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Age, gender and de-churchisation

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Introduction

This chapter proposes to help unlock the puzzle of how a clash of generations contributed to the sudden, swift and probably irreversible decline of Western church-based Christianity. Through a specific case study, I hope to draw further national and international studies together to provide empirical and theoretical insights into themes of gender, generation and religious change. Euro-American Christian mothers born in the 1920s and 30s raised what is commonly called the Baby Boomer generation. These Baby Boomers, who were born in the immediate post-war period of the 1940s and 1950s and are now in their 60s and 70s, were socialised early by their Christian mothers into mainstream Christian beliefs and practices. Theories maintain that the key to religious sustainability is intergenerational transmission, and yet most of those Boomers, in their late teens or early adulthood, rejected, and have never reclaimed, those forms of religiosity—nor have most of them raised religiously observant children, thus contributing to generational decline in Euro-American Christianity.

My recent ethnographic study (Day 2017) studied the generation of elderly Anglican laywomen born in the 1920s and early 1930s. I carried out my fieldwork in 2014–16, primarily in the UK (and to a lesser extent in Canada), where I studied in depth one church before moving to others for comparative purposes. My goal was to participate as much as possible with the women, hoping to gain insights into their religious lives. These women belonged to the Church of England, part of the international, loose network of churches known as the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion may be more homogenous in its embodied state than is usually appreciated. Most writing about Anglicans tend to focus on theological schisms, controversies about women bishops or anxieties about gay priests rather than the mundane activities of laywomen (see, for example, Markham et al. 2013). As a result, we know far less than we should about those women and about how studying them can help us understand wider societal structures and pressures. Studying microlevel, everyday phenomena can provide a larger picture, as the micro, the slight, the most mundane and the banally ordinary practices, emotions, social relationships and interactions also reflect convergences with and manifestations of wider social factors, forces, structures and divisions (Neal and Murji 2015, 813).

In my study, I detected amongst the women I studied hints of ambivalence towards their place in the hierarchy and also towards a growing conservative, evangelical movement within
the Church of England. Questions about religious transmission sometimes arose with these women, whom I called ‘Generation A’. After all, these were the mothers of the Baby Boomers, the less and differently religious ‘Generation B’, who in turn raised increasingly non- or differ-
ently religious Generations Y and Z. The lack of transmission is somewhat counter-theoretical, with so many studies emphasising the robustness of transmission in religious families. Devine’s (2013, 485) study concluded, ‘The data indicate strong support for the effect of socialisation in predicting levels of religiosity. In other words, having a strongly religious family background is associated with being religious in later life’.

During my fieldwork, as we dusted the pews or made cups of tea for post-service refresh-
ments, I sometimes noted the consistent absence of their adult children. The churches I studied conformed to the wider pattern of Christian decline, now extensively documented (see later for the theoretical and empirical context), and the women knew it. The children they had raised, now in their 60s and 70s, have consistently chosen not to follow their mothers’ examples. The women sometimes offered a few vague explanations (‘No time!’/‘Too busy!’) when I would ask ‘what happened?’ but they were mostly nonplussed: ‘Maybe you should ask them!’ a few of them said. I agreed that I should, and would, just as soon as I had com-
pleted the current study of their generation: it was important to understand and document the beliefs and practices of that previously under-studied, muted, sometimes invisible and dying out cohort of older, devout Anglican laywomen. My fieldwork ended with a predic-
tion that the older generation would die out and their Baby Boomer children would not replace them. This chapter now reflects on those questions through the lens of generational clash and change.

Theoretical Debates

There is broad scholarly agreement that Euro-American Christian decline quickly gathered pace from the 1960s onwards. The evidence, drawn from a variety of sources, appears to be robust, with the most common reason for religious decline being generational: as elderly church-goers die, they are not being replaced by the next generation, nor are they attracting or retaining children or teenagers (Ashworth and Farthing 2007; Brierley 2000, 2006; Voas and Crocke et 2005).

