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[CT]Postsecularity and a New Urban Politics—Spaces, Places and Imaginaries[/CT]

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My thesis is that the Void at the heart of the modern city is primarily an ethical and relational one. A common analysis, to which I largely subscribe, is that forty-plus years of neoliberal capitalism have created intense processes of change and innovation that have undermined and hollowed out the traditional sources of social and ethical capital, usually associated with institutions that were religious, educational, work-based (like unions), and finance based (banks and mutual societies). All these institutions had both a physically proximate, but also relational engagement and therefore commitment to the localities in which they were situated. Many of these localized connections are being lost through globalized metrics of gentrification and spectacle (Harvey 2006, 2003; Mitchell 2003; Smith 1996), accompanied by planning priorities driven by narratives of privatization (Low 2003; Soja 2000), security and fear (Davis 1990; Dawson 2006; Waquant 2008), terror of child and human abduction (Katz 2006), and hygiene (Mitchell and Staeheli 2006). The cumulative effect of these multiple and overlapping factors leads to spatial splintering, or “splintered urbanism” (Graham and Marvin 2001). The effect of this splintering is to create urban spaces of increased inequality and unequal access, which further disrupt the conditions for sustaining settled and flourishing communities. “While some people may be living in a postmodern urban lifestyle playground, others have to live in a post-industrial wasteland” (Hamnett 2014: 704).

However, this thesis is not intended to be simply a conservative knee-jerk reaction against innovation and change. Many voices across a number of different disciplines have also identified these trends after forty-plus years of what I am calling The Great Separation—namely the divorcing of economic and development agendas from more long-term visions that have a progressive telos. Many have identified the economic and political unsustainability of the current “business as usual” model (cf. Critchley 2012; Kristeva 2015; Calhoun 2016; Sandel 2012; Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012; Stiglitz 2012). Such is the pervasive nature of the ideology of The Great Separation to influence the way we imagine the world, and then structure it accordingly (what Philip Mirowski calls, after Foucault, “the bio-politics of neo-liberalism” Mirowski 2013: 148), we often lose sight of the fact that we have internalized it and can therefore see no alternative. Cloke defines this totalizing imaginary as “market worship” (Cloke and Pears 2016: 35) and highlights the spatial impact of this hegemonic worldview. Because capitalist markets simply see the concept of locality as a form of material asset, “as a chessboard in which the pieces can be shuffled round to best suit economic strategy” (Cloke and Pears 2016: 35). The importance of “humans-in-place” is thus willfully neglected, and disconnects citizens further from their unique contexts in which “traditions, cultural practices and local characteristics affect how people and communities are formed” (Cloke and Pears 2016: 36).

However, there is also increasing evidence that amid the current turmoil still emanating from the global banking crisis of 2008, we are also waking up to the importance of what I am proposing is The Great Re-connection. There is a growing recognition that a good city and vibrant civic polity cannot be built on technical innovation and adrenalized experience alone. Good transport, waste disposal, health care, and education systems are vital, as are iconic cultural and sporting venues and most important of all, decent and accessible housing (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2014; Lancione and McFarlane 2016). But that material infrastructure of services and welfare also relies heavily on a non-material infrastructure to support it. This thesis suggests that material urban outputs and processes always reflect and are profoundly shaped by invisible or non-human forces (Latour 2005; Stengers 2005): for example, air and water, discarded junk, memory, and the human senses (Blok and Ferias 2016: 45–62), as well as religious and spiritual beliefs, values, and worldviews (Beaumont and Baker 2011; Narayanan 2016). I will suggest that religions and beliefs, because of the confluence of current events and processes, have a significant role to play in generating both material and non-material infrastructures of urban sustainability and humanization (Calhoun 2016; Baker 2016)

I will seek to expand my thesis with respect to the following concepts: cosmopolitan religion; postsecularity; progressive localism; spiritual capital; and curating new political and ethical subjectivities and spaces.

