evaluation data was ever collected on audience reactions, but my own sense of it was that this impact was highly variable: while in some contexts the reception was enthusiastic, in others the choir generated more negative feelings, such as among the young Muslims present at our first public performance who reportedly found the choir 'laughable'.

These differences in attitudes did not always fall neatly into white people seeing nothing wrong with the 'sea of whiteness' and people of colour finding it problematic. However, responses *were* patterned along these lines, which made the question of the relative status of audiences or members highly salient, given that there were so few people of colour in the membership: if audiences didn't matter then the views of people of colour did not matter, since this was predominantly where the choir was encountering them. But because the status of the audiences was ambiguous in the programme design, it was hard to make the case that the negative responses of (nonwhite) audiences should be prioritised over the positive ones of (white) members.

A second site in which this absence could be traced was in the lack of a recruitment strategy. The choir began with a public sing-a-thon at the 2013 Urban Dialogues art exhibition, followed by two open rehearsals hosted at the 3FF office, publicised through the organisation's usual channels for its arts work; a fair number of the core membership from the outset were personally known to the team running it. Callouts for new members were then made each term, publicised through the same channels and also via the personal networks of existing members – inviting people to 'bring their friends and family'. Although targeted recruitment of underrepresented groups was often recommended, and I believe was attempted later on, this did not happen while I was a member. In this time, the choir grew rapidly, as the white people

in it brought their white friends and white family, resulting in an enormous group which could then only ever be heavily white dominated, short of half the membership leaving.

This kind of homophily (Chun, 2017) was highly predictable, and actively countered in 3FF's other programmes through, for example, actively targeting Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh networks to increase applications from these groups for Parliamentors or internships. When the desirability of targeted recruitment for the choir was raised, however, all three avoidance tactics were deployed: it was variously framed as unnecessary because the group was already diverse, unnecessary because the enjoyment of the members showed the choir was already effective, or simply ignored or treated as an optional add-on to the programme design rather than needing to be embedded from the start. In this latter sense, recruitment was treated as something which did not need a deliberate strategy and did not need to be spoken of.

The tactics described here by which accountability for the choir's racial homogeneity were avoided can all be seen as involving contestations over what should properly constitute explicit and codifiable 'metrics' within organising, and what should be 'fluids' which "cannot be counted or told" (Law & Mol, 1998, p. 22 emphasis removed). Precisely because they involved disputes about what should or shouldn't be spoken, such contestations were almost never expressed explicitly. But they underpinned the frequent frustrating conversations at organisational meetings in which those with the power to do anything about it failed to take it seriously as a problem, or to address it.

Rethinking the choir: the fluids of exclusion

So far, my discussion of the choir has focused on problems resulting from failures to speak or narrate aspects of 3FF's practice: the failure to see diversity as countable and to prioritise some measures over others, the failure to produce explicit knowledge about what 'living well together' might entail, the failure to situate the programme strategically and ground it in an explicit theory of change. If the analysis stopped there, it could be taken as a rather straightforward narrative in which I reveal the hidden power relations masked through the emphasis on unspoken and embodied knowledges within 3FF's practice. However, this would then have significant tensions with the epistemology outlined in the theoretical framework, and the arguments made in Chapter 6 about the importance of permitting and making space for the uncodifiable, nonconscious aspects of knowledge if we are to avoid enacting epistemological exclusions which are harmful to people of faith.

In fact, to see criticisms of the choir solely in terms of metrics is only to tell part of the story, for at heart I would argue that what such criticisms were attempting to convey were 'fluids' – other, uncountable ways of knowing inequality in the choir. To explore these, consider the following vignettes:

We were singing in Euston station, busking to raise money for 3FF. We broke into Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, the South African national anthem, and towards the end a black woman walked up from behind and started watching us. After the song, she gave a curious smile and said "I was looking for the South Africans".

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At a workshop afternoon, about a year after the choir was formed, the first explicit discussion about interfaith was had amongst the members. As usual with 3FF this included setting a 'safe space'. When the facilitator asked people in the room what kind of agreements we might need to make about our communication, a middle-aged white man said he felt the process was unnecessary: the choir didn't need to set rules as respectful dialogue had happened naturally, and he had always felt comfortable expressing himself.

Later that day, an older white woman who had been a member of the choir since the beginning stated in a small group discussion that she did not know why she had to be respectful of religious people who believed in 'fairytales'.

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At the second interfaith summit organised by the Parliamentors alumni, the Mixed Up Chorus performed after a majority black gospel choir. One of their songs was a Nigerian lullaby. From my position at the back, I watched the gospel singers; they were unsmiling, not engaging with the music, occasionally exchanging glances and quiet comments.

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After the end of my fieldwork, I learnt that Camille, the choir's longest standing member who was a person of colour, had left. This had come shortly after an incident in rehearsal, when someone had suggested that she should sing a solo in a particular song which was performed by a black woman in the music video. I had known her quite well and wanted to reach out, but realised I had no way of contacting her.

These examples try to capture the impact of the choir's overwhelming whiteness in its 'fluid' aspects: embodied reactions, ways of relating, the 'spirit' circulating within the choir and among audiences at its performances. Because these impacts were not explicit, they have to be inferred. I do not know in verbal, conscious terms what the woman in Euston station meant when she commented about us not being 'South Africans' (i.e. black, since this was based on looking at us). It would not have felt appropriate to ask the gospel singers if their reactions while watching the Mixed Up Chorus indicated some level of offence at a group without a single black member performing (or appropriating) an African song. The relationship between the micro aggression[50] in rehearsal and Camille's disappearance from the choir could not be definitively ascertained, as I had no way of asking her.

The impact of the choir's demographics on its white participants also has to be inferred from incidents such as the conversations at the workshop day. I cannot prove whether the middle-aged man's sense of 'comfort' was related to him being the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2004), or how this comfort might have been challenged if the group been majority black and people of colour. I also cannot say for sure if the older woman would have been able to ignore the fact that she was surrounded by people she considered to believe in 'fairytales' for so long if more members had had visible signs of their faith identities, such as women practising hijab. The nature of fluids is that they cannot be grasped in this way. But they can be felt, and perhaps transported here, painting a picture of an environment where whiteness (and for some, non-religiousness) was the unquestioned norm, and which was *not* in fact welcoming to all.

Paying attention to these unspoken, implicit ways that racial hierarchies are created and reinforced, as many have argued, is an essential part of knowing racism. Indeed, the reduction of racism to metrics – explicit assertions such as "I believe in the superiority of the white race" or actions such as membership of neo-Nazi organisations – is a well-documented means of denying the myriad other forms racism can take. As Bhavnani's (2001) study of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry shows, police went to extraordinary lengths to deny that their handling of the case was in any way racist on this basis (2001, p. 72). On the other hand, a nurse at the hospital Stephen was taken to tried to describe what for her were clear patterns in the behaviours she saw towards black and white victims of crime from police, saying "[i]t hinges on things like attitude and demeanour, on approach and manner" – a form of knowledge she found it hard to claim as 'evidence' even though she had observed it many times (2001, p. 60).

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[50] Micro aggressions have been defined in an African-American context as "brief, commonplace, and daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental slights and indignities directed towards Black Americans, often automatically and unintentionally" (Holder et al. 2008, p. 329). The term has since been expanded to refer to experiences of many other marginalised groups.

Racism, like other experiences of oppression, is a form of embodied knowledge. Feminists and other writers of colour have written extensively about what it feels like to know racism through "the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other" (Fanon, 1986, p. 109) – to know themselves as 'out of place' by deviating from the somatic norm of whiteness (Puwar, 2004). hooks (2000), for example, describes the reaction of white feminists when a woman of colour enters the room, who "become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory" (2000, p. 56). Ahmed writes about her experiences within white institutions with frequent references to her feelings of discomfort (2012, p. 37; 154), weariness (2012, p. 36) and paranoia (2012, p. 155). Furthermore, such feelings are accompanied by 'epistemic oppression' (Dotson, 2014), the exclusion of oppressed groups from being possessors of knowledge by empiricist standards, which operates at least in part *through* the association with the body. To assert that you can 'feel' the racism or sexism that is implicit in an interaction is to invalidate your perspective by naming yourself as embodied and subjective, rather than the disembodied rational individual capable of the 'God trick', the "view from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584), required by empiricism (see Fricker, 2007, pp. 160–1).

If racism is embodied, it is personal and specific. But it is not *individual* – it is precisely a relational knowledge of power that is likely to be invisible to the more powerful party (since they benefit from it) and it is therefore denied by them. A political tool of resistance is to share these embodied experiences with others who also occupy a relatively powerless position, thus creating collective 'subjugated knowledges' in which these unspoken dimensions of oppression can be validated. Feminist consciousness-raising groups, for example, have enabled women to identify patterns within their personal experiences and thus "to create feminist theory which included both an analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of social interaction" (hooks, 2000, p. 19). Similarly, the black feminist epistemology outlined by Collins (2008) emphasises the importance of dialogic processes for assessing knowledge claims (2000, p. 262), of communicating and validating emotions, and of developing relationships of care through sharing lived experiences (2000, p. 263).

These examples concern the ways in which embodied knowledges can be validated and shared amongst those who have relative powerlessness in common. But can this kind of knowledge be shared *between* the powerless and the powerful? The founding premise of 3FF's encounter-based religious literacy, I would argue, is that tacit and embodied knowledges *can* be shared across lines of difference, which will inevitably include such power differentials. However, this sharing is likely to face a number of challenges. Here, my position as a white person within the choir was highly relevant, and my journey with it might help explicate what the flow of embodied knowledge across power differentials might entail.

