Cohesive Societies: Faith and Belief

Examining the role of faith
and belief in cohesive societies

Madeleine Pennington
July 2020

The British Academy
Cohesive Societies

The
Faith
& Belief
Forum

About this report

This report was externally commissioned by the Faith and Belief Forum and the British Academy and makes a contribution to the Academy's Cohesive Societies programme. This programme asks how societies sustain cohesiveness in the face of rapid political, social, economic and technological change. This report contributes to the exploratory, scoping phase of the programme, which aims to capture existing work in relation to social cohesion under five key themes:

1. Cultural memory and tradition,

2. The social economy,

3. Meanings and mechanisms of social responsibility,

4. Identity and belonging

5. Care for the future.

Previous publications in this initial scoping phase of the programme have identified that there is a problematic over-emphasis in UK politics and policy to do with cohesion on security, and on the challenges that differences in ethnicity and religion pose for societal cohesion.[1] This has led to an evidence gap on other aspects of the interplay between belief systems and cohesion.[2]

This publication seeks to fill this gap by exploring a wider variety of the different ways in which faith and belief interacts with societal cohesion. It has a particular emphasis on how faith organisations interact with communities. It is not intended as a British Academy policy position, but rather contributes to the overall picture of the evidence base in order to inform a nuanced understanding of cohesion policy.
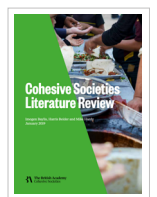
Further reading

Cohesive Societies
Policy Review
By Matthew Donoghue and
Sarah Bourke

Cohesive Societies
Literature Review
By Imogen Baylis, Harris Beider
and Mike Hardy

Cohesive Societies: Scoping
Concepts and Priorities

thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/cohesive-societies

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1   Imogen Baylis, Harris Beider and Mike Hardy, *Cohesive Societies Literature Review*, British Academy, 2019. p12, 47; Mathew Donoghue and Sarah Bourke, *Cohesive Societies Policy Review*, British Academy, 2019. pp12, 26

2   British Academy, *Cohesive Societies: Scoping Concepts and Priorities*, British Academy, 2019. p6,12-13.

Contents

Foreword from the British Academy

I am delighted to introduce this externally commissioned report, which examines the role of faith and belief in cohesive societies.

I am particularly pleased to introduce the report as a scholar of multiculturalism, racism, racial equality and secularism. I have closely followed the emergence of religious identities and faith communities as both a central component of British multiculturalism, and as a source of fear after the attacks of 9/11 and their foreign policy and domestic aftermath. While Britain has adjusted to the insertion of public religion into community relations, a focus on security has led to some communities, and Muslims in particular, being seen by some as the problem, rather than terrorism or socio-economic deprivation. New demography and faith activisms mean that we need to rethink secularist assumptions and the role of religion in public life.[3] We must better appreciate faith communities as social and national assets, especially considering how much inter-religious harmony and cooperation is seen across the country.

This review, commissioned jointly with the Faith and Belief Forum, is intended to complement earlier publications in the Cohesive Societies programme by providing an account of the ways in which faith and belief interacts with cohesion.[4] It places an emphasis on the role played by community organisations across a wide range of geographies and perspectives, brought to life through a set of case studies. Read alongside the other publications in the Cohesive Societies programme, this can help us to see the complex, important role that faith and belief have to play in our society. Like much of the programme's work to date, it is intended to enable us to think beyond and across sectors, disciplines, and religious identities to explore and consider a range of possibilities and opportunities for policy.

The British Academy's policy work aims to bring independence, authority and objectivity to complex issues. It is my hope that this report, seen alongside the rest of the publications in the Cohesive Societies programme, will enable a more informed and constructive discussion of the role of faith and belief in in strategies for sustaining societal cohesion. Writing in July 2020, this seems more important than ever.

Professor Tariq Modood FBA
Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy, and Director, Research Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, University of Bristol; Fellow of the British Academy

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3   Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, *Living With Difference*, Woolf Institute, Cambridge, 2015; Tariq Modood, *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism*, ECPR Press, Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.

4   British Academy, *Cohesive Societies: Scoping Concepts and Priorities*, British Academy, 2019.

Foreword from the Faith & Belief Forum

As an interfaith practitioner working across the UK I see first-hand how much incredible work local faith and belief communities are doing to build connection and help the most vulnerable in our society, from Buddhist to Bahá'í, Muslim to Methodist, Humanist to Hindu. Sometimes this work is driven by faith leaders, but more often it is ordinary people of faith, working tirelessly in a voluntary capacity. That is why we at the Faith & Belief Forum set up the London Faith & Belief Community Awards, to recognise this work that is flying under the radar. Over 400 nominations and 122 awarded faith-based organisations later, we have barely scratched the surface of grassroots, faith-inspired action in London, let alone the rest of the UK.

Simultaneously, when I hear faith discussed by our politicians and statutory bodies, faith groups are consistently presented as a problem to be managed, changed or risk assessed. I find it frustrating that faith and belief groups are often over-scrutinised in terms of risk and security, and then overlooked when cohesion-based solutions are considered. I am always just as eager to hear from politicians and statutory bodies about how faith and belief is also part of the solution. To be frank, too often this is missing.

Focusing on social cohesion presents an exciting opportunity to examine the positive role that faith and belief plays in UK society. I hugely welcome this study's effort to redress that balance and make recommendations to more strongly separate security from cohesion in policy and practice. This study asks what a society would look like where faith and belief groups were engaged with as a resource, an asset, a transformative power, and where faith groups' capacity to build cohesion was scrutinised as thoroughly as their safeguarding policies. It asks how and where faith and belief groups are leading cohesion work, and what agency faith and belief groups have when statutory bodies plan cohesion work. It also provides examples of places where positive work is already happening, including twelve case studies that illuminate how faith connects with social cohesion on the ground.

In commissioning this study, we have collaborated with the British Academy, the UK's national body for the humanities and social sciences, the study of people, cultures and societies, past, present and future. The study builds on the British Academy's exciting programme of work on Cohesive Societies, to ask about the place of faith and belief in broader questions about how societies remain cohesive. Bringing together our two organisations' expertise, and a steering group made up of community activists and interfaith practitioners alongside the academic expertise of the British Academy, has ensured that this study is both academically rigorous and practically poignant.

As I sit writing this 'locked down' from home, we must acknowledge that the COVID-19 response has powerfully demonstrated the need for this study. Faith and belief groups have been on the frontline of vital relief work and must play an important role in efforts to rebuild a hopeful and cohesive society. As you read this important study, I invite you to consider how grassroots faith and belief groups are feeling in 2020. Perhaps hopeful of rebuilding; perhaps fearful, overworked and at threat of prejudice. I hope this study will start new conversations between local faith groups, interfaith practitioners, staff working on community cohesion in local councils, and central government decision makers setting the integration agenda in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Tim Mortimer
Programmes Manager, The Faith & Belief Forum

Executive Summary

This review considers the impact of the faith and belief sector upon social cohesion in the United Kingdom, as part of the British Academy's ongoing *Cohesive Societies* series. The British Academy and the Faith & Belief Forum commissioned Theos to research and write this review in October 2019.

Part one of the review considers how cohesion policy has accounted for the faith and belief sector over time. It suggests that:

- Cohesion policy has been disproportionately dominated by concerns for national identity, security and loyalty. This reflects how such policy has been shaped in response to specific crises, rather than by a desire to pursue social cohesion as an end in itself.

- In this model, faith is implied as a concerning 'other' and a risk factor for things going wrong; it has also often been subtly racialised as the preserve of ethnic minorities in a broadly secular mainstream.

- Recent years have seen the scope of cohesion policy expand beyond security concerns, particularly in the wake of Brexit. However, there is still work to do.

- This presents an important opportunity to reassess the place of faith and belief in cohesion policy.

Part two considers the practical impact of the faith and belief sector on our communities, through the *Cohesive Societies* series' five themes:

- Regarding the **meanings and mechanisms of cohesion,** economic and structural factors alone do not account for cohesion outcomes, and we might also consider the complicating impact of so-called 'spiritual capital' (understood as sources of hope in our communities). Faith and belief groups can often have an impact here, but their contribution is complex. Bridging occurs both horizontally (between different local faith communities) and vertically (between different levels of the same faith community or organisation). When used to their full potential, these complex and over-lapping networks can enrich and support social cohesion on the ground.

- On the theme of **cultural memory and tradition,** the religious establishment is not as contentious as we might expect, though it does privilege certain sorts of storytelling in the public sphere. It has also been used (albeit to a limited degree when compared to other countries) to buttress nativist and exclusive understandings of national identity. At the same time, faith and belief groups can also create platforms for alternative narratives and a more inclusive public discourse.

- Concerns around **identity and belonging** have often been the focus of social cohesion policy. Religious identity in particular is often understood as a risk factor for crisis and division. Yet we all have multi-layered and intersectional identities, and faith and belief groups also generate positive and inclusive feelings of belonging. Notably, this can manifest differently in rural and urban settings.

- The contribution of the faith and belief sector to **the social economy** as a whole is vast and increasing. The unique assets of faith and belief groups provide foundations for a powerful social witness, drawing on buildings, paid and unpaid staff time, networks, and geographical spread. Faith-based social action also emerges from a unique set of motivations, and the role of prayer is a distinctive aspect of faith-based action that needs to be taken into account in a fully faith-literate policy approach.

- The networks of faith and belief that stretch across local, regional, national and international spaces can be a powerful resource as we **care for the future.** Yet the faith sector is rapidly changing, and places of worship in particular also face significant sustainability challenges of their own; their ability to continue to lead the way in this area will stand or fall by their ability to engage the next generation.

The **conclusion** considers how cohesion policy could more effectively take account of the practical realities of faith and belief in the UK, and suggests:

- More strongly distinguishing between cohesion and security concerns;

- Recognising the significant opportunities for 'bridging' capital offered by the faith and belief sector – not only through interfaith work but also, for example, in the social contribution of faith and belief groups and the facilitation of opportunities for minority groups (that is, the voices which can otherwise be overlooked or excluded) to 'tell the story' of a place or community;

- Recognising the positive impact of intersectional and inclusive approaches to identity – including the ways in which the faith and belief sector provides opportunities for these approaches on the ground;

- A more rounded consideration of the complex and distinctive nature of faith and belief, rather than considering faith and belief groups generically as one manifestation of the broader community sector.

Various avenues for further research are noted throughout the review, including more rigorous assessment of different local authority approaches to interfaith funding (section 2.1); grassroots alternatives to policy language around 'identity', including 'confidence', 'vocation' and 'dignity' (section 2.3); and how far faith-based motivations for social action are resilient to economic or social change (section 2.4).

About the authors

This report was authored by Dr Madeleine Pennington, Head of Research at Theos.

Madeleine joined Theos in 2018 as a researcher on the Free Churches Commission, investigating the impact of churches on social cohesion across England. She holds a doctorate in theology from the University of Oxford, and previously worked as a research scholar in Philadelphia.

Theos conducts research, publishes reports, and holds debates, seminars and lectures on the relationship between religion, politics and society in the contemporary world. Theos is a Christian think tank based in the UK. Theos is part of The British and Foreign Bible Society, charity number 232759.

theosthinktank.co.uk

Acknowledgements

Images

All images used in this report are courtesy of Near Neighbours, a nationwide scheme to bring people together in diverse communities (Case Study 2).

Introduction

The British Academy's ongoing *Cohesive Societies* series explores the theoretical and practical expressions of social cohesion, and has been running since 2017. Two initial review documents were completed late in 2018: a *Literature Review* conducted by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, and a *Policy Review* conducted by Dr Matthew Donaghue and Ms Sarah Bourke (both of the University of Oxford). Their findings were discussed at a roundtable event in January 2019, and the emerging reflections were published in the *Cohesive Societies: Scoping Concepts and Priorities* document. Along with a number of smaller, targeted reports, these documents have provided a framework through which to refine critical understanding of 'cohesive societies' according to five key themes:

1. **The meanings and mechanisms of social cohesion**

    How much can social responsibility be supported by informal cooperative commitments and obligations, and how much does it require more formal structures like legislation?

2. **Cultural memory and tradition**

    How are communities shaped by people's understanding of their historical and cultural context, the ways that they talk about these things, and the practice of traditions?

3. **Identity and belonging**

    How do people define and defend their identities with others? How do people contextualise one another's identities?

4. **The social economy**

    How are communities shaped by the different ways in which people make choices, invest their energy, and make exchanges of all sorts involving skills, space, knowledge, networks, technologies and physical resources?

5. **Care for the future**

    How should we think about the sustainability of society in the face of significant shifts like climate change and demographic change? In this context, how should we consider the nature of obligations across generations?

Approaching the topic of social cohesion in this way has enabled a wide-ranging consideration of the ways in which matters of 'cohesion' affect the human experience. Nonetheless, this initial phase of the series also identified a number of potential areas for further study. One of these areas was the role and contribution of faith and belief.

The faith and belief sector raises a unique set of considerations pertaining to social cohesion: the impact of ideology upon our relationships and politics; the complex nature of personal identity; experiences of prejudice and how best to eliminate discrimination; the economic contribution of volunteer organisations and their role in service delivery; the place of ritual in our collective experience; and differences between religious and non-religious frameworks of meaning. The purpose of this companion review is to consider how such issues intersect with the existing findings of the *Cohesive Societies* programme, to bring policy into conversation with practice, and to consider how the role of faith and belief might elucidate or challenge the five existing themes of the series.

In conjunction with the Faith & Belief Forum, the British Academy commissioned Theos think tank to write this review in October 2019. For the past year and a half, Theos has been researching the extent to which faith and belief groups (and particularly churches) foster or undermine social cohesion. This research, commissioned by the Free Churches Group, has taken Theos researchers into local communities across England and has uncovered both the positive ways in which faith groups contribute, as well as the ways in which they might prove a barrier to greater and more meaningful social relationships. Theos has spoken to nearly 400 people over the course of the Free Churches Commission, and the practical initiatives uncovered underlie the assessment of the treatment of faith and belief groups in existing cohesion policy in this review. The Free Churches Commission itself will be published in autumn 2020.

This report is divided into two parts. **Part one** summarises the major trends in British cohesion policy as it pertains to the faith sector. It accounts for the chronological and thematic development of this policy in seven sections:

1. **The underlying context of faith and social cohesion policy.** This section establishes the long-term context of cohesion policy as it has been forged out of four main factors: demographic shifts around migration; the growth of the 'non-religious'; significant changes to the welfare state; and the role of crisis.

2. **Social cohesion policy as crisis response; faith as a problem.** This section considers how a particular crisis moment – the race riots in 2001 – led to the emergence of 'community cohesion' as a distinct policy area. The legacy of this approach has been for policy-makers to view religion as a problem to be solved, in the context of things going wrong.

3. **Cohesion policy and the 'War on Terror'.** This section considers how this approach to crisis response was consolidated following various terrorist attacks in the early years of the new millennium, with painful consequences – particularly for the British Muslim community.

4. **How this approach has impacted wider social cohesion policy.** This section considers the wider consequences of the 'crisis approach' for cohesion policy moving forward, particularly focusing on the failure to distinguish security concerns from positive community-building, even in very recent cohesion policy interventions.

5. **Local government, austerity and the role of faith and belief groups in service delivery.** This section contrasts this national approach with the quite different priorities of policy-makers at a local level, focusing on the role of faith and belief groups in service provision (and particularly in the wake of austerity).

6. **Ongoing debates around the role and impact of faith schools.** This section considers the ongoing debates around faith schools in the UK, which bear resemblance to wider concerns surrounding faith-based service delivery but have been particularly divisive.

7. **Brexit Britain: signs of change in Future Policy?** Finally, this section considers the effects of Brexit, the changing focus of integration policy, and the contemporary political climate on faith and cohesion policy in the UK.

Part two considers practical examples of faith and belief initiatives on the ground. It looks at each of the five core themes of the *Cohesive Societies* series in turn, considering in each case the specific contribution (both positive and negative) of faith and belief groups in the United Kingdom today. This part offers a wider reflection, beyond the generally narrower approaches of cohesion policy, on the unique ways in which faith and belief groups intersect with the Cohesive Societies themes (including whether such themes are the most appropriate when applied to the faith sector).

The report closes with a reflection on the ways in which policy and practice cohere or conflict. It assesses ways in which cohesion policy in the UK could better account for the realities of the faith and belief sector on the ground.

Throughout the report, analysis draws on a number of practical case studies from across the UK. These case studies were chosen to reflect the role of faith and belief at different levels – whether through personal devotion, the local worship group, or the coordination of a national (and even international) operation, and in a wide range of geographical contexts.

Right
Christian Muslim Forum,
Near Neighbours, 2018

1. Faith and social cohesion policy in the UK

The existing *Cohesive Societies* documents offer extended discussions of the theory and policy archive of social cohesion, and this report does not seek to replicate either. Rather, it considers the specific role of faith and belief in these discussions, and particularly evaluates policy-makers' treatment of faith and belief against the realities of social cohesion initiatives on the ground. It does so first by identifying the underlying context within which policy has been formed, before summarising the broad trends in policy treatment of faith since the establishment of 'community cohesion' as a distinct policy area in the wake of the 2001 race riots.

1.1 The underlying context of faith and social cohesion policy

Social cohesion policy in the United Kingdom has been forged in the context of four main factors which are often in tension with one another: the demographic shifts accompanying migration, the growth of the 'non-religious' affiliation, significant changes to the welfare state, and the role of crisis.

The first of these factors, the demographic shift that has accompanied increased immigration, has been emerging since the end of the Second World War but accelerated from the last decade of the twentieth century onwards. In 1951, just over 4% of the resident UK population (1.9 million people) was born abroad. By the most recent census in 2011 that figure had almost quadrupled, far outweighing the overall rate of UK population growth, to 13% of the resident population (7.5 million people).[5] This has not only brought increased ethnic diversity across the United Kingdom, but has also considerably diversified the faith sector. The 2011 census found that 48% of the foreign-born UK population identify as Christian, and 19% as Muslim, while only 14% identified as being

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5   C. Smith, '2011 Census analysis: Immigration Patterns of Non-UK Born Populations in England and Wales in 2011', *Office for National Statistics* (17 December 2013). https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/immigrationpatternsofnonukbornpopulationsinenglandandwalesin2011/2013-12-17 <Accessed 20 November 2019>

non-religious.[6] As the theologian Andrew Rogers observes, '[in] London, white Christians declined by 18% over 2001-11 according to the census, with every borough seeing white Christian decline, whereas black Christian growth was 32% over the same period.'[7] Census data from 1961 to 2011 also points to significant growth in the Hindu, Sikh, and particularly Muslim populations of the UK – all trends that closely align with migration patterns over the same period. Policy-makers have (at least ostensibly) tended to present this diversity as a strength and an asset, but it has also been a source of anxiety in some sections of the population. These anxieties have profoundly influenced the direction of British politics, as seen most strikingly in the result of the 2016 EU Referendum.[8]

At the same time, secondly, Britain has seen an unprecedented rise in the number of people identifying as non-religious. In the 2017 British Social Attitudes survey, 52.8% of all adults described themselves as having no religious affiliation, up from 48% in 2015. This was the first time that less than half of the population professed a religious affiliation, and was a significant increase from the first BSA survey in 1983, when just 31% of adults described themselves as having no religion.[9]

Broadly speaking, the result of these two factors has been dramatically reducing faith affiliation among the white British majority, with generally higher levels of religiosity (and religious diversity) among minority communities. This has encouraged an implicit perception of faith as the preserve of ethnic minorities – and indeed, as a cultural 'other' in a secular mainstream. It has also led policy-makers to adopt a broadly secular approach (with some notable exceptions, including the continued establishment of the Church of England, the presence of bishops in the House of Lords, and state funding for faith schools) that has sometimes gone further towards a reluctance to work with faith groups altogether.