But I start with a brief excursus into a previous period of Western thought in order to show how far the parameters of the debate on religion and urbanization have shifted. Back in 1965, arguably the highest tide mark of secular modernity, the American theologian Harvey Cox wrote his seminal book *The Secular City.* Its narrative structure assumes that global secularization is the new normative paradigm that is irreversible. Cox envisages the modern city as a *Technopolis,* founded on technological innovation and planning and progressive social change in which most challenges confronting human existence—poverty, want, education, etc.—will be met by the critical mass of human ingenuity and connectivity that the modern city can bring together.

This brave new world of secularization Cox argued, is willed by God to free humankind from superstitious and backward religion based on mystical and enchanted phenomena. Instead, in the modern secular age epitomized by *Technopolis,* religion and the church have to adapt to living an authentic faith founded on prophetic politics and discipleship in a *de facto* religionless world. Cox’s theology is deeply shaped by the work of German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Back in the 1940s, before his execution by the Nazis for his role in the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler, Bonhoeffer talked about the emergence of a “religionless Christianity” in what he called “a world come of age” (Bonhoeffer 1972: 366). The Secular City said Cox, is the new space for a more mature form of religion to emerge in which humankind no longer lives in servile humility to a controlling deity, but enters into a new covenant with that deity that is predicated on the virtues of stewardship, co-production, and co-responsibility.

Under the auspices of this new theology, the role of the church and religion in relation to the *Technopolis* was to be a vanguard of a Kingdom of God community—a sort of prophetic leaven that announces in its social and liturgical life a foretaste of divine justice and reconciliation. The examples Cox gives of this new type of relationship are the prominent contribution of the church and other religious groups to developing and improving race relations and civil rights in deeply deprived urban localities (Cox 1965: 132–40). Cox uses metaphors such as “cultural exorcizer” and “God’s avant-guard” to reinforce this point. This is because in Cox’s view, the *Technopolis*, whilst able to resolve many of the material and technical challenges to human life, would be incapable of creating a truly just and harmonious society. Reverting to a Babylonian critique found in the Hebrew scriptures (Genesis 11: 1-9), Cox recognized that the collective assembling of humankind represented by modern urbanism would also create a hubristic city—the expression of a demonic and damaging will-to-power that would constantly need to be challenged and set in the context of more transcendent narratives of God’s redemption, but also judgment. The human and environmental cost of this excess of hubris would carry through in the form of oppression, exploitation, and inequality which would militate against the promise of abundant life envisaged by God in the new secular age. The question I have been forced to consider in writing this chapter is to ask the extent Cox’s vision still holds; is it all hopelessly outdated or do some elements still inform this debate?

As part of the answer to that question, I now outline the emerging conceptual frameworks that I mentioned earlier that more actively connect and engage with twenty-first century realities, framed as they are by the intensification of globalizing forces.

[A]Cosmopolitan religion[/A]

Ulrich Beck, as a critical theorist and sociologist in the post-Marxist tradition, develops this conceptual framework by juxtaposing the idea of two modernities, which he perhaps most fully articulates in his volume *A God of One’s Own* (2010). What he calls Modernity 1 is essentially the old and predictable modernity of the secular Enlightenment founded on the following elements: “ends-means rationality, interests, classes, the market, science and socially-constructed ‘nations’ which distinguish themselves from other nations and welfare states” (Beck 2010: 76). Modernity 2 emerges at the end of the last century, and is “modernity as globalization.” It intensely and vigorously attacks all barriers and hierarchies erected under the auspices of Modernity 1. “It refers to the erosion of clear boundaries separating the markets, states, civilizations, cultures, and the lifeworlds of different peoples and religions, as well as the resulting worldwide situation of an involuntary confrontation with alien others” (Beck 2010: 74). This modernity is a Global Risk Society because its heightened complexity and technological interconnectivity creates ever increasing numbers of unintended consequences, which now outnumber and subvert our intended ones. For Beck, this new modernity of risk is “reflexive” (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), meaning that the impact of our actions rebound on us, interfering with our original aspirations. These unintended consequences pose risks or dangers that sit alongside (or are enfolded in), our human belief in unlimited growth and development. He was particularly vexed at issues like the growth in pollution in the 1980s which he accurately predicted would create the conditions for climate change along with the viral distribution of financial risk which he describes as the distribution of “bads,” not goods (Beck 1992). He concludes that this complexity and fluidity that we have permitted to be built into our systems has created a new global order which we no longer have the means to describe or control. This lack of accountability and control is both created and epitomized by a neoliberal form of capitalism which is driven by the constant search for new markets and the need to maximize efficiency and flexibility within a single, real-time market.

