FAITH, SOCIAL COHESION AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

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Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to examine the ways that a notion of faith has been conceived and operationalised as a key aspect in the development of a British social cohesion discourse in public policy since 2001. Using data drawn from ethnography in Greater Manchester, the thesis also aims to investigate the extent to which this conception is translated into practice through local organisations, and to examine the particular contribution of South Asian religious traditions to this discursive relationship. In doing so, the research actively deconstructs the key terms ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, as well as related terms such as ‘faith community’ and ‘faith-based’ organisation. Through detailed analysis of key policy documents from 2001 to 2016, it aims to challenge normative assumptions regarding these terms, and to highlight the linguistic difficulties associated within the operationalization of ‘faith’ as a political tool. The thesis also explores the disjunctures of terminologies such as ‘faith community’ with everyday experiences of religious diversity in the UK, using ethnographic fieldwork to discover both the mechanisms through which discourse is translated by organisations ‘on the ground’, and the ways in which organisations seek to negate these mechanisms in establishing social action initiatives from a religious perspective. As a result, the research uncovers an emerging alternative discourse of ‘socio-religious action’ through which South Asian traditions in particular are increasingly acting to define and develop an approach to civic engagement strongly centred on religious principles and devotional practice.

The thesis explores the apparent discursive synthesis of faith and social cohesion in policy and in practice. Chapter one presents the key questions, and provides a clear introduction to the research, including explanatory notes on the importance of precision in the use of terminology. Chapters two and three then present a literature review and methodological rationale for both detailed policy document analysis and ethnography, as well as an overview of the three key organisations upon which this fieldwork is centred. Chapter four examines the role of ‘faith’ in the development of social cohesion discourse in UK policy since 2001, at both a national and local policy level, and the impact of this policy in two areas of Greater Manchester. Through detailed analysis of key policy documents and government outputs, this chapter aims to provide a foundation for subsequent exploration of faith and social cohesion in practice in the ensuing three chapters. These three chapters present the ethnographic portion of the research in direct conversation with my analysis of public policy. Chapters five and six assess the ways in which the discourse contributes to the conception and formation of ‘faith communities’ and ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based’ organisations, paying particular attention to the ways in which South Asian religious traditions have engaged with the discourse, and chapter seven aims to assess the ways in which these organisations conceive of their own contributions to the notion of social cohesion, and the specific role of South Asian religiosity within this.

Overall, the thesis aims to address gaps in research regarding analysis and ethnographic exploration of faith and social cohesion as discourses located in both policy and practice, and the specific contribution of South Asian religious traditions to a developing discursive framework of socio-religious action.
Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedicated to the loving memory of my Dad,

Ian Dermott
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Setting out as an undergraduate in 2010, I did not imagine that I would ever submit a PhD thesis. In fact, along the way towards fulfilling this goal, I also at times doubted whether I could indeed complete the task, particularly when facing significant struggles in my personal life, losing my beloved Dad at the beginning of this year. Without the initial push and sustained mentorship of my supervisor, I would not be writing these acknowledgements. So firstly, I must express my immense gratitude to Dr John Zavos. As my adviser and constant supporter, from starting my undergraduate dissertation, to submitting this thesis, he has offered continuous support and academic inspiration in helping me develop my ideas and reach my potential. His patience and understanding (coupled with a shared love of organisation and perfectionism!) has helped me to achieve my targets one step at a time, and to always remain positive in striving forward towards the end goal.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

In recent decades, the changing interface between state and religion has led to the re-emergence of faith in the public realm as ‘one of the few means of mobilizing common action’,¹ and therefore a key instrument in the management of ethnic and religious pluralism. At the same time, an acceleration of global migration has resulted in a rapid expansion of religious pluralism in Western Europe, with scholars such as Eade highlighting the impact of this in both national and local political spheres, on a variety of issues from planning to poverty.² As Ahmed, Cantle and Hussain note, over the past two decades, ‘faith actors’ have been increasingly identified as ‘potentially important brokers in fostering dialogue and interaction between different communities within and across ethnic lines’.³ As a result, academics and policy makers alike have begun to recognise that for many, faith remains a strong foundation of community, and thus can provide a solid base from which to pursue projects of social action and civic renewal.

Faith is increasingly perceived as a valuable source of social capital⁴ in the face of increasing ‘superdiversity’,⁵ and therefore religious communities and ‘faith-
Based organisations (FBOs) are increasingly looked upon in order to build ‘strong, active and cohesive communities’. Yet interestingly, the term ‘faith’ itself is often used without concern for clear definition or functional meaning, particularly within policy documents that consistently present the notion of faith as an asset to the development of social cohesion.

In a similar fashion, the term ‘social cohesion’ has also been launched into the political sphere as a notion developed as a way to address issues of social and political concern. Yet generally, social cohesion is taken for granted as a term loaded with presumed meaning whilst retaining a somewhat unsteady academic definition, and substantial analysis of social cohesion expressed as a British political discourse is noticeably absent.

These considerations provide the basis for my inquiry, in looking to explore the construction of social cohesion as a discourse in UK governmental policy, and the ways in which notions of faith operate as instruments of policy. Methodologically, I aim to provide a new perspective on researching social cohesion as ‘policy in practice’, by turning away from previous trends towards statistical analysis, and instead pursuing a detailed analysis of policy documents alongside localised fieldwork, in order to observe the translation of social cohesion policy into local authority initiatives, and to disclose the more

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nuanced instances of ‘cultural contact’ occurring alongside the dominant political discourse that only rich ethnography can uncover.

In assessing existing bodies of literature regarding social cohesion and religion, it is also apparent that discussion surrounding minority religious traditions in the UK is arguably over-represented in some areas, particularly with regards to South Asian Muslim communities, discussed in relation to extremism and a lack of cohesion. Likewise in terms of social cohesion policy, the religious pluralism produced by South Asian groups is consistently highlighted as a key area to be assessed and policies developed. Yet here there is a sense of irony. These groups, though receiving substantial political attention, in fact remain significantly under-represented in cohesion policy and scholarship regarding their specific contributions to ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’ work. Though some research has discussed a lack of involvement from South Asian religious traditions in areas such as ‘interfaith’ work, the reasoning behind this and alternative activities undertaken by these groups leaves a significant gap in research that I aim to address.

Key to this will be the exploration of how traditional models of community work are being by-passed, particularly within South Asian communities, by new initiatives that incorporate devotion and social action, through the re-articulation of religious practice in the diasporic context. These initiatives

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transgress traditional notions of ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based social action’, instead pursuing devotional acts that also hold social significance as forms of civic engagement. These acts are explicitly defined through religious models of charity and humanitarianism, argued by Zavos to be indicative of the ‘cultures of service’\(^\text{10}\) that form key components of South Asian religious traditions.

This is a notion currently unaccounted for by existing political frameworks, and so can provide an important evidence base for the development of new approaches to the management of pluralism in the UK. Through a specific approach to researching ‘policy in practice’, I therefore aim not only to locate the ways in which policy discourse becomes practice within localities of Greater Manchester, but to examine instances in which this discourse is skewed or circumvented in ways that may in turn feed back into policy, and potentially re-shape the way that we think about the management of religious pluralism, through differently articulated lenses of what I term ‘socio-religious action’.

The research questions that guide this thesis are as follows:

1. In what ways have notions of faith been appropriated within social cohesion discourse in UK public policy since 2001?

2. How has the discursive relationship between faith and social cohesion in national policy been translated into local policies in areas of Greater Manchester?

3. In what ways does the discursive relationship between faith and social cohesion contribute to the conception and formation of religious communities within these localities, with particular reference to South Asian religious traditions?

4. To what extent and how have South Asian religious groups sought to promote or produce a notion of social cohesion through devotional practice?

Question 1 allows me to trace the development of a national social cohesion discourse in the UK, and uncover the ways in which notions of faith have been operationalised within this discourse. Subsequently, questions 2 and 3 allow me to scale down my analysis towards local policy and local organisations, in order to develop a more detailed approach to analysis of policy documents enhanced by rich ethnography. Finally question 4 allows for further exploration in the ethnographic portion of my research, looking to locate instances in which South Asian religious groups undertake initiatives and projects locally to promote or produce a perceived notion of social cohesion through devotional practice. Here I aim to uncover how these communities and individuals themselves navigate and at times attempt to evade aspects of the discursive relationship between faith and social cohesion, often persistently avoiding political frameworks being pushed upon them by official bodies, institutions and organisations.

Being located within the discipline of religious studies presents the opportunity to utilise a range of methodological approaches in analysis of the relationship between policy and practice at both a national and local level. Detailed analysis of public policy documents and reports, coupled with ethnographic fieldwork of specific localities, offers a fresh approach to the
study of social cohesion in the UK. Instead of producing another definition of social cohesion, this research instead aims to explore the ways in which a notion of social cohesion is conceived both politically and socially at both a governmental and everyday level. Likewise, the focus on faith reflects the recent shift away from multiculturalist issues of ‘ethnic’ difference, and towards concerns related to increasing ‘religious’ plurality, and ethnographically, emphasis on South Asian religion in particular provides a new angle to traditionally ‘interfaith’ research that is often centred on Christian contributions.\(^\text{11}\)

More importantly, the wider significance of my focus on South Asian religious traditions also lies in their potential to actively deconstruct the discourse of faith as established in the context of policy formation, as these religions embody a set of traditions developed outside the normative bases through which ‘faith’ as a concept has developed in Europe and ‘the West’ in general. In recent years, scholars such as Mandair have increasingly called into question the universal applicability of the term ‘religion’.\(^\text{12}\) However, here I turn more specifically to the term ‘faith,’ operationalized by British public policy as a notion often asserted as the source of shared values applicable to all religious traditions. As I will discuss, South Asian religious traditions often place greater emphasis on ‘doing’ rather than ‘believing’, and on the undertaking of actions conceived as ‘service’ to both God and humanity.\(^\text{13}\)

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this reason, the discourse of faith as presented in social cohesion policy often holds little resonance, as a concept relatively absent from everyday religious practice.

Another reason for this lack of resonance may be the fact that South Asian communities are often contained within distinctive diasporic public spaces that present an alternative context to the wider public space or public sphere, in which discourses of faith and social cohesion are developed and deployed. It is in these diasporic public spaces that networks of action are established, through particular diaspora resources, and according to particular diasporic concerns, in line with aforementioned narratives of social action and religious service. As I will argue, this provides exciting opportunities to examine the particularity of religious practices that demonstrate alternative approaches to the wider social cohesion discourse, and the unique relationship between religiosity and social action. Key to this are specific instances of what I term ‘socio-religious action’, centred on the practical application of explicitly articulated religious principles that aim to promote ‘cultural contact’14 and develop a wider sense of community, unity and collaboration. Therefore, through an ethnographic exploration of this phenomenon, I am able to build a concerted analysis of articulations of social cohesion discourse in both policy and practice.

My study begins deliberately in 2001, a year in which we can observe significant modifications in state policy, away from a discourse of

14 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living With Diversity.’
‘multiculturalism’ articulated as promoting respect for perceived ‘culturally embedded differences’, and towards the development of a social cohesion discourse, deployed through the inception of the concept of ‘community cohesion’ underlined by a proposed recognition of a ‘common sense of belonging’. As I will discuss, this notion of commonality has subsequently remained a key feature of local and national policy agendas to the present day, and in doing so has utilised faith in particular as a key contributor to cohesion. Crucially, as I will argue, this developing discourse around social cohesion and faith highlights a wider trend in recognising the role of religious difference in the management of pluralism.

Though for some the emergence of a Western public discourse regarding religious pluralism can be traced back to the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a resurgence in the role of religion both publically and politically over the past few decades, often termed as ‘postsecularism’, has seen scholars and governments, both nationally and internationally, begin to recognize a need to engage more fully with religious communities and traditions, and to press for greater religious literacy in the 21st century. Therefore despite my own timeline of policy research beginning firmly in 2001, it is important to note that the political phenomenon deemed as the ‘post-secular’, in fact began

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to develop in the UK following events such as the Rushdie Affair in the late 1980s, and the election of a ‘New Labour’ government in 1997 that saw the increased backing of bodies such as the Inner Cities Religious Council in order to develop stronger partnerships with religious communities.20

Yet the significance of religion in particular, as a central concern for the management of pluralism, and therefore as a key asset to social cohesion, arguably became an issue demanding of more immediate attention in 2001 following ‘disturbances’ in the North of England, said to be initiated by ethnic and religious differences, and the events of 9/11 that subsequently sparked global concern regarding a perceived acute rise in religious extremism. These issues contribute directly to the overall rationale that frames the research period of interest.

Starting in 2001, I will explore the specific role that faith has played in the reformation of the multiculturalist trope, presenting a detailed timeline mapping the key moments in which policy acknowledges or employs faith as an asset to social [or community] cohesion. Looking firstly at a national level, and then also at a local level in both Oldham and Manchester, this approach allows for systematic analysis of the ways in which faith has come to form an essential consideration for the management of pluralism in the UK, and how these considerations translate from national to local policies and initiatives. Through detailed policy document analysis, the research will seek to elucidate how notions such as ‘community cohesion’, originally developed to discuss

ways to tackle ‘ethnic tensions’, have been increasingly interwoven with concepts related to religious diversity such as ‘interfaith dialogue’ and the recognition of ‘faith communities’ as a ‘vital resource’ for cohesion work, with policy documents such as *Faith and Community: A Good Practice Guide for Local Authorities* in 2002 stating that

the promotion of interfaith co-operation can encourage the development of greater mutual trust and understanding and can play a valuable role in enhancing social cohesion.\(^{21}\)

By tracing and unpacking the development of this discourse, I am then able to use substantial fieldwork to locate the implementation and interpretation of the discourse at a grassroots and localised level in particular areas of Greater Manchester.

In terms of fieldsites, the decision to select the specific localities of Manchester and Oldham relates to several considerations around issues such as demographics, history, geography and changes/developments in those areas. Both sites boast a diverse population in terms of ethnic and religious pluralism, and a substantial assemblage of South Asian communities. Manchester in particular is regarded as a city heavily embedded in a history of global interconnectivities associated with the growth of empire and subsequent migrant flow from both South Asia and East Africa,\(^{22}\) and has been described by ethnographers such as Werbner as ‘a city of immigrants’.\(^{23}\)


Yet these two areas possess distinctly contrasting environments in terms of geographical landscape, with Manchester as an urban and cosmopolitan city centre, and Oldham a large township with a mixture of semi-rural, rural, suburban and urban areas. Historically, both sites stood as thriving centres of the textile industry throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. However, in recent times while Oldham, like many mill towns across the North of England, has seen significant levels of unemployment and poverty since the decline of these industries, Manchester on the other hand has remained a thriving centre of commerce and been subject to various waves of regeneration and modernisation. As a result, the population density and migration patterns of these areas differ significantly, from the ‘chain migration’ seen in Oldham, resulting from demand for South Asian workers in the 1960s onwards, to the contrasting fluid migrant population observed in Manchester, of which a large proportion are urban professionals and students. In this way differences in geographical landscape do not just provide opportunities to compare and contrast urban and non-urban environments, but also the associated distinctions in ethnic and religious pluralism produced by these settings, such as the larger communities of ‘chain migration’ seen in Oldham, and the scattered ‘superdiversity’ seen in Manchester.

Politically, the selection of Oldham also relates to the area being a significant site of ‘race riots’ in 2001 that were argued to have sparked the aforementioned

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26 Vertovec, ‘Superdiversity and its Implications’.
national shifts in multiculturalist discourse.\textsuperscript{27} These disturbances saw clashes between South Asian Muslim communities, white communities, and the police, with various causes of these ‘ethnic tensions’ cited including; ‘socio-economic deprivation, the presence of Far-Right organisations, poor police-community relations, white victimisation, young male alienation/frustration, yob culture and criminal gangs’.\textsuperscript{28} As a result, Oldham has been a site of government funding via pathways and grant schemes such as the most recent Near Neighbours Programme. Manchester also retains political significance, being frequently perceived as the city central to the North-West region, and often seeking to project itself as an exemplary multicultural space. On the whole, both localities provide a contrasting, dynamic and diverse scope for exploration of social cohesion discourse in policy, local organisations and instances of everyday conviviality. Crucially, the exploration of this discourse is also essentially reliant on close attention to key terminology.

**Key Terms**

The careful scrutiny of the usage and articulation of key terms within policy documents and everyday lived experience, forms a central concern of this thesis. This intricate approach to terminology forms an essential element in producing an analysis of discourse that aims to takes full account of terminological issues and debates in both policy and practice. Through the use


of quotation marks, I aim to signal specific phrases as denotations of discourse, in order to disalign them from normative use in policy and/or public spheres. These particular terms will include ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, but also extend to associated phrases frequently deployed as discursive concepts, such as ‘faith community’, ‘faith-based’ organisation, ‘faith-based social action’ and ‘interfaith.’ In addition to this, my own terminological discussions regarding the notion of the phrase ‘socio-religious action’, will also be presented using quotation marks, as this again marks a discursive construction in this thesis articulated and evidenced ethnographically.

As Baumann has discussed, words can often be used in multiple and systematically different ways, providing alternative, yet not independent discourses.29 Significantly, as Baumann also suggests, most individuals in fact possess ‘multiple discursive competencies’,30 in their ability to navigate and negotiate the field of dominant and demotic discourses present in social and political spheres. This notion becomes apparent in my own research, in analysing the deployment of a politically produced dominant discourse, and the ‘multiple discursive competencies’31 displayed by those engaging with this discourse on the ground. Therefore, strategic use of quotation marks forms an essential element of my method.

By marking out specific discursive terms as key to the construction and negotiation of a dominant social cohesion discourse, and emphasizing the role

30 Baumann, Contesting Culture, p.10.
31 Baumann, Contesting Culture, p.10.
of ‘faith’ and of related concepts such as ‘interfaith’ within this framework, I offer a rigorous approach to terminology rooted in an approach to religious studies that seeks to apply pressure to generalizations and to deconstruct normative tropes and typologies.

‘Faith’

Underpinning this thesis is an initial interrogation of the notion of ‘faith’. One might initially question the preferential emphasis on this term as opposed to the term ‘religion’, and thus it is necessary to first defend this decision. Though the term ‘religion’ is often cited as a source of diversity and hence holding the potential for disharmony, within the propagation of a discourse of ‘social cohesion’ the notion of ‘faith’ is conversely the concept consistently upheld as contributing directly to the development of cohesion. As a result, in assessing the development of a discourse, I am aiming to explore the precise terminology used within policy documents in reference to the promotion of cohesion, as opposed to examining the proposed barriers to cohesion that are addressed through other policy discourses regarding the prevention of religious extremism for example. It is for the same reason that I avoid discussion of policies such as the government PREVENT strategy within my policy document analysis, as my focus is instead strictly on the notion of cohesion, and thus on the role of ‘faith’ within this, as I will justify further in chapter two.

In researching both policy and practice, it is of crucial importance to deconstruct and disalign the term ‘faith’ from normative and theoretical use as a fixed category, paying particular attention to clear analysis of what and
who we are precisely referring to when discussing a ‘faith community’ for example. I aim to assess the significance of the usage of this term within ‘social cohesion’ discourse, and to uncover the ways in which a mosaic of ‘faith communities’ has been ‘imagined’\textsuperscript{32} by policy documents. In addition, I will also explore how this idea may be somewhat subverted at a micro-scale level, within local communities and neighbourhoods. Therefore through close reading of these texts, I aim to uncover nuances of terminology used in the formation of policy frameworks, and through ethnography seek to highlight the ‘brittleness of textbook classifications’,\textsuperscript{33} instead looking closer at everyday experiences and instances of what scholars such as Amin refer to as ‘cultural contact’\textsuperscript{34}

As Hirst and Zavos\textsuperscript{35} have discussed, the Western development of the concept of religion as a ‘category’ or ‘classification’ of diversity, aligned with a typical model of ‘world religions’, often barely reflects the reality of lived religious traditions. Yet interestingly, as I will proceed to argue in chapter four, this paradigm is often still presently maintained and reflected within political frameworks used to account for the diversity of religious traditions in the UK, and these bounded categories still frequently form the desired requirements to demonstrate equal representation within ‘multifaith’ or ‘interfaith’ initiatives and projects.

\textsuperscript{34} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living With Diversity.’
The concept of ‘faith’ on the other hand, is often referred to as a stance, or the object believed, and has been theorised recently in the past few decades alongside the term religion, as a general terminological expression of what we believe, as opposed to religion’s denotation of what we do. In addition, debates within religious studies regarding ‘faith’ have frequently centred on opposing notions of the internal and informal, versus the external and organisational dimensions of ‘faith’. Yet primarily, the origins of the term ‘faith’ are strongly rooted in Christianity, conventionally referring to one’s relationship with the divine.

Classical theologians including Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin offered ways of understanding the overall concept of ‘faith’ as ‘the necessary and sufficient condition for true knowledge of God’, and thus the only valid ‘assent to revealed truth’, and more modern scholars such as William Lad Sessions have subsequently attempted to reconcile these conceptions in proposing a holistic framework of ‘six models of faith’ centred on personal relationship, belief, attitude, confidence, devotion and hope. From a more traditionally philosophical point of view, the notion of ‘faith’ has historically often stood beyond or outside of the ‘rational’, as an epistemological issue concerned with a particular way of ‘knowing’, while thinkers such as Durkheim have also provided sociological arguments regarding ‘faith’ as ‘the functional dimension.

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37 Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.58.
39 Walter E. Stuermann, ‘John Calvin’s Concept of Faith, Presented on the Basis of the “Institutes” and the Commentaries, the Catechisms, the Confessions and the Theological Treatises,’ *Church History* 23:4 (1954), p.357.
of the social... no more than a useful construction for organising certain experiences and desires in social space’.\(^41\) However, though it is important here to provide a genealogy of the term ‘faith’, both epistemologically and theologically, as well as politically and academically (as found in chapter two), the more specific focus throughout the thesis is on the political operationalization of the notion of ‘faith’ in the context of the UK, as a term embedded within the development of ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse.

In political terms, the inception of interest in issues of ‘faith’ may be traced back to the creation of the Inner Cities Religious Council in 1994, as a direct response to concerns raised in the 1985 *Faith in the City* report following the urban ‘riots’ in the early 1980s.\(^42\) Nowadays, the concept now finds itself at the centre of a new ‘faith-based multiculturalism’,\(^43\) demonstrated by exponential growth and development of political structures to promote engagement and capacity building, particularly between 2001 and 2010, during an observable concerted effort by Labour governments to strengthen and mobilise partnerships between the state and ‘faith communities’.\(^44\) In this way ‘faith’ has gained significance and substance as a key concept in the management of pluralism in the UK, and thus features heavily within policy documents and discourse.

\(^{41}\) Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, pp.57-59.
\(^{44}\) Smith, ‘Faith in Community and Communities of Faith’.
As I will argue, this ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse demonstrates a postsecular realisation of the maintenance of ‘faith’ as identity marker in contemporary Britain, and the subsequent utilization of ‘faith’ as a significant source of ‘capital’, and a valuable resource for civic engagement, particularly in the context of lingering austerity. As Dinham suggests, social capital, in its now ‘familiar contemporary guise’, has been recast in Britain as a policy tool for ‘building strong communities against a backdrop of individualism’, and the ‘primary lens for understanding community cohesion and active citizenship’. Notably, a key aspect of this policy paradigm centres on the notion of ‘faith’ as a source of community and repository of resources, with recent policy documents such as *Face to Face, Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multifaith Society* seeking to present ‘faith communities’ as particularly well positioned to increase social capital through ‘faith-based social action’.

Additionally, alongside this has been the development among scholars of faith and public policy, such as Baker and Skinner, in highlighting the distinctiveness of religion’s contribution to social capital, resulting in the designation of the terms ‘religious capital’ and ‘spiritual capital’ to complement this notion. According to Baker and Skinner, religious capital refers to ‘the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith

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47 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Face to Face, Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multifaith Society*, (2009).
groups’,\textsuperscript{50} and spiritual capital denotes that which ‘energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and basis of faith’.\textsuperscript{51} Here they draw a distinction between the \textit{why}, i.e. what motivates faith communities, and the \textit{what}, i.e. their practical actions.\textsuperscript{52} Consequently, this has also informed policy recommendations for areas including central government,\textsuperscript{53} local authorities and the community and voluntary sector, as well as academics and ‘faith communities’ themselves.\textsuperscript{54} Again it is interesting to note that this work generally uses data drawn from researching Christian communities, a trend I seek to challenge.

‘Social Cohesion’

In discussing policy, as I have stated, the keyword that underpins the enquiry of my thesis is the notion of ‘social cohesion’. For policymakers, ‘social cohesion’ forms a key consideration that represents an essential societal goal, and a notion that often links up different policy areas regarding social issues such as unemployment, poverty and discrimination.\textsuperscript{55} My aim in this thesis is to explore the development of a British discourse of ‘social cohesion’ since 2001, which contains this observable shift towards the recognition of religious difference as one of the latest key elements of this discourse. As I will discuss

\textsuperscript{50} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{51} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{52} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{53} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{54} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
at greater length in the following chapter, ‘social cohesion’ policy is often ‘problem-driven’, developed as ‘a reaction to new social cleavages’,\(^{56}\) and in the UK most recently, related to issues of increasing religious and ethnic pluralism that have been pushed into the spotlight of political and social concern.

The significance of discourse however, here lies in what Hall describes as the ‘production of knowledge’\(^{57}\) in both language and practice. In other words, through analysis of policy documents, I am seeking to uncover how these documents have come to define and govern the way in which the topic of ‘social cohesion’ is ‘meaningfully talked about and reasoned about’,\(^{58}\) and to explore the contexts in which this reasoning applies. Locating ‘social cohesion’ as a discourse allows me to apply this to ethnographic fieldwork in looking for ways in which everyday experiences can be seen to demonstrate or dispute this discourse, and the ways in which inflections of these everyday experiences can themselves in turn shift and influence the discourse itself. Therefore, as I will discuss in my methodology chapter, this analysis aims to produce an approach to research that does not simply present examples of policy in practice, but exposes the mechanisms by which practice also impacts upon policy, through a discursive contraflow of ideas regarding cohesion and social interaction.

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\(^{56}\) Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering ‘social cohesion”, p.279.


\(^{58}\) Hall, ‘The Work of Representation.’
Micro-Publics of Banal Transgression and South Asian ‘Socio-Religious Action’

Theoretical frameworks that have developed regarding conditions for ‘social cohesion’ are also central to this research. Over the past two decades, academics, particularly geographers such as Amin and Sandercock, have begun to emphasise the importance of locality and of ‘space’, in which meaningful interactions that may contribute to notions of ‘social cohesion’ may be more likely to take place. In a report produced in 2002 for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the ESRC Cities Initiative, entitled *Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity*, Amin considers issues related to race and ethnicity that in recent years have ‘come to the fore in British public life’. Yet instead of placing focus on the national frame of race and ethnicity, Amin places emphasis on what he terms ‘the politics of local liveability’ through the ‘daily negotiation of ethnic difference’ in urban environments. He presents this against a backdrop of failed ‘policy fixes’ and sustained contexts of ‘inter-ethnic intolerance’, leading to instances of civil unrest such as that which occurred in Northern mill towns in mid-2001. In this think-piece, Amin presents an analysis of these events, exploring the particular ‘dynamics of deprivation, segregation and changing youth cultures’ considered as contributors to the conflicts, before subsequently

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59 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
61 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
62 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
63 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
using this as a springboard to discuss potential ways to combat racism and live with difference in a multicultural and multi-ethnic society.\textsuperscript{64}

Key to Amin’s argument is the suggestion that urban spaces marked by ethnic diversity hold greater potential to form what he terms ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’.\textsuperscript{65} Here ‘micro-publics’ refers to local spaces or sites of interaction between individuals, ‘banal’ refers to the quality of these interactions as being mundane or everyday, and ‘transgression’ refers to the nature of this experience as having the power to disrupt or negate habitual behaviours or attitudes. This conceptual framework offers the ability to explore the notion of ‘social cohesion’ through a more ‘prosaic’ approach to the negotiation of difference centred on the power of everyday experiences that take place in the public sphere.

Importantly, though Amin’s discussion is centred solely around the issue of ethnic difference, here I aim to use his notion of ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’ in order to explore issues related to the management of religious pluralism and diversity. This allows me to expand the context of Amin’s work to include consideration of the politically produced discourses of ‘faith’ in relation to ‘social cohesion’, and to adjoin this with evidence of ‘micro-publics’ produced by religious individuals and organisations in Greater Manchester. In turn this also facilitates an exploration not only of the ways in which habitual behaviours and negative attitudes towards religious difference are ‘transgressed’, but also the ways in which the policy discourse described is

\textsuperscript{64} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{65} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
also being transgressed by these organisations. In other words, these ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’ provide the critical space to pursue alternative articulations of ‘social cohesion’ discourse, and to organically alter attitudes to difference.

As I will argue, these micro-publics directly assist in destabilising social segregation, by helping to facilitate ‘strategies of cultural contact’ through the ‘prosaic negotiation of difference’ that occurs as part of the initiatives and projects they pursue. In other words, these spaces produce instances of everyday interaction that have the ability to challenge normative assumptions and stereotypes regarding difference and diversity, and to produce a shift in attitudes that occur as part of lived experience, and not through structured points of connection such as consultation, frameworks or forums. As Sandercock argues, this facilitation of everyday ‘intercultural interaction’ or ‘meaningful contact’, particularly within urban environments, can assist in the development of a more organic form of ‘social cohesion’ that often results from the locality of a ‘modern metropolis’. As a result, as scholars such as Noble have argued, this highlights a need to assess the formation of ‘habits of intercultural civility’ in order to understand ‘how people develop capacities for living together amidst diversity’.

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66 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
67 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
68 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II.
Drawing on this, I will aim to deploy these approaches in conversation with notions of diaspora, networks, policy and public space, to argue that greater attention must be paid to the ways in which religious groups and individuals themselves act to articulate the notion of ‘social cohesion’ through religious and devotional practice. Key to this, as I have rationalised above, is an emphasis on the significance of South Asian religious traditions in particular, for whom the dominant ‘faith’ discourses and related frameworks such as that of ‘faith-based’ or ‘interfaith’ initiatives and organisations, often fail to engage.

Through this I develop a framework of what I will term ‘socio-religious action’, as a way to refer to the particular ways in which South Asian religious groups and individuals act to pursue social action initiatives, strongly rooted in religious devotional practice. I use this phrase not to collectively define these initiatives as a singular entity, but instead to highlight the development of a discourse in which religiosity is deployed directly alongside a discourse of social cohesion. This is evidenced through ethnographic data, in which individuals and organisations sought to articulate their actions not simply as instances of religious practice, but as practices also aiming to contribute to a discourse of cohesion through engaging with the local community, and even wider, serving humanity as a whole. This is something I argue that existing terminology does not account for, as the particularities of aligning South Asian narratives of ‘service’, with notions of civic engagement and ‘social cohesion’, produce an alternative dimension to existing discussions of ‘faith-based social action’, as I will discuss in the following chapter.
The role and impact of terminology within a developing synthesis of the terms ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ forms an essential aspect of this research. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to strip back and situate terms specifically in their discursive and practical usage, and hence to assess their synthesis not only through policy but through lived experience. In doing so, I endeavour to work towards a new approach to the academic study of ‘social cohesion’ that merges detailed policy document analysis, informed by methodological contributions drawn from discourse analysis, and ethnography centred on participant observation and informal interviewing, in order (perhaps controversially) to avoid large scale measurements and suppositions, in favour of smaller, nuanced accounts of policies in action and inverse innovations that allow for richer repositories of ethnographic evidence rather than expansive amalgamations of dispersed data.

Therefore what I aim to achieve through this research is not an evidenced speculation regarding perceived successes in ‘social cohesion’, but rather the presentation and analysis of a range of instances that demonstrate micro-scale action and practical articulations of unity and collaboration that may provide new perspectives on this field of civic engagement, particularly from within South Asian religious communities, whose participation is often overlooked and under-assessed in both political and academic spheres. In this way, I aim to provide both an analytical account of the work undertaken by these communities, and also an amplified voice for their specific ‘socio-religious’ expressions in contemporary British society.
Chapter Overview

Chapter one has sought to introduce the main objectives of the thesis, alongside guiding research questions and a brief exposition of key terms. In examining the role of ‘faith’ in the development of a ‘social cohesion’ narrative in UK policy since 2001, I have explained how the thesis primarily seeks to present both of these terms as indicative of related discourses. By doing this I attempt to decentre normalised usage of the term ‘faith’ and to situate the notion of ‘social cohesion’ in context, rather than defining, measuring or quantifying its impact on society. The second half of the thesis then attempts to enhance this with ethnographic data regarding ‘faith-based’ organisations in Greater Manchester, placing particular emphasis on the participation of South Asian religious traditions, and again aiming to deconstruct associated terminologies such as ‘faith community’ and indeed the term ‘faith-based’ itself, as well as looking to analyse ethnographically evidenced articulations of the notion of ‘social cohesion’ from within these religious traditions. As a result, this introductory chapter has aimed to present a systematic exposition of the thesis, as a reference point to guide the reader forward towards the body of the research, and to provide a clear rationale for the research project.

Chapter two presents a review of existing literature in the areas explored within the thesis. These areas include academic and political commentaries of ‘social cohesion’, covering issues related to both the definition and operationalization of the term from its inception in the USA and Canada, as well as associated works regarding what I propose as the unequivocally British articulation of the concept: ‘Community Cohesion’. I also present a similar
synopsis of the notion of ‘faith’, exploring how academics have analysed the relationship between religious identity and policy initiatives geared towards civic renewal and inter-community relations in urban environments, as well as the more recent uptake of the term ‘faith’ in socio-political spheres, and the rationale for focusing on this term in particular as opposed to the term ‘religion’. Following this is a discussion of literature on related areas of research regarding ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based’ organisations, as well as ‘faith-based social action’. In addition, here I argue that these terms alone cannot adequately describe the findings of my ethnographic work, and lead me to develop and defend my use of the term ‘socio-religious action’. This chapter then concludes by considering the ways in which this thesis draws upon existing scholarship, and also exposes particular gaps in the literature which I aim to address.

Chapter three then presents the methodological approaches underpinning this research: detailed policy document analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, developed in conversation with key theoretical material. Grounded in the multi-disciplinary field of religious studies, the thesis aims to combine two key methodologies in developing a new exposition of both ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ as political discourse and everyday practice. In this chapter I present a detailed discussion on the study of discourse and key aspects of formal discourse analysis, noting how scholars such as Foucault, Fairclough and Hall are influential towards my own approach to policy document analysis. Following this, I explore both dominant and demotic instances of discursive
practice, as discussed by Baumann,\footnote{Baumann, \textit{Contesting Culture}, p.10.} through use of long term ethnographic fieldwork. Through this I also aim overall to present a unique approach in not only researching ‘policy in practice’, but also critiquing that very framework in seeking to expose the ways in which the compulsion to evidence ‘policy in practice’ may in fact provide pressure to enact a discursive regime, and thus influence a fabrication of discourse ‘in the field’.

Chapter four provides a detailed analysis of ‘social cohesion’ as a narrative in UK public policy since 2001, specifically exploring the role of ‘faith’ within this. The chapter introduces ‘social cohesion’ as a concept developed in the USA and Canada, and translated into a UK context predominantly through the solidification of the term ‘Community Cohesion’, introduced by the British Labour government in 2001, presenting a marked shift away from previous multicultural approaches to the management of pluralism. This chapter then presents a chronological analysis of key policy documents that present the notion of ‘faith’ directly in relation to a ‘social cohesion’ discourse, and assess the role of related concepts such as ‘faith community’ and ‘faith leaders’ as central to this. The systematic exposition of these documents then leads to the discussion of overarching narratives regarding shifts in the strategic vision highlighted through analysis of policy, through frameworks of engagement and funding pathways that have attempted to operationalise notions of ‘faith’ as a key asset to ‘social cohesion’, and the identification of ‘faith-based social action’ as a particularly prolific concept within this.
The chapter also reflects on the translation of national policy into the localities of Greater Manchester that form fieldsites for the ethnographic portion of the research, and consequently exposes some interesting variations in local approaches, as well as issues with competing narratives established from central government. Importantly, as the conclusion of this chapter suggests, this effective drawing down of discourse, from national to local level, in turn sets the scene for the following chapters in exploring further the enactment of discourse ‘on the ground’, thus again utilising data gained through detailed policy document analysis as a reference point for ethnographic exploration of specific aspects of the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’.

Chapter five aims to begin the alignment between analysis of UK public policy and ethnographic research of organisations in Greater Manchester. This chapter draws directly on material introduced in the previous chapter, providing detailed discussion surrounding the conception of the notion of ‘faith community’ both in scholarship and in practice, through use of ethnographic work within three organisations located in Manchester and Oldham. The chapter examines the ways in which the individuals who participate in these organisations conceive of and/or operationalise the terms ‘community’ and ‘faith community’, and seeks to position this against dominant policy discourse discussed in chapter four. Chapter five also considers the expenditure of social capital and deployment of methods of networking as key to the development of what Castells et al. term ‘communities of practice’,72 and the increasing role of new technologies within this, in order

to lay foundations for further discussion in the following chapter regarding the supposed translation of ‘faith communities’ into ‘faith-based’ organisations.

Chapter six builds directly on both discussion of dominant policy discourses in chapter four, and of the formation of ‘faith communities’ in chapter five, in order to discuss the notion of ‘faith-based’ organisations as evidenced in both policy and practice. The chapter begins with discussion and critique of previous approaches to researching ‘faith-based’ organisations from a predominantly anthropological perspective, as well as an overview of the history of ‘interfaith’ organisations that may be considered a key part of the wider discourse of ‘faith-based’ organisations, particularly when discussing the dominant UK policy discourse regarding the role of ‘faith’ in the development of ‘social cohesion’. Having situated the chapter both academically and politically, I then present a substantial discussion regarding the ethnographic examples of the three organisations located in Greater Manchester, and the ways or the extent to which they conceive of themselves as being ‘faith-based’.

Through this discussion, we uncover a large disconnect between perceptions of what constitutes ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based’ organisations by policymakers and some scholars, and the self-articulated understanding of those involved in these organisations. There follows discussion of the complexities of constituting involvement in the ‘political sphere’ and the extent to which some of these organisations declare an explicit rejection of ‘politics’ yet also creatively and consciously navigate the political system. The chapter concludes by again highlighting the disparities between these organisations and
dominant political discourse, and the ways in which some organisations may be exhibiting demotic self-expressions of religiously motivated projects that aim to contribute to ‘social cohesion’ through devotional practice, as the following chapter will discuss.

Chapter seven is the last of three chapters that bring detailed policy document analysis into direct conversation with ethnographic fieldwork of organisations in Greater Manchester. The chapter aims to assess the ways in which these organisations conceive of their contribution to ‘cohesion’, and the extent to which this is aligned with the dominant policy discourse, as well as new ways of looking at the self-prescribed contribution of religious practice to the notion of ‘cohesion’. Again the chapter re-caps the emphasis on using ethnographic research as a more nuanced approach to observing instances in which the discourse of ‘social cohesion’ is being enacted, and the intricacies of locating the precise role of ‘faith’ or/and religious practices within this. Chapter seven also attempts to examine the projects run by these organisations within the contextual field of post-secular public space, and to demonstrate instances in which the informal nature of these initiatives acts to disrupt structural conceptions of the management of pluralism associated with the dominant policy discourse.

Here, the critical edge of this research, in placing emphasis on the specific contribution of South Asian religious traditions in particular, is brought to the forefront. The chapter presents a re-evaluation of ‘faith-based social action’ from a specifically South Asian perspective. Through this I highlight the development of what I term ‘socio-religious action’, as initiatives grounded in
religious principles and devotional practices, and translated into the diasporic context in alignment with the sentiment of “charity begins at home”, acting to situate these religious traditions as explicitly British, and therefore of essentially aiming to contribute to a British discourse of ‘cohesion’. In this way, this chapter comes full circle in looking not only to typically assess ‘policy in practice’, but to locate and evaluate discrepancies and re-articulations of the discourse that occur on a daily basis from within the diversity of religious traditions in the UK. Thus chapter seven brings the body of the thesis to a close and points forward to the synthesis of an overall conclusion found in chapter eight.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

As prerequisite to the body of the thesis, this literature review offers a summary of key theoretical and political approaches to associated areas of research and scholarship. Firstly, I provide an overview of key definitions and academic approaches to ‘social cohesion’, before seeking to explore the manifestation of this in UK public policy discourse since 2001. Following this, I look to examine existing scholarship regarding the relationship between the notion of ‘faith’ and public policy, in order to position my own policy document analysis that follows in chapter four. Finally, I will explore various literature regarding associated notions of ‘faith-based social action’, ‘interfaith’ work and ‘faith-based organisations’, and discuss their limitations with regards to my analysis of ethnographic work, leading me to subsequently develop and deploy the phrase ‘socio-religious action’. As a result, through this I aim to systematically review the ways in which academics have previously analysed the relationship between religious identity and policy initiatives geared towards civic renewal and inter-community relations in urban environments, in order to position my own contribution to research in this field.

‘Social Cohesion’

Within scholarship drawn generally from mostly Canadian and North American political contexts, ‘social cohesion’ has been a persistent focus of inquiry predominantly for social scientists such as sociologists and
psychologists,\textsuperscript{73} with the intellectual origins of the term often being traced back to the work of Emile Durkheim, noted as a founding father of modern sociology.\textsuperscript{74} As Chan et al. argue, in contemporary sociology, ‘social cohesion is often analysed in terms of the broader questions of social integration, stability and disintegration’,\textsuperscript{75} and as a result social psychologists have attempted to provide some useful frameworks for measuring ‘social cohesion’. Yet despite these contributions, overall ‘a satisfactory and operational definition is still in waiting’.\textsuperscript{76}

According to Friedkin, over the past few decades, analyses of ‘social cohesion’ have tended to regard the notion either as a ‘multidimensional phenomenon’ or as a ‘latent construct with multiple indicators’.\textsuperscript{77} As Klein suggests, through this approach, multiple ‘dimensions’ or ‘indicators’ of ‘social cohesion’ have been diversely proposed by numerous researchers working on the theme, most of which centre on the interaction of assorted economic, political and socio-cultural elements, that form the diverse ‘domains’ through which attitudes and behaviours can be examined as factors in the measurement of ‘social cohesion’.\textsuperscript{78} In other words, analysis of ‘social cohesion’ usually implicates an intersection of various socio-political lenses, and not simply an observation of a self-contained phenomenon. Following this, Klein also seeks to recognise

\textsuperscript{74} Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion’, p.275.
\textsuperscript{75} Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion’, p.275.
\textsuperscript{76} Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion’, p.277.
\textsuperscript{77} Friedkin, ‘Social Cohesion’, p.409.
other more recent contributions of Chan et al., who themselves offer a definition of the term, asserting that

social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations.\(^7^9\)

Chan et al. present a dimensional designation of ‘social cohesion’ based on an assessment of ‘vertical interactions’ constituted by cohesion between state and citizen, and ‘horizontal interactions’ representing the cohesion between members of a civil society, with each dimension characterised by subjective (state of mind) and objective (behavioural manifestation) components. Yet interestingly, as Klein points out, these authors do not consider the influence of an economic dimension, that hence for them has little or no direct contribution to the development of ‘social cohesion’.\(^8^0\) However, what is consistent between the analyses discussed by both Friedkin\(^8^1\) and Klein,\(^8^2\) is an emphasis on the measurement of ‘social cohesion’ based on an attempted definition of the term as an objective notion that can be observed, identified and evidenced.

In recent years numerous theorists have attempted to define the notion of ‘social cohesion’ in various ways, such as ‘the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper’ for

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\(^7^9\) Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion’, p.290.
\(^8^0\) Klein, ‘Social Capital or ‘social cohesion,’ p.895.
\(^8^1\) Friedkin, ‘Social Cohesion.’
\(^8^2\) Klein, ‘Social Capital or ‘social cohesion.’
example, as proposed by Stanley in 2003.\textsuperscript{83} As Klein argues, though these definitions of ‘social cohesion’ are multiple, on the whole they consistently contain some general ideas along axes of ‘the importance of shared values, trust and relationships among members of a society’.\textsuperscript{84} He identifies that these characteristics are not so dissimilar from those of ‘social capital’. However, I would argue that a distinct difference here may be in the way in which these concepts are typically measured, with social capital most often identified on an individual or group level and ‘social cohesion’ identified more holistically as existing on a societal level.\textsuperscript{85} Therefore it cannot be assumed that high amounts of social capital imply a high level of ‘social cohesion’. As Chan et al. describe,

\begin{quote}
In a highly ethnically segregated society, for example, individuals may maintain large amounts of networks with members of the same ethnic group even though there may be no-inter-ethnic social ties at all.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

Thus in other words, though there may exist significant amounts of social capital within an ethnic group, the society to which the group belongs cannot necessarily be considered cohesive. Yet still for many the presence of social capital does still remain an ‘essential basis for the “social cohesion” of a society’.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{84} Klein, ‘Social Capital or Social Cohesion’, p.896.
\textsuperscript{85} Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion’, p.292.
\textsuperscript{86} Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion’, p.292.
\textsuperscript{87} Berger-Schmitt, ‘Social Cohesion as an Aspect of the Quality of Societies,’ p.6.
With regards to its political inception, ‘social cohesion’ first became a subject of interest in Canada in the 1990s, as part of an effort to rebuild policy research capacity. It was identified as way to address social problems that could not be adequately understood using existing research paradigms that were predominantly economic, and thus failed to account of the importance of social relationships. As a result, an early working definition was presented by Judith Maxwell of the Canadian ‘Social Cohesion Research Network’ at an address to University of Alberta in 1996. Maxwell stated that, ‘social cohesion is the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity in Canada based on a sense of hope, trust, and reciprocity among Canadians’. This stimulated the subsequent insertion of the notion into the political arena. Interestingly, particular emphasis on ‘community’ and on ‘shared values’ is indeed a theme that remains particularly potent within UK policy to the present day.

Often central to these discussions is the notion of ethnic pluralism and segregation, as a key aspect that has recently driven ‘social cohesion’ further into the sphere of public policy. As Sturgis et al. describe it, in the UK, due to events over the past two decades such as race rioting, 7/7 bombings and immigration-related tensions, there has developed ‘an increasingly consensual view within academic and policy circles that ethnically diverse communities are characterised by distrust [and] low levels of social cohesion’, and that

88 Stanley, ‘What Do We Know About Social Cohesion,’ p.7.
89 Stanley, ‘What Do We Know About Social Cohesion,’ p.7.
'racial and ethnic heterogeneity is problematic for healthy community life'.

Therefore concerns of this nature have inevitably led to the proliferation of a concern for developing a notion of ‘social cohesion’ within various aspects of public policy. Crucially, over the past decade there has also been what may be described as a ‘religious-turn’, away from challenges surrounding differences of race or ethnicity, and towards challenges presented by religious diversity, and this has accordingly been evidently reflected within public policy in the UK. Through this, groups and communities have become increasingly politically designated along religious lines, and on the whole, notions of pluralism generally contain some aspect of religion or ‘faith’ diversity, in addition to ethnicity and race.

Social theorists have sought to uncover the effect of this plurality on the notion of ‘social cohesion’, with research on the whole falling into two dominant theoretical positions: conflict theory and contact theory. Contact theory asserts that ‘face-to-face interaction, and the formation of social ties between different ethnic [or religious] groups, leads to the formation of positive inter-group attitudes’, and can ‘reduce stereotyping and prejudice’. On the other hand, conflict theory argues that diverse social environments induce a feeling of threat and anxiety between minority and majority groups, particularly arising out of real or perceived competition over scarce resources, but also relating to social identity and relative positions in power and status hierarchies.

In other words, contact theory suggests that ‘meaningful contact’ with diversity has a positive effect, whereas conflict theory argues the opposite. Though many including Putnam have sought to demonstrate the validity of conflict theory and the apparent concerns over the increasingly plural dynamic of modern societies, others such as Sturgis et al. have sought to assert that ‘under most conditions, contact appears to “work”’. They argue that contact has this effect because stereotypes are replaced by schema derived from direct experience, which serve to foreground the individual heterogeneity that exists within as well as between ethnic groups. Positive individual-level interactions are generalized to the ethnic out-group to which the individual belongs and, potentially, to ethnic out-groups as a whole.

As Sturgis et al. also point out, this suggestion appears to be backed up by longitudinal evidence from the UK, which identifies that ‘negative racial attitudes are highly stratified by age, with younger cohorts who have grown up in more diverse communities considerably less likely to express racially prejudiced attitudes’. However, it must be noted that in identifying these trends, the quantitative or qualitative measurement of ‘social cohesion’ may differ significantly between studies.

On the whole though, the work of Sturgis et al. is especially interesting as it appears to denote some relationship between individual-level ‘social

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cohesion’, more closely related to the aforementioned notion of social capital, and the wider societal level of ‘social cohesion’ described earlier by the theorists such as Chan et al.\textsuperscript{100} In other words, it places emphasis on analysis of ‘social cohesion’ within a specific locality, not just within a whole society, something of particular significance within my own research in looking to observe nuanced notions of ‘social cohesion’ at a micro-scale, yet with a view to highlighting the ways in which these observations may hold wider policy implications.

