Identities in Flux: British Evangelical Identity in the Time of Brexit and Trump

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Since the 2016 British referendum vote to leave the European Union, scholars have analysed various aspects of this landmark political moment. However, one area that has lacked attention is the role of religion. This article fills that gap by using identity as a theoretical object of analysis to demonstrate how Brexit, in conjunction with the election of Donald Trump as US President, impacted a British evangelical identity. I show how identities fracture and reformulate during moments of political upheaval, focusing specifically on ethnographic data collected from Christians at a prominent evangelical-Anglican church in central London during 2015-2016. I ask: What does it mean to be British and evangelical? How do these religious and national identities interact with each other? And most importantly, how did this interaction change during the referendum and Trump's election? By investigating how evangelical British identity altered during these two important political events, this article brings granular attention to one of the most overlooked aspects of the British referendum: religion.

Introduction

The political landscape in the United Kingdom shifted dramatically in 2016, with the vote to leave the European Union (EU). Since then, scholars have analysed various aspects of this landmark political moment, but surprisingly little attention has been paid to the religious components of 'Brexit' (Bhambra 2017; Burrell et al. 2018; Virdee 2015). Even when controlling for variables such as age and location, identifying as Church of England (CofE) arises as a key variable determining how English people voted in the referendum (Smith and

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Woodhead 2018). Data collected from the 2016 European Values Survey (EVS) also shows a statistically significant relationship between identifying as Anglican and voting for Leave, even across different age categories. Whether respondents were nominal or practising Anglicans was not explicitly stated in these studies, though other research suggests that it was likely the former (Voas and Bruce 2019). The majority of evangelicals (51%), on the other hand, favoured Remain (Smith and Woodhead 2018). The issue of immigration was central for both Anglicans and evangelicals, though the way these two religious groups understood immigration in relation to their Christian beliefs varied greatly.

Closing British borders and controlling immigration became the second biggest reason why English Anglicans favoured Leave (Smith and Woodhead 2018, 216). Evangelicals, however, rejected anti-immigration narratives, and voted in opposition of them, as illustrated by the findings described in this article. Indeed, UK evangelicals are *less* likely to support a policy or political issue if it aims to reduce immigration (Evangelical Alliance 2015). Viewing themselves as more international and cosmopolitan, as well as being wealthier and concentrated in London, evangelicals' religious-national identity differs from mainline Anglicans'.

The year 2016 also brought a politically significant moment in the United States with the election of Donald Trump as President. Supported by 81% of white evangelicals, Trump's election amounted to the largest evangelical vote in nearly two decades (Smith and Martinez 2016). Evangelicals in the US and the UK often view themselves as part of a global community of believers with a shared religious identity (Day 2011, 131). In this article, I show how this shared identity fractured during the political events of 2016 by focusing specifically on data collected from evangelicals at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), an influential evangelical-Anglican church in central London. I ask: What does it mean to be British and evangelical? How do these religious and national identities interact with each

other? And most importantly, how did this interaction change during the referendum and Trump's election? To answer these questions, I utilize identity as my theoretical object of analysis. Firstly, I will demonstrate how Brexit disrupted a British evangelical identity. Secondly, given that evangelicals at HTB develop their religious identities in relation to American evangelicals, I show how Trump's primary and presidential victories reverberated across the Atlantic and impacted a British evangelical identity. Thirdly, I argue that immigration served as the key issue re-organising this identity. In doing so, I bring nuanced attention to an overlooked aspect of the British referendum: religion.