From the outset, having so few people of colour in the choir seemed problematic to me, and I strongly recommended targeted recruitment from the first term. My understanding of it at the time, however, was largely intellectual – from this perspective, the choir's imbalanced demographics seemed a problem of numbers, of counting. Over the year or so I was a member, this 'knowing' of its racial homogeneity came to take on a different meaning as I developed close relationships with people of colour both within the organisation and outside of it. Moving through white and mixed spaces next to these embodied others, and developing enough closeness for them to start to express what a 'sea of whiteness' felt like for them, led me to a different emotional understanding of the alienation and sense of exclusion that the choir could cause, and that *I too was part of this* through my continued membership as a white person. This emotional understanding led me to leave the choir.

This transition can be seen as analogous to two kinds of commitment described by Ahmed (2012) in her analysis of equalities work. On the one hand, there is commitment understood "as a pledge that is sent out" (2012, p. 114), often in the form of institutional statements such as 'this university is committed to tackling racism, sexism etc'; on the other, there is commitment "as a state of being bound to a course of action or to another person" (ibid). For me, becoming committed in this second sense necessitated taking action, removing my endorsement of the choir that had been implicit in my ongoing participation. This commitment *came* from the new kinds of embodied knowledge I had access to through my relationships, and also *led* to new forms of knowledge, since once I was no longer part of the choir others felt more comfortable telling me their negative feelings about it. This could be described as a kind of bodily attunement – a growing understanding of how to interpret the non-verbal signals of embodied others. For example, the indicators of discomfort that I perceived amongst the gospel choir members watching the Mixed Up Chorus perform would likely have gone unnoticed by me, had I not already understood that this kind of reaction was likely based on previous conversations and experiences. It is possible of course that my expectations led me to see something that was not there. But it is also true that such signals are likely to be subtle, and only picked up by someone who is paying attention.

This is a very different story to a secularising one in which I the knowing researcher, armed with my sociological categories such as race, reveal hidden power dynamics. Instead, the story is personal and relational, in which I came to *feel* with others, and to recognise my power and culpability in doing them harm. My experience did indeed have elements that could be called 'becoming conscious' of racial dynamics, but *conscious awareness* alone was not sufficient – after all, I was always 'aware' in an intellectual sense that the choir demographics were a problem, and indeed after I had left a number of people complained that one of the most

frustrating responses was that "it's okay because the choir are aware of it".[51] Something else – something intangible, unspoken and fluid – was required to move me beyond awareness and into active commitment, in the sense of being bound.

This fluid could be called many things – a spirit of understanding, equality, love. The significant aspect is not so much how I came to channel this (there was nothing very remarkable about me leaving the choir) but the blockages that *prevented* others from being moved in the same way. The next section looks in more detail at this failure of the fluid to flow, and how this relates to the production of knowledge.

Blockages and flows in the mediation of knowledge

The argument of this chapter so far has been to show how the choir operated as an exclusionary white space *both* through a failure to use the right metrics – to count the necessary kinds of diversity, or to construct a coherent theory of change – *and* through its failure to respond to fluids, the feelings of discomfort, annoyance and offence that flowed through many people who encountered it. I now want to consider this as a question of knowledge. My own experience was that becoming progressively more attuned to the experiences of embodied others and becoming committed to their perspectives *opened up* new forms of knowledge. Those who were in a position to address the demographics of the choir, on the other hand, seemed trapped in a vicious cycle in which these forms of knowledge became ever more invisible.

This vicious cycle could be seen as a form of 'wilful hermeneutic ignorance' (Pohlhaus, 2012). Pohlhaus describes a process by which epistemic resources developed by those within marginalised situations is "pre-emptively dismissed, because, attuned to what is not immediately present within the experience of the dominantly situated knower, such resources can appear to [them] to attend to nothing at all, or to make something out of nothing" (2012, p. 722). When people within the organisation, particularly people of colour, tried to make the case that they *knew* that the choir was problematic – for example, because they could read the embodied signals of audience members – this was dismissed as lacking evidence or lacking importance. In doing so, those with power within the organisation failed to create relationships of interdependence with the embodied others through which they could have

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[51] This echoes Ahmed's frustration with 'critical' white academics whose intellectual grasp of race theory is used to exonerate themselves from considering how they are implicated: "the critical white subjects, by seeing their whiteness, might not see themselves as participating in whiteness in the same way" (2012, p. 179).

come to see what they were missing: the more unresponsive they were, the more the knowledge needed to identify it as a problem escaped them. They thus demonstrated a form of "meta-blindness", in which they were "blind to their own blindness, insensitive to their own insensitivity" (Medina, 2011, p. 28).

Given that this failure to become knowledgeable perpetuated a lack of accountability, this raises questions about the role of monitoring and evaluation, which was clearly inadequate given its failure to detect the very strong signals being given out in many quarters that the choir demographics were a problem. Here it is necessary to acknowledge an additional aspect of my own power – which I had not reflected upon until writing this chapter – which lay in my role providing monitoring and evaluation support. Evaluation was largely designed and administered by the teams themselves, but I did have opportunities to input and influence how this was undertaken. Although I raised my concerns with the arts and culture team in evaluation meetings, and some of the issues discussed in this chapter did feature within the two cross-organisational reports I wrote, I did not push as much as I could have done to develop new procedures which perhaps could have exposed the problem.

My reluctance was largely because monitoring and evaluation was being conducted by junior staff and interns, who were already overstretched and whom I did not wish to pressure any further. The high level of resistance to change from senior management and those in charge of the choir also led me to doubt that I could have much influence. However, a more proactive stance might have at least facilitated certain conversations internally – for example, if I had insisted more strongly that data needed to be collected on audience reactions and raised this in staff meetings this might have created an opportunity for negative views to be aired more publicly.

What the example of the choir shows is that *much more work* needed to be done in order to create a knowledge system capable of overcoming systemic blind spots. With the benefit of hindsight, I can see just how different the monitoring and evaluation of the choir needed to be if it was to be able to detect the problem. Drawing on the literature on epistemic oppression, I want to outline some alternative procedures that might have gone some way towards rectifying the organisation's "meta-blindness".

First, we could have anticipated 'testimonial smothering' (Dotson, 2011), a process by which marginalised knowers silence aspects of their own experience when they see that others do not have the 'testimonial competence' to hear what they are saying. For example, I witnessed how various people of colour would not vocalise their discomfort with the choir in settings where they felt that this perspective was not going to be taken seriously. Given how vastly

outnumbered the few members of colour were within the Mixed Up Chorus, it was particularly unlikely that they would make explicit statements that they found the group's whiteness problematic, especially to white people they may have expected to dismiss their concerns. Dotson (2011) suggests that the burden of addressing this must be dispersed, with hearers taking pains to demonstrate their own testimonial competence, that is, their ability to hear experiences of others without dismissing them or becoming defensive. In terms of evaluation, this would have meant not necessarily taking positive statements about the choir from members of colour at face value, and actively creating opportunities for more critical perspectives to emerge.

Secondly, we needed to heed the emphasis placed on building trusting relationships, and to understand that embodied and affective relating would necessarily *precede* the flow of knowledge, especially across lines of power (Dotson, 2012, p. 35; Medina, 2011, p. 31; Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 721). This might have meant thinking carefully about who might be able to elicit certain kinds of information, and whether some conversations needed to take place between people with more similar kinds of lived experience: a person of colour encountering the choir was probably more likely to have admitted to finding it problematic to another person of colour than to an unknown white person. This also would have meant paying close attention to where trust had been broken, and making extra efforts to elicit knowledge in those circumstances. Camille's disconnection from the choir needed to be taken as an impetus for understanding what had gone wrong, and sensitive attempts made to repair the relationship so that knowledge of her experience could flow back to the organisation.

Third, we could have followed Medina's (2011) suggestion to seek out 'epistemic friction', actively searching for more perspectives "than those noticed" (2011, p. 29), or Ortega's (2006) advice to cultivate Frye's (1983) 'loving eye' where we "look, and listen and check and question" (Ortega, 2006, p. 60). This would have meant eliciting alternative and critical views and genuinely trying to understand how these viewpoints differed from the dominant perspectives within the organisation. For example, data could have been gathered systematically on audience reactions, including attempting to engage those who appeared uncomfortable in the choir's presence, 'looking and listening' (i.e. not acting defensively when critical perspectives were raised) and 'checking and questioning' (i.e. taking into account the absence or presence of trust, the likelihood of testimonial smothering, and so on). Dispersing the burden of proof would also have meant paying close attention to embodied reactions and more implicit expressions of discomfort, rather than only taking criticism seriously if it was expressed explicitly in words.

Finally, we needed to acknowledge that epistemic injustices are extremely common and difficult to avoid, and thoughtfulness about how to detect and address them needed to be built into the programme from the outset. For Ahmed, the institutional blockages experienced by equality practitioners – captured in the frequent metaphor they used of "banging your head against a brick wall" (2012, p. 175) – are the *existing* commitments which have to be unbound in order for a binding commitment to be made in a new direction, commitments which are often unspoken and unrecognised. In the choir, the fact that it was allowed to grow in size so rapidly made it extremely unlikely that the demographics could ever be substantially altered: by the time commitments had been made to seventy-odd white members the possibility of making commitments to different kinds of people had essentially been shut down. A more cautious approach to the design and development of the programme might have caught the problem at the outset and allowed the choir to take a different direction – or to have been called to a halt before too much damage had been done.

What the literature on epistemic oppression highlights is that metrics and fluids within knowledge production *co-constitute* one another. Explicit, codifiable aspects of persons (such as race or gender, or their position in a hierarchy) combine with implicit and tacit dimensions (such as the level of trust between people) to open up and foreclose the possibilities of knowledge. All too often, this results in vicious cycles whereby those with power are able to remain ignorant of the harm that they do. In the context of organisational practice, being accountable for these harms means developing forms of knowledge production which can allow knowledge to flow across lines of power. These procedures will be encoded in metrics such as whose views are solicited and the questions asked. At the same time, these metrics will never be able to substantially challenge organisational "meta-blindness" if there is no genuine desire to recognise mistakes and repair harms. The spirit of equality must animate the metrics of organisational knowing if such knowledge is to be capable of challenging rather than reinforcing imbalances of power.

