**“Because the Bible Tells Me So”:**

**Gender and authority in conservative Presbyterianism on the Isle of Lewis (Scotland)**

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**Thesis submitted**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**2020**

**ABSTRACT**

This ethnographic study explores the ways in which religion impacts the lives of those who live and visit the Isle of Lewis, an island off the northwest coast of Scotland. The churches on the island are, predominantly, of conservative Presbyterian denominations; the island has one Roman Catholic church and a mosque. I will argue that religion remains relevant to the cultural and familial traditions of the community.

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and observation as I immersed myself in island life utilising symbolic interactionism. One aim of this research was to examine female inequality in the church communities. I scrutinised ways in which women gained agency as they navigated between the patriarchal religious sphere and equality-driven social sphere of their lives. Power and authority are studied as separate entities, and the manner in which women uphold the patriarchy also comes under examination. I analysed the portrayal of women as ‘bad wives’ or ‘temptresses’ based on biblical role models and in particular in reference to adultery. There is a non-legitimate use of power by both genders which is played out in the media and from the pulpit, yet the research revealed resistance and agency as the betrayed wife strove for justice.

A second aim of the study was to examine the ways in which tradition, both cultural and familial, might impact on religious belief and practice. I explored this utilising the theory of religion as a chain of memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000). My research also scrutinised the boundaries between religious and secular traditions with reference to funeral rites. Likewise, the persistence of the rules surrounding Sabbatarianism, which are maintained by both religious and non-religious people alike, were studied to determine the ways in which religious tradition has become an integral part of a cultural identity of the islanders.

**Acknowledgements**

The most heartfelt thanks go first and foremost to my supervisor, Dr. Maria Diemling in the School of Humanities and Educational Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University. Without her limitless patience I would not have completed this process with my sanity intact. No matter the twists and turns she remained calm and a constant source of reassurance.

I am very grateful for the advice given by Professor Larry Ray; his guidance and expertise were much appreciated. I must add my thanks to Professor Robert Beckford, I began this journey with him at the helm and to Dr. Ivan Khovacs. who kindly took over as Chair for my final year.

I could not have undertaken this study without all of those who agreed to participate. I owe them a huge debt of gratitude. They gave me their time, their stories and encouragement. I value their friendship, their Gaelic welcome and hospitality. Slàinte.

Thank you to those who proof-read. Your expertise was much appreciated and very much needed. Thanks to my fellow PhD students at Canterbury Christ Church University, especially all those on the CCCU Postgrad WhatsApp group. Your Shut Up and Write sessions during the coronavirus lockdown kept me on track. Our Friday night Zoom calls were a great end to a busy week.

A special thanks goes to Dr. Christina Steed, you were ahead of me on this path. Your encouragement and friendship were invaluable.

Thanks to my family, my husband John and children Stuart, Ross, Adam and Faye. I hope I have done you proud. Sorry, John, I am still not getting a proper job.

A final debt of gratitude goes to Stephen Cooper. Stephen, you started me on this journey in 2003 when you signed me up to the Open University. As you can see, I did indeed run with it.

**AUTHOR’S DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

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**All photographs and charts are my own work.**

**INTRODUCTION**

*Chain eil thu tuilleach 's sean airson ionnsachadh fhathast*

*For as long as we live, we can learn*

**1. The Research Questions**

Off the northwest coast of Scotland lies the remote Isle of Lewis[[1]](#footnote-1). It is one of the last bastions of Sabbatarianism[[2]](#footnote-2) in the UK, though, this observance, despite protest, is slowly being eroded. Religion and religious practice have an effect on those who live and visit there, religious, and non-religious alike. The churches on Lewis provide more than spiritual guidance; religion is an integral part of the culture and tradition of the Gàidhealtachd.[[3]](#footnote-3) They also wield influence over many aspects of island life and culture. Chaplin, a social scientist (2010), carried out research into the health and well-being of those living in the Cearns, a social housing estate in Stornoway, the main town on the island:

‘The strict Protestant religion exerts an influence on the religious and the non-religious alike, at both individual and community level …The religious influence is strong, explicit and culturally important, especially around symbolic behaviours associated with Sabbath observance.’ (2010, p. 12).

Research has shown that religion plays a central part in the culture, traditions, and daily lives of Gaelic people, be they religious or not (Burchill 2008; Chaplin 2010). The island has maintained its cultural, linguistic, and religious customs, due in part, to its remote location. The sea that surrounds Lewis acts as a visible barrier to the influences of the mainland. However, the advent of the internet has made the world a more accessible place, enabling external influences to encroach on the natural barrier of the sea.

The island’s religion is predominantly Presbyterian, with the bulk of churches of a conservative nature. Sabbatarianism is adhered to by the majority of those who live and visit the island, and congregational attendance numbers at church services are high in comparison to churches on the mainland.[[4]](#footnote-4) The churches are patriarchal, and women can hold no role of authority within the church community. The Gaelic saying at the beginning of this thesis translates as, “for as long as we live, we can learn”, and I was interested to discover why the churches of the Gàidhealtachd continue to influence all who live and visit the island. The research questions which frame this sociology of religion study are:

* How do women find agency within the constraints of patriarchal Presbyterianism?
* How do women navigate between the patriarchal Church and the equality driven social spheres of their lives?
* What links are there between cultural identity and religious observance in the remote conservative Presbyterian communities on Lewis?
* What authority does religion hold for the people who live on Lewis?
* What effect does tradition, both cultural and familial, bring to religious belief and practice on Lewis?

This research is concerned with understanding the behaviours and hierarchies found in the church communities. This research is situated in gender and religiosity with reference to cultural and religious identity. The aforementioned research questions focus on group interactions, interpretations and relationship. To address and answer them I employed a qualitative, sociological approach using an ethnographic framework as a means of data collection. I have chosen, as explained fully in Chapter 4, a constructivist paradigm with an interpretive analysis. By employing a qualitative methodology, I was able to observe both the micro (the individual) and the macro (the group). This enabled me to analyse the ways in which individual behaviours affect the communities as well as the way the church community hierarchies shape individual conduct.

**1.2 Setting the Scene**

This introductory chapter sets the scene for my research project. It explains my interest in the conservative Presbyterian churches of the Gàidhealtachd and gives an overview of the island, the people, and the churches. I have included my own story in the research as I was drawn to Katz-Rothman’s (2007) work in which she wrote of the way in which, as scholars, we have been encouraged to remove our voice from our research in the interest of a supposed objectivity. I wanted to follow her lead by being a part of the research and therefore present in my study. In doing so I endeavoured to ‘reclaim the I in sociology.’ (2007, p. 11). One consequence of employing an ethnographic framework is that I had, just by my presence, an effect on the participants. I am an outsider and as such I cannot help but alter the dynamic. When carrying out interviews I enter their social sphere as a researcher and bring my own history, my own experiences. My interactions become a part of the research. As I believe I am both participant and researcher the first data collected was my own. The need to understand and analyse my own story is rooted in both my interpretivist approach and my use of symbolic interactionism.[[5]](#footnote-5) In my fieldwork I used different aspects of my identity and history to build a rapport with participants. As my history was a valuable research tool, this section will start with my story.

**1.2.a My story**

My mum was seven months pregnant with me when my brother, Billy, drowned just three weeks before his sixth birthday. This has, and always will have an impact on my life despite my never knowing him. Some of my earliest memories are of visiting his grave with my parents and Graeme, my younger brother. To this day I can see the tap where my mum and dad changed the water for the flowers and the bin beside it filled with dead flowers and cigarette butts.

Billy named both of us surviving siblings, even though he never met us. He wanted the new baby to be named Yvonne, if a girl, and Graeme, if a boy, as these were the names of his closest friends at school. We carry his legacy with us. Few people know of Billy, as it is difficult to mention him without receiving, either an embarrassed silence or excessive sympathy, neither of which I feel is appropriate. I carry no personal grief, although the sorrow I feel for my parents is enormous. In 2018 I attended a paper presentation at the BSA conference on having a deceased sibling. For me, that study was extremely pertinent, and I started to mention him. Billy is referenced in two of my interviews.

I attended a local comprehensive school in Greenock, a shipbuilding town to the west of Glasgow. University was never mentioned; girls with my academic ability became secretaries, bookkeepers, or nurses. I left school at sixteen years of age and immediately began work; first as a care home assistant, on the government’s Youth Opportunities Programme, for which I received the princely sum of £33 per week. There was no increase for working weekends or nightshifts, we were all expected to work these unsociable hours. When I was seventeen, I trained, in Glasgow, as a nurse. After completing my training, I worked as a staff nurse in a hospice, run by The Irish Sisters of Charity, and then in the community as a District Nursing Sister. This has left me with a passion for end-of-life care.

I met my husband when we were nineteen years of age (he is five days older than me) at a ceilidh[[6]](#footnote-6) in Glasgow and we were married at twenty-three. We initially lived in Slough where I worked as a district nurse. After a year we moved back to Scotland but to Edinburgh, rather than Glasgow. We have four children, three sons and a daughter, with just under seven years between the oldest and youngest. I was a stay-at-home mother until our daughter and youngest child Faye, was two years old, when I retrained as a Montessori pre-school teacher. We had moved to Sevenoaks in Kent when Faye was just a year old, and I felt that working shifts as a nurse and living so far from family was not an arrangement that would work for me or my family. As a pre-school teacher the hours and the holidays were more conducive to our family life. I spent five years working in St Thomas’s, a local Roman Catholic school. I would not have been given this job opportunity back home as, at that time, in the west of Scotland, Protestants did not work in Roman Catholic school. The Roman Catholic schools, at that time, had a policy of only employing Roman Catholics. This has now changed, although the applicant will be interviewed by the head of the diocese before being offered the job.

Following a chance meeting with an Open University lecturer, I decided to study for a degree in History through the Open University. During my first year, Stuart, our eldest child, became critically ill. At this point prayers were being said for him, from the Roman Catholic Church in Sevenoaks to the Regent’s Park Mosque. We used to joke that Stuart had covered all bases when it came to religion. These prayers were instigated by friends and family. He subsequently made a good, perhaps, some may argue, a miraculous, recovery.[[7]](#footnote-7) The offering up of prayers for his recovery ignited an interest in sociology of religion. As an atheist, I wanted to try to understand why people had such faith, why they believed in the power of prayer, and I changed my degree focus. After obtaining my BA in Religious Studies I went on to complete, with the Open University, an MA titled *Does Fundamentalist Protestantism flourish more in a remote community?* The research was based on the Isle of Skye.[[8]](#footnote-8)

During my MA studies I worked part time as a volunteer teacher with Kids Co., a now disbanded charity. The charity closed in a blaze of infamy, and it saddens me that it is remembered for what went wrong, as opposed to the good it did. It was during this time that I became involved with Bermondsey Central Hall Methodist Church. The church offered me a space in which to run a parenting class for young mothers and their babies. The group has evolved over the years, thanks to Winnie Baffoe, a missionary at the church, and is now known as Mummies Republic. Here, women support each other and receive practical help alongside mental health support. I have continued my involvement with this group.

This brings me to the present day. Our children have all left home, and I am continuing my studies. I have been fortunate to have been given access to both the religious and non-religious sections of the communities on Lewis. I have been welcomed into the congregations of Back Free Church of Scotland, Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland, and the churches around Tighnabruaich in Argyllshire[[9]](#footnote-9). I have also been welcomed into the community through the Lewis and Harris Glasgow Rangers Football Supporters Club and have met islanders in the Blue Room at Ibrox Stadium.[[10]](#footnote-10)

I have been studying religion from a sociological perspective for over fourteen years. I have had to examine my own views on religion alongside the ways in which I project these. My parents, particularly my dad, have a faith, and both are confirmed members of the Church of Scotland. They are very proud of my research and believe my end goal is the ministry. They are both in their eighties, and I have decided to be economical with the truth, knowing that my atheist views would upset them. My story forms part of this research but will not take centre stage. This research would be nothing without the numerous people who have shaped, not only myself, but this project. As I reflect, I realise that religion plays a large part in my life, from the Irish Sisters of Charity in the hospice, to Father Duncan visiting the pre-school and Winnie at Bermondsey Central Hall Methodist Church. It is ironic that this atheist spends a large proportion of her time in religious environments.

**1.2. b The Landscape**

In December 2020, the BBC aired a documentary, featuring the British comic Romesh Ranganathan, in which he travelled to the Hebrides as part of a series of films he made on adventure. At the end of the documentary, he summarised his time on Lewis by saying:

‘the thing that I have been most surprised about is the fact we are still in the United Kingdom, but this is so far distinct for me from even mainland Scotland, in terms of culture, in terms of the people, in terms of accents, in terms of the geography of the place. It really does sit separately to the rest of the UK.’ (BBC 2020).

The perception of the Gaels as being ‘foreign’ has its roots in history. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, by the reign of James VI, the Gaels were viewed by their Lowland countrymen as ‘irredeemably foreign’ (Hunter 1999, p. 175) a direct result of the contempt shown to them by the King.

I had never been to Lewis before starting this research project, my interest in the conservative religious islands began after a friend relocated to the Isle of Skye,[[11]](#footnote-11) and his stories of Sabbatarianism and the influence of Presbyterian churches on those who live there, both religious and non-religious, intrigued me. As is often the way, the research took its own path, and my initial research were never answered.[[12]](#footnote-12) I came to Lewis following a family recommendation and a subsequent introduction to Reverend MacLeod, the minister of Back Free Church of Scotland. The importance of having Reverend MacLeod on board was not lost on me as my ‘gatekeeper’ in Glendale, Skye, my MA research community, had been fundamental in changing the direction of my research. I was also aware that my research fell into the ‘category sensitive’ area (Gilliat-Ray 2005, p. 28) as it examines the very private spheres of religious belief and practise. I was mindful that ethnographic fieldwork could not begin until I had ‘located and gained access to a field’ (Adams et al. 2015, p.50). Locating the field proved a relatively straight forward process, gaining access necessitated a *canny* [[13]](#footnote-13)approach.

Lewis is the largest island of the Western Isles or Outer Hebrides archipelago in Scotland. The southern part of this land mass is the Isle of Harris and, although joined, they are frequently referred to as two separate islands. They have very different topographies; Lewis is flat, which contrasts with the hilly Harris landscape. Lewis is very exposed thanks to its flat terrain, and as a result, gales can prevail at any time of year. Thanks to the winds, few trees grow on the island and few floral tributes adorn graves.

Stornoway, the main Lewis town, is closer to Bergen in Norway than it is to London. The journey to the island from my home in Kent, was long. My preferred route was to fly to Glasgow from London, and then take a connecting flight to Stornoway, both flights taking around an hour each. My other option was to catch the ferry from Ullapool, a crossing of around three hours, preceded by a four-hour car journey to Ullapool from Glasgow. Flights and sailings are often cancelled due to storms but are no longer banned by Sabbatarianism. After much protest Sunday flights began in 2002, with Sunday sailings delayed until 2009; both have had an impact on island life.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The island is, in my view, truly beautiful; from its white sandy beaches to the peat bogs that stretch as far as the eye can see. I was extremely fortunate, as blue skies welcomed me on my first visit in August 2016. I was duly informed that July had been wetter than usual with only one rain free day. I spent this first visit meeting with the minister, attending a church service and, most importantly, letting people know who I was and my purpose for being there. This first visit was about getting a feel for the island and the people of the Gàidhealtachd*.* My initial community was Broadbay, a five-minute drive from Stornoway. This community comprises of four small hamlets: Tong, Col, Back and Gress, with a combined population of around 2000. Tong is the hamlet where Donald Trump’s mother was born and raised, and where one of his cousins still lives. Following a series of events[[15]](#footnote-15) I had to find another church community as those in Broadbay ceased all contact. The minister, elders and congregation of Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland offered to participate in this research project.

A herd of elephants walking across a dry grass field

Description automatically generated

This photograph was taken in Back and shows Col in the distance.

Photograph taken August 2016.

A close up of a map

Description automatically generated

Map reproduced courtesy of ontheworldmap.com.



Tolsta Beach, Broadbay, Isle of Lewis.

Photograph taken August 2016

When I took this photograph of Tolsta beach, I watched a group surfing in the Minch.[[16]](#footnote-16) This was interesting on two accounts; first, the weather on land, despite the blue skies, was a ‘balmy’ nineteen degrees, I can only imagine the coldness of the sea. Despite this the majority were not wearing wetsuits. Secondly this was on the Sabbath,[[17]](#footnote-17) and I was under the impression that such activities on a Sabbath were frowned upon. I mentioned watching the surfers to Rosie, Reverend MacLeod’s daughter and she spoke of the Sabbath growing up in the manse,[[18]](#footnote-18) confirming my thoughts that strict adherence to Sabbatarianism was slowly being eroded:

‘I wouldn't have been allowed to go surfing. I’d be allowed to go for a walk though. I think it was just my upbringing. I think it's different for everyone, my parents are much more relaxed now. I can actually watch telly on a Sunday. I wasn't allowed when I was growing up.’ (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018).

Stories abound about Sabbath life on the island. Until the 1980s the swings in the play parks were chained together from Saturday evening to Monday morning. One lady told me that as a teenager she had been out for a walk on the Sabbath with a friend and had met the minister who rebuked them. As she informed me the mistake, they made was not having a dog with them; the walk was deemed pleasurable, not a chore. I knew, from my MA research, never to hang my washing out on the Sabbath. Chaplin confirms this unwritten rule when he writes ‘[t]he hanging out of washing, widely condemned on the occasions when it occurs, is to be regarded as a symbol of Sunday observance.’ (2010, p. 87). The local sports centres are closed, and public transport does not run.

Lews Castle,[[19]](#footnote-19) which overlooks Stornoway, was built in the mid 1800’s by Sir James Matheson, a rich merchant who made his money from the Chinese opium trade. In 2016, following an extensive renovation project, a museum and heritage centre were opened on the ground floor. As part of the renovations, a branch of Starbucks, the first and only one on the island, opened in the castle. The company contributed to the works and, as part of the deal, were permitted to open on a Sunday between the hours of 10am and 4pm. Unlike the furore over Sunday sailings, the opening of Starbucks was protest free.

The local golf club sits in the grounds of the castle. It has the unique situation of being open on a Sunday for visitors / guests yet closed to members. This anomaly has occurred for financial reasons, the club needs the money from visitors to remain viable. Some on the island continue to petition the board to allow the club to be open on the Sabbath to members. This has not yet been passed.

A large green field in front of a castle

Description automatically generated

Lews Castle, Stornoway.

Photograph taken June 2018.

**1.2.c The Churches**

**Back Free Church of Scotland**

As with all Scottish Presbyterian churches, Back Free Church is a plain, simple building with no stained glassed windows and no interior decoration. My initial impression was of a dour, grey, joyless building, very much the stereotypical John Knox, Calvinistic ideal[[20]](#footnote-20). However, the starkness of the building served to highlight the beautiful wooden staircase and pews on the inside. Interestingly, the blinds on the windows that overlooked the Minch were half closed, obliterating the view. There were to be no distractions. The focus rested firmly on the minister and elders, the men in black seated, facing the congregation, at the front of the church. The positioning of these men reinforces the hierarchical constructs of the church, providing a visual representation of patriarchal authority.[[21]](#footnote-21) Unlike a Church of Scotland minister, their counterparts in the Free Church of Scotland do not wear robes, but dress, as do the elders, in a black suit, with a white shirt and black tie. The congregation were wearing a variety of clothes; from the traditional black suits for men, and ladies in plain dark coats and hats, to younger members of the congregation dressed in jeans and shirts. Women and girls are no longer required to cover their heads when attending worship, although this remains a requirement in other conservative denominations on the island, such as the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. They continue to adhere to this practice, which is within their doctrine, a scriptural requirement.



Back Free Church of Scotland

Back, Isle of Lewis.

Photograph taken August 2016

The first sermon I attended was in English, but I subsequently attended a Gaelic service. The services were not, as I had feared, in the lengthy fire and brimstone mode. The beginning of the sermon was, as with all church services that I have attended over the years, marked by rustling sounds as mints and other *sooky*[[22]](#footnote-22) sweets were opened and passed amongst friends and family. I was delighted on my third visit to be handed one such sweet. I felt accepted.

All the Presbyterian churches on the island hold a morning and an evening service on the Sabbath. They also hold twice weekly fellowship meetings which are similar to a church service. Although a creche for babies and toddlers is held during the service at Back Free Church, Sunday School is scheduled for 12.30pm. Children attend the main service as Back Free Church employs an intergenerational approach to worship. A variety of devices are used by parents to ensure the children do not disturb the sermon, from colouring books and pencils to electronic tablets. No longer are the children expected to sit still and give full attention to the service. One elderly gentleman recalled having to sit for hours in church and being punished with a quick *skelp[[23]](#footnote-23)* from his dad if he fidgeted too much. The church has strong links with the younger members of the community:

It's a growing community, and those who do come to church; from our creche facility, which is buzzing, to our children's church, which is a once a month service fortoddlers, to our bible bodies, youth club, and to Sunday school. You know we have around, I think fifty to sixty children attending Sunday school. In Tong where we have a mission hall, we have about twenty-five kids attending. (Reverend MacLeod, Back 2018).

The importance of having children attend church as part of their familial practice will be examined in Chapter 5.

Praise takes the form of singing of unaccompanied psalms. Until recently hymns and music were not permitted as these are viewed as ‘man made’. This denomination has interpreted that all aspects of worship must be Biblical. The singing of unaccompanied psalms, especially when sung in Gaelic, is a hauntingly beautiful sound.[[24]](#footnote-24) In 2010, a motion was passed by the Free Church assembly, which gave ministers and their congregations the option of singing hymns and having musical accompaniment. Most congregations have not embraced the use of music. On Lewis only one Free Church of Scotland does so, and this is Stornoway High Free Church.

**Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland**

This is a new Free Church of Scotland, born out of schism. In 2015 most of the congregation of Stornoway High Church of Scotland left to join the Free Church of Scotland. This defection was led by the Kirk Session,[[25]](#footnote-25) and occurred at a time when there was a ministerial vacancy. Figures cited in the media placed the number leaving at two hundred and fifty, around 80% of the congregation (Merritt 2014). The exodus came after a decision on the ordination of gay clergy by the Church of Scotland. This conflict and resulting schism are not unusual, for as Ryre notes ‘[a]t present, the single most explosive divide is over homosexuality’ (2017, p. 460). In May 2015 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted to allow the ordination of clergy in same sex relationships. Unlike the Church of England, this relationship does not have to be a celibate one. James, a deacon in the Stornoway High Free Church, discussed the event that brought discord with the Church of Scotland to a head:

You get a lot of misinformation definitely about the members of our church, that we're against people that were gay orientated but that wasn't the issue at all. The gay clergy allowed, was sort of the final straw. That was the cherry on the cake for a lot of people. (James, 65, Stornoway 2019)

James alluded to conflict in the wider social community and within the church community, following the decision. Friendships fractured as people took sides and the new church was portrayed as being homophobic. Jessica explained why she had decided to remain in the Church of Scotland, a decision that caused her to lose friends:

they were saying to me, "Oh, come along, come along.” But I don't agree with… I think there's too many divides. And I think they're losing sight of what it's all about. And you know, the Bible teaches that we're all supposed to love and support each other and that, but in actual fact, they just go around judging everyone. And saying, "Oh, we don't we're not judging.” I mean, somebody from the church went on the telly and said, "Oh, we're not judging people that are gay” And I was like, “Now, you obviously are, you know, because you've created this”. (Jessica, 28, Stornoway 2018)

In her 2009 book, *The Church on Trial*, Rose wrote of the problem churches face when an event has a cataclysmic outcome. Rose defined this as ‘when the event is mightier than the structure’ (2009, p. 85). She proposed that a well-functioning church will be cognisant of external factors in the secular community whilst at the same time providing for the spiritual needs of its congregation. In this situation the Church of Scotland was responsive to the secular needs of non-discrimination for those in same sex relationships, but this resulted in discord between the church, and the religious beliefs of some members of its congregations. I found parallels with this conflict and that of the ordination of women in the Anglican Church. Writing about women’s ordination, Rose noted that ‘[w]hat is interesting, however, is when we see the problem not so much as whether women should be ordained, but as one of what the church actually believes’ (2009, p. 87). It was the dichotomy between religious and secular belief that brought conflict. James did not believe the congregation to be homophobic. It was not a concern over whether those in same sex relationships should be ordained, but about what is permitted by the authority of the Bible. Jessica, however, disagreed.

It was not a simple process to begin a new church. The group could not change affiliation as a whole, and each individual had to renounce membership of the Church of Scotland and be confirmed as a Free Church of Scotland communicant. There had been hope that they could retain the church building, but the Church of Scotland decided to continue to minister to those who remained. Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland worship in a local primary school. The congregation has raised enough funds to buy a manse for their minister and a plot of land to enable a new church building to be erected. They continue to fundraise for building works. The church welcomed its first minister, the Reverend Ferrier, in November 2015. Reverend Ferrier is a young minister and a direct descendent of Robert Rainy, the Principal of the Free Church of Scotland at the time of the Second Disruption in 1893.[[26]](#footnote-26) The only concern the congregation have is that he is unmarried; one of the first questions many people asked me, tongue in cheek, was if I knew of any suitable young ladies.