In November 2015, the Church of England director of finance, John Spence, said that the evidence for decline was ‘indisputable’: ‘Twenty years ago the demographics matched the population as a whole. Now we’re 20 years older than the population. Unless we do something, the church will face a real crisis’. Many scholars cite the 1960s counter-cultural revolution as the critical period when Baby Boomers apparently rejected church, religion, respect for institutions, care for community and obedience to a higher moral authority (see, for example, Brown 2000; McLeod 2009). Scholars tend to agree that the causal influences likely include feminism, consumerism, pluralism, the power of choice and a preference for an individualised, non-institutional authenticity (see, for example, Brown 2000; Roof 1993; Wilson 1966; Wuthnow 1998; Snape and Brown 2016; Taylor 2007). Brown’s claim for the death of Christian Britain, or as he puts it, ‘the demise of the nation’s core religious and moral identity’ (Brown 2000, 1), rests on what he perceives as a sudden shift in the 1960s amongst the two generations who matured in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. These would be the ‘Baby Boomers’ and their progeny, the grandchildren of Generation A. The 1960s period was, Brown says, the time when the British population stopped going to church, marrying, getting confirmed and being baptised. As a consequence, he said, the majority of churchgoers are older women. The shift in the following decade was, he argued (Brown 2000, 176), sudden
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and violent with a quick series of major changes as the ‘institutional structures of cultural traditionalism started to crumble in Britain’. Some scholars (Brown 2012, 2015, 2017; Cook 2004) suggest the 1960s cultural milieu, particularly the feminist turn, may have had a longer tail and even snout, beginning in the late 1950s and extending into the early 1970s, what Brown (2017) refers to the ‘long sixties’ where there arose, he proposed, a new ‘moral cosmos’ as people began to doubt more the supposed truths and authority of religion and turned to broader ideas of human and natural rights.

Generations, gender and culture

First, central to understanding these changes is the concept of ‘generation’. While not an homogenous group, the majority of the UK and Canadian women I studied had always attended an Anglican church since they were children with their families, and they usually stressed the importance of their mother’s influence on their religiosity. Further, I argued (Day 2017) that evidence about the particularities of wartime, nation rebuilding, post-war austerity, domestication and the consumerist boom help draw broad strokes to characterise qualities of this Generation A. I operationalised then, and propose to do so again, the concept of ‘generation’ as suggested by Mannheim (1952). Mannheim argued that the idea of generation means more than a cohort of people born around the same time. He identified the idea that sometimes people born at a critically transformative time experienced phenomena that shaped their identity. Being aware of belonging to a generation, he argued, requires self-awareness and is therefore, I have argued (Day 2017), both performative and imagined, but no less ‘real’ for that.

Mannheim’s concept of a ‘generation unit’ refers to the idea that such people experience certain historical events in the same location, creating a unique, shared consciousness. Following Mannheim, Edmunds and Turner (2002, 7), I therefore use the idea of generation in terms of self-identity construction. Douglas Coupland’s (1991) novel Generation X defined young people by their attitudes and practices and spawned similar works (see, for example, Lipsky and Abrahms 1994; Mahedy and Bernadi 1994; Nelson and Cowan 1994; Beaudoin 1998; Flory and Miller 2000; Pardun and McKee 1995; Rushkoff 1994). Wade Clarke Roof (1993, 1999) explored attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which arose and became influential at a particular time in American society and influencing a specific cohort of post-war babies born in the 1940s. Not everyone born at the same time was equally affected, as Klatch (1999) pointed out in her study about 1960s young conservatives growing up at the same time as the hippies and radicals. Further, the coupling of gender with generation is important, as scholars have commonly identified the key influence of women in transmitting religious beliefs and practices to future generations.

In summary, the literature and my recent study seem to confirm that a major generational incline occurred from the 1960s onwards, provoked by larger cultural shifts. What is generally absent from the literature thus far is a fine-grained examination of the actual, lived moments of those generational conflicts and clashes. In this chapter, I will offer three vignettes from my research to illustrate and animate those claims. We know, in other words, what works in theory, but how does it work in practice? And, importantly, how can we find out? I aim here also to share a reflexive account of the fieldwork, exposing doubts and revisions that are often masked in most published accounts of research that tend to convey a picture of a cool, unruffled field-worker following an exact plan to a successful conclusion. Fieldwork is messy: let’s admit and embrace that.
Beginning bad

Few things, I have found, are more alarming at the beginning of an ethnographic study than the sinking, sick-making realisation that one of the most important characteristics of the project seems to be irretrievably lacking. Faced with that potentially catastrophic event, I did the only thing I knew to be most helpful—I phoned a friend, an accomplished anthropologist who had been enormously helpful as I had created the proposal for what became my Economic and Social Research Council–funded project, a two-year ethnography of the vanishing ‘Generation A’.