Beck surmises that the rise of global religion in the twenty-first century has occurred precisely because it is ideally suited to the new conditions of hyper-globalization that characterize Modernity 2. He suggests that the modern liberal democratic state—the love child, if you will, of Modernity 1—is at a loss to understand this new modernity that it has bequeathed, and even more of a loss to know what to do about it. This is Beck’s striking solution. A modernity that is always putting itself at risk requires the intervention of what he calls a cosmopolitan religious imagination and practice to co-create a new viable and sustainable modernity. “It is hardly possible to overestimate the potential of religions as cosmopolitan actors—they can mobilize billions of people across barriers of nation and class, and exercise a powerful influence on the way people see themselves in relationship to the world (…) they represent a resource of legitimation in the battle for the dignity of human beings in a civilization at risk of destroying itself” (Beck 2010: 198).

However, this aspiration is far from easy to ensure, or to assume will happen. For it to be up to the task of saving modernity from itself, religion has to opt for what Beck calls a cosmopolitan orientation over a universalist one. Religion historically has chosen both. Universalism (which is simply another form of fundamentalism) insists, usually through the use of coercive violence, on a single narrative and identity to which everyone else must to varying degrees conform. Secularism and the nation-state are, Beck adds, also perfectly capable of acting like bad examples of monotheistic religion. Or religion can face towards a cosmopolitan vision which, “is based on the actually existing historical impurity of world religions: the recognition that they are intertwined, that they are both one and the same. Learning to see and understand themselves in this way enriches religions’ own religiosity, mutually reinforces one another, and in this way they can practice and develop anew the public role of religion in the postsecular modern era” (Beck 2010: 178).

This discussion of Beck’s work has allowed me to establish the idea of the search for public ethos of ethical and progressive political engagement in which religion has a major role to play if it so chooses.

[A]Postsecularity[/A]

I now address the more specifically urban elements of my thesis, starting with the notion of postsecularity. The idea of postsecularity is naturally linked to the concept of the postsecular. For brevity, I simply reiterate Habermas’s classic definition which emerged from reflection on the demise of the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century and the re-emergence of religion in the subsequent vacuum. We must reconfigure our expectation, said Habermas, of the one-size fits all secular public sphere and instead re-imagine a *postsecular* public sphere “in which the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularizing environment must be reckoned with” (Habermas 2005: 26).

Now, many objections have emerged in response to this term which is seen as controversial and contested on several counts. For instance, it can only be applied to affluent Westerns societies, it is over-linear in its suggestion that secularism has been replaced by religion when it is still a normative political and cultural discourse, and the re-emergence of religion in public life has been driven by the demands created by government policy (like austerity programmes) rather than any intrinsic shift in social and cultural trends. My critique of the term is that it lends itself to a somewhat de-contextualized and abstract theorizing on the evolving relationship between the religious and the secular in the globalized public sphere. If this is the case, then does the idea of geographies of postsecularity allow us to better explore the material complexity of new urban spaces where these dynamics suggested by Habermas’s definition can be observed by inductively theorizing from emerging data and experience rather than the other way around? A working description of postsecularity currently under development (Baker, Cloke, and Williams forthcoming) focuses on three dimensions:

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1. It highlights the emergence of new forms of urban assemblage that are arising from contemporary incursions of religion and belief into issues and practices of social responsibility.
2. It enables a space for a critical discussion of the different types of normativity, values, and political direction that is created by these assemblages.
3. It focuses on empirical research into these new assemblages that maps and analyses the extent to which different social actors deploy beliefs, values, and worldviews in forms of practical experimentation and dialogical translation that generate new “cross-over narratives” of how society develops a capacity to sustain and ethical responses to social, economic, and political need.

