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‘Stretched’ Postsecular Rapprochement: Evangelical Solidarities in a Local Flemish Welfare Regime

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Abstract: This article is concerned with the concept of postsecular rapprochement, which refers to the coming-together of secular and religious voices over mutual ethical concerns such as welfare, care and solidarity. Although the concept provides a useful analytical instrument for capturing context-contingent transgressions of faith boundaries, we question some of the assumptions hidden in the way it has been employed so far. More specifically, we respond to geographers' recent call for more sensitivity to "power relations and marginal experiences within practices of rapprochement". We do so by turning the gaze towards historically non-incorporated religious welfare practices, in particular evangelical Christian solidarities in a Flemish urban welfare regime. Based on document analysis and in-depth interviews, we unpack a trajectory of postsecular rapprochement in a local cooperative network that connects a Flemish city council, a pluralistic umbrella-organisation, an evangelical Faith-Based Organisation (FBO) and a Church of Christ. We propose to see this configuration as a "stretched" mode of postsecular rapprochement in which crossovers take place at different levels of interaction, thereby bridging faith and other divides. Detecting this mode, we conclude, brings us one step further in exploring the full scope of the phenomenon of postsecular rapprochement.

Keywords: Postsecular Rapprochement; Welfare; Flanders

Introduction

This article is concerned with the concept of “postsecular rapprochement”, which refers to the coming-together of secular and religious voices over mutual ethical concerns such as welfare, care or solidarity. Postsecular rapprochement has shown itself as a useful analytical instrument to capture contextual transgressions of faith boundaries while starting from an open epistemological stance. However, we align with geographers’ recent acknowledgement that it calls for greater sensitivity to power relations and marginal experiences. In this respect, we argue, rapprochement should be understood not so much as a condition, but as a *process* imbued with struggle and mechanisms of exclusion. The persistent use of historical majority religions as research cases, we suggest, has contributed to eclipsing such obstacles. Therefore, we propose to study the phenomenon in solidarities that historically have *not* been incorporated into welfare infrastructure. In this article, we focus on one of the first local cooperative networks in Flanders to integrate evangelical-inspired solidarities into a formal urban welfare infrastructure. We view this network as a trapped interaction chain that links a Flemish city council with a pluralistic welfare organisation, an evangelical Faith Based Organisation (FBO) and an evangelical church. By unpacking the trajectory of postsecular rapprochement in this chain, we eventually discern a mode of “stretched” postsecular rapprochement in which faith crossovers take place at different levels of interaction, thereby bridging faith and other divides. Our analysis is based on 18 semi-structured in-depth interviews with staff members, volunteers, pastors and church

members held from February 2021 till May 2022, and complemented by a document analysis of meeting reports, vision texts and websites. The names of the city in question, the organisations and the respondents are anonymized for ethical considerations. The article will proceed as follows: First, we theoretically position the concept of postsecular rapprochement. Secondly, we situate the case study. Finally, we analyse in detail the intricate ways in which fragments of postsecular interaction are evolving in and circulating through the interaction chain.

Postsecular Rapprochement

Throughout the past two decades, postsecular theory has grown into a busy field at the intersection of multiple disciplines, most notably political philosophy, the sociology of religion and human geography (McLennan 2010). Pointing to a renewed presence of religiosity in public or academic spheres, accounts of the postsecular have challenged the empirical validity of classical secularisation theses, as well as questioned their normative assumptions predicated in the “project” of Modernity (e.g. Calhoun et al. 2011). The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas was one of the first and most influential users of the term (Habermas 2006; 2008). While initially placing himself among secularisation theorists predicting a decline in the relevance of religion under increasing rationalization, he later changed his mind for reasons both empirical and normative. First, as was evidenced by 9/11 terrorist attacks, religion had anything but disappeared. Second, if religion did not disappear, it was his opinion that secular societies should learn how to live with it. In the midst of a climate of scepsis toward religions, therefore, Habermas now highlighted their abilities, including their “semantic potential” (Habermas 2006, p. 17) and their “special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life” (Habermas 2006, p. 10). A postsecular society, for Habermas, is an ideal society marked by a type of state secularity which enables rather than obstructs the flourishing of religious traditions in the public sphere. Second, it goes beyond a mere desecularized one, but calls upon to live together across difference. In order to obtain such a condition, Habermas contends, both secular and religious citizens should meet some specified conditions and engage in a so-called “complementary learning process”. In short, this means that religion and scientific naturalism should reflexively engage with each other and recognize each other’s rationality and assets through communication and translation.