Context

Brexit in the Context of the British Empire

Anti-immigration discourse was central to the Brexit campaign and, in the aftermath of the vote, racially motivated violence in the UK increased (Burnett 2017). The Brexit campaign played on fears about immigration by invoking narratives of Britain's 'lost greatness' and emphasising the idea of a racialised outsider destroying the country (Burrell et al. 2018, 9; Virdee 2015). As Bhambra (2017a) argues, anti-immigration rhetoric must be situated and analysed within Britain's history of empire, historical configurations of otherness that carry into the present and, relatedly, the racialised underpinnings of what it means to be British today (see Bhambra 2017b; Bhambra and Holmwood 2018). Within this context, white eastern Europeans have been racialised in the media and state institutions, and the surge of racially fuelled violence following Brexit has targeted eastern European migrants as well as other groups (Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy 2012; Burrell et al. 2018; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Similarly, the participants in my study did not differentiate between different racial, ethnic or national categories when discussing immigration.

One third of Leave voters cited immigration as the main reason they wanted to leave the EU, making it the second biggest issue driving Brexit (Lord Ashcroft poll 2016). As Smith and Woodhead (2018, 216) note, English Anglicans were even *more* concerned about immigration than the general Leave voter, as it threatened their long-standing and vested interest in protecting an English "cultural-ethnic" identity. English Anglicans' anti-immigration anxiety demonstrates how a religious identity is folded into racial and national identities in such a way that to identify with the CofE is to simultaneously lay claim to an English and white identity. The conflation of race, religion and nationalism does not just exist on the figural level: a church census found that 83% percent of English Anglicans are white, while 79% of the English population are white (Brierley 2005; Office for National Statistics 2011).

The merging of national identities with a religious one emerged during the Brexit campaign when Nigel Farage called for a "muscular defence" of what he termed the UK's "Christian heritage" and "Christian Constitution" (Odone 2013; Ryan 2018). This narrative, which positions present-day Britain in need of a return to its sovereign, Christian past, recalls Paul Gilroy's (2005) concept of "colonial melancholy". According to Gilroy, it is precisely Britain's inability to acknowledge the devastation wrought by British colonial history, and an ongoing longing for imperial prestige, that fortifies the relationship between race, religion and national identity-- a nostalgic longing which in turn fuels anxiety towards outsiders. Melancholy for Britain's colonial past was activated and politically mobilised during the referendum, just as it was during Thatcherism (Gilroy 2005; Reddie 2019). Therefore, in order to analyse how some British evangelical Christians rearticulated their religious identities during two major political events in 2016, we must understand how a historical conflation of race, nation, and religion persists into the present (Bhambra 2017a; Burrell et al. 2018; Gilroy 1992). Inheriting a religious history that does not include a close association

with national identity or colonial and imperial power, evangelicals construct their religious identities distinctly from Anglicans. These historical differences and the religious-nationalist identities they concede in the present surfaced during the referendum vote.

Evangelicals in the UK

In recent decades, evangelical Christianity has experienced tremendous growth, especially in parts of Latin America. It is now a global religious phenomenon, at times referred to as a "network", a "movement" and a "religious culture" (Coleman 2000; Lewis 2004; Lindsay 2008; Robbins 2004). According to the Bebbington's (1989, 2) seminal definition, evangelicalism encompasses four key qualities: conversionism, activism, crucicentrism and biblicalism. As other scholars have noted, 'evangelical' is a deeply felt identity, meaning it directs believers' everyday choices and political beliefs (Guest 2007; C. Smith 1998). Although British evangelicals, similar to their US counterparts, express a desire to shape society through their faith, the means and ends to which they aspire differ (Robbins 2012; Strhan 2015).

Quantitative data on British evangelicals are difficult to gather. Firstly, the term 'evangelical' itself is contested by many British Christians, especially after the majority of American evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016, leading many believers to dis-identify with the label as a way to distance themselves from American Trumpism (Davies 2018). Secondly, collecting data on evangelicals is challenging as evangelicals are spread across various churches in the UK, including Fresh Expressions, Baptist and Anglican (Smith and Woodhead 2018; Warner 2007). As Holmes (2015, 25) suggests: "… It may be that certain practices, political attitudes or sociological factors are far more strongly associated with owning the title 'evangelical' than any beliefs."