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An example of postsecularity developed by Cloke et al. (2015) is the Occupy protest in Wall Street and the London Stock Exchange in 2011. Based on extensive literatures that have emerged since that time, as well as first-hand accounts, they suggest that Occupy demonstrated how religious and secular beliefs, worldviews, and practices became blurred and melded into a new third space of “emergent postsecularity” that challenged settled binaries of analysis. This happened, they suggest, in three ways.

First, Occupy challenged the churches to move beyond the “silos of the sacred” and see public space outside “the Temple” as also sacred. The protests in Wall Street and the London Stock Exchange both deployed institutional religious space as an integral platform to the performance of the event (namely Trinity Episcopalian Church in Wall Street, and St. Paul’s Cathedral in the heart of the City of London). The calls for prophetic justice debate and lament (what Cloke et al. (2015: 502) call “spiritual geographies of political resistance”) took place in public space around the church thus offering a “faith-without-walls” model of engagement.

Second, the Occupy protests at these sites of globalized economic power, encouraged religion to move from hierarchical models and images of God to instead see the “church of the multitude,” and to join with others—the multitude of the common people—in the building of the Kingdom of God and the Common Good. The Occupy movement was an active non-violent political and civic protest that “eschews the reinforcement of the privilege of the powerful, and instead enacts the conviction that God will prioritize is the needs of the poor, excluded and oppressed” (Cloke et al. 2015: 512).

Third, Occupy also encouraged the church to take action shaped by the “discursive remembering and prophetic purposefulness” modeled on the camps pitched outside the citadels of ecclesial, political, and economic power. “The church needs to open up its sanctified spaces that expose the idol-worship of success and consumerism and prosperity blessing, and that proposed sell-emptying practices of embrace, companionship, solidarity, caritas and agape” (Cloke et al. 2015: 513).

The return challenge to non-religious elements of Occupy by the religiously-inspired social actors was similarly three-fold: First, as some religious actors reneged on their initial welcome to the protesting “multitudes,” different types of religious actors rose to the challenge of providing solidarity and support (via the deployment of protest chaplains for example) as well as initiating their own protests. This opened a new appreciation on the part of the “no-religion” citizens for the prophetic and connected role of religion to civil protest, and challenged some of the prevailing stereotypes associated in many citizens’ minds of religion with neoconservatism.

Second, biblically-rooted events as the Sermon on the Steps and the symbolic parading of the Golden Calf created hybrid spaces where new expressions of spirituality could be explored and practiced; not only via the liturgical practices by the protest chaplains, but also a new feeling of being encouraged, on the part of “non-religious” participants, to engage in religious ritual and symbolism. Liturgical acts at the Occupy camps included deploying resources from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Pagan, Buddhist, and Native American traditions and facilitated by priests, rabbis, and imams (Rieger and Pui-lan 2012).

Finally, new narratives of injustice and hope were generated by the inclusion of these religious actors, spaces, and imaginaries that were rooted in what the authors call: “theo-ethical traditions: concepts of usury, languages of caritas, and the elevation of transcendental values of human dignity (…) used as innovative ways to trump economic metrics of value” (Cloke et al. 2015: 17).

The combined value of these mutually challenging perspectives, the authors propose, was to harness an emerging ethical and spiritual political subjectivity that colonizes urban spaces in ways that seem to transcend current theoretical concepts and frameworks.

[A]Progressive localism[/A]

Another concept I deploy in my work that further solidifies this emerging discourse on urban postsecularity is that of progressive localism. Emerging from post-Marxist political geography, this term attempts to redeem the notion of localism from its current policy framework where it is employed as a mechanism of neoliberal reform and austerity. Featherstone et al. (2012) seek to imbue localism with a more empowering element, by placing the word “progressive” in front of it. For them, progressive localism defines a vision of a vibrant and flourishing civil society based on cosmopolitan global ethics. It is “*outward looking* and creates positive affinities between places and social groups negotiating global processes. These processes are expansive in their geographical reach and productive of new relations between places and social groups and can (…) reconfigure existing communities around emergent agendas for social justice, participation and tolerance” (Featherstone et. al 2012: 180).