However, at the same time, faith groups have increasingly stepped into service delivery roles – especially in the wake of recent 'austerity' politics and the drastic reduction in state provision. The third factor affecting cohesion policy surrounding faith, then, is the changing shape of the welfare state. The expanding practical role of faith groups in civil society has come as a challenge to those local authorities that are uncomfortable with their involvement.

These three factors demarcate the broad territory of cohesion policy in the United Kingdom. However, responses to cohesion issues within this territory have largely been directed by a fourth factor: crisis. As we shall see, the immediate political concerns of policy-makers at any given time have significantly shaped the tone and scope of cohesion policy in the United Kingdom, beginning with the policy response to the 2001 race riots. Social cohesion is rarely pursued as a desirable outcome in its own right. Naturally, different levels of government have navigated these factors differently depending on their legislative obligations, whether that is the preservation of national security or the provision of youth services within a local community. Nonetheless, faith groups have generally been viewed as a risk factor at all levels.

Consequently, cohesion policy bears all the marks of being forged out of crisis, anxiety

6   R. O'Brien, and A. Potter-Collins, '2011 Census Analysis: Ethnicity and Religion of the Non-UK Born Population in England and Wales', *Office for National Statistics* (18 June 2015). https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/2011censusanalysisethnicityandreligionofthenonukbornpopulationinenglandandwales/2015-06-18 <Accessed 20 November>

7   A. Rogers, 'How are black majority churches growing in the UK? A London Borough case study', *LSE Religion and Global Society blog* (28 December 2016). https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2016/12/how-are-black-majority-churches-growing-in-the-uk-a-london-borough-case-study/ <Accessed 20 November 2019>

8   J. Curtice, 'The vote to leave the EU: litmus test or lightning rod?' in E. Clery., J. Curtice, and R. Harding, (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 34th Report* (London: NatCen Social Research, 2017), 158.

9   Clery, Curtice, and Harding, (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 34th Report,* 197.

as a result of increased cultural diversity, and a growing reticence surrounding the place of faith in the public sphere. However, as we shall see, the more recent legacy of austerity politics and the shifting political climate in the wake of the EU Referendum also seems to be creating a more positive space for the contribution of faith to flourish: in particular, it has often been the faith sector that has stepped in to keep vital frontline services going as state welfare provision has shrunk. This presents policy-makers with a challenging legacy, but also an important opportunity to re-evaluate the way faith is considered as an aspect of social cohesion in the United Kingdom.

1.2   Social cohesion policy as crisis response; faith as a problem

The seminal moment in the development of modern cohesion policy was the outbreak of 'race riots' affecting several Northern towns in the summer of 2001. In response to these riots, the government established an Independent Review Team, chaired by Professor Ted Cantle, to visit the affected towns and determine the conditions that had made them so vulnerable to civil breakdown. The resulting Cantle Report, published in December 2001, established 'community cohesion' as a distinct policy area.

The Independent Review Team largely focused on the segregation of different racial groups in the affected towns – but it also went far beyond a narrow consideration of race relations, exploring a wide range of structural issues that conspired to segregate ethnic and cultural groups. It was recognised that socio-economic inequality, poverty and deprivation, residential segregation, and educational separation all prevented meaningful integration between groups: 'separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives'.[10] The report was also critical of existing initiatives to bridge these divides, which 'reinforced the separation of communities' rather than bringing people together. It reflected on the

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10   T. Cantle, Community Cohesion: *A report of the Independent Review Team* (London: Home Office, 2001), 9.

comparatively 'few attempts to tackle problems on a thematic basis, which could have served to unite different groups', as 'the development of cross cultural contact and the promotion of community cohesion, was not valued as an end in itself.'[11] Above all, the report stressed the importance of meaningful and sustained contact between otherwise distinct groups and drew heavily on Contact Theory: that is, the notion that, assuming certain favourable conditions, prejudice will be reduced in the wake of interpersonal contact.[12]

Of course, the Cantle Report itself did not emerge in a policy vacuum, and while the focus of the present discussion begins in 2001 it is important to recognise that this intervention was understood by many as an intentional departure from the multiculturalist approach which had so characterised New Labour policy to this point (that is, a focus on the legitimacy and positive contribution of diverse identities on their own terms – in conscious opposition to an 'equality as sameness' model in which minority groups are accepted on the terms of the majority).[13] In fact, both Tony Blair and Ted Cantle – the Prime Minister at the time and the author of the Cantle Report – stressed continued value in the multicultural approach, and it is more helpful to understand the approach post-2001 instead as an additive policy correction (what Naser Meer and Tariq Modood have called its 'civic re-balancing') rather than a complete rejection of what went before.[14] Nonetheless, if multiculturalists have incorporated elements of this critique in the long-term, the conceptual thrust of such 'civic re-balancing' in the short-term was clearly to emphasise social mixing above a conscious celebration of difference – and indeed, the two models have at least remained distinct enough to precipitate Cantle's later promotion of an 'interculturalist' school, which positions itself as distinct from multiculturalism through a greater emphasis on the dynamic nature of identity and the inadequacy of mere co-existence.[15]

Crucially, those groups that were the focus of the Cantle Report were not only ethnically distinct; they were also predominantly of different faiths. Consequently, the report implicitly identified faith as a fault line along which society (in the absence of direct intervention) had divided into separate, internally homogenous 'communities' – and moreover, as an identity marker of ethnic minorities, in contrast to the white British population. A subtly racialised understanding of faith can be seen, for example, in the fact that the first participants quoted in the report were identified only as a 'Muslim of Pakistani origin' and 'a young man from a white council estate'.[16] In this sense, the faith background of the Asian population was brought to the fore, while white participants were defined more strongly in terms of their socio-economic position.

This approach to faith has set the tone for 'community cohesion' policy moving forward, despite the fact that the Cantle Report itself explicitly identified poverty and deprivation as the underlying drivers of disharmony in the towns in question. Indeed, even the language of 'community cohesion' as distinct from 'social cohesion' places emphasis on the culture and identity of interacting 'communities' rather than structural and socio-economic dynamics underlying all human activity. As the sociologist Derek McGhee has reflected, 'Oldham, Burnley and Bradford [where the riots took place] are not only cities and towns that suffer from actual and perceived "cultural injustices" and the associated

11   Ibid. 10.

12   G. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954); M. Hewstone and R. Brown, 'An integrative theory of inter-group contact', in M.P. Zanna, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (London: Elsevier, 2005), 256-345.

13   T. Modood, 'A Multicultural Nationalism?' in *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 25, 2 (2019), 233-46, at 234.

14   N. Meer and T. Modood, 'The Multicultural State We're In: Muslims, "Multiculture" and the "Civic-Rebalancing" of British Multiculturalism', in *Political Studies* 57 (2009), 473-97.

15   T. Cantle, *Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); Meer and Modood, 'The Multicultural State We're In'; M. Antonsich, 'Interculturalism versus Multiculturalism – the Cantle-Modood Debate' in *Ethnicities*, 16, 3 (2016), 470-93.

16   Cantle, *Community Cohesion*, 9.

"cultural" disharmony… these are also areas characterised by deprivation and perceived and actual socio-economic inequalities.' Nonetheless, these factors were de-emphasised in responses to the Cantle Report, in favour of a concern that culturally distinct communities should be encouraged to interact.[17]

In particular, McGhee judges this 'community cohesion' response as a 'fully-fledged Putmanesque problematization of excessive bonding social capital in a context of insufficient bridging social capital' – while objecting that 'merely attempting to transform an area's social capital from bonding to bridging, might… be only half the battle.'[18] In drawing on the language of 'bridging' and 'bonding', he identifies the influence of a commonly-held distinction between two types of social capital, popularised by the American political scientist Robert Putnam: that which solidifies bonds between members of a group (bonding capital), and that which brings members of separate groups into relationship (bridging capital). Thus, McGhee argues that while the rhetoric of policy has tried to portray diversity as an asset, the reality of policy decisions has often implied that diversity of faith and culture (understood as a source of bonding rather than bridging capital) is inherently a barrier to strong community. In this way, policy-makers have attached value judgements to favour certain forms of socialisation over and against others. In reaching this conclusion, McGhee draws heavily on sociologist Ruth Levitas' suggestion that in 'New Labour social exclusion discourse', 'conflict [was] constructed as a problem of the pathologised few which divert attention away from the essentially class-divided character of society'.[19] As sociologists Yunis Alam and Charles Husband similarly observe, this reflects a

> deeply value-laden distinction between bridging social capital, the 'good stuff' that should be nurtured through community cohesion initiatives, and bonding social capital, depicted as the obsolescent practices of the marginalised working class and minority ethnic communities. This ideological distinction would be problematic on its own but, given the political context in which community cohesion was developed, it became an instrument of a profoundly divisive urban policy.[20]

McGhee also identified the criminalization of Asian youths in the aftermath of the Bradford riots as unfortunate 'mixed messages' given the intentions expressed in the Cantle Report, and as a reiteration of those injustices which had led to violent outbreaks in the first place, leading to an essentially 'other-directed' attempt to manage social disharmony.[21] Such approaches undermine the well-meant rhetorical thrust of Cantle's exhortation to bridge divides and reconcile groups that are otherwise locked into patterns of suspicion and fear. In the words of the *Cohesive Societies* scoping document, 'social exclusion and economic inequality are identified in several policy documents as key problems that need tackling in social cohesion policy, especially at the devolved and local levels. Yet in practice, at all levels of government security, resilience, and race relations are prioritised'.[22] This discrepancy between rhetoric and practice is a problem for everybody – just as cohesion should be a concern for everybody – but has had especially pertinent implications for how we talk about faith.

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17   D. McGhee, 'Moving to "our" common ground – a critical examination of community cohesion discourse in twenty-first century Britain', in *The Sociological Review*, 51, 3 (2003), 376-404, at 380.

18   Ibid. 393.

19   Ibid. 393; R. Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005).

20   Y. Alam and C. Husband. 'Islamophobia, Community Cohesion and Counter-Terrorism Policies in Britain', in *Patterns of Prejudice,* 47, 3 (2013), 235-252, at 243.

21   McGhee, 'Moving to "our" common ground', 396-400.

22   British Academy, *Cohesive Societies: Scoping Concepts and Priorities* (London: British Academy, 2019), 5.

1.3   Cohesion policy and the 'War on Terror'

The 2001 race riots were not the only significant event to shape cohesion priorities in the early years of the new millennium. The commissioning of the Cantle Report also coincided with the terror attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, shortly followed by the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the so-called 'War on Terror'. These global events exacerbated public perception of opposition between Islam and the West, which was further heightened in the wake of domestic terror attacks on public transport in London on 7 July 2005. The perpetrators were all British-raised Muslims, and in order to counter the perceived threat of home-grown terrorism, the controversial Prevent programme, which had been operating since 2003, was made public in 2006. This scheme gave funding to local authorities and police to sponsor local community-based projects which deterred vulnerable people from engaging in terrorism. Its approach was based on the assumption that the root cause of terrorist acts was 'extreme' views and beliefs – and, since Prevent overwhelmingly focused on Muslim communities at this time, it was staunchly criticised for implying a correlation between such extreme views and Islam. Moreover, while the programme fell under the government's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, it was administered by the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government. This reiterated the blurred lines between 'community cohesion' concerns and counter-terrorism strategy, and confirmed the preoccupation with Muslim integration in cohesion policy as a whole. It also proved divisive within Muslim communities, as those groups who received Prevent funding were suspected of colluding too closely with what was seen as an anti-Muslim surveillance strategy.

Alongside this first iteration of Prevent, the government also commissioned an updated review of social cohesion in the United Kingdom – The Commission on Integration and Cohesion – whose report, *Our Shared Future*, was published in 2007. In fact, the report explicitly stated that 'addressing political extremism must be distinguished from addressing issues relating to integration and cohesion' and that 'while our Commission may have its roots in the initial response to 7/7, we are not working at a time of crisis, or responding to a set of disturbances or events'.[23] It also prominently stressed the need for a locally crafted responses to social cohesion concerns and ostensibly resisted a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to social cohesion work. Yet it also emphasised the need to strengthen common notions of British citizenship and a sense of national identity in education, and was clearly written with a desire to foster national identity (and loyalty) in mind. This made clear at a national level what 'community cohesion' implied at a local level – that is, a concerted emphasis on commonality rather than diversity.

To this end, the report proposed four key principles underlying its recommendations: an emphasis on a 'shared future, and what people have in common rather than what divides them'; a new model of 'rights and responsibilities that makes clear sense of local and national citizenship'; an 'emphasis on mutual respect and civility'; and 'a commitment to equality which sits alongside visible social justice'. It also proposed a new definition of cohesion drawing on these themes, which was adapted and taken up as the Government's own definition of social cohesion:

1.   **People from different background having similar life opportunities;**

2.   **People knowing their rights and responsibilities;**

3.   **People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly;**

23   The Commission on Integration and Cohesion, *Our Shared Future* (London: COIC, 2007), 15.

4.   **A shared future vision and sense of belonging;**

5.   **A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity;**

6.   **Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.**[24]

These criteria were all intended to emphasise commonality, a focus on the local as well as national, and the obligations of citizenship.[25] At the same time, a new *Cohesion Delivery Framework* was developed (published in 2008) which similarly stressed the need for local authorities to take a lead on their own cohesion policies.[26] Regarding the specific treatment of faith groups in this local provision, the *Framework* provided some guidance on addressing local issues but faith groups were only mentioned minimally (and notably, far less compared to other local stakeholders such as media and educational outlets). Yet much more significant was the fact that the emphasis on the local responsibility for encouraging confident and cohesive communities cleaved social cohesion *as an end in itself* further from central government responsibility.

Alongside this response, the British government also pledged to 'initiate an inclusive process of national debate to develop a British statement of values' in Gordon Brown's 2007 *Governance of Britain paper*.[27] This report effectively launched the notion of 'British values', which has since become part of the national curriculum. The brand of national identity encapsulated by a single list of 'British values' is understood in some sense as a shorthand (or at least a prerequisite) for national belonging, and therefore, as an inherent social good.

This approach has been subject to criticism on various fronts; as the *Cohesive Societies Policy Review* notes, 'Identity has purposefully been constructed to deal primarily with culture, ethnicity and race, alongside the benefits this brings and the threats it poses' so that belonging is 'predicated on being able to fit into specific identities. Those that [do] not [are] expected to do so.'[28] To this end, the political scientist Andrew Mason has denounced the emphasis on Britishness in cohesion policy as 'in effect a form of liberal nationalism' – which in some cases takes a rather less liberal form, bolstering narratives of incompatibility between faith and national belonging that have in turn been encouraged by the media with disastrous effects.[29] Mason challenges whether the quest for a national identity based on shared values – or indeed, meaningful contact between groups – really warrant such a central place in the policy-makers' attention, given the modest evidence that these factors increase levels of trust between citizens. Rather, if shared and well-founded trust is the aim, he instead suggests promoting a widespread sense of 'belonging to a polity'. This model focuses on nurturing each individual's positive relationship to national institutions (which must act in a trustworthy manner) from which trust between citizens will follow naturally.[30] In emphasizing *trust* Mason re-orientates the discussion away from specific cultural concerns, noting we 'need not suppose that there is anything problematic about Muslim women wearing the veil, and [we] may be supportive of publicly funded faith schools on the grounds that these help to foster a sense of belonging

24   Department for Communities and Local Government, *The Government's Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion* (London: Crown, 2007), 10.

25   The Commission on Integration and Cohesion, *Our Shared Future,* 7, 10

26   Department for Communities and Local Government, *Cohesion Delivery Framework: Overview* (London: Crown, 2008).

27   HM Government, *Governance of Britain Green Paper* (London: Crown, 2007), 8.

28   Donoghue and Bourke, *Cohesive Societies Policy Review,* 34.

29   A. Mason, 'Integration, cohesion and national identity: theoretical reflections on recent British policy' in *British Journal of Political Science,* 40, 4 (2010), 857-874, at 867.

30   Ibid. 868-72. For a helpful discussion on the difference between 'trust' and 'trustworthiness', and the conditions required for both, see C. McLeod, 'Trust', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. E. N. Zalta, (Fall 2015 edn.) https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/trust/ <Accessed 5 December 2019>

to the polity amongst religiously committed parents and their children'.[31]

Of course, the importance we attach to 'the nation' will significantly shape the overall tone and direction of our favoured cohesion policies – and the 'liberal nationalism' denounced by Mason is itself a conscious school of thought with active defenders. Moreover, in fact it pushes beyond the (more accurately understood) 'civic nationalism' of Gordon Brown's values-based cohesion policy, instead emphasising a national identity based on shared culture, language and historical perspectives. Typical of this view is David Miller's influential 1995 work *On Nationality*, which stresses that 'the drawing of political boundaries should not... be seen as a matter of sheer contingency', but rather embraces 'national identity' as an important resource for generating solidarity between citizens.[32] Such liberal nationalism is demonstrably more comfortable with identity-based politics than Mason's own model, and Miller is concerned to stress that national identities should be fluid enough to encompass all citizens.

However, this approach has been criticised as merely ensuring non-discrimination, rather than viewing diverse identities (including faith identities) as a genuinely positive contribution to a continually 'reformed national identity'. Here, the 'multiculturalist nationalism' forwarded by Tariq Modood (and the 'Bristol school' of multiculturalism to which he belongs) offers a counter-balance to this view, instead emphasising a bottom-up approach to national identity-building that explicitly affirms minority identities on an equal footing with the identities of the historical majority. In relation to faith, this approach may also enable a 'thickening' rather than 'thinning' of religion in the national imagination – the celebration of more religious festivals not less, the representation of multiple faiths in the House of Lords rather than the abolition of the Lords Spiritual altogether, and so on.[33] Such a model serves as a reminder that, despite a perceived opposition between national and faith identities as a result of the central government policies explored above, such an opposition is neither inherent nor inevitable.