Power, marginality and knowledge: articulating the personal and the collective

I now want to think more deeply about this question of power. In the theoretical framework, I referred to the common criticisms of ANT approach as insufficiently attentive to power differentials (Couldry, 2008; Benson, 2014). I have thus tried to address these concerns by following Star, who advocates bringing together the semiotic materialism that characterises ANT with the feminist concern with marginality: "[b]y experience and by affinity, some of us begin not with Pasteur, with the monster, the outcast" (1991, p. 29). Stating that "[t]he power

of feminist analysis is to move from the experience of being a non-user, an outcast or castaway" (1991, p. 38), Star suggests that these two approaches might be joined by "linking the nonuser point of departure with the translation model, returning to the point of view of that which cannot be translated: the monstrous, the Other, the wild" (ibid).

This relationship between marginality and knowledge is central to feminist and antiracist epistemologies (e.g. Harding, 1993; Collins, 2008) – but it has some complexities in the context of faith-based differences. The literature on epistemic oppression uses terms such as 'marginally situated knowers' (Pohlhaus, 2012) and 'epistemically disadvantaged identities' (Tuana, 2006) as if *who this refers to* is self-evident. The majority of this work has been produced in relation to racial or gender-based exclusions, in which it is taken as read that men experience multiple forms of historical and structural advantage over women, and white people experience similar forms of advantage over people of colour.

However, the picture becomes rather more complicated when the differences in question are those of faith, with intersectional analyses tending "to focus on 'master categories' such as gender or race" (Reimer-Kirkham & Sharma, 2012, p. 123) while studies of religion and spirituality often occur "in isolation from ethnicity, race, gender and class" (2012, p. 116). Going back to the discussion of the Rushdie Affair in the theoretical framework, this was a moment when a new claim of disadvantage was made – that Muslims were experiencing forms of marginalisation *as Muslims* that could not be accounted for when they were seen as Asians or as 'black' people (Modood, 1994). This was contested at the time not only by those hostile to any such claims from minorities, but also by secular antiracists. *Who is marginal* may therefore itself be a matter of contention.

Within interfaith work there are a wide range of different groups who could claim some degree of exclusion or outsider status. Over the course of my fieldwork, some of the groups mentioned in this category included: pagans, who are still not allowed to affiliate with the national Inter Faith Network; humanists, who are excluded from some local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs); Muslims, who are well integrated into interfaith circles but experience multiple forms of structural disadvantage outside; Hindus, very few of whom were engaged on the ground at 3FF; black people, who are both structurally disadvantaged and generally underrepresented within interfaith spaces; and unaffiliated nonreligious people, who had very few avenues into interfaith work outside of 3FF.

These multiple forms of marginality are perhaps unsurprising – as Star (1991) says, "we are all marginal in some regard, as members of more than one community of practice" (1991, p. 52).

However, this leads to something of a conundrum: if we are all marginal, but also differentially powerful, how does 'starting from the margins' help us to understand power, and indeed how do we know what the relevant centres or edges are in a given context? This will be especially important if claiming marginality becomes an exercise of power in itself: as Mirza (1997) notes, "'[b]ecoming marginal' appears to be a place everyone seemingly wants to occupy, to lay claim to, no matter how elite, privileged or empowered by their class" (1997, p. 20).

Whatever account of marginality we have, it has to be sensitive to the different forms that it can take – able to tell the difference between, for example, the sense of exclusion experienced by a nonreligious person on hearing a generalisation such as 'atheists are immoral', and the marginalisation a Muslim might feel when they hear a stereotype such as 'Muslims are terrorists'. The first may be wounding, but it is not contiguous, as the second is, with wider forms of oppression such as the highly disproportionate targeting of Muslims by the state under anti-terror legislation (Home Office, 2011), inflated incarceration rates of Muslim communities (Morris, 2014), and widespread Islamophobic street harassment (Tell MAMA, 2016). Macro mediations such as statistics are therefore also a crucial part of knowing marginality: the fluid, embodied and experiential aspects of oppression need to be articulated with explicit codifiable metrics in order to connect the personal with wider collective experiences.

How to situate the embodied, experiential, and emotional within a wider politics is a problem long identified by feminists. Already in the 1980s, Segal (1994) noted that "[w]hereas the problem for women's liberation was once how to assert personal issues of political, the problem has now reversed to one where feminists need to argue that the political does not reduce to the personal" (1994, p. 243); a decade later, Parmar (1997) talked of "divisive and immobilising" identity politics "unable to move beyond personal and individual experience" (1997, p. 69). As I will argue in the next chapter, the enhanced credibility being extended to embodied knowledge is easily co-opted within digital capitalism, and carries no inherent resistance to the inequalities generated by neoliberalism. This is not to deny or dismiss the crucial importance of these fluid aspects of human existence, but to invite a more sophisticated discussion about how they can be mobilised to enable collectives rather than further individualise neoliberal subjects.

This is where the non-modern epistemology outlined in the theoretical framework might enable these different kinds of knowing to connect – to bridge the apparent divide between elite forms of knowing such as statistics historically used to dominate, and the personal, tacit and embodied, by tracing the mediations in the former and reattaching 'facts' to the practices

which produced them. The example of how Muslims were able to claim and evidence their own marginality in the last thirty years might demonstrate what this means.

During the Rushdie Affair and its aftermath, it became clear that forms of communal knowledge held by Muslims themselves – that they were regularly discriminated against *as Muslims* – was not shared more widely, even amongst other people of colour. In the 1990s, Muslim civil society mobilised to produce new forms of knowledge which enabled them to create a new evidence base connecting their embodied personal experiences with the wider collective. Winning the battle for the religion question to be included in the 2001 census resulted in the production of statistics which showed a wide range of forms of disadvantage experienced by communities defined by their Muslim faith for the first time. Similarly, the battle to have religion or belief included as a protected characteristic within equalities legislation has led to new forms of knowledge produced by the public sector demonstrating rates of imprisonment (Morris, 2014), levels of job discrimination (Khattab & Johnston, 2013) and so on.

Islamophobia has thus become a widely accepted fact, as a result of a series of *political* battles. At every stage, the production of this knowledge has been contested – for example, the British Humanist Association strongly objecting to the religion question on the census (BHA, 2011), and some feminists saying that making religion or belief a protected category under equalities law would perpetuate patriarchy (Donald, 2012, 130). By tracing the mediations, the values embedded within the facts of Muslim marginality can be identified – values which align with my own, and also with the affective, embodied knowledge of disadvantage and exclusion which the Muslims I am close to have shared with me. There is a circularity here – facts and values co-construct one another, just as metrics and fluids do. This is what it means to give up on empiricist objectivity, and instead to seek "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). Accountability means acknowledging our own limitations, and seeking to push at the edges of our understanding in the pursuit of equality.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to construct a critique of 3FF's practice through examining the failure of accountability in its handling and running of the Mixed Up Chorus. It should be emphasised that other programmes appeared far more sensitive to racialised and faith-based hierarchies, and to my mind were more rigorous and thoughtful in their approach to the work. Indeed, it was the fact that those in the relevant quarters remained blind to the problematic character of

the choir despite so many of the staff being aware of it that led me to understand it as a matter of blockages to the circulation of knowledge.

This circulation failure is something I came sharply face-to-face with a year after I finished my fieldwork when I conducted a feedback session with the leadership team, where I raised a number of critical questions about the organisation's practice, including the ongoing issues with the choir. In the context of that meeting the choir's demographics were explicitly recognised as problematic by a number of people around the table, its future within 3FF was debated, and senior managers articulated the link between the programmatic weaknesses in the choir and wider issues of decision-making within the organisation ("we have a problem making difficult decisions"). However, following this the choir not only continued in-house but went on to perform a concert in which they sang a "choral song cycle illuminating the stories and experiences of migrants and refugees" (3FF, 2017) written by two white artists. The failure to connect up the critical conversation held internally and decisions relating to the programme – which felt very much like encountering Ahmed's (2012) 'brick wall' – prompted me to take a more openly critical stance in this chapter than I otherwise would have done.

Throughout the argument presented here, I have tried to show how the failure of accountability involved both metrics and fluids – a failure to speak, narrate and make explicit, *and* a failure to feel, to be attuned to embodied knowledge. Consequently, accountability could not be achieved simply through introducing more metrics or more fluids. Collecting more demographic data on the choir members would not have solved the problem, or even highlighted it, if the fluid of *care* about what the data said continued to be missing; gauging the embodied reactions of audiences would not have made a difference if the audiences in question were made up of happy white people and there was no way to count their racialised identities. A knowledge system capable of detecting a systemic "meta-blindness" needed to substantially reorient both its metrics and fluids in pursuit of equality, to draw upon multiple kinds of knowledge including macro mediations such as statistics, and to understand above all how much work is required to avoid perpetuating exclusions and epistemic injustices.

It is the need to explore the limits of our own knowledge that makes this quest non-secular, in the terms set out by Bartunek and Moch (1994). In the introduction to this thesis, I talked about my personal journey into the PhD, where I suddenly experienced a kind of 'conversion' from an intellectual understanding of climate change to an embodied, emotional one which led me to make significant changes in my life. My journey towards understanding the dynamics of racial exclusion, which I feel very much at the beginning of, has been slower, but has a similar experiential tone in that it has required the engagement of my 'spiritual sense' and attempts to push the boundaries of what I know and how I know it.

