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# Co-constituting neoliberalism: faith-based organisations, co-option, and resistance in the UK<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.**

The increasing prominence of faith-based organisations (FBOs) in providing welfare in the UK has typically been regarded as a by-product of neoliberalism, as the gaps left by shrinking public service provision and the contracting out of service delivery have been filled by these and other Third Sector organisations. In this way, FBOs have been represented as merely being co-opted as inexpensive resource providers into the wider governmentalities of neoliberal politics. In this paper we critically question how the concept of neoliberalism has been put to work in accounts of voluntary sector co-option, and argue instead for a recognition of different manifestations of secularism and religion, and their connections to changing political–economic and social contexts. Using the illustration of one particular FBO in the UK, we trace how neoliberalism can be co-constituted through the involvement of FBOs, which can offer various pathways of resistance in and through the pursuit of alternative philosophies of care and political activism.

**Keywords:** governmentality, neoliberalism, faith-based organisations, resistance, care

## **1 Faith-based organisations and changing landscapes of welfare provision**

Over the last three decades faith-based organisations (FBOs) have become increasingly prominent in welfare provision and political activism in the UK (as elsewhere), and their growing influence has been widely charted (see, for example, Cairns et al, 2005; Dinham, 2009; Dinham et al, 2009; Farnell et al, 2003; Furbey and Macey, 2005; Jochum et al, 2007; Lowndes and Chapman, 2005). FBO activity occurs at national, regional, and local levels and embraces a range of welfare arenas, including support for children and youth, the elderly, homeless people, and asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants, and a range of welfare activities relating to housing, poverty and debt, disability, and community regeneration (Clope et al, 2009). Such activity is by no means simply a recent phenomenon (see Harris, 1995; Prochaska, 2006); indeed the contemporary activities of some FBOs such as the Salvation Army are founded on a long history of service dating back to Victorian times. However, three aspects of the recent resurgence of FBOs in responding to urban social issues tend to contradict any interpretation that this phenomenon is simply a return to charity of former times. First, faith-motivated activity in this area is not exclusively charitable, and encompasses diverse practices of social engagement within and between the realms of service provision, capacity building, and political campaigning. Second, the increasingly multicultural and ethnic plurality of the UK means faith-based social action is no longer limited to the Protestant, or indeed Christian, faith but also extends to a range of non-Christian and non-Western faiths. Third, dramatic contextual changes in welfare policy, governance, and state-voluntary relations tethered to the long-drawn-out processes of Enlightenment and secularisation have relegated religion to a position largely subservient to the state. Unsurprisingly, both the consolidation of the welfare state, and its subsequent shrinkage and partial deconstruction, have transformed the terrain upon which faith-motivated actors and organisations have engaged in social and political action.

The contemporary reorganisation of the welfare state has typically been regarded as a by-product of neoliberalism (Beaumont 2008a; Peck and Tickell 2002), and has been marked by the opening up of a renewed role for faith-motivated groups in the public realm. Neoliberal governance over this period has led to shrinkage of public sector service provision and a greater propensity to contract out service delivery, and FBOs appear to be inextricably interconnected with these trends as they have expanded their welfare activities in order to fill the gap. In this way faith-motivated Third Sector organisations have been represented as merely being incorporated into the wider governmentalities of neoliberal politics so as to allow less expensive forms of government (Hackworth, 2010a, 2010b; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Trudeau and Veronis, 2009). However, there has been a recent insistence that these processes of neoliberalism need to be understood in conjunction with transformations within secularism amid an ever-growing realisation of radically plural societies in terms of religion, faith, and belief (see

Beaumont, 2008b, 2010; Beaumont and Dias, 2008; Cloke et al, 2010; Molendijk et al, 2010). Here, the idea of the postsecular has been deployed to help understand why religion (referring both to religious actors and to organisations) seems to be achieving an increased presence and visibility within the public sphere of secularised late-modern capitalism (Beaumont, 2010; Beaumont and Baker, 2011; Cloke, 2010; Cloke and Beaumont, forthcoming). In one sense the postsecular can be seen to represent a shift in the state's "secularist self-understanding" (De Vries, 2006, page 3; see also Beckford, 2003; Bretherton, 2010; Davie 2007), that is permitting a more-easily-accepted enlistment of FBOs in government-led partnerships. It follows that this shift can be interpreted as nothing more than the domestication and secularisation of religion, in line with prevailing political economic understandings of how the state co-opts voluntary and faith-based organisations into its programmes of rule. FBOs are in essence viewed as willing or unwilling participants in the hollowing out of the welfare state (Goode, 2006; Hackworth, 2009; 2010a; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Trudeau and Veronis, 2009;), and their politics can be assumed to be either entirely in keeping with, or subjugated to reflect, neoliberal values, or indeed an ambiguous mix of the two (Beaumont, 2004; Connolly, 2005; Davis, 2006; Lyon-Callo, 2008; Peck, 2006).

However, ideas relating to the postsecular have also been developed in a more ethical and philosophical register, recognising new opportunities for 'rapprochement' between previously separate (and often oppositional) religious, humanist, and secularist interests, in order to work together towards common goals for social justice (Cloke, 2010). Following this lead, in this paper we take issue with the lines of association that are commonly drawn in contemporary social science between neoliberalism, faith, and postsecularism. Following Gibson-Graham's practice of " 'reading for difference' rather than dominance" (2006, page xxxi), we argue that neoliberalism is being co-constituted by the involvement of FBOs and other similar agencies, whose locally situated and ethically flavoured activities and agency is able to shape, as well as be shaped by, the grander-scale rationalities of governance. Moreover, we raise the possibility that the involvement of FBOs in the local-scale technologies deployed in pursuit of these top-down rationalities can serve to subvert, resist, and rework the performative assemblage of neoliberalism. In this way the activities of FBOs can be read as coproducing neoliberal forms, rather than being produced by them. In what follows, using an illustration of a particular FBO in the UK, we critique how the concept of neoliberalism is theorised and 'put to work' in accounts of voluntary sector co-option, recognising instead the need to attend to the different manifestations of secularism and religion, and their connections to changing political-economic and social contexts. We conclude by developing the case for more a careful analysis of the co-constitution of neoliberalism, by examining a number of specific convergence points where FBOs have directly or indirectly helped coproduce neoliberal forms. Within some of these forms we consider

how FBOs could be read as offering paths of resistance against neoliberalism, deliberately resisting government partnership in order to pursue alternative philosophies of care and to meet the needs of those ineligible for state support and/or to engage in political activism.