The findings presented in this article are from charismatic evangelical Christians and a distinction must be made between charismatic and conservative evangelicals. The growth of charismatic evangelicalism in Britain dates back to the 1970s (Brown and Woodhead 2016; Goodhew 2012; Guest 2007). In 1982, John Wimber, a charismatic pastor from California, came to Britain and influenced evangelical Anglican churches by promoting 'spiritual gifts', such as speaking in tongues, healings and miracles (Anderson 2014, 7). In addition to a supernatural form of worship and a close, interpersonal relationship with God, charismatic evangelicals are characterised by an active participation in religious practices (Guest 2007; Luhrmann 2012; Strhan 2015; Warner 2007; Woodhead 2004). In one study, 94% of British charismatics reported attending Sunday services at least twice a month (Robbins and Kay, 2015, 140).

Another important line of distinction amongst evangelicals concerns race. The majority of white evangelicals in the UK attend Anglican parishes, while, at least in London, most black evangelicals, often West African and Caribbean immigrants, attend Pentecostal churches (Brierley Consultancy 2016; Davie 2015; Evangelical Alliance 2013). This racial demarcation also correlates to politics, as support for the Labour Party is much higher (61%) amongst evangelicals at black majority churches, whereas party affiliation is split for white evangelicals, though this may also depend on geographic location (Guest 2015).

The Political Beliefs of Evangelicals and Anglicans

Compared to the US, British evangelicals have a more accommodating orientation towards non-Christians and tend to ally with political *issues* rather than a particular political party (Guest 2010; Smith and Woodhead 2018; G. Smith 2018). One study of British evangelicals found they are distinctly non-partisan: 24% of respondents affiliated with the Conservative party; 28% with Labour; 5% with the Liberal Democrats; 1% with UKIP; 4% as Socialist and

35% with no party (Hatcher 2017b, 86). Anglicans, on the other hand, have historically aligned with the Conservative Party. Once branded the 'Tory party at prayer', since 2000, self-identifying British Anglicans have voted for the Conservative party more than any other party in national elections (Clements and Spencer 2014).

The presence of a US-style Religious Right in Britain has been disputed (Kettell 2017; Walton, Hatcher, and Spencer 2013). Factors such as a smaller population of evangelicals, the lack of political consensus around core issues, and the presence of an institutional religious body in the form of the CofE prevent the development of a religiously inflected political movement (Guest 2010; Smith and Woodhead 2018). Even so, since 2001, prime ministers have increasingly made religious references and politicians such as Tony Blair, David Cameron and Nigel Farage have contributed to a public narrative that celebrates Christian 'values' and merges nationalism with religion (Crines and Theakston 2015). As a result, 'Christianity is framed as a core part of British national identity' and 'Christian' comes to stand for a particular raced, classed, and nationalist identity (Kettell 2015, 522; Kettell 2009). How a British Christian identity is constituted, and when its constitution shifts, will be critically interrogated in what follows.

Theoretical Framework

Evangelicals place primacy on their 'identity in Christ', testifying to the importance of this social identity in their lives. The phrase arose several times during my fieldwork and half of the women I interviewed referred to their 'identity in Christ' at least once during our interview. Some referred to themselves as 'evangelical', others as broadly 'Christian', and others as 'Anglican'.

As an object of analysis in social science research, identity has come under scrutiny for being paradoxically too ambiguous or too rigid a concept (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

However, these critiques overlook the salience of these categories to the individuals who inhabit them, and their utility within social contexts. A key tension within the study of identity is the question of givenness or chosenness (Brubaker 2016). Examining the chosenness of identities, Skeggs (1997) argues that discursive formations frame the subject's responses, and the subject responds to the social categories created through discourse by reformulating, refashioning, or refusing them. Ahmed (1998), on the other hand, explores the givenness of identities to highlight the experience of misrecognition (see Butler 1997; Loizidou 2008). In order for an identity to be given or claimed, it must exist *a priori* according to a socially recognised definition. But not all categories are available to all subjects at all times; historical, political and cultural events determine how identities are positioned, and who can attach to which positions (Alcoff 2006; Hall 1988; Skeggs 1997; Weedon 2004).