Postsecular rapprochement is very much inspired by Habermas’s normative endeavour to bring secular and religious traditions into conversation. Sitting in a strand of human geography, however, the concept shifts the attention to the *situatedness* of learning processes by tracing their manifestations in particular (urban) spaces. In so doing, its premises strongly resonate with common critiques in the sociology of religion stating that Habermas’s assumptions do not sufficiently reflect empirical reality. Thus, these geographers, with Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont as protagonists, can be aligned with those voices calling for a more anthropological understanding of religiosity and (post)secularity. Rather than embodying “universal, epochal shifts”, postsecular rapprochements are then understood as organic flare-ups of relationships forged from shared feelings of indignation, albeit derived from different faith registers (Cloke et al. 2019; Cloke and Beaumont 2013). Such coalescence around mutual concerns, so the geographers observe, might engender “crossover” narratives and practices in the process,

creating a hybrid condition of being ("postsecularity") marked by the spilling over of different faith grammars (Williams 2015). In the light of the normative ideal of a postsecular society, spaces defined by postsecularity are meaningful. According to Cloke and colleagues (2019, p. 186), they function as micro-publics in which the secular/religious interface is renegotiated at various levels of society. They might provide a counter-narrative to the hegemonic image of FBOs guided by voluntarism and open up spaces of hope and resistance against (neo-liberal) logics of deservingness (Cloke et al. 2020).

In this article we aim to elaborate upon the concept of postsecular rapprochement. While we do endorse its value as an analytical device, we align with the often-held critique that its conceptual contours remain very much embedded in an overly selective set of empirical cases. After Kong (2010) cautioned that the postsecular framework is not "a discourse that can be universally and evenly applied unproblematically", growing efforts have been made to explore its configurations in other geo-political regions and relations (e.g. Meyer and Miggelbrink 2017). Yet, when it comes to the role of religious charities in welfare regimes, the main focus remains on long-established FBOs belonging to the historical dominant religion, most notably protestant-evangelical organisations like the Salvation Army in traditionally protestant contexts such as the UK or the Netherlands (Cloke et al. 2013). Having acquired a cultural legacy in their welfare regime already, such FBOs make the obvious cases for studying religious-secular relations. As such, we assume, they reproduce a rather static image of postsecular rapprochement and its conditions, obscuring potential elements of struggle and failure.

This critique comes with a second one. Since its beginning already, the geographic perspective has been subject to scrutiny for its "naiveté" in underplaying ambivalent effects of what seems a power-free, love-imbued phenomenon (e.g. Olson et al. 2013; Gökarıksel & Secor 2015). For instance, by looking at how two catholic FBOs' care in Turin is constituted by faith, Lancione observed how a so-called unconditional love of the poor produces expectations that turn the homeless into passive subjects, rather than providing a space for mutual learning (Lancione 2014). Likewise, Ehrkamp and Nagel conclude that Christian churches' hospitality to immigrants, combined with their politics of invisibility, contribute to structures of discrimination instead of opening up arenas of resistance in the US (Ehrkamp & Nagel 2014). In this respect, some have encouraged future research to explore "the nuances of how, and on what terms, particular faith actors are entering specific public arenas" (Lonergan et al. 2021). Geographers, too, are paying increasing attention to this issue. In their latest book, Cloke and his colleagues call for a "sensitivity to power relations and marginal experiences within practices of receptivity and rapprochement" (Cloke et al. 2019).

This article responds to this call by focusing on a historically marginal yet upcoming group of actors in a welfare landscape whose contours are largely drawn by Catholicism. Through the lens of postsecular rapprochement, it explores how Flemish evangelical Christians construct their solidarities in interaction with more established (secular) organisations and welfare concepts circulating in the local welfare regime. We believe that such an explicit focus on a minority religion will lay bare a wider variety of dynamics around postsecular interactions, allowing us to gain clearer insight into the continuous struggles and disagreements shaping them. As such, the aim is to illuminate postsecularity not as a condition, but as an ongoing process of interaction that is structured by existing institutions, conceptions of welfare and relations of power. Before we situate and analyse our case study, it is useful to provide the context of Evangelical Christianity in Flanders.

Evangelical Christianity in Flanders

Evangelical Christianity has always occupied a marginal position in Catholic Flanders. After a long process of negotiation, the denomination was finally recognised by the state in 2003 (Creemers 2017). Despite their convergence in a representative body vis-à-vis the state, however, evangelicals remain anything but unified. Roughly speaking, the evangelical landscape can be divided into two broad, internally diversified fields: a Dutch-speaking and a migrant group. While the former has been present in Belgium since WOI, mainly via the Belgian Gospel Mission (Prins 2015), the latter is composed of especially Sub-Saharan African, Latin American, Asian and East European communities and has substantially grown since the 1990s as a result of migration and reverse mission dynamics.