Right

Near Neighbours, 2014

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31   Mason, 'Integration, cohesion and national identity', 873.

32   D. Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 183-4, 188-9.

33   Modood, 'A Multicultural Nationalism?', esp. 236. For more on the Bristol School of Multiculturalism, see G.B. Levey, 'The Bristol School of Multiculturalism', in *Ethnicities,* 19, 1 (2019), 200-26.

1.4   How this approach has impacted wider social cohesion policy

Both the Cantle Report and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion were crafted in the context of specific crises – if not as immediate responses, at least with the particular details of those crises in mind. Consequently, insofar as they intended to avert similar future crises, their focus was on the potential for things to go wrong. Faith was implied as a risk factor, and this has significantly shaped the tone and scope of policy moving forward. Thus, for example, the 2012 government brief on *Creating the conditions for integration* begins with the positive assertion that 'integration means creating the conditions for everyone to play a full part in national and local life' before quickly swivelling (no sooner than paragraph two) to observe that 'integration benefits us all, and extremism and intolerance undermine this as they promote fear and division. An integrated society may be better equipped to reject extremism and marginalise extremists'.[34] Security concerns are never far from view.

In the helpful terms of the *Cohesive Societies* scoping document, this approach broadly reflects a 'glue' model of social cohesion at central government level. That is to say that it implies an understanding of social cohesion as a static quality which holds society together and is largely noticed in its absence – rather than a 'sugar' model of cohesion as a 'collection of… relatively small actions, such as asking the neighbour for sugar. This can be limiting if the particular features of the crisis in question are wrongly assumed to hold universally. And both trends – the implicit understanding of faith as the seed of potential crisis if not managed properly, and the securitisation of cohesion policy – imply faith *itself* not as an adhesive force, but as a barrier or problem that must be overcome or offset for positive and meaningful relationships to emerge.

Above all, this is reflected in the disproportionate focus on Muslim communities, and the interventions presented above have been fiercely criticised for encouraging Islamophobic sentiment to flourish across the United Kingdom. As Alam and Husband note, central government policies were 'devised to address the challenge of inner-city ethnic diversity, and the response to the emergence of a terrorist threat'. Therefore, they

> inevitably drew not only on the extant political repertoire of the government, but also on its taken-for granted cultural repertoire. That both policies *ab initio* were specifically targeted at the Muslim communities of Britain, and particularly at specific inner-city communities, inevitably resulted in the production of a legitimising political rhetoric in which Islam was central.[35]

Yet despite these concerns, if anything the policy implications for Muslim communities have been entrenched rather than ameliorated. Most notably, the Prevent strategy was revised and strengthened in 2011.[36] Responsibility for administering the policy was transferred to the Home Office, while the Department for Communities and Local Government (since 2018, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) retained responsibility for encouraging integration among communities. However, the revised strategy again identified extreme ideas as the root cause of terrorism. More controversially still, it introduced the objective to combat 'non-violent extremism' – a concept referring to ideas that are not violent, and perhaps not even illegal, but which are deemed to make a person more *likely* to commit an act of violence. Since this point, identification of such 'non-violent extremism' has been enough for individuals to be

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34   Department for Communities and Local Government, *Creating the conditions for integration* (London: Crown, 2012), 2.
35   Alam and Husband, 'Islamophobia, Community Cohesion and Counter-Terrorism', 236.
36   HM Government, 'Prevent strategy' (June 2011). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attach-ment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf <Accessed 19 November 2019>

sanctioned – and naturally, this raised profound questions about the limits of free speech, and indeed religious toleration, in British society. Neither were concerns over the wider implications of Prevent allayed when the policy was updated again in 2015 to introduce the (now infamous) 'Prevent Duty'. This was introduced as part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which specified a legal requirement on certain public authorities to 'have a due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.[37] Public sector workers are now expected to receive training in identifying people who may be at risk of being drawn into extreme views (itself a broader concept than terrorism itself) and vulnerable people are to be referred to 'Channel', the de-radicalisation programme. This often requires people with low levels of religious literacy to determine whether they think a person is at risk of religious radicalisation.

Thus, while the stakes are high for the individuals concerned, the referral process is largely subjective. Moreover, the compounded ambiguity between security and cohesion obligations has undermined the basic trust required for local stakeholders to promote any kind of cohesion initiative. As one senior councilor told Alam and Husband, 'When you are required as elected representatives to gain the respect of the community and drive through values… basically promoting and encouraging the greater well-being of the populace; to also be the Big Brother that is actually spying on part of the community – then there is a contradiction.'[38]

There were positive moves during the early millennium too. For example, in 2002 the Local Government Association (LGA) produced a general guide on community cohesion, urging local authorities to recognise 'faith communities in public life as a distinctive part of the voluntary and community sector and involve their representatives in partnerships', and to support faith communities by promoting this role in local voluntary networks.[39] At a national level, the LGA also collaborated with the Home Office and the government-supported Inter-Faith Network to produce a guidance manual for local councils working with faith groups and commending the latter as sources of community cohesion.[40] In 2006, the Faith Communities Consultative Council was brought in to unite the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Home Office's Working Together Steering Group as a national forum to discuss faith and belief issues – though was later ceased in favour of a 'manner that is strategic and appropriate for particular situations'.[41]

However, these isolated measures did not offset the over-arching tone of the scaffold policy documents, which treat faith identity as a cohesion challenge to overcome – and indeed, often as a distinctive feature of 'other' minority groups in contrast to a neutral, secular society at large. The conceptual inheritance of these policies has been continually reflected in more recent interventions on issues of cohesion and integration – the most influential of which has been the 2016 Casey Review, subtitled 'a review into opportunity and integration'. This report placed primary emphasis on the socio-economic benefits of integration and the intention to consider 'not just about how well we get on with each other but how well we all do compared to each other'.[42] Within this focus on social utility, Casey explicitly noted the difficulty of

37   HM Government, 'Prevent duty guidance' (2015). https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2015/9780111133309/pdfs/ukdsiod_9780111133309_en.pdf <Accessed 19 November 2019>

38   Alam and Husband, 'Islamophobia, Community Cohesion and Counter-Terrorism', 249.

39   Local Government Association, *Guidance on community cohesion* (London: Crown, 2002), 22.

40   Local Government Association and the Interfaith Network, Faith and Community: *A Good Practice Guide for Local Communities* (London: Local Government Association, 2002).

41   A. Stunell, 'Faith Communities Consultative Council' (23 June 2011). https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2011-06-23a.55499.h <Accessed 19 November 2019 >

42   L. Casey, *The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016), 5.

> [wrestling] with what to put in and what to leave out, particularly because I know that putting some communities under the spotlight – particularly communities in which there are high concentrations of Muslims of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage – will add to the pressure that they already feel. However, I am convinced that it is only by fully acknowledging what is happening that we can set about resolving these problems and eventually relieve this pressure.[43]

In this sense, the Casey Review consciously grappled with the difficult legacy of cohesion policy in the early millennium. The review even distinguished chapters on 'Hate and Extremism' and 'Religion', indicating an attempt to disentangle concerns about religious extremism from the ordinary experience of religious individuals and communities in the United Kingdom. This enabled consideration of some of the ways in which faith groups could make a positive contribution to civil society. Thus, Casey noted the contributions of churches, mosques, synagogues and temples to care for the 'sick or the elderly or the socially excluded', to 'help educate, protect and empower our children', and 'feed, clothe and house the poorest in society, fight the trafficking of women and children, and address a range of social justice issues'.[44] Of course, many of these concerns are just as relevant to the promotion of social cohesion as issues of national security and cultural identity, if not more so, and reflect the quieter contributions of faith and belief groups across the country.

Nonetheless, even despite this attempt to present a balanced assessment of the role of faith in society, three of the five summary points in the 'Religion' chapter were concerned with the growth of Islam – including recognition of the 'anxiety' caused by the 'growth of mosques' – and the prevalence of negative attitudes towards increasing religious diversity in the UK. This serves to indicate how deeply ingrained some of the concerns of earlier policy interventions have become, even where attempt is made to disentangle racialised notions of faith from on-the-ground experiences.[45] Similarly, the fifth summary point noted that faith leadership 'has not to date been strong enough to counter the vocal minority who are bringing religion into disrepute and influencing the attitudes of people who increasingly regard religion as a force for bad.'[46] Support for faith leaders is of course positive, as demonstrated by the success of the Faith Leader Training Initiative administered by the Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion and funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government. Nonetheless, Casey placed the onus for anti-religious prejudice on the religious communities themselves, with a particular focus on the responsibility of faith leaders to prevent radical and dangerous ideas developing in their congregations – even despite the fact that this chapter was supposedly concerned with the role of religion aside from 'hate and extremism'.

In this way, even where an explicit concern for balance is expressed, policy remains disproportionately focused on religion as a potential security threat and source of 'other' identities that generate social anxiety. This has led to a concomitant neglect of other important faith-relevant issues, many of which directly address the five core themes of the *Cohesive Societies* series: meaning and belonging in a modern world, collective memorialisation, the impact of faith on our economic choices and social networks, community, and intergenerational justice.

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43   Ibid. 5-6.
44   Ibid. 122.
45   Ibid. 121.
46   Ibid. 121.

1.5   Local government, austerity and the role of faith and belief groups in service delivery

The focus on identity and national security in central government policy has not always chimed with the priorities of local government – and indeed, such a focus on security concerns has often been criticised at a local level. Thus, for example, the 2017 Camden Commission (a local authority investigation into challenges facing the London Borough of Camden) states:

> The national public policy debate on community cohesion has tended to focus on ethnicity, and more recently immigration and religion, as causes of a lack of cohesion between what are assumed to be largely internally cohesive groups. This... does not reflect the realities of a socially "super-diverse" place like Camden where the relationship between individuals and communities is more complex – many people have multiple identities and ethnicity and religion do not necessarily define communities. Other dimensions such as housing and income are equally as important to community cohesion.[47]

The Commission's summary goes on to state explicitly that 'Camden does seek to promote bridging social capital but does also support groups which promote bonding social capital', thus making less of a value judgement between different forms of sociation.[48] So too, faith representation in governance itself is often strong at a local level, where local faith communities can be embedded in local politics and consultation to great effect.[49]

However, the extent of this embeddedness varies hugely between communities and many local authorities have also been wary to engage with faith groups – often understandably, as they have a responsibility to their constituents to uphold equalities legislation and provide safe and ideologically non-threatening services, which are often seen to be complicated by the role of faith and belief. Councils do not want to be seen to favour certain groups in their funding allocation, and it can be difficult to prove fair treatment in the presence of multiple faith groups. This can lead to nervousness around the faith sector as a whole – a sense which has only been reinforced by the timbre of central policy.

The risk of proselytism has loomed particularly large at a local level. The Evangelical Alliance's *Faith in the Community Report*, published in 2013, included an extensive survey of local authorities, concluding that fears over exclusivity, equality and diversity, and proselytism (often conflated into a single category, and rarely carefully defined) were indeed a barrier to working with faith groups. However, few substantiated their fears with any concrete examples.[50] A report in the same year from the think tank Demos, *Faithful Providers*, noted that 'censorious language around "proselytism"... gives faith-based organizations the impression that there is something offensive about their deep moral commitments'.[51] Fears over proselytism are commonplace at all levels of policy-making. However, as Paul Bickley observed in his 2015 report *The Problem of Proselytism*, the concept is rarely defined, is never a 'neutral' concept, and often fails to properly define the limits of acceptable activity with reference either to the law or the actual activity of faith-

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47   Camden Borough Council, *Community cohesion, social capital, social isolation and social action: Summary of the evidence* (London: Camden Commission, 2017), 2-3.

48   Ibid. 6-7.

49   T. O'Toole, D. Nilsson DeHanas, T. Madood, N. Meer & S. Jones, *Taking Part*, 22-24.

50   Evangelical Alliance, *Faith in the Community: Strengthening ties between faith groups and local authorities* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2013), 35-38.

51   J. Birdwell, *Faithfull Providers* (London: Demos, 2013) cited in P. Bickley, *The Problem of Proselytism* (London: Theos, 2015), 19.

based organizations.[52] That report encouraged a more nuanced attempt to engage with faith and belief groups, recognising that there are different levels of relationships between them and statutory providers, and that the ethos and faith basis of such organizations, far from being a problem, was often at the heart of the value they provided to service users.

The concern not to privilege faith groups, while also problematizing particular elements of their ethos and identity, has sometimes meant that their distinctive qualities are collapsed into a general consideration of 'community organisations' and the 'voluntary sector'. Faith groups in this sense are valued only as generic community organizations that can be useful in resilience planning, while anything about such identities that are particularly religious is eliminated or downplayed. The 2019 Community Resilience Development Framework is typical in this regard, insofar as it barely mentions faith groups in any capacity, except as part of a broad list of community organisations that can be useful in resilience planning – in which context it mentions, among others Muslim Aid and the Inter Faith Network, but otherwise betrays no real sense in which local faith communities might have something to offer.[53]

This collapsing of faith group identities into generic community bodies represents a missed opportunity to build on the resources and advantages that come precisely from the particularity of faith and belief groups. Just one example of this is provided in Paul Bickley's research on the role of churches in supporting resilience in the North East of England, which identifies the particular assets of churches in providing three types of capital: social capital (including both bonding and bridging aspects), physical capital (e.g. buildings, facilities and spaces of public gathering) and, crucially, and unlike many other possible community agents, spiritual capital (intangible factors which contribute to a sense of hope – or where lacking, entrench a sense of despair).[54] The distinctiveness of 'faith' ethos in faith provision is often overlooked – or, where it is acknowledged, often treated only in a negative sense.

The pertinence of these debates cannot be understood without recognising the unique conditions brought about in the wake of the 2008 global financial crash. Following Gordon Brown's *Governance of Britain* paper and the increased emphasis on citizenship in *Our Shared Future*, Government-led cohesion initiatives on the eve of the financial crash emphasised community empowerment and the role of individuals in setting local community priorities as a moral ideal.[55] However, this was shortly followed by the 2010 election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in the United Kingdom, heralding a period of 'austerity' whose legacy has profoundly affected the scope of 'civil society' and invested the need for civil empowerment with greater urgency ever since. Indeed, the 'Big Society' was a flagship policy of the 2010 Conservative Party manifesto, the stated aim of which was to empower local people and communities. In launching it (merely a week after becoming Prime Minister) David Cameron said that 'the state is often too inhuman, monolithic and clumsy to tackle our deepest social problems', with local people and communities better placed to address these issues.[56] The Big Society was presented as the means through which community and grassroots organisations would be empowered to provide services in a time of reduced government spending. Meanwhile, between 2010 and 2019 over £30 billion of cuts were made to government spending in areas including welfare, policing, housing and social services, with local government

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52   P. Bickley, *The Problem of Proselytism* (London: Theos, 2015), 12.

53   Cabinet Office, *Guidance: Community resilience development framework* (London: Crown, 2019), 9-10.

54   P. Bickley, *People, Place, and Purpose: Churches and Neighbourhood Resilience in the North East* (London: Theos, 2018), 47-8.

55   Local Government Association, *Action Plan for Community Empowerment* (London: Crown, 2007); Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power Community Empowerment (London: Crown, 2008); HM Government, *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act* (London: Crown, 2007).

56   HM Government, 'Government Launches Big Society Programme' (18 May 2010). https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-big-society-programme--2 <Accessed 20 November 2019 >

budgets also significantly reduced.[57] In this sense, while the importance of community and local empowerment was emphasised in the public sphere, many of the existing avenues for such participation were substantially reduced in the hope that either private or community sectors would step in to replicate these avenues outside of state provision.

This has precipitated a well-documented rise in faith-based social action. Church volunteer hours rose by almost 60% from 2010-2014, to 114.8 million hours per year; the Cinnamon Trust valued this contribution at £3 billion.[58] So too, the 2016 New Philanthropy Capital report *What a Difference Faith Makes* found that a quarter of all charities in the UK is now faith based (a total of 49,881 across the country – a significant rise even since their prior report in 2014), and that in the past ten years, a higher proportion of faith-based charities (34%) was registered with the Charity Commission than non faith-based (25%).[59] The faith charity sector is growing faster than the charity sector as a whole, despite the religious population of the UK being in decline.

This means that local authorities are relying on the contribution of faith and belief groups for service delivery, despite their wariness around working with them. One positive approach to these potentially thorny issues has been offered by the APPG on Faith and Society. In 2014, the APPG developed a Faith Covenant that could be signed by local authorities and faith groups as a means of establishing shared norms and language by which faith-based service delivery can proceed. Unless there is a significant reversal in patterns of central government spending, it seems likely that relationships between local authorities and faith and belief organisations will increasingly draw on this sort of framework as the foundation for positive working relationships in the delivery of basic community services.

57   B. Mueller, 'What is Austerity and how has it affected British society?', New York Times (24 February 2019). https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/europe/britain-austerity-may-budget.html <Accessed 20 November 2019.

58   G. Knott, *Investing More for the Common Good: National Church Social Action Survey Results 2014* (Shrewsbury: Jubilee Plus, 2014), 2; *Cinnamon Network, Cinnamon Faith Action Audit* (London: Cinnamon Network, 2016), 2.

59   R. Wharton and L. de Las Casas*, What a Difference Faith Makes: Insights on faith-based charities* (London: NCP, 2016), 5, 11.

Case Study 1:
The Faith Covenant

The Faith Covenant was developed by the APPG for Faith and Society in December 2014. It is a recognition of the need to 'unlock the potential of every part of our society', which in turn requires 'ensuring that local authorities are confident in commissioning services from, and transferring assets to, appropriately qualified faith-based organisations, and that they include faith groups when they look for solutions to social needs'.[60]

The Covenant wording itself is intended as a blueprint; the APPG encourages local areas to draft their own version of the commitment to suit their own needs. However, this blueprint establishes some basic principles and outlines best-practice responsibilities of both local authorities and faith bodies.

The Covenant stresses the rights of faith communities to 'practise their beliefs and religious observances without restriction, and to raise their voice in public debate and to be respected, within the framework of UK law', and praises their contribution to the 'benefit of the wider community'. It recognizes that 'monopolies of funding, action and participation are damaging'. Yet it also emphasises that 'public services and faith-based social action should respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the grounds of religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, mental capability or long term condition.'

Local authorities are encouraged to commit to building relationships of trust, adopt strategies with a view to maximizing faith participation, establish clear guidelines around funding, and share training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority. In other words, they pledge an openness to the contribution of faith groups and a willingness to engage them with their own learning around best-practice service delivery.