Another important area in the study of identity pertains to the relationship between individual and group identity. A collective identity preserves and supports an individual's social identity, according to Tajfel (1974). Indeed, the collective and the individual are distinct yet interrelated identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 298). Although this article focusses on individual identity, it is written with the understanding that personal and collective identities are mutually constitutive and synergistic.

Stuart Hall (2000, 4) defines identity thus: "Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference." For Hall, identities are foundationally relational; they gain salience and meaning only in relation to others, including those who are constructed as 'outsiders' (Butler 2011; Fortier 1999; Lawler 2008). On an individual level, the subject resists other identity categories in order to establish difference and (re)define the boundaries of the identity they occupy. This investment on the part of the subject is not neutral; rather, power attaches the

subject to particular identities and mediates the bounds of categorization (Butler 2004). Similarly, on a collective level, groups fortify their identity through difference and the use of boundaries (Bartkowski and Read 2003; Lamont 2001).

Intersectional feminist theorists have elucidated the way power facilitates the interaction of categories of identities such as race, class, and gender by placing identities firmly on axes of inequality (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Crenshaw 1989; Mirza 2013; Werbner 2017). Thus, the subject identifies with categories according to structuring effects: overlapping markers of difference that form the meeting points of identity. These meeting points shift and change, just as the constitution of social categories and the relationship *between* social categories fluctuates depending on context. In this article, I analyse the mutable nature of identity categories, as well as how these categories collide, overlap and nest within each other (Hall 1988; McCall 2005; Phoenix, Howarth and Philogene 2017).

Another key contribution of poststructuralist theory is the examination of how identity categories are inherently empty and rely on social and political contexts to take meaning. Political upheavals, such as Brexit, trigger a shift in how identity categories are constituted and articulated (Clarke and Newman 2019). Writing about the subject positions created under Thatcherism, Hall (1988) argued that political irruptions create new subject positions, alter existing ones, and modify the points of identification available.

I build on these theoretical dimensions of identity to argue that the referendum vote and the election of Trump altered how some British evangelicals understood their religious identities. The data presented here are located in a particular political time and place, which disrupted existing identities and created new ones.

The Study

This article draws from a larger study exploring how single evangelical women negotiate their religious, gender, and racial identities in London. The research participants in my study became politically mobilised during 2016 –to support the Remain campaign and to protest American evangelicals' support of Trump.

In London the full study consisted of 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork, 33 semi-structured interviews and participant observation during 2015 and 2016. This article is based on interviews with several women from the larger study, as well as field notes from the Bible study group, and church events I attended. I interviewed women according to a semi-structured format which included questions on their political beliefs and their religious practices. I obtained written informed consent from each participant I interviewed, and from the gatekeepers at Christian women's events and the Bible study group I joined.

All the women mentioned herein were between 25-40 years old. Of the eight women featured in this article, two are working-class, five are middle-class, and one is from an upper-class background. These classifications were determined according to a bundle of class markers including education, income and profession, as well as their own self-identification, when provided. All of the women hold university degrees and two have master's degrees. This is an important characteristic to note, considering that 68% of Remain voters held a university degree (Moore 2016; Antonucci et al. 2017).

I took copious field notes during and after events, and later coded this data thematically. I transcribed all interviews and coded them firstly by hand, and later on NVIVO software, using qualitative concept analysis when to identify patterns of phrases and words (Hesse-Biber 2016). This method was chosen for its flexibility, systematic nature and neatness of building coding frames that correspond with key thematic areas.