Patrice Cullors, one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, has described antiracism as spiritual work, stating that the force "much deeper inside of us that causes our behaviour to be biased or discriminatory" cannot just be changed by conscious effort but requires "something *else*, it takes a sort of exorcism" (Cullors et al., 2017). This chimes with the emphasis within the decoloniality literature of looking to ways of knowing suppressed by coloniality – including spiritual traditions – for 'decolonial options' (Mignolo, 2011). This spiritual dimension is likely to be even more important to conceptualise when the racisms at play include those related to faith-based differences.

These considerations raise questions about the character of research within the contemporary context. As I will discuss next in the thesis conclusion, the combination of rationalising metrics and embodied fluids has become a signature feature of neoliberal epistemology, through its co-option of forms of critique of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). As researchers, if we fail to include the embodied and the tacit within our accounts of knowledge production we risk reproducing empiricist models of having a dislocated "view from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584) – but since neoliberal ways of being already include recognition of these dimensions of human experience, bringing these into our methodologies will not by itself challenge imbalances of power. For example, a narrative of the choir which centred the feelings of enjoyment of its white membership, and celebrated the inclusiveness it afforded to nonreligious people who often feel marginalized within other interfaith spaces, might have subverted certain aspects of a Western empiricist tradition, while reinforcing the dehistoricised and depoliticised approach to 'diversity' critiqued above.

The critical account presented here required the development of new ways of seeing and feeling through the formation of relationships with those with different embodied locations, and for me to become committed to those perspectives through the undoing of existing commitments. I had to unbind myself from the choir's membership when I left, and in writing this critique in this way I am undoubtedly further unbinding myself from some within the organisation who will feel this is an unfair characterisation of their work, and perhaps a misuse of my power as a researcher and a breaking of trust placed in me. These are the inevitable risks of this kind of 'engaged' ethnography (Beech et al., 2009). However, I would reiterate the importance of an ethics of care within feminist research practices, and my hope that this critique can be heard in a spirit of love rooted in my faith and trust in the good work that the organisation does, and a desire to see it improve. Both the successes and the limitations of 3FF's practice have important lessons for the wider left, and these broader political implications will be drawn out next.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: neoliberal spiritualities and decolonial options

"Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling… ultimately, I don't see feel/think as a dichotomy, I see them as a choice of ways and combinations" (Lorde, 2007, pp. 100–1)

This thesis has tried to draw together a number of themes and trends that are shaping the contemporary moment – questions of difference and collectivity, the shifting foundations of knowledge, and how the mediations of media technologies are interfering with both of these and thus enabling and disabling coexistence. These wide-ranging and relatively abstract themes have been grounded in my ethnographic case, the work of the interfaith charity 3FF. Through analysing the empirical material generated during two and half years of collaborative research, I hope to have made original contributions not only to the literature on interfaith work (which has been little studied) but also to media studies, Actor Network Theory and feminist research practices.

In this conclusion, I want to zoom out from some of the particularities of the case to consider the broader implications of my findings. As outlined in the thesis introduction, the political stakes of this work for me reside in the question of assembling a 'plural collective' which might have the same efficacy for addressing inequalities as the mass institutions of the mid-twentieth century, but without the homogeneity of ways of life those collectives required. As argued earlier, the trade unions and churches who built the welfare state in the post-war period were conceptualised as internally undifferentiated 'meta-individuals' (Gilbert, 2013), which amounted to centring white male participants and resisting the inclusion of women, black and people of colour and other excluded groups on equal terms. The 'meta-individual' as a form of groupness is neither desirable nor possible given the massive diversification of ways of life since then – but the left has been struggling for decades to go "beyond the fragments" (Rowbotham et al., 1979) and assemble a plural collective capable of challenging capitalism on an alternative basis.

I begin by recapping the thesis and the central argument of each chapter, and how each explored questions about the mediation of knowledge. I then talk more directly about the neoliberal context in which 3FF was operating, recognising that elements of its organisational

practice reproduced neoliberal "forms of action and predispositions" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 10), for example through mobilising the spiritual commitments of interns as a means of enlisting their consent for unpaid and precarious labour. The relationship between neoliberalism and spirituality continues with Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) analysis of the ways in which neoliberalism has absorbed certain forms of critique, in which I argue that neoliberal ideology might be productively understood as a kind of spirituality in itself – albeit a spirituality which often operates *through* discourses of rational efficiency.

Drawing lessons from 3FF for building collectives that can challenge capitalism therefore needs to be undertaken with caution. However, the organisation's practice was not *only* neoliberal, and I then go on to outline its more liberatory potential through bringing in some of the literature on decoloniality (e.g. Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Quijano, 2007). This section argues that aspects of 3FF's approach could be seen as challenging the coloniality of knowledge through, for example, its refutation of the divide between religious and secular people, and its employment of nonintellectual methods for creating relationships. Its use of practices and procedures with similarities to those used within faith communities themselves could be seen as a way of engaging in decolonial 'border thinking' (Mignolo, 2011), working with ideas which have been discredited or marginalised as "traditional, barbarian, primitive, mystic" (2011, p. 46) under coloniality.

Having outlined the potential ways in which interfaith might reproduce or challenge neoliberal logics and coloniality, I then go on to propose three decolonial options for building plural collectives rooted in my fieldwork: acknowledging the nonconscious, developing sustainable media habits, and critically exploring embodied knowledge. Finally I close the chapter, and the thesis, by reflecting on the process of constructing this PhD and the potential of academic research to act as a means of bringing different worlds together on decolonial terms.

The mediation of knowledge: thesis summary

Given the wide-ranging character of this thesis, I will begin by recapping on the central argument of each of my chapters. The introduction began by positioning the interfaith sector within multicultural policy-making and the state's increasing preoccupation with faith since the 1990s, including its ambiguous relationships with the 'community cohesion' agenda and counterterrorism measures. 3FF's transition from its elite orientation in its early days as the Three Faiths Forum to today was charted, highlighting the distinctive features of the organisation's work within the sector: working with individuals and grassroots members of

faiths rather than elite representatives, emphasising intrafaith diversity rather than treating faith communities as homogenous, and involving nonreligious and religious people on equal terms.

In Chapter 2, I outlined my research methodology and how it related to the terms of my collaborative studentship, and described my intense working relationship with 3FF, which included actively shaping aspects of their work through my role providing monitoring and evaluation support. The collaboration resulted in relationships with staff members as colleagues, some of whom became close friends, and the consequences of this in terms of validity of my findings and the ethics of my research were discussed, acknowledging that these close relationships foreclosed certain kinds of knowing while opening up others.

This was followed by the theoretical framework, which returned to the Rushdie affair – a moment of high-profile tensions between faiths that was a spur to the growth of the interfaith sector. My analysis looked at the discourses around 'natural' and 'cultural' racism that accompanied the affair, concluding that comprehending faith-based racisms requires an epistemology which questions the nature/culture divide and accompanying narratives of scientific progress and modernity. A non-modern epistemology rooted in Science and Technology Studies was proposed, which sees knowledge production as a material practice involving mediations between humans and nonhumans, which understands all knowledge as situated, partial and value laden, is inclusive of multiple ways of knowing, and seeks truth through more democratic procedures. The focus on mediation within knowledge production led me to address the specific role of media technologies and to outline the non-secular approach taken in my empirical chapters, which highlights their affective, mythic and symbolic dimensions, alongside their functionality (Morley, 2007).

The first empirical chapter, *How Can We Live Together?*, attempted to illustrate the relevance of concepts developed within Actor Network Theory for interfaith work. These included terms derived from Mol (2003) such as 'holding realities apart', which was used to think about the complexities of Simone getting married, while 'interference 'was shown to be relevant to the role of media technologies in those weddings and in 3FF's navigation of contentious issues such as Israel-Palestine. 'Fractional objects' (Strathern, 1991) and 'partial connections' (Haraway, 1988) were also used to suggest a different way of conceptualising both innovation *within* faith communities, and interfaith work which seeks to mediate *between* them.

Media were then brought to the fore in Chapter 5, *Faith in Crisis*, which looked at how 'faith-inflected media events' were shaping the space in which 3FF conducted their interfaith practice. The organisation's attempts to navigate these using the available media technologies

– via written responses to moments of crisis publicised on their blog, or by communicating the more positive message of their day-to-day work through social media – were argued to have limited impact despite the efficiency promised by the 'myth of distributed digital agency'. Where the work was seen to have greater effect was in bringing people together for encounters in which the 'faith-inflected media events' could be felt, and their impacts intuited in a less conscious or intellectualised ways.

Chapter 6 continued this theme of embodied and unspoken dimensions of 3FF's practice through an analysis of its work with participants as a kind of religious literacy (RL). This was distinguished from more common forms of RL – the sociological and theological kinds – through ethnographic examples, before examining the epistemologies underpinning each. These were argued to have differing conceptions of situatedness: crucial to 3FF's encounter-based RL was a conception of the position *from* which one attends as having tacit dimensions which can never be brought conscious attention, but which might be nonetheless engaged with and shared through carefully staged forms of embodied encounter.

The ambiguities of bringing media technologies into this practice were briefly discussed through discussions of workshop videos and slide software – dimensions of 3FF's work which were further explored in *Dead Data, Living Knowledge*. Here, the organisation's data practices were described and the similarities with principles evident within the more hyperbolic literature on big data (e.g. Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013; Anderson, 2008) emphasised, along with their tensions with the organisation's core practice with participants. The evaluation framework I designed was then presented as an attempt to embed alternative principles that were more in line with the organisation's overall aims and values, helping to bridge the gap between dominant data practices and the emphasis on embodied and tacit knowing in the organisation's pedagogy.

Finally, *Counting and Accountability* looked at some of the limitations within the practice and its ambiguous understanding of power, through looking at the lack of response to critiques about the whiteness of the choir. This was argued to have involved *both* the failure to use appropriate metrics – to count the right things or to be sufficiently explicit about aspects of the methodology – *and* a failure to be attentive to fluids, unspoken feelings of hurt or offence which flowed within and between certain bodies. My own position within this as a white person who became progressively more attuned to these more implicit forms of racial critique was discussed, as well as the kind of knowledge system which might be necessary to foster this attunement. This was argued to require very different kinds of organisational evaluation, and also the articulation of personal ways of knowing with other kinds of knowledge such as statistics.