Meanwhile, faith organisations are encouraged to 'work actively' with local authorities in the design and delivery of public services, seek opportunities to 'bring people together to serve the community, particularly its poorest and most isolated members', serve all equally 'without proselytising' and use any public resources provided for 'delivering a service wholly for that purpose, and not for any other'. So too, they are required to ensure 'excellence in child protection, health and safety, accountability and transparency' and 'respond to consultations where appropriate'. This ensures that certain levels of accountability professionalism are maintained without precluding faith-based elements altogether.

The Covenant has been adopted in Leeds, Northamptonshire, Barnet, Solihull, Calderdale, Southampton, Blackpool, Essex, Brent, Wolverhampton, Preston, and Brighton and Hove.

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60   APPG Faith and Society, 'Faith Covenant', *APPG Faith and Society* (2014). https://www.faithandsociety.org/covenant/ <Accessed 1 December 2019>

1.6   Ongoing debates around the role and impact of faith schools

The discussions surrounding the place of faith in service provision are not entirely dissimilar from those circling the role of faith schools, and especially their access to public funds. This policy issue is worth discussing in its own right, since it has become an ideological battlefield that consistently receives outsized attention in the context of faith and belief in society. By way of a recent example, a Demos report brought out to coincide with the 2019 general election, *Bringing Britain Together: A manifesto for consensus politics*, makes only one mention of faith or belief in any context, which is to problematize it in the context of faith-based admissions:

> Faith of all kinds deserves a vital, special place in our diverse society. But it cannot be allowed to segregate our children and their parents. It's time to ban faith-based admissions.[61]

That faith-based admissions should be the only note worth making on faith in a paper about consensus politics might suggest that there is an problem around segregation in British faith schools. However, this is difficult to prove – not least given a general lack of clarity over what counts as a 'faith school'. The term may refer within the state sector to schools with a religious ethos (variously understood) across the category of community, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, foundation, academies and free schools, each of which come with different restrictions and rules over funding, admissions and staff faith requirements. Admissions to new academies and free schools with a religious ethos are capped at 50% of students from a faith background, while the vast majority of voluntary controlled schools do not operate any faith-based admissions criteria, and community schools are not permitted to have any such criteria at all.[62]

This is a separate issue from independent schools and supplementary education providers (for example, madrasas) or unregistered full-time schools, though often these too are included in a debate which suffers from a lack of nuance and little attempt at clarification of terms. This confusion is deeply unhelpful in debates on the role of faith schools in promoting or undermining cohesion.

The range and complexity of what counts as a faith school (and indeed, which faith manages the school in question) makes it very difficult definitively to demonstrate the extent to which such schools divide or unite communities. Tellingly, at least, evidence suggests that faith schools' awareness of their statutory duty to promote social cohesion and 'the approaches used to promote cohesion, monitor effectiveness and involve the broader community do not differ dramatically between faith and non-faith schools'. Moreover, faith-status primary schools are in fact more aware of their obligations under Prevent than non-faith (54% versus 43%).[63]

It is also worth noting that several reports (including regular bulletins from the Catholic Education Service) have suggested that Catholic schools attract a more racially diverse set of students than the average school. The anti-racism charity Runnymede noted in a 2008 report that 'inequalities and the failure to tackle religious discrimination in non-faith schooling are significant drivers for faith school attendance'.[64] Given the complexity of these issues (including disentangling school intakes from the ethnic make-up of their communities, the levels of school popularity, and policies designed to encourage parental

61   P. Mackenzie, T. Van Rens and B. Glover, *Bringing Britain Together: A manifesto for consensus politics* (London: Demos, 2019), 11.

62   E. Oldfield, L. Hartnett and E. Bailey, *More Than an Educated Guess: Assessing the Evidence on faith schools* (London: Theos, 2013), 19.

63   Department for Education, *Community cohesion and PREVENT: How have schools responded?* (London: Crown, 2011), 11, 35-36.

64   R. Berkeley, *Right to Divide?: Faith Schools and Community Cohesion* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2008). 7

choice) it is difficult to clarify with certainty how well faith schools represent different groups. Submissions to the Casey review note some concerns, while identifying some of the intricacies over this issue and concludes by noting that 'segregation appears to be at its most acute in minority ethnic and minority faith communities and schools, so ending state support for all faith schools would be disproportionate'.[65]

That said, other critics suggest that admissions criteria of any sort – and certainly including faith criteria – lead to socio-economic sorting, since wealthier parents find means of better playing such criteria to their own advantage. The researchers Rebecca Allen and Anne West argue that 'parents reporting a religious affiliation are more likely to be better educated, have a higher occupational class and a higher household income' and that 'higher-income religious families are more likely to have a child at a faith school than lower-income religious families'.[66]

1.7   Brexit Britain: signs of change in future policy?

More recently, the result of the 2016 Referendum on EU Membership (which occurred just before the Casey review was published, but after the majority of Casey's fieldwork) sent political and economic shockwaves through the United Kingdom, and raised serious questions about the direction of existing social cohesion policy. The sense of entrenched 'Remain' and 'Leave' camps within society – made clear during the Referendum campaign, confirmed by the result, and compounded in the three years since – points to increasing divisions along the lines of class, education, age and regional identity. The Referendum and its aftermath has therefore been a uniquely damning indictment of the cohesiveness of Britain's communities. In turn, this has arguably moved the focus away from a more limited preoccupation with integration between ethnic, cultural or religious groups, to a wider consideration of social cohesion in the UK. The urgency of the need to expand the cohesion agenda has been confirmed by the accelerating rise of far-right extremism in the United Kingdom. To this end, the government's most recent counter-terrorism strategy, published in 2018, recognised a 'shift in the threat', with four extreme right-wing plots having been disrupted since 2017.[67] As of 2019, five of the top 10 far-right activists with the biggest global reach were British citizens.[68]

It is perhaps no coincidence that the APPG on Integration was founded in the same year as the Referendum, and its reports have considered integration from various angles, including a significant focus on intergenerational mixing. So too, its final report (which admittedly concentrated on the integration of immigrants) distinguishes between social integration as an all-encompassing concept and the specific integration of immigrants into the country.[69] Along similar lines, is notable that Manchester's local Commission into *Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission* – which was, like many earlier contributions, commissioned in the wake of crisis, this time the Arena bombings of May 2017 – was as much focus on the victims of increased hate crime as the communities from which the perpetrators of the attack were drawn. In this sense, it might more accurately be characterised as a response to two crises: the attack itself, but also the rise in religiously and racially motivated hate crime which followed. In

65   Casey, *The Casey Review,* 50
66   R. Allen and A. West, 'Why do faith secondary schools have advantaged intakes? The relative importance of neighbourhood characteristics, social background and religious identification among parents', in *British Educational Research Journal,* 37, 4 (2011), 691–712, at 691.
67   HM Government, 'CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism' (June 2018). https://assets.publishing.service. gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716907/140618_CCS207_CCS0218929798-1_CONTEST_3.0_WEB.pdf <Accessed 19 November 2019>
68   HOPE not Hate, *The State of Hate 2019: People vs. the Elite?* (London: HOPE not Hate, 2019). 3.
69   R. Bell, N. Plumb, and R. Marangozov, *Integration not demonization: The final report of the All-Parliamentary Group on Social Integration's inquiry into the integration of immigrants* (London: APPG on Social Integration, 2017), 8.

the weeks following the attack, Greater Manchester Police reported a 130% rise in hate crime, including a 500% rise in Islamophobic related hate crime.[70] In response, the report emphasised the multi-dimensional nature of radicalization, explicitly questioned the appropriateness of the Prevent duty, called for continued efforts to increase hate crime reporting, sought to address economic opportunity 'as a key pillar to better integration', and noted that 'reduction in public services have increased isolation in communities' which is 'likely to have exacerbated fear and suspicion of different communities'.[71]

Growing concerns for the rise of antisemitism in the UK have similarly highlighted the likelihood that faith communities will be the victims of social division. This has contributed to a recalibration of public debate, away from viewing faith communities as a problem or a source of intolerance, and towards a more nuanced understanding of their place in wider society. The prominence of these conversations in the 2019 election campaign – particularly given widespread concerns surrounding the extent of antisemitism in the Labour party, but also reflected in scrutiny directed towards Boris Johnson's comments about Muslim women – has lifted the profile of faith into the national conversation in a way not seen for some time. This was seen most starkly following Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis's intervention published in *The Times* newspaper, less than three weeks before the election, staunchly criticizing Labour's handling of antisemitism in its ranks as 'a failure to see this as a human problem rather than a political one', and encouraging 'every person to vote with their conscience'.[72] His comments were shortly followed by a statement from the Muslim Council of Britain, standing in solidarity with British Jews but also drawing attention to Islamophobia in the Conservative party.[73]

At the same time, the legacy of austerity policies (see section 1.5) has also contributed to a broadening sense of the role of faith. Thus, the 2018 *Civil Society Strategy* acknowledges the contribution of faith groups to be 'essential' as they

> play a vital part in meeting the need for greater integration and community cohesion. They are embedded within communities, well-able to recognise real local need and offer important services, particularly for marginalised and isolated groups. As with the wider social sector they speak out on important issues on behalf of those in need.[74]

This is an encouraging sign that understanding of the role of faith and belief in society is expanding beyond a narrow concern for conflicting identities and the threat of faith-motivated terrorism. The tone of policy surrounding faith is once again shifting in the light of a new context.

Opportunities for a more holistic approach are also presented by the Government's investment in five 'Integration Areas' (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest) as the focus of strategic, localised integration programmes. Of course the scheme is inherently limited to certain geographical areas, but has opened up conversations between a range of local stakeholders, including faith groups, to deepen and broaden engagement with integration concerns across the whole community. At

70   Greater Manchester Combined Authority, *A shared future: A report of the Greater Manchester Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promot-ing Social Cohesion Commission,* (Manchester: GMCA, 2018), 4.

71   Ibid. 5.

72   E. Mirvis, 'Ephraim Mirvis: What will become of Jews in Britain if Labour forms the next government?', *The Times* (25 November 2019). https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ephraim-mirvis-what-will-become-of-jews-in-britain-if-labour-forms-the-next-government-ghpsdbljk <Accessed 3 December 2019>

73   The Muslim Council of Britain, 'Muslim Council of Britain Responds to Chief Rabbi's Comments', *MCB* (26 November 2019). https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/muslim-council-of-britain-responds-to-chief-rabbis-comments/ <Accessed 3 December 2019>

74   Cabinet Office, *Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future that Works for Everyone* (London: Crown, 2018), 19.

the same time, however, there remains a need to consider the potential and actual contributions of faith and belief groups in greater detail. Each of the strengths mentioned in the *Civil Society Strategy* – their embeddedness in community, their understanding of local need, their advocacy for those in need – manifests differently depending on context. So too, the fact that the strategy mentions 'faith' just 10 times, compared to 197 mentions of 'business' in the report, surely indicates the author's perception of who is positioned with the influence and resources to nurture social cohesion. In turn, this raises questions about who is best placed to foster cohesive societies, and how this is changing in the modern world.

Recent years have therefore seen a subtle, and welcome, expansion in the scope of social cohesion policy. Yet for now, a tone of reticence surrounding the place of faith communities remains in central policy itself. The Government's most recent significant intervention on cohesion was the *Integrated Communities Action Plan* released in February 2019. The only mention of faith in the 'Places and Communities' section (and indeed, one of the few mentions in the document as a whole) can be found in the commitment that 'we will develop stronger, more confident communities, running an intensive programme of engagement with communities facing complex issues relating to race and faith'. Faith is a complex issue to be 'faced', rather than an asset of the community as a whole. Most of the faith-based discussion is instead located in the 'Rights and Freedoms' section, which emphasises support to help faith groups 'professionalise'. Perhaps most strikingly, the report pledges to 'support training of faith leaders to ensure they understand the English legal system, including equalities and marriage legislation, British culture and our shared values, and that they are well-versed in their rights and responsibilities to better support their congregations'.[75] The thinly-veiled presumption here is that 'faith leaders' must have this understanding taught, and therefore cannot have been raised with an innate knowledge of British values, laws and culture – or perhaps, worse, that they are actively in opposition to those norms. Once again, tension between national and faith identities is presumed. So it is that faith in 2019 is still largely understood as an identity marker requiring considered special navigation – at best a mysterious other, and at worst as a threat to national loyalty – rather than a potential resource for the whole community.

1.8   Conclusion

The social landscape itself has changed profoundly since the riots of 2001. Britain has become at once less religious and more religiously plural; more secular, and yet more reliant on the contribution of faith groups in the delivery of basic services. However, despite these changes, faith and social cohesion policy has consistently been dominated by a select number of issues – namely, concerns about national security and the need to repair community relations where they are already broken – to the near-total exclusion of others. Policy-makers have been reactive to a number of traumatic events on the development of cohesion policy, rather than initiating proactive reflection of the cohesion challenges and opportunities facing British society. Less attention has been reserved for the potential for faith to play a positive role in the nurture of such cohesive societies – or indeed, on the pursuit of cohesive societies as a positive end in its own right. There is a contrast of approaches between central and local government on this matter, reflecting their different obligations and concerns within the broad remit of 'social cohesion' policy. Nonetheless, at all levels faith groups have often been viewed with some degree of suspicion – whether as a threat to national security, or as a potential safeguarding issue.

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75   Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Integrated Communities Action Plan* (London: Crown, 2019), 14-15, 18-19.

However, this approach is not universal or inevitable. At a local level, we have already seen from Camden that approaches can take a very different focus.[76] Other local strategies vary as much as the communities from which they emerge. Manchester's Commission considered the benefits of creating a community Charter, but rejected this idea in favour of more 'meaningful and authentic' community expressions and cited as an example the emergence of the worker bee as a 'symbol representing unity, solidarity and indomitable spirit'.[77] The first of Norfolk's 2017 equality, diversity and inclusion objectives was to 'integrate accessibility for disabled people across core service transformation initiatives', and their local emphasis on disability inclusion is unusual when compared to the national picture.[78] Birmingham's 2018 *Community cohesion strategy* began by noting the opportunities brought to the city by HS2 and the 2022 Commonwealth Games.[79] As the *Cohesive Societies Policy Review* has also noted, neither do all national governments approach their responsibility towards promoting social cohesion through a security lens: strategy in both Canada and Australia has a much stronger sense that 'the purpose of social cohesion [is] to support diverse communities and the expression of their various identities, rather than integrating them into existing norms' (partly as their policies have been more directly concerned with the rights of indigenous communities than, as in Britain, with the empowerment of ethnic minorities and immigrant groups).[80] And similar differences are notable even at the devolved level within the United Kingdom: the declaration in the Scottish Government's that 'We do not articulate what "Scottish values" are in the same way that the UK Government has articulated "British values", nor do we seek to' is in stark contrast to the approach of central British government.[81].

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76   See above, section 1.5.

77   Greater Manchester Commission, *A Shared Future,* 10-11.

78   Norfolk Country Council, *Norfolk Equality, diversity and inclusion objectives,* 2017-2020, (Norfolk: Norfolk County Council, 2017).

79   Birmingham City Council, *Community cohesion strategy for Birmingham green paper: Forward together to build a fair and inclusive city for everyone* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 2018), 2.

80   M. Donoghue and S. Bourke, *Cohesive Societies Policy Review* (London: British Academy, 2019), 31; Australian Human Rights Commission, *Building social cohesion in our communities: A summary of the online resource for local government* (Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015); Levey, 'The Bristol School of Multiculturalism', 203-4.

81   Scottish Government, *Tackling prejudice and building connected communities: Scottish Government response* (Edinburgh: Local Government and Communities Directorate, 2017), 4.

As this summary has shown, especially given the tendency for cohesion policy to shift based on the wider political and social context of the day, change is possible – and it seems likely that the current political climate is one such period of shifting assumptions. It is also worth noting that British wariness around faith has tended to be implied or assumed, rather than actively pursued; this can be contrasted strikingly to the situation in countries such as France, where secularist and assimilationist policies have been aggressive and highly controversial.[82] It is therefore a timely moment to consider the role of faith and belief afresh.

With this in mind, and informed by the wide range of issues upon which matters of faith and belief have a bearing, the remainder of the report will turn to consider the situation on the ground – that is, the practical manifestation of the faith and belief sector in communities across the country – through lens of the five core themes of the *Cohesive Societies* series.

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82   H. Redgrave, L. Paulsen, M. Comerford, and C. Tipple, *The Glue That Binds: Integration in a Time of Populism* (London: Tony Blair Foundation, 2019), 23-24.

2. Practical intersections between faith and social cohesion

The existing *Cohesive Societies* series suggests five core themes through which to explore social cohesion: (1) meanings and mechanisms of social cohesion, (2) cultural memory and tradition, (3) identity and belonging, (4) the social economy, and (5) care for the future. This section will consider the practical manifestation of the faith and belief sector in British society through these five themes. In each case, faith and belief communities present both distinctive assets and peculiar challenges – and while policy has tended to focus on negative concerns around national identity, loyalty and security, this barely scratches the surface of the wide variety of ways in which faith and belief inform our society on the ground.

2.1 Meanings and mechanisms of social cohesion

The broadest of the Cohesive Societies themes concerns the meanings and mechanisms of social cohesion: how best should we conceive of cohesion and what are its hallmarks? Can it be established informally, or does it require formal (and perhaps even legislative) structures of support? These questions are contested because there is no universally agreed definition of social cohesion. Consequently, most discussions of the topic spend significant energy defining what they are trying to discuss – or indeed, achieve. This problem is explored extensively in the existing *Cohesive Societies* documents, so this review has avoided preoccupation with definitions.[83]

Nonetheless, the way that faith and belief functions does shed some light on how we might think about such issues. In particular, the existing *Cohesive Societies* documents explore whether 'social cohesion' should focus strictly on what is 'social', or whether it

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83   I. Baylis, H. Beider and M. Hardy, *Cohesive Societies Literature Review,* 8-15; Donoghue and Bourke, *Cohesive Societies Policy Review,* 17; British Academy, *Scoping Concepts and Priorities,* 3.

should encompass structural, economic and political factors too. The *Scoping Concepts and Priorities* document emphasises the need for a 'multi-dimensional conceptualisation of social cohesion'.[84] However, the fact that economic and political factors can *affect* social cohesion does not mean that such factors are themselves components of social cohesion, or indeed, that they should be included in its definition. On the contrary, economic circumstances taken in isolation are particularly unreliable predictors of how people will feel about their communities. Take the local authority of East Lindsey as an example. The region performs badly on almost every economic metric. It has one of the highest percentages of economically inactive residents in the country, high youth unemployment, above average levels of children in poverty, far below average multiple deprivation scores, and 33% of residents have no qualifications. Yet at the same time, the area scores above the national average on sense of belonging, strength of social relationships, and satisfaction with the local area as a place to live.[85]

The absence of an obvious relationship between economic and social outcomes suggests that there may be significant complicating factors. Local priorities, environmental factors, pace of demographic change, cultural expectations, opportunities to make meaning, knowledge of other areas, and values may all have an impact. They are also all areas in which faith groups can – and often do – play a role. This raises the question of where 'spiritual' factors (broadly conceived, as in section 1.5, with regards to those intangible aspects that contribute to a sense of hope – or where lacking, entrench a sense of despair) might also fit in the rubric of social, structural and environmental considerations listed in the *Scoping Concepts and Priorities* document.[86]

In assessing the 'spiritual' resources of an area, the tendency of policy documents to collapse faith groups into a general consideration of 'community organisations' is particularly limiting. For faith and belief groups are not just local community organisations, nor is the faith and belief contribution expressed only through self-contained religious groups divorced from one another. Rather, the faith sector is built around ideological and organisational frameworks that intersect with one another, both horizontally (between different local faith communities) and vertically (between different levels of the same faith community or organisation), so impacting upon social cohesion at multiple levels.