Also of considerable interest in terms of smaller scale group interactions is Hewstone’s notion of ‘meaningful contact’ and the false conflation he identifies within ‘conflict theory’ of the opportunity for, and actual inter-group contact.\textsuperscript{101} As Sturgis et al. expound, ‘living in a neighbourhood comprising multiple ethnic groups may raise the probability of inter-group contact but diversity cannot be considered as necessarily resulting in meaningful social contact between ethnic groups’.\textsuperscript{102} Therefore, as a result, both Laurence and Sturgis et al. conclude the likelihood is that contact and conflict theories are not in direct competition within localities or neighbourhoods, but may actually be operating alongside each other and occurring simultaneously within the same space. This supposition potentially provides significant links to discussions within other disciplines such as urban planning and human geography, with academics such as Amin\textsuperscript{103} and Sandercock\textsuperscript{104} offering similar

\textsuperscript{100} Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion.’
\textsuperscript{101} Hewstone, ‘Living apart, living together?’. 
\textsuperscript{102} Sturgis et al., ‘Ethnic Diversity’, p.1303.
\textsuperscript{103} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{104} Sandercock, Cosmopolis II.
conceptions of spaces or localities in which meaningful interactions may be more likely to take place. As Amin suggests, urban spaces inhabited by ethnic diversity have the potential to form ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’.\textsuperscript{105} These ‘micro-publics’ destabilise habitual segregation and facilitate ‘strategies of cultural contact’, aiming to result in changes in attitude that occur as part of lived experience.\textsuperscript{106} In this way, the facilitation of everyday ‘intercultural interaction’\textsuperscript{107} or ‘meaningful contact’,\textsuperscript{108} particularly within urban environments, can assist in the development of a sense of unity and collaboration, perhaps conceived as ‘social cohesion’, that often results from the locality of a ‘modern metropolis’.\textsuperscript{109} These are ideas that I intend to explore further within my thesis, utilising new approaches to methodology in researching ‘social cohesion’ that I will expound in the following chapter.

What I propose to contribute to previous academic works regarding the notion of ‘social cohesion’, is a more specific approach to its analysis not as a given and observable phenomenon that can be defined and thus measured, but as a discourse. Here my intention is not to provide a new method of quantifying or designating the notion of ‘social cohesion’, but instead to assess the mechanisms through which the notion has developed meaning as a distinct discourse manifest in areas of UK policy at both a national and local level. In this way, I draw upon academic discussion above on the origins of the term in Canada, and the expansion of this as a discourse that has since reached across

\textsuperscript{105} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{106} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{107} Sandercock, \textit{Cosmopolis II}.
\textsuperscript{108} Hewstone, ‘Living apart, living together?’.
to Europe, and in many cases formed the basis of policy initiatives geared towards civic renewal and inter-community relations for almost two decades.

‘Social Cohesion’ in UK Policy – ‘Community Cohesion’

Since 2001, issues related to ethnic diversity and segregation have displayed a strategic shift away from multiculturalist notions of ‘celebrating difference’, and towards the advancement of a ‘social cohesion’ discourse, developed in direct response to recognition of the perceived need to develop a sense of commonality amongst the diverse groups and communities that constitute Great Britain. This notion was initially articulated in the now infamous ‘Cantle Report’, through the deployment of the term ‘community cohesion’.\textsuperscript{110}

For many, community cohesion was hailed as a ‘process dedicated to establishing commonality, from, and within, diversity’,\textsuperscript{111} and a way to address increasing ethnic tensions exemplified in the so-called ‘disturbances’ seen in summer 2001 in the Northern towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, considered as the catalyst for the report. These disturbances, coupled with growing criticisms of ‘outdated and unworkable’ multicultural policies that served to ‘divide our diverse communities by enabling and promoting difference’,\textsuperscript{112} led to a watershed in approaches to the management of ethnic and religious pluralism. Perhaps more significantly, the creation of

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\textsuperscript{110} Cantle, \textit{Community Cohesion}.
\textsuperscript{111} McGhee, ‘Moving to “our” common ground,’ p.381.
\textsuperscript{112} Sukhvinder Stubbs, ‘In Place of Drums and Samosas’, \textit{The Guardian}[Online], 14\textsuperscript{th} May 2008. Available from: \url{http://www.theguardian.com/society/2008/may/14/equality}. [Accessed 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 2014].
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‘community cohesion’ also marks the clear inception of a British brand of ‘social cohesion’ discourse in UK public policy.

In December of 2001, the final report of the Community Cohesion Review Team (CCRT), commonly referred to as ‘The Cantle Report’, was published, calling for the promotion of ‘community cohesion, based upon a greater knowledge of, contact between, and respect for, the various cultures that now make Great Britain such a rich and diverse nation’. The report aimed to bridge the gap between ‘shared values and a celebration of diversity’, through the establishment of a ‘greater sense of citizenship’ based on a set of ‘common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community’. This ‘common citizenship’ attempted to counter the perceived non-integration of immigrant communities who were said to be living ‘parallel lives’, viewed as the cause of the aforementioned disturbances.

However, the Cantle report received substantial criticism. Firstly, and perhaps most simply, as Kundnani notes, though the report aimed to develop a notion of citizenship based on shared values, ‘nobody seems to know what these are’. Bagguley and Hussain have also argued that discussion in the report regarding lack of integration and ‘social cohesion’ ‘construct segregated

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113 Cantle, *Community Cohesion*, p.10.
115 Cantle, *Community Cohesion*, p.10.
communities as “the problem”, consequently ignoring issues such as racism, deprivation and Islamophobia.\textsuperscript{118} Therefore instead of addressing actual causes of the disturbances, the report merely presents them as symptomatic of deeper problems that lie within the UK’s ‘multi-cultural areas’, conceptualised in a segregation discourse that tends to focus on ‘non-whites’ segregating themselves from ‘whites’, rather than vice versa.\textsuperscript{119}

Additionally, what is also of consideration here is the reliance of the conceptual framework of ‘community cohesion’ on the notion of ‘community’ itself, and the assumed divisions of identifiable communities, generally on the basis of religious or ethnic distinctions. In other words, it is essential to first consider the conditional defining of these \textit{communities} before we can assess or develop their cohesiveness. In policy terms, the word ‘community’ is often presented as self-evident, as a way to locate and describe collectives or groupings of citizens within society.

However, key scholarship regarding ‘forms of common organization’,\textsuperscript{120} and notions such as ‘imagined communities’\textsuperscript{121} have recognised how the composition of a community may shift, and criteria of commonality may be adjusted and amended over time. As Baumann has argued, ‘communities are processually constructed rather than found as the ready-made social


\textsuperscript{120} Raymond Williams, \textit{Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.76.

\textsuperscript{121} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}. 
correlates of consistent and bounded cultures’,\textsuperscript{122} and therefore cannot be treated as fixed formations in societies. As a result, ‘community cohesion’ policy in particular has been criticized for the way in which it ‘denies the conceptual complexities’ of communities,\textsuperscript{123} a suggestion which I will discuss at some length with reference to my ethnographic research in chapter five.

Overall, as McGhee notes, community cohesion marks a divergence by New Labour away from classical multiculturalism, in an attempt to ‘smash the multicultural mosaic’, and replace it with new forms of patriotic allegiance.\textsuperscript{124} The Cantle report serves as a starting point in pursuing a multiculturalism which, rather than trying to place communities into fixed positions of difference, calls for participation and dialogue between groups to find common ground and a ‘concept of citizenship, [in which] different cultures can thrive, adding to the richness and experience of our nationality’.\textsuperscript{125} From this we can observe the development of a ‘social cohesion’ discourse that centres on this notion of ‘common citizenship’ in a way that presents an overall message that ‘cultural pluralism and integration are not incompatible’,\textsuperscript{126} and thus calls for ‘unity in diversity’.\textsuperscript{127}

As I will outline in subsequent chapters, what is also particularly significant to this shift is the development of what Grillo describes as a ‘faith-based

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\textsuperscript{122} Baumann, \textit{Contesting Culture}, p.191.
\textsuperscript{125} Cantle, \textit{Community Cohesion}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{126} LGA, \textit{Guidance on Community Cohesion}, p.13.
\textsuperscript{127} McGhee, ‘Patriots of the Future?’. 
\end{flushleft}
multiculturalism’, in which ‘faith communities’ began to be assigned important roles as channels for representation, consultation and dialogue both nationally and locally.\textsuperscript{128} As Dinham argues, in fact ‘the swiftness with which the fracturing of local communities was transformed from a “race” issue to a “faith” issue is striking’, \textsuperscript{129} and highlights not only the increasing significance of this particular form of plurality, but also the ways in which ‘faith’ has been and continues to be conceptualized and discussed in direct relation to, and as a foundation for, ‘social cohesion’ discourse and policy.

‘Faith’, not Religion?

Over the past decade, we can plainly observe a resounding return of religion and more specifically the term ‘faith’ to the public table as categories of interest to policymakers, practitioners and academics alike.\textsuperscript{130} Yet in recognising these as increasingly politicised terms and thus loaded with standardized meaning,\textsuperscript{131} it is essential to deconstruct and assess their existing academic and political applications before embarking on more focused discursive analysis and ethnographic investigation, and to again justify a preferred focus on the term ‘faith’ as opposed to ‘religion’ within this. Hence here I seek to briefly analyse the relationship between ‘faith’, religious identity and policy initiatives geared towards civic renewal and community relations in urban environments, in order to situate my own contribution to research in this field.

\textsuperscript{128} Grillo, ‘British and Others’, p.57-58.  
\textsuperscript{129} Dinham, \textit{Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society}, p.92.  
\textsuperscript{131} Baumann, \textit{Contesting Culture}, p.12.
According to Sweetman, the origins of the academic and comparative study of religion is

marked by a shift in the primary meaning of the term “religion” from a sense roughly equivalent to “piety” to a sense in which the word has a plural, and denotes a system of belief and practice.\(^\text{132}\)

In other words, through increasing scholarly attention paid to the difference and diversity of religious beliefs and practices, initial applications of the term in a uniformly devotional sense came to be dislodged by notions of plurality. As Sweetman argues, this shift also ‘necessitated the development of concepts by which the individual religions were identified’,\(^\text{133}\) and precipitated the distinction of ‘religion’ as a distinct aspect of human life. However, as others such as Fitzgerald have argued, there is a perilous inevitability in the development of this category, in the production of generalizations that ignore the complexities of notions of religion and religious practice.\(^\text{134}\) In this way, we can evidence the establishment of academic discourse of the study of religion based upon a foundation of plurality and difference, leading to the formation of the typical ‘world religions’ framework in which religious traditions are often principally located within a fixed paradigm of discrete, bounded belief ‘systems’, still heavily evidenced in curriculums of UK Religious Education today.\(^\text{135}\)


\(^{135}\) Hirst and Zavos, *Religious Traditions in Modern South Asia*, p. xii.
As scholars such as Oberoi have demonstrated, ethnographic studies of religious traditions across the world have exposed the ‘brittleness’ of these textbook classifications, and highlighted how these ‘clear-cut categories’ bear little relation to the everyday lived experience of the human actors they denote.\textsuperscript{136} Moreover, the multiplicity of religious traditions within contemporary society is regularly cited as a source of discord and disharmony, with ‘religious difference’ often referred to as a key concern for ‘social cohesion’ in policy documents and accompanying political rhetoric.

‘Faith’ on the other hand, as discussed briefly in the previous chapter, is strongly contextually rooted in Christianity, and is espoused by classic theologians such as Aquinas and Calvin as ‘the assent to revealed truth’\textsuperscript{137} and ‘the necessary and sufficient condition for true knowledge of God’\textsuperscript{138}. Interestingly, far from the pluralistic connotations of ‘religion’, ‘faith’ is often conceived politically as a source of unity and commonality in the face of diversity, as evidenced in later policy document analysis in chapter four. As Smith has noted, in political terms, the inception of interest in issues of ‘faith’ may be traced back to concerns raised in the 1985 \textit{Faith in the City} report following the urban ‘riots’ in the early 1980s, that subsequently resulted in the establishment of the Inner Cities Religious Council in 1994.\textsuperscript{139} As Eade explains, this report sought to highlight the challenges faced by the Church of England in diverse ‘inner city’ areas and suburban estates,\textsuperscript{140} and since then

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\item Di Ceglie, ‘Faith, reason, and charity in Thomas Aquinas’s thought,’ p.133.
\item Stuermann, ‘John Calvin’s Concept of Faith, Presented on the Basis of the “Institutes” and the Commentaries, the Catechisms, the Confessions and the Theological Treatises,’ p.357.
\item Smith, ‘Faith in Community and Communities of Faith?’.
\item Eade, ‘From Race to Religion: Multiculturalism and Contested Urban Space,’ pp.155-156.
\end{enumerate}
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successive governments have sought to again centre the issue of religious diversity and crucially to explicitly utilise assets of ‘faith’ for the management of pluralism.

As Dinham suggests, in recent decades this realisation that ‘faith’ might be ‘useful’ has often formed the ‘dominant starting point’ of public policy discourse, in the recognition that ‘faiths’ hold key resources, buildings, relationships and people, all of which can be ‘put to good use’ for the benefit of a cohesive society.\textsuperscript{141} Therefore it is for this reason that this thesis places sole emphasis on the discursive formation of ‘faith,’ as a concept developed and deployed in UK public policy in close relationship to the discourse of ‘social cohesion,’ and is hence the focus of my analytical and ethnographic investigation as a term embedded in both policy and practice.

Building on the work of Dinham, I intend to expose the dangers of oversimplification and generalisation regarding the constitution and differentiation of ‘faith communities’ often seen within policy propagations, and the potential to overemphasise ‘common values’ and ignore realities of theological divisions and diversities of religious practice within and between said ‘communities’.\textsuperscript{142} As Dinham has previously suggested, this therefore also presents problems for participative governance and political engagement with so-called ‘faith representatives’ and organisations, through which relationships with the state are often fostered,\textsuperscript{143} and thus this also forms a

\textsuperscript{141} Dinham, \textit{Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{142} Dinham, \textit{Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{143} Dinham and Lowndes, ‘Faith in the Public Realm’.
particular area of research that I intend to build upon through ethnographic work in subsequent chapters.

On the whole, in both political and academic spheres, usage of the term ‘faith’ often belies pragmatic certainty in terms of both what describing what faith precisely is, and designation of what thus constitutes a ‘faith community’, a notion which itself is commonly subject to gross oversimplification.\(^{144}\) Likewise the term ‘community’ is also another debated at length regarding its definition and conception, as I will uncover in chapter five.\(^ {145}\) However, little academic attention of this nature has been paid to the specificity of the discursive conception and operationalization of ‘faith’ within policy spheres, and the significance in the usage of this terminology within UK ‘social cohesion’ policy documents and discourse. This is something I aim to address directly throughout this thesis, as a key consideration in my assessment of policy and practice, and an essential element in the deconstruction of related discourses.

**Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Interfaith, Faith-Based Social Action (FBSA) and South Asian ‘Socio-Religious Action’**

Anthropological and ethnographic approaches to researching ‘Faith-Based’ Organisations (FBOs) are a relatively recent development in the field, a trend emerging partially as a response to issues of ‘faith’ and public engagement

\(^{144}\) Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.57.

\(^{145}\) Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, pp.64-65.
becoming increasingly politically charged.\textsuperscript{146} In fact recently the contribution of ‘faith groups’ to local communities in the UK in general has become an increasing focus for both academics and policy makers alike.\textsuperscript{147} However, as Hefferan and Fogerty suggest, unlike previous trends in anthropological research regarding secular NGOs, ‘the analysis of FBOs requires that anthropologists take seriously the theological underpinnings shaping organizational thought and action’,\textsuperscript{148} and recognize the implications of these underpinnings in assessing what exactly we mean when using the term ‘faith-based organisation’. Several attempts have been made to assert typologies of FBOs by categorizing them along polarized axes regarding the extent to which organisations may be conceived as explicitly ‘faith saturated’ or secular,\textsuperscript{149} or by assessing affiliations or religious characteristics of participants, amongst a number of other factors.\textsuperscript{150} Yet admittedly these typologies remain elusive in application, as ‘real organizations and programs rarely fit perfectly into ideal types’\textsuperscript{151} and methodological issues are plentiful in gathering and analysing data to make such assessments, as subsequent chapters will explore.

One key area of interest in this area has been the notion of ‘interfaith’ and/or ‘multifaith’ initiatives. The origins of the term ‘interfaith’ can be traced back to the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, and its use has

\textsuperscript{149} Hefferan & Fogerty, ‘The Anthropology of Faith and Development’, p.2.
\textsuperscript{150} Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh, ‘Typology of Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Programs’, \textit{Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly} 33:1 (2004), p.120.
\textsuperscript{151} Sider & Unruh, ‘Typology of Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Programs’, p.128.
been since driven further into political agendas through increasing immigration and globalisation, leading to a present context in which ‘interfaith’ initiatives form a ‘central feature of the contemporary religious landscape of England and the UK’.\textsuperscript{152} Since the events of 9/11, religion has been observably placed ‘front and centre on the world stage’, arguably transforming ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’ work from ‘merely an academic exercise, or a spiritual enquiry...[into a] global imperative, and a global necessity’.\textsuperscript{153}

As Dinham has argued, government interest in ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’ work nowadays ‘echoes the notion of multiculturalism as a means of managing plurality and difference, with key policy documents such as *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multifaith Society*\textsuperscript{154} positing their contributions to community cohesion and the prevention of violent extremism, presenting ‘faiths’ as being ‘good at community’\textsuperscript{155} and thus best positioned to ‘mediate their differences by working together’\textsuperscript{156} to promote shared values. As Zavos has also discussed, this ‘recognition of common beliefs or values... articulated in a framework of respect for difference’ is crucial to the institutionalisation of the idea of ‘interfaith dialogue’, and the development of the ‘public legitimacy of religion’\textsuperscript{157} as a

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\bibitem{154} DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multifaith Society*, 2008.
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repository of shared values, and thus an asset to be utilised in government approaches to cohesion work and the management of pluralism.

However, what is also of significance here again is the imprecision of the terminological expression of ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’. Definitions of these terms have been offered by academics such as Weller, who states that

When a society or an event or a project is described as ‘multi-faith’, it usually means that it includes a variety of religious groups. While the use of multi-faith highlights variety, the use of the term inter-faith points more to the relationships between religions and the people who belong to them.158

Yet as Weller also argues, the two terms are often used interchangeably and it is not always clear what is meant or being referred to by ‘interfaith’ or ‘multifaith’ in either policy or practice. As I will suggest in subsequent chapters, these terms are also at times problematic in carrying political connotations that many religious groups may at present wish to avoid for various reasons, and therefore the terms themselves often become a barrier to engagement with some communities.

Similarly, a notion often discussed alongside ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’ is the notion of ‘faith-based social action’. As Zavos has argued, the concept of social action forms part of a post-austerity push towards ‘an energised civil society’ centred on ‘little platoons’ of local people addressing issues within their own communities.159 Within this framework, ‘faith communities’ are again

identified as a vital resource in terms of civic participation,¹⁶⁰ and as Dinham has noted, religious individuals and groups are identified as ‘good citizens, active volunteers and bringers of community cohesion’.¹⁶¹ This has often led to ‘faith’ and ‘faith-based social action’ being institutionalised and brought into the fold of the voluntary or ‘third’ sector, with local and regional policy structures reflecting this, as I will discuss in following chapters. In this way ‘faith-based social action’ has become a cornerstone of government engagement with religious pluralism in the UK, and considerable academic attention has been paid to the proposed wealth of social capital found within faith communities alongside this.¹⁶² However, terminological difficulties often arise regarding the blanket application of these and other terms such as ‘interfaith’, to religious groups or individuals undertaking charitable or civic renewal initiatives.

However, as Dinham notes, there are still substantial gaps in literature regarding these ‘interfaith’ initiatives and ‘faith-based social action’, and particular problems with policy approaches to analysis and recognition of the impact these initiatives have ‘on the ground’, as well as on the relationship between ‘multifaith partnerships’ and ‘multifaith cohesion’.¹⁶³ Crucially, there are also significant gaps in research regarding the participation of South Asian religious traditions in particular, as many ‘interfaith’ models have been constructed through the infrastructure of the Christian church, and so

¹⁶¹ Dinham, Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis, p.75.
¹⁶² See for example, Furbey et al., Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing?; Baker and Skinner, Faith in Action.
¹⁶³ Dinham, ‘The Multi-Faith Paradigm in Policy and Practice,’ p.582.
research has tended to be centred on this position.\textsuperscript{164} As a result, here I seek to further problematize the concept of ‘interfaith’ and the notion of the ‘faith-based organisation’, and to examine different articulations of the relationship between religious practice and social action, evidenced specifically within South Asian traditions. Therefore, throughout this research, I place South Asian religious traditions, communities and individuals at the centre of my line of enquiry as a central focus in my research questions and the ethnographic portion of my work. Key to this, as I will discuss, is to question the applicability of the notion of ‘faith-based social action’ for South Asian groups who may rather conversely operationalise specific religious principles in order to develop initiatives of what I term ‘socio-religious action’, that aim to contribute to a conceived notion of ‘social cohesion’ specifically through devotional practice.

The use of the term ‘socio-religious action’ aims to account for organisations and initiatives that reject definitions aligned with discourses of ‘faith’ and ‘faith-based social action’, yet still seek to pursue a perceived ‘social cohesion’ discourse, articulated as instances of religious devotional practice. Crucially, these devotional practices also demonstrate what Zavos refers to as ‘cultures of service’,\textsuperscript{165} evidenced strongly in South Asian religious traditions. Here the phrase South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ attempts to bring these notions together, as a way to denote a developing discourse that combines South Asian traditions and devotional practice with narratives of civic engagement and social action, fortified through a discourse of ‘social cohesion’.

\textsuperscript{164} Dinham, ‘The Multi-Faith Paradigm in Policy and Practice.’
\textsuperscript{165} Zavos, ‘Translating Cultures of Service in the Diaspora’.
In other words, to describe these initiatives and organisations as ‘faith-based’, in line with dominant political discourse and existing scholarship, such as that of Hefferan and Fogarty,\textsuperscript{166} is to severely distort their self-perception. Likewise, to describe them as undertaking purely religious or merely social action does not account for the interplay of these notions evidenced through my ethnographic work. As a result, the deployment of the term ‘socio-religious action’ is essential to adequately describe the intricacies of these organisations, and their unique contribution to a wider discourse of ‘social cohesion’.

Overall, throughout this thesis I will attempt to draw upon existing literature regarding ‘social cohesion’, as both a focus of sociological enquiry, and as a key area of public policy over the past two decades, placing particular emphasis on the temporal and geographic context of the UK since 2001. Crucially I will seek to push the research agenda in a new direction, by examining ‘social cohesion’ as a discourse, avoiding tendencies to define or measure levels of cohesion, and instead seeking to assess the discursive formations of the notion of ‘social cohesion’ in UK public policy.

In addition, my specific focus will be the role of ‘faith’ within this, as a related discourse developed and deployed alongside ‘social cohesion’ as an essential asset in contributing to civic renewal and the management of pluralism. I will explore the role of ‘faith-based’ organisations in political discourse, again

\textsuperscript{166} Hefferan & Fogerty, ‘The Anthropology of Faith and Development.’
drawing on key scholars in this area such as Dinham, but providing a wider evidence base through the use of localised fieldwork, and also placing particular emphasis on South Asian religious groups. As a result, I intend to bring this specific approach to analysis of ‘social cohesion’ in policy, and the role of ‘faith’ within this, into direct conversation with ethnographic research in new areas of interest regarding the participation of South Asian religions in both government-funded initiatives and in localised forms of ‘socio-religious action’.
Chapter 3
Multi-Dimensional Methods for Policy and Practice

The methodological approach of this research deploys two contrasting yet complementary methods of policy document analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, in conversation with key theoretical material. Through this approach, I aim to develop analyses that are both systematic and innovative, in exploring the relationship between ‘policy and practice’, and the role of discourse within this. The first part of the thesis presents a detailed policy document analysis, evaluating ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ as discursive formations in ‘policy’, and observing the ways in which compulsion to put ‘policy into practice’ provides pressure to enact the disciplinary regime on the ground. Then subsequently, the second phase seeks to uncover instances of divergence from this regime on a localised level, particularly within South Asian religious traditions. As a result, the full utilisation of each method is dependent on the successful exposition of the other, through the convergence of an analytical framework gained through detailed policy document analysis, enriched by key theoretical material, and explored ‘in practice’ through ethnographic fieldwork. This multi-dimensional methodology aims to provide a new stance on researching both ‘policy in practice’ and ‘social cohesion’ as discourse, to be observed, not measured or defined.
Policy Document Analysis: Tracking the Development of a Discourse

As discussed, the preliminary aspect of my methodology is centred on a detailed analysis of policy documents, tracing the development of a ‘social cohesion’ discourse within UK public policy since 2001, and the role of ‘faith’ within this. As such this portion of the research primarily addresses the following research questions:

- In what ways have notions of faith been appropriated within social cohesion discourse in UK public policy since 2001?
- How has the discursive relationship between faith and social cohesion in national policy been translated into local policies in areas of Greater Manchester?

As an idea, the notion of ‘discourse’ is not without its shortcomings, numerous theorisations and analytical approaches. Baumann, among many, is quick to admit the ‘bewildering vagueness’ of definitions and academic approaches to the study of ‘discourse’ in its spread from the humanities to social sciences.\(^{167}\)

So here it is important to outline some of these key approaches and offer an explanation of my particular methodological approach.

The term ‘discourse’ is most often used as an abstract noun, denoting what Fairclough refers to as the ‘domain of statements’, as a ‘count noun’ for groups of statements, or in reference to the ‘regulated practice’ (the rules) which

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\(^{167}\) Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.10.
govern a group of statements. As Fairclough suggests, ‘discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective imaginaries... tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions’. Therefore, inherent in discussions of discourse is also the acknowledgement and dissemination of different levels of power, as I will later discuss.

Discourse has been generally defined in academic terms as ‘an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being’. In other words, the term refers to the way in which a notion or concept develops its hegemonic status through the proliferation of a dominant framework of meaning based in what may be described as ‘cultural texts’. Thus in the case of this research, an investigation of discourse allows us to understand the ways in which ‘social cohesion’ has been formed as the conceptual basis for the political and academic understanding of social relations and the management of pluralism, through the proliferation of policy documents, and to also assess the role of ‘faith’ within this.

With texts thus forming a central focus, recognised as a material manifestation taking a variety of forms including written texts, spoken words, symbols and pictures, in a linguistic sense, formal discourse analysis is primarily concerned with the relationship between language and the contexts in which

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171 Philips and Hardy, ‘What is Discourse Analysis’.
it is used, and with examination of both spoken and written interactions. However, approaches to the analysis of discourse are wide ranging and varied.

Phillips and Hardy offer a systematic examination of approaches to formal discourse analysis, noting how

Traditional qualitative approaches often assume a social world and then seek to understand the meaning of this world for participants. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, tries to explore how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created in the first place and how they are maintained and held in place over time.\(^\text{172}\)

In other words, discourse analysis offers a deeper examination of the ‘social world’ in which participants are contained, and a way to account not only for the context in which the subject resides, but to also unpack this context as a construct itself. In addition, Philips and Hardy also present a framework that categorizes theoretical approaches according to two key dimensions. The first of these is ‘the degree to which the emphasis is on individual texts or on the surrounding context’, and the second on ‘the degree to which the research focuses on power and ideology [i.e. denoting a critical approach] as opposed to processes of social construction [i.e. denoting a constructivist approach]’.\(^\text{173}\)

However, they also note how the boundaries between formal discourse analysis and other qualitative methods are at times blurred, and discourse analysis itself has been conceptualised by a number of key scholars.

\(^{172}\) Philips and Hardy, ‘What is Discourse Analysis’.
\(^{173}\) Philips and Hardy, ‘What is Discourse Analysis’.
Hall for example, (referencing Foucault) describes discourse as

A group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.¹⁷⁴

Importantly, the concept of discourse in this usage is not purely linguistic: ‘It is a concept about language and practice’.¹⁷⁵ Therefore for Hall, the ‘production of knowledge’¹⁷⁶ refers to the way in which what one says (i.e. language) and what one does (i.e. practice) may produce a framework for reasonable and meaningful discussion of a topic through an implied sense of ‘regulation’ of acceptable ways to talk, write or conduct oneself in relation to it.¹⁷⁷ Yet again, implied within this concept of ‘regulation’ is also the notion of power, and the relationship between power and discourse, discussed perhaps most notably by Michel Foucault.

Key to the Foucauldian analysis of discourse is the assertion that ‘in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a ... number of procedures’,¹⁷⁸ and therefore as a result, an analysis of discourse directly implies and involves an analysis of the contextually reliant socio-political dimensions that contribute to, and substantiate, power relations. As Hook suggests, Foucault’s approach attempts to ‘restore materiality and power to what, in the Anglo-American tradition,
had remained the largely linguistic concept of discourse',\(^{79}\) and in his paper, ‘The Order of Discourse’,\(^{80}\) Foucault centres his analysis within the field of political action, in order to provide an account of the ways in which the development of discourse is strongly linked to the exercise of power. Through this he argues that ‘discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.’\(^{81}\) In other words, discourse should be viewed not only as a result of power, but also as an instrument of power. Crucially, this idea is carried forward in my own approach to research, in using policy document analysis to examine the development of discourse as constructed through policy, and then to also explore the dissemination of this discourse through ethnographic fieldwork.

With this in mind though, it is important to state here that throughout this research I do not intend to undertake a formal discourse analysis. Instead I will draw on key aspects of discourse analysis drawn from scholars such as Hall, Foucault and Fairclough, in order to develop an approach to detailed policy document analysis grounded in ideas related to the relationship between language and context. Through this approach, instead of focusing on the technical analysis of texts, as required by the formal method of discourse analysis, I aim to be more flexible in my investigation, in attempting to trace patterns and developments in a wider political context, and explore a number of narratives through a close reading of a larger range of texts. I employ this


\(^{80}\) Foucault, ‘The Order of Discourse’.

\(^{81}\) Foucault, ‘The Order of Discourse’, pp.52-53.
approach specifically in order to unpack complexities surrounding the development and deployment of ‘social cohesion’ as a discourse within UK policy since 2001, reliant on related notions of ‘faith’ operationalized within these policies. Through this, I also aim to emphasise the significance of power-play inherent in the development of political propagations and augmented governmental outputs regarding the management of pluralism. In particular, the critical approach to formal discourse analysis upheld by Fairclough informs my own assessment of the ‘intertextual chain relations’\textsuperscript{182} that connect the public and political sphere, explored here through an ‘interdiscursive’ and ‘textured’ policy document analysis that takes account of the various articulations and forms of discourse at play within any given context.\textsuperscript{183}

Building on this, I am able to situate these discursive formations in localized contexts in order to consider their impact on local religious communities and assess the subsequent re-embodiment and/or re-articulations of this discourse ‘on the ground’ in areas of Greater Manchester. In this way, my approach lies not only in locating and analysing existing texts or practices as discourse but significantly more so in an analysis of the conception, expansion and perpetuation of this discourse on both a macro and micro scale. In other words, in developing my own detailed policy document analysis, I seek to draw on ideas from within both constructivist and critical approaches to formal

\textsuperscript{183} Fairclough, \textit{Critical Discourse Analysis}, pp.381-382.
discourse analysis, retaining recognition that discourses are both shaped by as well as shaping of the context in which they are embedded.\textsuperscript{184}

Overall, as Baumann suggests, in pursuing an analysis, we must ask what we want the term ‘discourse’ to do.\textsuperscript{185} Through my close analysis of texts in examining policy documents, I am specifically seeking to uncover the ways in which these documents have come to define and govern the way in which the topic of ‘social cohesion’ is ‘meaningfully talked about and reasoned about’,\textsuperscript{186} and the configurations in which this reasoning applies. The methodological impetus here is to trace and assess the development of a specifically British articulation of ‘social cohesion’ through political narratives associated with the management of pluralism, and in particular, the management of religious pluralism. Through assessing policy on both a strategic level and an operational level, through the translation of this into local authorities and associated centrally and locally funded initiatives, we can begin to locate the precise interplay between discourses of ‘cohesion’ and ‘faith’ in the UK, and unpack a dominant discourse that has developed over recent decades since 2001. The substance here is therefore not in defining or examining ‘social cohesion’ as a measurable phenomenon, but in attempting to pinpoint the development of a discourse within public policy and its successive output into British society.

\textsuperscript{185} Baumann, \textit{Contesting Culture}, p.10.
\textsuperscript{186} Hall, ‘The Work of Representation,’ p.44.
Additionally, in order to supplement and attempt to further contextualize my policy document analysis, I also undertook several formal interviews with individuals involved in both the creation and implementation of social cohesion policy at both a national and local level. I conducted a substantial interview with a senior policy advisor for faith and integration at DCLG, who also had over ten years’ experience working as a consultant in areas of faith and community cohesion in the North West, and provided valuable insight into both previous and current approaches to social cohesion policy. I was also able to interview the cohesion leads at both Oldham council and Manchester City council, who again boasted extensive experience of working in these areas of policy for a number of years, and provided opportunity to gain greater understanding of local approaches reaching beyond the information contained in policy documents.

Besides this, I also conducted multiple interviews with individuals involved in the Near Neighbours programme, including the local coordinator in Oldham who had entered the sector only three years ago, coming straight from university, and the North West regional coordinator, K, who described himself as being ‘involved in interfaith dialogue’\textsuperscript{187} for over a decade. Interestingly K’s career in particular appeared to have ran parallel to several developments in government approaches to ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, having obtained jobs roles attached to various national and local funding programmes and policy initiatives. As a result, he was able to provide an insider account of the running

\textsuperscript{187} Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
of several significant projects, and to comment on his experience of working through substantial shifts in the sector that I will discuss later in chapter four.

However, in general this initial phase of the thesis is firstly an exploration of the birth of a British ‘social cohesion’ discourse, and of the place and pronunciation of the notion of ‘faith’ within this. This then also leads us to an assessment of related discourses such as those of ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’, that share an observable attachment to this overarching framework through explicit inclusion within the political expression of ‘social cohesion’ discourse in the UK. Following this, the second phase of the thesis then attempts to explore these discourses in practice.

**Ethnography, Ethics and Exploring Organisations**

In undertaking the ethnographic portion of my research, I initially sought to directly address two of my initial research questions through fieldwork:

- In what ways does the discursive relationship between faith and social cohesion contribute to the conception and formation of religious communities within these [Greater Manchester] localities, with particular reference to South Asian religious traditions?
- To what extent and how have South Asian religious groups sought to promote or produce a notion of social cohesion through devotional practice?

In pursuing ethnographic work, my aim was not to locate or present instances of ‘social cohesion’ through my case studies of three organisations, as this would be the antithesis of the approach to this research in examining ‘social
cohesion’ objectively as a discourse, and not as a measurable phenomenon. Instead, in my analysis of organisations, I look to examine the ways in which the articulation of the ethos and activities of these organisations relate to the discursive relationship between notions of ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ discussed in chapter four. As Marcus notes, when the object of research is contained ‘within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography’,\textsuperscript{188} and this is a notion that I aimed to highlight in pursuing a flexible approach to data collection. In other words, I sought to observe the ways in which organisations engage with the ‘signs, symbols, and metaphors’\textsuperscript{189} evidenced as constituting a wider political discourse, such as ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’, and how they conceive of their own contribution to what they themselves articulate as a sense of ‘social [or community] cohesion’. I do not however, in any way seek to provide any particular instances as demonstrative of ‘social cohesion’, nor to present an alternative definition of such.

In terms of research design, I felt that these questions demanded the particular use of ethnography in order to gather rich and detailed data that other qualitative methods such as questionnaires would fail to capture. These questions evidently demand a more nuanced approach arguably only achieved through prolonged ethnographic fieldwork. This overall intention of looking carefully at organisations and initiatives requires a similar level of precision.

\textsuperscript{189} Marcus, ‘Ethnography in/of the World System’, p.108.
and attention to detail reflected in my approach to policy document analysis. Consequently, though my fieldwork included initial contact with numerous individuals and organisations, I chose to pursue more substantial data collection via long-term case studies with three organisations - two located in central Manchester and another in the town of Oldham\footnote{Fieldwork consisted of volunteering one day a week at each organisation for around 12 months between June 2015-June 2016, along with attendance at any other events/activities that the organisations held or had been involved in within this time period.} - consisting of an average of around 7-12 months with each organisation.

This data collection was realised largely through extensive participant observation and conversational-style interviewing with members of each organisation. These three organisations manifest distinct and contrasting characteristics, located in diverse primary fieldsites, and therefore provide plentiful data towards both of the above research questions. Therefore, in order to gain some wider insight into these localities, I also chose to conduct several additional interviews with members of other similar organisations operating within the same areas, including an Islamic charity in Manchester, local interfaith forum in Oldham, and other Sikh volunteers participating in small scale homeless feed initiatives in central Manchester. However, three initial case studies form the substantial body of the multi-sited ethnographic work discussed in this thesis in relation to the above research questions.

Importantly, this use of multi-sited ethnography also provides unique challenges and opportunities for data collection. As Marcus describes it, in conducting multi-sited research, ethnographers are frequently faced with a
number of ‘cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments’,\textsuperscript{191} while trying to adopt multiple norms and perform multiple identities within different fieldsites. In other words, the process of moving through spaces often requires an alteration of persona, a renegotiation of roles, and a recognition of rules that may be present within the particular research site, and therefore as ethnographer, it is essential to be able to successfully navigate these various considerations. However, as he also suggests, it is the ‘posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography’.\textsuperscript{192} Hence the ability to effectively draw together data from multiple fieldsites in order to cohere towards an overall argument, arguably provides a stronger evidence base, especially in terms of looking to locate diverse instances of discourse in practice.

Organisation A, first provided the opportunity to directly observe ‘policy in practice’, following the translation of discourse from national to local policy, and from local policy to the practices of local authority funded organisations. This allowed me to assess the template of government work put forward through policy, and to analyse an organisation that may be considered a direct product of the discourse. Org.A therefore acts as a strategic case study to explore ethnographically, the findings of my policy document analysis, in locating the development of narratives around ‘faith and ‘social cohesion’, and examining the ‘projection’\textsuperscript{193} and dissemination of this through the ‘intertextual chain relations’\textsuperscript{194} that connect the public and political sphere as

\textsuperscript{191} Marcus, ‘Ethnography in/of the World System,’ p.113.
\textsuperscript{192} Marcus, ‘Ethnography in/of the World System,’ p.105.
\textsuperscript{193} Fairclough, \textit{Analysing Discourse}, p.124.
\textsuperscript{194} Fairclough, \textit{Critical Discourse Analysis}, p.401.
Fairclough has described. In other words, this case study facilitates an analysis of specific instances in which policy is directly translated in practice, by pinpointing the ways in which this occurs through mechanisms such as policy documents and funding frameworks.

On the other hand, Org.B and Org.C do not possess any formal affiliation with or funding from local or national government. This presents the prospect of investigating alternative enactments of ‘social cohesion’ that may reject or rearticulate the dominant discursive framework produced politically, and crucially, may therefore produce a religious rationale that is devoid of related discourses of ‘faith’ and/or ‘interfaith’. Both of these organisations have been founded by individuals who identify themselves as followers of South Asian religious traditions, and so in line with the above research questions, they afford the opportunity to reveal the ways in which these groups seek to contribute to a discourse of ‘social cohesion’ through devotional practice located in public space. As a result, they provide two case studies that demonstrate what I term South Asian ‘socio-religious action’, as I will later discuss.

Collectively, all three organisations offer ample opportunities for data collection along multiple axes of enquiry located through both preceding policy document analysis and my initial research questions. These axes include examination of both ‘interfaith’ organisations and organisations led by two different South Asian religious traditions, formally registered charities and informal initiatives, various sources of funding, and differing locations both
geographically and demographically, as well as spatially in terms of public space and premises.

Organisation A

Located in a shared building in a relatively quiet back street in Manchester city centre, Organisation A (Org.A) is a self-described ‘interfaith network’ formed through a local strategic partnership around fifteen years ago [in 2004], with the ‘specific brief of engaging faith communities in the decision making processes of the city’.[195] Now based in a ‘Multifaith Centre,’ which officially opened in 2012, the organisation operates on a day-to-day basis (though the centre is usually only staffed 2-3 days a week) with two paid staff, and at the time of my fieldwork one volunteer (myself), who run the various projects and initiatives that Org.A develops and offers to faith communities, schools, public bodies and the wider public. Their executive committee consisted of members representing different religious groups across the city, who meet on a monthly basis at the Multifaith Centre to discuss various issues such as funding and development of projects/events.

The organisation also co-ordinates a wider Greater Manchester Interfaith Group (incorporating the twelve different Interfaith groups within the region) and collaborates with other local organisations and partnerships such as the

[195] Interview with Community Development Worker (CDW) for Org.A, 13/05/2015.
local Muslim-Jewish Forum and the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) led initiative ‘We Stand Together’.197

At the time of my fieldwork, Org.A had been primarily funded for the past three years through the Manchester City Council Equalities Programme, who fund their five main projects. These projects include: regular interfaith dialogues, a school education project, a women’s interfaith group, workshops in which participants make a ‘mala’ bracelet while learning about fourteen different ‘faith traditions’, and a collaborative ‘Research Project’ to assess the need for improvement in services for ‘minority communities’.

Due to this source of funding, the organisation must purposefully align itself with local policy, and regularly report back to Manchester City Council to demonstrate this. Therefore, significantly, in terms of the overall research agenda, the organisation allows for a detailed exploration of the direct enactment of ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse through local council strategic outputs and funded projects.

In terms of the particular reference to South Asian religious traditions evident in the above research questions, Org.A did seem to lack participation of some of these groups. Though their executive committee included Hindu and Muslim individuals, and their engagement with Muslim communities in Manchester was aided by collaboration with the Muslim-Jewish Forum, members of Org.A have in the past admitted their lack of significant

197 ‘We Stand Together’ is a community partnership initiative coordinated by Greater Manchester Police.
engagement with local Sikh, Jain and Hindu communities. Interestingly, this was an issue explained to me as being identified as a national problem, and discussed at some length at a recent UK ‘Interfaith Network’ conference.\textsuperscript{198} Thus in terms of participation and representation, the diversity demographics of Org.A as an inclusive city-wide ‘network’ appear in some ways limited.

Yet on the whole, Org.A did regard their organisation and its projects as both ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’, making a clear distinction between the two. In an interview prior to commencing my volunteering position, Org.A’s half-time Community Development Worker (CDW), D, informed me that for them interfaith is “about learning relationships between faiths and about faith communities”, a notion that was in fact subject to internal negotiation as I will later discuss. Multifaith, on the other hand, for D is “about bringing people from different faith communities together to work together or to have a common voice”.\textsuperscript{199} Org.A aimed to do both of these things, and in addition to this, executive meetings regularly contained discussion and propositions centred on the sentiment that education is the best force to tackle prejudice and discrimination, and to promote and develop ‘community cohesion’.

My fieldwork with Org.A included volunteering one day a week in the Multifaith Centre in which the organisation was based, attending executive committee meetings and other meetings in which members of Org.A were invited to attend, taking part in events organised or attended by Org.A and its members, recorded interviews with Org.A’s Community Development worker,

\textsuperscript{198} Various conversations with D, Community Development Worker for Org.A.
\textsuperscript{199} Interview with CDW for Org.A, 13/5/2015.
and numerous informal conversational-style interviews with various members and visitors at the Multifaith Centre.

**Organisation B**

Organisation B (Org.B) is a registered charity based in Oldham town centre whose volunteer base consisted largely of Pakistani Muslim men and women from the local area. The organisation was established by a husband and wife team in 2009, with the specific aim of rebuilding communities and improving ‘community cohesion’.\(^{200}\) Since its inception, Org.B has expanded with a team of dedicated volunteers and a variety of projects, the most significant of these being several ‘Meet Your Muslim Neighbour’ exhibitions that aim to educate the general public about basic principles of Islam, and their most recent weekly food bank project established to help homeless and impoverished people locally. Yet crucially, though similarly to Org A. their work has previously drawn on education as ‘the key to any form of harmony’,\(^{201}\) their current focus was centred on social-action in the local community.

Their main project, a food bank service, operated weekly, out of a Unitarian Church situated on the outer edge of the town centre, off a busy roundabout, next to a college and the local branch of Halfords. The Unitarian church provided use of the whole building, including a main hall and café space with fully equipped kitchen area, free of charge, and also provided some volunteers who worked alongside Org.B each week. The services offered included a hot

\(^{200}\) Taken from Org.B’s website, accessed 28/5/2015.
meal, food parcels, informal advice on a variety of issues such as immigration and income support, and also the distribution of donated clothing and household items. On commencing the project in April 2015, the project assisted less than 10 service users for the first few weeks. However, this capacity continued to expand rapidly, and on completion of my fieldwork the project now currently served around 100 hot meals and provided between 40-70 food parcels every week.

The food bank initiative was run entirely by volunteers and was funded through the charity’s 100% donations policy. Org.B received no formal funding or affiliation from local government bodies, and was supported entirely by local communities, individuals and businesses. As co-founder M had previously stated, the organisation was purposefully detached from any form of political narrative,\(^\text{202}\) yet in regards to my final research question, the organisation did express reference to a notion of ‘community cohesion’ as a key aspect of their work. Similarly, in terms of being a ‘faith-based organisation’, though Org.B did not designate itself as an ‘Islamic charity’, a strong religious motivation was often implied through use of quotes from various Hadith (narrations of the Prophet Muhammad) on publicity materials such as ‘He is not a believer who goes to bed satisfied while his neighbour goes hungry’. Yet in terms of public description, Org B. preferred to describe themselves inclusively as a ‘community organisation’, welcoming and encouraging participation from people of all religions and ethnicities.

\(^{202}\) Org.B Fieldnotes, 15/2/2016.
Fieldwork with Org.B predominantly consisted of weekly participant observation of the food bank project, with involvement in various areas of the operation including food preparation and service, assembling and running of the food bank area, shadowing and conducting initial assessments of service users, and assisting with cleaning up and stock check. In addition to this I also conducted numerous conversational-style interviews with individuals at the food bank, including volunteers and service users, and attended trustee meetings and events organised or attended by members of Org.B, such as the Iftar Event during Ramadan, and fundraising activities including leafleting in the town centre.

Organisation C

Organisation C (Org.C) was initiated through a spontaneous act of charity by a group of Sikhs in Manchester in December 2015. After attending a service at a local Gurdwara, and seeing the amount of leftover food from the traditional langar meal, a small group of worshippers decided to take the food out onto the streets to donate to the homeless in the city. As a result of this, the group decided to begin a weekly food distribution on a Sunday afternoon, based in a corner of Piccadilly Gardens, one of the busiest areas in Manchester city centre. Food is cooked, packed, and blessed at a nearby Gurdwara, before the group make their way to the regular spot in which they set up a makeshift market stall to hand out langar to the homeless and needy in the area, as well as hot drinks, snacks and essential clothing such as gloves and socks.
Key to an understanding of this organisation is the term *sewa*. A concept found within both Sikh and Hindu religious traditions, *sewa* literally means ‘service’, and finds expression in numerous ways; from cooking and serving the *langar* meal or cleaning the toilets inside the temple, to acts of charity and compassion outside of ‘religious space’ within wider society. The purpose of Org.C, as envisioned by the members of the organisation, was to ‘serve humanity’, and provide *langar* to anyone in need, in a way that is reflective of an altruistic interpretation of a traditional Sikh practice. In this way, the act of providing food to the homeless is heavily loaded with religious meaning and motivation, and evidences the organisation as being ‘faith-based’ in this sense.

However, since the start of this initiative, Org.C had also partnered with other organisations, including an informal homeless charity whose volunteers walk around the city to give out food several times a week, who now came to collect the *langar* to take to those who cannot or do not wish to visit the stall in Piccadilly Gardens for various reasons. This partnership resulted from a simple conversation as the group were passing by wearing high visibility vests with their logo, and one of the key members of Org.C approached them to ask about their work and offer to collaborate. Similarly, volunteers had also been recruited from members of the public who had simply asked to join and help out. From its beginnings within the Sikh community, the members of Org.C had become an eclectic mix of regular and occasional male and female volunteers, young and old, from various religious and ethnic backgrounds.

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In terms of funding, the initiative was initially funded through a “kitty” between those involved, before transferring to a system of weekly ‘sponsorship’ predominantly from families who are keen to fund the project for spiritual benefit or in memory of a loved one. The group have previously stated to myself that they do not wish to be funded by the local authority, and are critical of other local groups who have been funded to run similar projects due to their perceived misuse of funds. Org.C have however began to take donations from the passing public, and on completion of my fieldwork period were discussing becoming a registered charity for that reason.