The case we study is rooted primarily in the first group. This might seem contradictory to our focus on less historically incorporated religious welfare practices. It is so, however, that Dutch-speaking evangelicals have rarely engaged in charity during the 20th century (De Cavel 2020). Thus, no more than the migrant group did they become enmeshed into welfare fabric. Seen from a postsecular prism, moreover, an interesting evolution is taking place in this segment. Increasingly, the "cultural isolation" following from its longstanding orientation on transcendental relationships has evoked internal questioning, so that many communities have shifted their energy from personal conversionism (mission) to caring for the socially vulnerable (action) (Godwin 2011). This transition has been facilitated by simultaneous changes in the welfare regime. Since the 1970s, former pillarised welfare structures have evolved towards a so-called "disorganised welfare mix" with an increased focus on the local level (Bode 2006; Oosterlynck et al. 2019). This has opened up a space of engagement for new, informal welfare actors, including evangelical Christians, to start building their own welfare provisions along the long-established organisations, often with roots in the ideological pillars.

Situating the case

Our case aptly reflects this socio-historical context. It involves a cooperative network which connects a city council, a pluralistic welfare organisation ("Circle around Poverty", or "CaP"), an evangelical organisation ("Heart Community") and a Church of Christ. We conceptualise this network as an "interaction chain" made up of different relationships or "links", the most important of which follow the order just described. The chain is locally embedded in the welfare regime of a Flemish city. Along with the geographers, we consider the rapidly diversifying urban as the setting where the emergence of liminal spaces of rapprochement is most likely to occur and the easiest to detect (Beaumont and Baker 2011, p. 1). Cities harbour those localities that "cry out for "something to be done about something"" (Cloke and Beaumont 2013, p. 32). It is where different voices, in their willingness to work together on issues of social justice, may let go some of the moral or theological principles dividing them and enter into processes of mutual translation. At the same time, many evangelical communities are concentrated in urban areas. The urban forms the stage for their shift from mission to action to unfold.

The cooperative network under study is situated in a medium-sized city in Flanders whose numbers of evangelical church communities has been rapidly growing. At the moment of our research, more than 70 evangelical church communities are settled, the first of which was founded in 1928. Unlike some other Flemish cities, its social policy is featured by a rather progressive culture concerning poverty and an inclusive attitude towards newcomers. Ruled by a left-wing government for a long time, the City (as a complex of actors and instances) used to strongly oppose what it considered paternalist and charitable conduct of the Catholics, instead promoting a strong welfare state regime at the local level. Yet, as mentalities depillarized and poverty issues complexified, the local government shifted towards a governance approach, stimulating collaboration with and between voluntary organisations. Our case study is the first collaboration that includes evangelical welfare players.

In the sections below, we will analyse the dynamics of postsecular rapprochement across the interaction chain. Starting from the first link of the chain, we discuss how it has operated in the strongly evolved liaison between Cap, an originally Catholic poverty-fighting umbrella organisation, and the local government. We move down the chain by examining Cap's rapprochement with Heart Community, an evangelical FBO sustained by 17 local Dutch-speaking evangelical churches. We finally elaborate on the interaction of Heart with one such church, namely a Church of Christ which is divided into a Dutch/English-speaking and a Twi-speaking group, the latter being the final link of the interaction chain. This will clarify how postsecular rapprochement is negotiated and re-composed via relations of welfare at different levels of interaction.

Case study: Stretched Postsecular Rapprochement

Link one: City/Cap, a postsecular space

The first link of the chain is the relationship between Cap (Circle around poverty) and the city council. Cap, a pluralistic umbrella organization founded in 1997, coordinates the work of fourteen local welfare organizations focused on fighting poverty, all rooted in different faith and ideological traditions (either Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical or secular-humanist). Over the past three decades, Cap has become an established local welfare actor, a position which is the result of a lengthy process of negotiation with the city council on a range of symbolic and practical matters. Whereas in a pillarized urban context, Cap's Catholic parochial origins initially hindered any cooperation with the socialist-governed City, a growing sense of complementarity eventually resulted in a *pragmatic* rapprochement involving the allocation of funding. As a precondition, however, Cap was to commit to the City's 'structural vision' of poverty alleviation, which was based on fundamental, inalienable rights and geared towards emancipation of the people in poverty. In practice, this meant that Cap-organizations were asked to conduct their work "under protest". This means they should offer support to needy people (e.g. food parcels, clothing), but at the same time communicate the need for structural policy initiatives. They should do so by identifying unmet needs or social problems and communicating them to policy makers. Moreover, they should use material aid as a mere entry for welfare users to claim their rights, come into contact with other welfare organizations and enlarge their social network. Finally, all organizations were assigned a specific neighborhood to operate in, in order to rationalize the welfare provisions and avoid overlap or shopping behavior.