## **2 The neoliberal orthodoxy: FBOs as ‘little platoons’ in service of neoliberal goals?**

The prevalent social science narrative of the role and significance of FBOs typically positions them as willing or unwilling victims, and in some cases collaborators (Goode, 2006; Hackworth, 2009; 2010a; Lyon-Callo, 2008; Peck, 2006), caught up in the neoliberal incorporation of voluntary resources to occupy the vacuum of welfare space left behind by retreating central and local state activity (Billis and Harris, 1992; Bondi, 2005; Deakin, 1996; Fyfe, 2005; Fyfe and Milligan, 2003a; 2003b; Harris, 1995; Owen and Kearns, 2006; Wolch, 1990). Peck and Tickell (2002) have demonstrated how neoliberalism entails both ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ manoeuvres—the former describing a shrinking of the welfare safety net, and the latter suggesting new discourses of welfare reform and new institutional arrangements designed to ‘contain’ or ‘discipline’ marginalised and socially excluded people and nongovernmental organisations. Through this lens (see also Buckingham, 2009; Larner and Butler, 2005) the renewed partnership between government and FBOs is typically understood as an embodiment of roll-out neoliberalism where central government simultaneously delegates risk and responsibility for welfare provision to newly enlisted nongovernmental actors, while extending state control through the regulatory mechanisms of performance targets and audits to ensure that state ends are met through clearly defined means. Understood through this analytical framework of roll-out neoliberalism, FBOs are often presented as “ ‘little platoons’ ... in service of neoliberal goals” (Peck and Tickell, 2002, page 390), or as pseudo-governmental bodies caught up in the decentralisation of state forms and the enrolment and governmentalisation of the Third Sector (Bretherton, 2010).

It is hard to deny that over the last thirty years roll-out neoliberal governance has opened up opportunities for FBOs to take up high-profile roles in public service delivery: for example, in education, homelessness, community regeneration, and health care (Harris et al, 2003). Successive governments have sponsored this trend. For example, the Thatcher era introduced a simultaneous decentralising of responsibility for welfare service delivery onto the private and voluntary sectors and a centralising of control over the direction of policymaking outcomes through new regulatory technologies and agencies. During this time there was a substantial incorporation of FBOs into the formal welfare system, not least because they represented exploitable resources with which to cut welfare costs. Congregations and local community groups, as well as more established organisations [such as Barnardo’s (now secularised), Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), English Churches

Housing Group, NCH Action for Children, and the Salvation Army] accepted the opportunity to expand their services in the community through greater delivery of public service contracts. However, FBOs in receipt of statutory funding soon found their organisational autonomy eroded, under pressure to adopt forms, practices and goals dictated by their funders (Barnes, 2006; Billis and Harris, 1992; 1996; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Harris, 1995; 1998; Smith and Lipsky, 1993; Salamon and Anheier, 1996; Wolch, 1990).

The New Labour government's policies of joined-up governance and partnership with the Third Sector certainly assisted this trend (Buckingham, 2009; Carmel and Harlock, 2008; May et al, 2005). After 1997, welfare reforms resulted in new and more complex relationships between central and local government and their nonstatutory partners. New Labour's 'compacts' with the Third Sector involved a recognition both of the inherent strengths therein (local awareness, creativity, expertise, and so on) and of the need for the state to act strongly to ensure issues of quality control and policy direction. Accordingly, since 2001 there has been a greater recognition of the contribution faith groups bring to the public sphere (DCLG, 2008a; 2008b; Dinham, 2009; Edwards, 2008; Harris et al 2003; Home Office, 2004; LGA, 2002), especially in terms of their heightened role in urban policy and regeneration (Cairns et al, 2005; Taylor, 2003). Across the political spectrum, faith communities have increasingly become acknowledged as repositories of resources, mobilising and training volunteers, providing venues and funding which provide a suitable platform to engage with socially excluded people (Furbey and Macey, 2005; Home Office, 2004; ODPM, 2005). Within urban governance faith groups offer a ready-made source of community representation that can be utilised in consultation and partnership exercises that help to "plug the governance deficit" (Lowndes and Smith, 2006, page 7) especially in hard-to-reach and disadvantaged communities. The 'Third Way' ideologies of neocommunitarianism, social capital, and active citizenship (Giddens, 2002) envisaged both a philosophical realignment with particular religious values and a series of practical opportunities for a new and more sympathetic involvement of faith groups in the mainstream political life of the UK (Scott et al, 2009).<sup>2</sup> The tendering procedures adopted increasingly spelt out exactly how agencies should fulfil their contracts—and along with strictly enforced performance targets, these technologies were designed to ensure that nonstatutory partners were 'fit' for a role in state-orchestrated programmes. FBOs therefore benefited from their status of 'fitness' for public service, but performance technologies may have induced processes of self-regulation that resulted in a realpolitik of compliance (Newman, 2000; Wolch, 2006).

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<sup>2</sup> The influence of Olasky's (2000) critique of big government in tackling social problems, and the comparative strengths of faith groups in delivering welfare, also gained particular purchase with the Conservative Party (see Harris et al, 2003)

The current Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government’s idea of the ‘Big Society’ has added what we regard as a more invidious form of roll-back neoliberalism, seeking to marshal FBO activity as legitimacy for its conservative communitarian vision. Although Big Society is sometimes dismissed as a mere rhetorical device, others argue that this political banner embodies a shift in the governing rationality of public policy in the UK (Barnett et al, 2011), and call for the deconstruction of the intellectual and political heritage of the Big Society, its conceptualisation of citizenship, responsibility, and civil society, and the uneven implications the project will have on different scales (Barnett et al, 2011). In practical terms, the Big Society idea seems paradoxical to many Third Sector organisations—seeming to endorse their involvement in public service provision, yet at the same time pursuing notions of smaller government through austerity measures in public spending that result in the loss of previously available support funds for these activities. Interestingly, the Anglican–Catholic theologian and conservative communitarian think-tanker, Philip Blond, is increasingly acknowledged as an influence behind the Big Society idea (Coombs, 2009; 2010; Harris, 2009). Blond’s (2010) *Red Toryism* draws extensively from the Radical Orthodoxy School of theology (Milbank and Oliver, 2009) which urges Christians to recolonise the secular public arena. While some faith groups see the Big Society as a recognition of what they are already doing in their social activism and an opportunity to take it further, other dissenting voices are concerned that the Big Society represents a suffocating and colluding return to Christendom in which revolutionary Christian hope is translated into passive acceptance of the current world order (see *Common Wealth*, 2010). Either way, the continuing narrative of FBOs as mere marionettes of neoliberal government remains undiminished in the current era.