First, then, even within a single faith tradition there will be a degree of symbiotic relationship between personal devotion and local, regional, national and even international systems. This relationship is formalised in most Christian contexts given the parish system. The organisational structure of most other faith groups is far less straightforwardly hierarchical. For example, the primary organisational unit of Muslim faith groups is the local mosque, run by a mosque committee which hires an imam to carry out their religious practices. Local mosques can send representatives to the nationwide Muslim Council of Britain, but not all mosques do, and it is a bottom-up arrangement rather than a top-down one; the MCB has no formal authority over individual Muslims, and does not claim to speak for all British Muslims at all times. As the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity & Citizenship's 2013 report *Taking Part: Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance* notes, a 'take me to your leader' approach simply does not work in this context – and the emergence of groups such as the National Muslim Women's Advisory Board (founded 2007) and the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (founded 2006) are just two examples of 'a substantial cohort of Prevent-funded alternatives to umbrella body representation, all of which might be considered

84   British Academy, *Scoping Concepts and Priorities,* 3.

85   Oxford Centre for Social Inclusion, 'Local Insight: East Lindsey' (Brighton: OSCI, 2019).

86   British Academy, *Scoping Concepts and Priorities,* 4.

"foils" to the MCB in one way or another'.[87] Representation has similarly proliferated in British Sikhism, where young British-born Sikhs especially are now forming their own representative organisations with few links to what already exists – and indeed, online networks and individual gurdwaras will often be more influential than national representative bodies.[88]

Local forms of representation will often be the most appropriate. This is not only the case with local places of worship, but also, for example, the many flourishing faith and belief societies on campus across British universities (although many student societies are also affiliated to national networks, such as the British Organisation of Sikh Students and the Union of Jewish Students).[89] At the same time, non-local faith organisations – whether authoritative, representative, or otherwise – can provide helpful avenues for religious communities to mobilise. By way of example, the Board of Deputies of British Jews will often speak out on behalf of an issue affecting a local Jewish community, as they did recently when gravestones at the Chatham Memorial Synagogue in Rochester were vandalised in October 2019.[90] In a similar way, the Muslim Council of Britain, Hindu Council UK, Sikh Council UK or UK Bahá'í Community might comment on local affairs in a representative capacity – and indeed, as occurred at several points in the 2019 election campaign, will speak out on issues of national importance where they are seen to affect the common interests of their religious communities. These bodies are not all directly equivalent (most notably because some of them are entirely elected and others are appointed through nomination, reflecting different attitudes to hierarchical power and leadership). However, they all draw local faith communities beyond their immediate context.

In this way, faith and belief groups can be effective non-state vehicles for moving between different strata of the national community when different organisational levels are able to cohere and work together. At best, this can facilitate the coordination of resources and relationships – a positive force for social cohesion – in a way that few other organisations can emulate. An example of this organisational 'pull' is the **Near Neighbours scheme** administered by the Church Urban Fund. The ability of faith groups to harness a much broader range and depth of community resources should be a significant incentive for policymakers to consider their contribution as a distinctive phenomenon – and beyond a local level.

87   T. O'Toole, D. Nilsson DeHanas, T. Mahood, N. Meer & S. Jones, *Taking Part: Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance (Bristol:* Centre for the Study of Ethnicity & Citizenship, 2013), 17, 21-22.

88   J. Singh, 'The Voice(s) of British Sikhs' in J. Garnett and S. Hausner (eds.), *Religion in Diaspora: Cultures of Citizenship* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 138-57; J. Singh, The Idea, Context, Framing and Realities of 'Sikh Radicalisation' in Britain (Leeds: CREST, 2017), 33-34, 46-51.

89   S. Perfect, B. Ryan and K. Aune, *Faith and Belief on Campus: Division and Cohesion* (London: Theos, 2019); Singh, 'The Voice(s) of British Sikhs', 147-49.

90   D. Sugarman, 'Police investigate after 300-year-old Jewish cemetery in Kent desecrated on Rosh Hashanah, *The Jewish Chronicle* (23 October 2019). https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/police-investigate-after-300-year-old-jewish-cemetery-in-kent-desecrated-1.490548 <Accessed 21 November 2019>

Case study 2: Near Neighbours

Near Neighbours is a nationwide scheme to bring people together in diverse communities, so that they can 'get to know each other better, build relationships of trust, and collaborate together on initiatives that improve the local community they live in'. This is achieved by funding small, grassroots initiatives in both 'social integration' and 'social action'.[91]

The programme was initially launched in February 2011 as a £5 million, three-year Communities and Local Government funded scheme to offer small grants for grassroots organisations to run community projects in line with the Near Neighbours aims. In its initial phase it operated in four regions: the mill town corridor between Bradford and Burnley, Leicester, London and Birmingham.[92]

The scheme continued and now runs in twenty English towns and across most of London, employing a regional Programme Coordinator at each of their ten regional hubs. It still operates a small grants fund, but runs several national projects of its own too. These schemes include the 'Places of Welcome' programme, which encourages groups to open up their buildings for the community, and 'Real People, Honest Talk' scheme, which creates safe spaces for local people to come together and talk through their concerns in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

Near Neighbours is administered by the Church Urban Fund, the Church of England's social action charity, but it partners with other faith organisations and has oversight from interfaith trustees. Explaining the decision to maintain oversight from the Church Urban Fund, the Near Neighbours website states that it

> gives Near Neighbours access to the Church of England's parish system, which sees a vicar present in every community in the country; opening up networking opportunities with experienced community professionals of faith. The Church of England's parish system recognises a duty of care for all and has for decades been working locally with partners in multi-faith areas to foster the better relationships and understanding that help build better communities.[93]

To this end, a Woolf Institute evaluation from 2013 was positive about the success of the scheme in '[reaching] individuals and organisations desiring to generate a greater sense of community'. It particularly lauded the role of the Near Neighbours Programme Coordinators and local clergy who were 'vital in initiating interest in Near Neighbours funding and, in some cases, raising the profile of the project' through 'advertising the fund, encouraging applications and publicising events'.[94] For some, this is a positive example of the established Church at its best.

91   Near Neighbours, 'About us', *Near Neighbours* (2019). https://www.near-neighbours.org.uk/about <Accessed 26 November 2019>

92   HM Government, 'Launch of Near Neighbours Programme', *HM Government* (14 November 2011). https://www.gov.uk/government/news/launch-of-near-neighbours-programme#:~:targetText=He%20was%20speaking%20at%20the,them%20improve%20their%20local%20neighbourhoods. <Accessed 21 November 2019>

93   Near Neighbours, 'About us', *Near Neighbours* (2019). https://www.near-neighbours.org.uk/about <Accessed 26 November 2019>

94   S. Cohen, S. Ahmed, and A. Sandham, *Near Neighbours Report* (Cambridge: Woolf Institute: 2013), 3.

The visibility and reach of the Church of England's parish structure may feel simpler for the government to navigate, and clearly offers an easy point of access to communities which are otherwise unknown in Westminster. On the other hand, some non-Christian voices have raised concerns that the scheme is so heavily rooted in Anglicanism – and therefore, that the government has entrusted significant funding and influence to one faith group over others. In the words of Abdul-Rehman Malik, 'Do you think Muslims know which parish they're in? To me, it's undemocratic.'[95] Clearly the embeddedness of the scheme in a particular faith tradition impacts on the ability of the scheme to bring different faiths together on an entirely level playing field – a potential problem, given that one of the core aims of the Near Neighbours scheme is clearly to promote interfaith dialogue.

At the same time, the reach of faith identities beyond their local context can mean that national or global issues are transplanted into communities that would not otherwise be affected by them. This is perhaps accentuated in an internet age – as was the case in 2010, for example, when the congregation of Grays gurdwara in Essex voted to allow alcohol, meat and tobacco in a hall owned by the gurdwara, leading to the establishment of the nationwide Satkaar (Respect) movement. Things came to a head when hundreds of Sikhs from across the UK protested outside the gurdwara premises.[96] In other cases the tension is political, and several participants in the Free Churches Group Commission noted the impact of disputes such as the Israel-Palestine tensions and Kashmir Conflict on local relations. Needless to say, the politicisation of local relationships is not always conducive to social cohesion.

This is one of many areas in which interfaith work plays an important role. Section one noted that policy-makers have tended to emphasise faith and belief as a source of bonding (rather than bridging) social capital. However, interfaith work is a vital source of bridging capital between groups that otherwise rarely mix and may feel hostility towards one another. To this end, effective faith-based bridging work takes a variety of different forms – all of which underline the fact that individual faith communities working in isolation are just one facet of the faith and belief sector. Bridging opportunities may be initiated or coordinated by:

— **A particular faith and belief group reaching out:** e.g. Peace by Piece (an interfaith programme initiated by the West London Synagogue to promote positive Jewish-Muslim relations locally), or the Church Mosque Twinning programme (coordinated by Wellsprings Together, a joint venture between the Church Urban Fund and the Diocese of Leeds).

— **Collaboration between different faith and belief groups at leadership level:** e.g. Council of Dharmic Faiths (a forum for fostering fellowship between Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism), Faithful Friends (a forum for local interfaith dialogue based in Forest Gate, London), Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (an ecumenical forum for dialogue between Christian denominations).

— **Grassroots interactions within and between congregations:** e.g. informal conversations and between individuals of different faiths (often amplified by social media), congregationally-motivated links between groups, such as Nisa-Nashim (the Jewish Muslim Women's Network), and activities such as Scriptural

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95   D. Singleton, *Faith With Its Sleeves Rolled Up* (Morrisville: Lulu, 2014), 33.
96   Singh, 'The Voice(s) of British Sikhs', 145-6.

Reasoning (a tool for interfaith dialogue whereby representatives of different faiths come together to read and reflect on their scriptures) where representation can be provided at a non-clerical level.

— **Faith engagement in government initiatives:** e.g. Near Neighbours (now independent, but established with significant government funding), the Scottish Interfaith Summit (a Scottish interfaith forum co-chaired by the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government). Here the distinctions between these categories can be blurred, for example were a group receives significant (or even total) government funding but was founded outside of government, as in the case of Nisa-Nashim, or where the funding and governance structures change over time, as in the case of Near Neighbours.

— **Independent charities:** e.g. The Corrymeela Community, Faith Matters, the Inter Faith Network, the Council for Christians and Jews, the Faith & Belief Forum.

This work can take the form of interfaith or intra-faith dialogue (that is between faith traditions or between different communities within a single faith tradition respectively), or it may be practically-focused on social action or even simple socialising (both of which can be organised at a grassroots or institutional level). A positive example of grassroots interfaith socialising is the recent 'Come Dine Together' initiative run by St Philip's Interfaith Centre in Leicester, whereby Muslim and Hindu families who had never met before ate an evening meal together during UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2020; nearly 60 people took part.[97] In contrast, initiatives such as the **Faith & Belief Forum's School Linking programme** (which matches school students from different cultural and faith backgrounds to explore issues of community, identity and belief) ensure bridging between faith communities from an early age and on a wide scale – and by their very nature, engage those with no necessary prior attachment or interest in the benefits of interfaith work. The interfaith landscape is, then, a complex web of different structures and stories in the pursuit of greater engagement between faiths. And indeed, local interfaith work has gradually expanded over recent years, with greater direct involvement from faith communities themselves and a more varied range of interfaith activities being established.[98]

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97   'Come Dine Together – Hindu Muslim Friendship Meals', *World Interfaith Harmony Week,* March 2020. https://worldinterfaithharmony-week.com/pec-events/come-dine-together-hindu-muslim-friendship-meals/ <Accessed 6 April 2020>

98   The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, *The changing face of local interfaith dialogue and cooperation* (London, 2020), 5-6.

Case Study 3:
School Linking (The Faith & Belief Forum)

The School Linking programme, run by national interfaith charity the Faith & Belief Forum, (as part of the The Linking Network umbrella) links classes of school students from different faith and belief backgrounds together for a year-long immersive interfaith experience, where young people learn through sharing, listening and building friendships across difference.

The programme is based in Contact Theory; the idea that prejudice is best lessened by encounter and dialogue. The methodology requires two classes to first meet in a neutral location, where both parties feel equally comfortable and any sense of a power dynamic is avoided, before subsequently hosting and visiting at each other's schools. A teacher from each school attends three Faith & Belief Forum CPDs (one before each 'Link' day) where they are trained in interfaith dialogue facilitation, and supported to co-plan and facilitate the Link with a teacher from their linked school, building a network of trained 'interfaith champions' across the education sector.

In terms of scale, School Linking is currently delivered across Birmingham and London, with a separate focussed project in the Borough of Waltham Forest. In the last academic year, it reached 2920 young people from 136 classes across 102 schools of different faith and belief ethos's, including non-denominational schools.

The Linking journey offers students the opportunity to develop important skills of self-reflection, critical thinking an empathy, as well as increased religious literacy, friendship and fun; many neutral Link days incorporate visits to memorable places such as museums and galleries. Long-standing secondary Muslim-Jewish linking partnership Tawhid Boys and JCoSS recently visited the Arsenal FC stadium where they were given a tour of the grounds.

Speaking about the programme, Sarah Koster, Education and Learning Manager, said:

'School Linking is about equipping educators with the tools to promote and facilitate understanding and meaningful encounter for their students. The team works with both class teacher and school management, resulting in long-term relation building between schools, and by extension, local communities. The programme empowers educational institutions and religious or non-religious communities to become agents of social cohesion and ensure that the next generation have the skills to navigate difference and foster harmony'.

The School Linking programme is funded through The Linking Network by the Pears Foundation, DfE and MHCLG, and by Waltham Forest SACRE. Interestingly, the Waltham Forest programme is run in one of the government's five current Integration Areas. The Faith & Belief Forum are currently working in two Integration Areas, also leading a large-scale community dialogue project in Walsall. This shows how interfaith programming can be used as a vehicle to fulfil a wider social cohesion agenda.

In terms of the above typology, The School Linking programme is an example of the 'blurred distinctions' discussed. It encourages and facilitates grassroots interactions between different faith groups, is run by an independent charity, and has local authority and government support.

That said, despite the importance of interfaith work across its many forms as a source of bridging capital, interfaith initiatives can generate their own challenges. In particular, where such work is institutionally led it can be dominated by older, already-established figures in the community – and of course, many faiths have restrictions around female leadership. Therefore, the inclusion of younger, female voices is a challenge. So too, interfaith concerns are often led by those who already recognise the need for 'bridging' between groups, and it can be a struggle to get new people involved – especially where there is suspicion regarding the aims and motivations of such work. Some indication of this suspicion across society at large can be gleaned from data on withdrawal from school RE classes; in polling of schoolteachers led by Dr David Lundie at Liverpool Hope University, 38.1% of participants had received a request for a child to be withdrawn from some or all of an RE lesson, 'with many participants reporting concerns about racism or Islamophobia as a motivating factor for parents seeking to exercise the right to withdraw'.[99] Indeed, interfaith engagement is often hardest among those who would most benefit from it.

A consideration of the wide variety of bridging models, and their relative benefits, becomes especially pertinent where secular authorities face difficult decisions around interfaith funding. Notably, authorities must choose whether to fund formal instruments (for example, salaried individuals or permanent interfaith councils) which are supported as social goods in their own right, and which in turn hopefully nurture meaningful relationships and impactful practical contributions, or whether to fund specific, boundaried projects on a case-by-case basis. These considerations have guided the recent decision by Bolton Council to reform its interfaith funding model. The Council has very positive relationship with local faith groups, and has traditionally funded individual faith councils and an interfaith council directly. Faith groups in Bolton received over £4 million in funding between 2005 and 2013, with specific funding for a variety of faith councils as well as a full-time paid Interfaith Officer. On its own terms, this has established strong interfaith relationships and a faith sector with a positive profile in the town. However, Bolton's community resourcing strategy was reviewed in Autumn 2019 to establish 'Bolton's Fund', which groups must now apply to in order to receive funding for specific initiatives. This change is intended to maximise the practical output of public resources, and to open the playing field to a wider range of community applicants. In this sense, it mitigates against a common perception that faith councils can be talking shops with little accountability and little emphasis on activity in the wider community. However, the move will also make funding sparser for projects (like interfaith councils) where outputs are less tangible, and the aim is simply to build trust. Ultimately, formal instruments guarantee that channels of conversation are kept open for the long term, nurturing contact on a regular basis and ensuring visible faith leadership at short notice – for example, in times of crisis. The impact of the change remains to be seen, but Bolton's experience will be an important case study for the future. Other local authorities have developed a 'Faith Policy' or social contract between faith groups, the Faith Forum and local government[100] Certainly, the relative benefits of different local authority approaches to interfaith work would be a helpful area of further study.

99   D. Lundie, *Religious Education and the Right of Withdrawal* (Liverpool: Liverpool Hope University, 2018), 1.

100   Barking and Dagenham Council, *Faith Builds Community – Working Together in Barking and Dagenham* (London: Barking and Dagenham Council, 2019)

2.2. Cultural memory and tradition

Part one noted that British cohesion policy has regularly implied faith to be the 'other' to a secular mainstream. Nonetheless, the actual enactment of cultural memory and tradition in the United Kingdom contrasts starkly with the presumed secularism of policy itself. The Churches of Ireland and Wales were disestablished in 1871 and 1920 respectively, but England still has an established Church of England (Anglican), and Scotland retains its national Kirk (Presbyterian).[101] Faith therefore weaves through the institutional memory of these nations in manner that is unusual within the global picture: only 43 countries in the world have a state religion, and only thirteen countries uphold state Christianity.[102]

By quite some way, this is at odds with the actual religious affiliation of most British people. Anglican affiliation in Britain is rapidly shrinking. The latest British Social Attitudes survey reports that only 12% of participants across Britain identified as Anglican in 2018, falling to just 1% in respondents aged between 18 and 24, while the number of Scots who say they belong to the Church of Scotland has also fallen, from 31% in 2002 to just 18% in 2017.[103] Determining attitudes towards the role of religion in public life is less straightforward than assessing personal religious conviction. In a 2012 YouGov poll, 67% agreed with the statement that 'religion should be a personal matter and has no place in public life'. However, the same survey also found that more than twice as many people thought Britain was too secular than thought it was too religious (36% to 17%).[104] So too, in a YouGov survey commissioned by Prospect just a year later, 51% of respondents thought that church and state should be separated.[105] This nuanced picture may simply point to a lack of understanding regarding the current place of religion in public life. Nonetheless, there are questions being asked surrounding the continued legitimacy of established and national churches. To this end, between 1995 and 2008, the proportion of respondents in the British Social Attitudes survey that thought being Christian was 'very' or 'fairly' important to be 'truly British' fell from 33.1% to 23.7%.[106]

All this is profoundly relevant to matters of social cohesion insofar as certain forms of remembrance and ritual become the default at civic events. Anglicanism especially directs the way that the United Kingdom as a whole reflects upon, memorialises, and reproduces its national identity in public. The most obvious example here is Remembrance Sunday, since civic Remembrance ceremonies are generally hosted by the Anglican Church. Most strikingly, the national Remembrance ceremony held at the Cenotaph is led by the Anglican Bishop of London, and according to the Anglican rite. Recent efforts have attempted to make the service more inclusive, including Humanist, Spiritualist, Mormon and Zoroastrian representation for the first time in 2018. However, representation in this instance is not presented as equal. Rather, one party – Anglicanism – hosts the memorialising space for all other groups.

