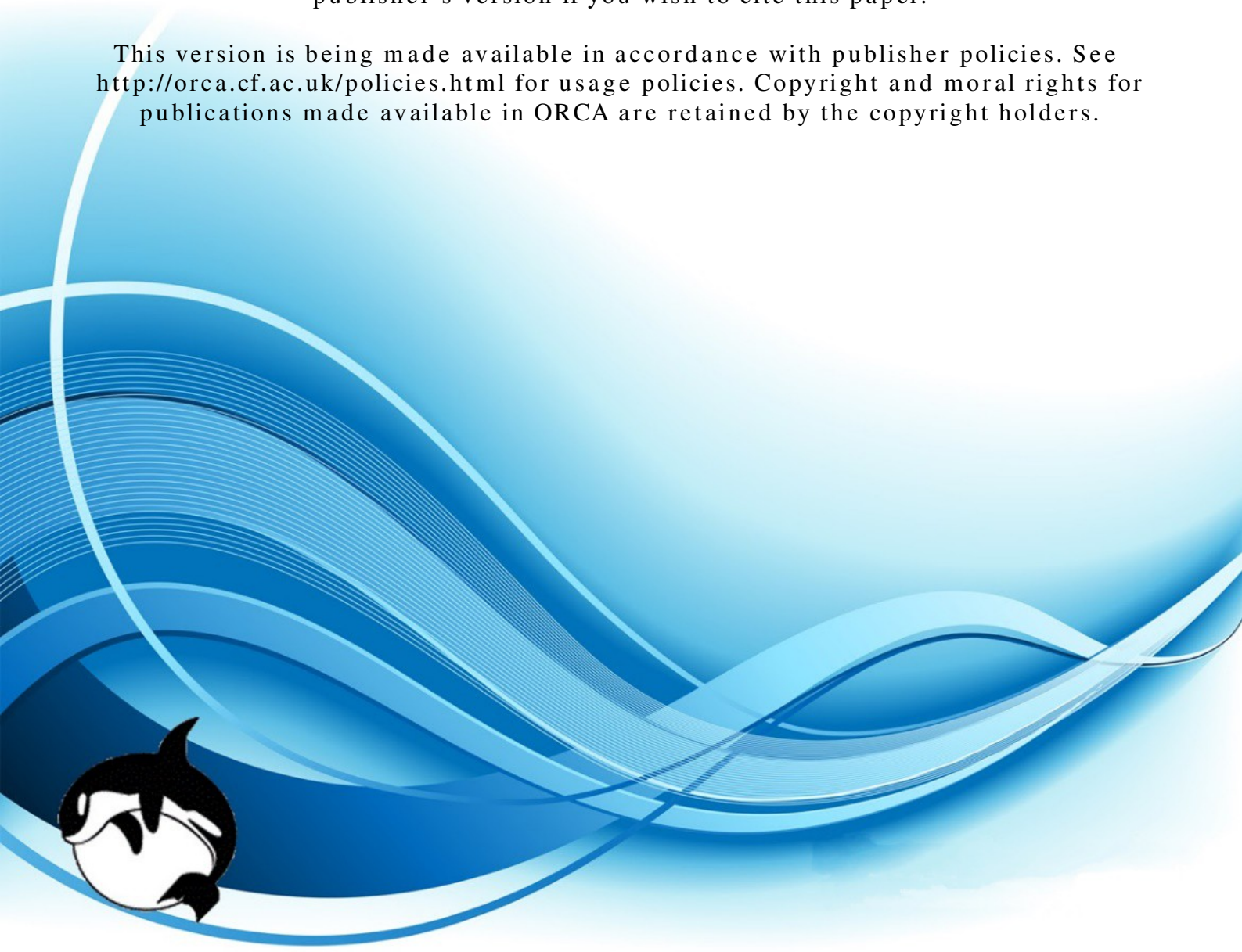

POSTSECULARITIES OF CARE: IN-COMMON ETHICS AND POLITICS OF "THE MEANTIME(S)"

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THE MEAN TIMES

This paper addresses a seemingly straightforward, but ultimately rather complex question: given the current mood of post-political pessimism, where might social scientists look to in order to identify geographies of hope? Somewhat perversely, given the often held assumption within social science that religion is a significant part of the problem (though see Hjelm 2014; Beaumont 2008), we point to the landscape of possibility presented by postsecularity as one hopeful terrain in which both resistance to neoliberal austerity and ethical and political alterity are being performed. Moreover, within this terrain, we argue that hopefulness is vested in rather ordinary spaces of care, welfare and justice – noticeably ambivalent spaces which typically are assumed to be shaped by neoliberalism and redolent of its subjectification of voluntarism and charity. The paper seeks to build on previous work that has investigated, theoretically and empirically, the possibilities for everyday spaces of welfare and care to serve as here-and-now spaces of in-common encounter and conscientisation (see Cloke's et al 2010 research on services for homeless people, and the work of Williams et al 2016 and Cloke et al 2017 on food banks in the UK). This research has foregrounded the capacity of seemingly mundane activity, such as volunteering in charitable food provision, to politicise people and generate new ethics of in-commonness based on an affirmation of interdependency and responsibility (see Popke 2009; Williams M 2018). Here, we extend these arguments on two grounds. First, we examine the role and potential of spaces of postsecularity, which we define as a context-contingent bubbling up of ethical values arising from hybrids of faith-related and secular determination that can build vital bridges between care and justice in the wider welfare arena. We point to the ways in which an analytic of postsecularity might help galvanise our thinking about what Blencowe (2015) calls the 'spirituality of the commons'. Second, we consider the practical curation and limits to these ethical and political possibilities, using the example drawn from our research on UK food banks (May et al 2019) to acknowledge that ethical transformation brought through in-common encounters will remain partial and circumscribed if food aid organisations do not change their modus operandi. In so doing we seek to provide a specific contextual account of how to make sense of "the meantime" (Cloke et al 2017), using at least two different registers in which the meantime operates.

