Faith sustains everyone in different ways through troubling times. Across diverse places, cultures and ages, children and adults are sustained by very different forms of faith. The implications of this for further research are that faith systems very much need to be seen as part of children’s lives, as well as continuing to be acknowledged as shaping adults’ worlds. Whether they are taught to believe in capitalism, Hinduism or climate change, children are born into belief systems that come to be part of who they are. I began this book by suggesting that we all have faith in something. This is because my qualitative empirical research has shown me that people are similar in the respect that we are all sustained by faith: faith that our children’s lives will be better than ours; that life after death will be better than it is now; faith in the ‘truth’ of science and the Enlightenment; in the fact that humans will never know all there is to this world; in the hope that our partner will outlive us; in whatever it is we need to believe.

The ways we come to have faith are complex and are different for everyone. The consistent thing about how we come to have faith is that everyone’s stories are different. Capitalism, Christianity and Islam are the three most powerful and therefore popular belief systems into which people in my research are born. Participation in these systems is largely a result of where people are born and raised. Religion and capitalism are entwined in complex ways, and these relationships shape children’s imaginaries and community cultures. As I have argued, faith mixtures are material: they are smells, memories, symbols and icons, places, words and sounds. We are born into lived mixtures that have been made through biography,
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geography, race and class. While we can modify these, we cannot completely change them.

In the communities with whom I worked, there is a gap between media (or popular) representations of faith and the way faith works. Terrorism is not necessarily seen by communities or individuals as an expression of religion. Memorialisation is a community response to terrorism and has significantly changed the physical and virtual landscapes of my research sites in Manchester, London and Sydney. Community, heritage and a feeling of belonging are the main reasons why those who identify as religious do so (Iner, 2015). As I have shown, there are specific subcultures of faith that transcend religion: children have faith in climate change (Hickey-Moody, Knight and Florence, 2021; Malone, 2017; Murris, 2016), friendship and virtual worlds, and adults have faith in something that is more than flesh, even if sometimes, they are not sure what that is. Others are sustained by the connection to the past and their family that religion brings (Cockburn, 2013). Children of all religions and class backgrounds are brought together by a concern about the environment. These arguments run across this book.

I began in Chapter 1 by bringing to life the locations in which my research took place and explained the place-based mixtures of faith attachment that community members felt. Reconciliation is an uncompleted project, and a broad context of colonial racism is embedded in my research sites. I tried to convey a sense of place attachment and share my experiences of being in place. West Sydney still reminds me viscerally of being stuck to a train seat, falafel, hot bitumen, telephone wires, rows and rows of pick-up trucks parked outside mosques on Fridays. Manchester brings to mind blue and yellow ‘magic’ buses with Wi-Fi, colourful corner shops, red-brick buildings, mosque visits and the black-red-gold Shia shrine to the massacre of Karbala, featuring mock bloodstained child corpses, hot school rooms, an empty shopping trolley in the corner of the women’s prayer room and an especially domineering teaching assistant. For me, London was Tesco sandwiches, the Docklands Light Railway wobbling along its tracks, grey buildings, the Thames and loneliness. London is so big, and one can be so alone at times in that city. The lost lending library: an amazing make-believe world invented inside a south-east Primary School that was designed to show children all the places that reading can take them. Adelaide
was a spectacular tapestry couch, dates and coffee served by mothers and friends on said tapestry couch, the outdoor chapel, empty streets and two worlds. Outside the liberal and open church and the friendly mosque community who gave me bread and vegetables, also I noticed the women with pearl earrings, gold shoes and turned-up collars in Norwood. For me, Melbourne was the council housing towers, rapping and football, cold morning drives out to the problem of ‘helping disadvantaged kids’ and family stories of resilience. Canberra was orange, biryani, a bird in a fallen building and fear of otherness.

Moving from trying to share my sense of the mixtures that make up place attachment to the discourses that construct and communicate faith systems, I discussed how popular media and social policy have demonised Islam through black-panic discourses (Aly and Walker, 2007; Brasted, 2001; Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama, 2018; Noble, 2008). Privilege, conflict and attachment situate me in the research.