As this church community had a hymn-based tradition of worship, a move to an existing psalm- based Free Church congregation was not an option. The congregation wanted to move as one, maintaining their Church of Scotland style of worship. Reverend Ferrier became minister on condition that hymns, and music were to continue during services:

I'm hymn orientated. There are too many psalms, and there's just more and more and more and that's the basis of the theological direction and stuff. For me, it's the way I've been brought up, I like carols. (James, 65, Stornoway 2019)

Not all ministers agree with this church’s policy. I attended Sunday worship and found the Reverend Ferrier was ministering at a communion weekend in another area. The service was taken by a retired minister:

The minister stands to begin the service and announces that there will be no hymns sung and no music. He tells the congregation that this is in line with church doctrine and, that if we do not sing the psalms loudly enough, we will start again. I’m not sure if that was a joke or not. I got the feeling it was said in a jokey fashion but was a serious threat. Our singing obviously passed muster as we were not stopped. (Fieldwork Diary, 6th October 2019)

The congregation of Stornoway High Free Church had the authority to employ a minister who would maintain elements of their traditional style of worship. The retired minister, that morning, had, as the doctrine of the Free Presbyterian Church decrees, Biblical authority to refuse.

This is a young church with a young congregation. There are more families living in Stornoway than in Broadbay, and it has a strong teenage cohort with links to The Nicolson Institute, the local secondary school. The church employs a shortened intergenerational approach to worship, with Sunday school beginning around 11.20am following the children’s address.

**1.2.d The People**

Lewis has the largest number of inhabitants of all the Outer Hebridean islands. Traditionally the main industries were fishing, crofting, and weaving. Today, people are still employed in these industries, but these are now, in the main, second or part-time jobs. Around 40% of those employed on the island work in the public sector. This is more than double the UK national figure and just less than double the Scottish figure.[[27]](#footnote-27) Public sector employers include Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) and the NHS. Tourism has been on the increase in recent years and was hoped to rise further following the commencement of direct flights from London to Stornoway beginning June 2019. The direct flights were brought into serviced to make the island more accessible for to those living in the Southeast for weekend and short breaks. Unfortunately, the flights were not economically viable and were stopped in the autumn of 2019.

Lewis has a combined population of around 19,658 of whom around 81% identify as white Scottish. The majority of those who participated in my research project were from the indigenous community, with only one person, Louise, identifying as an incomer. Around 60% of those who live on Lewis have a working understanding of Gaelic. Despite a slight rise in population (up by just over 1,000 between the 2001 and 2011 census) this is an ageing community with just over 30% over the age of sixty-five years.[[28]](#footnote-28) In comparison 14.4 % are of school age. Both ministers spoke of having to conduct many funerals each year.

When examining religious affiliation, the 2011 census data for the entire Comhairle nan Eilean Siar area has the figures at 42.5% Presbyterian, 18.1% Roman Catholic and 12.3% non-religious. It is important to note that the isles of Barra and South Uist, the most southernly of the Hebridean islands, are predominately Roman Catholic. The remaining islands are chiefly Presbyterian, with the exception of Benbecula, the third most southernly island, which is almost 50/50 Presbyterian/Roman Catholic. The local saying goes that the Reformation got stuck at Benbecula.

The religious affiliation figures for Lewis are remarkably different from the district as a whole. Most of the population who gave a religious affiliation, self-identify as Presbyterian, yet over 25% gave a non-religious response —double that of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Despite having such a high non-religious cohort, Lewis has 45 active places of worship, of which thirty-seven are Presbyterian. This an island where religion continues to influence those who live there, be that with Sabbatarianism, burial rituals[[29]](#footnote-29) or the acceptance of an Islamic place of worship. In August 2018 the island saw the opening of a mosque. This has been controversial with the Free Church of Scotland opposing planning permission. The mosque serves Muslims from all the Outer Hebridean islands, although the majority live on Lewis. The island has been a part of a resettlement programme for Syrian refugee families[[30]](#footnote-30); with an aging population, Lewis needs more families to move to the island. I found opposition to the mosque to be prevalent amongst the Free Church community and, at a Fellowship meeting in Tong, I observed an ‘othering’ of this small Islamic community:

The younger lady, Mharai, works as a teacher and held quite strong views on the opening of the mosque in Stornoway which she felt had been led by just one individual. In her view this was simply to cause a fuss and make a political point ‘these people have lived here for a few years and have done so without making a fuss’. (Fieldwork Diary, 5th June 2018)

I did, however, observe an example of integration amongst younger members of the island community. I passed three Nicolson Institute pupils one afternoon, who were chatting in Gaelic. One of the girls was wearing the hijab.

Chart 1

Chart 2

The charts above show active places of worship by denomination and religious affiliation.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Presbyterian churches aside, Lewis is renowned for one other affiliation — its support of Glasgow Rangers Football Club (RFC). The significance and history behind this will be examined in Chapter 4. The Lewis and Harris RFC Supporters Club is recognised as the world’s largest RFC supporters club with a membership of around nine hundred. Some members are season ticket holders and make the long journey to Glasgow every few weeks for home matches. The football club acknowledges the support with many players, ex-players and directors making trips to Lewis to attend events and give talks. At this juncture I must add that religion plays a large part in Scottish football, especially within the city of Glasgow.[[32]](#footnote-32)

In Scotland all those living on the islands are known as The Wee Frees, a name derived from the Free Church of Scotland. This name is viewed by church members as disparaging:

We tend to be labelled Wee Frees which I find a little derogatory.I don't think it's fair, I don't think it's reasonable to be labelled, in that way, and in any case, there is some ambiguity over the term. And in actual fact, historically it applies to another denomination which is more likely be the Free Presbyterian Church. (Reverend MacLeod 2018).

This reveals a lack of knowledge and understanding amongst the general Scottish population about the religious beliefs and practices of the Gaels. Bruce et al. noted that ‘the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church are routinely treated as a threat or as an anachronism, either that their Calvinism is a danger to liberal values or their people a joke’ (2004, p.94). Burchill (2008) discovered that those outside of the village she was researching ‘othered’ the people of Gamrie over their conservative religiosity. These are societies that appear to live in a bygone era; a people who spend Sundays at the kirk,[[33]](#footnote-33) not playing football, who read their Bibles, not the Sunday papers. However, the boundaries between secular and religious traditions are blurred as there are those who identify as non-religious who defended Sabbatarianism.

There are complexities within the communities with reference to gender, authority, and identity, be that cultural or religious. The Gàidhealtachd is more than just a geographical area, it is identity, tradition, history, and culture, enveloping both the religious and the secular. This research aims to find answers to the questions set out at the beginning of this chapter:

* How do women find agency within the constraints of patriarchal Presbyterianism?
* How do women navigate between the patriarchal Church and the equality driven social spheres of their lives?
* What links, if any, are there between cultural identity and religious observance in the remote conservative Presbyterian communities on Lewis?
* What authority does religion hold for all who live on Lewis?
* What effect does tradition, both cultural and familial, bring to religious belief and practice on Lewis?

Cultural identity may prove to be a significant factor in the answers to the questions. Ward wrote of the division between church and secular communities in western societies ‘[o]ne polarity is the very fundamental one between the religious belief system and the culture in which it is embedded’ (1999, p.1). This may well hold true on the Scottish mainland where the culture is increasingly secular, yet, despite this secularity ‘Scottish national belonging can be combined with diverse religious affiliation’ (Sunderland, 2019, p. 50). This is pertinent on Lewis where there is no polarity as religious belief and practice are embedded in the culture of the Gàidhealtachd rather than separate from it. This research suggests that the patriarchal aspect of the churches has its genesis not only in scripture but in the traditional patriarchal clan system. The notion of men governing continues to this day with all councilors of the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar island wards, as well as the island’s MP and MSP, being male.[[34]](#footnote-34)

**1:3 Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. This Introduction has provided the backdrop for the study, situating the researched communities both geographically and demographically, presented the research problem, set out the rationale for it., and has specified the questions that this research seeks to answer. It also briefly outlines the research method employed in the thesis.

Chapter two covers the history of the Gàidhealtachd, the Scottish churches and Scottish football. The ‘othering’ of the Gaels and the importance of language will be discussed. The evolution of the Scottish Presbyterian churches and the various conflicts that have brough schism will be examined in detail. The links that Scottish football teams have to religion and cultural identity will also come under review. This historical analysis is a necessary addition to my methodological arsenal. It was by understanding the past that I could consider the ways in which Gaelic culture and tradition was shaped by historical events, and why their cultural and religious identities differ from that of their Lowland Scot peers.

In chapter three, a literature review provides a critical overview of studies on ‘authority’ within Scottish Presbyterian churches, and the links between cultural identity, tradition and religious belief and practice are also evaluated. In this chapter I consider how scholars have dealt with the topics under investigation in this thesis. My review of the literature has revealed a gap in scholarship which specifically scrutinises conservative Scottish Presbyterian groups, the subject of my research. There is analysis on the religious response to the political which expands on Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) work on the political response to the religious. Throughout the chapter there will be a focus on gender, agency and identity.

Chapter four addresses methodological and method for the research process. It explains and provides rationale for my ontological and epistemological stances. Blumer’s *Symbolic Interactionism* (1969) provides a methodological structure, and my use of a qualitative ethnographic framework will be outlined and justified. The chapter also lays out ethical considerations concerning data collection and the way data was analysed.

Chapters five and six analyse the findings of my fieldwork. Chapter five examines women’s inequality within the Free Church of Scotland. Women are discriminated against in different areas of life. With this in mind this chapter looks at the specific segregation of women with reference to funeral rites, lack of authority in the church as well as the concepts of bad wife and temptress. The use of shaming by women on other women they believe to be behaving in an inappropriate manner will come under scrutiny. The concept of shaming was raised during interviews and was only used on women. This chapter introduces the importance of Biblical authority to the church communities and the concept of religion as a sacred canopy. The Bible is cited by participants as the reason why women hold no role of authority in the church. It is used by the church communities as life’s moral rule book as well as being a source of guidance and support. Biblical authority continues as a theme throughout all the analytical chapters.

Chapter six builds on the analysis concerning female inequality. The links between cultural identity and religious practice are discussed with reference to Sabbatarianism. The theme of authority comes under further scrutiny as it investigates the role religion plays in the lives of those on the island, be they religious or not. Finally, religion as a chain of memory, Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) work is used in analysis when investigating the religious choices made by the participants.

The Conclusion summarises my research findings and the contributions it has made to the field. The chapter then offers suggestions for further avenues of research. Finally, it concludes with a reflexive section.

**CHAPTER TWO:**

**The History of Scotland: Its People and Churches, 1513-2000**

**The disregard and othering of a people**

*‘To know the past is to know how things came to be, but to know how the past is perceived is to know how things are. For although the past is history, history is not the past.’*

*(Goldschmidt 1976, p.297)*

The history of Scotland’s people and churches is bound by tradition and myth. Keating wrote of the clichéd views of Scotland, portrayed in films such as *Braveheart* or *Outlander*, the Netflix series. He suggested that ‘the chief line of Scottish history is about resisting the English, as though the Scots existed only as victims rather than having a history of their own’ (2020, p.16). Contested as these histories are, I will examine some of the conflicts, reforms, and schisms, religious and secular, of the past five hundred years. This chapter will discuss why and how changes were introduced and explore the Church’s influence on cultural identity with reference to the Gàidhealtachd. The effects that religious authority holds for those who visit and live on the island have their genesis in the Reformation; the patriarchal aspect of the church has its roots in the traditional clan system. As a social researcher, by examining history I have obtained a better understanding of the links between cultural identity and religious observance, and how and why these have developed. As Bruce et al. wrote ‘[t]he past may be another country, but it is where we must start if we are to make sense of the present.’ (2004, p. 7).

Throughout the past five hundred years, conflict and schism have never been far from the shores of the Gàidhealtachd. The Scots may share the history of successive monarchs but the history of Scotland, under their rule, is not uniform. From language to religious belief and practice, the Lowland Scots and the Gaels can trace their differences through the way they were governed by their kings and queens. I have concentrated on specific periods of history, both secular and religious, that shaped the Gaelic people and differentiated them from their Lowland contemporaries. The historical roots of this division, the ‘othering’ of the Gaels, continues to affect the country. This is succinctly put by Hunter when he quotes an islander’s negative view on devolution ‘[i]n London…they might not give a damn about folk up here. But in Edinburgh they’ve always hated us’ (1999, p. 11). This chapter will explain how particular elements of the historical past continue to shape and haunt both Scotland and the Gàidhealtachd in the present; a country divided by culture, language, and religion.

Reformed theology was spread in the Gàidhealtachd using traditional oral methods. During the reign of James V and his daughter Mary Queen of Scots, entertainments, such as plays and ballads, were used as a method of instruction in doctrine and belief. Language was also of significance; Scots was the language of the Lowlands whilst those in the Gàidhealtachd spoke Gaelic. Language differences are viewed as fundamental in shaping the variances of cultural identity between the two areas. William MacLeod noted that over time ‘Gaelic became stigmatised as a language of poverty, backwardness, and even barbarianism’ (2020, p. 6). I argue that this is a direct consequence of the ‘othering’ of the Gaels by James VI. The issues that occurred over language and its usage are apparent in many of the conflicts considered in this chapter; from the attempted abolition of the use of Gaelic in church sermons, to a missed opportunity to prevent the Second Disruption.

As will be discussed in this chapter, and as has been seen with Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland, schisms have continued into the twenty-first century. As Ryre noted ‘[t]he main driver of continued division will be Protestantism’s knack for adaption.’ (2017, p. 457). As the church attempts to adapt to different times, to become more relevant to present day societies, it may discover that you cannot please everyone all the time.

The Scottish footballer Bill Shankly famously said ‘some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it's much more serious than that.’ [[35]](#footnote-35) As Bradley points out ‘significance on the football field is constituted for supporters and society via cultural, religious, political, ethic and national contexts and histories’ (2021, p. 1). Nowhere is this truer than in Scotland, where football is more than just a sport. The history of the ‘beautiful game’ will be examined in section 2.3with specific reference to religion and sectarianism. For many on Lewis their football affiliation is enmeshed in their religious identity and as a consequence is relevant to my research.

**2.1. The Gàidhealtachd and James VI: 1567-1625**

James VI is known to have held a less than favourable view of his ‘barbaric’ Gaelic subjects (Fry 2005; F.A. MacDonald 2006)). James did not just ignore his Gaelic subjects; he othered them. The concept of othering, or the quality of otherness is important in this chapter because, as Udah noted, ‘otherness is important for understanding how societies categorise and form identities’ (2019, p.297). The historical othering of the Gaels shows how Scotland became a country of two halves, with the Gaels forming a separate cultural identity from their Lowland countrymen. Othering is based on a hierarchal notion of difference (Udah 2019). Said (1978) wrote of knowledge and power when one considers a hierarchical notion of difference. I argue that James VI had very little knowledge about his Gaelic subjects, but he held power over them. When discussing the ‘othering of Orientals’ by Europeans Said proposed that ‘authority here means for “us” to deny autonomy to “it”. (1978, p. 32). One result of James’s othering of the Gaels was that they became considered as inferior to their Lowland contemporaries and were required to abandon their cultural identity and traditions.

James was baptised Catholic, but raised within the Protestant faith under the guardianship of the Earl and Countess of Mar. His education was entrusted to George Buchanan, a strict tutor who appears to have lived by the adage ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’. The education was brutal and skewed towards Calvinistic doctrine, yet, despite this, James developed a lifelong love of learning, publishing books, poems, and essays on many topics during his reign. His works contained his views on witchcraft, homosexuality, his hatred of smoking, as well as an instruction manual on kingship for his son and heir. Perhaps his greatest legacy was an English translation of the Bible, the version still used today by the Scottish conservative churches.

The Union of the Crowns changed the political landscape of Scotland in general and the Gàidhealtachd in particular. No longer were the Gaels half of an autonomous country – they were now a remote territory of a newly unified nation, governed from afar. When the court moved to London, they emulated the European courts that James found fashionable, unlike the Gaels whom he viewed as barbaric. Many as were not baptized, hence, in James’s opinion, ‘they were no better than pagans’ (Fry 2005, p. 11). James committed his views on the Gaels to print. His second book, Basilicon *Doron*, was written for his firstborn son, Henry, who died before he could make use of the book. In the book, he differentiates between the Gaels of the Highlands and those of the Islands:

As for the Hie-lands, I shortly comprehend them all in two sortes of people: the one, that dwelleth in our maine land, that are barbarous for the most part, and yet mixed with some shewe of civilitie: the other, that dweleth in the Isles are all uterlie barbars, without any sort or shewe of civilitie (James VI, His Majesties in Strvctions to his Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince 1599).[[36]](#footnote-36)

Over time, the chiefs allied themselves with the Crown and became a recognised section of nobility, learning the games of politics and becoming rich. James attempted to anglicise the Gaels using force and retribution.

**2.2. The History of the Scottish Churches**

**2.2.a The Established Church of Scotland**

The Church of Scotland, was, from its beginning, autonomous. *The First Book of Discipline* was compiled in 1560 and set out a system of church governance and parish-based reform. This required funds from the old religious institutions to pay for new ministers and a parish-based education system for all. Education was a particular preoccupation of John Knox who believed the road to true Protestantism was to be found in literacy, and an ability to read and understand the Bible. *The Second Book of Discipline* was adopted eighteen years later, placing church control in the hands of groups of elected church leaders in presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly. In the newly established Church of Scotland, all clergy were equal with a total separation of church and state. The Reformation afforded people social and educational progress, as well as freedom from hierarchal worship.

TheWestminster Confession was instigated in 1646 by the Westminster Assembly, following a period of civil, political, and religious unrest during the reign of Charles 1. The conservative Presbyterian churches continue to use it as the basis of their theological conviction. This doctrine for the newly established church was an austere form of Protestantism. There was no comfort to be found in the churches, either physical or spiritual. There were to be no paintings on the walls and stained-glass windows were replaced with plain glass. The playing of instrumental music was ‘feared as the work of the devil’ (Hanley 1986, p. 66). The singing of unaccompanied psalms was the only music permitted during the service. The most important part of any service was the long ‘fire and brimstone’ sermon – all this was far removed from Catholicism.

Scotland was not united under the Reformed banner, as Dawson stated, ‘the strong Protestantism which spread into the Highlands and Islands between 1560 and 1660 was a very different nature to that practiced in the Lowlands of Scotland’ (1994, p. 233). There were also differences in church administration between the Lowlands and the Gàidhealtachd due to simple logistics and language. The Lowland church administration was structured, but the logistical problems of the Gàidhealtachd meant the Gaelic ministry was run along the same lines as other aspects of the community. Meetings of the synod were reduced to accommodate the necessary travelling time. Sermons were held in Gaelic and, if a clan chief objected to the church, then it held no authority. The Gaels modified the church to fit in with the Gàidhealtachd, moulding Calvinism to suit Gaelic tradition and culture.

The Lowland Church and its hierarchy did not like this adapted form of Calvinism, and, over a short period of time, they demanded Gaelic sermons be replaced with sermons in Scots. From that point, ‘the Gaelic society, its language and culture were steadily eroded’ (Dawson 1994, p. 252). However, against the odds, Gaelic survived and continues to be spoken by the people of the Gàidhealtachd today. The ministers who preached in the Gàidhealtachd were themselves Gaels therefore they preached in their mother tongue. These Gaelic ministers utilised their language and culture and consequently the Gàidhealtachd and religion became entwined. Gaelic was important in terms of promoting religion, but religion served to preserve Gaelic.

In 2015 the Barna Group carried out research into the condition of Scottish Christian faith.[[37]](#footnote-37) They concluded that one factor appeared key to transforming the faith of today’s Scottish society, and that was the Bible. Its importance for the participants in this research will be scrutinised in Chapter 5 but what is of interest here is that language remains crucial for correct interpretation and comprehension of the scriptures. Barna Group argued that unless people have access to the Bible in their own language, they struggle to understand and subsequently pass on the message ‘language that is needed to communicate the gospel must be recognised in order to communicate effectively to those who have no biblical knowledge’ (2015, p. 36). This is something the Gaelic preachers knew and practised four centuries ago.

**2.2.b The Disruption of 1843: The Church of Scotland Free**

During the mid-nineteenth century the Church of Scotland was embroiled in religious conflict. The total separation of church and state was covered by the Establishment Principle, one of the fundamental aspects of the Church of Scotland. It purports that God holds authority over the separate domains of the secular and spiritual worlds. Although these domains are mutually supportive, they remain independent and have no jurisdiction over each other. The schism of 1843 is the largest within Scottish Presbyterian history, though, it was not the first, nor the last. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries conflict arose over the Church Patronage Act. The Original Succession Church was formed in 1732, following disagreement over this act. Over the years, new churches were formed through division and merger.[[38]](#footnote-38)

In this section I propose that the genesis of the 1843 church crisis can be traced back to the reign of James VI and the clan chiefs’ assimilation into the noble classes. Add to this the education of their sons in the Lowlands and, most importantly, that this education was carried out using the English language, and one can see how the chiefs and their successors became remote, both physically and spiritually, from the rest of their clansmen. C. MacDonald writes that ‘[m]any chiefs moved to Edinburgh and London, running up huge debts in the upkeep of mansions and high living’ (1982, p. 67). The clan system was already in decline thanks to acts passed by successive monarchs. F.A. Macdonald writes of ‘the traditional relationship between chief and tenants inevitably entering into more commercial relationships with their people’ (2006, p. 269). The kinship ties between chief and people were severed as the chiefs became absentee landowners, *lairds[[39]](#footnote-39)* of the manor.

The aforementioned Church Patronage (Scotland) Act came into force in 1711, placing parish administration into the hands of the lairds. Under the terms of this act, they could install a minister, irrespective of the congregation’s wishes. This was regarded by the clergy and laity as an infringement of the Establishment Principle. What happened next has been described as not only of importance in Scotland, but as ‘a major episode in the history of the modern Western Church’ (J.L. MacLeod 2000, p. 1). On the 18th of May 1843, David Welsh, the retiring moderator of the Church of Scotland, lead 121 ministers and 73 elders in protest from the General Assembly. The protest had its genesis in the disputed act. They marched from the Church of St. Andrews in George Street, Edinburgh to the Tanfield Hall in the Cannonmills and held their first meeting with Thomas Chalmers as its first moderator. It is estimated that the Established Church lost around one-third of their ministers and half of the laity as a result (J.L. MacLeod 2000; Ryrie 2017).

The majority of Highland and Island communities left the Church of Scotland or the Established Church as it became known, joining the new church, The Church of Scotland Free.[[40]](#footnote-40) The clergy of the Established Church found themselves ministering to the lairds, their families, and servants (Fry 2005). The Free Church was without church buildings as these belonged to the Established Church and the lairds refused permission for new churches to be built. Congregations were resourceful, meeting in woods, on shores, and in the hills, even though the weather was not always kind.

The Gaels were prominent in this schism and its eventual outcome. As previously mentioned, the geographically large parishes had seen them dependent on itinerant preachers. The majority of these preachers were Gaels; hence, sermons and psalms were presented in their mother tongue. To bolster the provision of spiritual needs, any communal meeting, forexample, a *ceilidh*,[[41]](#footnote-41) would contain an element of religion, including sermons, psalms, and dancing. This was very much in the manner of the entertainments of the courts of James V.

The formation of the Free Church brought with it an evangelical revivalism. Through this a religious dimension was added to the Gàidhealtachd. From the time of James VI, it was believed that the Gaels could only be *“*saved*”* by being more like their contemporaries in the Lowlands. However, the Disruption had the opposite effect – the Gaelic language was preserved through the use of the Gaelic Bible and the singing in Gaelic of unmetered psalms. The Disruption and the birth of the Free Church may have been spearheaded by the Lowland middle classes, but ‘the Gaels turned it into the redoubt of an oppressed introverted culture estranged from the Lowlands’ (Fry 2005, p.205). However, the religious unity was to last but fifty years.

**2.2.c The Second Disruption of 1893: The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland**

The Second Disruption happened during a period when the world was changing. This was a time of the Industrial Revolution, urbanisation, and Darwinism. Biblical criticism was challenging the very authority of the Bible. For some evangelicals, biblical criticism was to be embraced. Interpretation of the scriptures, as well as the Westminster Confession, was to be in line with the times. For others, this questioning of the Bible was inconceivable. Added to this was a decline in Sabbatarianism and the belief, in some quarters, that adherence to doctrine was slipping. Although these issues caused conflict, they in themselves, however, were not enough to cause division (J.L. MacLeod 2000).

As early as the 1843 Disruption, the Free Church had witnessed disagreement over strict adherence to the Confession. Thomas Chalmers was known to have had doubts over some of the more conservative Calvinist theologies (J.L. MacLeod 2000). For those seeking office in the Free Church, there was a requirement to affirm the Westminster Confession as their personal confession of faith. As people voiced objections to the authoritative stance of the Confession, the Free Church Assembly sought to find a way around the problem. In 1892, they believed they had found a compromise and passed the Declaratory Act.[[42]](#footnote-42) This act allowed the affirmation of the doctrines of the Confession in public and the declaration of the Declaratory Act in private, with no need to say what section of the Confession they adhered to. This enabled ministers to take up office without abandoning their own convictions. For many, this destroyed the integrity of the Free Church by removing absolute authority and modifying the Confession.

On May 25th, 1893, the Second Disruption occurred when Donald Macfarlane, a minister, read a protest to the Assembly and left the Free Church. Alongside him were Donald MacDonald, a fellow minister, and a schoolteacher, Alexander Macfarlane. So began the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. One factor may have prevented the schism, had Robert Rainy, the Principal of the Free Church, been able to speak Gaelic. He himself admitted ‘to reach the hearts and minds of the people it is necessary to speak to them in a tongue they best understand’ (Rainy, cited in J.L. MacLeod 2000, p. 133).