My fieldwork with Org.C consisted of weekly participant observation and informal conversational-style interviews during preparation of food at the local Gurdwara, transportation to the site of the homeless feed, conducting the homeless feed service in Piccadilly gardens, and accompanying members of Org.C in excursions around the city in order to locate and assist other homeless individuals on multiple occasions.

These three organisations together provide a spectrum of ethnographic exploration not only across both fieldsites of Oldham and Manchester, but as operating both within and outside of the political sphere in which I locate my initial detailed policy document analysis. They therefore present the opportunity not only to use ethnography to explore the discursive findings of

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my policy document analysis in practice, but to also discover the parallel re-articulation, rejection or re-embodiment of such within the same locality. Yet in choosing to pursue ethnography as a central method, it is important to firstly rationalise my use of this methodology, and to take seriously the ethical requirements of doing so.

**Ethnography and Ethics**

All ethnographic fieldwork for this study was undertaken in adherence with University of Manchester ethical guidelines, procedures and protocol. The research design was approved by the research ethics committee before commencing, and full names of organisations and participants have been omitted throughout the thesis to retain anonymity.

Ethnographic methods including participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used to enquire on the following themes regarding these organisations:

- Religious characteristics of the organisation (e.g. single faith, interfaith)
- History and development of the organisation
- Demographic of those involved in the organisation (age, gender, ethnicity, religion etc.)
- Involvement in ‘social cohesion’ initiatives
- Perceived success or impact of the organisation
- Perceived limitations to success or impact of the organisation
- Funding and running of the organisation (e.g. government/council/independent)
- Political affiliation(s) of the organisation
- Future hopes or concerns of the organisation

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205 Sampling for participants/interviews aimed to reflect differing levels of participation such as leaders, employees, volunteers, etc.
Regarding methodology, it is important to consider both the strengths and limitations of conducting ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation and semi-structured or informal interviews. As Wulff states, ‘interviewing has developed into an increasingly sophisticated and multifaceted research technique’ and is now considered a core method in contemporary anthropology and other disciplines.\(^{206}\) Yet challenges to proper use of this method are always apparent, within both the basic endeavours of designing an effective interview guide, and practical struggles to develop significant rapport between interviewer and interviewee.\(^{207}\) Hence this has implication not only for primary data collection but also for post-fieldwork analysis and further research. As Wulff suggests, in many instances the interview is perhaps best utilised alongside participant observation, as a way to check and contextualise information gathered via each method.\(^{208}\) This is something I felt very strongly about with my fieldwork, as information from initial interviews with members of organisations was often later contradicted by prolonged participant observation.

In addition, it was also important that information obtained via participant observation was confirmed through use of subsequent informal interviews, as well as vice versa, and so my approach to ethnographic work aimed to retain a feedback mechanism that offers a more rounded analysis, particularly since the length of time spent in the field also allowed me in some instances to conduct informal opening and closing interviews that in some cases provided


\(^{207}\) Wulff, ‘Instances of Inspiration’, p.165.

\(^{208}\) Wulff, ‘Instances of Inspiration’, p.168.
fruitful comparative data. The use of interview is also of increasing value when large parts of social life are enacted ‘behind closed doors’ and ‘in front of computer screens... thus offering fewer opportunities for observable situations’.  

This held significance within some areas of my research, as an increasing amount of organisation and recruitment for social action now appears to take place in an online environment, via use of various social media and networking sites. In this sense, overall the interview forms a valuable ‘strategy for discovery’, and a way to uncover information that is not apparent through observation alone.

In terms of interview questioning, as Fielding and Thomas describe, there are two principles that inform good research interviews. Firstly, ‘questioning should be as open ended as possible, in order to gain spontaneous information rather than rehearsed positions’. This was a personal consideration when interviewing individuals within organisations about matters such as political affiliation, as participants may be consciously prepared with specific answers on this subject. Secondly, they suggest that ‘questioning techniques should encourage respondents to communicate underlying attitudes, beliefs and values, rather than glib or easy answers’. In other words, using umbrella style questions should provoke discussion or further interpretation, rather than simple yes or no answers, and allow interviewees to take the discussion into spontaneous and unprompted directions. Moreover, the interviewer’s

211 Fielding and Thomas, ‘Qualitative Interviewing’.
212 Fielding and Thomas, ‘Qualitative Interviewing’, p.249.
213 Fielding and Thomas, ‘Qualitative Interviewing’, p.249.
manner is also a key consideration in contributing to the openness of respondents, who may exhibit anxiety or fear of ‘being shown up’\textsuperscript{214} in response to certain styles of questioning.

The presence or demeanour of the researcher is also of significance when conducting participant observation. Traditionally, within anthropological disciplines, the practice of participant observation typically involved the full and prolonged immersion of oneself within a particular ‘culture’ or ‘community’ in order to study that particular group. However, as Crang and Cook discuss, nowadays research may consist of ‘studying a “community” that comes together in different places and at different times’ and hence ‘the constant “immersion” suggested in many anthropology texts will not be necessary or possible’.\textsuperscript{215} This was the case within my research, as my observation of individuals did not take place within the ‘everyday rhythms and routines’\textsuperscript{216} of these people, but in the participation of these individuals within a particular community or group at a specific point in time. Therefore, here participant observation is of a ‘community’ that is \textit{physically} transient, and so cannot be observed on a sustained day-to-day basis.

In terms of methodological challenges, this lack of immersion arguably may hinder the development of meaningful rapport with participants, and therefore present further concerns regarding issues such as the ‘Hawthorne Effect’, in which participants may alter or modify their behaviours as a result

\textsuperscript{214} Fielding and Thomas, ‘Qualitative Interviewing’, p.249.
\textsuperscript{216} Crang and Cook, \textit{Doing Ethnographies}, p.37.
of being observed or studied, thus potentially significantly distorting data
collection and research findings. As Evans advises, the task facing the
participant observation researcher is ‘the challenge of trying not to capture just
detailed descriptions of the constant unfolding of social interaction, but also
the significance of meaning of it for those who are taking part’. Therefore I
would argue that as Wulff suggests, the best way to utilise this methodology
is alongside other techniques such as interviewing, which I aimed to do
consistently within this fieldwork.

Through undertaking this methodological approach, I intended that extended
contact with organisations would allow me to conduct on-the-spot
congressions during participant observation, as opposed to pre-arranging
interviews which may have resulted in rehearsed or rigid responses from some
participants. Through this approach I aimed to gather interview data that was
more organic and free of presupposed or preconceived responses. However,
ethically this did present potential problems for issues of consent, as it was
difficult to constantly clarify that engaging in everyday conversation may in
fact render that individual a ‘research participant’. Therefore, though initial
consent was obtained via organisations on behalf of those involved, I was
careful to also remind people of my presence as a researcher and thus clarify
their potential involvement in this research.

218 Gillian Evans, ‘Practising Participant Observation: An Anthropologist’s Account’, Journal
Regarding participant observation, I was constantly aware of the possible influence of my presence on the behaviour of those being observed, and so tried to develop a good sense of rapport in an attempt to avoid this. I was conscious of my manner and demeanour during both participant observation and interviewing, aiming as Fielding and Thomas suggest, to be ‘neither condescending nor deferential’ and ‘display interest without appearing intrusive’.\textsuperscript{220} However, concerted efforts again had to be made to continuously reassert my status as researcher, as at times it became difficult to retain this boundary due to prolonged befriending of participants.

Finally, in terms of ethical considerations regarding the topics touched upon by the research, I was keen to remain aware of the potential for conversations, in this case regarding religious beliefs and ‘social cohesion’ issues such as racism and Islamophobia, to provoke strong responses in participants. However, fortunately much of the research took place in multicultural and multi-religious environments in which discussions of this type are commonplace, and hence were unlikely to provoke strong reactions. Nevertheless, effort was still consistently made to avoid any distress to participants.

\footnote{Fielding and Thomas, ‘Qualitative Interviewing’, p.249.}
Conventional Compliance, Rhetorics of Rejection and Alternative Articulations: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of ‘Policy in Practice’

In its general approach to research, this thesis presents purposeful methodological tensions that act to disrupt traditional approaches to ‘policy in practice’ and the academic analyses of both ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’. Through this approach, I will attempt to expose persistent presentations of a lingering ‘world religions paradigm’ frequently found within political postulations regarding the management of pluralism, and to explore the ways in which organisations comply, contradict, or re-construct these narratives. Key to this, through my particular choice of methodology, I aim to locate British political expressions of ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ as discourse, before then seeking to uncover potential ambiguities in practice. The research therefore seeks to avoid tendencies to simply look for instances of ‘policy in practice’, instead striving for a more multi-dimensional analysis of discourse that takes account not only of conventional compliance but also of rhetorics of rejection which call into question the efficacy of the discourse itself.

The initial use of detailed policy document analysis acts as a springboard into fieldwork, in providing a reference point for identifying the output of ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse in practice, the rejection of such, and subsequent alternative articulations of this discursive relationship. My particular approach to policy document analysis, informed by key aspects and ideas drawn from formal discourse analysis, is what allows for an approach to research that does not merely present examples of policy in practice, but exposes the mechanisms by which practice also evades and impacts upon
policy, through a discursive counter flow of ideas and innovations regarding cohesion and social interaction. In other words, this detailed policy document analysis allows for the recognition and deconstruction of ‘the profound role of talk and texts in everyday life’, and subsequent fieldwork allows for the explicit ethnographic exploration of this.

As Philips and Hardy have argued, ‘ethnographies often aim at uncovering the meaning of a social reality for participants but are less concerned with how that social reality came into existence through the constructive effects of various discourses and associated texts’. Therefore the combining of these two methodological approaches allows for a more holistic analysis of ‘social cohesion’ as a constructed reality, through simultaneous examination of how policy acts to crystallize discourse, and the ways in which organisations and individuals engage with this discourse. I would also suggest that the necessity of ethnography here is not only in observing the discourse ‘in action’, but also in providing what Geertz describes as a ‘thick description’, of the nuanced ways in which aspects are inverted or alternatively articulated in subtle yet significant ways. In other words, put simply, emphasis must be placed not only on observing actions or behaviours, but also understanding the importance of ‘context’ as a key to analysing ethnographic data. For example, though from a first glance an organization may appear to be aligned with, or representative of, a typical ‘interfaith’ model, in reality the intricacies of relations, everyday

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221 Philips and Hardy, ‘What is Discourse Analysis.’
222 Philips and Hardy, ‘What is Discourse Analysis.’
operationalization and self-expression, uncovered only though long-term ethnography, may in fact reveal a very different reality.

On the whole, the methodological approach of this research holds the key to its success as a fresh academic output regarding ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’. Not only does the use of detailed policy document analysis combined with ethnography provide a disjuncture from previous studies of ‘social cohesion’ as a measurable phenomenon, the centrality of the notion of ‘faith’ to this investigation also presents a twist on a topic typically centred on ethnic and racial difference. This approach offers opportunities to explore how everyday interactions with practical frameworks apparently located in the prevailing discourse, may in fact provide a critique of that discourse, thus allowing for the ethnographic exploration of the contrary development of new mechanisms for action and innovation, rooted in devotional practice and the rejection of rigid rhetorics of ‘representation and engagement’.
Chapter 4
Social Actors, Shared Values and Strategic Assets: Examining the Role of ‘Faith’ in UK Social Cohesion Policy since 2001

Introduction

Amongst both academics and policy makers, recent decades have seen increasing interest in defining, measuring and promoting a notion of ‘social cohesion’. Yet despite its apparent proliferation, its precise definition is often contested by academics and variably constructed by policy makers. Since the 1990s in particular, policy makers in countries such as Canada and the UK have utilised the term to denote a ‘condition for political stability, a source of well-being and of economic growth and as a justification for public spending on social policies’,\(^{224}\) and for many, ‘social cohesion represents a central societal goal at the national and supranational level’.\(^{225}\) Plainly, the pursuit of ‘cohesion’ has remained a key consideration for governments across Europe and North America, and is often used to link up different policy areas as a term whose lack is used to explain social issues of the day such as unemployment, poverty and discrimination.\(^{226}\)

As Chan et al. suggest, ‘the policy discourse on ‘social cohesion’ is essentially problem-driven’ and ‘talk of “cohesion” is largely a reaction to the many new social cleavages’,\(^{227}\) such as most recently the issues related to increasing religious and ethnic pluralism in countries such as the UK. Within a UK

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\(^{224}\) Klein, ‘Social Capital or ‘social cohesion,’ p.892.
\(^{225}\) Berger-Schmitt, ‘Social Cohesion as an Aspect of the Quality of Societies,’ p.28.
\(^{227}\) Chan et al., ‘Reconsidering ‘social cohesion,’ p.279.
context, as I discussed in chapter two, the development of a British ‘social cohesion’ discourse centred predominantly on the management of racial, cultural and ethnic difference, follows several decades of political contention that have seen significant shifts in this area of social policy. In the 1960s, discourses of assimilationism and integrationism propagated and encouraged the dissipation of ethnic and cultural difference as an ideal. Substantial changes then followed in the 1980s and 90s, with the development of a discourse of ‘multiculturalism’ based on a foundation that aimed to combat discrimination, and to equate cultural diversity with equal opportunity and mutual tolerance; a shift argued by Vertovec to have marked the ‘acceptance of ethnic pluralism as a long-term feature of society’.

However, since 2001, approaches related to ethnic diversity and segregation have displayed a strategic shift away from multiculturalist notions of ‘celebrating difference’, and towards the development of a discursive form of ‘social cohesion’, based on a perceived need to develop a sense of commonality amongst the diverse groups and communities that constitute Great Britain.

This notion was first articulated in the now infamous ‘Cantle Report’, through the deployment of the term ‘community cohesion’. In this report, ‘community cohesion’ was defined as a ‘process dedicated to establishing commonality, from, and within, diversity’, and a way to address increasing ethnic tensions exemplified in the disturbances seen in summer 2001 in the

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229 Cantle, *Community Cohesion*.

230 McGhee, ‘Moving to “our” common ground,’ p.381.
Northern towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, considered as the catalyst for the report. Yet perhaps most significantly, ‘community cohesion’ represents the inception of a distinctly British brand of ‘social cohesion’ discourse in UK public policy.

The Cantle Report called for the promotion of ‘community cohesion’, based upon ‘a greater knowledge of, contact between, and respect for, the various cultures that now make Great Britain such a rich and diverse nation’. In aiming to counter the perceived non-integration of immigrant communities, and to bridge the gap between ‘shared values and a celebration of diversity’, the report sought the establishment of a ‘greater sense of citizenship’ based on a set of ‘common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community’.

What is of particular interest to my research is that these developments are also coupled with an explicit religious-turn, away from challenges surrounding differences of race or ethnicity, and towards challenges presented by religious diversity, a notion identified by scholars such as Chris Allen, and as I will argue, evidenced clearly in UK policy. Notions like ‘community cohesion’, originally developed to discuss ways to tackle ‘ethnic tensions’ have been increasingly interwoven with concepts related to religious diversity. Yet interestingly, emphasis is often placed on notions related to the term ‘faith’, and particularly ‘interfaith’, exemplified by a 2002 Local Government

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231 Cantle, *Community Cohesion*, p.10.  
232 Cantle, *Community Cohesion*.  
Association document entitled *Faith and Community: A Good Practice Guide for Local Authorities* stating that ‘the promotion of interfaith co-operation can encourage the development of greater mutual trust and understanding and can play a valuable role in enhancing social cohesion’. Interestingly, ‘faith’ is posited as the answer to tackling issues related to religious diversity, a trend that continues to be evidenced to the present day.

These policies are often permeated by terms such as ‘shared values’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘dialogue’, of which ‘faith groups’ in particular are noted to be a rich repository. As a result, with religion moving up the political agenda, we can also observe the emergence of policy structures around engagement with ‘faith communities’, and a significant shift in which faith organisations that were previously ‘habitually excluded from receiving public grants’ due to emphasis instead being placed on race and culture, now viewed as ‘potentially important social (and public) actors’. Subsequently, key areas of interest began to permeate discussions of ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ policy, namely around themes related to social action and ‘interfaith’ work. Yet despite this, the potentially divisive effects of religious diversity, and the potential for fundamentalist and extremist incarnations, also remained major concerns for central and local government, resulting in an apparent juxtaposition of religion as a barrier, and ‘faith’ a benefit to ‘cohesion’.

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236 Hussain, ‘Social Policy, Cultural Integration and Faith,’ p.628.
In this chapter I will begin to examine the developing relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ in UK public policy from 2001 to 2016, tracing the initiation of associated discourses related to ‘interfaith dialogue’ and ‘faith-based social action’ that underpin governmental strategic approaches to the management of ethnic and religious pluralism. By mapping key moments in national policy, and analysing the translation of this into local policies within two field sites in Greater Manchester, in this chapter I begin to demonstrate how government strategies regarding the conception and operationalization of notions of ‘faith’, and the development and deployment of formal ‘interfaith’ structures, have had a direct impact on the conception of bounded ‘faith communities’, and as a result have often limited the levels of engagement and consultation to within the confines of these structures. In addition, I will also discuss more recent attempts to promote more informal localised or ‘grassroots’ initiatives, following a key shift in government policy seen in 2008, in which ‘faith’ becomes entangled in ‘Big Society’ narratives of ‘social action’ and civic renewal.

Through this I lay the groundwork for later analysis of ethnographic work in the following three chapters, exploring the contra-indication of ‘faith’ discourses rooted in policy, and religiously motivated action in practice, highlighting examples of South Asian communities in particular, who pursue a notion of ‘social cohesion’ arguably devoid of ‘faith’ discourse, instead presenting examples of an approach to social action rooted strongly in religious practice. I will refer to this phenomenon as ‘socio-religious action’.
Significantly, though South Asian religious traditions are often heavily considered within spheres of public policy,\(^{237}\) research regarding the involvement of these communities in the ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’ narratives in which these policies have become increasingly framed is sparse. Therefore, in undertaking this research I aim to not only contribute directly to existing literature in this field, but to also provide a fresh output regarding South Asian diasporic religious practice in critical conversation with policy narratives in which these practices are considerably under-represented and overlooked.

**Conceptualising ‘Faith’ in Policy**

As discussed in chapter two, since the inception of ‘community cohesion’ in 2001, notions of ‘faith’ have been variously conceptualised and operationalised within national policy and strategy. And so, central to this research is a conscious and continued effort to interrogate the normative use of terms such as ‘faith’, ‘faith community’, and ‘faith-based’ as given categories in both a theoretical and a practical sense. As Smith argues, government interventions regarding ‘faith’ are often ‘highly pragmatic and unsophisticated in theoretical understanding’,\(^{238}\) and thus may fail to account for the complexities surrounding assumed notions such as the composition of ‘faith communities’, an issue I will explore in more detail here in this chapter. As I have suggested,

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\(^{237}\) It has been observed that Muslim communities in particular have come under substantial and somewhat inequitable scrutiny within public policy developments since 2001 (see Hussain, 2012), mostly with regards to the development of a Prevention of Violent Extremism or ‘PVE’ rhetoric.

\(^{238}\) Smith, ‘Faith in Community and Communities of Faith?’, p.192.
scholars such as Dinham have highlighted how policy often has a tendency to homogenize ‘faith’ traditions, habitually talking ‘as though there is one observable and graspmable “thing” called “faith” which represents something of value for society’.239 This arguably results in the reinforcement of a false ‘world religions paradigm’ that fails to account for the lived reality of religious traditions across the UK,240 and thus hinders policy in this area from having clear understanding and producing effective representation and engagement strategies. Additionally, we can also observe an ‘assumed cohesion within and between faith groups’ coupled with a perceived ‘threat of conflict arising out of religious difference’.241 Therefore religion and ‘faith’, though commonly perceived as synonymous terms, are consistently presented as distinctly different concepts.

As I will demonstrate, this can be evidenced in various key policy documents and government outputs, in which ‘faith’ is consistently presented as having the potential to be a ‘unifying force’, while religion and religious identity are often referenced as factors that ‘separate people from the wider community’.242 Yet again it is important to stress that my analytical emphasis here on the whole is solely on the conception and operationalization of the term ‘faith’ in relation to ‘social cohesion’. Likewise, it is also due to this emphasis on ‘social cohesion’, that I also avoid analysis of policy related to the prevention of violent extremism (PVE), in order to provide clarity in

239 Dinham, Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society, p.16.
240 Hirst and Zavos, Religious Traditions in Modern South Asia.
241 Dinham, The Multi-faith Paradigm in Policy and Practice: Problems, Challenges, Directions, p.582.
examining the discursive development of ‘social cohesion’, and retain a clear distinction between these two political narratives.

To be clear, the analysis I provide here is also not an exhaustive list of all materials that discuss ‘cohesion’, but an overview of crucial markers in the development of a ‘social cohesion’ discourse. Specifically, I intend to examine government outputs including reports, policy documents and speeches, that present the notion of ‘faith’ directly in relation to this discourse from 2001 onwards.

However, bearing this starting date in mind, though I have discussed the 2001 Cantle report at some length in chapter two with regards to the notion of ‘social cohesion’, it is important to note that this report is not included here in my chronological analysis. This is simply because reference to ‘faith’ is in fact somewhat limited within the document, as emphasis is instead placed primarily on ethnic difference in relation to the riots that stimulated the composition of the report. As a result, analysis of government outputs begins with documents following the report that utilize the language of Cantle’s ‘community cohesion’ as a baseline for the development ‘faith’ in relation to a wider ‘social cohesion’ discourse.

In general, as I will argue, since 2001 we can observe the increasing inclusion of ‘faith’ as a key consideration in the management of pluralism and the development of a ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse in the UK. Subsequently in an institutional sense, a clear push towards the incorporation of ‘faith’ within the Voluntary and Community sector in terms of a ‘joint voice’ is also evident,
facilitated by developments in infrastructure that allow ‘faith groups’ to begin to broker relationships and partnerships with local authorities and other ‘non-faith’ and Third Sector bodies and organisations. These notions are evidenced through detailed analysis of a timeline of key policy documents and government outputs that I will now present, in examining the increasing significance of ‘faith’ in the development of ‘social cohesion’ discourse in UK policy.

Guidance on Community Cohesion – 2002

(LGA, ODPM, Home Office, CRE, Inter Faith Network UK)

The first of these key policy documents is a paper published by the Local Government Agency (LGA), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), The Home Office, The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Inter Faith Network on 1st May 2002, entitled Guidance on Community Cohesion. The document was the first of its kind in aiming to provide practical guidance for local authorities and their partners in ‘strengthening and building community cohesion’,243 and here I will attempt to outline the way in which it presents the notion of ‘social cohesion’, the solutions it proposes, and role of ‘faith’ in this particular policy context.

As I have discussed, the rise of the term ‘community cohesion’ presents a significant step in UK policy away from a previous multiculturalist discourse of ‘celebrating difference’, towards the recognition of a perceived need to develop a sense of commonality amongst the diverse groups and communities that constitute Great Britain. As this first 2002 LGA document states, ‘the message must be that cultural pluralism and integration are not incompatible’. In this document, the notion of ‘community cohesion’ is outlined and practical guidance is offered for the first time to ‘assist all local authorities (from the largest counties to the smallest districts) and their partners in strengthening and building community cohesion’. The policy recognises the ‘importance of working for ‘social cohesion’, and explicitly ascertains a need to ‘translate our understanding of the issues raised into practical action to improve the situation on the ground’, identifying the entities contained within these issues as located within ‘community divisions’ related to race and religion amongst other factors.

Significantly, here this notion of ‘community divisions’ rests largely on a conception of community that is inclusive of ‘ethnic and cultural diversity’, and therefore these divisions are defined as being a cause of ‘fracturing within and across local areas and local communities’. In other words, ‘the community’

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245 The document provides a ‘broad working definition’ of a ‘cohesive community’ as one where: ‘there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods’ (LGA, 2002:6).
is conceived as a unified entity produced locally, containing elements of difference such as race or religion, that hold potential to provoke conflict and discord, and therefore impact directly on an overall notion of ‘community cohesion’.

In defining the ‘actors’ within this plan of action, the document calls for ‘strong local leadership from all sections of the community’, with local authorities as the ‘key drivers of change... working hand in hand with their partners at local level’, including public, voluntary, community and private sectors.251 In addition, ‘faith leaders’ and the ‘faith sector’ also play a key role here, identified as valuable assets within the proposed system of partnership working, with the development of ‘interfaith structures at a local level’ argued to provide ‘a valuable framework both for promoting mutual understanding and cooperation... and as a mechanism for consultation by the local authority and other public bodies’.252 On the whole, the approach is one of ‘unity in diversity’,253 in both a civic and a strategic sense, with calls to develop strong formal local strategic partnerships, as well as grassroots engagement and the development of ‘positive relationships’.254

The basis of the body of ‘guidance’ contained within the document is geared towards ‘raising awareness and understanding to break down barriers, developing shared values and mutual respect and trust’,255 through an

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251 LGA, *Guidance on Community Cohesion*, p.4.
emphasis on the importance of education in particular as a key aspect of this.256 Yet exactly what these perceived ‘barriers’ and the proposed ‘shared values’ offered as solutions consist of, remains largely undefined, other than recognition that they will differ in each local authority as evidently ‘each area’s economic and social make-up is unique’.257 Moreover, though the policy proposes various practical measures such as the development of conflict resolution strategies258 and a ‘work programme’ which may include: a programme of ‘myth busting’ to counter ‘traditional stereotypes’, an ‘ongoing series of events and programmes to foster openness and cross-cultural contact’, and developing ‘festivals and celebrations that involve all communities’,259 the notion of ‘community cohesion’ remains an elusive entity underpinning numerous statements of intent. However, a number of desired outcomes are identified, which may be seen to provide a more explicit vision for precisely what developments in a wider ‘vision’ of ‘cohesion’ actually look like on the ground.260

With regards to religion and more specifically, ‘faith’, while the document contains the explicit recognition of dynamics such as inter-cultural and ethnic diversity as a source of ‘tensions and divisions’,261 it also cites the specific need to combat ‘inter-religious tension and conflict’, hence pointing this out as a

256 LGA, Guidance on Community Cohesion, p.34.
257 LGA, Guidance on Community Cohesion, p.5.
258 LGA, Guidance on Community Cohesion, p.8.
259 LGA, Guidance on Community Cohesion, p.13.
260 These outcomes are stated as: an improvement in community cohesion for the local area; a reduction in racial and inter-religious tension and conflict; a reduction in perceived or actual inequalities for all sections of the local community; creating value from the diversity of the local community; adding to the quality of life and sense of well-being; and greater participation and involvement in civic life from all sectors of the community (LGA, 2002:14).
261 LGA, Guidance on Community Cohesion, p.4.
significant potential barrier to the notion of ‘cohesion’. Yet the report also provides statements referring to ‘faith’ as a category of group identification, suggesting that ‘at community level it is important to foster understanding and respect between different faith traditions as well as between different cultural and ethnic groups’.  

Additionally, the document also presents ‘faith’ as the source of ‘shared’ and ‘fundamental’ values present in all religious traditions, stating that ‘all major faiths promote equality and respect for others as a fundamental value’ and as such can provide ‘a real resource in the practical implementation of community cohesion strategies’. Therefore the document presents religion and ‘faith’ as separate and disparate entities, drawing them into a developing ‘social cohesion’ discourse, in which ‘faith leaders’ in particular are regarded as crucial to the development of infrastructure to enable effective government engagement with ‘faith communities’ in order to combat ‘inter-religious tensions’.

(LGA, ICRC, Home Office, Inter Faith Network UK)

At the same time, LGA, this time in collaboration with the Inner Cities Religious Council, Home Office Active Community Unit and The Inter Faith Network for the UK, also produced a document entitled Faith and Community: A Good Practice Guide for Local Authorities, which again recognised ‘faith groups’ as ‘an important part of the voluntary and community

sector... [having] a valuable contribution to make... in building a sense of local community and in renewing civil society’.\textsuperscript{265} This acknowledgement arguably marks the initiation of the institutional incorporation of ‘faith’ within the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) as a ‘joint voice’,\textsuperscript{266} facilitated by the aforementioned developments infrastructure that allow ‘faith groups’ to begin to broker relationships and partnerships with local authorities and other ‘non-faith’ and Third Sector bodies and organisations.\textsuperscript{267} As Dinham et al. states, though the Third Sector has retained a key role in government policy for a generation, it is only recently [in the past two decades] that we have begun to see ‘faith’ and ‘faith communities’ drawn into this framework alongside other parts of the sector.\textsuperscript{268} However, yet again the paradox of religion as a barrier and ‘faith’ a benefit to ‘cohesion’ still remains, largely in discussion of reasons why local authorities should actively engage with ‘faith communities’, with reference made to ‘the context of the increasing religious diversity of the UK,’ as both a potential threat to ‘shared citizenship’ and something to be ‘celebrated and encouraged’.\textsuperscript{269} In addition, ‘interfaith’ work is again emphasised, with the guide stating that

\begin{quote}
The promotion of inter faith co-operation can encourage the development of greater mutual trust and understanding and can play a valuable role in enhancing ‘social cohesion’ within the local community.\textsuperscript{270}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{266} Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
\textsuperscript{267} Dinham, ‘The Multi-faith Paradigm in Policy and Practice’, p.578.
\textsuperscript{269} LGA, \textit{Faith and Community}, pp.7-8.
\textsuperscript{270} LGA, \textit{Faith and Community}, p.22.
Therefore, again we begin to see lines drawn directly between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, based predominantly here on ‘interfaith’ participation and collaboration, a theme we later see reinforced by various funding pathways and initiatives such as the most recent Near Neighbours Programme.\textsuperscript{271} As a result, ‘interfaith’ configurations are upheld as strategic assets to ‘cohesion’ work, with the guide encouraging the development of ‘umbrella’ organisations and ‘representative councils’ for the purpose of providing local authorities with ‘a structured point of connection with the ‘faith communities’ in their area’.\textsuperscript{272}

**Partnership for the Common Good: Inter Faith Structures and Local Government – 2003**

(LGA, ICRC, Home Office, Inter Faith Network UK & Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)

A year later, the same collection of organisations, LGA, ICRC, Home Office, Inter Faith Network UK, along with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, published yet another good practice guide, this time with regards to the establishment of the aforementioned ‘interfaith’ configurations. The booklet entitled, *Partnership for the Common Good: Inter Faith Structures and Local Government*, intended to outline ‘issues involved in working with and helping establish multi faith initiatives... in particular the context of partnership working between inter faith structures and local government’.\textsuperscript{273} It states the

\textsuperscript{271} See http://www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours

\textsuperscript{272} LGA, *Faith and Community*, p.22.

intents of central and local government in ‘exploring ways to gain the input of people of faith’, and posits the contribution of local ‘inter faith groups’ and councils in ‘strengthening social cohesion’. Here interestingly, as in the previous two documents, we see the terms ‘social’ and ‘community [cohesion]’ used almost synonymously. This demonstrates the way in which a wider notion of a ‘social cohesion’ is being carved out in policy, to form a British brand of ‘cohesion’ discourse, articulated through the phrase ‘community cohesion’. This phrase is still recognised and deployed to this day, despite the change in governmental party political rhetoric, as I will later evidence through ethnographic data.

This particular report though, considers a variety of local ‘interfaith’ bodies and organisations as exemplary in developing ‘community cohesion’, through ‘bringing people of different faiths together... giving advice on religious issues to local public service providers’, and reducing ‘racial and inter-religious tension and conflict’. The booklet highlights the possibilities for various ‘types of local inter faith body’ to suit differing local contexts, and provides details of three different ‘options’:

- A relatively informal inter faith group, association or network where people of different faiths come together for discussion
- A “council of faiths” with more formal representation from all the main faiths in the area... [that] usually have a programme of events to deepen inter faith understanding and cooperation but, because of their representative nature, can also be used as policy sounding boards by outside bodies such as local government

274 Partnership for the Common Good, p.3.
275 Partnership for the Common Good, p.9.
276 Partnership for the Common Good, p.3.
277 Partnership for the Common Good, p.4.
- A multifaith partnership... set up by or with the assistance of local authorities to create a mechanism for nominating to the Local Strategic Partnership and giving input to this and other initiatives\(^\text{278}\)

Through these descriptions, most notably within the second option in particular, we again see engagement with ‘people of faith’ formed around notions of ‘major faiths’ and ‘representatives’ of such as ‘mechanisms’ for liaison with local government and Local Strategic Partnerships. In this way, though the approach aims to provide equal representation, it in essence merely demonstrates the aforementioned arguments of Dinham\(^\text{279}\) and Smith\(^\text{280}\) regarding the homogenization of ‘faith groups’ and the lack of theoretical understanding with regards to the composition of and incongruities within these assumed ‘communities’ in this sphere of public policy. Again, this contributes directly to the reinforcement of a typical ‘world religions paradigm’ in which ‘faiths’ are viewed as ‘self-contained, objective realities’\(^\text{281}\) that bear little resemblance to the lived reality of religious traditions. Therefore, on the whole, though attempting to applaud the benefits of ‘inter faith groups and councils’ in engaging with local government and promoting ‘cohesion’, the framework for this engagement itself arguably also establishes additional barriers to ‘cohesion’, this time not in the form of ‘tensions and conflict’, but in the structural sense regarding criteria related to ‘major faiths’ that may in fact look very different at a grass roots level.

\(^{278}\) Partnership for the Common Good, p.5.
\(^{279}\) Dinham, Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society.
\(^{280}\) Smith, ‘Faith in Community and Communities of Faith?’
\(^{281}\) Hirst and Zavos, Religious Traditions in Modern South Asia, p.21.
Working Together: Cooperation Between Government and Faith Communities –2004

(Home Office Faith Communities Unit)

Following this, in a shift away from the institutional context of LGA-based policy collaborations, in February 2004 The Home Office Faith Communities Unit produced a report entitled, *Working Together: Cooperation Between Government and Faith Communities*. As Jawad notes, this document stressed the ‘value of public authorities at all levels working in partnership with faith communities’, including key government departments and agencies, highlighting several examples of good practice of these departments in gaining ‘faith literacy’. This perhaps presents a moment in which ‘faith’ becomes operationalised not just in reference to localised notions of ‘cohesion’, as seen in the Cantle report, but as a national concern, therefore calling for wider engagement and consultation.

As Zavos states, the document provides guidelines and ‘clear indications as to how religion should have a voice in government in the environment of community cohesion’, namely through ‘organisational tropes which demonstrate representation of “the community”’. Through these requirements, ‘faith communities’ are asked to ‘speak with a common voice’, based on an organisational tendency towards a paradigm of ethnically

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homogenous ‘world religions’. Inevitably this leads to a reification of the diversity of religious traditions in the UK, and a distortion of government engagement and consultation with these groups. As McGhee describes it, recommendations in the report aim towards the transformation of the landscape of faith-based organizations in order to improve the Government’s consultation with faith communities... achieved through encouraging faith communities to form (if they have not already) over-arching ‘umbrella’ organizations that represent and include all groups, traditions and denominations in wider faith communities.

Therefore, though the report again also highlights the importance of ‘interfaith’ structures, the significance of this is largely in the form of a way for ‘faith communities’ to build stronger collective links and develop greater capacity for engagement with both local and national government. In other words, through this not only are individual ‘faith groups’ asked to ‘speak with a common voice’, but all ‘faith communities' are also asked to come together collectively to ‘develop a common approach' in order to ‘work productively’ with government. In this way, though the report proposes to afford some flexibility for ‘faith groups’ regarding ‘what kind of representative structures they should or can create’, they are subsequently encouraged to demonstrate their organisational coherence through prerequisites for successful engagement. These include ‘com(ing) to the consultation table with a position that has been negotiated and agreed in advance with as wide as

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287 McGhee, ‘Patriots of the future?’.  
288 Home Office Faith Communities Unit, Working Together, p.34.  
289 Home Office Faith Communities Unit, Working Together, p.37.  
290 Home Office Faith Communities Unit, Working Together, p.37.  
291 Home Office Faith Communities Unit, Working Together, p.34.
possible a range of traditions and organisations within the community',\textsuperscript{292} therefore in effect inherently endorsing the growth of a particular type of organisation.

Overall, as Dinham has highlighted, the foreword alone makes reference to ‘faith communities’ no less than five times,\textsuperscript{293} and on the whole the report demonstrates an explicit and increasing recognition of ‘faith’ as a key asset to delivering ‘community cohesion’, and presents subsequent attempts by government to locate, and speak to ‘faith communities’, through developing a conception of what legitimately constitutes community, thus providing a framework to develop representation through the appointment of community leaders as stakeholders, and encouraging the development of official organisations as mechanisms for state consultation and engagement. Thus overall the report presents a strategic approach to religious plurality in the UK centred on ‘organisations and traditions’ rather than people,\textsuperscript{294} and on the legitimacy of ‘faith groups’ based on their ability to form these appropriate structures of representation and engagement, rather than their lived and ‘imagined’\textsuperscript{295} community identities.


(Home Office)

A year later, we again see the re-emergence of ‘faith’ within the framework of

\textsuperscript{292} Home Office Faith Communities Unit, *Working Together*, p.34.
\textsuperscript{293} Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.64.
\textsuperscript{295} Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 
‘social cohesion’ policy, now articulated almost entirely through the language of ‘community cohesion’,296 in the form of a Home Office strategic report entitled *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*.297 This report also crucially came with an attached £7.5 million funding programme for ‘faith groups’ to ‘build capacity’ in order to ‘promote understanding and dialogue’ and develop ‘better government engagement’,298 namely, the ‘Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund’ (FCCBF), administered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). What is significant here is that again ‘faith communities’ are being asked to develop appropriate structures for engagement, with calls to ‘build leadership in faith groups’,299 leading to additional ‘mushrooming’ of various groups and organisations and infrastructures.300 Here, arguably ‘faith groups’ are again being instructed to appoint leaders merely for the purpose of representation and consultation at a strategic level, in what McGhee refers to as an overall ‘risk management’ approach to religion and ‘cohesion’.301 In other words, though these policies are presented as strategies to ‘improve cohesion’,302 in reality they attempt to foresee and preclude opposing issues of polarisation, disintegration and extremism.303

However, a progress report in 2007, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*, Both reports frequently use the phrase ‘community cohesion’ throughout, and make reference to the term ‘social cohesion’ only once.
300 Interview with North West Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8th December 2015.
301 McGhee, ‘Patriots of the future?’.
303 McGhee, ‘Patriots of the future?’.
Society: Two Years On, produced by the newly created Department for Communities and Local Government, announced a second round of the ‘Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund’, this time placing more emphasis on supporting ‘interfaith’ groups, programmes and forums. In addition, there is also mention of ‘developing the role of faith communities in wider social action and regeneration’, a notion that as we will see is later brought to the forefront of this policy area, as a driving force for ‘cohesion’. As a result, it could be argued that earlier strategies regarding the development of ‘faith leaders’ and ‘single faith’ structures were an exercise in creating capacity, predominantly as a prerequisite to the subsequent push towards the notion of ‘interfaith’. In other words, one has to first create and solidify individual conceptions of ‘faith communities’ before these communities can work together and engage in ‘interfaith’ work.

Our Shared Future – 2007

(Commission on Integration and Cohesion)

In the same year another key document also shed significant light on this increasing perceived need for ‘interfaith work’ and ‘intercultural dialogue’. The document entitled Our Shared Future was the final report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, a fixed term advisory body tasked with assessing how local areas can make the most of diversity while being able

305 DCLG, Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: Two Years On, p.91.
to respond to the tensions it may cause.

Again we also see religion presented as a ‘divisive... factor that separates people from the wider community’,\(^{307}\) while ‘faith’ is upheld as a ‘unifying force’, particularly in reference to the ‘recommendation that inter faith councils be developed locally’.\(^{308}\) It also calls for public agencies to develop ‘religious literacy... to establish effective patterns of engagement with religion and belief groups as part of wider public engagement’.\(^{309}\) Interestingly, there are also strong conclusions and recommendations regarding the development of ‘every day civility’ and ‘meaningful contact’ between diverse groups and individuals.\(^{310}\) This provides a sharp step away from the structural and towards the social, specifically within four key spheres identified within the report: schools, workplace, sport/culture/leisure, and shared public spaces/residential areas.\(^{311}\)

These calls for interaction may be seen to form part of a developing rhetoric regarding more localized and micro-scale approaches to ‘cohesion’ that avoid the umbrella style structures seen previously, and simply seek to connect individuals and communities within towns and neighbourhoods without the need for leaders or stakeholders. This allows for a more grassroots approach to ‘cohesion’ work that is devoid of the strategic governmental engagement seen in previous policies above, and significantly, following the economic

\(^{307}\) CIC, Our Shared Future, p.86.  
^{308} CIC, Our Shared Future, p.87.  
^{309} CIC, Our Shared Future, p.87.  
^{310} CIC, Our Shared Future, p.112.  
^{311} CIC, Our Shared Future, p.110.
crash of 2007/08, marks the beginning of a dissolving and devolving of large-scale infrastructure and capacity funding. As Kalra and Kapoor note, *Our Shared Future* places emphasis on ‘tackling what are perceived as national problems in a local way’,\(^{312}\) working towards collective action and ‘an integrated and cohesive community’.\(^{313}\) This is something we see come to fruition through the development of a ‘faith-based social action’ discourse embodied by a key document the following year.

Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in Our Multifaith Society – 2008

(DCLG)

*Face to Face and Side by Side*,\(^{314}\) published by DCLG in 2008, marks a significant policy shift in what Dinham refers to as the ‘multi-faith paradigm’.\(^{315}\) The policy builds upon the statement that ‘faith has the potential to be an immense force for good in all our communities’, as ‘faith communities’ play an ‘active’ role in ‘practical acts of social concern’.\(^{316}\) Building upon aforementioned assertions made in *Our Shared Future* regarding localized approaches to ‘cohesion’ and interaction between individuals, the report presents a strategic partnership framework for ‘faith communities’ to work together, structured around four ‘building blocks’ of ‘developing confidence


\(^{313}\) CIC, *Our Shared Future*, p.42.


\(^{315}\) Dinham, ‘The Multi-faith Paradigm in Policy and Practice: Problems, Challenges, Directions’.

\(^{316}\) DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side*, p.5.
and skills to “bridge” and “link”; shared spaces for interaction; structures and processes which support dialogue and social action; and opportunities for learning which build understanding’. As Dinham has noted, through these ‘building blocks’, ‘social capital is repeatedly used as the primary lens for understanding community cohesion and active citizenship through faith communities’, both between ‘people sharing the same religion or belief’ and across and beyond traditions.

The recommendations of the final report of the CIC provide some of the basis for a new policy framework, coupling the importance of previous discourses of ‘interfaith dialogue’ (albeit on a more localized scale devoid of umbrella organisations) together with a new recognition of social action as an operational force for ‘cohesion’ within and between ‘faith groups’ and wider society. As the document states, the overall aim is

> to create more local opportunities both for face to face dialogue which supports a greater understanding of shared values as well as an appreciation of distinctiveness; and for side by side collaborative social action where people come together and share their time, energy and skills to improve their local neighbourhood.\(^\text{320}\)

Importantly, this is the moment in which we see the development of a strongly articulated ‘faith-based social action’ narrative that presents a critical shift to the strategic conception of ‘faith’ in UK ‘social cohesion’ policy. From

\(^{317}\) DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side*, p.9.
\(^{318}\) Dinham, *Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis*, p.61.
\(^{319}\) DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side*, p.27.
\(^{320}\) DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side*, p.8.
assertions towards ‘faith groups’ and leaders centred on ‘talking’, either amongst themselves or to central or local government, in this document, merit is now being given to ‘doing’ as a way to develop relationships within, between and beyond ‘faith traditions’. In this way, ‘faith’ is still being operationalized as a category of group identification, and as that which encapsulates the ‘shared values’ amongst religious traditions, but is also crucially upheld as a source of social capital in recognizing the longstanding contribution of ‘faith-based’ organisations to social action and civic renewal. In addition, key to this is also a scaling-down of the notion of ‘community’, towards an emphasis on ‘local community’ in which this ‘faith-based social action’ narrative is situated, a trend continued and amplified with the change in government at the following election.

Near Neighbours Programme Launch – 2011
(DCLG)

In 2010, the governing Labour party lost the general election, and a lack of an overall majority saw the subsequent formation of a Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. In a speech shortly after taking up office, Prime Minister David Cameron put forward his new vision of the ‘Big Society’, in which top-down government schemes were shunned in favour of a devolution and redistribution of power ‘from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street’, in order to re-energize civil society and push local

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321 Dinham, Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis, p.63.
communities to become ‘little platoons’ in tackling social issues. A key aspect of this narrative, consistent with the shift seen in the previous Labour policy, was the notion of social and ‘community action’. Again ‘faith’ was often placed at the forefront of the discourse, with government officials frequently presenting ‘faith groups’ as often ‘better placed to reach different communities’ and ‘those who need help most’, and announcing relevant funding programmes to promote this notion.

Perhaps most notable of these was the Near Neighbours programme, launched in Autumn 2011, funded by DCLG, but administered exclusively by the Church Urban Fund, a charity organisation established by the Church of England in 1987. The programme consisted of a large funding pot of £5 million, providing three years of small grant style funding of between £250 - £5000 for ‘grass roots groups’ in four targeted areas of the UK. These areas consisted of the Northern mill towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, sites of the aforementioned riots in 2001, the city of Leicester, and selected boroughs and wards in East London and Birmingham. Speaking at the formal launch of the programme in Bethnal Green, the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, used the occasion to celebrate the ‘unbroken tradition of people of faith giving back to local communities’, and recognize the ‘vital role’ of faith groups not only in providing ‘practical action’ but also in ‘bridging the gaps’ between community

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324 David Cameron, ‘Big Society Speech.’
divisions. His speech also highlighted the need for councils to ‘work with local community groups and charities as a matter of course’, crucially including ‘faith-based ones’, reaffirming the consistency of government narratives that seek to elevate ‘faith groups’ into the voluntary and community sector as ‘key partners’ constituting a ‘joint voice’. Crucially, the speech made no reference to ‘community cohesion’, a phrase strongly associated with the previous New Labour government, perhaps as a prerequisite to the shift in terminology seen in the following report, in which the language of ‘cohesion’ begins to be replaced by a returning narrative of ‘integration’.

On the whole, the Near Neighbours programme has often been criticized for its logistical dependency on the Anglican parish system as the key stakeholder in local projects, and thus now metaphorically located at the helm of the ‘policy gateway’. As Dinham has suggested, handing over control of the primary funding stream to not only one single ‘faith’, but one particular denomination of that ‘faith’, arguably acts to undermine the ‘multi-faith’ aspect of the initiative, and to revalorize the Church of England as the ‘national church’, despite declining attendance and growing religious pluralism across the UK. Furthermore, with the Anglican church holding position as ‘gate-keepers’, others have also noted issues in reluctance of other ‘faith groups’ to apply for funding, and imbalanced levels of awareness outside of the parish network.

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327 Eric Pickles Speech – 14th November 2011 (Near Neighbours Launch) - Faith and social action: a long tradition.
328 Eric Pickles Speech – 14th November 2011 (Near Neighbours Launch) - Faith and social action: a long tradition.
Therefore, though Near Neighbours aims to streamline services and promote action without prescription, issues are still evident in the operationalization and practical implementation of the programme, as I will explore with regards to the locality of Oldham below.

Creating the Conditions for Integration – 2012
(DCLG)

In addition to the development of de-centralized programmes of funding like Near Neighbours, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government, also saw an interesting re-shuffling of terminology, away from New Labour notions of ‘community cohesion’, and back towards use of the term ‘integration’. A document published in 2012, entitled Creating the Conditions for Integration exemplifies this approach. It represents a commitment to the notion of localism put forward by the ‘Big Society’ agenda, stating that ‘instead of large-scale, centrally led and funded programmes, we want to inspire and enable civil society and local areas to take action on integration issues that are important to them’. As Chapman suggests, this document also presented opportunities for amplified involvement of religious organisations in the local provision of social welfare services and more direct access to government funding, arguably leading to better engagement and partnerships between ‘faith groups’ and local authorities. The document

333 Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
334 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Creating the Conditions for Integration, (2012).
335 DCLG, Creating the Conditions for Integration, p.19.
provides an approach to ‘faith’ that overtly addresses austerity concerns and reinforces neoliberal narratives regarding the deployment of voluntary and ‘faith-based’ organisations in order to tackle localized issues of social welfare and urban regeneration.

