

on the way home: nation, place and identity among Christian migrants

confirmation report



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Abstract

Large numbers of people who live in Australia and were born overseas identify as Christians. Yet, both in secular Australia and within mainstream Protestant churches migrants are often identified as unlikely to share Christian values. This project is concerned with exploring the impact of Christian faith on the migration experience. Taking a locality-based approach, I will work with a range of churches within a single suburb of Melbourne to explore the variety of ways migrants draw on their faith to shape and interpret their migration experience.

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1. Introduction

This paper provides a brief overview of my first year's work developing my PhD project "On the way home: nation, place and identity among Christian migrants". This introduction will summarise the research question and gaps addressed by this project, which will be elaborated in a literature review covering four key areas of interest: studies of ethnicity, studies of place and material culture, the anthropology of religion and especially Christianity, and studies of migration. An overview of my methodological approach is provided in section 3 and a rationale for the selection of the study site in section 4.

The primary research question for this project is: What is the impact of faith on the migration experience? I am concerned with the particular experience of Christian migrants entering a majority Christian country. Being Christian offers migrants some measure of 'insider' status, yet the establishment of migrant churches in Australia over the last 200 years suggests that the experience is still significantly that of being an outsider. This tension is the focus of my project.

It is my experience – and a motivation for the selection of this topic – that both within the church and in secular Australia there is a general assumption that migrants (especially recent arrivals) don't share 'Christian values'. Within the church, migrants are often seen as a 'mission field', a group in need of conversion. While in secular Australia, some commentators use a language of fear to identify migrants as holding 'un-Christian' outlooks. Although there is paranoia about the religious fervour of immigrants in many public narratives (e.g., Hage 2003; Dunn 2003), there is little acknowledgement of how many non-white migrants are themselves Christian; in Australia, 55% of persons born in Africa and the Middle East and 36% of persons born in Asia claim Christian affiliation (ABS 2006a).

Current literature on both migration and Christianity tends to focus on public worship and articulations of doctrine by church leaders. This project, in contrast, seeks to explore the everyday theologies of lay believers and the impact these beliefs have on quotidian

life and personal devotional practice. These personal aspects of the migration experience include a range of features such as: motives for departure; the way settlement is experienced and interpreted; the ways in which relationships are maintained between the sending country and the migrant; the way places in the new host country are lived in and ascribed meaning; and the way migrant faith communities interact with each other and with the community of settlement (including established faith communities). Accessing information about these aspects of personal migration experience and personal theology is likely to be different in different denominational, ethnic and generational contexts. Some of the ways this kind of information might be gathered are described in this report. They include observing and exploring:

- The use of space for public worship;
- The significance of material objects in personal spiritual practice and reflection;
- The way believers articulate their faith, draw on it (or not) in decision-making and use it as a lens to interpret experience;
- The way selfhood is understood, described and taught;
- The way relationships are enacted among co-congregants, and with family and friends outside the congregation; and
- The way Scripture is read, taught and interpreted.

However, the particular churches and congregations that will take part in this project have not yet been recruited. Exactly which aspects of the migrant experience are of most import and exactly which ways of accessing this information are appropriate remain, therefore, slightly open. As Danny Miller describes, anthropology as a discipline can allow for this openness to what the field presents:

The anthropology I am committed to eschews such hypothesis testing...my only real hypothesis is that I really have very little idea of what I am actually going to find when I go out to conduct fieldwork ... I assume that the most important

findings are going to be about things one didn't even suspect existed before going to live there.

Miller 2010 p7

The project seeks to speak into both the literature on anthropology of religion and literature on migration. The literature on migration often treats faith as an epiphenomenon. Contesting this, my project seeks to explore the ways in which faith is actively involved in shaping the migration process. Australian studies of ethnicity and religion operate within a monolithic discourse that binds ethnic identity with ethnic religious practice. This project will explore the largely unnoticed possibility that ethnic identity transcends religious identity or vice versa. There are significant critiques within the anthropology of religion of the way Christianity has influenced the discipline of anthropology (and modernity more generally) in ways which have limited its cross-cultural insight. It is my contention that the same assumptions about our Christian heritage that blind us when we work with other cultures, also make us myopic when we deal with Christian communities. Our presuppositions that we know what Christianity is all about, blind us to the ways in which it confounds the Christianized science and social science we have inherited.

Furthermore, this project seeks to explore the impact of faith on the migration experience not by heading to the margins of either Christian practice or migration experience but by examining the centre 'normal' churches in a 'normal' part of an Australian city. This is because I still fully expect unusual things to happen in such places, and that they are more radical and surprising because of it.

In relation to method, this project will harness new on-line and open-source technologies (such as blogging and open Geographic Information Systems like Google Earth) to include the community of interest in collaborative processes that not only meet high ethical demands (see section 3) and contribute to scholarship but also build community capacity to engage in public debate and information sharing. This process is already underway, as this paper builds on work already developed on my project blog, which can be found at: <http://nswann.wordpress.com/>

2. Literature Review

I had been in Melbourne a month and was reading my book – perhaps it was *Writing Culture* – sitting in the window seat by the middle door on the number 86 tram heading towards my new home in Thornbury. I like reading on the tram, or in cafes. The white noise is easier to think to than the whispers in a library. It was peak hour and crowded. My seat was an oasis from the people trying to move past one another to get on and off the tram. Periodically, I would look out the window or into space to process a sentence or a paragraph that amused me. It was in one of these moments that the young man who had sat down next me a few stops earlier finally broke into my carefully manufactured reverie to ask:

“You are Australian?”

“Yeah” I replied.

“I am not,” he said “I am foreign”

“That’s...good” I ventured

“Can you explain for me Australian culture?”

“Ummm... I don’t know. It’s what you see all around you. I’m not sure I can sum it up in a couple of sentences.”

He was a student from Burma. He had been failing his studies and couldn’t understand why. When he listened to his lecturers, he thought he understood, but it was becoming clear that he really didn’t understand at all – or at the very least was failing to adequately demonstrate that he understood. He felt like he must be missing something deep about Australian life. After I had attempted to provide some counsel, suggesting he ask to see examples of what would count as good work, he turned the conversation back to me and asked,

“What about you? What do you do?”

“I’m a student, too” I said.

“What do you study?” he asked “What speciality?”

“Anthropology.”

“And what is that? Anthropology?”

“Ummm...” I said, all too conscious of how at loss I had felt in response to his plea for help to understand Australian culture, “the study of ... culture?”

These first six months of study have been a process of learning something about what it means to be an anthropologist. This conversation did more to convince me about the length of the journey ahead than any anthropological text has yet done. It wasn’t just the content of our conversation, but the feeling of ineptitude, the awkwardness with which I engaged with this other person. At least I didn’t respond by saying “Australian culture is not talking to other people on the tram”, although my discomfort certainly suggested as much.

I did not do undergraduate training in anthropology; my background is in the related discipline of human geography. But I was attracted to anthropology as a discipline because of its deep expertise in qualitative research and because of its long history dealing with the social expression of religious belief. I hoped it would extend me in ways that more study in the discipline of geography would not. I have not been disappointed. This paper is my attempt to clarify the impact that this process of ‘learning to be an anthropologist’ has had on my initial project proposal. To finish this introduction, let me share with you briefly the reason for the words “on the way home” in this project’s title.

Home, at its most abstract, is the place where you live. It is the place where you keep your most treasured belongings. It is the centre of the order of your relationships. It is where you have rest and safety. It is a site of meaning and belonging. It is the place both where you can be found and where you can go to hide. Home is the stationery centre of identity (Kinnvall 2004). But home need not be a house. Home as the place of life in the

sense described above echoes Rapport and Dawson's (1998) definition of home as "the place where one best knows oneself". And it could easily be applied to a Christian understanding of heaven or the 'new creation'. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges his listeners,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21 (c.f. Wright 2007 pp160-164)

The title "on the way home" reflects my own understanding of Scripture and what it means to be a Christian in the world. That is, I believe my true home is heavenly – it awaits me in the new creation – the apostle Paul tells Christians their "citizenship is in heaven" (Phillipians 3:20). The idea then, is that this life is a journey that I am making "on my way home". The theological injunction to live in the world, but not be of the world (e.g. Fitz-Gibbon 2000) suggests a transience and uprootedness that is similar to that which I've read about in academic studies and fiction to do with migration. The title also has a hint of the substance of the journey. The very early church was known to refer to the Christian faith as 'The Way' (e.g. Acts 9:2, Acts 19:9, Acts 22:4, Acts 24:14; c.f. Peterson 2009 p302). This notion of 'The Way' reflects not just that life is a journey, but also how that journey is to be lived and enacted. It is the mode of journeying. And that, really is what this project is about, how Christians journey from one place to another as they look forward to the full realization of their home in the new creation. I hope that the title resonates with participants in the project. But I'm aware that it may need to change to more authentically represent their experience rather than my own.

Nation

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Revelation 7:9-10

The ancient world, the one in which Christian scripture was written was multi-ethnic (Hays 2003). Israel is described (or at least translated) as an ethnic nation. Despite the experience of severe ethnic barriers (between Israel and Samaria, for example), Christian Scripture encourages and predicts that worship of Jesus will lead to profound unity across these ethnic or national divisions, while still acknowledging that difference exist (for there are still tribes and peoples and languages represented before the throne):

... the people of God in the Book of Revelation are portrayed as being from all the different peoples of the earth. They are multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual ... God's intention for his people is to be multi-ethnic and multicultural, but yet united in their fellowship and their worship of him.