Over time, engagement with these governmental demands has generated *ethical* crossovers, both among the welfare organizations themselves and in the Cap-City relationship. These rapprochements have been constituted around the intimate entanglement of four elements, namely “rights”, “hope”, “indignation” and “receptive generosity”. First, at the heart of the Cap internal narrative has gradually grown a concept of *rights* in which humanist and religious ideas of human dignity smoothly coalesce. In particular, the basic ethical precepts of every Cap-initiative include “poverty is a social injustice” and “everyone has the right to a dignified life” (D1). Intricately entwined with this human-centered rights vision is an interplay of *indignation* –“It is unacceptable that people in our city of * should live in poverty” (D2)- and *hope* –“the hope that everyone can enjoy all basic rights” (D2), “the hope that we should no longer exist” (D3, p. 8)-. Hope, enacting a particular relation to the world, has earlier been elucidated as a sustaining force in religious and secular rapprochement (Holloway, 2013; Williams, 2015). In Cap, volunteers’ hopeful sensibilities, though tied to a variety of faith registers, produce a common “going-beyond-the-self” (Cloke et al. 2005) that is expressed in the attempt of jointly and persistently tackling the struggle for a just society in spite of mutual differences. This search for common ground has been best reflected in Cap’s vision statements, which represent an overlapping consensus of the elementary axioms that all Cap-organisations can agree on. All of them have been written jointly by their volunteers during meetings, a process of mutual translation in which “every little word was discussed” (I1) and which was not finished “until it was good for everyone” (I2). Central in this regard is an attitude of *receptive generosity* oriented toward “constructive cooperation” instead of “polemics about who offers the ideal help”(D5). Generosity refers to an ethical disposition characterised by an openness towards the Other wherein giving entails the ability to receive from others’ specificity (Cloke et al., 2005).

Thus, one could say, Cap can be considered a typical example of what Cloke and Beaumont (2013, p. 33) have referred to as a “liminal space in which citizens are able to journey from the unshakeable certainties of particular world-views, with their extant comfort zones, to the unknown”. Crucial in this regard, however, is that no difference has been allowed when it comes to the very disposition of receptive generosity. With the City’s criterium of non-discrimination in material aid as a motivation and the vision statement operating as a gatekeeper, Cap has only accepted those organisations which already display a certain affect of openness. The question then remains to what extent this still leaves space for the organizations to profoundly transform mentalities.

This rights-indignation-hope-receptivity composite has shaped and was shaped by Cap’s relationship with the City as well. The City/Cap relationship is described by both parties as a cooperative partnership characterized by healthy, constructive dialogue with room for criticism, and directed towards a common fight against poverty as an injustice: “There is nothing to lose. It is about standing up together for 13,000 people living in poverty: good cooperation is to their advantage” (I3). Besides the centrality of rights (it is the task of the City to ensure maximal access of every citizen to the fundamental social rights mentioned in Article 23 of the Constitution) and the importance of receptive generosity (in line with the non-discrimination clause), the City shares with Cap an ethics of hope and indignation. This becomes visible, for example, in the fact that the City, more so than other Cities, insists on providing aid to those whom it can and should not help directly. Hence, a large part of the postsecularity characterising their relationship lies in the intertwinement and mutual reinforcement of their going-beyond-the-selfs.

The impetus behind the formation of this composite, so I argue, has been a changed constellation of local interests over time. On the one hand, macro processes like depillarization and the decentralization of national social policy have made it strategically more interesting for the City to negotiate with all kinds of informal local players, including FBOs. On the other, secularization has pressured Cap, which was "pluralizing from within, both in volunteers, executives and clients" (D7), to open up towards secular welfare players and visions. These postsecular relationships, in other words, have always been, and still are, guided by power dynamics. Today, for instance, Cap staff report the need to protect their protest function as the City has increasingly instrumentalized its volunteers' unconditionality as an extension of the regular social insurance system.

Overall, it can be argued, Cap represents a typical case of postsecular rapprochement. Yet, underneath that postsecular space, many experimental learning processes and struggles lie hidden. The next link of the chain I discuss is Cap's relation with Heart Community, an evangelical service that entered Cap around 2009. I will trace how Heart has attached itself to the postsecular composite of Cap throughout its history, yet always found itself in difficulty with the element of receptive generosity. The aim of this discussion is to show how the members have attempted to creatively handle this hurdle and, in the process, engendered loose fragments of theo-ethics. In order to better grasp the evolutions underlying rapprochement and gain insight into evangelicals' shift toward Action more broadly, I start discussing this case at a time where there was no relationship with Cap yet.