Naturally, this act of remembrance goes far beyond remembering the past. It is a

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101   E. Butler-Sloss, *The CORAB Report: Living with Difference: Community Diversity and the Common Good* (Cambridge: Woolf Institute, 2015), 27.

102   Pew Research Center, *Many Countries Favor Specific Religions, Officially or Unofficially* (Washington: Pew, 2017), 4.

103   These figures are not entirely like for like, as Anglican affiliation is likely to be higher in England specifically than Britain in general. Note also that the BSA survey includes respondents from England, Scotland, and Wales, but not Northern Ireland. J. Curtice, E. Clery, J. Perry, M. Phillips and N. Rahim (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 36th Report* (London: NatCen Social Research, 2019), 20, 22. NatCen, 'Church of England Numbers at Record Low', *NatCen Social Research* (7 September 2018). http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2018/september/church-of-england-numbers-at-record-low/ <Accessed 28 November 2019>

104   YouGov, 'Sunday Times Results, 16th - 17th February 2012', *YouGov* (6 March 2012). http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/6195qkb1kr/YG-Archives-Pol-ST-results-17-190212.pdf <Accessed 22 November 2019> This survey includes respondents from England, Scotland, and Wales, but not Northern Ireland.

105   P. Kellner, 'Ye of little faith', *Prospect magazine online* (12 December 2013). https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/church-of-england-drop-religion-take-up-politics#.UqljSdJdWLg <Accessed 22 November 2019.

106   B. Clements, 'Is being Christian important for being British?', *British Religion in Numbers* (30 April 2014). http://www.brin.ac.uk/is-being-christian-important-for-being-british/ <Accessed 3 December 2012>

normative declaration of the sort of 'shared future' we imagine as a country – a statement of intent – and who contributes to it is highly politicised. It is partly a specific question of where 'Christianity' sits in the national consciousness, and the extent to which it is understood as a marker of British identity, though this itself is not as inherently divisive as we might expect. A 2015 Theos paper considering whether the next coronation ceremony should be Christian or not found that a majority of people (57%) thought that the ceremony should be Christian, compared with 23% who thought it should be secular and 19% who thought it should be multi-faith. When asked whether they thought that a Christian coronation would alienate them from the ceremony, only 22% of people from a religious minority agreed that it would (9% agreeing strongly) and 18% of people of no religious faith said it would. Meanwhile, support for a Christian coronation even among non-religious and non-Christian religious people was consistently stronger than support for a secular or multi-faith coronation.[107] If secularism is the default among policy-makers, it seems that the legacy of the established church has generally been successful in bolstering a perception of Anglicanism as the closest-to-default in our civic ceremonies.

That said, the politicisation of 'Christianity' (often, but not exclusively, in contrast to Islam) as a cultural marker for a particular nativist understanding of Britishness has sometimes been used to exclude or attack British ethnic minorities. For example, the late 2000s and early 2010s saw the British National Party attempt to employ exactly this rhetoric, including at least one election leaflet in 2010 that proclaimed that 'There is only one political party that Christians can support without betraying the Lord Jesus Christ'. The far-right English Defence League (EDL) has also regularly employed Christian imagery and presented itself as a Christian bulwark against an alleged Islamic invasion. Though neither have achieved much mainstream success, these and other sporadic examples sometimes raise concerns that the UK is witnessing the rise of an American style 'religious right'. Yet a Theos report from 2013 found that, while there is evidence of 'greater co-ordination among Christian groups with a strong socially-conservative commitment', the economic views of committed religious believers tend to be left-of-centre and their actual party loyalty was varied.[108]

Moreover, while fears over Islam do appear to be becoming more widespread, the UK in many ways has seen less successful use of Christian imagery in populist rhetoric and electoral tactics than in most of the West. Certainly by comparison with populist movements in Germany, France, the USA, Sweden, Hungary and Poland, the UK has seen little success for populist groups attempting to use and abuse Christian imagery to create a Christian populist movement or nativist ideology.[109]

A number of factors have been suggested to explain this trend, including the persistent opposition of the UK's largest churches to anti-migrant policy and rhetoric, and the lack (perhaps ironically given the aforementioned constitutional settlement of an established church) of a close association in the public imagination between denominational affiliation and national culture.[110] Such fraught ideological terrain demonstrates what is truly at stake in the conceptual discussions of 'the nation' (whether popular, civic, liberal, or multicultural) explored in section 1.3 – and indeed, illustrates how political outcomes can be directed by the response of faith groups in such discussions.

107   N. Spencer and N. Dixon, *Who wants a Christian coronation?* (London: Theos, 2015), 7.

108   A. Walton, A. Hatcher and N. Spencer, *Is there a 'religious right' emerging in Britain?* (London: Theos, 2013), 7-8.

109   See, for example, N. Spencer, '"The Dog That Didn't Bark": Christian Populism in the UK', in Susan Kerr (ed) *Is God a Populist?* (Skaperkraft, Frekk Forlag, 2019), 172-188.

110   T. Peace (2016) 'Religion and Populism in Britain: An Infertile Breeding Ground', in N. Marzouki, D. McDonnell and O. Roy, *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion* (London: Hurst, 2016), 95-108.

Moving from the national level to the grassroots, positive relationships between local faith and belief leaders can act as an important counterbalance to entrenched power dynamics around 'who gets to contribute' to the story of a place. Once again, interfaith work provides opportunities to foster equal, lasting relationships between groups that may otherwise have very different experiences of power and social status in the public conversation. These spaces foster alternative networks of trust and respect over time, in which a more diverse range of stories is told. Such networks also provide visible, diverse leadership in times where the community comes together – either for crises or celebrations – and many of the participants in the Free Churches Commission have lauded the power of public faith leadership as a force for cohesion. As noted above, this is an area where the faith and belief sector is a driving force for creating 'bridging' capital across community groups. That said, the general under-representation of younger and female voices in interfaith dialogue (as noted above) may limit the voices heard in other ways, and is particularly pertinent where the goal of interfaith work is to broaden representation.

Some of these limitations are overcome where the wider community is involved, and of course, whole faith groups can be initiators of public faith leadership in their own right. This is particularly the case where projects uncover voices that are ordinarily less prominent in the assumed national or local story. Thus, for example, the **Minhaj-ul-Quran in Forest Gate** hosted a public exhibition exploring the stories of Indian soldiers who served in World War One. The exhibition was an important intervention in our historical understanding of a period that is so often seen through the lens of patriotism, nostalgia, national loyalty, and in-group pride.

Across all these different examples, it is clear that faith and belief groups have powerful resources to facilitate and shape collective memory. This can serve the aims of the state in ways that are both positive and negative to social cohesion – but it can also rebalance which voices are heard, bringing new or silenced voices to the fore, and challenging existing power dynamics through shared conversation.

Case study 4: Minhaj-ul-Quran

Minhaj-ul-Quran is a mosque in Forest Gate, in the London Borough of Newham. Newham is one of the most diverse local authorities in London, and the mosque runs various activities in the local community – two of which are particularly pertinent to the theme of cultural memory and tradition.

In 2017, Minhaj-ul-Quran ran an exhibition exploring the lives and contribution of the 1.5 million Indian soldiers who served in World War One on behalf of the British Empire, entitled 'Far From the Western Front'. As many as 80,000 Indian soldiers died during the war, and the exhibition was specifically devised to focus on this topic because '[their] stories, and their heroism, have long been omitted from popular histories of the war,

or relegated to the footnotes'.[111] Thus, Minhaj-ul-Quran mobilised its vital assets – its building, staff time, imagination, and wider cultural understanding – to tell stories which expanded the more limited historical narrative we normally hear. In doing so, it provided an arena for an inclusive form of identity-building, in which ethnic minorities and migrants were encouraged to find their voice in the local and national community – facilitated by the advocacy and engagement of a faith group. The exhibition particularly emphasised the lack of contradiction between Asian and British identities in a period of history that is so often seen through the lens of patriotism, national loyalty, and in-group pride.

More regularly, Minhaj-ul-Quran facilitates a conversation space for ESOL learners that encourages people who are learning English to share their stories. The 'Your Space' scheme is run in partnership with Caritas Anchor House, a Catholic homelessness charity based in the same borough. Their ESOL sessions run fortnightly, having grown out of therapeutic conversation sessions that Anchor House was running as part of its homelessness empowerment programme. The emphasis is on informal conversation, enabling group sharing for non-native English speakers in a supportive setting. Attenders might have been in the country for any amount of time from a few weeks to several decades. For some, the sessions primarily serve as a convenient time to practise their language skills – and of course, in itself this is a vital foundation to participating fully in the wider community and the core services available there. For others, the sessions are a vitally important opportunity simply to tell 'their story'.

In both cases, Minhaj-ul-Quran facilitates cultural memory in its broadest sense, creating opportunities for personal reflection and communal remembrance in a listening and inclusive environment.[112]

2.3   Identity and belonging

As section one demonstrated, concerns about identity and belonging lie at the heart of cohesion policy, and have strongly directed how faith and belief communities are perceived. The legacy of interventions such as the Cantle Report and *Our Shared Future* was the emphasis on 'shared future vision and sense of belonging', 'a focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity', and 'strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds' as core criteria in the government's 2007 definition of social cohesion.[113] These criteria all stress aspects of identity and belonging. However, in practice there has been a disproportionate emphasis on one identity as a universally positive force for cohesion, demonstrated nowhere more clearly than in the emphasis on 'British values' at various levels of policy-making. Meanwhile, we have seen that 'other' identities – including faith identities – are viewed as risk factors for social division, or even as threats to national loyalty.

As applied to faith identities, this is nothing new. For centuries, the same trope has been employed to exclude certain religious groups from the national mainstream; by way of

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111   Minhaj-ul-Quran, 'Press Release: Minhaj-ul-Quran London open 'Far From the Western Front Exhibition', *Minhaj-ul-Quran International UK* (11 February 2017). http://www.minhajuk.org/index.php/branches/southengland/london/1439-press-release-minhaj-ul-quran-london-open-far-from-the-western-front-exhibition <Accessed 30 November 2019 >

112   Caritas Anchor House, 'Improving Language and Confidence with Your Space', *Caritas Anchor House* (15 October 2018). https://www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk/news/improving-language-and-confidence-your-space <Accessed 3 December 2019 >

113   See above, section 1.3.

example, we might recall anti-Catholic sentiment stretching back as far as the English Reformation.[114] Nonetheless, it is a prescriptive understanding of what constitutes feeling 'at home' in the UK, which has little to do with the experience of faith on the ground and is largely dominated by government and local agendas rather than community priorities.

That is not to say that 'identity' itself is an unhelpful category, or that faith is irrelevant to the way in which our identities are formed. Rather, as Kwame A. Appiah has notably argued, in practice our identities are overlapping, various and subjective.[115] Therefore, a narrow focus on a particular brand of shared identity – in this instance, a prescribed version of 'Britishness' – fails to recognise the ways in which our diverse identities can also generate belonging in an organic and non-threatening way.

A helpful framework for understanding this process is offered in the Faith & Belief Forum's 2019 report, *Faith, Belief and Inclusion*, which reflects that 'our identities tell the story about who we are and what we identify with, and belonging is where this identification becomes meaningful'. We all inhabit multiple identities as we belong to many different things at once – our family, friends, cultural heritage(s), religious affiliations, workplace, school, nation, or town – and lots of people move between these identities without facing any problems or perceived contradictions. However, where one identity is wrongly perceived to apply to an individual or group, or assumed by others to contradict or preclude another of their identities, exclusion can easily follow. In turn, this can lead people to question their belonging, and can foster feelings of isolation and withdrawal from society at large.

As organisations such as the Middlesbrough-based **Media Cultured** demonstrate, inclusive spaces in which individuals can explore and speak for their own identities – and so, express feelings of belonging in their own ways – are therefore powerful tools against the divisive use of identity to exclude. By this model, belonging is not singular and dependent on a particular identity; rather, we belong in different (and equally legitimate) ways as our different identities interact and intersect with one another without contradiction.[116]

114   For example, A. McClaren, 'Gender, Religion, and Early Modern Nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and the Genesis of English Anti-Catholicism', in *The American Historical Review*, 107, 3 (2002), 739-67; C. Z. Weiner, 'The Beleaguered Isle. A Study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Anti-Catholicism', in *Past & Present*, 51 (1971), 27-62; E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016 ed.); T. O. Hughes, 'Anti-Catholicism in Wales, 1900-1960', in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53, 2 (2002), 312-25.

115   K. A. Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright, 2018); see also F. Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (London: Profile, 2018).

116   J.D. Smith, L. Törning, B. Gidley and R. Sheldon, *Faith, Belief and Inclusion* (London: Faith & Belief Forum, 2019), 10-11.

Case study 5:
Media Cultured

Media Cultured is a Middlesbrough-based social enterprise that produces bespoke, high impact educational resources, including films that challenge racism, Islamophobia and extremism. The central aim of this pioneering organisation is to promote social unity through inclusion, safeguarding and equality programmes, often delivered through workshops and exhibitions. The interactive workshops and sessions build resilience too and provide an alternative narrative to hate. By highlighting positive role models as well as counter narratives (and indeed, more varied) representations of Islam than those presented in the media the organisation has made significant impact in these, the most challenging of times.

The organisation was founded in 2012 by Amjid Khazir, as a response to the death of his uncle Mohammed Zabir, following an alleged racially motivated violent attack. As an IT professional with experience in online de-radicalisation, Khazir began making films to challenge misinformation around Islam and give positive role models for young Muslims. This was the start of a much broader programme of resources and workshops. Media Cultured now works with schools, the police, professional football clubs and religious groups to spread a positive and celebratory approach to diverse identities. It is not attached to one Muslim tradition, but seeks to reflect the wide variety of Muslim experiences in the UK.

One of Media Cultured's most prominent films is the short documentary East to North East, which was showcased at an exhibition of the same name in 2018 and explores experiences of migration and diversity in Teesside. In another entitled 'Combinations', the Muslim boxing trainer and Olympic torch bearer Imran Naeem reflects:

> I always felt I was British because the boxers that were produced at the time – the likes of Frank Bruno, the likes of Nigel Benn, Chris Eubank – and you think, yeah, yeah, I'm British. I'm British now because I can identify with these guys. They're darker than me, they speak the same as I do, and we have the same passion in sport. I'm content with who I am and I'm content with what Islam has given me. Being a Muslim is all about being part of the community.[117]

The short video opens with Naeem staring sternly into the camera as the call to prayer plays in the background, before he bursts into laughter and is shown shopping, boxing, speaking at an Islamic Relief charity event and bearing the Olympic torch. It is a series of images which effectively captures the intersection of sport, faith and nationality in his sense of self, emphasising the coherence of these various facets as an authentic whole.

Media Cultured has also produced films on the growing number of attacks on Muslim women who adorn Islamic head coverings, as well as youth radicalisation and inclusion in football – and indeed, works extensively in the promotion of inclusivity and understanding in football through their Good Sportsmanship programme.[118]

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117   Media Cultured and Thousand Yard Films, 'Combinations Teaser', *Vimeo* (30 August 2012). https://vimeo.com/48519016 <Accessed 3 November 2019>

118   Media Cultured, 'Good Sportsmanship', *Media Cultured.* https://mediacultured.co.uk/good-sportsmanship/ <Accessed 3 December 2012>

As section 2.1 noted, religious organisations can in fact be helpful in the integration of our identities at different levels – whether local, regional, national or global – and this is particularly relevant if attitudes to these different levels of community become contested, as in the debates surrounding Brexit. To this end, the author David Goodhart has identified a socio–cultural divide between mobile, achievement-orientated 'Anywheres' and communitarian, place-based 'Somewheres'. Goodhart accepts that these groupings exist on a spectrum, but essentially presents our current political moment as a 'Somewhere' backlash against 'Anywhere over–reach'.[119] As noted in section 1.7, this is a recognition that the social cohesion challenges facing the UK go far beyond race and religion – and indeed, other factors can be even more fundamental in shaping our social perspectives. At the same time, the way that faith-groups are inherently rooted in their local communities, while at home with global and even universal notions of belonging, can offer a valuable model for healing in the wake of such a divisive public debate.

This rootedness is one aspect of the faith sector which functions very differently in rural and urban contexts. In rural communities, the faith sector tends to be predominantly Christian and the church building may be one of very few, or indeed the only, community space available. This makes it an important hub in which to nurture solidarity and a shared sense of identity within the community. Of course, this is critical in otherwise isolated communities. However, it is also becoming harder to sustain different congregations as rural populations become older, and the nostalgic perception that each village has its own priest is extremely rare in practice. Rather, one priest may find themselves stretched across many parishes, and while this trend is longstanding it also looks set to increase: between 2005 and 2011, 90% of parishes had less than the equivalent of half a clergy-person per year and 40% of existing Anglican clergy are due to retire in the next ten years.[120] Care for the building itself, and the vibrancy of the congregation beyond the priest, will therefore become increasingly vital if the church is to continue its role at the heart of these communities.