The first and most obvious is a recognition that we live in mean – nasty – times. In global terms, a resurgence of far right ideologies has resulted in hyper-political forms of nationalism (Bieber, 2018) often interconnected with strident ethno-religious movements acting to defend particular senses of national community and identity (Juergensmeyer, 2019). These "mean times" have in turn sponsored politics of explicit and violent othering (Carlson and Ebel, 2012) - taking various forms

including heightened xenophobia, social conservativism and separationalism (Bivins, 2008; Husain and Howard, 2017) - which have disrupted common spaces of welfare and care. In the UK context, emphasis has been given to the ways in which neoliberalised capitalism is bringing about a culture of cruelty and neglect towards disadvantaged and marginalised people (Hills, 2014; Lansley and Mack, 2015). Broadly politicised cultures of privatisation and deregulation have disowned previous collective terrains of society and community in favour of an aggressive marketing of subjectivities associated with possessive individualism and acquisitive consumption. State policies of austerity have targeted the poor, not only through punitive welfare reform, but also through a peddling of divisive and stigmatising stereotypes which re-narrate experiences of poverty through vocabularies of undeservedness and irresponsibility (Harkins, 2017; Slater, 2013). As a result, there is both a worrying resurgence of poverty, and a concomitant desensitisation to that resurgence, noticeable in a variety of forms of which three are illustrative here.

A recent report by Child Poverty Action Group (2017) has charted the first absolute rise in child poverty in the UK for two decades, with 30% of children (some 4 million) now recognised to be living in poverty. Child poverty has obvious causal connections with diminishing levels of welfare benefits, but in addition the fact that 67% of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one person is in employment suggests the further impact of low pay and worsening employment conditions in neoliberalised gig- and zero-hours economies (Barbieri and Bozzon, 2016). As Wickham et al (2016) emphasise, child poverty is associated with higher rates of infant mortality and chronic illness during childhood in comparison than is the case with more affluent families; it is also linked with negative educational outcomes and adverse long-term social and psychological outcomes. In other words, the poor health associated with child poverty limits children's potential and development, leading to poor health and life chances in adulthood. Despite these significant concerns, there has been no deviation from neoliberalised policies of austerity in this respect. Responding to the UK government's "child poverty strategy", the independent Children's Commissioner (ND) offers a clear verdict on its likely impact:

"We disagree that the policies outlined in the draft strategy will improve poverty now, and do not believe that it provides a comprehensive plan to address the drivers of intergenerational poverty. Child poverty is increasing in the UK, and a wide range of knowledgeable researchers and high profile NGOs are clear that current policies are predicted to make the situation worse rather than better. The draft strategy does not acknowledge this, let alone suggest policies that will improve the situation." (p.4)

Evidence of this element of the mean times, then, has simply been met with continuing adherence to the nasty punitive politics of neoliberalised orthodoxy. What is more, any criticism that austerity

and welfare reform is has led to 14 million people in the UK now in poverty (UN 2019) has been met with an obstinate insistence from government figures both that austerity is a moral and economic necessity, and that the very existence of poverty:

'Look around you; that's not what we see in this country… I reject the idea that there are vast numbers of people facing dire poverty in this country…I don't accept the UN rapporteur's report at all. I think that's a nonsense. Look around you, that's not what we see in this country.' (Philip Hammond, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer: BBC News, 2019)

A second example of the mean time can be identified from the growing use of food banks in the UK. The Trussell Trust (the UK's largest food bank franchise) reported that in 2018-19, some 1.6 million three-day food parcels were provided by its 1371 food banks and food distribution centres around the UK, and given the presence of 651 independent foodbanks alongside the Trussell Trust network (Butler, 2017), this indicator of food insecurity almost certainly represents the most recognisable tip of a much larger iceberg. Indeed, the Food Foundation (2017) estimate that more than 8 million people in Britain live in households that experience food insecurity, with more than half of this number regularly going a whole day without eating. Again it is clear that government policy is helping to fuel rather than respond to this food poverty. In a study of reasons for referral to their food banks, the Trussell Trust (2017) noted that more than 40% of food bank users did so because of benefit delays or changes, thereby clearly identifying connections between punitive welfare reforms and food insecurity (on link between welfare reform and food bank use, see Loopstra et al 2017). Yet responses by government ministers to evidence of food bank usage (see Cloke et al, 2017; Williams et al, 2016) have emphasised that users – far from being in poverty - are simply experiencing temporary cash flow problems, and that food banks create their own demand. This response seems to us to be equivalent to the equally preposterous idea that if fire stations were scrapped there would be no more fires.

A third example of the mean times comes with evidence of increasing levels of homelessness in the UK. A report from the government's own National Audit Office (2017) reveals that levels of recorded rough sleeping have more than doubled over the period 2010-2017, including a 73% increase over the last three years. According to Crisis (2017a) these recorded figures significantly underestimate the scale of the problem; their calculation is that by the end of this period at least 160,000 households were experiencing the worst forms of "core" homelessness, defined as rough sleeping, sofa surfing, squatting, living in hostels and unsuitable forms of temporary accommodation including cars, tents and night shelters. Moreover, the National Audit Office report also demonstrates a significant rise in the numbers of households accepted by Local authorities as statutorily homeless (a 44% increase over the period). Part of this increase is linked to broader economic austerity, as

households – rather than climbing the "housing ladder" – are sliding down into homelessness due to unaffordable private sector rents (see Cloke et al, 2014; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2017). More specifically, however, austerity reductions to public sector budgets have limited the capacity of local authorities to provide services for homeless people (see Crisis, 2017b). Again, it appears that it is the most vulnerable sections of society that are disproportionately paying the price for the mean times.

In this first register, then, we can suggest that neoliberalised policies of privatisation, deregulation and austere shrinkage of the welfare state have culminated in mean times that have not only served to punish vulnerable social groups but also produced what Hutton (2015) pinpoints as an amoral deficit of integrity. He argues that the sense of "we" – that which binds us together and gives us reasons to belong – has become critically eroded as the expense of justice and equity has been progressively abandoned in favour of permitting market decisions to dictate economic and moral standards and subjectivities. In general, the resultant decline in public integrity tends to be performed with increasingly self-centred outlooks and a distinct carelessness about vulnerable others. As Sandel (2012) notes, there is an increasing tendency for middle classes to operate within particular social bubbles, creating an echo chamber of similar voices which restricts encounters with vulnerable others except through often vindictively mediated and stigmatically stereotypical representations (Jensen, 2014) which further diminish the capacity to achieve in-commonness (Popke, 2009) with others. Inequality thus becomes a self-sustaining downward spiral, and is reaching levels that not only sponsor a broad sense of post-political pessimism, but also present highly significant ethical and moral challenges to any sense of common purpose.