Many mourned the actions of Macfarlane and his followers, especially as this coincided with the Free Church’s Golden Jubilee. The numbers who left to join the Free Presbyterian Church were not as great as those who left during the Disruption of 1843 (J.L. MacLeod 2000). One reason put forward for why more did not join the new church was that having gone through turmoil in the not-so-distant past, they could not face taking the same action again. Macfarlane and MacDonald lost their jobs and homes, preaching outside for many years. By the end of the century, Free Presbyterian Churches were being built, with the majority situated in the Gàidhealtachd. Churches built in the Lowland towns and cities would have accommodated Highland immigrants.

**2.2.d Lord MacKay and a Requiem Mass, 1989: The Associated Presbyterian Churches**

In 1989, there was further schism – this time in The Free Presbyterian Church, with adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith once more at the centre of dispute. Lord MacKay of Clashfern, a member and elder of the Free Presbyterian Church and Lord Advocate for Scotland, attended the funeral of Lord Wheatley, a friend and fellow member of the Scottish judiciary. The Free Presbyterian Church regards Catholicism as an unlawful religion which bases its practices on superstition.[[43]](#footnote-43)

As a practising Catholic, a requiem mass formed part of Lord Wheatley’s funeral. MacKay’s attendance at this funeral was deemed intolerable and the church suspended him from the office of church elder. Lord MacKay argued that freedom of conscience allowed him to pay his respects at the funeral of a friend and colleague and that, as Lord Advocate, he was expected to attend. His appeal against suspension brought the whole affair to the attention of the media. John MacLeod, at *The Herald,* wrote an article under the headline; ‘Church cadre lined up against Mackay. Lord Chancellor could be victim of right-wing power bid power struggle’ (*The Herald Scotland***,** 24th May 1989). This was a power struggle between the conservative right wing of the church and moderates. A petition to have his suspension overturned was signed by over one thousand congregationalists, though the petition itself was contentious. On Lewis, one minister attempted to have the petition organiser suspended, another preached against it and a third asked his parishioners to remove their names from it.

Lord MacKay lost his appeal as he refused to give the synod assurance that he would not attend a requiem mass in the future. The Church was divided over the affair which ended in schism and the formation of the Associated Presbyterian Churches. This denomination has an ‘open pulpit’ policy, believing in Christian fellowship[[44]](#footnote-44). Their doctrine also places the law of the Confession as second to that of the Bible. This is a small denomination with only nine churches, six of which are situated in the Gàidhealtachd[[45]](#footnote-45).

**2.2.e The Donald MacLeod Conspiracy 2000: The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)**

Conflict in the Free Church of Scotland was once again on the agenda at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. As with the Lord MacKay conflict, it was played out in the national press. Gerard Seenan at *The Guardian* reported the situation thus, ‘the Free Church of Scotland, the Wee Frees, became a victim of a very modern malaise — a messy divorce’ (*The Guardian*, 22nd January 2000). The conflict, this time, was not over theological interpretation, but rather a case of sexual misconduct and a concern that the church was becoming too liberal. The situation reported in *The Guardian* was a civil court case over church property.

In 1995, Professor Donald MacLeod a professor at the Free Church of Scotland College, was acquitted of sexual assault charges on five women, with the sheriff ruling that he was the victim of a conspiracy. Despite being found not guilty by both civil and church courts, MacLeod’s enemies demanded that the case be referred for a full trial before the General Assembly. Not only was their request refused, but the General Assembly banned all further discussion on the matter. This censure caused some ministers to leave and join the Free Presbyterian Church. However, others remained and resumed the Free Church Defence Association (FCDA), an organisation that had been active in the late nineteenth century. At the beginning of the new millennium, the General Assembly called for its immediate disbanding. When this did not happen, the General Assembly charged twenty-two ministers with contumacy, the deliberate defiance of a church court. In January 2000, following closed church court proceedings, the ministers were *sine die,* effectively sacked. The ministers signed the Declaration of Reconstitution[[46]](#footnote-46) and a new church —The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)— was born. At the centre of this split was the concern that the Free Church was sliding into liberalism. Seenan reported that Donald MacLeod’s enemies were vexed by his move away from conservatism. He had his defenders, with one parishioner quoted as saying:

this is about the sober-suited dog collar brigade and pious old women being unable to accept change. The church has led total repression on the Western Isles for as long as anyone can remember, and these ministers don't like that their grip is being loosened (*The Guardian*, 22nd January 2000)

This quote recalled Ryrie’s proposal that constant conflict had left an impression that ‘contemporary Protestantism is irrevocably divided between repressive, patriarchal dinosaurs and wild freewheeling libertines’ (2017, p. 457).

Following the split, a court case ensued over church property as the dissenting ministers refused to give up their churches and manses. The Free Church (Continuing) raised the action at the Court of Session, arguing that they held to the true doctrine of the faith and were being denied the right to the fundamental principle of continued protest. The Court of Session in 2005 dismissed the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)’s claim.[[47]](#footnote-47) The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) has thirty-two churches in Scotland, the majority of which are to be found in the Gàidhealtachd; the nine Lowland churches are all situated in the west of Scotland. Interestingly, there is a church in London and six in America, all of which are in the southern states.[[48]](#footnote-48)

**2.3 The History of Scottish Football**

Football is Scotland’s most popular sport, with spectator numbers, per capita, attending the top league matches being ‘the highest in Europe’ (Bradley 2021, p.1). Football has been played in Scotland since medieval times. It makes an appearance in Lindsay’s *The Thrie Estaitis*, portrayed as both, a failing for a member of the clergy, and a virtue for the hero character.

Thocht I preach not, I can play at the caiche[[49]](#footnote-49)

I wait there is nocht anr amang yow all

Mair ferilie can play at the fut-ball;

(1989, p.122 v.3340)

This section examines the history of the Scottish League with reference to cultural identity, be that British, Scottish, or Gaelic. It also scrutinises bigotry in the game and the specific problems found between the fans of the Old Firm.[[50]](#footnote-50) An important aspect of this thesis is an understanding of the role football plays in the social and religious spheres of the participants. I would not have gained access to the non-religious participants without my connections to Glasgow Rangers F.C. Sectarianism is rooted on the football terraces and strengthened in the Gàidhealtchd through a lack of religious diversity and doctrine.

**2.3.a Bigotry in the Beautiful Game**

Bigotry in Scotland takes the form of sectarianism. In an attempt to combat this blot on Scottish football, the Scottish government passed The Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act in 2012— the only country in the world to pass an act prohibiting sectarian language at, or around, a football stadium.[[51]](#footnote-51) The bigotry found in Scottish football has its roots in history. Songs and chants refer to William Wallace, King William of Orange and the Irish Famine. Bradley made an important point on the historical narrative when he wrote:

memories based on readings of history are contestable socially constructed terrain, particularly in terms of what is remembered, what is forgotten or consciously discarded (2013, p. 69)

Bradley (2021) has added to his narrative, arguing that although memory can be contested, it is fundamental to the construction of socio-cultural and political identities. When it comes to football, he states that ‘fan’s memories and identities are not produced in sporting isolation’ (2021, p. 2.), history, culture, and politics all bear influence. With the Old Firm, one can add religion.

My earlier MA research had demonstrated that religious authority had a role to play in both the religious and secular spheres of the Gàidhealtachd. This is not the case nationally where religions have lost their institutional influence. Scotland has a total separation of church and state. No Presbyterian churches are ruled by the monarch nor do any of the clergy have an unelected role in the Scottish government. However, that religion plays no part in Scottish politics is not entirely the case[[52]](#footnote-52). In the past eight years political affiliation has also made its way on to the football terraces. It is important that the links between politics and religious identity in Scotland are noted. Research has shown, Bennie and McAngus (2020); Bonney (2013); Keating (2020); and Webster (2020) that, for many Scots, religious and political affiliation are linked. Bennie and McAngus pointed out that, historically, ‘Labour did well amongst the Irish Catholics…. Conservatives were successful amongst Protestants, in particular those with some link to the Orange Order’ (2020, p. 290). Smith (2020) adds to this topic by arguing that, within Britain, although the majority of evangelicals are conservative when it comes to their own moral behaviours, they have a wide spectrum of opinions on political issues such as the economy or crime and justice. This correlates with my research as one participant is an independent local councillor and another an ex-Labour MP.

Leading up to the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014 the Scottish National Party pursued the support of Catholics (Bennie and McAngus 2020). They also targeted Muslims alongside the traditional Labour supporting working class. This has led to the perception that the Scottish National Party are pro Catholic (Webster 2020). This opinion has been gathering credibility since 2014 and has found its way onto the Scottish football terraces.[[53]](#footnote-53) Interestingly, until recent times, the Scottish National Party[[54]](#footnote-54) had been seen as a Presbyterian Party with its heartlands in the Gàidhealtachd. At this present time those on social media, both pro and anti SNP are making much of this change of religious attachment.

The aforementioned narrative highlights the links between religious identity and political affiliation. Further research is required as Scotland moves forward with elections in 2021 and calls for another Independence referendum. The rise in sectarianism is a concern for the Scottish people, a blight that until recently was on the wane. Additional research is required to gain an understanding of why it is increasing before steps can be taken to tackle it.[[55]](#footnote-55) That much of the literature mentioned is current reveals how much interest there is in the relationship between religion and politics in Scotland. Bradley notes that for the Scottish football clubs ‘virtually all are Scottish-British in origin, and, for many, Protestantism has been a conventional part of their make-up’ (2021, p. 4). It will be interesting to see what effects, if any, today’s links to British - Scottish identity in the footballing world will have on the Scottish cultural landscape as the Scottish political world makes an appearance in the stadiums. Increasingly the Scottish National Party and Independence support can be found on the terraces of Hibs, Celtic and Aberdeen with Union support being strongest amongst the fans of Rangers and Hearts.[[56]](#footnote-56)

**2.3.b The Old Firm**

The city of Glasgow has four clubs that play in the Scottish Leagues. The two main clubs, Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic have historically been associated with Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism respectively. The history of the two clubs with their roots in religious conflict has helped shape the Old Firm into ‘one of the greatest rivalries of the world’ (Bradley 2021, p. 2). Bradley noted that around seventy percent of Scottish football fans gave their support to one of the Old Firm teams (2021). Rangers were founded in 1872 as a football team for the working classes, with Celtic being established 15 years later by an Irish Catholic priest. Initially there was a friendly rivalry which included the other teams, Partick Thistle and Queen’s Park Rangers. That was to change as Irish immigrants, both Catholic and Protestant, moved to the city.

The bitter rivalry between the two teams began early in the twentieth century when the Ulster shipbuilding company, Harland and Wolff, opened a new yard in Glasgow following political instability in Belfast. The opening of this yard, close to Ibrox Stadium, Rangers home ground, saw hundreds of Orangemen*[[57]](#footnote-57)* make the move from Belfast to Glasgow. Harland and Wolff, builders of the *Titanic*, were known to exclude Roman Catholics from their workforce. As Smith pointed out, ‘shortly afterwards the ‘Catholics need not apply’ principles of Harland and Wolff began to be reflected in a Rangers playing squad previously open to all.’ (Smith, *The Scotsman* 1st July 2016).

Throughout my childhood only Protestants played at Ibrox Park. There was not a ‘Catholic only’ policy at Celtic Park, although Protestants were in the minority.[[58]](#footnote-58) I can remember where I was, and what I was doing, when news broke on the 10th of July 1989 that Rangers had signed a Catholic player, Maurice (Mo) Johnstone.[[59]](#footnote-59) The fallout from both sides was immense. Celtic had been about to re-sign Johnstone (a popular ex player) when Rangers offered more money. The following newspaper reports show just how deep feelings were running on both sides:

Scotland was stunned yesterday when Rangers broke their no-Catholic barrier in the most sensational way. Police were called to Ibrox after scuffles broke out when a wreath was laid outside the famous front door with the simple message, “116 years of tradition ended.”

Furious Celtic fans at Parkhead officially registered a "We Hate Mo *Johnstone Celtic Supporters Club.”*

Rangers' signing of Mo Johnston is a brave blow against the bigotry which has besmirched all Scotland's reputation for so long. (McDougal, *The Daily Record* 15th January 2018).

Sadly, the optimism for an end to the sectarian animosity and violence between both sets of fans has not materialised. As recently as April 2019 three Rangers fans were stabbed in a mass brawl prior to the last Old Firm game of that season. Bruce beautifully summed up the difference that the sectarian conflict brings to Scottish football compared to the violent clashes that blighted the English teams at the end of the twentieth century ‘England’s hooligans were modern; Scotland’s refought the Reformation.’ (2017, p. 349).

Historically, sectarianism has its genesis in the Reformation and can be defined as ‘institutionalised and everyday intra-Christian bigotry and prejudice’ (Lindores and Emejulu 2019, p. 239). Sectarianism has remained a blight on both the Old Firm and Glasgow, with it being, as Wilson wrote ‘embedded in the culture’ (2012, p. 210). Lindores and Emejulu noted that ‘[p]roblems with sectarianism are often thought to be located in specific white working-class communities in West Central Scotland’ (p. 41). From the 1970s until the end of the century collections would be taken before and after the game for various paramilitary organisations. The geographical areas that surround both stadiums, and in particular the pubs that are close by, are viewed as no go areas for the rival supporters (Flint 2012).

With sectarianism being perceived as a working class, white male problem, little is said about women. Although more women are attending football matches and there are now professional women’s football teams in Scotland, football remains a male dominated sport. Changes are occurring but these are slow. Any reference to women, following an Old Firm game, places them in the role of homemakers, peacekeepers and victim, a victim of domestic violence (Lindores and Emejulu 2019). The perception of victim can be viewed as having its genesis within hermeneutics where ‘femaleness has been devalued and frequently reduced to the role of victim’ (Gilfillan Upton, 2002, p. 102). However, sectarianism is embedded in the community and family culture with women’s agency in tackling the problem is being overlooked. Brown (2009) wrote of women, traditionally, being the moral guardians of the family, a role he argued had diminished during the 1960s, however:

‘gendered studies of sectarianism illustrate how women are active agents in reproducing and/or challenging sectarianism and demonstrate the importance of private and familial spaces as key sites for the performance of sectarian identities.’ (Lindores and Emejulu 2019, p. 43).

They continue to police the sectarian opinions of the family, maintaining the role of guardian. With women taking their places on the football terraces more research is required on women and sectarianism. Do they perpetuate the problem by silence, or are they beginning to challenge the men that surround them? Their guardianship within the family may be the best way forward in tackling this continuing ‘blight’ in Scotland.

It is hard for the directors of both clubs to tackle the problem as it goes back generations. A problem that Wilson situated in the way the clubs were created and evolved, ‘they developed, at least in size and their relevance, through sectarian division, rather than being the cause of it.’ (2012, p. 214). The anti-sectarian laws and self-policing by the fans are slowly making inroads but perhaps the key may lie with women challenging the sectarian norms that surround Old Firm rivalry.

The question I must address at this point is, why does a community 280 miles away have the world’s largest Rangers Football Club (R.F.C) supporters club? The answer lies in migration. The lairds chose to move south to the cities of Edinburgh and London. Their clansmen moved in search of employment, and this led them to Glasgow and the River Clyde shipyards. As the majority of those who left were Protestant, they found work in Harland and Wolffe and camaraderie in the stands at Ibrox. This allegiance to Rangers was passed back to the island through family ties.

These are a people who identify as Gaelic with a history of being oppressed by both Scottish and British monarchs. I was interested to understand their allegiance to a club with a strong British identity. A part of this is situated in the elements of the historical narrative that the fans chose to celebrate and identify with (Bradley 2013). Much is made of victories against the Irish Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne. Add to this the anti-Catholic rhetoric which remains firm on the island, fostered by the conservative churches.[[60]](#footnote-60) Bruce et al. offer up one more suggestion ‘[a]lthough the core of Free Church people presumably have not changed their theological view that the Pope is the anti-Christ, they no longer express bigoted views or act on them’ (2005, p. 158). However, an Old Firm game offers an opportunity to vocalise these views through songs and chants. The Lewis fan base has a Gaelic-British identity, an identity that is affirmed on the football terraces.

**2.4 Chapter Summary**

The Scottish churches have witnessed much conflict and division throughout their history. Much has centred on doctrinal differences. The Westminster Confession of Faith and its correct interpretation was the cause of much conflict. The Disruption began in the Lowland cities yet grew and thrives to this day in the Gàidhealtachd*,* aided in no small part by the use of Gaelic. Schism has not been confined to the history books but has continued within the conservative churches into this millennium. Conflict over doctrinal differences is ongoing. The new Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland, born out of rupture, is still in its infancy.

From the churches to the football terraces, religion has an impact on the Gàidhelatachd and its people. The Gaelic-British identity of those who live on the island and the anti-Catholic rhetoric are promoted and strengthened by the congregations of the churches and Rangers Football Club. Examining the history of Scotland, it’s churches and its people was an important aspect of my thesis as it formed the foundation on which one can understand the culture and the identity of those who live in the Gàidhealtachd. Historical analysis was a much-needed tool when it came to data analysis for the following three chapters. It granted me a better understanding of the culture and traditions of the Lewis people with which to analyse the data gathered from fieldwork.

**Chapter Three**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

*‘You cannot open a book without learning something’*

*Confucius*

The aim of this literature review is to situate my research in the field of religious studies with specific focus on gender, identity and religiosity. This chapter has reviewed literature which assesses the importance of religious authority. With this in mind, scholarship on the Bible as the ultimate source of religious authority by the conservative Scottish Presbyterian churches will be appraised. Within this denomination, women hold no positions of authority, they are silenced in church by scripture. Yet, my research reveals that women are not necessarily submissive in their religious practices. The manner in which women navigate between the patriarchal church and equality driven secular spheres will be reviewed in Chapter 5. I will also discuss the concept of religious authority, its relationship to patriarchy and its role in maintaining women’s subordination within the church, and why and how, women themselves uphold the patriarchy through asserting forms of social control over other women who transgress. Heterosexual marriage and the family remain central to the doctrine of conservative Presbyterian churches, and so I will critically review scholarship on discourses of the idealised gender roles of the nurturing wife and mother and the protective father. These roles are discussed within the analytical chapters with reference to women’s roles both in the home and in the church. They are also examined in relation to a suicide and shaming; used both to blame the woman and excuse the man for his indiscretion.

A significant amount of existing research on female inequality and religion focused on Islam and Judaism, both in Britain and America. Research into the growth of conservative Christian churches was mainly concentrated on America. This may be driven by the link between the conservative wing of the Republican party and the evangelical churches.[[61]](#footnote-61) Research examining the relationship between religion, politics and identity will be assessed with specific reference to Scotland. This is of relevance as all three are interlinked within Scottish and Gaelic culture. Cultural identity is not unified as Scottish, with this in mind ‘Scottishness’ will be examined with a focus on religiosity.

Müller notes that ‘the term religion has continually been used as a conceptual tool that normalises Christianity as the prototype’ (2020, p. 319). Although this thesis is examining a Christian denomination, I have included literature on conservative Judaism and Islam. To omit these would not only have limited available works but would have restricted analysis of data. This is off specific importance when examining women’s agency and the way they navigate between the patriarchal and equality driven spheres of their lives; there are similarities between conservative religions and denominations.

Throughout this thesis I examine religiosity within the church communities as opposed to religion. This is in relation to worship, doctrinal adherence, and ritual. Holdcroft (2006) and Bergan and McContha (2008) point out that religiosity is not a simple concept to define; much in the way that it is difficult for an agreement to be reached on a definition for religion (Woodhead 2011). One problem is that words such as religiousness, belief and faith are used as replacements, however as Holdcroft is quick to point out these are measurements of religiosity rather than synonyms. Holdcroft begins by looking at the history surrounding the definition of religiosity, with much academic debate taking place in the 1960s. Woodhead (2011) proposed that religion can be defined by situating it as five separate dimensions; culture, identity, relationship, and power. Religiosity can be defined in a similar manner and Holdcroft suggests that these dimensions cover knowledge, faith, and ritual. What is also noted is that it is possible to exemplify one dimension whilst being deficient in the others. A sound religious knowledge does not necessarily equate with a cast-iron belief. For this thesis I have defined religiosity as: faith, knowledge, belief, and practice.

**3.1. Authority**

Authority is important in religion; it is legitimised through doctrine and is at the core of religious adherence. McBride (2016) suggested that the basis for many authoritarian claims, such as women being silent in church, lie in religion, and what makes authority religious is the ‘resort to the supernatural or ultimate meaning’ (2016, p. 413). Hervieu-Léger pointed out that ‘there is no religion without the authority of a tradition evoked’ (2000, p. 76). The historical foundations of religious tradition in the Gàidhealtachd are explained in Chapter 2, and it is important to recognise that these religious traditions continue to be evoked in the twenty-first century.

McBride (2016) verified the importance of religious authority by examining it through the lens of rational choice theory. This theory asserts that people make rational choices to ensure outcomes to decisions meet with their personal objectives and are aligned to their self-interests (Segre 2014). I have chosen to use rational choice theory as it enabled me to examine the way the participants make use of the knowledge they have when making decisions on religious belief and practice. Rational choice theory is recognised as contested concept and subject to subsequent nuanced debate. Scholtz suggests that rational choice theory is:

‘both the most systematic and the most contested. Rational choice theory lacks a ‘classical’ foundation but offers a clear internal theory structure’ (2015, p. 587).

A key critique of this theory is that the researcher can only presume that the individual has made choices rationally. Rationality assumes a considered approach, with choice referencing an understanding by an individual of the outcomes of actions and the alternatives available to them (Scholtz 2015). One can never really know what the decision was based on, what drove the individual to make the choices they did. Even if an explanation is offered, the researcher can never be sure of rationality. It is a hypothesis that cannot be tested. Williams makes an interesting proposition; if one accepts the notion of rationality then it becomes specific to that participant, to that individual. The researcher is then making it ‘culturally specific and imbued with particular and often ‘local’ meaning’ (2014, p. 286). If using rational choice theory then the researcher must accept that choices made are not universal but ‘exist often quite widely across time and place’ (2014, p. 286). Given the same information individual choices can differ between genders, age groups, social class and geographical setting. This is of particular relevance when researching religious belief and practice (Wuthnow 2020). For those in the conservative Presbyterian churches who consider self-denial as a route to salvation then it is rational to choose to belong.

Although this theory has been used within the field of sociology of religion by researchers such as Bruce (1999) and McMullin (2010), McBride proposed that the specific aspect of religious authority had been neglected. He offered two ways in which religious authority can relate to rational choice; firstly, by linking authority to collective construction of religious groups, and secondly by relating authority to strictness. McBride drew on the work of other academics such as Iannaccone (1994) and Stark and Fink (2000) and observed that authority is at the core of successful social coordination. Iannaccone (1994) suggests that strictness is aligned to successful coordination, the stricter the group the more engaged and committed people become. Stark and Fink also posit strictness with strength; in reference to church numbers ‘growth is concentrated in the higher tension sector’ (2000, p. 217). Through the establishment of rules, there is an evolving shared expectation, and this is fundamental for successful group coherence.

Iannaccone (1994) examined the correlation between strictness, by this he is referring to doctrinal adherence, and religiosity. He noted that whilst membership to the more liberal churches is in decline, the opposite is occurring within the more conservative denominations. Rose (2009) added to the suggestion that strictness enhances attendance. She discussed the importance of fitting in and not looking out of place, ‘where worship is highly ritualised…. there are strong codes of behaviour or even dress’ (2009, p. 35). People know what is expected of them and that brings reassurance. The increase in numbers joining or attending conservative religions has continued to rise into the twenty first century (Iannaccone 1994; Brierley 2017). A recent critique by Müller noted that research into secularisation ‘fails to account for significant religious transformations, for example the rise of very strongly committed or strictly observant religions’ (2020, p. 318). A review of literature concerning secularisation will be undertaken later in this chapter, with a focus on gender.

Iannaccone proposed that the conservative churches have a strictness to them which benefits them in three ways, ‘they raise overall levels of commitment; they increase average rates of participation, and they enhance the net benefits of membership’ (1994, p. 1183). Interestingly, when a new member joins a group things do not necessarily change. There is no new understanding to be established. A new member is aware of the goals and benefits and joins at no expense to the existing members. However, without cost do we expose the group to free rider problems? Segre concurs with Iannaccone in that by adding costs and penalties or by giving rewards we counteract these problems; people consider the costs and rewards and act rationally ‘[f]or those who take part in a cooperative game, the common good is the reward they obtain thanks to their cooperation’ (Segre 2014, p. 285). What is also significant is that when one increases the prohibition of certain actions this can lead to an increase in observance (Iannaccone 1994). The continued observance of Sabbatarianism, temperance and the banning of gambling have been shown to have a positive effect on the conservative Presbyterian churches in both compliance and financial support as well as having an impact on health (Chaplin 2010).

McBride’s proposal positioned religious authority as a social phenomenon rather than a psychological or theological one. This correlated with the works of Iannaccone (1994) and Hervieu-Léger (2000). One limitation is that much of the aforementioned literature is at least ten years old and, whilst it still carries weight, this thesis will re-examine religious authority in present times. My research will demonstrate that religious authority remains crucial when it comes to group and individual commitment within this rural island community. I was interested in the manner in which McBride positioned authority as collective coordination and drew parallels with Blumer’s (1969) work on symbolic interactionism. Actions have reactions and can be interpreted both individually and in a group. For successful coordination to take place McBride proposed that one examined coordinating interactions through game theory. I was attracted by this approach, although I am aware that is not usually utilised in the field of sociology of religion. This theory examines the ways in which people interact to bring about group unity, this involves compromise alongside communal belief. Game theory has, in McBride’s opinion, ‘taught us many lessons about how groups can confront free-rider problems and how individuals and groups can resolve them (2016, p. 413). Whilst that may hold true, within the conservative Presbyterian churches there appears little compromise that can be made by the church group without schism, any compromise must come from the individual.