In Chapter 2, I developed a new materialist philosophy of faith. Through mobilising affect theory and writings from the new materialisms, I demonstrated how faith operates as both a form of what Lauren Berlant calls ‘cruel optimism’ and, alternatively, as a means of creating what Spinoza calls joy. I showed that a change in the capacity to act (affect), such as that created through belief, is an experience that unites both secular and religious people. For example, belief in the superiority of secular culture over religious culture, and vice versa, are two affectively similar corporeal orientations that, to quote Braidotti, show how we are ‘all too human’ (2019: 1–5) and all ‘in-this-together-but-not-one-and-the-same’ (2019: 157). I outlined the three scales across which faith entanglements and resulting unconscious orientations articulate: macro, meso and micro. I argued that, on a macro level, global material economies and worldviews, geographies and networks of faith impact substantively upon an individual’s capacities to act, as these assemblages are both political and world-making. On a meso level, the individual and community geographies of belonging that constitute people’s everyday lives demonstrate the complex entanglements of matter and belief that make up lived faith worlds. At a micro level, as I have suggested, faith is both a form of what Spinoza (1677) would call joy and, in some circumstances, what Berlant (2011) calls ‘cruel
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optimism’. We are all consciously or unconsciously enmeshed in various systems of faith relation, both formal and informal, religious and secular. This chapter puts forward a unified approach to thinking about the social and individual politics of orientation as expressions of different forms of faith.

In Chapter 3, I moved on to discuss methods for researching with children and understanding their lifeworlds, and researching the communities in which they reside in relation to the global and local issues that shape them. Multi-sited ethnography and socially engaged arts practice (Hage, 2005; Marcus, 1995, 1998, 2011) were the two methodologies that animated my research, and these were complemented by focus groups with parents and community members, and follow-up in-depth interviews with focus group participants. Chapter 3 explained the bespoke developments I made to methods for undertaking arts-based research with children. The idea of being ‘with children in their worlds’ was an organising principle for the way I encouraged children to make art (Coleman, 2016). The materials children use to make art become absolutely central to the meanings art has for children. Making creates mixtures of meaning-place-community-belonging that are material, emotional and intra-active. Places, smells, colours and textures are part of how children come to express themselves and to know.

I explained multi-sited ethnography as a way of adopting a critical perspective on how images and meanings circulate globally across places. Community, belonging and historical connections are surfaces of attachment, mixtures of belonging and ideas that span all places.

In Chapter 4, I examined joy and affect as products of faith and as material ways of coping that are developed by having faith. Increased capacity to act, brought about by empathy for others, insight into different experiences and a desire to be the change the world needs to see are examples of the positive affects that are engendered by faith. Rituals, icons, objects and places become networked systems that support connections and capacity to collaborate and share perspectives. Coping with difference, making new systems of belonging and negotiating conflict are some of the positive affects created through everyday faith. Spinoza, and after him, Deleuze and Guattari, offer ways of understanding the tectonics of emotion as they flow through assemblages of place, objects and
bodies. Examining these ideas, I look at the patterns, practices and feelings of opening up that articulate across surfaces of faith.

Examining outside belongings in Chapter 5, I foregrounded the voices of participants to examine intersections between race, class, gender and religion. I explored how my research participants’ experiences taught me about shifting landscapes of inclusion, exclusion, belonging and unbelonging. These feelings made up spaces of everyday life for the people in my ethnography, and while this chapter explored the dynamics of a few individuals and their families, the themes highlighted of being in between lines of race, class, sexuality and religion resonated across a significant number of my research participants. One of the main points I made in this chapter pertaining to the racialised limits of cultural studies scholarship on class. I argued that lines of inclusion and exclusion are created in literature that discusses class, which is often only applicable to communities who have lived in places for longer than one generation and often focus on white cultures. Drawing on Elspeth Probyn’s notion of outside belongings and attachments to surfaces and places, I examined migration, global inequality, education markets, social class and religion. I explored how these forces and practices create interiors, exteriors and intersections that can leave people in between dominant lines of identification and belonging. These are complicated issues that are mobile and diverse: intersections of religion and class are different from intersections of migration, inequality, and education markets. However, they are brought together by the feeling of being left out that people experience when they are outside changing contours of culture. The process of engaging with, and coming to understand experiences of being in between lines of identification, or experiencing ‘outside belongings’, has also led me to interrogate my own experiences of outside belonging, in terms of class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion, alongside those of my research participants. This process connects many people’s stories and experiences. Only some of the stories I have collected were able to be included in this chapter, which presents a theme that extends across the lives of many more research participants.