This summary highlights the core themes of the thesis: the relationships between different kinds of knowledge and how these are used to further faith-based racisms, the need to situate tacit and embodied knowledges within our overall epistemologies, and the contradictory patterns produced by the ubiquity of digital technologies within everyday life and organisational practice. The next section relates all of these to contemporary forms of capitalism.

3FF as neoliberal spirituality?

While neoliberalism has been a refrain throughout this thesis, I now want to consider it in more depth, recognising that 3FF's practice was in many ways congruent with, rather than challenging to, the ideology underpinning it. In broad terms, neoliberalism can be seen as a system which sees competitive markets as the best form of organisation, and thus encourages people to engage in 'marketlike' behaviour in all dimensions of human life, thus rendering them amenable to financialisation (Gilbert, 2013). For decolonial thinkers, it constitutes the latest period in "global colonial-modern capitalism" (Quijano, 2016). Although it is underpinned by a range of 'economic' policies such as deregulation and monetarism, the system involves a "generalisation of the market logic beyond the sphere of commercial exchange… with a view to legitimising the logic of economic profit over other forms of political or moral legitimacy" (Chouliaraki, 2012, p. 180).

The generalisation of this market logic means that while this ideology is rooted in profit-making, it is perpetuated in many other spheres, including the third sector which has seen a pronounced "diffusion of corporate norms and values" (Vestergaard, 2010, p. 168) in recent years. It has also been perpetuated in religious spheres: as recognised in Chapter 1, there has been a relationship between the development of neoliberal capitalism and the proliferation of forms of "entrepreneurial, democratised and individualised" (Woodhead, 2012, p. 19) faith practice since the 1970s, including the emergence of markets selling 'spiritual products' such as holistic therapies (e.g. Heelas, 1996; Williams, 2011). I would argue that this relationship between spirituality and neoliberalism also operates on a deeper level, and can be seen in certain kinds of organisational practice which were particularly evident at 3FF.

To think about these aspects of organising, I will turn to Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) description of the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist capitalism. As they argue in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005), neoliberalism can be seen as a partial adaptation to the demands of the social movements of the 1960s and 70s. These movements, they state, had two kinds of

critiques of capitalism: the 'social critique' demanding collectivity and the alleviation of suffering, and the 'artistic critique', promoting "values of expressive creativity, fluid identity [and] autonomy… against the constraints of bureaucratic discipline, bourgeois hypocrisy and consumer conformity" (Budgen, 2000). It is this second critique that Boltanski and Chiapello claim has been incorporated into neoliberal structures and working practices. Demands for autonomy and creativity, for example, have been met through a new emphasis on self-directed work, and imagination and innovation as generators of value, demands for authenticity have been met through the proliferation of diverse commodities and an emphasis on personal development in the workplace, and demands for liberation through the ending of prohibitions and opening up new markets such as more relaxed licensing laws for alcohol and the sex industry (2005, p. 326).

These shifts have been accompanied by changes in management practices. Rather than emphasising top-down control and strict professional boundaries, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) show that discourses of neo-management pay close attention to relationship building within the workplace, as well as to questions of personal development and fulfilment, in which the feelings of workers and their sense of alignment with the mission of the company are seen as crucial components of success. This management style seeks to mobilise workers through "their leader's *vision*" (2005, p. 73), engaging "the workers commitment… by making everyone's work *meaningful*" (2005, p. 76), and building trusting teams in which "everyone knows what they must do without being told" (ibid). The language here of trust, vision and 'the unspoken' strongly resembles aspects of what I have called 3FF's non-secular practice, and indicates that the incorporation of forms of critique into neoliberal capitalism involves greater attention to the tacit, embodied and spiritual dimensions of knowledge.

The relationship between neoliberal management practices and spirituality was extremely evident within 3FF. For example, there was an explicit acknowledgement that being 'authentic' meant bringing identities of faith and belief into the workplace, expressed most obviously in the expectation that staff members would undertake training to tell their faith journey, and participate in Encountering Faiths and Beliefs workshops in schools. Alongside this, informal sharing of personal faith practices was encouraged, such as the lunch 'n learn on Rosh Hashanah recounted in Chapter 4. The spiritual commitments of staff were also understood to be a source of energy and motivation for the work, with discussions among staff indicating their deep investments which were often rooted in a faith identity or background, leading to frequent statements of exactly the kind of 'passion' Couldry (2008) says is now demanded within the workplace. The personal and relational atmosphere at 3FF, so characteristic of the neoliberal capitalism, was thus underpinned there by forms of *spiritual* engagement.

Within 3FF, then, neoliberal "forms of action and predispositions" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 10) often had a direct relationship with employees' spiritual identities, lives and practices. My argument goes further than this, however, to suggest that the mechanisms by which our economic and social structures generate the types of persons compatible with neoliberal capitalism can themselves be seen to constitute a form of *spirituality*. While the term spiritual has a lot of 'baggage', both from religion and from its new-age associations (Rowson, 2014), I would follow Rowson in seeing the value of the term being "that it gives permission to speak of things that are unknowable" (Rowson, 2014, p. 16), the tacit and embodied dimensions of human life which extend outside of our conscious awareness. It is this attentiveness to 'fluids' that distinguishes my use of 'neoliberal spirituality' from Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) conceptualisation of ideology. While our understandings are very similar, ideology carries with it resonances of terrain that can be fully mapped and explicated through intellectual means, whereas 'spirituality' retains a sense that there are limits to our capacity to comprehend the forces at work.

One of the clearest examples of how this engagement of spiritual commitments operated to create neoliberal persons within 3FF was within the unpaid internship programme.[52] While the interns have not featured very much within this thesis they were a very important part of organisational life during my time there, and heavily influenced the tone and atmosphere within the office given that they often made up a third of the personnel. As with staff, the attraction to 3FF for many interns stemmed from their own faith identities or backgrounds, which was also a source of motivation for the work. What was noticeable was the enthusiasm with which almost all of them embraced giving their labour for free, often speaking glowingly of how much they loved working there and making very little complaint about having to do other paid work to support themselves. An equivalence was thus made and enacted between a set of moral values and ideals – a desire to do 'good' work within the charity sector, often rooted in faith – and an acceptance of short-term and underpaid or unpaid working conditions. In this context, a very literal line could be drawn between faith commitments and compliance with (or even joyful embracing of) neoliberal precarity.

Attentiveness to these spiritual aspects of neoliberalism is made complex because its ritualised, embodied and relational dimensions are often denied: many accounts present it as a solely economic system rooted in Freidman's 'rational choice theory', stressing "the trend for cultural expression of the qualities of abstraction, measurement and algorithm" (Rowson,

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[52] The majority of interns had just left university, and joined the organisation three days a week for three months at a time, although many extended to six months. This work was unpaid, with a small daily stipend for travel and food expenses.

2014, p. 49). I would argue, conversely, that part of what makes neoliberalism perplexing is that it simultaneously entails "abstraction, measurement and algorithm" (Rowson, 2014, p. 49) *and* trust, vision and the unspoken. Within 3FF, it was very apparent that different ways of knowing were at play within the organisation, with the epistemology of encounter underpinning the work with participants sitting alongside forms of rational calculation such as the Social Return on Investment analysis which featured in Chapter 2, and monitoring and evaluation procedures discussed in Chapter 7. This would seem to be highly characteristic of contemporary capitalism, which often involves the *combination* of rationalising 'metrics' with other kinds of knowledge which are tacit, embodied and 'fluid'.

Media practices are a key site of this conjuncture, and can help clarify how neoliberal spirituality operates *through* discourses of rational efficiency. In Chapter 7, for example, I recounted a request from senior management for a monitoring and evaluation software system where someone could "input the data and it will spit out an answer". This request was explicitly made in terms of rational calculation, as if motivated by the need for a machine that would make evaluation more efficient. However, given that there was no clear problem with the existing system, and no obvious question that was not currently being answered, the desire to bring in more expensive and time-consuming software was far from rational. Instead, it could be seen as driven by a deep-seated belief in the *symbolic* power of digitisation – 'efficiency' thus becoming a magical quality that would become attached to any answer spat out by the machine, regardless of its actual usefulness to the organisation.

Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) talk about the emergence of symptoms of anxiety under neoliberalism, using anxiety to refer to "an unease associated with the difficulty of identifying the origin of the threat and making plans to control it" (2005, p. 424). The anxiety which often accompanied the use of media technologies within 3FF, I would argue, often stemmed from this confusion regarding the rationality of their use. The overwhelming experience of attempting to navigate 'too big data' was exacerbated by an overall sense that data were *meant* to be helping the organisation be productive and efficient, just as the frustrations at the limits of social media for communicating a counternarrative were intensified by the efficacy promised by the 'myth of distributed digital agency'. What was notable was how difficult it was to conceive of doing things differently – to consider producing or keeping less data, or to not use the available media channels at moments of crisis. This curtailing of alternatives was aided by the blurring of life and work for 3FF's staff, in which the same problems of data management and speaking or staying silent online flowed seamlessly through their personal and professional lives.

This discussion indicates there needs to be a degree of caution when looking to 3FF for insights for how to create collectives which can challenge the inequalities caused by contemporary capitalism. In many ways its practice operated to reproduce neoliberal ways of being, and its spiritual engagements with staff and participants often elided questions of power. However, I would argue that my empirical material also indicates a more ambiguous analysis and that there are valuable lessons to be drawn from their organisational practice, since it could be seen as *simultaneously* furthering *and* countering neoliberal spirituality. This more critical potential is explored next as a form of decoloniality.

3FF as decolonial practice?