‘So, what’s going wrong?’ he asked me, as we settled with our coffees on a park bench overlooking a pretty London park. It was spring and everything but me seemed alive, bursting with energy and joy. I shook my head, feeling utterly miserable. ‘It’s them’, I told him. He raised his eyebrows. ‘By “them”’, he asked, ‘did I mean the women with whom I was beginning to spend my time in several Anglican churches in the UK?’ I nodded. He waited. Finally, I cleared my throat and mumbled, ‘I can’t stand them’. ‘How’, I asked him, ‘am I going to spend two years with people I intensely dislike and hope to form a bond with? How can I empathise with them?’ We discussed that issue for a while, as he helped me understand that many research projects did not involve mutual affection and that over time I would probably get used to the women and find things about them I did like, or, perhaps, at least respect. In practice, I found he was right: I did become accustomed to them and learned to respect many of their characteristics. What I had not anticipated was the extent to which I formed deep, and lasting, bonds with them in spite of, and maybe because of, my ambivalence. Further, I began to stay tuned to my emotional responses, realising that these could provide important data. I was, after all, a member of ‘Generation B’, the late-Baby-Boomer generation who had been born into and raised in an observant Anglican family by a Generation A mother. It was a form of auto-ethnography that helped me empathise with the generational clashes inherent in that relationship.

Sacred structure

Duty. It was a word I heard a lot during my fieldwork and on the occasions when I presented my work at conferences. People seemed to take it for granted, as if it were enough to simply say that Generation A women did what they did because of ‘duty’. The opposite was equally thin: if we use the word ‘duty’ to explain generational contrast, we are assuming some sort of binary where Generation A is ‘dutiful’ but the next generation is not. As Davie (1994) suggested, generations may differ to the extent that the modern home is a site of consumption, rather than production; families are not typically engaged in growing food, making clothes or managing a small shop. I felt, however, that there was more nuance awaiting to be uncovered with ‘duty’. While there was much I learned about Generation A’s sense of obligation, a surprising finding for me was to discover how limited it was. I did not often find Anglican women engaged in conversations about climate change, or food scarcity in the developing world (apart from ‘Christian Aid’ week, a fundraising drive which seemed to satisfy most people’s consciences). Their sense of duty was parochial, focused on their immediate families, the church, the idea of the Queen and the notion of country. They were the war generation, who had worked hard to support the war effort and maintain cohesion and normality at home, and many of them had lost brothers and lovers in the process. That may be why their ‘country’ was a place and an idea of traditional conservatism and lack of change. It was to that imagined community (Anderson 1991) that they felt an obligation, and for many, according to members of clergy I talked with, that sense of duty promoted a resistance to change that has led to the near collapse of their beloved church.
On one Sunday morning I witnessed a generational clash that illustrated this. It was a lovely, warm sunny day and I could hear people on the street outside laughing and talking happily as they wandered to the local parks for a picnic or just a day out. In contrast, we were sitting inside the old, cold church listening to the organ mournfully issuing its prelude, the congregation not much bigger than the Church of England average of fifty-three. Just before the service started three young women, who had never been there in the two years I had attended, came in and sat in one of the rear pews, chatting loudly. Strangers rarely came into church services, and as the liturgy began, I noticed they were aimlessly flicking through the prayer books, unaware of where they should be looking or reading. As we stood for the first hymn, they remained seated, looking through the pages and starting to giggle. Suddenly, I saw one of the Generation A women get up from her usual place (and we all had our usual places) and walk back to where the women were seated, handing each a hymn book opened at the right page. She returned to her pew and the women were left looking a little sheepish as they stood for the hymn. Shortly afterwards, they left. The incident reinforced to me the importance of structure, routine and sameness in the church that so comforted and pleased the Generation A women and so repelled those who were younger. Research into church growth and decline (Goodhew 2012) seems to indicate that the larger, more evangelical churches are less structured, more vibrant and more emotional in their hymns and sermons, and the people are more engaged. These are the churches to which the traditional Anglican women refer to, with clear disdain, as ‘happy clappy’. Disdainful they may be, and moved by a duty and obligation to their own familiar church and routines, but as their numbers decline and their style of worship is overtaken by the larger, more evangelical churches, they do not appear to regret clinging to their past while the present and future sweep by. One of my first intense realisations about that arose with, perhaps predictably, baking, that ultimate, quintessentially domestic mark of the happy homemaker.