Link two: Cap/ Heart, struggles over receptive generosity

The story of Heart begins at the turn of the millennium when a group of evangelicals and protestants raise the need to put the Word into action. Time was right, they thought, as the closure of the local Salvation Army a little earlier had created a void in the local protestant-evangelical action landscape, leaving some needy people in the cold. Starting from the idea of "soup, soap and salvation", Heart began to offer meals, organise coffee tables and eventually opened a second-hand shop, all of which the ultimate end was to bring the needy to faith. After the shop ended in disarray a year later, the organisation radically moved away from the Salvation Army-strand to become fully integrated into the local Dutch-speaking evangelical community. One Dutch preacher called Hendrik considered it his calling to take the lead and suggested in his blog: "Perhaps we should look at whether we have made use of the opportunities we were given" (D4 2000).

Looking for opportunities was exactly what Hendrik did from then on. In the following years, the number of congregations involved in the Heart operation increased to a dozen, mainly due to Hendrik who mobilised the local Dutch-speaking churches. These were united already in an informal group that called itself "ILD" (Informal Leaders Discussion). At Sunday services he urged them to financially support Heart as a local parachurch organisation and made use of the churches' pool of social capital to recruit dedicated evangelical volunteers. Soon, a system emerged in which the churches took turns in offering their gifts, something which worked to their advantage for at least two reasons. First, by uniting, the congregations hoped to enhance their image in the neighbourhood, fulfilling the Biblical task suggested by Hendrik (D4 2000): "…Our task is to be a curing salt that penetrates into the hearts. A city on a hill, you cannot look over it. Sourdough for society". Secondly, such an arrangement enabled the churches to

accomplish another mission in a convenient manner, namely their action mandate. As a volunteer (I4) argues, “providing shelter, giving food, offering clothing, those are things that are as important in loving the other as telling the Message, telling that Jesus died for their sins and that through Him they can have eternal life. Those two belong very much together, and that was an imbalance and it had to come back together”. Where individual churches struggled for money, time and people to perform this task, Heart stepped in, constituting what the current directors name “a diaconal arm” (I5, I6). In the words of McLouglin (2011), we could say that Heart became the centre of a “spiritual economy”: a network of actors and beliefs facilitating the mobilisation of resources, particularly the securement of a relatively predictable funding base, the availability of a committed echo chamber for validating ideas and the deployment of volunteers, some of whom working as missionaries paid by a church(network) abroad.

The following years, the provision of material help remained secondary to the goal of explicit evangelisation. Gradually, however, an awareness grew that “the gospel of our Great Investor does not demand incidental, but structural care for the poor” and that “it is not enough to give to a few charities, we must change social structures!” (D4 2008). An influential factor in this discursive turn has been the rise of international preachers stipulating new church models, especially the New York-based priest Timothy Keller, whose apologetics gave a push to a trend that was already happening within Heart. In “the Prodigal God” (D8 Keller 2011) and “Generous Justice” (D9 Keller 2012), the famous pastor introduced justice as an intrinsically biblical command for generosity, opposing it to charity which “conveys a good but optional activity” (2010, p. 15). Justice, he argued, is grounded in God’s grace in Christ and is, as a result, innately social (considering that God involves all social relationships). This justice transcends mere obedience and demands radically giving all humans their share as Godly creations, especially the powerless with whom God identifies. Such a discursive shift towards social justice would not much later facilitate the tie-up in Cap’s repertoire of social rights.

Indeed, at the same time, Cap with its aim to have its social services cover the entire city was looking for an organisation to join in an area where Heart was partially active. Since no evangelically inspired organisations were included in the network yet, however, Cap first wanted to be sure whether its vision would match theirs (D6). Therefore, Heart volunteers were expected to follow trainings on providing dignified assistance and remain “observing” Cap members during one year, meaning that they had no say in the organisation. In Heart, this step was presented as an “answered prayer”, simultaneously enabling to “tackle a major social problem on a professional level” and “give our congregations much more charisma” (D4 2009). The trial year, however, involved delicate balancing acts in which differing ethics of care were negotiated and crossover narratives and practicalities were sought. Implicitly, the focus of these negotiations revolved around the question whether and how Heart could tie into Cap’s postsecular composite.