Hays 2003 p199

In making my project proposal and naming my project I used the concept of nation because of its significance in the process of migration. International migration is by definition that which takes place across national borders. To talk of migration is to talk of those who were born in another country. I liked the resonance with English translations of Scripture that the word provided: "people from every nation". However, my reading of anthropological literature suggests that re-orienting the language from 'nation' to 'ethnicity' may be helpful.

Fredrich Barth suggested that anthropologists generally take an ethnic group to be a population which:

1. *is largely biologically self-perpetuating*

2. *shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms*
3. *makes up a field of communication and interaction*
4. *has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.*

Barth 1969 pp10-11

For Barth, this definition sounds similar to traditional and corresponding definitions of nation, race, culture and language. However, Barth is not satisfied with this definition, arguing that an emphasis on ascription as the critical feature is more useful making it “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (ibid). Furthermore, ethnicity is only ever expressed in relation to the Other, only when two groups encounter each other and seek to determine their difference from one another is ethnicity expressed (e.g. Yancey *et al* 1976). Unlike racialization, which is often imposed externally, ethnicity is a process of self-ascription, it emerges from within a group (Johnston *et al* 2000). Migration is a process whereby different groups encounter one another and can therefore be generative of ethnic identity.

One of the key strengths of the concept of ethnicity is its universalism. Instead of categorizing the people anthropologists study as ‘tribal’ or ‘primitive’, terms which imply that the anthropologist is somehow higher placed along a continuum of development, the concept of ethnicity places the researcher on even footing with the people they work with (Eriksen 2002). Even anthropologists have ‘ethnicity’. Ethnicity, however, should in no sense be considered natural. Rather, ethnicity is a construction that builds on shared historical narratives (e.g. Smith 1991), imagined fraternity (e.g. Anderson 1983) and ontological orientation to the world (e.g. Kapferer 1989).

So, ethnicity is defined at its boundaries, in relation to other groups. But Harrison (1999) persuasively argues that it is often similarity that is contested in ethnic conflict rather than difference. This astute observation provides some theoretical rigor for one of my

hypotheses about non-European Christians: that ethnically-other¹ migrants who are Christian may be more offensive to a Christianized country than non-Christian migrants because they seem to steal the host community's inalienable possession of religious identity. I do not wish to deny the potent and ugly Islamophobia evident in Australia, or suggest that migrant Christians are more persecuted than, for example, people of a Muslim background. But I do wish to suggest that the practice of Christianity that some migrants bring to Australia – whether it display a distinct piety, or an overt Spirit-filled joy, or an urgency for proselytization – may be offensive to the nominally Christian (and practicing Christian) community because of the way that it claims an alternative (and perhaps better) way of practicing the Christian faith. Without doing extensive research among non-migrant Christians and nominal believers, this will be difficult to quantify. Any reflection on this matter will simply be in relation to stories told by migrants about their experiences of exclusion and their interpretation of motive. I present it here as an hypothesis because a perception of exclusion may be a factor behind the establishment of independent migrant churches.

Shared religion is often a necessary, but rarely a sufficient, prerequisite for ethnicity. Religion often constitutes a major portion of that which we call 'culture': it can be foundational in setting what Barth calls (in point 2 above) 'cultural values'. Indeed, Eriksen (2002 p6) draws our attention to the "strong tendencies towards the ethnification of certain religious groups, such as European Muslims".

As religion helps define the boundaries of ethnicity in many cases, so also ethnicity play a major role in church life in Australia. Ethnicity is such a significant part of Australia's church landscape that a new interdenominational directory of churches in Melbourne (Figure 1) uses 'Ethnicity' as one of 6 search criteria to help users find a suitable church.

¹ Where ethnically-other includes anything considered 'un-Australian'. Most-likely, this finds its correspondence with theories of the Australian community as ethnically 'White' (e.g. Hage 1998).

Figure 1: Transforming Melbourne Directory of Christian Churches Screenshot

DIRECTORY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES MELBOURNE

...provided by Transforming Melbourne

Home ▶ Search

Church Directory

[Search](#) [Add Entry](#)

The Melbourne Church Directory has more than 1700 churches from every denomination listed including independent churches. The directory has just been launched and we will be adding many enhanced features.

Please contact us by email directory@transformingmelbourne.org.au if you have any feedback or need help finding a church.

God Bless,

The Transforming Melbourne Team

www.transformingmelbourne.org.au

Search for:

Any words All words Exact phrase

City

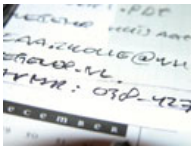
Postcode

Municipality

Denomination

Ethnicity

Select Category



Source: http://www.transformingmelbourne.org.au/churches/index.php?option=com_sobi2&sobi2Task=search&Itemid=541
3rd December 2010

Abe Wade Ata's three volume study of Religion and Ethnicity in Australia (1988, 1989, 1990) demonstrates the way in which Australia's diverse religious (and especially, Christian denominational) landscape is a reflection of its diverse migration history. Ata's collection is written by a range of authors, from journalists to academics to ministers of religion, and as such each chapter has a distinctive voice. The vast majority of chapters are written by members of the ethnic communities about which they are writing. By and large, however, the pieces take a sociological approach to religion and ethnicity. Most discuss the history of the relationship between church and state in the country of origin, identify push factors (e.g. Irish famine, World War II, Communism etc) and then turn to discussing the establishment of an ethnic church on the arrival of the migrant group in

Australia. The ethnic church is discussed in terms of attendance, cultural activities, and (seemingly) inevitable decline. Departure from the ethnic church is often insinuated as loss of ethnic identity. Very rarely is the substance of the theology of the migrant church discussed, with the exception of a passing comment from Nguyen (1988) on the Vietnamese church and quite a deeply theological piece on Greek Orthodoxy by Chryssavgis (1988). A similar approach is taken by Bouma (1997).

Ata's collections perpetuate what Glick-Schiller *et al* (2006) call the 'ethnic lens' of migration research, especially as it applies to religious groups and institutions. Glick-Schiller *et al.* instead attempt to "develop a conceptual framework for the study of migration, settlement, and transborder connection that is not dependent on the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study", in its place suggesting "an ethnographic approach to locality" (p813). Indeed, it is easy to reinforce social categories by assuming they already exist and framing our conversation/research around predefined groups. As a result, I believe it will be of more interest to work in a locality in Melbourne and do my best to work with people and churches in that area without recruiting on the basis of specific ethnic identification. I do not wish to assume that migration necessarily results in uniform expressions of ethnic identification. Rather, I hope to allow the particular character of ethnic identifications emerge from participants' own observations if they emerge at all. Ethnicity is, after all, a "fluid and ambiguous aspect of social life" and can be "of varying importance in social situations ... it is often up to the agents themselves to decide upon its significance" (Eriksen 2002 p32).

Religion in general, and Christianity in particular, can even have a cosmopolitan edge:

Although the research contains clear indications that many worshippers emphasize a community in Christ without an ethnic suffix, scholars persist in categorizing the worshippers by their ethnicity.

Glick-Schiller *et al* 2006 p814-5

There is a rapidly growing body of work that examines globalized or transnational religious networks (e.g. Levitt 2004, Beyer 1994). In this project, however, I am less concerned with transnational religion than I am with religious transnationals. That is, I

am less concerned with how religious institutions are enacted across national borders, than I am with exploring how those people whose bodies have been relocated across borders use their faith to shape and understand that experience.

To summarise: while national borders are definitionally critical to any discussion of migration, this study will be re-oriented towards the concept of ethnic identification rather than nationalism. Equally, while ethnic identification is my primary interest, the nature of those identifications is not something I wish to assume at the outset of the project. Instead of focussing on a self-identifying ethnic community or church, I will work with churches in a diverse area of Melbourne and seek to talk to people about their faith and migration stories.

Place

As a geographer, a focus on place in my investigation seemed apt. At the macro scale, any discussion of migration usually deals with at least two key places: place of origin and place of settlement. On the micro scale every human act occurs within space and examination of the spatial organization of religious life is as of as much value as the spatiality of telecommunications or education. This section will explore some of the work on the significance of place in studies of religion, but will propose that a more anthropological focus on materiality may be appropriate.

Geographical treatments of religion have historically focussed on large scale spatial patterns of religion – its distribution and diffusion – on the connections between religion and demography, or on sacred space (e.g Park 1994). At times this concern with ‘sacred space’ assumes that anything religious is considered sacred. Lily Kong insinuates as much in her discussion of churches, mosques, temples and religious schools (2001 p214). For some Christians, however, this idea of ‘sacred space’ is obsolete for every place and no place are simultaneously sacred. For example, for some Christians the whole world can be considered sacred (O’Donovan 2004 p302). And at the same time no particular place is sacred because God has done away with his need for worship in a particular place, instead seeking worship in spirit and in truth (e.g. John 4:16-26; c.f. Carson 1991 p226).

Yet Christians do, almost invariably², meet together in physical space. Different groups of Christians organize and decorate those spaces in different ways. I am particularly curious about those migrant congregations that rent church buildings from established churches. Often this means the migrant church meets at a time when the church building is unwanted by the established congregation (for example, at times which are difficult for families to attend) and is required to set up and take down all the distinguishing markers of their presence each time they meet.