Meanwhile, urban areas tend to have much more diverse faith sectors, with many faith groups serving people from various religious and national backgrounds – often sharing buildings between different congregations, or renting secular space for the worship time alone. Yet again, the presence of different faith identities alongside one another within a particular area is not necessarily a problem to overcome. To this end, the MP for Newham, Stephen Timms told the Free Churches Commission that:

> If we think about a classically cohesive English town somewhere, it was never the case that everybody in such a town belonged to the same thing. Some belonged to a nonconformist chapel, some to a Quaker meeting house, and others to one of the parish churches. But what was a characteristic of such a town was that almost everybody belonged to one of them. And the very diverse community that I represent is like that as well. Almost everybody belongs to one of the faith groups. Not to the same thing, but to something. Faith communities are a resource for enabling belonging, rather than – as is often, rather lazily, assumed – a threat to cohesion.[121]

At best, then, faith 'identities' can be a source of confidence and cultural capital which

119   D. Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere* (London: Penguin, 2017), 5, 19-48, 215.

120   J. Bell and J. Hopkinson, *Shaping strategies for mission and growth in rural multi-church groups* (London: Church of England, 2017), 7, 3.

121   Free Churches Commission (forthcoming).

can provide the authentic basis for mixing and learning from each other. This can easily be expressed in practical ways. One such example is the growing popularity and success of **Open Iftar events** in recent years, which provide an opportunity for people of all faiths and none to join with the Muslim community in breaking the fast during Ramadan. We might also recall everyday examples such as the Aberdeen Episcopal Church opening its doors to Muslims for prayer when the local mosque was no longer big enough, or the Glasgow gurdwara which brought together 90 women of different faiths to weave a multi-faith tapestry over 18 months.[122] Conversation begins where people are confident in their own, authentic voice.

Case Study 6:
Open Iftars and the Ramadan Tent Project

Open Iftar is the UK's largest community event in Ramadan and has been taking place since 2013. Open Iftar is the flagship event of Ramadan Tent Project, a not for profit organisation which aims to bring communities together to better understand one another. More than 100,000 people have attended Open Iftar since inception, spanning across 10 cities and four continents. The event centres on the iftar – the evening meal (or breaking of the fast) shared by Muslims after sunset during the holy month of Ramadan. The point of an 'open' iftar is to welcome into these events not only other Muslims, but also non-Muslims, to a shared meal. This provides a chance to educate people about the faith, to discuss issues relevant to the local community, and to pray.

As such they are not interfaith events in the classic sense, so much as (as the name suggests) an opening up of an Islamic event to welcome in others. Open Iftars include sharing of food, a chance to engage with ordinary Muslims, imams and other Islamic experts on questions people might have about Islam, and speakers and events, which often draw on speakers from beyond the Islamic community.

The effect of such events can be considerable. In the course of Theos' case study research in Bradford we heard from several interviewees how much they valued the Open Iftar there, which is held in the main city square. The visibility of the event, held in the very centre of the city in a civic (rather than traditionally religious) site is symbolically important in establishing the event as part of the city's collective culture and heritage. Several Muslim interviewees noted that the event had made them feel pride in the city and an increased sense of closeness with their non-Muslim neighbours who had come out to share food and support the event. This provided a forum for conversations so that people could ask questions and hear the answers for themselves, rather than through the medium of (what was often viewed as) unhelpful media narratives about Bradford's Muslim community.

122   J. Hyde, 'The Scottish Episcopal Church In Aberdeen Opens Doors To Muslims', *St John's Aberdeen* (30 March 2013). https://www. stjohnsaberdeen.co.uk/the-scottish-episcopal-church-in-aberdeen-opens-doors-to-muslims/ <Accessed 5 November 2019 >. C. Jenkins, 'Multi-faith tapestry for peace created in Glasgow Gurdwara', *Evening Times* (26 November 2019). https://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/ news/18060070.multi-faith-tapestry-peace-created-glasgow-gurdwara/ <Accessed 26 November 2019>.

All that said, it remains the case that faith and belief can be used to form exclusive or introverted communities – including those that mix infrequently with the wider society. In the first instance, this manifests in the simple segregation of different religious people according to faith and belief. According to data from the 2018-19 Community Life Survey, 28% of people said that all their friends were from the same religious group compared to 39% of people whose friends were of the same ethnicity, 20% who said all their friends had a similar level of education, and 17% whose friends were all the same age group.[123] Thus, religion is a stronger as a marker for segregation than age and education, though weaker than ethnicity. This segregation can be the result of deliberate circumstances, as in the Cohesive Societies Literature Review example of schoolgirls who felt unable to mix with students of a different cultural group because of parental restrictions on where and how they could socialize.[124] In other instances, it might flow naturally from the positive relationship-building and emotional support of a strong religious community

More problematically, certain faith positions are associated with attitudes that are actively exclusionary in other ways – and towards other identities. This is especially true of attitudes regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. The British Attitudes Survey shows that the percentage of Catholics, Anglicans and other Christians who think homosexuality is 'always wrong' or 'almost always wrong' has been in steady decline since the survey began in 1983. Nonetheless, respondents without a religious affiliation have commonly been more accepting of different sexual orientations and gender identities, and often still are – and certain religious groups remain among the most vocal critics of LGBT equality.[125] At the same time, the huge differences in approach to these issues across the faith sector should not be underestimated, as demonstrated forcefully by the recent rejection of the Quaker Presidential nominee for Churches Together in England (CTE) on the basis that she was married to a woman. CTE is the national instrument for ecumenical conversation between different Christian denominations in England. It is led by six Presidents from different denominations, some of which are nominated on a de facto basis because of their position within their own denomination (for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury), but the Fourth Presidency is nominated by one of several smaller denominations on a rotating basis. The Quaker nomination was rejected by other member churches in 2019, despite the celebration of same-sex marriage within Quakerism, reflecting how differently (and perhaps intractably so) these issues are handled across Christianity.[126] It is telling that, despite evidence of a general link between religiosity and positive mental health outcomes, LGBT people in churches that were identified as accepting of different sexual orientations and gender identities experienced lower levels of depression and 'internalised homonegativity' (and higher levels of 'eudaimonic well-being') than participants in churches that were identified as not accepting of different sexual orientations and gender identities.[127]

Incidents such as the Parkfield Community School protests – in which parents and (later) faith-motivated protestors from outside the area have been protesting against the school's 'No Outsiders' programme for a number of years – indicate the continued depth of feeling on these issues. The programme teaches acceptance and inclusion for different groups protected by equalities legislation, including those of different sexual orientations, but

123   Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport, *Community Life Survey,* England 2018 to 2019 report (London: Crown, 2019), 6.

124   Baylis, Beider and Hardy, *Cohesive Societies Literature Review,* 26.

125   B. Clements, 'Attitudes to Gay Rights', *British Religion in Numbers* (January 2017). http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/attitudes-to-wards-gay-rights/ <Accessed 28 November 2019>

126   Quakers in Britain, *Twitter* (22 November 2019). https://twitter.com/BritishQuakers/status/1197821621458948099 <Accessed 22 November 2019>. Churches Together in England, 'Churches Together in England statement on the Fourth Presidency', *Churches Together in England* (22 November 2019). https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/559995/Home/News/Latest_news/CTE_statement_on.aspx <Accessed 4 December 2019>

127   S. Boppana, 'The impact of religiosity on the psychological wellbeing of LGBT Christians', in *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Mental Health,* 23, 4 (2019), 412-26.

has been criticised as 'inappropriate' and 'confusing' by its detractors.[128] At the same time, these protests were condemned by a number of Muslim groups such as Imaan, Hidayah, and the London Queer Muslims, with the group Hidayah commenting that '[homophobia] is a cultural problem, not a religious one. In hiding behind the religion, protesters are being disingenuous. In order for any conversation to move forward, we need to accept Islam is divided in many ways by opinion - you can't speak about Muslim people as a homogeneous group'.[129] Faith and LGBT identities do not have to be mutually exclusive, and intersectional approaches are found across different faith traditions.

Finally, it is worth noting that many religious groups will not express their faith in the language of 'identity' and 'belonging' at all. Rather, they might do so in the specific framework of their own theology or practice – and the balance between the two will vary between faiths. This raises a question of whether the theme of 'identity and belonging' itself is broad enough to encapsulate the unique place of faith and belief in human lived experience – particularly since these terms have become so contentious as pillars of social cohesion policy. Both words imply a focus on the functionality or utility of faith and belief within the wider community, rather than as a personal motivation or framework for understanding the social world; they are therefore heavily weighted towards government and policy-makers secular priorities. Religious language of 'vision', 'fellowship', 'tradition', 'teaching', 'charity' and 'service' all implies the shared relationship of the in-group alongside care for the out-group, and this dynamic has been conceptualised in the distinctive voices of particular faiths over thousands of years. These are sustainable and powerful modes of identity-building – but they may not resort to the language of identity, or even recognise the relevance of the term to the religious worldview.

The question of whether it is useful to impose such loaded terms on communities of faith and belief would be a useful area of further study. Other categories that may resonate more strongly with the religious experience include 'vocation' (alluding to a sense of one's religious life as being in relation to something external and yet authoritative, such as a deity or deities) and 'confidence' (literally as *con-fidence* – 'with faith' – reflecting an underlying principle of trust, which can be expressed through both theology and practice and is particularly acute in religious communities, but also resonates more widely across society in its common meaning as a sense of assuredness that emerges out of harmony between one's identity, belonging and beliefs). It is also notable that many participants in the Free Churches Commission spoke about their belief in human 'dignity' as a central tenet of their faith, and as an important motivator for faith-based action. Personal notions of 'vocation', 'confidence' and 'dignity' may all have an impact on the wider social landscape, and would be a helpful area of further study.

2.4   The social economy

The fourth *Cohesive Societies* theme concerns the social economy – that is, the way in which communities are shaped by the different ways in which people make choices, invest their energy, and make exchanges of all sorts involving skills, space, knowledge, networks, technologies and physical resources. And if policy has been preoccupied with concerns around identity and belonging, this preoccupation has come at the direct expense of a consideration of the actual social impact of faith communities.

128   N. Parveen, 'Birmingham school stops LGBT lessons after parent protests', *The Guardian* (4 March 2019). https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/04/birmingham-school-stops-lgbt-lessons-after-parent-protests <Accessed 3 December 2019>

129   Ruchira Sharma, 'We are gay Muslims and our voices need to be heard', *inews* (6 September 2019). https://inews.co.uk/opinion/comment/parkfield-community-school-gay-muslims-cant-pray-gay-away-76101 <Accessed 26 March 2020>

Indeed, particularly in an age of austerity, it is through these choices that faith groups have had the most notable contribution. In simple financial terms, as noted above, faith-based volunteer hours rose by almost 60% from 2010-2014, to 114.8 million hours per year, and the Cinnamon Trust valued this contribution at £3 billion.[130] So too, the 2016 New Philanthropy Capital report *What a Difference Faith Makes* found that a quarter of all charities in the UK is now faith-based, with a significantly higher proportion of faith-based charities (34%) than non-faith based charities (25%) being registered with the Charity Commission in the past ten years.[131] These figures are good news stories for faith and belief groups in themselves – but have faith groups simply been in the right place at the right time, or is there something distinctive about their role in the social economy?

Faith and belief groups do have specific assets that render them well-placed to act in the community. The most obvious assets are their buildings, which can be used to host community celebrations, meetings, political hustings, and more. The fact that these buildings are often so evenly distributed is a second asset in its own right, making faith groups uniquely placed to respond to hyper-local issues (while retaining oversight of a much larger area and engaging at various organisational levels, as noted in section 2.1). A profound concern for the wider community can be found across all denominations and non-Christian faith and belief groups. Indeed, while policy documents such as the Casey Review emphasise the 'anxiety' that has been caused by an increase in mosques across the UK, it is worth remembering that this also equates to an increase in community assets across our towns and cities.[132] Of course, the extent to which these community assets are utilised to their potential is a separate question, and a helpful policy position might encourage faith and belief groups to open their buildings as widely and often as possible.

Buildings and geographical spread aside, faith groups have 'soft assets' too. We have already noted how the provision of local faith leaders can give voice and direction to communities that are otherwise neglected or ignored. Similarly, the informal networks of relationships centred around faith hubs may be largely faith-based, but can bring people of different ages, class, socio-economic background and political affiliation together in ways that rarely happen in other contexts.

Where these assets are deployed to greatest effect, the contribution can consolidate both bonding and bridging social capital. For example, the Interfaith Food Justice Network in Glasgow brings together various community groups to volunteer and work for projects that support people facing food insecurity across the city. The Network has gathered over 30 organisations, including Kagyu Samye Dzong (Buddhist), the Glasgow Humanist Society, Feed Glasgow & Central Mosque (Muslim), and small local businesses such as the Little Sourdough Bakery, running monthly meetings and networking events, as well as the annual 'One Big Picnic' – a free community meal attended by around 2,000 people in 2018. They have also drafted a public 'Interfaith Food Justice Declaration' for others to sign, and, along with various other faith groups including the Church of Scotland, submitted group evidence to the public consultation on the so-called Good Food Nation Bill.[133] In this sense, the Network is active at a number of different levels and illustrates the convening power of faith and belief communities, far beyond their own boundaries and in pursuit of a common goal. It is a regenerative model which fosters greater and more far-reaching cohesion over time.

One aspect of the faith-based social economy that is almost entirely absent from the

130   Knott, *Investing More,* 2; Cinnamon Network, *Cinnamon Faith Action Audit,* 2.

131   R. Wharton and L. de Las Casas, *What a Difference Faith Makes: Insights on faith-based charities* (London: NCP, 2016).

132   Casey, *Casey Review,* 121, 124-127.

133   Scottish Government, *Good Food Nation proposals for legislation: analysis of consultation responses* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2019), 37.

policy and literature of social cohesion is the motivating and sustaining role of prayer. Of course, this is something distinctive to (most) faith and belief groups. Yet leaving aside questions surrounding the efficacy of prayer itself, it clearly plays a strong role in the motivation for – and therefore mechanism of – many faith-based projects. Unsurprisingly and understandably, policy tends to cleave apart what is emotional and spiritual from what is economic and political. Beyond this, there is also a great deal of suspicion around prayer, and some awareness of its role in faith-based action is necessary if policy is to be truly 'faith literate'. The connection between prayer and action is made explicit in initiatives such as **Pray Haringey, and the Peace Alliance** that was established with its support. This relationship points to the importance of the personal inner life as a grounding for whatever choices we make around our time, networks, skills, knowledge and physical resources. Once again, the beliefs and practices underlying faith-based social action cannot be collapsed into a purely secular framework: prayer is simply its own phenomena.

Case Studies 7 & 8:
Pray Haringey and the Peace Alliance

Pray Haringey is an ecumenical umbrella organisation of different churches in the London Borough of Haringey, which exists to 'pray intelligently' for the area. Their vision is to pray together on a regular basis in a way that is alert to the issues facing the borough, and consequently to uphold the whole group in action which is targeted, accountable, and inspired directly by prayer. The focus of this action has been around building relationships between key stakeholders in the area, with an emphasis on the concerns of young people in Haringey. Pray Haringey has ongoing strategic partnerships with Haringey Council, the Multi Faith Forum, Haringey SACRE, the Cinnamon Network and the Borough Deans.

One initiative that Pray Haringey supported in its early stages was the Haringey Peace Alliance (now known simply as the 'Peace Alliance') which emerged in 2001 out of a concern led by Pastor Nims Obunge of Freedom's Ark Church. Pastor Obunge set up the Peace Alliance to tackle knife crime in Haringey. It focuses on providing effective role models and raising up committed ambassadors of peace to change the culture and values which support youth violence in London. Having flourished since 2001, it is now a London-wide initiative. Among its various ongoing projects are the annual Week of Peace event (held in September to coincide with International Peace Day) and the London Leadership and Peace Awards (which recognises members of the community who have led the way in building stronger, safer and inclusive communities).

Reflecting on the origins of the Peace Alliance, Rev. Obunge is clear about the importance of Church fellowship and prayer as a motivation for starting the Peace Alliance: 'it was built on friendship; it was built on prayer; it was built on the prophetic word. There was just that sense of, "Okay, what does God want to do?" We spent time seeking the face of God and saying "What's God saying to us? How, what, does this mean?" And the more we searched within ourselves, we became more united. And that empowered us to do [more].' His reflections point to prayer as a powerful motivating force that is often the bedrock of sustainable faith-based action.

To this end, our social 'choices' may not in fact be experienced or understood *as choice*, and many of the participants in the Free Churches Group have spoken about a feeling of being led or compelled to act in a certain way by their faith. Sometimes duty might arise from personal conviction; other times it may arise from a sense of vision for what God requires of the individual; still other times it may emerge from communal vision of a whole faith group. A pertinent example here is the Sikh Langar – that is, the community kitchen which serves a free meal to any visitors in the gurdwara. This is a vital expression of the more general Sikh commitment to hospitality, and serves as a reminder that existing faith structures often give shape and form to the precise manifestation of the social economy in a particular community. For example, these principles served as the direct inspiration for the considerable social contribution of the Sikh charity, **NishkamSWAT (the Sikh Welfare & Awareness Team)**. Language of 'choice', as it is commonly understood in terms of individual autonomy and freedom, does not adequately capture the motivation behind such faith-based action; the Sikh principle of 'sewa' (selfless service) is explicitly framed in terms of denying one's own ego, and the hospitality expressed through Langar is profoundly other-orientated. One third of respondents in the *British Sikh Report* said that they performed sewa at their gurdwara (though responses varied substantially by age, with two thirds over 65 and only one third in younger age groups doing so) and a quarter said that they volunteered elsewhere.[134]

Case study 9: NishkamSWAT (Sikh Welfare & Awareness Team)

Founded in 2008 in West London, NishkamSWAT is a Sikh charity whose aim is to 'unite and transform financially disadvantaged communities by focusing on projects which make a difference to people's lives in the short term and improve their prospects in the long term'.

SWAT began in response to the needs of a large homeless population in Southall in Middlesex. These needs intersected with a range of wider issues including immigration status, addiction, alcohol and mental health. Over time, SWAT contributed to a drastic reduction in homelessness in Southall, and expanded its reach to other locations. The charity now operates 28 times a week in 21 locations, including London, Reading, Oxford, Southampton and more.

In addition to this 'Homeless Project', SWAT runs an 'Elderly Care Project' (listening to elderly residents in care homes) and a Nishkam Healthcare scheme (which provides medical care to people on the streets through its own SWAT ambulance service). So too, in 2019 it instituted 'Project Recovery' (a helpline and educational programme that provides support and guidance to anyone who is suffering or impacted by alcohol or substance

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134   J. Singh Verdee (ed.), *British Sikh Report* 2019 (2019), 14.

addiction).

All these activities are consciously framed in terms of Sikh religious values. The charity's website describes their underlying ethos as an expression of the teachings of Guru Nanak (the first Sikh Guru and founder of Sikhism), drawing on principles of Naam Japna, (remembering God), Kirat Karni, (earning an honest living) and Vand Kay Shako (selflessly serving others, sharing income and resources). The Elderly Care Project is explicitly identified as a form of 'sewa' (selfless service) and the organisation claims to be 'the first UK Sikh charity to take Langar to the streets' in its Homeless Project. 'Nishkam' itself refers to action without desire (for reward), and the same values are imbued throughout the organisation in less explicit ways too– for example, in their statement that 'we pride ourselves as an organization built around entirely selfless volunteers'.[135] In this sense, the charity's activities are an expression of Sikh faith and cannot be understood entirely outside of this faith context.