IN THE MEANTIME?

Where, then, can we turn to for inspiration about how to move beyond this culture of cruelty and to break through the seemingly hegemonic nature of neoliberal capitalism that simultaneously binds us together and yet wrenches us apart? Where can we recognise new geographies of hope? In our research on food banking in the UK (see Williams et al, forthcoming) we have argued both for a re-evaluation of the contested and often contradictory spaces of political and ethical subjectivity articulated by food banks, and that such a reappraisal invites wider reconsideration of the ethics and politics of non-statutory service provision in the context of austerity. This involves a recognition of a second interpretative register of the meantime – that is to generate new forms of openness towards, and inspiration from, seemingly mundane performances of care, welfare and justice that appear as short-term "sticking-plaster" responses to austerity, but may incorporate deeper-seated possibilities for the learning of alternative ethical and political postures and practices.

A significant part of the context of the "meantime" lies in the temporalities concerned, and in particular in may involve the ethics and politics of waiting and urgency. Olsen (2015) argues that geographies of waiting often assemble harmful arrangements of power and inequality. Waiting, as a denial of urgency, serves to differentiate between the people and places that matter and those that do not, and contributes to a framing of justice that can often obscure – both practically and ideologically – the urgency of those who are regarded as surplus to the system. This tendency of ignoring the ethical implications of being compelled to wait is an integral and repressive component of the mean times, but the politics of waiting can also help to produce and maintain a creative politics of political engagement, as recognition of the obvious social problems of waiting sometimes prompts a wider desire to do something about the urgency of suffering bodies and the waiting spaces they inhabit (see Jeffery, 2008; 2010). The political emotions assembled amongst this waiting and urgency are usually conflictive, but may be influenced, at least in part, by significant shifts in the moral and ethical emotions affectively produced by a phenomenology of the urgency of need (see Olsen, 2016). The meantimes, then, may be times when mundane spaces of care and welfare such as food banks and other voluntary sector activities serve to incubate urgent and significant affective politics in response to the repression of waiting.

Orthodox political economy perspectives in social science have tended to regard these voluntary sector spaces of care and welfare as inherently implicated in the wider neoliberalisation of state welfare; as a result such spaces are therefore commonly understood as a compliant element of the kind of self-supporting alternative action necessitated by the punitive regulatory regimes of state-sector welfare austerity. Accordingly, voluntaristic spaces of care are assumed to be part and parcel of the multiplicity of largely aggressive political forces that replace state welfare with a normalisation of self-interest, entrepreneurial values and market consumerism. Other negatively interpretative factors also apply. The faith-motivation that underpins many such spaces means that they are often overlain with additional critique of their "religious neoliberalism" (Hackworth, 2012; also see Lanz and Oosterbaan, 2016) in which there is a presumed underlying intention to colonise welfare spaces for the purposes of proselytization and extending the scope of conservative moralities and politics. Equally, there is broad suspicion of the self-interested motivation of volunteers who are often interpreted as engaging in forms of "moral selving" (Allahyari, 2000) that project a certain kind of normalised social citizenship that in turn reproduces existing practices of social exclusion and anti-welfare discourse (see Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2014).

Any counterarguments to these received wisdoms run the risk of being dismissed simply as an uncritical ignorance of the ways in which neoliberal austerity incorporates charitable good intentions as a way of salving and placating its inherent meanness. Equally, though, it seems crucial to avoid

what Zizek (2011) labels a politics of cynical pedagogy, in which the sole response to neoliberal austerity is to demand an extension of state-sector activity regardless of an appreciation of the state's inability to deliver such increased activity. Hence there is a need to scrutinise this second register of "in the meantime" in search of different understandings of the role of social action in the austere conditions of the here and now, whilst concomitantly working towards an anti-capitalist sea-change in anticipation of more structural reform. In this register, the meantime can be understood as:

"a *political* space of engagement that transcends analytical boundaries of incorporation and resistance, or reformism and revolution; as an *ethical* space of engagement with the phenomenology of need, the possibilities of in-commonness, and the development of communicative publics in which ethical conversation provokes new practice-based normativities; and as a *theoretical* space that opens up a recognition of progressive and hopeful activities." (Cloke et al, 2017, 709)

Careful empirical examination of the meantime will involve scrutiny of the efforts, struggles and contentiousness from which more hopeful lines of flight may emerge, as well as critical but also open-minded evaluation of the potential to incubate social practices, values and subjectivities that not only differ from and resist neoliberal orthodoxies but also render visible new kinds of ethical desire and re-enchantment that result in different kinds of activism. To be clear, this argument does not seek to undermine energy for radical intervention – be that in the form of addressing structural injustices in labour exploitation, powerlessness and violence (Harvey 1973; Young 1990), or in more autonomous post-capitalist experimentation (Chatterton 2016; Chatterton and Pusey 2019) including radical food justice movements (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Herman and Goodman, 2018). Rather, what we wish to consider is the politics of ethics itself – where and how ethical sensibilities (of solidarity, of mutualism) are fostered and galvanised. An ethic of care is 'concerned with structuring relationships in ways that enhance mutuality and wellbeing' (Lawson 2007:3), which prompts a renewed concern to the politics of ethics itself, especially how intuition and emotion figures in the discernment of in/justice. Politics here is understood as an arena of deliberation where deeply entrenched sensibilities, dispositions, and practices towards 'others' come to be challenged and reterritorialized. It builds on feminist theorisation of care ethics to recognise personal, emotional, and aesthetic registers as fundamentally political (constituted through power and privilege, discourse and practice, distance and proximity - see Lawson 2007; Williams M 2017) and therefore responsible for shaping a capacity for and a sense of ethical and political responsibility. Within UK food banks, we have noted the capacity of ordinary participation in charitable spaces to generate affects and ethics which constitute more than the sum of their parts, for instance by

feeding politicised life into personal, charitable and congregational spaces that previously had been uncomfortable with political action, and building a groundswell of support for wider food justice and welfare movement amongst *unusual* subjects (Williams et al 2016). In this way, previously binaric interpretative divisions that suggest an organisation is either incorporative or subversive miss the point of the "messy middle" (May and Cloke, 2015) ground of the meantime. As Fisher (2009) has highlighted, contemporary capitalism tends now to trade on various forms of "precorporation" rather than incorporation, suggesting the significance of a pre-emptive shaping of desires, hopes and ethical values. It follows that any supplanting of interpretative orthodoxies about welfare and care in the meantime will require new analytical sensibilities to particular arenas in which there are glimpses of a realignment of desire, hope and values.