So far, this chapter has summarised the key themes of the thesis, and then looked at the affinities between 3FF's interfaith practice and neoliberal ways of being. A key consequence of the argument that neoliberalism propagates itself in part through spiritual means is that it cannot be countered solely through forms of rationalisation, but requires a kind of counter spirituality: one which is focused on undoing long-standing hierarchies and inequalities. This could be called a *decolonial* spirituality, and this section will argue that some of the methods and principles used by 3FF to build relationships between participants could be considered part of such a decolonial approach.

Decolonial scholars have a broad interest in faith traditions as ways of knowing which have been subjugated within the coloniality of knowledge,[53] i.e. the establishment of European modernity/rationality "as a universal paradigm" (Quijano, 2007, p. 172) and simultaneous dismissal of others as "traditional, barbarian, primitive, mystic" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 46). In his discussion of the different 'options' that will shape the twenty-first century,[54] Mignolo (2011) describes "the spiritual option" as "akin with decolonial options" (2011, p. 34), suggesting that spiritual options can open up "horizons of life they have been kept hostage (that is, colonised) by modernity, capitalism, and the belief in the superiority of Western civilisation" (2011, p. 62).

There are a number of ways in which 3FF's practice could be seen as providing this kind of decolonial spiritual option. One relates to the way that religion itself was approached. As outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, the category of 'religion' has a problematic colonial history: when faith traditions are understood as internally homogenous and entirely distinct from one

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[53] This is accompanied by two other concepts, the coloniality of power i.e. global asymmetries between the West and the global South, and the coloniality of being, "the pertinent question of how whiteness gained ontological density far above blackness" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 12).

[54] Mignolo (2011) names five different trajectories: rewesternisation, the reorientation of the left, dewesternisation, decoloniality and spirituality (2011, p. 21).

another (the World Religions Paradigm) this continues a long-standing "discourse of othering" (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 20) which reinforces the superiority of Western Christianity, albeit often implicitly. The organisational history in the thesis introduction talked about 3FF's transition away from a 'traditional' or elite-oriented kind of interfaith as a way of trying to reimagine faith outside of the World Religions Paradigm.

Rather than bringing together religious 'representatives', 3FF tried to create spaces in which the internal diversity of faith communities could be acknowledged and explored. By treating religions as more like fractional objects, plural collectives which are internally differentiated and which 'hang together' through active practices rather than because of an essential essence, 3FF could be seen as providing models for delinking religion from its colonial framing. Importantly, this was not about individualising faith – instead, the personal and the collective dimensions were constantly articulated, for example through encouraging speakers in schools to use formulations such as "for me, as a Jew", asserting the importance of the group identity alongside its personal dimensions.

A second aspect of 3FF's practice which could be considered decolonial was in refuting the 'modern divide' – the perceived distinction between modern, rational, secular people, and pre-modern, traditional, religious people, which (as I argued in the theoretical framework), is a key aspect of faith-based racisms. This divide was challenged within 3FF through their insistence that religious and nonreligious people could and should engage in interfaith work on equal terms, and that there was no group of 'secular' people without beliefs to which they were deeply committed. In *The Spirit of Encounter*, this was analysed in terms of tacit and embodied knowledge, arguing that everyone – whether religious or not – has grounds from which they attend to the world trustingly, which can never be fully brought to conscious attention. By subverting the self-understandings of nonreligious participants as fundamentally different to people of faith, and encouraging them to reflect upon and narrate their own beliefs, this challenged the forms of coloniality which are perpetuated by linking together modernity, rationality and secularism – a point expanded upon in more detail below.

A further dimension that could be considered decolonial were 3FF's attempts to enable participants to exchange these nonconscious grounds through embodied encounters rather than through intellectualised means. Decolonial thinkers argue that the processes of coloniality, which reduced non-Europeans to objects to be known and possessed by European subjects, have "blocked… every relation of communication, of interchange of knowledge, of modes of producing knowledge between the cultures" (Quijano 2007, p. 174), closing down options for such lateral exchange. However, they still consider that "it is a good thing to place different civilisations in contact with each other… it's an excellent thing to blend different

worlds" (Césaire, 2000, p. 2), and argue that there is a need to develop these new forms of "intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings" (Quijano, 2007, p. 177). 3FF's encounter-based approach was contrasted in Chapter 6 with forms of communication rooted in sociology or theology – the more common bases for religious literacy, both of which involve intellectualising and elite procedures which are strongly coded with coloniality. Sharing through encounters, on the other hand, did not require specialist expertise and was accessible to a wide range of audiences, including young children.

The use of artistic and creative methods to encourage personal sharing and emotional communication echoes the advice of Bailey (2014), who suggests that the difficulties of overcoming epistemic differences, especially where these are laden with power, often requires "aesthetic and affective resources" (2014, p. 67). She goes on to remark that in her experience "you can't always think, write, or argue your way around intersecting oppressions. Sometimes you need to sing, chance, dance… pray, laugh, read or write poetry" (ibid). The most moving experiences during my fieldwork – for example, the event at the Muslim community centre recounted in Chapter 4, or the moment of reflection after the Paris attacks in Chapter 5 – involved just these kinds of aesthetic and affective resources, and could be seen as decolonial in as much as they acknowledged the need for procedures which involved nonconscious forms of intuiting or sensing.

The fact that these practices bore a strong resemblance to those used within faith traditions to build communities and enable them to 'hang together' could also be described as decolonial, by taking as their point of departure concepts and ideas which have been discredited or marginalised under coloniality as "traditional, barbarian, primitive, mystic" (2011, p. 46) – a practice Mignolo describes as 'border thinking'. In Chapter 4, I described interfaith as a kind of 'partial connection' (Haraway, 1988; Strathern, 1991), seeking to create subtle shifts or to "'awaken' possibilities" (Velho, 2007) rather than expecting explicit and transformative change – mirroring practices such as those used by Grassroots Jews as they tried to build relationships across sectarian lines by innovating ritual practices.

There was a fine line between 3FF's practices reproducing neoliberal 'forms of action predispositions' and challenging them in decolonial ways – with the difference often lying in who was in positions of leadership and how power was conceptualised by them. Mignolo (2011) recognises the ambivalence within spirituality, drawing a distinction between those kinds associated with new age practices or 'soft' romantic revolutionaries, and those which explicitly engage with power. He is clear that his own understanding of spirituality is rooted in the latter, such as Native American epistemologies which entail material claims since in order

to practice their spiritualities the lands to which they are attached must be decommodified (2011, p. 62).

Drawing lessons from 3FF means thinking carefully about how its work could be used as a starting point for imagining 'decolonial options' which might enable a plural collective to emerge in the contemporary British context. The following sections outline three: acknowledging the nonconscious, developing sustainable ways of living with media, and thinking critically about embodied knowledge. All are rooted in my fieldwork and look to faith traditions and spiritual practices as means of developing a counter spirituality to neoliberalism, and as a way of engaging in 'border thinking' from my own perspective. And they all seek to engage with power, anticipating how they could be co-opted and attempting to embed forms of accountability by which this recolonisation might be avoided.

Decolonial option 1: acknowledging the nonconscious

As already stated, modernity/rationality operates through claim to universalism – that whatever knowledge the modern subject has is not situated or particular but a 'view from nowhere', produced through what Haraway (1988) calls 'the God trick'. Building plural collectives on a decolonial basis has to begin by recognising that all knowledge is situated. However, this has some complications in the contemporary moment, when I would argue there has come a new permutation of 'the God trick'. Where historically the overlapping belief structures of secular scientism and Christian morality were constructed as neutral starting points, there is now an additional way of adopting a 'view from nowhere' which positions the subject as uncommitted to any grand political or religious narrative, including a rejection of explicit atheism or belief in the superiority of Western science. This has a relationship with the idea of 'irony' as described by Chouliaraki (2012) as "a disposition of detached knowingness, a self-conscious suspicion vis-à-vis all claims to truth" (2012, p. 2) which she argues has become common in the neoliberal era.

This noncommittal disposition has strong similarities with the recent literature on nonreligious cultures, particularly the phenomenon of 'indifferentism' described by Lee (2014) and Mortimer and Prideaux (2018). Rather than explicitly rejecting religion, many of the nonreligious people they encountered self-consciously identified as indifferent to religion, while revealing on deeper probing to hold deep commitments, for example to the nonexistence of God. Mortimer and Prideaux (2018) argue that keeping these commitments largely unspoken was understood by participants (in their case, attendees at the 'atheist

church' the Sunday Assembly) as a way of trying to make the space *inclusive* of people of faith by avoiding overt statements of hostile atheism. However, I would argue that it may in fact serve to re-inscribe the modern divide in which religious people are constructed as premodern, traditional and overly attached to their beliefs, in opposition to modern, detached and uncommitted nonreligious people.[55]

Building a plural collective in which all participants are understood as situated therefore faces some particular challenges because of the existence of a significant section of the population who are often at pains to deny that they have any beliefs or commitments at all. In order to bring their worlds together with those who *do* acknowledge their commitments (especially racialised faith minorities) on a decolonial basis, practices need to be developed which can shift this understanding of the self as ironically detached from any particular perspective or way of being. This has similarities with workshops on 'privilege', which look at the "unearned advantage and conferred dominance" (McIntosh, 1990, p. 7) of favoured groups, which tend to entail men or white people engaging in forms of reflection on the "colossal unseen dimensions" (ibid) of power, including those which have constructed their identities and ways of life as "morally neutral [and] normative" (1990, p. 2).

3FF's work provides some templates for how the situatedness of nonreligious people might be asserted. One of the distinctive things about 3FF's approach compared to other interfaith organisations was its active inclusion not only of nonreligious people who had actively considered their beliefs (such as members of humanist groups) but also unaffiliated agnostics and atheists who may never have reflected on their beliefs prior to their engagement with the organisation. Importantly, the techniques used were not 'secularising', as if becoming more conscious of one's beliefs in explicit terms was their main goal, or as if a complete account of what one believes and why would ever be possible. Instead, the work was intended to facilitate new forms of relationality between religious and nonreligious participants by highlighting that everyone attends to the world from grounds which can never be fully brought to conscious attention.