Parallels are of course found across different religious traditions; the Jewish understanding of Mitzvah is explicitly an expression of duty to fulfil a religious commandment, and the concept of Dharma (across a number of faiths including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism) reflects a sense of ultimate duty governing one's actions towards oneself, others and creation. Moreover, while these concepts are in some ways distinctive to particular religious traditions, in other ways secular understanding of duty or conscience is comparable. This raises wide-reaching questions about how this sense of duty (broadly understood) might impact upon the social economy beyond a specific faith and belief context.

A consideration of 'duty' also raises further questions about how far faith-based motivations for community engagement might be unusually resilient to wider changes in the economic and political climate – particularly where a certain vision is supported and upheld by the whole religious community. A recent Theos report on resilience in the North East touched on some of these questions, observing that churches were building 'local spiritual capital' as a 'stockpile of hope, activism and purpose' in communities that were otherwise suffering from a lack of political or economic investment.[136] This would be a useful area of further study insofar as it pertains to social cohesion.

2.5   Care for the future

The final *Cohesive Societies* theme relates to care for the future, conceived both in terms of intergenerational justice and as our collective capacity to meet future challenges. Addressing the climate emergency is a particular concern, and a great deal of positive faith-based work is happening in this area. However, religious groups also have their own sustainability concerns – and their ability to contribute in the future will depend on their ability to address them.

As far as straightforward care for future generations is concerned, faith groups have a long history of providing services for families and youth work, including crèches, parents and toddler groups, educational programmes, and youth clubs for older children

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135   Swat London, 'Home'. https://swatlondon.com/ <Accessed 3 March 2020 >
136   Bickley, *People, Place and Purpose,* 47-8, 90.

and teenagers. These groups have significant potential to bring community members together and foster social cohesion, especially when the people who attend these groups come from non-faith backgrounds; one participant in the Free Churches Commission, a Church of England vicar, estimated that just a quarter of those attending his youth club and baby & toddler groups were connected with the church. Church-based projects such as the **Penlee Cluster Holiday Club** in Cornwall are vital in ensuring that children from deprived backgrounds do not slip back in their attainment record at the start of the new school year, by providing educational and expansive experiences for children who may not ordinarily have them during the summer holidays. Similarly, the Hindu **Shishukunj** movement works across the world with young children to invest in their spiritual, emotional and social development. This is a question of capturing youth potential early, and investing in it.

Case Study 10: Shishukunj

Shishukunj translates as 'children's garden' and is a model for holistic children's engagement and education that began in Karachi during the 1940s. Shishukunj charities were established in both Leicester and London during the 1970s; both were founded by individuals inspired by Shishukunj groups that they had witnessed among Gujarati diaspora communities in East Africa.

The aim of Shishukunj is to develop young minds with games, exercise, arts and crafts, and learning through traditional Hindu songs and stories. The hope is to promote 'ideals of love, compassion, respect, humanity, simplicity and eventually leadership so that each child can aspire for greatness in a way that benefits society'. The movement's emblem is a flower, emphasising the blossoming of the nurtured child. Parents are encouraged to participate fully in these activities, and older children and young adults run activities for younger children, so bringing the whole community together in the nourishment of the children.

Shishukunj Leicester was established in 1973 and runs out of the Shree Sanatan Mandir, holding classes every Sunday which include games, storytelling, songs, and puzzles. Outside regular classes, past events include an annual rangoli (a traditional Hindu artform) competition in October 2019, and a children's Shiv Puja in August 2019

Shishukunj London was founded in 1977, and now runs in several locations across the region (Harrow, Finchley and previously Croydon). 2015 also saw the opening of the dedicated Shishukunj Bevan in Edgware – a centre for the use of wider community activities, including music and dance classes and as a daytime hub for the elderly in the community.

Case Study 11: Penlee Cluster Holiday Club

The Penlee Cluster is a group of churches in Cornwall. The cluster is made up of St Mary's and St John's in Penzance, St Peter's Newlyn, and St Pol De Leon in Paul. It runs a full-time holiday club for local children for five weeks from July to August every year. The club is run by local clergy and volunteers from their congregations, many of whom give up weeks on end in order to provide the service. It also enlists help from former attendees at the club who join as 'young helpers' to engage with the younger children.

The summer months can be especially challenging for families on lower incomes: free school meals are not available and parents often cannot take time off work to care for their family. However, the organisers are clear that the Holiday Club is for all children, and that positive mixing between children of different socio-economic backgrounds is an important part of their motivation for running the scheme. This is not just a source of valuable free childcare, but offers a chance for positive relationships to form between children outside of a school context.

The Club provides a safe, reliable place where children are fed, educated, and entertained through a series of stimulating activities during the summer months. Activities include walking, art and cooking together; attendees are split into different groups based on age to ensure that all activities are age-appropriate.

The Club also provides 'teaching' on social values such as sharing, and practical skills such as map reading and cooking. However, despite its Christian background, it does not include any explicitly religious content. Rev. Sian Yates (the team leader of the Penlee Cluster, and one of the Holiday Club organisers) emphasised that the club's function is to provide a social good for the children and their families rather than to proselytise. She reflected, 'It is totally open handed, and for me that is almost a tenet of hope and trust… All I have to do is be faithful to the gospel imperative which says that Christ is in everything and at the margins, and we live out our faith.'

At the same time, faith groups do a lot to reach out among elderly generations, with programmes such as lunch and friendship clubs helping to combat loneliness and isolation among the elderly. This is a hugely significant contribution to social cohesion in itself, as Age UK estimate that 3.8 million of those aged 65 and over live alone.[137] It also raises the question of whether the need for cohesive societies to care for elderly generations is adequately recognised by the theme 'Care for the Future'.

However, projects which are genuinely intergenerational (aside from the worship spaces themselves) are rare – and as we see a shift away from religious affiliation in the 'millennial' and 'Gen Z' generations, with 'no religion' replacing Christianity as the British default, there are profound questions around the extent to which the scale of the faith contribution is sustainable. To this end, the 2011 Census data from the Office of National

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137   Age UK, 'Later Life in the United Kingdom 2019 factsheet', *Age UK Publications,* 5 (May 2019), retrieved from https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/later_life_uk_factsheet.pdf?dtrk=true <Accessed 2 December 2019>

Statistics showed that non-religious people had a much younger age profile than the population as a whole: 39% of those with no religion were aged under 25, and 82% were aged under 50. Christianity has the oldest age profile of all the major faiths in the United Kingdom, with over one in five Christians (22%) now aged 65 and above.[138] Looking forward, it seems likely that faith and belief in the United Kingdom will be shaped much more by non-religious and non-Christian groups – to which end, a combination of migration patterns and a higher retention rate among non-Christian religions has seen the percentage of non-Christian religious affiliation in Britain rise from just 2% in 1983 to 9% in 2018.[139]

All this points to a lack of intergenerational cohesion, not only in how individuals spend their time but also with regards to belief and religious participation. It also poses a practical problem: in simple terms, who will run the huge scope of church-based social programmes in the future? This is a particular problem for the established church, not only because of the sharply decreasing number of professing Anglicans (noted in section 2.2) but also because the inherited assets of the established church are especially strong. Their many buildings, geographical spread, paid clergy, and robust hierarchical structure have been built up over many centuries, but all depend on there being a next generation to sustain them. At the same time, the diversification of faith in the United Kingdom will undoubtedly bring the consolidation of new assets – making it vitally important that policy-makers nurture such communities as they grow, empowering emerging faith groups to apply their resources ever more fruitfully to the benefit of the wider community.

Moving to consider environmental concerns specifically, the existing assets of all faith groups are one alternative channel for mobilising large groups of otherwise disparate individuals, quite apart from (but often alongside) targeted state intervention. This may be used to encourage widespread lifestyle changes on an individual level, but is also a potent lobbying resource. Indeed, this is already happening, and several notable environmental movements and charities based in the UK have a faith and belief element; prominent examples include the Faith for the Climate network, the Cambridge Central 'Eco' Mosque, A Rocha, Humanists for a Better World, and Operation Noah. With precedent for leading society on various moral issues, the faith community have the base support to lead on the environment too – as was indicated by the prominence of the 'Faith Bridge' during the October Extinction Rebellion protests in London (led by Christian Climate Action).[140] Sub-groups of the Extinction Rebellion movement include XR Muslims, XR Quakers, XR Jews, XR Buddhists, and XR Brighton Meditators. The October 2019 Rebellion also saw passages from scripture read out over Trafalgar Square by loudspeaker, indicating the creative expressions of faith at the centre the environmental movement.

Inherent in the environmental movement is the symbiotic relationship between broad political coalitions and the individual action of the greatest number of people possible, and (as we have seen throughout this review) this is inherent in faith movements too. One striking example of this symbiosis is the Eco Church movement led by A Rocha, encouraging churches to work towards a series of bronze, silver and gold Eco Church Awards through a series of environmental measures. Once again, the fact that faith groups intuitively move across levels of participation in their everyday activities is a significant asset.

138   C. Stokes, 'Full Story: What does the Census tell us about religion in 2011?', *Office for National Statistics* (16 May 2013).https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/fullstorywhatdoesthecensustellusaboutreligionin2011/2013-05-16 <Accessed: 2 December 2019>

139   Curtice, Clery, Perry, Phillips and Rahim (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 36th Report,* 5, 21.

140   Christian Climate Action, 'Church leaders create extinction rebellion 'faith bridge' across the Thames', *Christian Climate Action* (7 October 2019). https://christianclimateaction.org/2019/10/07/church-leaders-create-extinction-rebellion-faith-bridge-across-the-thames/ <Accessed: 2 December 2019>

Of course, sometimes this relationship is conceived in the other direction, starting with localised projects that challenge existing structures and model alternatives believed to tend towards greater social and environmental wellbeing. This is the case with the Glasgow-based working community, **GalGael**, a values-led community not officially aligned to a particular faith or belief position. In this instance, a different way of living is simply offered as its own challenge to present norms, and highlights the deep inter-relationship between values, lifestyle, and sustainability.

Case study 12: GalGael

The GalGael Trust was founded in 1997 in the Govan district of Glasgow. Govan had previously been home to a world-leading ship industry employing tens of thousands of people, but the decline of industry in the area has meant that it is now one of the most deprived parts of Glasgow. It has particular problems with drug abuse and unemployment.

GalGael offers an alternative vision for Govan and its residents, whose purpose is to 'work together on demanding common tasks that demonstrate ways of living with more humanity in our times'. The most prominent way in which they do this is through traditional boat-building. This is intended to develop practical skills and agency in a way that meaningfully reflects the local heritage, connects workers with their landscape and nearby natural waterways, and acts as a symbol of the whole community on a shared voyage. Nearly 1000 people have passed through the programme, which has led to the construction of 21 boats over time. They also hold regular open workshops that teach woodworking skills to the wider community, and sell timber and firewood as a source of additional income.

The name GalGael itself is derived from the name of a group of Gaelic Norsemen living in Scotland from the ninth century onwards. 'Gall' means 'foreigner' and 'Gael' refers to the natives of the area, reflecting the mixed heritage of the ancient group as Vikings who intermarried with the settles Gaels. As their website states, this is an affirmation that 'there is both a bit of the stranger and a bit of the native in us all', and 'from the outset we were about reconvening what it means to be a people – rather than simply establishing a campaign or a charity. This guided our choice of name.'[141]

Reflecting on the constellating vision of GalGael, one of the founding board members Alastair McIntosh commented: 'Togetherness has been a central organising principle. It has led me to think about the basket of community. A basket is semi-permeable and therefore not a prison. Its strength supports that which it holds. Our weavers at GalGael set out a "warp" to which they weave the sideways "weft" or "fill". So it is with people. If our lives are all warp, and pushed along at warp speed, the ends spread out and fray. Life itself gets overstretched and frazzled. We need the woven weft as fill that gives the web

141   Galgael, 'What GalGael Means', *GalGael*. https://www.galgael.org/what-galgael-means. <Accessed 2 December 2019>

cohesion. That's how I've come to see GalGael. Our people are the weavers of the basket of community.'

GalGael is a holistic response – that is, a 'collective, intuitive and perhaps even soulful' response – to the painful process of deindustrialisation in Govan.[142] The community does not have an official faith basis, though it has been inspired by the spiritual convictions of its founders, and is in this way a testament to the power of 'belief' outside formal or organised religious structures to inspire and sustain social initiatives. It is open to all faiths and none. Simply, GalGael strives for sustainability in its widest sense, nurturing an inclusive community that recognises 'the value of heritage as a transformative influence for positive change'.

Finally, it is worth noting the differences in generational attitudes to the environmental movement itself. Across all age groups, concern for the environment is growing, and is now at a record high: YouGov data shows that 27% of the population ranked the environment as one of the nation's most pressing concerns in 2019, making it the third biggest issue facing the nation at the time. This rose to 45% among those aged 18-24, making levels of concern significantly higher amongst younger voters.[143] However, ComRes polling also found that those aged 55+ were most likely to feel responsibility to protect the planet for future generations, despite high levels of youth activism. On this note, it is also striking that the same poll found age to be the most telling indicator for defining 'morality', even more so than religion, gender or location.[144] Neither is this relevant only to the environmental movement: it seems that divisions between the generations run much deeper than the changing pattern of religious world-views, and such ideological divides will only become more pressing as the impact of generationally divisive issues such as Brexit and the housing crisis (of course, as well as the environmental emergency) become clearer.

142   Galgael, 'Our Theory of Change', *GalGael.* https://www.galgael.org/our-context. <Accessed 2 December 2019>

143   M. Smith, 'Concern for the environment at record highs', *YouGov* (5 June 2019). https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-re-ports/2019/06/05/concern-environment-record-highs <Accessed: 2 December 2019>

144   Savanta: ComRes, 'BBC beliefs survey – November 2019', *Savanta:* ComRes (21 November 2019). https://www.comresglobal.com/polls/bbc-beliefs-survey-november-2019/ <Accessed: 2 December 2019>

Conclusion

It is a dynamic time for faith and belief in the UK. The unprecedented rise in 'non-religious' affiliation is well known. Yet a large minority of Britons still profess a religious identity, and the demographic shifts accompanying migration have also considerably diversified the British faith and belief landscape. So too, the legacy of austerity politics has led to a huge rise in faith-based social action across the country.[145] The economic and social fallout from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, while yet unknown, is likely to make this faith contribution more pressing still.

These changes all have implications for the cohesiveness of our society, and indeed, matters of faith and belief are relevant to social cohesion concerns at a number of levels. Yet throughout this report, we have seen how often cohesion policy is generally dominated by narrower concerns for national identity, security and loyalty. In this model, faith is reduced to a concerning 'other' and a risk factor for crisis, and has commonly been subtly racialised as the preserve of ethnic minorities in a broadly secular mainstream.[146]

Recent years have seen some expansion in the scope of cohesion policy. Particularly in the wake of Brexit, we have been faced with stark divisions across our society, not only on grounds of faith and belief but through a range of factors: age, class, socio-economic background, and education. Against this backdrop, we have also seen a worrying re-emergence of far-right politics, and an increasing threat of far-right terrorism. Along with the scrutiny facing the Labour party over antisemitism and the Conservative party over Islamophobia in the 2019 general election, this has brought the realities of anti-religious prejudice into sharp relief. There are, then, some signs of a more nuanced reflection developing around the place of faith in our modern society. The pursuit of social cohesion is increasingly recognised to be an issue affecting us all.[147]

This current moment offers an important opportunity to bring cohesion policy into conversation with a practical consideration of the faith and belief sector. To this end, this review has explored the complexities of the faith and belief sector on the ground through the five themes of the British Academy's *Cohesive Societies* series, and offered some best-practice examples in each of these categories.

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145   Section 1.1.
146   Part 1.
147   Section 1.7.

How might this picture on the ground inform policy moving forward?

First, and above all, building on current efforts to separate cohesion and security concerns is vital for opening up the conversation and encouraging a much broader consideration of the faith and belief sector. We have seen the many ways in which faith and belief can impact (positively or negatively) the cohesiveness of our societies. Yet despite encouraging indications noted above, existing policy still remains disproportionately concerned with the negative impact of faith and belief; better policy should recognise the potential for both harm and good in a more balanced way, and work with faith groups to harness the best of faith and belief in the creation of cohesive societies.

Secondly, even positive consideration of faith and belief groups in cohesion policy currently tends to focus on faith as a source of 'bonding' social capital. Yet this review has shown that the faith and belief sector also provides significant opportunities for 'bridging' capital. This is most obviously demonstrated by the wide range of interfaith work happening across the country – and the interfaith contribution is growing in both scope and complexity.[1] But interfaith work is not the only way in which bridging opportunities are fostered by the faith and belief sector. So too, the social contribution of faith and belief groups has comprised many schemes that reach beyond the congregation, and faith communities often provide opportunities for minority groups (who can otherwise be overlooked or excluded) to 'tell the story' of a place or community.[2] Clearly, greater awareness of such bridging opportunities among secular authorities and policy-makers would help policy to tap into unfulfilled potential and enable more such opportunities in future.

The intersectionality of our identities also complicates the very distinction between bonding and bridging, as confidence in one's own identity and positive feelings of belonging can lead naturally to a more outward-looking perspective. To this end, identity can be portrayed in cohesion policy as a by-word for 'problem' – or, regarding a particular version of 'British' identity, as a social good only in very narrow circumstances. Yet this review has considered the many ways in which strong identities can be a positive source of cohesion. Identity and belonging often go hand in hand – and faith and belief groups are one source of inclusive forms of identity-making that foster greater (not less) affinity with the wider community.

Finally, all this alludes to the fact that the faith and belief sector is *complicated*. And while policy-makers have often considered faith and belief groups as disjointed local organisations (or generically as one manifestation of the broader community sector) there is significant merit in engaging more deeply with the multiplicity of ways in which faith and belief groups intersect and engage across different levels of society. In particular, being aware of how different faith groups operate is vital, and greater understanding of the different organisational levers available to faith and belief groups – whether the strong influence of a particular local faith community, representative bodies, hierarchical structures, or the array of faith networks springing up online – offers policy-makers more channels of engagement with this sector.

At its best, faith is a community resource. Given the opportunity posed by current trends in cohesion policy, and the changing landscape of the faith and belief sector itself, it is an exciting time to be considering this resource – and in particular, to be reflecting on how it might best be engaged in pursuit of the wellbeing of all our communities. It is hoped that this review will offer a helpful starting point in this regard, enabling further discussion in the ongoing *Cohesive Societies* series and beyond.

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1   Section 2.1.
2   Sections 2.2-2.5.

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