This second register of in the meantime, then, opens out two further strands of possibility when considering everyday spaces of care and welfare such as food banks. The first is that these spaces may exhibit evidence of *alternative prefigurative ethics*. The notion of the prefigurative steers attention away from an overemphasis on the end-result of participatory activity, and instead encourages a focus on the living out of particular values and organisational traits which are indicative of the kind of future society that is envisaged. At their core, then, prefigurative ethics suggest a demonstration of the ethical relations that are sought in a more idealised later world, but that are also possible in the here and now. There are strong parallels here not only with anarchist traditions (see Springer et al, 2012) but also with Christian ideas about how God's kingdom that is to come can "break out" in more localised (but nevertheless significant) fashion in the now – we could even say "in the meantime". In practical terms, then, it could be that mundane everyday spaces of welfare and care, which appear to address short-term needs rather than deeper structural reformulation, can serve as here-and-now spaces of alternative ethical virtues which prefigure larger scale ideals. Commitment to, and practice of, say, non-hierarchical relations, generosity, justice, hospitality, selflessness and so on would be significant evidence of a bubbling up of prefigurative ethics within the broader setting of neoliberalised austerity. The ends here are immanent to the means, as the emphasis on ethically rich and progressive practices within social participation projects contrasts starkly with the loss or commodification of these virtues in the wider environment of punitive austerity.

The second strand of possibility concerns how these spaces may demonstrate *alternative affective politics.* Sitrin's (2006; 2012) notion of "politica afectiva" emphasises how alternative political responses can be fostered through the creation of a base that is loving, supportive and built on trust. As Woodward (2011) puts it, we need to be aware of the affective dimensions that figure in the production of a dynamic environment of collaborative social relations and collective action.

Recognising emerging politics of social relations and love will require attention to how spaces of care and welfare shape, and are shaped by these affective dimensions. First we can note the capacity of participants to be affected by others, for example in the phenomenology of need that arises from working alongside vulnerable others in an atmosphere of collective trust. Such experience affects participants and offers an affective politics into their participation. Equally, participants can themselves contribute to a more collective form of social responsibility by the ways in which they perform co-operation, mutual support and in-common connection; a variation of what Hardt and Negri (2001) have termed affective labour. However sub-optimal the performance of these affective politics turns out to be in practice, the presence of alternative feelings, vibes and atmospheres relating to non-hierarchical and collaborative ways of being, opens out possible ethical capacities for further alternative affection and recuperative instincts in amongst the seemingly mundane activities of care and responsibility found in the meantime.

POSTSECULARITY, SPIRITUALITY AND THE COMMONS?

Postsecularity is one of the areas in which we can identify the emergence of hopeful geographies, resulting from new understandings of how common life can be shared, and how caring for the common good may be reimagined and alternatively practised. As Habermas (2010) has noted in his thesis of postsecularisation, the transformation of Western society into post-colonial immigrant societies has posed interesting questions about how to achieve hospitable relations of coexistence between different religious communities within a secular setting. In this mix, cultural and social modernisation do not necessarily depend on the depletion of the public and personal relevance of religion. Indeed, the assumed hopelessness of the unfolding post-political age has been widely associated with a disillusionment about the capacity of secularised values drawn from science and economics to solve fundamental problems relating to inequality and injustice (see Cloke, 2010; Cloke and Beaumont, 2012). For example, in discussions of global development practice there has been significant recognition that religion continues to be a shaping force within culture and that religious ideas remain highly relevant to the ethics and norms that shape economy and polity (see Ellis, 2006; Hasan, 2017; Tomalin, 2013, 2015; Tomalin et al, 2019). In European contexts too, it has been argued that religion has begun to reclaim some of its influence in the public arena, both as a community of interpretation that can speak truth to power, and as a community of action that is capable and willing to respond to welfare issues in the meantime. As a result, Eder (2006) argues that the previously hushed-up voice of religion is beginning to be heard again in more public ways, a

phenomenon that both Berger (1999) and Casanova (2011) have viewed as a potentially counter-secularising force.

The idea of the "postsecular" has many critics, and has been exaggerated in accounts which present it as an epochal shift or socio-spatial regime change in which secularisation is somehow being reversed or pre-empted. Other criticisms position the postsecular as a colonial project aimed at assimilating religion, and one which has limited application beyond the European context (for a critical discussion of these and other criticisms, see Cloke et al, 2019). However, Cloke and Williams (2018) envisage postsecularity as a more context-contingent bubbling up of ethical values arising from hybrids of faith-related and secular determination to relate differently to alterity and to become active in support of others by going beyond the social bubble of the normal habitus. Such ethical values go beyond a simple expression of theo-ethics as visible in the work of faith-based organisations (FBOs – see Beaumont and Cloke, 2012; Cloke et al, 2013). Rather they are characterised by a more explicit "crossing over" of religious and secular narratives, practices and performances that are revealed in particular spaces of care, welfare, justice and protest, and in particular subjectivities that reflect a commitment to in-commonness, and a progressive responsibility to reach out for alternative notions of the common good. The notion of 'common good' here is not guise to override identity politics or justify defensive postures towards difference. On the contrary, we position postsecularity as a condition of being, which in a similar way to feminist ethics of care asks what kinds of selves – and self-other sensibilities – do we need to be in order to recognise in-commonness and interdependencies. In such spaces and subjectivities, postsecularity is shaped by a co-productive relationship between the secular and the religious in which there are core commitments to solidarity, mutual hospitality and openness to difference. Again, we should emphasise that some partnerships between the religious and the secular will not reflect these characteristics, preferring to combine around strongly conservative political and religious discourses which oppose human rights and demonise some aspects of social difference, for example in areas of welfare, gender and sexuality (Hedges, 2008, 2016; Martin, 2005). However, opposition to this "dark side" of postsecularity should not preclude recognition of more hopeful and progressive forms of its being, which in our view offer contexts which can offer glimpses of hope in the meantime. This claim rests on the capacity of postsecularity to perform three different but interrelated forms of prefigured ethics and affective politics.