McBride highlighted the difficulty groups have in managing doctrine and practice. This is evident from the many schisms that have occurred within the Scottish Presbyterian churches. For any group to exist and flourish there must be unity. As societies evolve and views change, issues must be confronted, and an agreement reached. Game theory places at the heart of successful group coordination a commonality of belief and knowledge. As Segre notes ‘[t]his shared belief becomes a common or public good for them’ (2014, p. 284). It benefits the whole community. Anyone who joins the group makes their decision based on their knowledge of the beliefs the group holds.

Unity is derived from and strengthened by common belief and knowledge, which then helps groups manage doctrine and practice in an everchanging world. In turn, doctrine and practice provide common knowledge and belief which then aids the group as they manage further changes. This lies at the core of the conservative Presbyterian communities in this research. Stark and Finke (2000) also highlighted the importance of doctrine and noted ‘from the start, Christianity had doctrines appropriate for an effective structure of authority’ (2000, p. 34). In many denominations it is their doctrine that sets out the protocols for succession when it comes to the head of the church. (Stark and Finke 2000). However, for the Presbyterian churches under examination in this research, it is doctrine itself that holds the authority. For conservative Presbyterians doctrine differs from protocol as interpretation situates doctrine as Devine with protocol being human. This is a crucial difference as the perceived correct interpretation of doctrine has been at the centre of church conflict. A commonality of belief and knowledge cannot lead to successful coordination on their own. Authority is a requirement when planning religious or social activities, whether that be allocating funds or when deciding on a new focus, be that congregational or outreach. Conservative Presbyterian churches are strengthened in group unity as a result of their focus on doctrinal authority; there is no dilution of scriptural edicts caused by human interpretation. The accepted interpretations of the word of God are definitive.

The importance of religious authority can be discerned when one examines church attendance numbers and the decline in those identifying as Christian. As those in religious authority are witnessing a reduction in the extent to which their authority has legitimacy, there is a correlation in the decreasing relevance the church holds in British society. This can be demonstrated by examining the data from both national and church censuses (see Chapter 6, section 2). McBride (2016) and Iannaccone (1994) both suggest that where church authority is at an intensive level, decline occurs at much slower rate and, in some cases, there has been an increase in membership (Brierley 2017). Where there is liberalism with fewer authoritarian rules there is also pluralism and an increase in those offering little, or no, support to the group. Bruce (1999) also referred to the importance of authority and suggested that larger denominations, such as the Church of Scotland, have high levels of self-regard alongside high levels of tolerance. This leads to a level of liberalism but can also bring with it a degree of laxity. This can only occur when authority is challenged or disregarded. Bruce’s (1999) study does not discuss the smaller Presbyterian denominations, which, I would argue, do not disregard nor challenge authority as they are conservative in their doctrinal adherence.

This is not a problem specific to Scotland. Norman (2002) has argued that removing religious authority and adding individual choice has led to a feeling of discontent in the Church of England. Norman maintained that this happens when there is no ‘coherent Doctrine of the Church’ (2002, p. 97). Remove absolute religious authority, add to that a ‘pick and mix’ approach to religiosity, and people will choose the religious belief and practice that best suits them. This may lead to a reduction in numbers as people may choose to believe without belonging (Davie 1990) or convert to a different faith. Norman argued that the Church of England has become ‘a willing partner in its internal secularisation’ (2002, p. 101). A limitation of Norman’s work was that it did not consider the effect of cultural identity on religiosity. Cultural identity is important for this thesis as the conservative churches of the Gàidhealtachd owe much to the traditional patriarchal clan system that governed the Highlands and Islands of Scotland; without the clan chiefs’ patronage, the Reformation would not have been as successful.

Bearing in mind that authority is crucial, Hervieu-Léger (2000) took a different approach when looking for a solution in stemming the decline in the churches. She proposed that religious institutions must adapt their systems of authority if they are stem the decline in congregational numbers. She suggested that churches change the focus from religious belief and practice being perceived as sacred, to one where they are viewed as ‘ethnocultural heritage’ (2000, p.168). This shifts the narrative of authority as being prescribed by the church, to one where individuals regard their decision to adhere to authority as an individual choice. Yet, as Norman (2002) argued, this may quicken the decline. Belief and adherence now become subjective and individualistic. However, this appears only to be true of Christianity. Hervieu-Léger was at pains to point out that both Islam and Judaism place an emphasis on ‘fulfilment of observances as a criterion of religious belief’ (2000, p. 170). As the focus of Christianity has shifted from institutional to personal faith it may be observed as unstable. McMullin wrote about the changes religious groups were making to increase their relevance in the twenty-first century:

‘[r]eligious leaders and religious groups are not ignorant of the societal changes that have taken place; they not only seek to respond to those changes that have taken place, but they seek to influence those changes and they seek to change themselves’ (2010, p.6).

As will be discussed in the analytical chapters of this thesis, liberal changes appear to align with McBride (2016), Iannaccone (1994) and Norman (2002), who suggest that removing religious authority conveys a negative effect on religiosity. In an effort to maintain congregational numbers in a pluralistic world, churches have compromised, and ecumenical worship has become prevalent. By removing authority from the church, they offer belief without reference to tradition and tradition without reference to belief.

There was also the suggestion that ensuring the observance of prescribed behaviours is easier within small remote communities (Iannaccone 1994). In larger communities, private activities are harder to police as people can be more anonymous. Small remote communities are also more likely to be homogenous which according to Laniel (2014) can increase social conformity. However, in present times, with the advent of the internet and social media, within smaller communities, policing of prescribed behaviours is also becoming harder. It is easy to legislate a ban on purchasing a printed newspaper, but almost impossible to enforce that ban when newspapers can be viewed online in the privacy of the home (Segre 2014). Iannaccone suggested that individuals may turn to ‘self-enforcement’ (1994, p. 1188) but admitted that for some an activity is made more attractive if it is illicit. As will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 the perceived infringements of religious codes of practice, are quickly and socially put down within a community defined by religious homogeneity. The adherence to Sabbatarianism by the majority of the community, religious and non-religious alike, is an example of culture acting as a defense for religion.

According to the literature reviewed, religious authority is crucial when it comes to securing and maintaining unity within religious groups. Yet the role that tradition and identity play in religiosity and links to authority are not addressed in the above studies. This thesis will examine the impact authority, tradition and identity have on religious belief and practice as, in my opinion, they are interlinked.

**3.2. The Bible**

Throughout my research for this thesis, the importance of the Bible, both within church doctrine and for personal use was apparent. One area of interest for this research were the differing ways individuals both used and understood the Bible, and the way, for them, it retained relevance therefore a hermeneutical approach was critical. This is not a theological research project, but theology is important for those under investigation within the church communities and, as such, will be explored in the analytical chapters. Authority is essential for successful coordination and the ultimate source of authority for conservative Presbyterian churches, is the Bible. Strhan suggested that people continue to look ‘for an authoritative revelatory voice that speaks outside of time and establishes a referential unity’ (Strhan 2015, p. 115). For the participants in this research the Bible remains a relevant and significant facet of their lives.

The importance of the Bible in Presbyterianism can be traced back to the Reformation. There was, as discussed in Chapter 2, an interdependency between the Bible and the spreading of the Reformed message. The Bible was used to educate, to teach literacy, to preserve the Gaelic language. The Reformation situated authority in the scriptures rather than priests and the hierarchy of the church. It was authority which ensured that the Bible was the guide that warranted correct adherence of religious belief and practice. The work of, among others, Bruce (1999) and Barton (2019) explain the role of the Bible in the genesis of conservative Presbyterianism in the Gàidhealtachd. These works reveal the ways in which conservative religious belief and practice were, from the outset, a critical characteristic of the Reformed message. Luther himself was not in favour of religious freedom and proposed there could not be ‘absolute freedom because no one can be free from the obligations of truth’ (Bruce 1999, p. 3): truth that could be found only in the scriptures. Barton (2019) suggested that the imminence of Biblical authority can be found in the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, strongly arguing that ‘the biblical text itself was the only authority in matters of faith and that its meaning in that context was entirely lucid’ (2019, p. 396). Hundreds of years later this belief holds true in conservative Scottish Presbyterianism, which holds that ‘[t]he Bible is the fully inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, and therefore the only supreme rule for faith and life’[[62]](#footnote-62) (fpchurch.org.uk 2020) the Bible alone, for those in the conservative church communities, holds supreme authority.

The continued adherence to scriptural doctrine, such as women being silent in church and the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest, is not without its problems. Barton pointed out that ‘[o]ne of the difficulties in seeing the Bible as doctrinally authoritative, let alone divinely inspired, arises from its textual uncertainty’ (2019, p. 479). Interpretation of the Bible falls to human judgement. Yet, handing the final decision to individuals leaves the Bible and its authority open to (mis)interpretation. Loveday (2016) suggested that it was the way in which the scriptures were written that caused the inconsistencies. He wrote ‘[t]he texts we now use, initially written between 70 and 110 AD, were all changed, updated, added to, revised and rewritten - not to mention copied, with all the errors that introduces’ (2016, p. 142). He added that the early writers of the scriptures did not necessarily see their work as hallowed. Inconsistencies aside, Croatto (1987) made a valid point when he wrote ‘texts do have an essential, unchangeable meaning, but they always construct meaning in context’ (1987, p. 86). Croatto’s view helps to understand why the Bible remains critical in the lives of the church communities in this research; meaning is constructed in the context of their lives, with an emphasis on literalism.

Melanchthon (2005) writes of the Bible as an instrument of oppression. Her work examines Christian women in India with reference to the way in which Biblical authority has been used as a tool to control women both within the church and the wider community. She points out that even though ‘the Christian scriptures reflect women’s strengths as well as their subordination’ (2005, p. 212) reading and interpretation has found success in making sure women are ‘put in place’ (2005, p.212). Melanchthon also points out that the scriptures are not infallible. They were written, as noted, in a period that was dominated by men; hence it was men who fashioned the scriptures and men, who over the centuries, interpreted them. One further consideration is that women are a minority group within the scriptures (Gross 2002; Reuther 2002; Schüssler Fiorenza 2006; Connolly 2018). Yet women are not without censure when it comes to positioning gender inequality as doctrine:

It has been proven that the oppressed often internalize the ideals and values of the oppressor, and women are much more apt to do this because of their belief in scripture as the divine word (Melanchthon 2005, p. 212).

Women are given a pathway between the patriarchal and equality driven spheres of their lives, paved by the scriptures. By understanding that many conservative religious women adhere to the edicts of the Bible through choice, analysis of agency can obtain a new focus, one where the emphasis is on women’s autonomy not their subordination.

Gilfillan Upton writes that a majority of feminist exegesis ‘take as their point of departure a critique of patriarchy’ (2002 p. 99) where all texts are typified, from writing to preaching, as patriarchal authority. Michelle Connolly’s (2018) work examined the Gospel of Saint Mark. Although she is only scrutinising one Gospel her findings, and their reference to gender inequality, make interesting reading:

The first, most obvious, reductive strategy of the Gospel of Mark, that marginalises women, is the way stories about them are plotted in the large structure of the Gospel of Mark. (2018, p. 88)

Connolly points out that women in the first part of Mark’s Gospel were all given a familial role, they are all named by their relationship to men: wife, mother, sister, whereas those in the second section are all named by their function, such as slave or anointer. She makes a compelling point that women in this Gospel do not own their own identity, they are not portrayed as individuals but simply as appendages to the men around them. They are rarely given a voice; not merely silent but silenced. When women do talk, especially between themselves, they bring with them chaos and the consequences which follow have a negative impact on the men that surround them. The conversation in Mark 6:22-25 between Herodias and her daughter, Salome, ends in the killing of John the Baptist.

A second theme of this Gospel is that of women having ‘a remarkably high incidence of susceptibility to disorder’ (2018, p. 112). Women are portrayed as having an inherent weakness that leaves them disposed to disruptive behaviours; a weakness, which it appears, can be traced back to Eve. I find myself at odds with Connelly’s stance. Many of the women are nameless yet so too are most of men who hold no position of stature. The women who are named in the Gospel of Saint Mark held positions of authority through the class structure. I argue that bias in this Gospel is not solely gender specific but contains a bias of class. My argument is enhanced by Melanchthon’s (2005) view that the Bible does not only discuss women in terms of their subordination and inferiority to men but does make some reference to their authority. Gilfillan Upton also notes that the texts are guilty of ‘taking little notice of the poor, illiterate, the disenfranchised’ (2002, p. 99). Ethnicity, class, and gender shape the narrative perspectives of the scriptures. Herodias and Salome are central characters and have a degree of power. It was of no consequence that Herod was King, it was the women in this story who held the ultimate power, the power over the life and death of John the Baptist. The power to have Herod do as they asked, the inference being that women are dangerous to men and men are powerless to refuse their demands thus cannot be held responsible for their actions. Men are handed a defence.

The Bible was written during periods of bias in a civilisation that ‘idealised men and scorned women’ (Croatto, 1997, p.82). I propose that it is the way the Bible is interpreted, not its authoritarian position that defines women’s place, as Pfisterer Darr wrote ‘[t]he meaning of any literary work depends not only upon what the text brings to its readers, but also upon what the readers bring to the text’ (2006, p. 127). There is limited recent scholarship which examines the way women read and interpret the Bible. One relevant work is by Sharon Jagger (2019). Jagger proposed to her research participants (female members of the Anglican clergy) that, when reading the Bible, they substitute male language for female or gender-neutral terminology. Many of them found this difficult and some were unable to contemplate doing so. Jagger offers one suggestion as to why many of her participants continue to use male language. She writes that, perhaps, the reluctancy was ‘the associations with a political feminist agenda are on some level creating a distaste for language activism.’ (2019, p.222). Nyhagen and Halsaa also note that feminism is a contested term and ‘may intuitively be associated with negative images and stereotypes’ (2016, p. 188). I was interested in Jagger’s proposal; I consider that she offers a method of re-interpretation which can increase women’s agency within the constraints of patriarchal churches. I offer that one can be both a feminist and a Christian and that aversion for any feminist agendas may come from the patriarchal notion of what a Christian woman is or should be. Since the ultimate authority is the Bible it appears women are often averse to feminist theology, adverse to reinterpreting the scriptures with a gender equality perspective. Adverse to, what they may perceive, as an alteration of God’s statutes.

The conflict some Christian women may have with taking a feminist theological stance is not a recent phenomenon. Schüssler Fiorenza suggested that feminists do not look to modern interpretations. They start with the interpretations they already have but with the goal to ‘inspire biblical readers for engaging in the struggle to transform internalised cultural-religious kyriocentric mindsets and socio-political kyriarchal structures of domination’ (2006, p. 86). If read critically the Bible can be a tool that helps women find agency within the constraints of patriarchal Presbyterianism as they interpret the scripture for themselves.

The use of Bible study as part of a religious education was relevant to my thesis as research has shown that ‘[i]f read critically the Bible can be a resource in the struggles for emancipation and liberation’ (Schüllser Fiorenza 2006, p.84). This has also been found to be the case in other conservative religions. Joly and Wadi (2017) argue that ‘ultimately Western discourses end up reinforcing the view that Muslim women are hidden from the public eye, that they are submissive and subjugated’ (2017, p. 2). One way in which Muslim women can become empowered is through religious education. Through education Muslim women did not see Islam as the reason behind women’s oppression they viewed it as cultural (2017, p. 185). This is also noted by Nyhagen (2019) and Mir (2019) ‘a woman who reads the Quran soon learns that her subjugation and oppression is a man-made construct, very much against the law of Allah and his prophet’ (Mir 2019, p. 163). Religious education is a founding aspect of Scottish Presbyterianism yet the women in my research still saw the reason behind their lack of authority in the church as being doctrinal. Literacy was used to spread the Reformed message; all who can read the Bible can understand the decrees of God. Sunday School, family and intergenerational worship and Bible study play a large role in the life of the Free Church of Scotland communities. For the conservative church communities in the Gàidhealtachd religious education is reinforcing the patriarchal aspect of church governance yet this can still be viewed as giving women a degree of autonomy as they use their religious knowledge and interpretation to justify gender roles.

The theologian and critic of Evangelical theology Peter Enns takes an opposing stance over reading the Bible critically and in our own voice, considering it in today’s epoch. He argued that when making decisions one must remember ‘we are not free to make a Bible in our own image. What the Bible looks like is God’s call, not ours’ (2019, p. 232). However, this assumes that the Bible holds ‘objective truth’, yet people have always made the Bible in their own image. Although his opinion did not sit comfortably with me it cannot be discounted when it comes to this research. As I considered that Enns is not alone in his opinion, I was able to better understand the ways in which the participants understood and complied to the scriptures and their statutes. Enns did not use participants in his book, he wrote it as a personal narrative and was selective in his scriptural choices. Even though this book is not a research piece of literature I stand by my decision to include it as it gave me an insight into the ways in which individuals read and interpret the scriptures. My research expands on Enns narrative by analysing the perspectives of others. It acknowledges that they are also selective when it comes to their scriptural reading. What they take as factual truth and what they chose to ignore is relevant.

The Bible is not only used as a source of authority it is what many of the participants turned to in times of crisis or uncertainty. The world today can appear unsettled, and, for many people, this flux brings insecurity and, at times, fear. The remote communities of the Gàidhealtachd are not exempt from these changes nor these unpredictable times.[[63]](#footnote-63) As Enns suggested, the Bible can be ‘the go-to sourcebook for spiritual comfort, guidance and insight’ (2019, p. 3). However, Croatto argued the Bible ‘speaks as a text - not as a generic exhortation to spur our decision making’ (1987, p. ix). To gain a better understanding of the ways in which people make sense of the scriptures and relate them to their own lives I was drawn to Ryrie’s (2017) work on the history of Protestantism. Different Protestant denominations use different versions of the Bible, which leads to variations in both text (due to translation) and interpretation. For conservative Scottish Presbyterians their faith is formed around the King James Bible. In Ryrie’s opinion this version is a ‘literary masterpiece’ (2017, p. 463). However, he points out what he believes to be a serious flaw in that ‘it renders the Bible’s exuberant mixture of literary styles and voices into the same magnificent register, making it easier to mistake “the Bible” for a single voice’ (2017, p. 464). What was evident from my analysis was that this does not appear to be problematic on Lewis. For the participants, although the Bible was written by many hands, its words are from one source: God. Understanding this stance alongside Strhan’s view that ‘God’s voice still speaks in the Bible’ (2015, p. 117) was fundamental for my analysis. For the participants, it appears that confusion and contradiction are limited if the Bible is read in only one voice, not a cacophony of voices.

**3.3. Cultural Identity**

**3.3.a Fishing for Souls**

The difficulties in defining a broad-spectrum Scottish cultural identity were highlighted by Sutherland when he wrote ‘[s]tudents of Scotland have the difficult task of attempting to understand the identities of a population increasingly divided by values and beliefs’ (2019, p. 49). His work reveals a cultural identity that is divided and defined by differences in language, contested historical narratives and, importantly, religious affiliation. Although an increasingly secular society, Scotland and her people have long been, and continue to be, associated with religion (Sutherland 2019). Bruce wrote ‘Scots have a reputation for being more than usually religious, but stereotypes outlive their realities as much as they exaggerate them’ (2017, p. 349). These stereotypes range from the pious men in black of the conservative Gàidhealtachd churches to the sectarian football fans of the Old Firm, stereotypes that continue to outlive and exaggerate their realities.

Religion matters in the Gàidhealtachd and, as such, has been explored by researchers in other fields. Chaplin (2010) devoted a full chapter of his thesis to the health and well-being of islanders living in a Stornoway social housing estate, to religious belief and practice. He wrote of the importance of religion to social cohesion, and the positive effects it had on the health of many within the conservative church communities. Another study which had many similarities to my research was a PhD thesis *Fishing for Souls, Faith and Community in a Moray Fishing Village.* (Burchill 2008).Burchill carried out an ethnographic study of religion and community in Gamrie, a small village on the northeast of Scotland with a close kin and friendship network. The focus of her research was the continued relevance of religion in the community. This remote village had high numbers in attendance at worship, with many attending the conservative Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. This is a village where people are Sabbatarians and ‘Christianity claims a central place in the day-to-day life of individuals, families and the faith community as a whole’ (2008, p. 55). Burchill proposed that the churches remained successful due to the nature of the community, and their adherence to conservative doctrine (Burchill 2008). She also argued that religion remained relevant to counteract social change.

It must be noted that Burchill did not examine female inequality and made little reference to authority, although the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster does not allow the ordination of female clergy. This work does look at the effect tradition, both cultural and familial brings to religious belief and practice within this small community. Burchill recognised that the history of Scotland and its churches were fundamental in gaining an understanding of the community at the time of research. She also discussed the importance of the nineteenth century evangelical revivals within the Gàidhealtachd. For the villagers of Gamrie, these occurred at a time of great financial insecurity and unemployment due to a poor herring fishing season. This ‘predisposed the fishermen to revival because religion offered hope and consolation’ (2008, p. 109). Burchill noted that the revivals remained relevant in the village as they continued to strengthen and uphold evangelical conviction. [[64]](#footnote-64)

The church communities on Lewis and in Gamrie follow a cultural religion as opposed to a civil one. The difference between the two is that civil religion ‘seeks to encompass different faiths, while cultural religion is characterized by a privileged relationship with a single denomination’ (Laniel 2016, p. 383). I would add to this description a religious tradition which has roots in the cultural history of the community. As has been discussed, Lewis is predominantly Presbyterian with a history that goes back to the Reformation. Religious belief and practice on the island bear the characteristics of an historic cultural religion. A religiosity which affects those who live and visit the island, be they religious or not.

**3.3.b. Political Influence**

McMullin (2010) noted that Hervieu-Léger discussed ‘the ideal-typical extremes of religious response to the political but she did not discuss the political response to the religious’ (2010, p.8). He argued that there are examples of such responses in Western countries with Scotland being one such nation. In her examination of the religious response to the political, Hervieu-Léger gave the example of the Catholic church’s response to the political situation in Poland in the late 1980s. She wrote that Polish Catholicism ‘turned out to be the best of battering rams in attacking the Marxist fortress’ (2000, p. 114). I have used education as an example when examining the political response to the religious. Scotland, by law, must provide state run Catholic schools. Over the years much debate has taken place over the segregation of children from the age of five years on religious grounds. In 2004 the first shared campus school was opened in Dalkeith on the outskirts of Edinburgh. This new campus houses two secondary schools, one non-denominational, the other Catholic. However, there have been reports of ‘conflict and criticism over separate playgrounds’ (Flint 2012, p. 513). Although facilities are shared, contact between the students is minimal. The Scottish government planned for further campus schools to be built throughout Scotland. In 2004 the BBC reported that ‘the future of the campuses was thrown into disarray when the Right Rev Joseph Devine, Bishop of Motherwell, said the church could not go ahead with the proposal.’ (BBC 2004). Fourteen years later the debate continued:

‘[t]he diocese also called for children to be segregated when joint campuses are built. "Some of these difficulties could be mitigated by the provision of totally separate entrances to the two schools rather than, as has been the case up until now, a common entrance hall leading to two separate wings," it said.’ (*National Secular Society,* May 17th, 2018)

The Scottish National Party have turned out to be the best defenders of the Catholic citadel. The continuation of segregation in schools has ramifications beyond the boundaries of religion. Flint (2012) wrote ‘[t]here are continuing debates in the United Kingdom and many other nations about the relationship between faith schools and national identity, social cohesion and urban segregation’ (2012, p. 507). In Scotland faith schools influence all three social entities.

In urban areas the education of children in Catholic and non-denominational schools has led to an ‘othering’ on both sides. Catholic schools can be viewed as a diasporic space and one where an Irish Catholic identity is reinforced (Flint 2012). In rural areas, such as Lewis, schools are all non-denominational. However, due to schools being affiliated to Presbyterian churches there is the perception that far from being non-denominational they hold ‘a significant Protestant or, more accurately, Church of Scotland, identity that informed spatial and embodied practices’ (Flint 2012, p. 512). During religious festivals, such as Easter or Harvest Thanksgiving, children of other faiths may, if their parents ask, be excused attendance. This can act, as Flint noted ‘as an exclusionary signifier of Protestant identity’ (2012, p. 512) ‘othering’ the children who do not identify as Scottish Protestant. Although this thesis does not examine the ‘othering’ of children in school settings it was nevertheless important that I examined literature surrounding the issue as religion is an identity marker in Scotland, especially on the West coast. This aspect of identity is intensified in the school playgrounds of Scotland.

**3.3.c ‘Scottishness’ and Religion**

Religion continues to play a significant part in the lives of the Gaels, and this sets them apart from the rest of their Scottish peers. Scotland may now be a ‘smaller place’ thanks to better transport links, yet many urban Scots will have more interaction with ‘their Muslim or Sikh neighbours than with the Free Presbyterians of Lewis’ (Sutherland 2019, p.51). The perceptions some of the Lowlanders hold of their Gaelic kinsfolk has been summed it up thus:

‘[m]inority Christian communities could, with little difficulty, be pressed into the same stereotype. The Highlands and Islands were either ‘the last stronghold of the pure gospel’ (as a Lewisman put it) or a grim Puritan wasteland where nothing moved on a Sunday, but their eccentricity was distinctly Scottish’ (Bruce 2017, p. 349).