In addition, the document also presents a familiar narrative concerning religion as a barrier to ‘cohesion’, or in this case now articulated as ‘integration’, but regarding ‘faith’ and ‘people of faith’ as a force for ‘developing shared aspirations and values’337 and undertaking ‘faith-based social action’.338 As Zavos has highlighted, under this ‘Big Society’ agenda, ‘faith groups’ are commonly identified as excellent examples of the aforementioned ‘little platoons’, yet religious identity is still seen as contributing to ‘the fracturing of society’,339 and presenting potential dangers associated with ‘extremism and intolerance’.340

Yet on the whole, the association of ‘faith groups’ with civic virtue and social provision again strongly advocates the notion of ‘faith-based social action’, and the document itself contains substantial discussion of the involvement of ‘faith communities...in a huge range of activities and projects to improve communities’,341 including various examples of good practice, such as the aforementioned Near Neighbours Programme. Significantly, here again as Dinham highlights, the term ‘community cohesion’ is missing from the

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337 DCLG, Creating the Conditions for Integration, p.10.
338 DCLG, Creating the Conditions for Integration, p.15.
340 DCLG, Creating the Conditions for Integration.
341 DCLG, Creating the Conditions for Integration.
rhetoric of Near Neighbours,\textsuperscript{342} instead in favour of goals of promoting collaborative ‘social action’ and ‘social interaction’ within neighbourhoods in selected areas across the country.\textsuperscript{343} Likewise, within \textit{Creating the Conditions for Integration}, emphasis is consistently placed on ‘action’, taking ‘action’, and driving ‘action’ as a requirement for improving ‘integration’, with ‘people of faith’ identified as key contributors to this.\textsuperscript{344}

\textbf{The Casey Review: A Review into Opportunity and Integration – 2016} (DCLG)

In 2015, following her work on high profile cases of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham published in 2014, Dame Louise Casey was tasked by the then Prime Minister David Cameron, and Home Secretary Theresa May, to undertake ‘a review into integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities’.\textsuperscript{345} Casey presents the report as an opportunity to ‘consider what divides communities and gives rise to anxiety, prejudice, alienation and a sense of grievance’, and to ‘think about what we can do to resolve this and build more cohesive communities’.\textsuperscript{346} As evidenced in the title, the review retains focus on the notion of ‘integration,’ but also interestingly deploys this narrative alongside several uses of the phrase ‘social cohesion’, as well as ‘building cohesive communities’. The report also makes reference to a continued narrative of ‘shared values’ as a key element of this,\textsuperscript{347} evidencing

\textsuperscript{342} Likewise, the terms ‘cohesion’ and ‘community cohesion’ are both missing from the \textit{Creating the Conditions for Integration} report.
\textsuperscript{343} Dinham, ‘The Multi-faith Paradigm in Policy and Practice,’ p.586.
\textsuperscript{344} DCLG, \textit{Creating the Conditions for Integration}.
\textsuperscript{346} Casey, \textit{The Casey Review}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{347} Casey, \textit{The Casey Review}, p.119.
the continuation of a ‘cohesion’ discourse, now articulated through a slightly shifted lens of ‘integration’ in keeping with a more right-wing Conservative party politics. Through this, the document also presents a section on ‘the benefits of meaningful contact and interaction’,\(^{348}\) referencing notable scholars such as Miles Hewstone to evidence an encouraging argument for the ‘benefits of social mixing’\(^{349}\) in reducing issues of segregation and promoting ‘social cohesion’.\(^{350}\)

In terms of the contribution of ‘faith’ to this discursive framework, the report retains previous postulations regarding the importance of engaging with ‘faith leaders’, yet here placing explicit emphasis on a need for ‘Muslim leaders’ in particular, to develop ‘a clearer interpretation of Islam for modern life in Britain’.\(^{351}\) Similarly, the report also re-presents a continued support for ‘interfaith’ work as important for ‘drawing together’ polarised communities.\(^{352}\) However, Casey does also acknowledge limitations of ‘interfaith’ work in typically ‘avoiding difficult conversations’, ‘preaching to the choir’, and at times providing ‘an unchallenged platform or legitimacy to those whose views and values actually undermined cohesion’ in order to appear inclusive.\(^{353}\) This demonstrates a tension in relation to the political perpetuation of an ‘interfaith’ paradigm despite apparent issues with critical engagement, and questions over the legitimacy and intent of those involved in ‘interfaith work’.

Therefore, though the notion of ‘interfaith’ still retains provenance as the

\(^{348}\) Casey, *The Casey Review*, pp.54-57.
\(^{353}\) Casey, *The Casey Review*, p.149.
metaphorical backbone of the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, here its limitations are beginning to be uncovered, and this is an issue I will explore at some length in the following chapters.

**Frameworks of Engagement and Funding ‘Faith’**

On the whole, over the space of a decade we can see several narratives emerging and developing simultaneously. Structurally, we see shifts from calls to engage and consult with ‘faith communities’ through the use of larger national umbrella, ‘interfaith’ organisations and ‘faith leaders’, to promotion of more localized grassroots ‘dialogue’ and ‘contact’ between individuals and smaller neighbourhood based groups, echoing ‘Big Society’ sentiments and austerity measures that have seen the dissipation of larger scale operations and organisations. Through this we can evidence a conscious shift away from larger networks containing limited numbers of appointed or self-appointed ‘community leaders’, towards a search for ‘credible voices’ that dwell within the grassroots.\(^{354}\) In this way, newer strategies, developed both nationally and locally, seek to ‘empower communities directly... not via gatekeepers’.\(^{355}\) In addition, we can also see significant changes in the way in which the UK government conceives of ‘faith communities’, and what exactly to do with them, as policy and strategies have shifted from consultation and engagement (with leaders and umbrella organisations) to encouragement and reinforcement (of neighbourhood and grassroots civic participation and social action).

\(^{354}\) Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.

\(^{355}\) Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
Overall we can also see a full circle emerge in government engagement from issues of ‘faith’ and ‘cohesion’ highlighted at a local level through the initial Cantle report, to the development of a national discourse of ‘community cohesion’ calling for wider-scale engagement and representation of ‘faith communities’ using umbrella style structures and organisations, back to a more localised approach to engagement, empowerment, and more recently ‘integration’ of more micro-scale ‘faith communities’ at a grassroots and neighbourhood level, crucially coupled with the aforementioned developing discourse of social action alongside ‘interfaith’ dialogue. In other words, we can observe calls for local authorities and communities to build structures and capacity for engagement at a national level, with associated funding pathways such as the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund, being subsequently knocked down and instead emphasis placed in the opposite direction through devolution of power on smaller scale local level.

It is arguable that initial strategies of local consultation following the 2001 ‘disturbances’ were a result of a perceived need to learn about and begin to fully engage with the array of religious diversity increasingly seen in areas of the UK, with the religious and ‘ethnic tensions’ cited in the Cantle report and other local reports such as the ‘Ritchie report’ in Oldham providing something of a wake-up call for central government. However, in pursuing a strategic approach to engaging with ‘faith communities,’ the subsequent need to ‘properly categorise’ these groups evidently led to difficulties in putting ‘cohesion’ work into practice, with failure to engage individuals from

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particular backgrounds often resulting in a severe lack of representation of communities at a grassroots level. As a result, as I have evidenced in policy documents such as *Our Shared Future*, from 2007 we then see the re-orientation of government strategy for engagement with ‘faith communities’ from structural to social approaches, and from national to local initiatives, and a year later the solidification of a strongly articulated ‘faith-based social action’ discourse within *Face to Face and Side by Side* that paves the way for a localized ‘social cohesion’ narrative to develop.

Funding pathways have also followed this narrative, with nationwide costly programmes of capacity building replaced with limited small-scale grant funding initiatives, such as the ongoing Near Neighbours programme,\(^{357}\) that aimed to shun ‘too much bureaucracy’,\(^{358}\) make regulation ‘proportionate’\(^{359}\) and avoid ‘heavy monitoring’.\(^{360}\) Within these programmes, the focus is predominantly centred on ‘faith-based social action’, with ‘interfaith dialogue’ described as a natural by-product ‘occurring organically through involvement in projects’.\(^{361}\) Notions of decentralization and localism pushed by the Coalition and now Conservative government, coupled with substantial austerity measures, have seen significant funding cuts and the dissolving of regional and other structures initially funded to build capacity. These have now been rendered a costly and unnecessary expenditure for ‘cohesion’ policy, which, in relation to ‘faith’, is now based in strategic terms within localized

\(^{357}\) See http://www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours
\(^{360}\) Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
\(^{361}\) Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
‘interfaith’ and social action discourses, not in previous wider notions of consultation and strategy.

Additionally, the specificities of what types of ‘faith groups’ and activities have been funded also highlights more general trends in the relationship between religion and ‘social cohesion’ in UK policy. Tendencies to fund ‘interfaith work’, previously as a strategic consultation mechanism, then later as a ‘dialogue’ technique, coupled with further recognition of the significant capital of ‘faith groups’ in areas such as social action and civic participation, demonstrate the ways in which UK policies have sought to manage religious pluralism in ways that aim to both promote ‘cohesion’ and also arguably serve as ‘risk management’ to preclude issues of extremism and segregation.

However, as I have suggested, this notion of ‘interfaith’ often carries tendencies towards categorization of ‘faith groups’ into a framework of ‘major world religions’, asking individuals to align themselves within the boundaries of a particular prescribed religious tradition, encompassed within a generic notion of ‘faith’. In many cases, with regards to organisational structures and political engagement, this categorization may be useful in terms of fulfilling bureaucratic requirements of equal representation and in measuring the perceived successes of programmes and initiatives evidenced through participation of ‘people of different faiths’. Yet as a result, this discursive framework will inevitably encounter difficulties in developing an accurate conception of ‘faith communities’, as in many cases initial emphasis is placed

362 McGhee, ‘Patriots of the future?’. 
on the nature of these communities and organisations as merely strategic assets for government engagement, thus often neglecting the nuances of lived realities. Consequently, the reification of religious traditions prevails, and arguably has a direct impact on the ways in which government envisages and engages with ‘faith communities’ in order to develop strategies to promote ‘cohesion’ and tackle tension.

In addition, as critics such as Dinham have argued, the continuous funding of ‘interfaith’ organisations and initiatives merely perpetuates a problematic ‘multifaith paradigm’ in which these practices constitute a ‘parallel world’ alongside ‘real faith communities’, crucially also failing to engage with ‘the marginalised, radicalized and extreme whom policy-makers most want to address’.363 Therefore as I will argue in the following chapters with reference to my ethnographic work, persistent preferences for funding ‘interfaith’ organisations as the ‘easy’364 option may in fact result in overlooking the significance of single-faith initiatives that seemingly negate said ‘paradigm’.

On the whole, we can observe a constant battle between concerns regarding religious difference in one sense, and utilising the ‘shared values’ and social capital of ‘faith’ groups in the other. Thus in general, government strategies and policies that have served to deploy notions of religion and ‘faith’ into the management of pluralism have arguably failed to overcome the positive/negative juxtaposition discussed above, despite the purposeful separation between the ‘cohesion’ work of DCLG and PREVENT work of the

364 Interview with Cohesion Lead at Oldham Council, 18/11/2015.
Home Office. Therefore in policy terms, while faith work is argued to have “a pivotal role to play in community cohesion”, and hence religion and ‘faith’ still linger at the forefront of ‘social cohesion’ policy in the UK, an ambiguity of exactly how to manage increasing religious diversity in ‘multifaith’ Britain remains.

**Local Incarnations: ‘Social Cohesion’ Policy in Manchester and Oldham**

Looking at a more localized level from 2004, the year in which the organisation I use to explore ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse in practice (Org.A) was established, the translation of national policy narratives can be clearly observed in localities of Greater Manchester, in my field sites of Oldham and the city of Manchester. These policies reflect national trends and concerns, but significantly, also adapt and enhance their strategies to suit the contexts in which they operate. In both Oldham and Manchester, local policy explicitly aims to ‘take account of the national policy framework’, with key statements and documents making direct reference to definitions and strategies put forward by central government. However, both of these localities also make additions and alterations to policy, seeking to reflect and respond to the context and concerns within the local authority area.

For example, in a 2010 report by Manchester City Council, we can see policymakers build upon the foundation of the quoted ‘national definition of

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365 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
community cohesion’, stated as ‘what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together’, by adding several additional ‘components’ that are described as ‘the foundations which need to be in place for community cohesion in Manchester’.367 These components include emphasis on ‘what we have in common and how we will contribute to Manchester’, an understanding of the contribution of ‘the diversity of Manchester’, and the commitment of ‘Manchester people’ to ‘equality’ and ‘mutual respect’.368 In Oldham, statements are also made within policies regarding the recognition of the significance of the ‘multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-racial’ diversity of the borough, and nods to progress are made in relation to the 2001 ‘disturbances’ in the area.370 Here in both field sites we can see demonstrated the aforementioned overall trends in UK ‘cohesion’ policy towards more localized and micro-scale approaches that may build upon national strategy, but in turn allow local authorities to adapt these policies to suit the context in which they operate.

Yet despite this apparent sense of devolved and distinctive localism, consistencies remain between both of these contexts regarding the proposed role of ‘faith’ in relation to ‘cohesion’. Both local authorities regard ‘faith-based’ organisations and ‘faith communities’ as ‘an important asset’371 and recognize the contribution of ‘faith groups’ to ‘creating safe and cohesive

370 Oldham Council, Forward Together, p.15.
neighbourhoods’.372 In addition, both Manchester and Oldham councils place particular emphasis on ‘interfaith work’ in developing understanding, building good relations, supporting integration and promoting ‘community cohesion’.373 Interestingly, both local authorities also retain this usage of the phrase ‘community cohesion’, despite shifts in national policy rhetoric.

As stated in a report in 2014, in keeping with national policy trends evidenced above, ‘in Manchester, the approach to working with faith communities has been to strengthen and support inter-faith dialogue that builds understanding and celebrates commonly held values’.374 In this way, ‘interfaith’ organisations such as Org.A included in my ethnographic work, are cited as carrying out this important work in the locality, ‘delivering a series of projects funded through the Council’s Equalities Funding Programme during 2013-2016’.375 Equivalently, in Oldham Council’s Forward Together strategy published ten years earlier in 2004, the local interfaith forum was similarly stated as having ‘played a major role in developing understanding and respect across communities’,376 and still, in more current documents such as the Safe and Strong Communities strategy (2012 – 2015),377 the forum has continued to receive significant local authority funding for a number of years.

373 See Oldham Council, Safe and Strong Communities (p.17); Manchester City Council Communities Scrutiny Committee Report on Protected Characteristics: Religion, Faith and Belief (2014).
376 Oldham Council, Forward Together, p.15.
377 Oldham Council, Safe and Strong Communities, p.17.
The consistency of this emphasis on, and preference for, ‘interfaith’ formations in engagement with both local government and communities demonstrates a clear alignment with national policy narratives in place since the first strategic output regarding ‘community cohesion’ in 2002, in which local ‘interfaith structures’ were recognized as providing a ‘valuable framework’ for both ‘consultation by the local authority and other public bodies’ and ‘promoting mutual understanding’.\(^\text{378}\) However, despite these consistencies, there are some overarching key differences in the current structure of engagement with ‘faith communities’ and organisations in these two areas of Greater Manchester.

In Oldham, as stated, local strategies such as *Safe and Strong Communities* (2012 – 2015) have sought to take account of national policy frameworks, whilst also recognizing the significance of the ‘multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-racial’ diversity of the borough, in which faith groups are upheld for their contribution to ‘creating safe and cohesive neighbourhoods’,\(^\text{379}\) and ‘interfaith work’ is in particular praised for developing understanding, building good relations, supporting integration and promoting ‘community cohesion’. In this way, emphasis on ‘neighbourhoods’ and more micro-scale forms of civic renewal aligns this approach with the 2012 *Creating the Conditions for Integration* national policy that calls for more localised forms of ‘interfaith activity’ and ‘faith-based social action’ to ‘improve communities’.\(^\text{380}\) Overall, the approach in this locality is to strengthen and

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\(^{380}\) DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, pp.15-16.
support structured engagement with ‘faith communities’, by primarily utilising the local ‘interfaith’ forum for this purpose, and continuing to develop a ‘strong and active voluntary, community and faith sector’. Crucially, here ‘faith groups’ and organisations have been elevated to sit within the fold of what is usually simply the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Thus, as a lead on ‘community cohesion’ informed me in interview, engagement with ‘faith communities’ occurs largely through this infrastructure, in which the local interfaith forum is the key body recognized as ‘an easy way to tap into a lot of people’, funded for ‘community cohesion’ work such as ‘building relationships, building understanding... and dialogue’, as well as assisting in “managing threats”.

At the same time, on commencement of the aforementioned Near Neighbours Programme in 2011, Oldham was chosen as a primary site to receive local grants for grassroots projects. This funding stream from central government, channelled down to a regional ‘Northern Hub’ also encompassing areas of Bradford and Burnley, and then subsequently to a local community worker coordinator, ran parallel to the council funded interfaith forum, with little crossover or communication. This led to a patchwork of projects, fluctuations in funding, and resentment between individuals working in each organisation. For example, the establishment of Near Neighbours saw significant council cutbacks to interfaith forum funds, and members of the forum describing Near Neighbours projects as “one trick wonders”, with funding that is “too bitty,

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382 Oldham Council, Building Strong Communities in Oldham, p.2.
383 Interview with Cohesion Lead at Oldham Council, 18/11/2015.
helping groups not already in existence pop up for a while and then disappear”.\textsuperscript{384}

In fact, the overall presence of the programme locally was considered by some to be “undermining interfaith forum work whose strategies are tried and tested”.\textsuperscript{385} At the same time, in interview Near Neighbours coordinator B described traditional ‘interfaith’ and ‘community cohesion’ initiatives as “patronizing”, pronouncing his distaste for ‘interfaith dialogue’ that attempts to discuss similarities between Christianity and Islam, of which he feels the “theology and ethics are completely different”.\textsuperscript{386} Therefore, within this same locality, we can observe the implementation of initiatives that not only operate somewhat ironically as ‘parallel lives’,\textsuperscript{387} but also produce competing narratives regarding the notion of ‘interfaith’ and the basis of involvement of minority communities.

As described by the Near Neighbours coordinator, based in a small church community centre in the Clarksfield area of Oldham, once the grant scheme opened, a number of projects received funding, and attempts were made to involve the local Pakistani community as the target audience for several initiatives.\textsuperscript{388} These initiatives, taking place from 2012-2014, included a stone carving project, gardening projects, walking club and gym club. However, B admitted that they did “really struggle to get South Asian [Muslim] people

\textsuperscript{384} Interview with board member of local interfaith forum in Oldham, 5/8/2015.
\textsuperscript{385} Interview with board member of local interfaith forum in Oldham, 5/8/2015.
\textsuperscript{386} Interview with Near Neighbours Coordinator in Oldham, 12/5/2015.
\textsuperscript{387} Cantle, Community Cohesion, p.9.
\textsuperscript{388} Interview with Near Neighbours Coordinator in Oldham, 12/5/2015.
through the door”, despite numerous attempts to raise awareness through “lots of door knocking and leafleting”, and the groups targeted “regularly hiring the hall out for weddings” and other functions, yet failing to engage with any of the community projects advertised.389

Interestingly, none of these projects contained any explicit reference to ‘faith’ or ‘interfaith dialogue’, but instead placed emphasis on simply ‘getting people from different backgrounds together’ and engaging people in creative activities or forms of neighbourhood social action, like the cleaning up of a communal area and the planting of trees.390 As the North West Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours described, the principle underlying this approach aimed to avoid “starting with just dialogue”, instead “starting with action which may lead to dialogue and more prolonged relationships”,391 again echoing the narratives of the shift in central government regarding ‘faith-based social action’. Yet the self-acknowledged failure of these projects to engage Muslim communities in Oldham by the local coordinator B sparks questions regarding the overall impact of the programme, while the sense of competition instead of collaboration from the local interfaith forum also highlights the reluctance of local authorities and their longstanding partners to follow this shift away from traditional ‘interfaith work’.

In Manchester however, though still funding larger ‘interfaith’ organisations such as the aforementioned Org.A, Manchester City Council is currently

389 Interview with Near Neighbours Coordinator in Oldham, 8/4/2015.
390 Interview with Near Neighbours Coordinator in Oldham, 8/4/2015.
391 Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 28/5/2015.
engaged in a push towards empowerment and engagement of ‘faith communities’ at a neighbourhood and ‘grassroots’ level, in order ‘to better connect and engage’ with these communities and to understand their ‘needs and concerns’ in order to subsequently improve quality of life and promote ‘cohesion’.  

As a ‘cohesion’ lead informed me during an interview, in Manchester the aim is now to “get beyond networks and community leaders because they’re not the credible voices”, in other words, there is a conscious shift to begin to work “from the bottom up.” Therefore in contrast to the more structural approach seen in Oldham, Manchester may be seen to be going beyond localism towards a more micro-scale neighbourhood approach, echoing sentiments observed in the Near Neighbours Programme, and highlighting the perceived need to look at the conception of ‘communities’ on a smaller scale, rather than previous generalized notions regarding a wider ‘Muslim community’ for example.

However, this approach may be simply more suited to the area, as in contrasting the approaches of these two local authorities to ‘cohesion’ policy and strategy, it may be suggested that differences in diversity may result in differences in policy approaches. Demographically, some migrant communities have historically remained more static, with settled populations resulting from chain migration concentrated into particular areas, where others may appear more scattered and diverse. Therefore, in the case of my

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393 Interview with Cohesion Lead at Manchester City Council, 12/4/2016.
394 In fact, the Near Neighbours programme at this time is establishing links and offering grants in a number of areas in Manchester.
specific fieldsites in Greater Manchester, the largely static communities of mainly Mirpuri Pakistanis concentrated into particular areas of Oldham present starkly different contextual issues to the fluctuating demographics with numerous communities and contrasting cleavages of diversity found within the different wards covered by Manchester City Council. In statistical terms, Oldham has relatively large Pakistani (10.1%) and Bangladeshi (7.3%) populations, but other groups are proportionately smaller than nationally, and the proportion of Muslims in Oldham in the 2011 census (17.7%) is considerably higher than the national average of England at (5%). By contrast Manchester, although also identifying ‘Pakistani’ as the largest ethnic group, has seen considerable growth within other migrant communities such as Arab (now 2%, compared to the English average of 0.4%) and Chinese (2.7% compared to 0.7% nationally), and hosts a wider diversity of ‘faith groups’, with significant Hindu, Sikh and Jewish communities. As a result, we might conclude that the resulting wider structural approach is more suited to Oldham, and a more micro-scale approach more appropriate in Manchester, and thus national policy frameworks may not always be directly applicable or adaptable to every local authority. Yet questions must still be raised regarding the apparent stagnancy of ‘interfaith’ approaches to working with communities that often result in a reluctance to engage and a rejection of this kind of rhetoric, as I will discuss at some length in the following chapter.

**Conclusions and Current Conceptions**

When unravelling the role of ‘faith’ in the development of a ‘social cohesion’ discourse in the UK, there unfolds an uncertainty in exactly how both central
and local government attempt to engage with the increasing diversity of ‘faith communities’ in all areas of the country. From the conception of what exactly constitutes a ‘faith community’, how to engage with said community, or the purpose of this engagement and the overall contributions or conflicts provided by these communities, a sense of ambiguity lingers throughout policies and strategies aimed at tackling these issues. This ambiguity lies within the flexible conception of ‘faith’, and the perception of ‘faith communities’ as a benefit to ‘cohesion’, providing a valuable sense of shared values and an increasing abundance of social action, while ever increasing populations of religious difference and diversity are also postulated as providing significant potential for tension and conflict. Thus at any one time the same communities are being simultaneously viewed as both the problem and the solution, as religion and ‘faith’ are conceptualized as existing as disparate discourses. As a Senior Policy Advisor for Faith and Integration at DCLG stated in interview,

Faith work has a pivotal role to play in community cohesion, if you look at the role of faith in communities we can see yes, you have the negative side of things, like for example not just Islamic extremists, but also the far right extremists... But when you look at the positive side of faith, and how faith institutions work collectively together... faith becomes a very important and a useful tool for us to be working in communities.395

It is arguable that concerns about ‘cohesion’ have yet to solidify around a consistent conception regarding ‘faith’, or to develop a durable discourse for policy and practice. Yet perhaps as ‘faith communities’ themselves are somewhat indeterminate and flexible, so too must be the approach to what

395 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
appears to be the most significant aspect of the increasing superdiversity of the UK today.

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the development of a dominant political discourse regarding the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, reinforced by funding programmes and frameworks of engagement both nationally and locally. Through a chronological analysis of key policy documents from 2001 – 2016, as well as associated funding pathways, I have aimed to lay the groundwork for bringing this analysis into direct conversation with ethnographic data in the following three chapters, using local organisations to evidence policy in practice and to examine instances of religious practice that aim to promote notions of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘cultural contact’ currently unaccounted for by existing policy frameworks.

Yet before embarking on successive chapters, it is important to outline the overarching current trends in engagement strategies and the current conception of ‘faith’ in UK ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse, that form the basis of my ethnographic enquiries into organisations in Greater Manchester.

As I have argued, strategies of engagement between government and ‘faith communities’ have come full circle from initial local government association led initiatives, to the development of national and regional umbrella structures, and back around to the current dispersing of this type of infrastructure, instead seeking to “empower communities directly” and “get

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396 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
397 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
at the grassroots”.

This approach now seeks to develop more small scale informal initiatives that bring people together, in order to ‘develop relationships and improve their communities’. Aligned with the established Conservative ‘Big Society’ approach to civic renewal, previous attempts to fund and conduct organisations centrally, before subsequently filtering down to a regional and local level, have been dissolved and devolved in an attempt to circumvent ‘gatekeepers’ and engage with communities directly.

As I have demonstrated, crucial to the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘cohesion’ is the development of associated discourses of ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’, and hence these concepts in particular are central to my ethnographic work. With regards to the conception of ‘faith communities’, ‘people of faith’ have consistently been expected to develop formal frameworks for the purpose of engagement with local government, with ‘interfaith’ structures in particular cited as the ideal format for this. However, this type of network often carries tendencies towards categorization of ‘faith groups’ into a familiar framework of ‘major faith traditions’, in order to fulfil bureaucratic requirements used to measure the perceived successes of funding programmes and initiatives, through the evidenced participation of ‘people of different faiths’. Subsequently, the political positioning of ‘faith communities’ as strategic assets for government engagement, operationalized through ‘interfaith’ discourse, therefore inevitably produces a distorted ‘multifaith mosaic’ that does not reflect the lived reality of the diversity of religious

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398 Interview with Cohesion Lead at Manchester City Council, 12/4/2016.
399 https://www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours
400 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
traditions in the UK. This is a notion I seek to explore through my ethnographic work of an ‘interfaith’ organisation in Manchester, Org.A, in assessing the translation of the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ discourse from national policy, to local policy and local authority funded organisations.

In addition to this, in discussing the aforementioned shift in 2008 regarding the development of a strongly articulated ‘faith-based social action’ narrative, I will also seek to analyse this notion not through an examination of government funded programmes and projects, but through an exploration of alternative articulations of this discursive formation. In particular, I will explore the ways in which South Asian religious groups and individuals have sought to create informal collaborations locally, in order to pursue instances of what I term ‘socio-religious action’. I will examine how these groups are taking the lead on the configuration of the discursive relationship between religion and ‘social cohesion’, often rejecting or re-articulating rhetorics of ‘faith’ and ‘interfaith’, instead in favour of a more explicit ethos rooted in explicit religious principles and devotional practice. As I will discuss in the following three chapters with reference to my ethnographic work, these configurations offer insight into a unique discursive relationship between religiosity and social action, and provide fruitful exploration of the complexities not only in evidencing ‘policy in practice’, but for examining diverse and divergent practices that are conversely overlooked or disregarded in policy.
Chapter 5
Formations of ‘Faith Community’: Networks, New Technology and ‘Communities of Practice’

On a balmy Sunday evening at the end of June, I sit quietly at a round table, adorned with a red tablecloth and a small plate of dates. As guests shuffle into the remaining seats, the uniformed man next to me introduces himself as a representative of Greater Manchester police, and asks about my affiliation with the organisation holding the event. After explaining my position as both volunteer and researcher, and listening to his own reasons for attendance, both personal and professional, a voice can be heard shushing and asking for attention. Looking around the room, four round tables are now filled with a mixture of men and women, all of whom are slightly older than myself, and of various religions and ethnicities. One of the tables is introduced by the speaker, who first announces himself as the Community Development Worker for Org.A, and then declares a warm welcome towards the guests of the “top table”, including current and former mayors of Manchester, the Bishop of Manchester and two council representatives. The evening has been advertised as a ‘Faith and Fasting Dialogue and Iftar Meal’, and marketed towards ‘people of all faiths and none’ as a completely free event. Behind our host, a long table is laid out with an assortment of food, from curries and hummus, to crackers, crisps and fruit, ready to break the fast for those observing Ramadan, and providing a complimentary meal for everyone in attendance. As I eagerly eye up the variety of treats on display, the ‘dialogue’ begins, as a number of presenters are introduced as representatives to discuss “the role of fasting in Christianity, Islam and Judaism”, and the room again acquires total silence as the first of these speeches commences.402

Introduction

The above extract from fieldnotes produced working with Org.A, serves as a precursor to a wider discussion of the specific way in which a notion of the ‘faith community’ is being produced in this context, through the introduction of individuals as representatives of a particular ‘faith’, invariably presented as part of a normative framework of ‘world religions’. In the preceding chapter I have sought to trace and assess the development of a discourse of ‘social

cohesion’ in UK public policy since 2001, and to locate the role of ‘faith’ within this discourse. Through this I have highlighted the conceptualization of ‘faith communities’ as a notion central to various engagement strategies and associated funding initiatives. In this chapter, I will proceed to interrogate the terms ‘community’ and ‘faith community’, before embarking on an ethnographic assessment of factors that affect the formation, fluctuation and constitution of ‘faith communities’, and to what extent this may be seen to reflect or refute policy pronunciations. This will allow me to begin to develop my analysis using fieldwork to explore a dominant policy discourse in practice, and to also explore other examples of practice that present alternative conceptions and self-articulations, in this case initially of the notion of ‘community’ and of ‘faith community’.

Here I will explore the ways in which policy discourse regarding ‘faith’ and particularly ‘interfaith’ communities and configurations, affects the composition of organisations that may be regarded as ‘faith-based’, and the identities of individuals involved in these initiatives and projects. Through analysis of ethnographic data from three organisations in Greater Manchester, I will examine the mechanisms that shape the imagining of community, and the contextual issues that influence the constitution of organisations. As I will argue, these organisations conversely demonstrate both the deployment of discourse and a rejection of political rhetoric, and highlight the ways in which discourses of ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ contribute to the conception and formation of religious communities in both an institutional and a practical sense.
Conceiving ‘Community’

In simplistic terms, one might assume that the word ‘community’ merely evokes a notion of commonality and camaraderie. Yet academic understandings of ‘community’ have changed over time, with work in disciplines such as geography, anthropology and sociology reflecting shifts from ‘place-bound studies of social relationships’ to ‘considerations of symbolic and multiple identities’. As Day and Rogaly have posited,

We have moved from Middletown to Anytown, or from place to space, importantly informed not so much by how people physically move through places, but how they imagine (Anderson) and symbolize (Cohen) what is important to them, what may lend substance and meaning to their lives (Geertz) and how identities and structures intersect as ‘cross-cutting cleavages’ (Baumann).

In other words, there is now an overall sense that a ‘community’ cannot simply be located in place, cannot be revealed without meaning, and cannot be bounded individually or singularly. Drawing directly on this, I would also argue that in addition to analytical considerations of ‘imagined communities’ and ‘forms of common organization’, it is critically important to question the sustainability of what is in reality a fluid and flexible category. In other words, the composition and recognition of a ‘community’ may shift, and the criteria of commonality adjusted and amended over time. Therefore communities are perhaps better understood as ‘processes or

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404 Day and Rogaly, ‘Sacred Communities,’ pp.76-77.
405 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
406 Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, p.76.
movements’ rather than observed entities, and thus their impermanence, dynamism and continuous formation must be of constant consideration, as must the crucial impact of dominant forces and power relations involved in their constitution.

As Knott has described, since the 1980s, ‘a politics of recognition and representation has emerged in Britain which has put racism, ethnicity, and, more recently, religion on the public agenda’. This in turn has had an impact on the ‘production of community’ and the perceived need for minorities to ‘develop as a collective entity’ in order to engage in both political and public arenas and to gain access to resources. In this way it is important to recognize that though the composition of a ‘community’ is often discussed as a process unbounded and in flux, this process does not occur in a vacuum. In fact, it is substantively shaped by powerful political and public discourses that may have implicit yet imperative impact on the constitution of the notion of ‘community’. As a result, not only is it important to assess the various ways in which ‘community’ is conceptualized, but also the power relations that underpin this, and as I have discussed, detailed policy document analysis in particular provides a useful tool towards this task.

Another issue of principal importance here is sensitivity to context, and the recognition that analytical stipulations regarding one ‘community’ are not

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407 Day and Rogaly, ‘Sacred Communities,’ p.76.
409 Knott, ‘Becoming a “Faith Community”’, p.89.
410 Knott, ‘Becoming a “Faith Community”’, p.89.
necessarily reflective of the composition or configuration of all other communities. However, the overall significance of the applicability of the notion of ‘community’ is most often asserted as a major facet of research in social science and beyond. As Hall has asserted,

Modern people of all sorts and conditions, it seems, have had, increasingly, as a condition of survival, to be members, simultaneously, of several, overlapping “imagined communities”; and the negotiations between and across these complex “borderlines” are characteristic of modernity itself.\textsuperscript{411}

What I argue is key to this assertion is the idea of ‘negotiation’, in the way that individuals processually and symbolically construct the malleable boundaries that define an ‘imagined community’. Therefore as Cohen suggests, ‘in seeking to understand the phenomenon of community we have to regard its constituent social relations as repositories of meaning for its members, not as a set of mechanical linkages’.\textsuperscript{412} Cohen agrees that ‘community’ exists not merely in structural forms or as a geographic or sociographic entity, in fact the establishment, expression and embellishment of a community lies in the minds of its members.\textsuperscript{413} Thus community is very much a symbolic rather than a structural construct,\textsuperscript{414} one that is flexible and negotiable, and not bound by permanence. As a result, we can present an analysis of the notion of ‘community’ as an imagined, symbolic, fluid and fluctuating social construct.

\textsuperscript{413} Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community, p.98.
\textsuperscript{414} Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community, p.98.
Yet as I will later discuss, this conception is often difficult to reconcile with political discourses surrounding religion and ‘faith’.

With regards to the term ‘faith community’, recent approaches adopted within religious studies have sought to reject the reification and categorization of religious traditions, and avoid the identification of properties through which individuals may be labelled or stereotyped.\textsuperscript{415} Therefore many, including myself, are often cautious when defining or observing a ‘faith community’ in remaining mindful of the implications of this terminology. Studies of ‘faith communities’, such as that of Raj, have utilized anthropological approaches to identifying a ‘community’ and its influences on religious identity. In her ethnography of Punjabis in London, Raj specifically discusses how ‘Hindu identity’ is subject to change, produced in ‘moments’\textsuperscript{416} and in specific places, thus producing a dynamic notion of ‘community’ that is ‘spatially bounded’ and ‘temporally coherent’\textsuperscript{417}. In other words, the ‘Hindu community’ is not a found observable object, but is variably ‘imagined’,\textsuperscript{418} and exists at different points in time, evoking analytical considerations regarding the significance of both physical and social space.

Similarly, in her work, \textit{The Location of Religion}, Kim Knott proposes a comprehensive spatial approach to the study of religion, in which ‘focus on specific locations (whether physical, social, textual or virtual)’ serves to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[415] Smith, ‘Faith in Community and Communities of Faith?’, p.187.
\item[417] Raj, \textit{Where are you from?}, p.93.
\item[418] Raj, \textit{Where are you from?}, p.93.
\end{footnotes}
challenge the “world religions” approach of religious studies with its focus on discrete, generic traditions, and normative beliefs and practices’,\(^{419}\) instead opting for analytical approaches that recognize religion as ‘a dynamic and engaged part of a complex social environment or habitat, which is itself crisscrossed with wider communications and power relations’.\(^{420}\) Indeed, here in my research the same considerations apply for the notion of ‘community’. As noted above, the power relations implicit in the development and deployment of a dominant political discourse regarding ‘faith communities’ form a key consideration in evidencing the direct effect this has on the constitution of communities in both organisational and everyday life. This is something I seek to demonstrate below through localized ethnographic data.

As analysis from Vertovec has previously uncovered, on the whole we can observe considerable variation in the ways in which individuals or groups conceive of the terms ‘community’ and ‘faith community’\(^{421}\). In his work on the Hindu diaspora, he identifies the diverse ways in which those who one might assume share identity as a ‘Hindu community’, in fact variably conceive of their own identity and act on assorted assertions of ‘community’. He notes how for some, linguistic commonality denoted ‘community’, while for others it was residential concentration and shared religious activities, or conversely a recognition of ‘shared cultural habits’ irrespective of geographic location.\(^{422}\) As this would suggest, ethnographic research regarding ‘faith communities’ can

\(^{420}\) Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p.119.
\(^{422}\) Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora*, p.139.
offer fruitful exploration of the aforementioned negotiation of the ‘borderlines’ that constitute communities, in seeking to explore and uncover the everyday articulations of theological conceptions of community such as the Islamic notion of the *Ummah*. Yet of perhaps greater need of consideration are the discourses of power that underlie these conceptions.

As Baumann has argued, ‘communities’, and thus I would also argue ‘faith communities’, are ‘processually constructed rather than found as the ready-made social correlates of consistent and bounded cultures’, and therefore cannot be treated as such by policymakers and ‘community workers’ alike. We must take a step further in Baumann’s discussions regarding cultural and ethnic difference to also recognise that ‘faith’ identities also form ‘cross-cutting cleavages’ and ‘crisscrossing webs’, as opposed to simplistic ‘multifaith’ mosaics. Yet this inevitably provides some level of difficulty for governments, in mapping out manifold ‘faith communities’ in order to develop strategic approaches for appropriate representation and adequate engagement.

However, as Day and Rogaly have argued, the deployment of terms like ‘faith community’ are also of particular interest in their use both to cohere and to divide, as well as to mask conflict and diversity, as evidenced in my analysis of UK cohesion policy. As Delanty also suggests, in political terms, the word ‘community’ has itself become irreversibly pluralized, and thus is most often

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423 Smith, ‘Faith In Community and Communities of Faith?’, p.189.
424 Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.191.
427 Day and Rogaly, ‘Sacred Communities,’ p.77.
used to evoke boundaries and differences between multiple ‘communities’ rather than to assert a majority ‘community’. Therefore, the ‘mapping out’ of ‘communities’ has deeper discursive implications than one might initially assume.

As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, policy discourse regarding the management of pluralism has exhibited a ‘religious turn’, in which previous approaches based on racial or ethnic difference have been increasingly displaced by discussions of religious difference. Ceri Peach identifies and outlines this phenomenon, evidenced in his work on minority ethnic populations in the UK and USA, stating that

religion is the new key to unravelling ethnic identity in the west. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the British discourse was about race. Non-European immigrants and minorities were compressed, willing or unwilling, into a ‘black’ category. In the 1990s, interest shifted from the outer skin of race to the inner onion of ethnicity, thence to multi-ethnicity and now to religion.429

As a result, policymakers have inevitably been engaged in conceptualizing religion and religious difference present within local and national contexts, in order to develop relevant policies and frameworks for engagement. However, as we have seen, this consideration has been coupled with associated usage of the term ‘faith’ within policy documents and reports, as a notion that evokes cohesion, as opposed to the divisive connotations of the term ‘religion’. Through this ‘faith’ has been conceptualized as the common essence present

within all religious traditions, and thus postulated as an asset for the promotion of cohesion.

As McLoughlin and Zavos have suggested,

faith is perceived by the secular state as a resource for developing converging values and shared civility in the service of the nation, values said to be enshrined in the “core teaching” of the major religions of the UK: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism.430

In this way, though religious traditions are presented as bounded entities within a typical ‘world religions’ framework, ‘faith’ is upheld as the common essence of these entities, and thus identified as the tangible source of ‘core teachings’ and ‘shared values’ often cited in policy documents and reports. Interestingly, unlike other discursive categories of diversity such as ethnicity and ‘community’, which as Delanty proposes, evoke an irreversible sense of pluralism, ‘faith’ as a standalone term instead appears to assert the idea of a cohesive whole. In other words, whether one refers to an ethnicity or an ‘ethnic community’, these terms imply a prescriptive sense of division, whereas ‘faith,’ and even in some cases ‘faith community’, often implies a unification across differences within or between religious traditions.

However, with regards to the conception and constitution of ‘faith communities’ in policy, scholars such as Dinham have cited the dangers of oversimplification and generalization, and the potential to overemphasize

these aforementioned ‘shared values’ whilst ignoring the realities of theological divisions and diversity of religious practice within and between ‘communities’.\textsuperscript{431} Thus, as a result, government approaches are regarded by many as ‘highly pragmatic and unsophisticated in theoretical understanding’,\textsuperscript{432} and have arguably prevented policies from having coherent and effective engagement with the plurality of religious traditions across the UK. At the same time, others have also highlighted how particular funding pathways and initiatives produce tendencies towards tokenism, particularly within ‘interfaith’ work.\textsuperscript{433} This is a key notion I will now proceed to discuss through my analysis of ethnographic fieldwork in Greater Manchester.

**Faith Formations in Fieldwork**

Since its inception in 2004, Org.A\textsuperscript{434} has sought to build up a network of individuals to represent the needs and concerns of a variety of ‘faith traditions’ across the city, in order to engage with both local and central government in discussing issues related to ‘faith’. As their website and organisation description stated, Org.A aims to be a ‘voice for faith communities’ in Manchester, yet their conception of these communities often appeared limited to reified groupings aligned with the traditional classification of the ‘9 major UK faiths’.\textsuperscript{435} During my fieldwork with the organisation I witnessed little

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.57.
\item Smith, ‘Faith in Community and Communities of Faith?’, p.192.
\item As I have previously described, Org.A here serves as a case study to evidence policy in practice in the locality of Manchester, and so here I use the example of this organisation to begin this exploration of the relationship between discourses of ‘faith’ and ‘community’.
\item Org.A website, accessed 5/5/2015.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
interrogation or consideration of the diversity within these groupings, other than some denominational variations within Christianity and occasional considerations regarding Reform and Orthodox Judaism, probably due to this being reflected in the diversity of executive committee meetings which consisted almost entirely of Christian and Jewish men. Furthermore, this homogenisation of Manchester’s ‘faith communities’ arguably led to a distorted view of engagement with said communities, as religions were often reified for the purpose of monitoring and ‘equal representation’.

As Zavos has discussed, this type of aspiration to ‘form a robust network in order to facilitate consultation’ forms a direct response to the concerns of government, and often serves only to provide outputs regarding adequate ‘representation’ of ‘faith traditions’, in turn falling back into the trap of the ‘world religions’ paradigm. Government funding in this area has also been noted as possessing a lot of “heavy monitoring” regarding equal representation and engagement. Therefore, attempts to reflect the diversity of religious traditions may lead organisations to place greater emphasis on fulfilling quotas rather than engaging at a grassroots level, as the community worker for Org.A admitted to me during interview. He stated that,

Being funded for targeted work means that the targets tend to be the thing that’s prioritised, and if the resource that’s available isn’t big enough to do everything that we want to do, then things that aren’t prioritised are vulnerable to not getting done as much.

436 Zavos, ‘Digital Media and Networks of Hindu Activism in the UK,’ p.20.
437 Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, more recent funding initiatives such as the Near Neighbours programme have consciously aimed for a “lighter touch” in terms of monitoring, in promoting more action-based grassroots projects and aspiring to “attract people that would not have previously got involved in projects because of off-putting bureaucracy”.439

Yet with regards to Org.A, in terms of the policy discourse at a local strategic level, ‘faith leaders’ and communities are often identified as a valuable asset within proposed systems of partnership working, with the development of local ‘interfaith’ structures argued to provide ‘a valuable framework both for promoting mutual understanding and co-operation... and as a mechanism for consultation by the local authority and other public bodies’.440 Therefore, by receiving funding primarily through the local council, Org.A must inevitably attempt to put this policy discourse into practice in order to satisfy the requirements of their contractual agreement.

Quarterly bureaucratic requirements for this funding included ‘equal opportunity monitoring of service users’ in which Org.A hand out questionnaires to attendees of all events, requiring them to tick boxes regarding their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, belief group, disability and age, in order to collate statistical data to report back. In addition, questions within the ‘quarterly monitoring form’ discuss issues such as: promoting ‘access and inclusion’, demonstrating ways in which the organisation has ‘strengthened knowledge, understanding and evidence base about communities so that we

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439 Interview with Regional Coordinator for Near Neighbours, 8/12/2015.
can increase community cohesion and design services that meet everyone’s needs, and how and to what extent they have acted to ‘celebrate the diversity of Manchester and increase awareness of the positive contribution that our diverse communities make to the city’. Furthermore, Org.A’s responses on these monitoring forms also provided interesting insights into their conception and perceived increased inclusion of ‘faith communities’. One such form reports that,

The Hindu mentioned under this section in our last report has continued to become more involved in our work and featured earlier in this report. This will improve our engagement with the Hindu community.

Therefore, here there is an apparent assumption that engagement with one individual identified as Hindu, thus directly equates to further engagement with ‘the Hindu community’, though in reality, through my ethnographic work I discovered that this individual did not in fact identify herself explicitly as ‘Hindu’ and did not affiliate herself with the local ‘Hindu community’ or any particular local mandir or temple. In addition, similar statements were made regarding ‘the Sikh community’, in which the same report described how,

The CDW [Community Development Worker] and Chair of [Org.A] participated in the Sikh Vaisakhi Festival in May, further strengthening our links and relationships with the Sikh community.

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441 Manchester City Council, Directorate for Children and Families (Commissioning Hub) Quarterly Monitoring Form, 2015.
again equating involvement in a day festival as serving to strengthen ‘links and relationships’. Clearly apparent here is the power of bureaucratic requirements not only to define the deployment of the idea of community discursively, but to discipline the concerns of organisations and the techniques adopted by volunteers and individuals involved in effectively evidencing the work of Org.A. This also results in a more rigid imagining of the notion of community based on a static ‘world religions’ paradigm that fails to account for the diversity within and between religious traditions such as race, ethnicity or denomination. A notion exemplified through the deployment of a reified imagining of ‘the Sikh community’ and ‘the Hindu community’ in Manchester.

However, this is arguably a direct result of limitations related to capacity and the need to directly reflect the discourse of the funder. In this way, it is clear that the pressure of hitting targets to retain funding, and the time absorbed within bureaucratic process provided a huge hurdle for members of Org A., and frustrations were voiced by the two part-time members of staff who expressed their aspirations to “be doing more engagement work with faith communities face to face, and visiting them, talking about our work, finding out what they’re doing etc. and building the network in that kind of way”. Yet on the whole, these discursive requirements to demonstrate ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘inclusion’ in the form of a statically defined ‘world religions’ paradigm did also regularly appear at events organised by Org.A.

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An example of this was observed during one of the regular ‘interfaith dialogues’ held at the multifaith centre. During the month of Ramadan, Org.A decided to arrange an event entitled ‘Faith and Fasting’. The event was arranged on a Sunday evening, and intended to provoke a ‘dialogue’ on the subject of fasting, with invited speakers to introduce perspectives from different religious traditions. This was then to be followed by an iftar meal to break the fast for those who were participating in Ramadan.

On the day of the event I arrived early to help set up the space in the multifaith centre, carrying sweet treats for the iftar that I had ensured were vegetarian, halal and kosher, and therefore hopefully suitable for all guests in attendance. As I chatted with community development worker, D, and other Org.A executive committee members who had also arrived early with prepared food and drinks, I asked about who would be in attendance at the event, and enquired about the number of people who had signed up. In this moment I became aware that I was currently scripted into the organisation as Steph, the ‘volunteer’, yet my intention was to later participate simply as Steph, ‘a guest’, in order to fully immerse myself into the event and freely mingle with other attendees, yet as always also retaining and disclosing my position as a researcher.

One executive member was pleased to inform me that several “high profile” people would be in attendance, including the Bishop of Manchester, the current and two former Lord Mayors of Manchester, and representatives of
Greater Manchester police and other local organisations. Soon after, the phone began to ring as people attempted to gain entry to the event via telecom, and on entering the space were greeted and swiftly prompted to sign in and complete an ‘equality and diversity’ form. As more people arrived, the atmosphere of the space changed from the quiet rustling of preparation, to a packed room filled with chatter and laughter, audibly embellished by a variety of accents and greetings of “a salaam alaikum”. Tempting smells of a variety of foods and snacks wafted, waiting neatly arranged on a long table in one corner of the room, and frequently commented on by those who were eagerly awaiting the iftar meal. It was during these events that the space indeed came alive, designated as the ‘multifaith centre’.446

Org.A had invited three high profile speakers to discuss the concept of fasting within their own religious tradition. These speakers were a local Bishop, representing Christianity, and both the Muslim and Jewish chairs of the local Muslim-Jewish forum. On commencing the dialogue, there were no discussions of denomination or diversity within each religion. Opening speeches simply contained statements regarding the place of fasting within Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and interestingly the Jewish speaker in fact began by stating that she is not a practising Jew, and knows very little about Jewish theology. Other audience members were then invited to contribute to the discussion, including the single Baha’i member of the executive committee (and indeed the organisation as a whole) and the Hindu neighbour of the

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446 Org.A Fieldnotes, 21/6/2015.
single Muslim member of the executive committee. The absence of any Sikh or Jain individuals was again highlighted by the absence of any discussion of these religious traditions.