### **3 Pathways Ltd: one of neoliberalism’s little platoons?<sup>3</sup>**

The ‘welfare-to-work’ or ‘workfare’ sector has been a key arena in which the governing of neoliberal subjectivities via the Third Sector has been recognised in the UK as elsewhere (Dean, 2007). Organisations involved in providing employment training and advice have inevitably been swept up in broader analyses of a neoliberal moralisation of the poor, and deemed to be incorporated in the wider task of imposing appropriate behaviour on unemployed people through strict motivational requirements and motivational engineering (McDonald and Marston, 2005). The influence of FBOs in this sector has increased over recent years through the work of large-scale programmes, such as the Salvation Army Employment Plus services, and through smaller, more localised organisations such as Pathways Ltd. (Williams, 2012). Founded in London in 1989, Pathways was inspired by the vision of a

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<sup>3</sup> Pathways Ltd. is a pseudonym. The organisation concerned remains active in the London area.



few local Christian church leaders who recognised that serving their community needed to transcend traditional ideas of 'getting people into church'. Accordingly, the social and religious capital inherent in these local churches began to be mobilised in an attempt to address issues of unemployment (and related crime and social exclusion) in their locality. Pathways began at a small scale, with a few volunteers who organised employment-preparation courses that offered local people individual advice and guidance on how to succeed in the job market. Initially these courses were operated on a charitable basis, with volunteers going door to door in local estates to offer a free service to local people who were not reached by, or were disillusioned with public sector employment services. By the early 1990s Pathways had significantly extended the scope of its services, not only by running adult literacy and computer competency courses for local residents, but also by providing language teaching and personal counselling services to other groups, including undocumented migrants and asylum seekers and people recovering from mental illness. These operations remained reliant on charitable funding; in part because of the aversion of left-wing local government to any formal involvement by Christian groups in local welfare.

However, with the increasing opportunities opened up by central government during the 1990s for funded partnerships with FBOs, and the significant devolution of welfare tasks to nongovernmental agencies over the period, Pathways was required by political circumstances to consider the possibility of accepting state funding for its work. The crunch came in 1997, when the Labour government's "New Deal for the Unemployed" started to scoop up the clients that Pathways was working with; either the rationale and scope of the organisation had to change significantly, or it would have to continue its work as a formal partner of government. After very considerable internal debate—focusing at least in part on the question of whether the distinctive faith motivation of the organisation could be maintained when accepting government funding—Pathways submitted a successful bid for Voluntary Sector Option contract under the New Deal that enabled them to work with around 500 people per annum providing employment training and placements with local charities and voluntary organisations in the area. For a decade or so, Pathways became a large-scale local service provider, but by 2007 its New Deal contracts had been discontinued, and replacement bids under the new Pathways To Work and Big Lottery schemes were unsuccessful. As a consequence, several of its services had to be closed and some sixty staff were lost, although it currently retains around forty staff and a similar number of volunteers. In some ways, Pathways has once again shrunk down to its core foci—preparing young people and new immigrants for employment and meeting the needs of the hard-to-reach long-term unemployed, although it has also become involved in new specialist services for ex-offenders and providing Foodbank services. It would be all too easy to regard Pathways as a typical case of how an FBO becomes incorporated into neoliberal governance, as a little platoon first

co-opted into the ideology and practice of workfare in such a way as to lose its faith-motivated identity, and then spat out by that same governmental machine when fiscal restrictions led to public sector spending cuts, not only in major welfare programmes but also in smaller-scale local authority support for Third Sector activity. However, we want to present three lines of argument to suggest that the characterization of FBOs as little platoons co-opted by the state into a shadow state apparatus that dictates a hegemonic neoliberal *modus operandi* within the Third Sector (Wolch, 1990; 2006) represents a rather lopsided analytical conclusion.

#### **4 Contesting the idea of neoliberal co-option of FBOs**

Our first challenge to the idea that FBOs serve as little platoons in the service of neoliberal governance stems from the emerging critique of oversimplified conceptualisations of changing governmentality. It has been emphasised elsewhere (see for example Barnes and Prior, 2009; Barnett, 2005; 2009; Barnett et al, 2008; Conradson, 2008; May et al, 2005) that neoliberalism is not best understood as a static end-game, or as a framework that is somehow parachuted, top-down, so as to transform different spatial-temporal contexts. Rather, we can conceive of a more dynamic process of 'neoliberalisation' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Springer, 2010), presenting neoliberalism as a fabrication, co-constituted in contingent, often contradictory, assemblages and alliances, and as prone to subversion in various sites and spaces (Barnett, 2009). Rather than a seemingly monolithic force 'out there' that effortlessly reproduces itself, recognising neoliberalism-as-assemblage<sup>4</sup> helps to trace the specific set of resonances, the precarious maintenance work required to make durable these convergences, and the mundane, hybrid, and mutating processes that lead to different variegations of neoliberalism. Crucially, for critical geographers willing to trace the precarious and messy fabrication of neoliberal forms and practices, this approach renders neoliberalism and its processes of reproduction inherently fragile and open to contestation (Larner, 2003). Accordingly, we want to argue that neoliberalism, as a political project and a mode of governmentality, has at least in part become assembled through particular configurations of religion and the secular, and that these co-constitutional practices can lead to contestation as well as incorporation.

In conceptual terms, therefore, we want to issue two cautions about the framing of FBO activity through the analytic of roll-out neoliberalism. The first concerns the way the concept of hegemony—the notion that power subordinates through the production and maintenance of consent—has been applied to the analysis of neoliberal discourses, technologies, and subjectivities, particularly in

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<sup>4</sup> See Connolly's (2008) interpretation of Deleuze's critique of capitalism as axiomatic, comprising numerous coexisting entanglements with dense tangles and loose ends, where each element is not reducible to others.

accounts of governmental alignment and capture of faith-based and voluntary organisations in service of neoliberal goals. This analytical approach uncritically overstates the ways governmental targets, objects, and organisational cultures are automatically realised, normalised, and internalised in the day-to-day workings of FBOs. In doing so it ignores the complex and often contradictory negotiation work needed to maintain, reproduce, and contest these regimes of practices, and thus effectively renders invisible a significant arena of subversion and resistance within the trappings of neoliberal governance (Barnes and Prior, 2009). The second concerns the more general employment of neoliberalism as an analytical and explanatory framework. We want to argue there is a need to examine the contextual underpinnings of the revalorisation of faith groups as public actors; otherwise we are left with a reified account of neoliberalism as an all-persuasive process acting independently to reconfigure the welfare landscape (Barnett, 2005; 2009; Barnett et al, 2008; Larner, 2000; Springer, 2010). By attending to the co-constitution of religion, secularism, and neoliberalism, as well as questioning issues of power, agency, and subversion within neoliberal systems of governance, ideological explanations of state retrenchment and Third Sector incorporation can be made sensitive to the ways neoliberalism is itself a performative assemblage, relying on mundane processes and practices (Larner, 2003).

A particular problem here has been the combination of neo-Marxian perspectives on statehood and political-economic restructuring with post-Foucauldian accounts of governmentality that stress self-regulation and the micro-conduct of populations (see Barnett, 2005). This analytical fusion has been deployed to “unpack the precise mechanisms that give central state authorities the reach and capability to steer the activities of local institutions” (MacLeavy, 2008, page 1715), demonstrating how top-down government programmes ‘neoliberalise’ economies, institutions, and subjects on the ground, through mundane processes of calculation, self-regulation and subjectification. However, the congruity of these analytic perspectives has been disputed (Barnett, 2009; Barnett et al, 2008; Pykett et al, 2010), especially in the context of welfare restructuring and Third Sector incorporation (Bondi and Laurie, 2005; Fyfe, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Larner and Butler, 2005; MacLeavy, 2008; Trudeau and Veronis, 2009) on the grounds that it has resulted in a number of problematic interpretations of rationality and technology that overstate the power of central government to categorically discipline and morph Third Sector organisations into neoliberalised puppets.