The pews of the Lowlands may be emptier than those in the Gàidhealtachd, but the Scottish people do share some common traits; not least that religion has played a part in their education. Research has shown that church attendance is falling in Britain as a whole. It may be falling at a slower rate in Scotland, but it is falling, nevertheless (Brierley 2017). Davie (1994) proposed there were variances between the home nations in the ways that churches and Christianity are perceived. This is, in part, due to the way the national churches are construed. Religion has always been regarded as a cultural entity in Scotland. The Scottish Church was one of the few things to remain untouched by the Union of Scotland and England in 1707. It was this link between religion and a Scottish cultural identity that Bruce described when he wrote of the church being ‘a cornerstone of Scottishness’ (1995, p. 46). Yet, as has been discussed in the history chapter, ‘Scottishness’ and what that entails differs from the towns and villages of Gàidhealtachd to the cities and towns of the Lowlands.

Religion in Scotland is ‘greatly situational’ (Sutherland 2019, p.51). Davie (1994) also pointed out Scottish regional differences and suggested that the higher rates of belonging in Scotland may be, ‘skewed by the high rates of attendance in the Highlands and Islands (traditional rural areas) and by the considerable Catholic presence on the West coast’ (1994, p. 95). It was to the West of Scotland towns that many Irish immigrants moved to in the early twentieth century. It was here that the large shipbuilding areas on the River Clyde offered employment. However, many of the shipyards did not employ Catholics, with the result, that the many Irish immigrants who settled in these areas were predominantly Protestant, not Catholic.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Sutherland (2019) argues that religion and cultural identity are completely idiosyncratic. I find this suggestion problematic. In Scotland, religious and cultural identities are interwoven, a relationship that has its roots in history and the Reformation and continues today despite growing secularisation. As noted in the previous chapter these identities can also be found on the terraces of the football stadiums. There are distinct differences in religious affiliation between the East and West coasts as well as between the Lowlands and Highlands. These differences have an historical footing and are rooted in cultural identity. Interestingly, at the time of writing this chapter, Britain has left the European Union. The Scottish people voted overwhelmingly to remain a part of the European community going against the British national trend. In 1994 Davie noted that the Scottish Church had stronger links to European Presbyterianism than the English Church, ‘Scottish Calvinism has a Continental home in Geneva’ (1994, p. 96). She made an interesting suggestion that perhaps this pull towards a European identity is more to do with a push away from an identity with England. Davie proposed ‘the religious factor can and does, operate to reinforce this Europeanise’ (1994, p. 96). This opinion may be more relevant in 2020 than at the time of Davie’s writing. Indy Ref. 2[[66]](#footnote-66) is a popular battle cry as Scotland heads towards Scottish Parliament elections in 2021. It will be interesting to see if recent perceptions that the Scottish National Party are now aligned to the Catholic church will affect their numbers in Holyrood.[[67]](#footnote-67)

**3.4. Religion as a Chain of Memory**

Hervieu-Léger’s book *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (2000) examined, amongst other themes, religious belief, and practice as a family tradition, one that is passed down through the generations. Her account of memory is focused on group memory and the continuation of tradition from a Christian perspective. For Hervieu-Léger, religion is not defined by what one believes but by way one believes, as a result ritual is viewed as carrying more weight than faith. Throughout the book tradition and memory are interlinked with tradition being perceived as the foundation of Christian memory.

This book is significant to my research as the church communities on Lewis use intergenerational worship, both at church and at home. Through ritual and religious education, the older generations pass on religious knowledge to the children and the chain of memory continues. There are, however, limitations with the concept of religion being passed down as a memory, although it holds relevance for research into the communities on Lewis it can appear outdated when one considers the rest of British society. Religion as a chain of memory does not bring much weight to bear in a society which continues to witness the decline of the majority of its churches (Brierley 2017). Hervieu-Léger’s central thematic proposal is that it is through tradition and memory that one is socialised and as such becomes a member of a community. She argues that modernity itself has created a paradox. As many Western countries growing increasingly secular modernity has also created a need for religion. However, what happens when modernity breaks the chain of religious memory? Needs must surely go unmet.

A more nuanced debate looks at the importance of childhood socialisation. Stolz refers to the concept and points out the important role parents have in the process (2020). For Stoltz religiosity is not simply passed down through the generations by repetition of ritual. He highlights that over the past twenty years research has shown that parental socialisation to be ‘the single most important predictor of adult religiosity’ (2020, p. 8). However, he adds that other factors come into play. First, religiosity is also linked to the ‘national religious context’ (2020, p. 8). Despite parental input if a country is more secular than religious then religiosity falls. Second, decline is also linked to children’s opposition to religiosity. Peer pressure and a multitude of available additional activities have much to do with children resisting religion, with many then choosing the secular activities. Stolz is quick to point out that on many occasions the parents give in to their children’s choices despite their own preferences. Parents may pass down their religious traditions and beliefs but if the child is unreceptive the memory may go unheeded. Hervieu-Léger’s view of ritual being of paramount importance does not hold fast when one considers the external pressures exerted on children from their peers and wider society.

Stolz’s (2020) views correlate with the earlier work of Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016). When examining the religious identities and practices of women in Spain, Norway, and the United Kingdom they discovered that participants would talk of the importance of being raised in a religious family, the traditions and beliefs that were passed on to them through family bonds (2016). Importantly, they also noted that, although parental input was of fundamental importance it did not fully explain why religiosity continued, for some, into adulthood. For children and adolescents rituals and attendance were routine, a habit maintained by parental influence and socialisation, yet by adulthood this had manifested into a personal belief, becoming a part of the women’s identities. Religiosity may begin as a chain of memory, but it becomes, for some, ‘a root identity that permeates all aspects of life’ (2016, p. 113). Without a personal faith religiosity may remain a force of habit. Religion as a chain of memory may sow the seeds but belief is a fundamental requirement for a continuing religiosity.

These more recent literatures by Nyhagen and Halsaa and Stolz’s place an emphasis on socialisation but do not look at the effect on subsequent generations when ritual carries more weight than belief. I was left questioning what then was passed on to the next generation? If a parent has no faith and is simply participating in religiosity as a habitual ritual, is ritual as a chain of memory passed on or do the children, through socialisation, inherit religion as a chain of memory from the wider church community? This is a question that requires further research.

Hervieu-Léger points out that, when it comes to memory, be these good or traumatic, we all remember differently and sift through the past dismissing that which doesn’t fit with our narrative. To combat this ambiguity religion is reaffirmed through the continued repetition of ritual, ‘it is the recognised ability to expound the true memory of the group that constitutes the core of religious power’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000, p. 126). Ritual in these situations becomes more significant than faith. Wuthnow (2020) describes religion in these circumstances as holding an emotional authority, one that is prescribed and ordered through ritual and observance. Religious rituals, such as baptism or weddings[[68]](#footnote-68), have not changed over the years and this evokes memories for both the individual and the group, strengthening the chain. For the Lewis church communities, the baptism of an infant is the start of a long relationship with that community, ‘where the child can grow’ (Ward 1999, p.300). At the opposite end of the life spectrum, the rituals surrounding death and funerals also work to strengthen the chain.[[69]](#footnote-69) Rose wrote that ‘[a]nother powerful influence that brings people to church is personal crisis – bereavement’ (2009, p. 17). Religion has historically been ‘among the first responders’ (Wuthnow 2020, p. 127) acting as a comfort in times of emotional vulnerability. Religious rituals are situated to offer comfort and guidance in times of need.

Laniel added to this dialogue when he noted that, although regular congregational numbers continue to decline, numbers ‘opting for the rites for a birth, wedding or death has largely remained constant in Europe’ (2016, p. 374). In times of joy and grief many turn to the church. Religious memories underline joyfulness and bring comfort to those in distress. (Hervieu Léger 2000; Laniel 2016; Granqvist 2020). It is the repetition of ritual that reinforces the memory and social solidarity of the group. When it comes to the aforementioned rituals surrounding birth, marriage and death these memories are evoked for all who partake in them, be they religious or not. This occurrence highlights that religion is being ‘used independently from faith’ (Laniel 2016, p. 374). Laniel brings to the academic discussion that Christianity is becoming more embedded in culture and tradition (Laniel 2016). The rituals surrounding joy and grief have blurred the boundaries between what is a cultural tradition and what is religious. These blurring of boundaries affords Christian rituals a memory and meaning beyond religion.

McBride concurs with Hervieu-Léger (2000) that public rituals bring forth shared experience alongside shared knowledge and thus a chain of memory which aids with successful coordination. The repetition of action and language used within public rituals are directly linked to authority. Many Christian denominations have specific ritualistic ceremonies when people take office; be that the ordination of a vicar or the becoming of a Presbyterian elder. Such ceremonies take place in front of congregations, consequently those who are witnesses are acknowledging the authoritative role bestowed upon that person. McBride also suggests that a public ritual such as baptism ‘serves to reinforce the authority of the group norms’ (McBride 2016, p. 429); this correlates with Bruce (1999) in identifying religion as a warrantor for group identity. On Lewis any authoritative role, be that religious or political, is held by men, thus the community is in acceptance of, and reinforcing, this traditional patriarchal system.

Bruce (1999) proposed that a decline in religious attendance could be a symptom of a loss of community, its memories, and traditions. He made a compelling point when he wrote ‘religion has its source and draws strength from the community’ (Bruce 1999, p. 11). This is paramount when one is examining religious communities such as those found on Lewis and is correlated by Hervieu-Léger ‘[i]n the world of tradition, religion is the code of meaning that establishes and expresses social continuity’ (2000, p. 84). This can be seen in many aspects of life on Lewis; from Sabbatarianism to the rituals surrounding death.[[70]](#footnote-70) Stoltz does not talk of it in terms of coding but as a ‘symbolic language’ (2020, p. 9). It is through this shared language that people interact, gain knowledge, and make choices. Religion, tradition, and a shared symbolic language strengthens the Lewis communities, the religious and the non-religious alike.

The nature of change is very much at the forefront of inquiry. Within the academic field there is copious debate on issues such as the decline in church membership, the ageing demographic of congregations and the inability to attract younger members (Brierley 2017; Brown 2006; Davie 1994; Day 2017). One cannot fail to acknowledge that numbers at church worship continue to fall whilst those identifying as atheist / agnostic continue to rise (Brierley 2017). Some churches no longer have Sunday schools as parents are not bringing their children to church. The chain of memory appears broken. However, if religiosity, and / or ritual, are passed down by memory to subsequent generations this may help to ensure it retains a place within families and subsequently within the community. It is through the passing down of memories that symbolic language is required. The sharing of this language is what helps maintain the religious group and it is therefore important that this is passed on, especially to children. The importance of intergenerational worship has been assessed by Roberto (2012) and has been found to have positive implications beyond worship as people across the generations from a social bond.

The need to believe, to have a faith, has not vanished in today’s world, in fact, Hervieu-Léger argued that the uncertainties brought about by changes in society have strengthened the need for belief. One need only watch a news programme following a tragedy, or atrocity, to see firsthand the increase in spirituality and religious ritual. People can be observed leaving flowers and cards with messages which mention angels and heaven at the site. Vigils are held and are sometimes led by a member of the clergy. This is very much a recent phenomenon in Britain.[[71]](#footnote-71) In these moments of sorrow people want answers and when they do not, or cannot, find them in conventional ways they turn to religion and spirituality to gain a modicum of comfort. Hervieu-Léger captures this sentiment with a quote from Reinhold Niebuhr: ‘religion is always a citadel of hope built at the edge of despair’ (Niebuhr, quoted in Hervieu-Léger 2000, p. 34). The transformation of religious practice, through rituals following a tragedy, ensure it remains a component of modern society.

Much of what one does, from making a cup of tea to writing a PhD thesis, starts with belief and requires memory alongside imagination. It is from this standpoint that Hervieu-Léger posited religious belief and practice, ‘the production, management and distribution of the particular form of believing which draws its legitimacy from reference to a tradition.’ (2000, p. 101). This does not mean that individuals hold only one specific form of believing. On Lewis, many continue to abide by the dogma of conservative Presbyterianism, but that does not rule out that, for some, there may be a belief in the spiritual benefits of meditation. They may attend a patriarchal Presbyterian Church but that does not rule out a belief in women’s equality in other areas of their lives. Other beliefs can, and do, coexist, and may prove to be advantageous. (Hervieu-Léger 2000).

Brown (2006) positions the decline in religious belief and practice to the 1950s, as more and more people owned cars, shops and leisure facilities began to open on the Sabbath, church attendance became an afterthought. There was more choice for activities therefore, religion, for many, took a backseat. Stolz’s agrees with Brown and notes that ‘once a host of secular alternatives… are in place, it is very difficult to return to an all-encompassing religious language that (almost) everyone uses’ (2020, p. 9). Brown’s work aligns with my research as Sabbatarianism reduces islanders’ choices on the Sabbath and church numbers remain high in comparison to those on the mainland. What is also of interest is that much of what Brown writes about from the 1950s, shops and leisure facilities closed, fewer cars on the road alongside the traditional role of women as stay at home mothers, continues to be upheld on the island. Yet, Brown does not compare the present-day situation in the Gàidhealtachd with that of a bygone era. Hervieu-Léger (2000) argues that the fragmentation of memory is irreversible. If we take Brown’s (2006) suggestion that the cracks in religious memory have their roots in the 1950s we are now witnessing second and third generation children who have grown up with no religious memory; be that a memory of belief or ritual.

**3.5. Gender Inequality**

**3.5.a Secularisation**

I begin this section with an examination of literature which concerns secularisation with specific reference to gender. Secularisation has been a central component of the sociology of religion research field since the mid twentieth century. However, as Woodhead argues ‘the classical theories of secularisation which still dominate the discipline have not been interrogated by a gendered approach’ (2005, p.1). Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016) have also noted the gender-blind approach to secularisation and the general scholastic conclusion that women are more religious than men. The use of a gender-blind approach within the research area of gender and religion has not only disregarded the differences in gender but has situated the male point of view as standard (Müller, 2020).

I have reviewed literature by Brown (2006, 2009); Woodhead (2005, 2008); Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016); Jagger (2019); Müller (2020) and Stolz (2020). Müller proposes that examining research from a feminist stance is a necessary requirement to enable a better understanding of the way different genders are both affected by and influence secularisation. Within other academic disciplines, feminist research has shown that gender hierarchies continue to exert influence on the social, economic, and religious areas of life (Müller 2020).

Brown (2006; 2009) and Woodhead (2005, 2008) write about secularisation as being influenced by the role of women, and in particular the role of mothers. Woodhead (2005) argues that although men are disregarding religiosity, and increasing the secularisation process, continued adherence by women is slowing it down (2005). Brown (2009) disputes this by placing women at center of a “speeding up” of secularisation, a process that he situates in the 1960s and the advent of the contraceptive pill. Brown describes this period as a time off ‘[f]emale rebellion – of body, sexuality, and above all the decay of religious marriage’ (2009, p.179). Brown also notes that it was women who were ‘the heart of family piety’ (2009, p. 179) and would often attend church on behalf of the family. By the latter half of the twentieth century ‘women secularized the construction of their identity and the churches started to lose them’ (2009, p.192). With women no longer in attendance, family religiosity would surely be lost through the fracture of the chain of memory. Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016) point out that Brown’s proposal is problematic, and for many reasons. The first is that he is predominantly discussing Christianity in Britain and that within this genre he is focusing on church attendance and therefore not engaging with religiosity and the lived religious experiences of women. A second problem is that his work neglects the role women have affected religious reform from the within church, concentrating instead on the reasons behind women leaving.

Woodhead (2008) argues that women are more religious than men as they outnumber men ‘by a ratio of 3:2 in most churches in both Europe and America.’ (2008, p.188). The statistic may be correct, but there are two reasons to be considered as to why it may occur. The first is that women have a longer life expectancy. Although Woodhead notes that the average church goer is an older woman, she does not equate this with their perceived increased religiosity. The second reason is that for some women, church becomes a place of rest. Many women are working yet still perform much of the care giving at home. Add to that the increasing demands on the ‘baby boomers’ who find themselves the ‘sandwich generation’, caring for children, grandchildren and elderly parents (Nyhagen and Halsaa 2016; Day 2017). It is therefore difficult to ascertain if women are more religious than men or if circumstance just gives that perception.

Jagger adds to the debate on gender and secularisation and suggests that churches are gendered because inside the building ‘areas are identified as feminine and masculine’ (2019, p. 136). In her research she found that men, when asked to consider attending an Anglican church would often recoil and spoke about the feminine aspects of the space, such as the flowers and the pews being occupied mainly by women. For Jagger this finding was unexpected as the majority of churches, she argues ‘have such a patriarchal structure’ (2019, p. 137). In the Free Church of Scotland, the altar is a male domain, and women are unable to occupy this space during worship. It is important to recognise that women are allowed into this space at other times, to arrange the flowers or to clean, undertaking the role of ‘holy dusters’ (Petre cited in Jagger, 2019, p. 137). The gender-neutral aspect of the pews offers one reason as to why the conservative churches of the Gàidhealtachd continue to have large congregational numbers in attendance at worship. If the pews are perceived as being a feminine space this may be one factor that accounts for the higher rate of secularisation amongst men. One interesting question is how will theses spaces be viewed over time as women themselves are leaving the church? (Jagger 2019). It may lead to more churches closing and their buildings becoming recommissioned as secular public spaces.

None of the above literature acknowledge that conservative religions are declining at a much slower rate than the more liberal denominations (Brierley (b) 2017 p. 3). This may have a direct link with the idealised role of wife and mother, intergenerational worship, or the continued observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest. Religion is more than just attendance and more research is required into the lived religious lives of intergenerational women in both the public and private spheres of their lives.

**3.5.b Power and Authority**

I examine power in relation to gender inequality as women’s empowerment and agency within conservative religions owes much to the use of power. Before continuing with this section, it is important that I lay down the parameters with which I understood, and used, the key terms of power, authority, patriarchy, gender, and agency.

My research explored the intersections between power and authority. As I analysed the interview transcripts, I began to understand them as having separate meanings. Authority is held by all men[[72]](#footnote-72) in the congregation, affording them the right to give orders, make decisions, cast judgement, and hand out punishment. It does not afford them the right to direct or influence the behaviour of others, nor determine a course of events; power has the capacity to do all of that (Schüllser Fiorenza 2006). Schüller Fiorenza’s differentiation between power and authority relates with Berger’s (1967) definition of power. Berger discusses power within society arguing that in this setting power is coercive as it ‘directs, sanctions, controls and punishes individual conduct’ (1967, p. 11). That the men hold power afforded to them by their positions of authority is not denied, however, I suggest that the women also hold some power, albeit within a female sphere. In this manner women are empowered as they also have the ability to direct, sanction, control and punish. This can be self-empowerment or, as will be discussed, can be used against others they see as behaving out with the edicts of their religion.

I was drawn to Johnson’s work (2005) where he used the image of a tree to describe patriarchy and the ways in which individuals relate to, challenge, and uphold it. The roots of the tree represent the core of patriarchy and because roots run deep, it is difficult to challenge them. The trunk represents social institutions such as the church. The branches are our social groups as well as our families. These are the ways in which we interact with the trunk and ultimately the roots. The leaves are us as individuals, nourished by the roots. Johnstone wrote:

We can’t avoid participating in patriarchy. It was handed to us the moment we came into the world. But we can choose how to participate in it. In this sense we are far more than passive leaves on a tree, for human beings think and feel and most importantly, make choices through which we either perpetuate or challenge the status quo (2005, p. 19).

Walby (1990) situates patriarchy in six structures - production, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. She puts forward that ‘at the most abstract level it exists as a system of social relations’ (1990, p. 20). Day (2017) added religion and the family to this list, this correlates with Wood’s (2019) proposal that, as an ideology, patriarchy has been upheld by religion. Walby argues that the six structures that she has identified all exist within the family location and as such family is not a separate construct; likewise, religion is situated within cultural institutions. Whilst I agree that all of the six structures can be found within the family setting, I judge that religion is more than just an cultural institution. My analysis shows that religion is not just contained in formal worship but is part of family life, through intergenerational family worship and Bible study.

What is of significance to my research is the move Walby suggests patriarchy has made from the private to the public sphere. As women are no longer ‘restricted to the domestic hearth’ (1990, p. 201) patriarchal constraints have become more visible in the workplace as women become employed out with the home. There is not a clear separation between patriarchy and gender equality for the participants of my research, although women are not prevented from working, the stay-at-home mother is an idealised role. As will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, conservative Presbyterianism places an emphasis on traditional heterosexual marriage and gender specific roles of the nurturing wife and mother with the man being perceived as the protector and head of the family. I examine the ways in which women navigate between the patriarchal religious sphere and equality driven social sphere of their lives. Patriarchy, within the religious structure is situated in both the private and public domains as worship, both formal and familial are led by men. Yet there is a blurring of boundaries as women use religious compensation and household duties are divided between the sexes.

Müller highlights the importance of religious authority within patriarchal societies. He argues that religious authorities ‘are among the principal factors upholding patriarchal power structures across the globe’ (2020, p. 320). That patriarchy is a thread that runs through religion is added to be Walby when she notes ‘[p]atriarchal beliefs and practices are at the core of all world religions’ (1990, p.101). All ideologies have, in Walby’s opinion, the subordination of women by men but I argue that male domination within conservative religions is also upheld by women, legitimised by the conservative interpretation of the scriptures.

Gender is not a dichotomy. Schudson et al. (2019) examined how individuals have used and understood the six gender/ sex categories (man, woman, feminine, masculine, female, and male). Their results showed that understandings are less binary and more fluid, with greater diversity in the ways in contemporary understanding. However, for the purposes of this research I will use gender to mean man and woman. I have chosen to do so for two reasons, firstly, this is how the participants used the term. Secondly, as noted, gender is now recognised as being more fluid, Beattie (2005) advised that ‘[i]n refereeing, primarily to women rather than to gender or feminism I am addressing issues that are particular to women in terms of the concerns and ethos’ (2005, p. 66). This understanding of gender specific terminology was relevant to my research.

I will also be examining gender relations using Connell and Messerschmidt’s work on hegemonic masculinities. They point out that ‘gender is always relational’ (2005, p. 848) and gender patterns are socially defined in relation to masculinity or femininity. What I judge to be of particular interest to my research is the concept of ‘locally specific constructions of hegemonic masculinity’ (2005, p. 848)[[73]](#footnote-73) and the way women can construct and maintain masculine hierarchies of power. It is important to recognise that within each locality there can be multiple overlapping hegemonic masculinities and wider gender dynamics must be considered. The sharing of parenting duties, a woman with a role of authority in the workplace exist alongside the patriarchal gendered structure of the church. Yet while not all men are overtly alpha male they could be considered as being complicit participants of the patriarchy:

‘It was in relation to this group, and to compliance among heterosexual women, that the concept of hegemony was most powerful. Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasions. (2005, p. 832).

As will be discussed in Chapter 5 the importance placed on heterosexual marriage helps position hegemonic masculinities as a crucial aspect in the formation of a masculine identity for young boys. The role that women play in the construction of masculine identities must not be overlooked. A Patriarchal construct within a society ‘is open to challenge and requires considerable effort to maintain’ (2005, p. 844) this would not be possible without the consensus of most of the church community. This may begin with the divine edits laid down in scripture, but it can only continue with the endorsement of men and women.

Agency is, as Avishai notes ‘a key concept in social thought’ (2016, p. 265). This concept was initially grounded on men’s experiences as opposed to the experiences of women. However, as Avishai argues that:

[t]o see agency, one does not need to identify empowerment, subversion, or rational strategising. It is suffice to note how members of conservative religions “do- observe, perform - religion, wherever that may lead. (2008 429).

This encompasses free will, autonomy, choice, and independence. Within conservative religions it may be viewed that, due to the patriarchal hierarchy that women are denied agency. Avishai (2008, 20016) and Leamaster and Bautista (2018) give compelling arguments as to why this is not the case. Women’s lives within conservative patriarchal religions are not necessarily dichotomous (Mahmood, 2012). Women’s agency is more nuanced than that of men. One must consider that belonging to the Free Church of Scotland does not necessarily mean that a woman has become passive or submissive, it can be interpreted as a form of agency ‘agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms’ (Mahmood 20012, p. 15). Avishai examines the ways in which practice conservative religious rituals in a manner which grants them agency. Leamster and Bautista (2018) argue that one way in which Mormon women gain agency is by meeting and embracing religious gender norms. Both works examine how women inhabit the patriarchal norms and hence gain agency.

Irby (2014) discusses gender roles with reference to religion. She does so, not within the confines of the church but from the inner sanctum of the religious family. Irby, in her work into the gendered roles with conservative religious relationships, refers to ‘men’s authority’ (2014, p. 1269). Irby does not define authority in this work. However, what Irby is referring to is men’s power. As with Schüllser Fiorenza’s (2006) view of power and authority, they do not, within conservative Presbyterian church communities, have the right to give orders, make decisions, cast judgement, or hand out punishment. They are however, in some relationships, able to direct or influence the behaviour of others. The power that women have, within conservative religions, is limited, used in certain situations by using specific methods. Leamaster and Bautista (2018) argue that:

‘a woman who lives up to the gendered cultural expectations of her religion is using her agency because she is achieving a status that she desires (observant, religious woman), even if these actions seem to restrict her’ (2018, p.143).

As will be discussed, shaming is a power tool which is used, frequently obtaining the desired results.

Woodhead (2011) noted that, much as McBride (2016) did with authority, power has been neglected within the sphere of religion. Woodhead argues that this has been caused by secularisation theories and consequently religion has lost its social power. One major consideration for this thesis was the view that religious power offered both worldly and otherworldly compensation. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, a fear of hell affects the choices people make when it comes to church membership. However, it was Woodhead’s view of power at the micro level that bears relevance for gender (in)equality ‘[a]t the micro-level, the concept draws attention to religion as a form of personal and inter-personal empowerment or disempowerment’ (2011, p. 137).