Blessed jumble

Religious Generation A women not only put their heart and soul into their church-based activities, they engage their whole bodies. It is often physically arduous work, shifting boxes of second-hand books, bric–a–brac and items for the jumble sale—what hipsters today would recognise simply as ‘clutter’ and, following a mindfulness app, perhaps, would work hard to remove all such unnecessary objects from their homes in order to provide, in their eyes, a more streamlined, restful environment. The spaces of Generation A women tend not to be so sparse but are usually filled with items that would not in their eyes signify ‘clutter’ but are tangible symbols of memory and meaning: photographs of family in mismatched frames on their tables and sideboards, a bowl, probably picked up from a church sale (in what I termed a ‘self-circulating economy’, Day 2017, 170–173), filled with potpourri, a small porcelain box or two, probably Wedgewood, a cut-crystal vase. In their downstairs lavatory would be small ‘guest towels’ for washing hands and a bar or two of wrapped soap, probably lavender or rose. When it came time for me to contribute to such an event, I was terrified. The woman organising it told me to bring a few unwanted items from my home to contribute to the sale and bake a cake or some scones, or even biscuits. I felt more confident about contributing the items than I did about baking. I had by then been to a number of such sales during my research and noted that the style, purpose, function and content of those sales were similar in the Anglican churches of the UK and those I visited in Canada.

And so, I swiftly assembled on the appointed Saturday morning my items: a second-hand crime novel, a small box of scented tea lights, a glass butter dish and a tube of unopened hand cream. My sense of satisfaction was soon short-lived as I recalled her instruction (and these
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are women who more often instruct on such occasions than suggest) to provide some baking. I couldn’t recall the last occasion when I baked but assumed it must have been when my children were younger and enjoyed the often messy process. My predicament reminded me of a scene from a 2003 film, Calendar Girls, which told the funny, touching story of a group of women who were members of the WI, or Women’s Institute as it is more formally known. The organisation was started in 1897 in Canada by a woman, Adelaide Hoodless, to help create a sense of community and provide skills-sharing amongst often geographically dispersed women in rural areas. One of those skills was baking, along with jam making and fruit preservation. In the movie, a youngish WI member was worried about having to provide a cake for their WI stall at a country fair, and so she purchased one instead and presented it on a plate to appear homemade. All went well until her cake won first prize in the baking competition and she was asked about the recipe. One reason, I had thought, that the scene was so funny was that it resonated with the anxiety many younger women, such as I, feel in the presence of older women who are often much more proficient at producing the tangible expression of a societal value, or nostalgia, for family and domesticity. That may be one reason for the popularity of the UK television series the Great British Bake-off. While this may reflect a nostalgia for a long-ago, and probably imagined, era of domestic bliss, a key difference between the would-be chefs on the television series and the church-based efforts I witnessed is its purpose: the television competition is for individual success and affirmation, whereas the church sales are for the church. Eccles (2014, 7) reflected on a generational divide when she studied women’s involvement in voluntary organisations. Discussing one younger woman’s voluntary activity at her children’s school, Eccles suggested that her efforts would cease once her children stopped attending that school:

Moreover, will the turn to subjectivities and the desire for self-actualisation lend itself to the ethic of service to others in the community for no reward except social standing? Monica’s daughter serves on a parents’ committee at her children’s school but that will only persist while her children attend that school and she does that to help and support her children.

I corroborate her finding with one from my research (Day 2017, 173) where I described an elderly woman who provides small items every year for the church’s Christmas family party and had done so long after her own children were little and had participated in the games. She felt an allegiance to her ‘church family’ that extended beyond her own biological children.