On the whole, what is clear here from analysis of a network developed for the purpose of ‘interfaith’ interaction and representation, is that the policy discourse at both a national and local level continues to evoke a ‘world religions’ framework that places emphasis on categorizing and monitoring involvement of a variety of ‘faith traditions’ in order to demonstrate effectiveness and productivity worthy of relevant funding. This in turn directly affects the conception of the ‘faith communities’ that make up this network, through techniques of formal feedback and monitoring, and as a result also affects the ways in which this conception is reflected back into the political discourse through engagement with the local council. In this way, the formation of local ‘faith’ and ‘interfaith’ networks and ‘communities’ appears to demonstrate policy in practice on both a discursive and strategic level.

On the other hand, in terms of assessing the applicability of the dominant policy discourse of considering what may be perceived as individual ‘faith communities’ situated in localities of Greater Manchester, it is important to identify the significance not only of geographical considerations of place, but to revisit the construction and impact of social and ideological space. In her work, The Location of Religion, Knott notes

The importance of discerning that which is “locally particular”...[for example], how local forms of Christianity
and Islam differ both from those generic forms in textbooks and from other local forms, whether in Britain, in Africa or in Asia.\textsuperscript{448}

In this, she asks us to question not only the differences in religious traditions between scales from local to global, but also how these scales are increasingly interconnected in a globalized world, and how ‘places’ themselves are therefore also connected to wider physical and ideological spaces. In other words, in terms of my own research, a town such as Oldham is not merely geographically situated within the North of England, within the United Kingdom, within Europe, within the world. It is ideologically situated as ‘Northern’, as English, as multicultural and multi-religious, as enveloped in a historical narrative, and as influenced by political structures operating within local and national spaces.

The religious communities within Oldham are also themselves impacted by physical, metaphorical and social considerations that inform the development of space, such as migration and transnationalism. For example, the Muslim populations of Oldham may share ideological spaces of identification such as that of the Islamic \textit{Ummah}, and social or physical spaces such as places of worship, but may also inhabit separate spaces of identification along axes such as theology, diasporic identity and national identity. These physical, social and ideological spaces do not exist as bounded and distinct entities, but frequently overlap and intersect, and may also be mutually influential upon each other, as local religion may itself be impacted or impact upon various demographic,

\textsuperscript{448} Knott, \textit{The Location of Religion}, p.2.
economic, political or social factors.

With regards to Org.B and what may be perceived as ‘the Muslim community’ in Oldham, several narratives intertwine in conceiving notions of space, place, ‘faith’ and community. Firstly, though I have stressed at length the limitations of government approaches to constitutions of ‘faith communities’ regarding the recognition of theological and other differences that may disrupt perceptions of a unified ‘Muslim community’, this ideology of unity was in fact one upheld by many members of the organisation. On speaking with co-founder, M, references were often made to a “united community” free from divisions based on practice or sect, and assertions related to the suggestion that the word “Muslim is a verb, not a noun”. Through this statement, M firmly reasoned that actions, not beliefs, are what make a person ‘Muslim’, and as part of this one must actively recognise and uphold the commonality of submission to God as a unifying force. Interestingly, M also went further to propose that this commonality should also defy boundaries between religious groups, who he feels should more often share “one platform” denoting “unity in faith”, thus rejecting what he sees as superficial divisions implied by terms such as “multifaith”.

Building on these assertions, M and other members of Org.B also attempted to produce a positive projection of ‘being Muslim’ for purposeful permeation of the public sphere. Through embracing their Islamic identity as central to

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their conception of both ‘community’ and charity, the organisation acted to push these positive images into both physical and virtual public spaces, such as social media and news outlets, in order to demonstrate engagement between Muslims and the wider community, and be seen to be addressing “the concerns and issues in society but from an Islamic ethos”.

In addition to this, central to Org.B’s conception of ‘community’ was also the notion of locality. In addition to expressing concerns for “unity and community” both within and across religious divides, the location of this ‘community’ was also denoted physically within the geographic space of Oldham. As M stated of developing Org.B’s food bank project to tackle issues of poverty and deprivation, “it is my and our collective responsibility to look after our locality.” For M, and other members of Org.B, this locality is defined not just in terms of the ‘place’ of Oldham, but of whomever inhabits this space, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or other demographic differences. In this way, Org.B deploy the notion of ‘community’ to denote both geographical and ideological parameters of ‘collective responsibility’, and carve out their own position as located within this space as an essential aspect of their ethos as an organisation.

456 M in Shaw, ‘Oldham: Uniting across racial divides to fight poverty.’
In discussions surrounding this emphasis on locality, M and other members of the organisation frequently used the phrase “charity begins at home”, as a key slogan and tagline for Org.B found on publicity materials and websites. This phrase was also used in discussions with members of the public to both describe the ethos of the organisation, and to convince potential new donors. An example of this was observed during one afternoon spent with the other co-founder of Org.B, M’s wife, R, in which we visited a local fruit and veg shop in the town centre to ask for donations. I met R on a local supermarket car park at around midday, as she had insisted we both travel in her car. The day before she had asked at the foodbank if anyone was willing to assist her with some errands, as she struggles with heavy lifting, and also wanted someone to accompany her in representing the organisation when speaking to local businesses in the area. Taking the opportunity to spend some more time with R, and to gain more insight into her involvement in starting up Org.B, I was more than happy to put myself forward.

Leaflets in hand, we visited local charities and organisations, including a Christian run community café, and the local branch of ‘Age UK’ to inform them of Org.B’s foodbank project and to offer any services that might be of use. H seemed to be familiar with many of the people and places we visited, as she explained that she and her husband had “been involved in community cohesion work in the area for a number of years”. Yet she explained that most recently, their awareness of issues of poverty and destitution in the local area had led them to put most of their efforts into the foodbank project.

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The last of our Tuesday afternoon errands was a visit to a local grocery shop. Located on the main street through the town centre, opposite the entrance to an indoor market, the exterior of the shop boasted a variety of fresh produce, including fruit and vegetables, some of which immediately caught R’s eye, as she asked me not to forget to pick up two of the large watermelons on display on our way out. On entering the shop and exchanging “a salaam alaikum” with the Asian shopkeeper, H began to propose that he potentially provide weekly donations to the food bank project. The shopkeeper offered to provide some donations on the spot, and also offered us a both free drink from the chiller cabinet, but very politely declined the offer to become a regular donor. R then responded by citing Islamic requirements regarding charity, to which the shopkeeper responded by stating his commitments to sending zakat to his homeland of Pakistan. Immediately R challenged this statement with the phrase, “charity begins at home”, defining Oldham as her home, and therefore of primary concern and the recipient of her efforts. Yet despite this discussion, the shopkeeper retained his position, though we nevertheless left with quite a substantial portion of donated fruit and vegetables, and of course the two large watermelons. Once at a distance from the shop, R commented on her frustration with this narrative, and reasserted her insistence regarding Oldham as her home and thus the location of her charitable obligations as a Muslim. She seemed displeased with the response of the man in the shop, yet still determined to pursue what she felt was the most worthy location of her charity, Oldham, the place she passionately referred to as “home”.

To return to the idea of ‘community’, it must be noted that during conversations with members of Org.B, ‘community’ was often coupled with the location of Oldham, in advocating a need to “bring people together to work for the common good”, being cited as “the community in which we reside”. Therefore emphasis was consistently placed on physical location, overlooking other aspects such as racial, religious or ethnic divisions. This notion was also reflected in the spectrum of diversity exhibited by service users of the food bank. Service users regularly included refugees and asylum seekers from countries including Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Romania and Pakistan, as well as white and Asian families, and homeless individuals from various backgrounds. This emphasis on locality was also reflected in the recruitment of volunteers and donations that came largely from local individuals, organisations, businesses, schools and places of worship. Interestingly, in contrast with Org.A, as a self-funded organisation Org.B encountered no bureaucratic requirements regarding formal monitoring or evidencing of the exact demographics of service users or volunteers. This arguably allowed for the notion of ‘community’ to retain a more open and fluid designation, based predominantly on a sense of locality contained within the town of Oldham.

Overall, there are several observable axes at play within the organisation regarding conceptions of ‘faith’ and ‘community’ pertaining to both ideological and physical space. For individuals like M, ‘faith’ evokes a collective term for those who submit to God, therefore somewhat aligning with a dominant policy discourse regarding ‘faith’ as a source of universalism and shared values.

However, for him this does not extend to an aligned conception of individually observable ‘faith communities’, as this would demarcate boundaries and separations that are deemed both unnecessary and counterproductive to achieving ‘cohesion’. Similarly, with regards to the notion of ‘community’, emphasis is placed on geographic locality, and aligned with ‘Big Society’ notions of local civic participation, and is not inhibited by social or demographic distinctions that may be highlighted in policy discourse, such as race, religion or ethnicity. Interestingly, Zavos identifies this as a recent shift in South Asian communities, away from ‘intra-community activities’, and towards a sense of community development ‘beyond the specific parameters of local South Asian concerns’, with others such as Singh also linking this to the incentives of second and third generations of migrant communities in particular. In other words, social action projects such as that of Org.B serve to highlight an apparent turn towards localised notions of community that aspire to look outwards beyond the borders of religion and ethnicity, and evidence the ‘cross-cutting cleavages’ of identity and belonging that are being ‘negotiated’ in the ‘imagining’ of ‘community’.

In terms of Org.C and the ‘Sikh Community’ in Manchester, there was again an observable push to inhabit public space with positive affirmations regarding the Sikh religion. This was evidenced most explicitly in communication between G, the informal leader of Org.C, and other members.

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464 Hall, ‘Culture, Community, Nation,’ p.359.
465 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 
of the group, in which he suggested they “keep this up for a long time to come, and show what Sikhs can do, and show other Sikhs in Manchester who Sikhs truly are”. Here there is a pronounced purposefulness in exhibiting ‘good practice’ of ‘being a Sikh’ not only to the wider general public but significantly also to other Sikhs in the area. Lines are drawn between sections of what may be perceived in policy discourse as a singular ‘Sikh community’, and importantly, through this, simplistic declarations of engagement by local government funded organisations such as Org.A are negated. In this, the notion of ‘community’ is both contested and reconstructed, as defined through action and not merely assertion.

Discussions between volunteers regarding “temple politics” also demonstrated this notion. On a couple of occasions, the group encountered issues in using the communal kitchen of the Gurdwara routinely used each week, due to clashes with other functions or religious occasions. Consequently, members were forced to make enquiries with other temples in the area, requesting to use their facilities on one particular Sunday morning, yet were met with disapproval of older committee members, and therefore refused access. In addition, the same response was also often received with regards to calls for wider participation and donations, and even in simply informing worshippers about the work of Org.C. This outright refusal of some local Gurdwaras to participate or support the initiatives of the Org.C, resulted in sharp criticism by members on both ethical and theological grounds, as these “corrupt” elders were accused of not preserving the “true meaning of langar”, and being too

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concerned with “temple politics”.\textsuperscript{467} This is a notion also evidenced by Singh, who argues that many younger Sikhs in particular, now find the rigidity of the temple setting insufficient for gaining knowledge and experience of practicing Sikh identity, and as a result have begun to organize events outside of the Gurdwara that they are ‘free to shape as they wish’.\textsuperscript{468} Therefore in a similar vein, many Org.C volunteers sought to reject temple events, and instead proudly assert their Sikh status through justifying their participation in the homeless feed initiative as an “extremely rewarding” form of \textit{sewa}.\textsuperscript{469}

However, the make up of the organisation itself was, again like Org.B, not entirely limited to those who identify as Sikh, as due to being firmly located in a public space, interactions with passers by often led to the acquisition of additional volunteers from outside of the religious ‘community’. On several occasions, those who engaged in discussion with members of Org.C themselves then offered to volunteer alongside, and through this a number of regular volunteers began to attend, some even contributing to the food preparation at the Gurdwara. Volunteers included a father who attended with his two children, wanting to educate them about both homelessness and “other cultures”,\textsuperscript{470} two dinner ladies who wished to help out and “get involved with other communities”,\textsuperscript{471} and a Muslim woman who was passionate about volunteering and wanted to “make new friends in the area”.\textsuperscript{472} This woman initially informed me that she was “conscious of not telling everyone”\textsuperscript{473} that

\textsuperscript{467} Org.C Fieldnotes, 10/4/2016.
\textsuperscript{468} Singh, ‘Keeping the faith’, p.380.
\textsuperscript{469} Org.C Fieldnotes, 6/3/2016.
\textsuperscript{470} Org.C Fieldnotes 12/6/2016.
\textsuperscript{471} Org.C Fieldnotes 19/6/2016.
she was a Muslim, but after a conversation with a few other volunteers she was warmly reassured that everyone was welcome.

In a similar incident, members were approached on one afternoon by a lady with a pram, and were questioned about the applicability of being Sikh to joining the organisation. One volunteer, stood behind the pot of dahl with ladle in hand, responded almost instantly, stating firmly yet kindly, that this was irrelevant, as “it’s not about faith differences, it’s about helping people”, and explained that the fluctuating volunteer base of Org.C was often made up of people of diverse religious and ethnic identities. In addition to their assorted membership, collaboration was also formed between Org.C and another group feeding the homeless in the city centre, as on one afternoon, we spotted a group walking by in high visibility jackets, and G, always bursting with enthusiasm, wandered over and offered the group hospitality. On informing them of the Org.C initiative, and learning that they were also working towards helping homeless individuals across the city, G posed the idea of providing hot food for the group to distribute on a Sunday. This proposal was gratefully received, and thus began a sustained informal partnership. However, despite the existence of a varied pool of volunteers, it must still be noted that Org.C itself was principally made up of mostly Sikh members.

On the whole, again we can see interesting conceptions of both ‘faith’ and ‘community’ that permeate the ideological formation of the organisation, in acting to inhabit a space as representative of the ‘Sikh community’ but to retain

a critical approach to the configuration and unification of such within the locality, by placing criticism at the door of what are perceived as socially inactive Gurdwaras. In engaging with the public sphere, Org.C acted to solidify and promote a positive image of their religion, and to pursue collaborative action alongside other groups and individuals in the area. Interestingly though, there was no mention of the ‘Manchester community’ in the same ways evoked by Org.B and the ‘Oldham community’, though this is perhaps symptomatic of geographic and demographic differences that limit the wider application of the term ‘community’ in a city that not only covers a greater mass of physical space, but also is inhabited by a much larger and fragmented spectrum of diversity.

To return to discussions of political discourse, specifically regarding engagement with ‘faith communities’, through these two ethnographic examples of Org.B and Org.C, what is interestingly apparent is the contrasting demographics of those involved in these initiatives, compared to those who have usually been involved in government consultation and engagement strategies. Due to limitations resulting from previous attempts at building capacity through particular structural requirements, we have often seen representation of ‘faith communities’ drawn almost solely from male ‘elders’ and ‘gatekeepers’ within majority communities. It is for this reason that when government wishes to engage with the ‘Muslim community’ for example, they will most probably receive a middle-aged Asian male, as participation is often limited to this particular demographic. As a result, calls are now frequently made for greater participation of young people and women, perceived as acutely inactive in this area, with associated funding regularly attached to this.
However, what is apparent on analysis of ethnographic fieldwork in the two organisations above is a huge disconnect between this suggestion, and the demographics of the volunteer base for these social action initiatives. Both Org.B and Org.C pulled together a steady flow of regular volunteers from various age groups, of which interestingly the majority are in fact female, though they are often joined by their husbands and children, particularly in the case of Org.C, perhaps simply due to the project taking place on a weekend. The make-up of these organisations may however be considered more representative of a cross-section of religious individuals, than of adhering to official and formal attempts to identify ‘faith representatives’ or ‘faith communities’, as in organisations such as Org.A that appear to attract a majority of older male attendants as a result. Consequently, we might regard this as evidence of the greater desires of individuals to participate in social action initiatives as opposed to events centred on ‘interfaith dialogue’, and to also speculate on the methods of networking that these organisations utilize to gather and retain momentum.

**Networks, Capital and New Technologies**

Key to the notion of ‘community’, particularly in relation to a political discourse of ‘social cohesion,’ is consideration of the way in which communities are developed, held together and cultivated both internally and externally in the form of networks. Over recent decades, a substantial theoretical framework that has long underpinned discussions of both ‘community’, and networking between communities, are the notions of ‘capital,’ ‘social capital’, and related terms developed specifically to denote the
role of religion and ‘faith’ such as ‘spiritual capital’. Here I intend to reflect upon these frameworks in order to analyse my ethnographic data of three organisations in Greater Manchester. More recently, academics such as Eisenlohr have also began to recognise the increasing relationship between notions of networking and new technologies, and this is something I will again discuss in relation to my own fieldwork. Together, through these approaches I will assess multiple levels regarding the motivations, methods and attainment of organisations in developing a ‘community’ or communities into functioning networks, and explore the increasing role of new technology within this, evidenced strongly in South Asian communities through my own fieldwork.

On a basic level, what is initially apparent in the comparison of these organisations are the different purposes and motivations for the development of their associated networks. While Org.A explicitly seek to provide a platform for the ‘infrastructural joining up of people’, with the ‘specific brief of engaging faith communities in the decision making processes of the city’, Org.C and Org.B align themselves with a more action-based narrative. All three organisations may be seen to enact areas of policy discourse regarding ‘faith’ and cohesion, with Org.A embodying calls for representation and consultation with ‘faith communities’ through ‘interfaith’ work, and Org.B and Org.C pursuing what may be commonly deemed as ‘faith-based social action’. Yet what requires further assessment here is analysis of the methods and

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mechanisms of networking that affect the constitution of these organisations, through the designation and deployment of the notion of ‘community’, and the constitution of such both discursively and practically.

In assessing these conceptions of ‘networks’ and ‘communities’ in both policy and in scholarship, it is essential to consider the observation that these discussions are increasingly permeated by considerations of ‘capital’, a term that has been and continues to be widely used in a range of disciplines spanning from theology to economics. As a theoretical concept, it was initially and perhaps most notably developed in the work of critical social theorist, Piève Bourdieu. Bourdieu, whose work centred generally on discourses of class and hierarchy, posited that ‘capital’ could be described simply as a ‘resource’ that ‘yields power’, and as Calhoun notes, his original key insights on the subject served to set him apart from previous Marxist discussions of financial capital, proposing that

there are immaterial forms of capital – cultural, symbolic, and social – as well as a material or economic form, and that with varying levels of difficulty it is possible to convert one of these forms into the other.

Through this, Bourdieu inherently recognised the need for critical theory to ‘account for the structure and functioning of the social world’, not only through

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analysis of economic capital, but of capital ‘in all its forms’. As Dinham suggests, these theoretical developments have subsequently informed an ‘important proposition – that people are enriched not only by their financial and material assets... but also by their social relationships’, thus acknowledging the significant links between the subjectivity of personal experience, and the structures of the state and society. For Bourdieu, capital, as manifested in the above immaterial and material guises: economic, cultural and social, is ‘the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world’, and forms the basis of his ‘wider analysis of the diverse foundations of social order’.

What is of key consideration here is the notion of ‘social capital’ in particular. As Field notes, at the root of social capital theory is a simple proposition: ‘relationships matter’ and the development of these relationships into networks forms the basis upon which they may be seen as constituting a resource, and therefore a kind of capital. Theorists such as Putnam have sought to apply this notion in considering the ways in which politically, social capital theory presents a shift ‘away from a critique of class and the distribution and reproduction of power, to a policy vehicle for recalibrating the balance between the individual and the social’, and a response to the perceived growth of individualism. In defining the term, Putnam states that

\[^{482}\text{Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, p.242.}\]
\[^{483}\text{Dinham, }\textit{Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society, pp.100-101.}\]
\[^{484}\text{Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, p.241.}\]
\[^{486}\text{Field, }\textit{Social Capital, p.1.}\]
\[^{487}\text{Dinham, }\textit{Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis, p.43.}\]

By “social capital” I mean features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.\(^{488}\)

Putnam argued that ‘social networks have value’,\(^{489}\) predominantly as ‘a tool for building strong communities’,\(^{490}\) and encouraging the ‘productivity of individuals and groups’.\(^{491}\) According to Putnam, social capital is the key to producing ‘peaceful and thriving societies’,\(^{492}\) and can be deduced into two basic forms: bonding and bridging.\(^{493}\) Here bonding describes a kind of ‘sociological superglue’\(^ {494}\) that links similar or like-minded people who share mutual commitments, such as family or friends, and bridging describes connections between people who may have less in common, but may share overlapping interests, such as colleagues or neighbours. As Dinham notes, this typology has since also been extended to include ‘linking’ social capital, that ‘links beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status and similarity and enabling people to exert influence and reach resources outside their normal circles’,\(^ {495}\) a notion that proves particularly interesting when applied to religious groups who may seek to collaborate with others outside of their own traditions.

Overall Putnam’s discussion of social capital is framed primarily within the context of civic engagement, social action and community development, and


\(^{490}\) Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.103.


\(^{492}\) Dinham, *Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis*, p.43.

\(^{493}\) Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p.22.

\(^{494}\) Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p.23.

\(^{495}\) Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.105.
hence the value of social capital is presented as located within its use as a
communitarian resource, not merely as a means to an individualist end that
revolves solely around the acquisition of power and status. As a result of this,
as Dinham has demonstrated, social capital is now often viewed as the
‘primary lens for understanding community cohesion and active
citizenship’, and in its now ‘familiar contemporary guise’, has been recast in
Britain as a policy tool for ‘building strong communities against a backdrop of
individualism’. Significantly, as I have outlined previously, a key aspect of
this policy paradigm centres on the notion of ‘faith’ as a source of community
and repository of resources, with recent policy documents such as *Face to
Face, Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multifaith Society*
seeking to present ‘faith communities’ as particularly well positioned to
increase social capital through ‘faith-based social action’. As Dinham
suggests, the rhetoric on which this policy is based revolves around
assumptions that ‘ faiths’ are automatically ‘well bonded’ and inherently
interested in ‘bridging’ due to notions such as evangelism or the invocation to
be a ‘ good neighbour’, notions which he suggests may possess some truth,
but should still be evoked with caution.

In addition, related scholarship has also sought to examine the relationship
between notions of ‘ faith’ and social capital. Baker and Skinner in particular
have sought to develop the terms ‘ religious capital’ and ‘ spiritual capital’ to

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496 Dinham, *Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis*, p.61.
498 DCLG, *Face to Face, Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multifaith Society*.
500 Dinham, *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society*, p.106.
discuss a distinction between what motivates ‘faith communities,’ and the contribution of their actions.\textsuperscript{501} In a substantial report for the William Temple Foundation published in 2005, they discuss differences between ‘religious capital’ as ‘the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups’,\textsuperscript{502} and ‘spiritual capital’ as that which ‘energisest religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition... [as well as] a value system, moral vision and basis of faith’.\textsuperscript{503} Yet evidence of this is admittedly primarily drawn from a Christian perspective. Significantly though, these research outputs are then often translated into policy recommendations in the community and voluntary sector, for both central government and local authorities, as well as academics and ‘faith communities’ themselves.\textsuperscript{504}

On the whole, what can be drawn from this is the wider proposition that ‘faith’ is habitually conceived politically as a significant resource, as a source of ‘community’ and therefore a source of ‘capital’, as evidenced in my previous analysis of policy documents. Interestingly as Dinham suggests, in recognising the perceived inherent value of religious groups and individuals as ‘good citizens, active volunteers and bringers of community cohesion’, this prescribed role also effectively deems aspects such as beliefs and practices as ‘irrelevant except where they can be shown to have a role in the market’,\textsuperscript{505} thus creating a ‘publicly acceptable version of religion which can be palatable

\textsuperscript{501} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{502} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{503} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{504} Baker and Skinner, \textit{Faith in Action}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{505} Dinham, \textit{Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis}, p.75.
to the secular mind.\textsuperscript{506} It is perhaps through this logic that emphasis becomes placed on a generic notion of ‘faith’ as the shared source of capital that acts to provide the ‘bond’ within, and the ‘bridge’ between, reified categorizations of religious difference, in order to produce the discursive relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘cohesion’.

What is interesting to consider, in reflecting on the ethnographic portion of this research, are the ways in which these notional networks and collectivities of capital function on the ground, and the tools and techniques utilised by the three above organisations in order to further their connectivity within and between ‘communities’.

When first interviewing Org.A’s Community Development Worker, D, prior to the commencement of my volunteering position, the approach of Org.A as a ‘network’ was described to me in some detail. D informed me that Org.A seeks to interact and build networks with both the voluntary sector and the various ‘faith communities’ of Manchester... using various methods such as: website, email, press coverage, publicity materials such as leaflets/flyers, and going out into the city to meet up with groups and “make links”\textsuperscript{507}

Yet during my time with Org.A, I began to observe how their networking ability is arguably somewhat restricted by their choice of networking methods, resulting in a failure to recruit and widen participation from new angles and assorted different communities or peoples. As one member during an

\textsuperscript{506} Dinham, \textit{Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis}, p.78.
\textsuperscript{507} Interview with CDW for Org.A, 13/5/2015.
executive committee meeting admitted, Org.A’s virtual networking and ‘communication’ methods in particular are somewhat lacking. Though D assured me that the organisation’s “network for sending out emails has almost doubled in size in the last three years”, their website still remained very basic and their virtual presence on social media was largely in the form of un.responded to posts from their executive committee.

The membership of these online groups reflected the same group of individuals that regularly appeared at each of their events. On observing ‘dialogues’, and other community events attended by representatives of Org.A, I often watched as individuals entered and were soon greeted by familiar faces, and conversations were struck between regular attendees. Interestingly, many of these individuals were in attendance as representatives of official bodies or organisations, and not simply participants in a personal capacity as simply ‘members of the public’, and I began to recognise the same few faces as I continued to attend local events over the period of my fieldwork. In fact, I often felt an initial sense of awkwardness as a ‘new face’ at events in which most people seemed to have already met previously.

However, Org.A did occasionally seem to attract new individuals to the multifaith centre, albeit from the same handful of communities such as the local Ahmadiyya mosque and the Muslim-Jewish forum. Yet though efforts were assured to have been made to extend further invitations to other communities, Org.A did seem to fail to achieve any significant traction in

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508 Fieldnotes from executive committee meeting on 1/3/2016.
widening participation through the means of social media or online resources. D did however assure me that their website had now begun to generate “around 3 new enquiries per week”.\textsuperscript{510} Again, these issues are perhaps symptomatic of their bureaucratic requirements from their primary funding body located within Manchester City Council, as requests to demonstrate productivity based on the involvement of individuals from ‘diverse communities’\textsuperscript{511} may place constraints on the time spent on more ‘grassroots’ work.

This appears to be characteristic of organisations developed for the purpose of representation and engagement with local and national government. For example Zavos has observed a similar trend in placing emphasis on ‘networking amongst “traditions and organisations”’ within the Hindu Forum of Britain, again uncovering a tendency towards legitimacy based on numbers of organisations listed as members, which may in fact inhibit the ability to engage at ‘ground level’.\textsuperscript{512}

Like Org.A, Org.B too utilised tools such as websites, press coverage and flyers. However, their reliance on these methods appeared to be much less than Org.A, instead regularly favouring word of mouth and face-to-face interaction to promote their organisation publicly. Very often volunteers would be recruited to the food bank project who were family members, friends or

\textsuperscript{510} Interview with CDW for Org.A, 22/3/2016.
\textsuperscript{511} Manchester City Council, Directorate for Children and Families (Commissioning Hub) Quarterly Monitoring Form, 2015.
\textsuperscript{512} Zavos, ‘Digital Media and Networks of Hindu Activism in the UK,’ p.20.
colleagues of others involved, who had spoken to someone about the work of Org.B and subsequently offered to come and help out.

One volunteer, F, a woman in her 40s, who had been involved from the inception of the food bank, herself attended weekly, occasionally brought her children during school holidays and bank holidays, and on a few occasions her sister also attended and provided donations of hot food. Each time she would proudly bring in new volunteers, warmly introducing them to members of Org.B and other volunteers in the café, and was always happy to assist in acquiring any additional donations required. For example, on one occasion, F and her sister decided to make a roast dinner to serve in the café, and brought in over 30 portions of chicken, roast potatoes, Yorkshire pudding and vegetables, along with a large cake for dessert. F would also frequently seek to befriend service users in order to assess their needs in providing extra food for families to take home, and also managed to recruit her boss, the Headteacher of a local primary school, as a regular volunteer, and to involve students at the school in collecting food and clothing donations.

This became a familiar pattern of recruitment of members, and appeared to be a successful approach in providing an adequate number of volunteers each week to both grow and sustain the project. In addition to this, representatives of Org.B also took time to put on exhibitions and stalls at local community events such as UN International Peace Day in Oldham library, in which several volunteers adorned a stall with Org.B posters and information, chatted willingly to members of the public, and also handed out leaflets in the town centre. Through this approach to networking, volunteers and donations
appeared to snowball throughout my fieldwork period, and as demand increased at the food bank, so too did the response from individuals. Eventually, after around 12 months, just before I completed my fieldwork period, the organisation appeared to reach a point of saturation in which calls were now for maintenance and regularity of volunteers and donations, rather than substantial increases.

Org.C on the other hand, appeared to reach this point of saturation much quicker, as on joining the organisation in February 2016, having been set up for under two months, I observed that they already had a steady and adequate number of regular volunteers involved in the homeless feed project. They too appeared to have primarily recruited their volunteers from existing networks of friends and family, as well as other local attendees of the Gurdwara in which the food is prepared each week, and as the project took place on a Sunday, whole families were able to attend together each week. An example of this was demonstrated by one occasion in which H, a man in his 60s and longstanding member of Org.C, chose to fund the project for a week in commemoration of his late mother. This commemoration, in addition to offering funding, also consisted of providing additional homemade food including pakora and samosas, and inviting other members of his family to the homeless feed. H explained to me the importance of bringing along two of his children, who then also brought along his grandchildren, to participate in sewa in memory of his mother, as this was “something she would have greatly approved of”.513 This notion was also repeated on other occasions by members of the organisation,

who also brought additional volunteers and food offerings, in order to commemorate the anniversary of the death of a loved one.

As previously mentioned, volunteers were also occasionally recruited through face-to-face conversations with passers by. Yet during the whole time I conducted fieldwork with the organisation, there were never explicit calls made for more volunteers, other than a rallying of the existing pool of members and families. In this way Org.C remained a tight-knit network consisting mostly of families and friends.

Another notable theme relevant to these discussions is the impact of new technologies on the outreach of these networks and organisations. In anthropological terms, as Eisenlohr has noted,

New media can open up new spheres of public participation and political mobilisation... new electronic media can change the way public spheres are accessed and constituted, and... can redraw their boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.514

Likewise, Zavos has also observed that ‘the potential of the Internet to operate as a kind of “free public space,” in which new forms of networking enable new forms of social movement, is having its own impact on the ways in which activism develops’.515 As Baym has described, significantly this metaphor of online hardware or software platforms constituting ‘space’ is often integral to the language used to describe the internet, for example in the use of terms such

515 Zavos, ‘Digital Media and Networks of Hindu Activism in the UK,’ p.18.
as ‘cyberspace’. According to Zavos, these ‘new public spaces opened up by media technologies are spaces with an implicit potential to frame vigorous, “bottom up” trajectories of autonomous action accompanied by a strong sense of moral legitimacy’. Furthermore, these are not always ‘explicitly political activities, but they are strongly framed by a discourse of change, or social transformation’.

In terms of my own ethnographic data, these notions can be observed particularly in the ways in which both Org.C and Org.B utilise the messaging application ‘Whatsapp’ to create a ‘new public space’ to develop a form of activism based on intersecting discourses of religious practice and social action. This application allows users to generate a closed group to which other users may be added by individuals within the group who possess ‘admin’ status, and within this group, participants can share messages, images, videos, web links and other forms of media. Individuals who are members of more than one ‘Whatsapp group’ may also then share or ‘broadcast’ to other groups and individuals, resulting in an instant web of communication, and a potential limitless chain between associated users of the application. Through the use of this new technology, organisations such as Org.B and Org.C can swiftly send out targeted messages privately to all members and affiliates within the confines of the group, unlike on social media platforms that are often used to transmit information more broadly to a ‘general public’. This message can then be sent by recipients to other groups or contacts, and across other networks,

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517 Zavos, ‘Digital Media and Networks of Hindu Activism in the UK,’ p.22.
518 Zavos, ‘Digital Media and Networks of Hindu Activism in the UK,’ p.23.
forming a conglomerate of communications that draws upon existing social
capital evident in ‘real’ public space, and translates this into a virtual criss-
crossing of communities and connections.

On numerous occasions messages were sent out within the ‘Supporters of
[Org.B]’ Whatsapp group, calling for items needed urgently at the food bank
such as sleeping bags for homeless service users or furniture required for
refugee families being housed locally. This message would then be sent wider
through the network of online communications, a reply received within the
group, and often the items requested would be subsequently delivered to the
food bank the same afternoon, merely minutes or hours later. This same
platform was also often used as a feedback loop, in which participants in
projects would post images, videos or comments on the work that had been
done that day, a tool used every week by Org.C to communicate success to
those who may have donated items or cooked at the Gurdwara, but could not
be present in Piccadilly Gardens.

In addition, these organisations also inhabited various social media platforms
such as Facebook, Twitter and Linkedin, though some are more active than
others. On writing this in completion of my fieldwork the number of ‘Likes’ on
each Facebook page were 2979 for Org.B, 535 for Org.C, and 305 for Org.A.
Through this virtual platform, each organisation attempted to reach a wider
audience than their existing members, either to raise awareness (Org.C), call
for donations (Org.B), or advertise events (Org.A). Therefore, as a result,
Org.B, Org.A and Org.C all combined different methods of networking,
utilising different sources of social capital and techniques involving new technologies.

What is interesting to note is the limitations of these approaches, in particular when comparing Org.B and Org.A, who both claim to be constantly engaged in attempts to widen participation. Despite their limited attempts at using of social media, alongside their website, emailing list, and other conventional methods such as leaflets and flyers, Org.A regularly experienced limited attendance of a number of regular individuals. These individuals also often represented the same sections of particular religious communities, at events that are in fact marketed and proclaimed to be aimed at ‘people of all faiths and none’. In this way, their lack of grassroots outreach work, and retention of a closed conception of community contained within the bureaucratic framework to which they must adhere, arguably left them vulnerable to becoming a stagnant circle of ‘regulars’ rather than a growing web of connections that one would expect from a proclaimed city-wide ‘network’.

On the other hand, Org.B, in embracing new technologies and engaging in more face-to-face ‘grassroots’ work, appeared to have a more prosperous approach to widening participation and support. This approach also emerged successful not only within their own existing networks of social capital related to friends, family and religious identity, but also in expanding beyond this in reaching the general public, thus gaining momentum to grow as an

\[^{519}\text{Org.A website, accessed 5/5/2015.}\]
organisation, and to continuing to develop existing and new projects, a sentiment frequently expressed by both M and R.

Therefore, in terms of networking, it could be argued that limitations to ‘interfaith’ structures, largely resulting from rigid requirements of funding, lead to the inflation of a mosaic of small circles, rather than an expanding web of connectivity. These shapes of networking subsequently affect the conception and formation of ‘community’, in serving to maintain bounded categories of ‘faith communities’ represented within an ‘interfaith’ framework, or on the other hand acting to absorb these affirmations into a wider, more fluid notion of community located in practice, as seen with Org.B.

As Castells et al. have argued, new methods of mobile communication now allow for the often spontaneous emergence of what are termed ‘communities of practice’, by ‘transforming an initiative to do something together into a message that is responded to from multiple sources by convergent wills in order to share the practice’. This often involves a spontaneous ‘call for action’, and is argued by Castells et al. to evidence a general trend for ‘ad hoc groupings to take precedence over formal structures of interaction and participation’, through technological platforms that allow for these types of communities to manifest in instant time.

This is a notion exemplified by my aforementioned example regarding the use of Whatsapp to obtain items urgently required by the Org.B Food Bank, and

520 Castells et al., Mobile Communication and Society, p.249.
521 Castells et al., Mobile Communication and Society, p.249.
also seen in Org.C’s use of this mobile application in calls for volunteers or donations. However, as Castells et al. also significantly note,

These communities can only be formed if the message aimed at constituting them resonates in a network of affinity. In other words, communities of practice... express the latent existence of common interests and/or values.\textsuperscript{522}

By utilising the purposefully established platform of a Whatsapp group, joined by those with shared ‘common interests’, Org.B and Org.C were able to tap into a ready-made ‘network of receptive subjects’\textsuperscript{523} in order to ignite a ‘community of practice’ instantly at any point in time. What this demonstrates is the ability for new technologies to facilitate the initiation of a ‘community in moments’,\textsuperscript{524} and significantly one that is officiated not solely in physical space as ethnographers such as Raj\textsuperscript{525} have observed, but also in cyber space. The networked individuals who constitute this ‘community of practice’ are then subsequently transformed into a ‘conscious, collective actor’ in lived social space, thus evidencing what Castell’s describes as ‘multimodal’ forms of networking, utilising both online and offline, and pre-existing social networks.\textsuperscript{526} Through this, organisations such as Org.B and Org.C are able to utilise, unite and expand existing networks that pre-exist in diasporic public space.

\textsuperscript{522} Castells et al., Mobile Communication and Society, p.249.
\textsuperscript{523} Castells et al., Mobile Communication and Society, p.250.
\textsuperscript{524} Raj, Where are you From?, p.93.
\textsuperscript{525} Raj, Where are you From?, p.93.
As Werbner argues, diaspora communities in particular are most often ‘highly politicised social formations’ that frequently attempt to assert their identity through public acts of mobilisation and generosity,⁵²⁷ and so in accordance with Castells, I would suggest that new technologies can provide an effective platform to facilitate networking practices that may be rooted in urban or public space, but are sustained in the virtual space of the internet.⁵²⁸ As a result the mobilisation and expansion of existing communities for the purposes of social action can be accelerated and streamlined through use of online social networks utilised by ‘individuals living at ease with digital technologies in the hybrid world of real virtuality’,⁵²⁹ who can collectively ignite a ‘community of practice’.⁵³⁰ The use of these technologies can potentially stimulate a more efficient advancement of civic engagement, alongside the evolving embellishment of ‘community’, as a tool to connect and engage people in collaborative social action.

**Conclusions**

Academic analysis and utilization of the term ‘community’ has seen a shift away from focus on physical location, instead towards the consideration of symbolic and imagined constructions of ‘community’ that may occur within various forms of social, geographic, and virtual space. Having evaluated ethnographic evidence from field sites in Greater Manchester, interesting

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⁵²⁸ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p.221.

⁵²⁹ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p.233.

⁵³⁰ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*. 
irregularities are apparent between policy and practice, predominantly through an overuse of the term ‘community’ within policy discourse and documentation that: a) implies a presumed collectivity between individuals who share one identity characteristic, b) implies a presumed boundary that binds and separates these people apart from other ‘communities’, and c) fails to account for the fact that both of these may be inaccurate and may not exist in reality in terms of values, practices and social relations/interactions.

With regards to the notion of ‘faith community’, I have argued that there is clear overuse and oversimplification of the term by policy makers and organisations, who fail to account for the extent to which the notion applies to individuals and groups that may share the same religious identity, but may not envisage themselves as a ‘community’ either symbolically or practically. Likewise, in some circumstances, though we may observe some self-assertions of ‘faith community’, this may actually become adjoined with or even displaced by other notions of ‘community’ based on location, shared action or activity.

In terms of the ethnographic examples of Org.B and Org.C, one might initially seek to regard them as representative of particular ‘faith communities’, aligned with previous policy propagations. Yet on closer assessment of participation and engagement with the wider public, the expressions of ‘community’ evoked by these organisations are by no means bounded or closed, nor related exclusively to the notion of ‘faith’. The conception of ‘community’ found within these organisations is open to those from outside of their prescribed mosaic piece in the ‘world religions’ paradigm, and is not perceived within a framework of ‘interfaith’ parallelism. Further, the foundation and operation
of these organisations in fact displays not just a mechanism by which ‘faith communities’ are strengthened and ‘bonded’ from within, but the ways in which they are seen to also be actively build ‘bridges’ into wider society.

As a result, these organisations appear to be rejecting a notion of political legitimacy through failing to adhere to the particular political or ‘organisational tropes which demonstrate representation of “the community”’.\(^{531}\) However, narratives of religious homogeneity are utilized not to engage with government, but to engage with the public sphere in providing positive representations of ‘Muslims’ or ‘Sikhs’, and seeking to promote a notion of ‘social cohesion’ through the rearticulation of religious tradition into diasporic forms of devotional practice.

Conversely, Org.A instead presents a direct enactment of policy discourse regarding the representation of and engagement with individually bounded ‘faith communities’, as envisaged in both national and local policy documents, and evidenced in monitoring forms and interview data from fieldwork based within the organisation. Interestingly, as we have seen, this reification or rejection of the notion of the ‘faith community’ also has a direct impact on the development of social capital through ‘multimodal’\(^ {532}\) forms of networking located in both physical and online spaces.

In the case of all three organisations, internet amenities have been used in an attempt to develop a network of individuals and participants, across numerous

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\(^{531}\) Zavos, ‘Negotiating Multiculturalism,’ p.894.
\(^{532}\) Castells, \textit{Networks of Outrage and Hope}, p.221.
‘crosscutting cleavages’\(^{533}\) and diverse demographics. Key to this approach are often social media such as the messaging application ‘Whatsapp’, through which individuals are able to instantly initiate a ‘community of practice’\(^{534}\) initially rooted in religious collectivity, yet aiming to eventually reach further into the public sphere through action on the ground. Essentially, these ‘communities of practice’\(^{535}\) can cultivate communities that already exist in diasporic public space, and can also create horizontal connections outside of diasporic or religious affiliations, in aid of wider shared goals of social action and civic engagement. Through this, organisations are able to quickly tap into numerous networks in order to form a ‘conscious collective actor’\(^{536}\) in the pursuit of common interests. Yet crucially, this is an area that policy regarding ‘faith-based social action’ thus far fails to account for.

Importantly, overall what is evidenced here through initial attempts to assess ‘policy in practice’ is the fact that lines cannot always be clearly drawn between these domains. Instead, what is uncovered through ethnography is a fluid maze of meaning-making and an intricate imagining of ‘community’ and ‘faith’, found in physical, social and increasingly, virtual spaces, forming variable network formations that are in a constant state of flux. Drawing further on this, in the following chapter I will seek to assess the impact of this on practical implications towards the dominant structural conception of ‘faith-based’ organisations found in policy, and the tangible relationship between FBOs and the notion of ‘interfaith’ that often underpins this.

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\(^{533}\) Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle*, p.85.

\(^{534}\) Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*.

\(^{535}\) Castells et al., *Mobile Communication and Society*, p.249.

\(^{536}\) Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p.219.
Chapter 6
Performing Policy or Deflecting Discourse: ‘Faith-Based’ Organisations in Greater Manchester

Walking through the café into the kitchen area I am greeted by the usual volunteers from the church, as well as F (a longstanding member of Org.B) and another volunteer, who enthusiastically introduces herself and explains it is her first time at the food bank. After hanging my coat and bag, and acquiring an apron, together we begin to prepare the space for the arrival of hot food, setting out plates, bowls and cutlery, and instructing the ‘newbie’ in the logistics of our tried and tested production line of service. Looking through the kitchen hatch, the café area is now full of people sat around small tables, mostly in groups of two or three, drinking tea and coffee while others stand chatting or tending to children. Once prepared, M (co-founder of Org.B) appears to inform us that we are due to receive a large donation of leftovers from a wedding venue nearby, and asks us to package the food appropriately to hand out firstly to families who access the foodbank, and then to other service users on a first come first served basis. As we await the delivery, F tells us about her new diet and exercise regime, and we compare cooking tips for healthy meals as we shuffle around the kitchen washing up used cups passed through the hatch by church volunteers. After a short time, the food arrives, carried by two male volunteers, through the back gate and into the kitchen, in large plastic storage tubs full of chicken curry and carrier bags full of naan breads and rice. Slightly overwhelmed by the sheer amount of food supplied, F takes a moment to plan our packing strategy, and we then immediately begin portioning spoonfuls of curry into smaller containers, placing handfuls of rice into freezer bags, and dividing naans into individually foil wrapped parcels. During our rush to complete the task, M returns, accompanied by two men who appear to be on a guided tour of the foodbank. Visibly impressed by the amount of food being packaged in the kitchen, the two men enquire about where the food had been donated from. M tells them that a member of Org.B had been contacted by the wedding venue nearby, and had picked up the food this morning. Nodding in appraisal, the men audibly acknowledge this information with “mashallah” (a phase used to express gratitude to God, translated as ‘God has willed it’), but are met with a word of caution from M. “Alhamdulillah (praise be to God)” he asserts, “but it’s not really proper sadaqah (voluntary charity), the food has to be produced with the intention of giving, so leftovers don’t count...”

Introduction

This opening vignette acts to demonstrate the intricacy of religious meaning applied to acts of charity observed within my case study of Org.B, and provides an evidence base for an analysis of the specific ways in which this organisation presents itself as strongly motivated by Islamic principles, yet as I will later show, wholly rejects the notion of being a ‘faith-based’ organisation. In this chapter I seek to explore the formation of what may be termed ‘faith-based’ organisations, or FBOs, and the perceived rejection of this as a discourse associated with the political sphere. Having evaluated the role of ‘faith’ in UK cohesion policy, and subsequently assessing the ways in which formations of ‘faith communities’ are conceived in both policy and practice, I will examine the ways in which some organisations directly demonstrate a preference for policy frameworks, such as those that prescribe ‘interfaith’ configurations, while others may significantly challenge or deflect the terms ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based’ in an attempt to avoid political rhetoric, and instead place emphasis on precise religious practices as opposed to discursive assertions of ‘faith’.

I will firstly outline the significance of recent approaches to researching ‘faith-based’ organisations and the conceptual and political relationship between FBOs and the notion of ‘interfaith’. Following this, I will look to discuss the ways in which the individuals and groups I have worked with in Greater Manchester conceive of the ‘faith’ aspect of their organisation. I will seek to assess the alignment of these conceptions with local policy discourse, and question perceptions of the notion of ‘politics’ that inform the level of
engagement with local government and other formal partnerships. Subsequently, I will demonstrate the diversity of conceptual relationships between notions of ‘faith’ and religion within organisations in the UK, that may be considered misaligned with policy proliferations and local authority logistics. Through this I will uncover alternative articulations of the role of religion held by these organisations, that require a more nuanced sociological analysis to be developed in chapter seven, in exploring new forms of South Asian ‘socio-religious action’.

Saturated Structures? - An Overview of ‘Faith-Based’ and ‘Interfaith’ Organisations

In recent years, increasing interest regarding ‘faith’ and religion in the public and political realm has led to equivalent developments in researching ‘faith-based’ organisations or FBOs, particularly within anthropological studies in the USA and the UK. As Hefferan and Fogerty have suggested, unlike previous trends in anthropological research regarding secular NGOs, ‘the analysis of FBOs requires that anthropologists take seriously the theological underpinnings shaping organizational thought and action’, 538 and thus acknowledge the implications of such in assessing what exactly we mean when we use the term ‘faith-based organisation’. As is consistent with this thesis as a whole, it is essential to consider precisely what we mean by ‘faith’ and how this is conceived by those who establish or work within FBOs.

As Hefferan and Fogerty have noted, a number of typologies have attempted to account for the variety of FBOs, distinguished around several axes regarding considerations such as the founding of the organisation and the source of funding.\textsuperscript{539} As they suggest,

In such typologies, one end is fielded by those organizations considered to be “faith-saturated,” meaning that religious and faith elements provide an explicit organizational basis in all aspects of the FBO and are central to the programming and goals of the FBO. At the opposite end are those organizations considered “secular,” where religious and faith elements are completely absent, forming no part of the organization’s mission, goals, funding, or practice. Sandwiched between these two poles are a range of organizational types, where faith and religion come together in differing configurations that are more “moderate” than those at either pole.\textsuperscript{540}

However, inevitably these typologies do not always provide an adequate framework in all circumstances, and many organisations may align with or combine certain elements in some areas and not others. As I will argue, this spectrum presented by Hefferan and Fogerty is not always clearly apparent or consistently articulated by organisations whose ‘missions, goals, funding or practice’\textsuperscript{541} may shift or change over time, and may consist of multiple meanings intersected at various points by fluid notions of ‘faith’ or religious tradition. Importantly, these notions of ‘faith’ and religion are themselves also subject to discursive deployment as politically positioned terms that are far from synonymous as Hefferan and Fogerty appear to present them. These terms, particularly ‘faith’, have been operationalized in political discourse, and

\textsuperscript{539} Hefferan & Fogerty, ‘The Anthropology of Faith and Development’, p.2.
as a result the phrase ‘faith-based’ organisation itself begs further analysis.

