

# INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

**Multifaith Movements and Critical Religious Pluralism:  
Precarity, Performativity and Peacebuilding**

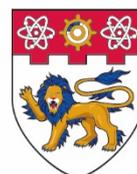
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# **INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS**

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**Multifaith Movements and Critical Religious Pluralism:  
Precarity, Performativity and Peacebuilding**

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## Abstract

We are currently witnessing an intensifying clash between cosmopolitans and anti-cosmopolitans internationally, in which religions are often playing complex and ambivalent roles in promoting or undermining respect for rights and diversity. This paper draws on my and my colleagues research on the global multifaith movement, and the Worldviews of Australia's Generation Z study to make a case for what I call *critical religious pluralism*. Building on Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitan theory, and Judith Butler's critical theory and thinking on precarity and performativity, I argue that there are lessons from the global multifaith movement that can perhaps be useful to contemporary social movements and networks addressing today's most pressing issues. I also contend that a more critical interrogation of religion's capacity to cause harm and violence, which is often lacking in multifaith movements and contemporary research on religions, is needed to stem the anti-cosmopolitan turn and to inform policies and curricula pertaining to religion.

## Introduction

The late 1980s to the mid-1990s can be characterised as a cosmopolitan moment, where respect for diversity and human and environmental rights was growing internationally. Widespread awareness was dawning that modern processes of intensified industrialisation and globalisation were threatening the lifeworld. Concerns about environmental degradation, particularly after the Chernobyl nuclear crisis of 1986, led to growing calls for environmental justice culminating in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, also known as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. A major UN World Conference on Women was also held in Beijing in 1995. These developments were gradual, inspired in large part by the 1948 United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights and the subsequent International Covenants of Rights in 1966, and the rise of non-violent social movements campaigning against war, racism, gender and sexuality inequality, and environmental destruction throughout the 20th Century. These peacebuilding movements resisted attacks on the lifeworld by colonisation, capitalism and patriarchy, and sought to create more just and equal communities and societies in their place. They were radically reflexive, questioning the unequal benefits of modernity and its negative impacts on human and environmental security.<sup>1</sup>

According to Ulrich Beck,<sup>2</sup> the heightened awareness of global risks at the turn of the 21st century created “an unavoidable pressure to cooperate” and served as a “source of new commonalities and interaction networks”. Globalisation, including global communication systems, also contributed to creating a “new space and framework for acting” embodied by social movements at the local and international level in the real world and online.<sup>3</sup> Cosmopolitanism thereby re-emerged as a political philosophy of governance involving state actors and also civil society organisations, with a rights-based framework at its core, to respond to pressing risks.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Beck argued that “[t]he diagnosis of the crisis is: too little cosmopolitan outlook; and the cure: *more* cosmopolitan sense of reality”, and that a growing “*cosmopolitan empathy*” and compulsion for activism, had led to a rise in global protests against violence and injustice, such as those against the Iraq War.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, and as a result of processes of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, a virulent anti-cosmopolitan swing emerged internationally led by people whose perceived that their ontological security and traditional ways of life were being threatened, and who reverted to narrow nationalism and religious ideologies, complete with aggressive intolerances, to preserve their power and privileges.<sup>6</sup> This anti-cosmopolitanism has intensified in recent years, evident in the escalation of populism, nationalism and authoritarianism globally, played out in the Brexit debate in the UK, the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA, and the close ties of conservative religion and state in societies including Russia, Poland, Brazil, and Australia. At the same time, progressives are mobilising against gun violence, racism, violence against women, violence against LGBTIQ people, for animal rights, for refugee rights and against climate change, to counter the negative effects of neoliberalism and anti-cosmopolitanism. This has led to a deepening clash between cosmopolitans and anti-cosmopolitans, at a time when neoliberalism has created a world of increased precarity and vulnerability, and when the results of climate change are now having a palpable impact in many places.<sup>7</sup>

Religion has and continues to play a significant role in both cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan ideologies and social movements. As my colleagues and I have outlined recently, cosmopolitans are socially progressive and welcome all types of diversity, including gender, sexuality, multispecies, cultural and religious

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006; Jürgen Habermas, “New Social Movements,” *Telos* 49 (1981): 33-37; Anna Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement: Global Risks and Cosmopolitan Solutions*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2013; David Held, “Cosmopolitanism: Globalisation Tamed?,” *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003): 465-480.

<sup>2</sup> Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, 23, 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995; Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*.

<sup>5</sup> Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, 5-7, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*; Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*.