In carrying out this research, I occupied an 'insider' position in many ways. I identified with many of my participants as I am a middle-class, white woman, who was a

practising evangelical for most of her life before leaving the religion prior to starting this study. The way I have framed my research question, how I carried out the study, and my analysis of the data all reflect my own complex personal history with Christianity. However, although I may be considered an 'insider' in some ways, I am also an 'outsider' in other ways; to be sure, the positions of insider and outsider are multiple and overlapping (Naples and Sachs 2000). In tracing how evangelical identities shifted during Brexit and Trump, this article follows a case study logic, and does not claim representativeness (Small 2009). The aim is to descriptively analyse how women's religious identities related to their political attitudes, rather than causally prove that religion was the operative factor influencing their vote, whilst ignoring other factors. The in-depth data presented here complement quantitative findings that elucidate the role of religion in Brexit.

Findings

The Role of Christian Leaders in Politics

White evangelical and mainline Anglican church leaders in Britain do not typically advance a political viewpoint from the pulpit. Less than 2% of evangelicals report hearing their church leaders supporting or opposing a political candidate (Evangelical Alliance 2015). However, as this section will show, Brexit was politically important enough to cause evangelicals to revise their position about the role of Christian leaders in politics. The CofE declined an official stance when it came to the referendum, but the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, declared his support for the Remain campaign on 11 June 2016 by writing:

>But for my part, based on what I have said and on what I have experienced I shall vote to remain. I hope and pray that the result will be reached with the aim of a good Britain in a good Europe, whether as part of the EU or not. I pray that each person's vote will be based on generosity, hope, confidence (Walters 2016).

Both Welby and John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York and second highest ranking leader, are evangelical-Anglicans, as demonstrated by their public testimony of speaking in tongues and alignment with evangelical Anglican churches. On 8 June 2016, in support of Remain, Sentamu wrote:

> One of the enduring British characteristics, nurtured and honed by the Christian ethic in its application to human responsibility, accountability and the ever-changing challenges, is the tenacity […] to stick to the Rule Book when one disagrees with others' decisions.

Similar to Welby's impassioned statement about why he would be voting Remain, Sentamu conflated a Christian identity with a British one. This identity, as put forth by both leaders' statements, was composed of values such as tenacity, openness, and hospitality. The referendum vote provided the political and social context in which to articulate this religious-nationalist identity.

Leaders at HTB remained silent on the topic of the referendum in the days and weeks leading up to the vote. When, Vicky,[1] a white, working-class woman aged 35, who worked for the church at the time, suggested to senior leadership that they hold a roundtable event for congregants to hear a balanced view on both sides, they rejected the idea on the grounds that the church was not the place to hold political debates. The congregants I met supported their vicar's silence – before the vote actually took place. Sandra, a white, middle-class woman in

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[1] The names and identifying characteristics of all participants mentioned this article have been anonymised for confidentiality.

her early thirties, who worked for a consulting firm in central London, told me: "Even off the record, a church leader should never voice his or her political views." Speaking of a curate at an HTB affiliate church, who vocalized his support for Brexit, Sandra stated: "I feel I cannot trust the guidance or counsel of a church leader who'd be so ignorant as to vote Leave."

Sandra's view that Christian leaders should not interfere with politics follows HTB leaders' pattern of abstaining from political commentary in church. Her view also supports a study that reports evangelicals find it "decidedly 'un–British'" to be preaching politics from the pulpit (Hatcher 2017b). This finding, and the way HTB congregants reacted to their leaders' silence, suggest that, prior to Brexit, to be a British evangelical meant to support a separation between church and party politics. This constitution shifted after Brexit when the women in my study expressed regret that their church leaders did not speak up and prevent Brexit from happening.

In the Bible study group I joined, the topics of Trump and Brexit first arose at our February gathering. Vicky voiced her disproval of Bethel Church, a large, charismatic evangelical church in California. Recently, the pastor's wife, Beni Johnson, herself a leader in the church, had posted a ten-point list on Facebook outlining her support for Trump as the Republican nominee in the upcoming primary election. Amongst the ten reasons Beni supported Trump, the one that most affronted Vicky was point six: "A man of sound morals." Vicky took umbrage with Beni's association of Trump with morals, especially as it concerned his treatment of women. Trump's long history of making disparaging comments about women triggered Vicky's feminist identity, causing it to rise to the surface, and thus drive her opposition to Trump, and Beni, by extension for supporting him.