As there are no comparable studies on conservative Scottish Presbyterian Churches I was drawn to literature from other Christian denominations and world religions, for example Day’s (2017) book *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen.* Day devised the term “Generation A Women” to describe the ‘predecessors and often mothers, of the post-war generation, the ‘baby boomers’” (2018, p. 4). Although my research covered a wider age demographic her work bore relevance with reference to male authority in the Church and the ways in which women gain autonomy. Of relevance were the specific gendered roles that women hold within church communities.

Avishai wrote of the ways in which women within conservative religions ‘do religion’ in a secular world (Avishai 2008). This, and her (2014) work on gender and agency, focused on American Orthodox Jewish women and resonated with my research. I examined the strategies Avishai proposed women use as a way of navigating their patriarchal religious world. In both works Avishai writes of the assumptions made by those outside of conservative religions into the subordination of women. Yet, what she highlights is that women do have a degree of agency. She argues against some feminist scholars who are of the notion that women are ‘bound by dominant ideological constructs of femininity’ (2014, p. 265). These only serve to highlight the perceptions of the dutiful daughter, the good wife and mother, that many conservative religions, including the conservative Scottish Presbyterian denominations, project.

Research studies conclude that women gain agency in such religions in a variety of ways. For Avishai there are three strategies that she argues women use, the first is that they undertake partial compliance. Here there is a gap between the edicts laid down by religious law and actual practice. The second strategy is that of strategic compliance; the woman in this situation is using religious compliance for ‘extra religious ends’ (2008, p. 420). Compliance is entangled with rewards and punishments. The final strategy is noncompliance; within conservative religions this could lead to the woman being ostracised or being shamed into using one of the other two strategies.

Avishai’s first strategy correlates with Leamaster and Bautista’s (2018) work on Mormon women. As with the churches on Lewis, The Latter-Day Saints place an emphasis on women being good wives and mothers. In this religion women are encouraged to be stay at home mothers. However, many do work, through choice and / or through financial need. Leamaster and Bautista (2018) suggest that when this occurs, women overcompensate in their religious practice. This was a tactic that I also found when I analysed one participant’s transcript; there was partial compliance with the religious ideal of a stay-at-home mother yet full compliance with the religious ideal of a silent woman in church. Leamaster and Bautista (2018) also noted the use of guilt as a control over women in conservative religions. They argued that ‘religion first induces guilt in women for not meeting gender expectations, and then offers a way to reduce the guilt through religious adherence’ (2018, p. 143). In this situation religious compliance can be viewed as a reward; complete religious compliance removes the guilt of not being a stay-at-home mother.

Brasher (1998) studied women from two fundamentalist Churches in America. Brasher described the religious beliefs of those in her study as being ‘the sacred canopy that covers congregational life’ (1998, p. 11). It is a canopy that shields all those who worship in the Presbyterian Churches. Bounds (2013) also made refence to a sacred canopy. Interestingly she wrote of it also being a shield for the non-religious, during times of crisis and uncertainty:

[R]eligion acts as a “sacred canopy” which provides the foundation of both personal and corporate life, binding and legitimizing the social order, consequently it is essential for the cohesion, and indeed for the survival, of any society (2013, p. 5).

This correlated with Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) view that religion is sought when conventual methods fail to offer comfort. It also connected with Schreiter’s (2014) proposal that religion continues to hold relevance in people’s lives as other ideologies fail to fill the void when religion is removed.

Stolz enhances the proposal of religion adding comfort. He writes of the link between insecurity and increased religiosity, noting that this concept is not a recent one (Weber (1978); Glock et al. (1967); Niebuhr (1957). Stolz notes that research has shown ‘that religion is essentially a human device to tackle societal (sociotropic) and individual (egotropic) risks’ (2020, p. 9). In tackling insecurity, religion reduces anxiety. However, he points out that recent research by Höllinger and Muckenhuber (2019)[[74]](#footnote-74) has shown that although individual insecurity influences religiosity, national insecurity has a far greater impact. Only loss, be that bereavement or materialistic, increases individual religiosity. There is no conclusive answer as to why this might be, but Stolz offers that national insecurity may be a perception, and one that is fostered by parental socialisation.

Shame was an emotion that was apparent during interview transcription, an emotion that was used to regulate behaviour and ensure compliance. Scheff writes that ‘shame is our moral gyroscope’ (2003, p. 18). It is an emotion that not only regulates our future actions but also threatens the social bond of our relationships (Lewis 1971; Scheff 2003). Much is written in other academic fields about women using shaming to control other women they regard as non-compliant with social or gender specific norms (Currie et al. 2007; Kennedy 2018; Morris 1992; Rosenblatt 2013 and Wiseman 2003). Saleem (2019) explains the difference between guilty and shame ‘[g]uilt comes from recognizing one’s own mistake. Shame is heaped upon us by other’ (2019, p. 157). Kennedy’s (2018) book *Eve was Shamed* is situated in the field of law and she highlights the similarities to the way in which shame is used against women in conservative religions. In both the legal and religious spheres women are seen to have contributed to their situations, be that through inappropriate dress in the case of an assault or through not nurturing her husband in the case of a man’s infidelity. I was drawn to her chapter tilted ‘The Good Wife and Mother’ as it resonated with a series of events that impacted on this research.[[75]](#footnote-75) The dual roles of good wives and mothers are idealised in conservative Presbyterianism (Irby 2014). Kennedy uses the example of the case in which the writer and novelist Jeffrey Archer’s wife Mary was portrayed in the court and the media in his 1987 libel case and subsequent 2001 case for perjury. In the first case Mary was portrayed as a good wife of high moral standing, in the subsequent case she had become ‘steely, calculating and manipulative’ (Kennedy 2014, p. 54). Kennedy argues that the image of the good wife is regularly portrayed in court, and as discussed in Chapter 5, is seen as being responsible for her husband’s behaviour. It is the woman who is responsible for the honour and morality of the family. Good mothers are also held up as virtuous in court yet, as Kennedy points out, what defines a good mother is generally ground in middle-class domestic ideology.

Within Islam it is predominantly men who shame women (Ahmed 2019; Saleem 2019). Family honour and morality are also situated at the feet of women. Saleem, in her (2019) essay ‘Shame, Shame, It knows Your Name’, informs us that she is shamed not only by Muslim men but by white men. To the men of the Islamic community, she is not behaving in a culturally appropriate manner and to the white men she is a threat to their perception of British values. Saleem makes an important point when she writes ‘shame is one of the biggest drivers of toxic masculinity’ (2019, p. 147). She goes on to add that this is amongst Muslim men, but I would argue that this can also be applied to men of other faiths and cultures; she was after all the target of vitriol from white, non-Muslim men. Ahmed (2019) also notes that shame is used within the Muslim community to control their children, especially their daughters. On Lewis shame is used, and experienced, mainly by women in much the same way. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, women are shamed by other women when they are perceived to have acted inappropriately. It is used as a control and when recognised it has the effect of maintaining social bonds and when it is overlooked it breaks them. From the beginning of my research I was aware of that shame was used to maintain the Sabbath as a day of rest, shame in this instance was recognised and reinforced the bond.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature search granted me the opportunity to answer the question I was asked when I undertook this research:What will this research add to the academic field? First and foremost, at the core of this thesis is the belief that ‘[t]he religious beliefs and practices of religious people matter’ (McMullin 2010, p. 4). Religion is not ‘a dying remnant of a traditional age’ (McMullin 2010, p. 4). It remains important for the participants in this research and, as such, remains important within the field of sociology of religion. This research is significant in two main areas. The first is that it will be off interest for those studying women’s inequality in conservative religions with specific reference to the manner in which patriarchal authority is upheld by both men and women. Secondly, this research will be of interest to the churches as they look to slow the decline in Christian affiliation and rebuild their relevance in British society. Tradition, both cultural and familial may well hold some of the answers.

At the core of this research is the importance of authority and the way it not only upholds and strengthens religiosity but the role it plays in the lives of those who live and visit the island. That secularisation continues to have an effect on Christianity in the West is not contested but a better understanding on why conservative religions are seeing a decline at a much slower rate than their more liberal counterparts will be analysed with reference to choice and gender. Müller’s three secularisation spaces will be a useful tool for analysis. The links between religion and cultural identity are more apparent in this island community than on the Scottish mainland with the rules surrounding Sabbatarianism now being perceived as a secular tradition as well as a religious one.

The following chapter examines the methodology used for the research process. It begins by setting out my ontological and epistemological stances. I then explain the rationale behind the methodological framework choices before examining deliberations taken before, during and after fieldwork with reference to ethics and data. I will analyse the interview transcripts, fieldwork diary and observations by engaging symbolic interactionism to gain an understanding of how the participants’ social world operates. The choices they make through their understanding of the social and religious worlds they inhabit will be examined by considering authority. Knowledge is acquired through Bible study and intergenerational worship therefore the way in which the scriptures are interpreted, and doctrine passed on from generation to generation will be discussed.

**Chapter Four**

**THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

*“We’re aw Jock Tamson’s bairns”[[76]](#footnote-76)*

This chapter introduces the research methods employed in this thesis. I start by outlining the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that inform the study. My decision to use ethnography as a means of gathering data will also be justified. The choice of a research paradigm is linked closely to research goals. The strengths of the paradigm are reflected in the research design. This chapter outlines the concepts, beliefs and theories which support and inform this research, all of which play a crucial role from the beginning of all research (Mruck and Mey 2019). As this research explores the interaction between culture, religion, tradition and gender I have used an interpretive approach using an interplay between paradigms, Putnam and Banghart (2017) with prominence given to symbolic interactionism. I aim to show that we cannot ‘aw be Jock Tamson’s bairns’ as we are shaped by our environments and experiences. The ways in which we acquire and process knowledge, the ways in which we interact with others all have a part to play in who we are and how we act. I begin by setting out the justification for my choice of methods and explain how my decisions were reached my understanding of the philosophical and theoretical aspects of qualitative research.

**4.1. Ontology**: **Taking a constructivist stance.**

Qualitative research is carried out in a variety of ways and the manner in which researchers choose to undertake it is dependent on how they obtain and understand knowledge. Through understanding of social entities as being either objective (objectivist) or constructed (constructionist), I was able to position my ontological stance. I needed to determine if social entities have a reality which is unconnected to the actions of individuals or if they are constructed by people’s actions. To discover which ontology was best suited to my research I examined the ways in which objectivism and constructivism view organisation and culture, as these are core social science terms (Bryman 2016). This was fundamental in deciding my ontological stance as both organisation and culture are at the heart of this research as I investigated the links between cultural identity, religiosity and the patriarchal stance of the church.

From an objectivist stance, the terms, organisation, and culture, are viewed as perceptible objects. They have rules, a mission statement, a hierarchy (Bryman 2016). An objectivist reality can be viewed as existing independently. Both Carpenter (2013) and Chaplin; (2010) [[77]](#footnote-77) who conducted research on Lewis felt that an objectivist stance limited their analysis when carrying out research on this remote isle. Both rejected objectivism, with Carpenter (2013) proposing that the understanding of, ’a single extant ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ waiting to be discovered’ (2013, p. 65) was just too restrictive. He argued that truth and reality can only be identified and understood through social interaction. For Chaplin (2010), understanding that individuals are social beings and form their views and knowledge through social interaction moved him from an objectivist position to that of a constructionist. We are not ‘aw Jock Tamson’s bairns’ and, with such distinctiveness there cannot be a single truth or reality just waiting to be uncovered.

Constructivism views organisation and culture as involving interaction between individuals and objects and are therefore in a state of flux. Since they are not static, I could only put forward a specific version of social reality in the community (de Sardan 2015). When looking specifically at organisation, those taking a constructivist stance argue that rules are not set in stone but are more a collection of understandings (Bryman 2016). Rules can be changed over time as those involved reach a consensus. Of interest to my research was the way individuals constructed their social reality which may be at variance with the reality constructed within the confines of the church, with particular regard given to views on gender equality and Sabbatarianism.

**4.2. Epistemology: An interpretivist researcher.**

Working from a constructivist stance I used interpretivism as the epistemological viewpoint. I rejected both positivism and critical realism; positivism being too impersonal, whilst critical realism places too much importance on the context of actions, not the actions themselves. The study of societies requires a logic which reflects human distinctiveness and individuality. Interpretivism places an emphasis on understanding human behaviour as opposed to simply explaining it. An interpretative approach considers that reality is socially constructed and as such our understanding stems from the meanings we give to objects, texts, and language, to our actions and interactions.

Social reality has context for each individual and, as such, actions and behaviours carry meaning, which must be interpreted. I wanted to find a way in which to access these meanings and interpret them from the individual’s point of view. By adopting an interpretivist stance, I was duty-bound to analyse the data using a three-step process:

* interpret the situation,
* interpret the subject’s interpretation of the situation
* interpret the reasons why I, the researcher, undertook the research.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Having worked through these stages I could then posit all findings in a social theoretical framework.

For all researchers ‘there is a degree of personal investment in choosing the area of research’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000, p. 13). Putnam and Banghart noted that as researchers bring a degree of bias to the research field and subsequent analysis ‘value free data or complete neutrality does not exist in interpretive work’ (2017, p. 7). With this in mind it is crucial that any preconceived values and bias become a part of the data under analysis. Understanding why one has chosen that area and the possibility of pre-held conceptions must be scrutinised alongside the data to ensure an in-depth analysis.[[79]](#footnote-79) Interpretivism afforded me the best epistemological position to ensure a comprehensive answer to the questions set out at the beginning of this thesis. My epistemological position merits that knowledge is created through interaction, through talking and engaging with the ‘lived, subjective experiences’ of individuals (Stead 2020, p. 27). Adding this to symbolic interactionism and the use of an ethnographic framework enabled these subjective experiences to emerge. My analysis has focused on the experiences of the participants and their interpretation of situations. For example, when one of the participants discusses her public shaming on a social media site, I am not examining the rationale behind the actions, but how Jessica interprets and then acts on them.

**4.3. Interpretative Frameworks**

**4.3.a. Symbolic Interactionism**

When deciding on an interpretive framework I was attracted by Grills view that ‘one of the great pleasures of engaging in symbolic interactionism is sorting out how the social world works’ (2019, p. 615). Grills highlights the differences between those taking a more subjective approach as opposed to an objective stance. He argued that those who favoured objectivism tended to use a quantitative approach and select ‘why questions’ whereas those in the subjective camp ask ‘how questions’ and utilise qualitative data (2019, p. 616). In the main, the questions I asked during analysis were ‘how’ questions. I wanted to understand how the participants’ choices were made and how they understood and made sense of their social world.

Babones (2016) proposed that ‘a defining characteristic of interpretive methodology is the blurring of the boundaries between measurement and modelling …the task of interpretive social science is to surmise what lies unobserved beneath’ (p. 461). To surmise what lies unobserved requires a framework that is grounded in observation. Symbolic interactionism dovetailed with my use of an ethnography framework and allowed me to study what lay beneath and to gain an understanding of how people make sense of their social world through action and interaction. A key part in my decision to make use of symbolic interactionism was Blumer’s proposal that:

symbolic interactionism is a down-to-earth approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct. Its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. It lodges its problems in the natural world, conducts its studies into it, and derives its interpretations from such naturalistic studies (1969, p. 47).

Symbolic interactionism is not without its critics. Since the early 1970s sociologists have perceived it as being impaired, proposing it holds an astructural bias,[[80]](#footnote-80) (McGinty 2016). A main point of contention has been that researchers have not given proper recognition to social organisations and are ignoring social structures such as race, gender and class when analysing social constructions of reality (Walby 1990). McGinty wrote that researchers have been accused of limiting their academic enquiries to ‘those underdogs who are, in one fashion or another, already beaten’ (2016, p. 10). My own research did not examine an already beaten community, it examined a social reality which exists because of the social structures surrounding the participants, with particular reference to gender and identity. As such, it was important that I was mindful of Walby’s argument that symbolic interactionism did not consider ‘systemic power relations’ (1990, p. 115) and thus overlooked gender inequality. To overcome this problem, I examined and analysed my data considering social structures such as patriarchy, culture, and authority. I viewed micro social constructs as being affected and influenced by the ripples emanating from the larger social constructs surrounding knowledge, views, and beliefs.

Puddephatt and Prus (2007) challenged the allegation that symbolic interactionism lacks scientific integrity and structure. They argued that critics have a narrow understanding of this methodology with the result that the critics themselves hold bias. Race, gender, and class are integral to experience and can be acknowledged as such if one places the individual at the center of the research. Grills noted that as people act and interact ‘they create various shared worlds that are situated in the community’ (2019, p. 619). These worlds combine to shape an individual’s identity. There exists an intersubjectivity within the lives of the participants as the indigenous identity of Gàidhealtachd is tied up with race, gender, class, and clan, a family lineage with an emphasis on patriarchy.

I wanted to get close to the community as a means of obtaining significant data. To do so I became a player in that world by submersing myself into the community and undertaking participant observation. This method was demanding and must not be considered a ‘soft option’ (Blumer 1969, p. 40) as it involved constant observation and analysis. This method necessitated ‘intimate familiarity with the sector of life being studied’ (Shibutani 1970, p. vi). This observational method came under criticism from those arguing that it held an astructural bias. It has been argued that symbolic interactionism held no theory on which to ground itself, as the researcher, using observation, went into the field with no preconceived ideas on what would/could occur (Huber 1973).

Huber proposed that symbolic interactionism left researchers running the risk of introducing their own biases as well as bias from those being studied. Yet, as individuals we all bring a degree of bias into research; research is value-laden, containing cultural specificities of both participant and researcher. I was aware, from the beginning, that I too would be observed and that those observing me would have their own preconceptions and bias. Be that because I was a Lowlander, an atheist, or a researcher.

Mruck and Mey (2019) added to the debate writing it was necessary to admit that a researcher brings acquired knowledge into the field. They proposed that researchers are no longer passive observers but that ‘their positioning, beliefs, and values do play a central role in the research process’ (2019, p. 472). This correlates with Letherby’s explanation of the subjective notion of social research ‘[w]hen we enter a field, we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave, we may have mud on our shoes and pollen on our clothes. (2003, p.6). I approached this project with a specific set of experience. I brought to the field my Scottish identity and my atheist views; from my previous research I had a familiarity with the Gàidhealtachd. I tried to limit environmental disturbance and strove to minimize the mud on my shoes from work in the field. This is not a new phenomenon in the field of sociology; Katz-Rothman pointed out ‘[f]rom the start, sociologists studied their own societies and brought their own values’ (2007, p. 12). Add to researcher knowledge an awareness that all research begins with a question has the result that the researcher goes into the field with their eyes wide open. A question posed requires an answer therefore it stands to reason that all social research begins with a hypothesis.

This work is interpretive, with the participants’ narratives located at the heart of analysis. I have used an iterative approach when evaluating the interview transcripts and, as such, have moved back and forward between the interviews, analysis and literature. This is, as Stead notes ‘consistent with the requirements of an interpretive study’ (2020, p. 27). Symbolic interactionism enabled me to interact with those under investigation. It supported my interpretive approach, allowing the actions and reactions of the participants, and myself, to direct the research; from interview to analyse to literature. In using this approach, the interviews led to the research questions. It was from my interactions with the participants that the theme of patriarchal authority came to the fore. I approach this project with a specific set of experiences but, by ensuring I laid down my personal axiological foundations (Carpenter 2010) and examined my own reasons for undertaking the research (Hervieu-Léger 2000), I aimed to bring a degree of objectivity to the field. It would, however, always sit alongside my subjective views and interpretations.

**4.3.b. Paradigm Fluidity**

Grills wrote that ‘the most enduring ethnographically based work is grounded in people’s everyday lives and sheds light on how those within a particular world actually get things done’ (2019, p. 631). Nonetheless, this thesis is not solely developed through the use of symbolic interactionism with other paradigms used to assist with explanation and interpretation within an ethnographic framework. Taking into consideration the limitations identified in symbolic interactionism it was important that I also considered other theories. Putman and Banghart put forward that ‘treating one paradigm in “God-like” terms’ (2017, p. 9) can result in incommensurability. They suggest that one way to avoid such problems is by moving between various paradigms to gain a more rounded interpretative perspective:

[i]n this way, scholars move away from paradigms as grand theories and produce work that helps individuals engage with the corporations at a meaningful level … Engaging in paradigm interplay, then, is not synergistic or simply addictive, it is thoughtful theory consideration. (2017, p. 10).

By situating symbolic interactionism at the centre of my analysis whilst acknowledging that other paradigms strengthen my interpretative framework helps broaden my assessment of data.

Putman and Banghart inform us that hermeneutics is a ‘cornerstone of interpretive work’ (2017, p. 11) and necessitates a degree of reflexivity as one interprets the actions and interactions of those under observation. I considered both Biblical and historical texts as an approach to gaining understanding of the way the participants made sense of their community, both religious and secular. This helped me situate the genesis of patriarchal authority on Lewis. Historical texts reveal the way male authority was grounded in the clan system. It also discloses the way religion became enmeshed in the Gáidhealtachd, with the Bible being used to teach literacy and preserve the Gaelic language. It remains a cornerstone of conservative Presbyterianism.

I was drawn to an intertextuality approach recognising that hermeneutics is more than just the study of texts but is expanded to encompass the relationship between social actions, organisations, and institutional structures (Putman and Banghart 2017). This interpretative methodology adopts a pluralistic outlook where I, the researcher was examining not only the individual but also the community alongside the dynamics, rules and structures that surround it (Cheney 2000). As noted in the previous chapter feminist biblical interpretation is being used to both challenge and uphold Biblical authority. Feminist hermeneutics is defined as ‘a reading of the text in the light of oppressive structures of patriarchal society’ (Tolbert 1983, p.113). Adding this to my interpretive framework afforded an understanding of the way the Bible was used as a tool not only to maintain the patriarchy but also to help women navigate between the patriarchal church and equality driven social spheres of their lives. Feminist hermeneutics is not solely used to gain an understanding of the way women read, interpret, and use the scriptures it also enabled me to acknowledge the manner in which men do the same. Upholding the patriarchy and taking on positions of authority because the Bible has decreed it thus can be perceived as a burden and as such necessitates investigation.

My final theoretical addition was rational choice theory examining the way religious authority is maintained using coordination games. I am aware of the criticisms of rational choice theory, not least the assumption that the decisions and actions of individuals are based on a stable understanding of the rewards their choice brings. It is therefore necessary that I consider, during analysis, that the individual may act for the benefit of the group not as an individualistic advantage. Beckford noted that although rationality is a component of thought and action, so too are ‘wishful thinking, error, inconsistency, delusion, imagination, hope, creativity and fear’ (2002 p. 170). However, he argues that despite these considerations rationality must not be discounted. If used alongside other paradigms it can assist with providing a well-rounded analysis.

**4.3.c. Ethnographic Framework**

As this is qualitative research in an ethnographic framework. I used an array of data collection, these included interviews, observations, textual analysis, both Biblical and historical. I have also utilized some statistical data from National and church censuses. From the beginning of this research project, my aim was to employ an ethnographic methodology using interviews, submersion and observation as means of data collection. Katz-Rothman proposes that the written word is narration, recounted by the author. Remove the author from the text and the account becomes passive. Initially I considered taking an autobiographical approach, as I further investigated this approach, attending seminars and taking part in a university run workshop, I realised that, although this would enable me to situate myself within the research, it placed me at its the center, and this was a position I did not wish to occupy. I rejected a purely autobiographical approach as, although it allowed for an insider / outsider perspective (Stanley 1993), I was not only telling my own story.

I also contemplated using auto-ethnography. Reed-Dannahay (1997) describes three genres of auto-ethnography: native, ethnic, and auto-biographical, with all three linked to the ethnographer’s own cultural identity. My submersion into the community, albeit for relatively short periods of time, alongside my cultural identity as a Scot with a Presbyterian background, and my connections to Glasgow Rangers F.C. enabled me to meet, in various degrees, Anderson’s three conditions for an auto-ethnographer, which are:

* belong to the social world which they are researching
* the use of reflexivity when examining data
* be present in the text

(Anderson 2006)

However, I was unable to justify using this framework as I do not, and have not, lived in the community full time. I do not belong to the Gàidhealtachd, though my Scottish identity shares many of the ethnic characteristics. Reading Goldschmidt’s proposal that ’all ethnography is self-ethnography’ (1976, p. 294) was thatlightbulb moment; ethnography placed me in the research, but as a participant not a main character. My decision was further strengthened when I considered Reed-Danahay’s view that ‘the line between ethnography and auto-ethnography becomes increasingly faint’ (1997, p. 8).

I sought to employ a method that purposefully placed my own narrative into the research. In situating myself in the community, albeit for short periods of time, through social interactions my own biography became part of the bigger picture (Chang 2008). My personal story was important in two ways; first, I used it as a means of establishing a rapport with the participants. This correlated with the principle of symbolic interactionism and the proposal that all individuals self-identify through social interaction, taking on roles depending on the social situation (Shibutani 1970). I was aware, however, that:

‘in social research, the distribution of power is not always tilted in favour of the researcher; oftentimes the participants command greater power over the research process: its progression as well as the amount and quality of data the ethnographer has access to.’ (Mapedzahama and Dune 2017, p.5).