<sup>7</sup> Gary D. Bouma and Anna Halafoff, “Initiatives pour Contre L’anticosmopolitisme dans le Contexte Australien”, in *Dix ans plus tard: La Commission Bouchard-Taylor, Succès ou échec?* eds Solange Lefebvre and Guillaume St-Laurent, Montréal: Québec Amérique, 2018, 235-247; Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015; Naomi Klein, *No is not Enough: Defeating the New Shock Politics*, London: Allen Lane, 2017; Rebecca Solnit, “How a Decade of Disillusion gave way to People Power,” *The Guardian*, 30 December 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/29/decade-disillusionment-global-protests>.

diversity. They uphold and defend the rights of diverse groups as long as they do not impinge upon the rights of others. They are concerned about and resist the negative effects of neoliberalism, particularly rising economic inequalities, inhumane treatment of asylum seekers and environmental degradation. They argue that these issues be addressed through policies and practices that recognise the interdependency of all life and an ethics of care that encompasses the entire life world. This cosmopolitan compassion is often inspired by peacebuilding aspects of spirituality and religion. By contrast, anti-cosmopolitans cling to nationalism as an ideology to avoid and address change, as they are threatened by processes of globalisation, and human and animal rights. They are often socially and religiously conservative, fearing and resisting diversities of all kinds, inspired at times by literal and selective readings of religious texts. In their exclusivist and dominionist worldview, religious rights triumph over others' rights, and religious freedoms are evoked to deny the rights of others.<sup>8</sup> Anti-cosmopolitanism can result in anti-cosmopolitan terror, evident in recent years in Islamist and Far-Right extremism,<sup>9</sup> witnessed for example in Sri Lanka and New Zealand.

My earlier research on the global multifaith<sup>10</sup> movement in the 2000s argued that it was a cosmopolitan peacebuilding social movement, given its emphasis on respect for diversity and rights, its critical stance on injustice, and its emphasis on global interdependence.<sup>11</sup> My more recent research has focused on an Australian multifaith youth movement InterAction,<sup>12</sup> a multifaith environmental movement Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change,<sup>13</sup> and a study of the Worldviews of Australia's Generation Z (AGZ) and implications this may have for religious literacy in Australian schools.<sup>14</sup> This paper, draws on data from my research on multifaith movements and the AGZ study to make a case for what I call *critical religious pluralism*, building on Beck's<sup>15</sup> cosmopolitan theory outlined above, and Judith Butler's<sup>16</sup> critical theory and thinking on precarity and performativity discussed below. I do so in order to inform policies, practices and curricula aimed to advance respect for religious diversity, that too often in my opinion do not take a sufficiently critical perspective when it comes to religion.

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<sup>8</sup> Bouma and Halafoff, "Initiatives pour Contrer L'anticosmopolitisme"; Anna Halafoff, Kim Lam, and Gary Bouma, "Worldviews Education: Cosmopolitan Peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 40.3, 2019: 381-395. While cosmopolitans and anti-cosmopolitans represent two extremes of a spectrum, individuals and groups may fall somewhere between these two extremes. There are additional complexities also, such as largely conservative anti-cosmopolitans who are addressing climate change, and largely progressive cosmopolitans who themselves hold or who respect other's right to hold conservative religious points of view on issues pertaining to gender and sexuality. However, this binary of cosmopolitans vs. anti-cosmopolitans is I argue, still helpful to understand current clashes occurring *within* societies and religions, and not between them.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Halafoff, "Riots, Mass Casualties, and Religious Hatred: Countering Anti-cosmopolitan Terror through Intercultural and Interreligious Understanding," in *Controversies in Contemporary Religions* (3 Vols) ed Paul Hedges, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014, 293-312.

<sup>10</sup> As I have explained earlier (see Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 1), terms such a multifaith, interfaith and interreligious are all used to describe gatherings of people belonging to diverse religious traditions. Patrice Brodeur and Eboo Patel ("Introduction: Building the Interfaith Youth Movement," in *Building the interfaith youth movement: Beyond dialogue to action*, eds Eboo Patel and Patrice Brodeur, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006, 1-14, 2) observed that Protestant circles tend to use the term interfaith, while Catholic circles prefer the term interreligious. I have also previously stated that the term interfaith has also historically sometimes been used to describe interaction between two religious' groups, such as Jewish-Christian or Christian-Muslim dialogue and that it is preferred in the USA. By contrast the term multifaith is more often used in the UK and in Australia, inferring that diversity of faiths should be welcomed, similarly to how the term multiculturalism advances respect for cultural diversity (see James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat, *Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-faith Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 4).