First, and drawing on the concepts put forward by political theorist, Romand Coles (1997; see also Hauerwas and Coles, 2008), postsecularity rests on ethical relations that are animated by a deliberately receptive form of generosity characterised both by a willingness to the being and voices of others and a wish to provide them with something valuable. This requires a transfiguring

dialogical process, part agonist and part collaborative, that seriously seeks to discern how difference and distancing can be appropriately brought together and held apart such that mutual gifts can be appreciated, and that the "entwinement of giving and receiving is the precarious elaborating foundation of well-being and sense" (Coles, 1997, 22). Forms of generosity that lack this receptivity, Coles argues, will be prone to the kinds of violence and assimilation that have characterised the majority of previous religious and secular political activities in the public sphere, and have limited the scope of wider participation in social movements that are formed through such activity. Receptive generosity, on the other hand, opens out scope for an embrace of politically and ethically progressive radicalism regardless of its source. Thus despite his personal self-identifying as not religious, Coles is willing to embrace what he sees as radical Christian religious values such as "caritas" (giving) and "agape" (sacrificial love) as key elements of a radical ecclesia that are well able to collaborate with other, more secular, value-sources relating to caritas in the wider task of caring for others. Both in theory, and in the agonistic and dialogical activities of individuals and groups, he sees the mobilisation – and subsequent transfiguration – of these kinds of religious ethics as contributing strongly to a kind of postsecular caritas which through relationship-building, and careful attention to common places and common goods, can shape diverse possibilities for flourishing.

This vision of postsecular caritas reflects two defining characteristics of postsecularity. The first is a shift of political and ethical imagination beyond current political formations away from the mean time political economy of endless growth, concentrated power and market-led individualism, and towards social movements that emphasise the co-production of in-commonness and thereby permit the emphases and engagements of receptive generosity to gain greater traction and influence. The focus here is on the careful marshalling of ethical principles in the morality of thinking as well as doing, so as to promote self-other relations over self-interest and in so doing to discover an ethical life that cultivates a generosity of giving that goes well beyond equivalence, and a grace-filled rejection of societal norms that excuse tit-for-tat revenge. Given that this first characteristic depends on the contribution of strong ethical sources, a second requirement is that postsecular caritas is able to work across the ideological and the theological; both of these territories (when unchecked) tend to assume silo-forms, but postsecular caritas requires a de-privileging of silo positions in order to forgo self-interested tribal practices in favour of the pursuit of transformative processes of attentiveness to in-commonness.

A second strand of the prefigured ethics and affective politics of postsecularity is a capacity to work towards *rapprochement* (see the detailed examples presented by Cloke and Beaumont, 2012). If postsecular caritas urges a slackening of the will to maintain tribal identity, rapprochement emphasises a willingness to trust in the possibility of a syncretic radical-democratic community that

works out of the excess of what was previously embodied as separate religious and secular organisations and ethics. This generative fusion of different traditions has flourished in the context of neoliberal austerity, a context which provides a fertile landscape for the propagation of religious / secular partnerships formed of individuals and organisations who just want to "do something about" the culture of cruelty being directed towards the most vulnerable social groups. So while some FBOs have ploughed their own well-badged religious furrow (see Cloke and Pears, 2016a; 2016b), others (see for example the account of London Citizens by Jamoul and Wills, 2008) have entered into deliberate partnership with secular and religious others to form avowedly postsecular liaisons in which "doing something about" the problems faced by socially excluded people in the city has entailed a solidarity over key ethical issues that requires other more divergent problematics to be left outside the room in which rapprochement is being achieved. Part of the problem with recognising such rapprochement as an empirical reality is the ongoing tendency to preserve social science as a critical secular space in which the very idea of rapprochement is assumed to be a naked and uncritical attempt to valorise religious values within secular society and academy. Rapprochement is, therefore, clearly also necessary in the terrain of evaluative academic research. It is all too easy to engage in ritualistic dismissal of FBO activity as inherently intertwined with neo-liberal subject formation, when often what underlies this equally uncritical assumption is an antagonism towards, rather than a critical engagement with, the possibility "that there is potential within postsecular rapprochement to embody both an expression of resistance to prevailing injustices under global neoliberal capitalism, and an energy and hope in something that brings more justice for all citizens of our cities rather than simply rewarding the privileged few (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012, 32).

A third strand of the prefigured ethics and affective politics of postsecularity relates to the possibility of hopeful re-enchantment. In his thesis on "disenchantment" Weber (1970) argued that public life has been stripped relentlessly of its ultimate and sublime values; scientific rationalism and bureaucracy, he contends, have emptied out the magical, mysterious and incalculable from our now increasingly disenchanted world. This analysis is consistently echoed by commentators of neoliberalised capitalism who advocate a postsecular response. From his *Red Tory* perspective, Blond (1998, 2010), for example, recognises the dangers of reproducing values from secularised economics and science directly into the arenas of politics and ethics. He charts the risks of complicity with an ontology of violence that promotes selfish individualism and standardises the prioritisation of force and counter-force, and warns of a resultant hopeless vacuity in which the weakening or absence of mysticism encourages self-seeking desire fed by the machinic power of commodity fetishism. Equally, political-economic theorists of the post-political (see for example, Wilson and

Swyngedouw, 2014) warn of increasing political apathy for mainstream party-politics with its ritualised choreography of supposedly democratic electoral procedure. As neoliberalised capitalism proceeds with the transformation of nature and the appropriation of its wealth, government appears to become reduced to an associated bio-political management of desire and happiness. Not only does this reduce the likelihood of encounters with less privileged others, but it actively feeds the neurosis of autonomous desire (Reinhard, 2005) that seems to fuel stigmatising stereotypes of others-as-enemies. Moreover, as Connolly (2006) emphasises, some forms of religion have been directly implicated in this disenchanted regime of neoliberalised and austere capitalism; in his terms the Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine has not only shored up the politics of existential resentment that fuels inequality and socio-cultural enmity, but has also contributed to active forms of disenchantment via the dogmatic espousal of desire based upon individualised prosperity and extreme moral conservatism.