Within this discursive framework we must also acknowledge the persistence of notions often deployed in the political conception of ‘faith-based’ organisations, such as the terms ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’. As demonstrated through detailed policy document analysis, in the UK political sphere these concepts are often closely intertwined with narratives of ‘cohesion’, through assertions that ‘faith-based’, and in many cases specifically ‘interfaith’, organisations have a key role to play in the promotion and development of ‘social cohesion’ both locally and nationally. However, here it is first important to consider what exactly we mean by the term ‘interfaith’, as well as ‘multifaith’, as terms frequently referred to in political narratives regarding ‘faith’ and cohesion.

Definitions of these concepts have been offered by academics such as Weller, who as we saw in chapter two, states that

> When a society or an event or a project is described as ‘multi-faith’, it usually means that it includes a variety of religious groups. While the use of multi-faith highlights variety, the use of the term inter-faith points more to the relationships between religions and the people who belong to them.\(^\text{542}\)

In other words, ‘multifaith’ is most often used simply as a term to denote diversity or to insinuate inclusion, while ‘interfaith’ carries deeper implications regarding a reciprocity of relationships within and between

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groups or individuals. Yet this definition is not always clearly articulated by those within organisations that utilise such labels, and in many cases the terms are often used interchangeably.

Though my analysis begins somewhat recently in 2001, as noted in chapter two, the term ‘interfaith’ can in fact be traced back to the first World Parliament of Religions in 1893, an event that was subsequently translated into a British context through the Religions of the Empire Conference in 1924, and followed by the World Congress of Faiths in 1936. As Weller suggests, ‘the colonial and imperial projects of the nineteenth century turned out, in many ways, to have been a significant catalyst for a growth in consciousness about religious diversity and plurality’, and for the development of ‘interfaith’ activity, away from its ‘enthusiasts’, and towards the political arena.

As a result, Brodeur has described how a ‘global interfaith movement’ has since emerged, typified through six main characteristics:

First, there is a unique history out of which this movement emerged with one social location: Chicago... Second, the uniqueness of the interfaith movement lies predominantly at a perceptual level, that is, dialogue affects our perceptions regarding identity similarities and differences... Third, the exponential growth of the interfaith movement in recent years is happening within a new emerging network culture, which is the result of the revolution in information technology. Fourth, this network culture shapes the diversity of forms (methodologies) and contents (goals) of every inter-religious organization. Fifth, the new self-awareness which participants in this interfaith movement have of themselves within its widespread reality is glocal in nature, that is, the awareness is a reflection of a complex

process of perception that integrates various local and global variables. Finally, traditional centres of power in human decision-making have taken notice of this new human phenomenon and have often responded creatively, thus increasing the relevance of the global interfaith movement.545

‘Interfaith’ is therefore about connections between religious traditions and individuals at both a local and global level. Here, as discussed in chapter five, the idea of ‘interfaith’ is argued by Brodeur to be increasingly underpinned by an ‘emerging network culture’ that shapes the form and content of organisations, resulting in what he describes as ‘the exponential growth of the interfaith movement’.546 However, I would argue that though this ‘network culture’ has allowed for the development of organisations formed through shared or collaborative religious motivations, the instinctive labelling of these movements as ‘interfaith’ is often inaccurate in terms of the self-perceptions of organisations and individuals involved. This assertion is demonstrated below through subsequent discussion of ethnographic case studies.

The various political structures developed in recent years that seek to enact an ‘interfaith’ framework inevitably carry ideological baggage with regards to the political positioning of the notion of ‘interfaith’ as contributing directly to the development of ‘social cohesion’ in the face of increasing religious pluralism. In this way, though for some the theological benefits of ‘interfaith’ outweigh political concerns, with ‘interfaith’ engagement forming not just a supplementary practice but a religious obligation,547 for others, ‘interfaith’ has

545 Patrice Brodeur, ‘From the margins to the centers of power: The increasing relevance of the global interfaith movement,’ Cross Currents 55 (2005), p.42.
546 Brodeur, ‘From the margins to the centers of power,’ p.42.
547 Ingrid Mattson, ‘Of Fences and Neighbors: An Islamic Perspective on Interfaith
become an irreversibly politically loaded term, contested by individuals and organisations for that precise reason.

In recent years, ‘faith’, and ‘interfaith’, have been driven further into political agendas through increasing immigration and globalisation, leading to a context in which the terms feature heavily in the contemporary socio-political and religious landscape of England and the UK.\textsuperscript{548} As Zavos has argued, the institutionalisation of the idea of ‘interfaith dialogue’ within this political discourse has helped form the ‘public legitimacy of religion’\textsuperscript{549} as a repository of shared values, and thus an asset to be utilised in government approaches to cohesion work and the management of pluralism.

As Halafoff has noted, in the UK this recent growth in state support of ‘interfaith’ engagement has resulted in a plethora of new organizations ‘cropping up all over the place’,\textsuperscript{550} and subsequent growth in associated umbrella organisations at regional and national level. As Pearce has discussed, local ‘interfaith’ activity has also seen rapid growth in recent years, and these local groups operate to perform various functions such as to promote either

\begin{itemize}
  \item informal activity... bringing together individuals who wish to learn more about one another’s religious traditions... [or to] represent more formally the multi-faith character of their localities and engage on this basis with the local authority and other public bodies... [or] combine a more formal representative role with the facilitation of personal encounter in pursuit of
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\textsuperscript{548} Weller, \textit{Religions in the UK Directory 2007-10}, p.45.
\textsuperscript{549} Zavos, ‘Negotiating Multiculturalism,’ p.890.
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mutual understanding.\textsuperscript{551}

These assertions present a continuity of ‘consciousness’ regarding religious diversity and plurality as described by Weller,\textsuperscript{552} as a consideration contingent on both initial imperial ‘interfaith’ projects such as the World Parliament of Religions, and in the current political envelopment of ‘interfaith’ in the political arena, as an asset towards ‘social cohesion’ through ‘learning about one another’s religious traditions’ and pursuing ‘mutual understanding’ as Pearce describes it.\textsuperscript{553} The notion of ‘interfaith’ to this day still carries the colonial conditions of a representative ‘world religions’ framework, now developed alongside discourses of ‘faith’ presented as the holistic mosaic formed through the perceived presence of ‘shared values’. Furthermore, the apparent preference in UK policy for ‘faith-based’ organisations to consist of interfaith configurations, as opposed to ‘single faith’ affiliations, further demonstrates the persistent positioning of the ‘interfaith’ model in the political sphere as an ideological tool and an institutional ideal.

This political encouragement towards the development of ‘interfaith’ FBOs has inevitably carried with it the conditional requirements of a particular preferred framework regarding issues such as equal representation and prohibition of proselytization in order to develop a more ‘palatable’ version of religion suited to the public and political sphere.\textsuperscript{554} In this way, it is of interest to consider the


\textsuperscript{552} Weller, Religions in the UK Directory 2007–10, p.44.

\textsuperscript{553} Pearce, ‘The Inter Faith Network,’ p.152.

\textsuperscript{554} Dinham, Faith and Social Capital After the Debt Crisis, p.78.
way in which policies conceive of the appropriate formation of ‘faith-based’ or ‘interfaith’ organisations, the way in which organisations themselves seek to articulate this, and the precise role of ‘faith’ or indeed, religion within this.

**Drive, Devotion and Demographics: Being a ‘Faith-Based’ Organisation**

Having outlined the key considerations for assessing FBOs in UK policy and practice, I now seek to discuss the conception and self-perception of a cross-section of what may be termed ‘faith-based’ organisations in Greater Manchester. The significance here is placed upon ethnographic and qualitative research methods, as opposed to demographic data, that aim to uncover the complexities of conceiving notions that are also produced discursively, such as ‘faith-based’ and ‘interfaith’. Perhaps more importantly, this provides opportunities for critical engagement with the conception of the term ‘faith-based’ itself, through exposing limitations in applying this notion to organisations who may in fact seek to reject this label. The methodological positioning of the ethnographer as an ‘insider’ allows for richer data in evaluating instances that may challenge the legitimacy of apparent demonstrations of ‘policy in practice’. For example, in observing the involvement of ‘people of faith’ in ‘interfaith’ projects or ‘faith-based’ social action, greater attention to detail allows for more accurate assessment of the precise perceptions of those involved in such activities. As Harris et al. propose, it is essential to consider ‘the special motivations of those who contribute money and voluntary time to the organisations of their own faith
communities’, and in the case of my own fieldwork data, it is evident that the precise role that notions of ‘faith’, ‘interfaith’, and indeed the label of ‘faith-based’ play in the development of organisations indeed differs dramatically.

Org.A based their self conception unequivocally around a discourse of ‘interfaith’ that was both publically and politically accountable. For this purpose, the theological alignment of the organisation remained consciously ‘neutral’, as opposed to ‘faith saturated’ by any particular religious tradition, thus seemingly placing them firmly at the secular end of Hefferan and Fogerty’s aforementioned typologies. Yet as I suggested, this typology is not necessarily definitive or reflective of the intricacies of organisations like Org.A. Though in its ‘mission, goals, funding, or practice’ the organisation may be seen to be ‘secular’, without explicit expressions of any particular ‘faith’, the individuals who make up the organisation may in fact carry with them explicit ‘faith-based’ motivations and some members did view their participation as theologically rooted practice. Yet for Org.A, the outward assertion was that they are ‘faith-based’ simply by the fact that they are primarily made up of ‘people of faith’ and serve the purpose of representing the ‘voice for faith communities’ across Manchester.

558 Org.A fieldnotes, 10/10/2015.
On the whole Org.A aimed to adhere to a discursively developed and defined notion of ‘interfaith’ that formed the foundation of the organisation, and augmented considerations for developing initiatives and events. Thus this was an initial line of enquiry for my ethnographic work.

On commencing fieldwork at Org.A, one of my foremost initial intentions was to interrogate the notion of ‘interfaith’, and in my first encounter with Org.A’s half-time Community Development Worker, D, he neatly explained to me the difference for Org.A between the two concepts of ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’. 'Interfaith’, he stated, is “about learning relationships between faiths and about faith communities”, whereas ‘multifaith’ is “about bringing people from different faith communities together to work together or to have a common voice”. For me, this seemed like a very rigid and closed answer, after which he began to change the subject, leaving little room to press further into his matter of fact response. Yet during participant observation of Org.A monthly executive meetings, these issues of definition did occasionally creep in regarding the logistics of a “proper interfaith event”.

Criticisms were made towards ‘faith groups’ in the city who had attempted to organise such an event that, in the eyes of some executive committee members, had failed to adhere to these ‘proper’ guidelines. During one meeting, sitting around the table discussing feedback from events members had attended over the preceding month, the only female and Muslim executive member present at the meeting, a writer in her late 50s, described how she had enjoyed

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560 Interview with CDW for Org.A, 13/5/2015.
attending a recent event at a local Sikh Gurdwara. She spoke fondly of how she and other attendees of several different ‘faiths’ were interested to learn about “Sikh faith and practices”, and were more than happy to take part in the langar and other rituals. Overall she was extremely positive about her experiences at what she argued was a “fantastic interfaith event”. However, on concluding her report she was immediately met with disapproval from another individual present at the meeting, P, and challenged as to whether the event was in fact an ‘interfaith’ event. Discussions then began as to the strategic, (and perhaps more importantly, discursive), requirements in referring to an event as truly ‘interfaith’, namely that the event must be organised equally in conjunction with another ‘faith group’ and contain some aspect of “dialogue”. Therefore here it is evident that though the discourse of ‘interfaith’ appears to be rigid and self-evident within policy frameworks, and even to some extent in the ethos of Org.A imparted to me by D, the content and legitimacy of the notion of ‘interfaith’ within this particular organisation was at times subject to internal negotiation.

I again sought to bring up this issue in my final interview with D, and after some hesitancy was met with the clarification that what P was suggesting is in fact correct, as “interfaith ought to be about a two-way exchange, because it’s between faiths as equals... [not] one-way traffic”. In other words, ‘people of
faith’ simply attending a place of worship in order to learn from other ‘people of another faith’, as in the case of the Gurdwara, is not in itself considered to be satisfactorily ‘interfaith’. There must in fact be a two way ‘dialogue’.

With regards to religiosity and being a ‘faith-based’ organisation, though several of their projects may inherently contain some discussion around ‘faith’ and religious practice, on the whole the organisation strived to maintain neutrality, so as to be open to ‘people of all faiths and none’ and avoid any particular theological alignment or bias. As D stated to me during an interview,

It’s a faith-based organisation in the sense that we are primarily made up of people from who identify themselves as being a particular faith tradition, but we’re not practising any particular faith tradition, because we have people from lots of different ones.567

Therefore, Org.A was conceived as a ‘faith-based’ organisation purely from a demographical and representational stance, and not based on, or motivated by, any particular religious perspective. Org.A, in fully embracing their position as an ‘interfaith’ representative body, thus tended to shy away from any explicit mentions of doctrine or scripture so as to remain neutral and unbiased, as an organisation that reports back directly to the city council.

On the other hand, Org.B, may be viewed discursively as a ‘single faith’ group. Yet for members of Org.B, it was not ‘faith’, but is specifically Islam, that was unequivocally and unapologetically cited as the explicit religious motivation

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for their work, and also provided a source of encouragement for donors. References to scripture were often included in publicity materials both in print and online via social networking such as Facebook, with leaflets and posts regularly including a related Hadith or reference to the Prophet Muhammad. However, though the charity drew inspiration from Islamic teaching in its approach to social action, they also actively encouraged the participation from all members of the ‘local community’ regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender, and claimed not to use their activities as a form of Da’wah or proselytising.

Interestingly, during one trustee meeting there was some discussion of the nature of the organisation as ‘faith-based’. In this the proposition was made that though for the majority of those involved in working or volunteering for the charity, Islam provided a strong motivator for participation, and theological notions such as sadaqah (voluntary charity) frame their involvement, the organisation is not officially registered as a ‘religious charity’. According to the Charity Commission, Org.B’s activities are described as ‘feeding the homeless, and social community cohesion exhibits’\(^{568}\) (used to educate the public about Islam), and are classified as undertaking ‘general charitable purposes, education/training, and the prevention or relief of poverty’.\(^{569}\) In addition, their ‘charitable objects’ are stated as

\[\text{The promotion of religious harmony for the benefit of the public by: (a) educating the public in different religious beliefs including an awareness of their distinctive features and their common ground to promote good relations between persons of}\]

different faiths; (b) promoting knowledge and mutual understanding and respect of the beliefs and practices of different religious faiths. 2. To further such charitable purposes for the public benefit as are exclusively charitable according to the laws of England and Wales and the trustees may from time to time determine. 570

Therefore, though they make reference to ‘religion’, their entire entry does not contain any allusion to Islam in particular, as they endeavour to maintain a public and political image of neutrality. For M, the co-founder of the organisation, this was a conscious decision seen as more beneficial in terms of public engagement, and avoidance of suspicions he perceived to be associated with formally ‘faith-based’ charities or organisations. 571 Though members of Org.B were open about their personal motivation for participating in these initiatives, such as one volunteer who described her wish to fulfil her “obligation as a Muslim to help others and give to anyone in need”, 572 the observable preference was for the organisation itself to remain religiously neutral in a bureaucratic sense, in order to aid wider public engagement.

In addition, though Org.B, particularly M, explicitly denounced any alignment along axes of traditional ‘interfaith’ work, their work did involve close collaborative effort with the local Unitarian Chapel in utilising their space and amenities. Therefore, in terms of ‘interfaith’ discourse in this context, though the collaboration here between the church and Org.B may contain the appropriate demographic to be outwardly viewed as ‘interfaith’, Org.B did not adhere to the ideological definition as such. As M informed me, the church

initially proposed to be merely providing a space, and there was no common practice of ‘interfaith dialogue’ in operation here,\textsuperscript{573} though informal conversations on the subject of religion did sometimes occur, such as during Ramadan in which members of Org.B were asked questions about the practice of fasting for example,\textsuperscript{574}

For Org.B, the service and the action comes first, as they claimed to have no interest in playing out any ‘interfaith’ narratives or outwardly acknowledging the diversity of their volunteers. They conveyed that they were simply concerned with “serving ‘people’” and not distinguishing or labelling those involved or service users in order to serve what they suggest is a “political diversity related discourse”.\textsuperscript{575} In this way they did not monitor or collect data on the demographics of volunteers, or consider this as vital to the publicity of their organisation. However, the religious orientation of those involved in the trustee board of the organisation did have significant impact on the activities of the charity.

Trustee meetings saw several theological discussions regarding the ways in which the charity spends monetary donations. For example, there had apparently been occasions when donors had specified that their donations be given to “Muslim only” recipients, to which the trustees expressed distaste as this was “not the Sunnah of the Prophet”, and thus the theology underpinning this discussion was explicit in guiding the decisions of the Board of Trustees,

\textsuperscript{573} Org.B Fieldnotes, 25/5/2015.
\textsuperscript{574} Org.B Fieldnotes, 22/6/2015.
\textsuperscript{575} Org.B Fieldnotes, 15/2/2016.
all of whom identified as Muslim.\textsuperscript{576}

In addition, as seen in the opening ethnographic vignette, other discussions also took place at the food bank project regarding the donation of leftover food from a nearby venue who regularly host large Asian weddings, posited by donors as \textit{sadaqah} (voluntary charity). Curries, rice (often both sweet and savoury), naans and other varied edible delights would arrive in large plastic tubs, bags and containers, which then had to be hurriedly divided into smaller portions suitable for small families and single service users to take home as ‘doggy bags’. However, despite these additional food packages always being well received by service users, on multiple occasions M was observed asserting to other volunteers that merely donating ‘leftovers’ from these events was in fact not “proper \textit{sadaqah}”,\textsuperscript{577} as food should be prepared or produced for the explicit purpose of charity in order to be accepted as an act of \textit{sadaqah}. Crucially, this demonstrated the importance for M and other volunteers, of recognising the particular religious principles that guide the conception of Org.B’s specific framework for doing ‘social action’, and the implications of such as practising Muslims.

Yet, it was not simply the fact of many of these volunteers ‘being Muslim’ that provided the religious aspect of the organisation. A strong sense of a theological framework guided the work of Org.B, motivating individuals to participate in order to reap spiritual benefits. As one volunteer described it, the work here was not just undertaken to benefit the local community and the

\textsuperscript{577} Org.B Fieldnotes, 15/2/2016.
service users, but it was first and foremost “for the pleasure of Allah... [in order to] accumulate good deeds in this world to be rewarded in the next”.\textsuperscript{578} In this way, though Org.B themselves rejected the label of ‘faith-based’, religious practices and principles clearly influenced the ethos and guided the actions of the charity. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this kind of ‘socio-religious action’ was also a key feature of South Asian religious groups shared by Org.C, who similarly constructed and conceived of their projects as devotional practice.

On the whole, Org.B present a distinctly different approach to the role of ‘faith’ with regards to their organisation than that of Org.A, mainly in retaining a sense of independence from any political affiliation. In addition, the organisation also lacked any direct involvement with any particular institution, religious or otherwise. Therefore Org.B also provides contrast to previous observations by scholars such as Eade and Garbin, who have previously highlighted the way in which Islamic activism in areas that possess high levels of South Asian Muslims such as Oldham is often led by one particular mosque, or is centred on attempts to coordinate action between mosques.\textsuperscript{579} Yet while Org.B indeed attempted to maintain an official public and political neutrality, at their core was an undeniably strongly Islamic ethos motivating their work and inspiring most of their volunteers to participate and donors to contribute. Interestingly, Org.C, may be seen to take this notion a step further, in perceiving their own social action initiatives not only as

\textsuperscript{578} Org.B Fieldnotes, 22/6/2015.

religiously motivated, but as overtly ritualistic in practice.

Org.C referenced Sikh religious traditions in both the name of their organisation, and in publicising its weekly project. The organisation and its homeless feed initiative were explicitly defined and guided by the Sikh principles of sewa and langar. Sewa, meaning ‘selfless service’, was operationalised in relation to the act of feeding the homeless, and langar described the vegetarian food that is prepared and blessed in the communal devotional kitchen for this purpose at the nearby Gurdwara, before being served on the streets of Manchester. As Zavos notes, as an obligation to participate in social action and ‘service to humanity’, sewa has become a central feature of both modern Hindu and Sikh organisations, and is a term generally used to indicate devotional acts of service or selfless giving.\textsuperscript{580} Langar is often referred to as ‘a quintessential form of Seva’, and is a pervasive tradition at religious sites both in India and the diaspora.\textsuperscript{581} As Murphy claims, although the foundations of langar and sewa are rooted in solid traditions associated with Sikh Gurus, this is ‘a past that is reconstituted in the present through the production and reproduction of Sikh historical narratives in relation to contemporary practices’.\textsuperscript{582} Through this, the retained prominence of sewa in Sikh tradition plays a crucial role in ‘binding the community together in a shared past and theology’.\textsuperscript{583} Therefore, the work of Org.C may be considered more than merely social action, but an enactment of

\textsuperscript{580} Zavos, ‘Small Acts, Big Society,’ p.250.
\textsuperscript{582} Murphy, ‘Mobilising Seva (“Service”),’ pp.342-343.
\textsuperscript{583} Murphy, ‘Mobilising Seva (“Service”),’ p.343.
community, and crucially, as I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, an act of personal and spiritual devotion.

The explicit consideration of the religious framework that guided these practices could be observed from start to finish of each Sunday on which the project takes place. On arriving at the Gurdwara at around midday, volunteers remove their shoes in the hallway, and place them on purpose built shelves before entering the main areas of the temple. Both men and women also cover their heads with either scarves or bandanas, with spares provided for visitors again located in the hallway. As a guest of the organisation, and of the local temple, I was also expected to conform to these cultural norms in order to gain access to the space, and to fully observe the activities of the organisation. However, I must note that at no point was my race or religion called into question, and when individuals were speaking in Punjabi within the temple, translations were often offered by some of the Org.C volunteers I was working with.

Walking into the kitchen area, initial greetings were exchanged of “sat sri akaal” (roughly translated as – blessed is the person who says ‘God is truth’), or an extended “waheguru ji ka khalsa, waheguruji ki fateh” (the khalsa belongs to God, victory belongs to God), occasionally followed by a Mancunian “Hiya” or “How’re ya doing?”. Food preparation then begins, conducted mainly by older women, who chat amongst themselves, sometimes in English, but mostly in Punjabi, while they roll chapattis and assemble huge pots of rice and dahl to be later divided into smaller portions. Admittedly I found it difficult to fully participate in the food preparation, as I was a complete novice
with regards to dahl and chapatti making, and the language barrier between myself and the older ladies made it difficult to communicate, especially as they rushed around and appeared to have little time to pause for explanation or demonstration. However, I often found myself assisting other younger volunteers, who kindly offered their services as translator, and guided me through the process, though my attempt at rolling what turned out to be a rectangular chapatti was somewhat embarrassing!

Once the food preparation was complete, and everything had been loaded into the van, G, the informal leader of Org.C, then proudly took his place, standing outside the temple, in front of the van, with palms together in anticipation of prayer. With the back doors of the van still open, G then commenced a traditional blessing upon the food, and as others gathered to stand alongside, also with palms together and eyes closed, to join the recitation of the blessing. Delivered melodically, both individually and as a group, the blessing included repetition of the word waheguru (God), and acted to designate the food as langar, before it was subsequently transported into the city centre. It was at precisely this moment, G informed me, that the food was transformed from being “just curry” to being officially regarded as “langar”.

Yet like with the notion of sadaqah for Org.B, the legitimacy and limitations of langar were also at times called into question both by those outside of the organisation and between volunteers themselves. For some Sikhs who I spoke to during a visit to another local temple, the location of langar should be

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strictly within the confines of the temple, and the new ‘trend’ of practising ‘sewa on the streets’ was somewhat frowned upon by elders who saw this as deviating too far from tradition. Yet for Org.C, doing ‘sewa on the streets’ not only provided a completely legitimate form of devotion, but also an opportunity to educate the public about the concepts of langar and sewa and to promote cohesion, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

As a result, Org.C confidently displayed signage that read, ‘#Langar4All, Sikhs Serving Mankind’. However, the spiritual premise of this hashtag in fact formed another basis of discussion between some members of the group itself.

After a few weeks of conducting the homeless feed, the number of service users began to steadily increase, and questions began to be asked regarding the legitimacy of homeless status of some individuals, in order to determine whether they should receive the food. As individuals approached and repeatedly asked for more of the crisps and biscuits lined up on one of the tables, I watched as some volunteers rolled their eyes and begrudgingly handed over extra portions and snacks, occasionally with an attached cautionary word regarding “being greedy”. Admittedly this sometimes made me slightly uncomfortable, but for one volunteer, H, this behaviour not only contradicted the signage of #Langar4All, but also the essence and theological principle of the langar itself. He passionately asserted to me that the purpose of langar is to serve all of humanity, and to therefore as a result you must feed anyone who asks you for food, as “it is not for you to judge whether they

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585 Fieldnotes from visit to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara Educational & Cultural Centre, Manchester, 6/12/2015.
deserve it or not”.

This motivation to keep the spiritual integrity of *langar* intact was also observed during a brief encounter with another group who arrived in Piccadilly Gardens one evening as Org.C were packing up. As the remaining volunteers were folding up tables into the back of the van, another group of young men began assembling their own food service alongside us. We approached the group, and they explained that they were also handing out food and offered to perhaps work alongside Org.C one day in serving the homeless. On further discussion regarding their organisational affiliation, it became apparent that they were representatives of the local Ahmadiyya mosque. As a result, though the invitation to work alongside Org.C was politely acknowledged by G, on approaching him about this afterwards he informed me that this would not be appropriate, as the *langar* meal must be vegetarian, and so it is not proper to serve it alongside halal meat from the Muslim group. Therefore here we can again observe the level of consideration given to the theological implications of performing the devotional acts of *sewa* and *langar*, as not merely the social action of handing out food, but a prescriptive ritual and ethical issue to which guidelines must be adhered to retain its spiritual integrity.

Yet on the whole, despite this level of adherence, and the fact that all three of these organisations contain some aspect of religious practice or affiliation to differing extents, it was also observable that not all individuals involved or

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associated with these organisations are ‘people of faith’, or people of the same religious tradition as that of the organisational core. With regards to Org.B and Org.C, though they appeared to be dominated by one particular religious tradition, and the majority of their volunteers and donors reflected this, both organisations also boasted an array of involvement from individuals from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, we can identify further pitfalls in simply describing organisations as ‘faith-based’ without more detailed interrogation. We must be careful not to assert a homogenised image of these organisations as demarcated by or limited to those of a particular ‘faith’, or even of any ‘faith’, as my own involvement demonstrates, being in all cases welcomed despite my lack of religious affiliation. Moreover, this assertion of ‘faith’ as a perceived primary indicator, that in many cases acts to define these groups in terms of political discourse regarding FBOs, may in fact be contrary to the more nuanced self-perception of these organisations, and thus deter partnership and engagement with local authorities.

**Feedback Loops, Funding and Full Circles**

In addition to observing the extent to which these organisations conceive of themselves as ‘faith-based’, I also sought to assess the ways in which these organisations reflect, deflect or rearticulate the aforementioned political discourse regarding FBOs in UK cohesion policy, at both a national and local level. National policies regarding ‘faith-based’ and ‘interfaith’ organisations have seen increasing emphasis placed on the ability of ‘faith communities’ to form appropriate structures for engagement at both government and grassroots levels. Since 2001, funding strategies have shifted from the
formation of larger umbrella style organisations, towards more devolved frameworks for civic participation on a smaller scale. This highlights a conscious shift, away from wider networks and so-called ‘talk shops’ containing limited numbers of appointed or self-appointed ‘community leaders’, instead aiming to search for ‘credible voices’ from the grassroots and seeking to ‘empower communities directly... not via gatekeepers’.

As a result, evidenced in my own research in Greater Manchester, the way in which relationships between the political and public spheres operate within and between these organisations has also been subject to variation and alteration, dependent on desired levels of engagement with local government, and guided by considerations such as funding and exposure.

As I have discussed previously, in recent years local authorities in both Oldham and Manchester have been seen to place significant emphasis on the use of ‘interfaith work’ to develop understanding, build good relations, support integration and promote ‘community cohesion’.

In Oldham, the local ‘interfaith forum’ is stated as having ‘played a major role in developing understanding and respect across communities’, receiving significant local authority funding for a number of years. Likewise in Manchester, ‘the approach to working with faith communities has been to strengthen and support inter-faith dialogue that builds understanding and celebrates

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589 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
commonly held values’, with Org.A cited as a key organisation funded specifically to carry out this work. Yet as I uncovered through fieldwork, not all apparent ‘faith-based’ organisations in these areas act directly to embody this political discourse, or to engage with the local authority in carrying out projects that may be seen to contribute to issues locally such as ‘cohesion’ and ‘integration’. In fact, in some cases organisations may actually be inclined to directly reject local policy, for example in Oldham where strategies centred on engagement with and dialogue between ‘faith leaders’ are being deflected by Org.B in favour of more grassroots action-based initiatives devoid of any ‘interfaith’ discourse.

For Org.B, the key issues were simply serving what they term the ‘local community’, a notion itself defined and problematized in the previous chapter. In many cases, this was first and foremost for the purpose of Islamic spiritual gains, but was not described by Org.B as aiming towards official recognition or for political gain. On several occasions, it was explained that Org.B does not wish to receive funding from the local authority as this would mean “they’ve got you”, meaning the council would be able to oversee their activities and stipulate the use of funds, as they refuse to take part in initiatives that they believe are “just a tick box exercise that doesn’t actually have any impact on the ground”. On the whole, during fieldwork with the organisation, members would regularly voice their distaste for local

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government who are “impossible to contact”,596 “get millions but don’t seem to do anything with it”597 and simply “throw money”598 at issues in order to solve them. Similarly, they were also critical of other larger charities who misuse donations to “fund directors’ salaries” and other forms of what they view as unnecessary bureaucracy.599

However, the one area in which M in particular did seek to utilise local political figures, such as the Mayor and his wife, was to raise awareness, gain positive publicity, and “spread their message”.600 For this reason the Mayor was frequently invited to the food bank project and to Org.B events and fundraisers, such as their ‘Iftar with the Homeless’ held at a local banqueting hall, during Ramadan 2015.

The Iftar event took place on a Saturday evening, and included performances from poets, several speakers, a room with a bouncy castle and other children’s activities, and a three course meal. Invitations were extended in an effort to ‘bring together local communities’, including Muslim, and non-Muslims, and the event was well attended by a variety of individuals including volunteers and their families, potential donors from small businesses, service users, and local figures including politicians and community leaders.601 The Mayor, who arrived late along with his driver, gave a short speech to express his support for the work of the charity, and boasted about his recent visits to the foodbank,

600 Org.B Fieldnotes, 20/7/2015.
in which he had observed the good work being done by Org B.\footnote{Org.B Fieldnotes, 4/7/2015.} In this way it was clear that Org.B and M purposefully sought to navigate the political sphere for their own benefit, prudently deciding their own terms of engagement. By refusing to pursue any form of outside funding, Org.B specifically sought to avoid any official affiliation or be seen to align themselves with any political narratives put forward by the local council. Yet they were willing to accept the assistance of the local Mayor in terms of publicity and endorsement that may lead to other potential independent donors. Importantly, for Org.B, the integrity of their work lay in its ethos as organically, ethically and spiritually motivated, not as a ‘puppet’ employed to carry out the ‘leg work’ of the local authority.\footnote{Org.B Fieldnotes, 19/5/2015.} Therefore for this reason their involvement with Oldham council was always carefully and consciously navigated.

Interestingly, this is a concern shared by other organisations I had contact with during my fieldwork in both Oldham and Manchester, as a level of distrust and distaste for ‘politics’ was often voiced by individuals and volunteers involved in these kinds of social action projects. As Harris et al. have suggested,

We need to be aware that faith-based voluntary organisations, like the rest of the voluntary sector, do not necessarily arise in areas where need as perceived by policy-makers is most acute. Faith groups vary as to which causes they prioritize at any one time and different generations and sects within faith communities may also vary in their views about important causes. Nor are the ‘mini voluntary sectors’ of faith groups necessarily rationally structured. They have often grown incrementally and organically in response to fashion and need and they may comprise a plethora of small associations and specialist agencies which run alongside, even in competition with, the larger highly structured welfare bureaucracies. This
poses major organisational challenges for governmental agencies which hope to enter into policy partnerships with faith communities.\textsuperscript{604}

This was evidenced in the case of Org.B, as an organisation developed as a result of perceived levels of destitution in the locality brought to the attention of the founders and volunteers, not as a direct response to governmental provocation. Org.B has indeed grown in response to ‘fashion and need’,\textsuperscript{605} as they have sought to rationalize their decision to “put more energy into poverty issues”\textsuperscript{606} as opposed to their community educational exhibitions, as this is seen as “a bigger problem at the minute”.\textsuperscript{607} Yet one aspect implied by Harris et al. that does not ring true in this particular context is the notion of ‘generational differences’, as the organisation in fact brings together a wide cross-section of ages and genders in uniting individuals who share the same broader concerns regarding poverty and deprivation in the local area. However, as Harris et al. suggest, the food bank initiative developed by Org.B did in fact run alongside ‘larger highly structured welfare bureaucracies’ in the area such as the Trussel Trust, who operate nationally and have a local presence in Oldham. Indeed, members of Org.B also voiced a distaste for the bureaucracy of such organisations, as well as their association with political structures.\textsuperscript{608} As Harris et al. propose, this does arguably lead to challenges for local authority engagement and partnership, as the self-sufficiency of Org.B has allowed them to reject any form of official affiliation or funding, and to

\textsuperscript{604} Harris et al., ‘A Social Policy Role for Faith-Based Organisations?’, p.109.
\textsuperscript{605} Harris et al., ‘A Social Policy Role for Faith-Based Organisations?’, p.109.
\textsuperscript{606} Org.B Fieldnotes, 19/5/2015.
\textsuperscript{607} Org.B Fieldnotes, 19/5/2015.
\textsuperscript{608} Org.B Fieldnotes, 15/6/2015.
retain a perceived sense of independence and ‘integrity’ as a grassroots organisation.\textsuperscript{609}

Similarly, Org.C also took particular pride in their self-sufficiency and lack of reliance on local authority funding or endorsement. They had no official status as a registered charity and received no outside funding or donations,\textsuperscript{610} therefore they encountered no stipulation with regards to how they spend their funds or conduct their activities. Their #Langar4All homeless feed project was primarily funded each week by volunteers and their families, and other donations of food such as crisps and biscuits are often offered from various individuals in addition. Here again there was also evidence of theological implications of this particular method of funding, as some families chose to dedicate their donation to a deceased family member in an act of remembrance, another tradition associated with langar that has been translated into the diasporic context.\textsuperscript{611} In fact, some volunteers chose to sponsor multiple weeks in remembrance of several different relatives.\textsuperscript{612}

Through this method of funding, Org.C expressed a preference to spend less time on logistics and bureaucracy, and more time undertaking charitable acts of selfless service, or sewa. They effectively enacted the presuppositions of political discourse regarding the involvement of ‘faith communities’ in social action initiatives, but did not engage with any government bodies associated

\textsuperscript{609} Org.B Fieldnotes, 20/7/2015.
\textsuperscript{610} However, it must be noted that on completion of the fieldwork, Org.C were in fact beginning to take donations from passers by who offered money to help the initiative.
\textsuperscript{611} Org.C Fieldnotes, 7/2/2016.
\textsuperscript{612} Org.C Fieldnotes, 7/2/2016.
with this either nationally or locally. As Org.C were not an officially registered charity, they obtained no official recognition or permission from Manchester City Council to conduct their homeless feed project in Piccadilly Gardens. They were fully aware that other organisations had conducted similar initiatives in the same place and eventually been moved from the area by council officials and the police. Despite this, they pledged to continue the project “until anyone says anything otherwise”, and had no desire to involve the local authority or inform them of their activities.\textsuperscript{613} In fact, on spending time in this area and speaking to service users, it became apparent that a number of other organisations currently operated within this same space in the city, inviting volunteers and service users from across a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Thus it became increasingly apparent, as Beaumont has described, that in many cases

\begin{quote}
The city is the social scale of faith adherence that permits the gathering in sufficient numbers of like-minded, faith-motivated and action-oriented people. This is true both within faith boundaries and, more radically, in interfaith or multifaith initiatives.\textsuperscript{614}
\end{quote}

However, it is arguably insufficient to attribute this to the geography and demography of the city, as Org.B too demonstrated similar characteristics in the confines of a small town. In addition, also like Org.B, members of Org.C also regularly expressed concerns over “dirty politics” and “hidden motives” of local government and other charitable organisations.\textsuperscript{615} As a result, though the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[613] Org.C Fieldnotes, 7/2/2016.
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project had only been running for less than a year, there were never any calls to apply for funding or to seek to engage with any form of local “politics”.\footnote{Org.C Fieldnotes, 9/3/2016.}

Org.A, on the other hand, had at the same time been primarily funded for the past three years directly through the Manchester City Council Equalities Programme, who commissioned their five main projects across the city, including regular ‘interfaith dialogues’, a school education project, a women only interfaith group, workshops in which participants learn about ‘faith traditions’ by making a ‘mala’ bracelet, and a collaborative research project that aimed to assess the need for improvement in services for ‘minority communities’. As a result, due to the nature of their funding, the organisation must purposefully align themselves with local policy, and regularly report back to Manchester City Council to demonstrate this through quarterly monitoring forms.

In addition, for Org.A, political engagement in the form of simply being ‘the voice of faith communities’ was also a key aspect of their organisation. Through this claim to representation they had developed a framework for engagement that satisfied both the requirements by local government to ‘celebrate the diversity of Manchester and increase awareness of the positive contribution that our diverse communities make to the city’,\footnote{Manchester City Council, Equalities Programme Quarterly Monitoring Form, 2015.} and their organizational desires to conform to perform traditional ‘interfaith’ work.\footnote{Org.A Fieldnotes - Observation of Executive Committee Meeting, 1/3/2016.}

Due to their main funding source coming directly from Manchester City

\footnote{616 Org.C Fieldnotes, 9/3/2016.}
\footnote{617 Manchester City Council, Equalities Programme Quarterly Monitoring Form, 2015.}
\footnote{618 Org.A Fieldnotes - Observation of Executive Committee Meeting, 1/3/2016.}
Council they had close contact with the political sphere of the locality, and exec-
ners often attend various events and pose for photographs with local polit-
icians and people of influence. Meanwhile others were heavily involved in
running other local collaborative bodies such as the WeStandTogether
initiative that aimed to encompass an unlimited number of both political or
public bodies and community organisations, from the Greater Manchester
Police (GMP) to biker clubs and campaigning groups. In this way the
organisation played a crucial role as a key point of contact between the city
council and community organisations, particularly in attempting to represent
the needs of religious individuals and to educate the local authority on the
increasing number of diverse traditions across all areas of Manchester.

As evidenced above, these local authority requirements to ‘strengthen our
knowledge, understanding and evidence base about communities so that we
can increase community cohesion’619 were also expanded and augmented to
compile a framework for the ‘proper’ Org. A way for ‘interfaith’ work to be done
within the city, as the only ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based’ organisation funded by
local government. Through this they enacted ‘interfaith’ discourses drawn
directly from considerations of ‘faith’ and social cohesion in national policy
that had since been translated into local policy and deployed through funding
pathways and commissioning of services. As discussed in previous chapters,
at a local strategic level, ‘faith leaders’ and communities are often identified as
a valuable asset within proposed systems of partnership working, with the
development of local ‘interfaith’ structures argued to provide ‘a valuable

619 Manchester City Council, Equalities Programme Quarterly Monitoring Form, 2015.
framework both for promoting mutual understanding and co-operation... and as a mechanism for consultation by the local authority and other public bodies.\textsuperscript{620} Therefore ‘on paper’, within feedback and monitoring documents as exemplified above, by receiving funding through the local council, Org.A must inevitably put this policy discourse into practice in order to satisfy the requirements of their contractual agreement.

Yet as we have seen, this alignment in Org.A’s accountability to the funding body within the city council also directly affected their engagement with theology, as they consciously sought to avoid any promotion or proclamations of any one particular ‘faith’ that may offend or aggravate any other religious groups, or deter individuals, even of no ‘faith’, from being involved with their work. On the contrary, other organisations in the area who did not receive local authority funding, such as Org.C, had no accountability to or official concern for issues such as ‘equal representation.’ As a result, they remained free to express their theological position amongst themselves and outwardly in the public sphere, and yet encountered little difficulty in engaging, interacting and acquiring volunteers from outside of this theological framework. However, it must also be noted that for Org.A, these concerns for equal representation also formed a key aspect of doing ‘proper interfaith work’ and appeared to benefit the organisation in developing a desired image of openness and neutrality.

In general, it would also be naïve to suggest that organisations such as Org.B

and Org.C were completely devoid of what we might describe as ‘politics’. Even the mere act of providing food for the homeless arguably carries implicit political narratives regarding poverty and austerity for example, and emphasis on these kinds of objectives does not go unnoticed by government and policymakers at both national and local levels. As Harris et al. have noted,

Faith communities may well be providing a good service for their own adherents and may also be contributing to the development of civil society by drawing together their own members in associational and voluntary activities. Yet, many of the characteristics which have drawn them to the attention of social-policy-makers reflect the fact that they have, up to now, been free to set their own strategic objectives and to govern themselves in ways which suit the wishes and culture of their community funders and volunteers.  

An increase in social action organisations and initiatives has arguably been reflected back into the policy discourse, with policymakers and advisors identifying the positive effects of these projects and pronouncing them as “the way forward”. Likewise, funding programmes have also reflected this two-way exchange from practice to policy. Initiatives such as the Near Neighbours Programme arguably seek to add some form of bureaucracy to community groups in order to include a level of monitoring, and to promote the inclusion of ‘interfaith’ dialogue alongside a discourse of social action, thus completing the circle in putting ‘interfaith’ policy discourse back into practice.

Yet as we have seen with Org.B for example, the identification of community groups and projects as ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based’ is not always entirely

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622 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016.
accurate from the perspective of those involved, and so there is arguably little need for these discourses to be applied to organisations in order for them to be successful or impactful. In other words, the conceptual frameworks upheld by policy discourse are deemed irrelevant by some South Asian organisations in particular, who are not constrained by the same notions of ‘faith’ and ‘interfaith’ in order to define or demarcate their work towards being politically accountable. Instead they seek to define their actions and initiatives through reference to religious traditions or devotional practices that have been assimilated into the diasporic public sphere as forms of ‘socio-religious action’ that in turn also aim to contribute to notions of ‘social cohesion’.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter I have sought to discuss recent developments in approaches to researching ‘faith-based’ and ‘interfaith’ organisations, and to demonstrate the significance of using ethnographic methods to uncover the ways in which organisations conceive of themselves as ‘faith-based’. I have also explored the ways in which notions of ‘faith’ or religious tradition contribute to the self perception and practice of these organisations, as well as their negotiated engagement with local and national policy discourse. For some organisations such as Org.A, ‘faith’ is conceived as a representational demographic, as a way to position those involved within a framework of bounded ‘world religions’, and therefore justify a collaborative notion of ‘interfaith’ reliant on this framework. Yet for others, religious devotion provides the fundamental source of motivation and inspiration for undertaking collaborative social action, as in the case of Org.B, or further, serves to situate social action as devotional
religious practice, as in the case of Org.C.

Though all three of these organisations may be outwardly identified as ‘faith-based’, the ways or extent to which this notion is articulated varies hugely, and must thus be of consideration in situating the perceived efficacy of these initiatives upheld within political discourse regarding ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’. In other words, though UK cohesion policy has sought to endorse the work of ‘faith communities’ in undertaking social action projects, there has been little attention paid to the motivation of these individuals and communities to commence these kinds of initiatives, and to the precise reasons why organisations such as Org.B and Org.C choose to do so without the involvement of the local authority.

For members of both Org.C and Org.B, this lack of engagement is often justified through a pronounced distrust of ‘politics’, as a term that serves to include local and national government, associated agencies or official bodies, as well as other larger charities or organisations that receive funding through political streams.623 Org.A on the other hand actively sought to engage with Manchester City Council in a bid to ‘represent the voice of faith in the life of the city’,624 and to ‘act as a means of communication between faith groups’625 and the local authority.

The variations in engagement with local government and other official

623 Fieldnotes from fieldwork with Org.C and Org.B.
structures deemed as associated with any form of ‘politics’ observed between these organisations, evidences a level of tension and disjuncture between policy and practice, and for many such as Brodeur, these ‘internal tensions between visions of grassroots versus so-called “top-down” methodologies to promote social action for peace’ may always remain.626 This is apparent in both Manchester and Oldham, where local authorities fund and facilitate one ‘interfaith’ structure in particular to seek engagement with the diversity of ‘faith communities’ and traditions evident in the locality. Yet the danger of prioritizing one organisation as a point of contact, is that engagement may remain largely within selective circles, and rarely reach the grassroots. In this way, these ‘top-down’ approaches may be a convenient way for local authorities to “tap into groups and communities”627, as seen in Oldham, but are arguably an ineffective strategy for the management of religious pluralism at a localized level.

Yet despite a discernible disconnect in some areas, the increase in religiously-defined grassroots organisations engaging in forms of social action has been read by both local and national government as evidence of the significant impact of ‘faith’ on developing ‘social cohesion’, as my interviews with policymakers have demonstrated.628 As Clarke has pointed out, in assessing the role of FBOs in civic renewal and development, it can be observed that the uniqueness of ‘faith-based’ organisations lies in the way that they

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626 Brodeur, ‘From the margins to the centers of power,’ p.45.
627 Interview with Cohesion Lead at Oldham Council, 18/11/2015.
628 Interview with Senior Policy Advisor at DCLG, 29/3/2016; Interview with Cohesion Lead at Manchester City Council, 12/4/2016.
draw on elaborate spiritual and moral values that represent an important and distinct adjunct to secular development discourse. As a result, they have a significant ability to mobilise adherents otherwise estranged by secular development discourse.  

In other words, those who may not be motivated by what may be deemed as ‘secular’ political discourses of civic participation may in fact be motivated by religious devotion or inspired by a shared affinity with other members of their religious tradition in pursuing a cooperative cause.

In the context of my own fieldwork, these ‘spiritual and moral values’ evidently provide a central stimulus not only for social action and charitable causes, but also for promoting and developing a notion of ‘social cohesion’, as a closely related concept evidenced in both policy and practice. However, these observations are often skewed politically by a developing discourse of ‘faith-based social action’, a term often rejected by some organisations, as one that fails to fully account for the significance of acts of religious devotion towards the development of a notion of ‘social cohesion’, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

Significantly, through this I will begin to develop an overall argument for my specific emphasis on South Asian traditions in particular, by presenting the notion of South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ as a new movement of organisations and initiatives that aim to produce social action through explicit

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630 Clarke, ‘Faith Matters,’ p.845.
religious narratives, projected into the public sphere in order to contribute to a conceived discourse of ‘cohesion’, crucially rooted in religious devotional practice.
Chapter 7
“Its Part of Our Culture, Our Religion, Our Faith, to Serve Humanity”: South Asian ‘Socio-Religious Action’ and Promoting Cohesion Through ‘Faith’

A drizzly afternoon in Manchester city centre. In a corner of Piccadilly gardens, largely populated by passing Sunday shoppers and clusters of youths, a makeshift ‘soup kitchen’ is serving homeless men and women queued along the side of the road. Under a bright red gazebo, plastic tables are adjoined to accommodate an assortment of provisions, including hot drinks, snacks and freshly prepared rice and dahl, and a small group of volunteers stand behind wearing high visibility jackets and plastic gloves.

“How come you’ve started doing this then?” asks one of the service users, as a male volunteer in his late 20s hands him a strong coffee. “It’s part of our culture, our religion, our faith, to serve humanity” the volunteer responds proudly, and continues to take orders from others waiting to be served.

Conversations about Sikh identity and practice would routinely take place between members of Org.C and service users, but this statement in particular, struck me as acutely illustrative of the ethos behind the work of the organisation. The atmosphere, though relatively casual and relaxed, was often tinged with sadness, watching some individuals who would wander over intoxicated and desperate, seeking nourishment or simply a “can of pop” to keep them going. Yet members of the organisation always sought to treat service users as equals, and engage with each individual who came to receive the langar made earlier that day for the purpose of this weekly service. As men and women shuffled down the line, accepting offers of “tea or coffee”, “crisps and biscuits” and “curry and rice”, volunteers chatted amongst themselves in a mixture of Punjabi and English, smiling and greeting people as they approached in turn. While service took place, the unofficial head of Org.C, G, stood proudly in front of the huge orange signage adhered to a white transit van parked next to the gazebo, laughing and joking loudly with members of the organisation and service users. G was an extremely friendly and dynamic personality, and as a result would often attract passers-by who would approach to ask about the project, occasionally encountering a mixed reception. “Is it just for Muslims?” a woman asked abruptly on one occasion. “No, no. Not Muslim,” G affirmed, and pointed to the word ‘Sikh’ on the signage. “I’m one of these,” he declared, and smiled as he began his explanation of the origin of the organisation, and the motivations of its mostly Sikh membership.  