There are several important elements in this definition that need unpacking. Most important is that the word “progressive” is not interpreted in ways that suggest being liberal or elitist. Rather, it is simply defined as outward looking and outward facing. The opposite of this would be a regressive localism; namely, an inward-looking form of civic engagement that was concerned only for the rights and welfare of your own group. Progressive localism suggests that a vibrant and flourishing urban ecology can only be based on new alliances and affinities between outward facing groups and institutions who can share a common vision of a just and participative social order, even whilst coming from very different cultural identities and thus from very different epistemological and ideological worldviews. Does this concept not capture the essence of the hyper-diversity we now encounter in our global cities?

What I also like about this definition is its suggestion that the geographical reach of these new “affinities” of progressive and outward looking participation transcends traditional and bureaucratic cartographies based on local authority areas or parish boundaries for example. A new urban progressive and cosmopolitan localism potentially requires all actors to cross over traditional institutional barriers and boundaries and create new spaces and new territories of engagement. But this crossing over of physical and institutional barriers also relies, I suggest, on a willingness to cross ideological and epistemological ones. Only then is a more sustainable and creative urban commons likely to emerge and then be upheld.

[A]Religious and secular spiritual capital[/A]

At this point that I would like to introduce the concept of spiritual capital. Spiritual capital, in the way that I am developing it, emerged from research I undertook with the William Temple Foundation in the early 2000s into urban regeneration in districts of south and east Manchester. We were interested in the role and contribution of religion in the urban regeneration agenda which lay at the heart of the then New Labor government’s policy agenda on re-populating post-industrial inner-urban and suburban cores. The churches we engaged with in the research often represented, in these areas of high deprivation, the last vestiges of civic institutionalism; and they found themselves delivering goods, welfare, and other services that used to be provided for by publicly funded state providers: opening their premises to the poor, running credit unions, complementary health schemes, school mentoring schemes, youth work programmes, gyms, community radio, anti-gang and gun crime initiatives, etc. (Baker and Skinner 2006: 92/3). These contributions were often produced as a result of innovative and strategic partnerships that were initiated with other agencies

However, we were also interested in what the churches meant by the word “regeneration.” Long before the theorization developed from Habermas’s definition of the postsecular emerged into the public consciousness, this word seemed capable of generating “cross-over narratives” that could hold multiple practices and discourses. The faith-based understandings overlapped, to some extent, with government understandings of the term: Based around, for example, the wholescale economic regeneration of areas based on flagship housing developments, retail experiences, and the creation of new cultural quarters.

But our church interviewees also wanted to attach definitions that highlighted the importance of *process* as well as product; of the *means* of regeneration, as well as *ends*. Thus, for example, regeneration:

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* Focuses on transforming people personally and spiritually, as well as improving their area physically;
* Values personal stories, especially about how individual “regeneration” occurs;
* Believes implicitly or explicitly that God is at work within regeneration and civil society[[1]](#endnote-1)

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It was clear that a vision for spiritual and emotional regeneration was integral to the faith communities’ engagement in the civic and public life. So in trying to capture the overlapping contributions of churches and other faith groups to regeneration, the William Temple Foundation used social capital theory due to its prevalent use in policy formation. It said that as a contribution to social capital, faith groups provide both religious and spiritual capital. Religiouscapitalis, “the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups.” Spiritualcapital meanwhile, “*energizes*religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshiping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis of faith” (Baker and Skinner 2006: 7). Religious capital is the ‘what’:i.e., the concrete actions and resources that faith communities contribute. The “why” is spiritual capital: i.e., the motivating basis of faith, belief, and values that shapes these concrete actions.

But here is an interesting way that spiritual capital can be further developed. If it is the motivating energy of our beliefs, values, and worldviews, that orientates us in a certain way in the public sphere, and influences the way we contribute to social capital, then spiritual capital is not the sole preserve of people who label themselves religious or belong to religious communities. Secular or non-religious beliefs and worldviews (i.e., secular spiritual capital—see Baker and Miles-Watson 2008) are also potentially generative sources of social capital. If the thesis around postsecularity is correct, then some of those who define themselves as “No-Religion” are also actively seeking new spaces and affinities of progressive engagement by which their “spiritual capital” can be deployed in authentic and fulfilling ways. This thesis is already being born out with new Templeton Foundation research in *Understanding Unbelief* which seeks to map the range of values, ethics, and beliefs that lie behind the cohort of those in the West who identify themselves as No-Religion, meaning not affiliating themselves with a religious identity. So, for example, the Understanding Unbelief programme seeks to “advance the scientific study of unbelief” with reference to the following goals:

