
THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT

BY

ELYSE JOANNE RIDER BA(Hons)

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ABSTRACT

The multicultural city of Melbourne, situated in the ecologically vulnerable state of Victoria, Australia, provides the research context for this qualitative study of the 'interfaith ecology movement.' This emerging New Social Movement under globalisation brings together the themes of religion, diversity, environmentalism and peace. It is situated at the intersection of the contemporary interfaith dialogue and the environment movements. This research is an ethnographic exploration of the fledgling cultural forms, structures, practices, motivations and challenges of this global grassroots community movement as it develops.

The ecophilosophical position of panpsychism provides the ethical, epistemological and ontological framework for this research. It informs the principles of the research methodology through which the eco-spiritual themes as well as the social, cultural and interpersonal relationships that characterise the interfaith ecology movement are explored.

Research was carried out between 2007 – 2010 primarily through engaging community groups and organisations working on interfaith ecology themes into Participatory Action Research projects and activities. This study discloses aspects of Australia's subtle and elusive spirituality, as well as local postcolonial and ecological identity politics at play with cosmopolitan spiritual and ecological experiences and identities. This study is therefore broadly relevant to the contemporary context of civic participation, environmental action and spiritual exploration under globalisation.

Through its organisations and projects, the interfaith ecology movement generates both inspiration and friction as participants navigate each other's differences in the complex process of project planning and practical action. Often hampered by cross-purposes in the development stages, these projects frequently reach a creative synergy, bridging the divides between participants. Perpetual learning and compromise characterises the practice of the movement as participants bear witness to the surfacing of an authentic dialogue of difference in the often muddy waters of social, spiritual and ecological change.

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ACRONYMS

AI:	Appreciative Inquiry
ASSISI:	A Strategic, Systems-based, Integrated Sustainability Initiative
CALD:	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CC:	Cooperation Circle (of the United Religions Initiative)
COMMON:	Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network
FRM:	Feminist Research Methodology
JCMA:	Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association
PAR:	Participatory Action Research
PWR:	Parliament of the World's Religions
URI:	United Religions Initiative

INSTANTIATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT

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GLOSSARY

Biosemiotics

According to the International Society for Biosemiotic Studies, Biosemiotics is an 'interdisciplinary research agenda investigating the myriad forms of communication and signification found in and between living systems.'¹ Biosemiotics is a combination of 'bio' (as in biology or organic systems), and 'semiotics' (as the study of signs and symbols of all kinds). Biosemiotics sees communication as biologically significant. Here 'codes and sign processes, from genetic code sequences to intercellular signalling processes to animal display behaviour to human semiotic artefacts such as language and abstract symbolic thought,' are understood as part of the communicative system-forming process underpinning all life and its evolution.

Conatus

Derived from the Latin term to 'strive,' conatus is the innate impulse in all selves, including system-selves and the whole system of life/materiality, to sustain and enhance their/its existence. This term has been used in different ways in psychology and philosophy, here I follow Mathew's definition, understanding conatus as follows:

The way in which any self reflects the dynamics of a wider self at the most general level is through its conatus. The conatus of the individual, by helping to shape the wider system, helps to sustain the conatus of that system, and the conatus of the system, by maintaining that specialised environment in existence, provides the conditions for the emergence of self-realising forms. It is the dynamics of the conatus which is reflected up through the levels of systems.²

Consciousness

This thesis adopts a broad definition of consciousness which connects into, but extends beyond the self-consciousness of individuals. It is used in the context of a panpsychist metaphysics to refer to the experience of existence as the animation of the interiority of being. From this position, consciousness is not a high order emergent property, but a fundamental property to existence. As Coleman explains:

Some properties... must be basic: If they are to be possessed by large-scale things at all, things must be present all the way down... consciousness is a property of this kind ... for its emergence from non-consciousness underpinnings would be as (metaphysically) unintelligible as the emergence of mass from the extension of masslessness.³

1 International Society for Biosemiotic Studies: <http://www.biosemiotics.org/>
2 Mathews, *The Ecological Self*, 155
3 Coleman, 'Mind under matter,' 85

This does not mean that the same expressions of consciousness are manifest across all things on all levels, but rather that there is a basic experiential element to all matter that enables its existence by virtue of it having a real interior as well as a real exterior. Some panpsychists avoid the use of the term 'consciousness' as they fear it might lead to a misreading of panpsychism as anthropocentric animism. I use it here in its eastern philosophical and spiritual sense to mean, as in the Advaita Vedanta school of non-dualism, the 'divine awareness that creates, pervades and supports everything in the cosmos.'⁴

Culture

'Culture' here is used in both relation to both inherited group patterns of meaning and expression, and the patterns of meaning and expression in new group and communities. Culture is understood as having both a collective coherent and dynamic aspect which allows it to evolve. I therefore follow Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as: 'A historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life.'⁵

Eco

'Eco' from 'ecological' is used as a prefix throughout this thesis in two main instances: 1/ When a term is specifically focused on an ecological theme or function, as in 'ecofeminism'; 2/ to express a hybridity between the human and ecological world not currently acknowledged in the naked term as in 'eco-social.'

Instantiation

I use this term to identify sites and examples where the emerging form of the interfaith ecology movement is being enacted by participants. It is used in the context of Anthony Giddens's 'theory of structuration' which connects naturalistic social sciences (of functionalism and structuralism) with interpretive hermeneutic sociology to explain the ontological reproduction of culture through practices: 'Structures exist paradigmatically, as an absent set of differences, temporally present only by their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems.'⁶

As this thesis identifies and examines a new social movement, the findings are strongly based on these instantiations which indicate how participants are, recursively and reflexively, generating the norms, culture and form of the movement.

4 Shankaranada, *Consciousness is Everything*, 326
5 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89
6 Giddens, *Central Problems of Social Theory*, 64

Mind

Whereas consciousness is the property of interior existence, mind is defined here as the structural aspect of this existence. Mind is best read in this thesis in accordance with Bateson's definition of an 'ecology of mind':

Mind [is] synonymous with cybernetic system – the relevant total information-processing, trial-and-error completing unit. And we know that within Mind in the widest sense there will be a hierarchy of sub-systems, any one of which we can call an individual mind.⁷

From this panpsychist perspective, mind is the structure for what Mathews refers to as the One and the Many – the One inclusive and holistic system-self that holds the many expressions of consciousness within it, some of which formulate into system-selves that connect to the whole but are also operationally distinct. These system-selves are what we shall call 'minds.' Whereas consciousness is not an emergent but fundamental property of matter, mind is the emergent structure that consciousness is inclined towards generating. In this way, mind is both the structural product and enabling structure for the self-realisation of consciousness.

Multicultural

Multiculturalism is used in this thesis in two ways: 1/ Following Bochner, to describe the condition of cultural diversity where 'people from different cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds come into contact with each other' in a culturally heterogeneous society, community or organisation⁸; 2/ to describe the recognition and management of this diversity as, following Festenstien 'the way in which cultural and ethnic differentiation may be accommodated in social, political and economic arrangements.'⁹

Panpsychism

Panpsychism and 'contemporary' panpsychism in this thesis refer specifically to the philosophical position, in both ethics and metaphysics, that is posited most directly (but not solely) by Freya Mathews. Panpsychism refers to the interiority or mind aspect of matter as a radical non-dualism of material and experiential existence. Rigby offers a thorough and concise definition of panpsychism in Mathews work: Panpsychism posits

the universe as a kind of 'cosmic self,' a unified, though internally differentiated and dynamic, expanding plenum,' which is self-generative, self-realising and self-referential.' Within this primal field of impulsion that is 'perhaps not so different from energy itself,'¹⁰ a multiplicity of secondary self-realizing systems, or individuated selves, are formed, which are interrelated with

7 Bateson, Ecology of Mind, 466

8 Bochner, 'Cultural diversity,' 22

9 Festenstien, 'Cultural diversity,' 70

10 Mathews, Love of Matter, 49

one another through intermediate systems, such as ecosystems. Importantly, some such individuated selves also have the potential to observe the manifestation of the greater self of which they are a part. While the science of physics can be understood as engaging in this process of observation 'from the outside,' the panpsychist does so, as it were, from within: here, the primal field, as manifest in particular material entities and places, is perceived in its subjectival dimension. From this perspective, the world appears not merely or principally as a series of causal relations, but rather as a nexus of communication, in which the One perpetually reaches out and signals to the Many, as they do, to a greater or lesser extent and intensity, to one another, in and through a shared, if variously experienced, physical reality.... not all physical entities can be supposed to communicate with us intentionally: such intentionality can only reasonably be attributed to more complex individuated selves.¹¹

Religion

I follow Durkheim's definition of religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community.'¹² This definition acknowledges the key social aspect of religion as dependent upon a community of believers. This community facilitates the institutionalisation of belief, continuity and coherence of belief across adherents, and the interpretation of spiritual experience and ethics through the collective system.

Semiosymbiogenesis

Wendy Wheeler coins this term as the confluence between the symbiogenesis as the process of creative emergence in biological systems whereby the joining together of organisms produces a new organism; and semiotics, as the signs and symbols of meaning making in the world of language and culture. Semiosymbiogenesis thus means the emergence in culture of new systems through the joining of systems.¹³

Social

Social refers here to the conditions of collective human life in the structural, compositional and material sense. As Johnson explains, the 'social' is the 'internal forms or modes or organisation, the processes that tend to maintain or change these forms of organisation, and the relation between groups.'¹⁴ The age, gender, ethnic, religious and economic make-

11 Rigby, *Minding (about) matter*, 1
12 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 47.
13 Wheeler, *The Whole Creature*, 134
14 Johnson, *Sociology*, 2

up of a community are therefore its social components. Its culture is what members of this community produce out of this context in relation to meaning, relationships and symbols.

Spirituality

I define and use 'spirituality' in this thesis in relation to both the individual experience of spirituality and the integral process of panpsychist spirituality. On the individual level, following Benson, Roehlkepartain and Rude, spirituality is:

*The intrinsic capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred ... It is shaped both within and outside of religious beliefs and practices.*¹⁵

The three components of this definition of transcendence, embeddedness, and accessible within and outside structural beliefs and institutions, is also relevant to the broad definition of spirituality employed here. This is an ontological position of the nature of integral spirituality infused into life processes and the universe that finds various expressions and communicative openings. As Wilber explains, a holistic and integrative panpsychist position entails that: 'the spectrum of evolution is a spectrum of consciousness. And one can perhaps begin to see that a spiritual dimension is built into the very fabric, the very *depth*, of the Kosmos.'¹⁶

15 Benson, Roehlkepartain and Rude, *Spiritual development*, 205-206
16 Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, 57

INTRODUCTION

We began as a mineral.

We emerged into plant life and into

The animal state, and then to being human.

And always we have forgotten our former states,

Except in early spring,

When we dimly recall being green again.

That is how a young person turns

Toward a teacher, how a baby leans

Toward the breast, without knowing

The secret of its desire,

Yet turning instinctively.

So humankind is being led along

An evolving course through this migration

Of intelligences, and though we seem

To be sleeping, there is an inner wakefulness

That directs the dream.

It will eventually startle us back

To the truth of who we are.

- An Evolving Course, Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī¹

1 Barks (ed.), Year With Rumi, 125

Sufi poet, Rumi's poem describes an 'evolving course' that is an innate impulse to life and an organic process played out on the micro, individuated, collective and super-structural levels. Although this course is realised through us, none of us are singularly responsible for it nor ever removed from responsiveness to it. Significantly, this course is something to be held in common; finding multiple expressions and manifestations, it is nonetheless a shared current through and between us and our differences. Buoying us up and keeping us intimately connected to each other, our relationality becomes the very stuff or 'matter' of existence. Further, this matter is animated with conscious power and intention. Rumi expresses faith in this evolving course; he has faith that it will continue to evolve us, to awaken us, and that we will continue to learn to know it, and through it, ourselves.

This thesis is an action research study of the groups and individuals bringing together the themes of religion, spirituality, diversity and environmentalism in an emerging New Social Movement I term the 'interfaith ecology movement.' Interfaith ecology has come into being over the late 20th and early 21st centuries at the intersection of the modern interfaith movement and the environment movement. Drawing on the infrastructure, networks and ideologies of these two parent movements, interfaith ecology responds to a unique set of eco-human circumstances coinciding under advanced globalisation including: ecological degradation and eco-crises; the increased capacity to communicate in global forums and create cultural and social movements across national divides; the increased multiculturalism, and multi-religiosity of all nations, and in particular western democratic states; and the increased interest in spirituality and religion as both positive and negative forces of social change and meaning-making.

Interfaith ecology seeks an integral understanding and practical ethics for this coinciding of conditions that will shape the future of humanity. It strives for a new shared culture of civic participation, cross-cultural relationality and eco-social sustainability while at the same time preserving and valuing diversity of identity, culture, and in particular, religion. While the world is struggling to contain religiously motivated violence and ecological exploitation, the interfaith ecology movement is attempting to develop its alternative of spirituality motivated peace and eco-cultural flourishing through diversity.

This research into the interfaith ecology movement was conducted over 2007-2010, primarily with organisations and projects in the Greater Melbourne Region of Victoria, Australia. It also included research into national and global networks and organisations of the movement and their contexts. This qualitative grassroots study reveals how interfaith ecology is being generated at the community level through creative responses to shifting identities and environments under globalisation. The interpersonal and transformative

interiors of the movement are as important to this research as the structures, theories and visions, ecological and social context, and mechanisms of action at the community level.

An inquiry of this kind is methodologically demanding as it requires an integral research framework that can explore how the movement is emerging from ecological, social and spiritual contexts and relationships. Contemporary panpsychism, as posited by Freya Mathews and other eco-philosophers, provides a guiding framework for this research and my approach as the action researcher and anthropologist. Panpsychism reinvests the material world with an interiority of layered and connective consciousness; 'a subjectival matrix, within the eddies and currents of whose dynamics we and other finite creatures stake out our relative identities'.² A panpsychist inquiry into the integrated form and content of the interfaith ecology movement elucidates the developmental processes of the movement, reflecting its purpose and potential, and maintains a receptive stance to its manifestations and expressions.

Implementing panpsychism as a methodology in this thesis required what Borrell and Boulet describe as a 'transpersonal-ecological approach' to social research which places the 'emphasis on holism and the dynamic interconnectedness inherent in all biological/social/human reality.'³ This approach encounters the research subject as a living system contextualised by form, matter, process and meaning, making it possible to 'apply a unified understanding of life to phenomena in the realm of matter and of meaning.'⁴

My first literary encounters with the interfaith ecology movement were the text and discussions generated by the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. The texts and links that this organisation provided highlighted for me how the academic interfaith ecology community had built and maintained strong practical relationships with community and religious leaders, grassroots organisations and global social networks. The Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia of Drew University had recently released its 2007 text *Ecospirit*⁵ which included numerous chapters on the ritual, community, theological and philosophical aspects of interfaith ecology and eco-faith work. Observing the Melbourne context I saw similar links between community organisations, religious institutions and academic institutions in the field of interfaith dialogue. These encounters resonated with my professional background in community development work at participant group Borderlands Cooperative, an organisation that actively fosters the links

2 Mathews, *Love of Matter*, 4

3 Borell and Boulet, 'Values, objectivity and bias,' 573

4 Borell and Boulet, 'Values, objectivity and bias,' 573

5 Kearns and Keller, *Ecospirit*

between academic research, holistic approaches to learning, and grassroots community projects.

In the early research stages, my online research revealed how large interfaith global organisations such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Alliance of Religion and Conservation were moving towards ecologically aware projects and themes. They were forging community relationships with religious and spiritual leaders, creating institutional partnerships that linked interfaith and ecology work and were seeding interfaith ecology initiatives across the globe in networks of dialogue, knowledge and action. I was inspired by the work of the international organisation, Interfaith Youth Core⁶, which focused on the way service and actions could be a common ground for multifaith youth to share experiences and create bonds of friendship and dialogue. In researching the Parliament of the World's Religions at this time, I found that there was an increasing emphasis on environmentally focused dialogue at its pentennial gatherings of thousands of members and leaders from global religious groups and institutions. I found that in December 2006 Melbourne had won the bid to host the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions and while the theme of 'hearing each other, healing the earth' had not yet been articulated, the reports that the committee were interested in the local issues of Indigenous participation and environment focused my research onto Melbourne. The coming Parliament and the energy the event generates in the communities that host it would provide an important opportunity for investigating how groups and activities organise at the grassroots level and the way awareness of interfaith cooperation and eco-faith themes would potentially spread and grow. Melbourne, over the course of 2007 - 2010, would be a unique environment for exploring the interface of global and local action in interfaith ecology.

Research into the literature on religion and ecology or religious environmentalism field revealed a gap that this thesis hopes to contribute to bridging. While there is a substantial body of work in comparative religion on the different understandings of ecological philosophy and environmental action – such as the Forum of Religion and Ecology's nine volume World Religions and Ecology Book Series – there is little academic focus on the way these religions are interacting to generate shared or new eco-insights. Texts addressing this specific nexus, featuring work by Mary Evelyn Tucker,⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether,⁸ Baird Callicott⁹ and Joanna Macy,¹⁰ among others, will be presented in chapter 3 where the ideas informing the interfaith ecology movement are explored. These texts

6 Referred to as 'core' not 'corps'

7 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*

8 Ruether, *Gaia and God*

9 Callicott, *Earths Insights*

centre, however, on the ethics, philosophy and vision of the movement rather than its ethnographic or sociological components of interest to this study.

The global interfaith ecology movement as a social and cultural phenomenon and New Social Movement were largely neglected in academic literature at the time of this study. There were a handful of studies on the interfaith ecology movement that addressed its various sociological, political and philosophical contexts published during the course of this research which illustrates both the growth and influence of the movement itself and the budding academic interest in the relevancy of the movement. Laurel Kearns' chapter entitled 'Religion and ecology in the context of globalization' in the 2007 volume *Religion, Globalization and Culture* is a strong overview of the growing practical social and political discourse between globalisation, religion and environmentalism. Emma Tomalin provides a comprehensive and critical study of the trends of thought and practice within the religious environmentalism movements of India and Britain in her 2009 book *Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The limits to religious environmentalism* which focuses on the myth of primitive ecological wisdom and its propagation through the interfaith ecology movement. Also published during the course of this research were two edited volumes that draw together work relevant to interfaith ecology: the aforementioned 2007 *Ecospirit* edited by Kearns and Keller brings together philosophical and practical research relevant to the movement; the more recent 2010 collection edited by Sigurd Bergmann, Dieter Gerten entitled *Religion and Dangerous Environmental Change: Transdisciplinary perspectives on the ethics of climate and sustainability* includes authors in disciplines as diverse as hydrology, religious studies, theology, cultural studies, philosophy and visual arts who examine religion as a microcosm of cultural response to environmental change. Jim Kenney's *Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change* examines the general trend of current social change movements to integrate themes and to generate an increase in the three measures of complexity, awareness of interdependence and integral knowing. The interfaith ecology movement is not identified by Kenney, but it clearly sits among the trends, practices and communications he defines as 'emergents' of global social change as will be discussed in chapter 2.

There are comprehensive anthropological, political and sociological studies of religious environmentalism focusing predominantly on Christian environmentalism in the USA as found, for example, in Robert Wuthnow and John Hyde Evans' edited volume, *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-based activism and the public role of mainline Protestantism*. Studies such as these are relevant to interfaith ecology, but do not explore how interreligious dialogue or action intersects with ecological actions and civic participation locally or

globally. Bron Taylor's *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, published towards the end of my research period in 2010, is a pertinent study identifying the structures, trends and culture of the global eco-spiritual movement from the perspective of grassroots action and communications. Taylor does not focus on interfaith dialogue in relation to this movement, but provides analysis on the cross-cultural influences and hybridized beliefs and practices of dark green religion as a new social movement. The most comprehensive study of Christian environmentalism in Australia was Steven Douglas' thesis *Is 'Green' Religion the Solution to the Ecological Crisis?* examining the ways different church institutions in Australia are greening themselves and the effectiveness of these actions. At the time of this research, how non-Christian global religions in Australia are engaging in environmentalism, and the nexus of the religious diversity of Australia and its environmental issues at the community level, were under-explored.

Limiting the scope of this thesis was an arduous task as the subject's multidisciplinary nature opens up multiple fields and topics. Interesting companions to, but outside of the scope of this work are studies into the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements. While interfaith ecology is influenced by these movements and these movements express many of the ideals and visions of interfaith ecology, they are not especially focused on cultural diversity and are therefore less pertinent to this study on a movement at the intersection of multiculturalism and environmentalism. This study focuses on the way mainstream religious organisations and community members are engaging with each other on the issue of environmentalism, revealing the eco-conversion of mainstream religious beliefs and institutions as well as the ways interfaith relationships are beginning to characterise a range of civic activities in multicultural societies. Methodologically, the scope of this work is qualitative and ethnographic. It is focused mainly on narrative and experiential data collected through Participatory Action Research and Feminist Research Methodology processes, in-depth interviews, participant-observation and internet surveys of the field. Outside of the scope of this methodology are quantitative data collection processes and participant surveys.

In this thesis I use the term 'interfaith ecology' as an umbrella for the various ways participants are defining their work in the movement. Some other terms used by participants and writers include 'faith and ecology,' 'religion and ecology,' 'religious environmentalism,' 'green faith,' 'eco-theology,' 'eco-faith' and 'interfaith and the environment,' to name a few. The terms 'multi-faith,' 'interreligious' and 'multi-religious' are also commonly used instead of 'interfaith.' I have selected the term 'interfaith ecology' for several reasons. The use of 'ecology' encompasses the different areas of focus within the movement such as eco-spirituality, environmental activism and ecological awareness

raising; the term 'environmentalism' would perhaps define a narrower field of political activism. The use of 'inter' in 'interfaith' as opposed to 'multifaith' acknowledges that in a pluralist project, participants are hearing and sharing their beliefs and that this process is itself dialogical and mutually creating new understandings and relationships out of that interaction. 'Faith' is used instead of 'religion' because it is a more inclusive term that can apply to those within the movement that do not subscribe to a religion but do have faith. 'Faith' can encompass commitment to a religious system as well as a general commitment to a belief in a process, being or entity. 'Interfaith' is inclusive of different layers of faith as they interrelate both within and between participants.

In chapter 1 of this thesis I develop a conative research practice that enables a holistic and ethical exploration of the movement guided by a panpsychist position. The transpersonal-ecological inquiry of this research is linked here to the principles of panpsychism and the methodologies of Participatory Action Research and Feminist Research Methodology. The emphasis on the philosophical position and its ethics for practice are important to this study which seeks to enact through the research process the vision of a holistic mode of social, spiritual and ecological practice, reflective of the subject matter itself.

Chapter 2 pans out to the broader context of the movement within globalisation. The movement's position within a framework of multiculturalism theory is explored here. From the global context, the chapter then focuses back onto the national socio-historic, cultural and spiritual setting of Australia generally. It highlights Australia as a unique site for the emerging movement as a liberal multicultural democracy on colonised land in the Asia Pacific region.

Chapter 3 is a thematic overview of the literature which informs and articulates the grassroots actions and the institutional approaches of the movement. The interfaith ecology movement has a rich and growing body of literature that articulates its formative philosophy and vision on the development of integral and holistic ethics and philosophy in the context of global pluralism and ecological imperilment. Theorists from diverse backgrounds in theology, history, philosophy, political science, social theory, feminism and ecology contribute to this literature.

While interfaith ecology literature is thorough in its development of theory and ethics, there is little exploration of how these theories play out within the structures of current social, economic and political environments. Chapter 4 sets the scene for this inquiry by relaying the structural environment that is bringing forth the interfaith ecology movement. This chapter focuses on interfaith ecology as a developing New Social Movement and the key elements and implications of this status within globalisation. The policy frameworks that are conducive to the strengthening of the interfaith ecology

movement in Australian, Victorian and Greater Melbourne society are explored in this chapter. The way policy shapes the movement, as well as the potential influences of interfaith ecology on multicultural policy are considered. As a new social movement in the Australian third sector, interfaith ecology faces specific key structural challenges in its operation and development which will also be identified in this chapter.

Part Two of this thesis then turns to the emerging culture of the interfaith ecology movement. This ethnographic exploration of the movement's people and practices includes its grassroots community organisations, religious institutions, global networks and individual drivers. Part Two depicts a growing movement, facing complex challenges in finding right action, establishing its identity, and defining the parameters of participation. It also portrays the achievements of the participants working towards the principles of interfaith ecology in their lives, communities and organisations. Accounts of my personal research journey are embedded throughout Part Two. These tell the story of how, alongside participants and through collaborative action, I learnt about the modes and products of the movement.

Chapter 5 investigates the key standpoints of diversity and approaches to these differences within the movement. Interfaith ecology tends to attract high levels of diversity that are played out differently in relation to age, gender, ethnic and cultural identity. These identities are layered upon the religious or faith identity of participants creating a complex matrix of differences which sets the challenge of the shared project of interfaith ecology as a New Social Movement.

These challenges are the subject of chapter 6 which explores the frictions and conflicts generated within the movement between these differently situated participants striving towards a shared goal in very different ways. Participants often have opposing political views, boundaries of tolerance, cultural histories as victims and perpetrators of violence, understandings of environmental issues and science, personalities and ways of relating to power structure and decision making.

Chapter 7 demonstrates that, while often painful and sometimes insurmountable, the frictions of interfaith ecology at the grassroots and interpersonal levels are generating a creative synergy of dialogue, action and innovation. The practical and lived actions of the movement relayed in this chapter, exemplify the persistence of the participants in working through difference to make real the vision for alternative modes of eco-cultural sustainability and empowerment. This achievement is striking a chord at many different levels and sectors of globalisation institutions and networks allowing the impact of the interfaith ecology movement to spread and take on new forms.

Chapter 8 seeks to understand the inspirational forces driving the development of the interfaith ecology movement. It delves into the motivations that are attracting participants and feeding their patience and dedication to this hybrid and complex cause. The movement provides a forum through which the personal life narratives and learning experiences of participants intersect with their faith-based spiritual callings to motivate transformative collective action. These inner motivations are linked to external sources of inspiration within the movement. Inspiring projects, programs, and places promote the growth of the movement through demonstrating actions, sharing models, and seeding ideas which become locally and diversely implemented.

Through its ecologically grounded dialogue and practical community empowerment processes, interfaith ecology is germinating a holistic culture through rather than against difference. Its development is both viral within and subversive to the mainstream structures of globalisation. As a New Social Movement, interfaith ecology is springing up to rejuvenate the capacity of communities, newly diversified and ecologically situated, to make and shape their world in reflexive and responsive ways. By undertaking the intricate work of communication across difference in practical settings, the interfaith ecology movement is developing new and appropriate modes of civic participation, lived pluralism and ecological attunement, highly relevant to globalised societies as they seek to chart their evolving course.

PART ONE

A CONATIVE RESEARCH PRACTICE

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF INQUIRY

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

RATIONALE

Identifying and exploring interfaith ecology as a new social movement is relevant to the broader academic project of mapping social change movements and their transformations within the contexts of globalisation. This study joins with other community-level social studies of responses to globalisation to investigate how multiple social themes and trends are interacting at the community level to influence cultural and social change. It also joins community development and empowerment studies to explore the capacity of social actors to shape these changes and environments.

The interfaith ecology movement is a collectivity of self-conscious actions that identify and work to strengthen the links between multiculturalism, multi-faith contact and co-existence, interfaith dialogue and cooperation, environmentalism and changes in the cultural role and understanding of spirituality in the context of various religious groups in the cosmopolitan society. The movement is an important indicator of cultural and social trends as it is articulating interactions between elements of the global society and seeking to understand how these interactions can be directed towards positive ends from the grassroots of society. By investigating the instantiations of the movement through specific projects, actions and participants, this study identifies the mechanisms and trends through which these holistic community-based responses are taking form.

The will of movement actors to adapt and develop traditions and cultural forms, and the creative and collaborative projects they participate in when navigating this transformation, warrants exploration. These endeavours reveal channels of empowerment linking individuals, institutions and layers of community participation. Significantly, and related to its spread and vitality, interfaith ecology works on a number of layers of

community in which individuals are embedded: the community of belonging (the cultural, religious or social group to which the individual belongs); the community of dialogue (the diverse group of people with which the individual communicates and lives their everyday); and the community of action (the people the individual works with to further their social and political goals). All of these communities are inextricable from local and global sites and structures.

AREA OF CONCERN

The dynamic network of actions and communications on social, ecological and spiritual themes in the interfaith ecology movement draws upon a number of fields of information and experience, modes of knowing, and ways of expressing. At the community level, interpersonal relationships across religion, culture, politics, age, gender and other life factors are at the helm as well as the heart of the work movement participants embark upon. The spiritual orientation of the movement means that participants are consciously engaging with the movement as part of their spiritual experience and development. They are informed by their religious or spiritual tradition as well as the milieu of practical, philosophical and political texts and contexts they have encountered in their journeys to and within the movement. In threading together the themes of spirituality, diversity and ecology, the interfaith ecology movement is taking a radical step towards the development of a connected, yet diversely lived and expressed, global human-eco culture.

For this study to adequately explore the emergent culture of the interfaith ecology movement, it required philosophical and methodological frameworks flexible and appropriate to the movement's integrative work at the liminal spaces between culture and ecology, theory and experience, and spirituality and practicality. Through a panpsychist philosophical position, the ontological and epistemological grounds of inquiry here are rendered inextricable to each other and to the ethics and principles of the research praxis. Their deliberate and deliberative integration in this research connects the research process to complex philosophical positions and insights and equally, though differently, complex practical circumstances in fieldwork. This connectivity is bolstered by a strong infrastructure of research ethics in which panpsychist concepts find practical expression at the community level through Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Feminist Research Methodology (FRM) approaches.

KEY QUESTIONS

Stemming from this rationale and area of concern, this thesis seeks to address three key questions:

1. How is the interfaith ecology movement developing within the context of globalisation?
2. What is the emerging social and cultural form of the interfaith ecology movement?
3. What is the work and learning of the interfaith ecology movement?

Enabling the investigation of these questions is the key methodological question of:

How do I research an emerging, multifaceted social movement that is essentially holistic and transformative?

This chapter will explain my response to this methodological question.

The first section of this chapter explores the contemporary panpsychist position as posited by Freya Mathews and other ecofeminists and ecophilosophers. This philosophical position is the grounding from which the research process and methodology will develop. The panpsychist understanding of emergence and manifestation as based on 'conative' expression and motivation, will be explained and historically contextualised here. The ways in which conatus is enacted as a mode of operation and ethical living will then be explored.

The third section of this chapter draws on qualitative research methodologies that synergise with the tenets of panpsychism to develop the principles of practice for this research. The qualitative methodologies of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Feminist Research Methodology (FRM) suitably express the panpsychist position in action because they actively challenge the dualist power structures and inconsistencies of traditional social research and deeply embed the researcher into the research as a co-creator of action and knowledge with participants.

The resulting methodology developed here links the panpsychist concept of 'conatus,' as the innate striving of the 'becoming' in context, to the field of community practice and the development of the interfaith ecology movement. Here, the research methodology itself aims to be a vehicle of 'conative' expression. The final section of this chapter describes how this methodology is applied in the fieldwork methods and structure of this research.

PANPSYCHISM AND CONATUS

Panpsychism recognises and reclaims the consciousness embedded as the connecting and relational interior of all things; it reveals the holistic and integrated mind inseparable from the holistic and integrated materiality of the 'real' world. In adopting a panpsychist framework for this research, I subscribe to Freya Mathews' panpsychist philosophy which

seeks to destabilise the fundamental dualism underpinning the modern concept of the real and reintegrate matter and mind. Under material dualism, the conscious actor (human) and non-conscious object (the world) are severed via the relegation of mind solely to the realm of human/animal consciousness and the subsequent denial of the interiority and of matter. 'From the dualistic point of view,' Mathews observes, 'mind and matter are categorically distinct substances – mind is devoid of the externalised, empirical attributes that characterize matter, and matter is devoid of the internalized, expressive characteristics associated with mind.'¹ Panpsychism understands mind and matter as inextricable; it therefore reanimates matter and re-materialises mind.

Mathew's 'argument from realism' establishes the interiority of matter as a necessary corollary of an existent world both individually encountered as well as operating outside of our personalised conscious perceptions. If the world exists, and we can engage with it and know it, she argues, then matter must exist unto itself and not only in our perception, it, therefore, has its own internally constitutive status. The dualism between materialism and idealism leads, as Rigby notes, paradoxically to 'derealisation'² in which our conscious experience of the world is understood as isolated, disassociated from a living conscious world that creates and lives in and with us.

The human question in this argument is further addressed by Wheeler in her 'materialist argument about the nature of human sociality.'³ Wheeler's theory of human 'naturalness,' complements Mathew's panpsychism by providing some insights into the similarities between emergent phenomena in human collective and contextual consciousness and non-human natural emergence in evolution: 'Creativity is in many ways a word for describing autopoiesis as biosemiotic life,' Wheeler states, 'all nature and culture is creative becoming and change. In human complex systems, creativity is semiotic liveliness: liveliness in language, and liveliness in the processes via which tacit knowledge can emerge in concepts which can be articulated or, rather more accurately, are articulated as the process of such an emergence.'⁴ This autopoietic creativity is the conscious and interactive 'real' of all things.

Panpsychism recognises the interiority of all things evidenced by this creative impulse within all matter and its manifestations to 'be' and to 'become.' In terming this impulse 'conatus,' Mathews instates *emergence* as fundamental to her panpsychism. *Conatus*, from the Latin, describes both striving and impulse, both the will to 'become' and the situatedness of this will at the heart of being/existence. The essence of life is this very

1 Mathews, Love of Matter, 26
2 Rigby, Minding (about) matter, 1
3 Wheeler, Whole Creature, 139
4 Wheeler, Whole Creature, 139

'becoming' and importantly the panpsychist perspective entails that this is necessarily a becoming *with* as not only all beings, but all matter shares this impulsive spark.

The Greek *pneuma* (breath, breath of life, cosmic breath) as used in Stoic philosophy is closely akin to the Spinozian meaning of 'conatus' upon which Mathews draws in developing a contemporary panpsychism. As Inwood describes, 'the Stoics explained the persisting identity of particular beings by reference to the 'sustaining' power of the things internal *pneuma*, which also accounts for each thing's individual substance...it pertains to both animate and inanimate things.'⁵ For the Stoics, the manifest divine is in all things from the movement of objects in the technical sense, to instinct in animals and plants, to the reasoning faculties of humans. Inwood's summary of this aspect of Stoic thought points to the connection between the individual conatus or *pneuma* and that of the divine whole: 'Individual human beings are "parts of universal nature," which is to say that they, like everything else, are necessarily connected to the world of systems ... God or Nature manifests itself in particular animate natures as an impulse to self-preservation.'⁶ As McEvilley explains, this Stoic thought on manifest and unmanifest Zeus is paralleled in Hindu philosophy in the Advaita Vedanta distinction between the One and Many, or transcendent and immanent aspects of divinity.⁷

McEvilley describes this concept of conscious harmony in relation to ethics: 'the ethical end is to bring one's patterns of desire and aversion into harmony with the actual flow of events which are outside our control, or with nature.'⁸ As Inwood affirms, human thought and action are

*generally imperfect because most human beings fail to understand the organisation of nature and their own individual natures... Happiness and freedom depend entirely on accommodating one's mind and purposes to the necessary causal sequence of nature. One can achieve that accommodation only by understanding that virtue consists in living according to one's nature ... The ideally wise person has a mind-set which in the coherence of its ideas and their practical implications, mirrors the necessary and rational sequence of natural events.'*⁹

Wolfson contextualises this growing understanding in Classical scholarship, from Aristotle to Cicero and Laertius, that conatus is the driver of not only emotions and subsequent action, but also our sense of 'the good' inasmuch as we attribute goodness according to our conative inclination.¹⁰ What we know to be 'good' here is not determined by our superficial or rational decision-making alone, but plumbs the depths of our existential

5 Inwood, Companion to the Stoics, 374, n11

6 Inwood, Companion to the Stoics, 374

7 McEvilley, Ancient Thought, 542

8 McEvilley, Ancient Thought, 623

9 Inwood, Companion to the Stoics, 374-375

10 Wolfson, Philosophy of Spinoza

being and is inextricable from our innate instincts. Furthermore, ethical relationality is not only relevant to the human realm, but permeates all being thus rendering all beings and things morally considerable.

The link between conatus and divine will in Stoic thought was further developed by the medieval Scholastic philosophers who worked at the intersection of science and theology by incorporating ancient Greek philosophy into Christianity.¹¹ These and later Christian and Jewish scholars continued to use 'conatus' to describe the expression of the immanent divine in each being, thing and entity as a natural ethical compass.¹² The ethical aspect of conatus is thus not imposed upon the instinctive aspect in the way that moral codes of conduct may be imposed upon other 'impulses' such as sexual, creative or violent impulses. Rather, conatus comes to embody the ethical dimensions of impulse and inclination through: a/ the relationship between conative desire and the will of God; and b/ conative enhancement as contextualised.

The modernist move away from the interiority of matter and the consciousness of non-human beings undermined the possibility of a shared and holistic level of conscious infused into existence in the world. This modern denial of interiority also included animals through the mechanisation of animal consciousness as evident in Descartes' theory. As Singer describes, this denial of conscious interiority had significant ethical implications for the treatment of animals in modern science and society, here animals assumed to 'experience neither pleasure nor pain, nor anything else. Although they may squeal when cut with a knife ... this does not, Descartes said, mean that they feel pain in these situations. They are governed by the same principles as a clock.'¹³

The concept of conatus has largely lived on in the modern context in the field of psychology. Conatus comes to mean the equilibrium between individual and context that allows for both the existence of the individual and the structure or mutual supportiveness of the context. Conatus is the striving of each mind to be in and of itself but also to belong in its context – to make sense of its context and its place or part within it. Conatus is the differentiating force allowing for the diversity that is the very structure of conscious existence. Psychological health depends upon the ability of individuals and societies to balance this 'unity in diversity' principle, as Warren explains:

An individual, particular thing is such only by reason of having conatus and without this tendency to self-preservation a thing would not be a distinct thing but merely a part of some other; without conatus all would collapse into chaotic flux in which no individual thing would be

11 Gaber, Descartes' Metaphysical Physics, 150-154

12 Lin, 'Spinoza's metaphysics of desire,' 4

13 Singer, Rethinking Life and Death, 168

*identifiable. Conatus might be seen as a homeostatic process or a process serving an equilibrium in both an inner and external world of change and fluctuation.*¹⁴

In recognising the balance between the One and the Many or the individual and the whole context, the concept of 'conatus' reveals an 'ecology of becoming' descriptive of the material, spiritual, psychological and social realms. In this ecology, the striving essence of conatus, diversely expressed, is maintained in equilibrium with the unfolding of the whole, and as such individual conatus is situated within a community of others, an ultimately inclusive community of humans, animals, plants, entities and things. As Mathews explains, 'in a panpsychist universe everything is unfolding towards a greater end, an end of cosmological self-increase that is already immanent in the very sources of Creation.'¹⁵ While this notion *can* be also applied to the concepts of 'emergence' or 'creativity' it is not inherent to the meaning and history of these terms in the way it is to 'conatus.' Whereas creativity and emergence can take place in relation to any desire or intention, including violent or destructive situations such as the 'creativity' of an innovative weapon, the conative creativity contains the 'whole' or 'divine' will to co-create as well as self-preserve and as such, to flourish holistically and 'essentially.' Conatus thus refers more particularly to those modes of creativity and emergence that arise through a harmonisation of the whole consciousness and the will and actions of the beings or entities at play within it.

THE PANPSYCHIST MODUS OPERANDI ET VIVENDI

Consciousness is understood in panpsychism as nested manifestations of itself expressed with varying degrees of intentionality and awareness. Mathews differentiates her panpsychism from pantheism and the animist traditions that ascribe human-like interactive qualities to non-human life, she does not attribute intentioned communications to all things. As Rigby notes, 'Mathews cautions that not all physical entities can be supposed to communicate with us intentionally: such intentionality can only reasonably be attributed to more complex individuated selves.'¹⁶

For Mathews, the panpsychist world is a space for consciousness in action; an animated arena in which 'selves', defined as self-maintaining systems, emerge, interact and dissipate. These selves are not all conscious in the same way, and are not all at the same level of self-realisation; very few are self-aware or reflexively conscious. At the most basic level, Mathews describes 'selves' using the metaphor of water movements. She contrasts the transient water disturbances with the occasional complex figurations of small vortices

14 Warren, Personal Construct Psychology, 30

15 Mathews, Reinhabiting Reality, 25

or whirlpools which form autonomous self-supporting systems of movement, resisting merger back to the disparate movements of the whole while at the same time being part of and dependent on that whole: 'even while we observe their relative independence of "wild" causal influences,' she explains 'we are aware that this independence is itself a function of their geometrical dependence on the complex wider structures in which they are embedded.'¹⁷

The understanding that a/ selves are distinctively operating systems, with their own conatus or drive to 'be'; b/ these systems are always a formation of the whole, which is the substance of all selves; and c/ all selves are thus expressions of this whole's conatus, are interdependent concepts in Mathews theory. Mathews points out that '[t]his holistic dependence creates a relative independence in the face of external causal conditions. In the case of the vortices, the "autonomy" of the self-maintaining system is thus acquired at the cost of a geometrical or functional dependence on a special environment. This "autonomy" then is ... in no way a capacity to "stand alone."¹⁸ She proposes, therefore, that we 'call this special kind of individual, whose, autonomy and integrity are a function of its interconnectedness with its environment, "a self."¹⁹

Ecofeminist, Val Plumwood also describes an organising principle of emergence, inseparable from the forms it generates. In agreement with Mathews' underpinning principle of conatus, Plumwood posits 'a materialist spirituality which recognises that spirit is not a hyper-separated extra ingredient but a certain mode of organisation of a material body, unable to exist separately from it.'²⁰ The ordering of the universe is here understood as an active-creative and perpetual-adaptive process practiced by all structures, matter, life, animals and humans. For humans to engage with this process we need, in Plumwood's view, to practice 'intentional recognition' through which we cultivate a perspective on the things and life around us as co-creative entities that shape us and are shaped by us. '[I]ntentional recognition provides the basis for a fusion of mind and matter,' she states. Much like the mindfulness of the meditative traditions, it is a practice of awareness through which one accesses a 'richer conception of materiality as intentionality organised and thus participating in mindfulness and transcendence.'²¹ The intentionality we learn to recognise in the world around us is similarly recognised in the self, thus rendering self and world kindred.

16 Rigby, *Minding (about) matter*, 2

17 Mathews, *Ecological Self*, 107

18 Mathews, *Ecological Self*, 108

19 Mathews, *Ecological Self*, 108

20 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 223

21 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 223

Plumwood stresses the difference between ego and self in this process of intentionality. The “personal” is not to be equated with the solipsistic hyperbolised individual whose essential self identity can be maintained beyond death in a separate realm, but acknowledges essential links to nations and communities of earth others, including the more-than-human ancestors of the human.’²² The revelation of the expanded yet uniquely manifest Self is necessarily linked here to panpsychism through a process of recognising spirit as manifest in all things, and thereby in the personal self. Not only does this perspective lead to a humble honouring of the self as an expression of universal spirit, a far richer experience of individual subjectivity than that of contracted ego; it also firmly instates communicative ethics in our relationship with what is now understood as our responsive world.

Mathews defines self-awareness and self-determination in this embedded context as ‘Eros’, or ‘love,’ which she differentiates from the ‘appetite’ of unthinking need fulfilment.²³ Eros, for Mathews, refers to falling in love with the process of life and life affirmation. The project for humans thus becomes to make space within ourselves for the expression of our conatus, the expression of life unfolding, and to acknowledge, watch and participate in this process.

Eros as the relational experience of panpsychism resonates strongly with the Australian Aboriginal worldview in which the flow of ethical communication between all beings and things is literally grounded in the practice of caring for ‘country.’ ‘Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun’ anthropologist Deborah Rose explains, ‘[p]eople talk about country in the same way as they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy.’²⁴ This philosophy of country resonates strongly with panpsychism as in Aboriginal culture, ‘country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and *a will toward life* ... Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it *is lived* in and lived with.’²⁵ ‘Country’ is conscious and operates in a mode of conatus, which manifests in all the life and beings it brings forth, including its humans. As Aboriginal philosopher Mary Graham explains, this is the fundamental relationship that all other human relationships derive from and reflect:

The two most important kinds of relationship in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second being always contingent upon the

22 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 227

23 Mathews, *Love of Matter*, 149

24 Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 7

25 Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 7 [my emphasis]

*first. The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our human-ness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relation between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations. Therefore all meaning comes from land.*²⁶

This is what Aboriginal people mean when they describe being 'one' with the land. Theirs is a culture which maximises the flow of communication and responsiveness with their conscious world at the local level of real engagement. Decolonising place as land, is echoed in the practice of decolonising cultural 'space' more generally. This includes the creative spaces lying between relationships, the spaces where ideas are formed, the space for contributions from others, the space for one's own unpredictable flourishing, and the space of unknowability. In the mode of conative being, decolonising methodology lets all these spaces 'be' and as such is the ethical framework allowing the dynamic flow of the life-world to enter our social and intellectual, as well as our ecological actions.

A CONATIVE INQUIRY: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Panpsychism presents an approach that is not only descriptive of consciousness in the world and the interiority of material existence, but also deeply ethical in the relationships it reveals and the ways in which we can approach our own and other life as situated in this newly animated world. The panpsychist principles distilled here are the theoretical backbone of this methodology. They collectively present a system of being in and with the world that is applicable in community, ecological and interpersonal ethics.

In panpsychism, opening awareness and relationality is navigated through ethical decision-making or what Plumwood refers to as 'recovered reason.' Rose describes the balance between openness and ethics as follows: 'On the one hand openness is unlimited, since one always wants to try to understand others, and to listen with an open mind. On the other hand, openness has limits: an ethical position does not remain open to assisting violence or to sustaining the silences that oppress.'²⁷ Non-violent, decolonising politics and dialogical attunement and learning are thus complementary processes in a panpsychist ethics that sustains ecological, cultural and personal revelation.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Feminist Research Methodology (FRM) are not primarily concerned with ecology or consciousness (though they are both concerned with 'consciousness raising' in the political and social sense), yet there are striking similarities between the principles of these methodologies and panpsychism. The primary synergy of this relationship is the orientation towards the deconstruction of dualism and dualistic

26 Graham, Aboriginal worldviews, 181-182 [my emphasis]
27 Rose, Wild Country, 22

methods of inquiry. Importantly for panpsychism, PAR and FRM have explored extensively the practical aspects of a non-dualist theory in social action, education and research covering the ethics of engagement, the flexibility and structure of research programs, the expression and communication of learning and findings, and many more ethical considerations for practice. These are both emancipatory research methodologies – PAR stems from Marxist and Neo-Marxist approaches to pedagogy and social work developed throughout the 20th Century;²⁸ FRM stems from the feminist critique of research as a ‘male gaze’ that reduces women and others to passive research ‘objects.’

PAR practitioners Whitehead and McNiff describe their community research practices as linked to the unfolding process of evolution: ‘We understand the universe, and ourselves and others as part of it, as involved in constantly unfolding processes of creation. We and the universe are not working towards closure, but are part of growth that is always in a process of self-creation and new evolutionary forms.’²⁹ This is a conative research process in that it enables an eco-conscious meeting of practice and theory, operating through the same evolutionary growth continuum as all life processes. Here ‘belief in the nature of these processes travels to belief in the nature of all growth processes, as free, self-transforming, relational and inclusive, and therefore co-creative.’³⁰

PAR and PRM open the possibility of research that is holistic, integrative and transformative. Yoland Wadsworth explains that the use of these ‘whole systems’ inquiry methods require a cross-disciplinary approach bringing together four key domains:

- *living systems (ecology)*
- *research as inquiry (epistemology)*
- *by individuals (psychology)*
- *by organised human collectivities (sociology)*³¹

This integrative approach is particularly relevant to this study of a movement focused in both form and content, on holistic social change responses. As Wadsworth continues, developing an inquiry along these woven lines reveals the instantiations of action in the research process (the action research projects and activities) as it builds seamlessly with

28 Antonio Gramsci, working as a politician, activist and writer circa 1920 Europe, developed a reflexive and liberationist approach to learning and research where analysis is co-constructed with research participants whose perspectives and experience are valued. Gramsci advocated this method as a way of valuing the intricate philosophies that research participants form about their own lives through lived experience. Paulo Freire applied these liberating principles to participatory and empowering education and social work in Brazil and U.S.A, expanding and developing participatory theory and practice throughout the latter half of the 20th Century (1940s-1990s). See: Mayo, *Adult Education*

29 Whitehead and McNiff, *Living Theory*, 86

30 Whitehead and McNiff, *Living Theory*, 86

31 Wadsworth, *Building in Research and Evaluation*, xxvi

action in the research subject (the development of the interfaith ecology movement): 'It is in these busy buzzing micro-inquiry actions that may be seen slowly, over time, to build up to comprise more (or less) viable exchanges and patterns.'³² This is not a process of random observation of smaller and larger actions. Rather the action research framework instills an ethical and analytical 'mental architecture' in the research process which is key to understanding 'how we do or do not achieve the conditions for living systems,'³³ in this case, the system of the emerging interfaith ecology movement. Linking strongly to the panpsychist position, action research becomes here a device for 'thinking about the sequence of life-becoming-itself' in the context of social change and community development.³⁴

PAR and FRM tools and processes focus on the development of reciprocity and mutual co-creation in research with community groups. This methodological process mirrors in research practice Mathews' description of a relational system that maximises conative flow and opens reflexive consciousness: '[T]he identity of a self-realising system is a function of the identities of those with whom it is inter-related,' she explains, '[w]hen self is understood in this way, conatus is served, not by a will to stifle and destroy others, but rather by mutually sustaining interaction with them: it is by *mutualistic* relations ... that the individual in question asserts and consolidates its self-hood: to seek such relations is thus the essence of its conatus.'³⁵ PAR and FRM provide an opening for this essence to be realised sociologically.

MY RESEARCH FORUM

My three year fieldwork period, from July 2007 – July 2010, covers an important time of growth for the interfaith ecology movement in Australia and globally. Over this time, new initiatives were taking hold and a growing awareness of the connection between peace and understanding between faith communities and peace and understanding in the life world we share were becoming more widely recognised and supported.

A variety of organisations were selected for this fieldwork so as to gain a range of experiences and encounters of organisational processes and cultures as well as project themes and contexts. These multiple organisations and my positions with and within them allowed me to gain various perspectives on the interfaith ecology movement. These perspectives included the first hand experience of a movement participant who is:

32 Wadsworth, *Building in Research and Evaluation*, xxvii

33 Wadsworth, *Building in Research and Evaluation*, xxiv

34 Wadsworth, *Building in Research and Evaluation*, xxiv

35 Mathews, *Love of Matter*, 57

- working practically on a project with local communities
- building a new group or network
- an active member of an already established organisation
- a volunteer assisting leaders realise their vision
- a team leader with a vision
- mediating relationships within an organisation
- engaged in on-line discussions and information exchange
- holding influence and power in group decision-making
- a peripheral participant taking direction from group leaders
- integrated through friendship and acceptance into a group
- an outsider who is interested in a group or organisation from a more distant perspective

I began this journey observing the work being done by organisations whose orientation is more generally interfaith or eco-faith. I then became involved as a volunteer in projects initiated and led by movement leaders, I was operating as a movement ‘apprentice’ in these roles and these projects became more directed towards the specific nexus of interfaith ecology work as my awareness of the movement and the movement itself developed. With the knowledge and experience gained, and following this panpsychist informed research methodology, I moved into a community organising role and developed projects with participants that were focused specifically on interfaith ecology themes. During this time I also became connected to the global networks that support this work and was increasingly aware of the broader interfaith ecology movement activities.

Project work is the primary forum through which this research was conducted. Seminal to PAR, project work is a community development process of working with participants on a practical project or activity that requires group organisation, planning and a tangible outcome. This forum of research is a fertile ground for exploring the interpersonal relationships that grow between participants and the way that participants encounter difference, conflict and inspiration with each other. There is significant overlap between the different aspects or levels of fieldwork I encountered in the sense that any one project or fieldwork encounter has inextricable dimensions of experience ranging from the practical to the social to the spiritual. Projects are interrelated formally in organisational partnerships or project feed-on effects, and less formally in the way an incident or relationship in one project inspires or hinders action in another. Project work experiences

also provide a wealth of firsthand knowledge of working in this movement as a participant and are the source of my own narrative knowledge of the movement. This is complemented by the use of in-depth narrative interviews with participants who reflect on their understandings of these and other experiences important to them. In addition to this, further observation, experience and analysis stems from my immersion in the activities and communications of the movement generally through attending and observing other organisations' projects of events, activities or dialogues in local, national and international contexts. In each of these research forums, I strove towards the synergistic principles of panpsychism participatory research described below.

SPACE FOR EMERGENCE

In both PAR and FRM practitioners are concerned with the role of activism in the research context and research in the activist context. In this research I strike a balance between the active and passive roles of the practitioner by understanding practitioner work as active space-making. This underpinning principle is relevant to a key methodological issue in both PAR and FRM: Researcher-activists produce research studies that map the course of their activist experience with participants, communicating and reflecting on what was learned through that experience. This, as Pain *et al.* state, requires 'some parity in political goals, and sometimes complex negotiations, but adds to an existing canon of action as well as facilitating research.'³⁶

Whitehead and McNiff draw on Buber's concept of contemplative dialogue and attentive silence to build a communicative practice for PAR. For Buber the communication instinct is a conative communion; 'the longing for the world to become present to us ... which goes out to us as we to it, which chooses and recognizes us as we do it, which is confirmed in us as we in it.'³⁷ Methodologically, this means that in an 'encounter it is important to settle into the expectation of dialogue as a form of living contemplation.' This is found through 'an attitude of attentiveness, and this could often be accomplished through silence, not a hostile silence, but a silence full of anticipation, pregnant silence, while we prepare to give the other our full and undivided attention.'³⁸ Knowing how to manage silences, listening, speaking, being with and letting-be are intuitive as well as learnt processes that this methodology seeks to practice and develop.

The space-making approach enables the participation and expression of the participants and the movement through the research process. It is maintained throughout the project

36 Pain et al. 'PAR: Making a difference,' 32

37 Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, 88

and is inclusive of different combinations of participants in different organisational and project settings. Furthermore, it allows these settings to be co-created and unique, providing greater insight into the dynamic culture emerging through the project as well as through the participants as individual players. In active space making, group dynamics and the FRM process of working with groups is important to exploring and 'how arguments are developed, and identities elaborated, in focus group context, typically through challenge and provocation from other members of the group.'³⁹ In this research an emphasis is placed on the flexibility, understanding and support group members offer each other in the realisation of a shared vision.

While power is distributed away from the practitioner in the group method, they still have an important mediation role to play in ensuring the safety and security of the group – in maintaining and sustaining the space for emergence and shared exploration. Feminist researchers have found that relinquishing control in the group context is largely beneficial to the research and the participants, but that it also means the practitioner is less able to curtail the negative aspects in group dynamics, such as interpersonal power abuses. Active space-making aims towards this balance between facilitation and letting-be.

This methodology does not deliberately avoid potentially 'difficult' research projects or situations; rather it understands these as necessary to the overall ecology of a diverse and dynamic community. Chatterton *et al.* describe such challenging cultural and social spaces as 'opportunities for transformative dialogue, mutual learning, as well as conflict. Their openness also makes them sites of potential manipulation, fear and insecurity, but civil society stems from all of these tendencies and should be embraced.'⁴⁰ This research is open to the unpredictable integrity and authenticity whereby projects reclaim space for potential creativity and contestation. As Chatterton *et al.* continue, such encounters remind us 'what it means to be free while also connected. It rejects what stops us from expressing, what restrains us, governs us, disciplines us, and makes us blind to each other and the natural world on which we depend.'⁴¹ It is the primary intention of this methodology to work in this context to make and maintain 'participatory spaces...created for building understanding, encounter and action which are inclusive, which nurture creative interaction with others... and which can lead to critical reflection and interventions.'⁴²

38 Whitehead and McNiff, *Living Theory*, 91
39 Wilkinson, 'How useful are focus groups?' 68
40 Chatterton, Fuller, Routledge, 'Relating action to activism,' 222
41 Chatterton, Fuller, Routledge, 'Relating action to activism,' 222
42 Chatterton, Fuller, Routledge, 'Relating action to activism,' 222

INTERACTIVE AND SITUATED SELFHOOD

This research methodology explored what systems I am contributing to and participating in throughout the research and their implications for the participants, the movement and the broader eco-social environment. Pain *et al.* describe the interactivity of research and learning in PAR as an 'ethical and dialogic engagement and...commitment to research-informed action.'⁴³ This opens research activities to co-production with 'participants in particular places' who 'profoundly change our research practices and theoretical perspectives.'⁴⁴ I apply this method here through allowing dialogue in my research to flow through the co-creation of projects, activities or practices with research participants.

The more enthusiastic the participants are about the research project, the more they will be both interested and challenging learning partners for each other and the practitioner. Foote Whyte *et al.* describe this process as the 'continuous mutual learning strategy' whereby 'the researcher is constantly challenged by events and by ideas, information, and arguments posed by the research participants.'⁴⁵ The 'continuous mutual learning strategy' permeates the research project with learning opportunities through the active involvement of others (i.e. participants) who have an interest in the life and development of the project, but have no vested academic interest in making the process easily definable and conclusive.

This methodology places the practitioner in complex relationships with participants who often have equal vested interests and stakes in the project. As Pain *et al.* explain, 'PAR requires researchers to negotiate changing and fluid understandings of being inside or outside throughout a project's life. It may also require movement beyond the bounds of normal research relationships into the less clear-cut realms of friendship.'⁴⁶ Research participants may wish to take the project beyond the defined agenda of the academic project, they may form political or social alliances through the project or bring these pre-formulated relationships and interests with them, they may form friendships, they may disappoint or inspire themselves, each other or the practitioner through the long-term engagement with the project. These 'relational aspects of PAR also demand a rethinking of positionality'⁴⁷ as a continual dialogical process defining the practitioner's role as various and collectively managed with other participant roles.

Some PAR or FRM projects may require participants to be of, or open to, an explicit political process, such as a Marxist or radical feminist approach. This would be

43 Pain, Kindon and Kesby, 'Participatory action research', 29

44 Pain, Kindon and Kesby, 'Participatory action research', 29

45 Foote Whyte, Greenwood and Lazes, 'PAR: Through practice to science,' 42

46 Pain, Kindon and Kesby, 'Participatory action research,' 30

47 Pain, Kindon and Kesby. 'Participatory action research,' 31

inappropriate for the interfaith context of this research where different approaches and worldviews are of the essence. In applying this methodology I do not require participants to agree upon a blanket approach or vision. Instead I seek to incorporate the multiple perspectives and approaches of the participants into the flexible knowledge networks of the research. The active spaces this generates are built, maintained and grow through these networks of dialogue and participation.

EMPLACEMENT

According to Mathews we can 'honour and cherish the place in which we find ourselves, whether that place happens to fall in the degraded heartlands of the inner city or the pristine expanses of the outback.'⁴⁸ Our active role in these places is to nurture and leave room for the potential grace of earthly communication to shine through both places and people, even in the most industrialised or degraded regions.

An ethics of locality is not, however, limited to our home-place. Place sensitivity rather brings to the fore, especially in our globalising world, the relationship between places and the exploitations and injustices that these reveal. As Plumwood argues, 'Communities should always be imagined as in relationship to others ... An ecological re-conception of dwelling has to include a justice perspective.'⁴⁹ This approach engenders a deep respect for the ability of local people to act creatively and generatively in systems of participation that shape their environment.

Webster and Mertova argue that narrative methods allow research to focus on human relationality and complexity: 'quantitative methods tend not to have the scope to deal with complex human-centred issues. Therefore, we believe that narrative inquiry has a particular value to contribute, as it is well suited to addressing the issues of complexity and cultural and human centeredness in research.'⁵⁰ As Lieblich *et al.* concur, a narrative method can be particularly appropriate to understanding a person's cultural and personal reality and context: 'In many studies in sociology and anthropology, the narrative is used to represent the character or lifestyle of specific sub-groups in society, defined by their gender, race, religion, and so on.'⁵¹ Stories, they continue, also provide unique insight into the inner aspects of this experience which is of interest to a holistic research practice: 'One

48 Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality*, 200

49 Plumwood, *Shadow places*, 139-140

50 Webster and Mertova, *Using Narrative Inquiry*, 3

51 Lieblich *et al.* *Narrative Research*, 4

of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lived and their experienced reality.⁵²

My methodology uses narrative research techniques in allowing participants to tell the stories of their involvement with the movement through semi-structured interviews. In the research process, narratives allow people to tell the story of their work in interfaith ecology, highlighting what the most important aspects of that journey is for them. Not only the practical, but also the embodied, intuitive and emotional aspects of the experience were communicated.

Using multiple data-collection methods, inclusive of narrative and experiential data, makes the hermeneutic journey of translation and analysis complex. As Acker *et al.* state: 'Our feminist commitment had led us to collect data that were difficult to analyse and had provided us with so much information that it was difficult to choose what was "essential" and at the same time tried to give a picture that provided a "totality."' ⁵³ The practitioner needs to employ the same openness, intuitive inquiry, honest reporting, contextual consideration and relationship aware approach in data analysis and communication that is taken in the research process itself. Along these integrated lines, I draw in this research on Whitehead and McNiff who use the following questions in data processing:

Is the account comprehensible?

Is the account truthful?

Is the account sincere?

Is the account appropriate? ⁵⁴

DECOLONISING PRACTICE

Rose describes decolonisation as offering a new mode of relationship based on 'connection.' As a way that 'leads into engagement and purpose ... decolonisation depends on this process: the moral claim, the response, the recognition and connection, the commitment.'⁵⁵ Instead of attempting to own, control and homogenise land, non-human lives and human others, we might learn to respect and honour these companions as our keepers, appreciating the givenness we share in, and the unknown creative potential therein.

52 Lieblich et al. Narrative Research, 7
53 Acker et al. 'Objectivity and truth', 143
54 Whitehead and McNiff, Living Theory, 141
55 Rose, Wild Country, 31

Decolonisation rejects a homogenised system of production in favour of honouring unique expressions of eco-cultural systems. In this research I seek to reconnect people, place and social action. As Martin explains: 'Action researchers today place high value on change processes that are developed *with* the local community ... change ordered from the top risks being superficial and mechanistic.'⁵⁶ Following PAR, this research works on the local level, engaging community groups and organisations in projects which enhance learning and action opportunities in interfaith ecology. Linking local people to projects through which they can directly address the issues that concern them is not only important to the satisfaction and expression of the participants but also to the broader society into which these often innovative actions are fed. Fonow and Cook point out how context based research in FRM projects has been 'characterised by an emphasis on creativity, spontaneity, and improvisation' which is required when adapting research to local community needs and interpretations. This includes 'the selection of both topic and method' and tends to focus on 'already given situations both as the focus of investigation and as a means of collecting data.'⁵⁷ Grassroots community work in this research is mutually beneficial as the skills and time of the practitioner are given in service to the community: 'The most important objective of action research is to strengthen local abilities to seek, organise and utilise relevant information to solve problems...Non-local partners in PAR need to have something to offer. To be useful and justify their presence.'⁵⁸

A substantial amount of time and effort is put into place and people relationship building in this research because, as Barton notes 'it is unrealistic for people unfamiliar with a community or the local context to have the kind of understanding and local acceptance necessary to become partners or facilitators in the PAR process.'⁵⁹ This includes learning organisational customs, practices and social-ecologies through sustained participation. This commitment is fruitful as projects and network building are more successful when appropriately tailored to local needs and potentials.

The five principles of Indigenous Methodology that Wilson and Pence found to be successful in including Indigenous systems in both research process and content are reflected, almost directly, in the principles that have been developed throughout this chapter and are relevant to all participatory grassroots research projects. These include:

The Community of knowledge: we are the interpreters – not the originators or owners of knowledge.

56 Martin, 'PAR in public schools,' 223
57 Fonow and Cook. 'Back to the future,' 11
58 Barton, *Our People, Our Resources*, 98.
59 Barton, *Our People, Our Resources*, 97

Recognising Spiritual Connections: We agreed that our work must recognise the spiritual links between people and the power of spiritual connections.