It is this embodied, locatedness of religious practice, the organization of material stuff in space and the way these things manifest and impact the identity of individuals and groups that fascinates me. Miller suggests that “in religion the main purpose of the material is to express the immaterial” (2010 p72). With this statement, I think he is suggesting that the immaterial being expressed is the transcendent or divine. Yet the material need not be simply representation, it may be seen as a tangible gift from a good and generous God (e.g. Ecclesiastes 10:7-10, 1 Timothy 4:4-5). The material need not simply be a human attempt to represent the divine, but a divine attempt to demonstrate love and provision. Miller also suggests that it is not only those objects laden with meaning (such as bread and wine) that are determinant, but those items that we fail to notice, those that are so embedded in our practice that they become natural and shape our very being in the world (2010). In addition, Miller highlights that the boundary between person and object is often blurry – drawing attention to occasions when people are considered as gifts – which finds a clear application in the Anglican response during the liturgy of the Holy Communion, which echoes Romans 12:1:

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

The Anglican Church of Australia 1992 p151

The key aspects of materiality that are of interest within the scope of this project, therefore, are spaces used for worship or public meetings, objects of personal spiritual

² Although there is a growing body of work on the possibilities ICTs offer for the virtual church e.g. Estes 2009

significance or devotional use, the way public spaces are negotiated and interpreted through belief, the value given to material things and achievement, even the consideration of the self as a meaningful object (ie. as a gift).

Identity

When I wrote my project proposal, I thought very little about the substantive nature of identity. I assumed that typical Western outlook of individuals as self-contained: “the sense of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West” (Taylor 1989 ix). I was interested to know how migrants balance competing national (or ethnic) identities, how religious or denominational identity intersects with these ethnic identities, and how being an ethnically ‘other’ Christian in a Christianized country might provide a unique insider/outsider experience. In much of the literature, identity is used an entirely unproblematic concept (e.g. Ata 1988, Barot 1993, Bouma 1997). But I have found those few pieces I have engaged with that challenge the concept persuasive, not least because I expect to discover many ways in which troubling the concept of identity might prove illuminating in my investigation of Christian relationships.

Richard Handler (1994) suggests the idea of individual ‘identity’ is not very useful as a cross-cultural concept. He draws attention to Whorf’s description of the Hopi from the south western United States, who “consider that human thought acts routinely as a force in the outer world” rather than being somehow contained within the brain of a physically contained human body (ibid p31). He links this with Geertz’s description of repetitious naming practices in Bali that “mute the ... details of personal biography” pointing instead to the continuousness of the unchanging cosmos (ibid p33). These examples, according to Handler, demonstrate just how much the Western notion of the self strains to explain important features of other cultures. For Kinvall, even the Western search for identity does not necessarily demonstrate that such a thing exists, “rather, we need to understand identity not as a fixed, natural state of being, but as a process of *becoming*” (2004 p747-8 emphasis in original).

This challenge of the self-contained individual could even be said to be reminiscent of the way the Bible talks about Christians' being 'in Christ' or the church being 'the body of Christ':

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

Ephesians 2:19-22

This multi-layered metaphor, of Christians as both members of a household and the stones themselves bound together into a single structure, acknowledges individuals (Jesus, apostles, and prophets) while also being profoundly communal. While the intersection between the rise of Protestantism and of Modernity is critical to the development of the Western notion of the self, there is no reason to assume that contemporary Christians, and especially Christians of non-Western backgrounds, find this notion of the self to be satisfactory. These brief excursions into the theory of the self need much more deliberation, but remaining critically alert to ways in which identity may be an insufficient model for the way the people I will work with describe themselves (it is almost impossible to escape the language of the self) and their relationships will be imperative.

Christian

Is Christianity a religion? Most anthropologists would answer an emphatic "yes!". Indeed, all anthropology of Christianity falls within the broader field of the anthropology of religion. Christianity is the religion that, according to many, has shaped every interaction of Western scholars with non-Western religious practices (e.g. Asad 1993, Ruell 1982 [2002], Engelke and Tomlinson 2006). There are, however, Christians and theologians who would be profoundly uncomfortable with calling their faith 'religious'³. Religion, according to Coleman and Collins (2004), is after all "a comment on, and

³ Timothy Keller, for example, calls the gospel "neither religion nor irreligion" (Keller, 2008). This conflict can be traced to differing definitions of 'religion', but the debate over the use of the term is clearly of significance.

analysis of culture ... as well as being part of culture” (p7). Christian discourse is capable of self-critique, and contemporary Christian faith and action is unlikely to be the same as that which shaped modern assumptions decades or even centuries ago. This section provides a brief discussion of what ‘religion’ is, the presentation of Christianity in the anthropological literature, and concludes by proposing that the criticisms voiced by Asad and Ruell about the way a Christian heritage has biased anthropological discovery are surprisingly relevant even (or especially) to the study of Christianity itself.

Within the field of anthropology one of the most well known definitions of religion is that provided by Clifford Geertz. According to Geertz, religion is:

(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic

Geertz 1973 p90

This definition interestingly contains no reference to the supernatural or transcendent: it could as well apply to Dawkins-esque science as Christianity. This flexibility can be both strength and weakness. A less flexible definition, which nevertheless requires no reference to a supernatural being or beings, is provided by Linda Woodhead for the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission:

By means of a range of different dimensions (including symbols, rituals, practices and forms of community), religions promise to bring people into relation with a dimension of life which is portrayed and perceived as more real, more powerful and more meaningful than everyday experience, and which provides a template for interpreting that experience and providing orientation within it.

Woodhead (2009 piii)

Perhaps as a result of the emphasis placed in definitions like these on symbols and rituals, the anthropology of Christianity is characterized by a focus on public performances such as preaching (e.g. Tomlinson 2006) , public worship meetings (Connell

2005), and public prayer (e.g. Shoaps 2002). Less visible, and less accessible is the private devotional practice and theological understanding of everyday believers. It is the way faith is lived, enacted and drawn upon to interpret experience in day to day life that most fascinates me. I am not a ‘Sunday Christian’. I do not wish to produce a ‘Sunday Anthropology’.

Fenella Cannell, in reporting on research performed in Mormon communities, argues that within the social sciences “too narrow and ascetic a model of Christianity has become standard” (Cannell 2004 p335). She characterizes how mainstream anthropology represents Christianity as, for example:

- insisting “on the opposition between this world and the next world – the material and the spiritual...” (p338);
- believing in “the withdrawal of God from the world” (p340);
- stressing “its ascetic components above all else” so as “to assume that it would be premised on an antagonism between body and spirit” (p340).

While Cannell doesn’t think this is necessarily a true representation of Christian thought, especially not one that resonates with her work in Mormon communities, she presents them as well-established opinions in the anthropological literature. These descriptions are at odds with what I thought was my very orthodox, mainstream Christian upbringing in suburban Australia. Most of my experience in Anglican and Lutheran congregations has been characterized by deep concern with this world and what happens in it because of a belief that God is still intimately involved in it and cares for it deeply. The mainstream representations are likely true for some Christians. However, I don’t think my experience is unusual and I think Cannell’s critique can be extended from her reflections on more marginal denominations to mainstream orthodox believers.

Concomitant with these representations of dualism and asceticism, is the characterization of Christianity as both ‘white’ and ‘modern’. Clifford Geertz writes that,

...it is possible to suggest a few characteristics of the contemporary [global religious] scene ... that seems at once as something rather new under the sun and logical extensions of settled trends. Of these, I will mention here only two, though they are but part of a much larger social picture and they rather come down to two ways of saying the same thing: (1) the progressive disentanglement, for want of a better word, of the major religions (and some of the minor ones Mormonism, Cao Dai, Bahai) from the places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which they were historically formed: Hinduism and Buddhism from the deep particularities of Southern and Eastern Asia, Christianity from those of Europe and the United States, Islam from those of the New East and North Africa; and (2) the emergence of religious persuasion, inherited or self-ascribed, thinned-out or reinforced, as a broadly negotiable, mobile and fungible, instrument of public identity – a portable persona, a movable subject position.”

Geertz 2005 p11

Granting that this is not a deeply argued piece, I feel this manifests something widespread in the literature of anthropology of Christianity; namely, the assumption that it is a white, European (and in the quote above North American) phenomenon. While I understand the vast impact the missionary movement of the modern era has had on the developing world, to nominate Europe and the United States as the “places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which” Christianity “was historically formed” takes a somewhat limited look at history. It privileges the history of the last 400 years over the 1600 that preceded it.

Moreover, I find it somewhat entertaining that Geertz suggests that the displacement of the major religions from “the places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which they were historically formed” is “something rather new under the sun”. For it was no European writer, but the ancient Israelite author of the Book of Ecclesiastes that he is quoting indirectly:

All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.

*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.*

*Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new'? It has already been, in the
ages before us.*

Ecclesiastes 1:8-10

A number of authors suggest that anthropological investigations of all religions, and the language they use to represent religion, are a product of Christian history. According to Asad,

Thus what appears to anthropologists today to be self evident, namely that religion is essentially a matter of symbolic meanings linked to ideas of general order (expressed through either or both rite and doctrine), that it has generic functions/features, and that it must not be confused with any of its particular historical or cultural forms, is in fact a view that has a specific Christian history.

Asad 1993 p42

The very same definitional attempts made above are here accused by Asad of uncritically reflecting a Christian worldview. Engelke and Tomlinson (2006) level the same charge against the search for meaning that lies at the heart of most modern scientific (or social scientific) endeavour. Malcolm Ruell (1982 [2002]) takes this issue of the distinction between religion and belief or faith as an important one – something that is a product of Christianity itself. Ruell suggests Christianity has made us unsuspecting users of the framework of ‘belief’ as the primary entry point for the study of religion. For Ruell the word ‘faith’ is cognate with the idea of ‘belief’ and shares with it a similar semantic range meaning trust or confidence. He rigorously demonstrates that the contemporary use of the concept of belief owes a great deal to Christian history, scholarship and theology. He concludes by identifying four unwarranted assumptions that anthropology is susceptible to when it transposes this understanding onto other cultures and religions: (1) that belief is as central to other religious systems as it is to Christianity, (2) that the belief of a person forms the basis for their behaviour and is sufficient evidence for it, (3) that belief

is a fundamentally interior state, and (4) that the status of being a believer is more important than the substance of what the object of the belief is.