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* “mapping” unbeliefs as psychological, social, and cultural phenomena,
* providing more detailed accounts of the diverse types of, and aspects to, unbeliefs, and,
* documenting the different combinations in which these diverse “unbeliefs” manifest. (Lee et al. 2016)

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Early US research also suggests a wide diversity of stances within the “No-Religion” category, many of which are rooted in strong ethical and values-driven frameworks. For example, Chris Silver’s research on “nones” in the United States (2014) begins by stating that the “no-religion” category is “fluid” before identifying six categories of “no-religion” identity. Several of these categories reflect positions on religion and/or spiritualty that are open and positive to certain dimensions of the religious “experience” including an appreciation for religious ideas and aesthetics, alongside a radical openness to seeking authenticity and truth from all forms of religious and spiritual insight.

So, for me, there is a clear link between progressive urban localism and spiritual capital. Both conceptual frameworks reflect the desirability and possibility of crossing geographical and bureaucratic but also increasingly, ideological and epistemological ones. The challenge, but also opportunity within urban postsecularity is to experiment and occupy new intellectual and political spaces, offering both cognitive and emotional hospitality to others, but from within the wells of our own values and beliefs. This wellspring of values and beliefs I have called spiritual capital. In all scenarios of emerging urban cosmopolitan ethics (Bloc and Farias 2016), I am suggesting that what is occurring is that citizens are investing their spiritual capital alongside others for the sake of making an intervention for change, but also so that their own wells of beliefs, values, and worldviews can be replenished.

But these spaces and affinities of progressive urban subjectivity are fragile and quite ephemeral. They need consciously tending, and also propagating, and it is here that I want to move to my final idea; that of religion, deploying and displaying its cosmopolitan tendencies, not in a hubristic way, but an enabling way—as curating a new expression of urban politics.

[A]Curating a new ethics and politics of civil engagement[/A]

The basis of what I am proposing is predicated on the simple reality that increased “affective demand” is generating a surplus of places and spaces of “practical supply.” In other words, “spaces of convergence” (Cloke et al. 2015) emerge as people seek to reconnect what has been disconnected; both relationally but also ethically. These new spaces of convergence recreate a sense of place, solidarity, community, etc. Faith groups are inherently well placed to curate these new spaces of convergence, by which I mean two things. First I use the term “curate” in the secular sense—as in to curate an exhibition for example which involves organizing a space so that it makes sense of a collection of artifacts within it and tells a coherent narrative. For example, the online Oxford Learner Dictionary defines “to curate” as the ability “to select, organize and look after the objects or works of art in a museum or an art gallery, etc.”.[[2]](#endnote-2)

But I am also using curate in the religious sense of the word. Here it means something more holistic; entrusted with the care and healing (or cure) of souls. As mine and others’ research shows, at their cosmopolitan best, religious groups hold the cure of souls and the cure and transformation of social and material structures—what I would call the physical and the spiritual infrastructures required to build a good city—in a unique and creative tension (Cloke and Pears 2016; Beaumont and Cloke 2012; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Beaumont and Baker 2011). They often use their institutional resources (for example buildings, paid leadership, and other forms of professional infrastructure) to provide not only an open space of hospitality, but also to consciously, and non-hubristically, arrange new reasons and opportunities to citizens to meet, out of which emerge further relational initiatives that bring in ever wider circles of different social actors. In this way, often inchoate searching for connectivity, authenticity, and a desire to make a difference by multiple different social actors is met in arenas of common public space and intent.

I suggest that religious groups are well-placed to curate a new urban politics for three reasons.