Relational Accountability: As researchers, we are part of our research and inseparable from it. In our interpretation of knowledge, we must be respectful and supportive of the relationships that have been established through the research process.

Reciprocity: The notion of reciprocity and the research relationship suggests that the communities of people who are the subjects of the research should be the primary beneficiaries of the research.

Holism: Holism recognises that people are the sum (and more) of their many parts. Holism reminds us that in the research process, the spiritual, physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of the people participating in the research (including the researchers) must be considered.⁶⁰

The ethical principles in panpsychism explored above in conjunction with their practical expression in PAR and FRM produce a methodology for this research which links self, process, and context. These research ethics on the themes of space-making, situated interaction, emplacement and the unique, decolonisation, and relational ethics inform this inquiry, enabling an understanding of the social-ecological adaptive change under consideration in the emerging interfaith ecology movement. The panpsychist insight of the inseparability of mind and matter – or social, personal and natural ecology – allows me to invest this research with the practices of sustainability, continuity, co-existence and habitat generation, in the given organisational and interpersonal contexts of the movement.

FIELDWORK STRUCTURE AND METHODS

RESEARCH ETHICS

The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) at Monash University, granted approval for this research under Project Number: CF07/2808 – 2007001726. Some considerations in applying participatory ethics to the research include the status and positionality of the researcher in the research. Traditionally for FRM and PAR the researcher is assumed to be in a position of social power (ie. they may be of a more dominant gender, class, race or political position). As Ramazanoglu and Holland note, however, power is not always distributed in this way or remains static throughout

60 Wilson and Pence, 'U.S legal interventions,' 201

the research: 'You will need to decide what to do about power relations in your own research, including situations where the people you are studying can exercise power over you.'⁶¹

This research recognises power as part of the ecology of organisations and is cognisant of its unique manifestations as well as its structural expressions. As the practitioner of this research practise I am an Anglo, middle-class, educated woman in my mid-late twenties. I do not belong to a religious organisation or institution but was raised a practising Christian. This identity positions me in both dominant and subordinate structural standpoints in this research. Many participants are of minority ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Most key participants, however, are older, and hold positions of importance in their faith or work communities. In a number of instances this meant that the participants viewed and related to me as a young and interested novice and offered encouragement and nurturing. This inversion of the traditional power dynamic of research was fortuitous and an example of the conative flow of openness and care in this research. I was given substantial support in terms of advice, emotional support, and spiritual development, social and intellectual opportunities to grow and learn by these participants. I was referred to as a 'young leader' by various participants at different times and in different groups. The care and interest in my development and capacity that research participants showed me meant that relationships in this research were balanced by an active exchange.

In investigating how other faith-based organisations were engaging in the interfaith ecology movement I came across the Shiva Ashram of Mt Eliza where Swami Shankarananda runs courses in the 'self inquiry' method of meditation and Shiva yoga. The Ashram was strongly involved in the interfaith dialogue scene in the Melbourne area. I attended a meditation course and read some of Shankarananda's teachings.⁶² The methods and techniques of self inquiry further connected me to the panpsychist perspective of non-dualism, which from this Hindu perspective is *Advaita Vedanta*. This practice showed me how the panpsychist and conative understanding was being enacted as a spiritual practice. Maintaining these practices of mindfulness and meditation throughout this research gave me the ability to process issues and conflicts I encountered. It also enabled me to relate more genuinely to the movement participants who practised a faith tradition and maintained spiritual connections that informed their work in interfaith ecology.

Whitehead and McNiff uphold this sense of self in research as not 'a ring-fenced identity, but as in deep relationship with those whose company we keep... we form our identities in

61 Ramazanoglu and Holland, *Feminist Methodology*, 156

62 Shankarananda, *Self Inquiry*

relation to our attachments ... we understand our practices in terms of our duties to those to whom we are attached.'⁶³ The opportunities I had been given by my participants made me more committed to our collective work and the ethical relationship of the research became, in most cases, one of genuine reciprocity.

This distribution of power did not mean that there were no ethical dilemmas arising from power. Ultimately, as the academic researcher, I have power over the way events or activities are communicated in the written research. The close relationships of support and friendship between the practitioner and participants is thus a power relationship when this hermeneutic process of reporting on activities and group dynamics takes place. As Ramazanoglu and Holland explain 'if your project demands spending long periods of time with research subjects, people can become accustomed to your presence, drop their guard, and perhaps reveal more than they might wish. For the entire experience is data, but ethics and accountability to the researched demand that you are alert to the interest of your participants, and accountable for producing knowledge that could harm them.'⁶⁴

Many of the participants and participant organisations in this research were disappointed in the prospect of anonymity and requested that I readdress the Ethics Committee of my university to allow for their presence in the research. The feeling of being able to claim a voice in the research was important to these participants. This meant that the participants placed a high degree of trust in me to properly represent them and their movement. I have honoured this trust by selectively using identification. I have attempted to balance my relationship to the movement and my relationship to the integrity of this research by being as clear and honest about my observations as possible. I have also disguised some situations so that the individuals or organisations involved are not negatively impacted while the important findings are still communicated.

In sensitive circumstances where I made observations that may negatively impact participants and their relationships with fellow participants or their organisation I have de-identified both the participants and the organisations with code names. Code names are marked with an asterix, e.g. Geraldine* from EarthOrb* denotes a code named participant and organisation. I have also de-identified participants who were part of the research process via their participation in organisations that signed onto this research but who were not signed into the research as individuals. For instance, the United Religions Initiative was signed on as a participant organisation, but those with whom I conversed at the global assemblies, numbering over 100 were not signed on as individuals. In these

63 Whitehead and McNiff, *Living Theory*, 91

64 Ramazanoglu and Holland, *Feminist Methodology*, 158

circumstances I either de-identify the participant with a code name or name them only by the position they hold in the organisation.

Throughout the writing process I have analysed the data from my research observations, experiences and relationships, and determined how these accounts should be relayed within the ethics of PAR. Sensitive accounts, mostly representing conflicts in interpersonal and organisational relationships analysed in chapter 6, have been included under the following considerations: 1/ the protection of the participant; 2/ the validity and impact of the account to the research findings; and 3/ the extent to which the account revealed deeper or broader aspects of movement development.

INSTANTIATIONS IN FIELDWORK FINDINGS

Giddens' theory of structuration bridges natural and hermeneutic inquiry in social science through an ontology of social change. Through the reproduction and adaptation of social practices, individuals recursively enact the social structure itself. As Giddens states, 'human social activities, like some self-producing items in nature, are recursive ... In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible.'⁶⁵ This process of structural enactment and change occurs through series of acts and moments that Giddens terms 'instantiations.' He argues in that these moments are the constituting social acts that form and define any coherent human social structure: 'The instantiation of structure in the reproduction of social systems, as its medium and outcome, is the proper focus of sociological analysis.'⁶⁶ Furthermore, reflexive actors have the capacity to create and order of practices which they knowingly instantiate: 'It is the specifically reflexive form of the knowledgeability of human agents that is most deeply involved in the recursive ordering of practices.'⁶⁷

As the purpose of this study is to identify and examine an emerging new social movement, in communicating findings I have focused primarily on the instantiations of the movement and how the actors generating these instantiations understand their work, impact and relationship to broader social trends and adaptations. This approach preferences a broad range of instantiations across the movement, rather than several in-depth case studies which would not illustrate its spread, scope and developing trends.

65 Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 2

66 Giddens, *Central Problems of Social Theory*, 106

67 Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 3

Exploring instantiations is particularly relevant to the study of interfaith ecology as a social change movement founded in religious and cultural structure and the structures of globalisation. The theory of structuration explains how established cultural and religious forms and structures, such as traditions, institutions, moral codes, rituals, norms and practices, shape and define the capacity and media through which individuals act. It also explains how through adapting these reproductive acts in new ways, social actors reflexively enact social change and shape the changing of instituted structures situated in specific moments of time and in specific sites and places. As Giddens explains: 'Social activity is always constituted in three intersecting moments of difference: temporally, paradigmatically (involving structure which is present only in its instantiation) and spatially. All social practices are situated activities in each of these senses.'⁶⁸

In the making of a new social movement, grounded in a commitment to both the preservation and the adaptation of religious and cultural structures, participants in the interfaith ecology movement are building-up collective cultural adaptations through participating in the enactment and reproduction of small and large collective instantiations of the movement.

RESEARCH FORMAT

ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND OBSERVATION METHODS

Over the three year research period I worked on twelve action research projects spread unevenly across twelve organisations as a single researcher. These projects were the key research sites and were complemented by participant interviews and observations of the activities of the broader interfaith ecology movement. My involvement in projects varied from key leader to peripheral participant. I conducted several action research projects in some organisations and in others my research was limited to participation or observation. Overall my immersion as an anthropologist and social actor in the movement was intensive and absorbing. This gave me a strong understanding via experience of the different ways people are creating this movement and contributing to its development. The action research projects involved a range of participatory and observation methods including working with groups, organisations and individuals to:

- design and plan projects
- conduct project evaluation and review discussions
- develop grant applications to fund projects

68 Giddens, *Central Problems of Social Theory*, 54

- attend and participate in planning and management meetings
- adopt volunteer leadership roles and positions in organisations
- participate in programs and events of large and small scale, locally and internationally
- present at events and gatherings on project activities and issues
- drive networking and relationship-building within and between organisations
- conduct strategic development workshops for organisations
- brainstorm ideas and possibilities through dialogue sessions
- share and discuss philosophical and spiritual views and understandings in dialogue
- participate in rituals and spiritual activities
- discuss ideas and hopes for the future development of organisations
- work towards resolving differences, issues and conflicts
- provide administrative support and leadership on projects
- participate in email and online chat discussions

In addition to this project-based action research, I also participated in activities and communications with non-participant organisations which exposed me to the broader activities and trends of the movement locally and internationally. This research included the following activities with groups/organisations that did not participate in action research projects:

- participating in formal and informal online networks and information sharing groups
- attending 15 activities and events
- surveying websites and blogs from 10 organisations
- receiving regular newsletters and updates from 6 organisations
- reading organisational magazines, reports and publications from 9 organisations

The data collection techniques I used in action research and observation based activities included:

- 12 in-depth interviews with leaders of participant organisations
- collecting and mapping trends in email and online discussion forums
- compiling project development materials and exchanges that shaped these
- journaling significant experiences, incidents and observations throughout the research period
- collecting project planning and evaluation materials

- collecting and compiling promotional materials and publications from a range of organisations
- collecting feedback and responses to activities and processes undertaken with groups

The interviews I conducted with the twelve leaders/movement drivers in this research were in-depth, semi-structured and one-on-one, lasting one-two hours. The semi-structure of these interviews guided participants to reflect on:

- the structure and process of the project or organisation they worked in (as volunteer leaders/key participants)
- their work in the movement over time
- the story of how they came to be involved in the movement
- their understanding of the movement and its future
- their personal commitment to the work and their faith/ beliefs
- their personal motivations and experiences

These interviews were used to collect narrative data and were reflective devices that allowed the participants to discuss the learning process of the project or organisation, and their own learning and development process.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Organisations and networks were selected for this research that represented a range of types of organising, activities and focus areas, all of which were contributing to the development of the interfaith ecology movement in the Greater Melbourne region. All groups, projects, organisations and movement publications in this research had one or more of the following attributes:

- religious environmental or eco-spiritual organisation/project working with interfaith themes or partners
- interfaith or multi-religious organisation/project working with eco-faith/environmental themes or partners
- religious or spiritual organisations working with both eco-faith/environmental and interfaith themes across different policies, actions, projects and networks
- projects, events, activities and publications where interfaith and eco-faith/environmental issues and themes were addressed

The twelve interviewees were selected based on their position as leaders of the participant organisations or projects. They self-identified in the following faith traditions: Catholic, Uniting Church, Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh, un-affiliated and eco-spiritual.

I used a networking structure to develop these contacts and engage participants in the research. Project participants referred me to further contacts in the movement. The relationships between organisations through networks and partnerships also led me to additional projects and activities. The map of this research, spreading along the paths of local to global networks and organisations, inside and between institutions, therefore reflects the operational structure of the movement itself and the growth and reaches of its influence.

CATEGORIES AND STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH PROCESS

A focus on the emerging culture, trends and structures of the movement meant that I was attuned to communication styles and different ways participants approached issues, resolved conflicts and enacted the collective values of the project in both formal and informal contexts. Much of this learning and observation came from participating as a team member in project planning and development within organisations, attending numerous meetings, sourcing funding in collaboration with organisations and engaging in debates around actions and responses. In this sense, my research is an ethnography of the movement as I became a part of the society of the interfaith ecology movement and made observations based on my experiences within its local and global community.

Figure 1 and Table 1 below explain the way the multiple projects and organisations engaged in my fieldwork fit into the matrix of inquiry in this research. I have categorised projects and organisations into layers of A-D with category A indicating projects that were most central to my fieldwork and category D those that were most peripheral.

Organisations listed in category E were not research participant organisations, and therefore had the lowest level of involvement; I engaged these through attending events, informal interactions, researching websites and reading publications over the course of the fieldwork. Some of these organisations had a strong impact on the networks of the interfaith ecology movement in Melbourne and revealed important findings in this research.

Projects and organisations in categories A-E are briefly outlined in tables 2 - 6. These categories do not indicate the worthiness of any particular project to the overall interfaith ecology movement, rather it is *only* a reflection of the place various projects and

organisations held in the research process. The size category is an estimate of the number of members the organisation or project regularly engages.

Organisations in category F are outlined in table 7. These were not part of the Participatory Action Research matrix because this category of research did not involve communication and engagement with participants and leaders of these organisations, or participation and observation of activities. These are documented case studies that were researched through the internet and organisational publications. Research into these organisations included reading policies, publications, updates, reports and promotions online or in print.

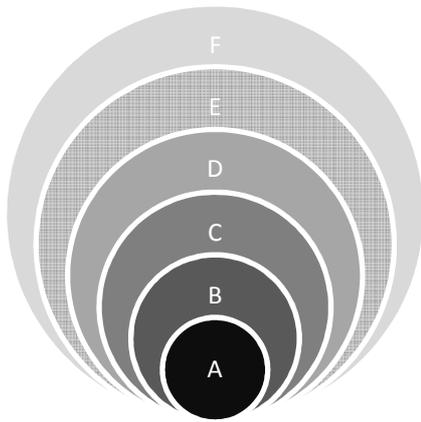


FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM OF RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

TABLE 1: RESEARCH PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN CATEGORIES A-E

	A	B	C	D	E
Time and effort input	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low
Knowledge and experience output	Very High	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Interpersonal relationships	Influentia l	Influential	Medium impact	Medium- low impact	Very low
Level of involvement in organisation or project	Crucial	Important	Medium	Low	Low - none

TABLE 2: LEVEL A PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY

Name of project	Type of org.	Size of org.	Purpose of org.	Research method	Research timeframe
Founding of GreenFaith Australia	Melbourne, community incorporated association	>20 members	Interfaith ecology projects and events	PAR organisational development	June – December 2008
Water for Life Seminars: GreenFaith Australia	Melbourne, community incorporated association	>40 members	Interfaith ecology projects and events	PAR event project planning and delivery	September – November 2008
Spirit Into Sustainability: GreenFaith Australia	Melbourne, community incorporated association	>50 members	Interfaith ecology projects and events	PAR event project planning and delivery	December 2008 – February 2009
Walking Humbly Project: GreenFaith Australia	Melbourne, community incorporated association	>100 members	Interfaith ecology projects and events	PAR event project planning and delivery	May 2009 – November 2009
Sharing Our Space Project: COMMON (Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network)	Melbourne, community incorporated association	100 – 200 members	Interfaith projects and events	PAR event project planning and delivery	June 2008 – September 2008
Global Environment Satellite: United Religions Initiative	Global interfaith network	< 5000 members	Interfaith community building and networking	Participation in strategic planning for environmental actions	January 2009 – December 2010

TABLE 3: LEVEL B PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY

Name of project	Type of org.	Size of org.	Purpose of org.	Research method	Research timeframe
Young Leaders Program, United Religions Initiative	Global interfaith network	< 5000 members	Interfaith community building and networking	Participation in 1week program	November – November 2008
Global Assembly, United Religions Initiative	Global interfaith network	< 5000 members	Interfaith community building and networking	Participation in 1week program	December 2008
South East Asia Pacific Regional Forum, United Religions Initiative	Global interfaith network	< 5000 members	Interfaith community building and networking	Participation in 1week program	March 2009
Globalisation for the Common Good Conference planning committee	Global interfaith conference series	500 – 1000 members	Linking academic interfaith inquiry to practical political and social analysis	PAR participation in the planning and delivery of the 2008 conference	June 2007 – July 2008
Green World Youth Day planning team, Young People for Development	Global international youth development network	200- 400 members	Annual global residential programs for young people	PAR participation in and volunteering for the 2008 program	January – September 2008

TABLE 4: LEVEL C PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY

Name of project	Type of org.	Size of org.	Purpose of org.	Research method	Research time-frame
Parliament of the World's Religions 2009	Large global interfaith organisation	< 3000	Arranging a large global interfaith conference every 5 years	Participant-observation in planning and delivery. Lead-up activities and events. Web-research	2007 - 2010
PWR 2009 – Aboriginal Reconciliation and Spirituality Sub-Committee	Sub-Committee of the 2009 Melbourne PWR	10	Develop and deliver the Indigenous program at the PWR 2009	PAR in the research and planning for the sub-committee	2008
The Augustine Centre Creative Ritual Planning Group	Spiritual Centre under the Uniting Church	>200	Provide a creative and contemplative outlet for spiritual expression	PAR in the planning committee and participant-observation at ritual activities	2007 – 2008
Borderlands Cooperative and the Augustine Centre organisational transitions	Community Cooperative and Spiritual Centre in relationship	<400	Working cross-organisationally, to facilitate social,		

spiritual,
ecological and
aesthetic
development.

EarthSong	Eco-faith Catholic education program and journal	<200	Education and eco- spiritual development in the Christian context	Participant- observation at multiple events and journal subscription	2007 - 2010
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TABLE 5: LEVEL D PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY

Name of project	Type of org.	Size of org.	Purpose of org.	Research method	Research time frame
Dandenong Interfaith Network	Local Government Partnership Network	>100	Local area interfaith relationship- building and Local Government connection to faith communities	Participant- observation at events and meetings	2008
Jewish Ecological Coalition	Jewish-based community organisation	>100	Eco-faith and practical activities and education for and from the Jewish community	Participant- observation at events	2008

Jewish Christian Muslim Association	Melbourne, community incorporated association	<200	Interfaith dialogue gatherings for Abrahamic faiths	Participant-observation at events	2007-2008
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TABLE 6: LEVEL E PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY

Name of project	Type of org.	Size of org.	Purpose of org.	Research method	Research time frame
GreenFaith, New Jersey	USA Interfaith Ecology organisation	<500	Interfaith action and learning on ecological issues	Communication with leaders and web-research	2008-2009
Initiatives of Change	Global social action network	<2000	Global grassroots network supporting social change	Communications and collaboration with leaders in Australia.	2009
The Shiva Ashram	Hindu Ashram in VIC	<500	Mediation and spiritual development in the Hindu tradition	Participant-observation at events/ activities	2008-2009
The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology	Academic interfaith ecology centre	<4000	Academic eco-faith publications and forums	Web-research, publications, participant-observation at events/ activities	2007-2010
Interfaith Power and Light	USA Interfaith ecology network	<3000	Spread a network of local community actions on the environment	Web-research and communications with leaders	2009-2010

Cultural Infusion	Melbourne Community service provider	<30 staff	Arts, culture and education projects, including support for interfaith projects	Participant- observation at events/ activities and collaboration on projects	2009 - 2010
Interaction	Melbourne, community incorporated association	<200	Youth interfaith practical projects and social and environmental action	Participant observation at events/ activities, communication with leaders and web-research	2009- 2010
Interfaith Centre of Melbourne	Melbourne, community incorporated association	>200	Interfaith arts and culture projects	Participant observation at events/ activities, communication with leaders	2008
Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change: ARRCC	Sydney-based incorporated association in partnership with the Climate Institute	<300	Education and awareness raising of environmental issues in faith communities	Participant observation at events/ activities, communication with leaders, collaboration and web- research	2008 - 2009
Faith Ecology Network	Sydney community network and organisation supported by the Columbans	>200	Interfaith ecology action and learning	communication with leaders, and web-research	2008 - 2009

Mission					
Western Region and Victoria University Interfaith Network	Melbourne community network supported by Victoria University	>100	Interfaith meetings	Participant-observation at events/ activities	2008 – 2009

TABLE 7: LEVEL F PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY

Name of project	Type of org.	Size of org.	Purpose of org.	Research method	Research time frame
Alliance of Religion and Conservation	Global UK-based organisation	<2000	Brokering strategic eco-religious partnerships and projects	Web-research	2009-2010
The Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia	USA university-based academic forum	>200	academic forum and publication	Web-research and publications	2007 - 2008
Interfaith Youth Core (sic.)	Global interfaith youth action organisation	<2000	Practical youth projects on social and environmental action	Web-research	2008-2009
World Congress of Religions for Peace	Global interfaith network	<5000	Interfaith forums, dialogue and projects	Web-research and publications	2009 - 2010
Pachamama	Global activist	<2000	Interfaith ecology activism,	Web-research	2008-

Alliance	network		education and programs on indigenous and rainforest issues	and publications	2009
Justice and International Mission Unit, Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania	Eco-faith arm of the Uniting Church of Australia	NA	Ecumenical environmental education, projects, forums and publications	Web-research, policies and publications	2008 - 2010
Catholic Earthcare Australia	Eco-faith arm of the Catholic Church of Australia	NA	environmental education, projects, forums and publications for the Catholic community	Web-research, policies and publications	2009 - 2010

The organisations selected do not represent the full spectrum of interfaith ecology work in Greater Melbourne. The chosen methodology required an intensive focus on a select number of projects and organisations that represent a spectrum of structures and forms ranging from large and established global networks with local sites, local new initiatives and institutions or government supported organisations. Over the time period of this fieldwork many more interfaith ecology projects and activities were developed in new or existing organisations.

Greater Melbourne is the research project area, but the experiences stemming out from this engagement into state, national and global activities and networks are included as they strongly impact the local manifestations of the movement. Greater Melbourne was considered an appropriate project area for research in this field because of its diversity, ecological issues, connection to global communications, and potential for supported community actions through policy and government frameworks.

CONCLUSION: GROWING FROM AN INTEGRATED PRACTICE

This chapter has integrated the philosophical framework of my research in contemporary panpsychism with the explanation of my practice as a participatory researcher. I have focused on the panpsychist concept of conatus as it allows for the metaphysical insight that mind and matter are unified to be actively engaged as a mode of being and acting. Conatus cannot only be understood and experienced, but also enacted in a community organising, research and interpersonal context. Conatus is the method through which we may engage actively and reflexively with the panpsychist mind-matter in and around us and, importantly, do so ethically and flourishingly. The life affirming and system generating ethics I presented were linked to the political and social change methodologies of Participatory Action Research and Feminist Research Methodology in ways that revealed their synergies and appropriate application in a research project seeking to embed and enact conatus. The shared underpinning of non-dualism in panpsychism and these methodologies is the link through which the metaphysical, social and ecological can be holistically explored in relation to the interfaith ecology movement.

This holistic methodology is highly applicable to this delicate inquiry in which an emerging social movement, itself exploring its spirituality, identity, ecology, social relationships and ethics is the subject. The methodology allows this research project to contribute ethically and reciprocally to the movement and its participants who are seeking to thrive sustainably in an ever-adapting, globalising world and to generate an eco-social habitat where this flourishing in diversity is possible and through which new awareness and knowledge grows from harmonious interaction across difference. With roots in panpsychist ground, the principles and methods of this research are an effective means for gathering information, data and ethnographic observations on the interfaith ecology movement as well as the mode through which friendship grew, creativity was expressed, experience was nurtured and learning was enabled with participants throughout the research process. In presenting the structure of the research method in the final section of this chapter I have set up a map of the engagement to which the reader can refer as needed.

THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

*Australia, both in its changing religious profile, the repositioning of the religion-state relationship and the evolving interface between the global ecumene and the cybernetic world, has been impacted by these globalising forces which require a response at all levels of government and by the faith communities themselves. –
Safeguarding Australia¹*

The *Safeguarding Australia* report was commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, and the Australian Multicultural Foundation in association with RMIT and Monash Universities and the global interfaith organisation, World Conference of Religions for Peace in 2004. The report aims to map the interrelationship between religion and cultural diversity in the context of Australia's social cohesion and internal security, especially in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the USA of September 11th, 2001. As the report states above, the context of globalisation is generating new social configurations, power relationships and influences in Australian society. The interfaith ecology movement, with its grassroots community organising method, global networked growth and creative and open approach to dialogue in and between religious communities is a response to and product of these new conditions.

In this chapter I explore these conditions more fully, examining how the movement is coming forward globally. Theory on grassroots globalisation and understanding creativity and emergence in this context is the focus of the globalisation and multiculturalism theories I address. The policy support of the movement, analysed in chapter 4, is founded in this theory.

I then turn to an analysis of the Australian cultural-historic context, looking at the factors of national history, sociology and ecology that both shape and hold the local expressions of interfaith ecology in Australian communities. Drawing from these national trends and issues, I then discuss Australian religious diversity and the greening of religious institutions. I further contextualise these findings in a reflection on how the in-between, grassroots aspects of the interfaith ecology movement suitably link with the subtle and delicate Australian approaches to religion, spirituality, place and belonging.

THE GLOBAL EMERGENCE OF THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT

There is a long history of interaction between communities around the world who have peacefully and productively lived and communicated with each other across religious differences and respectfully learned about each other's beliefs and practices. The majority of religions in their contemporary manifestation have indeed been shaped by this exchange of influence throughout their heritage. Similarly, many religions have focused on the ecological world, connected with it and developed strong spiritual practices and ethics around the human-environmental relationship. Some religions, such as many Indigenous religions, are inextricable from this localised eco-human network of spiritual and cultural life. In this sense the interfaith and the eco-faith movements are as old as religion itself. Developing more recently, however, and gaining ground in religious institutions over the 19th and 20th centuries has been the articulation of interfaith dialogue as a distinctive process connected to changes in the world social order pre-figuring globalisation.

The establishment of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875 is an example of this trend.² The Theosophical Society was reviving the western interest in holistic and mystical spiritual practices in the context of cosmopolitanism and the ideals of global unity. The aims of Theosophy stated below illustrate the growing consciousness around interfaith dialogue at that time and, interestingly, open an early space for this dialogue to intersect with eco-philosophy and science: '1/To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour; 2/To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science; 3/To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.'³

International congresses, agreements and declarations around globally relevant issues in recognition of a newly pluralist context for action and social change exemplify the early

1 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 116

2 Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 26

3 Krishan Lal Kalla, *The mid-Victorian literature*, 213

cosmopolitan trends in ecology and religious pluralism. The Parliament of the World's Religions is a prominent example as it has been an important catalyst for the spread of the interfaith movement. The now pentennial event stemmed from the original World's Congress of Religions at the World's Columbia Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. This congress marked the beginning of the modern international interfaith movement as it was the first formal gathering of representatives of eastern and western spiritual traditions.⁴ As Simmer Brown explains, the motivation for this original dialogue was founded in cultural imperialism, but the power of the dialogue itself soon transformed the sentiment into one of mutual respect and learning. The Columbian Exposition, she states, was held in honour of 'the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' "discovery" of America' and the 'World Parliament of Religions was planned as a conversation ... exploring the foundations of religious unity in the world ... The purpose ... was, according to reports, "to indicate the impregnable foundations of Theism," especially to prove the superiority of the Christian Religion.'⁵ The gathering was hosted by Protestant leaders who invited presenters from all the major world religions; 'those present were exposed – most for the first time – to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and other Asian Religions.'⁶ As Simmer Brown continues, this shift in perspective from conversion to respect was important to the dawn of the modern pluralist approach to diversity in American society:

White American Protestants met Buddhists, African-Americans, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, and found them powerful, worthy of respect, and remarkable. What occurred has been called the "dawn of religious pluralism" in America: the first time that mainstream America really looked at the question of difference in religion, acknowledged that there were actually a variety of different religious paths, and realised that the superiority of Christianity was not obvious to everyone.⁷

In 1988 interested academics, religious leaders and community organisations formed the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions to organise a centennial celebration of the event. The 1993 Parliament attracted 8000 participants from diverse religions, cultures and nationalities and marked the strong revival of the interfaith movement in its new, networked and globalised form.

While the interfaith ecology movement is a sub-set of the broader interfaith and religious pluralism project under globalisation, interfaith ecology is featured early in the broader interfaith revival. Two years prior to the formation of the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions, the interfaith ecology movement formally entered the international

4 Parliament of the World's Religions: <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1&sn=4>

5 Simmer-Brown, 'Commitment and openness,' 97

6 Simmer-Brown, 'Commitment and openness,' 98

7 Simmer-Brown, 'Commitment and openness,' 98

scene through the prominent Assisi Declarations. These were issued by representatives from the major world religions who met in Assisi, Italy on the 29th of September 1986 to mark the 25th Anniversary of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWFN) by making an international declaration of their faith's commitment to ecological healing. As Northcott explains, WWFN president Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh proposed the meeting in Assisi in recognition of the patron saint of ecology, St Francis of Assisi: 'The leader of the Franciscan order would invite four other leading representatives of the world's religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism - to join him at Assisi in order to discuss the religious implications of the environmental crisis.'⁸ This meeting also bridged the divide between religion and science with multi-disciplinary as well as multi-cultural and multi-faith support as Edwards and Palmer describe:

*For the first time, representatives of the great faiths of the world came together in pilgrimage in order to hear what religion has to offer to conservation and what conservation has to share with religion. Pilgrims, religious leaders, musicians and dancers marched into Assisi alongside scientists and conservationists, their divisions overcome by their shared commitment to the natural world.'*⁹

This merging of interfaith with inter-disciplinary dialogue became the hallmark of interfaith ecology. The resulting declarations included statements from five faiths – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Soon after Assisi, three more faiths – Baha'i, Jainism and Sikhism – produced statements to join the Declaration. The statements were responses to the 'environmental dangers facing the world'¹⁰ and marked the beginning of a 'powerful alliance between the forces of religion and the forces of conservation.'¹¹ Assisi produced not only statements of support for conservation, but also the holistic action program of the Network of Conservation and Religion which included practical actions, education, reflection and dialogue.¹² Through this network 'leaders of the faiths have since sought to put what they had learned into practice through practical conservation projects and programs ... a vast number of such projects are now operating throughout the world, ensuring that the ecological message reaches millions of people.'¹³ This new field of influence that religion offered the environmental movement was acknowledged and celebrated through Assisi, as the International Interfaith Organisations Network reports:

8 Northcott, 'BP, the blowout and the Bible belt,' 118
9 Edwards and Palmer, Holy Ground, 43
10 Williams, One World Many Issues, 130
11 Edwards and Palmer, Holy Ground, 43
12 Williams, One World Many Issues, 130
13 Edwards and Palmer, Holy Ground, 43

*By one count, the assembled leaders represented more than two billion religious adherents – roughly one third of the earth’s population. The results, say those who were involved, represent not only a dramatic degree of commitment by each of the faith communities to further their work at promoting conservation within their own membership, but also a new level of interfaith cooperation and concurrence.*¹⁴

The Network on Conservation and Religion was developed out of Assisi and worked on projects and partnerships such as: the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) project of engaging ‘local religious communities – whether organized around a mosque, church, temple or Spiritual Assembly – in monitoring changes in the local environment’; and the project of religious leaders meeting ‘with key directors of The World Bank to discuss how it can become more sensitive to local concerns and spiritual values as they fund development projects.’¹⁵ This network also published the newsletter *The New Road* from 1986-1995.¹⁶ An influential academic interfaith ecology network also formed at this time at Harvard University; the Forum on Religion and Ecology produced the book series *World Religions and Ecology* from 1986-1998 on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and First Nations Faiths.¹⁷

The 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions supported the achievements of Assisi and the message of environmental healing and action became embedded into the founding statement of the Parliament: ‘Towards a Global Ethic: an Initial Declaration’ which became the consolidating basis of future Parliaments. This Declaration responds to the fear and suffering of the modern global condition and makes clear links between this and the spiritual, ecological and social dispossession of communities. It gathers the world’s faithful around these themes to reclaim a more harmonious and hopeful future. The declaration begins:

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear. Peace eludes us – the planet is being destroyed – neighbors live in fear – women and men are estranged from each other – children die! This is abhorrent.

We condemn the abuses of Earth’s ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life’s potential; the hunger that weakens the human body, the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

14 International Interfaith Organisations Network:
<http://interfaithorganisations.net/2009/11/09/religions-vow-a-new-alliance-for-conservation/>

15 International Interfaith Organisations Network:
<http://interfaithorganisations.net/2009/11/09/religions-vow-a-new-alliance-for-conservation/>

16 Encyclopedia of Earth: http://www.eoearth.org/article/religion_nature_and_environmentalism

17 Forum on Religion and Ecology, World Religions and Ecology Series

We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

But this agony need not be.

The declaration then goes on to list its key action and affirmation areas including specifically ecologically relevant statements such as:

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.

... we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.¹⁸

Throughout the 1990s the interfaith ecology movement grew and developed globally, seeded by the actions of and network relationships of these international forums and alliances. These were bolstered on the global scene by the 1992 Rio Earth Summit which galvanized a new global mode of social-organising and action around environmentalism. Following from Assisi, the WWFN planned a subsequent interfaith conference in 1995 to map the work undertaken after Assisi and to seed further developments in the interfaith ecology movement. The level of collaboration surprised even the summit organisers. As Martin Palmer, director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture (ICOREC), who facilitated the Summit explains:

We had planned quite meticulously that each faith would issue its own statement and detailed program of action, but, and this was something we had hoped for but could not plan for, what emerged quite substantially was also a willingness of the major faiths to work collaboratively on conservation projects, in relation to the major secular institutions we had invited.¹⁹

In this spirit of alliance and collaboration between religious institutions and between religious and conservation organisations, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) was launched, which has since brokered numerous partnerships for action between religious institutions and environmental organisations generating practical projects around the world as will be further discussed in chapter 7.²⁰

These institutions have acted as a backbone from which smaller scale local and global actions have developed in new networks and organisations such as the American-based

18 Parliament of the World's Religions:
http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/File/TowardsAGlobalEthic.pdf

19 International Interfaith Organisations Network:
<http://interfaithorganisations.net/2009/11/09/religions-vow-a-new-alliance-for-conservation/>

20 International Interfaith Organisations Network
<http://interfaithorganisations.net/2009/11/09/religions-vow-a-new-alliance-for-conservation/>

Interfaith Power and Light network. Interfaith ecology has also spread internally to existing interfaith networks and organisations such as the World Congress of Religions for Peace, the United Religions Initiative and Initiatives for Change. Mainstream religious institutions across the major world faiths now consider ecological programs and actions as playing a role in their spiritual and moral leadership, and many environmental organisations now see partnerships across religious and cultural diversity as a key site for spreading ecological awareness and learning from diverse global perspectives.

All of these actions and alliances are unique to the social and ecological conditions of globalisation and the avenues for action and communication it has opened in and between communities. To properly understand the context of the interfaith ecology movement, it is therefore important to define and reflect on the new forms of creative collective action that globalisation enables.

CURRENT RESEARCH INTO INTERFAITH AND ECO-FAITH NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Many texts on the theme of the interfaith movement or the eco-faith movement are produced by movement participants about the need for the movement, the values and vision of the movement, or provide guidance and tool kits on how fellow participants can create actions and further the work and teachings of the movement. Social science, ethnography and cultural studies that analyse and map these new social movements are less common than the 'in-movement' texts. Such studies have, however, been increasingly recognised as important to understanding the transformations of religion and grassroots social action and change in the context of globalisation. Two studies, both published in 2010 during the final stages of this research, make important observations on contemporary global social change movements relevant to interfaith ecology. These are Bron Taylor's *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, and Jim Kenney's *Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change*.

This thesis sits as a substantiating example of the emergent global collection of integrating and interlocking movements mapped by Kennedy. It also sits as an example of structural observations Taylor makes about the developmental process of an eco-spiritually oriented movement under globalisation. This thesis is distinctive from these studies in its focus on the interfaith ecology movement as a discreet global movement and in the way qualitative and participatory research methods have been used to illustrate both the specific instantiations of the movement and its broader form and trends.

Taylor's *Dark Green Religion* explores the culture, forms, products and motivations of green-spirituality as a grassroots global social movement. Taylor's study distinguishes between 'green religion' (which posits that environmentally friendly behaviour is a religious obligation) and 'dark green religion' (in which nature is sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care).²¹ These two aspects of the broader religious and spiritual environmentalist movement, he explains, 'are often in tension and sometimes in direct conflict.'²² This tension is present in interfaith ecology which incorporates both aspects of dark and light green religion. Indeed participants in interfaith ecology also find this tension in relation to their understandings of the role of interfaith dialogue as aimed towards mutual understanding and/or integrated spiritual growth.

The interfaith ecology movement shares many structural resemblances and cultural influences with dark green religion as defined and analysed by Taylor. His description of the eclectic, elusive but clearly influential development and spread of dark green religion is pertinent to interfaith ecology:

*It can be found in the minds and hearts of individuals who invent and are drawn to organisations that express its central convictions and moral commitments. It has charismatic figures and bureaucratic hierarchies devoted to its globalisation. It is reinforced and spread through artistic forms that often resemble, and are sometimes explicitly designed as religious rituals. It seeks to destroy forms of religiosity incompatible with its own moral and spiritual perceptions. It is considered dangerous by some, while others see it as offering salvation.*²³

Interfaith ecology also mirrors the structure of dark green religion as a social movement comprised of numerous cultural, spiritual and political influences and forms. As Taylor describes, these form an amalgamated and hybridized structure he terms 'bricolage':

*The result is an eclectic bricolage, by which I mean the amalgamation of bits and pieces of a wide array of ideas and practices drawn from diverse cultural systems, religious traditions and political ideologies. In bricolage these various ideas and practices are fused together, like a brick layer or mason piecing together a wall or building with mortar and stone.*²⁴

This bricolage structure is highly significant to the structure of interfaith ecology as the deliberate incorporation of influences from participant faith traditions is a substantive and normative defining factor of the movement itself.

21 Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 10

22 Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 10

23 Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, xi

24 Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 14

Kenney's *Thriving in the Crosscurrent* explores the connectivity between the different expressions and manifestations of global social change movements. This text identifies numerous examples of trends in grassroots global activism and social change that indicate a positive and integral 'sea change.' He examines 'emerging values, understandings, and behaviours that constructively address the anomalies that agitate our age.'²⁵ These are not dominant forces, but 'emergents' – developing global change movements seeking an alternative to destruction and violence. These emergents include:

- The development of cultures of peace and restorative justice and dialogue which are replacing violence in political and social institutions
- The rise of the liberal ideals of fairness, justice and rights as an international framework and cross-cultural recourse
- The erosion of patriarchy and the linking of feminist development causes to other social empowerment movements
- The increasing prominence of global greening and grassroots green movements
- The strong and fast development of the interreligious or interfaith movement
- The emerging language of global conferences and declarations that further the above mentioned causes and create a new language for their integration.²⁶

According to Kenney's criteria 'each authentic evolutionary value should generate an increase in three measures: complexity, awareness of interdependence, and integral knowing.'²⁷ As such, the current global sea change is holistic and integral, distinctive from single issue and identity politics movements which prefigure it. The interfaith ecology movement clearly sits into this broader global trend as Kenney further defines:

*To determine whether a given cultural change is really part of the sea change, we must assess both whether or not it has augmented creative complexity and whether or not it has generated broader awareness of interdependence of various systems.*²⁸

The global sea change of new social movements examined by Kenney is structurally formed through the communications, cultural exchanges and activist trends of 'globalisation from below.'

25 Kenney, *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, 68
26 Kenney, *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, 125
27 Kenney, *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, 68
28 Kenney, *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, 69 - 70

GLOBALISATION FROM BELOW

The *oikos* (the Ancient Greek 'whole household' and the root-word for our *eco*) has revealed its diversity in this era of globalisation; there are no longer impenetrable walls of terrain and distance between different peoples. The conditions of globalisation dictate that the behaviours of people in different communities and locations intimately affect people in all other locations. In this context, the impact of our ecological belief systems, especially those of the dominant and violent, spread beyond our cultural communities to other human communities, non-human communities and life supporting entities world-wide.²⁹ As McIntyre-Mills explains, the need for a liveable and safe 'home' is a strong driver for global social action, and a motivator for structural change:

*We need to develop a democracy/governance cycle that spans conceptual spatial and temporal boundaries. In order to do this we need to engage people in what matters most to them, namely providing livable and safe environments.*³⁰

Globalisation as a social phenomenon has not only meant a heightened degree of interaction between communities situated all over the globe but also the unprecedented diversification of local communities in cities, villages and neighbourhoods around the world.³¹ Grassroots and academic movements, springing up through these structures of globalisation, critique the paradigm of polarised consumption propagated by corporate globalisation which they argue has spread fiercely and become the dominant value system governing our shared world.³² According to this 'postmodern socialist' critique,³³ corporate globalisation is simultaneously generating homogenisation and has led to the 'destruction of resources; the creation of monopolies over land, biodiversity, water, and food' as well as the simultaneous 'destruction of democracy, peace, and cultural diversity.'³⁴ Corporate globalisation, Shiva argues, 'embraces exclusivist monocultural modes of thinking – the belief in the necessary dominance of one species, one race, one economy, one religion.'³⁵ Instead of the proverbial 'global village', in which care and acknowledgement are cornerstones to social life, McCann³⁶ describes how we are indeed a global city in which isolation, exclusion and deprivation sit alongside overconsumption, ignorance and escapism. To reclaim the dialogical and inclusive 'village' culture on the global scale requires, as McIntyre-Mills argues, states, markets and social movements to

29 Tsing, *Friction*, 477

30 McIntyre-Mills, *Identity, Democracy and Sustainability*, 242

31 Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular*, 25

32 Burbach et. al. *Globalization and its Discontents*

33 Burbach et. al. *Globalization and its Discontents*

34 Shiva, 'Earth democracy,' 316

35 Shiva, 'Earth democracy,' 316

36 McCann, 'Beyond the global city,' 36

work as nested systems in the global material, environmental and intellectual commons: 'The more inclusive and the wider we can draw the boundaries of participation for risk management and protection of 'the other,' the greater the potential for creating trust and the closer we can move towards social and environmental justice.'³⁷ Such a system would depend upon the operational principle that those 'who are to be affected are included. This is the principle of subsidiary.'³⁸

A definitive definition of both the meaning and history of globalisation remains a contested issue for sociologists, economists and political scientists.³⁹ The definition offered by Held *et al.* most appropriately encompasses the elements generally referred to in globalisation theory, especially in globalisation anthropology:

*A process (or set of processes) which embodied a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power.*⁴⁰

Applied to this research context, this definition reveals how the coming together of different religious sensibilities at the local level is produced by the spatial organisation of social relations playing into transcontinental flows of interactions. The spatial element also highlights the site of globalisation as emplaced and physically realised in communities and local eco-social environments which are increasingly connected as nodes in the network of material, cultural and social flows.

Wendy Wheeler describes the mode of 'becoming' a system as the communicative organising principle of all life, matter and consciousness understood through biosemiotics. Creative expression, following structures of communication which we can broadly refer to as 'language' are common, in Wheelers theory, to all life, indeed to all structurally transformative things. 'Creativity in culture and language reiterates creativity in nature,' she explains; 'it springs ... from the joining together of different things in newly productive and complex ways.'⁴¹ Wheeler reveals this emergence as always contextualised by the environment or *Umwelt*. 'When we are being creative, whether in the arts or the sciences,' she states, 'what we seem to be alert to are the ... rich intelligences of our *Umwelt*, which are participative, and which spring from a deep immersion of self in the otherness of our world.'⁴² Wheeler coins the term 'semiosymbiogenesis' as a biosemiotic recasting of

37 McIntyre-Mills, *Identity, Democracy and Sustainability*, 243

38 McIntyre-Mills, *Identity, Democracy and Sustainability*, 242

39 Williams, 'Globalisation of education policy,' 78

40 Held et al., *Global Transformations*, 16

41 Wheeler, *Whole Creature*, 134

42 Wheeler, *Whole Creature*, 134

symbiogenesis (the merging of organisms into a whole organism). This is a non-reductive move which generates change – the very act of creativity and process of collective emergence that we are witnessing in globalisation.⁴³ She goes on to explain how this mode of creativity generates newness through, rather than in opposition to the given processes of life: 'Creativity seems to be symbiogenesis in culture: not something at all new in nature, but the way that biosemiotic life, semiosymbiotically, makes newness in us.'⁴⁴

As McIntyre-Mills argues, creative and collaborative social evolution depends upon grassroots communications networks and exchanges: 'the most important issue for those who wish to shape policy is to promote the opportunities for dialogue.'⁴⁵ Dialogue opportunities, such as those presented by the interfaith ecology movement, enable participants to 'reconsider the territory of the mind as a flowscape that is linked with others and the environment as a source of creativity.'⁴⁶ For Anna Tsing dialogical creativity is characterised by sites of friction through which 'cultures are continually co-produced.'⁴⁷ At multiple physical, virtual and social sites, constant encounters with difference generate a creative energy and evolve new forms of organisation and cultural memes that can be both supportive and destructive of community cultures in their ever changing social, ecological, technological and economic landscapes. Tsing further defines these encounters as 'the awkward, uneven, unstable and creative qualities of interaction across difference.'⁴⁸ This description highlights the micro-encounters that globalisation facilitates as constitutive rather than symptomatic. This perspective shifts from the overt aspects of globalisation in global markets and international governance structures, to look underneath into what is co-creating the conditions for such structures, what is buoying them up and, importantly, what is germinating in their wake.

Appadurai identifies these underneath sites – grassroots and from below – as the living and creative counteraction to the homogenising and disempowering force of global capitalism:

*A series of social forms has emerged to contest, interrogate, and reverse these developments and to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system ... these social forms rely on strategies, visions and horizons for globalization on behalf of the poor that can be characterised as 'grass roots globalisation,' or, put in a slightly different way, 'globalisation from below.'*⁴⁹

43 Wheeler, Whole Creature, 134

44 Wheeler, Whole Creature, 134

45 McIntyre-Mills, Identity, Democracy and Sustainability, 249

46 McIntyre-Mills, Identity, Democracy and Sustainability, 249

47 Tsing, Friction, 4

48 Tsing, Friction, 4

49 Appadurai, Grassroots Globalisation, 3

This 'globalisation from below' is highly relevant to the interfaith ecology movement as it seeks to understand how community level responses are contributing to a new social movement that is both a product of and a reaction to the broader structures of globalisation.

Theories of community and individual empowerment within the context of globalisation resonate with Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of autopoietic human-world emergence, which he posits against the xenophobic and totalising trends of globalisation. Nancy defines the fundamental distinction of our times as that between globalisation and *mondialisation* or 'world-forming.' Globalisation, for Nancy, is the notion that we can name and control the whole as a product or commodity. This has spread a culture of sameness rather than diversity, and of consumption rather than creativity leading to the ultimately destructive death drive, or 'unworld.' The alternative of 'world-forming' entails the empowerment of people to actively engage in their human capacity to 'make' a world as a relational process. This *mondialisation* keeps the horizon of a 'world' as a relational and unfinishable space in contrast to the wholly known 'globe' of globalisation where 'completion' renders creative culture redundant. Nancy describes this 'horizon of the "world"' as a 'space of possible meaning for the whole of human relations (or as a space of possible significance).'⁵⁰ This space of active possibility gives 'a different indication than that of an enclosure in the undifferentiated sphere of a unitotality... *mondialisation* preserves something untranslatable while *globalisation* has already translated everything in a global idiom.'⁵¹ McIntyre-Mills interprets this space of creative participation as a connective channel, crafted in the various modes of communications technology and design, between individual expression and the dialogical community where exchanges are mediated and take flight in the communal imagination:

*What matters across all domains of personal and professional knowledge is to preserve the space to be ourselves, to make meaning and to express our own identity and creativity. We need to address the paradox that we need to be individuals but also we need to be members of groups ... if we accept that technology is the way in which we design, then we have choices about whether technology will enable personal and group needs on a sustainable planet.*⁵²

Interfaith ecology movement participants adopt and tailor for their own use a number of technologies and methods from social change and therapeutic arenas and apply them to dialogue in the movement. Some of these include:

50 Nancy, Globalization, 28 [my emphasis]

51 Nancy, Globalization, 28

52 McIntyre-Mills, Identity, Democracy and Sustainability, 247

- dialogue processes such as the Appreciative Inquiry method, deep listening and other group work methods
- online communication forums in chatrooms, blogs and websites where photographs, footage and live conversations occur
- ritual forms of communication in the adaptation and invention of communal experiences
- performances and artistic expression mediums

Through these forms the interfaith ecology movement is opening creative spaces for world-forming and the adaptation of old institutions and traditions in new socio-historical contexts.

The interfaith ecology movement is only beginning to find its form and defining features, yet it is clearly expressive of the trends and cohesive structures which have grown from the participation of variously situated imaginations. This movement is evolving through the world-making actions of its participants who are reclaiming sites of creativity and meaning making within global systems and structures. They embrace the dynamism of religious and social transformation in global and local relationships. The frictions and relationships of the movement are still emergent and are at once a response to and a product of globalisation in its many guises ranging from international movement of people, creative currency, and activism, to the grassroots interpretations and reclamations of these articles of knowledge.

Inasmuch as the movement is necessitated by the diversification of societies and communities, it is structurally informed by multiculturalism as a public policy and pluralism in international relations. Supported by these liberal theories and approaches, the movement is able to flourish ideologically and find political support especially in western multicultural urban environments of which Melbourne is a clear example.

FRACTURED GLOBALISATION AND FUNDAMENTALISM

The same economic, political and technological apparatus of globalisation that enables communication, dialogue and the development of cosmopolitan social movements, is also fuelling xenophobic and separatist trends through the 'revival of ethnocentrism, fundamentalism, support for authoritarianism, and a decline in support for the open society.'⁵³ This polar flip-side of the cohesive qualities of global connectivity is what Fathali Moghaddam terms 'fractured globalisation.' Just as the positive impacts of

53 Moghaddam, *How Globalization Spurs Terrorism*, 8

globalisation are structurally defined, so too are these splintered consequences, as Denmark explains: 'like most complex social movements, fundamentalism is a confluence of social, political, and economic forces and can be adequately understood only interactively.'⁵⁴ Fractured globalisation is a consequence of global inequality, entrenched injustice and fear of cultural annihilation being played out in domestic politics of North America, Europe, China, India, the Middle East, and the rest of the world.⁵⁵ It arises when and where

*sociocultural disintegration ... pulls in a local direction at the same time that macroeconomic and political systems are set up to pull towards the international direction and to accelerate globalization. Fractured globalization involves uneven, sometimes paradoxical, and conflict ridden changes, with economic-political forces on the one hand and psychological-cultural forces on the other hand, pulling in different and even diametrically opposite directions.*⁵⁶

Fractured globalisation spurs certain vulnerable communities to retreat from broader institutions at the very moment when such a retreat is structurally impossible, these communities are at risk of turning in on themselves and instituting fundamentalist internal structures.⁵⁷ As Tétreault explains, 'globalization has effectively erased most geopolitical and social-structural firewalls separating different ways of life.'⁵⁸ These changes are tolerated, co-opted and even welcomed by the majority of global communities which embody cultural resilience through basic levels of social and political security and freedom. In the more privileged cases communities have had the time and social resources to adapt to cross-cultural dialogue and co-existence. Marginalised, isolated and disempowered cultural and ethnic groups, however, have not evolved to their new and fast-changing environments.

When these communities take the fundamentalist and separatist turn, they are further denied room to grow and interact in cross-cultural dialogue, through internal and external institutions and conditions, yet they remain starkly exposed to the harsh cultural differences of the global society, as Tétreault describes: 'Today, virtual technologies carry such tensions even to remote villages – all that you need is a computer or TV set to be confronted as an Ego with images of the Other's alien features, immoral sexual behaviors, and disgusting cuisine.'⁵⁹ Under these circumstances, communities resort to violent projections of and reactions against the inescapable 'other', the most violent expressions of which are seen in acts of terrorism. Moghaddam therefore argues that terrorism is a

54 Denmark, 'Fundamentalism and the Global Political Economy,' 269

55 Moghaddam, How Globalization Spurs Terrorism, 8

56 Moghaddam, How Globalization Spurs Terrorism, 8

57 Giroux, Living Dangerously

58 Tétreault, 'Contending Fundamentalisms,' 19

maladaptation of cultural and social evolution at the community level requiring long-term structural solutions, rather than individualised ad hoc responses:

*Basic shared human needs, such as identity needs, arise out of the common evolutionary challenges we share. When the environmental conditions change, as they are changing dramatically through fractured globalization, then the basic needs of at least some groups are threatened.*⁶⁰

Terrorism, he continues, is a 'collective defence mechanism, albeit a destructive one, for the survival of minority groups who perceive themselves to be under attack and facing annihilation.'⁶¹

While fundamentalist movements often use the image of a past utopia to define themselves against the contemporary and future society, they are actually a 'communally organized response to modernity' generating new modes of social organising in the community and the society. Internally, traditions and beliefs in fundamentalist communities cease to be about 'what the mainstream believes or does.' Rather traditions become markers of identity politics, they are symbols and signs 'hallowed by the past ... from which they try to construct safe havens in a fallen world. These include visible markers that set off true believers from the rest of society'.⁶² As Riesèbrodt explains, fundamentalist 'traditions' are markers of newly instituted structural oppression rather than benign historic cultural practices:

*Tradition in this sense does not refer exclusively to the preservation of arbitrary, received conventions, ethical precepts, or customs, but implies quite specifically structured social relationships and an ethical regulation of life conduct the transformation of which is protested ... these are derived primarily from patriarchal structural principles and culturally specific patriarchal structural forms, which fundamentalism attempts to preserve and recreate.*⁶³

Through modern global political mechanisms, fundamentalist movements create and maintain belief systems as separate from the 'other' and in doing so institute oppressive forms and violent practices against both self (internal) and other (external).⁶⁴ In this way, fundamentalism is the antithesis of interfaith ecology and other progressive reformist cultural and religious movements focusing on adaptation into a different, but welcome, future life for the community and its belief system. Progressive reform attracts those in the moderate mainstream or dialogical boundaries of religious communities. These

59 Tétreault, 'Contending Fundamentalisms,' 19

60 Moghaddam, How Globalization Spurs Terrorism, 20

61 Moghaddam, How Globalization Spurs Terrorism, 15

62 Tétreault, 'Contending Fundamentalisms,' 13

63 Riesèbrodt, Pious Passion, 178

participants are often the most threatening to fundamentalist sub-groups as they are seen as opening the door of cultural change and influence:

*The fundamentalist self-image is of a community of true believers. Their acceptance of divinely revealed truth and adherence to behaviours that are commanded by scriptures they say they accept literally and completely sets them off from an otherwise wicked world. Much of the fundamentalist rhetoric on dogma charts the boundaries between blessed communities and the rest of the world. Included as members of the benighted majority outside of the blessed community are persons who nominally share religious traditions with fundamentalists.*⁶⁵

In its hyper-xenophobia (internally and externally defined), fundamentalism systematically shuts off openings for progressive change and institutes strongly oppressive structures against individual expression and rights, especially the rights of women. In practice, Riesèbrodt argues, 'fundamentalism adapts to some of the societal changes but creates new forms of personalistic-patriarchal relationships.'⁶⁶ Fundamentalism can in this way be understood as the negation of healthy living religion: it is, as Derrida explains, a violent auto-immune disorder where the closed organism attacks itself and others in a confused attempt to maintain itself.⁶⁷

RESPONSES TO MULTICULTURALISM

The interfaith ecology movement, and the interfaith movement more broadly, experiment with different approaches and methods of managing increasing local level diversity under globalisation to prevent the emergence of fundamentalism and related consequences of fractured globalisation. These approaches are designed to limit the levels and impacts of fractured globalisation and its consequences in liberal societies. Broadly speaking, there are three distinct schools of thought, policy and practical approaches to managing multiculturalism that take on multiple and tailored forms in different policy approaches, community development practice models and theory. These are: 1/ the post-liberal approach informed by a communitarian framework; 2/ the pluralist approach informed by a cosmopolitan framework; and 3/ the hybrid liberal culturalist approach which draws from the social benefits of mediated communitarian, maintaining a liberal framework and a cosmopolitan vision. Policy frameworks in multicultural Australia, and especially in

64 Litke, 'Fundamentalism, oppression and violence,' 110

65 Tétreault, 'Contending Fundamentalisms,' 2

66 Pious Passion, Riesèbrodt 178

67 Derrida, 'Faith and knowledge,' 82

Victoria, are following this third liberal culturalist approach, in line with many other western multicultural societies.

POST-LIBERAL COMMUNITARIANISM

The post-liberal school is based on religious tolerance. This is a non-interventionist approach to the internally held belief systems of cultural and religious groups within society and their reluctance to interact with other groups within the broader community. 'The centrepiece of this post-liberal perspective is that ... all religious believers should stay in their own backyards ... their backyard is their cultural-linguistic system which provides the beliefs or rules by which life makes sense.'⁶⁸ Some post-liberal practitioners see interfaith engagement as a fruitful step in conflict resolution out of which 'interpretations, mutual influences, and even mutual fecundations [come forth but] ... we are finally left with several well-elaborated, complex, and yet mutually irreconcilable views of reality' and modes of community life.⁶⁹ Other more separatist post-liberals see this ideological interaction as unnecessary and as adverse to the best interests of participants because it undermines their self preservation. These practitioners instead believe that sturdy fences make for a non-threatening neighbourhood.

The 'post-liberal' approach is termed such because it is founded in a communitarian framework that critiques the inability of pure liberalism to recognise cultural or group rights. Taylor describes the enforcement of common values in a multicultural society, invariably based on liberalism, as inhospitable to genuine diversity and difference: 'I call it inhospitable to difference because it can't accommodate what the members of distinct societies really aspire to, which is survival. This is a collective goal, which almost invariably will call for some variations in the kinds of law we deem permissible from one cultural context to another.'⁷⁰ Under liberalism, individual rights are protected and actively promoted, but the rights of communities and groups within the society to practice their religion, culture, language, education and other aspects of their distinct life-style are not. As Taylor continues, 'the notion that any of the standard schedules of rights might apply differently in one cultural context than they do in another, that their application might have to take account of different collective goals, is considered quite unacceptable' in a liberal framework.⁷¹ Communitarianism alternatively promotes the rights of cultural groups to maintain themselves as distinctive and to socialise their children as such. Sometimes group practices are undermined by liberalism where the group practice

68 Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 52

69 Panikkar, 'Religious pluralism,' 108

70 Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 248

contravenes the liberal rights of individuals within that community, such as in the case of female genital mutilation or underage marriage; in other cases it may contravene less fundamental laws such as the wearing of bicycle helmets which is impossible in a turban. The communitarian position 'weigh[s] the importance of certain uniform treatment against the importance of cultural survival, and opt sometimes in favour of the latter.'⁷²

Historically it may be observed that 'where religious groups or associations are self-contained, where conversions are rare or even prohibited, and where close contact between members of these groups is kept within strict limits even in non-religious fields, the internal features of each belief system tend to remain intact.'⁷³ But is this really a sustainable option for a globalising world? The school of religious pluralism believes not.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM

For pluralists, humanity is 'crossing the threshold into a new era in the history of human religious life. What characterizes this new era is an increasingly general recognition of our individual and corporate role in fashioning the religious worlds, the symbolic universes in which we live.'⁷⁴ Religious pluralism maintains the standpoint that no one religion is the sole source of truth, all belief systems may contain truths.⁷⁵ This steps closer to syncretism than 'religious tolerance' as the truths are extended beyond the internal frameworks of the constituent groups and into an evolving realm of shared knowledge.

Religious pluralism also has a greater call for internal changes to institutions and cultures so that they are better adapted to the shared cosmopolitan global context. They therefore apply an interventionist and cooperative rather than a competitive or hands-off methodology to this change. Pluralists actively go out to seek and engage people in dialogue and to generate new shared systems of working together across difference. Throughout history, pluralism has been at work wherever 'fences' have crumbled with the effect of religious and cultural syncretism. This is unsurprising for any scholar of religious history who notes the textual, ritualistic and mythological overlaps between religious cultures arising at certain points of interaction in the geo-historical contexts of diasporas, wars, trade relations, colonisation or multiculturalism. As Hamnett explains, in 'given historical circumstances, de facto pluralism can modify the internal character of religious belief-systems for the believers themselves. Where this occurs, pluralism cannot be understood simply as a political 'state of affairs' involving only the external relations

71 Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 318

72 Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, 61

73 Hamnett, 'Religious pluralism,' 7

74 Rupp, *Commitment in a pluralistic world*, 215

between groups.⁷⁶ Religious pluralists diverge on whether collectively managed syncretism is an appropriate 'goal' of interfaith dialogue. The natural process of cooption and integration of the other into the self through de facto pluralism has aided the political relations between cultures generating fusions in the place of conflicts. The observation of this tendency is different, however, from taking syncretism on as a project designed to epistemologically merge the different theologies and cosmologies of defined religious groups. The majority trend in pluralism is to avoid syncretism and preserve the distinctive identities and beliefs of groups under a shared framework of values through which they can live in harmony.

Religious pluralism is therefore based on cosmopolitan social theory which contrasts with the communitarian focus on groups and community as the primary site of the social good. For Cosmopolitans, the institution of collective global structures and social relations is fundamentally transformative and necessitates cosmopolitan responses which will characterise new shared methods of social management and governance:

Once cosmopolitanism emerges as a determinate social form it transforms that which precedes it. It impacts upon the deployment of civil and political rights, on the exercise of moral judgements, on the practices of love and friendship, on the organization of civil society and on the formation of the nation state. Social life can never be the same again.⁷⁷

Cosmopolitanism does not only seek to observe this change but to actively facilitate it. It acknowledges the 'accomplishments of political modernity and looks to the growth of new social forms to sustain this conception of humanity.'⁷⁸

The interfaith movement represents both the streams of post-liberal and pluralist dialogue and policy. In conflict zones and in more formal government or institutional dialogues, a separation and tolerance is maintained which prevents participants from feeling threatened in potentially volatile situations or undermined in their need to maintain a distinctive stance that represents their community in an official capacity. In the interfaith ecology movement, which attracts less orthodox religious community members, grassroots projects, both in global organisations and in local community organisations, are clearly situated in the pluralist and cosmopolitan framework. Participants firmly believe in a transformative society and the possibility of a productive common ground; they are also open to interfaith learning, but wholly reject the idea that syncretism, or the creation of one unified religion, is appropriate. These sentiments are clear in many of statements of purpose and goals of the organisations and networks that will be explored in chapter 8.

75 Swindler, *After the Absolute*

76 Hamnett, 'Religious pluralism,' 7

77 Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, xii

78 Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, xii

LIBERAL CULTURALISM

Liberal culturalism, theoretically positioned between the communitarian and cosmopolitan approaches with a greater cosmopolitan influence, is the dominant framework for Australian multiculturalism. This positioning is reflective of a common policy trend in western liberal democracies as they manage an increasing level of cultural and religious diversity. Liberal culturalism maintains a strong liberal rights framework, actively fosters global networks and connection that promote integration into a harmonious global system socially and economically. It also promotes a thin form of cultural rights whereby Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities are entitled to a range of services to enable them to properly participate in society and celebrate and maintain their distinctive heritage, belief and practices.

Liberal culturalism opposes the communitarian stance on group rights claiming that this is not only divisive but also unbeneficial to the social and cultural goals of most minority groups: 'In reality most ethnocultural groups within Western democracies do not want to be protected from the forces of modernity in liberal societies. On the contrary, they want to be full and equal participants in modern liberal societies.'⁷⁹ The benefits of cultural membership are also actively encouraged by liberal culturalists who argue that 'there are compelling interests related to culture and identity which are fully consistent with liberal principles of freedom and equality, and which justify granting special rights to minorities.'⁸⁰ These cultural interests are not only consistent with liberalism in effect, but liberalism is compelled to value and support them if it is to be consistent with its own position of enabling full participation and access to all citizens. In the social landscape of diversity, cultural identity plays an important role in a person's ability to participate in society and translate and contribute to the development of that society's social norms and shared culture.