<sup>11</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Halafoff, "InterAction Australia: Countering the Politics of Fear with Netpeace," in *The Interfaith Movement: Mobilising Religious Diversity in the 21st Century*, eds John Fahy and Jan-Jonathan Bock, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019, 68-86.

<sup>13</sup> Geraldine Smith and Anna Halafoff (*under review*) "Multifaith Third Spaces: Digital Activism, Netpeace and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change," *Religions*.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Singleton *et al.*, "Australia's Generation Z Study: Australia's Teenagers Negotiating Religion, Sexuality and Diversity. Project Report," ANU: Deakin and Monash Universities, 2019, available at:

<https://sociology.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/australia-s-gen-zs>; Anna Halafoff *et al.*, "Religious Literacy of Australia's Gen Z Teens: Diversity and Social Inclusion," *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 2019, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13617672.2019.1698862>.

<sup>15</sup> Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*.

<sup>16</sup> Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*.

Critical theory does not feign neutrality. It is focused on emancipation and liberation from conditions that enslave us, from all forms of injustice and violence that face the entire lifeworld.<sup>17</sup> Contemporary research on religion has a tendency to try to present religion from the perspective of the religious groups or actors involved in that group in order to understand their viewpoints better. This is an interpretive approach. By contrast a critical approach identifies and problematises aspects of religion that can lead to enslavement, injustice, harm and violence, that I argue are intolerable. Critical theory enables the calling out of such conditions that lead to harm and violence, resistance toward them, and the creation of more just, equitable and non-violent conditions in their place.

It is my view that a critical religious pluralism is more crucial now than ever, as anti-cosmopolitan regressive religious forces gain momentum and threaten the very liberties that cosmopolitans have fought so hard to establish in order to protect and respect diversity, cognisant of human and environmental rights. This critical capacity to think and question is also being curtailed and devalued by neoliberal and autocratic states and leaders, and by the mass media in a post-truth climate of short sound bites. When it comes to religion, demands to obey, not question, still frequently dominate religious and spiritual communities, even ones thought to be progressive. This blind faith in state and/or religious authorities, has led to countless cases of violence, abuse and suffering, that have recently been increasingly exposed and condemned in inquiries into institutional abuse and by the outing of sexual abuse by religious and spiritual leaders emboldened by the #metoo movement, thereby challenging religious authority. These are critical and highly significant developments however as Butler states “we may still query in what ways resistance must do more than refuse a way of life” and “say yes to another”.<sup>18</sup> The critical theorist, as scholar-activist, draws on data to do just that. This paper thereby proposes that the study of progressive multifaith movement’s commitment’s to both cosmopolitan peacebuilding and critical religious pluralism, and also young people’s perspectives on religious and sexuality diversity and strongly held views that religious rights should not trump the rights of others, can provide some insights as to how we can collectively stand up against violence and oppression and strive to create a more liveable life together.

## Precarity, performativity and public assembly

Butler describes how “embodied”, “public assemblies and demonstrations”, such as the Occupy Movement, and more recently we could add the school strikes for the climate, “form unexpectedly... as collective expressions of the popular will... [that] question the legitimacy of the government”.<sup>19</sup> These “transient and critical gatherings”, are “social practices of resistance”, and “plural forms of agency” and “performativity”. As Butler explains, “acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political”.<sup>20</sup> Bodies assemble, strike, hold vigils, and occupy public spaces, in response to the conditions of precarity that endanger them: “it is... *these* bodies, that require employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well as a sense of the future”.<sup>21</sup> These bodies “demand... a more liveable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity”.<sup>22</sup> It is also these bodies that are “on the line” when they do so.<sup>23</sup>

Precarity, Butler states, has been “induced and produced by [neoliberal] governmental and economic institutions” that have “decimated social services” at a time when employment is increasingly temporary.<sup>24</sup> Their emphasis on individual responsibility has “cruelly” eroded the responsibility to care for others.<sup>25</sup> Butler asserts that “public assembly embodies the insight that this is a social condition both shared and unjust, and that assembly enacts a provisional and plural form of coexistence that constitutes a distinct ethical and social

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<sup>17</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1972; reprinted New York, NY: Continuum, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 217.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 7-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 13-15.

alternative to 'responsibilization' in "opposition to induced precarity and its accelerations".<sup>26</sup> The "bodies assembled 'say' we are not disposable"<sup>27</sup> and the "gathering itself signifies persistence and resistance".<sup>28</sup> As Butler explains:

In our individual vulnerability to a precarity that is socially induced, each "I" potentially sees how its unique sense of anxiety and failure has been implicated all along in a broader social world. This initiates the possibility of taking apart that individualizing and maddening form of responsibility in favour of an ethos of solidarity that would affirm mutual dependency, dependency on workable infrastructures and social networks, and open the way to a form of improvisation in the course of devising collective and institutional ways of addressing induced precarity.<sup>29</sup>

Butler<sup>30</sup> cites Adorno as underscoring "the difficulty" of living "a good life within a world in which the good life is structurally or systemically foreclosed for so many".<sup>31</sup> She then goes on to argue that "if this sort of world, what we might be compelled to call 'the bad life,' fails to reflect back my value as a living being, then I must become critical of those categories and structures that produce that form of effacement and inequality".<sup>32</sup> Again Butler<sup>33</sup> cites and quotes Adorno<sup>34</sup> to argue that we must resist and protest against this bad life. The "contemporary politics of performativity" according to Butler "insists upon the interdependency of living creatures as well as the ethical and political obligations that follow from any policy that deprives, or seeks to deprive, a population of a liveable life".<sup>35</sup>

According to Butler "if resistance is to bring about a new way of life, a more liveable life that opposes the differential distribution of precarity, then acts of resistance will say no to one way of life at the same time that they say yes to another".<sup>36</sup> She states that "precarity is the condition against which several new social movements struggle". Butler concludes that:

If I am to live a good life, it will be a life lived with others... since my dependency on another, and my dependability, are necessary in order to live and to live well. Our shared exposure to precarity is but one ground of our potential equality and our reciprocal obligations to produce together conditions of a liveable life.<sup>37</sup>

Butler's insights are similar in ways to the findings of my own study of multifaith movements at the turn of the 21st century, described in detail below. Particularly that an awareness of mutual dependency and responsibility, that I argued are present in many Indigenous, spiritual and religious traditions, can be useful in working toward creating a more liveable life.<sup>38</sup> My study of multifaith movements thereby provides a hopeful and achievable example of how cosmopolitan peacebuilders can mobilise against anti-cosmopolitan forces, which often employ exclusive religious and nativist, nationalistic narratives to build societies where only the privileged few are entitled to a good life, at the expense of others.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 193-194.

<sup>31</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London: New Left Books, 1974, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 199.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 214-215.

<sup>34</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002, 167-168.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 208.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>38</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*.

## Netpeace and the Multifaith Movement

Multifaith engagement between diverse religious traditions internationally well-preceded any organised multifaith movement. The 1893 Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago is typically viewed as the beginning of a global multifaith movement, that celebrated its centenary in 1993. The terrifying and tragic events of September 11, 2001 catapulted religion into the media and public mind, and this resulted in a significant increase in multifaith activities. They were, and continue to be, much-needed in order to reduce misinformation about and negative prejudices against religious groups and people perpetuated by the media and political figures, and to increase religious literacy and interreligious understanding. They were frequently initiated by faith communities, state and UN actors particularly in so-called Western societies as part of peacebuilding and preventing/countering violent extremism strategies.<sup>39</sup> As Sister Joan Kirby – who was the Temple of Understanding's UN Representative during this time – exclaimed, "it's as if the wave is cresting. There's such enormous interest in interfaith dialogue and cooperation" from the grassroots all the way to the UN in the mid-late 2000s.<sup>40</sup>

I have more recently argued that the multifaith wave did crest then, and that by the 2010s, while grassroots and high-level multifaith engagement, activism and education certainly still continued and continues to this day, state and UN interest in and funding for multifaith initiatives began to wane as religiously motivated extremism was no longer the most pressing risk facing humanity and the planet. This lessening of state and UN support was and is not necessarily a negative development as the multifaith movement had mostly been socially progressive and grassroots led pre-2001, and its mainstreaming and inclusion of more conservative religious actors and groups, and closing relationship with state and UN actors had both beneficial and problematic aspects. On one hand it led to multifaith and multi-actor – including religious communities – peacebuilding being taken more seriously, but on the other it did in part reduce the multifaith movement's critical and progressive aspects, that had been much more prevalent within the movement pre-2001.<sup>41</sup>