I find the arguments of Asad, Ruell and Engelke and Tomlinson persuasive, and would like to take them one step further. I would suggest that if it is our Christian heritage that makes us blind to our application of these assumptions when we work with other cultures, it makes us doubly so when we deal with Christian communities. For each of points 2, 3 and 4 above are relevant to the study of Christian communities. Those who call themselves Christian are not automatons whose every action is determined by their faith. In fact, they have a term for those actions which fail to be driven by love for God and neighbour - sin. The Book of James works very hard at dissuading Christians from the idea that faith is only internal, instead holding faith and action inseparably together, claiming that faith is only genuine faith when it is directed into action (James 2:14-26). Finally, the idea that ‘having faith’ or declaring an identity as a Christian is more important than the person Jesus in whom that faith is being put would be anathema to me and many other Christians. Furthermore, the risk Ruell suggests this poses – that we “bracket off ideas that they hold about the world from the world itself” (p112 1982 [2002]) – is one frequently perpetrated against Christians in the anthropological literature. Our presuppositions that we know what Christianity is all about, blind us to the ways in which it confounds the Christianized science and social science we have inherited.

For these reasons, I believe investigating *Christian* communities can contribute theoretically to this project of challenging uncritical assumptions in the study of religion. I expect deliberations on the nature of what religion is, and what a Christian is will arise out of data collected in the field. At this stage though, some working definition of what a Christian is will be necessary to limit the scope of recruitment. The Australian Bureau of Statistics generally works on the assumption that a Christian is anyone who claims that label for themselves. I think Ruell pretty accurately captures the orthodox Christian position that Christian belief is in “a complex person-event” (1982 [2002] p103), that is, Christians believe in the threefold person of God (Father, Son, Spirit) and what God has done in history. Being a Christian could therefore be described as a social

relationship of trust with God rather than as a system of shared ritual, rules, or kinship. A Christian in this study will be anyone who calls Jesus “Lord” (cf. Romans 10:9).

Migrants

My friend, Qian, and I were driving through Sydney’s inner west. She had come to Australia from mainland China to do post-graduate study at Sydney University. She knew I was a Christian and often asked me questions about Christianity. As we wiggled our way through the back streets of Newtown and Summer Hill, her questions was:

“Why are there so many different churches in Australia?”

“Well”, I said, “I suppose its a reflection of Australia’s migration history” and launched into a potted history of Irish Catholics, English Anglicans, German Lutherans, Scottish Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and all the rest. Of course, the ethnic boundaries between the long established denominations are becoming increasingly blurry, but the fact that Australia’s religious landscape is a product of its migration history is well accepted:

All non-Aboriginal religious groups have found their way to Australia by migration either by being carried by migrating peoples or by 'migrating' as systems of belief and practice transmitted by means of teachers, publications or missionaries. The shape of Australia's religious profile is primarily a function of its migration history and only secondarily a function of conversion or changing religious identification.

Bouma 1997 p1

Migration is not a new phenomenon. People are, and have been, mobile for many reasons leisure, curiosity, maintaining friendship, conducting business, fleeing oppression, or deportation. Peggy Levitt lightheartedly suggests that ‘Abraham really was the first migrant’:

...the relationship between religion and migration has a long history: Abraham began a journey, guided by his faith, that millions have followed. The intensification of life across borders will only increase the numbers for whom

social, political, and religious membership is decoupled from residence. It is time we put religion front and center in our attempts to understand how identity and belonging are redefined in this increasingly global world.

Levitt 2003 p870

I appreciate the metaphor. There is, however, an even earlier moment in which migration is described in Scripture: the forced expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The story of the Fall illustrates that the interplay between faith and movement does not have to be causal, positive or freely chosen. Rather, Adam and Eve were the first forced migrants. Both these stories demonstrate that the experience of migration is not new, but ancient. The migration of the faithful (or perhaps, as in the case of Adam and Eve, the doubtful) has long precedent.

While the phenomenon of human movement is in no way new, the speed and volume of human movement has radically changed over the course of the last century. The speed with which long-distance travel can be achieved and the number of persons that can be transported, together with the development of low-cost telecommunications information and communication technologies has revolutionised the mobility experience. Harvey (1989) described these developments as having the effect of time-space compression – a phenomenon that, while always occurring, has accelerated dramatically since the 1960s.

Castles and Miller (2003) suggest that there are six general trends playing a role in contemporary international migration: the globalization of migration; the acceleration of migration; the differentiation of migration; the feminization of migration; and the growing politicization of migration. But perhaps the most significant trend is the growing impermanence of migratory movement. Traditional definitions of migration as a one-way residential movement across national borders fail to capture the complexity of global circulation in the contemporary world (Ley and Kobayashi 2005). The close-ended assumptions of narratives of immigration as a completed act, even if they were at one time valid, are increasingly shown to be inadequate.

Migration is typically characterized by a feeling of disconnection, of engagement in “multiple cultural worlds that are dynamically intertwined” (Coleman and Collins 2006).

It is in many ways an experience of liminality. Unlike ritual experiences of liminality, however, there is no promise of future reconciliation, no easily identifiable moment at which the migrant returns to a defined role in the social structure. In many ways this is an experience that Christians are already trained to embody. Victor Turner himself describes Christianity as a perpetual state of liminality:

But traces of the passage quality of religious life remain in such formulations as: "The Christian is a stranger in the world, a pilgrim, a traveller, with no place to lay his head." Transition has here become a permanent condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions.

Turner 1969 [2002] p367

Or as the current Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, puts it: "the Church is nothing if not an assembly of migrants, answerable finally to the law of another city" (2005, p41). I am curious to explore how this interaction of transitional identities (as migrant and as Christian) impacts the everyday lives of migrants in Australia.

The migrant community is not the traditional site of anthropological study, but it has become an increasingly significant focus for attention in recent years (e.g. Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, Baldassar 2001, Ong 1999); "The ethnographer is no longer a (wordly) traveler visiting (local) natives...instead, his 'ancient and settled' fieldsite opens onto complex histories of dwelling and traveling, cosmopolitan experiences" (Clifford 1997 p2). In many of these studies, the focus is on transnational (or translocal e.g. Portes *et al.* 1999) migrant communities, especially those of migrants from less-developed countries settling or circulating within more developed countries. Often adopting multi-sited techniques, such studies explore the material, social, and even imagined linkages of people originating in a particular national community.

Two key forms of religiously motivated movement captivate the anthropological imagination, that of pilgrimage (e.g. Turner and Turner 1978, Coleman and Elsner 2003,

Coleman and Eade 2004) and that of mission (e.g. Dow 2005, Keane 2007). While these two forms of movement are seen as inherently 'spiritual', residential migration is usually explained in the literature as being driven by economic or social factors and faith treated as an epiphenomenon. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this body of literature in detail. It will, however, be of interest to explore how collaborators explain their migration story – whether they use these paradigms of pilgrimage or mission (or even of persecution) to describe their experience or whether they too conceive of residential migration as an unspiritual process.

3. Methodology

This section reviews the ethical approach I intend to take towards fieldwork and research practice as well as outlining the actual methodologies I intend to implement to gather data. The data collected in this project, excepting for the brief analysis of census data provided in this section, will be qualitative in nature.

Ethnographic

Ethnography refers to a field method (the process of immersive participant observation), to the practice of analysis (writing about that field experience) and to the research output (usually, a monograph) (Fetterman 2010). Ethnography is not an objective or experimental science. It cannot be reproduced. Rather, ethnographic fieldwork involves interactive, firsthand experience with people in a social setting (Murchison 2010) The purpose of ethnography, according to Clifford (1986 p2) is to “make the familiar strange, the exotic quotidian”. That is, I think, it draws our attention to what is surprising in the everyday and what is recognisable in that which appears at first to be incomprehensible.

For this project, I hope to participate in as many different aspects of church life as possible, which is likely to include activities such as Sunday worship, community lunches, bible study groups, play groups, prayer meetings and service activities. In addition to these organised activities, I will seek to meet with people outside formal church programs. However, I expect meeting outside church programs will be difficult. While participant observation may be the bedrock of ethnographic techniques, more deliberate data-elicitation methods may be employed to gather data that complements

participant observation. I therefore intend to use interviews and autophotography as tools to access more intimate spaces and stories.

Autophotography is a method whereby research collaborators are provided with cameras and invited to take photographs that are meaningful to them in some way. Usually, they are asked to take photos in response to a particular agenda. For this project, collaborators may be presented with a request such as:

- Please take photos of anything that makes you feel close to God; or
- Please take photos of things that have spiritual significance for you.

The method does not finish with the taking of photographs. Interpreting the photographs is not done by the researcher alone, but discussed with the collaborator (Brück and Kainzbauer 2009).

Autophotography has been identified as being of use in cross-cultural contexts (Brück and Kainzbauer 2009), in examining identity in general (Noland 2006) and religious identity in particular (Dollinger 2001). Autophotography provides a useful tool to gather information about intimate spaces that may not be accessible to the researcher (Wallace 2010).