Cultural identity is, for liberal culturalists, a moral and social compass for the navigation of social life in a multicultural society. It is not, however a ruling force that overshadows the role of the individual in the wider society. As Kymlicka explains 'liberal culturalism rejects the idea that groups can legitimately restrict the basic civil or political rights of their own members in the name of preserving the purity or authenticity of the group's culture and

79 Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular*, 20

80 Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular*, 21-22

traditions.⁸¹ It is necessary for the government and community leaders to distinguish between 'bad minority rights that involve *restricting* individual rights, from the good minority rights that can be seen as *supplementing* individual rights.'⁸² The task for liberal democracies is therefore to balance the empowerment of cultural groups and the celebration of social diversity with a strong understanding of liberalism and the embedding of liberal rights into communities.

The successful application of this principle in policy and its acceptance in the community is dependent upon the specific social, historical and cultural factors of the society. Multiculturalism always finds unique expression according to these contexts which differ vastly between nations and which are the framework upon which a society is built and from which it draws its identity, norms, acceptabilities and intolerances. In investigating the interfaith ecology movement in the Melbourne region, it is therefore important to relay some crucial aspects of the Australian socio-cultural condition and major issues for the development of our society, uniquely positioned in history and geography as a post-colonial, multicultural western democracy in the South East Asia-Pacific.

AUSTRALIAN SOCIO-HISTORICAL FACTORS

Australia is a colonised country with a minority Indigenous population, a dominant white-Anglo settler population and a large migrant population.⁸³ It has moved from a settler society to an immigrant society over the course of the 20th century making contemporary Australia highly culturally and linguistically diverse.⁸⁴ The city of Melbourne and the state of Victoria have attracted the highest levels of diversity in Australia, as described in the *All of Us* policy:

Victoria is now a society with people from more than 200 nations of origin, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects and following more than 120 faiths; where more than 43 per cent of

81 Kymlica, *Politics in the Vernacular*, 22

82 Kymlica, *Politics in the Vernacular*, 22

83 'In 2001, the two most common ancestries of the Australian population were Australian (reported by 6.7 million people) and English (reported by 6.4 million). The third most common was Irish (1.9 million people), followed by Italian (800,000), German (742,000), Chinese (557,000) and Scottish (540,000). A further six ancestries were each stated by between 150,000 and 500,000 people - Greek, Dutch, Lebanese, Indian, Vietnamese and Polish. In total, more than 160 ancestries were separately identified, many of which were relatively uncommon (70 were each stated by less than 2,500 people).' 'In 2001, 410,000 Indigenous persons were counted in the census, an increase of 16% over 1996, continuing the trend of recent years.'

Australian Bureau of Statistics:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/af5129cb50e07099ca2570eb0082e462!OpenDocument>

84 The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, *People of Australia*

*the present population have been born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas.*⁸⁵

Australia is challenged by this shifting social landscape and by multiple instances of power malady embedded in our national history. We struggle to define a national identity, a process fraught with exclusions and silences. While government bodies describe us as a 'tolerant and inclusive society'⁸⁶ the United Nations has been highly critical of both the treatment of asylum seekers and Indigenous peoples in Australia which continues to contravene national and international human rights, refugee and equal opportunity laws and conventions.⁸⁷

Hage describes the Australian national identity crisis as caught in a trap of imperialism that permeates both left and right discourses on immigration and multiculturalism. In these discourses white Australians, especially those of Anglo-Celtic heritage, position themselves as the judges and mediators of the multicultural society.⁸⁸ This legacy of the White Australia Policy (a series of laws restricting non-white migration between 1901 and 1973)⁸⁹ perpetuates a fantasy, Hage argues, in popular and political culture in which white Australian society can and does choose to determine the numbers, proportions, location, cultural expression and economic and social position of non-white Australians.⁹⁰ This discourse is displayed in support for detaining 'illegal' immigrants in detention centres,⁹¹ the distorted claims of 'Sudanese gang violence' perpetuated in the media⁹² and the need to limit their presence in 'our' neighbourhoods, and the idea that jobs are stolen away from 'real Australians' by impostors from aboard.⁹³ In its most extreme form of recent years, the demonstrations at the beach suburb of Cronulla, Sydney, brought to a violent head mounting tensions between white and Lebanese Australians leading to riots in which hundreds of white locals took to the streets wrapped in Australian flags chanting 'Fuck off lebs! Fuck off lebs!', while Lebanese-Australian youths burnt the Australian flag.⁹⁴

The white Australian fantasy is more subtly expressed within the tolerant pro-multicultural Australian culture, but Hage argues that it is equally predicated on the notion of white control. This fantasy is one of 'tolerance' in which the white population is benevolent in their toleration of the other cultural groups, which are maintained as

85 Victorian State Government, All of Us

86 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/culturally_diverse.html

87 Sawyer, Abjorensen and Larkin, Australia: The State of Democracy 26; and Lez Malezer, 'A long journey,' 274

88 Hage, White Nation

89 Jupp, White Australia to Woomera

90 Hage, White Nation

91 Jupp, White Australia to Woomera

92 Media Watch: <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s2054150.htm>

93 Jupp, White Australia to Woomera, 134-138.

94 Hyndman-Rizik, 'Shrinking worlds'

different and in the subservient position of the accepted rather than the acceptors.⁹⁵ A contained celebration of the gifts of diversity is expressed here, alongside a love of ethnic restaurants, the monitored exoticism of inner city suburbs, and the ideal of thin-multiculturalism underpins utopian constructs of 'unity in diversity' here.⁹⁶ The white voice of reason and paternal control maintains the order of democratic participation and shared cultural expressions.⁹⁷

Hage analyses the motivations behind this fantasy of white control as one that is founded in the fear of lost culture and identity. White Australia, he argues, is experiencing social and cultural change as neighbourhoods, towns and cities become more authentically diverse. Imagining that this diversity can be controlled, contained and used for entertainment and other socially useful purposes, means that white Australia is able to maintain a sense of power while in actual terms it is being lost.⁹⁸ This sense of impotence is also coupled with a sense of lost community. As local community engagement becomes less and less accessible across intercultural boundaries, white Australians feel their sense of belonging threatened by the too many or too different others. Community is defined in most urban Australian discourse as culturally rather than locally oriented, a mode of defining community that perpetuates various exclusions and is indeed founded on the notion of displacement.⁹⁹ Hage analyses this condition of white fantasy as a deep social fear and confusion which needs to be properly addressed if white Australian racism is to be undermined.¹⁰⁰

The question for interfaith dialogue here becomes not, 'how do we prevent white Australians from generating fantasies of domination and social control?', but more fundamentally, 'How does a post-colonial, immigrant society maintain a shared identity on common ground?' How can we generate a sense of belonging, not only nationally, but, crucially, on a community level, that alleviates cross-cultural fears and undermines the very impetus for racism? The interfaith ecology movement responds to this condition by promoting the common shared ground as the very land that we collectively inhabit. This land could provide a neutral yet living meeting point for different cultures who work together to generate local community ties across cultural differences. The movement hopes that working together in this way may regenerate a living sense of belonging to

95 Hage, *White Nation*, 88-89

96 Woodcock, 'Multicultural Melbourne'

97 Woodcock, 'Multicultural Melbourne'

98 Hage, *White Nation*, 232

99 Lever-Tracy and Quinlan, *A Divided Working Class*

100 Hage, *White Nation*, 21

place for participants of migrant, Anglo and Indigenous heritage who have been displaced both socially and geographically.¹⁰¹

In order to realise this interfaith ecology vision, these places and this land must be understood historically. In the Australian context this history is a highly contested site, and a site which strikes at the heart of national identity insecurities stemming from the violence of colonisation here and the dispossession of Indigenous people. This island-continent is also a site of geo-political significance the South East Asia Pacific region where Australia is surrounded by multicultural and diverse nations with distinctive and unique political, cultural and religious heritages. People from these regional nations, Indigenous peoples locally and regionally, and the diverse Australian populous, are important dialogue participants for the regional interfaith ecology movement. This highly complex nexus of multiple modes of colonisation, governance, rights, security and religious expression are what defines both the challenge and opportunity for the interfaith ecology movement.

A CONTINENT IN THE SOUTH EAST ASIA PACIFIC

Australia's regional placement means that we are surrounded by the diverse nations of the South East Asia Pacific with multiple and unique religious cultures and histories as well as religiously influenced violent conflict and identity battles. We are also surrounded by nations with high levels of multiculturalism, such as Indonesia and Malaysia in particular, the social and political configurations of which bare both similarities and contrasts to Australia's western liberal multiculturalism.

Throughout this research I have experienced the benefits of Australia's regional placement for the interfaith project. As the representative of one of only two western cooperation circles in the United Religions Initiative, South East Asia Pacific Region, I was privileged to participate in a regional assembly in Mindanao, Philippines. The attendees represented some of our unique regional ethnic and religious diversity including Indigenous Mindano, Ancient Balinese Hinduism, Filipino Catholicism, Indian-Filipino Hinduism, Cambodian Buddhism, Australian Sikhs, and Muslim-Indigenous Bangsomoro people. In contrast, I attended an academic conference in northern Wales for the British Association of the Study of Religion. There were only two participants in this conference of a non-Anglo background, only one of whom purported a faith, Buddhism.

101 McDaniel, 'Ecotheology'

At interfaith conferences held in Victoria, such as the 2008 Globalisation for the Common Good Conference, the academic and interfaith scene was closely linked to the traditions and institutions of our region and our local diverse population. The first fieldwork project opportunity presented to me was to join the planning committee of this upcoming international conference in 2007 to be held in Melbourne in partnership with Latrobe University's Centre for Dialogue. The planning committee was a key insight into the work of creating an opportunity for dialogue that traversed local, international, faith leader, academic and community faces of this movement. Much time was spent by this committee of academics in the field of interfaith dialogue on forging relationships and tapping into their existing and new networks with Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu organisations as well as community-based interfaith organisations such as the Jewish Christian Muslim Association, the Australian Intercultural Society and others to form relationships that would ensure that the event was attended by a diverse range of local and international participants and that the ensuing dialogue would be inclusive. Prof. Joseph Camilleri, chair of the organising committee, reflected on the importance of Australia's regional placement and history for interfaith dialogue here:

Historically our roots are in Europe, but geographically we are in a land called Australia where the original owners of this land have been here for tens of thousands of years. So this is the first important connection... Then there is the other element of our geography – we are in the middle of the Asia Pacific Region, which places us in contact with a number of Pacific and Asian cultures, religions and civilizations that we have no option but to engage with, interact with and become familiar with. So the confluence of these currents, historical, geographic and demographic, gives us an extraordinary responsibility but also opportunity. Hopefully Australia can rise to this challenge in the coming years.¹⁰²

Australia's placement and work in our region gives Australian nationals a special opportunity to focus attention on the importance of dialogue. Many of the elite of neighbouring countries are Australian educated or have diasporic links to Australia. This means that there is a significant opportunity for relationship building on the community to community level that links local multiculturalism to regional dialogue that is specific to our regional issues and shifts the sole focus of inter-religious peace building from the Middle East.

102 Fieldwork interview: Prof. Joseph Camilleri

Australia is unique in the significance of its Indigenous population in terms of the longevity of the living Aboriginal culture here, the strong links between people and land in the Aboriginal tradition, the level of violent colonisation suffered by Indigenous Australians, and the institutionalisation of racism and violence that remained after colonisation. This discrimination and dispossession advanced well into the second half of the 20th century and remains embedded in Australian law, policy and communities today. These factors reveal the crucial role of Aboriginal Australians in the interfaith movement and especially in the interfaith ecology movement both in regards to the unique contributions they can make as the custodians of this land and in regards to the pressing need to advance reconciliation.

The national identity of white Australia is founded on the myth of *terra nullius*, the proclamation that Australia was, at the time of settlement in 1788, land that belonged to no one, a territory without a people.¹⁰³ This myth was used to justify the genocide of Indigenous people in direct and indirect ways. Aboriginal people were relegated to the class of fauna, not counted in the census of the population until the 1967 referendum.¹⁰⁴ They were only granted the right to vote in 1962, with the last State, Queensland, granting this right in 1965.¹⁰⁵ The eradication of Aboriginal cultures and the breaking up of communities and families as part of a eugenics program to breed out the Indigenous race was enshrined into policies, such as the removal of children from families into institutions, between 1910-1970.¹⁰⁶

It was not until 1992 that the myth of *terra nullius* was legally dispelled by the High Court of Australia in the landmark native title decision of *Mabo and Others v Queensland*.¹⁰⁷ But *Terra nullius* lingers still, not only as a legal legacy of dispossession, but also as a cultural one. The fantasy of colonial control is exercised in attempts to maintain Indigenous culture as a relic of the past, as a static set of practices that cannot be adapted or replaced.¹⁰⁸ Ten years after *Mabo*, in 2002, the *Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v Victoria*¹⁰⁹ Native Title case exemplifies the way the fantasy of a static Indigenous culture allows Indigenous communities to be labelled as inauthentic, where authenticity is defined by the colonisers and their notion of otherness.¹¹⁰ In this case, the *Yorta Yorta* native title claim was initially

103 Buchan and Heath, 'Savagery and civilization'

104 Attwood and Markus, The 1967 Referendum

105 National Archives of Australia: <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx>

106 Manne, In denial, 5

107 High Court of Australia, *Mabo and Others v Queensland*

108 Buchan and Heath, 'Savagery and civilization'

109 High Court of Australia, *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v Victoria*

110 Moreton-Robinson, 'The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty'

dismissed in the Federal Court, and again in their High Court appeal, on the grounds that while the community had continually occupied their traditional lands, they were not practicing their 'traditional laws and customs' in the same way as they had done before colonisation.

In Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations on the 13th of February 2008 emphasis was placed on the significance of the apology and the reconciliation process for a diverse range of Australians, and indeed for cultural/ethnic diversity itself, in the forging of an inclusive national identity. He stated the underpinning reasons for the apology in terms of this project of forward-looking nationalism:

The time has come, well and truly come, for all peoples of our great country, for all citizens of our great Commonwealth, for all Australians—those who are Indigenous and those who are not—to come together to reconcile and together build a new future for our nation.¹¹¹

He returns to multicultural nation-building with the imagery of a new page or new start in the speech conclusion: 'So let us turn this page together' he entreats,

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Government and Opposition, Commonwealth and State, and write this new chapter in our nation's story together. First Australians, First Fleeters, and those who first took the Oath of Allegiance just a few weeks ago. Let's grasp this opportunity to craft a new future for this great land: Australia.¹¹²

The sentiment of the new page presents a possibility for renewed intercultural relations, but there is also danger in assuming old stories have reached their end or that we can write on blank paper, a concept typical of a transcendent text-based culture. Perhaps a more nuanced image for these beginnings could come from Aboriginal culture: Indigenous song-lines that wind through country inscribe multiple stories on the uneven richness of lived and living land, stories that need to be retold, re-walked and revisited as part of an inclusive interfaith ecology dialogue of national significance.¹¹³

In February 2008 I contacted Mikael Smith, the Aboriginal Community Organiser for the Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions to discuss my research and the upcoming event in relation to Aboriginal Reconciliation. At our first meeting we spoke about need for healing relationships with land and people as one, especially in relation to 'place.' He shared his vision of how the significance of 'place' in Australian and other Indigenous cultures would be physically, socially and spiritually honoured through the respectful

111 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:
http://www.dfat.gov.au/indigenous_background/rudd_speech.html

112 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:
http://www.dfat.gov.au/indigenous_background/rudd_speech.html

113 Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift*, 57

structuring of ritual and knowledge exchange between Indigenous cultures and between Indigenous and other cultures and religions at the Parliament. Mikael's vision was that the Parliament would be a real opportunity for respectful relations towards the traditional owners of the land of Melbourne, the Wurundjeri People, to be restored, that it would avoid at all costs cultural tokenism, and that all of the cultural program would be overseen by the elders of the land. Overseeing this process was the newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reconciliation and Spirituality Sub-Committee for the Parliament made up of leaders of local aboriginal organisations, and headed by a Senior Wurundjeri Elder. I became the research assistant for this sub-committee and was keen to observe and aid in the realisation of uniquely Indigenous-owned event. By the end of 2008 there had been two meetings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reconciliation and Spirituality Sub-Committee and it was clear that the vision for genuine Indigenous representation and respect at the Parliament of the World's Religions, especially in relation to the role of the local Aboriginal owners, was unlikely to blossom. Mikael could not secure the financial or cultural support necessary to empower the sub-committee to have a strong role in the programming process, nor could he find the resources to gather Australian Indigenous peoples from across the land to a pre-Parliament forum which would lay the social and spiritual foundation of the event. This experience was frustrating and disappointing to Mikael and other supporters from the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities who hoped to use the Parliament as an opportunity for reconciliation and support of an empowered and genuine Indigenous spiritual tradition.

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA

At the time of this research there were no comprehensive studies or surveys of either interfaith activity or organisations, or eco-faith activities or organisations in Australia. In the shifting volunteer body of these third sector organisations, there is also poor corporate knowledge of the past actions and programs of the organisation with the main focus being the activity at hand. Through the course of this research fieldwork from 2007-2010 multiple new organisations, projects and networks in both fields were formed at the local and institutional level. There was also a strong trend of organisations and institutions taking on activities of these themes to complement their core business.

Steven Douglas has undertaken the most thorough study of the greening of mainstream Christian institutions in Australia based on their policies, programs, doctrines and actions. His findings indicate that the greening of religious institutions has been largely an

ecumenical effort within Christianity and often an interfaith endeavour.¹¹⁴ This, Douglas shows, is largely a result of the low level of participation and attention paid to ecological change within the traditional institutions which has left those internal players no choice but to unite in their cause with people of other institutions and faiths.

This trend was quickened by the joint pressure in Australia of environmental crisis and increased religious diversity. Finding new and improved approaches to both of these issues became key priorities of national security for institutions of all sectors. The *Safeguarding Australia* report clearly identified these joint issues, as the number one challenge for religious institutions and communities in Australia: ‘the development of an ecological consciousness that recognizes the sacredness of the universe and the dangers of the exploitation of the world’s non-renewable resources.’¹¹⁵

The report further highlights the need to act on ‘dealing with cultural pluralism and religious extremism,’¹¹⁶ not as a matter of personal conviction or preference, but as a matter of necessity for religious and social stability:

*Across the world... both the actuality and the potential for inter-religious conflict has increased – as a consequence, all Australians, whether from faith or secularist backgrounds, need to engage with the world’s religious ecumene.*¹¹⁷

Interfaith work has thus gained a higher political profile and economic support within Australia. Not, however, to the extent that it is well supported by professionals in dialogue facilitation or community development. As the report continues, this work is taking place almost solely on a grassroots level and may not be meeting the demand to develop strong relationships and partnerships within and between Australia’s diverse communities:

*Inter-faith activity ... is even more problematic exemplified by the fact that the research team could identify only one salaried person working full-time in this sensitive area. It relies on volunteers. Whilst the Federal and State multicultural bodies would claim that the inter-faith area might come under their aegis as part of inter-ethnic relationships, none has any specialist expertise in the area.*¹¹⁸

The community sector basis for the movement, in-between rather than through formal structures, is characteristic of the Australian approach to spirituality and religion and elements of non-conformity and antiestablishment tendencies in the nation’s cultural heritage. In some ways the grassroots spirituality in Australia is well suited to the grassroots globalisation of the interfaith ecology movement as I will now consider.

114 Douglas, *Is Greening Religion the Solution to the Ecological Crisis?*, 258

115 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 127

116 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 127

117 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 116

118 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 91

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND THE AUSTRALIAN WAY

As Adam Possamai describes, Australia has a complex relationship to religion as related to both its national history and current social diversity:

*Australia is a former English penal colony where the Anglican religion was first used as a tool for social control despite claims of separation of church and state. It saw its religious homogeneity change after WWII as post-war migration and conversion to new religious movements transformed the cultural, religious and ethnic profile of Australian Society.*¹¹⁹

The statistical picture of religious affiliation in Australia shows a largely Christian-identifying population even though mainstream churches report declining membership, low attendance levels and aging membership bases. An increasingly high proportion of citizens identify as having 'no religion,' and an increasing minority of religions other than Christian, largely of eastern religious affiliation linked to ethnic diversity, are being reported. According to 2006 census data, the Australian population is decreasing in declared religious affiliation overall, with the main religious affiliation of Christianity, divided into Anglican and Catholic, in decline from the 2001 census. Stated religious affiliations were: 27% Catholic; 21% Anglican; 21% other Christian denominations; and 5% non-Christian religions. 19% stated they had no religion, and 11% did not adequately respond to the question to enable classification of their religion. The smaller portion of non-Christian religious affiliation has been increasing since the 1970s due to increased migration from countries where Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist religions are dominant: 'The number of persons affiliated with Buddhism increased by 79%, with Hinduism by 42%, Islam 40% and Judaism 5%' from the previous census.¹²⁰ This migration has also increased the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations.¹²¹ The *Safeguarding Australia* report responds to this increasing religious diversity by positing a new way of defining our religious national identity and the development of robust and influential dialogue structures that reposition Australian secularism while maintaining the independence of religion and state:

*Australia needs to have, firstly, co-operative leadership between our ethnic and religious communities and secondly, co-operation between its civic and religious leaders as Australia moves from being a Christian to a multi-faith society.*¹²²

119 Possamai, *Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y*, 142

120 Australian Bureau of Statistics:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/46d1bc47ac9d0c7bca256c470025ff87/bfdda1ca506d6cfaca2570de0014496e!OpenDocument> 1201301.0 - Year Book Australia, 2006

121 Woods, *Medium or Message?*, 167

122 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 127

The statistics on religious belief depict only a surface map of a much deeper and nuanced landscape of spirituality in Australia which reflects many globally applicable changes in a uniquely Australian way.¹²³

Cultural theorist, David Tacey, describes Australia as split between 'non-religious, anti-metaphysical, and rational,' culture and belief, and a subversive 'search for truth, including the truth of the spirit and even of mysticism.' Tacey attributes these perspectives to our cultural and national heritage, 'they reflect different phases of national identity' he explains, the 'debunking, rational and practical style is mainly from our colonial heritage, and the mystical, reflective, sensitive style is characteristic of our post-colonial experience.'¹²⁴ This socio-historical context has generated a strong divide between the public and private spheres in relation to spirituality and religion that Tacey refers to as a 'fault line in the national psyche. I meet people all the time who have private interests in spirituality, but never or rarely declare these in public, lest they be regarded as strange, weird or unAustralian.'¹²⁵

Garry Bouma, a prominent Australian sociologist of religion and spirituality, researches the subtleties of Australian religious expression and found that underneath the census data, there are new as well as long held social and cultural forces intervening with any attempt to easily and accurately map religious affiliation. Bouma explains the Australian irreverence in the face of piety or institutionalised religion as a legacy of the way 'religion was used by the state to "civilize" the prisoners in penal colonies, those free settlers who had set themselves up beyond the control of the state, and the Indigenous inhabitants of the land.'¹²⁶ This led to a cultural legacy of resistance and a highly sceptical society on matters of religious compliance. In the later 20th century, Bouma states, the idea of a specifically 'Australian religion' seemed to many 'a contradiction in terms, or at best an embarrassing legacy of the forgettable past.' Over the last 40 years, however, more evidence of spiritual interest and influence is presented in Australian society, not only through the introduction of new religious communities through migration, but also through more subtle and covert ways. Bouma describes these as the 'more-than-ordinary, the heartfelt connection with life, the practice of divine arts, the search for the more holistic healing of more than just the body, and the desire to address the social policy implication of religious belief'¹²⁷ which are permeating society and everyday life.

123 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 2

124 Tacey, 'Spirituality in Australia,' 50

125 Tacey, 'Spirituality in Australia,' 46

126 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 40

127 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 1

In these conditions, Tacey claims, 'we have not only outgrown the values and assumptions of mechanistic science and humanism, but we can no longer situate ourselves comfortably in the containment of the traditional religions.'¹²⁸ Bouma's findings concur with this position: he states that in Australian society, 'the religious and spiritual have moved out from the control of both the state and such formal organisations as the church.'¹²⁹ One of the characteristics of this transformative state is a 'world-making' approach to spirituality that Tacey defines as the grassroots 'spirituality revolution':

*The revolution involves a democratisation of spirit... It is about personal autonomy and experimentation, with the use of direct experience of the world as a kind of laboratory of the spirit. It is also about finding the sacred everywhere, and not just where religious traditions have asked us to find it. Things previously considered worldly or even unholy are being invested with new spiritual significance, such as the body, nature, the feminine, sexuality and the physical environment.*¹³⁰

This transitional time leads to a destabilisation of definition and identity as new forms are created to explain ourselves, our experiences, and community relations. Bouma paints a picture of a subtle, subversive and distinctively Australian spirituality in this context:

*Being unsure about foreign categories or techniques, being hesitant in the presence of certainty, doubtful when faced with a faith declared with too much surety, and often happier with the questions than with what some pose as answers, Australian spirituality, both indigenous and more recently arrived, is grounded in place and land. Australian sacred places can be found in the bush and in the cities and towns. They are there, they are used, but may become apparent only when threatened.*¹³¹

Emerging through this grounded, subtle and deeply personal Australian spirituality, the interfaith ecology movement here is taking hold with people who have become increasingly curious about the other in their diverse nation. Movement participants seek to reclaim the land and place-based ecological aspects of formerly transcendent explanations of religion and are seeking new expressions of both spiritual and social belonging. The interfaith ecology movement allows for a creative and adaptive approach to truth and belief, counteracting the disciplinary experiences of religion in our cultural heritage. Interfaith ecology is understood by its proponents to hold open a space for a deeper reconciliation with Indigenous Australia, one centred on a shared love of sacred land. It also presents a space for dialogue around the individual and often unexpressed understandings of spirituality and sacred experience of people and places.

128 Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 2
129 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, xiv
130 Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 4
131 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 2

NEW AGE AND NEO-PAGAN

The interfaith ecology movement in Australia is influenced by the cultural presence of the New Age and other eco-spiritual trends, including earth-based religions such as Neo-Paganism and Wicca. Adam Possamai's study of the beliefs, structures and practices of New Age Spiritualities, which focused on qualitative data with Melbourne-based research participants describes the networks of the New Age movement as fluid, ad hoc and based on the individual's learning journey and social connections:

My participants attended seminars, workshops, conferences, reading groups, and exchange ideas. They visit many kinds of religious associations and very few stay all their lives in one. They also visit psychic fairs and New Age festivals ... they experience many religious groups or ideas until finding what 'feels right for them.'¹³²

This type of spiritual investigation has clearly impacted on the ability of the interfaith ecology movement to set itself up as both an attractor to New Age westerner seekers with no fixed affiliation, as well as to people within religious institutions and communities who would like to explore other beliefs and undertake a spiritual learning journey, within the confines of their tradition.

With their centres largely in the USA and UK, Neo-Pagan and Wiccan communities have an increasing presence in largely urban Australian communities. These groups focus on teachings that link Greek, Roman, Celtic or Germanic Mythology and folk lore with spiritual practices, science (and pseudo-science) and ecology.¹³³ These beliefs and organisations have opened the way for questioning around the connections between spirituality and the land in Australia that operates largely outside an Indigenous socio-historical framework, but often in reference to what is perceived as Indigenous spirituality, as Gelder and Jacobs describe:

Much contemporary New Age environmentalism and Jungian spiritualism turns to Aboriginal religion as a means of making modernity reconcilable with itself. Here Aboriginal sacredness retains its other-worldly, residual features, but it is also activated as something emergent, as integral to what we should become.'¹³⁴

132 Possamai, In search of New Age Spiritualities, 29

133 Matthews, New religions, 114

134 Ken Gelder, Jane Margaret Jacobs, Uncanny Australia, 1

The Neo-Pagan desire to reconnect with an eco-spiritual practice and ancient sacred tradition is shared by many interfaith ecology participants – especially those of a New Age persuasion, entering the movement in search of such wisdom.

The primary project of interfaith ecology is not to be a network of earth worshipping traditions, but rather of mainstream religious adherents who become inspired to undertake an ecological conversion within their traditional frameworks. Interfaith ecology participants and writers are often keen to distance themselves from Neo-Paganism as they are often required to defend themselves to their own communities as not having come under the influence of earth-worshipping traditions, but are rather maintaining an authentically Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or other stance in relation to ecology.¹³⁵

Interfaith ecology participants are also keen to differentiate their movement from the New Age movement or spiritual practices. Simmer-Brown explains how pluralism and diversity is used in the interfaith ecology movement to differentiate genuinely interfaith projects and theory from the New Age syncretism:

Syncretism cannot tolerate difference, and so two traditions get blended together, mixed, creating a new, unified system. Many of the spiritual teachings of the New Age fall into this category, weaving together Native American ritual, Buddhist meditation, oriental medicine and Hindu yoga into a new, creatively expressed movement. This is an approach which avoids the challenges of diversity through homogenizing and blending difference into a single path. This is not pluralism. Instead pluralism respects the differences which reside in the variety of religious traditions, without reconciling or integrating those differences into a single path. Pluralism is willing to rest in the ambiguity of religious difference. From this point of view, pluralism is a very courageous practice, an engagement with the fact of diversity in our world.¹³⁶

Pluralism in the interfaith ecology movement pushes against New Age tendencies and instead understands its 'unity' as a core truth which has many unique approaches, each valuable to the whole. The interfaith ecology movement therefore does not seek out the New Age movement as a companion in its actions and emerging culture, preferring to work with mainstream religious institutions.

135 Kearns, 'Religion and ecology,' 310

136 Simmer-Brown, 'Commitment and openness,' 101

CONCLUSION: GRASSROOTS GLOBALISATION ON AUSTRALIAN GROUNDS

The interfaith ecology movement operates through the structures of grassroots globalisation, giving voice and form to the welling spirituality from below that is springing up between institutions and traditional forms of organising. It is beginning to influence the status quo of both religious and secular positions on diversity, faith, ecology, place, spirituality and community. Interfaith ecology is developing in diverse communities who are active participants in world-forming creativity. As will be explored in the chapters to follow, they are developing new ways of relating across differences and forging avenues for spiritual engagement and community belonging away from both sectarianism and universalisation.

In Australia, liberal-culturalism endorses these actions and the identified social and ecological need for better interfaith understanding, Aboriginal reconciliation, environmental healing, and a more inclusive and regionally connected national identity all weave into interfaith ecology's holistic project. The nuanced and subversive expressions of Australian spirituality in its many forms and localities combined with the variously situated religious identities and practices in Australia's multicultural society, constitute a fertile ground for the growth of the interfaith ecology movement here.

Before analysing the structures and processes of this growth in chapter 4, I will relay the ideas and understandings of the interfaith ecology movement as expressed in its texts and theories in chapter 3. Describing the emerging tenets, principles and beliefs of the movement in its literature will illustrate how interfaith ecology is a creative community response to a quickly evolving social, cultural and ecological environment.

IDEAS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

FORMATIVE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY THEORIES, THINKING AND TEXTS

Religions have traditionally been a means of expanding the measure of the mind through the power of the religious imagination; now is the moment for the religions to move forward boldly with comprehensive narrative perspectives that are grounded in relevant traditional resources, open to a sense of wonder, and guided by inspiring moral visions for shaping human-earth relations for a sustainable future. In this spirit, the religions of the world are moving towards their ecological phase and finding their planetary expression. – Mary Evelyn Tucker¹

Mary Evelyn Tucker's statement refers to both a social project and a cultural transformation; she expresses a vision for religious engagement with a changing eco-social world in the cultural contexts of globalisation. The hopes and observations Tucker offers here are characteristic of the field of academic and theological writing that responds philosophically, practically and spiritually to the increasingly integrated issues of cultural and ecological transformation in the global era. Much like the social movement it informs, this literature has not been defined as a body, except most broadly as 'religion and ecology' which falls short of defining the specific focus on diversity and dialogue that is elucidated here. This literature is impacting on the development and growth of the interfaith ecology movement at the grassroots level, in academia and throughout environmental, religious and interfaith global networks.

This growing body of literature can be recognised as contributing to a coherent movement philosophy or ideology, rather than as a disparate group of texts and positions, because these theorists share the common interfaith ecology project of investigating how dialogue across a number of different boundaries produces new configurations of flourishing with

earth. They explore questions of how and why this process is made possible and what its implications are for the meaning or future of humanity. Some of these theorists, while eschewing a religious theology, recognise the importance of the emerging ‘dialogue of civilizations’² that includes religious perspectives. They may also be interested in contributing to an as yet undefined spirituality and mode of community organising stemming from this dialogue and enabled by the conditions of globalisation. The writers I include in this overview all have three key common aspects to their work: firstly, they are interested in ecology; secondly they are interested in communication between different cultural, religious, disciplinary or institutional perspectives on eco-social transformation; and finally, they are interested in developing this nexus as a holistic enterprise that is inclusive of the spiritual, as well as the sociological, political, physical aspects of the life-world. This thematic overview of the field describes the common trends and tenets of these writers’ collective work on the issues of transformative religion, multidisciplinary considerations, integral and utopian visions, justice, diversity and post-modern theoretical influences.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ecological anthropologists understand cultural paradigms and belief-systems as grounded: as constituted by, and in their turn constituting, their social and physical environments.³ This long-standing insight, understood for millennia by numerous ecologically aware societies, was taken up by social ecology, deep ecology and ecofeminism in the western environmentalist movements in the late 20th century. These theories deconstruct the long held dichotomy in western thought of Nature and Culture, proposing instead a variety of theories on the interconnections between all life that attempt to redistribute social, ecological and spiritual power and empowerment. These philosophical approaches have been in dialogue with each other in producing what Wood describes as ‘econstructions.’⁴ These are deconstructive positions that do not leave theory in ruin but rather re-build ecologically cognisant philosophies that grow and evolve.

Econstructions inspire dynamic relationships with the more-than-human world we seek to understand and are always ‘becoming with.’ Deconstructing the Nature/Culture dichotomy underpins this project. It revealed nature and culture as interactive systems of action and meaning generation that Harraway, following Latour, terms ‘naturecultures:’

1 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*, 51
2 Segesvary, *Dialogue of Civilizations*
3 Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*
4 Wood, ‘Econstruction’

There is no teleological warrant ... no assured happy or unhappy ending, socially, ecologically, or scientifically. There is only the chance of getting on together with some grace. The Great Divides of animal/human, nature/culture, organic/technical and wild/domestic flatten into mundane differences – the kinds that have consequences and demand respect and response – rather than rising to sublime and final ends.⁵

Mathews stresses the agency of the ecological world in this relationship, highlighting its role in shaping human culture through a relational dialogue of action and reaction between human and environmental actors and the need to re-position ourselves in ‘right-relations’ in this dialogue of life and survival.⁶ Furthermore, she argues that the ‘cosmology’ of a culture, inclusive of the human, ethical, spiritual and eco-relational understandings of the culture, is crucial to the flourishing of this relationship and the survival of the culture.⁷ Plumwood agrees, stating that we urgently need to develop ‘new mutualistic and communicative models ... for both our own and nature’s survival in an age of ecological limits.’⁸

Belief systems define the rules or ideals of the natureculture from the perspective of the human actors. They inform everything from the way we dwell in our environments as sacred and profane, to the way we build places of dwelling and worship, to the closed or open structures of the systems through which we exchange the products of our lands in trade, or the rules of engagement with those lands; how we share it with others, be they humans, plants or animals.⁹ Some belief systems are better adapted to changing environments; the culture has moved regularly and their divinities can move with them or are placed in a realm beyond movement. Other paradigms have adapted to safekeeping environments; these cultures have stayed long in the one territory and embed religious knowledge into the locale.¹⁰ Religion has always been an adaptive framework for explaining the world and our place, purpose and practices in it.¹¹ It is a means through which to act and evolve, ethically, ritually and socially in interpreting and shaping our socio-ecological context.

The philosophy of the interfaith ecology movement understands worldviews and belief systems as crucial in finding a solution to contemporary ecological crises such as climate change, global soil degradation, loss of bio-diversity, deforestation and air and water pollution. As Douglas points out, many of these writers specifically identify religion as a

5 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 15

6 Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality*, 62

7 Mathews, *Ecological Self*, 5

8 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 122

9 Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*

10 Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*

11 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*

key player in both the causes of malfunctioning eco-relations and the transition to right relations:

There are a substantial and growing number of authors from a variety of backgrounds who argue that religions have a significant role to play in addressing the ecological crisis. Not all such authors are themselves religious – some simply see that most of the world’s population identifies as religious, and that religion can be a powerful vehicle for instilling and changing people’s values, attitudes and behaviours. Whilst religions have been at least implicated in the values, attitudes and behaviours that have caused the ecocrisis ... the global ‘greening’ of religion suggests that they could equally be involved in enacting solutions to the ecocrisis.¹²

Michael Northcott notes the trend of using faith communities as a new forum for environmentalism:

most of those who engage and promote the religion ecology dialogue do so from a pragmatic belief that it represents a way of involving non-experts in conservation, and a way of drawing religious impulses into a science-informed project that does not involve traditional religious belief.¹³

In his reflection Christian responses and interpretations of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Northcott cautions against the instrumentalist approach to religion by environmentalism. Shallow attempts at eco-conversion, he states, do little to engender behavioural change and further disregards the sacred in modern society. Northcott posits that a genuine dialogue of religion and ecology would recognise the cooption and complicity of religion (notably but not singularly in the history of Christianity) by the interests of capitalism through colonisation and industrialisation. This deconstruction can enable a transformative dialogue, in which the sacred, mystical and deep ethics of religion are reclaimed and serve to undermine the technocratic order:

Without this recognition the attempt to marry conservation science and religion will remain marginal to the continued industrial assault on the earth. And the claim that religion is acquiring new public force in the late modern world will remain at best an aspiration rather than a reality when humanity’s microcosmic and sacred power - to frustrate or to fulfil the given order of the cosmos - remains so marginal to the core and driving rationale of modern political economy.¹⁴

The interfaith ecology theorists step strongly up to this challenge of radical and meaningful transformation. These writers draw together a range of social and spiritual

12 Douglas, Is 'Green' Religion the Solution to the Ecological Crisis? 18

13 Northcott, 'BP, the blowout and the Bible belt,' 123 -124

14 Northcott, 'BP, the blowout and the Bible belt,' 123 -124

transformative fields and among them are ecofeminists,¹⁵ theologians,¹⁶ scholars of comparative religion¹⁷ and cultural theory,¹⁸ ecocritics,¹⁹ anthropologists²⁰ and scientists.²¹ Theorists in interfaith ecology are believers not only in the political and social capacities of faith communities to enact justice for themselves and the earth, but also in the real and meaningful power religion facilitates through the sacred and ethical components of spiritual wisdom embedded in religious traditions. The writers I engage here are by no means exhaustive of those writing on interfaith ecology themes but should rather be read as seminal voices in the movement's emerging philosophy.

RELIGION IN TRANSITION

Interfaith ecology writers are actively engaged in theorising the transition of religion and other institutions of belief and practice, from the modern era into a new postmodern era of integral relationship and reflexive diversity. In interfaith ecology, Tucker explains, we are drawn into 'contemplation of our own as a planetary species with allegiance beyond regional or national bounds.'²² In developing and understanding our shared universal story we 'celebrate our kinship not only with other humans but with all life forms.'²³ This communicative niche, this 'reflective consciousness' and 'wondering intelligence,' is identified by Tucker as 'the indispensable capacity of all humans that religion can evoke in the presence of the mystery of life.'²⁴ The role religion has played and may continue to play in the development of humanity is, for Tucker, this opening it provides for wonderment.

The possibility of religion being part of a solution to oppressive and violent systems rather than a perpetrator is also explored by Ruether. She investigates the way the fundamental questions of the human condition that religion grapples with, namely evil, ethics, and the meaning of existence, has meant that it has generated systems to manage these insurmountable issues. Practices of care as well as violence mark the history of religion as 'this effort to name evil and struggle against it reinforced relations of domination and created victim-blaming spiritualities and ethics.'²⁵ There are also glimpses, however, of 'transformative, biophilic relationships' in this heritage.²⁶ Religion is not a tame or neutral

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- 15 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*
16 Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*
17 Tucker, 'Ethics and ecology'
18 Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*
19 Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred*
20 Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*
21 Maturana and Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge*
22 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*, 11
23 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*, 11
24 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*, 11
25 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 3
26 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 3

force in society but it has both good and bad potentials. While the religious focus on sin has led to violent acts, the way religious communities have struggled with defining and identifying sin and injustice has also worked towards the cultivation of 'just and loving relationships between people in their relation to the earth and to the divine.'²⁷

The scope of this review prevents me from exploring the multiple ideologies informing the interfaith ecology movement and their historical interplay. It should be noted, however, that a crucial characteristic of this literature is the way religious and spiritual philosophies are placed in dialogue with a range of eco and social justice positions, generating new understandings for both fields. Interfaith ecology critiques the way humanity's wonder has been stifled under the techno-centrism of modernity and instrumentalism has relentlessly driven mystery away from our encounters with the other than human, now largely seen as resources rather than being. This critique of consumerist instrumentalism runs through the movement and justifies a return to a transformed mode of religion, which Tucker refers to as the 'ecological phase' of religion. The new eco role and mode of religious engagement, Tucker argues, will reawaken 'a sense of awe and wonder regarding the beauty, complexity, and mystery of life itself.'²⁸

Jay McDaniel identifies five historical challenges for the world's religions in taking up this task of transition. These include: 1/ To live compassionately, 'helping to build multi-religious communities that are just, sustainable, participatory, and non-violent;'²⁹ 2/ To live self-critically, recognising the aspects of our religions that have led to violence and arrogance and to amend these reflexively away from fundamentalism; 3/ To live simply and provide an alternative to the dominant religion of consumerism, this is a common ground of most religions that understand material accumulation and waste in direct opposition to spiritual and social enlightenment; 4/ to live ecologically, aware of ourselves as ecologically embedded beings and to balance our needs and wants to allow the flourishing of others and ourselves; and 5/ To welcome diversity and 'promote peace between religions by befriending people of other religions, trustful that the truths of the world religions are manifold, all making the whole richer.'³⁰ These five callings of contemporary religion encapsulate a common ground or set of core values from which to collectively launch an interfaith ecology dialogue spanning the ecological, cultural and spiritual components of the human condition.

27 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 3

28 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*, 52

29 McDaniel, 'Ecotheology,' 39

30 McDaniel, 'Ecotheology,' 40

MULTIDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

There is a strong call throughout interfaith ecology literature for a multidisciplinary as well as interfaith dialogue. This is particularly prominent in the field's engagement of scientific knowledge with spiritual-ethical interpretations of how that knowledge can connect with religious teachings. Joanna Macy theorises this dialogue as a catalyst moment in history where different streams of knowledge and ways of understanding are intersecting:

*Now, in our time, these three rivers – anguish for our world, scientific breakthroughs, and ancestral teachings – flow together. From the confluence of these rivers we drink. We awaken to what we once knew: We are alive in a living Earth, source of all we are and can achieve. Despite our conditioning by the industrial society of the last two centuries, we want to name, once again, this world as holy.*³¹

Ruether investigates the longstanding relationship between religious philosophy and scientific knowledge.³² She illustrates how historically, where scientific and technological knowledge and development have been scorned and severed from ethical, spiritual and religious systems, close-mindedness breeds on both sides of the polarised divide. In the modern global scientific paradigm, Ruether observes the split between religion and science as eliminating in both religion and science the synergistic potential of each other. This split between 'value' and 'fact,' as Ruether characterises it, relegates religion to ungrounded interpretations and textual literalism, and science to a purely material investigation devoid of ethics and wisdom.³³ In agreement with Macy, she sees a growing potential in progressive scientific thinkers and spiritual communities to rejoin this severed dialogue believing that 'there is something of a new global consciousness arising from the union of these concerns.'³⁴

Scientific and spiritual thought are understood in interfaith ecology as interactive and complementary. As Callicott explains, engaging in a fruitful and sophisticated dialogue between science and religion adds validation and depth to both fields. The traditional environmental ethics embedded in belief systems can be 'revised and, just as important, validated by their affinity with the most exciting new ideas in contemporary science'.³⁵ In turn the 'rich vocabulary of metaphor, simile, and analogy developed in traditional sacred and philosophical literature of the world's diverse cultures' can be drawn on to express

31 Macy, *Coming Back to Life*, 21

32 Ruether, 'Gaia and God'

33 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 6

34 Ruether, 'Gaia and God,' 11

35 Callicott, *Earths Insights*, 11

the 'most arcane concepts of nature, human nature, and the relationship between people and nature implied in ecology and the new physics.'³⁶

Writers in this field tend to use ecological science as a means of establishing some common ground or principle. Because of its 'global' relevancy and colonial distribution, science has become an indispensable aspect of interfaith ecology highlighting the dependency of the movement on the structures of globalisation that have manufactured some shared beliefs. Knitter explains the use of science as a common dialogical ground: 'A number of contemporary scientists, philosophers and theologians are suggesting that the Earth is providing us not only with a context for experiencing the Divine/Truth in a vast variety of ways, ... but also with a *common story* by which we can better understand our different religious experiences.'³⁷ The ecological situation of the diverse cultural world is the context that links religious belief systems and has the potential to 'give them some unified shape.'³⁸ As Knitter observes, interfaith ecology writers are visionary in their mission 'to understand religious phenomena in relation to scientific and ecological phenomena.'³⁹

Many theorists use an ecosystemic model to frame this relational knowledge system as a binding paradigm. Metzner supports this eco-meta-structuring of interfaith ecology because of ecology's 'concern with the complex web of interdependent relationships in ecosystems, including the pervasive role of the human,'⁴⁰ which makes it the 'interdisciplinary "subversive science" par excellence.'⁴¹ Carroll further defends the primacy of the eco-scientific discipline in this discourse, stating that 'spirituality that encourages ecological practice must be compatible with the best available science of the day.'⁴² The science of interest to the interfaith ecology movement is not, 'the old and outmoded Cartesian-Baconian-Newtonian paradigm,' but instead the new and apparently more ideological sound and neutral 'story of quantum theory and ecology, of holism rather than reductionism.'⁴³ This story allows for difference and change, what has 'been discovered is truly extraordinary: the basic reality of the universe is change, not stasis.'⁴⁴ In using this adaptive and evolving scientific framework as the context for interfaith ecology, religion is required to relinquish static or 'fundamentalist' elements, becoming more transformative in its 'ecological phase.'

36 Callicott, *Earths Insights*, 12

37 Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 118 [his emphasis]

38 Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 119

39 Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 119

40 Metzner, 'Emerging cosmological worldview,' 163

41 Metzner, 'Emerging cosmological worldview,' 163

42 Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*, 129

43 Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*, 129

44 Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*, 129

INTEGRAL CULTURE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The theories of interfaith ecology point towards a vision of an integral utopia and/or an emerging integral consciousness. Integral theory maintains the ideal of social progress and a common good towards which we are collectively moving through integrating knowledge systems.⁴⁵ This potential is understood as a fruitful response to globalisation that uses the circumstances of cultural knowledge exchange in dialogical learning to mutually integrate and advance a common understanding and through it the social, environmental and spiritual growth of humanity in relationship to earth. In this way interfaith ecology envisions an alternative to what Northcott describes as the three fold subversion of religion, community and nature under the modern technological and instrumentalist paradigm:

*The technological society involves the death of God as technical progress is substituted for divine creation/redemption as the origin and end of human life and the cosmos, and the idolatry of consumer artefacts is substituted for worship of God; the technological society involves the subversion of human community as the traditional moral order and government of human life by communities of kinship, place, religion and ethne are dissolved by the social and technical power of nation states and corporations; and the technological society involves the 'end of nature' as the natural world is increasingly subject to human technical re-ordering, and we rarely experience nature in its unhomified state as a prior order of reality to human claims and interests.*⁴⁶

Integral culture and consciousness in interfaith ecology seeks to address the common root of these maladies. It is understood as a mode of social and personal being and becoming where social, environmental and spiritual harmony evolves through the communion of cultures, through inclusion and transcendence of differences.⁴⁷ This integrated and adaptive future is held up as an alternative to the dystopia of violence, destruction and fragmentation in all these aspects of the life-world should dialogue not proceed. As Macy states:

Though we can discern the Great Turning and take courage from its manifold activity, we have no assurance that it will happen in time. We cannot tell which will happen first: the point of no return, when we cannot stop the unravelling of the systems supporting complex life forms, or the moment when the elements of a sustainable society cohere and catch hold. If the Great

45 Wilber, Sex, Ecology and Spirituality

46 Northcott, The Environment, 258

47 Wilber, Sex, Ecology and Spirituality

*Turning should fail, it will not be for lack of technology or relevant data so much as for lack of political will.*⁴⁸

Tucker believes that we 'humans are called for the first time in history, to a new intergenerational consciousness and conscience – and this extends to the entire earth community.'⁴⁹ Tucker understands this evolution of consciousness as historically contextualised where the contemporary circumstances of globalisation call for an already surfacing paradigmatic shift of the twenty-first century. In this way, as Kearns explains, interfaith ecology writers

*participate in the critique of globalization as homogeneity. Yet they want to link this knowledge and insights into a global(ized) religious/spiritual consciousness that promotes a recognition of the need to value the interconnected life systems of the planet.*⁵⁰

This shift is characterised by the human ability to think about welfare holistically, welfare of the entire human race and welfare of other-than-human beings. 'The twenty-first century will be remembered,' she predicts, 'by this extension of our moral concerns not only to humans, but to other species and ecosystems as well.'⁵¹ As Macy concurs, actions toward this great social and ecological change 'must mirror what we want and how we relate to each other. They require, in other words, a profound shift in our perception of reality.'⁵² For Macy and Tucker this shift is observable today, it is 'happening now, both as cognitive revolution and spiritual awakening. It is ... the most basic dimension of the Great Turning.'⁵³

This integration of different knowledge systems and different modes of knowing is demonstrated in the emphasis interfaith ecology theorists place on the development of empathetic faculties alongside and of equal importance to the development of rational thought faculties which have been favoured in enlightenment thinking.⁵⁴ As Northcott observes, there is recognition in this literature of 'the interaction of the divine and the human quest for justice and peace, and the self-renewing capacities of ecosystems.'⁵⁵ In this vein, Vandana Shiva seeks to bring scientific development, economy and ecology together in a way that presents an alternative to the oppressive configuration they form under corporate monoculture. Shiva deconstructs the separation between ecology, economy, and various cultural knowledge systems, including the scientific, religious and localised worldviews. The alternative 'earth democracy' she describes, works on the

48 Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 23

49 Tucker 'Ethics and Ecology' 496

50 Kearns, 'Religion and ecology,' 313

51 Tucker 'Ethics and ecology,' 495

52 Macy, *Coming Back to Life*, 21

53 Macy, *Coming Back to Life*, 21

54 Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*; Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*

principle of 'continuity of all life on earth' and the 'continuum between the indivisibility of justice, peace and sustainability.'⁵⁶

Shiva understands this integral transformation as founded in justice and resistance. She hopes that the 'economic, ecological, and social crisis resulting from corporate globalisation [will] invite a new way of thinking and being on this planet.'⁵⁷ The destruction and destructiveness we find ourselves facing will prompt us to embrace a new and alternative world-view in which:

*compassion not greed is globalised, a new consciousness in which we are not reduced to ... narrow, fragmented, one dimensional identities based on colour, religion, or ethnicity, but can instead experience our lives as diverse beings with planetary consciousnesses ... connected to each other and the world in the common fabric of life.*⁵⁸

DECOLONISING ECO-JUSTICE

In addition to a strong multidisciplinary approach to science and ecology, interfaith ecology literature is also in dialogue with emancipation and social justice theory stemming from both religious and secular political traditions. Emancipation from poverty and injustice is linked in this work to the change of consciousness and integral society pre-figured in the movement's vision which ties it to social action and personal transformation. As Northcott describes, this critique links 'human poverty and injustice, and especially the oppression of indigenous peoples and poor farmers with the degradation of the land and waters of the earth.'⁵⁹ Kearns explains how this justice agenda is also effective in mainstreaming environmental issues in religious communities who are reluctant to engage with a 'green' cause as either spiritually and politically stigmatised:

*Not only does this focus on justice enable religious environmentalism to intersect with other New Social Movements, but the focus on justice also provides a clear authoritative religious mandate for work that is often deemed suspect within religious circles... because of 'pagan' overtones and fear of 'worshipping creation.'*⁶⁰

Ruether links her integral vision to a change of consciousness at the personal and the communal level where 'the work of eco-justice and the work of spirituality ... [form] the inner and outer aspects of one process of conversion and transformation'.⁶¹ This linking of

55 Northcott, *The Environment*, 130
56 Shiva, 'Earth democracy,' 315
57 Shiva, 'Earth democracy,' 320
58 Shiva, 'Earth democracy,' 320
59 Northcott, *The Environment*, 131
60 Kearns, 'Religion and ecology,' 310
61 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 4

social and eco-justice to spiritual transformation and growth is a crucial component of the interfaith ecology movement as it safeguards the movement against political and social exclusion, appropriation and ignorance.

Interfaith ecology theorists draw important lessons from the post-colonial critiques of the environmentalist and feminist movements which, having engaged similar projects of justice, identity and inclusivity, highlight the pitfalls of injustice that this movement must be wary of. Avoiding these pitfalls and injustices is not an easy or entirely clear path as there is often a fine line between enthusiasm and inclusion of the 'other' and appropriation. Ecofeminist Carol Adams articulates the dangers of appropriation: 'In many instances cultures that are struggling for physical survival against genocide are romanticised, their spirituality misappropriated and misunderstood'⁶² she states. This misappropriation and exclusion is enabled, Adams continues, by the colonial gaze that separates the subject from their cultural context and objectifies ideology. 'When Euro-American ecofeminists elevate some of the spiritual aspects of these cultures above those political struggles,' she notes, 'they perpetuate dualisms while ignoring the fact that it is the dominant cultures that have necessitated such struggles for survival in the first place.'⁶³ Many ecofeminist theorists adopt a postcolonial critique of difference into their work,⁶⁴ enabling it to evolve into a rich and diverse body of theory and practice on and of difference, socially and ecologically.⁶⁵ The misappropriation of others cultural apparatus and knowledge is made possible where authentically different perspectives are excluded from debate and where the dominant seek to define their goals as the 'ends' to which the movement progresses. Interfaith ecology therefore seeks to develop its 'integral ideology' through reciprocal relationships and 'dialogue' with other cultures. A genuine dialogue prevents cultural knowledge systems and products being treated as object of desire which may be claimed or subsumed in a hasty attempt at synchronisation. Severing people from their knowledge systems is a colonial act only possible in a paradigm of extreme dualism that the interfaith ecology movement opposes.

Ruether takes up this challenge and calls for a dialogical construction of shared social-environmental ethics gathered through the exchange of multiple forms of wisdom. She does not presume to pre-empt the outcome of such a dialogue. Ruether assesses the 'cultural and social roots that have promoted destructive relations between men and women, between ruling and subjugated human groups, and the destruction of the rest of

62 Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, 3

63 Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, 3

64 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*

65 Cudworth, *Developing Ecofeminism Theory*

the biotic community.’⁶⁶ Her ecofeminist analysis seeks interrelated solutions to interrelated problems, ‘it demands that we must speak of eco-justice and not simply of domination of the earth as though that happened unrelated to social domination.’⁶⁷ Ruether’s analysis of the classical western traditions, reveals the role of religion in justifying and even sacralising relationships of domination so that our western culture has inherited ‘not only a legacy of systems of domination, but also cultures that teach us to see such relations as the “natural order” and as the will of God.’⁶⁸ This religious culture has been a powerfully limiting force in humanity’s social and ecological development. It is a culture that interfaith ecology ideologically opposes and seeks a dynamic and life affirming alternative to.

BALANCE OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Interfaith ecology texts acknowledge the dangerous extremities of unity on one side and fragmentation on the other, and try to move towards a balanced position in relation to both the personal and community practices they promote. As Callicott explains, ‘inwardness, isolation, mutual hostility [and] intolerance – is no less destructive of the human biotic communities than is cultural homogenization.’ A social analogue to ‘ecosystemic integration’ is therefore needed, he argues ‘to complement cultural diversity.’⁶⁹

The metaphors of bio-cultural diversity used in interfaith ecology, such as the crystal with many faces and colours and the woven threads of a tapestry, are preferred over the metaphors of assimilation such as the melting pot. Maintaining diversity within the interfaith ecology movement is a cornerstone of theory in this field, as Kearns describes:

*Just as environmentalists are concerned over species extinction and the loss of bio-diversity, religious environmentalists are concerned that globalised media-promoted mono-culture destroys (makes extinct) both the local ecological knowledge as well as the particular (diverse) strands of religious traditions or indigenous religions that may provide a religious ecological ethic and salvific ecological knowledge.*⁷⁰

As in an ecosystem, it is this diversity that will allow the movement to flourish and adapt. Shiva identifies the ‘included middle’ as the residing space of ‘diversity and

66 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 6
67 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 2-3
68 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 3
69 Callicott, *Earth Insights*, 13
70 Kearns, ‘*Religion and ecology*,’ 313

multifunctionality.⁷¹ This middle is being eroded by the social, economic, religious and ecological polarisations of globalisation, but it is a crucial moderate space in which, Shiva states, dialogue affirms ‘the logic of both/and... the logic of inclusion.’ The middle is where creativity through interaction flourishes as it transcends the ‘false polarization of wild vs cultivated, nature vs culture, or even the false clash of cultures.’⁷²

Habermas describes a common paradox presented in interfaith ecology whereby the arena of communicative ethics is governed by the dominant paradigm that ‘tolerates’ the others and allows the dialogue to proceed accordingly. For Habermas, therefore, ‘the act of toleration retains an element of an act of mercy or of “doing a favour”’ creating a power imbalance in which the dominant or governing party *allows* the others ‘a certain amount of deviation from “normality” under one condition: that the tolerated minority does not overstep the “threshold of tolerance.”’⁷³ In interfaith ecology, this paradox is most apparent when theorists grapple with navigating an equitable and fruitful path between sameness, or what unifies us, and difference, or what makes us diverse. Acknowledging that this task is not one that can be reduced to an understanding of ‘unity in diversity’ as a simplistic cliché but is one that sees the balance between unity and diversity as a dialogical process without resolution, is important for the integrity of the interfaith ecology movement.

In navigating this process, Callicott draws on our embedded circumstances as communities living within the context of globalisation. ‘The one shared worldview which we can collectively develop,’ he states, ‘has one associated environmental ethic ‘corresponding to the contemporary reality that we inhabit one planet, that we are one species, and that our deepening environmental crisis is worldwide and common.’⁷⁴ The multiplicity of culturally situated belief systems are simultaneously revived and many associated environmental ethics are encouraged to flourish ‘corresponding to the historical reality that we are many peoples’ inhabiting many diverse bioregions apprehended through many and diverse cultural lenses.’⁷⁵ Kearns further elucidates this position in practice:

While it works to raise awareness and concern for global interconnectedness of environmental problems and solutions, religious environmentalism also heralds particular religious traditions (to avoid accusations of being ‘new age’ or ‘new religion’) and particular locales, urging followers to ‘think globally, act locally’ (borrowing a slogan from the peace movement).⁷⁶

71 Shiva, ‘Earth democracy,’ 317

72 Shiva, ‘Earth democracy,’ 317

73 Habermas in Derrida and Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 40

74 Callicott, *Earths Insights*, 12

75 Callicott, *Earths Insights*, 12

76 Kearns, ‘Religion and ecology,’ 314

In interfaith ecology theory, our embedded condition in globalisation prevents the parochialism and individualism of the 'many' to dominate and destroy what we share. Nor does it allow the homogenising tendencies of unity to destroy our uniquely situated eco-cultural systems and expressions.

ECONSTRUCTION

Interfaith ecology theorists apply deconstructive methodology in eco-conscious ways that undermine the myopia of anthropocentrism in favour of a biocentrism that Wood describes as 'a kind of full-spectrum seeing, a capacity to respond to other life-forms that is only possible for us because we are ourselves life-forms.'⁷⁷ This responsive relationship opens the potential of difference in communication: 'What other life forms offer us is the opportunity for the affirmation of difference, other ways of organising reproductive complexity.'⁷⁸ The distinctive offering of econstruction is this reproductive complexity that brings forth new phenomena. Difference, and further, paradox and contradiction, Wood argues are acceptable states in both ecology and deconstructive theory and the weaving of deconstructive methodology into ecophilosophy thus enhances interfaith ecology's ability to approach difference:

These phenomena are issues for us because of further questions about the adequacy of our knowledge and control, the models we deploy to engage with these phenomena, the social practices that enable and disable appropriate responses to these problems, and the deep difficulties we face in trying to think through the contradictions they throw up... to the extent that deconstruction trades in this complexity, it might be thought to be just what environmentalism has needed.⁷⁹

Wood explains that the convergence of material ecology and deconstructive critique in econstruction is akin to a 'theology of becoming'⁸⁰ inasmuch as: a/ meaning is understood as perpetually developing 'without end,' b/ difference is maintained as a creative structure of convergence and c/ the products of this process are unpredictable and integrate multiple forms of knowledge and experience. In bringing ecophilosophy and deconstruction into an unlikely partnership, Wood demonstrates the significant contribution each field can make to the other: 'environmentalism finds itself in an often problematic and aporetic space of posthumanistic displacement with which deconstruction is particularly well equipped to offer guidance ... [E]qually ...

77 Wood, 'Econstruction,' 276

78 Wood, 'Econstruction,' 276

79 Wood, 'Econstruction,' 282

80 Wood, 'Econstruction,' 282

environmental concerns can embolden deconstruction to embrace ... “strategic materialism,” or the essential interruptability of any and every idealization.’⁸¹

Such dialogical cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary creation represents, for Callicott, ‘an important step in the future movement of human material cultures towards a more symbiotic relationship – however incomplete and imperfect – with the natural environment.’⁸² Acknowledging the role of partial or situated knowledge’s contributing to a larger net of evolving common ethics leads Callicott to the claim that a ‘postmodern ecological worldview’ is the cognitive motif most suited to understanding and developing common ground between the multiple religious or cultural belief systems, as well as scientific knowledge and development.⁸³ For Wood, this econstructive motif allows for social and cultural constructivism to be activated in a reflexive fashion while a space for ongoing development is maintained through the recognition of perpetual partiality.⁸⁴

Interfaith ecology literature and practice explores the ‘other’ in a multiple and layered form including cultural and religious human others, spiritual Other as God or divinity, and ecological others. These writers are thus well suited to deconstructive theory which, in ultimate respect and reverence for the potential of otherness, perpetuates movement towards unknowability. Ruether characterises this process as allowing for an ever-evolving notion of divinity and ethics that no one culture can colonise: ‘We need a vision of a source of life that is “yet more” than what presently exists,’ she claims, one that is ‘continually bringing forth both new life and new visions of how life should be more just and more caring.’⁸⁵

Shiva uses a self-deconstructive ethic which draws on the Gandhian concept of ‘Satyagraha’ from Sanskrit, meaning ‘truth-force’ or ‘love-force’ in her earth democracy praxis.⁸⁶ Gandhian Satyagraha moves towards truth through understanding its multiple and subjective aspects. It recognises different perspectives of truth and from this recognition advocates a non-compliance, or non-violent resistance, to those forces that attempt to homogenise, claim and enforce their ‘truth’ through power.