The sessions run for speakers in schools to learn to narrate their faith journey, which sought to be as applicable to nonreligious as religious people, could therefore perhaps be described as a form of *nonconsciousness-raising*. Through learning to speak openly of their beliefs, volunteers became more attuned to the nonconscious dimensions of their lives, while hearing these stories alongside those of people of faith in schools may have acted as nonconsciousness-

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[55] It would be interesting to explore the similarities between 'colourblindness' with regards to race, where 'not seeing race' means 'not seeing racism', and indifferentism, where 'not caring about religion' may well often amount to 'not caring about inequalities between religious groups'.

raising for nonreligious students, modelling ways of narrating the self which emphasised the comparability of belief formation across the 'faith line'.

3FF's model was not perfect nor the only way such procedures could be imagined, and a plural collective would benefit from further experimentation with different means of nonconsciousness-raising. In particular, a combination of their methods with a stronger power analysis could encourage more reflection on people's positions in relation to the central political myths of neoliberalism, such as ideas of meritocracy or the superiority of market mechanisms, highlighting that without actively resisting we are all enacting commitments to a marketised (sexist, racist, classist) society through our daily actions.

Schulz (2017) suggests that one form of 'border thinking' is for white Europeans to "openly reclaim our right to be enchanted" (2017, p. 135) and to "engage more thoroughly with the mythical narratives that we tell ourselves" (2017, p. 134) – and nonconsciousness-raising could be seen as a practice of this kind. However, he also warns that "[s]imply speaking in mythical, numinous or metaphysical terms… is not per se a decolonial position" (2017, p. 137), acknowledging that technologies of enchantment can be misused, such as in the appropriation of indigenous cosmologies. Nonconsciousness-raising for the nonreligious, if undertaken without due attention to the imbalance of power between the dominant white hegemonic nonreligious culture and those from the religious and racial minorities othered by it, could become another means of centring the perspectives of white middle-class people, this time through our emotionality rather than our rationality. For this reason, it must be led by those whose lived experiences include being marginalised through their association with the irrational and the unspoken, particularly racialised people of faith.

Decolonial option 2: learning sustainable ways of living with media

The ubiquity of digital technologies in a context like contemporary London means assembling a plural collective will inevitably involve media practices, since even creating 'media-free' space now generally requires deliberate effort. Despite the promise of the early internet to act positively to bring together different worlds, and to "realise, with little effort, the impossible dreams of democracy and community" (Mosco, 2005, p. 30), it is becoming increasingly clear that digital technologies may in fact be making it *harder* to communicate well across lines of difference. As the discussion in Chapter 5 of faith-inflected media events showed, at moments of crisis the frenetic pace of digital culture often resulted in misunderstandings and fractured relationships, with individuals and organisations alike struggling to work out how and when to

speak in constructive ways, even as silence or nonparticipation became increasingly difficult to maintain.

Developing new ways of living with and relating to media is therefore vitally important, but also complex because our existing relationships include many hidden and unspoken dimensions. In line with the non-secular approach to technology taken throughout this thesis, the significance of media technologies needs to be recognised as extending far beyond functionality, with an attentiveness their status as mythic symbols of modernity (Morley, 2007). Attending to these mythic dimension can be challenging, however, because (as described above) the symbolic aspects are often encoded within discourses of rational efficiency, and because of the ubiquity of these technologies in the working and personal lives of so many of us, including media academics.

These hidden dimensions of our relationship can be connected to previous discussions of tacit knowledges which comes to dwell in us as embodied inhabitance (Polanyi, 1966). Already in the early 2000s, Lally (2002) described the experience of a computer crashing as "an assault on our ontological security" (2002, p. 210) given that this is tied to "our reliance on technologies to function as expected" (ibid). This sense that our safety and security is intrinsically linked up with our ability to constantly connect to others via digital networks has become yet more endemic with the spread of smart phones, with studies showing significant levels of anxiety amongst moderate and heavy phone users when these devices are taken away even for short periods (Cheever et al., 2014); nearly half of the young adults in a recent survey said they would rather have a broken bone than a broken phone (Alter, 2017). These technologies have thus for very many of us come to dwell in us, becoming part of our grounds, the position *from* which we attend *to* the world, making it hard to imagine how our lives or relationships would function in their absence.

The dominant ways of interacting with media technologies perpetuate coloniality in a range of ways, from the entrenchment of the 'digital divide' through expectations of online access (Loader & Keeble, 2010), to the mining of conflict minerals and dumping of toxic e-waste (Maxwell & Miller, 2013), and the surveillance and profiling associated with big data (Cupples, 2015). Constant connectivity also furthers coloniality in terms of the encroachment of commodified labour into nonwork time, and fostering habits which maximise data and therefore profit-making for the 'big tech' corporations which are now among most powerful entities in the contemporary world. Assembling a plural collective on a decolonial basis therefore requires the development of media practices which are sustainable, in social, environmental and political terms.

My empirical chapters have already suggested some alternative practices – the data principles built into my monitoring and evaluation system in Chapter 7, or the convening of embodied encounters in Chapter 5 which enabled affects of peacefulness to flow, counteracting the aggravation and terror of 'faith-inflected media events'. Engaging in 'border thinking' on this topic might involve not only taking our own enchantment with these technologies seriously, but looking to non-Western spiritual practices for guidance on how to reimagine these relationships

An example of this based on my fieldwork could be taken from the narrative told by one of 3FF's staff members, Tamanna, who used to describe in her faith story the multiple meanings of hijab in her life. For her, this was a practice which involved not just clothing but also the 'hijab of the ears', the 'hijab of the eyes' and the 'hijab of the tongue' – being mindful of what she looked at, listened to and said, taking care that these were in line with her values and moral commitments. I never asked her how this related to her use of social media, but one can imagine how different patterns of use on popular digital platforms would be if participants were practising the 'hijab of the eyes, ears and tongue' online. It is significant here that not only did I, the media researcher, take a long time to consider that the spiritual practice might have relevance in the technological context, but the organisation also did not see these personal ways of navigating questions such as 'when is it right to speak or to stay silent' as relevant to its own challenges; such practices were not brought into conversations about how to respond to faith-inflected media events, for example.

A decolonial approach to media practices within organising might entail looking to Muslim women who have engaged with various kinds of veiling (whether as a daily practice or not) for guidance on how their understandings of embodied comportment relate to patterns of speech both on and off-line. It also might involve seeking to understand more deeply the Qur'anic idea of 'the veil' as a multifaceted concept concerning how the public and the private should relate to one another (El Guindi, 2003) – and how centuries of contestation over its meaning might contain wisdom which is highly relevant in a context where we are constantly being exhorted to put ourselves on digital display.

Similarly, spiritual traditions in which chanting plays a major role might have much to teach us about the relationship between speech and subjectivity. The emerging literature on 'expression effects' (Pingree, 2007; Pingree et al., 2013), that is the effect of messages on their senders, is beginning to map the reflexive impact of asserting a belief or position in words, which often reinforces one's commitment to a stated position and may be a key factor in the kinds of polarisation which often play out in online debates. Pingree et al. (2013) suggest that

expression effects may "be increasingly relevant in the modern media environment due to increased availability of expressive opportunities" (2013, p. 355) such as the prevalence of opportunities to state opinions afforded by social media platforms. These unknowable effects of speech on subjectivity would come as no surprise to those who practice chanting, which is premised on the idea that speaking aloud can change the speaker in ways that go beyond conscious comprehension – and they may therefore offer wisdom as to how to navigate these expressive opportunities in more constructive ways.

The emphasis on *sustainable* practices is important here, because digital capitalism itself constantly exhorts us to create new practices, use new platforms and update our habits. Indeed, as Chun (2016) states, neoliberal subjects are always being encouraged to "change their habits – rather than society and institutions – in order to become happier, more productive people" (Chun, 2016, p. xi), individualising and depoliticising change. To be decolonial, this option needs to avoid being neophilic and to resist the draw of the latest or most advanced technologies which are invested with the "magical qualities associated with 'newness'" (Morley, 2007, p. 295). Crucially, the development of new practices needs to be understood as involving a circulation of agency that cannot be achieved solely through the conscious will. This is where spiritual traditions, which emphasise the creation of new ways of being through submission rather than mastery, may provide more accurate models for sensing and intuiting the complexities of our interrelationships with technologies than Western models of cause and effect which privilege the individual will as the locus of agency.

Decolonial option 3: critically engaging with embodied knowledge

A central theme here has been to cultivate an attentiveness to both the embodied and tacit 'fluid' dimensions of knowledge, alongside more explicit 'metrics'. While these coexist in all forms of knowledge, the embodied ways of knowing which are central both to faith traditions and to 3FF's interfaith practice have historically been suppressed under coloniality. This means that building a plural collective which addresses the historic exclusions of subjugated groups through their associations with the body, including religious and racial minorities, needs to find ways of validating and including these ways of knowing rather than seeking to objectify and rationalise them.

However, simply acknowledging the embodied and the tacit dimensions of knowledge does not in itself constitute decolonial practice. As we have seen, neoliberalism involves greater attentiveness to fluid ways of knowing, but combines them with rationalising metrics in ways which often serve to entrench rather than challenge differentials of power. The analysis in

Chapter 8 also showed how this this could enable an immunity to critique through switching between different modes of knowing. With the choir, it was the slippage between the explicit and the implicit which allowed *both* metrics (such as demographic data) *and* fluids (such as embodied feelings of discomfort and offence) to be discounted when they did not fit with the established viewpoint of those in power.