Interviewing can range from informal conversations through to highly structured formal sequences of questioning (Murchison 2010). In all cases, however, the interviewer's main role is to listen and secondarily to guide the conversation. Murchison (2010) suggests three key attributes of the good interviewer: being prepared to learn from your collaborator(s); being willing to cede some control to your collaborator(s); and being ready to adapt to changing circumstances. These attributes relate to both formal and informal interviewing

Dunn (2000) identifies three basic types of interview: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews utilise a set of fully worded questions that are asked in exactly the same order and manner to each respondent. At the other end of the

spectrum, unstructured interviews, such as oral histories, are guided by the respondent and focus on story telling. Unstructured interviews follow a unique trajectory and are more similar to a conversation than any other interview type. Semi-structured interviews cover the range of interview practices in between these two extremes. They generally employ a carefully constructed question schedule, but allow flexibility in the manner and order in which the questions can be asked. Within a semi-structured interview, it would be acceptable for the researcher to probe responses or to explore unexpected ideas or experiences brought up by the respondent. Like structured interviews, the researcher is involved in directing the conversation in a semi-structured interview.

Much of ethnographic practice includes conversations that can be classed as informal and unstructured interviews. This is a well-accepted part of ethnographic practice and a key part of creating rapport. Collaborators, however, are not always alert to the fact that intimate kitchen table discussions will be part of what later gets reported in an ethnographic text. I believe finding an appropriate balance between becoming ‘native’ and reminding collaborators that you are there to study is critical (the next section on collaboration will explore this in more detail). As such, I think the use of deliberate interviews (although they could be unstructured) are an appropriate complement to participant observation. By deliberate, I mean an interview which the participant recognises as such, for which formal consent is sought and which is recorded to allow for detailed analysis and accountability in reproducing the speech of collaborators.

Collaborative

I am committed to collaborative research methods. This section will explore some of my rationale as well as exploring some of the features of social media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that are part of an emerging, popular (as in ‘of the people’), collaborative and creative ethic that I find persuasive and that am keen to employ in my project. Woven throughout is a discussion of blogging and how it might be a useful – even if sometimes a little blunt – instrument to help put into practice some of this commitment to dialogue and collaborative creativity.

I’m committed to collaborative methods because I have a high view of both the community and academia. That is, I view the community – the people we work with – as

intelligent and creative, with the potential to engage in research. And I view academic research as fundamentally useful, with the capacity to contribute something of value to the community. Locking academic discussion away in an ivory tower is harmful both for the community and for academia. Collaboration is not a new idea to anthropology. At some level all ethnography is collaborative. Lassiter, however, suggests that what is new is the move to push collaboration from its “taken-for-granted background and put it at centre stage” (2005 p16) and to establish “as a main goal the writing of ethnography with local community consultants as active collaborators in that process” (2005 p17). For Lassiter, collaboration is an attempt to redress (typically colonial) power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. He asks: “When does anthropology serve the very relationships created and maintained by anthropological practice? How can anthropology become relevant for our consultants?” (2005 p19). It views the people we work with not as subjects, but consultants, collaborators, co-creators. Lassiter suggests that,

a deliberate and explicit collaborative ethnography is founded on four main commitments:

- 1. ethical and moral commitment to responsibility to consultants;*
- 2. honesty about the fieldwork process;*
- 3. accessible and dialogic writing; and*
- 4. collaborative reading, writing, and co-interpretation of ethnographic texts with consultants.*

Lassiter 2005 p77

With this in mind, my blog is an attempt to be honest about who I am, what my project is about, what my questions are. It’s open to anyone with internet access. One of the key features of blogs is the ability to comment on posts and in this sense it is dialogic and collaborative. And it is an attempt to practice these things before I even have collaborators. But I think there’s other philosophical precedent to collaboration that goes deeper than redressing colonial power imbalances.

I understand collaborative research to be grounded in a commitment to dialogue and a responsibility to the other. I am persuaded by Levinas' call for a responsibility to the Other merely in light of coming face-to-face with them as another being (Bergo 2008). The other places ethical demands on us, lays claim to us. For Levinas, an ethics of responsibility precedes any objective searching after truth.

My commitment to collaborative research also comes from an expectation that I won't be able to understand the other in a perfect sense. My reading and translation of another's experience their culture will be enriched by engaging in dialogue with them about my interpretations. Collaboration isn't only about redressing power imbalance. It is also about achieving deeper "co-interpretations" (Lassiter 2005 p12). The Psychiatrist RD Laing puts it this way:

I see you, and you see me. I experience you, and you experience me. I see your behaviour. You see my behaviour. But I do not and never have and never will see your experience of me.

Laing 1967 p15

That is, we can never fully appreciate the experience of the other. This could be seen to doom to utter failure any social science that attempts to interpret the experience of someone else. I think, however, Laing would suggest that, even though our understanding is always limited, as we experience one another experiencing that is, as we respond to one another we get closer to sharing something of each other's experience. He goes on to say:

Since your and their experience is invisible to me as mine is to you and them, I seek to make evident to the others, through their experience of my behaviour, what I infer of your experience, through my experience of your behaviour.

Laing 1967 p17

My own motivations are not just philosophical, but also theological. They are deeply grounded in a theology of service and a responsibility to the other before the self. The

theorist/theologian John Milbank I think would agree with Laing when he describes the way receptivity to the other should be ontologically primordial.

Since we are created, we are received, even as ourselves, before ourselves. Likewise, in order to exercise strength we must first be sensitive and attentive, which always involves a vulnerable exposure to risk, failure and the tragic misinterpretation by others of our own ventures.... On the other hand, just because receptivity is for us ontologically primordial, it cannot begin as a passivity in the ordinary sense: as I am entirely received, even as an I, there is no original 'I' that could be the subject of a passivity: Reception is therefore from the outset active and affirmative and this ontological circumstance is reflected ontically in our best attention towards others. Since we cannot be in their position save by falsely feigning an absolute sympathy which secretly seeks to displace them, our true attention weaves further the interval 'between', such that we most accurately sympathise by creatively responding with our own perspective. In this way the work of solidarity in its essence promotes, in their shared compossibility, both the power of others and our own.

Milbank 2006 pxvii-xviii

One of the key criticisms of an approach which seeks to give power to the research subject over representations of themselves is that they will hide the ugly truth about themselves. The common question is: What happens when your 'translation' is contested by the people you're working with? In an attempt to respond to this valid question, I follow Asad (1986) by drawing a distinction between translation and critique. Asad argues that explaining why the actions of another make sense does not equate to justifying the right-ness or wrong-ness of those same actions. Producing an account of another culture that makes it coherent is not an act of charity, but one of accuracy in translation. Working in collaboration with a community should give you more rather than less right to produce social critique: "In order for criticism to be responsible, it must always be addressed to someone who can contest it" (Asad 1986 p156). Working collaboratively with people actually opens up *more* opportunities to ethically critique practice and culture than non-collaborative methods for the very reason that it creates the space for open disagreement.

This approach also opens up questions about authorship: Is the aim to empower the community to author their own work, or for the researcher to author it in their place? Collaborative research taken to its extreme can sound like all the work is being done by the consultants while the researcher is nothing more than a glorified archivist and meeting administrator. I am convinced, however, that there has to be some anthropological work for the researcher to do. The researcher has to bring something to the project that wouldn't otherwise be available to the community in order for their work to have any function or purpose. In another context, Asad makes a passing comment on authorship:

The sense of author is ambiguous as between the person who produces a narrative and the person who authorizes particular powers, including the right to produce certain kinds of narrative. The two are clearly connected, but there is an obvious sense in which the author of a biography is different from the author of the life that is its object

Asad 1993 p4

Extending this metaphor, the type of collaborative product I am aiming to achieve is a critical, but authorized biography.

These philosophical commitments to dialogue, an acknowledgement of the creative contribution to the other, an expectation of creativity happening in the spaces in-between, and open disagreement seeking consensus find remarkable parallels in the community of participants in ICTs and especially web 2.0. Three of the most relevant parallels to this discussion are 'open source', the hyperlink and 'perpetual beta':

1. 'Open source' describes software which is both free and for which the source code is freely available. It's about honesty, dialogue, and iterative improvement. I'm using blogging through the set-up phase of my project as a way to try to practice 'open source' social research. The things I read, the reflections I have on them, the way I put different ideas together and shape my research question – these are my anthropological 'source code'.

2. The hyperlink is one of the most potent forces in social media. If you are writing a blog post – or even a Facebook update or tweet – and you refer to someone else (or someone else’s work) it is good manners to link to them. On a blog, this will sometimes come in the form of the ‘hat tip’ – at the bottom of a post, you may see h/t and a link to a person or blog. There is an expectation in the online community that people ought to be recognized for their contribution – for the knowledge they contribute.

3. ‘Beta’ is the term given to software that is in its testing phase. It belongs to a model of production that creates a prototype, tests it and then releases a final, static product into the market. Perpetual Beta is the idea that a program is never finished. It is constantly in a state up being updated, refined, in a state of process.

Given that there is such a philosophical synergy between the commitments of collaborative researchers and the ethics of social media it seems appropriate to use a blog to experiment with ‘open source’ research – to expose my reading and thinking, link to books, articles and resources, and to allow people to comment on, challenge and refine the project. There has been some research (e.g. Hine 2005) into doing research online. It focuses, however, on using the Internet as either a source of data or as a recruitment or data collection tool. Either it considers ‘computer mediated communications’ as a new form of input into the research process – something new that you can study. Or it sees information and communication technologies as a tool – something to use for recruiting participants, conducting interviews and discussion groups.