Ideologically, econstructive thought requires secular and sacred thought, in various forms and traditions, to relinquish their ultimate claims to static truth. In so doing it attempts to level the inequity of the dialogical arena and encourages new, integral, understandings.⁸⁷

Based on postmodern perpetual motion (propelled by the ever-present shortfall between

81 Wood, ‘Econstruction,’ 286-287.

82 Callicott, *Earth’s Insights*, 5

83 Callicott, *Earth’s Insights*, 7

84 Wood, ‘Econstruction’

85 Reuther, *Gaia and God*, 5

86 Shiva, *Biopiracy*, 98

87 McDaniel, ‘Ecotheology’

sign and signified), econstruction serves to liquefy fundamentalist potentials in interfaith ecology. Econstruction prevents theories in this field from developing their own static truth claims and becoming what they are designed to oppose. For McDaniel, therefore, the drawing together of postmodern fluidity, and a belief in divine existence that 'saves' us from nihilistic angst, resists both fundamentalism and fragmentation in econstruction, allowing for diversity to thrive in unity.⁸⁸

McDaniel's focus on the spiritual as well as the social implications of an econstructive practice draws on the process theology developed by Alfred North Whitehead.⁸⁹ Process theology constructs divinity as both immanent and transcendent; as having an embedded adaptive aspect which, much like the ecosystem, also has a holistic and omnipotent aspect defined by the act of becoming; by the process itself.⁹⁰ Process theology is useful to interfaith ecology theorists as it brings divinity back to 'earth,' manifest in human relationality with a living and divinely infused more-than-human world. Kearns highlights this role for interfaith ecology in environmentalism:

*Religious systems attempt to give meaning, stimulate moral responses, and encourage individuals to act within a framework that transcends the immediate and individual. Thus, religious environmentalism brings in the additional dialectic of the immanent vibrating with transcendental significance.*⁹¹

Process theology can be interpreted within numerous belief systems as it most simply treats the divine as manifest and thus adaptive and living; as well as whole and encompassing; again this metaphysics stands in direct opposition to static notions of divinity projected and enforced by fundamentalists. Process theology does not threaten the transcendent cosmologies and rather opens an additional aspect of divinity within them. This is important for interfaith ecology's endeavour to facilitate dialogue between ecologically, socially and cosmologically centred belief systems.⁹²

88 McDaniel, 'Ecotheology,' 23

89 Keller, Face of the Deep

90 Hartshorne, A Natural Theology

91 Kearns, 'Religion and ecology,' 307

92 McDaniel, 'Ecotheology,' 23-9

CONCLUSION: AN EMERGENT IDEOLOGICAL BASE FOR ACTION IN INTERFAITH ECOLOGY

The supporting literature of the interfaith ecology movement depicts a firmly rooted yet flexible approach to the joint themes of eco and cultural diversity. This provides a sound framework for the task of weaving together spiritual, social, political and ecological themes in the context of globalisation and community transition. This still fledgling field of academic, theological and philosophical inquiry draws on many schools of thought to develop a flexible ecosystemic approach to the difficult questions of difference, diversity and unity inherent to the movement and contemporary global society.

The call for interdisciplinary as well as interfaith dialogue ensures that the earth has voice through ecological sciences and that dialogue is rooted in the common ground of ecological concern and response. Constructing integral visions of the future maintains this dialogue as moving towards collective and mutually acceptable and rewarding responses; it also ensures that the special offering that faith systems bring to humanity, that imaginative capability to think the beyond as an ethical and spiritually enriching goal, is not lost in purely material debates. The volatility of this idealism is checked by a firmly grounded eco-justice approach, concerned with the inclusivity of dialogue that holds open the doors of the utopian vision to contributions and challenges from marginalised or subjugated others. Keeping these projects in a cooperative relationship requires the delicate and paradoxical balancing of unity and diversity, of the one and the many as contradictory yet symbiotic states that we all occupy. Striving for this balance is the ongoing work of any theorist recognising the depth of complexity that working in a context of difference entails. Econstruction in theory, ethics and spirituality finally ensures that the striving to become more open, inclusive and integrated – open to the aprioristic contradictions such a project necessitates – is unfinished and perpetual. These elements in interfaith ecology literature create a dynamic field working towards integrating knowledge and modes of knowing in new and fruitful ways.

Interfaith ecology is a young field that draws on long histories. It takes up the long held mantle of spiritual and cultural development passed through the heritage of the world's religious traditions, but it is young and still inexperienced in terms of practical application. There are many faith communities who practice interfaith dialogue with their neighbours and ecophilosophy in their neighbourhoods. There are also many organised networks between these communities locally and globally. But the movement is still fledgling and experimental. It now needs the leaders, members and scholars of these faith communities to critically engage with, apply, test and develop these theoretical frameworks.

Importantly, these global practitioners of interfaith ecology need to be encouraged and aided in contributing to this growing corpus based on their uniquely situated experiences and cultures so as to diversify it out from its North American roots where academic interfaith ecology is most strongly supported.

Having explored the thinking of the interfaith ecology movement in this chapter, and the contextual framework in chapter 2, I move in the next chapter to address the practical structures of the movement including how social, governance, organisational, financial and ideological channels are shaping the direction of the movement in Australia. If the theories and philosophies expressed in this literature are the content of the movement, these structures are the channels through which it is being expressed, spread, coming into practical fruition and adapting in new eco-social environments.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT

To promote greater communication and, therefore, greater understanding between Victoria's cultural and religious groups, the Government supports a number of cross-cultural and cross-religious networks. ... This is most effectively done at the local level. This can happen by connecting local communities through public policy, campaign and advocacy work, community education, community events and media activity that promotes awareness and tolerance within the local community. – All of Us¹

The Victorian state government's multicultural policy relevant to this research period, *All of Us*, was launched in March 2009. According to the Victorian Multicultural Commission, responsible for this policy, *All of Us* 'sets out a framework for continuing to strengthen and promote multiculturalism across the state' and was 'developed after extensive community consultation.'² The policy therefore reflects both the political and community sentiment on interfaith relations at the time of this research. Multicultural policies provide a structural framework through which social change is supported by government bodies and agendas. They are vehicles for both reflecting community needs and values, and engineering these values and societal goals.

As will be analysed in this chapter, the Victorian and Australian policy environment was supportive of the interfaith ecology movement at the time of this research. The policy and program areas for multiculturalism were bolstered by sound legislation and government institutions, such as the Victorian Multicultural Commission, which built 'a strong foundation of partnerships, harmonious community relations, advocacy and supportive

1 State Government of Victoria, *All of Us*, 28

2 Victorian Multicultural Commission: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/all-of-us/the-policy>

programs.³ Localised and tailored support was also strong through the policies and structures of local governments who are increasingly compelled to address local diversity issues through interfaith processes. This chapter shows how the policy assumptions and directions, couched in the social context explored in chapter 2, are forging a strong Australian multiculturalism in which the interfaith ecology movement has a place. As will be described in the first section of this chapter, interfaith ecology is a New Social Movement. It is springing into society and creating its relationship to government, institutions and communities through the third sector. The second section will relay some of the challenges that this positioning entails.

A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

New Social Movements (NSMs) arose in Europe and America from the 1970s, and marked a new era of social organising. They built on, but also contrasted with, the traditional social movements of the earlier 20th century which were clear resistance movements against systemic oppression. These New Social Movements maintained an interest in justice but were less structured in their approach and more nuanced in their foray into identity politics. New communications technologies generated different modes of social organising, and traditional theoretical political positions were challenged by a myriad of resistance activities and community organising around a new set of issues. The NSMs of the late 20th century included 'peace movements, student movements, the anti-nuclear energy protests, gay rights, women's rights, animal rights, alternative medicine, fundamentalist religious movements, and New Age and ecology movements'⁴ to name but a sample. As Lee explains, across this diversity of themes and issues, the 'epicentre of NSMs is inseparably connected with community life and grassroots citizen activism.' Across the intents of theorists and the contents of theories addressing NSMs, Lee further notes, 'communal citizen actions and contending identities are pivotal reference points.'⁵

Porta and Diani describe the role of NSMs as a 'fundamental, meta-political critique of the social order and of representative democracy' which challenged 'institutional assumptions regarding conventional ways of "doing politics," in the name of radical democracy.'⁶ As an emerging NSM, interfaith ecology bares many of the structural hallmarks common to this mode of organising:

3 Victorian Multicultural Commission: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/all-of-us/the-policy>

4 Johnston, Larana, Gusfeild, 'Identities, Grievances and NSMs,' 3

5 Lee, *Debating New Social Movements*, 3

6 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 12

Among the principle innovations of the new movements, in contrast with the workers movement, are a critical ideology in relation to modernism and progress, decentralized and participatory organizational structures; defence of interpersonal solidarity against the great bureaucracies, and the reclamation of autonomous spaces, rather than material advantages. New Social Movements are characterized... by an open fluid organization, an inclusive and non-ideological participation, and greater attention to social than to economic transformations.⁷

These characteristics not only define the existing structures of the interfaith ecology movement, but also point to the means and methods of its potential development. Further supporting the status of interfaith ecology as an NSM are three hallmarks clearly present in this emerging movement. These include the structure of its resource mobilisation, the role of utopianism in the culture and dialogue of the movement, and the development of new language around novel elements arising through globalisation. These hallmarks are relevant to the status of the movement within the milieu of global counter-culture movements.

RESEMBLANCES TO THE 'CULTIC MILIEU'

As a NSM that draws together social change initiatives with spiritual and religious development, the interfaith ecology movement bares some structural, rather than substantive, resemblances to the 'cultic milieu' as analysed by Colin Campbell. The cultic milieu is defined as the 'sum of unorthodox and deviant belief systems together with their practices, institutions and personnel and constitutes a unity by virtue of common consciousness of deviant status, a receptive and syncretic orientation and an interpretive communication structure.'⁸ Examples of activities in the cultic milieu include New Age and countercultural spiritualist practices and beliefs, such as beliefs in alien communications, the spiritual significance of the Mayan calendar, psychic abilities and shamanic healing practices, to name a handful. These tend to link into one another in a hybrid and highly fluid exchange of influences and teachings. The interfaith ecology movement is clearly different from this New Age spiritualist movement as it orients towards mainstream environmentalist issues, the reform of mainstream religious institutions and cultural practices, and political activism and social justice agendas; which are of little interest in the cultic movement. Whilst not 'cultic' in substance, however, the interfaith ecology movement does intersect with the cultic milieu in terms of the movement's blurred and intersecting boundaries with other global milieus, including the cultic, the social activist and the environmentalist counter-culture movements.

7 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 12

8 Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,' 23

An important shared structural element is the way the interfaith ecology movement, by virtue of its diversity, inclusivity and fluidity, struggles to define and retain a central core of beliefs and goals. Rather it strains towards variety to meet the demands of participants who can largely be defined as social, spiritual or cultural ‘seekers.’ While the seekers of the interfaith ecology movement are distinctive from cultic seekers (though some cultic seekers are part of the movement), they share a similar process of seeking out underexplored alternatives to themes and issues and experimenting with how these alternatives can be generated and instituted in new practices, teachings and insights. As Campbell explains, this poses some structural barriers to the development of movement solidarity and the cohesiveness of organisations and projects:

Seekership is probably the one characteristic that all members of cultic groups have in common, and while this facilitates the formation of groups, it poses special problems for their maintenance. Seekers do not necessarily stop looking in other directions when one path is indicated as the path to truth. They may in fact have lost sight of their original aim, and through the ‘displacement of goals’ have come to accept seeking itself as the primary end. Because of this, groups face continuing pressure to widen their concerns and explore new cultic regions ... Such a ‘strain towards variety’ may cause the group to lose its focus of concern altogether and finally disappear back into the general milieu from which it arose.⁹

As Taylor suggests: ‘even when certain types and tendencies ... can be identified, the boundaries between them remain permeable, blurred and perpetually shifting, much like the boundaries of religion itself.’¹⁰ Permeability of boundaries and eclecticism is characteristic of NSMs generally. In specific relation to religious and spiritually oriented movements, however, participants tend to seek unifying factors that allow for ‘unity in diversity’ and shared spiritual connection. Similarly to the cultic milieu, therefore, interfaith ecology participants and texts often use ‘mysticism’ to serve this purpose:

Since [the mystical] tradition emphasises that the single ideal of unity with the divine can be attained by a diversity of paths, it tends to be ecumenical, super-ecclesiastic, syncretic and tolerant in outlook. These tend, in fact, to be characteristic of the cultic milieu in general whether or not the belief content is mystical in the sense of pursuing the goals of ecstatic experience. As a result, the fragmentary tendencies present in the milieu because of the enormous diversity of cultural items, are more than counteracted by the continuing pressure to syncretisation.¹¹

9 Campbell, ‘The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,’ 18

10 Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 14

11 Campbell, ‘The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,’ 15

The interfaith ecology movement holds and maintains the tension between a unifying set of movement beliefs and practices, and the diverse array of culturally and religiously specific beliefs and practices participants hold in the hybrid space between movement values and those of their own tradition.

RESOURCE MOBILISATION NETWORKS

While NSMs certainly draw on and generate ideology, Johnston *et al.* explain how NSMs wax and wane according to social and financial resources that attract causes and allow them to develop into movements:

*mobilization required both resources and a rational orientation to action. The actor in movements and in protest action was not under the sway of sentiments, emotions and ideologies that guided his or her action, but rather should be understood in terms of the logic of costs and benefits as well as opportunities for action.*¹²

This is not to say that movement participants are not internally motivated and compelled to act for altruistic reasons, but rather that the new conditions of society meant that these motivations were checked, controlled and directed by resources making these causes and their proponents more fluid.

The interfaith ecology movement reflects this condition in that it is dependent on the availability of funding and facilitated activities. Organisations grow when resources are available and sink into dormancy when not. In this sense, the movement is typical of the western NSMs in that the issue or struggle for social change is important to the participants, but not so threatening to them that they can persist in activism without resources. While the participants are committed to the cause and are motivated by their faith and by the need to act on environmental issues, they do not see participation as an immediate 'life or death situation' for themselves and their families as the participants in traditional class struggles did. Part of the activism of the movement is indeed convincing participants and the rest of society that environmental catastrophe is an urgent and life threatening force, even though the middleclass western, urban constituents are not finding that they struggle to put food on the table.

The networked structure of the interfaith ecology movement and other NSMs are largely defined by these channels of resource mobilisation. This means that the networks are informal and adaptive. As Porta and Diani explain, 'movements may be conceived as informal interaction networks between a plurality of individuals and/or organizations'¹³ working under similar assumptions and towards similar goals. These organic

12 Johnston, Larana, Gusfeild, 'Identities, Grievances and NSMs,' 5

relationships characterise the informal networks of NSMs which 'may range from very loose and dispersed links ... to the tightly clustered networks which facilitate adhesion to terrorist organizations.'¹⁴ Interfaith ecology networks are not a hard or prescriptive structure but rather defined through trends and characteristics emerging within the broader interfaith and eco-faith movements. Networks are sites where interfaith ecology participants turn when faced with religious conflict, environmental issues and various campaigns in order to gain support and resources. Particular organisational networks are highly integrated into each other with many of the same participants subscribing to and working within a collection of networks and organisations. These participants become the distribution nodes of communication, knowledge and resources for the movement.

Resource mobilisation in the form of ideas, participation and materials in the interfaith ecology movement, are shaped by a tension between the fluidity of symbolic products and creative potential on one hand, and the rigidity of the political and economic systems and structures on the other. Specific structures embedded in time and place allow or hamper the fruition, enactment and reproduction of symbolic products. As Lee explains, this tension situates NSMs in specific social, geographic, political and economic settings:

*The symbolic contents of social movements and their linkage to the socio-political environment are historically specific, and the task involves linking the micro and macro social analyses in a definite historical context. Whereas the symbolic contents of social movements like identities and worldviews are embedded in the lifeworld and interactively derived through ongoing collective definitions, the socio-political environment is structured and lacks such emergent or spontaneous flexibility.*¹⁵

This tension is clearly played out in the relationship between the utopian vision of the interfaith ecology movement, and the way participants approach action in relation to this vision.

PRE-IDEOLOGICAL AND UTOPIAN SOLIDARITY

As evident in its literature, discussed in chapter 3, the interfaith ecology movement draws strongly on the utopia of flourishing eco-cultural diversity and holistic consciousness. As will be further explored in chapter 8, movement participants gravitate towards this vision as a collective motivation to develop mutually acceptable processes and structures. Ralph Turner identifies utopianism as a necessary factor to the establishment of an NSM. NSMs

13 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 14

14 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 14

15 Lee, *Debating New Social Movements*, 18

are pre-ideological in that they are still forming their ideology or collective philosophy. In Turner's analysis, the role of this utopia is to allow for strong commitment and organising in the absence of a fully developed ideology. Turner describes how this process is important to the dialectical formation of NSMs as they first emerge and, if successful, later mature into new social systems and norms:

*When [a] system of thought mobilises a sufficient number of people into action to shatter the existing social order and render prevalent ideology no longer meaningful, it is called a utopia. The utopia becomes the basis for a general social movement that fosters profound social change, leading ultimately to a different social order and a new ideology to support it.*¹⁶

Through these visions, NSMs constitute both 'new orientations on existing issues and also the rise of new public issues.'¹⁷ This tendency is very strong within the interfaith ecology movement as it attempts to convert multiple institutions and levels of society to the understanding of how ecological and religious diversity issues are linked. With this cause, participants actively influence the wider society through their communities, organisations, religious institutions, the interfaith movement and environment movements, and government bodies.

This vision is therefore the glue of the movement's solidarity – another key characteristic of a NSM. 'To be considered a social movement,' Porta and Diani state, 'an interacting collectivity requires a shared set of beliefs and a sense of belonging.'¹⁸ The interfaith ecology movement bolsters its vision-based solidarity with shared ritual experiences such as assemblies, conferences and local level gatherings that create a sense of global fellowship and local belonging. This sense of belonging is indicated by the tendency in the movement networks for participants to refer to each other in familiar terms such as 'sister' or 'brother,' and the organisation as a 'family.'

While the utopian unifying vision maintains a sense of movement cohesion, the various approaches and ideas of how to achieve this vision are fractured, as is typical of the NSM structure. As Lee describes, there is 'no illusion about the fact that NSMs are greatly fragmented, making joint struggles, inclusive mobilization and unified political intent very difficult if not impossible.' As a movement which explicitly values and seeks to maintain internal diversity, however, the interfaith ecology movement is following the trend of contemporary movements to allow and define themselves around plurality of ideas and approaches. As Lee continues, this has become an important feature of the democratic ideals of NSMs:

16 Turner, 'Ideology and utopia,' 81

17 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 14

18 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 14

*The very idea of universalism expressed in a unifying vision of social-political change or in the centralized organizational directive is resisted in noted contemporary movements which generally opt for 'democratic pluralism' on an ideological platform.*¹⁹

Like most human communities, NSMs require an 'other' in defining and developing their solidarity. This antithetical other defines what they are against and gives their cause a united front, helping to determine its boundaries of inclusivity. As Porta and Diani describe

*social movement actors are engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts, meant to promote or oppose social change at either the systemic or non-systemic level. By conflict we mean an oppositional relationship between actors who seek to control the same stake.*²⁰

For the interfaith ecology movement, this stake is religion and its role in public global space. The underpinning common belief held by movement participants is that while religion can be a negative force, in their true interpretation, all religions promote peace, unity and a range of other socially and ecologically sound teachings. Movement participants have faith in religion itself as a positive social and ecological force. What they oppose is therefore: a/ religious fundamentalists whose interpretation of the same religious texts and teachings is exclusivist and often violent to the other; b/ those who maintain the political position that religion is always polemical and violent, and the only pathway to peace is to eradicate religion in favour of a radical form of atheism; and c/ those who are apathetic or antagonistic towards the ecological world and its sustainable future.

NEW LANGUAGE AND NOVELTY

Typical of NSMs, the interfaith ecology movement is a response to the changing conditions of society under globalisation. As Johnston *et al.* explain, New Social Movements focus 'attention to the meaning of morphological changes in their structure and action by relating those changes with structural transformations in society as a whole.'²¹ These changes are the source of 'novelty' that is another key characteristic of NSMs. The interfaith ecology movement is highly novel as it is based on the unique intersection of religious pluralism, social multiculturalism and environmental issues. The novel issues and circumstances of globalisation not only generate new social organising around them, but also a new language for communicating the emergent phenomena.

19 Lee, *Debating New Social Movements*, 5

20 Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 14

21 Johnston, Larana, Gusfeild, 'Identities, Grievances and NSMs,' 5

Gusfield identifies NSMs as sites for the development of these language trends and communication styles. Developing a language around their cause that allows NSMs to put forward their issue, attract further participants and present their issue for public consideration. NSMs thereby contribute to ‘the existence of a vocabulary and an opening of ideas and actions which in the past was either unknown or unthinkable.’²² This is clearly apparent in the interfaith ecology movement where people are actively seeking new terms for expressing new intersections of thought and experience and noting that they find it difficult to express these experiences because language has not ‘caught-up.’ Many older participants in this research commented on how they had been undertaking interfaith or eco-faith work long before the terms were understood or accepted, even to themselves. As Kenney notes, this language is also developed and instituted into the movement through declarations made in international forums and conferences:

*From our sea-change perspective, they often embody the latest iteration of a maturing idea or value set. The three key precipitating elements of evolutionary thought and action are new visions, new ideas and new language.*²³

These vision statements link strongly to the utopian solidarity of the movement and deliberately seek to engender solidarity across movement diversity.

NSMs AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The characteristics and hallmarks of NSMs described above illustrate the way the interfaith ecology movement is evolving through the modes of social organising opened up by globalisation. As McIntyre-Mills argues, these opportunities empower social and political change as individual participants form cognitive and social connections through actively addressing complex and hybrid themes and issues:

*The more connections we make not only within the brain but also across different areas of knowledge and different paradigms (social, economic and environmental) the more conscious we can become. This has implications for the way we live, for the way we do science, for the way we run our governments and for ethics.*²⁴

The interfaith ecology movement encourages experimentation with connective ideals and actions, and also enables participants to share these experiences and understandings in dialogue locally and globally. Lee supports this analysis of both the significance of NSMs to the social system, collective dialogue and creativity, and the political empowerment:

22 Gusfield. ‘Social movements and social change,’ 325

*Grassroots activism is the largest facet of contemporary struggles and demands in advanced capitalist societies. It is also the source of critical insights surging from everyday life and the possible point of 'radical' convergence toward participatory-democratic control of collective life against all oppressive modes of inequality and discrimination in the name of common standing.*²⁵

The structure and developmental process of the movement is furthering participatory democracy as government programs and policies are beginning to work in connection to the movement, supporting its development while tapping into its participatory and community driven structures. As McIntyre-Mills notes, this is an important opportunity for the development of globally responsive, participatory democratic structures:

*Co-creation needs to occur at the local level to address the most complex and intractable problems ... Improved representation means that people who are to be affected by the decision act as caretakers for the next generation. This requires changes in the scale and depth of democracy and governance. It also requires the capability to support discursive democracy, voting and governance processes that span sub- and super-national regions on issues that affect the global commons.*²⁶

Strengthening and working in relation to the actions and structures of the interfaith ecology movement as an NSM are the national and local level policy frameworks and government structures which allow the movement to flourish in certain regions and encourage the development of certain projects and organisations. These supportive frameworks further endorse and resource movement activities and provide new networking and civic participation opportunities through which movement participants can influence social change processes.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The grassroots community actions of the interfaith ecology movement in and around Melbourne are bolstered by current policy frameworks at the federal, state and Local Government levels. These frameworks and strategies have come to the fore in the post 9/11 context in which policy has had an increasing interest in matters of religious identity

23 Kenney, *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, 130
24 McIntyre-Mills, *Wellbeing, mindfulness and the global commons*, 61
25 Lee, *Debating New Social Movements*, 6
26 McIntyre-Mills, *Wellbeing, mindfulness and the global commons*, 56

and harmony. Religion was considered firmly in the private realm prior to the threat of religiously motivated terrorism to western interests and security, at home and abroad.²⁷

Current policy frameworks endorse interfaith ecology work through an agenda of holistic social development based on participation, belonging and community/cultural empowerment. These documents provide an accessible evidence base supporting Australian multiculturalism and a vision for how diversity and harmony in Australian culture and society can be better fostered and celebrated. They also seek to ameliorate barriers to democratic participation experienced by marginalised communities. This policy direction encourages local level projects around interfaith harmony and understanding and thus provides social as well as financial support bases for interfaith ecology work in the community. They legitimise the work of organisations, providing them with access to funding, community programs, consultation opportunities, partnerships and sponsorship.

Policy statements, frameworks and recommendations are models and do not in themselves constitute action until adopted and actively implemented. In their implementation they often fall short of the ideals presented in the framework. They are, however, significant in setting the direction for how government will support certain social developments and trends and in this way offer an insight into how and why trends interact with government structures to become social and cultural realities in the community.

In this section I will firstly introduce the two key policy making and government advisory bodies that set the direction of multicultural policy in state and Federal Government at the time of this research. These are the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council and the Victorian Multicultural Commission. I will then address the three current policy documents relevant to the interfaith ecology movement in the Melbourne region. I will provide a thematic overview of their key recommendations and frameworks looking specifically at how they provide a space for the development of interfaith ecology action and themes. These policy documents include:

- *The People of Australia* (2010): The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's statement on cultural diversity and recommendations to the Commonwealth Government.
- *All of Us* (2009): The Victorian State Government policy framework for continuing to strengthen and promote multiculturalism.

27 Jupp et. al. Social cohesion in Australia, 44

- *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* (2004): A report commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs conducted by the Australian Multicultural Foundation in association with the World Conference on Religion and Peace and RMIT and Monash Universities. The report identifies issues on the place and function of faith traditions and religious groups in an increasingly multicultural Australia as a basis for policy recommendations.

Lastly, I will outline the policy and program trends in Local Governments in the Greater Melbourne region that are influencing the development of interfaith ecology work at the local level.

GOVERNMENT BODIES

The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) was established in July 1994 for a term of three years to report to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. In June 1997 the Government appointed a new Council for a further three years with a largely revised membership and new terms of reference which required it to 'develop a report ... which recommends on a policy and implementation framework for the next decade that is aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia.'²⁸ The AMAC was to consult with a broad spectrum of the Australian community in making these recommendations. As part of this process it released the Issues Paper *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward*²⁹ to stimulate community discussion and encourage input. In 1999 the AMAC produced the policy statement *Multiculturalism for a New Century – Towards Inclusiveness*.³⁰ This statement was seminal in strengthening and broadening the multicultural agenda and setting clear definitions and directions for a uniquely 'Australian Multiculturalism' based on community consultation. This statement's definition and vision of multiculturalism in Australia continued to underpin later policy frameworks:

Australian multiculturalism is a term which recognises and celebrates Australia's cultural diversity. It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy. It also refers to the strategies, policies and programs that are designed to:

28 Department of Immigration and Citizenship:
<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/issues97/macpape2.htm>

29 Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward*

30 Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, *Multiculturalism for a New Century*

- *make our administrative, social and economic infrastructure more responsive to the rights, obligations and needs of our culturally diverse population;*
- *promote social harmony among the different cultural groups in our society;*
- *optimise the benefits of our cultural diversity for all Australians.*³¹

The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council at the time of this research was officially launched in 2008 to produce a second research-based policy statement and recommendations for 2010-2020. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship reappointed the AMAC for a second term from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2012 with the specific task of developing a long-term strategy for increased settlement in rural and regional locations. This AMAC consisted of 16 members with a wide range of backgrounds, experience and professional expertise, and reflected a balance of ages and gender. The current role of the AMAC is to provide the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services with advice on:

- *social cohesion issues relating to Australia's cultural and religious diversity*
- *overcoming intolerance and racism in Australia*
- *communicating the social and economic benefits of Australia's cultural diversity to the broad community*
- *issues relating to the social and civic participation of migrants in Australian society.*³²

The most recent statement at the time of this research, *People of Australia*,³³ was released in 2010 and sets the policy direction for the upcoming decade. The statement came under immediate criticism by the public for its lack of depth and meaning in comparison to the comprehensive 1999 statement. The new statement was approximately a tenth of the length of its predecessor and offered little substantive development on the 1999 document. As Andrew Jakubowicz, Professor of Sociology at the University of Technology Sydney describes 'with this report, imagery is everything and there is far more white space, colour fillers and pictures than text or argument... In terms of the contemporary issues confronting Australia's culturally diverse society, this statement is the most minimal offering possible.'³⁴ While the *People of Australia* statement recommends a stronger and better understanding of Australian Multiculturalism in industries of all kinds, and improved economic development and social access for migrant communities, it

31 Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, *Multiculturalism for a New Century*, 4

32 Department of Immigration and Citizenship: <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/stakeholder-engagement/national/advisory/amac/>

33 Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, *People of Australia*

includes some weaker recommendations which may serve to disempower the strategic placement of multicultural policy making and research at the Federal Government level. The statement recommends that:

*Government establish a permanent and independent, bi-partisan body that can advise and consult on policies and emerging issues to inform a national multicultural Australian strategy. The council recommends that the government consider models such as the National Australia Day Council.*³⁵

Even though numerous academic submissions argued for a structure allowing independent research capacity and resources with links to policy and community consultation, this recommendation marginalises the proposed body to the level of the Australia Day Council model which has no substantive impact on policy research and development, as Jakubowicz explains:

*It is also not an Australian Institute for Multicultural Affairs ... nor a Bureau of Immigration Multicultural and Population Research as in the 1990s. The model of the National Australia Day Council suggests an events focused stakeholder body with no resources of its own.*³⁶

This indicates a shift in priorities regarding the importance of multiculturalism to policy making processes.

At the time of this research, this potential weakening of multicultural policy-making bodies at the Federal Government level, was not mirrored in the Victorian State Government where the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC), under the Labor Government, has enabled community centred and active policy research and development on multiculturalism, meaning that Victoria is considered a progressive state on multicultural inclusion.

The VMC is an independent statutory authority established in 1983 under the name of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission. It serves a similar purpose to the AMAC but on a State Government level through providing independent advice to inform the development of legislative and policy frameworks. The VMC is more directly linked to policy delivery and program management than the AMAC. There are twelve Commissioners representative of different communities who advocate the values of the VMC and act as a conduit between the community and policy-making. The VMC is supported by the Department of Premier and Cabinet. This strategic placement allows the VMC to realise its whole of government approach by working cross-departmentally to ensure services are

34 http://www.culturaldiversity.net.au/index.php?view=article&id=494%3Athe-people-of-australia-multicultural-minimalist-statement-handed-to-government&option=com_content&Itemid=16

35 Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, People of Australia,18

36 http://www.culturaldiversity.net.au/index.php?view=article&id=494%3Athe-people-of-australia-multicultural-minimalist-statement-handed-to-government&option=com_content&Itemid=16

delivered in line with multicultural policies, to consult on specific issues for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, such as education, health and housing. This government arm is made up of five areas focusing on different aspects of policy and delivery including community strengthening, communications and events, two areas of policy and strategic projects and the international student care service.³⁷

The key objectives of the VMC are to support CALD communities by promoting their access to services made available by governments and other bodies and encouraging them to retain and express their social identity and cultural inheritance. The VMC also serves to promote co-operation between bodies concerned with multicultural affairs and to foster unity and understanding in and between Victorian communities on issues of social inclusion for CALD communities.³⁸

VMC is increasingly aware of the importance of interfaith dialogue and including faith leaders in making real the commitments of multicultural policies, understanding diverse cultural values and connecting with CALD communities. In recent years the VMC has created the Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network and the Multifaith Advisory Group as consultative structures forming in 2007 and 2008 respectively. In addition to these structures, the VMC supports direct programs that generate interfaith work in the community through training and leadership development. These include:

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Mentoring Program which responds to the need for an increase in participation among young people from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds in the corporate, government, community and faith sectors in Victoria.

The Participate, Advocate, Communicate, Engage (PACE) Project which responds to a need to enhance opportunities for women from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds to take up formal leadership and decision-making roles in the Victorian community.

Media and Communications Training for Faith Leaders which was developed to provide Victoria's faith leaders with the skills and knowledge to respond to, and utilise the media effectively.³⁹

The grants section of the VMC is the key funding body for the projects undertaken with community organisations in this research. The Promoting Harmony: Multifaith and Interfaith Grants Program enables grass roots interfaith projects on a variety of themes. They provide 'funding to a range of projects that bring different faith and community

37 Victorian Multicultural Commission: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/org%20chart%20for%20website.pdf>

38 Victorian Multicultural Commission: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/about-us>

39 Victorian Multicultural Commission: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/promoting-harmony/training-and-leadership>

groups together to promote community harmony, celebrate our shared values and increase our understanding of, and respect for, differences.⁴⁰ The aim of these grants is to:

Promote understanding about the diversity of faiths within Victoria and engage the wider Victorian community; and assist in the establishment of new interfaith networks or to build the capacity and sustainability of existing interfaith networks.⁴¹

Much of the work of interfaith groups in Greater Melbourne is solely dependent upon this program which is specifically focused on developing interfaith work and organisations. There is significant demand for these grants and, as such, the majority of organisations are unsuccessful in their second applications as will be further discussed in relation to third sector issues later in this chapter.

LEGISLATION

Victorian State Government legislation protects the expression of diversity and rights for CALD community members and groups, and provides a robust structure for policy-making. This legislation strengthens the work of the VMC in making government departments responsible for meeting the needs of CALD communities. This legislative support framework includes the following Acts:

*The Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*⁴² prohibits racial and religious vilification. Vilification is public behaviour that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of another person or group of people because of their race or religion.⁴³

The *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004*⁴⁴ establishes a number of important principles and fosters a common understanding of cultural diversity. The Act recognises the positive effect of cultural diversity on social, cultural and economic life in Victoria.⁴⁵

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*⁴⁶ is modelled largely on the *International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights*. It makes it unlawful for a public authority to

40 Victorian Multicultural Commission:
<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/grants/categories/promoting-harmony-multifaith-and-interfaith>

41 Victorian Multicultural Commission:
<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/grants/categories/promoting-harmony-multifaith-and-interfaith>

42 Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001, part 1 section 1

43 Victorian Multicultural Commission: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/about-us/legislation/racial-and-religious-tolerance-act>

44 Multicultural Victoria Act 2004, part 1 section 1

45 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/schmultivicact04.htm>

46 Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, part 1, section 1

act in a way that is incompatible with the human rights listed in the Charter, or in making a decision, to fail to give proper consideration to a relevant human right.⁴⁷

The *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*⁴⁸ makes it unlawful to discriminate or sexually harass in the following areas of public life: education, employment, provision and receipt of goods and services, sport, accommodation, clubs and club members, Local Government and disposal of land.⁴⁹

This legislation supports the development of the interfaith ecology movement by providing a social and political platform from which government is striving to find better ways of connecting with CALD communities. It establishes and enshrines in law multiple cross-government opportunities for community leaders to engage and consult with departments. The legislation demands that diversity and multicultural dialogue is recognised as important across multiple social issues and themes, and cannot be relegated merely to a single area of government. The ensuing programs and actions stemming from this legislation are also effective in raising community awareness on the need for inclusivity and participation with CALD communities as fundamental to the liberal democratic culture. Interfaith ecology's method of engaging community members in eco-focused civic participation plays into this agenda.

POLICY ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions underpinning policy are significant insofar as they are based on the narrative of the policy development from preceding policies and they reveal trends in research and consultation. These assumptions set the tone of the policy and define the direction of the specific recommendations and purpose. As much as the development of the White Australia Policy (1850 to early 1970s) and its abolition reflected the shifting social and cultural trends locally and internationally, current policy assumptions reflect contemporary Australia's cultural understanding of diversity and how it should be managed. Whilst there are always dissenting groups on any policy issue, policy-based on consultation and implemented by majority elected governments changes with social trends. Policy assumptions are set and re-set based on a convergence of cultural and popular demands, policy background, leadership and research findings.

34 La Trobe University: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/legalservices/assets/downloads/other/gen-charter%20of%20humanrights.pdf>

48 The Equal Opportunity Act 1995, part 1 section 3

49 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission:
http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=523&Itemid=116

The key issue of boat refugee arrivals in the Gillard and Abbot 2010 federal election exemplifies the way policy is increasingly used to address popular concerns rather than political ideals or research findings on cultural diversity and immigration. Policy frameworks are especially important to influencing social trends and are still working to build up an Australian tolerance for diversity following the Liberal Government's national leadership from 1996 – 2007 throughout which anti-multiculturalist discourse coupled with a narrow definition on Australian identity and a policy shortfall on fostering tolerance in the society.⁵⁰ This policy landscape endorsed and legitimised intolerant trends in the community. The degree to which policy directs rather than reacts to trends in the community is the degree to which it is providing leadership and development.

Policy assumptions are crucial to how interfaith and interfaith ecology work is supported in both the government and community context and reflect the social impact of the movement. I will now provide a brief overview of the common assumptions underpinning the *People of Australia*, *All of Us*, and *Safeguarding Australia* policy documents reflecting their relationship to the interfaith ecology movement.

MULTICULTURALISM IS AN ASSET TO THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY

These policy documents strongly support multiculturalism as a condition – the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the society – which is represented as a social, cultural and economic asset to the state and the whole community. This assumption leads the social trend of appreciating diversity and undermines the tendency in the community to fear increasing diversity and its perceived negative impact on Australian identity and lifestyle. These policy documents indeed seek to identify diversity as a key component of Australian identity and something to be celebrated as fundamental to our national character. This assumption appears in the following statements:

*All of Us: Victoria's diversity is one of our greatest cultural, social and economic assets. As a result, Victoria is perceived internationally as a welcoming place to do business, study, work, live and raise a family. It is this platform that we want to build on, utilising the opportunities that cultural, linguistic and religious diversity offers the state across the spectrum of ages and ethnic communities.*⁵¹

People of Australia: Our multicultural society is an inescapable necessity now and in the future, as much a fact of our existence as our geographical position in the Asia Pacific and just as great an advantage... The story of immigration and multiculturalism so far, is one of which we should

50 Jupp et. al. Cohesion in Australia, 67

51 State Government of Victoria, All of Us, 10

*be proud – as proud as we are of our soldiers, sports stars, scientists, artists and pioneers. As much as Anzac or any other Australian story, it is our story.*⁵²

In assuming that diversity is both unavoidable and beneficial, policy actions to support projects that focus on diversity and cooperation between groups are enabled. Such projects are the mainstay of the interfaith ecology movement.

MULTICULTURALISM IS AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC POLICY

Multiculturalism is clearly promoted not only as a condition, as stated above, but also as a policy that both enables diversity to flourish in the community and manages its development and direction. This assumption is based on strong policy leadership which not only allows the multicultural condition but directly supports it. It also assumes that diversity in the community requires a directive governance framework and should not be allowed to develop purely organically which may lead to social issues such as exclusions, inability to access services, welfare dependency, the development of ethnic enclaves and intercultural conflict. According to this assumption, then, diversity is an asset but one that requires management to be beneficial to society and is always contextualised by the national interest. The following statements illustrate this assumption:

*All of Us: Multiculturalism is an approach that respects and values the diversity of ethnicities, cultures and faiths within a society and encourages and enables their ongoing contribution within an inclusive context that empowers all members of the society.*⁵³

*People of Australia: It assures all Australians of the same basic rights and in return for this assurance, it demands that all who make their home here owe their loyalty to this country and must respect the democratic right and liberties of all and uphold and obey the law.*⁵⁴

This is a supportive assumption for interfaith ecology which can be used as part of the social engineering process of creating a particular mode of diversity – one that is focused on respect for difference as well as working actively across difference to form productive connections between communities and foster engaged citizenship. The eco focus of the movement also allows for the land to be a unifying source of national identity and belonging.

52 Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, People of Australia, 17

53 State Government of Victoria, All of Us, 6

54 Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, People of Australia, 12

MULTICULTURALISM IS UNDERPINNED BY A SHARED VALUES FRAMEWORK

The goal of a shared values framework further supports the strongly liberal culturalist assumption in these policy frameworks presented in chapter 2. Here multicultural diversity is only supported insofar as it maintains at its core a shared national values system across all communities. These values reinforce the right to diversity, but do not tolerate those aspects of diversity that are perceived as intolerant, exclusive and illiberal. The *All of Us* policy clearly states this aim:

*Cultural differences are something we all have in common, yet we are all Victorians. By respecting our shared diversity and the rule of law, we can realise our shared aspiration to build a cohesive and welcoming society.*⁵⁵

The *Safeguarding Australia* report was based on data from consultations with the heads of faith in every state, and invitations were issued to the heads of 25 faith communities identified by the Australian census as having more than 10,000 adherents. Consultations were also conducted with appropriate Federal and State Government agencies and with relevant NGOs. In addition to this, Ninety public submissions were received, including from across all states.⁵⁶ This research found that within the Australian faith leadership community, there was strong support for a shared values framework and the view that potential threats to this cohesion should be managed by government policy and responses:

*An overwhelming majority (78%) agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (35%) that 'religious extremism has the potential to destroy the fabric of Australia's civil, pluralist and democratic society'.⁵⁷ Biblical, Qur'anic and all other fundamentalisms need to be monitored and the state cannot be religiously neutral in the face of corrupted religion. Solutions need to be focused around religious moderation and its support.*⁵⁸

The interfaith ecology movement is emerging as part of this community need and interest in developing shared values and a common ground. It is an effective means of couching this dialogue as it directly links interfaith participation with a locally and nationally relevant issue requiring urgent cooperation. The process of reaching tangible cooperation and the challenges and opportunities of finding consensus across diverse communities and individuals is keenly relevant to the implementation of this assumption at the community level. In Victoria, Local Governments, as the level of government working most directly with local communities, play an important role in this implementation process as will now be discussed.

55 State Government of Victoria, *All of Us*, 26

56 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 135

57 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 83

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government in Victoria has become increasingly interested in supporting interfaith dialogue and understanding in their communities over the past ten years. There are approximately 16 municipal interfaith networks supported by Local Government Councils in Victoria. Interfaith dialogue networks facilitated by Council community development workers, or interfaith actions and events celebrated as part of local area cultural and social inclusion programs have become common Local Government initiatives, especially in the culturally diverse municipalities of Greater Melbourne. As the *Safeguarding Australia* report states, in Melbourne, 'the Cities of Dandenong and Moreland have led the way in moves to form inter-faith councils for their municipalities, and now there are similar organizations in the Cities of Geelong, Hume and Kingston.'⁵⁹ Since this 2004 report, further Local Government interfaith or multifaith networks have been initiated in the cities of Casey, Darebin, Boroondara, Knox, Maroondah, Whitehorse, Port Phillip with varying levels of community up-take. Plans to initiate networks were underway in further councils including Maribyrnong and Brimbank at the time of this research. These municipalities span areas of high and low socio-economic disadvantage, different geographical and industrial zones, varying population density and age demographics, as well as differing levels and types of cultural and religious diversity.

The State Government *All of Us* policy recognises and further encourages Local Government in fostering multiculturalism through local level programs and projects:

The Municipalities have to ... respond to the complex needs of newly arrived communities, transient populations, youth and student communities and single parent households... By initiating local activities and engagement for multicultural groups and ethnic communities, Local Government can play a critical role in supporting cultural diversity.⁶⁰

The policy goes on to endorse these actions through the recommended strategy of supporting 'funding initiatives for local councils to implement strategic projects to advance multiculturalism locally.'⁶¹ This strategy entails that State Government support will be directed through Local Government to implement interfaith initiatives which will open further opportunities for local level interfaith ecology projects.

As the tier of government most directly engaged with the community, and with a high degree of knowledge of the needs, issues and characteristics of their local community, Local Government plays a crucial role in fostering grassroots projects and activities. As

58 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 116
59 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 84
60 State Government of Victoria, *All of Us*, 22
61 State Government of Victoria, *All of Us*, 25

such Local Government is supporting the development of many interfaith ecology activities as a funder, facilitator or, most commonly, a partner of a community-based organisation. These partnerships are particularly effective for the interfaith ecology movement as they can provide expertise to interfaith organisations on the environmental needs of the local area and even facilitate local area green activities such as tree-planting. In the course of this research such Local Government partnerships for interfaith ecology activities occurred in six municipalities including Brimbank City Council, the Shire of Murrindindi, Greater Shepparton, Greater Bendigo, Mt Alexander Shire and Dandenong City Council.

The support for interfaith initiatives is embedded in Local Government policies on diversity and multiculturalism which incorporate the state and national policy frameworks and legislative requirements into plans designed for implementation in the local community. These plans detail the local demographics and identify the key CALD communities in the area. They then put forward a vision for local multiculturalism and identify priority areas for achieving this policy goal. For example, the City of Boroondara's *Cultural Diversity Plan 2009- 2013* identifies the following priority areas:

- Recognition and celebration of cultural diversity in Boroondara
- Partnerships and advocacy
- Culturally responsive service delivery
- Accessibility of Council⁶²

These priority areas include the actions that the council will implement and are the areas through which resources will be channelled and opportunities for action presented to community organisations and service providers. These plans offer the interfaith ecology movement an opportunity to engage with Local Government on key local area issues relevant to mutual goals.

The policy frameworks and actions for Federal, State and Local Government offer a strongly supported environment for the development of the interfaith ecology movement in Greater Melbourne via grassroots community organisations, government partnership opportunities and within general interfaith and multicultural activities and events. The relevant policy documents and plans at all levels of government indicate that the types of resources and activities that support the interfaith ecology movement within the context of multicultural policy and programs will become increasingly available. This is especially significant in Local Government where the broader policies are translated into practical and tailored local initiatives.

THIRD SECTOR

While government interest and structural support for interfaith ecology is growing, the movement in Australia remains firmly situated in the third sector social economy and is shaped by the characteristics and challenges of this sector in the national and global context. The third sector can be loosely defined as those collective human activities and organisations that do not fit into the primary and secondary sectors of the state and the market.⁶³ These range from religious institutions, the largest third sector bodies in Australia and globally, to 'charities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), self help groups, social enterprises, networks and clubs to name a few.'⁶⁴ Corry describes the difficulty in defining the third sector as a whole and cohesive unit. It is 'closely associated with the idea of civil society and volunteerism' and therefore has 'non-system qualities' which prevent it from being easily mapped and analysed:

*Unlike the state and the market economy, it is something that can scarcely be subject to the detailed planning or regulated without losing some its third sector qualities such as voluntary participation, value based motivators, and independence from institutionalized power structures.*⁶⁵

Some such non-system qualities, include an open ended project development and intermittent innovation and creativity which has enabled this sector to host the structural emergence of New Social Movements generally. As Kandall and Anheier explain, 'the third sector has often acted as an important pioneer of new services, and an incubator of innovation in the social services field,' furthermore, these innovations are 'often promoted by time-limited, small scale public financial support.'⁶⁶ In this way the structural challenges of the third sector generate some of its innovative and adaptive characteristics.

The interfaith ecology movement clearly reflects this innovative third sector capacity in that it is an experimental ground for interfaith relationship building in connection with the environment; a theme that did not stem from government programs and which is outside of the market. As Kandall and Anheier write, this type of creative work allows for governments to partner with and observe programs and trends that may become absorbed into their policies and services:

62 City of Boroondara, Cultural Diversity Plan 2009 -13, 11

63 Corry, 'Defining and theorising the third sector,' 11

64 Corry, 'Defining and theorising the third sector,' 11

65 Corry, 'Defining and theorising the third sector,' 11

66 Kendall and Anheier, 'Third sector at the crossroads?' 234

*By acting as a 'test bed' for new public initiatives, the third sector has offered state decision-makers an intermediate possibility between complete policy inaction on the one hand and unconditional commitment of public resources on the other.*⁶⁷

This 'test bed' status characterises the current interfaith ecology activities which receive some government partnership support through grants programs as discussed above.

Mark Lyons identifies small size, volunteerism and democratic process as three key defining features of community-based third sector activity in Australia. These findings match my observations of the interfaith ecology movement in Melbourne as driven by small scale, volunteer organisations with loose and inclusive decision-making processes where members feel they are able to participate in project and organisational planning. Lyon's observation that 'most third sector organisations operate from the kitchen table of whoever is their most active member,' in particular, 'those organisations whose main tasks during the year are to organize a competition, stage a few events or publish a few newsletters'⁶⁸ is descriptive of interfaith ecology organisations and projects encountered in this research. While most organisations express an intention to grow and expand, they commonly remain small and voluntary and make significant contributions from this set-up.

Through my fieldwork I was introduced to the work of the Faith Ecology Network supported by the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice, Sydney. This network is supported by a part-time administrator and runs annual conference style events with guest speakers on environment and conservation themes in relation to faith and faith communities. In speaking to the administrator I received advice on the process of building the network; we discussed issues of capacity, in particular the need for a core driver, in their case an active Priest, to take these projects on board and inspire others to become involved. This proved a valid insight for all the fieldwork projects I undertook in this research: active drivers are hubs for activity and others gather around them; without them projects and organisations tend to disperse and fade out. This point was emphasised for me in discussion with a friend who was involved in several interfaith networks in Melbourne. We were discussing the approach of an active network member who tended to go to different places and start organisations and activities hoping to seed action that would be taken up by local participants. I noted that her plan was to build the local capacity and then hand over the driver role. My friend pointed out that this didn't tend to work because this woman *was* the capacity; when she left, so did the drive. This rang true to other observations made throughout this fieldwork. It was rare that any driver would

67 Kendall and Anheier, 'Third sector at the crossroads?' 234

68 Lyons, Third Sector, 16

take on another person's project; they tended to want to start their own initiatives. Much like other third sector activities, many seeds are planted in the interfaith ecology movement, and only a few are nurtured into growth.

While there are some third sector employers, such as large hospitals and non-government schools that employ thousands of staff, the vast bulk of third sector work happens within these small organisations and is conducted by volunteers which Lyons estimates to include between 500 000 and 700 000 people in Australia.⁶⁹ The great majority of third sector organisations, he states, 'operate on a purely voluntary basis and have fewer than 100 members.'⁷⁰ Even the approximate '6% of third sector organisations [that] employ paid staff... utilize volunteers to undertake important tasks.'⁷¹ The interfaith ecology organisations and projects in this research were clearly dependent upon this volunteer workforce. All of the projects and organisations used volunteers as a major component of their work. The majority were entirely volunteer run, with some engaging a casual employee to assist with a project when funding became available. Some had a part time administration role to assist a larger pool of volunteer leaders, other larger global organisations had several paid full-time and part-time staff working with a large group of volunteers. Some projects were based in university or religious institutions and used their staff resources, while also depending on volunteers.

The majority of the organisations participating in this research were incorporated associations, which is the main governance model and structure adopted by third sector groups as it provides them with legitimacy, accountability and independence.⁷² Incorporation provided these organisations with an ability to gain grant funding and to adopt a clear democratic structure of a committee of management, meetings and Annual General Meetings which organisations work towards enacting, if often loosely and sometimes falteringly. This small-scale democratic structure is important to the way these organisations attracted new members and include them in decision-making and projects. The dysfunction of such processes is also often at the core of why members become dissatisfied and leave organisations feeling that their needs for participation were not met. As Lyons describes: The organisational representation of interests also seems to require a non-profit form of organising... most people join an interest association because they want (or want assurance of) an opportunity to shape the policies and strategies of the association by democratic means.⁷³

69 Lyons, Third Sector, 17

70 Lyons, Third Sector, 15

71 Lyons, Third Sector, 24

72 Lyons, Third Sector, 12

73 Lyons, Third Sector, 14

Lyons identifies several challenges for small third sector organisations that undermine their capacity and sustainability and weaken the relationships within and between them. The three challenges presented below were represented in the projects and organisations encountered in the interfaith ecology movement throughout this research, as examples in chapters 5 to 7 will demonstrate.

VALUE JUDGMENT AND PERCEPTION

Interfaith ecology organisations are founded through the values of the individual participants and their interpretation of the broader New Social Movement that they are contributing to. When well defined and agreed upon between members, such values hold organisations together and attract new members.⁷⁴ This dependency on values, however, can lead to instability in the organisation when members feel their values are not coherent and even contradictory leading to divisiveness.⁷⁵ As Lyons states, ‘the importance of certain values, beliefs, identities or enthusiasms to many of those who keep the organisation going often makes it difficult to resolve disagreements through compromise.’⁷⁶ As a movement that draws together different religious and spiritual convictions, different political positions and different understandings of how these may be translated into collective action, the interfaith ecology movement is particularly prone to values-based conflicts.

The evaluation of the work undertaken by interfaith ecology organisations and projects is similarly precarious. Lyons attributes this to the centrality of values, the volunteer basis of the work and the service orientation of the projects in third sector organisations.⁷⁷ These elements combine with time-poverty, limited funding and low administrative capacity which means that the steps of evaluation, of both organisational performance and the projects themselves, are based almost entirely on the subjective perception of the organisers. In the interfaith ecology movement, such perceptions of achievement are particularly varied as many of the events and activities offer an interpersonal, ritual or spiritual experience that cannot be quantified or easily assessed. It is common for some organisers or participants to find the same event anything from life-changing to inadequate depending on how it meets their values, expectations and personal experience in the moment.

74 Lyons, Third Sector, 22
75 Lyons, Third Sector, 23
76 Lyons, Third Sector, 23
77 Lyons, Third Sector, 24

COMPLEXITY OF REVENUE GENERATION

Revenue generation across the third sector stems from various and multiple support avenues. These may include:

*membership dues, donations, bequests, sale of core services, profits from unrelated business ventures, government grants or contacts (often many of these, each with different conditions attached), grants from trusts or foundations, sponsorship or other forms of partnership arrangements with business and interest on capital reserves.*⁷⁸

While interfaith ecology projects and organisations in this research do have membership structures and some accept donations, the services they offer are largely free or very cheap and donations are minimal. As a NSM seeking to establish and grow itself, interfaith ecology projects and organisations are largely satisfied to gain only the interest rather than the financial support of participants.

These organisations depend almost entirely on resources and support of government bodies. In Victoria this is largely through State and Local Government grant programs which provide sporadic funding based on projects as discussed above. This is a highly unstable environment for organisations which become intermittent, gaining more membership and producing more activity when funding is awarded them and becoming dormant when they are not supported. This intermittence is further generated by the lack of support within funding for organisational development and administration. The structures of these funding rounds encourage new groups and initiatives, in line with the 'test-bed' relationship between government and third sector organisations. This preferences new community-based trends and, therefore, worked in the favour of the interfaith ecology movement initiatives during this research period. However, this short-term novelty funding also means that the movement is not supported in a more sustainable way. Government funding bodies are reluctant to support groups through stable or recurrent funding as they believe that this will create long-term dependency.

Corporate and foundation philanthropy in Australia is limited and underdeveloped compared to the USA, UK and Western Europe. Philanthropy in Australia is not suited to the support of New Social Movements which are considered high risk. Related to the cultural factors discussed in chapter 2, it is unlikely that corporate bodies will sponsor activities that are related to religion and spirituality in Australia. Even large, government endorsed events, such as the Parliament of the World's Religions, failed to secure the expected levels of corporate support that had been possible in other national contexts, such as the USA.

78 Lyons, Third Sector, 23

Other interfaith ecology initiatives are based on partnerships within religious or educational institutions. These initiatives receive a limited, but consistent, amount of funding that allows them to subsist. This often means one or two staff members are able to run the organisation and its activities taking pressure off volunteers. For example, the Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change (ARCC) Network was supported in its development by a funded staff position from the Australian Climate Institute.

There are several university centres and positions that support interfaith community relations via research and policy development in Greater Melbourne, including: the Australian Catholic University's Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue; Monash University's UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations - Asia Pacific which is an educational, research and policy activity centre in the School of Political and Social Inquiry; and LaTrobe University's Centre for Dialogue which fosters research, education and training, policy development and community engagement locally, nationally and internationally. The academic staff members of these centres are active in interfaith community work and provide key resources including meeting venues, conferences and forums, and other support services through project involvement. Academic and religious institutions may also support an individual academic or leader to participate in the movement rather than developing their own centre or organisation through allowing them to allocate staff time to work in the movement. For example the Rabbi of the Leo Baeck Centre is active in interfaith ecology work as part of his role as an engaged and socially aware community leader. These institutions support their members and leaders to explore and participate in interfaith ecology work through contact with experts, potential institutional meeting spaces and high capacity participants. These roles are also crucial to the effectiveness of the movement in influencing policies and mainstreaming movement goals.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEADERSHIP

Many of the conflicts and disruptions to the work of organisations are related to the unclear flows of accountability and the challenge this presents for robust organisational leadership. This was a key concern for interfaith ecology organisations and projects in this research and centred on the problem of representation and inclusivity. As Lyons points out, 'it is not clear to whom ultimately these organisations should be accountable ... most have very few members who, on their own, are not suitable as the object of the organisations accountability.'⁷⁹ In the interfaith ecology movement this lack of clarity is

79 Lyons, *Third Sector*, 25

further muddled by the issues of religious affiliation and identification and the power structures within different religious groups. In one example, a debate arose within GreenFaith Australia over the use of the term 'representation' on the organisations website. The meaning of 'representation across religious faiths' could be construed as meaning either that: 'the organisation is religiously diverse,' or 'the organisation has formal representation within different religious bodies.' This led to the resignation of a Baha'i member who felt that the organisation could not operate without more formal endorsement from the leadership of religious groups whereas others believed that the grassroots initiative built by people from those diverse faith communities did not need formal endorsement.

Due to the low capacity of small third sector organisations, action drivers within the organisation are often tacitly permitted to operate while the members are unable to keep abreast with the actions and communications due to limited time and/or interest in organisational and project processes. As Lyons explains, 'members are uninterested in the organisation, provided it renders them the service they joined to receive.'⁸⁰ As will be discussed further in chapter 6, power struggles over project ownership and direction are common in such circumstances and delegated positions of leadership do not always match to those with the highest level of influence or involvement in a project or organisation. Lyons' assessment that 'these tensions arise from lack of clarity about the role of boards, a difficulty made worse by lack of clear performance measures,'⁸¹ is appropriate to the interfaith ecology movement. Here the difference between those heavily involved in project implementation, and those with either religious leadership power or organisational leadership power are often split, generating resentment, poor knowledge and information transfer and therefore organisational instability.

Outwardly, because of its project-based existence, the interfaith ecology movement may appear largely accountable to funding bodies such as the VMC, Local Government funders or other partnership organisations and bodies. Organisations are responsible for reporting to funding bodies on their projects and the financial records are kept accurately and in line with the requirements of the grant agreements. The project reports, however, are highly subjective; they are often based on the image the organisation is seeking to present rather than an honest exploration of the barriers and issues encountered in the work. This leads to the poor knowledge and experience transfer from organisations to policy makers that is typical of the entire third sector. Lyons emphasises this point: 'when donors to Australian third sector organisations receive a report on their organization, it is usually designed to

80 Lyons, Third Sector, 25

81 Lyons, Third Sector, 26

elicit further support rather than present a fair and honest picture of the organization.’⁸² Under these conditions, the ‘test bed’ approach to new policy development is unlikely to yield sound findings. This support is rather likely continue to be ideologically motivated by an appreciation across government, and in educational and religious institutions, of the benefits of linking environmental sustainability, multicultural diversity and local community development.

In this research the issues faced by third sector organisation described here, including value judgement and perception, the complexity of revenue generation, and accountability and leadership were clearly represented in many organisations and project. The case of the development of GreenFaith Australia relayed below illustrates how the balancing the pace of organisational development against the capacity of participants, their competing visions and ideas of organisational leadership and structure, and resource mobilization were defining factors for the organisation.

INSTANTIATION 1: GREENFAITH AUSTRALIA ESTABLISHMENT

In the development stages of GreenFaith Australia in 2008, I consulted the main organiser of the Sydney-based Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change (ARRCC). I was able to link our plans for a local interfaith ecology organisation in Melbourne with their plans to become an umbrella support organisation, clearing house and network hub for the interfaith ecology movement nationally. The ARRCC was able to provide a small seed grant to us for the initial establishment of what would later become GreenFaith Australia.

There was a considerable level of interest shown at a scoping event for this initiative with thirty two attendees from a diverse range of faith perspectives and environmental/community interests. The group also represented a wide age range and gender balance. Many attendees represented organisations, some in an official capacity. Fifteen different community, environmental or interfaith organisations were represented. Time was dedicated to sharing ideas, motivations, expectations and backgrounds. We needed to make sure that the conversation was not dominated by a particular person’s agenda; it was a delicate task because if people feel that they are not being heard or their interests will not be met it is unlikely that they will remain involved. The areas of interest expressed were broad ranging from practical ecological projects, to political lobbying to spiritual eco-rituals and education.

In the immediate follow-up all communications were via email groups as participants were spread across the city and we did not want to encourage people to drive to meet each other unnecessarily. At first I did not get involved in the email discussions as I wanted to allow them to develop by themselves. This did not work very well and I needed to spend time engaging with each group to foster and maintain the online conversations. It was difficult to maintain a balanced conversation in this way as some participants would spend a lot of time contributing and younger full-time workers, for example, would not be able to keep up and then drop out of the discussion. Political and cultural difference also became clear in these online discussions with some concern that particular members were trying to push their political or religious agenda. Through this process I learnt about the difficulties in balancing participation; this remained a difficult process and led to a common third sector cycle where those with the most time put in the most effort in communications and take control to the detriment of others.

Managing the pace of organisational development and project engagement was a key theme in holding this organisational space. In order to maintain sustainable growth and development rates Rabbi Jonathan and I decided that while this focus group set up was a good experience, it was not functioning and we needed to meet face to face in order to have a balanced discussion. We also needed a committee that could distribute tasks and share responsibility. A second meeting was called for those interested in joining, forming an incorporated association and we were able to fill the office bearing positions and additional places with representation across Quaker, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Bahai, Anglican and Mormon faiths. This new structure provided us with a sense of cohesion and purpose.

As a fledgling committee of people who had only recently met and were attempting to form a shared identity across religious, age, gender and cultural differences we needed to manage expectations without quelling enthusiasm. The initial meetings centred on establishing organisational values and visions. Through this dialogue some initial participants left as they couldn't reconcile their personal goal or belief with the organisation and others came to join as news of the organisation spread through the interfaith networks. This fluctuation around a small group of core members continued as a structural theme of the organisation throughout its first two years. I learnt to manage my own and other's expectations of what could be achieved, working with the flow of activity where and when it arose and letting aspects of the work settle when they were not attracting participation. This open and flexible approach was appreciated by some who found it a space for possibility and potential while others found that it lacked direction and leadership vision.

The organisation remained on a small scale of meetings and activities until it was supported by a major grant from the VMC which enabled it to undertake a major project, Walking Humbly, in association with the Parliament of the World's Religions, and employ a part-time project worker throughout the process. The organisation interest and membership piqued at this time and after the event, when new funding was not available, it returned to less active state.

CONCLUSION: SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURES AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

As an emergent movement, with a still fledgling ideology and shared purpose, interfaith ecology is oriented towards the unifying utopian vision of an integrated and harmonious eco-cultural future. The movement is fast developing a language around its common themes and experiences which are generating solidarity and an increasing sense of community and belonging through its loose and shifting network formation.

In the Australian context this interfaith ecology vision sits in strong allegiance to the multicultural policy visions and assumptions that government bodies are leading and supporting. This legislatively and socially supportive environment has much to offer the development of interfaith ecology as a method of engagement within multiculturalist programs and plans. These policies cultivate the local level and community involvement as sites for multicultural harmony. Interfaith ecology, as a grassroots third sector movement, will continue to benefit from this localised community level engagement and the Local Government initiatives that nurture it.

The challenges the movement faces within the third sector points to ways in which government policy initiatives and methods of grassroots support could be better targeted to generate more sustainable futures for initiatives and organisations. Building longer term supportive relationships with organisations would allow for them to grow beyond the initial 'seed' stage and become more established active community partners for Local and State Government, aiding the realisation of policy goals and providing important local level feedback. The barriers to sustainability, accountability and leadership development for interfaith ecology permeate the movement generating friction and uncertainty. These factors, along with the perennial third sector challenge of low and unpredictable funding, mean that the interfaith ecology movement is tentatively and slowly developing intermittently, subject to the ebb and flow of both financial and human resources. The creative ways that participants are working through and around these challenges mean that the movement is beginning to demonstrate its worth as a 'test bed' to government,

education and religious institutions as well as a valuable partner for other third sector interfaith and environment organisations.

Having established the context, content and structure in and through which the interfaith ecology movement is emerging in Part One of this thesis, I will move to an ethnographic exploration of the movement's make-up, motivations and expressions in Part Two. This second part tells the internal story of the interfaith ecology movement through my participatory research experiences in the Greater Melbourne region and through national and global networks. The chapters of Part Two will thematically describe the people and groups who are creating and growing this fledgling movement including the processes, collective cultures and actions that participants are forming. The spiritual and personal motivations and tribulations of these participants will be relayed along with the tentative spaces of intercultural and ecological harmony that they are beginning to open.