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Introduction

This particular ethnographic example offers insight into the ways in which the location of Org.C in the city centre produces interesting exchanges between volunteers, service users and passers by, and opportunities to publicly assert Sikh identity and devotional practice as a key stimulus for the initiative taking place. In addition, assertions about ‘serving humanity’ also spark questions regarding the development of a discursive relationship between religious practice and a notion of ‘social cohesion’ being produced in this context, and the role of ‘post-secular’ public space in facilitating these kinds of exchanges. This then also leads us to reappraise the policy discourse in framing the specific ‘socio-religious action’ undertaken by both Org.C and Org.B, and the particular contribution of South Asian religious traditions towards this notion.

In preceding chapters, I have attempted to explore the role of ‘faith’ in the development of a ‘social cohesion’ discourse centred on the management of pluralism in the UK since 2001. Using detailed policy document analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, I have sought to outline and trace the deployment of this discursive formation in public policy at a national and local level, and to locate the role of ‘faith’ as a key aspect of this, through evaluating the ways in which ‘faith’, ‘faith communities’ and ‘faith-based’ organisations are conceived by policymakers and situated as central to this discourse. In addition, I have aimed to assess the ways in which ‘faith communities’ and ‘faith-based’ organisations are formed in practice, within the localities of Manchester and Oldham, and to consider this in relation to the policy discourse.
Through this I have observed significant levels of disconnect between policy and practice, and aimed to consider complexities presented by notions such as the ‘faith community’ and the difficulties encountered and deviations displayed in the application of government approaches to the management of religious pluralism at a local level. I have argued that the deployment of discursive notions of ‘faith’ in ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse has had a direct effect on the formation of ‘faith communities’ through the lens of a ‘world religions’ paradigm, and on the continued development of ‘interfaith’ structures and ‘faith-based’ organisations as preferred strategies for consultation and engagement at both a national and local level. This has been demonstrated using ethnographic data from my case study of Org.A, as an example of an organisation that observably enacts policy discourse through collaboration with the local authority.

Yet, as I have also shown, my analysis of organisations initiated by South Asian traditions provide examples of alternative articulations of discourse through the lens of devotional practices and explicit religious principles. These case studies provide an evidence base, not only for examining the diversion of discourses of ‘faith’, ‘faith community’, and the notion of being ‘faith-based’, but also the specific ways in which these organisations seek to produce a notion of ‘social [or community] cohesion’. As I will discuss in this chapter, for Org.B and Org.C, this notion is pursued explicitly through the translation of diasporic religious practice into applied social action on a localised level.

Drawing on these interim conclusions, in this chapter I seek to explore the ways in which all three of the organisations central to my fieldwork claim to
contribute to a discourse of ‘cohesion’ through ‘faith’ or religious practice, locating the conception and attempted cultivation of the notion of ‘social cohesion’ within the projects and initiatives undertaken in their local area. I will then look to align this with analysis of the policy discourse, and to juxtapose methods preferred by policymakers such as ‘interfaith dialogue’, with new forms of ‘socio-religious action’ observed within South Asian traditions. As Dinham has argued, this preference towards ‘interfaith’ or ‘multifaith’ initiatives, is based on the fact that ‘policy-makers have often assumed that single-faith settings will be disengaged from bridging and linking with others’ and are suspicious that ‘single-faith groups are motivated by the desire to evangelise their own traditions.’

However, as I will argue, the particular form of social action demonstrated by Org.B and Org.C stands in direct contrast to these assumptions. Instead initiatives indeed represent a strong commitment to ‘bridging and linking’, through self-articulated notions of civic renewal and ‘social cohesion’, conceived and operationalised through a purposeful and considered act of religious devotion. The development of these religiously rooted approaches does however demonstrate a conscious divergence away from politically led narratives of ‘faith’ and ‘cohesion’, towards more considered forms of diasporic engagement in the post-secular public sphere. These forms of engagement subsequently illuminate the civic contribution of minority religious traditions in the UK, through producing a conceived notion of ‘social cohesion’ as a by-product of what Amin has termed ‘positive prosaic

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interactions’.\textsuperscript{633} Through this, in line with scholars including Amin and Sandercock, I point forward to the concluding chapter of my thesis in which I will argue for a substantial shift away from structured approaches to the management of pluralism reliant on discursive concepts such as ‘interfaith dialogue’, instead towards a notion of unity and collaboration developed through everyday life experiences, located within what Amin refers to as ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’.\textsuperscript{634} In other words, spaces that can facilitate mundane ‘intercultural interactions’\textsuperscript{635} that have the power to shift attitudes and behaviours.

What is of particular significance to the development of this argument is my ethnographic approach to the study of ‘social cohesion’ as a discursive formation, not as a measured model. As we have seen, research regarding ‘social cohesion’ in both the USA and across Europe has traditionally centred on attempts to define and subsequently measure levels of ‘cohesion’ through methods drawn predominantly from social psychology, and though some of these studies may situate themselves within a specific locality,\textsuperscript{636} there is little long-term ethnographic exploration of the notion of ‘social cohesion’, and of the ways in which more micro-scale ‘faith communities’ and ‘faith-based’ or religious organisations seek to contribute to this. As a result, my emphasis here is on a more nuanced approach to understanding the ways in which ‘social cohesion’ is developed as a discourse in both policy and practice, and the specificities of the contributions of ‘faith’ or religion to this discourse. In doing

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{633} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{634} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{635} Sandercock, \textit{Cosmopolis II}, p.103.
\textsuperscript{636} See McLoughlin’s (2005) work in Bradford, for example.
\end{flushright}
so I seek to outline the ways in which South Asian religions in particular, are observably producing diasporic discourses of ‘socio-religious action’, in which aspects of religious tradition and devotional practice are relocated and reimagined to sit within the discursive framework of ‘social [or community] cohesion’ in the post-secular public sphere. Through this I will also consider new possibilities for understanding ‘social cohesion’ as observed through the intricacies of human interaction and communication.

In centring my research on South Asian traditions in particular, I aim to assess interactions that routinely take place within ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’, through the specific lens of religious difference, and from the perspective of the minority religious traditions towards which policy mechanisms regarding pluralism are often aimed. As a result, I will defend my own approach as one that avoids methodological tendencies for measurement and definition, and also shifts the academic focus from ethnicity to religion, considering the contributions of political discourse alongside ethnographically grounded understandings of the perceived cultivation of ‘social cohesion’ through religious practice.

‘Faith’ and ‘Social Cohesion’ in Practice?

In analysing the role of ‘faith’, and exploring the articulation of this by ‘faith communities’ and ‘faith-based’ organisations, it is also essential to discuss the extent to which ‘faith’ is comprehended as directly contributing to a discourse

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637 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
of ‘social cohesion’. In other words, in addition to assessing where ‘faith’ is situated in ‘social cohesion’ discourse, in relation to policy, people and organisations, we must also assess where, how and to what extent ‘faith’ is situated in practice, as an enactment of discourse. Through detailed ethnographic work we can locate the ways in which organisations who self-identify as ‘faith-based’, conceive of their contribution to ‘social cohesion’ through ‘faith’, and the activities and projects operationalised for this purpose. In addition, we can conversely look to observe ways in which other organisations who may reject labels of ‘faith’ or ‘faith-based’, as discussed in the previous chapter, may instead seek to translate notions of religious practice into instances of public interaction, through undertaking ‘socio-religious action’, commonly conceived through the same discursive lens of ‘social cohesion’. Again these propositions are explored through the three organisations with whom I conducted my fieldwork.

As a registered charity, and a pronounced ‘interfaith’ network, Org.A deployed methods centred around education and ‘interfaith dialogue’, specifically geared towards measurable outcomes to be reported back to their primary funder, Manchester City Council. Arguably the most successful of their projects, in terms of uptake and participation numbers, was their school education programme. Through this they recruited volunteers from two or more religious traditions to host “multi-faith informal education sessions” in primary and secondary schools across Manchester, giving short presentations to students to “give first hand insight into the real lives of different faiths”,

aiming to provoke discussions and “dialogue” around issues of “diversity and cohesion”.

As their website states,

The aim is to enrich, inspire and empower young people. We want to build respect amongst young people for those of other faiths who might have different beliefs and values from their own, which in turn will help develop social cohesion both within schools, youth groups and the local community.

Through this, Org.A use ‘informal education’ as a catalyst for ‘dialogue’, their preferred method for developing a notion of ‘social cohesion’, and identify young people in particular as key to the progression of this notion and therefore the target audience for this project.

Org.A also facilitated regular ‘interfaith dialogues’ on key themes, inviting ‘people of all faiths and none’ to participate in discussion and debate on issues such as ‘Faith and the Environment’, and again to ‘develop cohesion’ through “enabling people to work together across communities”. Similarly the two other additional projects run by Org.A, mala bracelet making workshops and the women’s interfaith group, were also centred around notions of learning, discussion and dialogue, again with a wider view to creating ‘cohesion’. All of the projects ran by Org.A drew on narratives of education and ‘dialogue’ as strategies that aim to “bring together people of different faiths across the city”, and build “good relationships” that promote “social cohesion”.

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Therefore here the ‘faith’ aspect of the organisation was conceived mainly as a demographic distinction, devoid of any practical or devotional discourse, though admittedly some members may view interfaith participation as spiritually beneficial or indeed an “expression of faith”. Through identifying ‘faith’ as a discrete element of diversity and therefore of division, the focus for Org.A was predominantly on the facilitation of frameworks of interaction between “people of all faiths and none”. These interactions centred firmly on notions of education, dialogue and engagement, in order to “increase community cohesion” between “different faith communities” through projects commissioned and monitored by Manchester City Council on this basis.

Significantly, for community development worker D, this centrality of ‘faith’ as essential to Org.A’s expression of a ‘cohesion’ discourse was what distinguished the organisation from other projects and people who are “simply working at cohesion without a faith base”, work he saw as “coming from a different place”. For D and Org.A, the role of ‘faith’ in particular is carved out individually within ‘social cohesion’ discourse, alongside and “intermingling” with other non-‘faith-based’ approaches, and thus centralising the significance of ‘interfaith’ work in particular to the operationalization of this discourse, as the favoured mechanism through

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646 Manchester City Council, Directorate for Children and Families (Commissioning Hub) Quarterly Monitoring Form, 2015.
which to carry out this work. In other words, for Org.A, as ‘faith’ forms a key aspect of diversity in the locality, thus it should follow that the best people to talk about such issues, both amongst themselves through ‘dialogue’, or to members of the local authority, are indeed ‘people of faith’.

Org.B on the other hand, rejected this mechanism as a key route to ‘cohesion’, and saw no use for any official affiliation with the local authority in Oldham, instead seeking to maintain a sense of integrity through their 100% donations policy. This financial independence of the organisation allowed for the expenditure of donations in implementing desired projects and appropriately allocating funds in any direction, at any point in time. It is for this reason that in recent years the focus of the charity was able to shift swiftly from ‘Meet Your Muslim Neighbour’ exhibitions, aiming to educate the public about Islam, to the establishment of a food bank service, as a direct response to perceived increase in “poverty and destitution” in the local area.\textsuperscript{650} Crucially, both of these projects were underpinned by an overall pursuit of civic renewal and “community cohesion”,\textsuperscript{651} firmly rooted in Islamic practice. The purpose here was consistently articulated as “to serve God”, “to serve our community” and to “create community cohesion”.\textsuperscript{652}

In the example of the Org.B food bank, we clearly see the explicit operationalization of a ‘social action’ discourse alongside the operationalization of (Islamic) religiosity. Significantly, as key to this, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{650} Org.B Fieldnotes, 19/5/2015.
\item \textsuperscript{651} Org.B Fieldnotes, 19/5/2015.
\item \textsuperscript{652} Org.B Fieldnotes, 4/1/2016.
\end{itemize}
political expression of related discourses of ‘social action’ and ‘social cohesion’ was rejected, and instead replaced by religious practice as a motivating factor and a key contributor to the production of a self-stated notion of ‘social cohesion’. Therefore, here we can observe that unlike Org.A, Org.B seeks to reject narratives of the dominant political discourse on ‘faith’ such as ‘interfaith dialogue’, yet also acts to rearticulate other notions developed in policy, i.e. ‘social cohesion’, in developing a distinct notion of what I have termed ‘socio-religious action’.

In this way, for Org.B, though their activities were defined largely in reference to an overall commitment to social action and “community cohesion”, these activities were also consistently presented in reference to Islamic concepts such as zakat (compulsory charity) and sadaqah (voluntary charity). In conversations about involvement in the organisation, volunteers and donors often made frequent reference to these religious requirements of charity, as well as following the Sunnah (example) of the Prophet, and the subsequent reward from “God almighty”. On one occasion, one particular volunteer was very keen to stress to me the importance of continuously and consciously thinking about “why we are doing this, and not just doing it”, and as we folded chapattis and spooned out portions of curry from a huge pot on the stove, forming a co-ordinated conveyor belt lining up meal after meal for those waiting in the café area, she made sure to regularly remind other volunteers that “to serve the needy was also to serve God”. In addition, co-founder M

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would frequently reinforce calls to serve the “community in which you reside”, and this particular notion also informed a key campaign by Org.B to “keep zakat local”, quoting the teachings and life of Prophet Muhammad as undertaking the proper application of such, and thus providing the perfect example for Muslims to follow in their own practices in the UK.

Collectively, these notions formed the groundwork for the development of Org.B’s most recent initiative, the food bank project, in collaborating with the local Unitarian church to run a weekly service for people of any background who require assistance in the form of food, advice, guidance and signposting. Yet significantly, as stated previously, though the project was run in collaboration with the church, the term ‘interfaith’ was not used and was explicitly rejected by the co-founder of the organisation, M, who viewed the term and the discourse as divisive, and in fact counterproductive to ‘cohesion’.

What was instead proposed by Org.B as being developed through the food bank initiative, is a strong sense of commitment to social action by aiming to be “a force for real change” in “helping the local community”. Hence, as discussed previously in chapter five, this sense of localism was key to the output of the organisation in developing social action projects through a

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geographically framed sense of ‘community’, located explicitly in Oldham, addressing “the concerns and issues in society but from an Islamic ethos”.661 Through these pronouncements, in defining their work Org.B used religious frameworks in order to pursue social action that intentionally and explicitly also aims to produce “community cohesion” and “restore social balance”.662 Therefore here the particular approach to developing an ascribed notion of ‘cohesion’ was located strongly in the Islamic principles upheld by the founders of the organisation, and operationalised through social action initiatives that draw on such, and are rooted in the locality.

Similarly, Org.C also grounded their approach to social action in the Sikh tradition, but significantly they pushed this notion further in denoting the deployment of their initiatives not only as religiously motivated, but as a ritual act of religious devotion. As discussed in chapter six, key to the religious framework of the organisation was the term sewa, a concept common to both Hindu and Sikh traditions, denoting the act of ‘selfless service’, considered to be an act of personal devotion to God. For Org.C, the homeless feed project was not about ‘faith-based social action’, as the dominant policy discourse would allude, but was very much about social action as religious practice.

However interestingly, as the project developed, it became increasingly diverse in demographic, as non-Sikh volunteers began to regularly attend and participate, yet clearly did not conceive of their participation as religious practice in the same way as the Sikh volunteers. In addition, by placing the

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661 M found in Shaw, ‘Oldham: Uniting across racial divides to fight poverty.’
initiative into public space, specifically within the busy location of Piccadilly Gardens, Org.C also invited the general public to interact, question and learn about the Sikh religion, and to project an image of unity, and conversations similar to those previously described at Org.B would often take place regarding discussions of religious tradition and the mutual exchange of learning languages.\textsuperscript{663} Service users would also ask a variety of questions from “how did you make the curry?” to “what’s the difference between Sikhs and Muslims?”.\textsuperscript{664} Interestingly, on multiple occasions, assumptions were made by both members of the public and by service users that the organisation was in fact made up of volunteers who identified as ‘Muslim’. On one occasion, a man approached and offered “a salaam alaikum”, to then be firmly corrected to the fact that “we are not Muslim” and offered the alternative traditional common Sikh greeting of “sat sri aakaal”.\textsuperscript{665} Here clear assertions were made not only to designate and educate about differences between the two distinct ‘faith communities’, but to also provide a public affirmation of Sikh identity.

Other frequent food related enquiries such as “who made the food?” and “where did you make it?” also provided opportunity to invite both service users and members of the public to the local temple, as a place that is “open to all”.\textsuperscript{666} I would regularly watch G as he approached people and enthusiastically pointed to the signage and gestured towards the group in proudly discussing an assortment of topics related to Sikh belief and practice, as well as wider

\textsuperscript{663} Org.C Fieldnotes, 21/2/2016.
\textsuperscript{666} Org.C Fieldnotes, 21/2/2016.
issues regarding “community cohesion”.\textsuperscript{667} Thus through this a sense of “developing cohesion” was often upheld by Org.C, as a pleasant by-product of this activity,\textsuperscript{668} with education about the Sikh tradition forming a considered aspect of this.

In relation to this notion, the leader of Org.C, G, informed me that one thing he had thought long and hard about was both the name of the organisation and the use of the hashtag #Langar4All, but concluded that it would be a good way to engage with members of the public, to educate them and to “push the message of Sikhi”.\textsuperscript{669} This proved an effective tactic, as on several occasions, service users or people passing by asked about the signage, in particular the meaning of the words \textit{langar} and \textit{sewa}, giving opportunity for volunteers to engage in informal conversations about Sikh traditions and beliefs.\textsuperscript{670} In fact on several occasions, I observed that whilst some volunteers served food, snacks and hot drinks, others milled around taking opportunities to talk to passers by and engage in discussion regarding concepts including \textit{langar} and \textit{sewa} and general aspects of Sikhi (lived Sikh traditions).\textsuperscript{454} As Murphy has suggested, ‘in religious and cultural terms Seva provides a means for Sikhs to articulate themselves “as Sikh”’,\textsuperscript{671} and this notion was clearly evident in the work of the Org.C volunteers.

\textsuperscript{667} Org.C Fieldnotes, 7/2/2016.
\textsuperscript{668} Org.C Fieldnotes, 5/6/2016.
\textsuperscript{669} Org.C Fieldnotes, 10/4/2016.
\textsuperscript{671} Murphy, ‘Mobilising \textit{Seva (“Service”): Modes of Sikh Diasporic Action},’ p.348.
On one occasion I overheard a volunteer discussing the motivations for the project with a service user. Whilst scooping coffee into polystyrene cups, forming part of a production line of hot drinks at one end of the row of tables, the Org.C volunteer, a man in his late 20s, began answering welcomed questions regarding why those involved choose to set up and take part in this project. In a swift yet considered response, the volunteer simply smiled and stated that “it’s part of our culture, our religion, to serve humanity”.672 This statement effectively equated religion, particularly Sikh religiosity, with ‘serving humanity’, and therefore arguably provided the explicit embodiment of a discourse of social action strongly rooted in religious devotional practice. Importantly, this highlights an enactment of ‘socio-religious action’ that is disentangled and detached from explicit narratives of ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based social action’, and is instead centred on the enactment of religious devotion, and not on the enactment of a politically guided ‘faith’ discourse.

Likewise, in a similar vein to Org.B, as the project was not funded through a larger organisation or local authority, this allowed Org.C to retain a sense of integrity, authenticity, and ownership over their project explicitly as religious practice. Though seemingly evidencing discursive notions of ‘faith-based social action’, on closer inspection the organisation and the homeless feed project were in fact framed more intricately by discourses of diasporic devotion, and were not reliant on the deployment of dominant political narratives regarding the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’. Yet for Org.C, a somewhat organic sense of unity and collaboration developed.

through their activities was occasionally acknowledged by volunteers as a welcomed by-product of the performance of religious practice located in what may be described as ‘post-secular’ public space.

On the whole, both Org.B and Org.C also clearly demonstrated the activation of an aforementioned ‘community of practice’ discussed in chapter five, through realization of a shared latent existence of common values and interests. Crucially, for the founders and majority of the members of Org.B and Org.C, these latent values were strongly centred on reciprocal religious principles. Yet importantly, despite their initial establishment being based in an assertion of ‘socio-religious action’, these ‘communities of practice’ were not intrinsically bound by religiosity. In fact, the location of these organisations in the public sphere allowed them to attract others from outside of existing networks, who were welcomed in pursuing a collective social action and indeed ‘social cohesion’ narrative, albeit perhaps from a somewhat different source of moral motivation or standpoint.

**Post-Secular Public Space, Positive Engagement and Prosaic Interaction**

In discussing the increasing role of ‘faith’ in policy and practice in recent years, it is essential to acknowledge a wider context of debates regarding the notion of secularism, and whether we might indeed consider the current context in which this research is situated as ‘post-secular’. As Beckford has discussed, the

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673 Castells et al., *Mobile Communication and Society*, p.249.
674 Castells et al., *Mobile Communication and Society*, p.249.
increasing significance of FBOs activities in social welfare in particular highlights a ‘broader augmentation of religion’s place in the public sphere as a consequence of neoliberal public policies’. Therefore following this, in researching the emergence of a ‘faith’ discourse within the political sphere, we must consider the role of the notion of ‘post-secularism’ as denoting the transition between previous affirmations of secularisation theory as ‘an inevitable outcome of processes of modernisation’, and current contrary assertions of the re-emergence of ‘religion’ in the political and public sphere in a new era of ‘post-secular’ politics. Yet as Beckford also points out, this concept is not without criticism, as many would argue that an assertion of the ‘postsecular’ represents a gross oversimplification of historical progression from presecular through to secular, and finally postsecular societies. Likewise, as others such as Kong also argue, the notion of ‘secularism’ must itself also be substantially interrogated before one can subsequently proclaim the emergence of ‘postsecularism’. Therefore, as with other terminology used and discussed throughout this thesis, we must remain mindful of how such concepts are used.

Significantly, on the whole, discussions of ‘postsecularism’ are often centred on the role of religion within a notion of ‘public space’ or the ‘public sphere’, a concept extensively theorised most notably by political philosopher Jürgen Habermas, whose work arguably set the agenda for academic debate on these

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677 Beckford, ‘SSSR Presidential Address Public Religions and the Postsecular,’ p. 11.
themes. All of the organisations with whom I conducted fieldwork were located to differing extents within what may be termed the ‘public sphere’, conceived as a notion that provides the receptive context for the development of a perceived discourse of ‘social cohesion’. As a result, in discussing ‘policy in practice’, it is crucial to consider these wider contextual debates regarding both ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’.

In his 1962 book, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas traces the development of the public sphere as an asset of Enlightenment and a vital part of ‘modernity’, identifying the historical emergence of such within late eighteenth and early nineteenth century coffee-houses and salons in London, Paris and Frankfurt, in which members of the bourgeois elite would gather to discuss matters of common interest. These middle class men, he argues, through ‘engaging in reasoned argument over key issues of mutual concern’, formed a ‘zone of mediation between the state and private individuals’, and effectively cultivated the initial rise of a democratic ‘public sphere’.

Nowadays the term ‘public’ or ‘public sphere’ is often used more generally to describe a metaphorical construct or virtual space, in which people or ‘citizens’

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679 Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (trans.), (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989 [1962]).
may interact and exchange ideas away from the apparatus of the state. As McKee suggests,

The concept of the “public sphere” is a useful one for researchers who believe that ordinary citizens play a role in the creation and distribution of ideas about how society works.\footnote{McKee, \textit{The Public Sphere}, p.10.}

In other words, in terms of my own research, it is essential to consider the role of the ‘public sphere’ as a second space in which ‘social cohesion’ discourse is negotiated, rearticulated, and at times rejected, forming an essential arena for the translation of policy into practice, in which individual citizens form collectivities or ‘communities’ that may be subsequently permeated or pervaded by policy discourse. In line with my previous discussion in chapter five regarding the role of new technology in the formation of networks and ‘communities’, as McKee discusses, the mass media in particular have recently been argued to have begun to play a crucial role in the public sphere, through their ability to connect vast populations of people in an increasingly globalised world, and thus facilitate wider discussions between populations that in reality would not fit ‘into a town hall where they could all discuss issues that affect them’.\footnote{McKee, \textit{The Public Sphere}, p.5.} However, as Herbert suggests, though globalization has led on the one hand to ‘parts of the world being drawn closer together through improved communications, increased economic exchange, political interdependence and cultural interaction’, on the other hand, ‘increased interaction does not necessarily lead to convergence’,\footnote{Herbert, \textit{Religion and Civil Society}, p.103.} and therefore questions are increasingly
being raised regarding the practicality of an amalgamated public sphere, particularly in light of the increasingly pluralised nature of modern societies.

This leads us back around to discuss the re-emergence into ‘the public sphere’, of one form of identity in particular, that of religion and ‘faith’, and to assess calls to ‘redefine the functions that religion or religious identity perform in the public space’.686 As Rovisco and Kim note, ‘in recent years, scholars and public intellectuals... have been directing their theoretical concerns to the role of religion in the public sphere’,687 and as Reddy and Zavos argue, though ‘the Habermasian public sphere provides a kind of universal template for understanding the idea of the public... that template needs to be amended in terms of the role of religion within it’.688 Indeed, in recent years, Habermas himself, as a previous key proponent of ‘the secularisation thesis’, has notably revisited such propositions in acknowledging ‘the endurance of broad religious beliefs in the most modern of societies’ leading to a ‘crisis of faith amongst secularists’.689

For some, religious pluralism may provide a source of conflict, and ‘a salient backdrop for national identity politics defined as struggles over representation

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and recognition in multi-cultural contexts’. Yet on the other hand, as Mohamed-Saleem suggests,

As religion can cut across class, ethnic and cultural divisions, religious leaders can serve as an important if informal representative function. Members of the same religious community, anchored in different parts of the world, have greater capacity to increase their cultural, social and economic links with other religious and secular partners in other parts of the world.

Here in encountering notions of globalization, religious identity, though frequently subject to minority or subaltern status, may offer a ‘powerful bond amid the vicissitudes of globalization’ and a way to facilitate links between the aforementioned criss-crossing webs that constitute the multitude of public spheres. Therefore for many, the public role of religion, despite often being conceived in negative and inflammatory terms, may in fact be viewed as a source of ‘communal identity’ and a form of ‘sociological superglue’.

Overall, interestingly as Knott suggests,

The spaces of religion are synchronically dynamic because at any time they are overlapping, co-existent, in parallel with other spaces, and because they are internally in tension, being made up of multiple, contested, real, and imagined sites and relations.

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690 Mohamed-Saleem, ‘Moving Beyond the Rhetoric’, p.199.
693 Herbert, Religion and Civil Society, p.107.
694 Putnam, Bowling Alone, p.23.
695 Knott, The Location of Religion, p. 23.
In exploring ideas regarding the spatial approach to the study of religion, it may also be useful to outline the ways in which notions of religion and religious space intersect both practically and theoretically. As Knott suggests, religion is often in itself inherently social, and therefore must exist and express itself through space, as well as playing a part in the production and reproduction of space. Religious space may regularly take the form of what Knott refers to as ‘conventional religious spaces’, i.e. places of worship such as mosques, churches or temples, which provide physical and visual markers of religiosity within the wider notion of ‘public space’. These physical spaces may also produce various other forms of social space, at times also non-religious, as many places of worship are now often used as community centres, youth clubs, mother and baby groups etc. Religion may also inhabit public space in other forms, such as through the temporary transformation of space by religious processions, providing both audio and visual markers of religiosity, or through the identification of natural sites as places of pilgrimage, such as the river Ganges. As Kong suggests, ‘there are many ways in which everyday spaces can be implicated in religious meaning-making, legitimating, maintaining and enhancing, but also challenging religious life, beliefs, practices and identities’, and as I will later discuss, this becomes evident in my own ethnography.

However, it is first essential to again return to the notion of postsecularism, and of the emergence of 'post-secular' public spaces in which ‘faith’ or religious

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697 Knott, The Location of Religion, p.60.
practice may act to shape and transform everyday spaces temporarily. With regards to the central concerns of this thesis, this conceptual framework asks us to consider the role of postsecular public space in a wider public discourse regarding ‘social cohesion’, and in particular the role of individuals and/or organisations in promoting a notion of ‘social cohesion’ through the performance of religious practices in public space. In this way, we can also assess the apparent crossovers occurring in the permeation of notions of ‘faith’ within the presupposed secularism of the public sphere, and this may lead to the creation of what Cloke refers to as ‘post-secular rapprochement’,699 in which ‘secular citizens’ may work together with ‘faith’ organisations in addressing social issues, putting aside other frameworks of theological or political difference,700 with the urban neoliberal setting of the city seen as a key arena in particular for this.

In terms of my ethnographic research, the three organisations I have discussed all utilise the same space regularly, but these spaces may be considered ‘public’ to differing degrees. As a result, the extent to which the location of the organisations can be considered ‘public’ arguably has an impact on the level of engagement with the wider ‘public sphere’, beyond the networks or ‘communities’ embodied by organisations.

As described in previous chapters, Org.A’s engagement with the ‘public sphere’

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was arguably limited, and in addition to issues of capacity, another issue contributing to this may be the location of Org.A within the ‘Multifaith Centre’. The centre was marketed as “an attractive and flexible place to meet”. However, in reality the location was arguably neither central nor easily or publicly accessible. In fact, on my first visit I was unsure of the location, and slightly hesitant to enter the unmarked building in which the organisation is housed. The building is found in a quiet backstreet surrounded by apartment buildings, car parks and a fire station, and is shared by a number of other organisations and businesses. The designated ‘Multifaith Centre’ can only be accessed through telecom when the centre is staffed, during the two working days a week when the community development worker and admin officer are present. Therefore, I am cautious to describe the centre as a shared space that is open to ‘the general public’. I also felt that the nature of access to the centre via telecom also created a sense of formality that may again inevitably negate the desired environment of an ‘open and flexible’ place to meet, and the physicality of the space itself was not particularly ‘faith-based’ in aesthetic or atmosphere.

On arrival at the ‘Multifaith Centre’, once gaining entry and journeying to the second floor of the building, there is no crossing of a physical or metaphorical threshold, no removal of shoes or dutiful rituals as one might do upon entering a sacred space, and no demarcation of the space as particularly ‘religious’ in terms of decoration or adornment. Again, on my first visit, I was initially unsure as to whether I was in the correct part of the building, as signage for

the centre is also limited. However, I did receive a warm welcome from the community development worker, and was offered a swift tour of the multifaith centre space.

The centre consisted of a shared space in which events take place, an adjoining private office and storage room, and ‘quiet room’ containing sofas and a coffee table. The shared space felt very bright and airy, with sizeable windows at each end providing ample natural lighting, and an open area usually set up with a large meeting table and chairs, a photocopier, and a small kitchen area. Due to its use by another community organisation and a small IT business, the area was generally presented as relatively secular in both physical appearance and in atmosphere, and perhaps also for the purposes of maintaining neutrality in welcoming ‘people of all faiths and none’, though the logo of Org.A displays religious symbols, there were no permanent displays of religious imagery in the communal spaces of the ‘Multifaith Centre’.

In addition, other than individual members of the organisation attending outside events, there was little Org.A activity that took place outside of the ‘Multifaith Centre’, and so their engagement with the ‘public sphere’ was essentially limited to this space. One must already be aware of Org.A, or aware of a particular event, in order to engage with the organisation, and this, coupled with their admitted lack of use of new technologies and social media, and lack of capacity in going out and engaging with individuals and communities at a ‘grassroots’ level, proved problematic for ‘public

engagement’. This therefore left Org.A located within a limited network of bounded circles, with little hope of developing expanding wider webs of public engagement outside of this.

Org.B, on the other hand, though again being somewhat statically located in the same space each week, did display some attempt to push their organisation further into the public sphere, and to utilise various mechanisms such as social media and public ‘embodied performances of identity’ to do so. The Unitarian church building in which the food bank was located is publically visible, easily accessible and centrally located in the town centre of Oldham, with clear signage displayed on the main road to denote the use of the space for the ‘[Org.B] Food Bank Project’. On approaching the building and walking through car park, each week I would look to the large windows of the café and kitchen area, to see F and other volunteers waving and smiling as I hurriedly carried bags of tinned and fresh foods donated by family and friends who had heard I was conducting fieldwork at a foodbank. Often there would be service users outside, smoking or waiting for friends, who kindly opened doors and offered to help carry donations to the main hall where the foodbank was being set up.

Each week I would shuffle through the front door, past queues of men, women and children, seated and standing, chatting in a mixture of accents and languages. Through the door to the left was the foodbank, set up with tables of food neatly arranged in rows, fresh food piled up in boxes, an area for clothing

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704 Wording of the signage slightly altered for the purposes of retaining anonymity.
and household items, and another two round tables with seating for members of Org.B to conduct assessments for service users, and provide signposting or guidance for a wide variety of issues, from seeking asylum status to managing benefit sanctions. After handing over my donations and having a brief chat with R and other regular volunteers, I would make my way back through the double doors, across the hallway containing queues of people, and through to the other side of the building into the café and kitchen area, where my volunteering role was usually conducted. This location of my role within the kitchen area admittedly somewhat limited the individuals with whom I had contact with each week, and as a woman, my gender may also have impacted on the people who I worked with regularly, due to variably adhered to cultural norms regarding the mixing of men and women. However, in seeking to fulfil my role as ‘volunteer’, I agreed to be placed wherever help was needed, and in many cases I was able to work in other areas of the foodbank project, and therefore to conduct observation and informal interviews with a variety of participants within the organisation, including both men and women.

Each Monday, F would be waiting with a hug and a smile, along with other members of the Unitarian church who volunteered each week. After donning an apron and acquiring a cup of tea, we would quickly arrange plates, dishes and cutlery ready to begin service once the hot food was delivered. The arrival of the Org.B foodbank project remarkably transformed the feel of the building, from a quiet and reflective space, largely uninhabited during the week, to a bustling hub of hurried activity. Through the fast-pace of service required, both in the foodbank and the café, it was often easy to forget to stop and observe, and to really take account of the space and the interactions taking
place within it. The noise of people talking loudly across a crowded room, children playing, babies crying, and occasionally cross words between service users who presented with drug and alcohol issues, became background noise, punctuated only by the co-ordination of volunteers in a continuous conveyor belt of service. Yet looking out through the kitchen hatch, it was easy to observe the huge diversity of people that inhabited the space, and contributed to its transformation from Unitarian church to cosmopolitan common area.

All members of the public were invited, encouraged and welcomed into the space, regardless of circumstance, and no questions were asked regarding any individual’s religious identity in order to join or engage with the organisation, for either admittance or monitoring purposes. Volunteers from both the Unitarian chapel and Org.B worked alongside each other every week, and together they encountered service users from a variety of backgrounds. However, it must be noted that the majority of volunteers from Org.B were Muslim women, many of whom were visibly demarcated through wearing of the hijab or headscarf.

On conducting regular participant observation with the organisation, I noted how this mix of various demographics, particularly between volunteers working together regularly for a number of weeks, frequently brought about comments and discussions regarding Islam, language and cultural practices. Questions were often asked by non-Muslim volunteers, including myself, on themes such as wearing the hijab or niqab, halal and non-halal food, fasting
during Ramadan, and even issues related to politics and extremism. In addition, I would also take the opportunity myself to provoke further discussion on particular topics, and to also request translation of some of the conversations that would take place in Urdu between F and frequent service users, with whom she had developed a rapport by talking at some length about their specific situations. These individuals, most of whom were mothers accompanied by their children, would ask for F specifically, as their English was limited and they sometimes struggled to communicate.

Interestingly though, over the weeks and months that I regularly attended the food bank, I observed how volunteers and service users frequently taught each other basic phrases from different languages including Arabic and Urdu. Phrases included ‘Hello’, ‘How are you?’ ‘Please’ and ‘Thank You’, and were subsequently used and practised amongst each other and with service users in the following weeks. I also myself enjoyed learning multiple Urdu words through observing and listening to conversations, and this became useful in communicating with both volunteers and service users who were themselves attempting to learn English whilst attending the food hub. For example, ladies would approach the church volunteers and ask for pani (water), and from overhearing and clarifying the translation of this word from Org.B volunteers, I was able to understand, offer assistance, and pass on this knowledge to the church volunteers in question. Likewise, due to most of the volunteers also being ‘born and bred’ in Oldham, conversations and discussions would also frequently take place regarding colloquialisms from different localities of the

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V6 Various Org.B Fieldnotes.
North West. These included mundane and occasionally comical debates on topics such as the prevailing lack of consensus in defining bread rolls as “muffins or barms”, and architectural changes to the locality over the past few decades.706 These interesting linguistic exchanges became habitual practice through regular participation and collaboration with individuals of different beliefs, cultures and languages, and for some volunteers, this provided a significant and marked alteration from their normative interactions.

Crucially, these conversations arguably hold deeper significance in being described as what Amin terms ‘prosaic negotiations’; everyday exchanges that have the potential to shift perceptions and alter attitudes. Here, the space of the foodbank constitutes what Amin describes as a ‘micro-public of banal transgression’,707 as a space inhabited and transformed by the particular collection of people. For Amin, the ‘micro-public’ is conceived as a space or site of interaction populated by diverse individuals, and it is within these ‘micro-publics’ that ‘banal’ or mundane interactions occur as everyday experiences, that may lead to a ‘transgression’ of habitual attitudes and behaviours towards ethnic (and as I argue, religious) difference.

For Amin, this notion of ‘transgression’ involves a process of 'cultural displacement and destabilization... placing people from different backgrounds in new settings where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new

706 Various Org.B Fieldnotes.
707 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
attachments’. In other words, these ‘transgressions’ comprise a powerful shift in normative assumptions and a disruption of negative stereotypes. Through this framework, Amin seeks to highlight the potential of everyday ‘cultural contact’ to produce a significant modification in mindset, through the removal of intolerance and learning to live with ethnic difference. However, Amin notably bases this discussion firmly within the realms of ‘ethnic cultural differences’. Yet as I have shown, wider consideration of the notion of religious difference also has a crucial role to play in the management of pluralism, and the specific contribution of minority religions to this discourse has also received limited attention in both political and academic spheres, thus adding further contextual motivation to my overall focus on South Asian religious traditions in particular.

The Org.B food bank provides an example of this, representing a ‘micro-public’ often populated by people from a variety of religious backgrounds, who may not ordinarily encounter one another on a day-to-day basis. Within this ‘micro-public’, ‘prosaic’ conversations regularly take place, seen in the examples described above, aiding the disruption or ‘transgression’ of normative assumptions and negative stereotypes, and often resulting in ‘new attachments’ produced through instances of ‘banal interaction’, such as the simple act of questioning, listening and learning. Similarly, the same could be said for the work of Org.C, in which banal interaction and conversation can constitute a significant shift in perception through ‘discursive negotiation’ and

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708 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
709 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
710 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
the disruption of stereotypes, that may in turn facilitate the development of what may be conceived discursively by these organisations as ‘social cohesion’.

Significantly, both of these organisations also demonstrate a ‘transgression’ of political frameworks and funding, and a rejection of dominant discourses of ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based social action’. Drawing on the work of Amin, Sandercock argues that these kinds of ‘spaces of accommodation and intermingling’,711 present the opportunity to ‘disrupt familiar patterns’712 and develop changes in attitudes and behaviours that are a direct result of lived experiences. In this way, the examples of ‘socio-religious action’ undertaken by Org.B and Org.C, crucially represent a disruption of the structured approach to the management of pluralism, as presented through policy, and sustained through preferred strategies such as ‘interfaith dialogue’. As Sandercock suggests, in these spaces, it is possible to facilitate informal opportunities for the development of a sense of shared ‘active citizenship and daily negotiations of difference’713 that may present stimulating instances of ‘intercultural interaction’,714 resulting in a ‘diverse civic culture that people feel in their bones’.715

These smaller-scale transgressions based in ‘multi-ethnic [or indeed multi-religious] common ventures’ offer examples of the ‘fragile and temporary resolutions springing from the vibrant clash between empowered publics -

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711 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.103.
712 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.94.
713 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.103.
714 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.103.
715 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.87.
rather than as a matter of policy fixes’, and demonstrate the ‘politics of local livability’ found in the practice of negotiating diversity and difference.\textsuperscript{716} In other words these initiatives evidence what may be described as a ‘transgression’ of policy discourse, through producing alternative approaches to the development of a perceived sense of ‘social cohesion’ located in everyday interactions, as opposed to structured, monitored or measured engagement.

In addition to this, it is also important to again highlight the spatial aspect of this argument, in considering the notion of ‘transgression’ as located in physical as well as metaphorical space, and the ‘micro-publics’ in which these transgressions take place as being located in the wider aforementioned notion of ‘public space’. In other words, we can not only observe the ‘intercultural interactions’ within a ‘micro-public’ of a project like a food bank, but also the potential wider reach of these organisations as projected into the ‘public sphere’. In terms of Org.B, though the physical and geographical location of the organisation in the space of the Unitarian chapel means that the project arguably holds limitations related to public reach, as one can only observe the organisation through intentionally entering this space, attempts are frequently made to push the organisation further into the ‘public sphere’ through use of social media and the local press for example. As discussed in chapter five, this demonstrates a move towards the use of new technologies to facilitate the opening up of ‘new spheres of public participation’\textsuperscript{717} that ‘redraw the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion’\textsuperscript{718} and allow for new forms of

\textsuperscript{716} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{717} Eisenlohr, ‘The Anthropology of Media,’ p.42.
\textsuperscript{718} Eisenlohr, ‘The Anthropology of Media,’ p.42.
‘autonomous action’\textsuperscript{719} through ‘multimodal’\textsuperscript{720} forms of networking.

Interestingly, images of Org.B and the food bank were purposefully projected into the ‘public sphere’ as exemplary instances of positive engagement, through which they are attempting to shift the “public image of Islam” away from negative narratives of extremism and segregation, and towards affirmative accounts of civic engagement.\textsuperscript{721} Yet despite this assertion, both Org.B and Org.A were perhaps limited to some extent by their location in semi-public buildings, with regards to their desired permeation of ‘post-secular public space’.

Org.C on the other hand, conducted their homeless feed initiative on a weekly basis in one of the busiest areas in Manchester city centre, Piccadilly Gardens. Each Sunday morning, at a nearby Gurdwara located in an industrial backstreet off one of the main roads through Manchester, volunteers arrived at around 10:30am to begin cooking food to be served later that afternoon. Preparation of the food begins using huge \textit{pateela} (pots) to cook dhal, vegetable soup and rice, as well as \textit{pateela} for volunteers at the temple to consume with their own \textit{langar} meal before leaving for the city centre. Cooking was done mainly by the older women, chatting amongst themselves as they busily assembled ingredients, spooning heaps of seasoning that wafted the smell of spices through the open kitchen doors out into other areas of the temple. Often one of the ladies would shout for the helping hand of a man, for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[719] Zavos, ‘Digital Media and Networks of Hindu Activism in the UK,’ p.22.
\item[720] Castells, \textit{Networks of Outrage and Hope}, p.221.
\item[721] Various Org.B Fieldnotes.
\end{footnotes}
lifting or extensive stirring of the pots, and this invitation would be kindly obliged by one of the men waiting nearby.

Once the food was ready, a configuration of eager volunteers would rapidly assemble in the main langar hall, in which rice would be divided into individual portions and packaged into boxes, then hauled into the van along with the pots of soup and dhal, to be freshly served on the street. Men and women of all ages sat on the floor side by side, a key aspect of the tradition of langar that demonstrates the notion of equality and humbleness, and together on one side of the room, huddled around the pot of rice, spooning servings into plastic containers. When sitting amongst volunteers, chatting and working with haste to get everything ready to go on time, kirtans (devotional songs) could sometimes be heard, played over the sound system in the hall, filling the airspace that was already punctuated by the smell of seasonings and the rising steam from the hot food. While most of the volunteers sat and packaged up boxes of rice, others would then quickly take their turn to consume their own portion of the langar, again taking a seat on the floor, and sometimes uttering a brief recitation before eating.

After the packing process was complete, boxes of rice would be collected and lifted into the back of a transit van, along with the hot pateela of dahl, and occasionally other additions such as buttered bread or samosas, and before embarking on the short journey to the usual spot for serving, a final blessing would be made upon the food, in order to solidify its demarcation as langar. Meanwhile in the city centre, a pre-formed queue was often assembling to await the entrance of Org.C to the scene. Before their arrival, the small area of
Piccadilly gardens in which the homeless feed takes place, may be regarded as simply another concrete corner in the landscape of the city, heavily populated with passers-by on a Sunday afternoon, located opposite a bustling bus stop, a convenience store, and a well-known chicken restaurant. However, when the Org.C van pulls up, the space is temporarily transformed.

As the van pulls up, people who regularly attend to receive food immediately begin to congregate, and while the tables, tubs, pans and pots are quickly hauled out of the back doors, service users shuffle into position to spot what will be on offer this week. Volunteers then swiftly assemble to form an organised conveyor belt of smiling service, with clothing at one end, followed by snacks and hot drinks, and finally the main attraction, hot rice and dahl, often accompanied by bread and samosas. Around ten to fifteen volunteers then continue to serve those who attend until all of the food has ran out.

Along with the physicality of the space changing, inhabited by numerous members of Org.C and their offerings, the sights and sounds of the space are also shifted significantly. Huge orange signage of the organisation is displayed on the side of the parked up van, and makeshift posters and leaflets are hung on the tables. A colourful array of scarves and turbans worn by volunteers is also visible, though at times these are perhaps outshone by the bright yellow high visibility jackets used to identify them from the service users and passers-by. Audibly, the hustle and bustle of service creates a constant hum of “tea or coffee”, “can I have one of them, love?”, “what flavour crisps have you got?”,
“is it spicy?” and exchanges of “thank you” and “you’re welcome”. Voices can also regularly be heard above this shouting “food for the homeless”, and in later weeks G also acquired a large speaker and began to play traditional kirtans (devotional songs) to “enhance the atmosphere”. Many of the volunteers spoke of how hearing these kirtans in particular provided a welcomed reminder of the spiritual purpose of their actions as sewa, and some service users also asked about the “nice music” playing in the background.

Through these visual and audible markers, the space attracted not only regular service users, but frequently passing members of ‘the general public’ who would approach to enquire about the organisation, point to the signage, ask what the words langar and sewa mean, and then often engage in conversation about the key principles of Sikh tradition that guide the initiative. As a result, many of these passers-by subsequently became volunteers or offered to give donations, thus demonstrating a chain reaction between seeing the organisation, speaking to members, and becoming active participants in one way or another.

As Cloke and Beaumont suggest, here we can identify the city as creating the potential for a myriad of ‘spaces of ethical identity’, that display ‘reconciliation and tolerance involving individuals and groups who are working across, or at least problematizing, previous divides involving inter-religious, anti-religious,
or anti-secular statement’.\textsuperscript{726} As they suggest, this demonstrates what may be seen as embodied performances of identity – religious or otherwise – in which local lived spaces can come to represent the potential for new formations of tolerance and agreement in place of previous sectarian tendencies.\textsuperscript{727}

Importantly, these ‘performances of identity’ not only form a precedent for ‘spaces of ethical identity’ in the postsecular city, but they also become inflections on the formation of these identities, through the embodiment of social action as religious practice.

Significantly however, I would argue that these ‘spaces of ethical identity’ are not limited to urban environments in the city. This notion can also be identified in more suburban areas of Oldham, in which the shared space of the Unitarian chapel comes to embody the sentiment of a ‘local lived space’,\textsuperscript{728} as a ‘micro-public’\textsuperscript{729} of tolerance and cohesion, grounded in an ethos of service and civic responsibility, and again intersected by religious motivation and social action. In addition to this, in both Org.B and Org.C we can also evidence what Cloke and Beaumont describe as the move towards an emphasis on ‘faith as praxis, rather than faith as dogma’.\textsuperscript{730} Through these organisations we can evidence the potential for South Asian religious traditions to carve out their place in ‘local lived spaces’,\textsuperscript{731} defined not merely by notions of diaspora, but

\textsuperscript{726} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.33.
\textsuperscript{727} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.33.
\textsuperscript{728} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.33.
\textsuperscript{729} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{730} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.34.
\textsuperscript{731} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.33.
by new notions of localism and British belonging, through the involvement of younger generations of South Asian descent claiming a strongly articulated identity that acts to assimilate religiosity within wider notions of ‘Britishness.’

**South Asian ‘Socio-Religious Action’ and Postsecular Praxis**

As discussed in some detail in chapter four, the deployment of social action as central to expressions of ‘social cohesion’ as a political discourse can be evidenced most strongly since 2008, when the DCLG report entitled *Face to Face and Side by Side* posited social action as a way to ‘achieve real and positive change’ and which would ‘help to build cohesive, active and empowered communities’.\(^{732}\) Here lines are drawn directly between social action and ‘social cohesion’, with ‘faith communities’ notably upheld as particularly resourceful in making an ‘important contribution’ to this type of work.\(^{733}\) From a sociological perspective, on the whole, social action represents a form of ‘citizenship’ and ‘citizen participation’ that involves ‘individuals taking action in response to societal problems and in generating “social capital”’.\(^{734}\) However, I would argue that these actions are also inherently political, and though many forms of participation are not necessarily politically motivated, such as volunteering for a community group or simply proving help to those in need, this cannot be inherently detached from the context in which they may carry implicit expressions of politics. For example, helping at a local food bank or feeding the homeless also represents

\(^{732}\) DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side*, p.17.