First, Heart’s eschatological *hope* in the manifestation of a Kingdom on earth and its *indignation* that it did not manifest yet, connected well to those of Cap which were more grounded in a concept of rights. Secondly, the framework developed by Keller and the alleged Christian roots of rights provided the rationale for Heart to engage in that *rights* narrative, as a volunteer argues: “In one sense you could say that universal human rights have torn themselves away from the Christian tradition (...) but then you could say that they have become a bit more concrete in the social rights and how the federal government and social centres deal with that, in order to find a way back to *Heart in a

practical sense" (I4). Finally, however, the evangelical ethos underpinning Heart's aid has been the main, and recurrent, bone of contention in the Cap-Heart relationship. Whereas Cap did not want people in poverty to be approached by volunteers whose prime motivation is "earning their heaven" (I3, also D6), Heart posed the following questions: "Do we want to coordinate that with another group, a broad group with other motivations, or do we lose ourselves in it? (...) Is the freedom there or are you not allowed to say anything anymore about faith ever or the Christian inspiration behind it" (I7)? As we will discuss later on, Heart volunteers' difficulty to display a full openness towards the beliefs of their recipients – thus, their struggle in embodying *receptive generosity* - is what has prevented a full postsecular rapprochement to develop.

During the first year, a crossover arrangement was worked out linking Cap's philosophy of encounter to Heart's assets in this regard. A volunteer describes how both parties brainstormed about Heart's method: "We thought of what was not there yet (in Cap) and what our strengths were, what could we do? For example, we had a limited building and storage space, but we did have a network of people, so perhaps that could be done in a different way" (I7). Through conversation it became evident that Cap's integral approach to poverty alleviation connected well with Heart's main asset, namely its central role in a spiritual economy. Therefore, a buddy system was developed in which each needy person or family was assisted by a volunteer (a "friend in need") who would offer not only material, but also psychological and social support, all from the idea that "one gets further if one has someone to really walk the road with than if one comes and just picks up something material" (I1).

After the first year, both parties accepted Heart to become a fully participating member of Cap's well-established network, formally imbricating an evangelical spiritual economy in a regular urban welfare circuit for one of the first times in Flanders. In concrete terms this meant, amongst others, that Heart would from then on receive (limited) funding from the City via Cap and, in return, help those people referred by the local public social centre.

The following years, however, Heart hit rock bottom. Not only did Hendrik, one of the main driving forces, fall ill, but internal struggles over its vision and future (the new director was too business-minded for some) led to considerable drop-out of volunteers, coinciding with a low point in one of the main supporting churches. Just when plans were made for simply dismantling the whole operation in 2015, a highly educated pastors couple stood up to give the organisation a new lease of life. Since then, Heart's discourse and public image has been extensively elaborated, primarily drawing on Cap's repertoire of social rights. Overall, these new leaders seem to have turned Heart into a liminal space for buddies, "buddy-friends" and members of the broader (faith) network to join Cap and the City in experimentally reflecting on poverty across faith boundaries.

This, however, did not fully solve the tensions around Heart's evangelical ethos, which had prevented a full postsecular rapprochement to occur. Joshua captures the struggle very well: "I think that together we are very much looking for ways to be very creative and very subtle in pointing to Jesus without disrespecting the intention of Cap, without feeling that that is a condition for getting that help. But…we do want to make clear in one way or another that we have that in common, we want to do this because Jesus loves us, because Jesus loves you" (I4).

We discern three techniques of self in Heart volunteers' attempts to cope with the expectations of Cap and the City. These, we argue, gradually result in a further postsecular repositioning of Heart's discourse and praxis. The first technique is to "work with your hands to make people look heavenwards" (D4 2016; I4), behind which lies the

idea that living out God's love will make people ask questions. Such faith embodiment is entangled with an emphasis on the fact that "God saves and we don't" (I8). Hendrik in this regard advocated from his sickbed: "Don't force your ministry. Pray for wisdom" (D4 2016)! This strategy reflects a hybrid ethos between what Cloke et al. (2005) termed Christian Caritas (a quid-pro-quo ethics hierarchically ordering spiritual over physical and emotional needs) and Postsecular Charity (a theo-ethical enactment of faith values), ambiguously featuring a certain openness to difference, yet displaying no genuine willingness to let go of the hope that the Other would eventually receive the wisdom to convert. In Heart, such hybrid ethics materialise in intimate relationships of mutual learning between buddies and buddy-friends. In particular, they trigger the blurring of dogma to a "living faith" (Tangenberg 2004), which in the observation of geographers provides fertile ground for postsecularity and rapprochement to emerge (Herman et al. 2012).