In my earlier work, I identified four principal aims of the multifaith movement, and proposed a new theoretical framework termed *netpeace*,<sup>42</sup> that remains relevant and shares similarities with Butler's<sup>43</sup> observations on precarity and assembly described above. I built upon Patrice Brodeur's<sup>44</sup> characteristics of the multifaith movement, to identify the multifaith movements main aims as: *developing understanding of diverse faiths and of the nature of reality; challenging exclusivity and normalising pluralism; addressing global risks and injustices; and creating multi-actor peacebuilding networks for common security*.<sup>45</sup>

These aims were all evident during the 1893 Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago, when despite the Christian dominionist agenda of Rev. John Henry Barrows, its two other main organisers Charles Carroll Bonney and Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones shared a genuine desire to develop interreligious understanding.<sup>46</sup> Notable religious leaders from Asia in particular, including Swami Vivekananda, Anagarika Dharmapala, the Right Rev. Soyen Shaku and Harai Ryuge Kinzo were highly critical of Christian universalism, colonialism, and missionary activity at the Parliament. And there were numerous calls to respond collectively to economic injustices and negative stereotyping of religious groups. Participants also engaged in deep theological and philosophical inquiry regarding life's big questions.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Marcus Braybrooke, *Interfaith Witness in a Changing World: The World Congress of Faiths, 1996–2006*, Abingdon: Braybrooke Press, 2007; Diana L. Eck, "Dialogue and the Echo Boom of Terror: Religious Women's Voices after 9/11," in *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations*, eds Akbar Ahmed and Brian Forst, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005 21-28; Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*; Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*; Halafoff, "InterAction Australia".

<sup>42</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*.

<sup>43</sup> Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*.

<sup>44</sup> Patrice Brodeur, "From the Margins to the Centers of Power: The Increasing Relevance of the Global Interfaith Movement," *Cross Currents* 55.1, 2005: 42-53.

<sup>45</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 163.

<sup>46</sup> M. Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*, London: SCM, 1992.

<sup>47</sup> Barrows, John Henry (ed.), *The World's Parliament of Religions*, Chicago, IL: The Parliament Publishing Co., 1893; Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*; D. L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a 'Christian country' has now become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001.

My other main argument was that the multifaith movement has always been responsive to global risks, and that this has determined which actors have a central place at the table. The main focus of the multifaith movement has shifted, from the horrors and injustices of colonialism, to the Holocaust, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the Vietnam war, to Chernobyl and environmental catastrophes, to Islamist and Far-right terrorism, and to climate change.<sup>48</sup> This mutual understanding of one another and the entire lifeworld within the multifaith movement, particularly in the late 20th century, was based on theological and philosophical inquiry and commitment to human and environmental rights-based frameworks. Multifaith leaders were committed to non-violent resolution of conflicts, respect for all beings, countering gender inequality, and often evoked doctrine of interdependence and interconnectedness from Indigenous and Asian cultural and religious traditions.<sup>49</sup>

Scholars and/or activists William Vendley and David Little, described at this time how religious narratives typically “engage in some sort of questioning about what is wrong with the present state of affairs (pathology) and about what religious means should be applied to remedy that condition (soteriology)”.<sup>50</sup> Steven C. Rockefeller also explained that while many religions have generated “anthropocentric, dualistic, hierarchical, and patriarchal ideas and attitudes that are problematic from an ecological as well as a democratic perspective”, at the same time faith traditions also advocate shifting from a self-centred desire to control, compete, and consume to more compassionate, creative and cooperative ways of living.<sup>51</sup> Paul Knitter similarly stated, many religions hold the view that “self-seeking, conflictive individualism can be transformed into... compassionate, cooperative mutuality”.<sup>52</sup>

This “ambivalence of the sacred”,<sup>53</sup> evident in religion’s role in perpetuating cultures of direct and structural violence, and its commitment to peacebuilding, led experts to call for a need to understand religion’s role in violence in order to address it.<sup>54</sup> As I argued in 2013, “by developing an understanding of how religion legitimates violence, rather than denying that it does, religious peacebuilders are better equipped to address the root causes of social problems”.<sup>55</sup>

Multifaith activities include dialogues, large and small gatherings such as meetings, festivals, parliaments and conferences, participating in protests, prayer vigils, interfaith ceremonies, and educational programs carried out in real world and virtual spaces made sacred through bodies’ performativity.<sup>56</sup> I also observed in my research on multifaith movements that such initiatives “are capable of expanding ‘cognitive frames’ from ignorance to mutual understanding” through “communicative and dialogical processes”, “embodied in role models, in personal stories and real relationships”.<sup>57</sup> As two of the participants in my *Netpeace* study, Nurah Amatullah, the Executive Director of the Muslim Women’s Institute for Research and Development in New York and Paul Knitter, then the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture, at Union Theological Seminary in New York elucidated:

<sup>48</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*.