Returning to the quote from Lorde (2007) in the chapter opening, we could say that there is a need to think more deeply about the role of rationality within "the chaos of knowledge" (2007, p. 100), to avoid a feeling/thinking dichotomy, and to imagine the "ways and combinations" (2007, p. 101) which might best help us to learn decolonial ways of being and relating. In Chapter 8, I outlined some possible methods for articulating 'metrics' such as statistics with personal and emotional ways of knowing. Here I want to address the conditions under which personal sharing might constructively contribute to the building of plural collectives.

Again, looking to faith traditions as a form of 'border thinking' might highlight that embodied practices and sharing of sacred knowledges are encased within specific circumstances – particular times and places which are set apart. These principles were reflected within 3FF in the care taken to create very particular conditions for sharing embodied knowledge. As outlined in Chapter 6, this involved various kinds of preparation, such as the development and rehearsing of a faith story, and sometimes preparatory workshops like the Art of Asking for students. It also involved a facilitator who was responsible for setting the tone for the encounter, and for creating the safe space agreement which acted as a ritualised means of setting the space apart from everyday life.

These practices indicated a recognition that sharing these very personal forms of knowledge created conditions of vulnerability – and had an inherent unpredictability given the indeterminate outcomes of the interactions between participants. The riskiness of truly engaging with the sacred commitments of others was understood to be something which could go wrong and damage relationships, for example between participants, or between speakers and 3FF. This demonstrated a very different kind of approach to sharing compared to forms of digital disclosure about intensely personal embodied experiences which have become normalised, but without a cultural context which provides any kind of protection in the vulnerability that this will entail.

An additional feature of spiritual practices is the importance of the passage of time, and the building up of experience and forging of community relationships. As described in Chapter 7, there were tensions within 3FF's work between the logic within a digital context of 'immediacy' and the need to take time over relationships. This indicates a need to resist the

impulse within the digital context to construct all forms of knowledge as informational, as if they can be shared in condensed form (such as a 20-minute TED talk or a listicle) and transmitted 'magically' i.e. without work (Gell, 1988). Drawing distinctions between different kinds of knowledge and the central importance of building relationships through time means acknowledging that our ability to receive endless amounts of information about different categories of people is not the same as understanding them – and that understanding requires the effort of loving actions through time.

Love, here, is not about learning to be 'nicer' to one another, but creating relationships across lines of power in which the aim is to learn how to treat one another as equals, divesting oneself of the desire to dominate the other. This also means being accountable within these relationships, as a means of mitigating against the sharing of embodied knowledge becoming another form of extraction, facilitating new forms of control through understanding the emotional worlds of embodied others. And it means acknowledging that these differences have concrete, material and financial dimensions, requiring the sharing of resources and serious exploration of material claims such as reparations for enslavement and colonialism.

These three decolonial options – acknowledging the nonconscious, developing sustainable ways of living with media, and critically exploring the place of embodied knowledge – are merely suggestions, avenues that might enable new kinds of collectives to emerge which might then be able to creatively face the enormous challenges ahead. None are silver bullets or quick fixes, but could constitute small steps towards being able to have different kinds of conversations, the subtle shifting of grounds that might prevent damaging fragmentation and enable empathy and mutual learning.

Concluding reflections: decolonising research?

This chapter has tried to tie together the themes presented in this thesis, and to suggest some avenues for building plural collectives that might be explored through looking at the successes and limitations of 3FF's interfaith work. To conclude, I want to reflect on the research process, and to consider the role this kind of work might be able to play in bringing worlds together on a decolonial basis, recognising that this will face challenges given the problematic colonial history of all Western academia, including the social sciences and anthropology (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Like all PhDs, the thesis presented here is the outcome of the long process, much of which could not have been predicted at the outset. My original proposal, submitted to the ESRC five

years ago, was entitled 'Mediatisation, nonhuman agency and truth claims'. Alongside the collaboration with 3FF, I initially planned to do a second strand of research with a scientific organisation, most likely the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs as I had previously worked on a book with its founder Professor David Nutt (Nutt, 2012). This idea was dropped early on in the research process when it became clear how intensive the collaboration with 3FF was going to be. The mediatisation literature (e.g. Lundby, 2014; Hepp & Krotz, 2014; Hjarvard, 2013), which featured prominently in the writing I produced during the first two years, was also dropped as I became increasingly frustrated with the apolitical stance taken by its most prominent authors. Despite these changes, conceptually the questions I have sought answer here are very similar to those I had in mind five years ago.

Methodologically, the formal collaboration placed certain limitations on the approach I was able to take, enabling me to answer certain questions – for example, coming to a very fine-grained understanding of 3FF's data practices – but curtailing others. As discussed in Chapter 2, the collaboration made it difficult to engage in the more Freirean type of action research, which I came to realise would considerably strengthen my methodology and enable me to build up a fuller picture by incorporating a greater diversity of standpoints. Were I to design the collaborative relationship from the start again I would give this more priority, and also anticipate the need to conduct this independently rather than relying on support and buy in from the organisation.

3FF itself, at the time of writing, both is and is not the organisation I knew and which is presented here. The core programming in schools and universities continues to be delivered in much the same way, but the arts and culture work has largely stopped, and new 'community' projects have been taken on. A trend begun during my time there towards recruiting increasing numbers of nonreligious staff seems to have intensified, which by some accounts has changed the atmosphere in the office: it is less non-secular, less the kind of environment in which staff can speak easily of God. Frustrations around decision making and strategy have persisted, as has the excitable, youthful energy and penchant for lively and emotional leaving parties when staff move on.

Methodologically and ethically, the fact that there has been an almost complete changeover in personnel has certainly affected the process. There are only three staff currently working at 3FF who were present when my fieldwork began, and everyone with whom I originally conceived the collaborative relationship, including the director, deputy director and my original contact Esther, have now left the organisation. Current senior management are largely disengaged from the research process and took minimal action on the extensive feedback I

gave them in March 2017. The reflexive and conversational dialogue I imagined having with the organisation as I negotiated these final stages has therefore not materialised, making it difficult for me to enact the feminist ethics of care I intended. Speaking from my own side of the relationship, I also do not feel entirely cared for in the way I might have hoped, given the lack of value attributed to much of the work I undertook there.

While I have only sporadic contact with the organisation as it is now, it remains an implicit presence in my daily life through my ongoing relationships with ex-staff members. The closest of these, with Esther, Tara and Simone, have kept the thinking begun there alive and have been an invaluable source of energy through the lonelier moments of writing up. Esther and Tara have now set up a business together and we recently spent a day talking through my analysis and critique of 3FF's practice and its relevance for their work. A tentative suggestion for ongoing collaboration is that I will design some monitoring and evaluation when they pilot their work based on the principles outlined in Chapter 8. Simone and I have found opportunities to work together, including co-facilitating an event on race and faith which sought to bring a wider group into conversations we have been having since our time together at 3FF. She has recently begun her own PhD, and we hope to co-author some academic work together, which may also involve others we met through the organisation.

To what extent might conducting research itself have decolonial potential in assembling plural collectives? Continuing with the theme of looking to spiritual practices as a way of engaging in 'border thinking', I want to return to the quote from Tara in Chapter 6 about "finding God in silence". In a higher educational context in which constantly producing explicit and codifiable outputs is the measure of success, there might be something important about reclaiming a role for silence and the unspoken. For example, I have found I have become increasingly taciturn about my 'impact', minimally complying with the requirements of the ResearchFish portal this year, and having no intention of recording the interaction with Esther and Tara even though this is exactly the form of 'knowledge exchange' with the private sector that the ESRC would highly value.

Silence could also be seen as a factor in the ways in which I have tried to shift my theoretical centre of gravity over the course of constructing this thesis. Having begun with a heavily white and male literature, over time I found it increasingly important to follow the call of Todd (2014) to resist the urge to constantly link back to the same 'Great Thinkers' and actively search for those "discussing the same topics in other ways" (2014). This led to my growing interest in black feminism, and literatures on epistemic injustice and decoloniality – the latter entering the thesis theoretically late in the process. However, on reading this literature I

discovered that it was already congruent with my approach, since the antiracist *organising* spaces I have become part of over this period are heavily informed by decolonial practice.

I now hope to embed and reinforce this direction of travel through the avenues I choose to pursue in future research. The most powerful lessons I received while writing this PhD came from the relationships I formed with those encountering the world from different embodied positions to my own, which also taught me that the practice of research can be a means of creating and deepening such relationships. For this reason, I no longer wish to extend this thinking through an exploration of the mediation of knowledge within scientific institutions which will almost certainly be dominated by elite white men, whom I wish to decentre both academically or personally. A refusal to explore a topic, to reference a particular writer or link their ideas to my own might be a means, as Todd suggests, of correcting historic erasures and "decolonis[ing] the Academy" (2014).

Decolonising the Academy also means thinking very carefully about my own position as a class privileged white woman located in the West, thinking critically about how to use the accrual of knowledge to disperse power rather than gain status on an individual basis. This means pushing back against the neoliberal direction of travel within higher education and trying to navigate a different path with different measures of success. In practical terms, I intend to continue the collaborative spirit of this research by co-authoring and co-presenting as far as possible, and nurturing relationships in which I can be held accountable for these choices in future.

Finally, this silence has more personal dimensions: I am a quieter person than when I began, and hope to continue to cultivate a sensitivity and attentiveness to the right time and place in which to speak. This has meant learning to carefully guard the kinds of knowledge I have gained which can only be spoken of within relationships of trust. And it has meant becoming progressively attuned to the inadequacy of whatever conscious mapping I have of what I know and how I know it, while also finding the process of contemplating these limitations illuminating both academically and personally. The real learning of the past four years is not here on the page, but somewhere else; an embodied inhabitance which has come to dwell in me, which I cannot tell but might sometimes succeed in sharing through embodied and nonconscious means.

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