Neoliberalism as a political rationality refers to a specific form of organising the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship (Brown, 2006) in which there is an explicit imposition of a particular form of market rationality on the noneconomic spheres. A key concern here is the apparent effortlessness with which particular programmes of government are assumed to be neoliberal, and particular processes are accepted as the product of neoliberal ideology. The social sphere is often only

considered as a contextual factor shaping the variability of neoliberalisation; an arena of reaction deemed relevant in accounts of welfare restructuring only insofar as it is the object of state administration in the interests of economic efficiency. In this way, investigation of Third Sector organisations such as FBOs “lends itself to kind of cookie-cutter typification or explanation, a tendency to identify any program with neo-elements as essentially neo-liberal” (Rose et al, 2006, pages 97–98). Conradson (2008) specifically warns against this temptation to interpret FBOs solely through the conceptual lens of pseudo-governmental normalisation and neoliberal subjectification, calling instead for closer empirical scrutiny of the organisational and ethical precepts that have helped reform faith-based practices from charity to social and skills development. In this way, what appears as right-of-centre neoliberalism may actually turn out to be something rather different, connected to a rediscovery of theological precepts of wholeness, justice, and human dignity:

“ A key element of this analysis, for present purposes, is the notion that charitable endeavour has the potential to become complicit in the maintenance of client deprivation. One might detect apparent echoes of right-of-centre arguments about service-induced dependency here, perhaps suggesting a degree of organisational capture by the wider neo-liberal social policy culture. However, interviews with staff instead suggested that this position was derived from a social work emphasis on client empowerment and various strains of liberation theology. This left-of-centre mix of thought was informing a particular evolution in the Mission’s practice of voluntary welfare provision” (Conradson, 2008, page 2129).

We therefore need to be critically hesitant before prematurely labelling discourses of welfare dependency, responsibility, and empowerment as intrinsically ‘neoliberal’, and we might instead analyse the disparate streams of rationality that produce fundamentally different landscapes of political intelligibility and possibility in different social milieux.

Equally it seems important to question any assumption that top-down governmental rationalities have an inherent strategic intentionality that somehow automatically produces neoliberal subjects. Barnett et al (2008) have argued that political rationalities do not entail at any stage of production a singular logic, but rather invoke multiple and contested rationalities that are negotiated, made durable, and disseminated in praxis (also see Barnett, 2009). It follows that we need to focus less on what particular actors want to happen, and more on how plans are played out in a field of contestation against other actors with their own ‘wants’ (see Li, 2007). In other words, intentions—even the intentions of powerful actors—are simply the most visible aspect of much larger and more complex mechanisms through which outcomes are produced, reproduced, and transformed (Li, 2007). Rationalities, then, are co-constituted through praxis, and it cannot necessarily be assumed even if we can accept

governmental intentions as neoliberal that these intentions will not be resisted and transformed, rather than slavishly followed, by actors such as FBOs. Accordingly, analyses that simply picture FBOs as wearing the cloak of neoliberalism are prone to turn a blind eye to how FBOs may seek to refashion the garment and its cloth because of the theo-ethical attributes (see Cloke, 2010) of their motivation that serve to co-constitute the nature and practice of their participation.

The technologies of neoliberal governance are understood as the means by which individuals and groups are governed according to particular political rationalities. The incorporation of FBOs into contracted service delivery has been understood as a “translation mechanism” (Trudeau and Veronis, 2009), by which faith-based praxis creates “active participants in generating the types of changes and new relationship entailed in policies that promote state devolution and privatisation” (page 1130). Thus, regardless of their idiosyncratic values and practices, FBOs are typically viewed as inextricably enacting macroscale programmes of welfare restructuring and neoliberal governance. Technologies of government are also understood as ensuring that the intended outcomes and processes of government policy are brought about within the activities of contracted services providers. Bondi (2005) and Fyfe (2005) detail how governmental mechanisms of new public management, monitoring, and audit have ‘professionalised’ Third Sector organisations, leading to the corporatisation and neutralisation of alternative ideologies and ways of being among voluntary and faith-based agencies (Jenkins, 2005). In this way, governmental technologies are seen to “exert power at a distance by normalising particular preferred approaches or procedures within the voluntary sector” (Buckingham, 2009, page 245).

However, this account of institutional isomorphism towards neoliberal logics and techniques raises a number of critical questions concerning the issue of power, agency, and resistance. In accounts of governmentality, the exercise of power through governmental technologies is often conceptualised as always and necessarily operating as intended and as successful in meeting the objectives concerned (Clarke et al, 2007; Marston and McDonald, 2006; O’Malley et al, 1997). Little, if any, attention is given to the different ways in which organisations resist, revise, or modify government rationalities and technologies. Resistance is typically understood in terms of those individuals and organisations that remain separate from governmental schemes and funding, thereby remaining at liberty to challenge neoliberalism *from the outside*. We are thus presented with an over-easy dichotomy whereby actors are either successfully incorporated into overriding rationalities and thereby made into neoliberal agents and subjects, or maintain a position outside of neoliberal subjectification in order to engage in marginalised resistance.

Moreover, as Prior (2009) argues, resistance takes multiple forms; oppositional/counter agency is only one form of subversion. In a similar vein to Lisky's (1980) influential work on street-level bureaucrats, Barnes and Prior (2009) challenge governmentality perspectives by providing a more sophisticated account of how government policy is subverted by the agency of insiders—of staff and clients. We want to argue, then, that, while governmental rationalities and technologies may reduce space for autonomy and discretion by encoding certain behaviours, they cannot be assumed to dictate what happens in particular contexts. However robust or definitive specific strategies and technologies may be, what actually happens on the ground is contingent on the interaction of rationalities and technologies on the one hand, and the agency of both practitioners and clients on the other. Agency, here, refers to the ways staff, service users, and volunteers in public service organisations “interpret and reinterpret policy; negotiate their own values, identities and commitments in relation to the way in which they are encouraged and exhorted to act; determine what they consider is the right thing to do in particular circumstances; and challenge or resist identities that are offered to or imposed on them by government” (Barnes and Prior, 2009, page 3). Prior (2009, page 29) identifies three separate forms of this subversion. The first can be understood as *revision*, whereby practitioners adopt alternative strategies and technologies that modify or ‘bend’ official policy and practice towards different outcomes. This could be said of an FBO fulfilling a government contract but doing so in a different way or bringing additional values and practices insofar as it changes intended policy outcomes. The second is *resistance*, whereby clients develop alternative strategies or technologies in response to specific situations, in order to achieve outcomes other than those prescribed in official policy. The third is *refusal*, and refers to a more passive mode of response to the official prescriptions of government policy, whereby organisations, staff, or clients disengage with official rationalities and technologies of government. This can take the form of refusing the terms of engagement, identities, and obligations imposed by government.