In Chapter 6, I followed unexpected connections that sustained adults and children. Class and race, particularly class and whiteness is a significant theme that connects experiences from council estates in my research. This sense of connection is complicated in the
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experiences of Black migrant families. Football, both as a material cultural practice of significance and a mediated, symbolic way of diversifying representations of whiteness is another theme I explore in this chapter. Children made artworks about the ethnically diverse football stars they love, which express the superdiverse worlds in which they live. They play football whenever possible: even in classrooms. Ice-cream and the popular combination of football and ice-cream is another site of global connection for the children with whom I worked. Family relationships, friendships and happy moments of solitude were seemingly best experienced and expressed through the consumption of ice-cream. Finally, digital games, both as a mode of social engagement and as a source of creative inspiration really inspired many who were involved in my research.

I explored the sets of negative affects that attach to faith practices in Chapter 7. Promises, objects and imagined exchange values can become complicated ways of stopping engagement with the here and now, in favour of imagined possibilities to come. I unpacked histories of colonisation carried on in new ways and contemporary performances of racism. I also examined contemporary expressions of racism as spaces of discomfort. While I work to stop racism and I opposed expressions of racism in my fieldwork, creating enduring change is complicated and I have not yet found a way to do so. I think about these complexities in the hope this may create future changes.

In Chapter 8, I examined the idea of other worlds. Faith is a way that adults sustain possibilities of a better life or a better future. For adults, other worlds after death are a reason to live well and are something to look forward to. Other worlds also inspire children. When asked about ‘what really matters’, the 343 children involved in art-making developed a shared voice that spanned place, culture and religion to articulate their fears of homelessness and climate change. Some, but by no means all, of the children in my study were quite vulnerable. All of the children were worried about climate change. Some were scared of homelessness. For children, these concerns came above organised religion, with climate change – and their faith in climate change – being the most enduring fear present in their minds. Many children’s families spent special time together at the mosque or at church, and while for some children, in some instances, this seemed more significant than football, for many, football was the most important community in their life.
Privilege, conflict and attachment

The embodied position from which I speak, work and experience the world co-produces my research findings. I try to acknowledge this wherever possible, alongside the ways my heritage and lived experience shape my interests and orientations. One of the ways I do this is to begin all of my focus groups with adults in Australia by acknowledging the unceded Aboriginal land on which we meet and, in both UK and Australia, by acknowledging my own privilege, living as a white woman in dominantly Anglo-Saxon, diverse social and cultural contexts. As I have suggested, both Australia and England are dominated by negative discourses in relation to Islam, and its relationship to contemporary incidences of terrorism (as I acutely observed during my fieldwork when the Manchester and London terrorist attacks occurred in mid-2017). Privilege is also associated with my role as a widely respected university professor. In the context of my research, I assume the position of the asker of questions and the agent who wants to map engagement and listen. As well as a listening researcher, I am a speaking and caring person. I identify myself to research participants in terms of my history of conflict and attachment, especially with the Catholic Church, which provides me with some insight into their experiences. They also contribute to the emotional labour of care involved in this project, which is often a heavy weight to bear.

Where next?

In focus groups and individual interviews, 285 adults, who spoke 22 languages between them and belonged to a range of formal and informal faith systems, told me about their ways of worshipping, observing, ways of communicating. Often, we shared food and we always shared our experiences. In exploring subcultures of faith, I shared stories from people who believed that there is more than what ‘we know’ to life and death, but didn’t know what that is. I also examined subcultures of Muslim faith: Muslim diversity and connections with secular cultures, the spectre of terrorism, empathy, religious and personal identities, and global flows of cosmopolitan Muslim culture.
The body of research that informs this book sets forward a new research agenda for those working with children and migrant communities to examine faith practices. This begins with the awareness that faith is bigger than religion (Ammerman, 2013; Dessing, Jeldtoft and Woodhead, 2016) and brings together the complicated ways that people are motivated and sustained by their faith practices. Future researchers need to investigate faith and belief systems in ways that respond to empirical experiences rather than theoretical framings. I am trying to make a contribution to cultural studies of everyday life, by highlighting the significance of quotidian meanings in religion, spirituality and community. Such everyday experiences are core to the fabric of our society.