Sacred family

The aforementioned Women’s Institute became an occasional site for my fieldwork, as several of the Anglican laywomen I was studying were WI members and one suggested I visit her local chapter with her. While my first visit was as her guest, I then informed the members of the research that I was doing and asked for their consent to visit occasionally and talk with them. They agreed, providing I would occasionally update them on my research and allow them to ask questions. I agreed and found it was an important ‘secular’ site to further observe how Anglican laywomen practise their beliefs and values. Although the WI points out that it is not related to any religion or political party, in practice I found a high percentage were practising Christians, and many of them Anglicans. The WI has also campaigned for the rights of women and girls worldwide, although this serious, labour-intensive work of social action and change
is usually ignored in wider, popular discourse about the WI, which favours the softer gloss of ‘jam-makers’ or ‘flower ladies’, perhaps revealing a popular preference for women to be safely contained in a domestic sphere.

The WI chapter with which I became most familiar met regularly in a village hall in a small town in England. I was to learn that a conflict within the organisation had emerged as the membership changed over the years from being mostly rural based to a growing contingent in cities, with an accompanying sense of disquiet amongst some members. An article in the UK’s conservative-leaning *Daily Telegraph* newspaper quoted one member who said many rural groups were complaining about the high costs of maintaining the organisation. She said that elderly women could no longer afford the subscription rates, and groups were unable to pay travel expenses for speakers or the cost of hiring the hall.

On one occasion I witnessed a generational clash between the invited speaker, a younger woman, Sarah, in her thirties, and the older generation of women members, most well over seventy. One of the first clues about the generation difference was Sarah’s confusion about how to pick out winning tickets for the raffle. It was obvious that Sarah had never before participated in a raffle, one of the most important fundraising activities of the older generation, nor had she experienced the thrill of being able to have one of the first picks of the prizes at the raffle table. A bottle of ginger wine? A pack of *After Eight* mints? A pot of *Celebration* chocolates, perhaps? Would she be able to resist the tin of mixed biscuits? I secretly hoped so, as the biscuits are handy for guests and keep well, and the tin can be reused for a number of purposes. She would resist, as it happened, as she moved quickly to explain to the women the real purpose of her visit. She would talk to us about the healing power of self-love and invite us to engage in some activities. Eyebrows raised. ‘Self-love?’, whispered one woman next to me as she winked. A few stifled smiles. Was there something a little saucy about that expression, and were the women privately having a laugh? I wouldn’t put it past them, having seen the room once erupt in raucous laughter as a member explained in some detail, and with appropriate hand gestures, their recent outing to a sausage-making factory (an annual popular event in the chapter calendar, I was not surprised to learn).

Sarah explained that self-love was key to healing because research had shown that negative thoughts made people ill. It was important, she explained, to focus on oneself, not just one’s family. ‘But I always think of my family’, said one elderly woman at the back of the room. ‘Yes’, beamed Sarah, who was about to move on to her next point when the woman piped up again, ‘But I want to think of my family’, she said. ‘I am quite content with that’. I realised that Sarah was missing the woman’s point and also that the normally well-behaved audience was, with their whispers and interruptions, behaving uncharacteristically. Perhaps a more seasoned speaker, or one more aware of generational differences (engaging in even a quick scan of Heelas and Woodhead 2005, perhaps) would have noticed that she had lost their support from her opening comment and changed tack.

Sarah, however, decided to ignore the heckler and charge on, talking about healing, empowerment and self-love. The women began to move restlessly in their chairs. Sarah seemed to lose track for a few minutes and then said she would play a recording of a famous author who wrote about healing and self-love. Unfortunately for her, the device did not work, and it appeared the batteries had died. After several moments trying to remedy that situation, and failing, Sarah repeated to the group the central message again—if we only thought positive thoughts and loved ourselves we could be cured of illness that we had brought on ourselves.

‘I don’t believe that’, exclaimed one woman loudly. ‘It’s been proven by neuroscience’, Sarah snapped back. The room fell silent. She then asked if anyone prayed and most people nodded.
Sarah explained that we did not have to go to church to pray, we could simply light a candle and think of someone to whom we wanted to send healing thoughts. On the mark there, I thought. My observations and others’ research had indicated that more people today are lighting candles in churches and at graves (Day 2012). She added that it was important to realise that when we give out good thoughts to other people, we will receive them back. One woman nodded and said she likes it when people give up their seats for her on the tube. Sarah smiled and said, ‘Yes, they do that because they can see you’re giving out love’. The woman seemed to think about that for a few seconds and then shook her head: ‘No’, she said. ‘I just expect people to act considerately’.