Accounts of how the rationalities and technologies of governance serve to neoliberalise the Third Sector often seem to underestimate this crucial *emergent space of resistance*, largely because analytics of governmentality have tended to focus primarily on what the authorities wanted to happen at the expense of how such rationalities materialise and connect with dissipate entities on the ground (McKee, 2009). This disregard to the messiness of the empirical can lead to totalising accounts of the way rationalities and technologies automatically realise and normalise themselves in organisational practices and subjectivities. Such realisation of power effects from governing rationalities and technologies cannot be taken as given, or ‘read off’ from the government ambitions (Clarke et al, 2007, page 22). On the contrary, the assemblage of neoliberalism within these spaces is contingent on the inculcation of governmental rationalities and technologies on the ethical agency of both the

practitioner and client, whose performance is inextricably a space of deliberation, interpretation, and potential subversion of the intended processes and outcomes of government policy.

## **5 The scope and activities of FBOs**

Our second challenge to the idea that FBOs are state-mobilised little platoons in the service of neoliberal hollowing out of the welfare state draws on research into the scope of FBO activity in the UK (Cloke et al, 2009), which demonstrates that FBOs operate in complex roles that defy easy stereotyping as either ‘insider’ pseudo-governmental contract partners, plugging the gap where local and central state activity has retreated, or as small ‘outsider’ charities with low capacity for welfare praxis. Rather, FBOs represent a spectrum of different faith-based involvements in various domains of welfare—including homelessness, debt and working poverty, asylum, community regeneration, elderly and disability, young people and children—reflecting a rich tapestry of different ideologies, capacities and practices which take variegated forms in different organisations. In most areas of social welfare there is prominent representation from FBOs, which in some cases are the sector leaders: for example, in the areas of homelessness services (The Salvation Army) and disability (Livability) (see May et al, 2005).

A significant proportion of FBO activity does operate on the inside of neoliberal governance. At a national level, FBOs have accepted invitations from the state to become involved in advisory and even policy-forming capacities; they have acted as part of government initiatives to bring private and Third Sector investment into mainstream service provision (for example, in the building of new schools) and they have tendered for local contracts to supply services (for instance, in the fields of homelessness and care for the elderly). Some FBOs may therefore be regarded as insider organisations, working within neoliberal frameworks of responsibility and target culture. However, there is evidence that not all FBOs should be portrayed as docile subjects co-opted under institutional pressures of their funders. Rather, FBOs have been shown to employ a number of “strategies and tactics to satisfy state mandates, and at the same time, satisfy the objectives and values outlined in the organisation’s mission” (Trudeau, 2008; Trudeau and Veronis, 2009, page 4). For instance, FBOs are responding differently to the tactical question of how to present themselves in the public sphere of service provision. Some FBOs, such as Barnardo’s (working with children and young people) have chosen to present themselves as professional, secularised organisations to avoid the idea that they may be partisan. Others, however, have maintained their religious character, and are presenting themselves in different ways: for example, Faithworks (Chalke, 2002) adopts a deliberately Christian position in order to act as a faith-based voice in ethical/ political and practical debates on social policy and action;

and the Salvation Army, while remaining staunchly Christian in its approach, allies itself with more postsecular ideas of unconditional, nonproselytising service. Therefore, isomorphic pressures on FBOs should not be presented as purely coercive—resulting from formal and informal pressures exerted through legal, financial, and technical requirements of the state or other organisations upon which FBOs depend (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Rather, FBOs often adopt the imitative or mimetic behaviour of ‘successful’ organisational solutions and structures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, in Garland and Darcy, 2009, page 758), presenting themselves as professional and ‘fi t partners’, while maintaining alternative values and practices ‘on the ground’ that retain a capacity for performative subversions of official government strategies.

However, not all FBO activity is insider activity, as we can illustrate in three important respects. First, at the city level, there are many FBOs that do not become incorporated in the financial or political frameworks of contracted service provision, with all of the strings associated with being on the inside of public policy. Evidence [for example, from the homelessness sector (see Cloke et al, 2010)] demonstrates that some FBOs remain as outsiders to government policy, using voluntary resources to fulfil advisory and caring roles that are not nested within joined-up local servicing. Some of these outsider organisations pursue philosophies and objectives of care which contravene the state’s insistence on responsible neoliberal subject-citizenship. This factor can clearly be seen in the provision by FBOs of soup runs for on-street homeless people, thereby serving people on-the-street when government policy is infatuated by target-driven reductions in on-street forms of homelessness (see Johnsen et al, 2005).

Secondly, although it is sometimes assumed that insider FBOs subjugate their faith motivation to the frameworks of governance that envelop them, it has been demonstrated that the incorporation of faith-motivated activity can enable subtle but significant shifts in moral and ethical politics from within. In some cases these shifts will arise from the way in which care and service are performatively brought into being by staff and volunteers, creating both a localised fragrance of care that can deviate from professionalised uniformity, and a groundswell of experience which at national levels can cumulatively stand in countercultural opposition to the edicts of neoliberalism (see Cloke et al, 2009; Conradson, 2003). For example, government regeneration initiatives such as Local Strategic Partnerships seek out local community representatives, congregations, and FBOs as prospective partners under a pragmatic and instrumental rationale to access ‘hard-to-reach’ people for whom decades of government social policy have failed. In our research with FBOs across the country, one spokesman of a prominent mosque in London that receives various funds from different governmental



departments and philanthropic organisations to deliver health access, education, and employment programmes, stated that within funding contracts:

“ There is no pressure to water down the faith element. The faith-based ethic is central to the way projects are run—faith is crucial, it is a useful tool to inspire people, for example, getting the parents to encourage their children to go to school—if the Imam goes to talk to them it would hold a lot more weight because he is a pillar of the community, he is respected by the parents; and similarly, for all the people trying to find work, if there is a faith-based element about why they should find work, and there’s a religious aspect surrounding it, then they’ll be more inclined to be more proactive in trying to find something and doing some work.”

This would seem to present evidence both that governments are often content to tap into FBO networks, and that, where necessary, the faith ethos performed within these networks can be left unchallenged by this apparently insider status.

Thirdly, some of the national-level FBOs such as The Salvation Army and the Church Urban Fund, which have been willing to use state funding for some of their activities, are publicly active in contesting contemporary social conservatism. Although it can be argued (see Dinham, 2008; also see Goode, 2006, page 210) that prominent FBOs have abandoned a neo-Marxist critique of individuation, and become content with approaches that emphasise active citizenship at the local level, there remains an obdurate streak of prophetic radicalism among some campaigning NGOs that has successfully placed structural interpretations of international poverty and debt on the public agenda. Some of the most remarkable political protests of recent decades have not only been organised in conjunction with FBOs such as Christian Aid, but have featured ethically inspired demands to Drop the Debt, Make Poverty History, Cut the Carbon, and so on that have brought together faith-motivated protestors with others in a positively postsecular display of counterhegemony. With regard to poverty in the UK, many prominent campaigning FBOs [such as Church Action on Poverty (CAP), Barnardo’s and Housing Justice] and faith–secular protest movements (such as Get Fair, Living Wage, and Still Human Still Here) have been active in mobilising public concern around counterhegemonic rationalities of the poor, and translating these concerns into feasible policy alternatives.