PART TWO

APPROACHES TO AGE, GENDER AND ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITIES AMONG INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT

PARTICIPANTS

There was a Palestinian who lived in Jordan and who came to Australia temporarily and who attended the conference. Then we have Muslims who have lived in Australia all their lives and whose parents have lived in Australia all their lives. Similarly you have Jews who have grown up in Australia and have been here for several generations, I who have come five years ago from Britain, and then an Israeli Jew who has served in the army who spoke about his experiences. For Christians, we have had people from various different countries and communities. So the diversity is pretty broad... The other part of the answer is that of course every individual is different. So we of course have different denominations of Christians and Jews and Muslims coming along... But even if two people come along who are both Catholic they are going to have different views about how Catholicism applies to them and their life.

– Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, Jewish Christian Muslim Association.¹

The above description of the multiple diversities inherent to interfaith gatherings, in this case the Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association's annual residential conference, illustrates the way faith identity is always situated within a matrix of other diversity factors such as ethnicity and national heritage, career and life course, gender, age, personal relationships, past experience of peace or conflict, political views, and the individual interpretation and experience of each person's faith. As Rabbi Keren-Black concludes, this means that each interfaith dialogue participant is unique and therefore speaks not only from their faith

1 Fieldwork interview: Jonathan Keren-Black, JCMA

perspective but from all of their human complexity. For interfaith ecology, the participants' experience with ecology and environmental issues, both in terms of their scientific understanding, political positioning and personal eco-experience and relationship to place, enter into this diversity.

Recognising that diversity is as nuanced and varied as people themselves disallows a definitive analysis of representation in interfaith projects and organisations. In this chapter I will address only three elements of this web of diversity, focusing on age, gender and ethno-cultural identity. These elements were particularly prominent in this research through the way participants interacted with each other, judged and determined participation and worked towards shaping the culture and inclusivity of the interfaith ecology movement.

AGE

The age composition of any movement is a telling indicator of the breadth of its appeal across generations and their cultural trends as well as its longevity and sustainability through leadership succession, stability and growth. For the interfaith ecology movement, there is a strong recognition of the importance of youth engagement and of cross-generational dialogue through which the energy and enthusiasm of young members and the wisdom and experience of older members is equally valued and placed into a fruitful relationship. To this extent the movement is seeking to mirror the cross-generational relationships found in most faith communities. Larger interfaith ecology organisations are addressing the need for specific youth defined programs and activities in interfaith ecology. The smaller community based organisations struggle to engage youth, reflecting the trend away from both traditional forms of social engagement and worship communities among Australian Generation Ys.

Youth is defined broadly and loosely in the interfaith ecology and interfaith movement. While the category varies across organisations, most are not referring to teenage participants and have defined youth as young adults. This is largely because the organisation's activities or work requires adult participation and, other than with specific schools programs that several organisations deliver, they are not equipped to supervise teenage participants. The broadest definition of youth in the movement is the United Religions Initiative's 18-35 bracket. Defining age participation is also relative to other participants; for some organisations 'younger people' may include working or younger families or, in older organisations, anyone not yet retired. In interviews across organisations, 'younger people' thus refers loosely to those under 45. Here I will adopt

these same categories where 'youth' is defined as 18-35 and 'younger people' refers to under 45.

As Possamai states, there is not firm agreement in academic literature on generational categories, but they are often defined as follows:

Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 whereas generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1980; followed by the Y generation between 1981 and 2000. Yers are also known as the dot.coms, the millennials, the Net Generation or the Thumb Generation (because of the use of remote controls and mobile phones).²

The majority of the movement's youth are therefore members of 'Generation Y' with some 'Generation X' overlap. As the action researcher, I am a Generation Y youth participant in the movement.

The interfaith ecology movement in the Melbourne region reflects the aging of the third sector broadly and of religious participation in the mainstream Christian community specifically.³ In their comprehensive study on religion and spirituality for Generation Y Australians using both quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews, Mason, Singleton and Webber found that '46% of Gen Y identified with some variant of the Christian traditional and 6% were followers of one of the other world religions.'⁴ They found little commitment to Christian institutions, practices or beliefs, even among those identifying as part of the Christian tradition and that 'attendance at religious services was quite low, even among those in Generation Y who are believers and are adherents of a religion or denomination.'⁵

We have seen that fewer Gen Ys than expected identified with a denomination, and that a significant proportion no longer considered themselves part of the denomination in which they were raised ... [few] confidently believed in God and in Jesus... few believed in one true religion, and the 'supermarket' approach to beliefs and morality was strongly in evidence.⁶

In the Christian religion in Australia conservative evangelical churches are the fastest growing and have the highest level of youth participation.⁷ The more fundamentalist of these churches discourage interfaith engagement for theological reasons and are less hospitable to green causes, some even seeing ecological catastrophe as part of a divine plan of punishment and salvation.⁸ As Kearns notes, the co-operative pluralism of interfaith

2 Possamai, *Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y*, 2
3 Warburton and Cordingley, *Volunteering in an aging Australia*
4 Mason et. al. *Spirit of Generation Y*, 71
5 Mason et. al. *Spirit of Generation Y*, 124
6 Mason et. al. *Spirit of Generation Y*, 96
7 Nilan, Julian and Germov, *Australian Youth*, 191
8 Dittmer and Sturm, 'Introduction' 8

ecology 'threatens the particularity and exclusivity of more fundamentalist Christianity.'⁹ This was evidenced in this research as the more liberal, interfaith and eco-faith oriented institutions of mainstream churches, such as the Augustine Centre (Uniting Church) and EarthSong (Catholic), are facing significant challenges in engaging youth and younger people. The Augustine Centre Director, Paul Sanders, laments the seeming loss of youth to what he observes to be less progressive religious institutions:

When you look at any Christian church at the moment, those involved in progressive spirituality, interfaith relations and a kind of post-Christian presence and understanding, are not actually a young age group. They would be from 40 upwards. A lot of younger Christians are evangelical, they are growing enormously. So here again lies a peculiarity, that we are trying to have a broader and more inclusive understanding and approach and yet in many ways we are a diminishing number.¹⁰

This trend debunks the notion that youth are leaving the church because of its social and political conservatism as Generation Y are tending towards socially conservative institutions that focus on consumerism, emotive evangelism creating a sense of tribalism and pop-culture.¹¹ Mason *et al.* found that 'the smaller Australian churches mostly Protestant and conservative ... very clearly excelled the much larger and older denominations in achieving the participation of young people from Generation Y and developing their spirituality.'¹² They suggest that these churches may have 'found ways of taking today's youth as they are, connecting with this 'spiritual consciousness' at a level which does not assume too much.'¹³ These attractive methods focused more on individual satisfaction and social opportunities, rather than on social service commitments and traditional religious instruction. One 15 year old participant in the Generation Y study relays this position:

My friend from school actually brought me to the church once, and I enjoyed it, I've been a Christian my whole life, I've been brought up as a Christian and so I really wanted to go because it was more up-beat and it had a live band and music, which my other church doesn't have and then she kept telling me about events and stuff, and I wanted to try out the cell groups, which is more like a prayer group.¹⁴

Interfaith ecology provides an opening for Generation Y to express and explore different types of social engagement and spiritual expression with a strong emphasis on experience and social relations. This is attractive to the spiritual values, understandings and needs of

9 Kearns, 'Religion and ecology,' 321
10 Fieldwork interview: Paul Sanders on the Augustine Centre
11 Nilan, Julian and Germov, Australian Youth, 191
12 Mason et. al. Spirit of Generation Y, 125
13 Mason et. al. Spirit of Generation Y, 125
14 Mason et. al. Spirit of Generation Y, 125

both Generations X and Y, as Possamai explains, indicating the broad potential appeal of the movement as it grows:

They are more likely to be tolerant of religious belief systems; as many of them embrace the view that there are no absolute rights and wrongs for everybody. They tend to view dogmatic beliefs with suspicion. Contrary to older generations that remain loyal to institutional and doctrinal beliefs, these generations are more interested in religious experience than theological reasoning. For them, the heart must win over the head. They want to know, but the forms of knowledge they encounter better not be dogmatic, and the more they are presented as a narrative the better.¹⁵

While Interfaith Ecology strongly captures these sentiments and is attracting younger people through networks and experiential opportunities, the leadership and organisational work of the movement reflects the overall trend of ageing in the third sector with a poor outlook for volunteerism. Aging activism is also felt throughout the western world in the environment movement where it is recognised as a 'leadership challenge'. Snow sites research surveys undertaken in the USA movement indicating that only 7% of volunteers were under the age of 35 and 18% were over 65.¹⁶ In the Australian context, Generation Y 'did a series of one-off activities like door knocking for a major charity or a walkathon' there was no evidence that 'they are happening on anything like a scale needed to replace the forms of service that are languishing.' They found that 'a small number of young people are doing a good deal for their community, but they are not typical and do not appear to be trend setters.'¹⁷ There is a connection between the intermittent and reduced levels of volunteer engagement for Generation Y and the decline in participation in church communities. As Mason *et al.* explain:

Active church membership itself encourages relating to and being concerned for the welfare of those in the church community. There are responsibilities and obligations that are associated with being a member of a church community. They require putting the central humanitarian teachings of one's faith into practice ... the habit of belonging and of working for the good of others is catching, and the skills learned in that setting can easily be transferred.¹⁸

Overall the *Spirit of Generation Y* study found that the low rates of civic engagement of Generation Y was attributed to a matrix of cultural factors including prioritisation of material possessions, limited sense of social responsibility and empowerment, technological engagement, and low community connectivity:

15 Possamai, *Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y*, 3
16 Snow, *Inside the Environmental Movement*, 111
17 Mason *et al.* *Spirit of Generation Y*, 287
18 Mason *et al.* *Spirit of Generation Y*, 299

*Many young Australians are in part-time employment during secondary and tertiary schooling; they also spend a lot of time on the internet and watching television or DVDs as well as socialising with their friends. This does not leave them with a lot of spare time. Most young Australians do not include community service among their leisure time activities.*¹⁹

All of these factors impact on the interfaith ecology movement's engagement of young people. EarthSong Director, Anne Boyd attributes the older age bracket of her organisation to time factors – a common explanation for aging participation across the third sector:²⁰

The ones who come to our advertised programs would tend to be older and retired, with the leisure time to do these things and to read ... people with young families haven't got any leisure time. I've had to come to terms with that because you can get very disappointed when only oldies turn up.²¹

Much of EarthSong's work is in schools and the organisation thus caters for the two extremes of the age group – the very old and the very young. This 'missing middle' was identified by several other participant organisations as a threat to sustainability. The missing middle is most commonly attributed to the combination of time poverty and financial pressure on working families in contemporary society.

Mason et al. found that Generation Y valued mentorship highly: 'having a mentor who could support them in learning the necessary skills assisted young people to move out of their comfort zone and into more challenging types of community service. For those who were able to engage in serving the wider community, the benefit that flowed back to them in terms of satisfaction and meaning was enormous.'²² At Borderlands Cooperative students on social work and community development placements in their 20s tend to be attracted to the organisation and the ability of older leaders to provide a mentoring learning experience. These leaders, however, often lamented that there are few people to pass their mentoring skills and roles onto; the missing middle of people in their 40s and 50s who have the experience and knowledge to lead and mentor are less engaged. Generation Y suffers from this condition through lack of mentors and supporters from Generation X and younger baby boomers who are neglecting to mentor Generation Y into community leadership roles. What is missing is the generational continuity that once defined religious and local communities and allowed for sustainable knowledge and leadership transfer.

Structures of events, their timing, communications style and cost are also barriers to cross-generational participation. Lead community organiser, Alex Butler, identifies

19 Mason et. al. Spirit of Generation Y, 273

20 Warburton and Cordingley, Volunteering in an aging Australia

21 Fieldwork interview: Anne Boyd on EarthSong

expense as well as the aging of religious communities as a reason why the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne did not attract many youth participants even though there was a youth committee involved in the organisation of the event:

Participation in the Parliament was biased towards older people. I think money was a big issue there; although there were, for example, some theology students who took it as part of an accredited subject. The age profile also reflects the ageing of some religious faiths and particularly some of the Christian communities and also some of the Jewish communities too.²³

She also addresses the relationship between age and gender roles in religious institutions and the stronger participation of older women in the movement as will be discussed later in this chapter. Her assessment is that because older women have less leadership opportunities within their institutions and the workforce, they are more likely to use their experience and skills gained from maturity in community organisations and volunteer-based events such as the Parliament:

More of the long term volunteers were women and that is often built into the nature of the community. For instance, we had some fantastic Catholic religious sisters; all of these women who are about my age (50 -60), with a huge wealth of experience running hospitals and schools and all sorts of things, but there is nowhere for them to go, they can't become Cardinals or anything. So actually there are high capacity middle aged to older women who are available to interfaith. These are amazing women whose capacity is just not being fully utilised.²⁴

Against this ageing trend, there are some significant local and global actions being undertaken by youth and through organisations that specifically support youth involvement. These actions indicate that youth are more readily involved in action focused events and activities and less involved in forum-based activities and more traditional interfaith dialogue programs. Furthermore, youth are more actively involved in virtual communication modes outside of the meeting structures common to incorporated associations and traditional forms of community organising. This means that youth participation may be less visible when examining these organisational structures within the interfaith ecology movement, but that they are participating and communicating in new and less structured ways. Many organisations are rethinking their ways of communicating and gathering to better accommodate this shift in modes of engagement.

The United Religions Initiative (URI), as a large global network, is specifically targeting youth in programs that generate a sense of belonging and social connectivity while fostering leadership and linking them into structures that will hold them to the

22 Mason et al. Spirit of Generation Y, 294

23 Fieldwork interview: Alex Butler, 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions

24 Fieldwork interview: Alex Butler, 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions

organisation and empower them in their home communities. Interfaith ecology is taking hold in these targeted youth-based or youth-led organisations as the environmentalist message resounds more clearly in their socio-cultural framework and education. This link between youth, environmentalism and action was highlighted when the URI Young Leaders Program was launched in 2008, in the lead up to the URI's Global Assembly in Mayapur. The program of youth-led workshops was complemented with training in dialogue facilitation and community organising. The week was an empowering experience and the young leaders were encouraged to take their knowledge back into their communities and commit to holding an event or activity.

INSTANTIATION 1: URI YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

In the busy month of October 2008, amid GreenFaith Australia's Incorporation, seminar series planning, funding applications and the evaluation of the Sharing Our Space project, I received an email from United Religions Initiative (URI) informing me that I had been nominated and accepted for a scholarship to attend their Global Assembly and Young Leaders Program from November 25th to December 6th, 2008. I was invited to run two workshops on interfaith ecology. I was aware that COMMON was a 'cooperation-circle' (or member organisation) of URI and that the URI Charter was an important example of interfaith cooperation that had been carefully and collaboratively developed across different belief systems. I was eager to learn more about this global organisation and excited to be returning to India where I had travelled in 2006. The Assembly was an unprecedented global gathering of 300 grassroots interfaith leaders, from 44 countries, including over one hundred youth (18 - 35 year olds) participating in the Young Leaders Program.

My two weeks at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness campus, host of the URI Global Assembly and Young Leaders Program, was filled with inspirational encounters with people from around the world working towards interfaith harmony and peace at the community level. During the young leaders program I established beautiful friendships and was engaged in a myriad of conversations with young people and elders alike who were working on programs and projects in their home countries as varied as Malaysia, Palestine, Uruguay, Germany and Sierra Leone to name but a few. This experience was guided by URI staff through a program of appreciative inquiry; thematic work on the issues of environment, health, poverty and gender; service opportunities; sacred services; and the sharing of art, dance and music.

During the program I learnt about the experience of living different faiths in different places and heard intimate stories of violence, renewal, hope and loss. I participated in

workshops ranging from Tai Chi to deep listening to global social marketing and attended sessions on environmental activism, Indigenous rights struggles and Middle-Eastern community peace-building projects. I discussed freedom of information issues with journalists from Kashmir and freedom from hunger issues with northern Ugandan Ministers. In the local area we painted a mural with primary school children, participated in rituals on the banks of the 'Mother Ganga,' visited sculptures of the seven Stations of the Cross and attended scriptural recitals at the children's Madrasa.

All of these activities were set in the diverse and colourful community of Mayapur and the site of the ISKCON Headquarters, the community of which housed and fed us, welcomed us into their homes and places of worship. In addition to the strong and lasting personal stimulation I took away from this rich experience I developed a new level of appreciation for what is possible when the people working at the grassroots level are able to meet, exchange dialogue and form bonds.

URI is unique in the extent to which it honours and supports this grassroots work and volunteers. The global and regional assemblies are the way in which it uses network resources to feed and sustain its organisations and their local leaders. In this context I found the interfaith ecology movement to be thriving under the surface of many organisations and in many participants, especially among the young leaders. While the environment was not the core business of most cooperation circles, interfaith ecology issues and themes were raised and relayed numerous times in discussions and presentations throughout the program and especially by the youth participants. Interfaith ecology was linked into much of the work of different groups through eco-arts, eco-worship, eco-practice, eco-education and eco-awareness rising. The 2008 Assembly ensured that interfaith ecology became a priority area for URI into the future.

In preparation for the Global Assembly, the Young Leader Program participants began to workshop ways of structuring their participation in URI into the future including through the idea of a youth council. The formation of the youth representative council sparked significant debate within and between young and old participants and the Global Assembly around representation and participation based on age. Many participants thought that this structure would exclude young people from the decision making of the main organisational leadership by relegating them to a less powerful body. It was especially noted that the 18-35 year youth age bracket meant that many 'youth' were able and mature enough to contribute to key organisational decisions. Others saw it as the way youth could be uniquely and powerfully involved in the decision-making of the organisation while retaining their own ability to develop the institutional culture. They

also saw this youth council as an opportunity to separate from the perceived 'politics' of the main council leadership. Furthermore, these youth believed that, if structurally empowered, they would be able to direct the work of the organisation to become more action oriented and avoid being waylaid by dialogue processes and conflicts that they observed among their older leaders.

Establishing youth specific programming and representation is a common trend in larger international interfaith organisations. The largest international interfaith organisation, Religions for Peace, established a Global Youth Network and an International Youth Committee at their world assembly in Kyoto, 2006. This Global Youth Network is similarly focused on 'multi-religious youth action.' As well as working on global issues of poverty, peace building and earth care, the organisation is seeking to use these structures as a way of mainstreaming 'youth and youth issues into Religions for Peace programming activities at the local, regional, and global levels.'²⁵ As such, this large organisation has multiple youth regional networks – a goal towards which the URI is also moving in their youth structures.

The belief that youth are able to avoid the pitfalls of dialogue and argument through a focus on action is a common assumption among youth in the interfaith ecology and interfaith movements generally. In this research I found this to be a myth with young organisers and organisations facing as many issues of consensus and power distribution as their elders. For example, when the youth-led Green World Youth Day program was being developed, the team of young organisers came into conflict throughout the process on moral stances and personal approaches as well as control and workload distribution. Like their older counterparts in other teams and organisations, these young organisers dealt with these problems as minimally as possible in order to implement the project. They did not show more or less capability in conflict management than was generally observed in the movement. In some instances, this belief in the power of 'youth action' meant that youth were more reluctant to join committees and leadership structures which they perceived as boring and hampering their desire for action. This perception combined with the use of different communication methods is creating a uniquely youth driven aspect of the interfaith ecology movement alongside the more traditional structures of the movement.

During the course of this research the new Melbourne interfaith youth organisation, InterAction, was formed and incorporated. As the name suggests, these interfaith youth participants had grown weary of the dialogue and discussion oriented forums that characterise the interfaith scene in the Melbourne region; instead they sought to make

dialogue an organic outcome of working together on social and ecological causes. The two first projects of this organisation was the building of a permaculture garden followed by a recycled goods fundraising fair for a variety of charities addressing homelessness in Melbourne. This development demonstrates the benefits of youth action orientation for the interfaith ecology movement insofar as it highlights the environment as an easily accessible 'practical' cause and physical site for action allowing such groups to realise their goals of practical cooperation.

InterAction was inspired by the service model of the Interfaith Youth Core (*sic.*). This organisation began in 1998, in the early stages of global interfaith networking demonstrating how youth in interfaith have been active in developing interfaith ecology since its inception. The organisation educates and supports participants in pluralist environmental and social actions:

Instead of focusing a dialogue on political or theological differences, we build relationships on the values that we share, such as hospitality and caring for the Earth, and how we can live out those values together to contribute to the betterment of our community.²⁶

Specific youth action focus in organisations serves to dually strengthen youth participation and isolate it from mainstream participation. The youth interest in the environment and the format it undertook in the URI stands as an example of this trend.

INSTANTIATION 2: MODES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION IN THE URI

The URI has a centralised 'hub' in San Francisco from which it supports regional offices, raises funds and designs programs. The hub connects with the regions by sending staff to regional assemblies to learn about regional issues and activities and connect people in the regions to the hub on specific projects. The executive director of URI attended the South East Asia Pacific Regional Assembly and invited me to become a representative on the organisation's Global Environment Satellite. The satellites were developed by the global trustees and president of the URI so that specific issues could be addressed by committees of experts within the organisation and across different regions. These satellites advise the global trustees on the relationship between these issues and peace between religions in various contexts. They design program ideas for the organisation to better support targeted actions in the global network and thus hold an important leadership place in the organisation. Throughout this research I participated in the monthly conference call meeting for the environment satellite which has undertaken an investigation of the

25 Religions for Peace: <http://www.religionsforpeace.org/initiatives/global-youth-network/>
26 Interfaith Youth Core: http://www.ifyc.org/about_core

environmental work of cooperation circles, formed partnerships with active interfaith ecology organisations such as Interfaith Power and Light on practical projects, and developed a seed grants program to encourage and enable cooperation circles to undertake environmental projects. As evident at the 2008 Young Leaders Program, the URI has many youth members who are keenly interested in the environment, many of whom undertake environmentally focused work in their communities. The satellite was set up to advise the President and the Global Council on environmental programs, activities and issues and thus holds an influential position within the organisation. The satellite was not, however, able to attract and retain youth participation.

Participation of youth in URIs virtual communications such as chatrooms on various themes, social networking through the website, and the specific youth communication networks is stronger than participation by older members. While youth are not represented on the environment satellite, they are involved in environmental discussions and sharing of action and beliefs through other means. The youth chat on the theme of the environment held on July 25th, 2010, for example, attracted youth participants from Israel, Pakistan, Australia, Palestine, Philippines, USA, Morocco, Luxemburg and Argentina. The edited sample from this two hour chat below illustrates how such communication forums bring in a range of participants who engage with multiple aspects of the theme. The participants touch on important issues to the interfaith ecology movement that intersect with their own beliefs and theologies. They are able to proceed with a strong dialogue around these themes:

K: i think monotheistic religions in general advocate dominion over the earth.

P: one teaching i like about Thich Nhat Hanh is how he describes the sunshine becoming the plant and when we consume the plant, we consume the sunshine and sunshine becomes part of who we are.

D: i agree

E: i don't think we can change that dominion idea easily. it is at the core of our lifestyles and is spreading all over the world now - our global economic and trade system depends on eco-externalities.

K: we don't need to change it. but live with it.

D: but there are people working to change that, i hope they do

S: i think we need to become more aware of all the processes involved in the making of the things we consume

K: to know that to have dominion comes a responsibility.

I: modern man has forgotten that we are all at equal footing with the rest of creation. there's no hierarchy actually. We've lost the Sacred Feminine values of seeing everything as alive, of seeing everything in nature as divine, as an ally

S: the price we are paying for things does not include the price of all the resources that were exploited and people that were affected by the waste produced along the way

K: I wouldn't call AIDS my ally.

K: Or cancer.

I: at least a teacher

S: we have to realize that we will face the consequences of our short-term vision eventually... that will change the "dominion" myth

K: i don't believe it's a myth.

S: i like this quote from julia butterfly hill, "when we throw things away, there is no away..."

E: i wonder if humanity will need a huge crisis before fundamental change happens...

S: how so?

K: There are crises all the time.

P: I think that is just one interpretation. In whole, there is a symbiosis that is taught. there is a difference between being a "steward" and having "dominion."

I: the key is to live in harmony with nature, not control nature

E: one that affects those in power- crises that affect poor people are sadly ignored...²⁷

This detailed chat of approximately 7000 words was later posted in the youth section of the URI website for others to read. Youth dialogue in this way and through these technologies is becoming not only a rich site of encounter that is increasingly accessible and affordable, but also a recordable dialogue that is able to build and for further ideas to develop and be shared.

The myth that youth in interfaith ecology are only interested in action is dispelled by these dialogues – dialogue is important to youth, but it needs to be couched in terms and through media that they find accessible and inviting. Traditional modes of organisation, such as advisory committee structures of mixed ages, were less likely to appeal to young participants in the interfaith ecology movement.

27 URI Young Leaders Program:
http://www.uri.org/the_latest/2010/07/interfaith_actions_for_the_environment [grammar quoted as in original chat room]

Even within an action oriented framework and with youth-led initiatives, there is no certainty that youth participation will be strong. A local example of this was the Green World Youth Day (GWYD) project in 2008. The team of young organisers from Young People for Development came from England, Philippines, France and Vietnam. They sought to build a team of local youth to work with them on the process of designing the immersion education program for international youth in the lead up to the Catholic World Youth Day. While all other parts of the program were highly successful, engaging local youth was a key challenge. The GWYD team found it easier to attract young international volunteers to their program but failed to attract Australian youth. One lead organiser reflected on this issue:

We had several objectives, one was to build a local team of young people and to create a team spirit and get to know each other better while raising awareness of these green issues and social issues; how to participate and educate. We tried to achieve this in many ways. We had three participants from Footscray but that was all, the young people here were very hard to engage. We had made it free for them to participate. The biggest challenge of the program was to involve local young people.²⁸

Organising team leader, Kins Aperece offers some explanations for this gap in participation at the local level. She attributes it largely to the aging of the Catholic parish in which the project was based and the divided interests of the youth into more evangelically focused youth organisations and programming elsewhere. The trend of GWYD indeed reflected the overall participation of young people in World Youth Day who were largely international with lower than anticipated participation rates from Australian youth.²⁹

The parish from which GWYD operated is located in one of the most highly culturally diverse and highly socio-economically disadvantaged areas of Melbourne. Kins describes the impact of ethnic division among the youth which affected participation:

To put that into context, this parish is an older parish most of the young people here have moved out already or ... are already involved in their own groups. One example, in the Philippines community here the youth have to be under the 'Youth for Christ' and so they have a strong loyalty to the Youth for Christ movement. The Vietnamese also have their own group so this is a reality that we also have to deal with in this parish, with the divisions between the ethnic groupings.³⁰

Kins' explanation reflects the complexity of interfaith ecology work as it intersects with social and cultural trajectories of age, class, ethnicity, language and special interest in the diverse context of Australian society and the Melbourne region.

28 Fieldwork interview: Anon., Green World Youth Day

The trends and patterns of youth participation in the movement are important to consider as they define the future of the movement as these 'young leaders' become stronger movement drivers. In a dialogue session at the Globalisation for the Common Good Conference, a Muslim leader, active in spreading interfaith understanding and peace in the community, captured the significance of intergenerational relationships for the movement in one simple phrase: 'dialogue only lasts one generation.' His powerful sentiment was that interfaith dialogue and understanding must be experienced by every generation first-hand in order to keep the flame of peace alive in our multicultural society. If the flame is allowed to be extinguished by failing to include and mentor a new generation of future community leaders, it is difficult to reignite. The effort to focus organisational development on flexible structures that directly encourage and foster youth leadership on action-based projects, especially in key global organisations, indicates a strong future for the global interfaith ecology movement. Locally, these trends are beginning to take shape and provide more opportunities for youth specific involvement that is running alongside, but distinct from, general interfaith ecology participation. The movement needs to continue to evolve more effective ways of developing mentoring relationships across generations to generate a sense of multi-aged community in order to effectively transfer knowledge and garner energy for the equally important areas of action, dialogue and strategic organisation.

GENDER

Gender issues are sensitive within the interfaith movement and are approached with various strategies including tokenism, segregation and recognition. They have also been an issue in the history of the environment movement, with women protesting against the male dominance of political and social organising over the 1970s – 1980s and turning to the development of environmental justice and eco-feminist actions and critiques.³¹ Many of the issues surrounding gender equality in the interfaith and environment movements stem from the inherent 'gender order' of political and major religious institutions. Connell describes the 'world gender order' as the 'structure of relationships that interconnect the gender regimes of institutions, and the gender orders of local societies, on the world scale.'³² Religious institutions are strong perpetuators of this order and even those institutions that now ordain women carry the legacy of their recent history and have few

29 Ang, 'Youth ministry in the wake of World Youth Day'
30 Fieldwork interview: Kins Aperece, Green World Youth Day
31 Pezzullo and Sandler, 'Environmental Justice Challenge' 9
32 Connell, *Masculinities*, xxi

women faith-leaders, especially in high office. During the term of this study, the Anglican Archdiocese of Melbourne consecrated the first female bishop in Victoria. While this was a significant milestone for women's leadership, the faith leader positions in Melbourne's faith communities remain significantly male dominated.

This observation is supported by Cahill *et al.* in the 2004 *Safeguarding Australia* report. They found that 'the role of women did not emerge as an issue of serious concern in the consultation with religious leaders, but it did emerge as a significant issue in the public consultation – many saw it as an issue of serious concern.'³³ This imbalance flows onto the leadership and representation within the interfaith movement as when departments, conference organisers and organisation or education leaders seek out faith representatives they turn first to religious faith leaders. Faith leaders are most commonly asked to participate in the movement because they are easily identifiable and hold a representative capacity officially sanctioned by their religious institution. A manager from the Victorian Multicultural Commission noted this dilemma; he recognised the importance of approaching faith leaders in their representative capacity – failing to do so would indicate a lack of respect for the participating religious institutions and their internal structures – but also understood the gendered exclusions of this participation. In effect, this situation translates to a significant split in power and work within the interfaith movement where mostly male faith leaders are in positions of power and figurehead leadership, but the movement is driven and led in actuality by a significantly female majority who are rarely awarded decision making power or the ability to officially represent their faith.³⁴

Also carrying a legacy of patriarchy are academic institutions. Prominent academics in interfaith dialogue, as both researchers and participants, are likely to be male and are often former or current faith-leaders in addition to their academic roles. They are also overwhelmingly Christian – another factor of inherited cultural homogeneity in the 'ivory tower.' Again, these academic leaders are most often supported by a largely female body of volunteers who action decisions and create the environments for the dialogue to take place. In the Melbourne context, academics interested in interfaith ecology more specifically are on the contrary, mostly female. This indicates that the newer and less structured and religiously bound academic space of interfaith ecology is providing an opening for female academics in a variety of religion, anthropology, ecology and feminist fields to explore this emerging intersection of themes.

33 Cahill et al., *Safeguarding Australia*, 111

34 Fieldwork notes: 5-9-2009

While this is a hopeful trend for interfaith ecology, the movement is still subject to gendered power imbalances of its context. Whereas for men faith leadership, academic credentials, recognition, representation and power tend to align, for women in faith communities, especially those from more disadvantaged Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, the opposite trajectories of low levels of education, non-recognition of work, and few opportunities for representation align. Sikh woman and active leader in both interfaith and interfaith ecology circles, Jessiee Kaur Singh, describes her frustration with this inequality below. She laments her feeling of being excluded from the decision-making processes and cites the role of women in her religious tradition to highlight their sacred importance which she believes is undermined by patriarchal structures in many interfaith organisations:

The patriarchal leaders that we've had in the political scene in our government and in the interfaith scene ... They are all heavy men. And that is why I have to ask, 'is it because I am a Sikh, and not part of the majority? Or is it because I don't have a PhD and I'm not working for a university? Or is it because I'm a woman?' Within my own religion, women play an important role. Women added the sugar into the holy water, when the first baptism took place with water, it was the guru's wife who added the sugar to bring all the feminine qualities into human beings.³⁵

In further describing barriers to her success in the movement and working with male faith and academic leaders she states:

They are based on patriarchal power and the fear of someone else. ... I have been feeling completely left out. They want me to pay my own fare to come in and give them advice, like this little voice from one of the communities. So they use me, but I am not allowed to be a part of it.³⁶

Many women in the movement are accepting of these gendered power structures and are accustomed to working within them. They tend to describe their work in terms that justify and confirm their position and their satisfaction with it. Geraldine*, an active movement driver described her involvement of over 30 years in the interfaith ecology work as follows:

I've never chosen to be a very visible person, nobody sees me as one of the shining lights of this movement. I have chosen to work at the grassroots, and I've chosen to just involve myself with people who come into my life. Part of my spirituality is to let people come into my life who are meant to be in my life at any particular time for the purposes and the healing of earth and

35 Fieldwork interview: Jessiee Kaur Singh, COMMON

36 Fieldwork interview: Jessiee Kaur Singh, COMMON

relationships. That is central to who I am, so that means I let happen what happens. I try not to control it.³⁷

While this approach is common among women in the movement, and is a traditional role for women in patriarchal societies, women tend to express varying levels of dissatisfaction with it. Geraldine* explained to me on another occasion that, while she managed the attitudes of the males she worked with in the movement, she did find many of their behaviours sexist. Her strategy was to explain and thereby justify these behaviours through the avenue of the cultural-religious identity. She would thus 'understand' that men of patriarchal traditions were socialised to wield power and hold leadership kudos. Geraldine's* strategy allowed her to remain within the movement without harbouring resentment as she retained a sense of inner-empowerment of being able to recognise and manage this apparent aspect of 'working across difference.' In an incident where another participant was angry about a sexist incident and wished to take action on it, Geraldine* described the woman's approach as based on the negative experiences of environmental activism in the 1960s and 1970s where sexism was more prominent within a range a community and political organisations. 'Many of us were burnt at that time,' she explained, 'and some of us have never really recovered.' She went on to describe how in her opinion this woman was not managing the situation well because of these past experiences.³⁸ Strategies and approaches such as these in the movement may indicate why incidents and experiences are not often addressed and tend only to be privately acknowledged among women. They also point to the success of women as the 'glue' that holds these organisations together through tolerance and understanding.

Several women expressed concern during the course of this research over sexist tendencies in different organisations, including those from organisations and institutions outside of the participant groups. The types of sexism more commonly cited included the devaluing of women's work in the organisation, men 'talking down' to women in meetings and male leaders failing to publically or officially acknowledge the support they receive from women in their role.

In relation to women's issues, the prevention of violence against women, female genital mutilation, economic exploitation and other oppressive practices were not addressed in forums or by eco-faith or interfaith organisations in Melbourne during the term of this research. Women's identity politics in a multicultural context, the roles of women in different faith traditions, women in mythology and theology and their ritual or symbolic significance, and women's work in peace making and other social justice projects and

37 Fieldwork interview: Anon.

38 Fieldwork notes: 17-10-09

movements were more commonly discussed themes. These latter themes dominated the 18 sessions related to women and women's leadership at the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions, reflecting the non-confrontational gender politics and culture of both the interfaith and interfaith ecology movements. Dialogue guidelines, such as those published by JCMA state that participants should 'respect the differences among religions and spiritual expressions. Participants will try to speak of their own faith perspective, leaving others to speak of theirs.'³⁹ This guideline seeks to limit stereotypes and assumptions that can lead to misunderstanding and conflict in dialogue.

Non-confrontational themes that focus more on relationship building at the interpersonal rather than socio-political level can be seen prominently in the 2008 JCMA Women's Conference themed 'Daughters of Faith' which is described by the organisation as:

The opportunity for women's experience and perspective in the conversation of faith and hope towards the future of humanity, and the opportunity to explore ways in which women make a difference.⁴⁰

This conference brought 45 women from the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam together for a residential conference. The need for this conference became apparent to JCMA leaders when it was noted that women in patriarchal traditions often feel unable to participate in dialogue and allow male leaders to speak for them at forums and events. As Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black explained:

It is clear in the more traditional ends of the religious spectrum that women find some subjects difficult and embarrassing to talk about, and often women also find it more difficult to get a word in than men. So there was an interest in a women's Jewish, Christian, Muslim group so we set up a women's conference.⁴¹

The women's conference provides an important forum for women's solidarity across religious and cultural divides through the sharing of life-experiences and friendship. This model has significant potential for the development of the women's movement in multicultural societies and under globalisation more broadly.

The interfaith ecology movement is grappling with the gender equity issues of the interfaith and environment movements and general social barriers for women in society. It is, however, a special space within the interfaith movement where female organisational leaders are coming to the fore by virtue of the position of this movement in the third sector, operating at the grassroots level and rising in-between institutions where

39 Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association: <http://www.jcma.org.au/prindia.html> JCMA Principles of dialogue

40 Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association: <http://www.jcma.org.au/nwconf.html> The 2008 JCMA Women's Conference

41 Fieldwork interview: Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, JCMA

gendered power structures are flatter and representational capacity more dynamic. One prominent example is the significant role of the Pachamama Alliance in the global interfaith ecology movement. This network connects Indigenous rights issues, eco-feminism and rainforest activism. They have played an important role in the United Religions Initiative by carrying the green message to dialogue assemblies. Pachamama (peace mother) works towards 'bringing forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just human presence on Planet Earth.' Their twofold mission is to: '1/ preserve the Earth's tropical rainforests by empowering the Indigenous people who are its natural custodians. 2/ To contribute to the creation of a new global vision of equity and sustainability for all.'⁴²

While there are many benefits to Women's forums and networks, there is also a negative side if it becomes common practice to segregate women's issues only to women's groups and forums. The tendency to sideline women's issues came to the fore in this research in the organising of a women's discussion panel for the Globalisation for the Common Good Conference.

INSTANTIATION 3: GLOBALISATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD CONFERENCE WOMEN'S PANEL

Late in the planning process of this conference in 2008, the mostly, but not exclusively, male organising team noted the problem of low numbers of women presenters. The discussion centred on how to find women to act as mediators or facilitators so as to balance this effect. Another female participant noted that this may be perceived as tokenistic and I made the suggestion that in order to avoid tokenism the organisers could invite women to participate in a panel where they could discuss the theme of womanhood in their faith. I was then charged with arranging this panel. I found that although women had not applied to speak at the event as men had done, when approached they were very happy to participate and I was able to arrange with relative ease for Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Aboriginal-Christian women to speak under the facilitation of a female academic in women's studies at very late notice. This indicated that a high quality of female participation can be easily sought with some willingness to approach women.

Issues arose, however, when the program organisers located the session as a concurrent panel in a small room. Several of the speakers had expected to be at a plenary session and the placement in a concurrent session seemed to reinforce rather than dispel the possible charge of tokenism. Furthermore, two of the speakers were unhappy with the arrangement that unless they were able to pay the registration fee they would need to

42 Pachamama Alliance: <http://www.pachamama.org/content/view/2/4/>

leave as soon as their panel had ended. They felt that in only being asked to speak and then leave they were not being included in the 'dialogue.' In this instance, the economic restraints placed on the event acted to exclude these participants from full participation. The venue that was provided was inadequate for the size of the audience which outnumbered any other session and attendees were left with standing room only. Only a handful of male participants attended the session.

This situation revealed several barriers relating to women's participation in the movement: firstly, women's issues and voices were more valued by event participants than was expected by event organisers. Secondly, almost all of the audience were women revealing that while women were under-represented among panellists and speakers, they were over represented among attendees. This imbalance is common to interfaith and eco-faith events. The absence of men in this audience indicated that men at the event were either not interested in the panel or assumed that because the panel title included the word 'women' that they were not expected or welcome to attend. While both reasons were likely to have influenced attendance, conversations with several males at the event indicated that the latter was also a common factor in low male attendance. This aspect of the movement culture could be addressed by featuring women's issues and voices in general and plenary sessions of events to break down the assumption that women's issues are only relevant to women.

In their capacity as community organisers, women are the active drivers and glue of the interfaith ecology movement and are leading its development. The movement is a conducive grassroots space for women's participation and leadership to thrive. It also provides a networking opportunity for women locally and globally to act on the joint issues of peace and environmental justice, of which women are long term activists. There are, however, significant gender inequities seeping into the movement through its association with the structures of the interfaith movement more broadly. This centres on a gendered division of labour and power in which women's work is systemically under-recognised. Bringing these issues to light in the movement requires some affirmative action measures such as: seeking out speakers rather than waiting for them to approach the event; providing some economic assistance to ensure inclusivity; and, perhaps most significantly, featuring women and women's issues in the mainstream dialogues of the movement in order to breakdown the culture of sidelining which the movement has inherited from the patriarchal traditions and gendered societal norms. Through these mechanisms the interfaith ecology movement has the opportunity to influence the gender struggles taking place within patriarchal religious organisations through acting as a

leadership development hub and demonstrative model for gender equity in a spiritual and religious community context.

ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

The intersection of ethnic and cultural identity with religious identity is the most complex diversity issue within the interfaith ecology and broader interfaith movement. Unlike age and gender, ethno-cultural identity is difficult to measure and analyse and is largely dependent upon an individual's sense of self and community affiliation. The relationship between ethnicity and religion is often discussed by interfaith ecology participants and, as I will explore here, there have been attempts to manage this factor of diversity. While mostly well intentioned, such attempts have been ambiguous in their benefit and in some instances perpetuate stereotypes and prejudice. While the clearer barriers to participation such as language and finance can be identified, the more insidious barriers, including levels of tolerance, types of organising, and constructs of authenticity are less approachable. The movement lacks direction in dealing with this area of inclusivity and participants tend to generate different pragmatic ways of defining and shaping their organisation's ethno-cultural diversity based on their personal views and experiences.

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSION

The language of the local and international interfaith ecology movement is English. Communications are rarely translated and interpreters are not often used at events, largely due to a prohibitive cost for community organisations. Global interfaith organisations actively encourage the use of English at events and in communications as it is recognised as the global language. While this practice is exclusive, the movement participants acknowledge English as the most pragmatic option for global networking. A leader in the URI discussed this issue with me. He was concerned that the Indigenous members from South American countries could not properly participate because they could not speak English. He was considering whether the limited resources would be more beneficially channelled into translation services or into assisting these participants to learn English, which would be empowering for them in other global forums, such as the Indigenous people's global forums. The URI Charter is translated into multiple languages, as are most policy documents and key statements from government and larger organisations. The dialogues themselves, however, tend to be Anglophone. This situation indicates the underlying assumption that while grassroots movement participants may

not be able to read English, those representing them in dialogue and committee communications do.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, many participants recognise that ethnic and cultural differences translate into different ways of communicating, working and relating. Awareness of such differences is important to how organisational structures and processes are developed and upheld. Dandenong Interfaith Network President, Helen Heath, describes the inherent difficulties in this process:

I think sometimes there is feeling of ‘why don’t they network in a certain way? Why don’t they come to the meetings?’ My approach has been to say ‘people will network however they can.’ For example there are some faith representatives who don’t come to the monthly meetings. It is either not their way – it’s a western style business meeting – or they are very busy in their own communities. But they will post information to us, they host tours and they do come to the annual gathering which is what we really encourage all faith leaders to attend ... There are others who will say, ‘no, they should be coming to the meetings.’ I try to encourage people to see it more openly.⁴³

Following this trend, other organisations reported that while those who are attracted to planning events and regular meetings tend to be more homogeneously white and middle class, those to whom programs are delivered and those who will participate in events ranging from panels to arts and music, are more ethnically and culturally, as well as religiously, diverse. Anne Boyd describes this distinction for EarthSong:

There are the two different categories of participants: the ones with whom I’m invited to work within schools and parishes and the ones who come to our meetings or subscribe to the journal. In the first category they are a highly diverse group. When I was at Noble Park there were Somalis, Vietnamese, and many other backgrounds ... In general the second categories of participants are Anglo.⁴⁴

The most ethnically diverse management committee I worked with or observed in this research was that of the Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network (COMMON). Then President of COMMON, Jessie Kaur Singh, actively adopted an empowerment agenda in engaging CALD community members to lead this organisation. In particular she worked extensively in supporting an Indigenous Elder to work as Vice President and then take on the President role in the third year of the organisation. This type of support work requires considerable time and effort in empowering individual CALD community members, adapting to their needs and creating the space for them to take on leadership

43 Fieldwork interview: Helen Heath, Dandenong Interfaith Network

44 Fieldwork interview: Anne Boyd, EarthSong

roles, at first figuratively and later in actuality. Jessiee sees her role in the movement as generating these spaces for CALD and disadvantaged community voices:

I am trying to involve people ... more strongly from the beginning. I learnt that I should share my leadership qualities, and really inspire others too. And try to maintain a link so they don't feel a gap after they have been involved ... I am using the experiences that I have had to develop better leadership.⁴⁵

As a Malaysian migrant of Indian heritage Jessiee is an example of how people from CALD communities have special skills in empowering others to take on leadership roles and have their voices heard. In relation to connecting with Indigenous people in particular, many CALD communities are free from the negative associations and history of colonisation linked to the Christian Anglo communities and, therefore, can act effectively as mediators in reconciliation processes. Jessiee describes how her empowerment skills derived from her own cultural and ethnic heritage:

I'm very fortunate to have been born in Malaysia. So I bring that experience of having lived with ancient traditions, right from Chinese culture, to the Muslim culture. Then I lived in England for 10 years and now I've been here 28 years. Being Australian I can directly see the Indigenous people and their sufferings ... I went to the University of South Australia and did my postgraduate diploma in social science and counselling. In my community based project I actually did Pitchinjara language. I do speak a few languages so that helps me to really understand the issues ... Whoever is down trodden, whoever is the underdog is the one that I will be looking out for.⁴⁶

COMMON's interfaith ecology events link interfaith community engagement with Indigenous people and issues in the context of eco and social justice. The past four conference themes have been: Healing Love in Action, 2007; Sharing our Space, 2008; Sharing our Water, 2009; and Sharing our Land, 2010. All of these events hold environmental and social justice discussions together with ritual, ceremony and prayer. COMMON events include alternative cultural ways of communicating through story-telling, arts, ritual, dance and sharing of experiences. This aims to break down the western cultural divide between 'performer' and 'audience' and rather create an environment for holistic experiences. These events tended to be more inclusive of CALD communities in interfaith ecology and produce powerful experiences of bonding across diversity as one participant describes:

As I drove Shankutala home she told me, "My heart feels full" and I, too, felt the conference had with me filled the cup that could see light and love in the world once more... It feels like

45 Fieldwork interview: Jessiee Kaur Singh, COMMON

46 Fieldwork interview: Jessiee Kaur Singh, COMMON

this is the beginning of joining people to support one another, creating connections that will bring people to feel they can be at one and always feel loved.⁴⁷

In accordance with COMMON's organising method, Prof. Camilleri identified the ability to form a diverse team as an effective method for engaging groups and generating a sense of ownership for the communities: 'The more diverse the organising committee, the more diverse the participants will be. This is relevant across the board, not just in relation to religious diversity but also in terms of age, gender and other factors.'⁴⁸

Both Islam and Christianity are wide ranging faiths globally and share a history of expansionism and colonialism that now means there are a vast variety of diverse ethnic and national adherents within these belief systems. As a multicultural society in the Asia Pacific region, Melbourne is home to many culturally defined churches and mosques. These communities are often hard-to-reach; their representatives stretched and their members suffering high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and low English proficiency. Interest in interfaith ecology is clearly more prominent among established and assimilated groups who have overcome initial settlement issues of sound housing, employment and education, to become more active in the mainstream community. Rabbi Keren-Black further describes the difficulty in engaging hard-to-reach communities in JCMAs residential conferences:

We haven't been specifically targeting immigrant communities. We do have a problem with maintaining balance at the conferences. We are oversubscribed with Christians and it is hard to keep the numbers even with the other faiths ... Although there are a lot of Muslims, for cultural and economic reasons it is more difficult for us to get through to them. So we do struggle to get enough Muslims and Jews. We could potentially target immigrant groups but the conference is run in English and if they are not comfortable with English they might find it difficult to follow what is going on. The original intention when we started with 15 people of each faith was to identify 3 different age groups and to say that ideally we would have 5 from each age group and that would also be people who were students, academics, lay congregation members and religious leaders. So there would be a mix. We also try to at least be cognisant of male/female balance. So there is that element, but the truth is you can do that more amongst the Christians because when you haven't got enough people you take whoever you can get.⁴⁹

Similarly, Prof. Camilleri explains the difficulty of attracting Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist participants to the Globalisation for the Common Good Conference. While the organising team had ensured that these faiths were well represented among the speakers at the

47 COMMON: <http://www.commonaustralia.com/pastevents/pastevents05.html>

48 Fieldwork interview: Prof. Joe Camilleri, Globalisation for the Common Good Conference

49 Fieldwork interview: Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, JCMSA

conference, this did not mean that the conference was well attended by the community members:

I don't think we were successful in getting a sufficiently sizable participation from the Jewish tradition, although we did try. We got speakers, I think we may have gotten one or two to come but I think we could have done better. The Muslim contribution and participation was also small. Mind you, this is true of all comparable initiatives ... They are small and everyone wants them to come to what is being organised and they have limited resources. Especially with Muslims and even more so with Buddhists. You're up against it all the time, but still, while you are able to handle it reasonably well at the level of presenters, round table discussions and keynote speakers, I don't think it filters through to the wider participation.⁵⁰

As Prof. Camilleri notes, low participation from smaller and more marginalised populations was common across research groups and the general eco-faith and interfaith movements in Melbourne. There is room for some more focused work in engaging these communities in interfaith work rather than only targeting the most likely participants.

Disadvantaged CALD communities require a stronger voice and support within interfaith ecology. Working with these communities would provide greater opportunities for organisations to connect with newly arrived refugees and aid in their settlement process. Targeting projects to these ends is likely to prove a more effective avenue than inviting representation at events. Helen Heath describes how she hopes the Dandenong Interfaith Network will move more into actions that connect communities now that the network has established strong principles of interfaith understanding. Moving into community service initiatives would be relevant to this region which has the highest levels of socio-economic disadvantage in metropolitan Melbourne:

I think one of the challenges of the network is that we are very good at faith leader to faith leader contact but we need to go to another level where we share our communities with each other – that might be the strategy for the next 5 years. When I joined the network it was around the time of their group identity phase. People were looking at 'who am I?' 'What am I doing here?' and 'Where are we headed?' questions. Then 'what do we do?' I would like to see the network reach out more to each other's communities in the future.⁵¹

Action-oriented projects are beginning to be recognised as important to the movement entering the next stage of interfaith dialogue as experience rather than purely forum discussion. This indicates an opening for interfaith ecology projects to be utilised in forging deeper and more socially aware interfaith relations through service activities in interfaith organisations and networks.

50 Fieldwork interview: Prof. Joe Camilleri, Globalisation for the Common Good Conference

51 Fieldwork interview: Helen Heath, Dandenong Interfaith Network

HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

The relationship between diverse ethnic and cultural participation and the social justice agenda of the interfaith ecology movement is recognised and managed by organisations to varying degrees and in different ways. A perceived mismatch between a person's ethnic heritage and their religious identity is a difficult issue within the movement as participants balance respect for the choice of religion with a sense of entitlement between certain ethno-cultures and their religious heritage.

On several occasions I witnessed claims from movement participants of non-western backgrounds that those of a 'Christian heritage' (meaning those who were white) should remain within the Christian tradition and avoid converting to Buddhism or Hinduism. Such converts are active in interfaith dialogue and eco-faith circles because they tend to have a general interest in spirituality and religion but have become converts to an eastern tradition in an attempt to distance themselves from the history of the Christian tradition. They perceive Christianity as restrictive or violent – the history of oppression or violence in their newly adopted faith is rarely acknowledged. These converts are also interested in interfaith dialogue because they tend to have to 'live' interfaith dialogue in their everyday lives with friends and family, as one convert participant describes:

I come from a family where we have lots of different traditions. My cultural heritage is Christian, and I am one of three siblings, I'm a Buddhist, my sister's husband is Indian and they are very active in the Baha'i community, and have been for many years. Then my brother's wife is Jewish and she belongs to the Leo Baeck Centre and their children are very active in that community. So I have lived interfaith in my family.⁵²

Participants whose identity is strongly based in an ethno-religious group can find this freedom and diversity confronting. One such participant made the following claim in reference to an Anglo Buddhist: 'These westerners are so lost, they need to reclaim their own religion and not come over into ours, they don't really understand what it is all about and think that they can just flit around to different ones as they please – there is no commitment there.'⁵³ While this prejudice is often based on first hand experiences of western converts showing interest in a religion or community and then abandoning it, several participants I encountered tended to generalise this to all converts, even those whom I knew to be devout in their practice. The Tibetan Buddhist who was referred to above, for example, was not a convert and was born into a family where the parents were long term converts. He was studying to become a monk in the tradition.

52 Fieldwork interview: Alex Butler, 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions

53 Fieldwork notes: de-identified 102

Some movement participants perceive conversion as an attempt to colonise a tradition with a western New Age perspective and therefore do not wish to acknowledge such participants as genuine. At an interfaith ecology event, organisers were disappointed that no one from a Buddhist ethnic background had come to make an opening prayer. Afterwards I pointed out that several white converts to Buddhism were actually in attendance and would have been able to offer an appropriate prayer. The head organiser responded by stating that they did not want to represent these converts as Buddhists because they were inauthentic and that giving them air-time would somehow devalue the event. This was the most overt case of this type of exclusion I encountered in this research.⁵⁴ Western converts to Islam are well respected in interfaith circles. This is perhaps because, unlike Buddhism or Hinduism, Islam was not tied up in the New Age movement and those converts are thus freed of suspicion of merely converting to satisfy a social trend.

Some converts are themselves uncomfortable with adopting a Hindu or Buddhist identity as they recognise a difference between their engagement with these faiths as a practice within a western culture and the adherents who are both religiously and culturally imbued with the tradition. These converts often refer to themselves as Anglo-Buddhist or Western-Hindu in the same way as some Australian migrants might refer to themselves as Greek- Australian or Chinese-Australian.

While the coupling of ethnic culture and religion can tend towards discrimination or stereotype, decoupling is also problematic as it means that hard-to-reach cultural or ethnic groups within the community are more easily rendered invisible. This issue is reflected in the differing responses of two participants below on the question of organisational diversity. This participant focuses on the ethno-cultural diversity and the barriers faced by CALD groups:

Perhaps one of the barriers is that it is one of many things that a community does. It mightn't get a high priority Remember there are lots of other issues of refugees and asylum seekers, housing and other social justice issues and community issues here. So the faith leaders are busy dealing with those. They are a lot more immediate for them then finding out about other faiths.⁵⁵

The second participant describes the diversity of an event organising team as follows:

It was quite diverse. Emmet* and I are Buddhist, Amy* is a Christian. Josie* would also identify as a Buddhist, so that is 3 Buddhists. I don't know how Kelly* would describe herself, but she is certainly very involved with lots of Buddhists and Buddhist teachers, but also with teachers

54 Fieldwork notes: de-identified 087

55 Fieldwork interview: Helen Heath, Dandenong Interfaith Network

from the Hindu and New Age traditions. Ericka* is a Baha'i and I believe the rest of the staff are not religious... So we had a reasonable diversity.⁵⁶

Whilst they may represent different religions, all of the above mentioned team members are Anglo Australians. The systemic barriers noted in the first participant response remain invisible here under a guise of genuine diversity.

This issue of how organisations represent themselves and how they are judged as authentic is pervasive in the movement and not easily resolvable. It raises questions of how the language of representation and identity is used to define the movement and its boundaries of participation and internal power distributions. As in gender politics this 'personal' stance on the relative fluidity or otherwise of authentic religious identity is also often inadvertently 'political.' As such, the identity politics of the movement – along with the interpersonal relationships that span this diversity and the individual identities that transgress the categorical boundaries of diversity – will continue to evolve through struggle as well as dialogue among interfaith ecology participants.

CONCLUSION: STANDPOINT NODES

Defining the diversity of the interfaith ecology movement is highly complex with as many standpoints as there are participants. Organisations that are guided by social justice and empowerment principles in relation to age, gender and ethno-cultural inclusion, are more likely to be open to new and different ways of congregating, creating and sharing leadership. The more adaptive and flexible an organisation is to different styles of participation, the more diverse it will become not only in terms of the makeup of its members but in the collective work they produce and the structures of organisational development they forge. In line with the vision of interfaith ecology, diversity under globalisation is giving rise to new types of organising but it is also erecting unknown and complex barriers to participation and new and uncertain forms of identity.

In the interfaith ecology movement, project teams are purposeful gatherings of people representing multiple and unique standpoints in the matrix of age, gender, ethnicity and culture that intersect with their religious identity. These teams are thus important sites for the fostering of genuine dialogue and exploring these multiple standpoints and their relationship to cooperation in civil society. When teams work together to produce a tangible outcome the planning process brings inherent and sometimes incommensurable

56 Fieldwork interview: Anon.

differences to the fore around expectations, assumptions, norms and methodologies for action. Dialogue in interfaith ecology is no longer centred on abstract discussion of differences but rather on tangible differences embedded in any process of collective creation. Digging into this layered and gritty process of teamwork and the difficult learning and growing experiences found within it will be the subject of the next chapter.

CONTESTED SITES AND STRUGGLES WITHIN THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT

I almost want to cry, it is so awesome that we achieved that. None of us walked off and said 'I can't do this.' We were prepared to engage and grapple with what were really difficult issues. That is staying in dialogue ... The question with dialogue is if you are prepared to bare the pain and if you're prepared to do what you can to move yourself towards the edge of the fish bowl. To ask the questions of what is going on and how can we engage with it in a way that will be life giving. – Carol McDonough, GreenFaith Australia¹

Whereas the utopia towards which interfaith ecology aims characterises relationships across difference as harmonious, the reality of project work and the need to cooperate in achieving practical goals is often characterised by negotiation and 'peace-keeping' in organisational cultures. This sometimes painful process, when leading to a positive outcome and tangible project result, is a strong affirmation and developmental experience for the participants and the organisation. Conflict, however, can also lead to disillusionment and disassociation from the movement, especially when it is based on discrimination and exclusion. Carol McDonough expresses above how the great achievement of the Walking Humbly project team was to stay together and tackle the issues arising between them in the project process. She recognises these issues as learning experiences of how to work across difference and to manage challenges to individual norms and assumptions. Her comments capture the worth of practical project engagement that faces up to the reality of difference at the tangible community and inter-personal level, the level at which we act as diverse and engaged members of the civil society.

1 Fieldwork interview: Carol McDonough, GreenFaith Australia

Working with the Walking Humbly project team that planned a four day journey for eighty-six interfaith participants to the drought affected communities in the south eastern Murray Darling region was an important learning experience for me. This project planning evolved and changed through 2009 and ownership and control of the planning agenda was highly contested. Every aspect of the project from the underpinning ethos of community building to the types of groups and communities it sought to engage, to the ecological issues and sites it presented and the balance of different activities in the itinerary needed to be birthed through dialogue. At each of these laborious points the real differences and divides in attitude and approach as well as culture and religion obstructed a smooth delivery. As the action researcher, I had sought to uphold a flat and inclusive leadership structure throughout this process, and as the planning developed I found my role as mediator increasingly difficult. I was failing to maintain the peace within the team and in many ways the resulting project was as much a product of a political bargaining process as rational planning through shared goals and objectives.

Through this rocky planning process I learnt about the intersection of control and ownership in projects, about how different communication styles and leadership structures are incommensurate and produce conflict in cross-cultural and diverse attitudinal contexts. Mostly, I learnt to accept that interfaith ecology projects seeking to achieve practical outcomes can be muddy and turbulent and, by this very nature, the most authentic site for learning about one's own assumptions as well as those of others. Interfaith ecology at the community level is uneven, organic and dynamic; it can be draining and confronting, but maintaining the process and holding faith in it, means that the achievement of mutual growth through a creatively evolved project outcome is healing and all the more remarkable.

This chapter explores experiences of conflict and friction in the interfaith ecology movement in several forms: Firstly, through the issue of knowledge, in the way different understandings of scientific and environmental knowledge conflict in organisational decision making. Secondly, through the conflict arising from different religious understandings and the way participants define the boundaries of participation. Thirdly, dialogue techniques and their limitations will be presented. These overt and acknowledged techniques will contrast with the passive exclusionist management techniques some participants employ to maintain harmony in organisations. The shadow sides of leadership and idealism in the movement will finally be discussed and the different types of destructive and constructive conflict presented in the various cases reflected upon.

CONFLICT AND KNOWLEDGE

Conflicts within the environmental movement itself testify to the strong political and philosophical differences of participants and the deep tensions these produce. Throughout this research such tensions and disagreements between participants came to the fore. The cases below illustrate how in one instance the conflict was able to be effectively managed and in another it led to the fracturing of the group.

INSTANTIATION 1: GREENFAITH AUSTRALIA'S 'WATER FOR LIFE' SEMINAR SERIES

GreenFaith Australia was established as a community organisation in October 2008 and the new organisation was keen to launch this interfaith ecology initiative with an activity or event. Having no access to funding it was decided that a seminar event where people of different faith traditions shared their historical, spiritual and cultural connection to water would be appropriate. The organising team was made up of a man of a New Age persuasion, under 35, two men of Anglican and Latter Day Saints faiths, one woman of a Quaker faith all over 55 years of age and myself as the action researcher. All of the team was of an Anglo-Celtic heritage. The idea of a launch project grew organically out of ongoing discussions within the group on water issues. We chose the 'water for life' name as it continued the theme of the Green World Youth Day program which had taken place earlier that year, this new program was aimed at bringing the water message to a local faith community audience.

In the initial planning stages the organising team entered into debate around expanding the program to include local water issues such as the then proposed desalination plant in Wonthaggi and the North South pipeline redirecting water from rural areas. While some members of the team wanted to stay clear of political campaigns and 'biased' perspectives, others argued that it was futile to run an event on the theme of water without engaging with the real issues impacting on communities and our future water security. In mediating an inclusive and comprehensive ground for the issue, the team resolved to hold a three part seminar series addressing water from three different angles as their launch event.

This structure enabled us to approach water from several different angles, from the spiritual, including the interfaith panel on water; the environmental and the political, including the Environment Journalist from *The Age* and an environmental scientist; and the social/ community, including the Rural Women's Trust; and an interactive workshop on the intersection of water politics, environment, spirituality and community action. The series was supported by the Darebin Interfaith Network and City Council which provided the venue of the Northcote Town Hall. Without funding for publicity, however, we relied

again on our networks for spreading the invitation flyer and the series attracted a small number of participants.

Through planning the event to include these various aspects and themes the planning team alleviated internal conflict by resituating the issues under debate into the event itself. Instead of the team needing to declare a unified stance on the issues, they instead organised a forum where experts could present differing views for discussion and the participants could actively engage with the questions from different perspectives. While this meant that the team could practically continue with organising the launch event, it also meant that the event did not take a stance or achieve any particular action, ecologically or politically, nor did it allow for any definitive statement on the issues to be collectively agreed. If it had attempted to do so, the team would have needed to determine a mutually acceptable stance rather than an all-inclusive process that would have threatened their tentative relationships within the fledgling organisation.

The seminar series was an important networking exercise for the organisation and through it connections were made with participants from rural communities in Victoria as well as with the Sustainable Living Foundation; both of which seeded future projects and activities.

INSTANTIATION 2: RE-BUNDLING WATER AND LAND

WYC* was a small organisation where the management committee members were participating in multiple small and disparate projects. The organisation did not have a strong strategic direction and was led by the pull of differing participant views and interests. Two members of the management committee participated in the national consultation on the development of a Human Rights Act for Australia in 2009. These members saw that an interfaith ecology organisation could offer a unique perspective on the ethics of community relationship to land and water in a rights framework. As well as attending several consultation meetings, these members dedicated a significant amount of time to researching the various issues of rights relevant to the consultation. They became particularly knowledgeable in the issues and history of water access as a human right, how this right is being eroded in rural areas, and the general trend towards the privatisation of water as disempowering for communities. Based on this knowledge and prior experience in the human rights field, these members produced an in-depth submission document for the consultation which was circulated to the management committee of the organisation.

Following circulation, one of the points in the submission became a point of contention between members: 'Water must be re-bundled with land. Land and water cannot be separated'. This issue is highly complex and controversial in regional Victoria and has enabled a water trading system which has significantly impacted upon communities and in particular farmers with permanent crops. A full understanding of the issue and its impact requires an extensive legal, economic and environmental overview which most other members of WYC* did not have.