Immediately after Vicky shared the Facebook post with us, Diana, a white, middle-class woman who worked as a teacher, spoke up. She had spent two years at Bethel's worship school and, having returned only six months prior, held the school and the church in very

high esteem. Carefully side-stepping the content of Beni's post, Diana instead defended Beni's right to hold her own political opinions, and to share these opinions freely, as long as they did not come from the pulpit. What followed was a heated debate amongst the four women – not about Trump himself, as all disproved of him - but about whether or not a pastor should speak about politics given their public role as religious leader. On one side of the debate Diana defended the position that pastors could hold political opinions and share them on non-church related platforms (such as Facebook). On the other side, Sandra argued that Christian leaders should never share their political beliefs, even in casual conversations, given their powerful role in the church. As for Brexit, the women in my Bible study did not express concern over the upcoming vote; similar to many other Londoners, they remained highly confident that Remain would win.

The debate over whether or not Christian leaders should vocalise their political beliefs carried on the next day in our text message group after Beni Johnson deleted her Facebook post. In its place she wrote: "The last couple of days I've been shocked and saddened by the response of Christians on my post. I thought that there would be a better discussion then [sic] hateful nasty post. Therefore, I have pulled down the majority of my post on Donald Trump." She followed this message with emoticons: prayer hands, a sad face, and two American flags. Just as Welby and Sentamu entwined national and religious identities in their support for Remain by drawing on discourse that merged Christian ethics with British characteristics, Beni fused an American identity with an evangelical one in her support for Trump. The political ends that this entwinement conceded, however, were diametrically different; Beni (and later, her husband Bill) supported Trump for his anti-immigration politics, based on their understanding of a 'Christian value' to protect one's own land. Welby, on the other hand, supported Remain for its *pro*-immigration agenda, citing the Christian value of hospitality towards outsiders. By issuing these public statements, both Christian leaders discursively

invoked a Christian identity, which positioned (or re-positioned) the category to which individual Christians' could attach (Alcoff 2006; Skeggs 1997; Weedon 2004).

Just as the day before, the debate amongst the women on the group chat revolved around whether or how a church leader should speak about politics, rather than debating Trump himself. Diana defended the pastor's wife, and the church more generally, and Vicky continued to advance her position that, as a church leader, Beni should not have posted her support for Trump. Sandra and Vicky's opinion of the appropriate religious-political relationship reflects a view that although faith influences political choices, religious leaders should not vocalise these choices.

At this point in time, all of the women agreed that church leaders should not speak about politics from the pulpit, which they considered an 'American' characteristic. Indeed, two-thirds of US Christians (mainline Protestants, evangelicals and Catholics) report hearing their pastor speak about politics or political issues from the pulpit, even though US law is stricter than UK law on religious leaders' endorsements of political candidates (Pew Research Centre 2016; 2012). Through their opposition to Beni's post, and to Trump moreover, British evangelical women crafted their religious identities *in relation to* American evangelicals. Their debate signifies not only a contestation over the appropriate religious-political relationship, but a contestation over the way national and religious identities interact with each other. The next section will explore how religious-national identities shifted in response to another political irruption: Brexit.

Brexit and the Issue of Immigration

When the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU on 26 June 2016, the women in my study reacted with sadness, anger, and confusion. HTB held a non-partisan prayer meeting the night before the referendum for congregants to come and pray for peace in the nation, and for

"God's will" to direct the vote. The morning after the vote, Jennifer, a 30-year-old white working-class woman who had previously worked for a Labour MP, told me that she went to the 24-hour prayer room in order to process her sadness. She reported that she spent the rest of the day crying. The part of Brexit that most upset her, she said, was the anti-immigration sentiment behind the vote, which violated her understanding of what it meant to be a Christian: welcoming to outsiders, and inclusive in terms of race, gender and sexuality. A Christian identity, together with her internationalist outlook as a resident of London and her education level, shaped her support for Remain.