What Hine hasn’t (yet) explored are the ways in which the Internet creates new possibilities for research output, for releasing information, providing access to the inner workings of a project, and imagining new ways to organise and display research results. Johnson *et al* (2009) remind us that, as researchers we very often draw clear demarcations between “the users, producers, and subjects of anthropological knowledge”. They, and I, hope that ICTs might open up possibilities for overcoming these divides. In their words:

...it is beholden upon us to incorporate more effectively the subjects of, or more appropriately, the participants in our studies into both the making and use of anthropological knowledge.

with the hope that:

...the schisms between the subjects, producers and users of knowledge [will] begin to dissolve.

My use of a blog is an attempt to harness the internet as a form of output. It's about using the Internet to share data. Instead of using old methods on new communities, it is experimenting with using a new methodology in a more traditionally organised project. To summarise, there are four key attributes of blogging that I think are valuable:

1. The blog is an attempt to honestly reveal my anthropological process and working. This is my open source source-code.
2. The blog will hopefully encourage dialogue and criticism to refine my thinking through encounters with other people.
3. Online possibilities (such as hyperlinking) mean I can make connections between people and ideas in non-linear (but still very much narrative) ways. It is a way of providing recognition for the intellectual capital other people contribute to the project.
4. It is a tool to manifestly demonstrate that research is process. A thesis is part of a much bigger, and hopefully ongoing, process of creation, dialogue and iteration.

Post-Modern

I find scholars taking both phenomenological and post-modern approaches to social science persuasive. Clifford Geertz entertainingly suggests that anthropology has had a post-modern flavour all along:

The contextualist, antiformalist, relativizing tendencies of the bulk of that [postmodern] opinion, its turn toward examining the ways in which the world is talked about—depicted, charted, represented—rather than the way it intrinsically is, have been rather easily absorbed by adventurer scholars used to dealing with strange perceptions and stranger stories. They have, wonder of wonders, been speaking Wittgenstein all along.

Geertz 1983 p4

To some, it may seem strange to seek to combine a Christian framework for research with a phenomenological approach to knowledge, given Christianity's long association with modernism and the metaphysical. Given that one of the key characteristics of post-modernism is its skepticism of grand theories, how can I reconcile that with a belief in a grand theory like Christianity? Yet I find it compelling because it resonates with my Christian expectation that humans are finite and creaturely; all human experience is a straining towards understanding, whether it be understanding of the natural world, of other people or of God himself. Post-modernism's questioning of the authority of the observer resonates with my theological commitment to service, rather than expertise (described in detail in the section on collaboration above).

Partly this affection arises because I find the hard scientism of evolutionary anthropology and biology problematic, sharing Marilynne Robinson's (2010) discomfort with the suggestion that all behaviour is a by-product of reproductive 'fitness'. Robinson persuasively argues that the life of the mind, our experiences of decision-making, of art and of altruism are unaccounted for in 'parascientific' accounts of science and the human. For Robinson, the same mind/body dualism that many parascientific writers are arguing against is re-imagined and made manifest in their theories of the mind/body (as she delicately puts it) as "lump of meat" (p112). For example, the idea that affection for kin is an outworking of genetic fitness demands that the love felt is some kind of act of seduction by our genetic inheritance:

"Why would nature bother to distract us with [moments of love and embrace]? Why do we stand apart from nature in such a way that the interests that really move us should be concealed from us? Might there not be fewer of these

interfamilial crimes, honor killings, child abandonments, if nature had made us straightforwardly aware that urgencies more or less our own were being served in our propagating and nurturing? There is more than a hint of dualism in the notion that some better self—the terms seems fair—has to be distracted by ingratiating pleasures to accommodate the practical business of biology”.

Robinson 2010 p114-5.

In light of this, I am committed to ensuring that my participant observation and other field methods directly engage participants in the work of interpreting those things they do. Although they may not necessarily have theorised them ahead of time, I do not expect their actions to be inadvertent but something which they can actively reflect upon.

For Harvey, post-modernity is primarily an historical condition that reflects the changing experience of space and time (1990). It is characterised by flexibility and fragmentation. Aesthetically it is a bricolage. Perhaps post-modernism’s most significant contribution is its seeming argument for the intransigence of meaning. This characterisation, however, does not do justice to the acuity of post-modern scholars. Just because signifiers are unstable does not also mean that meaning and explanation are obsolete. Rather, I find Stanley Fish persuasive and find his conclusions about interpretive communities compelling:

(1) Communication does occur, despite the absence of an independent and context-free system of meaning, that (2) those who participate in this communication do so confidently rather than provisionally (they are not relativists), and that (3) while their confidence has its source in a set of beliefs, those beliefs are not individual-specific or idiosyncratic but communal and conventional.

Fish ([1980]1999) p54

As Geertz suggests above, it has long been the concern of anthropology to understand and interpret these systems of meanings, to explain the context for communication and behaviour across cultural barriers.

Phenomenology shares with post-modernity a dissatisfaction with positivist models of understanding subject and object. The position of the researcher is challenged and understood to be intricately bound up in the world they are studying. I find the phenomenological insistence that we cannot ever be sure we totally understand the other powerful. And yet, I still expect that there are better and worse understandings of the other. In particular, I have found Heidegger's reflections on nearness helpful for reflecting on the experience of migration. For Heidegger, we succeed in understanding a thing by drawing near to it, but nearness is not the same as proximity:

Yet the frantic abolition of of all distances brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance. What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us. Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness.

Heidegger (1971) p165

These reflections on nearness seem to echo Harvey's claim that new experiences of time and space demand new ways of talking about the world. The above quote also foreshadows the migrant experience of alienation among that which is proximal on the one hand and intimacy with that which is far away on the other. I have only engaged in preliminary readings of phenomenological scholarship so far. I hope to explore this literature in more detail over the next two years in expectation that it will provide opportunities for theoretical exploration of data collected in the field.

Christian

I am a Christian and I understand being a Christian to affect the whole of my life, including my work. In the interests of honesty (as outlined in the section above), I intend to be completely open about this with both my research collaborators and my colleagues in academia.

Readers of his report may be surprised or troubled at the use of Biblical references throughout. Using Scripture in this way is largely a reflection of my experience as a Christian anthropologist in which resonances (or dissonances) between the

anthropological literature and Scripture fascinate me. In the same way that I am seeking to allow collaborators in my project to speak back, correct and redirect me, I am exploring the ways I, as a person of faith, can allow that faith to interact with anthropological scholarship. Furthermore, I have used Scripture because I feel that it illustrates the length of time and depth of deliberation that people of the Jewish and Christian faith have given to discourses of, for example, belonging, citizenship and epistemology. I have not yet fully developed a methodology or strategy for this incorporation of Scripture and hope that the process of review and the next two years of the project will allow me the space to explore whether this is appropriate and if so, to articulate a scholarly justification for doing so.

When it comes to working with Christians, I expect being a Christian will have advantages and disadvantages (just as being a non-believer would have advantages and disadvantages). I hope that being a Christian provides some rapport and trust. My connections with church organizations may facilitate recruitment. I am, however, a Christian of a particular persuasion with a particular denominational history. I hope to work with people from a range of denominational backgrounds, whether they be Protestant, Orthodox or Catholic. I don't expect to agree with all the people I work with on all points of theology. This being an insider-believer but also an outsider-with-not-quite-the-same-beliefs needs may create tension. My collaborators may expect me to write about them in solely positive terms.

Within this Christian context for the project I propose to run a short series of groups in each congregation that combine aspects of both Bible study and focus groups in order to provide a space for collaborators to reflect on their migration experience with reference to a key Christian text – Scripture.

Many churches encourage members to meet in small groups for fellowship, pastoral support and to read the Bible and pray together. I will call these groups Bible study groups, but the same kinds of activities are called by a vast array of names; for example, fellowship groups, small groups, growth groups. There are many prepared Bible study guides, based on topics (such as money or friendship) or books of the Bible. The purpose and conduct of such groups differs widely between churches. One way of characterising

the purpose of Bible study is studying the Bible in order to grow as Christians, in which “observation, interpretation and application are fundamental” (Morris and Morris 2004, p48). Morris and Morris further suggest that a successful Bible study is one at the end of which members can answer the following questions: “What does the text actually say?, What does the text mean? and How do we respond to what the text means?” (ibid.)

In many ways, they are similar to the research methodology of focus groups. Focus groups are “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996, p130) in which “interaction between members of the group is a key characteristic” (Cameron, 2000, p84). This synergistic effect in focus groups is one of the key advantages of the methodology, utilising the interaction within group discussion to “elicit rich experiential data” (Asbury, 1995, p414).

I propose to take some aspects of Bible study and use them in a group context that mimics a focus group. Like a Bible study it will involve reading and reflecting on Scripture. Like a focus group, it will be focussed on learning from participants rather than teaching particular lessons.

Methodology and Timeline

In section 3, I have so far discussed some of the key methodological tools I intend to use; blogging, interviewing, auto-photography, and Bible studies as focus groups. This final part of the section situates those data collection techniques in the broader context of the project design and timeline.