For example, in 2003 CAP and the Community Pride Initiative, Manchester jointly created the Participatory Budgeting Unit which establishes schemes to enable local people experiencing poverty to decide how new public investment should be best spent. In July 2007, citing CAP’s pilot work, Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced that all local authorities should be doing some form of participatory budgeting within five years. Since then, over 150 local authorities have asked CAP for some form of help or support, and they have identified a new round

of pilots in various parts of the country. In so doing, CAP has become the lead agency for participatory budgeting in the UK, and is now working with other public agencies such as health authorities and police forces around the potential for participatory budgeting work on pooled budgets. Another CAP initiative, entitled Changemakers, aims to develop the capacity and skills of the members of socially and economically disadvantaged communities across England, so that they can become both better equipped to identify and help meet their own needs, and able to participate more fully in local regeneration processes, and in the development of effective local and national urban policy. In some deprived areas of Manchester, Changemakers has mobilised over forty faith groups, community groups, and refugee organisations to enable local people to set the agenda in changing their communities, sometimes challenging the orthodoxy of state-directed programmes. This initiative represents an attempt to sponsor participatory forms of democratic activity alongside representative mechanisms—wherein the poorest and most marginalised communities are not conceived as powerless or indeed the ‘problem’ to be solved through government intervention, but rather as agents of change whose collective voice can begin to establish new political spaces capable of augmenting, challenging, or even overturning the tables of power as currently structured.

In each of these three ways, it seems inadequate to understand FBO activity simply in terms of an incorporated role in neoliberal governance. Not only is there often a disconnection between the commentaries, values, practices, and beliefs of FBOs responding to urban social issues and extant neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies (Beaumont 2008a; 2008b; Beaumont and Dias, 2008; Cloke et al, 2010; Conradson, 2008; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Pacione, 1990—see also Barnett et al, 2008; Cloke et al, 2007; May et al, 2005), but the idea of a simple dichotomy between insider and outsider organisations seems inadequate to reflect the complex positionalities and relationships between FBOs and local and central government policies.

## **6 Contesting the neoliberal co-option of Pathways Ltd**

Our third challenge to the idea of FBOs as little neoliberal platoons draws on our specific example of the FBO Pathways. The previously argued conceptual challenges are supplemented here with an empirical challenge to the assumption that FBOs will inevitably become co-opted into neoliberal rationalities in the performance of their role within state-funded programmes. Empirical understandings of why and how Pathways became involved in delivering government welfare-to-work programmes serves to pose further questions about the rationalities and technologies that supposedly underpin the co-option of faith-based welfare services into the government-orchestrated neoliberal project. Over the first decade of its activity Pathways delivered programmes that were detached from

formal labour-market activation policies. Effectively, the founders of Pathways set up an ‘outsider’ organisation as a direct response to what were perceived as the perniciously unjust socioeconomic and political policies of government. As one of the founding members of Pathways put it:

“ how the state could simply abandon people ... we set up [Pathways] because something needed to be done ... we wanted to bring hope into often hopeless situations where people are visibly suffering” (interview with one of the founding members of Pathways, 2 October 2010).

The employment-preparation courses established during this period differed significantly from the governmental norms encapsulated within labour-market activation and welfare-to-work policies. For example, the Pathways courses made no use of sanctions to ensure client compliance, and there were no repercussions if clients failed to ‘work the programme’, compared with the likelihood within state-based systems of benefits being stopped as punishment for the failure to fulfil various behavioural and motivational requirements.

The decision by Pathways to bid for New Deal contracts was one of necessity. Many members of staff and of support churches were critical of the philosophy and methods of New Deal’s welfare-to-work programme, and fearful that government money would jeopardise their person-centred ethos and religious independence. Their service had been established in opposition to mainstream programmes which were perceived as operating in a contractual and impersonal manner; as one interviewee put it, “as if people were ‘numbers’ on an excel spreadsheet (interview with a current member of staff at Pathways, 9 July 2009). There was concern that the New Deal technologies of strict time limits, targeted outcomes, and the threat of sanction to elicit compliance were completely ‘out of sync’ with Pathways’ ethic of voluntary participation and unconditionality. The decision to deliver New Deal programmes thereby arose from a critical pragmatism. It was *critical* in the sense that they were aware of the likely tensions that would arise between Pathways’ ways of doing things and that of the government; it was *pragmatic* because members wanted to continue working with their existing clients, and if they were to continue this work anyway they might as well receive financial support from the government to do so and expand the scope of their services.

However, this critical pragmatism was implemented according to a significant organisational ethos and performed in alignment with a strong ethical commitment between staff and clients, such that Pathways staff can be seen as subverting the ethical rationalities of welfare-to-work in their delivery of the programme. For example, the organisational ethos of Pathways was founded on the precept that unemployed clients are not idle or feckless but rather circumstantially disadvantaged from lack of education or training which has had consequences on their job opportunities and motivation.

Pathways was therefore set up to address the “whole person to give them the fullness of life” (interview with a previous manager of Pathways, 2 October 2010). The founding churches never intended this approach to be directly evangelistic or proselytising; rather they designed Pathways to be a vehicle for local churches to help reduce unemployment as part of their expression of ‘faith in practice’. The dominant theo-ethical vision that narrates the organisation’s social action is that it is “building the Kingdom of God predominantly by helping people overcome the barriers to employment and have a more abundant life” (extract from Pathways website). This approach involves “freeing people from oppression in all its forms (social, economic, physical and spiritual)”, “healing any damaged sense of self-worth, security and feelings of significance”, and coming into a “living relationship with Jesus”. In fact, the organisation was critical of overt displays of proselytisation, instead hoping clients develop an understanding of the Christian faith by seeing faith-in-action through the attitudes and performances of staff. Great emphasis is laid by the organisation on staff behaviour and values to ensure no one is discriminated against: “all people we serve are to receive respect, value, love, care, patience, positive feedback, encouragement, integrity, individual attention”.