While the idea of re-enchantment has to be recognised as complex and multifaceted, we want to argue that this crisis of ethical subjectivity under neoliberalism requires new spaces and subjectivities of spiritual disobedience in which deep-seated hierarchies, predispositions and affective capacities can be reworked. In their study of religious involvement in the Occupy movement, Cloke et al (2016) illustrate something of this kind of spiritual disobedience:

"We suggest that Occupy needs to be understood at least in part as a deeply spiritual and sacramental protest, not solely in its aims and objectives, but in its practices, its hospitality to otherness, and in its offer of direct experience of mutualism and radical democratic forms of organising. The solidarity practices within encampments offered a deeply spiritual counter-formation to the affective repercussions of capitalist liturgies (or discourses) that saturate our everyday lives. Counter-neoliberal liturgies that enforce an alternative spiritual and ethical worldview to the neoliberal entreaty to consume, behave, and be comfortable, can be a pragmatically meditative resource for producing a hopeful subjectivity that operates beyond a symbolic understanding or attachment to the capitalist order, recognising its perversity, and more able to imagine and embody prefigurative possibilities." (p. 523).

While it is difficult in some ways to imagine parallels between the rarified atmosphere of left-leaning protest in the Occupy movement, and the more mundane and politically varied charitable environments of food banks, drop-in centres and the like, it is crucial not to lose sight of the possibilities that postsecularity can bring for forms of re-enchantment in these in-the-meantime terrains. Moments of reflexive postsecularity can emerge as key components of re-enchantment almost regardless of the setting, simply because alternative ethical predispositions and affective

politics enable a mysterious sense in which the subjectivities of desire become open to remodelling. So it may not be too far-fetched to imagine a reshaping of desire in these settings, away from those values inflicted by self-interested capitalism, and towards values fed by a counter-cultural, and sometimes theological ethic that confronts the prioritisation of wealth and self-pleasure in order to cultivate an affective capacity for hopefulness and healing, hospitality and generosity, justice and equality.

Blencowe's (2015) work is insightful here to encourage recognition that 'the commons and commoning practices are sources of spirituality' (p187), and equally that spirituality plays a critical role in maintaining desire for in-commonness. In this way, the emergence of 'in-common ethics' is not a homogenisation of difference, but rather entails getting 'outside of ourselves by entering, and sharing, a world. To have some-*thing* in common supplants the need to *be* common' (Blencowe 2015: 187). The spirituality of commons is about self-transcendence:

'commons promise escape from the disenchanted iron traps of instrumentalised, privatised lives – a route to self-transcendence that is also the transcendence of nihilism, existential angst and hopelessness. Alienation and disenchantment are not, as is often thought, the symptom of an overly institutionalised or fixed formation of life. Rather, they express the absence of a shared reality, of knowing together in a common world (Blencowe 2015: 187)

Material practices of commoning vary, but we want to suggest voluntary spaces of care constitute encounters and temporary constellations where spirituality of commons might emerge. While not tempering energy for 'purist' forms of commoning, such messy, incomplete and ambivalent forms of the commons are important in reaching those unlikely to engage in more radical praxis. Cloke et al (2019) argue that late capitalism animates phantasmatic desires, affective state of numbness, and modes of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011). They suggest:

'neoliberalism presents a tired selection of progressively ineffective and instantly-gratifying dopamine buttons that detach people from life in-common through distraction, denial, and ennui. Neoliberalism animates these shallow reservoirs of false enchantment, deflecting attention from the structural causes that underpin the grinding conditions which its austere politics are imposing on an expanding precariat.' (p. 189).

Ethical contestation of neoliberal enchantments is therefore vital to a post-capitalist politics of the commons and commoning practices. However, as Blencowe notes 'spirituality generates energy that can be captured and utilised - and so captured, territorialised, spirituality becomes a means of capture' (2015: 187)

POSSIBLITIES AND BARRIERS TO POSTSECULARITY AND IN-COMMON ETHICS: THE CASE OF FOOD BANKS

Our research on food banking in the UK context (see Cloke et al, 2017; Williams et al, 2016) offers two potential readings about the role of postsecularity in "in the meantime" spaces. First, there is a possibility that postsecularity helps both to generate motivational capacity and to contribute to the ethical values and normativities being performed in mundane spaces of welfare and care, and in so doing enables such spaces to become unusual exemplars of virtuous common life. On the surface this seems a strange claim, not least because food banks and other such spaces are commonly characterised by narratives of stigma and the performance of well-meaning but ultimately unevenly power-related charity (see Douglas et al, 2015; Horst et al 2014). While the reproduction of stigma is a constant concern, it is now recognised in studies of the geographies of care (see for example, Conradson, 2003; Marovelli, 2019; Midgely, 2017; Parr, 2007) that significant material resources, senses of refuge and even therapeutic encounters are possible even in sensitive contexts where anxious and stigmatised subjectivities abound. The fact that faith-motivated organisations have been so prominent in responding to the culture of cruelty arising from austere welfare restrictions allows the suggestion that they are in some ways seeking to promote alternative sets of virtues from those which drive neoliberalised politics and ethics (see Williams, 2015). Sandel (2012) reminds us that worthwhile nonmarket norms have been crowded out of public policy under market-driven forms of governance. He further argues that "altruism, generosity, solidarity and civic spirit are not like commodities that are depleted with use. They are more like muscles that develop and grow stronger with exercise" (p. 130). There is, then, a strong possibility that faith-related values are contributing to the reassertion of prefigurative ethics that react against neoliberalised capitalism and offer some sense of an alternative basis for a politically progressive common good (see Birdwell and Littler, 2013). The combined ethical passions of the 'faith of the faithless' (Critchley 2012) and those motivated by theological ethics of justice, generosity, hospitality and the like may well be helping to put into practice alternative prefigurative frameworks in a context of post-political pessimism. Any such claim must, of course, acknowledge two important caveats. First, these religiously-rooted ethics are at their most effective when they help to create opportunities for a wider platform of participation and prefigurative collaboration that stretches beyond the solely religious. Secondly, religious participation in politics can clearly also be anti-progressive, not least when black-and-white evangelical faith-moralities team up with wider conservative politics to produce political platforms capable of hostility rather than hospitality in areas of social difference and otherness.