To date, most of the work conducted for this project has been theoretical, based in a detailed examination of relevant literature. In addition to establishing a scholarly groundwork for the project, I have:

- Examined census statistics for Australia, Melbourne and Preston;
- Identified Preston as a potential study site;

- Developed/maintained relationships with the Anglican Archdeacon for Multicultural ministry, the lead researcher in the Catholic Parish Partnerships Office and Catholic migrant chaplain co-ordinator, and the multi-denominational research co-operative NCLS Research;
- Begun a project blog (<http://nswann.wordpress.com/>) which has had to date, 25 posts, 31 comments and 1372 page views

I am seeking access to 3 or 4 congregations centred on High St in the Melbourne suburb of Preston (see Section 4: Study Site). I intend to spend 4 months with each participating congregation in sequence. Because so many activities take place in churches on Sundays, it is not possible to conduct fieldwork in more than one church simultaneously. The overall outlook for location of research activity can be visualised:

Apr 2011	May-Aug 2011	Sep-Dec 2011	Jan-Apr 2012	May-Aug 2012	Aug 2012-Apr 2013
Seek Ethics approval and start recruitment	Field work with Congregation 1 Ongoing writing and analysis	Field work with Congregation 2 Ongoing writing and analysis	Field work with Congregation 3 Ongoing writing and analysis	Field work with Congregation 4 OR start of full-time writing and analysis [To be determined at end of field work with congregation 3]	Full-time writing and analysis

Within the 4 month cycle of research in each congregation, I am to follow a pattern similar to this:

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
Participant observation; active participation in church life	Participant observation complemented with Autophotography	Participant observation; active participation in church life	Participant observation complemented with Bible study focus groups

I will initially approach 6 local churches, and extend my contacts to more churches as/if those initial contacts decline to participate. The tasks involved in research and analysis are detailed below:

Method/Activity	Start and Duration	Additional Comments
Blogging	May 2010 thru completion of thesis	
Preliminary letters sent to <i>denominational</i> leaders seeking consent	April 2011	Follow up phone calls and meetings may be required to finalise consent
Preliminary letters sent to <i>congregational</i> leaders seeking consent	April 2011	Follow up phone calls and meetings may be required to finalise consent
Participation in congregational activities (after consent obtained) -- start of ethnography	May 2011 through August 2012	Start date dependent on acquiring consent from congregational leaders
Individual consent sought from all people involved in interviews, Bible studies, and auto-photography.	From May 2011 as appropriate	
Qualitative data analysed thematically and narratively using NVivo	From May 2011 as possible	Data stored securely and backed up regularly
Draft analysis provided to participants for review and comment via password protected space on blog	From September 2011 or as available	
With written approval from relevant participants, draft analysis may be posted to the blog	From September 2011 or as available	
Contestation about analysis acknowledged and written into the thesis	From August 2012	

4. Study site

The proposed site for this research centres on High St, Preston, in the Local Government Area (LGA) of Darebin within the Metropolitan Area of Melbourne. This section provides data about the study area and a builds a rationale for the selection of this area as the study site. Religion, or at least the construction and use of religious infrastructure such as church buildings, mosques and temples, is becoming an increasingly suburban phenomenon (e.g. Connell 2005 on Australia's own Hillsong, Naylor and Ryan 2002). This study is situated in a diverse, but not uncommonly so, middle ring suburb of Melbourne.

Statistics⁴

Melbourne is a city of migrants. One in three people in the city were born overseas (37%) and for over half the population (53%) one or both parents born were born overseas. Only 29% of Melbourne residents claim Australian ancestry. Preston has slightly elevated levels of migrants in residence compared to Melbourne as a whole. However, it is not commonly classified among those suburbs with unusually high levels of new arrivals such as St Albans, Dandenong or Springvale. Preston's migrant profile includes long term migrant groups such as Greek and Italian-born persons, medium-term groups such as those born in Vietnam, as well as newer migrant groups such as those born in The People's Republic of China. It is in this very sense of the 'normalness' of Preston's diversity in the context of Melbourne that makes it attractive as a study site. In the same way that I hope to speak to the migrant experience by using the case study of Christians instead of seeking out more 'exotic' religions, I hope to show the way in which faith impacts the everyday experiences of suburban life.

In Preston, 2 in 5 people were born overseas (42%), most of whom were born in a non-English speaking country⁵. Concomitantly, over 80% of people born overseas who live in Preston speak a language other than English at home, and nearly a quarter of the overseas born (24%) speak English poorly or not at all. Over half the people who live in Preston (58%) have at least one parent born overseas, indicating they are first or second generation migrants, which is 5% higher than in Melbourne overall (53%). In Preston, only 20% of people claim Australian ancestry, which is lower than in Melbourne overall.

Preston is a working class suburb: nearly half of all households (49%) had gross incomes of less than \$1000 per week at the time of the 2006 census, which is somewhat higher than the average across the whole city of Melbourne (40%). As in much of Australia, younger people are more highly educated than older people in Preston. Among those aged 20-54 years, 62% have finished high school to year 12 or equivalent level, while the same is true of only 15% of those aged over 55. In Melbourne overall, the proportion of

⁴ All statistics in this section are from the 2006 Australian Census. I compare figures from the Basic Community Profiles for the Melbourne Urban Locality (ABS 2006b) and the Statistical Suburb of Preston (ABS 2006c)

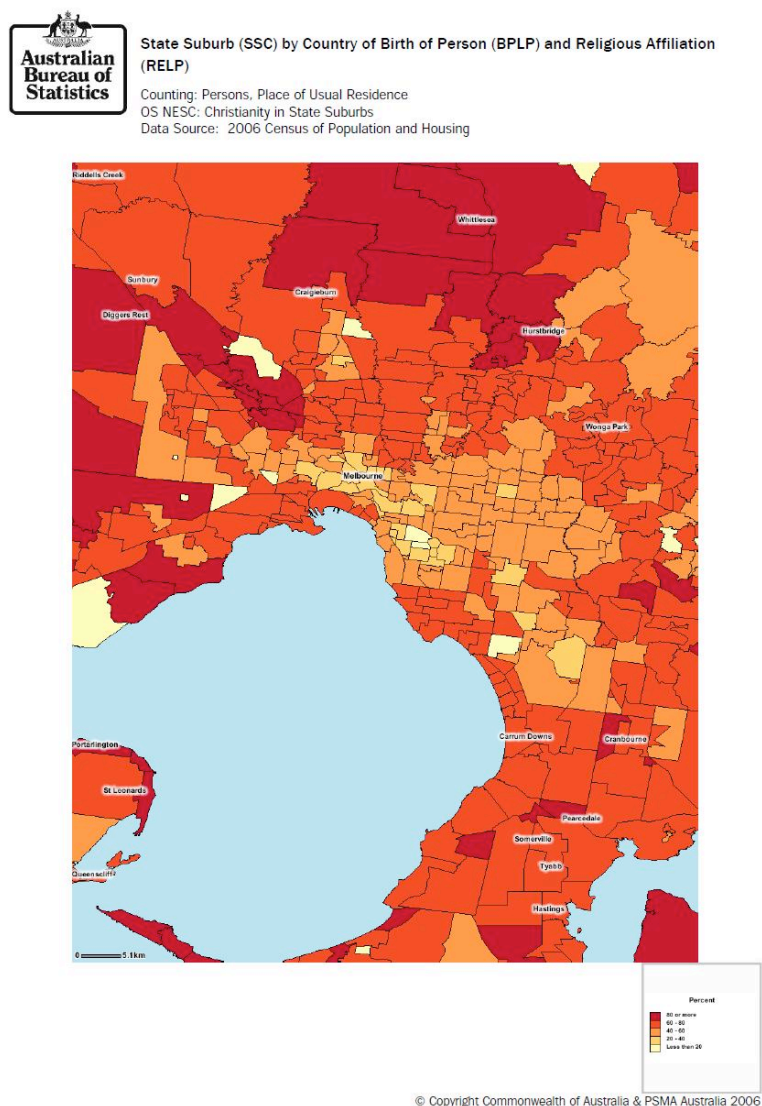
⁵ Only 3% of the population in Preston was born overseas in an English speaking country compared to 7% in Melbourne overall.

20-54 year olds who have completed year 12 is similar (61%), but among those aged 55 and over it is nearly double (29%). This is likely a reflection of the significant numbers of Southern European post-war migrants in Preston, who had restricted opportunities in war-time Europe and on arrival in Australia due to the language barrier and financial need. The distribution of workers by industry and occupation is similar to Melbourne overall.

These statistics illustrate Preston is a diverse multicultural locality in an already multicultural city.

Christian migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to be found in the outer suburbs of Melbourne than in the inner city. Figure 2 illustrates suburbs by the proportion of the overseas born population from non-English speaking countries who claim a Christian religious affiliation (including Catholic, Orthodox Protestant or other). Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants in the inner city are less likely to be Christian than CALD migrants in the outer suburbs.