On the way home, I asked my elderly friend what she had thought about the talk. ‘I think it’s unnatural’, she said. ‘It’s not right to think so much about loving yourself. That’s just selfish’.

The experience showed me a generational divide, corresponding to the theories discussed earlier that a cultural change had occurred; the women following Generation A were less interested in institutional religion and practices than their mothers’ generation, turning instead to more diffuse, spiritual practices and an ethic of care which extended to the self, as well as to others.

**Using emotion to gather and analyse data**

Experiencing conflicting emotions during my research project, ranging from dislike and fear to affection and longing, prompted me to reflect more on how valuable emotions are as data-gathering instruments. This requires a turn from notions of distance and objectivity to embrace that which is close, confused and subjective. In practice, and through practice, the ethnographer stays attuned to ‘their own culturally conditioned common sense’ (Buch and Staller 2014, 108).

As Ortner (1995, 173) described it, ethnography ‘has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing’ (see also Kleinman 1991; Kleinman and Copp, 1993, 1997). While ‘ethnography’ is becoming a buzz word that often is used as a synonym for qualitative research, my methodological goal was closer to what the American Anthropology Association describes as ‘ethnography’, 3 stressing ‘the researcher’s study of human behaviour in the natural settings in which people live’ which will produce a ‘description of cultural systems or an aspect of culture based on fieldwork in which the investigator is immersed in the ongoing everyday activities of the designated community’. That requires time spent in whatever ‘field’ we construct for ourselves in an attempt to concentrate on, as Bielo said, ‘being there, wherever there is’ (Bielo 2015, 31). Brewer (2000, 20) contrasts the ethnographic approach with that of ‘natural science’ and provides a useful distinction:

The natural science model of research does not permit the researcher to become a variable in the experiment, yet ethnographers are not detached from the research but, depending on the degree of involvement in the setting, are themselves part of the study or by their obtrusive presence come to influence the field.

As I am known to frequently correct students—there is no such thing as the ‘data’ out there. Comments such as ‘I let the data speak for itself’ (or themselves, if we want to be pedantic) are nonsense. Researchers create data. From the first moment of deciding on the research question, the whole process is intersubjective. We, assisted perhaps by supervisors and colleagues, decide
what is important and why, and we design a process to find out more. In their article describing emotions during their field work exercise, Satterlund and Mallinson (2006, 125) quoted a professor who usefully pointed to a main difference between qualitative and quantitative research:

On the first day of class, our professor grabbed our attention by explaining that it would be necessary to ‘lose’ the methods that we had previously been taught in statistics-oriented courses. Instead, our thinking would have to be different. Rather than looking to a hard and fast theory to guide our research, we were told that our data would drive our research.

This inductive, more immediate approach had already become familiar to me during my doctoral research from 2002 to 2006 (Day 2011) when I tried to be first informed by the data I was creating and second by any theory to help explain it. As Satterlund and Mallinson (2006) also reflected, this process is not linear, and in practice one goes back and forth between theory and empirical data. So, too, was the relationship between the apparently separate spheres of intellect and emotion. As I became more accustomed to the women I was studying, I consciously adopted the practice of interrogating my own emotional response to reveal qualities of the generational discord. I eventually found it helpful to create a five-part schema that could be used to more systematically analyse the process I was engaged in. I began to understand that my field was temporally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally defined and coloured by processes of intersubjective relationality. On that particular Saturday morning, I could see all five at work as I hovered over the kitchen table wondering if I had time to bake or to stop at a bakery. I was anxious temporally because I wanted to use my time differently. That didn’t mean that I had any more or less time than did the Generation A women so much older than myself: it is a fallacy to assume that the women of a few decades ago had more ‘time’ than women do now. Many of them worked outside the home and even if they did not, they worked in their homes, churches and communities often raising families and also having significant caring responsibilities for aging parents and other relatives.