On both my second and third fieldwork visits pre-arranged interviews were cancelled by the participants. On both occasions I used the time to carry out observations in the town. These incidents served to remind me that I my research relied on the understanding and munificence of others. Secondly, my past experiences and knowledge gave me the analytical tools which enabled me to interpret my surroundings and the social interactions taking place, be that at formal worship or sitting in a coffee shop. A large part of my nursing involved listening to people; listening to what was said and to what was omitted. Learning and understanding when to talk and when to remain silent. I considered that these skills are strongly suited to an ethnographic approach.[[81]](#footnote-81)

I also needed to be reflexive in my collection and analysis of data. Reflexivity has become an increasingly significant tool for social researchers (Etherington 2004; Adjepong 2017; Lumsden et al. 2018). It was a practice I wanted to use and develop from the outset as I was aware that my own data, if not checked, could take on a more prominent position. There was also a risk that my chosen methodology may, inadvertently, affect the research. However, I was reassured when I considered Adjepong’s view that ‘[r]eflexivity addresses the assumptions that the researcher might take with them into the field examines how their presence shaped the social setting and consequently avoids producing a flawed sociology’ (2017, p.31). I also took on board Etherington’s proposal that reflexivity operates well alongside a constructive ontology. She suggests that combining the two can help the researcher ‘avoid accusations of solipsism, self-indulgence, navel gazing or narcissism. (2004, p. 31).

Participation in my research study was open to all members of the community over the age of 16 years. A section of this thesis has examined the ways in which women navigate between the patriarchal church community and an equality driven Scottish society. I gave thought to Beattie’s (2005) argument that ‘there is still a tendency by those working in the field of religion and gender to elide their own religious contexts’ (2005, p.65). When carrying out any form of investigation the researcher is asking participants for honesty and transparency. This must be a two-way street. Trust can only be built on integrity and to ignore the researcher’s own views can, as research has shown (Beattie 2005; Jagger 2019) lead to an imbalance of power in the researcher — participant relationship. On a similar vein, ethnography ‘acknowledges and values a researcher’s relationships with others’ (Adams et al 2015, p.1).

At a very early stage in the research process, I was compelled to examine my own religious beliefs. I had to work out how best to recount (or not) these personal beliefs to my participants. My own religious identity is that of, and here I am appropriating Phillip Pullman’s phrase, a “Christian Atheist”.[[82]](#footnote-82) I enjoy church services from the sermons to the hymns and psalms. I enjoy the sense of community and belonging but have no personal faith. I am in agreement with Mountford (2011) that worship and prayer can be beneficial[[83]](#footnote-83) but humanity is ultimately responsible for everything that happens. I had initial concerns that my lack of faith may be a constraint when analysing the actions and interactions of the participants. I was aware of the potential to misinterpret the beliefs of those interviewed, as, during fieldwork, I was both an insider and an outsider in this remote island community.[[84]](#footnote-84) I had taken into consideration Beattie’s suggestion that research in the field of religious studies necessitates an outsider stance to ensure objectivity ‘whatever else the study of religion should be, it should not be religious’ (2005, p. 67). My outsider status afforded me opportunities to observe and be as objective as possible.

My decision is further strengthened when one considers ethnography as a qualitative method that examines ‘particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people’ (Adams et al. 2015, p. 21). Examining particular lives does not, however, exclude examining the rest of the community, as individuals are connected through a common identity (Jaffe 1997; Chang 2008). I concurred with Jaffe’s (1997) view on islanders when she wrote ‘you cannot write the “I” without that “I” being read as the “Isle”, as a true representation of the collective, cultural identity’ (1997, p. 151).[[85]](#footnote-85) Jaffe may have been writing about the people of Corsica but could easily have been writing about the people of Lewis, who as Gaelic people, embody a collective, cultural identity.

Katz-Rothman argued that in our research we give the participants a voice; we describe, quote and analyse but ‘where are we, the researchers in this?’ (2007, p. 12). By bringing to the research my opinions, my bias, my experiences I have ensured that the reader knows where I am in the research. By situating my story at the beginning of this thesis I was able to extract my life experiences and locate them in the research, both during data collection and analysis. As Mruck and Mey noted ‘[a]s researchers are not neutral observers but part of the field, their responses are responses to the performance and narrations of the Other’ (2019, p. 480). The decisions I made, from choosing the topic I wished to research to deciding on my theoretical approach have impacted on this thesis. All choices made were subjective and underpin this work. Taking Katz-Rothman’s lead, I am a woman, a sociologist, a Scot, and an atheist. These facts have a context in my research and by acknowledging them through an ethnographic approach I aim to be a character in my story and an actor in my research (Katz-Rothman 2007). I am not center stage, but I am present.

I decided to enlist a relatively small section of this community as participants who would be interviewed both individually and in small groups. I was drawn to microsociology as it typically uses research methods that involve direct interaction with research participants, one-on-one interviews, ethnographic observation, as well as smaller-scale statistical and historical analyses. However, I did not ignore the rest of the community. When on Lewis, I immersed myself into island life. I rented a small cottage as opposed to living in a hotel, and over time, I became friendly with the owner of the cottage and his wife, as they lived next door. I visited the local shops daily, used a local hairdresser, had a manicure, found a favourite coffee shop, and went running in the grounds of Lews Castle. Undertaking everyday chores in the local area gave me the opportunity to use what Adams et al. refer to as ‘person-cultural entanglements’ (Adams et al. 2015, p. 22) as a means of gathering data from the wider community. It was through chatting to the hairdresser, and subsequently, the owner of a local gift shop, that I first learned of problems at the local secondary school. It was by talking to my neighbours over a cup of tea that I discovered the chain of events that had caused Back Free Church to, first of all, lose its assistant minister and, eventually, Reverend MacLeod. It was also my neighbours, Sandy and Ella, who suggested I approach their church. It was through them that I found, and was welcomed into, Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland, a church with a schismatic beginning.[[86]](#footnote-86)

As a social researcher I am studying the lived experiences of the participants, therefore, it was important that I establish a relationship with each of them. These relationships are based on trust and transparency. As a participant, I was aware that my role would be ‘characterised as that of dual identity’ (Reed-Danahay 1997, p. 3). I was both researcher and participant, both insider and outsider (Blumer 1969; Stanley 1993). I was aware that as a researcher I was also going to be observed and have judgements made about me by those in the community. Understanding this concept was vital for data analysis as I endeavored to be both objective and subjective. Chang interestingly described the dynamic between objectivity and subjectivity as a ‘tug of war’ (2008, p. 45), a conflict that shapes debate surrounding social research that is situated within an ethnographic framework. I consciously chose to place my own ‘personal and subjective interpretation into the research process’ (Chang 2008, p. 45). I was mindful that data collected by observation was open to question as it relied on my interpretation of events. The interviews were transcribed, the information is there in black and white. However, the conversations, before and after taping, often wielded rich data. Writing this up, alongside information from the observations I made, was reliant on my memory and memory is selective, subjective and open to question (Stanley 1993). Ethnography requires external, broad-based data as a measure to both strengthen and validate the internal subjective data (Chang 2008). I have used external data from Scottish government and Scottish church censuses to corroborate my fieldwork data.

**4.4. Entering the Field**

**4.4.a. Ethics**

My data was collected over a period of three years, both on the island and on the Scottish mainland. Ethical clearance was paramount before I could commence fieldwork. After applying to the university’s Ethics Board, I was granted clearance on 26th October 2016. The suicide of a prominent member of the Lewis community had an unforeseen effect on my research. I lost my initial church community and acquired a new one. The suicide also shifted my attention to a more detailed examination of female representation in the church community. My focus was shifted as media reporting, following the suicide, revealed that all the women involved were situated in a position of blame. The participants had made informed consent yet were unaware that the research had changed focus. Mapedzahama and Dune highlighted the concern that the notion of informed consent could be ‘limiting and potentially impinging’ (2017, p.3) on research. However, the question must be asked, how informed can a participant really be?

Taking this into account my main concern was from an ethical standpoint as the majority of those involved in the events surrounding the suicide still live on the island and the title of this research project was changing, I submitted an ethical amendment form to the Ethics Board. On the 13th of January 2020 the Faculty Ethics Chair, having reviewed my amendment form, wrote to inform me that my ethical clearance still applied. I did not need to resubmit an ethics application, and the participants’ consent forms remained valid.[[87]](#footnote-87) My concerns had been based on the emotional aspect of the events surrounding the suicide, and that none of those involved had given permission for information concerning them to be used in this research. However, having consulted literature on covert observation and using information without permission I was reassured when I read ‘[d]ifferent norms apply to public actions than private ones… Where a function is public, researchers can legitimately put themselves in the place of service users’ (Spicker 2011, p. 124). All aspects, discussed in this thesis, of the suicide and events following it, can be found in the public domain.

All participants in this research were guaranteed anonymity as well as confidentiality. I used pseudonyms for all participants bar those whose names can be found in the public domain. The exception includes all the members of the clergy who agreed to participate in this research. These individuals were not anonymised as all their names can be found in the public realm. All transcribed interviews are stored on my computer and can only be accessed using a security password. No transcriptions were printed out. All consent forms are stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home study.

I was drawn to Katz-Rothman’s view that one way in which researchers can strengthen their ethical obligations to their participants is by situating ourselves in the research. In using this methodological tool, we, the researcher, provide ‘an honesty about ourselves: who we are as characters in our own stories and as actors in our own research’ (2007, p. 15). Throughout this research I have been obligated to grant the same ethical considerations to my participants as I have myself. This has bolstered my ethical stance.

**4.4.b. Fieldwork and Data Collection**

Although I was not granted ethical approval until October 2016, I made my first visit to Lewis in August of that year. This was a reconnaissance trip, one where I sought to determine the suitability of the community, as well as the appropriateness of my research within Broadbay. I had an informal meeting with Reverend MacLeod in the new coffee shop in Lews Castle. Establishing a good working relationship with him was of utmost importance as he was the gatekeeper to the church group. Gaining access to this community would have been unfeasible without his understanding and approval, as Chaudhuri notes ‘it can have an effect on the project’s success through the gatekeeper’s own observations on the importance of the research’ (2017, p. 132). That Reverend MacLeod had some questions that he hoped my research would provide answers for, helped strengthen my proposal.

I made three subsequent fieldwork trips to Lewis. Each lasted six days and followed a similar schedule. I submersed myself in island life and by doing so was able to collect data through observation as well as using semi-structured interviews. My fieldwork was not restricted to visits to the island, I also met with members of the community in Glasgow. The Blue Room at Ibrox Football Stadium proved to be an unexpected place to meet potential participants. I also made a trip to Tighnabruaich in Argyllshire. Initially I had planned to use both church communities in a comparison study. It quickly became apparent that this was not going to be feasible. Although both communities are similar demographically, a comparative study would not allow the necessary depth of research in the available timescale, as is fully examined in Chapter 7, section 1. However, I have included some of the data from the interview with Reverend David Mitchell, as well as data acquired from conversations with Reverend Teri Peterson and the Right Reverend Susan Brown. I met Reverend Peterson and the Right Reverend Brown at a commemorative service at my parents’ church in Gourock. All three clergy are ordained Church of Scotland ministers and spoke of their own visions for the future of the Church of Scotland — of all the Scottish Presbyterian denominations, a church that is witnessing the largest decline in congregational numbers.

In line with qualitative research my data was collected using semi-structured interviews, participant and covert observation, and textual analysis (Putman and Banghart (2017). I wanted to use a conversation-based approach when carrying out interviews and, during any observational interactions. Interviewing is, as Gray points out ‘a skill that must be learnt through experience and practice’ (2014, p. 390). Although my years of nursing had given me the necessary practice and experience, it had been many years since conducting my last interview. With this in mind, I attended a university workshop on interview techniques before commencing fieldwork. This workshop helped refresh my interview skills and over the course of the research I improved my technique. It was important to keep the interview process as open as possible, so that participants were not constrained by specific questions being asked which fitted to preordained theoretical constructs.

The recruitment of participants occurred in two ways; those who were adherents or communicants were introduced to me by the ministers of the churches, Reverends MacLeod, and Ferrier, or by church elders. Those I recruited myself came about from chance meetings in the Blue Room at Ibrox or through my affiliation with Glasgow Rangers Football Club. These participants tended to identify as non-religious. The choosing of suitable participants is very important, and I was aware that there was a degree of risk involved in handing this over to others. Blumer noted that:

[o]ne should sedulously seek participants in the sphere of life who are acute observers and who are well informed. One such person is worth a hundred others who are merely unobservant participants (1969, p. 41)

It was my good fortune that all of those involved in this study, recruited by both myself and by others, appeared to be well informed with good observational skills.

The participants covered a wide age demographic, the youngest being seventeen years of age, the oldest seventy-five. However, in terms of class, education, ethnicity, and sexuality, the cohort could not be described as diverse. The participants identified as either adherent, communicant or non-religious, two participants were ordained Free Church of Scotland ministers and as mentioned, three were Church of Scotland clergy. I carried out fifteen interviews, ten were formal and five informal. The formal interviews were taped and transcribed, the informal were not and relied on my memory. Of the ten formal interviews, six were with individual participants, three were with couples, and one with a group of three. Four informal interviews were with a single participant and the fifth with a group of three. The charts below show participant age and religious affiliation with reference to gender.

Chart 3

Chart 4

The interviews were held in coffee shops or in homes, either the participants’ or, on one occasion, the house I had rented. I wanted to have as relaxed an atmosphere as was possible. Before and after taping the formal interviews, I would sit and talk to the participants. This was not only to help build a rapport, but it gave me time to re-explain the purpose of the interview. It also allowed for the research information sheet to be read by the participant(s) and the relevant consent form signed.[[88]](#footnote-88) I adopted a ‘sandwich approach’ when it came to the formal giving of consent. I would chat for a few minutes, give out the necessary paperwork and explain the research once more. After the forms were signed, we would spend a few more minutes chatting informally before switching on the recorder. I used this approach after reading Delamont and Atkinson’s suggestion that acquiring formal consent can:

radically transform emergent (or even established) social relations in the field, by imposing an inappropriate degree of formality on otherwise informal relations that are embedded in the ordinary give-and-take of everyday life (2018, p. 125).

Data acquired from these informal periods was noted in my fieldwork diary.[[89]](#footnote-89) Each interview ran its own course, although I set the tone of the interview by explaining my research and asking the participants to tell me as much or as little as they wished about their lives on the island, past, present, future, with reference to the church. I began each interview in this way as I wanted to cover as much ground as was possible. By giving the participants a focus, the research had a direction from the beginning. It also allowed those being interviewed a degree of choice as each interviewee took a different path. Connie spoke of her family; Donnie spoke of regaining his faith; whilst Angie and Jessica concentrated on the Sabbath.

I had ethical concerns over the use of observation as a means of data collection. With the interviews all participants gave consent, with observation no consent was given as those involved were unaware of their participation. However, observation was an essential tool as it reduced the risk of participant behaviour modification as well as granting me exposure to the same situation as those under observation (Roulet et all 2017; Grix 2010). I was mindful of Blumer’s (1969) proposal that, as an outsider, my experience would be restricted through a lack of familiarity. This was especially evident when I attended the AGM for Tong Mission Hall.[[90]](#footnote-90) This lack of familiarity also brought with it a positive focus. Stanley noted that by undertaking participant observation, I, as the outsider brought to the community ‘a particular kind of knowledge’ (1993, p. 43). Sandy, my neighbour, and landlord in Stornoway, was keen to utilise my knowledge of other church groups to discover if there were new ways to raise church funds. As a Free Church of Scotland church group any form of gambling is not allowed, hence, all fund raising must come from donations, there can be no money raised by using raffles or lotteries.

I became a participant when carrying out observations during worship and fellowship. I must make clear at this juncture that at no point was I being deceptive in my reasons for attendance. However, the lines between overt and covert observation are not clearly defined (Iphofen and Tolich 2018; Spicker 2011). The covert observation I carried out fell into two categories the first being that ‘the observation is fleeting or anonymous’ (Spicker 2011, p. 120). The second is when the researcher ‘attends a public event’ (2011, p. 119). An example of the first occurred when I was sitting in a coffee shop, the second, every time I attended worship. Although, the majority of those present at worship did not know I was carrying out research, if asked at any point about my attendance, I was honest in my answer. To alleviate my ethical concerns, I ensured that all observational data was ring fenced by strict anonymity. I made sure that no individual could be identified by their actions as described in my diary or this thesis.

Deception and anonymity are not the only criticisms levelled at those using covert observation as a methodology (Roulet et al. 2017; Adams et al. 2015; Iphofen and Tolich 2018). It has been argued that as the researcher is directly involved in the actions, they run the risk of losing objectivity. Roulet et al. proposed that by utilising an ethnographic approach, which acknowledges the subjective nature of enquiry, then:

the sense-making processes experienced by the researcher offer important insights that can be considered and accepted as useful subjective accounts rather than biased elements of data (2017, p. 497).

The very notion of the personal interpretation of an experience by the researcher warrants that subjectivity becomes a strength, not a weakness.

As a Lowland Scot, I was always going to have a degree of outsider status. There are many cultural similarities between the Lowlanders and those of the Gàidhealtachd but there are also many differences. One major obstacle was my lack of Gaelic. After one Sunday morning service, I was talking with the Reverend MacLeod when an elderly lady approached. After we were introduced, she spoke solely in Gaelic. This enabled her to speak confidentially to Reverend MacLeod, but it also marked me out as an outsider. Her actions had the effect of ‘othering’ and excluded me from the group:

I was chatting to CI in the carpark when an elderly lady approached, and CI introduced me. She immediately began speaking in Gaelic. I am unsure if she had something personal to say that she did not wish me to hear. No matter her reason I felt awkward. My reaction was to become silent, I felt invisible, and my outsider status was never more apparent to me. When she left CI did not offer an explanation. It was not mentioned at lunch. (Fieldwork Diary, 27th November 2016).

By analysing this extract, I understood my overriding emotions as being embarrassment and shyness, both of which have been identified as originating in a threat to social bonding (Scheff 2003). I was unable to interact in this social situation and my reaction correlates with Scheff’s suggestion that both embarrassment and shyness bring about ‘feelings of rejection or failure and heightened self-consciousness’ (2003, p. 20). For a brief moment I lost my role as a researcher and was placed outside the social world that I had, only moments before, inhabited.

When I attended the Gaelic service Reverend MacLeod introduced each psalm, prayer and the beginning of the sermon in English. He later explained that this was solely for my benefit to enable me to follow the service. This highlighted the change that my presence at worship had inadvertently brought about. Reverend MacLeod altered his behaviour, and this altered the experience for all who attended. It also acted signalled that there was a non-Gaelic speaker in the congregation. My own experience at worship was limited as I could not understand the prayers nor the sermon. I did not experience this service as the others around me did and this placed limits on my observations. I must add at this juncture that it was not a necessary requirement that I spoke or had even a basic understanding of Gaelic as English is the first language of the majority of islanders.

**4.4.c. Data Analysis**

I conclude this chapter with a short section on the approach taken when analysing texts, both transcripts and observational notes. Ryan and Bernard point out ‘[t]heme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research’ (2003, p.85). With this in mind it was imperative that I used a technique which enabled me to identify themes and subthemes which were of significance to my research.

Using an interpretative framework allowed me to analyse the data considering that ‘modelling decisions emerge from the idiosyncrasies of the data rather than being imposed by the data’ (Babaones 2016, p. 462). This encouraged me to look across the data when identifying themes, from statistical data to covert observations. I initially considered using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. After trying the software, I decided against its use and chose to use manual methods in my analysis. My decision was based on two factors: I found the software programme difficult to navigate. I found that I spent much of my time struggling to understand the system and felt that using an electronic approach was not for me. The software is also geared for large data sets. I did not have an extensive number of interviews or observations; therefore, manual thematic identity would not be time consuming.

I was able to identify themes by listening to the taped interviews and then reading and re reading the transcripts.[[91]](#footnote-91) This is what Ryan and Bernard (2000) refer to as a social science approach. In using such a method, the researcher is ‘[s]earching interviews for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control’ (2000, p. 4). As I had used an ethnographic approach, my experiences in the community, and my observations, served to highlight themes. Within the data, themes, such as female inequality, familial tradition and Biblical authority, demonstrated both examples and expressions of behaviours. These themes came from the data not from preconceived ideas or rigid hypothesis. Ryan and Bernard put forward that a theme is identifiable to a researcher when ‘you can answer the question, What is this an expression of?” (2003, p. 87). By listening and reading the transcripts I was able to identify themes such as gender inequality, fear of hell and authority.

As discussed, to keep with the interpretative framework of this research analysis did not draw on a specific body of theory. Throughout the analysis phase I followed an iterative approach. This enabled me to adapt the content of discussion during the research. A qualitative approach is by its very nature unpredictable (Le et al., 2019) and is ‘led by an inductive approach’ (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009, p. 77). I was able to take on board information from initial interviews and used these to expand areas of questioning in subsequent meetings, thus generating deeper, expansive data. I was further drawn to an iterative approach as, when used alongside reflexivity, it becomes ‘at the heart of visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understandings’ (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009, p. 77).

**4.4. Chapter Summary**

Religion permeates all areas of Lewis society. Research in different academic fields, books, both fact and fiction, refer to the churches and the authority they hold over the islanders and those who visit. The design of this research, from the philosophical, the theoretical and the analytical, has endeavoured to examine the ways in which the participants make sense and bring meaning to their social reality.

Throughout my research the ability to carry out data collection in a manner that was as open, sympathetic, and transparent, as possible, was key. All philosophical and theoretical decisions were chosen with this in mind. From the very beginning this research project was qualitative in design. It was imperative that, as this was my research, my voice was heard and that I situated myself in both the community and the research.

My aim was to examine the interactions and behaviours of the people of Lewis with regards to religion. Through an understanding that all individuals construct and share a social reality and do so through interaction with others and their environment, I was able to evaluate the data I collected. Through knowing my own reasons for carrying out the research alongside acknowledging my own pre-conceived ideas of the conservative religious practices of the church communities, enabled me to enter the field with recognised bias and prejudice. The following three chapters examine the way religion impacts on the lives of those who live and visit the island.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**Seen but not Heard: Women in the Church**

*Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.*

*1 Corinthians 14:34, King James Version*

*Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent*

*1 Timothy 2:11-12 King James Version[[92]](#footnote-92)*

This chapter will consider Müller’s view that ‘paying attention to gendered patterns of religiosity might also allow for a more differentiated understanding of which groups are experiencing what kind of religious transformation (2020, p. 320). My objective was to determine if gender influences religiosity within conservative Presbyterianism. I analysed the data collected during the fieldwork visits I made to Lewis, over a period of three years, aiming to answer the first two questions posed at the beginning of this thesis:

* How do women find agency within the constraints of patriarchal Presbyterianism?
* How do women navigate between the patriarchal Church and the equality-driven social spheres of their lives?

Women hold no position of authority within the conservative churches of the Gàidhealtachd, yet some hold positions of authority within their working lives. I was interested to discover how they rationalise these polar positions within their lives. This chapter will consider that, for many of the women in this research, agency is achieved through religious compliance. Far from passively accepting conservative religious doctrine women use religion to empower themselves within different areas of their lives. This includes the way in which they understand their world, the specific gender roles within the church and the family and the use of religion as a sanctity from outside pressures and anxieties.

Following a suicide on the island my focus shifted to a more in-depth analysis of the way women are portrayed on the island. Although the suicide, and events that surrounded it, occurred out with my fieldwork trips, they have had an impact on this research and, as such, are an important aspect of it. I am therefore including the episode in this chapter, using both media and literature as sources of information. As a result, the final two sections of this chapter examine the media coverage of this episode and I discuss two books which place the burden of guilt for sexual temptation and adultery on women. They also give an insight into the way women are instructed on how to be a good wife and mother, meeting the needs of others before their own.

I have ensured my work focuses on examining issues experienced by the women, as individuals, in the context of everyday lived religion. Within this framework I look at the ways in which the women of Lewis navigated between the secular and religious spheres of their lives. I was mindful of Jagger's view that, as a researcher, my job ‘is to amplify the voices of the women I have interviewed’. (2019, p. 15). What became apparent was that, despite interviewing women, their voices remained silent when it came to sharing their opinions on topics that concerned the church. What was noticeable was that it was not just the women from the conservative church communities that remained quiet, it was also a participant who had been a member of the Church of Scotland and a woman who identified as non-religious. [[93]](#footnote-93)

Strict adherence to gender differentiation as laid down in the scriptures ‘determines which meetings they can attend, what offices they can hold, and how they are expected to relate to their God’ (Brasher 1998, p.168). I was interested to discern if women agree with the patriarchy, as to do otherwise would be to question the participants’ interpretation of scriptures, such as 1 Corinthians, and make them take a degree of responsibility for their compliance with their lack of authority in the Church (Croatto 1987; Brasher 1998; Schüssler Fiorenza 2006).

**5.1. A Patriarchal Church Community**

Contemporary Scots live in a society that strives for equality between the sexes, with laws in place to prevent sexual discrimination. These are governed by the Equality Act 2010. Between 2015-17 women led the three main Scottish political parties.[[94]](#footnote-94) The Church of Scotland has been ordaining women since 1969 with four women being elected Moderator of the General Assembly,[[95]](#footnote-95) Dr. Alison Elliot being the first to hold the post in 2004. The churches of Lewis are, however, patriarchal in both dogma and tradition. This includes the more liberal Church of Scotland. Although women have been ordained for over fifty years in this church and can take on other positions, such as elder, there are no women holding such positions in Church of Scotland churches on the island. The Biblical passages at the start of this chapter were cited by members of the community as reasons why women’s equality finds no place on the pews of the Lewis churches. The quotes below are indicative of the generational transmission of these beliefs:

Jesus said to women to hold their tongues in church, to keep quiet, it is written in the Bible, and we must follow that (Sophie, 17, Stornoway 2019).