A second and related reading of in the meantime spaces of welfare and care is that they also serve as liminal spaces of encounter in which alternative affective politics can emerge. Recent engagement with poststructural ethics in geography has prompted a focus on more emotional and affective registers of encounter in which the collective working of mind, body, habit and reflection can lead not only to different forms of self-expressive agonistic confrontation, but also to an expanded capacity to be generously "in-common" with others – those outside of our social bubbles and echo chambers. Application of these ideas about the potential affective politics of in-commonness (see, for example, Cloke and Conradson, 2018) opens up grounds for further interpretation of the affective dispositions occurring in everyday spaces of care and welfare provision. So, for example, it can be suggested that staff and volunteers working in food banks or facilities for homeless people learn to be affected by in-common encounters with the users of these services who would otherwise remain outside of their direct emotional and visceral experience. In turn, the cultural work of dispositions and habits involved in this in-commonness can help to shape what Thrift (2004. 69) has called "proto-political longings for change". In practical terms, involvement in sites such as food banks and drop-in centres for homeless people opens up opportunities for political and ethical deliberation that amounts to a kind of "ethos talk" (Barnett, 2012), in which participation in care and welfare provides people with situated encouragement to reflect openly about their experience in ways that develop wider understanding and political sensibility.

Such a conclusion needs to reflect the complex conceptual and practical attention given to the often paradoxical or ambivalent nature of the ethics of care. Seminal writers (for example Noddings, 2003; Tronto, 1993: 2013) have established care as everything that is done to maintain, continue or repair the world, and as such it is inevitable that processes and practices of care will be entangled in, and sometimes appropriated by powerful social configurations some of which lead to destructive rather than constructive outcomes. For example, as Engster (2019) argues, the recognition that caring relations will often produce dependency on the part of the cared-for contributes (perhaps inadvertently) to an understanding of care as private, personal and episodic, rather than part of a broader public duty, and as an exercise in moral selving on the part of volunteers and staff in caring organisations (see Orlie, 1997). However, the ambivalence of caring relations should not be permitted to negate the ethical significance of care. Kittany (2011) positions care as a resource which acknowledges dependency relations between unequals yet at the same time is able to ensure a more fulfilling life for both carer and cared-for, and Held (2006) warns that while a care perspective eschews some ethical principles, on balance it reinforces the requirement to respond to complex human needs and opens out wider interconnections with broader themes of justice. Ultimately, the choice in interpreting care in the meantimes seems to be either one of critical

disavowal of the unequal relations of entanglement, or a commitment to stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016), by holding conflicting ideas in tension and participating in uneasy and committed dialogues in pursuit of reducing human exposure to vulnerability and other blights to survival and well-being. De la Bellacasa (2017) sees the technology of caring knowledge as integral to staying with the trouble, suggesting that relational affordances arising from speculative grounded practice can afford an unfolding of knowledge between subjects mediated both by how carers reach out, and by the receptivity of the cared for.

So it is that the ethos talk arising from participating in spaces of in-commonness in care and welfare inevitably reflects different caring knowledge, and conflicting experiences of staying with the trouble. We need to emphasise that in our research in UK food banks we found that such ethos talk is certainly not always be positive towards the service users concerned, and we encountered not only those for whom in-commonness has configured a greater support for vulnerable social groups, but also those whose attitudes towards such groups were hardened through sustained encounter. Nevertheless, we conclude that a personal and collective phenomenology of need has the capacity to prompt the kinds of conscientisation that can be shaped into an effective agent of change, and that (often unintentionally) opens up the possibility for individuals to be caught up in a wider sense of transformative praxis. In so doing these everyday spaces of welfare and care offer potential for the incubation of sets of alternative values and subjectivities that not only deviate from neoliberalised norms, but can also start to challenge their capitalist counterparts. From such small-scale beginnings can emerge changes to the art-of-the-possible, and even ruptures within a seemingly immutable and austere capitalist fabric which disproportionately penalises the most vulnerable people in society.

Equally important, although urgently needing further research for detailed consideration, is the possibility that the generosity of in-commonness is also experienced by the subjects of ordinary spaces of charity as well as its providers. Recognition of the inevitably uneven power relations that underpin service-based encounters with vulnerable people generally prompts an evaluative emphasis on the negatives, both of embarrassment and stigma experienced by service-users (see, for example, Purdam et al 2016), and of the limited impact of involvement programmes on the emancipation or capacity-building of service-users (Tanekenov et al, 2018; Whiteford, 2011). These critical assessments are of crucial importance and should not be underemphasised. However, attention to the messy middle of mundane service spaces should not ignore the possibility that in-commonness can be beneficial to service-users as well as service providers. Tanekenov et al's survey of the bodily, political-economic, socio-emotional and creative self-development domains of (in this case homeless) service-users provides a useful framework for considering the potential for individual

benefits from in-common encounters. Equally, affective politics of in-commonness have been demonstrated to co-create sense of refuge and sanctuary for users of those spaces (Bowpitt et al, 2014), and the acquisition of 'expertise-by-experience' has been shown to develop sense of involvement and authority that can lead to ex services-users becoming volunteers or staff members in analogous services (Fagan and Cook, 2012; Noorami, 2013).

Such possibilities may seem overly idealistic. Indeed, if the emphasis of these new affective politics remains on providing care to victims, then it seems likely that in-the-meantime activities will remain at the level of gap-fillers in the neoliberalised shadow state. However, if the affective politics of conscientisation succeed in connecting up care and welfare with wider ethical and political questions about *justice* – as is indeed evident in the three indicators of "mean times" (child poverty, food insecurity and homelessness) discussed earlier in the paper - then the resultant formation of emergent communicative publics (Barnett and Bridge, 2012) points to the possibility that they can come to act as effective agents of change. However, it is essential to examine postsecularity critically as a contextually-contingent phenomenon that is not immune from entanglements of power. While we wish to identify the hopeful promise of in-common encounters and conscientisation in UK food banks, it is important to recognise the limits to these possibilities on numerous grounds.