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1. The inherently spiritual nature of this new politics that Cloke et al. have remarked upon and the increasing recognition from those outside religious structures that the spiritual is an important dimension to public and civic life (Kearney 2015).
2. Through their dense patterns of sociality and deep and enriching patterns of worship and ritual religious groups provide essential tools for living within our borderless and increasingly unsettled world order: an experience of relationship and a sense of home or dwelling. Anthropologists of religion like Manual Vasquez (2011) suggest religions facilitate relationships by creating opportunities for “face-to-face encounter” within the context of “storied” space. Meanwhile Thomas Tweed argues that religious groups provide a sense of “dwelling” that allows migrants to be physically located in contexts which are otherwise bewildering and alienating. It also allows them to be nurtured and valorized by connections or “crossings” that speak of the past but also reflect future hopes through rites of passage, rituals, and regular acts of remembrance and worship (Tweed 2006: 167). It is the dialectic tension between dwelling and crossing that makes religions particularly adaptable to an era of globalized flows and migration.
3. In many localities, faith groups are often a vital institutional space of welfare and service—what you might call a public space. They still have substantial infrastructural resources in terms of leadership, buildings, volunteers, etc. Other citizens are therefore drawn to use and contribute to these spaces of performative care, such as foodbanks, mental health and addiction services, homeless projects, etc.

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One example of a faith-curated space that picks up and amplifies these three criteria of urban postsecularity is a Muslim-run example which is a foodbank and community food project called Sufra, which is based in the London borough of Brent.

Sufra is a polyphonic Middle Eastern word which has connotations of tablecloth, dining room, space of hospitality. Ninety percent of the people who access their services are non-Muslim. Its first client was a young man named Stephen who on being given a bag of food had no idea how to cook it. This led Sufra to run a ten-week cooking course for its clients which is now an accredited training for 16- to 25-year olds (25 people have successfully found work as a result). They run a vegetable box scheme—providing fresh produce at wholesale prices—and a food growing project. Fifty percent of Sufra’s funding and resources comes from other faith groups including the local Catholic Church and Jewish community, as well as a multi-faith workforce including people from non-religious backgrounds. Meanwhile Sufra volunteers have been trained by staff from the council’s housing department to offer advice on housing needs something “never seen before” in Brent, and a “radical” change. Sufra was also a venue for pre-election hustings of 2015 where the issues of food poverty and homelessness were center stage. Sufra’s Director Mohammed Mankami says the project feels like the end of the road for many who step across the threshold for the first time, but he wants it to be the start of a new journey. It also aspires to be an organization where people of different faiths and no-faith could “take part in social action together, fundraise together, and share resources together” to create what he calls a “sustainable common purpose”.

[A]Conclusion[/A]

So as a final coda, and returning briefly to Cox’s ideas of the relationship between religious and secular in the secular city. Fast-forwarding sixty years from the publication of Cox’s ground-breaking volume, we might say that the secular city is also increasingly the postsecular city (Beaumont and Baker 2011), and that the faith groups are not so much “God’s vanguard” and “cultural exorcisers”—although that prophetic role is still important. Rather, they are increasingly “co-producers” of a potentially new progressive politics and curators of new spaces of urban convergence. These experiments in convergence require a maturity of belief and breadth of vision from all social actors; what I have been calling (after Beck) a “cosmopolitan imagination.” Of course, our world today is oppressed in many places by what Beck would identify as universalist and regressive religion, intertwined with other forms of regressive ideology. In these scenarios, religion reverts to or exhibits a hubristic will-to-power that seeks to conform all other social actors to its cultural and psychological hegemony. Like Beck we can only hope that most religious actors embrace the new public spaces of postsecularity that are opening up so that they can help to guide (along with other cosmopolitan actors) an urban polity, always at risk from itself, into a more humane and sustainable future.

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1. Other definitions of regeneration that emerged from this research included:

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   * An acceptance that there is considerable and strong emotion experienced and expressed when working for healthy communities (for example, anger, frustration, cynicism, weariness, fragility) and an acknowledgement of the importance and significance of “feelings”;
   * An introduction to the values of self-emptying, forgiveness, transformation, risk-taking, and openness to learning;
   * Begins with the intention of accepting those who have been rejected elsewhere;
   * Values people’s inner resources and their capacity to create their own solutions to their problems, ones that constitute a form of *liquid* capital relating to intangibles such as ideas and visions, not exclusively claimed by a specific religious tradition (Baker and Skinner 2006: 11).

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2. http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/curate2 (accessed April 4 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)