We want to suggest that these theologically inspired ethical approaches have challenged the dominant rationalities that otherwise characterise welfare-to-work. The conception of *caritas*—God’s love for all people—in the context of welfare provision questions the distinctions made in modern society about the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’, and the pursuit of unconditionality led the staff at Pathways to subvert the restrictive eligibility criteria of New Deal programmes. For example, many of the clients Pathways worked with were considered ‘chaotic’ and ‘hard-to-help’ by mainstream services due to past behavioural violations of the codes of conduct and behavioural expectations placed on them by case workers in the job centre. However, Pathways pooled funds from donations and other funding streams in order to offer these kinds of ‘ineligible’ clients the same opportunities as those considered eligible by government targets. In this way, people from whom the state had withdrawn statutory support (asylum seekers, single homeless people, and so on) came to benefit from government-funded programmes. Indeed, neoliberal welfare-to-work programmes are often criticised as ‘cherry picking’ or ‘creaming’ the most qualified unemployed into jobs while marginalising the long-term unemployed who are hardest to help. In contrast, as the Pathways manager told us:

“ One of the challenges the government faces is flexibility, and that’s very hard on a national level, but it is where local organisations can be, responsive to local needs, and that’s what is ultimately everyone’s needs are different, particularly when you are working with people with

complex backgrounds, environments and needs—have a number of barriers to integration to mainstream society. For someone who has just been made redundant from the banks—they've got their stuff in order, all they need is another job. They can be easily processed and find something. Compare that to someone who has never worked— third or fourth generation unemployed – has a whole load of other things going on. You need to get alongside that person over time and build trust, build relationship—the person will say ok I'm going to try and do something different here. And it's that group of people who government are trying to reach but can't. I've heard ministers say the focus is on those who have just lost jobs back into employment, so the hardest to reach are just pushed further away from the labour market. The quick turnaround of getting people back into work shouldn't be at the exclusion of others otherwise you're just storing up problems for yourself fifteen years down the line" (interview with current Pathways manager, 9 July 2009).

In this way, Pathways' ethic can be described as " 'life-first' approach to welfare-to-work: an approach that would place a person's life-needs, including their need to work, before their duty or obligation to take paid employment' (see also Dean, 2007, page 586; Dean et al, 2003).

Supposedly neoliberal technologies of workfare—characterised by compulsion, sanctions, strict monitoring of targets, and putting the onus on the recipients to find jobs—were also subverted within the operations of Pathways. Although interviewees were keen to position themselves legally as fulfilling the necessary requirements and target criteria of contracts, they were adamant that in its everyday practices and performances the organisation reworked the expected values and practices of welfare-to-work in order to provide a far more person-centred experience for clients compared with the job centre. As a previous manager explains:

" Outcomes became really important in those particular funding regimes, when we did accept contracts we worked very hard to both achieve the outcomes but also be very frank about who we were and how we presented ourselves in applying for those contracts, but also working with people on the coalface as it were, we still remained a very strong Christian ethos. So even though we might have changed the way we did things on the ground as it were, we worked, I suppose, possibly in a slightly subversive way in the sense of, not being dishonest, but saying, we'll take the money but we put in quite a lot of extra work which wasn't required of us from the contracts we took, so with a large number of volunteers involved and staff doing more than what they really needed to. We managed to maintain an ethos on the ground that is person-centred but at the same time reached the level of outcomes required by our funding regimes" (interview with a previous manager of Pathways, 20 October 2010).

The ethos and approach of Pathways begs to differ from the stark ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality that tends to be institutionalised in job centres and reinforced through fixed appointments with case workers, and the threat of sanctions and surveillance. Indeed, we can suggest this to be an emergent space of resistance, where the apparent incorporation into the rationalities and technologies of workfare can more accurately be regarded as a deliberate co-constitution of alternative ethical performances within the overall framework which are capable of subverting the regressive nature of that framework. The revision that takes place occurs through the theo-ethical prompting of extraordinary performances of care that involves a going-beyond-the-call-of-duty by staff and volunteers:

“ There’s something about staff going beyond the call of duty, going around on the weekends and evenings to people’s homes, just to support them, you know, going shopping for an outfit for a job interview – actually going to the job interview with them, sitting outside, giving them confidence and reassuring them there is someone there and they can ask questions if they need to. Other things like that we are not paid to do but staff are doing it and are trying to find ways of working that in, so there is also a real sense as a faith-based organisation, or Christian organisation, I passionately don’t believe that this world is it – that is one of the principles in which we operate, we have clients from all sorts of backgrounds, religions, faiths, whatever leaning, we respect everyone for their own independent choices and positions that is central to how we operate, we operate in a multicultural multi-faith environment with our clients and respecting that is central otherwise they wouldn’t come back” (interview with current Pathways manager, 9 July 2009).

Other interviewees recounted stories of ‘going-beyond-the-self’ that included sharing meals together, remembering birthdays, babysitting, giving informal advice and support, taking people to interviews, and buying a travel pass, going around their house on the weekend and helping them with DIY. Although this theo-ethical praxis is played out within the contractual environment of the New Deal, the enactment of such ethics brings a considerable “challenge to the capitalist version of economics that reduce people to units” and the sociality that developed reciprocal ethical commitments between staff and clients

“ gave people [clients] a real sense of hope that life could be different ... . I know that [personal relationships] makes a difference and I know that is understood and appreciated by our clients. The environment in which people come into here is often commented on by clients—they see something different here, they want to come back. The fact that we get the majority of referral here from friends and family members of past clients is testimony to the

fact they are appreciating what they get when they come here” (interview with current Pathways manager, 9 July 2009)

In Pathways, then, the performance of organisational and individual theo-ethical approaches by staff and volunteers stood between unemployed clients and the technologies designed to govern them according to particular political rationalities. This approach was formed when Pathways was established outside of any contractual partnership with government, and it was continued within the machinery of collaboration, where spaces of resistance were opened up even within contracted workfare environments. The approach continues at a smaller scale now that state funding has diminished. This journey of outsider/insider/outsider status has by no means defined the rationalities concerned; indeed, this illustration indicates the futility of any sharp distinction between insider and outsider organisations in terms of their capacity to shape, as well as be shaped by, the wider neoliberal political environment. This illustration does not suggest that contractual partnership imposes no restrictions on agency, or indeed that the participation of faith-based organisations can be counted on to bring about normative or even consistent performances of care. It does, however, indicate that locally situated activities and agencies do co-constitute grander-scale rationalities, and that the technologies deployed in pursuit of these rationalities can be subverted by the practice of particular ethical precepts and affects, thus confirming that the performative assemblage of neoliberalism can be reshaped locally in such a way as to inculcate resistance and subversion.

## **7 Conclusion: faith and the co-constitutive enactment of and resistance to neoliberalism**

These different strands of argument lead us to suggest not only that FBO activity represents more than a simple outworking of neoliberal governance of the city, but also that neoliberalism cannot be regarded as the principal driving force behind the revision of secularism so as to reinstate religion in the public realm. Indeed, any such framing of the power of neoliberalism takes insufficient account of how the secular inherently accommodates instituted forms of religion. That is, the religious and the secular should not be regarded as stand-alone categories, but rather as mutually constitutive both historically and in the contemporary provision of welfare and care in the city. For example, Smith (2008, page 15) argues that the Enlightenment did not represent “the start of the relentless march of atheism leading to a godless Western society”, but rather it sundered Christian ethics from Christian doctrine, so that the technologies of science were liberated from divine law but politically remained Christian in values. As a consequence, 18th-century Christian theology imbued the secular values of universal egalitarianism, the ethos of teleological progress through the nation-state and Lockean liberalism (demarcating the public and private life of the citizen), to the extent that European

modernity rests on the secularised patterns of Christian thought (see Lash, 2004). As Habermas (2002, page 149) has suggested:

“ Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love.”