Those in support of the statement saw its inclusion as crucial to the integrity of the submission; they felt that the suggestion to remove it was both arrogant and ignorant. When discussed, they expressed frustration with the notion that people who had not researched the issue and had limited understanding of it, could wade in based on opinion and have this part of their work removed. Those who opposed the inclusion of the statement noted that it was politically loaded; they wanted the organisation to remain more neutral on political issues. They also felt pressured to approve a statement of which they did not fully understand the implications and thought it better to remain on more certain ground.

This conflict revealed deeper tensions in the organisation along two key trajectories: 1/ between those with more clear eco-political agendas and those with general environmental interests, and 2/ between those with more decision-making authority and those who contributed more to the work and projects of the organisation. Excerpts from the email exchange below demonstrate the difficulties the organisation was facing around decision-making processes, entitlement to act, knowledge and power, all in relation to an ecologically and politically complex issue:

1: Response to the initial draft by P1:

... there is one sentence which I have removed: 'Water must be re-bundled with land. Land and water cannot and must not be separated.' I do not fully understand it but feel it is dogmatic and probably far too over-simplified and making a particular political point that we would need much more understanding to evaluate fully, and be persuaded of, before putting our name to it. I don't think removing this line negates the point of submitting the document with its many excellent points.

With these points, I am very happy that it should both be submitted and also distributed for others to send in with their own amendments and under their organisational names. I would not, however, be happy to have the document submitted in the name of WYC* if it still contains the line about 'land and water not being separated'.

2: Response to this email by P2:

... If you don't wish the proposal to be submitted with reference to re-bundling, I think we do have an issue. If we withdraw any reference to re-bundling after we have circulated the document with re-bundling in it, explanations could be difficult. It could be construed that WYC* endorses the inequities of water commodification and trading.

... If you had come into the conversation back when we first started talking about this, then we could have explained all this well in advance. Now we are running out of time and it can be a bit difficult in a short time-frame to bring you up to speed. We [The authors] have background and experience - different yet complementary - in human rights and environmental issues which has undergirded this project. In addition, we have both done a lot of talking, reading, thinking, researching and attending legal workshops. This has led us to place our discussion in a Well Being Framework ...

3: Response by P1

... I understand that the current system is failing. To my mind that is not necessarily the same as saying 'Water must be re-bundled with land. Land and water cannot and must not be separated.' Where have you spelled out the implications for the city dwellers (the majority of Australians, after all) if we immediately achieve this demand? (And do bear in mind that I agree that there is a huge injustice going on, and city dwellers should be making do with far less water - as we do!).

When you say that 'If we withdraw any reference to re-bundling after we have circulated the document with re-bundling in it, explanations could be difficult. It could be construed that WYC* endorses the inequities of water commodification and trading.' I suggest that - if that were true, it means the exercise of distributing a draft is pointless. And anyone who draws that conclusion is wrong! If you wanted to add a statement to the effect that 'Members of WYC* are concerned that the separation of land and water has led to gross injustices and needs to be carefully re-examined and at least substantially if not even fully reversed' I would be happy for that to be included. All documents go through changes, often very significant ones, in the process of drafting and consultation.

... this is a major issue that we have not given or got enough resources to deal with adequately. If we simply let anyone draw up a report and give it our imprimatur without due diligence, it is potentially problematic for the survival and development of the organisation. In other words, my serious concern is that we learn to walk before we run, or we will fall over ...

The conflict over this issue continued and spread to another partner organisation and a consensus was never reached as to the inclusion of the sentence on 're-bundling water and land.' Eventually this led to the resignation of the authors from the organisation. This complex and painful experience for the organisation and especially the authors left

participants feeling bewildered as to how to properly handle the issue of knowledge and authority in decision making.

This type of situation is more likely to occur in organisations the more it attracts participants with long histories in environmental activism, or the more its participants become deeply committed to particular environmentalist projects. The key dilemma for the interfaith ecology movement is that while many people of faith are interested in the environment, they are often uneducated in the complexities of environmental issues scientifically, politically and historically. When a participant shows that they do have this knowledge, others question how this power can fit into the democratic decision-making model of the organisation. Should those with superior knowledge be able to 'trump' the decisions of those who are relatively ignorant? Furthermore, how can those with less knowledge know which perspectives to follow? In the face of such questions, the interfaith ecology movement risks being a purely dialogical forum that attempts to balance perspectives as illustrated in Instantiation 1. All action on environmental issues has both a scientific and political aspect and an organisation's inability to respond to these leaves it at an anxious and potentially destructive stalemate.

While environmental education and awareness raising are key components of the interfaith ecology movement, as a young NSM, this can bring forward conflict and confusion as the more it achieves its goal of creating politically and socially active environmentalists in faith communities, the more it will face potential internal conflict around these issues. This will test the capacity of interfaith organisations to hold together in the face of robust and complex dialogues. Where these same issues of power and knowledge arise in the environmental movement there is no such added challenge of maintaining a cross-religious and cultural dialogue as the movement is relatively culturally homogenous. Environmentalists can fearlessly debate these issues without the threat of destroying a hard earned interfaith dialogue arena.

The second point of contention revealed in Instantiation 2 is the issue of input and power that is relevant to the many other third sector organisations where participants are under-resourced and volunteer-based. Do those who contribute the most time and effort have the right to authority over the decisions that determine the projects they are pursuing on behalf of the organisation? While there seems to be a natural justice to this notion, there is equally, as P2 notes in the above instantiation, the problem of allowing this balance of power to erode the principles of joint decision-making that define and legitimatise a community organisation and, in this movement, an interfaith dialogue.

In working with this group in my action research capacity, I had allowed the structures of this conflict to build by adopting the approach that committee members should be allowed

to work on whatever project they saw fit with the endorsement if not the close involvement of the management committee. I learnt through this conflict that organisations need to work together, at a mediated pace, to maintain cohesion. Unfortunately this contrasted starkly to my observation of the interfaith ecology movement in general and the tendency of individuals within organisations to push it forward with relatively independent agendas. The key lesson to this process was that there is a risk in allowing the enthusiasm of a few high capacity participants to run free of the involvement of the collective. This does not only lead to disappointment when their efforts are not appreciated or acknowledged, but also defeats the purpose of the collective engagement and co-learning process of interfaith dialogue groups. The principle of sustainable growth is thus crucial to interfaith ecology organisations.

Conflict around environmentalism is a crucial element of the interfaith ecology movement's role in engendering civic participation within the context of religious diversity. Importantly, while debates and conflicts will arise over issues of approach and science in environmental work, the participants are no longer segregated along religious and cultural lines. Instead they are engaged with others in a wider debate around a universally significant issue. Their allegiances and beliefs are varied and wide ranging, and in the process they experience agreement and disagreement with people from various social and religious backgrounds. In both of the cases above the conflicts and allegiances were not defined along religious lines but between, across and through them. Learning to debate, passionately, for one's view on right action for the earth, with and against people of one's own religion, and with and against people from whom you have been isolated because of religious or cultural differences, is the very interaction that defines robust civic participation in a multicultural community.

CONFRONTING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

The interfaith ecology movement is a nexus of borderlands of faith, action, scientific and spiritual perspectives in which projects are contested sites where participants offer differently situated explanations of shared phenomena and experiences. Participants also use their spiritual knowledge and religious ethics differently in the shared culture of the movement which creates tensions over acceptable limits of tolerance, inclusivity and truth claims.

On the Walking Humbly Journey we travelled through a particularly drought ravaged region of Victoria. One evening there was a substantial thunderstorm. Several participants expressed to organisers and each other that we, as a spiritually empowered group, had

attracted this rain. Other participants found this attitude confronting, they noted that this belief undermined and devalued the status of the local people who, under this presumption, were spiritually inadequate in their inability to invite the rain as we had done. On one hand I felt that these participants were trying to endorse the journey and our cause within the parameters of their religious belief system and did not want to undermine this sentiment; on the other I felt the view conflicted with my own more scientific understanding of weather systems. Encountering different understandings of spiritual power as invested in individuals and groups was common in the interfaith ecology movement. Participants often debated these differences in private but there was no public or formal discussion on belief and its intersection with ecology on a spiritual level.

This and other experiences raised the questions of legitimacy within the interfaith context. Interfaith ecology activities and organisations tended to focus on engaging participants who were dedicated to the cause rather than focusing on the specific religious identity they held. In addition to mainstream or major religious groups, these organisations attracted spiritual seekers, humanists and less orthodox minority groups at the fringes of mainstream faiths. More traditional interfaith organisations drew stricter boundaries for inclusion: the Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association, for instance, held strictly to participation of members of those faiths at their conferences. For more open organisation, the question of legitimacy arises as participants find themselves in contact with people whose beliefs or identities they find confronting. Interfaith ecology participants grapple with appropriate boundaries and judgements about each other as demonstrated in the instantiation below.

INSTANTIATION 3: PACHAMAMA ALLIANCE

Pachamama Alliance is an American-based international organisation which aims to 'empower indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest to preserve their lands and culture and, using insights gained from that work; to educate and inspire individuals everywhere to bring forth a thriving, just and sustainable world.'² It is a female led organisation and a member of the United Religions Initiative. The word 'pachamama' reflects the purpose of the organisation as it refers to 'earth mother' or 'world mother' in the goddess oriented religion of the Indigenous people of the Andes. An email discussion arose between four organising team members of Life World Together* over the inclusion of the Pachamama Alliance in a locally based interfaith program. The Life World Together* program was

2 Pachamama Alliance: <http://www.pachamama.org/about/>

being managed by a team of mainly female representatives from different faiths and organisations who had not worked together before. It was comprised of myself, two women of the Sikh tradition, one under 35 and one over 55, a spiritual but unaffiliated woman over 60, a spiritual but unaffiliated woman under 35, a Christian woman over 60 and a Hindu woman under 50.

Email from Camille*:

From Samantha*, I heard of Pachamama in relation to a proposal. Now I find out who/what Pachamama is, I am concerned. I could not have anything to do with any involvement that included this type of 'spirituality' and I feel that this will not be acceptable to many other people in Life World Together*... As our program begins to become more 'fleshed out' I can see that we may need to establish guidelines in relation to the project. In short, I believe we need to be clear about the ethos of the project. I think we need to define this and do so in a way that we can - almost automatically - rule some things in and some things out without giving offence to people. Some things may be appropriate at another time - but not in this project.

... is there some way of dealing with such spiritualities in a way by which we don't give offence or offence is minimised while staying on more secure interfaith ground and giving due recognition to Australia's own indigenous spiritual values? The process of attitudinal change finds its expression in dialogue ... Therefore, I think we need to give recognition to this so that nothing impedes dialogue among all participants.

Camille's* email shows the depth of consideration participants put into questions of inclusion. She has clearly considered the impact the inclusion of marginal spiritualities will have on the success of the program overall and considers her own rejection of this form of spirituality as indicative of other attitudes of potential participants. She is also highly reflexive about her own beliefs and her request for a dialogue around establishing guidelines is based on her recognition that her own intolerance of particular groups or activities may be offensive to the other organisers. Another member of the organising team responded as follows:

Josie's* email response:

I agree we should have guidelines, I think they should be broad:

1. If an activity is not related to any of the following it should not be included:

a/ interfaith dialogue and cooperation

b/ local faith communities

c/ environment

2. No decision of exclusion should be made based on discrimination against another community's religious or spiritual beliefs as this is against the ethics of interfaith dialogue
3. All activities should be relevant to the local community and all information should be linked to the local community

This suggested set of guidelines achieve the following:

- a/ rules out the possibility of completely unrelated activities or presentations.
- b/ rules out the possibility of overseas material dominating
- c/ (and to my mind most importantly) rules out the potential for discrimination against groups and communities because certain people on the organising team may not agree with their beliefs. We should only discriminate against a group if we are aware of a record of corruption, violence or other social ills.

This final point and point 2 in the guidelines is my response to Camille's* suggestion to exclude Pachamama (meaning peace mother) because she doesn't like fertility goddesses. Personally I found this suggestion confronting; I am familiar with Pachamama ... That aside, however, when you are in a dialogue circle, as we are, all is fine until we face up to each other's genuine differences. This is when the temptation to walk away comes in; Camille* wants to walk away from Pachamama because she doesn't like fertility goddesses. I then want to walk away from Camille* because I do like fertility goddesses (more than monotheistic male gods) and I am 'offended' by her exclusion... so then we all want to walk and we feel confronted and hurt. If the dialogue and cooperation is to continue, however, we don't walk away, we walk together still.

In this case the Pachamama Alliance was not included in the Life World Together* program, not because of the dialogue above, but because the program became too full. This dialogue ended at this stage and was not fully fleshed out with other organisation members.

As dialogue in the interfaith ecology movement emerges from action and planning around action rather than only around belief, participants sometimes find themselves unexpectedly confronting differences that they may find offensive among fellow participants with whom they have been working. Conflict of this kind arises when there is a mismatch of expectation in which some members are focused on works and seek to legitimise participation through works while others seek to legitimise participation through belief and feel threatened by certain others, regardless of their works or common environmental goals. Josie's* response shows that she is clearly offended by the suggestion to exclude Pachamama based on their belief, which she admits is an

organisation she feels in some way reflective of her own beliefs. She is also in agreement with Camille* that guidelines are important but turns these against Camille's* suggestion by deliberately including an 'anti-discrimination' clause as a major component. Josie* is more interested in content than who is presenting it; she is concerned that the material is relevant to the local context and is in agreement with Camille* on this point. Her discussion at the end of the email shows her consideration of the issues at hand and her feeling that it is confrontations of belief that are the most difficult to negotiate in interfaith organising teams but that perseverance with each other in itself is in some ways the most important outcome.

The issue is not 'solved' or closed by guidelines such as those proposed by Josie*, as Josie* herself seems to recognise in her concluding reflection. There would no doubt be organisations or religious groups that Josie* and even the most liberal of interfaith participants would find offensive though she attempts to rule this out by naming history of violence or corruption as means of discrimination, though she has not considered that most mainstream religions have such histories and indeed current practices among their ranks. The underpinning question of this debate is: are some faiths or beliefs threatening to dialogue and how can interfaith ecology as a tolerant and inclusive NSM deal with them?

DIALOGUE OPENINGS AND BLOCKAGES

Organisations and networks often seek to manage the conflict encountered through difference by creating sets of guidelines or specific techniques for dialogue and interaction. Such guidelines and techniques pre-figure the organisational culture and the direction of the relationships within it. As will be discussed here, this can have positive and negative outcomes for the culture and norms of the developing interfaith ecology movement. At best, it maintains respectful interactions so that trust relations can be built and the participants feel a cohesive bond of shared values and behaviours. They also can act as a reference point for decision making and safeguard decisions from becoming tainted by prejudice or discrimination. The negative impact can be to limit the areas of dialogue and interaction that are explored so that some questions, behaviours or themes are exiled to the shadow lands of the movement culture where they can fester or return in covert ways.

My most poignant experience of the purpose and the shortfalls of dialogue exercises in interfaith ecology was in a context of violent relations between communities in Mindanao,

Philippines, where organisations were using dialogue forums to build peace as described in the instantiation below.

INSTANTIATION 4: MINDANAO PEACE FORUM

In March of 2009 I attended the United Religions Initiative South East Asia Pacific Regional Assembly held in Lanao del Norte, Mindanao, the Philippines. This assembly brought together the leaders of URI 'cooperation circles' (member groups) from the region to team-build and make regional plans for the organisation. This area of Mindanao had been, and continues to be, a site of armed conflict and terrorism over territory involving the Bangsamoro people (across different 'liberation fronts' and internally conflicting clans), and the Filipino military. As the Bangsamoro are Muslim and the Filipino military and mainstream culture are largely Catholic this conflict has also become a religious conflict between local Catholic and Muslim communities with Wahhabist Islamic groups from the Middle East spreading their brand of terrorism and influence into the frustrated Bangsamoro communities who have held their own Islamic and Indigenous culture since the 13th century. Holding the regional assembly here at the request of a local cooperation circle attempting to work at building peace, was designed to support the Lanao del Norte Month of Peace activities and allow the assembly to become a forum for positive community relations and dialogue.

The forums achieved wide community and military representation inclusive of Military personnel, Muslim and Catholic leaders, priests, ministers, clerics, Indigenous community representatives, government officials, youth, social workers, nuns, community organisations and community members. It provided an opportunity for story-telling where participants were able to share some of their painful experiences of the conflict. The military commander explained his policy on open communications and offered an apology to anyone who had encountered military misconduct.

Much of the forum was spent talking about what peace would mean for the people attending. The regional youth planted a peace pole in the town and created an eco-arts piece around it using colourful rainforest leaves. The people wanted peace and filled the discussions and activities with their hope of its possibility. They were fluent in the language of peace – they knew it well, inasmuch as its actualisation eluded them time and again. They spoke of it with a reverence that I had not encountered in those who take peace for granted. This great hope for peace explains for me the idyllic nature of the event.

An Australian Embassy official attending saw this as somewhat arbitrary in the face of ongoing conflict; a facade of dialogue or a disingenuous display of peace. These charges

may well be true, but from my experience there was more under the surface than political posturing; there was a need to speak as if peace were possible, and a need to enact it as a potential. The dialogue event was almost a ritual in peace, an act, but a sacred one, bearing all the ideal forms of sacred performance. At the end of forum we all travelled to a mountain site overlooking the region where large sculptural pieces, including a sacred labyrinth, were set among the tropical trees and views stretched out to the ocean vistas of this beautiful island. This culminated the forum in a special place of meaningful reflection and unity for the participants.

In November of 2009, I was struck by the harsh reality of the ongoing conflict for these people when the massacre of forty seven people in the town of Datu Abdullah Sanki in Maguindanao province, Mindanao as a result of conflict between Muslim clans led to the declaration of a national state of emergency in the region. The work of dialogue and peace building by the URI cooperation circle in Mindanao continues throughout these conflicts, its volunteers have not lost hope in a resolution to the longest standing freedom and territory struggle in human history.

In the Mindanao Peace Forums case, the dialogue gatherings maintained a hope in the potential of peace, and perpetuated the ideology of peace in the community in the face of past and pending violence. This hope was clearly articulated and displayed at the dialogue gatherings which buoyed up the peace workers in their enduring and practical struggle. The dialogue served a ritual, rather than a problem-solving purpose.

Dialogue processes and techniques used in the interfaith ecology movement often adhere to a ritualistic format in the way that certain expressions and modes of communication are permitted and others are disallowed. Organisations often undertake processes for determining these 'rules of engagement' which they believe will help them to preserve the integrity of the dialogue and, most importantly, avoid offence to the participants over cultural communicative faux pas. The Jewish Christian Muslim Association has researched and created a set of principles for dialogue based on their experience in finding this balance between integrity of dialogue and hospitality to difference. These principles were often used by participants in this research to reflect on appropriate practices across organisations in the movement. The instantiation below illustrates the way these guidelines were used as a marker of appropriate actions across the movement.

INSTANTIATION 5: MULTI-FAITH CHANT

An elder and established leader of an interfaith ecology organisation regularly preformed a multi-faith chant at meetings and organisational activities. This chant incorporated different key texts or calls to prayer from different faith traditions including their own. Many members of the organisation appreciated the chant but some found it confronting. The issue was raised in the following way with the clear use of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association's (JCMA) guidelines:

P 1:

I realise that we have no 'guidelines' for dialogue in place and need them. Therefore I am attaching JCMA's as a starting point. Participants in our events need to be able to see clearly what to expect and what is expected of them.

Please note in particular:

'Participants will try to speak of their own faith perspective, leaving others to speak of theirs.'

It seems to me this is most important. I know little enough about Judaism and am very wary indeed before making any comments about other faiths or beliefs. Others who have those beliefs are there to talk about them. I am therefore uncomfortable with people of one faith using and leading formulas of prayer of other faiths. Rather let's have representatives of those faiths coming together to participate.

I would be interested in your responses to these guidelines and perhaps we should consider it at the next or a subsequent meeting.

P 2:

In regards this issue, I would like to let you know that one Christian and one Hindu have who attended the event approached me separately with the same concern. I know that the multi-chant is loved by many including me but I don't think these perspectives should be ignored.

This issue was never openly addressed by the organisation and a clear decision was not made. The use of the chant at meetings stopped and there was some degree of disappointment around this. For some participants the chant had been an uplifting and sacred shared experience that consolidated the group. In this case the opportunity to draw on the work of another organisation to develop guidelines was not taken-up and dialogue continued in an ad hoc fashion.

The tension underpinning this issue concerns the differing cultural goals participants have for the development of the movement. Whereas some see themselves working towards a paradigmatic shift in which we will all be highly literate in different faith wisdoms and

have the right to draw on them all, others believe that clear separation between faith rituals should be observed so as to preserve their true significance and reverence for believers of those specific traditions. This separation precludes the awkward or offensive situation in which people are challenged in their own faith by being asked to participate or state the sacred words of another. The JCMA principles are clearly designed to support this latter culture of mutual respect and distance.

URI has developed tools which are useful in encountering difference at the interpersonal level and breaking down reactionary responses and defensiveness. URI's 'Appreciative Inquiry' process is used widely at their events and assemblies and by their organisations. It is based on the work of David Cooperrider and the contributors to the 'rapidly growing discipline of positive change,' as described by the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Commons website.³ AI attempts to generate positive change and creativity through 'the art and practice of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a systems capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential.'⁴

AI has been used in URI to establish a sense of shared vision and culture where participants are left thinking and feeling that interfaith dialogue is a positive activity and not as difficult or confronting as they may have feared. The goal of interfaith ecology collaboration and the goal of AI are aligned in this sense. Cooperrider and Whitney state: 'Through mass mobilized inquiry, hundreds and even thousands of people can be involved in co-creating their collective future.'⁵ URI uses the method in large groups at the beginning of their Global and Regional Assemblies. The organisers split the gatherings of up to 500 into pairs or smaller groups to undertake the AI. The following sample from URI's AI process illustrates this focus on profoundly positive experience that immediately opens the relationship between two potential strangers from different religions, nations and cultures into a space of deep sharing:

We have all been part of efforts where we have joined with others and brought dreams of a better world into being. For the moment I would like you to reflect on a "high point" in your life experience – a time when you were involved in something significant or meaningful. Reflect on a time when perhaps...

- your deepest energies were called upon;
- you gave your whole best self to something;
- you were listening, perhaps with a spiritual ear, to what the world was calling for from you and others;

3 Appreciative Inquiry Commons: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/default.cfm>

4 Cooperrider and Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry*, 8

5 Cooperrider and Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry*, 8

- whole new paths or possibilities emerged;
- changes, small or large, were made that at first seemed impossible;
- visions of a better world were actually brought into being.

Please share with me the story and how it unfolded. Without being too humble, please share what you contributed to this effort. Are there lessons that might be brought to this gathering?

Each of our communities of faith has special gifts—traditions, beliefs, practices, values—to bring to the arena of interfaith cooperation and action. As you think about your community of faith, what are some of its most positive qualities or gifts that make it capable of working cooperatively with others of different faiths to create a better world for all people?

- Are there special texts or passages or quotes that stand out for you?
- A story or parable?
- Historical experiences?
- Capabilities, commitments, or values? ⁶

AI processes were seminal to the organisational formation of the URI and much of its success in building meaningful relationships across difference and developing deep friendships and solidarity are attributed to this process, as the Organisational Development Manager states:

The personal experiences and the valuing of our diverse traditions such questions evoke, and the relationships that are created as the answers are shared in one-on-one interviews and then in small groups, provide a foundation of trust, mutual respect and a recognition of common ground in the midst of diversity. They create a climate of careful listening and a spirit of cooperation and inquiry. Building on this foundation, participants co-create a positive vision of a shared future powerful enough to motivate the cooperative action necessary to transform the past.⁷

Through my participation in URI gatherings I observed and experienced the way AI produced a sense of shared community and friendship that is necessary for any serious engagement across difference. I also observed and experienced, however, that the perpetual return to the positive worked to deny interaction over the more difficult and painful issues and experiences. While the sense of peace and unity was maintained at gatherings, there were times when participants felt that they were not being heard or allowed to express their painful experiences or oppositional views. These instances seemed to tear the thin veil of ‘deep friendship’ that participants had believed themselves

⁶ United Religions Initiative:
http://www.uri.org/files/resource_files/Appreciative%20Inquiry%20and%20URI.doc.pdf

to be surrounded by. The case of the Statement on Gaza was a significant organisational conflict in which these tensions were revealed and a 'positive' outcome was not reachable.

INSTANTIATION 6: THE STATEMENT ON GAZA

The URI is led by an elected Global Council of Trustees, comprised of 30 well respected faith and community leaders across 8 global regions, representing a range of faiths, ethnicities and a balance of gender. The smaller Standing Committee is a nominated group within the Council charged with certain project development tasks. In early 2009, the heightened conflict in Gaza prompted the URI Global Council to undertake the ambitious step of trying to develop a collective statement on the conflict through its Standing Committee. Many Global Council members were disappointed with the stalemate this long and painful process produced. Neither Palestinian nor Israeli participants were satisfied with the resulting statement; for many it reopened real wounds of interreligious conflict. The process came as a stark reminder to participants that the AI approach and general sense of collective good will in the organisation was perhaps a surface under which unresolvable religiously motivated conflict continued to simmer.

The conflict over the Statement on Gaza also brought out tensions in the organisation regarding control and power of particular lobby groups and major donors. Some were disillusioned that people they had considered sympathetic to them, stood on the opposite side in these debates. Others found the desire to 'keep-peace' within the organisation as antithetical to the goal of justice outside of it. One Global Council member circulated a 'stronger' statement with specific condemnation of Israeli violence in response to the perceived weak statement developed by the Council through its consensus process. This second, unofficial statement attracted multiple responses, some claiming that it was divisive and others endorsing its tacit critique of the 'inoffensive' Global Council statement. This exchange between the author of the second statement and another Global Council member encapsulates the underpinning issues in the long organisational dialogue around the themes of organisational cohesion, tolerance and justice:

Global Council member:

Thank you for this compelling statement. Please know that I very much appreciate your deep and urgent concern for the violence in Gaza. My first impulse was to sign it because it very well expressed the outrage that I feel inside. But I hope you understand my reasons for withholding to do so. It is not because I wish to remain silent in the face of the atrocities in Gaza...

The SC statement may not have been forceful enough for us, but it was clear about our stand against violence in Gaza. The words may not have expressed our outrage enough, but feelings of outrage are feelings, and feelings come and go. At the end of the day, when the smoke clears and the feelings of outrage subside and we decide to return to being URI, how many "dead bodies" will there be in our ranks? How many maimed and wounded? And how many times will we keep on reacting with our feelings instead of responding with our hearts rightly?

... I am coming from the need for a process of dialogue in arriving at a place of mutual respect and understanding (as we envisioned in the URI). This is the means to an end that I had hoped would result in the same strong statements that all of you are making, but with the voices of our Jewish brothers and sisters too. I thought this would be a different way (than the usual) of being in this world in our relationship with others. But then, I realized that this way takes more time, effort and patience to unfold. I understand that there is no time or space for this process to happen in the URI at the moment.

The author of the second statement responded as follows:

In this issue, I disagree with you that we should talk peace without condemning the inhumane massacre inflicted upon the Gazan children and civilians, even if we cannot agree on who started this war, or whether the fact that the Palestinians have been robbed of their land, their honor, their freedom, their livelihood and their lives systematically over the last 60 years are important considerations in our peace-work. Yes, the Palestinians too have contributed to the violence when they retaliated with rockets and suicide-bombings over the years. Pray tell me, which people wouldn't if they are reduced to live like rabid chained dogs? There may be the saints among them who will forgive unconditionally, but you cannot expect an entire people to be like that. I believe peace-work will be futile if the injustices are not addressed ...

The division was already there the moment the Standing Committee attempted to come out with its statement on behalf of the GC, and had difficulty because our Israeli/Jew friends objected to any hint of condemnation of the disproportionate killings by Israel. At the same time our Palestinian brothers were crying in agony and peeved at the "impartiality" of those who had hugged them and called them 'brothers' only a month previously. Finally, only a neutral politically-correct statement was. I endorsed the statement, because I agreed with everything it contained.

But it did NOT contain a crucial point - a condemnation of the evil inhumane massacre which is wrong even if it was Hamas rockets that provoked the war (which we now know was planned 6 months before that provocation, and even if we ignore the fact that the Gazans were routinely killed, kidnapped, jailed, humiliated, etc, etc, all the time for years before this "provocation") ...

The Members' Statement I released was to provide a platform for members who agree with me to indicate so. I had mentioned that I may be biased in this issue because I am a Muslim, so I needed to know if there are non-Muslims who also shared my view ...

You have chosen your path, with abundant explanations, to listen softly and not condemn any party. I have chosen to speak out, shout and fight for justice and condemn any unjust party, as my religion has taught me:

"If you see injustice, fight it with your actions if you can; if not, fight it with your words if you can; if not, then fight it in your heart - that is the weakest of Faith" [meaning of Hadith of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him].

Please regard what has happened as a maturing process in our interfaith peace-work, that will better prepare us to face future crises together.

Dialogue around this issue continued and eventually petered out. The Global Council member who endorsed the original statement resigned from Global Assembly for this and other reasons. The Global Assembly continued to grapple with the problem of representation and justice in a mediated environment.

This instantiation demonstrates how participants can become adept at working with the positive but if this becomes the sole focus of the organisation, they do not develop skills in dealing with real conflict resolution. As such, these conflicts are a threat to the organisation's cohesiveness. In the context of interfaith ecology work, it seems pertinent that as much as participants are taught to engage and build friendship, they are also equipped with skills to manage conflict, pain and disputes in a way that is constructive, honest and transparent. The AI approach in its current form falls short of this need. Nor do guidelines of any kind encompass the complexity of these real life situations. Augsburg identifies conflict resolution and mediation as an underdeveloped field with little to offer in the concrete and practical sense:

In most conflict situations, we are painfully ignorant. The most experienced mediators, theorists, or councillors are still, in a larger sense, conflict ignorant. The confusion we experience as conflict breaks into the open, revealing our ignorance of our own part as well as of the roles played by others in the interaction.⁸

While dialogue techniques are crucial tools and should be further developed, what is more important is a willingness to face up to potential and real conflict, instead of seeking to run from it or avoid it.

Amongst other observations and experiences, an incident at the Globalisation for the Common Good Conference taught me about this harder edge of dialogue across difference. I had slipped into a sense that dialogue in Melbourne was congenial, that the real religious conflicts were not strongly felt here. This perception was emphasised by the fact that

those participating in dialogue are largely self-selecting moderates, already ‘converts’ to the movement and do not hold strong resentment or prejudice. At a panel discussion including well recognised academics speaking from different faith perspectives, I witnessed the Jewish and Muslim participant come up against misunderstanding after misunderstanding – words and meanings were not well communicated and perceptions between them tainted the dialogue leading to the Jewish academic collapsing into tears. These were not Israeli and Palestinian representatives, but a Malaysian Muslim and Australian Jew. I had mixed feelings about this encounter – on one hand I was confronted by the level of anguish simmering under the surface of Jewish-Muslim relations, far removed in distance but not spirit from the conflicts of the Middle East. But further to that, I was challenged by the role of emotion in this dialogue. Did it stymie the dialogue or make it more genuine? Is dialogue best kept rational or is it an opening for catharsis? These questions remained with me and I was reminded of the incident again in my reflective interview with the conference organising team leader, Prof. Joe Camilleri who describes this pain as a hallmark of genuine dialogue:

I think it is important that the hard issues be discussed. I don’t think there is much gained by saying ‘let’s have an agreeable atmosphere and let’s do it by putting the hard issues in the too hard basket.’ Probably, we should have done even more of this, because there are many hard issues about which people have very strong and conflicting views. Of course, when you are dealing with an issue like Palestine, for example, it inevitably touches a raw nerve; there is little doubt about this. But this is no reason why the issues should be swept under the carpet.⁹

The importance of dialogue in these difficult scenarios takes priority over the sense of comfort felt by the panellists and audience: although these scenarios may be confronting and painful, they are, Prof. Camilleri explains, necessary, and any genuine participant in interfaith work must be willing to surrender to this process:

One of the underlying principles of real dialogue which is still not widely understood is that you must be willing to feel pain. In real dialogue it is important that those engaged in the dialogue be able to tell their story in ways that make you hurt and vice versa. It’s painful, and I don’t think there is any way around that. It doesn’t mean that you use the most insulting language you can think of. If you feel that in the past, you or your group, or whatever the ‘you’ is, has been at the receiving end of unjustified treatment then I think you should feel free to say so. I feel very comfortable with allowing fairly robust exchange.¹⁰

The insight that ‘real dialogue often hurts’ is highly significant for the development of the interfaith ecology movement. Participants must accept that while sometimes dialogue

8 Augsburg, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 6

9 Fieldwork interview: Prof. Joe Camilleri, Globalisation for the Common Good Conference

10 Fieldwork interview: Prof. Joe Camilleri, Globalisation for the Common Good Conference

across difference generates joy and good will, it equally generates pain. To ignore or avoid this pain and the truth of participants' underlying feelings and stories renders the process kitsch. In this research I found that many leaders and participants were unwilling to open themselves to this possibility, instead staying exclusively on the safer ground of statements around peace, love and care for the earth.

PASSIVE EXCLUSIONS

Many of the frictions in interfaith ecology projects were similarly centred on questions of process and how a particular task should be achieved, who would make the ultimate decision about its implementation and who would be invited to participate or excluded. An organising team participant described her involvement in a project where she felt that her contribution was not wanted and how she managed or explained that in relation to understanding it in a framework of cultural and religious difference. For this participant the achievement of being able to collectively complete the task across these conflicts and differences balanced the hurt and rejection experienced at various moments in the project's development:

We worked it through, but I had to do a lot of withdrawing when I realised that the relationships I made were not working and as you know I dropped right down and then came in at the end to do the particular task I had been given. And even that, they tried to take over. I think it was more like, here is culture A, here is culture B, it doesn't matter which is which, and people are operating out of their cultural assumptions and understandings and the communication across that with particular needs and aspirations was difficult. I think we did very, very well, considering that we also had to achieve a task.¹¹

This participant's attempt to manage conflict passively, through withdrawal and mediation, reflects the way a culture of Appreciative Inquiry in interfaith ecology organisations can tend towards a stance of passivity. Because conflict is understood as negative and to be avoided in AI, participants do not wish to be the cause of conflict and all would like to be in the role of the 'peace-maker'; the one who is holding the space for dialogue. One participant in a leadership position describes how she goes in to a 'space of silence' as a response to conflict in her organisation:

You've been to some of our meetings and have seen some really bizarre stuff being said, and I just listen and then calmly, without a fuss move on... Not allowing my emotions to take over ...

11 Fieldwork interview: Anon.

Then I go into a state of silence and until I feel strong enough to come back and there is still some change taking place.¹²

In practice, this culture can lead to passive-aggressive behaviours in the interpersonal politics of the organisation. I encountered several examples of this tendency in this research and will relay one example of how this played out in organisational decision-making and another where it impinged upon participation in an event. In both cases the conflict was avoided through excluding the person deemed to be its cause.

INSTANTIATION 7: ORGANISATIONAL EXCLUSION

Act Now* organisation was delivering a project which had multiple components of practical and forum-based activities. There had been ongoing passive conflict over a number of issues and decisions of a practical nature between Harpreet* and Chau*, two key members of the organising team. While Harpreet* had a formal position within the leadership of the organisation, Chau* was an active member and volunteer assisting with the development of the project. These members had conflicting ideas of process and difficulty working together. They and the rest of the organising team at no point directly addressed these issues and they were largely discussed privately with other team members who became part of a highly politicised environment where Harpreet* and Chau* attempted to gain support for their conflicting agendas and each attempted to 'manage' the other. In the final phases of the project Chau* approached the organising team and the organisational management committee to raise a concern about the project's legacy in the community. This concern directly conflicted with an action being undertaken by Harpreet.* Harpreet's* response was to exclude Chau* from the final phase of the project and ongoing organisational communications and networks. Her justification was that by 'causing a conflict' Chau* was demonstrating that she didn't 'like' the process or organisation and therefore demonstrated that she did not want to be involved. The fatigued state of the organising team meant that this was allowed to occur with little resistance and Chau* was successfully excluded from the key decision-making processes of the project and organisation. The organising team and management committee did not see this as an ideal solution, but neither did they deem it inappropriate or actively resist it. The final project phase was delivered without conflict which was understood by the team as justifying the exclusion of Chau*.

12 Fieldwork interview: Anon.

This instantiation demonstrates a culture in which conflict is stigmatised. To resolve a conflict openly, it must be brought to a head and discussed; this is confronting for some organisation cultures where there is a real fear of escalating conflict breaking the fragile bonds within the organisation and jeopardising the delivery of the project as the ends to which the leadership is focused.

INSTANTIATION 8: PARTICIPANT EXCLUSION

Moses* registered for a residential interfaith event in which participants engaged with a variety of Christian and non-Christian faith communities through the sharing of food and music in different venues, including places of worship. Moses was from a conservative evangelical Christian tradition and had migrated to Australia from Uganda where evangelical cultures tend to be highly exclusive, restricting contact with non-Christian faiths. Moses'* registration to the event therefore indicated his willingness to reach-out from an encultured tradition. As the event progressed, however, it became apparent that Moses was only prepared to take this engagement so far. He refused to enter places of non-Christian worship and on one occasion where the group were eating at a Sikh Gurudwara this meant that he excluded himself from the meal. The event organisers and several participants spoke to Moses attempting to convince him to enter and his refusal was seen as an offensive gesture of rejection and intolerance. There was little sympathy or understanding of his position within the group as he stood as an affront to the culture of interfaith engagement as understood by the other participants.

Following this incident, another participant became ill and needed to leave the program. Elok*, one of the event organisers asked Moses* if he would do the special favour of accompanying the participant home on the train. This achieved the outcome of sending Moses* home half way through the program even though he would have otherwise stayed till the end. Elok* understood Moses'* presence to be a threat to the *communitas* of the event participants because of his confronting unwillingness or inability to accept the hospitality of a religion different to his own. Elok* felt proud of her conflict-avoidance strategy where instead of confronting the issue at hand, or taking the measure of asking Moses* to leave the event as a result of his 'offense', she had been able to manipulate his departure in a way that she believed meant he did not understand the true motive of her request. In her mind she had thus preserved the 'friendship' and peace. Moses* left the event with some level of confusion and possible resentment, messages that would likely be relayed to the conservative and exclusive tradition he is a member of, discouraging fellow believers from participation in interfaith activities.

When I discussed this issue with Elok* she gave a socio-spiritual explanation for this action. Her understanding was that religion and spirituality is evolving into a new era of

interfaith ecology. Exclusivist and intolerant traditions run counter to this evolution and will inevitably be left behind. Those individuals who maintain intolerant beliefs that are counter to the movement are less spiritually evolved and if they do not take up the opportunity for participation when offered there is little hope for them. There is no obligation on the part of interfaith communities to 'lower' their standards of hospitality across religions to accommodate such laggards. While she felt sympathy for Moses* she also felt superior to him on a fundamental spiritual and social level and therefore managed his exclusion in a patronising method that disallowed engagement with the underpinning issues.

Both of these cases reveal how interfaith communitas can form quickly, even over the course of one event, and may exercise the same social exclusions for individuals of difference as seen in many religious communities, political groups and identity-based organisations. There is a tendency to avoid internal conflict through scapegoating individuals deemed to be trouble-makers, and to 'excommunicate' these individuals through informal and under-acknowledged strategies. These actions can be justified introspectively through the lens of spiritual beliefs and outwardly through appealing to a set of cultural norms or customs demarcating adherents to the movement from 'non-believers.'

SHADOW SIDES

While the vast majority of interfaith ecology participants held highly tolerant, inclusive and curious attitudes to other religious groups, there was a clear tendency in some participants to succumb to deeply ingrained religious intolerance and discrimination in times of interpersonal conflict. This revealed how such intolerances are not easily shifted in society and can remain simmering alongside interfaith efforts and behind facades of peace that the participant displays to others and, in some cases even to themselves.

INSTANTIATION 9: SIKH AND HINDU

An event organised by a Sikh participant, Makhan*, was under-attended by Buddhists and Hindus, even though both the Buddhist and Hindu faiths were represented on the organising teams. In disappointment, Makhan* lashed out against these religions as inferior to the Sikh faith. Hindus and Buddhists, Makhan* claimed angrily, were selfish and only wanted to convert people to their own traditions and did not genuinely participate in

interfaith dialogue. Referring to the religious tensions and history of violence between Sikhs and Hindus in India, Makhan* claimed that the Hindus were always trying to crush the Sikhs. Makhan* irrationally refused to attend an upcoming function organised by Hindus out of fear that they may attempt to poison him. In the end Makhan* did attend this event and had seemed to have forgotten the severity of the claims and anger. Another movement participant of the Sikh tradition expressed concern to me that this person was involved in interfaith work as he had made derogatory comments about several other faiths at times of frustration and stress.

INSTANTIATION 10: JEWISH AND CATHOLIC

In another scenario, Patrick,* of European Catholic heritage, had been in dialogue with a Jewish community member, Shiran* on matters of movement development – both participants were active at the community level, mature in age and experience and highly educated in the importance of tolerance and intercultural acceptance. While they maintained an outer calm towards each other, Patrick* found his work with Shiran* difficult, mainly because they had differing views on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. After one such encounter Patrick* expressed his frustration in a highly discriminatory way; he referred to Shiran* as a ‘typical spoilt Jew’ and stated that her interest in interfaith was base, similar to the desire of dogs to ‘smell each other’s arses’ out of curiosity and a need to dominate the other. In Patrick’s* view, Shiran’s* politics and her ongoing commitment to her tradition as linked to the politics of Israel was offensive to the new order society should be taking.

These scenarios bring to light several significant factors. Firstly, in both cases the participant who deemed themselves superior and most enlightened was the one who perpetuated the greater form of discrimination to their ‘other.’ Secondly, both were apparently blind to the discrimination they were perpetuating as being contradictory to their goals in the movement, indeed they made the comments in ‘defence’ of the movement. Thirdly, in both cases the derogatory comments followed from long-standing and violent histories between the religions represented i.e. between Sikhs and Hindus in the first instance and between Catholics and Jews in the second. Finally, both scenarios demonstrated uncharacteristically derogatory and angry behaviours for these individuals. For the most part, I found both of these participants to be highly adept at conflict resolution, widely respected in the movement and their own communities and other communities, charismatic and personable, focused on empowering others, and strongly committed to peace and understanding.

The leaders of the interfaith ecology movement are subject to similar pressures to uphold ideal behaviours as leaders of other movements and institutions that base their identity on a type of idealised behaviour. Living up to their personal ideals and absorbing the conflicts of those around them, can sometimes mean that leaders strongly suppress the underlying and perhaps unconscious reactions that conflict with their ideals.

From a psychological perspective, this behaviour might be understood in terms of Jung's theory of the 'shadow.' In Jungian theory, the shadow is an undesirable and unacknowledged aspect of the self that the psyche projects onto others: 'The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself.'¹³ As in the scenarios above, this shadow contrasts with the conscious vision of the individual and is played out in social terms of their relationship with others or groups of others. In these cases the leader vented their anger and frustration towards a situation, onto this other, revealing a shadow opposite they remained unaware of, even after the incident. Wilkinson describes how this is common to those working towards a social good or ideal: 'In striving for the common good of humanity, what is denied is primarily that which is believed to be against society's benefit, that which is not ideal ... These consciously or unconsciously denied experiences constitute the shadow side of human nature.'¹⁴ Through continually affirming their vision and the belief that they embody this vision, and carrying the burden of the movement's idealism and the hopes of fellow participants, some leaders in interfaith ecology may be at risk of continually denying their shadows.

CONCLUSION: DIFFERENTIATING CONFLICT

As a movement pioneering new ways of organising, dealing with new concerns and relationships and working in newly diversified communities and groups, interfaith ecology is constantly encountering uncertainty. Uncertainty around scientific, ecological and political knowledge, interfaith conflict management, appropriate leadership, interpersonal relationships, and ways of expressing one's own beliefs and relating to those of others, as well as the identity of the movement generally; all of these can become contested sites.

There is some confusion within the movement on the difference between religiously motivated violence, confrontation and offence around dialogue, and friction in organisational development. In one case, a young person expressed disappointment in the leaders of his organisation, stating that they are supposed to know and understand conflict resolution and creating peace among religions – 'how could they expect to do this work

13 Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 284

14 Wilkinson, *Psychotherapy Training and Practise*, 16

with others if they could not even manage to work together on the interpersonal level?' He asked. This *a priori* critique can be an internally damaging sentiment for the interfaith ecology movement as it chains the practicalities and politics of organisational culture to a behavioural ideal its members could never fully live up to.

Fear of conflict as an indication of 'movement failure,' does not acknowledge different types of conflict as they arise within organisations. Friction in interpersonal and organisational development is an organic aspect of civic participation and community relationship building. It can form allegiances and disagreements around themes other than group identity and history, thus working in contrast to the forces of ingrained cultural and religious intolerance. To whitewash these types of conflict because the movement participants feel it undermines their standing as 'peace-makers' is to place in jeopardy the grander task of addressing religiously motivated violence, hatred and intolerance, and indeed to risk the resurfacing of xenophobia as a serious shadow to the idealism of the movement. While some conflicts indicate productive participation and robust dialogue, others are more sinister. Distinguishing these conflicts will be important to the maturing process for interfaith ecology and build its resilience as a movement based on creating practical relationships between people across long-standing socio-historic divides.

Carol McDonough understands the difficult process of inclusion and conflict management within the movement in light of her experience in mental health community work. She notes how the collaborative cross-difference work of interfaith ecology projects act as 'therapeutic communities' for participants who overcome these differences. The Australasian Therapeutic Communities Association describes a therapeutic community as a facility or program in which 'the community itself, through self-help and mutual support, is the principle means for promoting personal change.' The community itself is used to 'heal individuals and support the development of behaviours, attitudes and values of healthy living.'¹⁵ For Carol McDonough, the often difficult processes of working with each other across difference in interfaith ecology projects, is an important site of healing socially as well as personally and interpersonally:

I look back and think, 'that was worthwhile'... when I worked in community mental health, in Therapeutic Community, one of the models we used was that the most healing thing that people can do together was the making and doing of projects together. We did that in our Walking Humbly project.

The following chapter will contrast the frictions of interfaith ecology work explored here to its synergies which generate hope and create genuinely uplifting and bonding

15 Australasian Therapeutic Communities Association: <http://www.atca.com.au/home.htm>

experiences for participants. It is worth remembering when reading these positive experiences and successful movement projects that, in the workings of each synergistic story, friction played a key role in the creative process and the collective striving. To the extent that working together on projects creates both friction and synergy, the authenticity of interfaith ecology engagement is maintained and the participants grow and learn in their production of a healthy and resilient movement culture.

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE TRANSFORMATIONS IN INTERFAITH ECOLOGY

When I went to the UN conference I had taken a message from our Aboriginal elders here, through the South Australian group. I read the message from the Aboriginal elders at the conference. The Aboriginal leaders that were there were actually crying out about the pain of the ice melting. This was in 2000. I remember the Indigenous person from the Canadian group with his drum saying 'the ice is melting!' and my hair was standing on end. We called a meeting and I was the only non-Indigenous who went for that meeting. They were talking about climate change and I realised how important that was. – Jessiee Kaur Singh, Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network.¹

Interfaith ecology leaders are working at the shifting margins of old and new worlds; they are connected to faith traditions and are shaping the future of these traditions through transformative social and environmental actions. They encounter a variety of borderlands in this integral work, as Jessiee Kaur Singh describes above, between reconciliation with earth, other cultures, multiple places, global communication structures and colonial histories.

The interfaith ecology movement is producing a range of engagement and development models and approaches through which participants and leaders are exploring how events, activities, dialogues and projects can effectively encompass and channel these synergies. This chapter explores the models and approaches of successful interfaith ecology work

1 Fieldwork interview: Jessiee Kaur Singh, COMMON

through a number of movement instantiations located in various global and institutional contexts and with different scales and focus.

I will firstly relay community level transformative actions in small local projects and through religious institutional engagement. Specific political actions in global and regional settings will then be presented followed by an explanation of the crucial role of partnership models in both smaller and larger scale interfaith ecology projects. The approaches that are achieving reconciliation and decolonising relationships within the movement in the Greater Melbourne context will then be relayed.

COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATIONS

In early 2008 I began attending meetings for the Dandenong Interfaith Network. As Australia's first interfaith network and having a unique Local Government partnership, this organisation offered insight into the work of established and well supported networks based in a specified local area. As a participant on the bus tour of local places of worship, including a significant Aboriginal site, I was impressed by the way the local community representatives were able to share their beliefs and culture generously and articulately with a group of visitors. The practical link of being on the site of a place of worship with the community members speaking for their own religion and culture revealed the significance of inviting the other into a place of sacred importance. Opening these doors, network president Helen Heath explained, was significant in the early establishment of the network where the network banner was physically taken to different places of worship and exchanged between community members.

Interfaith ecology organisations sometimes work on 'greening' projects with specific faith communities and places of worship. These incremental and grassroots initiatives achieve real outcomes for these communities as their places of worship also become sites of education around earth care and responsibility for their members and their neighbourhood. The Lighting the Way project of GreenFaith USA demonstrates this method in empowering communities to act on their local project via a wider campaign across different communities and locales:

In 2003, GreenFaith worked with [a] solar installer ... to launch Lighting the Way, an opportunity for religious institutions in New Jersey to install solar electric systems on their buildings at no upfront cost. 23 religious institutions around New Jersey participated, and these solar arrays

*are hard at work generating clean, renewable energy – preventing over 8,536,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions from entering earth’s atmosphere over the next 20 years.*²

Progressive religious institutions in Australia are beginning to follow this trend of ‘greening’ their organisational behaviours, values, social actions and buildings. As in the USA projects, these actions are broad and include a range of place and community-based actions such as e-waste recycling, retro-fitting, clean-up initiatives, food co-ops, water saving measures, permaculture gardens or renewable energy projects.

The Uniting Church of Australia has been particularly active in this field and the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania recently produced an ecumenical booklet entitled, ‘Greening the Church: Australian churches tell their inspirational stories’³ celebrating the green actions of twenty-eight Christian churches around Australia. The book’s opening strongly reflects the broader sentiments of interfaith ecology by connecting religious motivation to practical action and the vision of a spreading movement of divinely inspired environmentalism across different churches and communities. Sharing this information and celebrating these stories between Christian communities steps towards ecumenical dialogue around earth themes and highlights the ‘common ground’ these communities are working on:

*The churches whose stories are included in this booklet come from a range of different places, circumstances, beliefs about ‘the environment’ and motivations for acting; but they share one underlying motivation – a love of God. This love prompts them to care for God’s creation, the poor, their children and each other, and challenges them to be good stewards of the earth. This love has been expressed in many ways, but there are many different ways to reduce our impact on the Earth, and each church will be unique. The churches in this booklet have shared their stories in the hope that other churches like yours will be inspired by what they have done.*⁴

Ceremony and symbolism play an important role in both the Australian and international cases of community greening. Congregations conduct ceremonial openings or blessings for their project that unites the congregation in their earth action. They also often use symbolism in the colour or lay-out of the project to link it to their faith and cultural heritage. This convergence of spirituality, tradition, community, economy and ecology in tailored and community driven projects encapsulates the grassroots potential of the interfaith ecology movement in social change. The two examples below illustrate this empowerment and integration of themes in practical projects.

2 GreenFaith: <http://greenfaith.org/resource-center/stewardship/renewable-energy-sources/lighting-the-way-in-nj>

3 Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, Greening the Church

4 Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, Greening the Church, 2

INSTANTIATION 1: CALOUNDRA UNITING CHURCH, CALOUNDRA, QLD

This community explains how the project of installing a large cross of solar panels on their prominent roof has made an impact within and beyond the church community and symbolises God's life-giving power in the environment:

We have erected a new cross on the roof of the Caloundra Uniting Church! It will supply power to the Church for all of its lighting and energy needs for its programs and for the many cultural and social groups who use the property. The 24 solar panels will generate all of our electricity needs and will earn the Church approx. \$2,000.00 per year through the sale of our surplus electricity onto the grid. As we are empowered in our life and mission by the cross, we will be helping to reduce our greenhouse gases by 65%. This visually striking cross we hope will be a reminder to the whole community of the importance of "going green" to save the planet. During our preparation for the installation of our solar panel cross, 14 of our members installed solar power at their own homes, and others are considering doing the same...We see the sun as a gift from God, as is all Creation. It is our task to use the power of the sun to help create a cleaner environment as we take a small step towards the vital issues of climate change in our beautiful Sunshine Coast.⁵

INSTANTIATION 2: SPRINGVALE UNITING CHURCH, MELBOURNE, VIC

As part of the most culturally and linguistically diverse area of greater Melbourne, this congregation represents a range of cultural communities including emerging African communities, South-East Asian communities and Pacific Islanders. Many of these migrants are newly arrived and facing issues of integration, belonging and security in their new environment. The project of installing a rainwater tank became a way for this diverse community to bring together and share stories of where they had come from and to celebrate their new home and community with a festival. This project pulls together the themes of cultural diversity, migration, belonging, ecology and religion at the site of the church. Here ecological activities link participants to their new place through action and ceremony engendering a sense of belonging:

We view our rainwater tank as a symbol of hope and new life in our community. The project was instigated by Khuna, a Cambodian woman in our congregation. The tank is for watering the church's flourishing and well-used gardens and it provides water to flush the church's new toilets. It is a response to the water crisis, and a sign of our care for the Earth. The symbol of water represents new life in this diverse community. While we raised funds to purchase the

5 Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, Greening the Church, 11

10,000 litre tank, a Festival of Living Water was proposed. The festival would combine celebrations for the 120 year anniversary of the church's presence in Springvale, and would include the blessing of the tank. People shared stories of their experiences of water... A Sri Lankan woman remembered carrying water over a kilometre each day before and after school. The Tongan minister told of her weekly journey as a child when she would do the household laundry and then carry back sufficient drinking water for a week. These everyday stories of valuing water were told alongside the story of Jesus' offer of living water as a symbol of leading people to new life. As part of our preparations for the festival, the Sudanese members of the congregation were invited and agreed to lead a procession into the gardens with dance and drums. In the weeks leading up to the event, children made a banner and colourful cellophane sculptures of vegetables, flowers, and insects to carry in the procession... A memorial garden was designed and built in preparation for the festival.⁶

The role of the organisation or network in these local and international projects is to support specific faith communities to act and then to link these actions into an information sharing network between communities so that they can inspire each other. The interfaith or ecumenical dialogue is therefore a flow-on effect of this community-based action. Following the trend of the movement generally, in the USA these projects are mostly Christian and Jewish and in Australia they are almost entirely Christian.

The interfaith ecology movement is creating more opportunities to turn these single community projects into multi-faith projects. In Melbourne the youth-based interfaith organisation 'InterAction' was launched in late 2009 and is directly targeting these practical service opportunities. This organisation's statement describes how the interfaith encounter of shared practical service deepens the faith of the individual and their interfaith dialogue:

InterAction aims to promote religious pluralism by engaging young people in common action for the common good. InterAction creates innovative links that bring about face to face encounters between young people from different backgrounds who wish to help others. Through service projects we give young people the opportunity to volunteer for a good cause and at the same time meet likeminded people who share the same goal. Individuals who participate in our projects meet with others from different backgrounds, grow their understanding of one another and foster friendships. By moving beyond dialogue into positive action, interfaith service is a unique encounter that brings people from different religious traditions to work side by side for the sake of something greater. The service they engage in meets a real need in the community.

6 Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, Greening the Church, 8

Being interfaith service, it affirms religious identity, showing how being a good Christian, Muslim or Buddhist also makes you a better citizen. In this way InterAction holds to the ideal that service is a shared value between different religious traditions, and can be used to build bridges of common understanding.⁷

This organisation depends upon the role of practical service as a site where religious differences are down-played. It also promotes itself as an avenue through which religious people can promote themselves as good and active citizens. In this sense it follows many other interfaith organisations which seek to show society the positive face of religion, especially in relation to groups that may be maligned in media and public perception. InterAction gives young people the opportunity to demonstrate their good will and high level of tolerance on behalf of the faith or cultural group they represent. The dialogue in InterAction is incidental and grows organically from the state of being together.

Mainstream religious institutions in Victoria are beginning to respond to interfaith ecology work through promoting community-based projects in award schemes. This acknowledges and supports community action across the institution and legitimises it as a valid form of faith service. The two cases below of the Uniting Church Five Leaf Eco Awards and the Catholic ASSISI Awards show how mainstream Christian institutions are promoting a holistic approach to eco-action in their parishes and churches that link ecologically aware worship to practical actions.

INSTANTIATION 3: THE FIVE LEAF ECO-AWARDS⁸

The Five Leaf Eco-Awards are a non-competitive awards program aimed at developing the skills and capacity of church communities to deal with ecological themes, issues and actions. At the time of this research, the program was in its pilot stage having begun in late 2008. These awards are an 'Ecumenical Environmental Change Program for Churches' managed through the Uniting Church. The 'leaf' system allows for churches to achieve a level of recognition for their actions and to then progress according to their own timeframes and interest level to further actions. After achieving one leaf there are other leaves to work towards which provides an incentive for sustaining actions and building up a culture of eco-awareness in the community culture. The 'greening' the program supports is holistic, spanning the areas of buildings, worship, congregation, outreach and leadership.

7 Interaction: <http://www.interaction.org.au/Home/tabid/104/Default.aspx>

The Five Leaf Eco-Awards Provide:

- *Recognition and incentives for environmental performance*
- *Advice and support kits with all the information you need to green your church; including information about grants & rebates and eco-theology texts*
- *Information about what other churches have achieved*
- *We can run a workshop for your church and talk to your church council, leadership group or individuals about the importance of Creation Care.⁹*

The program in 2010 had twelve churches engaged in working through the following steps. Each step is supported by resource booklets created for the program:

- Step One: Conduct an Energy Audit
- Step Two: Take three actions to reduce your energy use.
- Step Three: Run two behaviour change campaigns
- Step Four: Provide at least two resources for members of your church to take action in their own lives outside the church.
- Step Five: Conduct a worship service around the environment.
- Step Six: Conduct one 'green' event.

In running the Five Leaf Eco-Awards as a pilot project, the organisers were assessing the success of the program based on 2 criteria: 1/ the structure and support of the program based on feedback from participant churches, 2/ the extent to which the project encouraged and enables actions and awareness in communities that were previously not engaged in eco-faith work. This second criteria was the most challenging for organisers as they found that initially the award system attracted those communities who were already engaged in these works and were seeking recognition and promotion for their activities. While organisers recognised this as valuable, their main priority was to move eco-faith projects away from only 'preaching to the converted' which they recognised to be a long-term problem in most environmental work and activism. In describing the development, promotion and future planning of the program, the organisers emphasised the importance of interfaith organisations and networks in expanding this influence to harder to reach communities within and beyond the Christian tradition.

The Five Leaf Eco-Awards were announced at the World Environment Day Dinner of the Sydney-based interfaith ecology organisation, Australian Religious Responses to Climate

8 Uniting Church in Australia: <http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/green-church/environmental-awards-for-churches/>

9 Uniting Church in Australia: <http://victas.uca.org.au/green-church/awards>

Change (ARRCC).¹⁰ Organisers noted this as a key promotion opportunity for the awards program leading to a marked increase in ecumenical participation. They also anticipated that in the future planning, a partnership with ARRCC would be important to sharing the program with other faith communities. The organisers deemed it appropriate for the program to be presented to broader faith communities by representatives of those faiths and saw that an interfaith organisational partnership would enable this development.

Both the Greening the Church Book project and the Eco-Awards program demonstrate the emerging role of interfaith ecology organisations as clearing houses for community-based project ideas as well as spaces where initiatives and ideas can cross-pollinate between communities. Interfaith organisations are most often managed by interfaith committees and can be efficiently used to test ideas with faith group representatives who act as bridges between sometimes relatively closed communities. Broader opportunities in eco-education and interfaith ecology projects often stem from these relationships.

These projects also demonstrate the benefits that action by a faith institution, in these cases the Uniting Church, with an existing organisational support and communications structure, can bring to the interfaith ecology movement. This mutually beneficial arrangement allows for the institution to promote eco-faith actions to and by its own members as well as promoting itself as a best-practice example to the wider community. In doing so, the institution inspires further actions in and relationships with other communities, these relationships enhance its project and expand its networks. Another example of an Australian church institution taking action is presented below in the Catholic ASSISI project. Similar to the Five Leaf Eco-Awards, ASSISI is focused on integrating systems, behaviours and spirituality into a holistic response to ecological change and awareness.

INSTANTIATION 4: ASSISI (A STRATEGIC, SYSTEMS-BASED, INTEGRATED SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE)¹¹

ASSISI is a new, ongoing, large-scale intervention developed by Earthcare. It provides a theological, spiritual and practical base for implementing Earthcare's ecological vision for Catholic schools, parishes and church communities, agencies and congregations. It is a useful model and a roadmap for the way to achieve ecological sustainability for the Catholic Church in Australia.

10 Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change: <http://www.arrcc.org.au/>
11 Catholic Earthcare Australia: <http://www.catholicearthcare.org.au/assisi.html>

The ASSISI project aims to support Catholic communities in transitioning to a new mode of interaction and behaviour with each other and the earth, and a renewed role for spirit and religious values in this context. In this sense, ASSISI strongly mirrors in both language and vision the interfaith ecology movement as evident in the statement of change below:

life-long process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness of all creation, and to know of creation as a gift from God which requires equitable sharing and right relationship. It also entails practice in decision making for living a life that is ecologically and ethically sustainable.

The ASSISI approach is based on transforming communities within the Church into 'learning communities' and actors of sustainable change and awareness through providing them with a framework for developing their own actions and changes. In this way, ASSISI empowers communities to tailor actions and approaches to their needs and interests. This high level of participation in the planning and development of community change strategies and actions is designed to create a sense of ownership for communities and engages them in their own process of cultural production:

The 'learning communities' approach involves a co-created process that enables organisations to work meaningfully with broader sustainability frameworks and make autonomous decisions appropriate to their own context and that link with their strategic intent. This enables the ecological conversion required for full ownership and embedding of ecological sustainability into all aspects of organisational life in the context of, and in collaboration with, the broader community.

Again, ASSISI is linking strongly with the interfaith ecology vision of local action networked into a broader movement of social, spiritual and ecological change under globalisation. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, ASSISI brings to light for organisations within the church an 'ecological praxis' for them to implement in their own contexts to bring about an ecological conversion that reaches from the deep culture and roots of the organisation, to the broader church community and out into the world.

knowledge and information on the participant organisation's eco-footprints and then allows the institution to target programs to areas most in need.¹²

ASSISI also links directly to Catholic doctrines and the language of Catholic belief systems as evident in Figure 2, with labels such as 'word made flesh.' The church creates a unique Catholic approach to this interfaith ecology project by linking its transformation to its own faith teachings and beliefs:

This is a long term approach, inspired by Catholic teachings, values and beliefs. It is aimed at developing, implementing and monitoring the processes needed to facilitate the development of a spirituality of communion that is at the heart of achieving ecological conversion and ecological sustainability in the Catholic Church in Australia.

ASSISI is an example of how interfaith ecology values and processes are influencing institutions to take on internal change processes through a cultural shift in thought and language around faith and the environment and, significantly, through the recognition of the role of integration and holistic transformation as part of an embedded community, environmental, belief and structural change process. The success of ASSISI in forming a cross institutional partnership with an environmental advisory organisation with the appropriate level of skills and knowledge to implement the scheme, exemplifies the benefit of multi-disciplinary dialogue in developing sound and workable interfaith ecology projects.