First, in terms of partiality, it would be erroneous to 'read off' the experience of receptive generosity and rapprochement only from their main protagonists, but instead, be open to more critical readings of postsecularity as lived, negotiated and experienced by different groups of people. Postsecularity intersects with wider processes of differentiation (class, race, sexuality, age, ability), underlining the need to examine more marginal(ised) voices in postsecular partnerships. While holding to the hopeful promises of developing in-common spaces, research must question for whom these spaces benefit? Secondly, in terms of temporality, encounters of in-commonness along with the deterritorialisation of previously held beliefs (for example relating to attitudes on welfare/poverty, or the disenchantment associated with right-leaning religion) can be short-lived, only to be reterritorialised through entrenched discourses and congregational cultures. This highlights important questions about the contestability of political discourse and the durability of specific lines of thinking/being/doing that mitigate against social change. Thirdly, within spaces of care, the seeds of potential can wither on stony ground of charitable pragmatism (May et al 2019). Elsewhere we have discussed the techno-moral practices that produce stigmatised encounters within spaces of care. The time-limited nature of support inherent to referral-voucher systems prevalent in Trussell Trust and the majority of independent food banks can have inverse effects on people seeking support. Strict restrictions of 'no voucher, no food parcel', three vouchers within six month guidance, alongside bureaucratic burdens placed on people to be assessed as 'genuine' has been

shown to result in self-rationing – both of the contents of food parcel (for example, making a three day food parcel last over a week), and of vouchers themselves (with service users delaying use of allocated vouchers until absolutely desperate) (see May et al forthcoming). Different organisational spaces of care will therefore present divergent possibilities for emergent postsecularity with different capacities for senses of in-common ethics to emerge. For some UK food banks, the potential for a more progressive prefigurative politics will be hindered both by these organisational practices and entrenched 'small c' conservative theologies/politics that so often reproduce a reactionary construction of 'the poor' (ibid). However, the opening up of what have been predominantly church-run food bank to volunteers inspired by different secular and religious traditions, we argue, can constitute spaces of deliberation (or 'ethos talk') where secular visions of social justice (for example, Rights-based approaches to food insecurity) can catalyse more progressive stances. Acknowledging these uneven geographies of emergent postsecularity must also entail research agendas that venture beyond just those 'doing the caring' as well as exploring the possibility for affective politics of mutuality and in-commonness. Opening the privileged to the experience of the 'victims' of austerity is crucial, and progressive in itself, but is in itself limited. Our argument is not to valorise particular instances of postsecularity emerging in spaces of welfare and care to be an end in itself; but rather, point to the possibilities for conscientisation and in-common encounter to prompt experimentation within food aid provision according to more participatory and mutualist principles beyond the charitable model.

CONCLUSION

This paper has gone in search of geographies of hope in amongst the mundane spaces of care and welfare that have sprung up in response to the needs of people who have been forced to suffer the excessive cruelty dished out by policies of neoliberalised austerity. For some social scientists, hope will be considered a "weak" concept, too ambiguous and ill-defined to be of use in the harsh political world of injustice and inequality. However, this weak theory opens up the possibility of considering hope in generative ways (see Wright, 2014), of reflecting on the texture of how it arises, how it feels and what its practice looks like. Although powerful forces stand in its way, the cultivation and expression of hope may indeed be a key ingredient in counteracting the disenchantment of living in amongst neoliberal austerity.

The paper offers two main sets of conclusions. First, critical reflection on geographies of hope needs to remain open to the idea that hope can be found in mundane spaces ordinarily rejected because processes of interpretative orthodoxy position them as incorporated into the neoliberal agenda rather than offering any resistance to it. In other words we need to avoid one-eyed and uncritical

scholarship that rules out key spaces and subjectivities either on theo-antagonistic grounds that no good thing can come from religion, or based on the assumption that voluntaristic charitable responses to social exclusion inevitably promote, rather than reject, the goals of neoliberalised capitalism. Here, we argue that acknowledgement of the concept of "in the meantime" opens up new registers of interpretation. In one sense, the mean times connote the nasty and socially regressive politics of austerity in which a culture of cruelty ensures that the most vulnerable sections of society are disproportionately victimised by spending cuts and welfare reforms. However, another characteristic of this political landscape is the rising up of voluntary sector organisations working in the context of "the meantime" – that is to say dealing with the immediate social needs arising from cruel austerity. These organisations are commonly thought of as not only applying sticking-plasters to structural issues, but also as actively allowing the state to get away with its programmes of welfare shrinkage. However, we argue that some of these in the meantime activities present more hopeful arenas in which alternative predispositional ethics can lead to the virtuous performance of care and welfare, and in which liminal spaces of encounter with others can generate a longer-term capacity for alternative political ethics. Rather than simply being spaces of emergency care, these activities offer opportunities for conscientisation, and the development of communicative publics eager to interconnect care and welfare with more structural issues of justice.

Secondly, we conclude that religion has a role to play in this hopefulness, although it would be equally one-eyed and acritical to assert this as a general expectation. Throughout the paper we have emphasised the potential for religious involvement to produce reactionary and conservative responses as well as more left-leaning and progressive activity. Nevertheless, evidence from our research into food banks and services for homeless people strongly suggests that faith-motivation has triggered the significant presence of FBOs working in-the-meantime, and that predispositional theo-ethics have been influential in generating a counter-response to the neoliberalised shrinkage of state-sector care and welfare. In so doing FBOs have opened up opportunities for wider participation in care and welfare, and thereby helped to create spaces that allow greater opportunities for in-commonness between increasingly separated social groups. FBOs are of course by no means the only actors in these networks, and are certainly capable of operating within a restrictive silo-culture, in which values and affective outcomes become badged as religious. Indeed, the most hopeful spaces and subjectivities to emerge from our research occur when silo-positionalities are deliberately de-privileged, and where postsecularity bubbles up as a co-productive relationship between the secular and the religious modelled around core commitments to solidarity, mutual hospitality and openness to difference. The key characteristics of postsecularity – the acceptance and living out of receptive generosity, the capacity for (if necessary sacrificial) rapprochement, and

the commitment to a re-enchanting reshaping of desire away from the values of self-interested capitalism towards counter-cultural values of hospitality, generosity, justice and spiritualities of the commons – in our view offer potentially substantial grounds for prefigurative and affective hopefulness in the meantime.

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