Two weeks later, the topic of whether a pastor should publicly speak about politics arose again at Bible study. This time, given the recent vote, Sandra expressed a different opinion.

> I think in certain exceptional cases, church leaders *should* mention their political views, for example, if we were about to elect a fascist government. Also, Brexit – this is a human rights issue that church leaders should have stopped, especially because it was often pushed forward on anti-immigration and xenophobic grounds, which contradicts my understanding of what being a Christian is.

Sandra went on to cite Matthew 22: 39, '… Love your neighbour as yourself', as the reason why Brexit, and its anti-immigration agenda, contravened her religious identity (New International Version). Similar to Jennifer, her formulation of an evangelical Christian identity as welcoming towards immigrants, interacted with her location, age, and educational status (Smith and Woodhead 2018).

During the rest of the Bible study group, the three women articulated different amounts of outrage over Brexit (Diana was not present). The week before, Sandra cancelled

social engagements with other Christians she feared might be Brexiters and reported crying several times in the days following the vote. Fiona, though less impassioned, was also upset about Brexit. Vicky told us that she had arguments with a pro-Leave colleague at HTB. Their argument, according to Vicky, centred around whether Brexit was truly "God's will" or not.

Over the space of only five months, these women's beliefs about whether and how church leaders should intervene in politics altered considerably. During the February session, when the conversation revolved around Trump and Bethel, the women felt church leaders should never comment on their political allegiances. However, at the July Bible study gathering, after Britain voted to leave the EU, the women expressed the exact opposite attitude. This shift leads to two important findings. Firstly, Brexit and Trump's election were significant enough political events to alter evangelical women's opinion of how or if a Christian leader should speak about politics. In other words, Brexit unsettled a core aspect of their British-evangelical identity: that a church leader should not interfere in politics.

Secondly, the issue of immigration served as the primary catalyst for re-organising a British evangelical identity. Welby's public statement in support for the Remain campaign centred around immigration, and similarly evangelical women's determination that, in certain cases, church leaders should publicly speak about political issues hinged on immigration. The British evangelical women in this study viewed the passing of Brexit on anti-immigration grounds as a threat to their evangelical identity. Lacking the historically constituted notions of empire and nationalism that English Anglicans drew on, the British evangelicals I met supported immigration. Furthermore, they expressed a desire for their church leaders at HTB to protect the constitution of this evangelical Christian identity by speaking out against Brexit.

After Brexit passed, Barbara Ann, a white, middle-class woman and vocal Labour supporter, said: "For the first time in my life, I am truly and deeply ashamed to be British."

When asked why, she replied: "Because the vote was motivated by racism and xenophobia."

For Barbara Ann, the issue of immigration prompted a re-articulation of two nested identities:

evangelical and British. Having lived in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England, Barbara

Ann identified as 'British', which represented a more encompassing national identity for her.

And although she referenced her 'identity in Christ', she also identified as 'evangelical',

which corresponded to her theological beliefs and charismatic style of worship. Thus, rather

than conceiving of her religious and national identities separately, she, along with the other

participants in this study, understood evangelical and British as mutually constitutive of one

another (Hall 1988; Phoenix, Howarth and Philogene 2017).