As Durkheim (1915) pointed out: all time is social time. Evans-Pritchard (1939, 201) developed that idea: ‘Perceptions of time, in our opinion, are functions of time reckoning, and are hence socially determined’. Leach (1971, 135) wrote, ‘We talk of measuring time, as if time were a concrete thing waiting to be measured; but in fact, we create time by creating intervals in social life. Until we have done this there is no time to be measured’. More recently, the social nature of time has been explored through the idea of collective memory (Connerton 1989; Halbwachs (1992 [1925]) and anthropological conversations turning on themes of uncertain time, nostalgic time, ethical time and conflicts of time (see for example the special issue of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute: ‘Doubt, Conflict, Mediation: The Anthropology of Modern Time’, 2014, and for discussion of ‘sacred time’ see Day 2018).

My week may have been more filled with paid labour, such as teaching classes or marking essays, but was also considerably lighter than Generation A’s whose tasks centred both within and outside their homes. I was physically implicated as well, finding that my dexterity was well suited to the keyboard but not to the chopping board. I lacked the practised certainty of baking muscle-memory (Mauss 1935) that comes through years of rubbing in butter and flour and rolling it out, separating egg yolks from whites and knowing exactly when to stop whipping the cream with a whisk. My decision not to bake was as much a choice about how to spend time as it was about how to avoid feeling humiliated and ashamed by presenting a substandard cake or pie to the women at church. The emotional impact of that shame and anxiety brought home to me the generational clashes of what we valued and desired. Finding an intellectual
response was the easy part—I could theorise why I felt as I did and how it might correspond to wider theories about social, spiritual and emotional labour (Day 2017). I congratulated myself for knowing so well those arguments while at the same time I felt inadequate and nearly tearful. I had no spiritual outlet or support for those emotions or the doubts about myself that they raised. Jesus was not like an angel sitting on my shoulder observing and about to help me traverse what I felt to be my own valley of death, nor did I have an institution or community designed to support me. But, I concluded, the women did have that church-based spiritual support and an institution in which they belonged that supported them throughout those moments of doubts, anxieties and stresses. It was an institution from which I felt alienated, being, I knew, a product of a generation that revelled in its post-institutionalisation. We were post-structural teenagers, feminists, anti-institutional war protestors, spiritual experimenters who believed that the truth lay within, or certainly in the minds and hearts of the people we loved, not within old, cold, stone walls. And that, I realised on that Saturday morning, was our generational clash: Generation A women desired exactly the opposite from what I and my friends desired: they wanted a relationship with a male god in a solid institution led by a male priest where they could feel the strength of what I termed their ‘pew power’, satisfied by their matriarchal role as co-head of the church ‘family’. I also appreciated that the women had a tight association between the spiritual aspect of the church and their friendships and fun. I recalled bumping into one Generation A woman on Easter Saturday. She told me she would be getting up at 4.30 the next morning to join the Easter Sunday sunrise service at the church. I told her she would go straight to heaven for that and she replied, ‘Well . . . it is followed by a full cooked breakfast’.

Feeling intellectually self-satisfied, if still emotionally and spiritually bruised, I gathered my small jumble items and headed to the church where the women awaited me. I had left it too late to stop at a bakery. I hurried along the street aware that while they may overlook my lack of baking experience, they would not be happy if I were late for my ‘duty’. After half an hour or so of angst-filled guilt, I had resigned myself to not baking or buying a cake on that occasion and apologised as I arrived for not having ‘time’. That paltry excuse was met by the quick smile and cool gaze of a Generation A woman who knew, perhaps better than I, that ‘time’ was not an external resource to be acquired, spent or stored, but a process of value-rich choices reflecting one’s priorities. The glimmer of guilt and disquiet I felt was an emotion worth exploring to provide me with insights into the generational qualities we each valued and the generational divide that occurred and became embedded as a result. I smiled back.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study provided material linked to issues that may be of interest to others studying religion. First, for research into gender and generation, there is the potential to compare and contrast self-conscious generational identities. These may help explain some of the reasons for religious change as much of the way religious beliefs and practices are transmitted depends on women. A comparative lens may also account for the different ways women see themselves and each other, particularly in terms of where they locate meaning, purpose and power. Second, there is the value of ethnographic research which can bring the scholar to a near-native subjectivity through a process of enculturation and reflection; and, finally, through deliberately engaging with the range of emotions that inevitably arise in fieldwork, researchers may be able to use these as data for review and analysis.
Age, gender and de-churchisation

Notes

3 www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1652.

Bibliography


