

**GRSF Working Group – RGS-IBG Annual Conference, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2009**

**New Spaces of Geography of Religion – seven minute think piece**

*Step 1 – a phenomenological and inductive approach*

- **Hancock and Srinivas** (2008) – Religious presence in urban space is ‘**variegated**’ (p 618) (see also ambiguous) as befits the postmodern, postcolonial, city
- ‘Spaces engendered by religious imaginaries and forms of mobility and networks that religion relies on and constitutes’
- ‘the embodied nature of religious urban experience’ (p 617.)

*Step 2 – Two pieces of research by William Temple Foundation*

- Regenerating Communities – A theological and strategic critique (2002-5) – Church Urban Fund
- Religious capital: defining the scope of traditional capitals (2007 – 10) Leverhulme Trust

*Step 3 – Cluster of theories that ‘sort of fit’ observed interaction between religion and urbanisation*

- **Homi Bhabha – Third Space/hybridity** which I use to explore the ways in which religious buildings (as hubs) and religious spaces such as worship, study groups facilitate **spaces of negotiation and translation** between religion, culture, ethnicity and gender that help new identities to emerge that are broadly productive, functioning and wellbeing. Also describes the new **hybridities of practice** which religious groups often develop within contemporary postwelfare and postmodern conditions – practices that fuse explicit and implicit identities, local and global imaginaries, institutional and networked structures. These hybridised practices are evidence of what I am beginning to call spaces of **passionate pragmatism** i.e. the ability of religious groups to generate both (ongoing) traditional but also groundbreaking forms of social welfare and civil participation that combine transcendent worldviews with new technologies and methodologies of civic engagement
- **Soja’s 4<sup>th</sup> urban revolution (*Postmetropolis*)** – do the conditions for the postsecular city and the re-emergence of public faith emerge out of the rubble of the modernist industrial city – is this one of the contours of a new urban form/polity that is still emerging?

*Step 4 – Religious and spiritual capital (WTF definitions – old concepts/new spin)*

- These distinct but conjoined areas of capital describe the distinctive contribution religious groups and individuals make to the social capital field
- Religious capital is the ‘direct contribution to local and national life made by faith groups’ (Baker and Skinner 2006:9)

- Spiritual capital ‘energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition but also a value system moral vision and basis of faith’ (Baker and Skinner, 2006:9)
- With these terms we join the ‘what’ of faith-based participation with the ‘why’ of faith-based motivation.
- This tends to make the secular systems of policy and funding uneasy, but Habermas amongst others argues that within the postsecular city we need to create public spaces that respect transcendent sources of discourse and reasoning (also reference **Cloke’s theo-ethics**)
- **Virtuous cycles of capital production** – if faith-based spaces of participation and action are indeed distinctive or represent ‘added value’ (we still need robust measurement systems for this claim), is it because of this mutual interaction between spiritual and religious capital (i.e. faith/theology and action)? (DIAGRAM)
- Of course spiritual capital is not the sole preserve of religious people so elsewhere I have also developed ideas around **secular spiritual capital**, and perhaps this is one the causal features of a newish space that has also opened up as part of the postsecular city – namely **spaces of rapprochement** (Cloke) or partnership between religious and non-religious actors, and the processes of cognitive and emotional risktaking but also new learning that is prompted on the part of all parties by the opening up of these spaces.

*Step 5 - Spaces of belonging, becoming and participation*

So to recap – by deploying certain the theoretical constructs such a Third Space hybridity and religious and spiritual capital I can trace the emergence of certain spaces. These spaces (rooted and expressed in religious symbolism and practice) often represent a cumulative journey for many religious citizens which unfolds from spaces of **belonging** to spaces of **becoming**, to spaces of **participation** (in an **extending radius or dialogic movement of trust (DIAGRAM)**). Of course, and a big health warning, I go back to the variegated and sometimes ambiguous nature of religious interaction with urban space – in our research we found religious spaces could be spaces of refuge and disengagement (although often with good reason) and sure, sometimes, religious based participation is not good for the health of the *urbs*. But like or loathe it, religion continues to represent a powerful moral, cultural political and social force shaping our contemporary cities.

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