Through the name which references the 'environmental' saint, St Francis of Assisi, as well as referencing the interfaith Assisi Declarations on the Environment, this project translates interfaith ecology themes into a particular religiously informed terminology. It draws on the eco-faith heritage and long history of eco-faith writing and worship in the Catholic Church and uses terms such as 'conversion' and 'communion' amongst others, to link to existing church practices. In creating this link between the sacred and the everyday, the ASSISI model enables the Catholic Church as an institution to wade into areas of community life and practice that it had previously not had authority over. Whereas the Church hierarchy and authority system is traditionally used to dictate spiritual and moral codes of conduct and doctrines, certain areas of everyday life such as the use of energy and water, have been outside of its sphere of interest and influence. Through expanding this sphere the Church is seeking to take on the mandate of environmental care as part of its authority in communities. By structuring this process in a way that empowers communities to be part of the strategic process, it is seeking to be supportive rather than

12 Catholic Earthcare Australia: <http://www.catholicearthcare.org.au/assisi.html>

dictatorial in its approach and is replicating the interfaith ecology agenda of working with communities to begin this ecological conversion in behaviours, processes and faith.

POLITICAL ACTION

During the course of this research, environmental action and debate centred on the issue of climate change. This issue served to galvanize religious organisations and groups into making environmental statements and contributions where they otherwise may not have seen them as relevant to their core business. The interfaith ecology movement was developed, to a large extent, as a response to the global threat of climate change and the recognition of the pressing need to communicate across difference in seeking a global solution. Political action in the form of campaigning for climate action and environmental justice to different levels of government and to international governance bodies, as well as mobilising communities around regional and local environmental issues are an equally important feature of interfaith ecology work as the practical community-based actions discussed above.

The creative political actions by interfaith ecology participants surrounding the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change illustrates how this action is generated by formal and well as informal links between movement actors who quickly mobilise around issues and international gatherings.

INSTANTIATION 5: THE COPENHAGEN SUMMIT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The coinciding of the Parliament of the World's Religions, 3rd – 9th December 2009, with its theme of 'healing the earth', and the United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly known as the Copenhagen Summit¹³, 7th – 18th December 2009, brought the political activism of interfaith ecology to the fore. As religious and interfaith organisations worked towards the theme of the Parliament and reflected on their own actions and beliefs in relation to its theme, global environmental organisations encouraging political action and lobbying. It was felt in the lead-up to Copenhagen that this was a real chance for global change and cooperation.

As a large, broadly representative and politically influential organisation, the World Congress of Religions for Peace (WCRP) was well placed to take interfaith ecology action

¹³ This international summit of national leaders was the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 5th Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP 5) to the Kyoto Protocol.

surrounding Copenhagen. The WCRP partnered with the Global Campaign for Climate Action to hold a conference of senior religious leaders on September 23, in the lead up to the Copenhagen Summit. The conference allowed these leaders to directly advocate to policy-makers from around the world on the vital moral, social and spiritual as well as ecological importance of 'a fair, ambitious and binding agreement that secures climate justice for all in Copenhagen.' The multi-religious leaders' delegation included representatives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous traditions, Islam and Judaism coming from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Two key themes of the conference were the 'disproportionate impact of climate change on the poor in the global south' and 'the benefits of partnership with religious groups when dealing with this issue.'¹⁴

The Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) 2009 was reluctant to make a decisive statement to the Copenhagen Summit despite the pressure of many of its delegates who saw a clear opportunity to link the two high profile global events, one of world political, and the other of the world religious leaders. The PWR governing council see themselves as holders of a dialogue space and they understand that the act of making authoritative and supposedly representative statements can undermine the openness and participatory nature of this space.

Organisations participating in the PWR, however, sought to develop their own networks of political action and several delegates from interfaith ecology or eco-faith organisations were sending representatives to participate in the NGO level activities and campaigns surrounding the Copenhagen Summit. One prominent organisation undertaking this action of linking the two events and taking up the mantle of interfaith ecology activism was Initiatives for Change. Initiatives for Change representatives worked with URI and GreenFaith Australia members to develop a 'video statement' or series of interviews taken from the PWR as a message to Copenhagen. While lacking the clout and influence of an official statement, this creative and spontaneous project was a way of taking immediate and subversive action which did not conflict with the PWR's position.¹⁵

Bishop Geoff Davies, Coordinator of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, took action by preparing a message to the Copenhagen Summit which he brought to the PWR to stimulate discussion and gather endorsement from the other delegates. As well as calling for specific targets this message highlighted the importance of environmental justice, again demonstrating the strong links between social and environmental care in the interfaith ecology movement:

14 Religions for Peace: <http://www.religionsforpeace.org/initiatives/protect-earth/>

15 Initiatives of Change: <http://iofcenvironment.wordpress.com/>

Climate justice is an issue of peace and conflict. Either we follow the moral principles, upheld by all faith communities, of justice and equity and share the resources of the world with justice, or we continue to follow selfish acquisition, resulting in ever more conflict and environmental destruction.¹⁶

Regional political actions are regularly undertaken by better established USA interfaith ecology organisations such as GreenFaith USA and Interfaith Power and Light. These campaigns demonstrate how interfaith ecology organisations can mobilise local communities on environmental justice issues as well as contribute to larger national and international environmental campaigns, thus involving religious communities in these debates and actions. This type of organising is demonstrated in the cases below.

INSTANTIATION 6: GREENFAITH USA

GreenFaith USA has developed a set of principles for the political advocacy project entitled 'Called to Protect the Earth.' The recognition that environmental suffering is disproportionately felt by poor and vulnerable people is a key motivator for the movement to weigh into politics and create further links between religious social charity, as a long established and defining factor of religious organisations, and the newer environmental issues that will increasingly impact these communities. GreenFaith USA's statement encapsulates these linkages:

All people suffer from environmental degradation, but the poor around the world suffer its worst impacts. In the United States, research shows conclusively that people of color and the poor suffer the impacts of environmental harm disproportionately. GreenFaith strongly affirms, consistent with the values of compassion and justice present in every world religion, that the Divine commands humanity to care for the poor and vulnerable, protecting them from environmental injustice, racism and harm. We will advocate for policies that ensure that an unfair burden of environmental harm does not fall on those most vulnerable communities.¹⁷

Examples of the advocacy actions derived from this commitment include:

- *Environmental Justice Tours in our home state of New Jersey to educate religious leaders about the environmental burdens facing these at-risk communities.*
- *Action Alert advocating for stronger US legislation to regulate toxic chemicals.*

16 Fieldwork interview: Geoff Davies, Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute
17 GreenFaith: <http://greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice/called-to-protect-the-earth>

- *The Coalition for Healthy Ports to seek clean air and good jobs at US ports.*¹⁸

GreenFaith's support for communities in legal and social battles for freedom from pollution and toxic waste in poor neighbourhoods demonstrates the potential role for religious institutions in redressing this suffering and resituating themselves in relation to the issues of peace and justice in modern society.

INSTANTIATION 7: INTERFAITH POWER AND LIGHT

In another USA example, Interfaith Power and Light works on a number of levels to generate political action within faith communities as well as with political leaders. The organisation's figurehead and leading activist, Rev. Sally Bingham has garnered significant influence in US religious and political circles through her demonstrated ability to inspire and support local and widespread social action on the environment. Under her leadership Interfaith Power and Light has grown into a broad network across the USA made up of member organisations. In one of their campaigns, 'Climate Convert,' the organisation focuses on inspiring members to become politically active in lobbying senators on climate change bills. The campaign enables participation in three steps, '1/ writing to your senator; 2/ collecting a Climate Convert pin to help promote the movement; and 3/ making a difference by participating in local actions.' This letter is the template the organisation offered their participants.¹⁹ It allows the members to take action without considerable effort, as well as serving to educate and 'convert' the members themselves to further action and a stronger commitment:

I am writing to urge you to delay no further in taking up a strong clean energy and climate bill. The recent coal mining tragedy and gulf oil catastrophe underscore the urgency of a move toward safer and cleaner energy sources. As a person of faith deeply concerned about climate change, I was very disappointed to learn that after months of negotiations and deliberation, the Senate leadership announced it would not take up a climate bill before the August recess. The United States should not miss this critical opportunity to provide global leadership in reaching an international climate agreement. We need action this year. As the Senate legislation moves through the process, I ask that you:

- *Provide funding to help developing nations adopt clean energy technologies, adapt to climate change impacts, and protect tropical forests.*

¹⁸ GreenFaith: <http://greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice>

¹⁹ Interfaith Power and Light:

<http://action.interfaithpowerandlight.org/site/c.dmJUKgOZJi18G/b.6134551/k.BD6B/Home/apps/nl/newsletter2.asp>

- *Build jobs and prosperity here at home by funding the Green Jobs Act.*
- *Suspend new offshore oil drilling plans in the wake of the BP gulf disaster.*
- *Ensure any new nuclear plants comply with essential safety and environmental regulations; do not require taxpayers to foot the bill for nuclear disasters.*
- *Include an energy efficiency standard to reduce energy consumption by 10% and require that at least 25% of our electricity come from clean energy like the wind and sun.*

With your leadership, we CAN protect Creation. Please give this matter the urgency it deserves by passing a strong climate, energy, and jobs bill through the U.S. Senate.²⁰

Political mobilisation actions centring on national and local issues of environmental justice are beginning to be taken up in the Australian interfaith ecology movement with organisations such as Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change designing letter writing templates for faith communities in the lead up to the 2010 federal election, and with environmental justice awareness-raising actions such as GreenFaith Australia's Walking Humbly Journey that exposed ecological, political and economic issues in the South-East Murray Darling region.

As it is developing, most of the actions in the local movement, however, remain more focused on interfaith ecology dialogue, smaller practical projects and education on the environment in and through faith communities. Political affiliation and campaigning is contentious in new organisations seeking to establish their identity. As the movement matures and becomes more stable in its identity in Australia, there will be an important role for participation in political advocacy and activism as illustrated in the USA cases above.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR LEARNING AND ACTING

The fields of science, politics, economics and social justice are significant contributors to the interfaith ecology movement's knowledge base and the types of activities and educational experiences its members generate. The movement is, in this sense, a forum not only for different religious and cultural understandings of the environment, ecology and spirituality, but also a site through which scientists, politicians, economists and social

²⁰ Interfaith Power and Light:
http://action.interfaithpowerandlight.org/c.dmJUKgOZJiI8G/b.6075589/k.5B0E/Interfaith_Power_Light_Take_Action/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx

justice leaders of various other movements ranging from feminism to global health and food access issues, can enter into dialogue with the world's religious traditions. These collaborations and dialogues are often founded in partnerships between secular and religious organisations on certain projects, campaigns and issues. When well brokered and actively maintained, these partnerships are vibrant learning exchanges that take pressure off faith groups in deciphering environmental science, as exemplified in the ASSISI case above.

Interfaith ecology organisations are highly collaborative and supportive of each other. Each organisation is held up by a network of partnerships with other organisations that form the structure of the movement. This was demonstrated in my fieldwork in the establishment of GreenFaith Australia.

INSTANTIATION 8: GREENFAITH AUSTRALIA'S SUPPORT NETWORK

Partnerships and supportive organisational relationships were a strong component of my fieldwork experience, especially in the establishment of GreenFaith Australia which was born from a network of supportive organisational relationships. In this process I contacted Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black who was very active in both interfaith and eco-faith work with the Jewish Christian Muslim Association and the Jewish Ecological Coalition through a referral from the Globalisation for the Common Good conference team. Rabbi Jonathan was keen to have me work with him on a long-standing dream of his to establish the first ecologically focused interfaith organisation in Melbourne. We talked about the potential of such an organisation from its beginnings in community-based education projects to a site of multi-faith worship and eco-demonstration for interfaith community groups and activities.

I initiated the first in a series of conversations with Rev. Fletcher Harper, the director of GreenFaith USA, on his work and received advice on how to begin establishing an organisation of this kind. Throughout the Globalisation of the Common Good Conference, and Green World Youth Day, Rabbi Jonathan and I promoted the possibility of an interfaith ecology organisation for the Melbourne region to various groups. Our efforts were strongly supported by the recent announcement that the theme of the Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions was 'Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth.' This particular emphasis on interfaith ecology work and ideas provided wide promotion and further legitimacy to the movement. We established partnerships with supporting organisations such as the Jewish Christian Muslim Association, COMMON Melbourne and the Faith Communities Forum which enabled us to use their communications networks to promote an initial meeting for interested parties. We also

secured a small seed grant from the newly established Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change (ARRCC).

In August 2008 I spoke to Rev. Harper about us becoming their namesake in Australia. He explained that they were thinking of expanding internationally and using the name elsewhere. We saw two options, either we could not use the name and remain completely separate, or we could use the GreenFaith name and make this the beginning of a relationship where GreenFaith USA would be an older sister organisation which would help us to develop through advice and resource sharing. This relationship was a good example of not 'reinventing the wheel' but rather working with the organisations that are already in this line of work in a mutually beneficial way. By October 2008 the committee had worked hard and fast to become incorporated, set up a website and submit a funding grant application to the Victorian Multicultural Commission for its first major project to be held the following year.

Increasingly, in the face of economic, social and ecological crises and the spiritual deficit of industrialised advanced consumer societies, global culture is seeking out a deeper reality and spiritual nourishment that can fill the social as well as personal hole left by the uprooting of religious belonging and the institutionalised social and existential security that religion once provided. The interfaith ecology movement offers institutions of various kinds the ability to engage in a spiritually relevant dialogue without being accused of partisanship to a particular religious creed or power. Interfaith ecology organisations provide easily accessible sites for this interaction and are indeed key facilitators of this process.

Interfaith ecology projects often seek multiple partners who enable different aspects of the project to be delivered by the most appropriate and well equipped organisation. Both the Walking Humbly Journey and the Green World Youth Day (GWYD) projects operated on this principle, whereby the organising teams coordinated actions and scheduling to allow different religious, interfaith and community and environmental groups and organisations to participate in different aspects of the project. Both projects were essentially a space for the contribution and inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups and organisations. The great achievement of these projects was the way the organising teams forged local level relationships and micro-partnerships in the regional Victorian communities where the programs were run. Regional community organisations and bodies provided schools for sleeping space, transport around their towns, tours of ecological sites, information sessions on local issues, food and activities. This experience highlighted for me the level of engagement that can be achieved through involving local

people in partnerships and creating a sense of ownership. Communities are generous and willing to share their knowledge and their spirit if approached with respect and an openness to what can be shared. Table 8 below illustrates the partnerships involved in the GWYD project.

TABLE 8: GREEN WORLD YOUTH DAY: WATER IS LIFE EMERSION PROGRAM ACTIVE PROJECT PARTNERS

Organisation	Role in the program
Young People for Development	International youth network providing the participant and international publicity
Victoria University	Hosting venue for in-Melbourne forums and education sessions Provided academic staff and event management students to work on the project as an assignment
City of Greater Bendigo	Venues for meeting/ forums when in Bendigo Tourism and community liaison advice for the local area
Brimbank City Council	Tree planting activity to actively off-set flights in Brimbank Park with the Environment Department
Mt. Alexander Shire	Tourism and community liaison advice for the local area Expert information session on the ecological impact of drought in the region
Holy Eucharist Parish	Hosting of billets in Melbourne, church venue and main site for volunteer organising team to use office space and resources. Also active in pre-project fundraising
Loddon Murray Community Leadership Program	Promote local water projects in the Loddon – Murray river catchment area on the 2 day emersion program in this region. Linked the program to water recycling

	projects, water wise gardens and agricultural initiatives and diverse farming enterprises. Key community relations body
Water Watch	Melbourne Water's education program ran sessions with participants on how to test and determine the health of urban waterways
Coliban Water	Expert presentation seminar on water issues and futures in the region including water trading
Iramoo	Education on Australian grasslands flora and fauna
Goldfields Revegetation Nursery	Demonstrations and tour of seed regeneration projects endemic to the Bendigo region
Greater Bendigo XPress Youth Advisory Committee	Involvement with local volunteer youth as volunteers and guides

In May 2009, GreenFaith Australia received notification from the Victoria Multicultural Commission that we were successful in securing a grant to deliver 'Walking Humbly on the Land: A Journey to the Murray River.' This project aimed to establish relationships with regional interfaith and faith groups in the south eastern Murray Darling Basin area throughout 2009, and then to involve them in a travelling project in the week leading up to the Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) in which interfaith communities of Melbourne and delegates from the Parliament would visit communities and share in various reciprocal encounters where the local people could share in the benefits of the PWR and the travellers could learn about local communities, their projects, social and ecological heritage and the ecological problems of the drought affected region. In the lead-up to the project, team members went on four planning and development journeys to Castlemaine, Echuca, Shepparton, Kinglake, Ngambie and Bendigo to meet with communities, build relationships and consult with them on what they would like to achieve through the project. In attending two of these journeys, I was enlivened by the meetings we held with regional community groups and their openness to the opportunity the project presented them to share and celebrate their local activities and raise awareness of local ecological and diversity issues. Importantly we forged a strong and lasting relationship with the Yorta Yorta Indigenous owners of the region that has

developed into future activities and projects. The method of approaching communities with an open invitation to contribute as they saw fit was the key success of this planning period. Table 9 below illustrates the number and type of project partnerships undertaken.

TABLE 9: WALKING HUMBLY, A JOURNEY TO THE MURRAY RIVER: ACTIVE PROJECT PARTNERS

Organisation	Role in the program
Parliament of the World's Religions, Melbourne	Promotion and international delegation. Forum for post-journey discussion and presentation
Yorta Yorta Nations	Traditional owners of the land, tour of Barmah forest area and traditional lands. Sharing cultural mapping project
Shepparton Interfaith Council	Local participation, and contributions to interfaith ceremony
Sikh Gurdwara: Shepparton	Hosting for sacred concert, shared ritual and dinner
Sikh Gurdwara: Blackburn	Hosting of launch breakfast and sacred opening
Mt. Alexander Shire	Presentations on local social and ecological issues, venue provisions and promotion in local area
Spirit of the Valley Farm	Orchard tour, locally grown produce and presentation on local farming issues
Transition Town: Mt Alexander	Workshop on local change initiatives and the role of faith and spirituality to culture in transition to climate futures
Castlemaine Uniting Church	Hosting of interfaith service and music
Coliban Water	Expert presentation seminar on water issues and futures in the region including water trading
Golden Dragon Museum	Local Chinese gold rush history presentation
Murrindindi Shire Council	Garden planting in new bushfire recovery playground as a shared healing activity with the local community.

In both the GWYD and Walking Humbly projects there was breadth of participation from both environmental, government and community contributing organisations. Collaboration was brought to the fore of the planning process which greatly enriched the learning program and the ongoing relationships between individuals and organisations. While these partnerships required a high degree of organisational and networking and complex stakeholder relationships throughout the planning stages, this method was effective in ensuring the expertise and local knowledge of different organisations was used and promoted. Participant organisations valued the opportunity to be involved as they are able to contribute without carrying the organisational burden. Such projects become important forums for interfaith ecology dialogue as diverse perspectives and areas of expertise intersect and holistic responses can be explored. Having relayed how these partnerships are forming through the interfaith ecology movement on a local and grassroots community level, I will now present an instantiation of a global organisation that focuses on larger scale and politically significant partnership projects.

INSTANTIATION 9: ALLIANCE OF RELIGION AND CONSERVATION

The resources and skills needed to broker active partnerships has become the purpose of the global, UK-based organisation, Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC). This organisation is fulfilling an important role in identifying and fostering relationships at the institutional rather than community level of religious and environmental organisations.

The work and projects of ARC are varied and range from widespread practical initiatives to high level political activism. All projects are based on the partnership policy and process that has been planned to enable faith communities and leaders to engage with effective environmental change strategies. ARC understands the power of narrative for interfaith ecology work and seeks to generate inspiring stories of successful partnerships and actions to build a practical evidence base for the interfaith ecology movement. They focus on sustainability so that partnerships can be maintained without continued mediation from ARC as an external body. They also focus on tangible and achievable results that are not too complex and allow for small steps to be taken. This means that participant's gain a sense of achievement and the desire to continue the learning and partner relationship.

Prince Philip is patron of ARC which allows it to operate at a high level of global social and political influence. ARC has been influential in legitimatising interfaith ecology work and bringing the movement to the table in important global negotiating circles as seen in the case of the ARC Climate Change Partnership in 2000. This project sought to establish the ARC partnership model as globally endorsed and supported by national governments. It invited the world's major faiths to lead by example and work in partnership with environmental agencies to determine targets for energy saving and reduction in emissions. Through representation at the inter-governmental meeting, ARC drew upon and strengthened its relationship with the United Nations Environment Program:

ARC took its Climate Change Partnership initiative to the inter-governmental meeting at The Hague in 2000... The 15 countries committed to work with religions on climate change issues are: Albania, Australia, Belarus, Bolivia, Botswana, Canada, Croatia, Gambia, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, Romania, Zambia and Zimbabwe

How ARC gained support at The Hague:

- *The Mongolian Minister for Nature and Environment endorsed the partnership as part of his presentation. The Mexican Minister also supported it.*
- *The United Nations FCCC circulated copies of the proposal to Ministers of all nations. It now stands as an official proposal tabled by Mongolia within the framework of CoP6. As such, all national governments present at CoP6 are invited to take up the partnership.*
- *13 nations took up the invitation to make it official policy to work with religions on reducing emissions. The UK and US were among those who did not express interest. However, since The Hague meeting an array of different practical partnerships between faiths and national governments have emerged.*

Now, in association with UNEP, ARC is developing practical climate handbooks for many of the countries – reflecting needs, beliefs and cultures.²¹

An example of an ARC community level partnership project is Living Churchyards Initiative which is a long standing program that ARC was involved with launching in the 1990s. 'The vision was of churchyards throughout the UK – and overseas if possible – becoming places where wildlife could thrive, and wildflowers could grow.' The initiative to link churches and places of worship across England with eco-conservation projects so that church grounds could become eco-sanctuaries and native habitats in an increasingly urban environment captured the mainstream church imagination and linked with church

21 Alliance of Religions and Conservation: <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=137>

teachings on sanctuary and stewardship. 6000 church yards across the UK now participate in providing eco-sanctuaries for remnant native flora and fauna.

These instantiations demonstrate how actions at the community level in eco-faith and interfaith ecology work are based on utilising partnerships between organisations to develop systems. These cooperative systems create stronger support structures, transfer skills and knowledge, and move towards more innovative and holistic responses to ecological issues. When developed effectively and with mutual benefit, partnerships are a crucial enabler for the spread and strengthening of the interfaith ecology movement. These partnership principles are equally relevant at local and global levels of social organising and action.

DECOLONISATION AND BELONGING

The theme of decolonisation in the interfaith ecology movement stems from the positioning of the movement largely in post-industrial multicultural societies in the west as discussed in chapter 2. In these global sites, particularly in Australia and America, immediate experiences and memories of colonisation coincide undeniably with ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples and ecological devastation. These trajectories coincide further with a crisis in spirituality in western culture, linked strongly to disillusionment around the role of Christianity in the colonising process, and the widespread craving among western post-Christians for an earth-based spirituality. Those seeking eco-spiritual teachings outside of institutionalised religion, along with those seeking to reclaim the eco-faith teachings of the Christian tradition, as seen prominently in the strong leadership of Christian eco-theologians, are keenly attracted to the interfaith ecology vision and its organisations.

Many interfaith ecology participants support engagement with Indigenous people and knowledge and have instituted this goal for dialogue as a broad movement goal. These participants also often have histories that link them to Indigenous causes and people. Carol McDonough describes the inspiration she found in living with Indigenous people. Her experiences created a strong commitment to Indigenous issues in interfaith ecology work and dialogue:

I know that from those sorts of experiences, almost deeper than language, I started to absorb through my skin a sense of the Koori way of being with earth. I remember on Minjilang the male elders and I look back and think, how extraordinary that this happened in the sixties, they were hunting geese, and the respectfulness of just taking the geese that were needed for the

food for that day. Being taken out in dug-out canoes and so on. That has really stayed with me.²²

The most successful interfaith ecology projects that engage Indigenous participants and work towards reconciliation are those based on the formation of interpersonal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants around respect for place and Indigenous custodianship. This approach to relationship building and knowledge sharing is demonstrated in the instantiation of the Women's Interfaith Network Foundation and the Yorta Yorta community.

INSTANTIATION 10: WOMEN'S INTERFAITH NETWORK FOUNDATION AND THE YORTA YORTA COMMUNITY

GreenFaith Australia's Walking Humbly journey overwhelmingly attracted female participants and was led by women interfaith ecology leaders. The legacy of this was that special friendships and relationships developed between women, and in particular between several key organisers and the Yorta Yorta Indigenous women involved in the program. As this relationship developed through visits and exchanges after the program, it became apparent to the GreenFaith female leaders that connecting with the Yorta Yorta women was a special opportunity to support and celebrate their connection to country and to link other women into a network of reconciliation. This network was soon after incorporated as the Women's Interfaith Network Foundation with a Yorta Yorta elder as the vice-president. One foundation leader describes the first step of forming this network through an intimate place-based experience:

It was a hot January day as we drove the dirt roads of the forest seeking out the Tree. We had a couple of false starts before we located the spot. The Birthing Tree is a short distance from the road. It is clearly ancient. Not a leaf on it. Too sacred to photograph. Before, Yorta Yorta culture was disturbed and the nation dispersed, this is where people began life. A mother, knowing the time was near, would come to the Tree – perhaps walking some considerable distance. After the Tree, we visited Cummeragunja and the cemetery there. The visit to the cemetery was amazing. It is a peaceful restful place in the Australian bush and there were many famous Yorta Yorta people there, the historic figure, William Cooper and his family; distinguished Australians like Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls, his wife and children; Margaret Tucker and her daughter; Hyllus Maris and her daughter. This was an amazing experience to see extended Yorta Yorta families resting here. We had, ever so briefly, traversed the Yorta Yorta

22 Fieldwork interview: Carol McDonough, GreenFaith Australia

*journey from birth to death. On the way we met the most interesting people – not only our wonderful hosts but people who kept a culture alive in life and in death and people who have made the most significant contribution to Australian life in spite of dispossession, obstacles and vicissitudes.*²³

The Women's Interfaith Network Foundation reconciliation model is successful because the focus is on building friendship among a small group of participants – not some externalised body of imagined 'members' or participants in future events. These externalities often shift the focus away from the immediate interfaith relationships at hand in organisations.

This relationship building through interpersonal dialogue and learning around place also characterised the achievements in reconciliation through the Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) community engagement process described below.

INSTANTIATION 11: PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

Two research participants, Alex Butler and Mikael Smith, worked together in 'community organising' roles for the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions. Alex has worked extensively in organising Buddhist global gatherings and events, but had not previously worked in an interfaith context. Mikael is a successful Indigenous entrepreneur, working in business and social enterprise, this was also his first major interfaith role.

The roles of the community organisers was to engage the Australian and specifically the Melbourne community in the event as volunteers and participants. Their experience exemplifies how a process of open dialogue and 'being with' can inspire new understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Their process of holding dialogue sessions in communities opened this possibility both with the session participants and between the organisers themselves. Alex describes these experiences as one of the most significant she encountered in the PWR planning process. As she expresses, underpinning these encounters and learning is a new respect for the importance of place for Indigenous people and their place-attuned world view:

Mikael had quite an impact on me. Just seeing the world through his eyes. Mikael has a very interesting view of place and the physical environment. So even if you walk over the road to have a sandwich with him, he would say things like, 'this all used to be water here, the docklands never existed.' Whereas that is not something I would ever think about. It doesn't

23 Women's Interfaith Network Foundation: <http://www.winfoundation.net/about.html>

actually matter where you go with Mikael, he is always very aware of the land. That had quite an impact on me really, he sees a different Melbourne to what I see, and he sees the original one as well as this one. It's a way of perceiving space through time. I feel a deeper commitment to reconciliation now as a result.²⁴

Alex continues to describe the impact these dialogues had on participants and the limits placed on extending these to meet the level of interest in dialogue and learning:

I went out with Mikael to run focus groups, especially people from mainly immigrant faith groups had never met an Indigenous person before. They would have talked to him for hours and hours. That wasn't new age fetishism, that was just 'oh wow, this guy is really an Aboriginal person, and he's articulate and he's not going to get angry with me if I ask a question and he knows enough about his culture to respond.' Those people in the Aboriginal community with that knowledge and those interpersonal skills are very key, and they are very stretched. But it certainly was the right theme; it really did connect with what people wanted to know. But the problem was about not being able to resource the demand properly.²⁵

The majority of interfaith ecology gatherings and activities I attended in Victoria throughout this research actively sought to engage an Indigenous representative; most were unsuccessful. Organisations recognise the importance of including Indigenous people in the dialogue process but also recognise the strains put on Aboriginal leaders to participate in multiple events. Few projects have sufficient budgets to compensate these leaders for their time and effort. The experiences described by Alex Butler above touch a level of authenticity in reconciliation dialogue that was not strong in the actual event of the PWR nor in most events where participation is tokenistic or where interpersonal dialogue is not a feature. These experiences and the work of the Women's Interfaith Network Foundation indicate that a 'small is beautiful' interpersonal and place oriented dialogue is an effective way that interfaith ecology projects are participating in the reconciliation process.

This relationship model and the theme of local space was important to the successful step the Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network (COMMON) took in initiating a dialogue on the issue of healing our relationship to country and reconciliation between indigenous and multifaith communities in the Sharing Our Space project.

24 Fieldwork interview: Alex Butler, 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions
25 Fieldwork interview: Alex Butler, 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions

INSTANTIATION 12: SHARING OUR SPACE CONFERENCE

The focus of the COMMON organisation is their annual healing conference which is held on the United Nations International Peace Day (the 21st of September). Each of these conferences is based around the theme of reconciliation in relation to the diverse interfaith communities of Melbourne and the environment they all share. The 'healing' of these gatherings is aimed at bringing people with various histories together to develop a sense of belonging and relationship in our shared home and to explore and heal the past experiences and heritage of many dispossessed peoples from around the world now living in this multicultural society. The organisers seek to achieve cultural healing through initiating a deep dialogue around the significance of the Australian heritage of colonisation and the dispossession of Indigenous people to our shared need for a renewed national identity.

In March 2008 I connected with COMMON, whose president, Jessiee Kaur Singh, a devout Sikh, became an important mentor for me in community-based interfaith ecology work. Jessiee and the COMMON team, including Bahai, Hindu, Muslim and Indigenous Australian members were planning a unique event that linked the complex issues of Aboriginal Reconciliation and multicultural belonging to the land we share as Australians in our multifaith and postcolonial society. I became a core member of the organising team and participated in the processes of linking with Aboriginal organisations, including the Maya Healing Centre and the Aborigines Advancement League. I was also part of negotiations around the content and form of the event, which needed to be inclusive of multiple cultural and faith perspectives and different visions of team members.

The theme of the 2008 conference was specifically linked to the Apology to the Stolen Generation given by Prime Minister Rudd (discussed in chapter 2) earlier that year as stated in the conference invitation:

We warmly welcome you to this free event to begin Multi-Faith Week and to celebrate International Peace Day.

It is the aim of this forum to demonstrate our support for the Commonwealth Government's apology to the members of the stolen generation and to build on the foundations laid down by our Prime Minister Hon. Kevin Rudd.

Take part in a process of recognition, reconciliation and learning between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Let us recognise what we have in common and let us share our space with each other.²⁶

26 Event Flyer, COMMON

The theme for the 2008 conference of 'Sharing Space' was derived through organisational dialogue with two Aboriginal partner organisations, the Maya Healing Centre and the Aborigines Advancement League. The theme of sharing space and place was important to these partners and recognises that living in harmony is not an abstract idea but is actually related to how we live in local communities together, and the need to be active on that grassroots level.

The program, developed in collaboration with the project partner organisations was varied and sought to take participants into a sacred multi-faith presence, a serious and meaningful dialogue as well as bringing them into a space of shared celebration. The resulting program included the following elements:

- Smoking Ceremony
- Multifaith Prayers
- Panel: 'How do we heal the grief of our country?'
- Children's workshop
- Workshop: Acknowledgement of Country
- Closing ritual
- Food and celebration

The panel session brought representatives from different groups together to reflect on how, from their cultural and religious perspective, cultural healing could be achieved in our society. This was followed by the 'Acknowledgement of Country'²⁷ workshop which invited participants to engage more directly with the theme of the event by exploring in small groups how a more genuine and less tokenistic acknowledgement might capture the collective experience of diverse Australians and be more meaningful for Indigenous custodians.

The event attracted over 300 participants which exceeded the expectations of the organisers. The atmosphere of sacred engagement was created by the long multifaith prayer ceremony. While this was particularly significant to many attendees and was the primary way in which the communities were engaged and represented, it did take time away from the workshop sessions. Upon reflection organisers felt that the depth and breadth of material encapsulated by the theme was barely touched upon and that participants would have needed significantly more time to engage in a genuine dialogue on the issues. The team was satisfied, however, that an important dialogue and bridge

27 It is a protocol in Australia that at public gatherings there is a short opening statement that acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the area as the traditional custodians. If it is done by one of these traditional custodians it is a 'welcome to country' if it is done by any other person it is an 'acknowledgement of country.'

between Aboriginal and multi-faith communities had been opened. The success of this opening was built on the relationships between interfaith and Indigenous people and organisations in the planning process. The empowerment model the team took in approaching Indigenous organisations, and the theme, deeper reconciliation dialogue, which would be carried into COMMON's future conferences, were crucial to this process.

Australian Aboriginal philosopher and Kombu-Merri woman, Mary Graham, describes an opening for dialogue around a shared future in which we focus collectively on a philosophy for living together in land and with each other:

Aboriginal people's culture is ancient, and certain observations have been made over many millennia about the nature of nature, spirit and being human. The most basic questions for any human group, despite advances in technology, have not changed much over time; they include: How do we live together (in a particular area, nation, or on earth), without killing each other off? How do we live without substantially damaging the environment? Why do we live? We need to find the answer to this question in a way that does not make people feel alienated, lonely or murderous.²⁸

Answering these questions requires a deep and long running dialogue between Aboriginal Australians and the diverse Australian communities through which Aboriginal heritage can be better understood and in which land and place become newly valued as the site to which we belong and that we share. This dialogue, around our connective and common 'country' can only be built on trust and friendship. It is a dialogue that is beginning to emerge in the interfaith ecology movement where genuine interpersonal relationship building is prioritised in organisations and projects. Through this dialogue interfaith ecology participants are beginning to re-imagine the relationship between people and place at the community level and in relation to Australia's socio-historical context – a crucial step in the reconciliation process.

CONCLUSION: SEEDING THE POTENTIALS OF INTERFAITH ECOLOGY

The interfaith ecology projects, events and initiatives presented in this chapter are not only examples of the successes of the movement in generating synergies of themes and actions, and producing new structures and processes for holding these spaces open; they are also a picture of a very young and recent set of actions and processes.

28 Graham, Aboriginal worldviews, 181

This chapter has touched on examples of the successful strategies of this budding movement, including its development in and through religious institutions such as the Uniting and Catholic churches that have created their own projects and engaged their communities in eco-faith actions. It has explored how participants are able to mobilise creatively and in solidarity around eco-justice issues and wade into the politics of climate change. At the very broadest global political level, and the very local project level, partnership methods of multidisciplinary, multi-locality and interfaith dialogue were shown to be effective in establishing creative relationships and sharing expert knowledge. In the Australian context specifically, the interfaith dialogue around reconciliation and decolonisation has indicated an important emergent role for the interfaith ecology movement in working with themes of eco-cultural healing and national identity formation. As is clear from these varied cases, there is not one sector or method through which interfaith ecology is developing.

Behind the successes of the movement are the people who create its actions and projects and who persist in its complex dialogues and relationships. They are almost all volunteers who work out of a dedication to the movement's cause and their faith. The motivations, aspirations and inspirations for these participants and leaders will be the subject of the next chapter.

SUSTAINING AND MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR INTERFAITH

ECOLOGY MOVEMENT PARTICIPANTS

It is not through a breaking down of the unique contributions of a particular story or a particular tradition, but these will enter into an 'appreciative inquiry' ... I think we're in an age now where the presenting issues are out of reach of, or beyond only the particular or any particular community which then thrusts us into a much more universal conversation. - Paul Sanders, Augustine Centre¹

Paul Sander's statement reflects the form that inspiration and creativity in the interfaith ecology movement is taking. It is not sourced from a single tradition, philosophy or text, nor is it based in a single issue, individual or community. Rather the modes and methods of inspiration in interfaith ecology stem from a dialogue that is both an act of conversation as well as a creative and transformative process around people, spirituality and place.

This chapter explores the modes and expressions of this inspiration. It addresses what inspires individual participants and leaders in the movement, and actions and methods that they in turn generate which inspire communities and broader movement participants. This exploration begins with the personal, looking at examples of individual inspirations and faith callings. It then turns to collective motivation in the movement, focusing on how participants define their common ground, and on the local and global networks through which creative ideas, resources and support flow as inspirational channels for movement growth.

Later in the chapter, the inspiration participants draw from place, and how places are becoming important partners in the dialogical creativity of the movement will be discussed. The way participants perceive the reality and threat of eco-crises as motivators

1 Fieldwork interview: Paul Sanders, Augustine Centre

for action will then be explored before turning to address ritual as a unique site of renewal and transformative expression in the movement.

SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Many of the influential and inspiring experiences shared by participants were those in which people encountered barriers related to difference and identity and were able to learn from and grow through the experience. Movement participants recognise these as genuine moments and cite them as important to their participation and interest in the movement, and more generally and personally, to the way they continued to conduct their lives and relationships. Often the most meaningful experiences were those in which participants reassessed their own behaviour or attitudes in the face of cultural difference. These experiences place the participants in relationship to difference in various ways such as: moments of experiencing another cultural approach, sharing connection across difference in interpersonal and collective contexts, and breaking from a cultural and institutional past.

Jacques Boulet is the founder and leader of Borderlands Cooperative, which works on holistic education and community development projects that link social, spiritual and ecological themes and actions. He describes an important personal growth experience, stemming from encountering a different culture, which was seminal to his ongoing work in relationship building at the community and interpersonal levels:

I went to Congo for 3 years; existentially those were the most important 3 years of my life. I had come from a pretty individual, decentred kind of environment. Whilst I was in the Congo my mother died, about 10 months into the piece. I did exactly what I had learnt to do with sorrow. As a man you are not supposed to cry, crying would get you in trouble. So I just did exactly what I had learnt. I went to my room, and shut the door behind me and sat with that tickling feeling behind the bridge of my nose you experience when holding back tears. Then there was a knock on the door and about 30 black men of my age who I had been working with were there. They stood there waiting for me and they said, 'do you want us to come and cry with you? It's not good to be alone when you're sad.' I said, 'no, I'll be ok' and went back to my misery. So I didn't really know then about that word 'relationship', but somehow we have unlearned what it means to relate and that relationships are first and individuals are second. Unfortunately we see that the other way around, we see relationships as only there to create better 'me's'. So that is probably the most important thing for me at the moment, to rethink and recalibrate my relationship to the world that surrounds me.²

2 Fieldwork notes: event transcript

This is a story that Jacques Boulet often shares in his mentoring relationships and with groups; it captures for him an important turning point where an encounter with a different cultural approach to social relationships and emotional expression was the catalyst for him to rethink his own cultural norms at a time of immense grief.

Participants also describe positive bonding experiences across religious and cultural divides as formative to their work in the movement. These experiences become important motivators that remind participants of the worth and potential of their work in producing higher order relationships and experiences for themselves and others. In these experiences participants often felt a strong level of spiritual connection, equality and respect across faith differences which empowers them. Sikh woman, Jessie Kaur Singh is very active in the global interfaith scene and attends many international forums and gatherings where she seeks out relationships with people across faiths. Below she describes the impact of her meeting with Mother Theresa as a meeting between two spiritually inspired activists and female leaders from different faiths:

I remember meeting Mother Theresa in my journey ... When I saw her she tried to get up from the wheel chair and both our heads hit each other. She felt honoured to meet me and I was honoured to meet her. I didn't try to go and meet her, somehow it just happened. I told Mother Theresa my vision of peace through the multifaith movement across the world. She held my hand and said, 'that is the only way peace is going to come. You have to do what I could not do.' Those were her words to me, which was very powerful. I didn't know that this would have such a special meaning for me.³

Inspirational interpersonal experiences also occurred through movement gatherings where participants were interacting with multiple different others but felt a great sense of community across all of the differences. In these circumstances participants feel that they are realising the movement's potential and seek to recreate these experiences for others.

Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black describes the inspiring environment of his first interfaith conference. As a participant with a strong personal experience of the event, he was inspired by the potential of these gatherings and was later motivated to recreate this type of gathering when he migrated to Australia:

The Leo Baeck College in London where I trained to be a Rabbi worked in conjunction with a German Christian conference centre called Hedwig Dransfeld Haus in Bendorf am Rhein over many years to organise a Jewish, Christian, Muslim conference, as a residential weeklong conference. I found as a Rabbi that ministers of religion do a lot of giving out and it is very important to learn how to take in – What I found at this week in Germany with other Jews and Christians and Muslims was very important. I would stay up talking until there was no one else

3 Fieldwork interview: Jessie Kaur Singh, COMMON

to talk to and often had conversations till three in the morning. I came back very high and completely exhausted. I went to study with a Jewish Rabbi from the orthodox seminary in London about a day after I got back. I was telling him how wonderful this conference had been. He said, 'why do you want to waste your time talking to goyim (somewhat disparaging term for non-Jews)?' I was a bit taken back by the question. It seemed so obvious and I knew what I had got out of it and it seemed so blinkered a view.

In 2003 when I came to work in Australia, I asked if there was a similar residential interfaith conference and was told there wasn't. I was also told it wasn't going to be possible here. I coincidentally met a guy ... who was very interested in moving Jewish, Christian, Muslim relations forward. He had lots of contacts with the Australian interfaith scene and between us we managed to get together a steering group to set up a similar residential conference and that was the Jewish Christian Muslim Conference of Australia and that grew into the Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia, one of the tasks of which is to run conferences.⁴ Later, the orthodox Rabbi came to Australia and ended up attending one of the JCMA conferences. He is no longer working as a Rabbi in Australia so perhaps he is not so much under the spotlight of the orthodox community as he would have been if he had been practicing as a Rabbi, but it was interesting to see that he had moved on.

Important to Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black's story is the way the original experience of the interfaith gathering instilled a strong sense in him of what was possible. This motivated him to overcome discouragement from others in his own faith, who questioned the worth of the experience, and later in a new country where the feasibility of the gathering was questioned. In founding the JCMA and the regular conferences – the most recent of which at the time of this research was on the interfaith ecology theme of 'greening with God' – he was able to prove to himself and others the worth of interfaith relations, even to the orthodox Rabbi who eventually became a participant.

Movement participants often encounter peak-experiences linked to a project activity that they find especially meaningful and inspiring. In these experiences, participants describe feeling that the difficult work of collaboration across difference has culminated in an inspired communion, reflective of both the spiritual and social aspirations of the interfaith ecology movement. One participant of the Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network (COMMON) Healing Conference describes the effects of such an encounter in inspiring hope and faith in the future:

During the healing ceremony I felt uplifted but also extremely overwhelmed with sadness. It was a rollercoaster of emotions as he touched upon the problems the Aboriginal Healing Centre deals with everyday... Encouraging words provided hope that Aboriginal people are coming to know their tradition once more and people of all cultures are beginning to respect

the traditional Indigenous ways. With a room full of people who only want to feel and give love this conference flowed smoothly from one session to another ... In our uncertain, changing society we need to create these events more and more so those who are fragile can feel its ok to laugh, cry and show emotions. The conference was born out of love and enveloped the message of unconditional love to those we mix with and interact with. It's a clear sign that times are changing, truth, justice, honesty and freedom can become our reality.⁵

Other movement participants and organisers describe how major life changes and shifts in their own personal perception and faith generated high order experiences that they now hold as their personal mission or calling. For several participants these stemmed from negative institutional settings or restrictive religious cultures. In such cases the types of environments and actions the participant sought to create through the interfaith ecology movement actively countered the context they broke from. Such actions can be understood as a rebellion from the strictures of their past culture but in a way that allows for the positive spiritual elements of their past to have new life and expression. Uniting Church Minister, Zen teacher and director of the Augustine Centre, Paul Sanders, describes this experience in his journey from ministry in a conservative Christian denomination to a more open and integral contemplative path and institutional setting:

I grew up in a very in-cultured, barriered experience in which the fences and ways of self defining were very comfortable but also closed off. My own experience was when that kind of conditioning, and I don't mean that in a harsh way, when that kind of formation simply unravelled in a fairly dramatic way when the world that I perceived looking over the fence didn't act in the way that I had actually perceived it. Particularly when I lost my own relationship to that community because I dared move my thinking and stretched my own thinking a bit. So I think it was out of a complete collapse of a consciousness that simply wanted to overlay life with a particular prescribed way of viewing life. This made me more available then for an appreciative inquiry, a mutual regard began to develop, not agreement but at least the sense that other's perceptions could actually challenge and inform my own. I think that most of us probably change through experiences like that ... So I was guided by informing experiences in my own practise. So it was actually a praxis model and I thought when I came here, how I could keep that practice and that vision consciously alive.⁶

These transformative actions are also relevant for participants who broke from non-religious institutions, such as work or education institutions, to seek out a different approach. Jacques Boulet describes how the formation of Borderlands Cooperative and the Oases Graduate School was informed by his initial positive experience in participatory action education. The desire to recapture the possibilities of his initial work and create an

4 Fieldwork interview: Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, JCMA

5 COMMON: <http://www.commonaustralia.com/pastevents/pastevents05.html>

activist and education context that engendered freedom and exploration of holistic interfaith ecology themes directly responded to his dissatisfaction with the eroded and compartmentalised education institution he broke from:

The nature of universities and of higher learning was changing profoundly. That is where disenchantment really started to take a hold of me. Then I saw what was happening to curricula, and it was just not following a relationship with practice and activism. I'm saying this because that dream and hope was based on things I knew were possible and had experienced previously. That was certainly one of the motivations that I then carried as I decided to quit. Because of my experience internationally, I really wanted to connect back to the solidarity movement which I had been cut off from while teaching.

It became clear in talks and discussion that we would have to focus: 1/ on community development, so that it would be about communion; 2/ It would have to be about international solidarity and learning from others. Realising that more and more we were losing our own capacity as people in the west, to even understand what was going on with us; 3/ to do with ecological responsibility; 4/ Respect for people's knowledge, particularly in the Participatory Action Research way. So you can see how the four things became embodied in what we figured out Borderlands was probably to be. All of these kinds of experiences held together. Finally, if Spirit was anywhere it was between all of that. That was what emerged in the conversation.⁷

In all of these examples the participants held a faith in a vision of what they sought to create based on inspirational experiences. Sometimes these experiences are positive, based on new interpersonal relationships across difference that stood as a goal and reminder of the potential of interfaith ecology work. Other times they were founded in negative cultural experiences that stand as antithetical to what the participants were seeking to create through the interfaith ecology movement. What is common to the experiences is the role of cultural difference that challenges the comfort zones of the participants and in doing so generates new and creative responses for and through them.

FAITH CALLINGS

The vision that these experiences inspire in participants is related to the potential for a new integrated and harmonious culture for humanity and the earth. Participants believe this future is possible, but not inevitable and, therefore, significant work is needed. Faith in their own activism sits in relationship to the participant's traditional religious faith and spiritual expression. This relationship generates deeply meaningful sources for action in

6 Fieldwork interview: Paul Sanders, Augustine Centre

7 Fieldwork interview: Jacques Boulet, Borderlands Cooperative

the movement. The three movement leaders below explain how their individual faith, and their faith in an integral future, motivates their interfaith ecology work.

Jessie Kaur Singh reflects on how her Sikh faith endorses and encourages followers to engage in multi-faith dialogue and truth:

I am very blessed to be a Sikh because Sikhism promotes Multifaith. It says 'truth is the highest virtue and truthful living is even higher.' Truth is the base of it all and it is about being practical. And if you are a Christian, be a good Christian. If you are a Muslim be a good Muslim ... That is the teaching, it does not say that you have to become a Sikh. We are all Sikhs anyway, because Sikh means seeker, it means a learner.⁸

Catholic Sister, Anne Boyd explains how she sees a role for Catholicism in sharing sacramentality as a gift to the new integral vision of interfaith ecology:

The diversity that religions – which are human constructs – have brought about, will not be diminished, because we need the diversity. But they will exist in a far more harmonious manner with other diversity. So we will see that you can have Christianity, or even Catholic and Uniting and Anglican, all treasured. So what does a Catholic bring to that? I think our gift is sacramentality, that we can understand in the context of the new mentality that the world is a sacrament of God. Everything that exists, with all its mysteries and suffering and death and whatever else, is a manifestation of the divine. Our traditional sacramentality, even in the traditional incarnation of Jesus, was a manifestation of someone who was so deeply engaged with the divine that the people saw the divine engaged in that human. So I think we have a gift to this new consciousness, and it's not a gift unique to ourselves, but we have our own way of doing it and we ritualise it in a specific way.⁹

Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black's Progressive Jewish tradition and personal beliefs have guided him to see humanity as God's partners who can make a space for God's presence, peace and harmony, but who can also disempower God and damage the world by refusing to engage and act:

It is intrinsically embedded into Judaism to, in every way, look after our world and look after each other, to show respect to each other and to look after the environment and the infrastructure that we live within and to live in harmony with nature rather than damaging it... We have a Jewish principle called 'shituf' which means partnership. I actually reject the idea that God is all powerful, I would say that God is 'all knowing', but God is only 'all powerful' in conjunction with humanity and with all creatures of creation. That relates to us being God's tools. We don't really accept the idea that God puts a hand down and parts the sea. The miracles are the amazing things that we experience and see and the depths of the achievement of the human soul and relationships. We see miracles in strength and ideas and creativity. So

8 Fieldwork interview: Jessie Kaur Singh, COMMON

the miracle that we can bring about in conjunction with God is to find ways forward to save our world and to develop strong relationships between people and peoples and nations. Or perhaps to downplay the significance of nations so that we can work together on the common goal of looking after all the world. All the people and all the animals of creation give it future hope. We have to have hope and faith that we play our part and God plays God's part in saving the world and moving forward in a positive way.¹⁰

The depth and profundity of dialogue is important to many participants who gain a deep appreciation of the knowledge and complexity of another faith through long term engagement. As a Uniting Church Minister in the Christian contemplative tradition, Paul Sanders describes his personal interfaith dialogue with Zen Buddhism:

I say that out of my own Buddhist involvement which has been 15-16 years now, that it has taken me a long time and I'm really only scratching the surface of what I call the subtleties of Buddhism, just as much as Christianity has subtleties in it. If you are moving into those more practised and mystical dimensions of those traditions, then they require a degree of sophisticated appreciation. And I think that happens as Christians begin to understand Buddhist practise and Buddhists begin to understand Christian practise and we begin to break down some of the coarseness and the raw edges of understanding that we've had. There is a subtlety in the appreciation and the understanding.¹¹

Much like the philosophy it purports, the interfaith ecology movement has two aspects to its vision; a manifold and diversified vision and approach embedded in the diversity of participants' spiritual and faith callings and experiences, and a unifying vision and approach that is the grounds for their shared inspiration.

A COMMON CAUSE

In defining and clarifying their common cause as a source of inspiration and unity, participants create organisational statements which summarise their aspirations and define their philosophy. These statements are inspired by the individual approaches and understandings of the members as well as statements of other organisations in the movement. Organisational statements are an important defining factor of interfaith ecology as a New Social Movement. All of the statements surveyed in this research capture, with varying foci, the integral and holistic ideal of wellbeing for a globalised world that can be understood as the common ground of the movement. Some examples of these statements will now be presented.

9 Fieldwork interview: Anne Boyd, EarthSong

10 Fieldwork notes: event transcript

11 Fieldwork interview: Paul Sanders, Augustine Centre

GreenFaith Australia's Statement of Purpose balances the vision of 'ecological and cultural flourishing through diversity' with the need to bring people together to act across difference in their social context. This statement also summarises how a two-way exchange process occurs when 'faith' or 'wisdom' traditions bring spiritual and ethical knowledge to environmental causes, while interfaith dialogue spreads environmentalist messages to diverse and often hard-to-reach communities:

Greenfaith Australia brings together people from different faith communities and spiritualities in Melbourne to respond holistically in thought, practice, community and spirit to the ecological problems our diverse multifaith society is facing.

Statement of Purpose

1. To bring together people from the different faiths in responding to environmental issues.
2. To learn from the wisdom of the faith traditions in responding ethically to our ecological environment.
3. To act practically on ecological issues aimed at healing ourselves and our environment.
4. Through this action, to create opportunities for interfaith friendship and learning.
5. To foster ecological and cultural flourishing through diversity.

Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change (ARRCC) focus on the need to galvanise faith communities in practical actions towards this 'ecologically and socially sustainable future.' This statement also reflects the common movement belief that all religions have an ecologically sound ethical and spiritual basis:

The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) is a multifaith network committed to taking action on climate change. The religions of Australia have a shared sense of moral purpose on climate change. Each of our diverse traditions has a common concern for our world and a deep reverence for life. We strongly acknowledge the interdependent relationship between our welfare and that of the planet, and between social justice and ecological integrity. We recognise the threat posed to these by human-induced climate change. While celebrating the uniqueness of our different traditions, we stand together in working for an ecologically and socially sustainable future.¹²

The 2009 Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions theme of 'Make a World of Difference: Hearing each other, healing the earth' was drawn from community consultation and international interest in interfaith ecology. As the event website proclaims:

Working towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable future lies at the heart of aspirations of people everywhere. Emerging at this moment in history is a growing and shared recognition that "we are all in this together." The deciding factor in our future will have to do with those things which will make us an Earth community, and for which we must take common responsibility.¹³

Further to capturing the vision of a holistically peaceful and sustainable future, this statement universalises the vision as the goal of all humanity. It also focuses on this historical moment as a privileged site for change and action and a galvanising force across differences.

The process of defining a shared organisational statement is a bonding experience for the group or organisation, motivating them to work together towards their aspiration. Through expressing what is most important to each member, and negotiating how this is collectively presented, participants learn about each other and themselves. This dialogue lays an important foundation for the organisation and the resulting statement is a crystallisation of this newly shared identity.

The development of the United Religions Initiative (URI) Preamble and Charter described below followed a long and thoughtful dialogical process which is an example of how the formation of a statement can bond an organisation across religion, culture and nationality to become a source of lasting inspiration.

INSTANTIATION 1: 'WE UNITE'

Upon joining the United Religion's Initiative (URI), member organisations or 'cooperation circles' read the charter, with its preamble, principles and purpose, and agree that their vision aligns with that of the global organisation. The charter is referred to regularly in the international communications between members and within local cooperation circles. The URI developed a process through which to articulate a set of values and beliefs between members spread across 75 nations, and to define the unique project of the movement in a way that is universally acceptable for its current and potential adherents. The URI charter has been useful in 'uniting' organisations into the network through helping them to establish and connect to a common cause that is expressed in inspiring language and covers multiple issues and projects.

Recognising the power and significance of the process of forming its charter, as much as the worth of the charter itself, the URI created a promotional film entitled 'We Unite.' The

12 Australian Religious Responses to Climate Change:
http://www.arrcc.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=31&Itemid=2

film captures the process of intensive dialogue that the fledgling organisation underwent in finding a common voice and sentiment among its religiously diverse global participants with the inspirational statement as the outcome. The film focuses in particular on the powerful first sentence of the preamble to the charter which encapsulates the vision of human and ecological harmony across religious beliefs and cultures:

We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.¹⁴

URI leaders describe the intricate, four year long, dialogical process where vastly different metaphysical, cultural and ethical understandings needed to be considered and incorporated into this one sentence vision:

The sentence that begins the URIs charter took four years to write. We had 4 global gatherings, 20 regional gatherings and thousands of people involved in creating a vision and putting that vision into words. I can't tell you how difficult it was to bring thousands of people into one sentence. I sat with 30 people who cared passionately about the purpose statement. I needed to know from them, 'what do you need to have in the purpose statement to be able to find yourself there?' An Anglican bishop said 'God has to be in the purpose statement.' Then a Buddhist monk said 'God can't be in the purpose statement.' You can't get more oppositional than that. God and not God.¹⁵

We found a way to move through language and come up with a sentence that meant that an Anglican bishop could find God and a Korean Buddhist monk could find not-God and they could link arms and join together as part of the founding of URI.¹⁶

Portrayed in an empowering and emotive context, the film shows participants from across the globe and of various ages and faiths and generates a sense of belonging for viewers. As one participant states:

When you look at the history of the URI, including the charter of the URI, it is really people from all over the world who have come together to design it. People can see their own concerns well written in that charter and they can say, 'I belong to this community.'¹⁷

URI is sending a clear message through this promotion: that the processes of dialogue and decision-making are fundamentally important. They are seeking to inspire participants to value dialogue and undertake inclusive and thorough processes in defining a shared vision

13 Parliament of the World's Religions: <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=8&sn=5>
14 United Religions Initiative: We Unite: http://www.uri.org/about_uri/we_unite
15 United Religions Initiative: C. Gibbs in We Unite http://www.uri.org/about_uri/we_unite
16 United Religions Initiative: C. Gibbs in We Unite http://www.uri.org/about_uri/we_unite
17 United Religions Initiative: We Unite: http://www.uri.org/about_uri/we_unite

for the movement and their organisations. This reinforces the 'how to' behind the underpinning belief of the movement that indeed dialogue is the right path.

Whereas some interfaith ecology participants deem the process of defining purpose statements laborious and rhetorical, preferring immediate action opportunities, participants tend to find that statement formation is an important founding act for new organisations. Through these statements organisations establish their shared aspiration to which participants continuously refer. Purpose statements remind participants why they came together and what they sought to achieve. The authenticity and strength of the statement for the organisation is reflective of the dialogical process that went into its development. Such statements are crucial to the establishment of an organisation's identity, as well as the identity and direction of the interfaith ecology movement as these statements inform its broader ideology.

LOCAL- GLOBAL MOBILISATION

Many of the interfaith ecology initiatives in this research were either fully or partially inspired by encounters participants had with projects and initiatives in other countries and contexts. Global networks, both of participants personally and of their religious, social and educational institutions, enable ideas to flow between people and places. Participants are continually seeking out how successful projects can be shared and how what they witness in other places may be implemented in their own context. Well established projects can often act as seed-banks for new initiatives and are held up as a vision of what is possible.

Anne Boyd describes how EarthSong was developed through her exploration of international projects on eco-faith education:

I had been trying to explore how to set up a project in this field for some time ... I had the chance of going overseas in 2002 and I looked at centres for ecology and spirituality established by religious orders. I stayed at many of them and heard their story. Then I went to Schumacher College in England and then I went to the States, to Genesis Farm in New Jersey. I came back feeling much more confident about what we might do out of an educational base ... I invited anyone who was interested to come to a conversation group. Out of that came EarthSong.¹⁸

Both Genesis Farm and Schumacher College are often referred to by movement participants as sources of inspiration. Both initiatives are long-standing and generate their

18 Fieldwork interview: Anne Boyd, EarthSong

own resources and projects in education, spiritual exploration, ecology and activism. Both also actively engage international visitors seeking to generate locally adaptable models of their work. They are strongly founded in place and use their unique place-based projects as sites of learning and education for residential retreats and courses.

For academic and research focused initiatives, the Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), now located at Yale University provides both inspiration and legitimisation to interfaith ecology projects in universities around the world:

The Forum on Religion and Ecology is the largest international multi-religious project of its kind. With its conferences, publications, and website it is engaged in exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics in order to broaden understanding of the complex nature of current environmental concerns.¹⁹

In Australia, the work of the Yale FORE and the attendance of the two founders and coordinators, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm, at the 2009 Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions, inspired a proposal for a regional academic centre for interfaith ecology inquiry.

INSTANTIATION 2: FORE @ MONASH

Steven Douglas is a Canberra-based academic and activist in the environment movement who has researched Christian Environmentalism. Finding no existing Australian forum through which to further this research, he put forward the following proposal after having consulted with Yale FORE leaders and local eco-faith, interfaith and eco-theology academics:

It is proposed that a FORE be established at Monash University, potentially under the UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations - Asia Pacific. The establishment of 'FORE @ Monash' (to partially mirror the Yale title) is intended to promote the study of and engagement with issues of religion, spirituality, environmentalism, and ecology ... FORE @ Monash would serve to promote scholarly collaboration on the theme of religion and ecology within the university, likely with other universities, and potentially with external professional associations and the wider community.²⁰

FORE @ Monash has received some initial financial support within the Arts Faculty and has been approved by the Dean of Arts as a Monash Centre. While small, this initial support will likely attract more postgraduate student applications, multidisciplinary projects, forums and publications over the coming years on interfaith ecology themes. The

19 Forum on Religion and Ecology: <http://fore.research.yale.edu/>

20 Steven Douglas and Kate Rigby correspondence

establishment of FORE @ Monash is a significant endorsement of the interfaith ecology movement in Australia, indicating its increasing global relevancy in both community and academic spheres. Those academics working on interfaith ecology themes in Australia recognise the unique aspects of inquiry needed in this region because of its colonial history, significant Indigenous cultural heritage, pressing ecological and climate change considerations, specific migration patterns, and the proximity and relationship to South East Asia. The local manifestation of the project will be uniquely tailored and managed to suit local circumstances, thus following the same pattern of inspiration as community-based projects at the global-local interface of interfaith ecology.

When the structures and funding are available, organisations are able to extend this 'inspirational' or learning style of support across the globe to deliberate seeding policies and programs. In such cases the organisation is able to determine a particular course of action that has been effective in some local communities or groups, or that it is seeking to explore, and then use its network, governance and reporting structures to promote the project possibilities to other communities in the formation of a locally-based global program. When available, funding provides an ideal incentive for groups at the local level to take up new projects or themes which they may not have considered their core business. Such programs encourage growth interfaith ecology work by creating incentives that reward organisations for their initiatives and also to link both funding and promotion to interfaith ecology actions.

INSTANTIATION 3: ENVIRONMENT SEED GRANTS

This practice was demonstrated in this research in 2010 when the United Religions Initiative's (URI) Environment Satellite developed a seed-grant plan for their cooperation circles. The initial planning centred on how the seed-grants could be structured to both initiate small level projects in organisations that had not yet undertaken interfaith ecology work, as well as support more substantial and established environmental actions in organisations. It was also noted that while many cooperation circles were conducting ecologically relevant work, there was a communications issue with identifying this as many would not consider it their core business. Rolling-out the seed-grant program was also considered a way of mapping current interest among the member organisations on this issue, to bring out of the woodwork current unidentified actions and inspire new actions though providing a monetary support incentive and promotion of the network in local communities.

The seed grant program generated the following grassroots interfaith ecology projects in Cooperation Circles (CCs) around the world. Not only are there a range of environmental focuses and issues represented here, there are also different types of action being supported ranging from communication, to ritual openings of projects, to political activism, to environmental food security:

1. Great Lakes Region Office, Uganda, in collaboration with Friends of Community Health, Latter Glory of Religions in Busoga , Youth Interfaith Mission Uganda, Interfaith Youth Partnership

Improving our livelihoods through energy efficiency and a forestation project: This six-month program will train leaders in faith communities, teachers and students in the care and maintenance of medicinal gardens, planting of trees to combat the effects of climate change, and the use of energy-efficient stoves and solar cookers to replace open fires and wood/charcoal stoves. A secondary goal of this project is to work with district environment officers to reinvigorate and enforce environmental policies that will ensure the long-term protection and care of the environment.

2. Green Prophet Cooperation Circle, Tel Aviv, Israel

The Bloggers' Guide to Saving the Planet: With chapters by leaders from the best environmental blogs around the world, Green Prophet will produce a Bloggers' Guide to Saving the Planet. This work will integrate faith-based expertise from the Green Prophet environmental blog to access and mobilize Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and pagans, amongst other faiths. The guide, which will initially be published as an e-book and then in hard copy, will be used to train future activists in the Mideast, Asia and Africa.

3. Kuna Women Artisans (Muku) CC, Veracruz District, Panama

Training for the Creation of Family Orchards and Adaptation to Climate Change: This overall project will focus on sustainable environmental management, climate change and deforestation. The Seed Grant will enable the Kuna Women Artisans CC to build awareness by training 30 community members in home gardening, green manure use, alternatives to burning garbage and proper accounting practices. This is part of an anticipated larger project that will plant 300 family orchards. Their holistic approach to raising awareness and training/education will benefit an estimated 200 additional family members, beyond those who are directly trained.