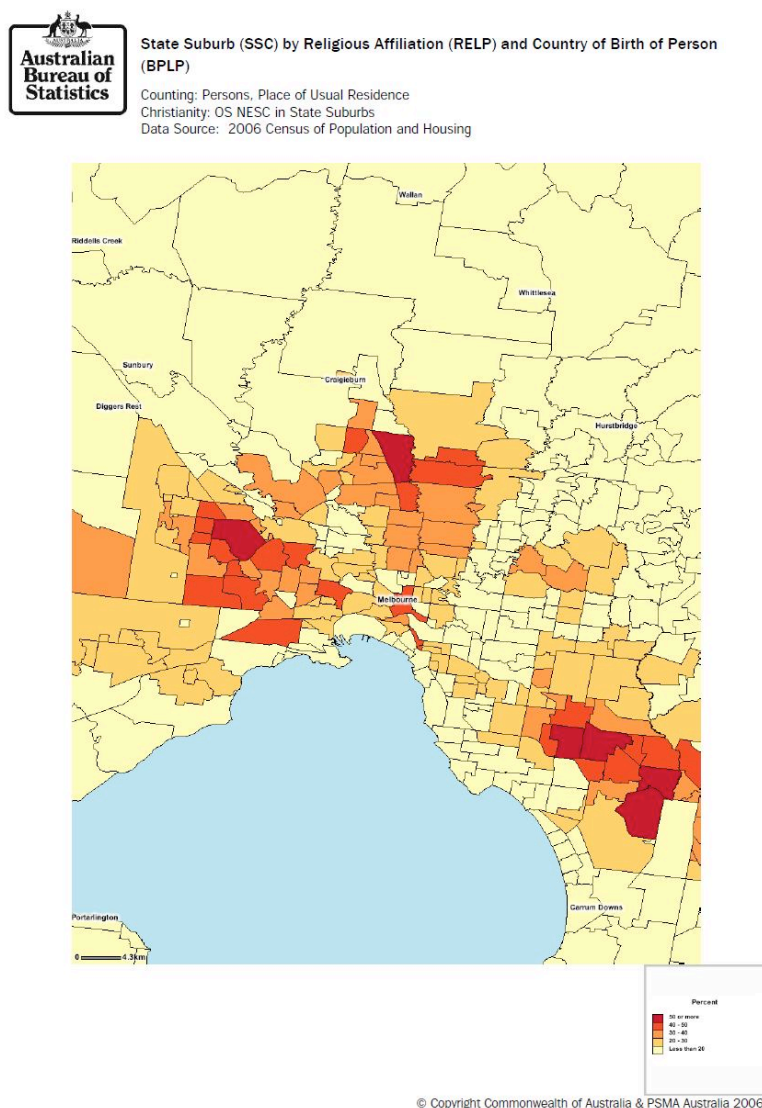
Figure 2: Map showing the proportion of overseas born persons who claim Christian affiliation by suburb



Source: ABS 2006d

Not only are CALD migrants more likely to be Christian in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, but Christians are more likely to be CALD migrants. Figure 3 shows the proportion of Christians in each suburb in Melbourne who were born overseas in non-English speaking countries. In some suburbs in Melbourne, such as Campbellfield, St Albans and Clayton South/Springvale, more than half of the Christians were born overseas in non-English speaking countries.

Figure 3: Map showing the proportion of Christian persons who were born overseas by suburb



Source: ABS 2006e

Both these trends make Preston, in the middle ring of suburbs to the north of the city, a prime location for this study. Preston is not one of the suburbs in which these trends are at their most extreme, but ought to have sufficient evidence of migrant expressions of Christianity to make the study sustainable.

Prior studies

There is one anthropological monograph published with reference to the community in Preston, *The Macedonian Question* by Loring Danforth. In this study, Danforth is

concerned with tracking “the global cultural war between Greeks and Macedonians as it plays itself out in Athens and Skopje, in New York and Brussels, in Toronto and Melbourne, as well as in villages in northern Greece” (1995 p7). The chapters dealing with Greek and Macedonian emigrants to Australia are focussed specifically on the lives of two brothers, one who claims a Greek identity, the other Macedonian. Danforth states the problem experienced by these migrants as one of being ‘doubly displaced’,

When they lived near the border between Greece and Yugoslavia, their national identity was ambiguous, their political loyalties suspect. They were never fully accepted as Greeks or as Macedonians. As immigrants to Australia, as members of diaspora communities, they have been doubly displaced; they have been marginalized even further from the national communities to which many of them would like to belong.

Danforth 1995 p8.

Highly acclaimed Australian novelist, and Preston resident Christos Tsiolkas writes stories set in Melbourne’s northern suburbs and focussed on diverse migrant communities. His debut novel *Loaded* (1995) follows the story of a young second generation Greek man, Ari, over the course of a single day and night. The story is divided into sections East, North, South and West that reflect the part of the city of Melbourne that Ari inhabits in each part of the story. In the voice of Ari, Tsiolkas provides a lengthy description of the Northern suburbs (of which Preston is one):

Hit the North. The North is where they put most of the wogs. Not in the beginning. In the beginning we clogged the inner city and the industrial suburbs of the west. But as wogs earned some money and decided to move further afield, into the bush-land-torn-down-to-become-housing-estates, more and more concrete and brick-veneer palaces began to be sprinkled across the Northern suburbs. Wogs were not welcome to move South of the river, the brown murky Yarra which divides the city; so instead the Greeks and Italians, the Chinese and Arabs, began to build their homes on the flatlands on the wrong side of the river.

The North, if you're a wog, will entrap you. Push, push, push against it. Little Arabic communities, little Greek communities, little Turkish and Italian communities. The Northern suburbs are full of the smells of goats cheese and olive oil, hashish and bitter coffee. The Northern suburbs are unrelentingly flat with ugly little brick boxes where labouring and unemployed classes roam circular streets; the road to nowhere.

The North isn't Melbourne, it isn't Australia. It is a little village in the mountains of the Mediterranean transported to the bottom of the southern hemisphere; markets of little old ladies in black screeching a Babel of languages. Harridans, fishwives, scum. The North is a growing, pulsating sore on the map of my city; the part of the city in which I and my family, my friends are meant to buy a house, grow a garden, shop, watch TV and be buried in. The North is where the wog is supposed to end up. And therefore I hate the North, I view it with as much contempt as possible.

I resist the North, the spaces in which Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese, and the rest of the one hundred and ninety other races of scum, refoos and thieves hold on to old ways, old cultures, old rituals which no longer can or should mean anything. I hit the North, get off the bus and walk along the steaming asphalt streets and I want to scream to the fucking peasants on the sidewalk, Hey you, you aren't in Europe, aren't in Asia, aren't in Africa any more. Face it, motherfuckers (and motherfucker is appropriate, the greatest obscenity: the matriarch reigns supreme in these wog houses. She may be kicked and beaten, exploited and hated, but it is she who maintains a rigid grip on the traditions that blighted her life and will blight the lives of her children). Face it motherfuckers, I want to scream, there isn't a home anymore. This is the big city, the bright lights of the west, this is a wannabe America and all the prayers to God or Allah or the Buddha can't save your children now.

Tsiolkas (1995 pp81-2)

This piece is full of the tension of migrant experience. There is a hint at the very end of the quote that religion plays a role in the lives of migrants in the North, but in both *Loaded*, and Tsiolkas' recent book *The Slap* (2008), none of the main characters believe in the Christian God. *The Slap* presents the North as a slightly more gentrified, middle class

area than the above quote from loaded portrays, which reflects changes in the area over the years between the two publications. Ethnic identity plays a major role in both books: *The Slap* presents a more diverse picture, with major characters identified as Greek, Indian, Jewish, Australian and English, and minor characters identified as Lebanese, Yugoslav, Aboriginal, Muslim, and Arab. Interestingly, the only characters of strong faith are a Muslim couple, an Aboriginal man and white Australian woman who converted to Islam independently. One of the older Greek characters, Manolis, talks of God, but expresses only anger, frustration, and disbelief. None of the first or second generation migrants – and nor, for that matter, any of the Australian characters – express love for the Christian God. This provides something of a warning for me about the possible disconnect between those in the North willing to identify themselves as Christian on the census, and those who actually actively participate in church life and love of God.

Most of the studies on religion and ethnicity in Australia take a sociological approach (e.g. Ata 1988, Bouma 1997, Carey 1996, Black 1991) or what Carey calls “cultural history” (1996 pxiv). They deal in broad brush strokes with the collective experience of migrant groups, the establishment and growth of institutions, transformations of “religious culture” (ibid) in Australia at large, and many lean heavily on discussion of statistics. These are useful studies, but they have created a monolithic discourse that binds ethnic identity with ethnic religious practice. The possibility that ethnic identity transcends religious identity (or vice versa) goes largely unnoticed. Ethnographic explorations of the impact of faith on the migration experience are few in comparison.

Ethnographies of migrant communities in Melbourne tend to focus on particular ethnicities, e.g. Cohen (2008) on Israeli mediascapes, McMichael and Manderson (2004) on well-being among Somali women, Mar (2005) on the significance of hope as an emotional structure shaping the migration experience of migrants from Hong Kong.

5. Conclusion

This report has summarised the first year of my PhD research. It has reviewed four key areas of literature, discussed my methodological approach and provided an overview of the study site from secondary data.

It has explored the primary research question for this project: What is the impact of faith on the migration experience? And discussed the various ways that this could be explored in the field, through investigations of:

- The use of space for public worship;
- The significance of material objects in personal spiritual practice and reflection;
- The way believers articulate their faith, draw on it (or not) in decision-making and use it as a lens to interpret experience;
- The way selfhood is understood, described and taught;
- The way relationships are enacted among co-congregants, and with family and friends outside the congregation; and
- The way Scripture is read, taught and interpreted.

It has explained why I am concerned with the particular experience of Christian migrants entering a majority Christian country; because it makes manifest an obvious tension between being an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’.

It provides a road map for upcoming fieldwork, in terms of the pragmatics of methodological techniques such as ethnography, autophotography, interviewing and Bible study focus groups, in terms of the ethical orientation to collaboration, and in terms of a theoretical commitment to taking an approach that is both post-modern and inherently Christian.

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Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006e) Custom map created with *CData Online*, State Suburb (SSC) by Religious Affiliation (RELP) = Christianity and Country of Birth of Person (BPLP) = OS NESC, Counting Persons by Place of Usual Residence in State Suburbs. Data Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing. Cat. No. 2064.0: <http://www.abs.gov.au/CDataOnline>

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7. Appendix: Doctoral Attributes Workshop