Identities Developed in Opposition

Since learning of white American evangelicals' support for Trump, British evangelicals have

distanced themselves from the label 'evangelical', reconstituting their own religious identity

in rejection of their American counterparts (Davies 2018). In February 2017, Welby also

spoke out against Trump by criticising Trump's 'Muslim ban' and urging the White House

not to start "dissing" communities (Embury-Dennis 2017). A white, upper-class woman at

HTB named Julie told me: "We just don't understand how American Christians could vote

for Trump! There's nothing *Christian* about him." In using the plural "we", Julie drew a

boundary separating herself and other British Christians from American evangelicals,

demonstrating how identities are reliant on exclusion to form their categorical integrity

(Connolly 2001; Hall 2000; Lamont 2001). The election of Trump provided a social context

in which British evangelicals could establish a boundary with American evangelicals and

thus affirm their religious-national identities through opposition.

In late summer 2016, HTB announced that Bill Johnson, the head pastor of Bethel

Church, would be one of twelve keynote speakers at HTB's annual church retreat. The

women in my Bible study, along with a few others, were distressed by this news given Bill's public support of Trump. The women responded in various ways: Vicky and Jacqui, a black middle-class woman, wrote a letter of protest and gathered signatures to present to church leadership, seeking the withdrawal of Bill's invitation from the retreat. Jacqui also organised a new Bible study group for people who were angry about Bethel's support of Trump, and, in light of Brexit, wanted to address what role Christians should play in politics. Sandra avoided the retreat altogether and Barbara Ann engaged in debates on Facebook and in person with fellow Christians about how wrong it was to invite Bill to speak at the retreat. Once again, British evangelical women consolidated their religious-national identities through resisting white American evangelical Trumpism, and Bill Johnson by proxy.

Identities arise out of and shift within changing political contexts; the election of Trump as GOP candidate *in combination with* the passing of Brexit dislocated the relationship between evangelical and British identities and created a new terrain for evangelical women to articulate the relationship between these identities. In other words: precisely because of these two political upheavals were concurrent, British evangelicals' identities were vulnerable to reformulation.

Conclusion

By drawing on ethnographic data of British evangelical women's religious identities during major political events in 2016, this article has highlighted three important aspects about identity as a theoretical object of analysis. Firstly, juxtaposing white evangelical identity in the US with the UK exemplifies that 'evangelical' is an inherently empty category and, like all identities, is contingent upon social context for meaning (Fitzgerald 2017; Hall 2000). In the UK, evangelical women, like their archbishops, established their religious identities on

values of hospitality, openness, and internationalism. The issue of immigration served as a central organising principle for the formation of this identity.

Secondly, by situating the re-articulation of a British evangelical identity within Trump's primary election win and Brexit, I demonstrate that identities shift in relation to particular political moments. The Leave and Remain campaigns provided subjects with new discursive attachment points and identification opportunities (Clarke and Newman 2019). Thirdly, this article demonstrates how identities are developed relationally and require exclusion for consolidation. After Trump won the Republican nomination, and later the Presidency, British evangelicals distanced themselves from their US counterparts in order to re-establish the boundaries of their collective and individual religious identities (C. Smith 1998).

The Brexit vote also demonstrated how Anglicans differ from evangelicals in both political beliefs and party affiliation. The shift in British evangelical identities during 2016 occurred alongside a shift in the CofE, as more leaders in the institution are now evangelical-Anglican rather than mainline Anglican. This study did not attend to Anglican political beliefs, but future research must explore how Anglican and evangelical identities are transforming alongside each other, and how practising versus nominal religious affiliation influences political attitudes. Furthermore, examining evangelical attitudes towards Brexit in different parts of the country (e.g. rural locations) would elucidate how much the findings from this study are London-specific.

The evangelical women mentioned in this article reflect the larger relationship that evangelicalism has with politics in the UK. Evangelicals have an internationalist outlook and are politically mobilised around issues more than party affiliation in Britain. Moreover, white British evangelicals themselves do not desire a political impact in the way that most white American evangelicals do (Hatcher 2017b; Strhan 2015). Given the significant role of

religion, particularly Anglicanism, in the referendum, and the impact of Brexit for years to come, it is crucial that further qualitative research investigates how Christian identities continue to change in relation to political events.

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