Equally, the postwar welfare state, which many herald as the birth of secular welfare, was largely built from the values of Christian philanthropists who pioneered many welfare initiatives in the absence of state activity (Brenton, 1985; Farnell et al, 1994, pages 34–37; Harris, 1995; Prochaska, 2006, Whelan, 1996). Once the welfare state was created, faith groups shifted their direct action to helping those most in need who fell underneath the safety net (Prochaska, 2006). This is evident in the longstanding work of The Salvation Army, Church Army, and St. Vincent de Paul Society. The welfare state made concessions to religion from the onset, incorporating schools, children’s homes, and hospitals with religious connections into the apparatus of the state yet permitting them to continue their work, albeit in a secular way, omitting particular expressions of religion and instituting acceptable modalities (see Holman, 1999; Malesic, 2009; Whelan, 1996). Such evidence of the “ ‘crossing-over’ in the public realm between the religious and secular” (Clope and Beaumont, forthcoming, page 4) suggests that the differentiation between these two realms is not as fixed as is sometimes assumed (Wilford, 2010). Likewise, neoliberalism has not simply brought about a new form of secularism—one that instrumentally incorporates religion rather than excludes it from the public realm (Dias and Beaumont 2010) —but rather that we are witnessing the latest phase of a co-constitutive dynamic between religion and secularism. Faith both enacts neoliberal formations and embodies resistance to them, and it will be tracing these practices and moments of enactment and subversion that will lead to a more nuanced understanding of the FBO phenomenon in the contemporary city.

There are a number of ways in which faith has been ‘brought into’ neoliberal formations, shaping and being shaped by the neoliberal state’s “secularist self-understanding” (De Vries, 2006, page 3) and accommodating the voices of faith groups in the public realm (Baird, 2000; Dias and Beaumont, 2010). Firstly, some religious groups have continued to resist involvement in what they see as the too-political world of social action and protest. The relative silence of such religious groups against the effects of neoliberal ideology and policies, and the particular theologies that lead them to this view, can be argued in some ways to be preserving the seeming inevitability of neoliberalism. Secondly, immigration and religious extremism have brought about something of a resurgence of public religion and raised significant questions for the established structures of secularity, for ideologies of



secularism, and, by implication, for liberal democracy (Gorski and Altinordu, 2008, page 68). This has driven neoliberal governance into close ties with faith groups in a bid to build links with moderate religious groups. Thirdly, in recent years social policy in the UK has been heavily imported from the US policy context (Harris et al, 2003). The remoralisation of welfare ethics and of neoliberal welfare reform has primarily been articulated and promulgated via experience in America, where the alliance of free-market neoliberalism and religious neoconservatives sceptical of the poor's capacities for autonomous self-regulation (Hackworth, 2009; 2012) has helped construct the view among policy makers in the UK that FBOs possess distinctive values in eliciting personal transformation and cultivating individual responsibility (Villadsen, 2007). Fourthly, the personal moral and Christian commitments of several members of the New Labour government, including Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, have played an important part in heightening awareness of faith and politics (Dale, 2001), as well as giving theopolitical legitimacy for 'Third Way' ideologies of neocommunitarianism, social capital, and active citizenship (Timms, 2002). Fifthly, FBOs have been geared up to expand their services through the marketisation of welfare provision and particular forms of contractualism, which has levelled the playing field for faith groups to become bidders for service delivery funding.

However, it is also clear that co-constitutive relations between neoliberalism and religion have been marked by challenges by FBOs to the habitual neoliberal economic metrics and spatialities through which welfare is conceived and articulated. Whilst it is undeniable that the scope and activities of FBOs have expanded in response to neoliberalism, there are at least three broad ways faith can be seen embodying forms of resistance to the governmentalities of neoliberalism. The first concerns the motivations that underpin the burgeoning number of FBOs involved in welfare provision, and the types of social need that FBOs commonly address. In the main, faith groups step in to meet the needs of those people from whom the state has chosen to withdraw its support (for example, single homeless people and asylum seekers). These welfare services are often performed out of criticism of what are perceived as the pernicious and unjust social-economic and political policies of neoliberal government (Beaumont, 2008b). Secondly, FBOs (such as the Pathways example relayed above) often tend to suspend the growing moralisation between deserving and undeserving recipients, and rather affirm a more unconditional gesture of social welfare premised on an ethic of universality and sociality with the other (Romanillos et al, 2012). The reworking of the neoliberal ethics of welfare is not just something that occurs outside the trappings of joined-up governance. Individuals within these insider organisations are less bound to the technologies and ideologies of these governmentalities than is often made out in the narrative of incorporation (Buckingham, 2009), and frontline actions of staff are incremental sites of subverting the intended processes and outcome of government policy (Barnes and Prior, 2009). Thirdly, in addition to these more subtle intermediary practices of subversion

within the system, there is still an obdurate streak of prophetic radicalism among FBOs active in campaigning and political protest. Counter to suggestions that prominent FBOs have abandoned a neo-Marxist critique of individuation and become content with approaches that emphasise 'active citizenship' at the local level (see Dinham, 2008; Goode, 2006, page 210), the prophetic calling of many FBOs to speak truth to power and stand with the poor, vulnerable, and marginalised has not become domesticated or duped into the logics of Third Way, but is alive and active and making itself known in a secular society. Part of what is distinctive about FBOs that challenge neoliberalism is their underlying theo-ethics (Cloke, 2010; 2011), the hopeful imaginations derived from these beliefs-in-action that can provide a shared counternarrative (Hackworth, 2007) against the hegemony of neoliberal politics. In these ways, the interconnections between faith, secularism, and neoliberalism are much more fragmented and variegated than has been argued elsewhere. The ethical agency of organisations and individuals involved in the FBO sector cannot simply be circumscribed by the structures and technologies of neoliberal government, and the connection of religion to contemporary capitalism defies straightforward characterisation as simply a legitimising force complicit in the powers that be. Rather, the ambiguous and contingent entanglement of faith groups working in neoliberal structures reveals specific points of resonance where neoliberalism and faith converge to coproduce neoliberal forms, and dissonance where faith and neoliberalism diverge. Even within the contractual arena of neoliberal governance, the frontline performance of care can often be understood as a site of subversion. In coproducing neoliberal structures of welfare governance, the ethical performance of staff and volunteers in FBOs rework and reinterpret the values and judgments supposedly normalised in the regulatory frameworks of government policy, bringing alternative philosophies of care into play.

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