4. Pakistan Council for Social Welfare and Human Rights CC, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

Environmental Education to Save the Earth: Four hundred and fifty women in 15 vocational training schools in the Poonch District will receive training on growing home gardens. An additional 300 community activists and master trainers will receive general education about the environment (pollution, acid rain, climate change, destruction of rainforests/wild habitats, species extinctions, etc.). 100,000 food and tree seedlings will be distributed to 10,000 people. The group will use various creative forms of theatre, seminars and nature walks to convey their message.

5. Ranchi Peace Cooperation Circle, Jharkhand, India

Hariyali Tribal Movement to Save Nature: This year-long program will take action against local mining companies that have been polluting the land and water supply in the rural area of Jharkhand, India, where poverty is at a high level. The project comes under the umbrella organization "Save the River." Activities will include tree planting by children, protecting existing forests, cleaning the riverbed, and working with the local government to hold mining industries accountable for their destruction of the environment.

6. Trust Win (Women's Interfaith Network) CC in collaboration with MADA ("Horizon") CC Women Reborn CC Center for Hagar and Sarah

Forest of the Mothers Opening Planting Ceremony:

In January 2011, devastating fires destroyed a large section of the Carmel Forest in Northern Israel. A busload of prison services personnel were caught in the fire and died. Fifty women from these four groups will plant some 200 trees near the site to honor the fire victims and also interfaith leaders whose widows are part of group. There will a ceremonial planting with local and regional authorities, religious leaders, families of the victims, women interfaith leaders and school children.

7. Volunteering for Peace CC, West Bank, Palestine, in collaboration with Palestinian Peace Society CC, Palestinian Youth for Peace CC, Palestinian Women for Peace CC and United for Palestine CC

Environmental Awareness for Palestinian Youth: Volunteering for Peace CC will lead several awareness-raising seminars for young adults, aged 18 to 28 years old, coming from each of these five Cooperation Circles located in the West Bank. Participants will include university and vocational school students, as well as students in their last year of high school. The seminars will present information, facilitate dialogue about local environmental issues and solutions, and foster interfaith cooperation among Muslim, Christian and Druze living in the conflict zone.²¹

It is appropriate for the interfaith ecology movement that responses to the issues of ecology and diversity under globalisation are locally tailored, but also globally connected into the broader movement where participants can compare the effectiveness of different actions and seek support from each other. This helps to spread good ideas and projects throughout the movement and generates a global awareness for movement participants who, through these networked projects, gain a stronger sense of how their ecological and socio-cultural context is embedded in a larger socio-biospheric system shaped by politics, economics, social trends and cultural discourse. The structure of the movement appropriately enhances global cooperation as the participants are often already globally

21 URI Environment Seed Grants: https://www.uri.org/action_areas/environment/seed_grants

connected through diasporic exchanges, cultural and religious heritage and local cultural influence as all societies become more multicultural.

Interfaith ecology, as a New Social Movement, is heavily dependent on the internet and other information and communication technologies for its activism and growth. This forum of communication has become an important source for inspiration as participants are able to share their stories and discuss issues with each other around the world. Virtual communications are indeed part of the vision for a sustainable future coupled with the global connectivity that the movement is working towards. Interfaith ecology is joining other NSMs in using these communication spaces for their activism and advocacy work. These movements are generating a sense of cosmopolitan and communications literate community around their causes, as well as 'linking' to each other to expand their networks and overlaps.

Interfaith ecology networks and organisations both on the local and the global level are seeking out stronger virtual communications methods. For small local organisations much of the communication of the organisation takes place online and many organisations struggle with protocols around such communications. The responsiveness of members to emails is often discussed and there is a clear knowledge and skill deficit in setting-up of and maintaining websites. Nonetheless, these organisations benefit from the low cost communication forum of cyberspace to promote their events, send out information to members and define themselves. Websites become repositories for information and hyperlinks to constituent groups. Chat rooms and communications technologies such as twitter are also used to complement subscribed email groups where dialogue is played out.

The key attributes of the local-global interface for inspiring the interfaith ecology movement are ideas and resources. Ideas are viral through the movement as activities and initiatives that have been successful in one location are creatively adapted and implemented by participants in another. Learning is shared and built upon where centralised communication networks act as clearing houses for these initiatives. The movement can also act as a resource redistributor, attracting and disseminating funding, staff-support, communications and time. These attributes feed further activity in the growth of the movement and maintain its connection to local community actions. This flow is structurally supported by an increasingly sophisticated cyber networking process.

A PLACE TO GROW

With equal weight and influence as the cyber world, the local place stands as a source of great inspiration for interfaith ecology participants. Place is crucially important to the vision and spiritualities of many of the participants and organisations and is the site through which practical action in the movement is realised. Many interfaith ecology movement participants working at the local community level envisage a place where they can work on and with land and physically enact their vision of eco-cultural diversity in their lives. Organisations are often caught in discussion focused forums and events because they lack access to such places. Under-resourced organisations often struggle to find affordable meeting spaces and places to host their events and activities and, therefore, are seeking a free and open meeting place which is also a multi-purpose site for permaculture, events and workshops.

At the beginning of this research period I spoke with Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black about his vision of a multi-faith ecological community centre. He described this centre as an eco-designed multi-purpose space for the movement in Melbourne. This would be a site where small organisations could share office space and hold meetings, where the building itself could act as a demonstration site for the latest technologies and green-processes. There would be a worship space appropriate for sacred observances, prayer and meditation designed to cater for all faiths and particularly interfaith ceremonial activities. The space would be open to the public for reflective time. There would also be a gallery and performance space and kitchen for fundraising, events, concerts and exhibitions appropriate for the movement. Importantly, there would be a community permaculture garden where the communities could work together to learn and teach organic and sustainable growing techniques in an urban context. Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black's dream was one that I heard echoed by other movement participants throughout the course of this research, the idea of a place was always central to vision of growing the movement at the local level and many felt it impossible to make real the connection to land, earth and community without being grounded in a site. Anne Boyd reflects on this longing for place in her work with EarthSong and the inspiration she has gained from place-based initiatives overseas and in Australia:

There is a constant tension in me about not being on land. Somewhere where the community of life itself is shaping your own consciousness. That's a real tension ... All the centres that I stayed in overseas are very conscious of where they are; their bio-region and the rhythms of the land ... The Glenburn Centre for Ecology and Spirituality talk in terms of locality. They are very much part of the local Yea/Mansfield community. But there is more to the community than that. There is the creek and the mountain; there is a sense of them being part of a

landscape. They are revegetating their land and there is a great sense of belonging to place in the social sense as well as the ecological sense.²²

This statement around place, community and consciousness reflects how the interfaith ecology movement is part of the growing recognition of the inextricability and porous configuration of people, place, technologies, other life-forms, beings, and systems. The importance of an experiential dialogue with place, and the role of places in nurturing people and organisations, is elucidated in the story of the Augustine Centre below.

INSTANTIATION 4: THE AUGUSTINE CENTRE AND BORDERLANDS COOPERATIVE

The site of the Augustine Centre, a church built in 1889, has held the Borderlands Cooperative and the Augustine Centre together, placed them in a conversation that has influenced their development and growth, and seen them through multiple transitions and transformations.

I have an eight year connection with this place and its organisations through my community project work with Borderlands Cooperative, an organisation that mentored me in my community development work and action research. The place is dear to me as it is to many other community workers, volunteers and participants who people its offices, gallery, sacred spaces, libraries, couches and garden. Here the knowledge exchange between academic enquiry and grassroots community projects are an important focus of education and social work. As a project worker and community participant I had been part of the process of relationships building between Borderlands Cooperative and the Augustine Centre. The religious and philosophical differences between these organisations is an ongoing dialogue subject in formal and informal context and through this dialogue, these organisations develop projects that are holistic and inclusive of the activist, educational, spiritual, aesthetic and environmental interests and understandings of both groups. I had also been involved in the challenges and struggles of this process, particularly in relation to the ecological priorities and how they were understood and translated into action in the place these organisations shared.

Sharing and indentifying with a specific place has been a central and defining force for these communities, their work and the way they pre-figure their future. Jacques Boulet, reflects on how the site provides a space of creative potential for multiple groups and initiatives:

22 Fieldwork interview: Anne Boyd, EarthSong

It works though making this place a place of potential, where we can give people and groups a place to be and do their work in. I am very open to these communications: when people ask me to be involved in their work or when they need a space. And the more I do that the more I realise that this openness is actually the natural way of our being. The enclosed way of our being is not a natural way. That is learnt through a couple of centuries of increasing enclosure and privatisation of our interests.²³

Jacques highlights the way the openness of the place, contrasted with closed privatised spaces, generates an organisational culture and personal approach of openness in the work undertaken and relationships formed. This culture of hospitality and creativity in place was developed from the inception of the organisational relationships that make up the joint community. When Borderlands moved from their former premises to find a home in the Augustine Centre in early 2002, the communities celebrated the new relationship with a ritual and ceremony that brought old and new places and people together:

We constructed a wall hanging together through constructing bits and pieces from our memory-boxes and created a 4 year story. And we also took some of the plants from the old place and composted them, and burnt some other plants and took the ashes and composted them here. We wanted to bring some of these things, ritually and symbolically, from that place into the new place in a way that recognised the change of soil and ecology of our old and new places. Meanwhile this group here had done a similar sort of ritual amongst themselves, figuring out their 150 years. By February of that year, after we had physically moved in, there was an official gathering of them, inviting us into the space. We guided people through our story and they guided us through their story. The big square bowls with all the things written in them, we made them then, writing our wishes into the ceramic which was later baked.²⁴

The earth-bound consciousness expressed through this ritual, sanctified the relationship to the shared place and pre-figured the significance of place for the new joint organisational culture. Over the past eight years these organisations continued to work together in the site of the Augustine Centre. Their most significant joint project was the establishment of an accredited post-graduate school for holistic and integral learning, Oases, in 2007. This initiative was born out of the ideas and relationship of the spiritual, social, intellectual and aesthetic elements the combined communities could offer. As is clear in the purpose statement of Oases described below, the relationship between people and place is central to its holistic education and action learning model:

Our Masters program is about taking responsibility for increasing and using our knowledge and skills in relating with and responding to the situations in which we find ourselves, our organisations and our society ... Our program starts from this point: the whole person in their

23 Fieldwork interview: Jacques Boulet, Borderlands Cooperative

24 Fieldwork interview: Jacques Boulet, Borderlands Cooperative

whole world. We focus our attention on becoming increasingly mindful of our daily individual and collective choices and practice as they hold the keys for integration and transformation.

The Uniting Church Synod, in consultation with the communities, determined that an amalgamation between the Augustine Centre congregation and the nearby St David's congregation would occur in 2009. This led to a new community becoming part of the Augustine Centre site and dialogue around how these communities would interrelate. The two former congregations of Augustine and St David's amalgamated into the new 'Habitat' congregation. This name was chosen as it strongly reflected the eco-spiritual interests of the communities and a less traditional approach to congregating and engagement. The changes enabled all of the communities to consider and voice their visions for the site in a consultation process in 2010. The description below is derived from the submission from the Borderlands and Oases organisations to the Uniting Church Synod. It encapsulates the continued vision for the Augustine Centre as a site of eco-cultural flourishing. At the consultation meetings informing this document, the key focus of discussion was on why the site itself was fundamental to the work and initiatives that take place within it, and on the strong love of place felt by the community members:

This proposal deals with our experience in, and desire for, an ongoing and growing presence at the Augustine Centre. The Oases/Borderlands Community desires a place which allows it to realise its vision as a thriving accessible social justice and learning community and one which gives life to the mission of the Habitat Uniting Church. Members of the Habitat, Oases and Borderlands' communities who 'reside' here are committed to creating and nurturing spaces where individuals, families and people of all abilities, ages and cultural backgrounds feel comfortable to enter and take part. Such a place would express as a whole and in each individual space - indoor and outdoor - a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere; a warm and safe physical and emotional environment which gives rise to creative potentials and exploration in social, ecological, aesthetic and spiritual fields ... The intimacy and lived-in nature of the spaces of Augustine are reflective of the atmosphere which matches the aspirations of the 'resident' community. Newcomers and those not so new are attracted to the ambience of a centre which allows one to explore and sink into its pleasures ... Over many years, the building itself has held countless experiences of worship, learning and creativity which have become embodied in its very presence and atmosphere. In its evolution and manifestations it has indeed remained the special or sacred site its founder's intended it to be ... The Oases/Borderlands community wishes to be involved in an ongoing way, creating with and within the wider Habitat community, a place that fully expresses the integrated nature of our common aesthetic, social, spiritual and ecological vision.

Reflective of the Augustine Centre relationships, Freya Mathews theorises place relations as a two way process whereby we are shaped by our interaction with place as much as place is shaped by our interactions with and in it. She describes this process as coherence between self and place: 'Place is a category already fostered by the principle of letting-be: a world in which things are allowed to grow old is one in which they start locally to take on one another's characters, to *cohere*.'²⁵

The interfaith ecology organisations that do not have a place where they can collectively cohere in this way often prioritise place-awareness as central to their education and community work. For these organisations and projects, place can still be important to the way the movement connects with people at the local level, through valuing their places and local eco-relationships and issues. This approach was important to the organisers of the Walking Humbly Journey throughout the planning process. The strong place-based connections and learning tapped into through this journey made it an important experience for me in my action research process and one which encapsulated much of the sentiment of interfaith ecology at the intersection of community, place, spirituality and diversity.

INSTANTIATION 5: WALKING HUMBLY ON THE LAND

From the 26th -29th of November, 2009, in the lead up to the Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions, eighty-six participants including fifteen interstate participants; fourteen overseas participants from India, South Africa, Israel, New Zealand, Philippines, Malaysia and America; and ten volunteers gathered and travelled together from the Yarra River to the Goulburn River to the Loddon River to the Murray River, thus, through the central Southern Murray Darling Basin. As organising team member Carol McDonough explains, through this project:

We shared story across nations and in and between communities of the impacts of climate change, of sea level rises and of floods and here in South East Australia of long drought, of impacts of wild fire then on farm production and livelihoods with emphasis on water, food and rural community securities and futures.²⁶

This journey was the final step in the organising team's long relationship building process with the people to whose places we visited and from whom we learnt and shared stories and experiences of ecological inspiration and despair.

25 Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality*, 53

26 Fieldwork interview: Carol McDonough, GreenFaith Australia

The Walking Humbly organising team had made place and place-knowledge a priority in the planning process and in so doing ensured that the journey was a learning and community engagement exercise rather than a tour. Place was brought to the fore through pre-journey visits where the team met and discussed the plans with community members to ascertain how the project could best meet their needs for what they were trying to achieve in their own communities and how we as national and international visitors could support this. The journey was varied and encountered people and places with diverse localised histories and unique socio-ecological challenges.

The journey began at the Blackburn Sikh Gurudwara where participants gathered for a welcoming breakfast and morning prayers. We visited Worawa Aboriginal College, Healesville where one of our participants, a teacher in its first year in the 70s, gifted the college with her photo albums from this time.

We then travelled the winding road to Kinglake that roped through the charred forest landscape and on which people had died in their cars attempting to escape the bushfires earlier that year. On arrival we encountered a makeshift village of portable houses among the still blackened landscape and the shells of buildings as well as the presence of the resilient community, which spoke volumes of the pain and strength experienced here daily. We had brought a lunch to share with the community and worked with them in tree-planting activities for their park. Interfaith prayers of renewal were offered and a special cake was dedicated to the family of a girl who would have been celebrating her ninth birthday that day, but had perished in the fires. We heard the story of a woman who found shelter from the flames with her two children in a wombat hole, and visited the shell of the Macedonian church and heard the survival story of its caretakers. For me the visit to Kinglake was a story of the triumph of the human spirit and the strength of community over adversity; the community was raw in their pain and strong in their resolve to support each other through it. There was a sense in which entrenched barriers of social isolation had been swept from this community and in this state, the genuineness and honesty of shared experience shone through to each other and to us as their guests. As the Shire Mayor explained after giving me a big hug – ‘we all hug in this community now, whenever we see each other or meet, we’ll give each other a hug.’

That night we stayed at Nagambie Lakes, alongside the Goulburn River, a beautiful cabin camp on the water and our base for visiting the region over the next three days. Being a Friday evening we observed the opening of Shabbat with our Jewish participants who led us in traditional ritual and song. The next morning we travelled east towards Castlemaine where we would participate in a rich program balancing ecological information, community initiatives, a sacred service and local arts and culture, all supported by the local community and their generous hospitality.

We entered the fringe of the Redesdale area fires and the bushfire recovery coordinator led the in-bus program explaining the problems of fire and drought for the farming region we were driving through. The Castlemaine Interfaith group had arranged an Interfaith Service in the historic Anglican Church where we were welcomed to country by a Dja Dja Warrung Elder. The ecological and technical approaches and dilemmas of drought were explained to us over lunch by Coliban Water's Managing Director. The participants then split into groups according to their choice with some going deeper into water issues; a holistic sustainability meditation and reflection by Transition Town Mount Alexander; a performance of 'Simone', the story of Simone Weil, a one woman play written in Castlemaine; gold history and art at the local Art gallery; or relaxation and Peace Choir performance in the Uniting Church, this was followed by a traditional Australian country afternoon tea put on by women from the local church community. The variety of culture, community and activity in Castlemaine confirmed for me how drained in social energy and community capacity major cities are; the particular busy isolation they breed stood in comparison to the connectivity and engagement of the country towns we visited.

That afternoon rain fell heavily and happily in light of our learning about the parched land that surrounded us. During the gathering storm we visited the Bendigo Golden Dragon Museum Sacred Gardens and heard the story of the Chinese religion and customs practiced on the Victorian Central Goldfields told by a sixth generation Chinese Australian. We then travelled to the Shepparton Gurudwara, which had been vandalised in racial attacks a couple of months earlier, for a special Evening service and blessings from the representatives of the Shepparton Interfaith Council. This was an important step for connecting the Sikh community to the interfaith council in this town and we all celebrated with a traditional Sikh dinner. We relaxed into the end of Shabbat with Jewish singing to welcome in the new week and a classical Hindu dance performed by the children of one of our organising team.

After an Indian music workshop or Catholic Mass the next morning, we visited a third generation orchard in the Shepparton region, Spirit of the Valley, where we shared in a locally produced brunch and listened to the farmer's presentation on the difficulties of maintaining agricultural water under the current, politically loaded, water trading scheme.

We travelled towards our central point, the Murray River where, at the Indigenous managed Barmah forest, Yorta Yorta Elders and rangers explained their heritage-mapping project and escorted us to the banks of the Murray River where the environmental flow had just been put through. We returned to Federation Square in Melbourne for a celebratory dinner at the Indigenous run Tjanabi Restaurant serving bush-food inspired

cuisine. The final speeches and buzz of the room echoed the friendships that had been formed and the sense of achievement in the team who had worked through their differences to produce what had been a special experience for the participants, and for me, the highlight and anchor of my participatory research into this movement.

It was this genuine interest in place and respecting place-based knowledge that allowed Walking Humbly to forge connections with people who showed us, as guests, sincere hospitality and a humbling gratefulness for our interest. Organising team member, Carol McDonough reflects on this impact:

A very important outcome was the deep connections and impact we made to people in places. I was really deeply moved at two places. The first was King Lake and the second was the Gurudwara in Shepparton. The commonality of those was that they were both desecrated in the recent past. The almost pathetic gratefulness, in the sense of pathos, of us being with them was so moving. I think that is something we cannot estimate in terms of what is happening in these communities on the personal level. As I've meditated and mulled on the connections of desecration, place and connection with people of other cultures, I've wondered whether the gifting they gave us, which was huge, and the gifting that we gave back by simple presence, may or may not have been of comfort in that terrible time, that will be continuing, we never know. That simple act of connection of people of different faiths and cultures means that when trauma comes, I would hope, and I have life experience that would suggest, that it helps with resilience.²⁷

These experiences show how respect for people and the places they are connected with are closely linked. Interfaith ecology projects tend to acknowledge that the affection people have for the places in which they dwell, inspires in-depth connections which touch upon the complexities of diversity and embedded experience. This is because land is given voice through its people, and communities are given voice through the site of their land.

Understanding the balance of local place-attunement and global-connectivity means that the local community is able to act and learn locally in relationship to their place, without becoming narrowly parochial. Movement participants discuss the complexities of rights frameworks in relation to land rights, human rights and broader rights to and in the life-world. This dialogue is often inspired by considerations of specific places and people in the context of a boarder global political framework. Anne Boyd's comments depict this connection between spiritual place sensitivity, respect and rights:

Indigenous people intuitively knew that they were part of place and part of the land, that the land itself brought them into being. This is true. The land itself has brought us into being. That

is a huge challenge to mainstream thinking. The hope for the future is a reconnection or reengagement with place and a re-identification with ourselves as part of an interrelated community. As beings who can be voices for those voices that are not heard, humans as well as all other beings. Our legal system does not recognise that. The Murray Darling has no rights, it doesn't have a right to live as a river system according to our legal system. The old growth forest in Gippsland has no rights in our legal system. Yet they are integral to the wellbeing of our land.²⁸

Jacques Boulet further describes how the history of colonisation has shaped our structural ability to relate to people, place and life-communities as interconnected entities and the deep challenge of reconfiguring these relationships that digs to the heart of our very sense of self:

The invention of citizenship is tied up with our notion of how to govern the place and that is always problematic because it disenfranchises all of the other beings who are not human ... We have come to understand it as a set of claims we have to a particular state or particular territory. Like most of the social bodies we have created, particularly in the west, we have come to conceive of them more and more as just being there for me as an individual.²⁹

Place sensitivity is inspiring the development of a broader socio-political awareness of place and the more-than-human world in the interfaith ecology movement via relational ties deeply within as well as vastly beyond the home-place. This mode of being for the movement connects participants through the awareness nurtured in specific places to a politics of defending the right to love and live fully in places nested globally.

INTERPRETING CRISES

With increased environmental crises and continuing religious violence around the world, many participants are questioning how transformative action can be urgently motivated, as well as how to maintain hope in the face of the fear and sorrow such crises engender. This need for an urgent response has motivated more frequent actions in interfaith ecology and promoted its growth in recent years. It has also had a strong emotional impact on many movement participants who experience grief in the face of ecological devastation that they are powerless to remedy.

The issue of responding to crises came up strongly in a Pre-Parliament of the World's Religions interfaith ecology dialogue event titled 'Who am I as a citizen of the earth?' which featured three of the interfaith ecology participants in this research as panellists.

27 Fieldwork interview: Carol McDonough, GreenFaith Australia

28 Fieldwork notes: event transcript

One question from the audience captured the fear around this transition and how to motivate a spiritual eco-conversion as a powerful force of social change:

My concern about the call for a paradigm shift and a new way of thinking, which I agree is urgently needed, is that in my assessment of the historical record, those collective changes in world view have tended to come about through dramatic socio-economic change. I suspect that what is most likely to force a paradigm shift now is an ecological breakdown. The problem is that by that stage it will be too late to do anything about it. So the only hope I have in that context is that sufficient people will have some kind of conversion experience, because there are historical exemplars of conversion experiences taking hold more broadly in society. So I think we definitely need political responses and mechanisms but I'm interested in hearing from the panel on how they think a kind of conversion to the earth or a conversion of consciousness to earth care could come about.³⁰

Jonathan Keren-Black's response illustrates his belief that slow change is the only way society will be able to adapt and that a dramatic paradigm shift is not realistic. He believes that the small and persistent changes may build up over time into more significant change and has acted accordingly in his promotion of sustainable living:

I see a paradigm shift as slow, as fast as possible, but I don't think that it will happen fast. I think that revolutions are generally problematic in a variety of ways and I like the description of Judaism as a 'slow revolution.' Because it has those goals of changing the world, or equality and fairness and justice, but it is taking its time, it still has that vision, but it hasn't turned the world over night, though you could say it has been influential. So I don't think the paradigm shift is going to happen ... To give you an example, I built and lived in an underground house ... and it's a wonderful environment ... But the main problem of why they were not more popular... is that you can't stand in front of it and say 'this is my house'... So our house here is more environmentally friendly but it looks like a normal house and I've come to the conclusion that you have to do things that are significant in terms of the statistics but not significant in terms of people's feelings that they need to change their life suddenly or dramatically. So there are some practicalities and that is why I have reservations about a paradigm shift unless it is a fairly paced one.³¹

Anne Boyd describes how she believes the paradigm shift and conversion is already well underway through grassroots globalisation actions of which interfaith ecology is a part. She presents a hopeful picture of this change that motivates her work:

This is a global crisis, so the notion of conversion must happen in myriad places. I'm thinking of a video I have seen a few times by Paul Hawken and he has written a book called *Blessed*

29 Fieldwork notes: event transcript
30 Fieldwork notes: event transcript
31 Fieldwork notes: event transcript

Unrest and he begins to list the numbers of movements around the world that are participating in this 'revolution' or 'conversion' or 'paradigm shift.' There are millions of people in small groups, participating. You all know about the one-hundredth monkey, I don't know how many monkeys you'll need this time, but it's a grassroots movement and I have absolute hope that this movement around the world is going to bring change. As the economy collapses, unfortunately eco-systems are collapsing at the same time, but I also have faith that earth will recover ... There are been six major extinctions and earth has recovered and come into greater flourishing every time. So I think that the conversion or revolution is happening, but in small places.

The question of how pending crisis can bring about social change in the interfaith ecology movement is a spiritual/religious version of a common issue for the environmental movement. At its heart is the question of how fear and hope act as motivators and how they are balanced in a way that generates action. When does fear lead to ingenious invention and when does it lead to disillusionment? When does hope lead to generative action and when does it lead to passive optimism or denial? This issue was raised in this same interfaith ecology dialogue:

My question is about rhetorical strategies for getting people to shift their expectations. Tonight's evening is remarkably optimistic, I thought. There is no fear mongering here. But I recall in my lifetime people like the Club of Rome. Looking ahead, do you recommend rhetoric of hopefulness or a rhetoric that has more fear mongering?

Both respondents rejected the use of fear as a tool to generate action through rhetoric and expressed hope as a necessity in the movement:

Anne Boyd: I don't desire to have rhetoric of fear, I think we need to understand the burdens that are upon us, and in Joanna Macy's terms, work through that despair and dispose of it so that we may have the energy to move forward. I have every hope in humans to do that.

Jacques Boulet: I would suggest that we should do away with rhetoric. Because there is so much hot air going around and you forget to bring it back to things which matter to people and to how we live. People often don't mean 'hope' they mean 'optimism.' I think optimism and pessimisms are the luxury of the middle classes. Most people who really have to fight for survival, and we all do now, that is the way the world is, don't have that luxury of this 'choice.' Because we all actually have to fight for survival, even if it doesn't sound like it, it has nothing to do with optimism and pessimism anymore, but therefore hope is the only thing that remains.

There were several instances throughout this research where participants expressed grief over the ecological changes around them. In one instance a father of teenage children explained that he and his wife had deliberately put off having children in the early 1980s because they were scared of a nuclear holocaust and did not want to bring children into

that world. When that immediate threat passed, they had three children and were now very scared that their children were going to have to go through an ecological holocaust. In another instance, a woman who had grown up near the Campaspe River returned to the region on the Walking Humbly project. As she crossed the river – which the prolonged drought had turned into a small creek of only five meters wide in a large eroded dry bed – she began to weep. She recollected the fishing and swimming which she and her siblings had done in the then abundantly flowing river and felt personal loss over its degraded state. Interfaith ecology responds to the issue of an ecological crisis as a holistic issue of how we live as ecologically embedded social and spiritual beings in communities. This indicates a potential role for the movement more broadly as people cope with the emotional sides of ecological crises expressed in fear and grief.

The holistic responses to pending environmental crisis and crisis events in the interfaith ecology movement are articulated by HRH Prince Charles in a speech presented at Oxford University on Islam and the Environment in June 2010:

When we hear talk of an 'environmental crisis' ... I would suggest that this is actually describing the outward consequences of a deep, inner crisis of the soul. It is a crisis in our relationship with – and our perception of – Nature, and it is born of Western culture being dominated for at least two hundred years by a mechanistic and reductionist approach to our scientific understanding of the world around us ... As soul is elbowed out of the picture, our deeper link with the natural world is severed. Our sense of the spiritual relationship between humanity, the Earth and her great diversity of life has become dim ... And so, unfashionable though it is to suggest it, I am keen to stress here the need to heal this divide within ourselves ... The task is surely to reconnect ourselves with the wisdom found in Nature which is stressed by each of the sacred traditions in their own way.³²

The interfaith ecology approach expressed here connects the movement deeply into a call for spiritual transformation as well as to practical behaviour change. Importantly, both of these sites for change are empowering in that, unlike scientific and technological advancement, which is largely out of the reach of local communities, these changes happen in and between people and communities at the micro-level. The interfaith ecology movement has a strong faith in the resilience and potential of this level of transformation.

RITUAL AND RENEWAL

Throughout this research I observed how in the programming of interfaith ecology events, movement participants often use ritual forms and religious texts from their traditions to

32 Speech transcript: HRH The Prince of Wales, 'Islam and the Environment'

inspire new ritual performances designed to generate shared sacred experiences on interfaith and eco-faith themes. As interfaith ecology participants are moving into more creative and challenging forms of ritual sharing, they are less satisfied with the traditional use of the arts as a passive site of cultural sharing and are seeking deeper ritual connectivity between diverse participants.

In the first six months of this fieldwork I connected with EarthSong, a Catholic-based eco-faith organisation in Melbourne. I participated in their programs and events focused on the 'new story' of creation presented by Brian Swimme that drew strong synergies with the eco-spiritual texts and other contemporary eco-theological works in linking contemporary scientific knowledge with spiritual wonder and respect. EarthSong became an important organisation for me in learning how these complex messages of religious transformation could be communicated at the grassroots level in a way that was not confronting to believers and that engaged ritual, contemplation and aesthetic appreciation. Their solstice event, annual symposium and variety of meetings and forums that drew together sacred and intellectual aspects of ecological engagement were an insight into creative transformation of traditional religious doctrine and ritual into more ecologically aware practice.

EarthSong coordinator, Anne Boyd's vision for the eco-faith movement includes a reclamation of ritual as a creative site of inquiry. She hopes we will not abandon the ritual form which allows us to sanctify actual and virtual spaces and relationships, but rather become more conscious of the roots of traditional rituals and remake them in ways that are relevant to our contemporary needs, most especially, our need to reconnect with our ecological world:

Our rituals have lost many of their roots, but if we could root them again in new soil then they could flourish to the benefit of many I think. I don't think we can yet see clearly, but through the strand of Christianity and Catholicism, there has always been this consciousness ... Through the mystics this strand was kept alive. It hasn't been dogmatised and put into articles of faith. It's there in Francis of Assisi, it's just there ... getting there still. I think that this is the time for a renaissance of that.³³

Exploring a creative ritual process was also a strong practice at the Augustine Centre where I joined a small committee working on developing interactive and creative rituals. This group delved into the intertwining of different themes stemming out from the Christian contemplative tradition at the heart of this Uniting Church centre, to draw on interfaith themes in Zen Buddhism, of which the Minister was also a teacher, and other Eastern religious practices in music, art and contemplation. With this group I explored

33 Fieldwork interview: Anne Boyd, EarthSong

how ecological imagery, forms and movements, through sound, dance, photography, art and contemplating the elements of earth, fire, water and air could evoke connections and insights in participants. Paul Sanders reflects on the Augustine Centre's gallery space where the ritual and arts group arranged these creative and sacred rituals and reflections:

The things that accompany people's lives and the way people frame their narratives and the way they exercise and ritualise their narratives, always has a cultural dimension. I think that the frontier of cultural appreciation is really vital and that is a frontier that I think is really opening up. But I'm concerned about that area flat-lining again, where we reduce everything down to aesthetics and I can see a bit of that happening and I think that it comes out of a tentativeness in which we recognise that we don't have a depth understanding.³⁴

Interfaith ecology gatherings are generally more creative and experimental in the use of the ritual form than traditional interfaith gatherings. GreenFaith Australia's 'Spirit into Sustainability' event illustrates this experimentation in ritual renewal.

INSTANTIATION 6: SPIRIT INTO SUSTAINABILITY

Amid a summer heatwave and spurred on by prolonged drought conditions, bushland and farming communities around Melbourne were ravaged with the most intensive natural disaster in Australia's recent history, the Black Saturday Bushfires of February 7th 2009. 173 people died and 414 were injured as a result of the fires; there was extreme loss of wildlife and bush habitat as well as homes and farms with some entire villages, such as Kinglake, all but destroyed. As this was the most tragic event close to home in living memory at the time, the Victorian community as a whole came together in generosity and support for the victims. Grief mixed with a foreboding recognition in the public dialogue that we were at the coal face of climate change; that our new and shifting environmental conditions would produce extreme weather events such as these more often and with greater severity in the future. This moment of public consideration and condolence tapped into core questions of how we live on this land, with each other and our environment. It opened lines of questioning that were deeply relevant to the interfaith ecology movement around spiritual, social and ecological futures in the face of eco-human suffering. The religious communities and interfaith organisations were reminded of their emplacement in an increasingly ecologically imperilled land.

In the wake of this disaster, on Sunday 22nd of February, GreenFaith Australia held the Spirit Into Sustainability event at the Sustainable Living Festival at Federation Square. Many of the attendees had come to our event from a memorial service for the Black

34 Fieldwork interview: Paul Sanders, Augustine Centre

Saturday victims and an acknowledgement of the severity and devastation of the fires underpinned the peaceful and restorative mood in the presentation space. This context impacted on the way the Spirit into Sustainability event was received, especially in the way the attendees understood the ritual component. Serene harp and flute music welcomed the 250 attendees to the space which was surrounded by paintings and sculptures from a Baptist Church exhibition on faith and the environment. The event brought together story-tellers from different traditions, panellists from different interfaith ecology projects in the community and centred upon the ritual component of a sound-scape journey followed by participants placing a leaf in a central circle space.

The forum sought to encourage people of faith, at personal and organisational levels, to live more sustainably, and take proactive steps to encourage others to do the same by inspiring them socially, practically and spiritually. Working on the development of this event with the organising team of five including GreenFaith Australia and Sustainable Living Festival representatives, took several months and was a creative process in which we were all experimenting with how ritual could be made relevant and inclusive to our interfaith ecology theme.

Balancing ritual invitation with aesthetics, story and discussion was the main achievement of this event and moved the gathering away from a 'talking heads' model into a more integral space which seemed to strike a chord with our participants. We were uncertain of how the ritual invitation in particular would be taken, but as participants made their way to the front of the room and placed their leaves in the painted circle in different ways, some kneeling to cross themselves, others touching the leaf to their heart or forehead before placing it, I had a strong sense that we were generating a shared sacred space for interfaith ecology and were tapping into a shared understanding that was not clearly communicable in spoken dialogue.

In a context where a new ritual form is being explored and expression is not based on long established processes, the site for meaning making can become contested. One participant raised concerns about the meaning and motivation of the sound-scape – was the sound-scape too confronting? Was it in danger of turning people away from nature by generating fear? Did it strike the right balance between destructive and constructive sounds?

Questions around the meaning of new ritual acts were often raised in interfaith ecology. New rituals of this kind are not tried and practiced faith rituals, but rather the product of an individual or group hermeneutic and creative process. The participants in these rituals, therefore, actively engage, emotionally as well as rationally, with the ritual act and its interpretation. This could at times be confronting for participants as they were not

passively consuming the performance as an 'audience' of a cultural display, but rather called upon to invest themselves on the process of interfaith and eco-faith meaning making.

The interfaith ecology movement seeks to reinvest ritual with contemporary significance in relation to earth and intercultural healing. Ritual is a significant offering to the environmental movement as interfaith ecology participants understand the power of the ritual form in generating sacred space, meaning and healing in communities. Experimental ritual is a formative mode of expression in the interfaith ecology movement. A nuanced dialogue is opening up in the movement around the use of ritual performativity in generating inspiration and connectivity among participants.

CONCLUSION: SOURCING THE SPRINGS OF INSPIRATION

As participants pioneer new ways of relating to each other and their local and global ecological context, they draw upon their faith perspectives, community situation and life histories to generate social, spiritual and ecological actions and configurations. These rich sites bring forth ideas and expressions of how to relate to one another and interpret spirituality in creative ways, linked to the shared vision of eco-cultural harmony. The spiritual calling of the participants to this work is a strong foundation for action in interfaith ecology.

The shared aspirations of the movement are defined through the founding dialogue of collective purpose statements. This dialogue is an important way in which participants share their stories, beliefs and experiences as they identify both the overlapping values and the incommensurable differences across which they will work. Such statements, when well developed through inclusive processes, are strong motivators for participants to continue their collective work and reiterate their cohesion as groups and organisations in the interfaith ecology movement.

Inspiration is spread actively and organically through the structure of the movement as both locally-based and globally networked. Networks of resource mobilisation and cyber communications facilitate shared storytelling and dialogue around the globe, allowing for ideas and concepts to be distributed, coopted and transformed in local contexts. Underpinning this global communications structure is the strong inspiration participants draw from their local places as sites of eco-social connectivity and potential renewal. The movement is focused on developing these sites as loved and cherished places of inclusivity and holistic learning where dialogue is practically extended to the grounded more-than-human world.

There is a significant dialogue within the movement around the role of ecological crises in inspiring action. Participants are in some ways motivated by fear of crisis and in other ways motivated by hope. This tension is firmly grounded in the movement's goal for micro-level changes in behaviour and relationships at the personal, inter-personal and community levels.

Participants are boldly experimental with the ritual form. They are drawing on the significance of ritual in their faith traditions and reclaiming the form for new contexts and meanings. These rituals bond participants together as well as provide an experience through which they can gain new spiritual inspiration directly channelled through and towards their work in interfaith ecology.

These major sources for inspiration in the movement uphold its participants and leaders in their commitment to this cause in the face of the challenges of working across difference and the barriers of time and resources faced by organisations.

These sources and methods of inspiration feed the development of the interfaith ecology movement's culture that is emerging as collectively creative, spiritually experimental, pragmatic and hopeful, socially empowering for communities and individuals, and ecologically cognisant. In this sense the movement itself stands to inspire social and cultural change through offering unique and deeply holistic approaches to contemporary global social and ecological challenges at the community level.

CONCLUSION

*The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this is no winter now.
The frozen misery of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move.
The thunder is the thunder of the floes, the thaw, the flood,
the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now, when wrong comes up,
to face us everywhere
Never to leave us till we take the longest stride of soul
men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise is exploration into God.
What are you making for?
It takes so many thousand years to wake.
But will you wake for pity's sake?*

- Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners*¹

Fry's poem evokes a transformative world, burgeoning with conative striving at a moment of cataclysmic change. This sense of integral change, balanced on edge of flourishing and catastrophe, is compelling the development of the interfaith ecology movement. From a panpsychist perspective, the movement itself is an expression or manifestation of this same systemic evolution and the 'great turning'² of the whole. Inasmuch as it is creating and testing methods for giving dialogical and holistic voice to

1 Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners*
2 Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*

this turning, interfaith ecology is beginning to express a highly reflexive consciousness around global transformation.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND POTENTIAL OPENINGS

This thesis sought to identify and illuminate the emergence of interfaith ecology as a new social movement through which holistic approaches in grassroots global and local community organising are used to explore and enhance eco-cultural diversity. As will be addressed below, this inquiry explored the following questions:

1. How is the interfaith ecology movement developing within the context of globalisation?
2. What is the emerging social and cultural form of the interfaith ecology movement?
3. What is the work and learning of the interfaith ecology movement?

I approached these questions by developing and implementing a participatory and conative research process which aligned, ethically, philosophically and practically to the themes and processes of the movement itself. This was inspired by the key methodological question of: How do I research an emerging, multifaceted social movement that is essentially holistic and transformative?

Research was conducted through engaging with the instantiations of the interfaith ecology movement throughout its evolving network of sites, social enterprises, personal convictions, texts, policies and community building projects. Using Participatory Action Research projects and participant-observation methods, this research explored instantiations in the local region of Greater Melbourne and from these interlinked project sites, the global reaches of the movement. These instantiations revealed the processes, structures and communications through which participants are reclaiming their means of cultural production and enacting new and adaptive modes of civic participation and cultural cohesion in their layered and situated communities. Findings indicated that for the increasing number of movement participants, interfaith ecology as a personal commitment, community organising conduit and global movement, has the potential to strengthen communication and learning across various ecological, religious and social differences.

As the project of this research was broad and multi-disciplinary, it opened up multiple potential research avenues which could be pursued in collaboration with participants as the interfaith ecology movement continues to develop its capacity and culture in coming years. Some openings include:

- Developing and testing technologies for information sharing on projects in a global context, including research designs and methods that allow differently located participants to explore the relationship between their local places and the emerging global culture they share in virtual sites and exchanges.
- Identifying and building dialogical reflection and evaluation techniques through which research groups can collectively reflect on the meeting and interaction of their religious beliefs and how these are reflexively played out in the shared practical project.
- Analysing the inequalities and power distributions within the movement along the lines of global north and global south, gender, institutional and social power, and the availability of financial resources. This research could develop models for mitigating these differentials in the processes of the movement.
- Exploring the differences between the structures, interpretations and outcomes of projects situated in different faith communities, including analysis of factors common to successful project across the movement.

HOW DO I RESEARCH AN EMERGING, MULTIFACETED SOCIAL MOVEMENT THAT IS ESSENTIALLY HOLISTIC AND TRANSFORMATIVE?

In 1972, Bateson proposed a ‘new way of thinking about ideas and about those aggregates of ideas which I call “minds.” This way of thinking I call the “ecology of mind”... It is a science that does not yet exist as an organised body of theory or knowledge.’³ For Bateson, the ‘bilateral systems of an animal, the patterned arrangement of leaves in a plant, the escalation of an armaments race, the process of courtship, the nature of play, the grammar of a sentence, the mystery of biological evolution and the contemporary crisis in man’s relationship to his environment’⁴ can only be understood in terms of this ecology of mind. Engagement with the communicative order, integrative of both human and more-than-human others, is a practice learnt over time through persistently bearing witness and responding to the context of this ecology of mind. ‘As a locus of subjectivity and conativity in its own right,’ Mathews writes, ‘the universe is capable of and actively seeks communicative engagement with its infinite modes, the Many, or, again, with those of them that are capable of such engagement.’⁵

In working through a conative research methodology, I have sought throughout this research to remain attuned and responsive to the panpsychist ecology of mind emerging

3 Bateson, *Ecology of Mind*, xxiii

4 Bateson, *Ecology of Mind*, xxiii

5 Mathews, *Invitation to ontopoetics*

in and through the voices and work of participants, the shared city and varied places in which we dwell, the lived experiences of projects, and the revelation of interpersonal relationships. This has been the basis of my learning which, as McDermott describes, resides 'in the conditions that bring people together and organise a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance ... learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part.'⁶ Through developing a conative research practice based on the ethics of panpsychism, I have sought to hold the space open for this dialogical learning in the interfaith ecology movement.

HOW IS THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT DEVELOPING WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION?

Anthropologists and sociologists of globalisation theorise the interconnectedness of different lands and cultures on our diverse planet as intertwining paths held in tension and generating creative friction. Monoculturalism is spreading the mechanisation of both cultural production, and the life giving capacities of the ecological world. This advance threatens biodiversity, social empowerment and our eco-cultural means of survival at the community level. Epiphytically and subversively to this 'top-down' globalisation is what Appadurai refers to as 'globalisation from below'⁷ and what Nancy terms 'mondalisation' or 'world-forming.'⁸ The path of 'globalisation from below' is being built, continuously and variably, with scarce financial resources but the wealth of grassroots creativity and ingenuity that characterise the third sector. It contrast and seeks to ameliorate the disenfranchisement of communities under a fractured globalisation which has spawn separatist and fundamentalist responses. Interfaith ecology has joined other New Social Movements in this econstructive global community building project which is unpredictably paving the way towards an undefined goal; its rewards are safely in the building, and not the ending. This uncertain ground is as challenging as it is productive with different modes of leadership, subjective judgements and perceptions, unclear accountability, and unstable revenue generation creating an environment where new movements and trends emerge based on the ad hoc ebb and flow of material and human resource mobilisation.

6 McDermott, 'On Becoming Labelled,' 16

7 Appadurai, Grassroots Globalisation, 3

8 Nancy, Globalisation

Here at the underbelly of globalisation, eco-human cultures are evolving 'semiosymbiotically,' as Wheeler describes,⁹ through responsive relationships to the earth, through non-human beings and things, through our creations, modes of community organising, languages and cybernetic configurations. This study witnessed the emergent structures of global culture, manifest in the development of the highly networked and dynamic interfaith ecology movement.

The networks of interfaith ecology are forming around the novelty of globalisation's new positioning of human-diversity and biodiversity in relation to spiritual, social and cultural production and evolution. Underpinning interfaith ecology's exploration of these relationships is the utopian vision of a new era of eco-cultural flourishing and awakening. Interfaith ecology is nurtured by companion movements in global social change such as human rights, peace and conflict resolution, environmentalism, water and food access, gender and racial equality, and world arts and music movements. It also neighbours a range of spiritual and religious movements including the New Age spiritual movement, eco-spiritual movements, religious revivalism and third generation human rights as group and cultural rights. Interfaith ecology grows at the intersections of these movements and as such links, spans and integrates multiple issues and responses to globalisation. Its integration of the specific themes of identity, peace, ecology and spirituality point to its potential as a dialogical weaver of the ways in which empowered 'world-forming' communities, movements and individuals contribute to the 'evolving course'¹⁰ of 'globalisation from below.'

While experiencing moments of strong synergy and lucidity, the interfaith ecology movement also encounters many of the barriers faced by communities in attempting to act in relation to major global social and environmental issues. As participants struggle with clarity, knowledge can be used to gain power in organisations and over projects which destabilises collaborative organisational dynamics and threatens dialogue. Some of the more successful interfaith ecology projects draw on a multidisciplinary as well as interfaith dialogue in cross-organisational partnerships whereby secular environmental organisations, and other relevant specialists, provide knowledge and practical resources to interfaith groups, alleviating the burden of expertise. Many interfaith ecology projects reflect this multidisciplinary ethos by becoming conglomerations of multiple interests and themes contributed by different organisations with different areas of expertise, local knowledge and focus. Participants expand the influence of the movement by meeting and drawing together, through the organic project dialogue, people working on issues such as Indigenous rights, transition towns, bushfire recovery and permaculture; with people

9 Wheeler, *Whole Creature*, 137

practicing sacred music, religious charity, contemplation, and scriptural studies to name but a few examples.

WHAT IS THE EMERGING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FORM OF THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT?

This research identified that the interfaith ecology movement is emerging through four key mobilisation mechanisms: local community organising, international grassroots organising, government bodies and policies at the local and national levels, educational and religious institutions, and international governance structures. Different participants weigh in at each of these sites dependent upon their relative influence and area of interest. The movement is, therefore, multifaceted and appealing to partnerships and engagement from multiple sectors and bodies ranging from the local school committee to the Local Government all the way to the United Nations. This widespread appeal of the movement indicates that the joint issues it presents, the diversity of its membership and ultimately, its vision for the future, fit into broader agendas at all levels of the multicultural global society. While much interfaith ecology dialogue and action is situated at the community level, the movement is also manifesting in and through top-down global governance structures of international congresses and declarations, as well as global governance bodies such as the United Nations Environment Program, and mainstream religious and education institutions. In this way interfaith ecology is straddling the divide between global institutions and grassroots resistance movements, a flexibility and strength that will continue to lift the ceiling of its impact.

The mainstream openings for the interfaith ecology movement are facilitated in part by the rise of liberal culturalism as a framework for multicultural policy in diversifying liberal democracies. In the Australian, and particularly the Victorian policy environment, liberal culturalist policy supports multiculturalism and active engagement with faith communities as part of multicultural harmony and social inclusion. Liberal culturalism is enshrined in legislation and embedded in whole of government policy implementation frameworks which uphold the holistic principles of the interfaith ecology movement and local level community initiatives. This policy direction cultivates 'test beds' for new initiatives that the interfaith ecology movement is germinating in. A test bed policy environment is, however, also intermitted and unstable with an emphasis on novelty and little to no capacity to support the sustainable flourishing of organisations and projects. In

this way many interfaith ecology seeds sprout up, but few are watered and nurtured into maturity. In this volatile policy and third sector environment, new interfaith ecology leaders and participants gather and re-form around new organisations. There is considerable corporate knowledge lost in this frantic process that would be important to both policy and organisational learning. This instability contributes to malfunctioning organisational dynamics in which participants are rarely able to establish their relationships and practices before fragmentation and reformation occurs. Interfaith ecology in Australia is almost solely run and delivered by volunteers who vary from being highly skilled in conflict resolution or scientific understanding, to lacking the skills and knowledge to resolve complex issues in this work. Many movement participants are calling for professional and trained interfaith support workers to bolster projects and strengthen the networks and communications strategies of organisations.

In Australia's multicultural cities and on its ecologically imperilled and colonised land movement participants are eager to explore issues of environmental rights and justice in the context of Australia's history, heritage, and contemporary politics. They are craving the opportunity to collectively belong to 'country' and heal the social and ecological wounds of colonisation. In this context, movement participants are deeply concerned with the ecological issues we face at the coal face of climate change, the latest and perhaps most extreme chapter of the multiple ecological crises that have shaped the national psyche. They are equally disturbed by the injustices of Australian politics and xenophobia; by the imprisonment of asylum seekers, of the rhetorical fear of 'boat people', racially motivated attacks and the continued fourth world living standards of Indigenous communities. In this context, interfaith ecology participants are also attuned to the potential of Australia as site of great learning and development where this old and sacred land, through its new and old peoples creates cultures of flourishing that can inform, not only a newly situated and inclusive national identity, but a model for a sustainable and integral globalised community.

Geopolitically, Australian interfaith ecology is shaped by the South East Asia Pacific region, colonial ties to Europe, strategic and cultural alliance with America, and diasporic links through migrant communities to people and places around the world. These layered connections generate common encounters of difference for Australians and provide greater opportunities for interfaith ecology movement participants to engage in dialogue and cross-cultural community organising. The religious diversity of the movement in Australia and globally is layered onto multiple other factors of diversity and identity whereby movement participants are uniquely situated nodes at various intersections of religious, ethnic, cultural, national, gender, age and class identities. The way participants navigate the meaning and visibility of these various identities for themselves and others is

revealing of the emerging boundaries of inclusivity for the movement and the directions in which it is promoting its own growth.

The role and inclusion of young people are highly valued in the interfaith ecology movement and significant effort is focused onto their participation. The traditional community organisations of the movement reflect the aging of the third sector and of liberal Christian communities. Young people are tending to organise and participate in the movement in more specialised ways; through youth specific programming, cyber communications and youth led organisations. While interfaith ecology is conducive to the desire in young people to take action instead of 'talk', the cross-generational community of the movement is undermined by these trends. This fractioning perpetuates the illusion for young people that they can avoid the difficult aspects of dialogue and conflict. Addressing and engaging in genuine dialogue forces participants to manage complex conflict scenarios that would be better addressed in an organisational culture of cross-generational learning. This gap in the movement is widened by the typical third sector issue of a relatively inactive middle generation which would create the links for mentoring and organisational knowledge transfer.

Some established organisations of the interfaith dialogue movement in Australia mirror the 'gender order'¹¹ of patriarchal religious institutions and their norms in decision making and division of labour. Whereas men represent communities in recognised decision-making roles, women are over represented as movement participants and are the key drivers and facilitators of the movement activities as community organisers. Whereas many of the male leaders in the movement are professionally supported by religious or educational institutions, women tend to be the un-supported volunteer labour of the movement. Women in the interfaith movement tend to have fewer credentials in leadership and education, less influential support networks and more restricted access to economic resources to support their participation in prestigious events. The interfaith ecology movement in some respects follows this gendered structure, but as an emerging movement with less defined representative roles and more egalitarian structures, it is providing an important site for women's leadership. Women are heavily over represented in interfaith ecology activities and organisations. The ecofeminist recognition of the links between different types of oppression and exploitation fits within an interfaith ecology framework and allows women in the movement to address multiple issues, including their own spiritual, political and structural empowerment.

Whereas gender and age diversity factors are visible within the movement, the intersection between religious identity and ethno-cultural identity is a fuzzy space where

questions of inclusivity, authenticity and legitimacy contest the boundaries of participation. The movement attracts a high number of converts from western to eastern religions. The role and identity of these participants, and the extent to which the movement is seeking to engage ethnic and cultural as well as religious diversity is debated among participants. Attempts to match and signify ethno-cultural and religious identity in the movement has been the cause of inclusive and just practices that acknowledge the tacit exclusion of non-western voices; as well as prejudice against religious converts and their contribution to the movement.

The issue of ethno-cultural diversity is complicated by the use of English as the universal language of interfaith ecology, globally and in Australia, and the use of traditional western and middle class methods of community organising and civic participation through formal organisations. These western and Anglophone structures shape the avenues for participation leading to invisibilities and exclusions. Globally, interfaith ecology is centred in western and European democracies with larger middle class populations. It is carried by those with greater leisure time to pursue civic and personal development around future concerns and interests rather than immediate survival situations. This global profile of interfaith ecology is reflected at the local level in Greater Melbourne with participation reflecting middle class and assimilated migrant participation. While there is a diversity of participants from multiple ethno-cultural backgrounds, the movement does not attract nor pursue newly arrived migrant communities with low English proficiency or disadvantaged communities. Channelling resources towards projects that target these participants is a potential support opportunity for government. This would enhance the capacity of the interfaith ecology movement to connect with hard-to-reach communities, work towards a sense of belonging to country, and embed environmental education alongside social integration in a liberal culturalist assimilation process.

WHAT IS THE WORK AND LEARNING OF THE INTERFAITH ECOLOGY MOVEMENT?

The effectiveness of interfaith ecology projects in building interfaith relationships and enhancing diverse civic participation is attributable to the movement's focus on practical issues or actions. This has two key effects; firstly the dialogue between participants becomes organic, not centred on abstract beliefs but on a similar goals. Secondly, it creates an environment where participants need to communicate effectively in a co-creative

process across difference where a tangible outcome is pertinent. Dialogue and relationships are subject to this purpose and cause and the process they undertake shows authentic and nuanced faces of difference which are largely unrevealed in structured dialogue forums. Whether it be through organising an event, preparing a submission or running a practical eco-project, participants encounter and overcome differences in leadership styles, ways of communicating and debating a view, understandings of decision-making processes and hierarchies, modes of friendship and trust, and levels of participation. These lived and tangible differences derive from the unique standpoints of the participants; they are informed by, but run deeper and through more intricate life narratives, than statements of faith and religious belief.

The more diverse the team, and the more practical the project, the more friction tends to be generated. This challenging and often painful aspect of interfaith ecology can reveal deeply held prejudices on the shadow sides of participants. Working together in practical engagement has casualties and is largely responsible for the volatility in membership as participants, both inadvertently and overtly, offend, exclude, judge, manipulate, and defy each other in their attempt to bring a project into fruition. Those that stick together through this intensive dialogical journey are those who are willing to feel the pain of authentic interfaith dialogue and to grow through it. The skills and strategies built up by participants through these projects are crucial to the community learning of how to work through and across the layered diversity that characterises globalised societies. Participants are constantly negotiating the boundaries of acceptability and tolerance in the mundane and practical environment of the project planning and organisation. In so doing they are not only defining the positive and negative cultural trends in the interfaith ecology movement, but also living out and shaping broader social understandings of the role and effect of difference in society.

Interfaith ecology's community capacity building is grounded in strong place recognition and sensitivity in the movement. The project of eco-conversion in faith communities is facilitated through the clear connection religious institutions have to specific and highly localised communities and their often cherished sites of worship. Eco-faith projects are using these sites as local grounds for ecological relationship building and education. Places in which to develop harmonious communities are highly sought after in the movement. Where organisations and projects are connected to sites, these become the grounds from which new projects and relationships spring. This grounded coherence presents an opportunity for interfaith ecology organisations to be supported in the use of places of worship, community centres, neighbourhood houses and other social and public sites for meeting venues, project development, sacred and aesthetic events, and education programs; alongside the collective nurturing of a place-based eco-cultural habitat. Place-

sensitivity in the interfaith ecology movement extends into the principles of the projects and engagement processes delivered by participants. In forming effective partnerships at the local level, participants often use place and place knowledge as vehicle for involving and respecting local communities and activists. This heightens the learning opportunities for movement participants and connects them to issues of environmental justice and service.

In the Australian context, place plays an important role in the decolonisation of culture-land relationships. Respect for place has featured in the way the interfaith ecology movement is building relationships with Indigenous people and learning from them the significant connection between the dispossession of people and degradation of land. By engaging with Indigenous people and issues, diverse participants are learning about Australia's eco-cultural heritage of Indigenous custodianship and colonisation as linked to current environmental and social crises. They are also becoming aware of the significant opportunities, in urban, rural and bushland settings alike, to listen to and connect with country; still alive, interactive and the perpetual life-giver to the old and new communities it carries. On this land, glimpsed through the in-between spaces and undercurrents of dialogue, diversity and friction is a subtly evolving Australian spirituality. As Bouma describes, this spirituality is implied and understated, yet deeply held and rooted in place; it is sceptical and questioning as much as it is inclusive and integrative; and what it lacks in performativity it makes up for in patience and integrity.¹²

The exploration of ecological conversion and globalised transformation in interfaith ecology is conduit for what Tacey describes as the welling-up of grassroots spirituality under globalisation.¹³ The widespread search for a global spiritual community that transcends the strictures and violence of fundamentalism, and the injustices of religious political history, is generating interest in interfaith ecology. The movement is becoming a global forum for this diverse community of seekers, both inside and outside religious traditions and institutions, who share a faith in the potential for spiritually inspired peace to replace religiously motivated violence. In seeking to sanctify this integral vision, participants are creatively working with multiple performative forms and meanings from diverse traditions and contemporary mediums to create new rituals for the movement. These rituals give rise to *communitas* and push the boundaries of meaning making on the edges of language and text.

The work and cultural trends of interfaith ecology derives from the catalysis between the collective vision of participants and their individual motivations and callings. Inspiration is

12 Bouma, *Australian Soul*

13 Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*

sourced from positive and negative experiences in the life narratives of participants which have motivated them to attempt to create certain ways of being in community. These participants may have been inspired by a community or project they have experienced and are seeking to recreate. Other participants are inspired by the alterity of their negative institution experiences in religious, educational and organisational settings. Still others are not inspired by a grand institutional or social change project, but by the interpersonal learning and relationship building that they experience within the movement.

Different understandings of the ecological world, through personal, local and global interactions and perceptions within the movement, generate both fear and hope as motivational forces. Some participants believe that environment crises may be narrowly avoided if action is swift and pertinent, while others believe that a great transformation in consciousness is nigh and that they are part of this transformation. The roles of fear and hope are thus nuanced by faith, lifestyle, location, education, worldview and personal narrative. To draw a generalisation in this midst, participants tend to be susceptible to the fear of environmental crises and productively balance this fear with faith in the potential of transformation via action that is supported by divine will or the good. It is unlikely that the movement would attract participants who do not hold this motivational assemblage in some sense as it operates against the apathy of both pessimism and optimism.

Most participants understand their role in the movement as part of their religious or spiritual calling and path and must therefore feel that their deeply held personal and spiritual convictions are finding expression through the movement and that the movement in turn feeds and nurtures this inner inspiration and faith. Some participants see their work in the movement as directly inspired by the teachings of their faith tradition while others see participation and learning in the movement as feeding back into the development and evolution of their tradition, many see the relationship between their tradition and the movement as symbiotic of both of these processes. The contributions of participants to the movement spring from deeply personal wells which mean that the stakes they hold in the movement activities are high and may conflict with those of their colleagues. This meaningfulness of participation is at the root of the transformative experiences and powerful relationships within the movement. Organisations seek to articulate and enshrine this gathering of meaning in purpose statements which require intensive dialogical processes that weave together metaphysical, material and ethical approaches among participants.

Through all of these manifestations and mechanisms, the interfaith ecology movement is developing as a therapeutic community to the transformative conditions of globalisation.

Projects are sites through which multicultural communities and multifaceted issues are holistically and actively encountered at the grassroots level. Often hampered by cross-purposes and seemingly disparate themes in the development stages, interfaith ecology projects frequently reach a creative synergy, healing the divides between and within human and earth communities. The complex process of project planning, and the econstructive commitment to perpetual learning and compromise in the movement allows participants to bear witness, within themselves and their collective space, to the emergence of an authentic dialogue of difference. This dialogue is beginning to articulate, intermittently and experientially, an integral mode of being in the context of vast social and ecological change.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Throughout this thesis I have painted a picture of emergent trends I experienced as an action researcher in the interfaith ecology movement as it is taking shape locally and globally. Behind this knowledge stands the experiences that I have encountered with the movement's local leaders and participants during the three year study period. These participants have been my teachers, elders, friends, guides and colleagues in this learning. With them I have discussed at great depth the dilemmas and hopes of this movement, the barriers it is facing and how it might grow into the future. I have shared in their conflict and frustration in the process of activism across the sometimes vast divides of difference. I have also experienced the collapse of these divides in productive work. I have partaken in the blessed aspects of this work, the wondrous coming together of people striving, conatively, against the apathy and ill-disposition of communities. I have seen and experienced how this process can open spaces for intercultural and ecological healing and seeded vital relationships of hope and peace between former strangers. These participants continue to carefully and curiously open up a renewed, organic and richly muddled culture of eco-cultural diversity under globalisation.

From early 2010 I began to withdraw from the intensive fieldwork period. I handed over leadership of the GreenFaith Australia committee and remained in quieter support as they applied for new funding rounds to undertake a practical permaculture project with faith communities in Melbourne. Throughout the year interfaith ecology activities sprung up more regularly in the fertile space cultivated by the 2009 Parliament of Religions in Melbourne with the Jewish Christian Muslim Association running their annual three day residential conference on the theme of 'Greening with God.' The COMMON team were planning another forum to connect the multi-faith and Indigenous communities of Melbourne with their 'Sharing our Land.' InterAction was finding its feet in Melbourne over this period and launched with a permaculture gardening project at Monash

University and a recycled goods market at RMIT University. The Women's Interfaith Foundation sprung up from the female Walking Humbly participants and focused on strong relationships between women as community leaders in the movement. Their eco-focus stemmed from their interest in the ecological issues of the region experienced in Walking Humbly and particularly the relationship that had been forged with the Yorta Yorta women. Through the URI Environment Satellite I started a relationship between GreenFaith Australia and the Green Prophet, a Palestinian organisation focusing on peace building through environmental action, awareness and news which became an organisational sister. Cultural Infusion, a leading organisation in multicultural arts and education programs, became a strong supporter of GreenFaith and interfaith ecology activities in Melbourne, in partnership with both the new Interfaith Women's Foundation and GreenFaith Australia, they worked on planning a second journey, this time to North Eastern Victoria, to build community relationships and raise environmental awareness.

As an action researcher my own assumptions, boundaries and idealisms have been pushed and reshaped through the experience of this study. This ecological engagement and interfaith encounter, as Simmer-Brown identifies, placed me on the uncertain and ever questioning grounds of 'diversity, plurality and pluralism in our religious lives' leading to social, personal and interpersonal understandings and experiences that are arduous and unpredictable teachers. I entered the research process courageously and openheartedly as a seeker; hoping that this movement would be the 'salvation' to social, spiritual and ecological challenges. In this way, I mirrored many other movement participants, seeking to find in this New Social Movement answers they have not found elsewhere and the assurance of a worthwhile future for themselves and the planet.

Later in the research period I developed a more grounded sense of the enduring and daily work that the movement demanded. This work reflected other fields of community development, social work and environmental activism I had experienced, but was intensified in its placement within a context of the often bewildering diversity of political, personal and religious views and competing positions. Interfaith ecology was no easy answer; indeed the movement reiterated my questions over and over again in new and complex circumstances with different people, places and issues. It is this, I believe, that speaks for the authenticity of the movement as a spiritual practice and community, a contemporary and emerging Dharma and Sangha, to use Eastern religious terms. Interfaith ecology offers the opportunity to tie, tentatively, organically and painstakingly, the links of a network of global civic participation in which the spiritual, as well as the social and ecological has a place, and through which the culture that binds us does not attempt to annihilate the differences between us.

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