<sup>49</sup> Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*; Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*; Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, “Preface,” in *Ecospirit: Religions and philosophies for the earth*, eds Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2007, xi-xvi; Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995; Roderick Nash, “The Greening of Religion,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed Roger S. Gottlieb, New York/London: Routledge, 194–229; Steven C. Rockefeller, “Faith and Community in an Ecological Age,” in *An Interfaith Dialogue, Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue*, eds Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992, 139-172; Steven C. Rockefeller, “The Wisdom of Reverence for Life,” in *The Greening of Faith: God, the Environment, and the Good Life*, eds John E. Carroll, Paul Brockelman, and Mary Westfall, Hanover, NE and London: University Press of New England, 1997, 44-66.

<sup>50</sup> William Vendley and David Little, “Implications for Religious Communities: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity,” in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, eds Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 306-315, 307.

<sup>51</sup> Rockefeller, “The Wisdom of Reverence for Life,” 54, 147, 154.

<sup>52</sup> Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Scott R. Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*; Anna Halafoff and Melissa Conley Tyler, “Rethinking Religion: Transforming Cultures of Violence to Cultures of Peace, in *UNESCO Paris and International Outlook Conference, Religion in Peace and Conflict: Responding to Militancy and Fundamentalism*, Paris: UNESCO, 2005, 365-371; Douglas Johnston, “Looking Ahead: Toward a New Paradigm,” in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, eds Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 316-338.

<sup>55</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 60.

<sup>56</sup> Smith and Halafoff (*under review*) “Multifaith Third Spaces”.

<sup>57</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 127, 166.

... if not our faiths, our individual faiths, you [Anna Halafoff] being Buddhist, me being Muslim and the teachings of those traditions to respect each other, to hold human life sacred, to be courteous, to be hospitable. If individually we did not hold those values and practise them, and therefore cultivate a relationship in the practice of those teachings, we would not have a relationship, and we have a relationship that I value, so it is in these types of exchanges that the beauty of those things, of those teachings really become manifest and that is what counts. It's not a theological debate about texts ... it's how we understand our traditions, how we practise them and how they inform our engagement of the other.<sup>58</sup>

... the best way, maybe the only way, to break down some of our deeply rooted maybe prejudices or even our senses of superiority and exclusivity that we have inherited in our religious traditions ... the best way to start questioning that is through friendships with people from other religions. When a human being enters into a relationship of genuinely caring for another human being and respecting another human being and then realising that that other being follows a totally different religious path, that is one of the most effective ways for self-reflection. And ... we see the evils that can come out of religion in terms of violence, but that being the occasion for greater cooperation. [As a result of this] greater cooperation ... friendships are developing. And once those friendships come, I think there's ever-greater hope that there can be real openness, genuine, genuine collaboration, genuine respect and affirmation of each other.<sup>59</sup>

Another two participants, Sylvie Shaw, Lecturer in Religion and Spirituality Studies, at The University of Queensland in Brisbane and Freeman Trebilcock, then Secretary of Loving Kindness, Peaceful Youth (LKPY) in Melbourne, noted how the multifaith movement can act and unite with other social movements in demonstrations and actions to effect systemic social change, strengthened by their diversity.

When you go to Central Australia, you'll see the white ghost gums, and they're growing, they're quite flourishing, but it's completely dry on the surface. So underneath, the roots are down there, they're tapping into the water that's allowing the growth of the desert to bloom. But occasionally, when it rains, there's an inundation and overflow, and that allows the Berlin Wall to fall down, or Apartheid [to end] ... or a big demonstration to happen, and then it goes back and continues to bubble on ... the underground movement that's there, that bubbles up every now and again in Seattle or Genoa, in multifaith and interfaith. It's not on the surface, but it's such an important development, and there are so many people involved, that it can shift, and so the interfaith can meet with the environment [movement] can meet with the social justice [movement] and we can turn things around ...<sup>60</sup>

... the truth that you share between different religions is a transcendental one, but at the same time I also read this really cool book ... on the scheme of bio-diversity ... and it was basically this idea that there's ... this movement at the moment ... 250,000 different groups of people around the world, who are all doing different things ... there'll be an environmental group over here or there'll be a different group over there doing something else. But just the sheer number of them, and the fact that they are diverse, and there is ... that scheme of diversity, means that they ... are almost indestructible in a way because they're all different people acting independently, yet they're unconscious of the fact that they're all interconnected because they're so ... disparate, there's so many of them but they're so small, so unconnected. So that really got me thinking, this diversity that you have between faiths or between movements is really, really important, because it's strengthening ...<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Amatullah (2007) quoted in Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 127.