A second technique is implied in the social network-building nature of the buddy-system. On the one hand, its intensive character aimed at creating an equality-based friendship has allowed volunteers to point at God outside Heart's official confines. On the other, by involving the buddy-friends in a social network which in fact largely consists of the faith community itself, volunteers found an implicit way of tying the desire to talk about God to Cap's aim of realising network formation as part of the right of social self-development. As suggested by the former Cap coordinator (I2), however, this same relational constellation may as well unlock spaces of conversation for deconstructing conventional faith boundaries and, in the process, create fragments of postsecularity.

Thirdly, the new leaders of Heart make strategic use of language to maintain internal cohesion while reaching out to Cap and its vision. Over time, they have engaged in constructing an "incredible vision" (I3) that is very much in line with Cap's ideas and even expands on them. Because of the buddy system, they are able to detect and pass on more policy signals than other Cap services, thereby maintaining Heart's public image and hiding internal polyvocality. Moreover, they actively engage in "code switching" (McNamee 2011), staging a legitimate rights-based discourse in interaction with external partners and a more evangelical vocabulary internally. Whereas Lonergan et al. (2021) would interpret such ambiguity as a "dual register" and therefore not as a ground for genuine rapprochement, for the two leaders, these two speech codes simply seem to form other ways of pointing to the same things. As such, they have tried to spill over the rights-narrative onto the volunteers by articulating it with an evangelical vocabulary.

As for the children's club, for example, the question was raised about the extent to which the use of Christian language could exclude children from different backgrounds: "We wanted to tell Christian, Biblical stories and then there was the question of 'can we do that'? That actually came from Lars* and Myriam*, like "we have to be very careful with what we say because we are not allowed to evangelise openly" (I9). Suzanne, then, recounts the solution they collectively came up with: "We specifically made our lessons to be a bit more general, I would say, so, just about showing 'love', or, gosh, what have we, about 'joy' and those kinds of things. So we don't just say 'and Jesus says and Jesus says'" (I9). While Suzanne views such translated language as an inclusive means of communicating the teachings of Jesus, especially to those children who would normally not get access to it - thus as a tool for evangelisation -, its compatibility with other faith narratives may at the same time become a soil for rapprochement (Chapman and Hamalainen 2011).

To conclude, Heart has been one of the first evangelical groups in Flanders to join forces and build a spiritual economy of welfare. In doing so, the organisation and particularly its key figures have grasped the opportunity to embed their activities into Cap's process of postsecular rapprochement, using its central position in the local welfare fabric to "break out of its previous position of being 'hushed up' in the public sphere" (Cloke and Beaumont 2013). Although fragments of postsecularity did gradually trickle down in the process, this has been entangled with mechanisms of power pressuring Heart to abandon its very motivation, i.e. spreading God's love. In its search for creative ways to reconcile this contradiction, however, evangelical love concepts have been slowly transformed.

Link three and four: Heart/ Dutch-speaking/Twi-speaking Church of Christ, touching hybrid welfare concepts

The next link of the chain includes one of Heart's supporting churches, the Church of Christ, which uniquely consists of both a Dutch-speaking and a Twi-speaking segment. Through its engagement in ILD and its informal connection to Heart, the church attempts to fulfil a more public role, thus ending up in discussions over Heart's receptive generosity. Taking this church as a case allows to uncover difficulties some groups experience with making their voice heard, especially when confronted with postsecular expectations. It also demonstrates, however, how such marginal actors can still be included in and contribute to a process of (stretched) postsecular rapprochement.

The local Church of Christ was established in 2003 as a daughter church of another Church of Christ in Flanders, established earlier by American missionaries. After gathering in the pastor's house for some years due to difficulties in finding an affordable place, the church members started worshipping every week in a school - the Dutch-speaking group in the canteen and the Ghanaian in the gymnasium. Such get-together of Dutch-and Twi-speaking evangelicals is highly exceptional in the Flemish evangelical scene where Dutch-speaking and migrant churches have, over time, built their informal networks entirely separate from each other. Before addressing this relationship, we focus on the association between Heart and the Dutch-speaking group.

From the perspective of postsecular rapprochement, our point here is not that the Dutch-speaking segment and Heart are in a postsecular partnership, although crossovers do take place between various creeds that come together. Rather, it is to suggest that the former is making use of Heart's rapprochement with Cap and the City in two ways. First, the church enjoys the infrastructure Heart has provided for broadening its network and supporting local people of all faith. The pastor and his wife, both missionaries paid by a US Church of Christ, are the only church members who can devote themselves full-time to the task of performing love of neighbour. As argued by the pastor, Heart constitutes a convenient channel to do so: "If I want to think missionary, then I should think 'How can I communicate with the people who live here, who are around the corner'. (...) So that also comes with Heart" (I18). Moreover, as the centre of a spiritual economy, Heart offers an opportunity to achieve another goal shared by Churches of Christ worldwide, namely the will to unite Christians: "We may not be in complete agreement with them theologically, but helping people is more important than dotting all the i's in terms of theology" (I18).