\(^{733}\) DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side*, p.19.

engagement with the impact of austerity, and a manifestation of neoliberal narratives regarding social intervention and civic contribution to social welfare.

As Snyder and Omoto describe, in line with the previously described political discourse regarding social cohesion, ‘it has often been suggested that one way to solve many of the problems confronting society is to promote these forms of social action, that is, to encourage people to act in ways that will benefit not only themselves as individuals but also the larger communities and the society of which they are members’.735 In this way social action narratives carry implied notions of political engagement as well as civic participation.

In conjunction with these narratives is a developing discourse of specifically ‘faith-based social action’, that positions ‘faith communities’ as key contributors, long experienced in providing a ‘force for positive social change’.736 As Snyder and Omoto describe, we can observe notable variety in the motivations for participation in forms of social action, including: volunteerism, civic and political participation, social movements, and organizational citizenship.737 Yet as Marzana et al. have suggested, ‘religious activity (i.e. practising a religion) is [posited as] one of the strongest predictors of motivation to voluntary service’.738 This recognition of the prominent role played by ‘faith-based’ organisations in different areas of welfare provision has

735 Snyder and Omoto, ‘Social Action,’ p.940.
736 DCLG, Face to Face and Side by Side.
737 Snyder and Omoto, ‘Social Action,’ p.954.
also been upheld by others such as Lowndes and Chapman, who argue that normative religious values often translate into ethical impulses of charity, justice, and equality, that are subsequently harnessed in areas of welfare, cohesion and ethical citizenship.\textsuperscript{739} As evidenced in the development of the political discourse, ‘faith’ is often singled out as a particularly prominent proponent of social action initiatives and projects, in tackling ‘social problems’ related to cohesion.

However, as discussed elsewhere in chapter six, the relationship between these FBOs and the political sphere encounters significant divergence in many cases. As Cloke has acknowledged, ‘the involvement of FBOs in front-line welfare provision may involve partnerships of governance that may dilute, or at least press into the background, the very faith-motivations that originally formed the basis of their existence’.\textsuperscript{740} As I have shown ethnographically, this is one of the reasons that many organisations may choose to reject such partnerships, instead seeking to retain the integrity of ‘faith-based’ or religious motivations.

This juxtaposition between strong political shifts towards ‘faith-based social action’, and the rejection of this by some South Asian groups, has provided a strong justification for my ethnographic work, particularly with regards to Org.B and Org.C. These organisations appeared to be engaged in ‘faith-based social action’, yet did not explicitly subscribe to the political discourse, evidenced in their frequent dismissals of government affiliation or funding.

\textsuperscript{739} Lowndes and Chapman, \textit{Faith, Hope and Clarity: Developing a Model of Faith Group Involvement in Civil Renewal}, Civil Renewal Research Programme Report, (Leicester: DeMontford University, 2005).

\textsuperscript{740} Cloke, ‘Theo-ethics and radical faith-based praxis in the post-secular city.’
This was also a notion evidenced in fieldwork interviews with individuals from other groups and organisations run by predominantly Muslim or Sikh members, including a Manchester-based Islamic charity,741 and Sikh volunteers participating in other homeless feed initiatives in the city.742 Crucially, this ethnographic work has served to expose the over-constructed nature of the ‘faith-based social action’ discourse, and to uncover an obscured relationship between social action and South Asian religious practice that is not currently considered by the policy discourse.

As a result, this data serves to evidence an increase in the engagement of South Asian religious groups in social action initiatives that may instead be deemed as ‘socio-religious action’. These initiatives cannot be termed as ‘faith-based social action’, as they reject the political discourses surrounding ‘faith’ that underpin this notion. Nor can they merely be termed ‘social action’, as the religious motivations and principles that guide this work are strongly articulated as essential to its undertaking. Likewise, defining these initiatives as ‘religious action’ also does not take account of the postsecular social and humanitarian concerns that intersect with these religious motivations, often articulated through the discursive lens of ‘social [or community cohesion]’. Nor does it account for the added involvement of people who do not identify as religious. It is for these reasons that instead the term ‘socio-religious action’ aims to provide an adequate marker for the precise interplay of religion, social action and ‘social cohesion’ that collectively underpins these projects and initiatives. Importantly, this again should not be considered as descriptive of

741 Interview with Islamic Charity Founder, N, 12/8/2016.
742 Interview with Sikh Volunteer, S, 18/12/2016.
particular instances, but as denoting a developing discourse deployed by the variety of religious traditions that may undertake such work, demonstrated here by the specific contributions of South Asian traditions.

As Beaumont has noted, ‘the fast-growing number of Muslim FBOs and of non-Christian FBOs, despite the disputed figures that are available, is crucially important’,\textsuperscript{743} as ‘contributors to the opening up of new possibilities for wider involvement in postsecular ethical praxis’.\textsuperscript{744} As Cloke and Beaumont suggest, many local organisations who reject these contractual government partnerships seek to ‘open out opportunities for people of other religious faiths, and none, to “do something about” the plight of socially excluded people’,\textsuperscript{745} offering arenas for collaboration with people of no faith to join in with ‘activities that are prescribed theo-ethically’.\textsuperscript{746} They also suggest that this in turn ‘creates conditions for postsecular possibility’ and ‘new spaces of opportunity for faith groups to emphasize praxis rather than dogma, and to break out of their previous position of being “hushed up” in the public sphere’.\textsuperscript{747} As Cloke argues, this notion of ‘hushing up’ has led to some organizations becoming ‘professionally secular so as to secure a better relationship with both funders and clients’,\textsuperscript{748} a notion perhaps demonstrated by Org.A’s attempt to promote neutrality in order to appease city council funders. These ‘insider’ organisations, he argues, are in stark contrast to those

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{743} Beaumont, ‘Faith action on Urban Social Issues,’ p.2024.
\item \textsuperscript{744} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.30.
\item \textsuperscript{745} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.31.
\item \textsuperscript{746} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.41.
\item \textsuperscript{747} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.41.
\item \textsuperscript{748} Paul Cloke, ‘Emerging Postsecular Rapprochement in the Contemporary City,’ in Beaumont and Baker (eds.), Postsecular Cities: Space, Theory and Practice, (London: Continuum, 2011), p.244.
\end{itemize}
deemed as ‘outsider’ organisations who instead by rejecting affiliation and funding are able to hold onto a more explicitly religious *raison d'être* for their activities.

Still, while Cloke and Beaumont emphasize the practices of Christians in particular to demonstrate this,⁷⁴⁹ I argue that South Asian religious traditions are also providing significant contributions to this notion, as evidenced in my fieldwork. In fact, crucially they evidence an approach that not only provides a more open articulation of social action strongly rooted in religious principles, but also one that is explicitly centred around practising religion, rather than simply citing a generalised motive of religious belief. BothOrg.B and Org.C demonstrate a commitment to social action and civic participation strongly grounded in religious principles and/or devotional practice. These organisations cited specific religious concepts as the motivation and inspiration for the formation and continual advancement of their current initiatives, both centred equivocally on notions of providing welfare and tackling poverty. Yet importantly, these organisations also acted to open up ‘spaces of ethical identity’ and ‘postsecular rapprochement’ in which people are invited to work across ‘inter-religious divides’ for the mutual benefit of common goals and ‘new formations of tolerance and agreement’.⁷⁵⁰

In addition, what is of particular significance with regards to both of these organisations is their grounding in South Asian traditions, considered to be of diasporic and minority status compared to the traditionally White-British

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⁷⁴⁹ Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement.’
majority Christian population of the UK. Still, it must however be noted that Christian communities are also themselves becoming increasingly diverse in demographics, through the incorporation of migrant populations into Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches across the UK, as demonstrated by scholars such as Eade. Yet significantly, Eade does also acknowledge the position of the Anglican Church in retaining a symbolic sense of dominance both politically and publically, through ‘institutional privileges such as its episcopal representation in the house of Lords’, and through new and minority religious groups being generally understood in relation to the ‘Established Church’.

Nevertheless, the specific alignment of South Asian tradition and social action reveals interesting implications of diasporic belonging in postsecular public space, for example in the translation of religious practices such as langar into urban cosmopolitan environments (outside of the traditional context of the Gurdwara). Furthermore, in line with earlier discussion of Amin’s work on *Ethnicity and the Multicultural City*, the location of these practices in public space may also contribute to the development of a ‘micro-public’. Through this, these ‘embodied performances of identity’ can potentially provoke instances of ‘banal transgression’ by sparking opportunity for conversation and education, in order to improve religious literacy and thus also contribute

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754 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
756 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
to a narrative of ‘cohesion’. This notion, also occasionally described as doing ‘sewa on the streets’, not only demonstrates the insertion of traditional Sikh religious devotional practice into the ‘cosmopolis’ of the city, but also the adaptation of practice to suit the contextual requirements of a ‘British Sikhism’.

Crucially, in addition, these ‘embodied performances’ not only evoke identity, but contain instances of religiosity and devotional practice grounded in South Asian narratives of religious service that substantiate the point that these traditions place particular emphasis on the notion of ‘doing’, not just simply ‘believing’. As Mandair has described, ‘Sikhism’ as a term coined by Europeans in the nineteenth century, holds less relevance to Sikhs themselves than the often preferred term of Sikhi, meaning ‘to learn’, a notion also expressed to me in interview. Here the word ‘Sikhi’ does not denote an object or a thing, but refers to a path of learning as a lived experience, therefore it more specifically describes a process, not merely a belief. Similarly, as noted in chapter five, founding member of Org.B, M also made regular assertions to the fact that he argues the term Muslim to be “a verb, and not a noun”. In other words, the emphasis here is placed on the fact that what defines an individual as a Muslim is their actions, not just their beliefs, and is a notion asserted regularly in Islamic traditions through reference to following the example or the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.

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757 Various Org.C Fieldnotes.
758 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II.
760 Interview with young Sikh involved in community work during visit to Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurdwara, 18th December 2015.
Drawing further on this, the fact that both of these organisations embed their charitable work within religious principles that denote a particular religious practice provides an interesting point of discussion in terms of locating their ‘socio-religious action’ within South Asian traditions and what Zavos describes as ‘cultures of service’, considered key components of what it means to be Sikh or Muslim. Here the concepts of *sewa* and *langar* for the Sikhs of Org.C, and *zakat* and *sadaqah* for the Muslims of Org.B, provide more than mere justification or motivation for social action initiatives, but are part of a wider discourse of South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ as devotional practice, selfless service and adherence to God. Therefore, this characteristic of practising ‘service’ in the name of religion is key to understanding the particular contribution of South Asian religious traditions to political narratives of what is ordinarily deemed generic ‘faith-based social action’, and indeed to a wider conception of adherence to a discourse of ‘social cohesion’ within the localities in which these organisations are found.

Further to such considerations of locality and ‘space’, a notion common to both Org.C and Org.B, was the use of the phrase “charity begins at home”, a well-known proverb in the UK. Intriguingly, this phrase is said to be of principally Christian origin, generally understood to be adapted from a verse found in the New Testament. It is now used in common parlance to assert one’s responsibility to their immediate surroundings, though this is often interpreted in different ways, ranging from family, locality, country, or sometimes to the extreme extent of negative connotations relating to race or

762 Zavos, ‘Translating Cultures of Service in the Diaspora’. 
ethnicity. What is interesting here though is that the use of this phrase intersects with notions of diaspora in terms of reference to a ‘homeland’ that differs from one’s current country of residence, and thus instead often posits these individuals, groups and organisations as inherently ‘British’. In other words, as volunteers at both organisations described to me, as second, third and fourth generation immigrants who have been born in the UK, their ‘home’ is found in the context of Britain. Therefore, the phrase “charity begins at home” is used to deflect traditional assertions regarding sending donations ‘home’ to Pakistan or India for example.

For R, co-founder of Org.B, this logic was frequently deployed in discussion with potential donors, and also featured heavily on their publicity materials, arguably as the common ‘tag line’ for Org.B projects. In this way, South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ is a developing and distinctive discourse not only in the translation of religious principles and practices into the physical geographical spaces of the UK, but also ideologically in the positioning of these religious traditions as grounded in conceptions of Britishness and thus contributing to the wellbeing of British civil society. As we have seen, this ideological attachment may also extend down to a more localised scale, as with the emphasis of Org.B on the ‘local community of Oldham’ as the key benefactor of their efforts. Through this ideological positioning, these groups act to carve out their religious identity within wider notions of British belonging, and claim their piece of postsecular public space as key collaborators in ‘common goals’ and crucial contributors to a notion of ‘social cohesion’.

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Conclusions

Through focusing on ethnographic evaluations of three organisations I have aimed to uncover the ways in which ‘faith’ or religious practice may be conceived as a key contributor to a discourse of ‘social cohesion’. From education and ‘interfaith dialogue’, to ‘socio-religious action’ and civic participation, I have sought to outline the ways in which these organisations conceptualise their own contributions to ‘social [or community] cohesion’ on a local scale, as well as on an ideological humanitarian basis through particular religious practices, as in the case of Org.B and Org.C. Additionally, I have also observed how policymakers’ preferred frameworks of ‘interfaith’ configurations are often evaded by organisations who wish to preserve an ‘outsider’ status, in order to retain independence and integrity in maintaining the explicitly religious motivations for founding and sustaining their organisation.

I then discussed the significance of locating these organisations within what is often referred to as a political and social climate of ‘postsecularism’, in which religion is argued to have re-entered the ‘public sphere’, and despite previous assertions of the decline of such in the face of modernisation, has retained relevance as an enduring source of ‘communal identity’\textsuperscript{764} and a form of ‘sociological superglue’.\textsuperscript{765} Aligned with this, I explored the significance of ‘public space’ in assessing contributions to social cohesion, and the functions of ‘faith’ and religious practice within this. Furthermore, I outlined the

\textsuperscript{764} Herbert, \textit{Religion and Civil Society}, p.107.
\textsuperscript{765} Putnam, \textit{Bowling Alone}, p.23.
particularities of a developing discourse of South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ within the context of postsecular public space, through the translation of traditional religious devotional practice and principles into social action initiatives that aim to ‘serve humanity’\textsuperscript{766} in the name of God.

Notably, a key consideration running through these discussions of developing discourses regarding religion, social action and ‘social cohesion’ is the notion of ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’,\textsuperscript{767} as spaces in which ‘socio-religious action’ may often occur, through the opening up of postsecular public spaces and the performance of ‘ethical identity’\textsuperscript{768} that disrupts normative assertions of ‘otherness’ and instead promotes a sense of ‘prosaic negotiation’\textsuperscript{769} across demographic differences.

Crucially, though similar assertions are occasionally evidenced in policy documents and government programmes regarding to ‘interaction’ leading to ‘cohesion’,\textsuperscript{770} as I have shown, the relationship between policy and practice is not a simple sliding scale of participation and potential partnership. Therefore, in exploring the role of ‘faith’ in the promotion of ‘cohesion’, in addition to observing where ‘faith’ is situated in ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse, we must also assess where ‘faith’ is situated in practice, through the representation or rearticulation of discourse. Hence through assessment of organisations such as Org.B and Org.C, overall we can observe a significant

\textsuperscript{766} Org.C Fieldnotes, 10/4/2016.
\textsuperscript{767} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{768} Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement,’ p.33.
\textsuperscript{769} Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
\textsuperscript{770} DCLG, \textit{Face to Face and Side by Side}, p.23.
gap evident between policy discourse and public practice, and little desire to bridge the gap.

Through working ethnographically with these organisations, I have exposed the over-constructed nature of discourses such as ‘faith-based social action’ and ‘interfaith dialogue’, and evidenced the unique relationship between South Asian religious practices and ‘social cohesion’ discourse through ‘socio-religious action’. As I have discussed, this kind of work is not currently considered by dominant policy discourse, yet as several others have observed of other groups, it has in fact been on the rise in many areas of the UK for a number of years, particularly in response to growing austerity measures and public service cut backs since 2008.

What these instances of South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ demonstrate, is not only an alternative to traditionally Christian-led initiatives which are often slightly less explicit in publicly declaring their ‘Christianness’, but also an emphasis on practising religion as social action, as opposed to practising social action in the name of religion or religious beliefs. Here there is a significance in ‘doing’ rather than simply ‘believing’, a notion that is central to many South Asian religious traditions, including Sikhism and Islam. Therefore, this particular approach to social action as religious service gives a new dimension to the typical model of a ‘faith-based’ organisation or ‘interfaith’ collaboration, in placing greater weight on a more explicitly defined form of religiosity or

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771 See for example, Lowndes and Chapman (2005); Beaumont (2008); Cloke (2010); Halaffoff (2011); Zavos (2015).
772 For example, the ‘Trussel Trust,’ though a Christian organisation, does not generally advertise itself as such.
devotional practice, rather than simply a homogenous label allocated within a ‘world religions’ paradigm. In other words, those involved in these projects may not describe their organisation as ‘faith-based’, as this particular language or phrasing bears no relevance, but would denote their activities as zakat or sewa for example, in defining the specifics of their involvement in social action.

Significantly, this move away from formal structures and ‘faith’ centred articulations also presents opportunities for a more substantial shift away from structured approaches to the management of religious pluralism reliant on discursive notions like ‘interfaith dialogue’, instead towards developing a conceptual framework centred on expressions of religiosity found in lived experiences, and the cultivation of a sense of ‘cohesion’ that people ‘feel in their bones’.773 As I will now subsequently argue in the concluding chapter of this thesis, it is perhaps through these informal interactions that we can look to develop a discourse based on a more prosaic approach to living with religious difference.

773 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.87.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to synthesise arguments regarding the role of ‘faith’ in a discourse of ‘social cohesion’ developed and deployed in UK policy from 2001 to the present day. I have presented a detailed critique of ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse, and observed how South Asian religious groups are undertaking initiatives of what I have termed ‘socio-religious action’, as specific forms of social action rooted in religious practice. Crucially, these initiatives are often articulated by those involved as contributing to ‘social cohesion’, yet the specific forms of religiosity that inform this reasoning are currently overlooked by the national and local policy discourse. Therefore, as a result I have argued that policies and engagement strategies must be amended to account for this particular kind of social action, in order to recognise the contribution of ‘socio-religious action’ towards a broader notion of ‘social cohesion’.

By weaving together detailed policy document analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and theoretical discussion of existing literature on ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, I have endeavoured to both assess and critique instances of policy discourse in practice, and to present examples of practice that policy fails to account for or engage with. Using complementary methods, I have also aimed to develop an approach that can be further adopted, adapted and advanced to pursue future research. I hope that this thesis will offer an innovative assessment of what is a compelling area of interest not only within political
and academic spheres, but also in wider public discourses surrounding the management of religious and ethnic pluralism in the UK.

Research Recap – Policy, Theory and Practice

Discussions developed in previous chapters have attempted to synthesise several arguments in response to the following research questions:

1. In what ways have notions of faith been appropriated within social cohesion discourse in UK public policy since 2001?

2. How has this national policy discourse been translated into local policies in areas of Greater Manchester?

3. In what ways does this discourse contribute to the conception and formation of religious communities within these localities, with particular reference to South Asian religious traditions?

4. To what extent and how have South Asian religious groups sought to promote or produce a notion of social cohesion through devotional practice?

In addressing research question one, my initial objective was to undertake a policy document analysis to examine the ways in which ‘social cohesion’ has been developed as a discourse in UK policy since 2001. This particular starting point was chosen due to a combination of both the global events of 9/11, and local events such as race riots in Northern towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, that sparked interest in developing a new framework for discussing the management of pluralism in the UK. Drawing on work of scholars
including McGhee,\textsuperscript{774} Grillo\textsuperscript{775} and Dinham,\textsuperscript{776} I presented this as a crucial moment in which we can observe a definitive shift away from previous notions of multiculturalism towards a discourse of ‘social cohesion’ modelled on existing policy and related scholarship from the USA, Canada and other parts of Europe, branded in British discourse as ‘community cohesion’. Key to this examination was an assessment of the role of a related discourse of ‘faith’ within the deployment of ‘social cohesion’ in both a national and local context. Here, emphasis was placed on singling out the term ‘faith’ as a discursive concept, conceived differently from the term ‘religion’, and analysed as the preferred term in policy and in practice regarding ‘social [or community] cohesion’.

In order to address research question 2, I aimed to locate this discourse in a smaller scale, within two local authority areas, in an attempt to assess the translation of national policies into the localities in Greater Manchester in which the ethnographic portion of the research would be based. Through this I attempted to assess the strategic role of ‘faith’ within a local notion of ‘social cohesion’, as well as the persistence of particular narratives such as the emphasis placed on the concept of ‘interfaith’, highlighting a critical marker in the overall discursive relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’.

During this analysis of both national and local policy, a number of key narratives became apparent as central to this discursive relationship between

\textsuperscript{774} McGhee, ‘Patriots of the Future?’.
\textsuperscript{775} Grillo, ‘British and Others’.
\textsuperscript{776} Dinham, \textit{Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society}.  

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“faith” and ‘social cohesion’. These included the conception of bounded ‘faith communities’ that sit within a framework of ‘world religions’, a specific emphasis on the development of ‘interfaith’ organisations aligned with this framework, and the observed turn in policy around the financial crash in 2008 resulting in increasing importance placed on the need to promote ‘faith-based social action’. Question three then led me to analyse these factors through ethnographic fieldwork, in looking to examine the ways in which political discourse affects the conception and formation of religious communities in practice, and South Asian religious communities in particular. Significantly, here I also began to demonstrate how South Asian religious traditions, otherwise under-represented in research in these areas, in fact offer a distinctive contribution to broader notions of social cohesion and social action beyond the confines of the policy discourse.

In locating this research ethnographically within two geographical fieldsites, I again sought to contextualise my analysis of ‘social cohesion’ policy at a local level, in order to investigate the practical implications of translating national policies into local policies and initiatives, and to reinforce my appraisal of the wider policy discourse. Through this I chose one organisation funded by the local authority, to be examined as a direct product of the ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse regarding the notion of ‘interfaith’, and another two organisations that aim to operate outside of the local authority, in undertaking social action projects without any formal government affiliation or funding. As I found, these latter two organisations in fact displayed alternative articulations of ‘social cohesion’ discourse that transgressed the discursive relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ put forward in policy, often
centred on notions of ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based social action’. Instead, in the case of Org.B and Org.C, these notions are rejected and replaced by emphasis on religious devotion and South Asian ‘cultures of service’\textsuperscript{777} that also feed into narratives of ‘social cohesion’ and civic renewal. This therefore allowed me to reflect back on my analysis of policy, in order to reappraise the practical applicability of discursive notions of ‘faith community’, ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’ as a result of my ethnographic work.

In chapter five, I argued that the notion of the ‘faith community’ is one that limits the conception and representation of religious traditions politically, and has a direct effect on the construction of ‘communities’ in practice. I discussed how attempts to provide equal representation often result in a presented paradigm of ‘world religions’ that is simplistic in homogenising religious traditions, and is not an accurate reflection of the reality of religious expression that often varies according to ethnic, sectarian and cultural differences. Following this, I also argued that related concepts that rely on this type of framework, such as the notion of ‘interfaith’, also act to perpetuate fixed boundaries between religious groups and traditions, and a presumed sense of collectivity and rigidity of religious identity that is not consistent with everyday life.

By assessing ethnographic data regarding organisations in my fieldsites, I instead evidenced a growth in what may be deemed ‘communities of practice’\textsuperscript{778} that extend beyond politically prescribed notions of the ‘faith

\textsuperscript{777} Zavos, ‘Translating Cultures of Service in the Diaspora’.
\textsuperscript{778} Castells et al., \textit{Mobile Communication and Society}, p. 249.
community’, and place emphasis on shared commitments such as civic renewal or social justice, alongside notions of religious devotion. I also found that these ‘communities of practice’ increasingly rely upon new technologies including smartphone applications such as Whatsapp and Facebook. Yet what remained apparent within these organisations, was also a collective religious motivation that is at times called upon to address distorted images of minority religious traditions, such as Islam, in the public sphere.

This led to a discussion of the notion of the ‘faith-based organisation’, and whether the deployment of this term is relevant to those who participate in initiatives and projects that may be deemed ‘faith-based’ by the policy discourse. As I argued in chapter six, the term ‘faith-based organisation’ has diverse connotations and can be analysed according to a variety of typologies related to what constitutes, and to what extent an organisation may be described or identify as ‘faith-based’, and hence difficulties immediately occur in attempting to use this label consistently. Further, my ethnography again uncovered a distaste for this term within Org.B and Org.C as a phrase, like the notion of ‘interfaith’, that for these organisations carries strong political connotations, and is therefore avoided. Yet as I evidenced in chapter four, these political preferences for such terminologies and ‘interfaith’ frameworks remain apparent at both a national and local level as operationalised in ‘social cohesion’ policy and strategy. However, what is interesting to observe is the ways in which these organisations, grounded in religious motivations, seek to negate political narratives and to develop

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devotional practices into instances of social action that act to contribute to the same perceived notion of ‘social cohesion’.

In addressing research question four, these alternative articulations of organisational self-expression form the basis for discussions in chapter seven, highlighting the increasing importance of instances of what I have termed ‘socio-religious action’. Critically, these contributions, conceived as part of an inclusive discourse of ‘social cohesion’ are both expressed with explicit devotional purpose, yet are also open to collaboration with those from outside of the religious tradition within which such practices are rooted. These organisations do not present themselves as ‘secular’,780 or as undertaking ‘faith-based social action’, as they reject this discourse. Nor do they present their activities as exclusively religious acts. They are conversely developing an approach rooted in social and religious motivations, that seek to produce both spiritual and societal gains, and to nourish a sense of belonging beyond their own politically prescribed ‘faith communities’. Drawing on the work of Amin, I discussed how these initiatives take place outside of ‘interfaith’ frameworks or funding programmes, in informal spaces or ‘micro-publics of banal transgression’.781 These spaces, I argue, facilitate a shift in attitudes or behaviours, through mundane ‘intercultural interactions’782 that challenge stereotypes and therefore ‘disrupt easy labelling of the stranger as the enemy’.783

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781 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
782 Sandercock, Cosmopolis II, p.103.
783 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I also concluded that a recent influx of these types of organisation offers exciting new opportunities for policy, and indeed religious studies, to account for and engage with new approaches to the production of ‘social cohesion’ that occur outside of the spheres of ‘interfaith dialogues’ and ‘faith-based’ formations, conceding the ‘multiple discursive competencies’784 of the individuals involved. This thesis therefore aims to offer a new contribution to knowledge in this developing field of study, as I will now discuss in the following section.

**Contributions to Knowledge**

In chapters two and three, I surveyed theoretical and methodological approaches to the key themes of this thesis. This included an extended examination of ‘social cohesion’ as a measured and defined phenomenon in multiple fields, including social psychology and human geography, and a summary of existing research on the topics of ‘interfaith’, ‘faith-based organisations’ and ‘faith-based social action’ in the UK. Alongside this, I also presented a justification of my preferred emphasis on the notion of ‘faith’ as opposed to ‘religion’, as part of a concerted effort to deconstruct and disalign particular terminologies from normative use, and to pursue an analysis of the specific deployment of this term in policy documents. As discussed in chapter one, these terms include ‘faith’, ‘social cohesion’, ‘faith community’, ‘faith-based’ organisation, ‘faith-based social action’ and ‘interfaith’, and are

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784 Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.10.
consistently presented within quotation marks in order to highlight awareness of a discursive framework.

As a consequence of these considerations, in this thesis my aim has been to provide an approach to research that addresses several existing gaps in literature evidenced in these initial chapters, and challenges normative understandings of ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’. As key to this, I endeavoured to present an evaluation of ‘policy and practice’ in which ‘social cohesion’ is analysed as a discourse, avoiding attempts to define or to measure it as a fixed phenomenon, as in the previous studies critiqued in chapter two. Instead I discussed ‘social cohesion’ as a discursive construction, and demonstrated its alignment with a discourse of ‘faith’. In addition to this, I also explored the specific contributions and engagement (or lack thereof) of South Asian religious traditions both within and outside of this political narrative. In other words, I have tried to “tell the story” of ‘social cohesion’ as a feature of British social and political life, and to position South Asian religious groups as actors in relation to this story. Here my aim has been to develop new ideas regarding the ways in which South Asian traditions are seen to be ‘transgressing’ policy discourse on ‘social cohesion’, through examining initiatives of devotional practice and ‘socio-religious action’ observed through my ethnographic fieldwork, that policy is yet to fully account for.

Central to the development of these ideas has been the use of theoretical frameworks and discussions drawn from two particular scholars: Dinham and

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Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’

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Amin. Firstly, Dinham’s extensive work into the relationship between ‘faith’, public policy, ‘multifaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’ provided a substantial basis for my enquiry, and a starting point to begin the first phase of the thesis in pursuing a detailed policy document analysis. Dinham’s work frequently raises questions regarding inconsistencies in terminology and contradictions in conceptualising religious difference in policy, and his research into what he describes as the ‘multi-faith paradigm’ was of particular interest to the development of my initial research questions.

In a 2012 paper, Dinham assesses the development of the term ‘multi-faith’ from within the political sphere, and identifies substantial gaps in research regarding relative engagement of different groups in ‘multi-faith’ initiatives. Interestingly, here Dinham concludes that ‘multi-faith practices risk constituting a parallel world [a phrase resonant of Cantle’s ‘parallel lives’ motif deployed as part of his infamous ‘community cohesion’ report] running alongside “real” faith communities.” However, he does not pursue ethnographic work to substantiate this nor to observe this ‘multi-faith paradigm’ in practice. Therefore, this is a key area in which I aimed to produce an original contribution to knowledge, by expanding upon Dinham’s argument using ethnographic fieldwork to directly address questions regarding the relationship between ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’ in both policy and in practice, and to further contextualise this within South Asian religious traditions in particular.

In doing so, I also studied the work of Amin, and used a key piece of research entitled *Ethnicity and the Multicultural City* as a baseline for my ethnographic enquiry into the power of social interactions in the development of ‘cohesion’. In this paper, Amin discusses the ‘politics of local liveability’ and deploys the phrase ‘micro-publics of banal transgression,’ to discuss the relationship between locality/space and the notion of ‘social cohesion’, through the lens of ethnic difference in particular. Through this, he outlines the importance of these ‘micro-publics’ as facilitating contact between diverse individuals, in order to destabilize habitual segregation and shift attitudes towards difference, critically through alternative articulations of ‘cohesion’ developed outside of the dominant political discourse. This in turn also helped to develop a spatial element to my own analysis, in discussing the impact of the location of organisations within public areas or in private buildings, and the precise composition of these organisations as constituting a ‘micro-public’.

Further to this, in line with and going beyond Amin’s reasoning, I discussed how interactions taking place within these ‘micro-publics’ may be identified as instances of ‘banal transgression’, in which mundane conversations and interactions can have the power to shift attitudes and behaviours related to diversity, and to ‘transgress’ negative stereotypes through a process of ‘cultural displacement and destabilization’. This conceptual framework provided a key component in my assessment of ethnographic data and my discussion of ‘socio-religious action’. Through this I was able to demonstrate my own

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787 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
788 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
789 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
790 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
contribution to knowledge in this area, by pushing Amin’s ideas further in the direction of my own particular research agenda. Most notably, Amin’s work is strongly centred on the ‘negotiation of [ethnic] difference’. However, I have instead explored this approach to ‘social cohesion’ specifically through the lens of [religious] difference. In doing so, I have sought to emphasise the impact of religious diversity in the management of pluralism evidenced in policy and practice, and to account for the significance of religiosity and the constitution of religious ‘micro-publics’ that contribute to the development of initiatives related to ‘social cohesion’.

As well as evidently resonating with the disruption of negative stereotypes and attitudes towards religious as well as ethnic difference, I have shown how Amin’s notion of ‘transgression’ provides a conceptual framework for discussing the ways in which organisations ‘transgress’ hegemonic political categories or narratives, in order to pursue alternative articulations of ‘social cohesion’. Examples include: rejecting association with the notion of ‘interfaith’ seen as a defective political construct; placing emphasis on a particular aspect of religiosity to define an initiative not merely as ‘faith-based social action’ but as an explicit devotional practice. As a result, I have argued that the notion of ‘transgression’ is not only useful towards describing the transformational quality of everyday interactions occurring through the projects discussed, but also in denoting the contravention of dominant political discourse seen within case studies of Org.B and Org.C that also constitute instances of what I term ‘socio-religious action’.

791 Amin, ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City.’
Using these ideas drawn from Amin, I have developed this term in order to analyse ethnographic data that evidences particular associations between religiosity and social action that are currently unaccounted for in the field of religious studies. I developed the term ‘socio-religious action’ to discuss this phenomenon, as a notion that does not conform to existing normative labels of ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based social action’ produced in policy. Importantly, in again treating ‘socio-religious action’ as a discourse, my approach has intended not to solely place emphasis on particular religious practices, but instead to assess wider implications regarding the development of an alternatively articulated relationship between religion and ‘social cohesion’.

Key to these discussions has been an examination of South Asian religious traditions articulated as contributing towards a notion of ‘social [or community] cohesion’, namely the instances I have labelled as South Asian ‘socio-religious action’. These instances not only demonstrate a particular relationship between specific religious or devotional concepts such as sewa and zakat, but also again the ‘transgression’ of a wider ‘faith’ discourse deployed through dominant policy narratives that ordinarily seeks to neutralise explicit religious expressions, and to label such initiatives as simply ‘faith-based social action’. Hence the term ‘socio-religious action’ attempts to account for the transgressive discursive formations occurring between religiosity, social action and ‘social cohesion’.

In researching ‘faith-based social action’ generally, I again sought to contribute towards existing literature regarding the involvement of ‘faith groups’ and ‘faith-based organisations’ in social action initiatives and civic
renewal projects, such as Cloke & Beaumont\(^\text{792}\) and Lambie-Mumford and Jarvis,\(^\text{793}\) as well as related research on notions of ‘interfaith’ and ‘multifaith’ participation and collaboration, such as that of Bretherton\(^\text{794}\) and Weller.\(^\text{795}\) However, much of this research is explored through an evidence base rooted in data drawn from mostly Christian groups. Therefore more specifically, in researching South Asian traditions in particular, I have also aimed to contribute to the more recent work of scholars such as Zavos,\(^\text{796}\) in seeking to specifically locate the involvement of South Asian religious groups in social action projects, and to the work of Halafoff,\(^\text{797}\) in attempting to redress the balance of research regarding the involvement of South Asian religious traditions (or lack thereof) in ‘interfaith’ initiatives and organisations. Yet crucially, the work of this thesis differs significantly from that of Zavos and Halafoff, as my analysis is grounded firmly in the context of the policy discourse, in systematically showing how the discourse has developed, and exploring ways in which organisations have engaged (or failed to engage) with this through an interplay of notions of ‘faith’, social action and ‘social cohesion’.

Drawing on these existing theoretical models, I have sought to carve out the particular discursive features of South Asian ‘socio-religious action’ as a phenomenon not adequately accounted for in scholarship, and persistently

\(^{792}\) Cloke and Beaumont, ‘Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement.’

\(^{793}\) Lambie-Mumford and Jarvis, ‘The Role of Faith-Based Organisations in the Big Society.’

\(^{794}\) Bretherton, ‘A Postsecular Politics?’


\(^{797}\) Halafoff, ‘Countering Islamophobia: Muslim participation in multifaith networks.’
overlooked by the policy discourse. As I have discussed, the projects undertaken by Org.B and Org.C transgress dominant policy discourses regarding ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’, instead developing alternative approaches to social action rooted in specific religious devotional practices, deployed alongside notions of ‘social cohesion’ and civic engagement. As a result, this specific focus on the self-articulation of South Asian-led initiatives provides a distinct approach to researching the relationship between religion and politics, whilst also taking account of the counter-flow of discursive formations that guide these practices.

Following Hirst & Zavos\textsuperscript{798} and Nye,\textsuperscript{799} in this thesis I have been committed to recognising and appreciating the complexities of researching within the field of religious studies. I believe strongly that before embarking on any study of religion, one must take account of its contextual intricacies, aiming to avoid evoking a homogenised paradigm of individually bounded ‘world religions’, and instead espouse instances of religious practice or what Nye terms ‘religioning’.\textsuperscript{800} As Nye suggests, we must not take terms such as ‘religion’, or indeed as I have shown ‘faith’, at face value.\textsuperscript{801}

Through my own ethnographic work, I have begun to demonstrate a need to reappraise political discourse surrounding the notion of the ‘faith community’, and to reconsider the applicability of terms such as ‘interfaith’ as deployed

\textsuperscript{798} Hirst and Zavos, \textit{Religious Traditions in Modern South Asia}.
\textsuperscript{800} Nye, ‘Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning.’
\textsuperscript{801} Nye, ‘Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning.’
through policy. As key to this, we must also work to challenge representations of religion as typology or trope, and look to ‘examine the political strategies that underlie the construction of religion as an object’,802 and the ‘political dynamics through which certain conceptualizations of religious authenticity are produced and maintained’.803 In line with this reasoning, throughout this thesis I have attempted to consistently and consciously deconstruct the term ‘faith’ as deployed in the context of political discourse, to carefully observe instances of ‘religioning’, to avoid generalisation and oversimplification, and to retain an awareness of the ways in which I have approached my analysis of related notions of ‘faith community’, ‘interfaith’ and ‘faith-based social action’. Through this I hope to have produced an original and stimulating contribution to knowledge.

**Research Limitations and Appraising Approaches to Methodology**

In the above contributions of this research, some limitations may be noted, and provide scope for future work to be undertaken. Firstly, in seeking to explore South Asian religious traditions, issues related to fieldwork progress meant that data ultimately became limited to two religious traditions, Islam and Sikhism, represented by Org.B and Org.C. It may have been beneficial to explore the notion of ‘socio-religious action’ further, through undertaking case studies of similar organisations rooted in other religious traditions. This could potentially highlight greater diversity within these initiatives, thus contributing further to my analysis of religious practice and social action.

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through the notion of ‘socio-religious action’, as a notion that may indeed have been identified to the same extent within other traditions and groups. Yet to have pursued this here would have resulted in a lack of depth within the key case studies that I have utilised, and therefore a decision was taken to focus on those specific organisations in order to achieve a more detailed examination.

In addition, I chose not to present a larger number of case studies in order to represent different religious traditions, as this would induce yet another depiction of the ‘world religions’ paradigm. Instead I chose to select organisations based on the characteristics of the work they were undertaking locally, and not on the provision of providing representative examples from specific religious traditions. Therefore, the emphasis here was on the quality of the sample, since the study would not necessarily be further enhanced by introducing more case study examples as tokens towards the same discursive arguments. However, as some of the wider variables of diversity within and between traditions are not accounted for here, I believe that the methodological framework developed within this research could easily be used again to address this. The notion of ‘socio-religious action’ itself presents ideas for various prospective projects regarding the ethnographic exploration of such within different religious traditions and organisations. Likewise, the method of tracing the translation of national policy discourse to local policy and community initiatives could surely be deployed to explore similar narratives within different geographic locations.

Similarly, as this research stresses the significance of engaging discursively with key terms such as ‘faith’, this also opens up the possibility for a
comparable study that explores the discursive deployment of ‘religion’. In other words, though my research acts to identify the development of a ‘faith’ discourse within British ‘social cohesion’ policy, the term ‘religion’ too could be examined in greater detail in its application and operationalization within areas of UK policy such as Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) strategies and narratives related to radicalisation. Furthermore, trends identified briefly in the contrasting use of these terms, particularly in policy, may also provide opportunity for more detailed research into the linguistic application of ‘faith’ and ‘religion’, and the discursive effects of the choice of language in discussion of issues such as ‘social cohesion’ or extremism.

To return to my initial research questions above, in discussing the notion of ‘communities’ contained within research question 3, it may be perceived that perhaps the focus shifted slightly more towards organisations, rather than a general exploration of ‘community’. However, as I discussed in chapter five, the notion of ‘community’ is itself not a concrete reality, nor a fixed concept, and so it would have been difficult to address this type of question exhaustively. The research presented does contain detailed analysis of the ‘conception’ of religious communities through policy document analysis, and of the ‘formation’ of ‘interfaith’ structures or organisations as particular expressions of community. The ethnographic data in particular, essentially indicates a reconsideration of lived and ‘imagined’ communities, through observing how the lived ‘communities of practice’ developed in Org.B and Org.C, subtly subvert and ‘transgress’ the imagined communities seen in the

\textsuperscript{804} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities.}  
\textsuperscript{805} Castells et al., \textit{Mobile Communication and Society}, p.249.
policy discourse. Crucially, these communities are discussed as conceptualisations continually formulated in different contexts, and existing ‘in moments’,\(^\text{806}\) as opposed to being permanent entities, and their existence as oblique counter-hegemonic conceptions of community may also provoke further questions regarding the long-term impact of this on the wider formation of communities outside of the policy discourse, therefore providing another potential area for future research.

Additionally, methodological amendments could have been made to include more in-depth interviews and case studies with individual participants, and interviews with others who were not involved with any particular organisation, in order to explore more prosaic articulations of religious community. This more individual approach might have resulted in less time spent absorbed into the wider organisations explored through participant observation. Further, on reflection I remain confident that the research presented does attempt to assess the formation of the notion of ‘community’, by analysing the ways in which communities are lived and ‘imagined’\(^\text{807}\) through the development of organisations and networks as ‘communities of practice’,\(^\text{808}\) as seen in chapter five.

With regards to methodology, ethnography was used specifically in addressing both questions three and four, to develop detailed case studies of organisations in order to explore these issues, and to draw down the overall analysis from

\(^{806}\) Raj, Where are you From?, p.93.
\(^{807}\) Anderson, Imagined Communities.
\(^{808}\) Castells et al., Mobile Communication and Society, p.249.
national policy, to local policy, to individual organisations. My objective here was to assess what the dominant discourse looks like ‘in real life’, by investigating the relationship between policy and practice on a smaller scale. Through this I aimed to expose the intricacies of everyday religious practices that are often overlooked by policies and funding programmes, for various reasons related to frameworks upheld by the dominant discourse, such as a preference for ‘interfaith’ rather than ‘single faith’ groups and organisations. Additionally, ethnography allowed me to observe deeper levels of meaning coupled with what might be considered mundane instances of interaction, that combine to form unique interpretations of the relationship between religion, social action and ‘social cohesion’, that I argue to be instances of ‘socio-religious action’. Essentially it is through this maintained participant observation that I was able to understand these discursive interactions and to form a stronger evidence base over a prolonged period.

This use of ethnographic case studies over 12 to 18 months proved particularly valuable in allowing me to revisit initial issues and discussions, in light of research developments or diversions that resulted from a flexibility for research questions to be shaped and refined over time throughout the research process. As a result, I was able to reconfigure and re-examine specific areas of investigation that became more crucial to the overall research agenda, and to also check consistency from participants over such discussions. In addition, I also used supplementary interviews with policymakers and members of each local authority in a similar vein in order to clarify issues elucidated through analysis of policy documents, and to explore specific statements in greater detail.
In general, I would argue that the use of ethnography is particularly suited to the study of religious practice, in the examination of religiosity through observation, supplemented by interviews and discussion, rather than the collection of more quantitative data such as that obtained through questionnaires for example. This allows for the development of more nuanced analysis and individual accounts, rather than pursuing wider assertions, a factor that I wished to emphasise specifically in terms of discussing certain organisations and not ‘faith communities’. However, the use of ethnography does effectively limit the range of data collected, as in order to obtain the nuanced level of analysis described above, the main body of the fieldwork undertaken for this thesis was subsequently confined to just three organisations. The commencement and length of time spent within each of these organisations also varied, and thus presented challenges in producing a consistent detailed analysis to the same extent for all three case studies.

Additionally, the use of ethnography in general is essentially limited by the willingness of participants, which may prevent the researcher from effectively entering or engaging with organisations substantially enough in order to truly embed oneself in the fieldsite. This is a particular concern for ethnography of more specific organisations. Yet it is for this reason that the formulation of my initial research questions aimed to provide some flexibility in the selection of participants and fieldsites, in order to be able to conduct initial fieldwork in approaching multiple individuals and initiatives, before subsequently selecting particular organisations as final case studies. Therefore, in pursuing the ethnographic portion of my research, I did endeavour to consider the limitations as well as the advantages of this particular method.
Yet overall, in aligning the above methodologies with key theoretical material drawn from different disciplines, I have addressed the above research questions, and reflected on the limitations produced by this choice of methods. The formulation of these initial research questions has provided a catalyst towards the development of a precise methodological framework of detailed policy document analysis further explored through ethnographic fieldwork, aiming to produce an original contribution to knowledge, and provide potential for future research in this area.

**Concluding Thoughts and Policy Implications**

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the specific role of ‘faith’ in the development of ‘social cohesion’ policy discourse in the UK since 2001, to explore the ways in which local organisations have engaged with this discourse, and to observe the ways in which South Asian religious groups in particular have sought to promote or produce a notion of ‘social cohesion’ through devotional practice. I have pursued this through a synthesis of detailed policy document analysis, discussion of existing theoretical material on ‘faith’ and ‘social cohesion’, and ethnographic fieldwork in two areas of Greater Manchester. In my policy document analysis, I examined the way in which the term ‘faith’ is deployed in the development of ‘social cohesion’ through specific narratives related to notions of the ‘faith community’, ‘interfaith’ or ‘faith-based’ organisations, and ‘faith-based social action’. I then discussed these notions at length in conversation with existing literature, before attempting to assess these findings in practice, through ethnographic fieldwork of local organisations. Through this, I also explored the specific
contribution of South Asian religious groups to a discourse of ‘social cohesion’ through what I have termed ‘socio-religious action’, in order to develop a concluding critique of policy discourse in the UK.

In observing the ways in which political discourses affect the conception and formation of religious communities, I have sought to demonstrate discrepancies in the ways that religious communities frame their own engagement with notions of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘social action’, and to highlight the unique contribution of South Asian religious groups in particular, through a developing discourse of ‘socio-religious action’. Importantly, in this thesis I have intended to place emphasis not only on the need to examine instances of ‘policy in practice’, but to also attempt to evidence cases in which practice may in fact have the potential to influence policy.

As I have discussed, shifts are occurring to some extent in local authorities such as Manchester, in which calls are increasingly made for greater engagement at a more micro-scale level. Yet wider discourses concerning the frameworks for engaging with ‘faith’ remain relatively rigid, with the preferred format for religious individuals to participate in politics consisting of partnership with people of different religious traditions, often as a representative of their own ‘single faith’ group, but not solely alongside members of the same group alone.

This preference for the notion of ‘interfaith’, noted as a concept rooted in Christian traditions, may leave some religious groups and individuals,
including South Asians for whom the concepts of ‘faith’ and ‘interfaith’ often do not resonate within their own religious tradition, feeling alienated by the discourse, therefore resulting in a lack of engagement. Instead, as I have shown, the conceptions of religiosity, and ‘socio-religious action’ that emanate from these traditions, have the distinct potential to challenge established frameworks of ‘faith’, and to provide a new approach to developing a sense of unity and collaboration amongst religious (and non-religious) communities.

As demonstrated, a general distaste for political discourse often leads these groups to establish their own organisations and initiatives that focus more explicitly on the religious ethos that motivates their actions, creating an environment in which expressions of religiosity are not only welcomed but are often central to the projects themselves. Yet significantly, these groups also act to include people from outside their religious tradition, and articulate their actions not only as religious practice but also as promoting a notion of ‘social cohesion’, in looking outward towards a wider notion of ‘community’ and engaging with diversity through acts of devotion and humanitarian ‘service’.809 These groups are therefore developing an innovative discourse of ‘socio-religious action’ that seeks to contribute to the same wider dominant discourse of ‘social cohesion’, but framed specifically through religious practices. Importantly, though the political narrative may label these groups as ‘single faith’, or in some cases even ‘interfaith’, it is apparent that the level of outreach beyond these groups is often far greater.

809 Zavos, ‘Translating Cultures of Service in the Diaspora.’
This begs a question regarding the way in which policy can begin to account for developments in discourses of ‘socio-religious action’ taking place within South Asian religious groups, and to work towards engaging with those who have chosen to reject political rhetorics such as the notion of ‘interfaith’, in developing alternative approaches to ‘social cohesion’ in practice. To do so, policymakers must first comprehend the intricacies of South Asian religious practices such as *sewa* and *sadaqah*, that inspire initiatives through narratives of ‘service’ and social action, enacted through what Baumann terms ‘multiple discursive competencies’.\(^{810}\) Subsequently, policymakers must themselves seek to develop their own ‘multiple discursive competencies’\(^{811}\) in order to respond to nuances presented by groups and individuals involved in establishing explicit connections between religion and civil society, conceived within an articulated notion of ‘social cohesion’. Only through this shift in political perception can we fully account for the valuable contribution of these initiatives to the management of pluralism, in endorsing the everyday endurance of religious traditions working towards the development of a ‘diverse civic culture’,\(^ {812}\) through a pronounced commitment to civic unity and communal collaboration.

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\(^{810}\) Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.10.
\(^{811}\) Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.10.
\(^{812}\) Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II*. 
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