<sup>59</sup> Knitter (2007) quoted in Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 127.

<sup>60</sup> Shaw (2007) quoted in Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 131-132.

<sup>61</sup> Trebilcock (2007) quoted in Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 132.

Such multifaith and multi-actor networks have the capacity to draw on Indigenous and so-called Eastern and Western religions and philosophies' embodied peacebuilding principles of how best to live a good and just life, together with all beings within an interdependent lifeworld. They can also inspire people to move away from self-centred individualisation, from an us vs. them exclusivity, to a collective vision in which there are no others, or othering.

John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt in their book on *Networks and Netwars* stated that "it takes networks to fight networks".<sup>62</sup> I instead argued that *netpeace* was a preferable option to netwar for countering global risks of terrorism and climate change, as it "acknowledges the interconnectedness of global problems and solutions, and particularly the capacity of critical and collaborative networks" of multiple actors including religious actors, "co-committed towards common good, to solve the world's most pressing problems".<sup>63</sup> I concluded that:

If we are to build a genuinely peaceful and secure lifeworld, hope alone is insufficient to counter the politics of fear. We need a new cosmopolitan *politics of understanding*... not only of one another but also particularly of the interdependent nature of reality. For fear is derived from ignorance, primarily the ignorance that makes us think that we are somehow separate from one another.<sup>64</sup>

As Butler<sup>65</sup> and other notable scholars and/or activists such as Naomi Klein<sup>66</sup> and Rebecca Solnit<sup>67</sup> are highlighting, in response to the precarity that has resulted from neoliberalism, the world has witnessed a rise of powerful progressive uprisings in the 2010s of diverse social movements that share critical and peacebuilding orientations. They may focus on particular issues, such as climate change or women's rights, but these social movements and scholars and/or activists are also increasingly more aware of the intersectionality, and interconnectedness of social and environmental issues and solutions to them.

## The Worldviews of Generation Z

More recently, my research on multifaith youth engagement and climate change activism, has shown that the four aims of the multifaith movement that I put forward in 2013 remain at the heart of progressive multifaith alliances.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, our research on the Worldviews of Australia's Generation Z has yielded significant results pertaining to the complexity of young people's worldviews, and also their critical and caring capacities when it comes to issues pertaining to diversity.<sup>69</sup> We also found that learning about diverse religions had a positive effect on attitudes towards religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Hindus.<sup>70</sup>

Briefly, in our nationally representative survey of 1200 AGZ teens aged 13-18, we found six worldview types among Australian teens, the religiously committed (17%), the nominally religious (20%), the religious and spiritual (8%), the spiritual but not religious (18%), the religiously ambivalent (15%), and the neither religious or spiritual (23%). 50% believe in karma, 30% in reincarnation, 20% in astrology and 30% had practised meditation and 22% had practised yoga. 91% of teenagers think that having people of many different faiths makes Australia a better place to live and 88% think that all religious groups in Australia should be free to practise their religion the way they want to. Yet at the same time 44% think that religion causes more problems in society than it solves and 32% think that local communities should be able to prevent the construction of mosques or temples in their area if they do not want them. Our AGZ Survey also revealed that about a third of those who identified with a religion apart from Christianity had experienced some kind of discrimination on the basis of their religion. In addition, our 30 follow up interviews showed strong opposition among AGZ teens to religious exemptions

<sup>62</sup> John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, eds John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001, 1-25, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*, 169.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

<sup>65</sup> Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*.

<sup>66</sup> Klein, *No is not Enough*.

<sup>67</sup> Solnit, "How a Decade of Disillusion".

<sup>68</sup> Halafoff, "InterAction Australia; Smith and Halafoff (*under review*) "Multifaith Third Spaces".

<sup>69</sup> Anna Halafoff, Heather Shipley, Pamela Dickey-Young, Andrew Singleton, Mary Lou Rasmussen and Gary Bouma (*under review*) "Complex, Critical and Caring: Young people, Worldviews and Diversity in Australia and Canada," *Religions*.