Secondly, the arrangement causes the church to get into touch with and contribute to hybrid concepts and practices of welfare as they circulate and transform across the local welfare regime and the spiritual economy. One way of supporting Heart (besides prayer,

donation and volunteering) has been the pastor's participation in ILD, which serves both as Heart's justification forum towards its supporting churches and as a platform for collective reflection on ethical issues. In this discursive arena, discussions have arisen about the challenges Heart faces in assigning an appropriate place to God within Cap's confines. Especially due to the hybrid discourse of Heart's leaders, these debates have moulded fragments of receptivity and going-beyond-the-self to the point that most supporting churches eventually agree that "the contacts, the chance to help and the value of that exceed the few chances to evangelise" (I18). Thus, it can be argued, emergent postsecularity has been an attractive force for the Dutch-speaking segment to tap into, as it creates an entrance to develop a local network in a legitimate manner. At the same time, it has led the church to become entangled in the chain of travelling welfare concepts and the power mechanisms governing them.

For the Ghanaian group, however, finding such connections turned out harder, despite their easier access to hidden people in need. Due to language and cultural differences, the group highly depends on the Dutch-speaking group to establish local relationships, as explained by a church member: "When the communication is problem, it's difficult for you to giving, or how you call it, contact with people is not so easy. So, in a Nederlands, if we found somebody who is interested in worshipping, all we do is, okay, we connect Marc*, so that Marc* can help them" (I11). The group, still young and consisting of first-generation migrants particularly struggles with the place of religion in Belgian public space, the Dutch-speaking pastor argues: "Connecting with the neighbourhood or with the City is something that I think can be useful to have a voice. For them, having a voice is just being loud sometimes" (I10). The engagement of the Dutch-speaking group in local bodies provides an opportunity for the Ghanaian group to gradually become familiar with local concepts and structures of welfare, however reluctantly and preliminary. In so doing, they too are to some extent involved in what we consider a "stretched" form of postsecular rapprochement, that is, a construction of multiple levels of interaction all learning from each other at different rhythms and in proportion to their resources. In the Cap/Heart/Church of Christ chain, such mediated mode of rapprochement -which can be added to other modes detected by Cloke and Beaumont (2013, p. 32)-, has assisted in overcoming faith divides and enabled convergence around the common concern of fighting poverty.

Conclusion

By identifying crossovers of discourse, praxis, and subjectivity among four welfare players in a Flemish urban welfare regime, this work has shed light on a "stretched" form of postsecular rapprochement in which faith and other divides are overcome by means of a mediated structure. So far, this mode was left unexposed, arguably due to the reified image of postsecular rapprochement and the limited scope of case studies underpinning it. This stretched configuration and the dynamics of coordination governing it, however, is emblematic of secularised settings in which faith traditions struggle to find their place. By discerning this phenomenon, our article has thus added nuance to existing understandings of postsecularity as a mere organically grown "bubbling up of ethical values" (Cloke et al. 2019, p. 3). This indicates a more general need to disentangle the normative and the empirical in geographical accounts of postsecularity. Taking the ideal of a postsecular society seriously is also to gain an understanding of the elements that *complicate* the realisation of such goal in the real

world. Therefore, we argue, further research should involve historical minority religions as cases alongside the long-established ones. Since they typically mediate newer and sharper tensions in the faith/reason interface, they might generate a more explicit understanding of the imbricate dynamics underlying postsecular rapprochement, including mechanisms of exclusion. The evangelical shift towards action in Flanders has formed an interesting terrain to start with. Yet, in order to explore the full extent of the phenomenon of (stretched) postsecularity, the inclusion of non-Christian religions in other types of local welfare regimes will be indispensable.

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I1: Cap coordinator
I2: Ex-cap coordinator
I3: Cap board member
I4: Volunteer Heart and church member Church of Christ
I5: Heart Director
I6: Heart Director
I7: Ex-volunteer Heart
I8: Volunteer Heart and church member Church of Christ
I9 & I18: Volunteer Heart and church member Church of Christ
I10 & I17: Pastor Church of Christ
I11: Member of Twi-speaking Church of Christ
I12: Volunteer Heart and member of supporting church
I13: Ex-volunteer Heart
I14: Member of supporting church
I15: Employee local social policy
I16: Cap board member

D1: Website Cap
D2: Vision statement cap 2018
D3: Cap magazine 2017
D4: Blog founder Heart
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