<sup>70</sup> Singleton *et al.*, "Australia's Generation Z Study".

that allowed for discrimination against LGBTIQ employees or students by religious organisations. Indeed, the right to freely express one's gender identity and sexuality was widely supported among the AGZ teens and conservative religious perspectives that were not respectful of this diversity were seen as highly problematic. AGZ teens were highly aware of these issues and tensions as they were playing out in the media in debates on marriage equality and religious freedom at the time that our AGZ survey and interviews were conducted.<sup>71</sup>

This shows that many young people are already engaged in a robust critique of religion, and particularly when it comes to issues of competing rights claims related to religion and sexuality. The Australian curriculum provides hardly any opportunities to learn about diverse religious and non-religious worldviews, so young people are gleaned their information about religion largely through their families, peers and the media.<sup>72</sup> Victoria is the only Australian state that has introduced dedicated content on Learning about World Views and Religions in its curriculum in 2016, yet it remains limited and does not as yet reflect the more complex worldviews of young Australians or include content on religion's role in direct and structural violence and peacebuilding. Courses that do cover this material are provided in Catholic and other private and often faith-based schools and as optional, Years 11 and 12 subjects that are hardly offered in state schools due to lack of demand and availability.<sup>73</sup>

It is our hope that the findings of the AGZ study may have an impact on the way in which learning about diverse worldviews are approached in the Australian Curriculum, and that of all of the states, to improve religious and interreligious literacy and understanding. It is vital that this type of education involves a critical approach to religious and non-religious worldviews and organisations. Such critical religious literacy and understanding, particularly which recognises religion's complex role in both creating and ameliorating direct and structural violence, is important not just for young people but all members of society, including civil society and state actors, for more genuine peacebuilding practices and policies to be enacted that do not privilege religious rights above others.<sup>74</sup>

## Critical Religious Pluralism

The main point of my paper, is that respect for religious diversity and pluralism should be encouraged, as part of cosmopolitan peacebuilding strategies that affirm respect for diversity of all kinds, but that this should be undertaken critically, cognisant of religions' ambivalent capacity to create and perpetuate cultures of peace and direct and structural violence. This type of critical religious pluralism, has been modelled at times by progressive multifaith alliances, in embodied performative actions, that have critiqued religious exclusivity and the inequities and injustices produced by neoliberal development and precarity. By drawing on peacebuilding principles, from diverse religious, spiritual and non-religious worldviews such as interdependence and compassion, progressive multifaith movements are endeavouring to alleviate inequality, harm and suffering and to create a more liveable life for the entire lifeworld cognisant of the rights of all beings.

This is very different to a false peace, perpetuated by more conservative religious actors who neglect to see the harm and injustices that religions can cause and to call them out. This critical religious pluralism is crucial in our current era where there exists a robust anti-cosmopolitan global swing, evident in a rise of nationalism and authoritarian rule, often aligned with conservative and exclusive, discriminatory religious ideals, and a resulting lack of empathy for some humans and species seen to be others, and less worthy of respect. It is critical that people become more aware of religion's role within anti-cosmopolitanism, and better equipped to provide alternate narratives for collective resistance to it. This applies to practices, policy and curricula pertaining to promoting respect for religious diversity, that need also to be aware of the complexity of the lived and embodied realities of religious, spiritual and/or non-religious worldviews, and especially of younger generations who insist that religious rights should not override the rights of others.

<sup>71</sup> Singleton *et al.*, "Australia's Generation Z Study"; Halafoff *et al.*, (*under review*) "Complex, Critical and Caring".

<sup>72</sup> Singleton *et al.*, "Australia's Generation Z Study".

<sup>73</sup> Anna Halafoff, "Special Religious Instruction and Worldviews Education in Victoria's Schools: Social Inclusion, Citizenship and Countering Extremism," *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 36.3, 2015, 362-379; Halafoff, Lam and Bouma, "Worldviews Education"; VCAA (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority), "Learning about World Views and Religions," Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2015, available at:

<https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/static/docs/Learning%20about%20World%20Views%20and%20Religions.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*; Halafoff, Lam, and Bouma, "Worldviews Education: Cosmopolitan Peacebuilding"; Halafoff *et al.*, "Religious Literacy of Australia's Gen Z Teens".

Finally, my taking such a critical position – against harm, injustice and violence caused by religions – may be viewed by some readers as prescriptive and thereby problematic. Yet critical theory and peace theory do not pretend to be objective. My research has always hoped to make a positive and peacebuilding contribution to society. My insights and recommendations, based on my research, highlight what can be harmful and what can and needs to be done to reduce harm and to create a more liveable world for all. That is what my iteration of a more critical religious pluralism sets out to achieve.

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