I believed and still do that the reason we have male ministers and elders is Biblical and although I do not doubt that women are perfectly able to perform these roles, the Bible is the source of our beliefs, and we need to remain steadfast and true to the guidance written in it. (Jean, 75, Stornoway 2019).

Biblical interpretation has been traditionally grounded in a male-dominated elite. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, men wrote, interpreted, and spread the message of the scriptures. Taking a hermeneutic approach allows for a multiplicity of interpretation but as Gilfillan Upton reminds us ‘the oppressed tend to collude with their oppressors, women, no less than men are com/implicit in patriarchal thought worlds’ (2002, p. 102). Sophie and Jean’s words resonate with that perspective and are the first way that women navigate the patriarchal religious sphere of their lives. Women are upholding the religious patriarchy because it is decreed thus. Conservative biblical interpretation through bible study and intergenerational family worship has furnished these women with a divine reason for their lack of authority within the church.

Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016) note that gender equality in religion is a multifaceted concept. The women in my research were either in full-time employment, retired professionals, or in full time education. Louise holds a job of high prominence on the island and shares childcare with her husband. Yet there is a disconnect between their views on secular and religious equality. Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016) posed this question ‘[h]ow can it be that so many European women continue to adhere to religious faiths and doctrines that support the equal value of women and men yet also support gender inequality?’ (2016, p. 30). I aim to show that this comes down to women’s autonomy, the choices they make, and their understanding of the Bible as the ultimate authority.

The views of multi-generational women that gender roles were laid down in scripture is explored by an essay contained in Stacey and Gerard’s work on contemporary Evangelical gender ideology. The essay title “*We Are Not Doormats*” draws on a direct quote from one of their research participants (1990, p.98) rejecting the idea that women who belong to conservative religions do so through learned patriarchal submission. This aligns with Mahmood’s argument that women’s agency is more than just a gulf that separates ‘deplorable passivity and docility from a progressive point of view’ (2012, p. 15). Stacey and Gerard argued that although the women were selective in their scriptural reading choices, to belong to a patriarchal denomination was an active choice. The women I interviewed on Lewis had all chosen to either belong to their Church or, in the case of Jessica, to leave it. Choice is fundamental to the ways they navigate their religious lives, however, the extent of autonomy of choice will be further discussed.

Jessica was a member of Stornoway High Church of Scotland before the schism of 2015.[[96]](#footnote-96) She had been living and working in a city on the mainland, before returning to Lewis in 2014. Jessica is registered disabled and as a consequence she resists any encroachment into her independence. On her return to Stornoway, Jessica explained that the churches on Lewis were limiting her choices on how she wanted to live her life. This had not been the case on the mainland:

There's a lot of things here that are, with the Churches here, you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't do that (Jessica, 29, Stornoway 2017).

Jessica spoke of one incident that had particularly caused her offence. A friend was visiting from Aberdeen, and Jessica put a post on Facebook asking for recommendations for family friendly places that were open and served lunch on the Sabbath. She received a lot of posts criticising her wish to eat out on the Sabbath.[[97]](#footnote-97) It is notable that the criticism arose not from the men in the community, but from other women who were vocal in their disapproval. Lindores and Emejulu’s wrote of ‘women policing women’s behaviour in private space’ (2019 p. 48) however social media blurs the lines between the public and the private. Burkell et al.’s research revealed that ‘online social spaces are indeed loci of public display rather than private revelation... it appears that participants view and treat online social networks as public venues.’ (2014, p. 974). The advice Jessica sought in a private social network group was taken public by those who believed she was taking inappropriate action.

On transcribing the interview tape, I was aware of the emotion in Jessica’s voice when speaking of the incident. The primary emotion was one of anger; anger at those who restricted her choice and anger with herself for compliance. Anger is an emotion which bears an affinity with shame with Scheff recognising that ‘one way of hiding shame is to become angry’ (2003, p. 11). As discussed in Chapter 3, shame threatens the social bond and can bring about feelings of rejection and conflict. As with anger this conflict can be with the wider community, in this case the women who were chastising Jessica, but it can also be with oneself and self-reproachment (Scheff 2003). The interaction between Jessica and the women was played out in a public forum bringing an unknown number of silent observers and possible participants. The threat to the social bond was, potentially, not just between Jessica and the women, but also between Jessica and the wider community.

The issue of women being critical of other women within the workplace is examined by Mavin et al. 2014 and Sheppard and Aquino, 2017, however, I was unable to locate relevant literature specifically concerning women in a social / friendship setting.[[98]](#footnote-98) Similarities between workplace and social settings with regard to prescribed behaviour can be discerned. Sheppard and Aquino’s research pointed out that ‘there are consistent social penalties when women violate prescriptive stereotypes by behaving agentically’ (2017, p. 696). Jessica violated the prescriptive stereotype of a conservative Presbyterian woman by openly challenging the rules surrounding Sabbatarianism. Her social penalty was a public dressing down by her female peers. This aligned with Brasher’s view of ‘the impressive amount of power that fundamentalist women can wield in their communities’ (1998, p. 5). This cohort of women had the power to chastise and to do so on a public forum, using a form of informal social control. As Segre notes ‘[i]n any group combined cooperative actions may be voluntary or may be made compulsory by the norms created and enforced by the group (2014, p. 286). This is confirmation that game theory works well within the small church communities of the Gàidhealtachd, the norms are easier to enforce when people are so visible. The consequences can appear starker.

Serge argued that many decisions made by people, using rationality, were ‘selected according to habits or customs or considering social rules prescribing particular behaviour obligations’ (2014, p. 283). The shaming served to reinforce social rules and behavioural obligations as an islander, therefore I judge that Jessica made a rational choice in deciding against the lunch. In such a case, when the social constraints cannot be changed, we have what Serge called ‘parametric social actions’ (2014, p. 283) impinging on choice. The social cost to Jessica on disregarding these parameters was too high a price to pay. Co-operation through game theory relies on the existence of social norms. However, one must consider who it is that decides what these norms are. In Jessica’s case it was other women and, knowing the various outcomes her decision would have she chose compliance, avoiding ostracisation.

I offer that Jessica’s public reprimand had the dual purpose of serving as a warning to others, and as a means of upholding the patriarchy of the Church. This form of social control was also observed by Chaplin (2010) when he carried out research into a social housing scheme in Stornoway:

[s]ocial control was exerted in a variety of ways, either by using fear arousal formally with sermons preaching hell and damnation if certain behaviours weren’t being followed, or informally at neighbourhood level through concerns about neighbours ‘opinions’ (2010, p.257)

Mavin et al noted that ‘negative intra-gender relations between women are one way through which women’s subordination and marginalization within gendered contexts is apparent.’ (2014, p. 441). This incident shows the importance of social interaction in its own right, with Jessica’s conduct being formed by her social media interactions. Jessica decided against the lunch so her choice over a social activity had been removed, not by men in authority, but by women using their power. Their power strategy of choice was shaming, a potent tool, which had the desired effect.

Shaming was used to regulate behaviour. It stands, without authority, reinforcing behaviours over which formal law has no jurisdiction (Rosenblatt 2013). To gain a measure of power over other women, Morris pointed out ‘[w]e [women] too often employ the historically white, Christian, male tactics of ostracism and shaming.’ (1992, p.201). Shaming is utilised in different areas of life and analysed in different fields of research; Rosenblatt (2013) wrote about shaming in the discipline of Law, and Morris (1992) in the field of Women’s Studies. It is a tool used by pre-teen girls in the school playground to police, not only the behaviours, but also the appearance of other girls (Currie et al. 2007; Wiseman 2003) following us into the workplace. Rosenblatt wrote that there may be many reasons behind the use of such a device:

Shaming may have many motivations, including a desire to impose norms on another, to trigger someone else’s shame, or to inflict reputation-based punishment. Regardless of the motivation, shaming appeals to community norms and attempts to impose them on someone else. (2013, p. 8).

No matter the motivations behind shaming, the results can be viewed as the meaning behind the action. This travels along ‘Mead’s triadic nature of meaning’ (Blummer 1969, p. 9). First, it conveys what the person making the action is planning to do (in this instance a public reprimand), second it expresses what the person being shamed is expected to do (cancel a social engagement) and finally it communicates the significance of the action (the power to control).

Avishai suggests that agency ‘has challenged feminist theorists to discern its limits when individuals interact with oppressive social structures’ (2016, p. 265). Women’s agency is limited within the Free Church of Scotland, but it is not removed. There is, however, a degree of compromise on the women’s side. Gender inequality holds different meanings for different people and in different settings. For those who belong to conservative religious groups gender inequality is scriptural and many women make an autonomous choice in joining such a community. To remove that choice would be to deny religious freedom and ‘[w]hen norms of gender equality meet norms of religious freedom, religious freedom tends to be prioritised’ (Stolhøy cited in Nyhagen and Halsaa 2016, p. 161). Gender equality is more nuanced than parity for men and women. One must consider the constructs that surround it and allow women to navigate between the social and religious spheres of their lives using their knowledge and beliefs to help make choices.

One way in which women’s agency is assured is when the men are removed from the setting. Research has shown that women belonging to patriarchal religious communities form women only groups (Brasher 1998; Ibry 2014; Nyhagen 2019). The Free Church of Scotland has such an organisation, Women for Mission[[99]](#footnote-99), established over 100 years ago, to enable women to support mission both at home and internationally. The excerpt below shows how much importance the people of Lewis place on mission. In the interview I was asking questions about a special Fellowship meeting held in Back Free Church in June 2018. The talk was by a man who had spent ten years in Afghanistan with his wife and three young sons on a mission placement:

**Louise:** Yeah. Absolutely, I felt jealous

**Me:** about going out to Afghanistan?

**Andrew:** Yeah, sometimes it's hard to, it's hard to accept what your [mission] is, you know-

**Louise:** because for a long time, my natural desire is to do something big, and exciting, but you know, I've got to remember my whole life isn't -- I've got two wee boys. We've got a family, and that is where, you know, the focus is at, just now, and there'll be time for other stuff. (Louise and Andrew, Back 2018)

My analysis of the above excerpt initially saw me make ‘culturally specific assumptions’ (Müller, 2020, p. 317). I saw the speaker and Louise and Andrew as thinking and behaving irrationally. However, my analysis is not necessarily the participants’ analysis (Jagger, 2019). Decisions are made on belief, knowledge and understanding and I am not party to all the knowledge the participants hold nor do I share their religious beliefs, therefore I hold a different understanding. For those in the church community there was a belief that mission, no matter where to or the dangers involved, was a calling from God. Louise and Andrew were waiting for that call but until then God had placed them in the important role of parents, their mission was familial.

Rosie’s reply to my question shows that a call by God to mission is equally important as being called to the clergy. Rosie spoke of her younger sister who had spent a year on a mission before going to university.

:

**Me:** What if a woman is called? Your dad has three daughters, but if you were called?

**RM:** I mean, I'm never going to be called.

**Me:** What about Evie [Rosie’s younger sister] if she is called?

**RM:** Oh, she already is. She's already doing it; she’s been on mission.

It's just like, I don't know in terms of like, ministry, like, there still isn’t really space for it, but then again, I've gone to, like, mission meetings where women have led it. It's like women who have gone on mission and stuff, and they speak about it. Like that's happened plenty. (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018).

Once again, my initial judgement was socially specific as I viewed Rosie’s sister as having her true calling denied. However, undertaking a mission is not a lesser calling. Not all men are called to the clergy, the speaker had been called to mission and, as Louise and Andrew explain, this is an honour and something they hope to be asked to fulfil in the future. For the participants gender equality was in God’s calling; it was situational, differing between upholding the spiritual well-being of the congregation and spreading the message abroad. With mission, women perceive themselves as being given a gender equal religious position. Yet this comes with a caveat.

Brasher pointed out that ‘women lead, only when men are not present’ (1998, p.169). Women’s only groups appeared to dilute male authority, but do not contest it (Nyhagen 2019). Ibry suggested that such groups offer ‘an autonomous women’s sphere’ (2014, p. 1272) and membership confers a degree of agency. Any position of authority held in a women’s only group no way negates the patriarchal authority and governance of the rest of the church. Within conservative religions, men govern mixed sex groups. Nyhagen wrote of leadership in mosques noting that ‘if women are to be allowed any autonomy it tends to be confined to women’s own activities’ (2019, p.2). Brasher (1998) and Irby (2014) however found that such groups offer women a place of solidarity. The following extract from my fieldwork diary concurred with their findings:

James and Sandy talk to Reverend Ferrier and inform him that I will be going to the Women’s prayer group tomorrow. I say that I don’t know if it is appropriate. and the minister says he agrees with me. This is, as I suspected, a small group and they tend to discuss problems and confide in one another. Reverend Ferrier doesn’t attend himself and it is held in his home. (Fieldwork diary, 19th February 2019)

During this interaction I judged that my attendance, as an outsider, would have altered the sense of confidentiality. I assessed, in that instance, that I would have removed the freedom to speak openly about private issues, an aspect that neither James nor Sandy appeared to understand. These men were, I thought, attempting to take control of my research, deciding what I should attend, relegating me to the women’s zone, seen but not heard. Following the meeting I emailed Reverend Ferrier to say I had decided against attending. He agreed this was the correct decision.[[100]](#footnote-100)

Rosie was the only participant who raised the subject of gender inequality. She spoke of her feminist beliefs and of challenging her dad on the subject:

There's been times like my dad's come back from a meeting like one of the big Presbyterian ones when they're all kind of—meet up together and it kind of feels like so—how many women were there, I mean how many old white guys did you have? You can just see like a sea of white men. I find that really frustrating and I still don't know how I feel about it and I always try and separate like God's Christianity and stuff from the more religious side of the Free Church. and it always felt like there’s no space for us in a way.

(Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018).

For Rosie her way to navigate between the patriarchal religious and gender equality social spheres of her life was to use her agency to find a church that offered her a place in a traditional male only space without compromising her beliefs.[[101]](#footnote-101)

**5.1.a Power and Authority: The Men in Black and the Women at the Back**

The men in black and the women at the back was never more apparent than when I came across a funeral procession on a drive from Gress to Stornoway. The road was blocked as over one hundred men, all dressed in black, walked behind the coffin as it was carried a short distance from the church to a waiting hearse. This has become a symbolic procession. Traditionally, the coffin was carried to the cemetery, a journey of many miles, and men would take turns as the coffin bearers. What struck me most about the procession was that the women remained outside the church, indeed, they remained at the back. Traditionally, women do not attend the burial, although I was told by Sandy and Rosie that this is slowly changing. No-one was able to tell me why women do not attend burials; it has been this way back through the generations.

I spoke about this change to Dave. I specifically chose Dave as he does not attend church and was raised, in Stornoway, by parents who were non-church goers, and he himself had no religious affiliation. I was unsure if the men-only attendance at the grave was a religious or secular tradition, and wanted to gain a perspective from a non-religious[[102]](#footnote-102) individual:

It’s the norm now, especially for close friends and relatives to attend the cemetery. I think it’s just more enlightened elders and deacons now who actively encourage women to go (Dave, 57, Stornoway 2019).

Dave did not know if the tradition had its roots in the secular or religious spheres, but whatever its origins, this tradition that was being changed by the men in authority in the churches. Dave was also unaware of the reasons behind the change and whether these were also secular or religious. However, it is the men in authority in the churches that have the power over both the religious and non-religious people of Lewis to initiate such change; no matter where the call for change initiated from. By studying the funeral rituals from a feminist position, I propose that this is evidence of the way in which religious authority permeates and upholds the patriarchy in this society. Secularisation, in this case, has normalised the patriarchal ritual. This places funeral rituals on the island in Müller’s first sphere of secularity, a public space (2020).

When I spoke of the funeral with Reverend Ferrier, he spoke of the majority of women still staying away from the burial despite the approval of the Free Church. The important thing to consider is that this is also a secular tradition and bound up in the culture of the island. Mahmood (2012) wrote of the transformation women’s lives had undergone thanks to liberal dialogues surrounding female equality. Recent debate has ensured that more nuanced discourses take place, considering, amongst other things, cultural and religious identity. However, both the cultural and religious identities of the Gaels have strong patriarchal roots with links to the clan system. As noted, no women hold political roles on the island, no women are on the board of the Glasgow Rangers Supporters Club, no women are ordained as ministers or elders even in the more liberal Church of Scotland.

Death is surrounded by ritual and tradition (Davies 2017; Mitima-Verloop et al. 2019). What I found noteworthy is that the rituals on Lewis were different from rituals I had experienced on the mainland. A death on the island is proclaimed in three main ways: a newspaper announcement in the relevant section, from the pulpit during worship and through the “cards”. Many newsagents, petrol stations and supermarkets have a board, framed in black, just inside the entrance. On this board, postcards are placed giving the name of a deceased islander. It announces three dates: the death, the wake, and the funeral. This is an island tradition and not one, as a Lowland Scot, that I was familiar with. The announcement of a death to the local community in this way may be linked to the pre-Reformation use of the dead bell, one of the few practices to survive for many years post Reformation. The ringing of the dead bell ‘not only announced the death, it also instructed the populace to pray for the soul of the deceased’ (Raeburn, 2015 p.39). It may well be that this Presbyterian tradition has its roots in Catholicism.

Both the wake and the funeral are open to all who wish to attend. The following exert from my fieldwork diary tells of my first encounter with the concept of the cards and an open-door policy for funeral rituals:

As I leave another elder starts to chat and explains that there is a wake going on and I should attend. I decline the invite as I do not know the family and would feel that I was intruding on their grief. The wake is held in a church and takes the form of another service. The funeral is tomorrow. This elder told me that most supermarkets, petrol stations and newsagents have a board which is black and contains postcard notices of those who have died. The cards give the times and dates of the wakes and funerals. I was told that I could go along to any of these. I know from my time on the island that I do attract attention as I am not local (Fieldwork Diary October 6th, 2019)

As a researcher I did not wish to alter the experience of the mourners by my presence, especially at such an emotional occasion. I was extremely aware that, as research has shown, ‘a funeral offers a venue for the culturally accepted expression of loss-related emotions’ (Mitima-Verloop et al 2019, p.2). Once again, I had the involvement of a man attempting to steer the course of my research, deciding what I should observe. He was insistent that I should attend but I politely declined to do so.

Ethically, in my opinion, my attendance was inappropriate. I did not want to breach peoples’ privacy at such an emotional and pivotal time in their lives. That I had the right to attend is not disputed, but I would have been attending as a researcher not as an individual paying their last respects. My decision was based on the difference in carrying out covert observation between private and public domains. As Spicker pointed out ‘privacy means that people are not inappropriately observed, inconvenienced or reported on’ (2011, p.123). The wake was advertised, and held, in the public domain but the service inhabits the private sphere. The ritual of paying last respects to the deceased makes it a private occasion. As the island has a small population, those who live there have a connection, many are related, others are friends, neighbours, or colleagues. Therefore, those who attend a wake will have had a connection to the deceased. As I had no connection, I would have been deceptive in my reasons for attendance. I would not have been paying my last respects, but I would have been undertaking covert observation. [[103]](#footnote-103)

The wake[[104]](#footnote-104) is different from those on the mainland and takes place, the night before the funeral, in the church. Raeburn wrote of the cultural differences between the Lowlands and the Highlands with reference to the wake. He noted that this was called the ‘late-wake or lyke-wake’ (2015, p.40) and occurred the night before the funeral with mourners watching the body overnight. This was a practice that the Reformers deemed superstitious. It was also known to become boisterous as alcohol was involved; with Highland wakes being generally more inappropriate than those of the Lowlands (Raeburn 2015). However, the ‘such frivolity was not seen in all Highland wakes’ (2015, p.43) and those in the Western Hebrides were much more solemn affairs.

At the funeral the coffin is brought to the church door and a service of mourning is held. The coffin is not placed inside the church for the funeral. Rosie spoke of being at her granny’s funeral:

**Rosie:** We were all at the grave. Like it was a Free Church Continuing[[105]](#footnote-105) funeral I was at, it was my granny’s last year. And even then, they wouldn’t let us have the casket in the main room because it distracted from the service. That is a power thing. That is a minister with power there.

**Me:** Did they mention her name? Is there a eulogy?

**Rosie:** No, there wasn’t. And in my family, we’re kind of saying like this is a power thing because when do they kind of get that? When do the Free Church Continuing get this kind of attention? (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018)

The funeral services do not contain a eulogy. This is not about celebrating a life but about praising God for giving life. Rosie’s final sentence refers to the church being full for the funeral when it usually has a very small congregation in attendance. Jo, an incomer, and non-religious member of the community, spoke of her astonishment when attending her first funeral on the island:

J. spoke of her surprise of being at a funeral and having the coffin outside the church. She was shocked that the name of the deceased was not mentioned. She said it was not a celebration of the person’s life but a lecture on sin and damnation. A warning for us all on what could happen to us. (Fieldwork Diary 19th February 2019).

All traditions surrounding death apply to the religious and non-religious alike. There is no crematorium on the island therefore, unless the body is to be transported to the mainland, everyone is buried.[[106]](#footnote-106) I propose that the consistency of the funeral ritual warrants that all are sheltered by religion in times of bereavement (Stoltz, 2020). The rituals surrounding death are, as Davies noted ‘as much concerned with the issues of identity and social continuity…. such rites possess their own social and personal functions.’ (2017, p. 11). This was evident when I considered the different rituals that take part in the different Scottish areas. Tradition and cultural identity flow from the cradle to the grave.

The importance of such rituals is a significant aspect of grief management (Davies 2017; Mitima-Verloop et al. 2019). Romanoff and Terenzio highlighted the importance not only as a space to express grief but also for the wider community to offer support and to move on:

They provide opportunities for the public display of grief, structures for the delimitation of grief, vehicles for affirming the relationship of the deceased to the community, and the continuity of the community in his or her absence

(Romanoff and Terenzio 1998, p. 168).

With regards to grief management, there was one aspect of a Gàidhealtachd funeral that I propose requires more research, the traditional exclusion of women from the internment. This was out with the remit of my research, and I did not have ethical approval to interview people during vulnerable periods of their lives. Due to the sensitive and emotional subject matter I did not have adequate time nor the appropriate relationships to undertake research in this area. I was left considering how women came to terms with being excluded from the graveside, especially if this was a much-loved family member or friend. They have been removed from the ritual of laying that person to rest. If the funeral is part of the grieving process, are women being denied the right to begin healing? The men in black have, traditionally, controlled the final act carried out for the deceased. I propose that the move towards change, however that change has been instigated, is for the good. Women are to be given an equal opportunity to take part in the full funeral ritual and grieving process.

From the start of this research, I was aware of the male authoritarian stance of the conservative Churches of the Gàidhealtachd. However, I was unaware that this encompassed all aspects of congregational life. I attended a fellowship meeting in Tong Mission Hall during a fieldwork trip in June 2018. The meeting took the usual form; prayers, led by the men, a short Bible study and a concluding psalm, Precented[[107]](#footnote-107) by an elder. Following fellowship there was an AGM for the administration of the Mission Hall. I had assumed, correctly, that women would not hold a place on the Hall committee; what I had not expected was the women being seen but not heard. Not one woman spoke at the meeting. The following is from my fieldwork diary concerning the AGM:

No women are involved in any capacity on the board of trustees or holding office. When it came to proposing and seconding matters it was only men who spoke, despite them being outnumbered 2:1. The women were, however, thanked for their tea making and baking skills and two young girls for cleaning skills. The chairman of the committee (an elder) said “we couldn’t do that” (Fieldwork Diary 5th June 2018).

Before analysing this data, I was minded of Jagger’s writing that ‘my critique may not be their critique’ (2019, p. 15). I needed to understand their analysis of the situation. Louise’s critique was very different from my initial consideration. Louise is an incomer, married to a Lewis man with two young sons:

With regards to holding office within the church I would say in a worldly sense that would be exactly what I would do and what would be expected. I do it for other organisations, so why wouldn't I do it for the church? However, I believe the Lord has created His church with a structure that is correct, but how it plays out day to day will vary from church to church. Women play a vital role in the church and have the room to nurture, whilst also being supported by office bearers. I do think some practices are outdated but I think humility is important to realise any service is service to God whether it is tea making, cleaning, or sorting finances and holding office (Louise, 34, Back, 2018)

Louise mentioned that she found some aspects of the Free Church of Scotland practices to be out of tune with present times, but then justified her compliance. This is an incongruence that Leamaster and Bautista examined during their research with Mormon women. They proposed that although the women acknowledged gender inequality, within the church community, they did not feel it was problematic as ‘the “roles” men and women played were “complimentary” and not complete without the other. The gendered expectations were different, but equally important’ (2018, p. 9). Research has shown that compliance to religious gender norms can also be viewed as autonomous (Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2012; Nyhagen and Halsaa 2019).

Avishai wrote that women who belong to conservative religions can be thought of, by those out with the religions, as not only being oppressed but also, ‘operating with a false ’consciousness’ (2008, p. 411), a perception Avishai did not agree with. Muslim women who participate in conservative Islamic movements are also perceived as being ‘pawns in a grand patriarchal plan’ and if freed from subservience would rail up against the oppressive religious texts of the Qur’an (Mahmood 2005, p. 1). From my time on Lewis, talking to the women and conducting interviews, I have been steadfast in my thinking that the women are not “doormats”, they have agency and own their own religious views. Could it be that those outside the religion are all too keen to see women in all conservative religions as being submissive or as locked in a constant battle with compliance and agency? Walby wrote of those who see it as a battle between subservience and freedom ‘they see the ideological constructs of the patriarchy as critical to women’s subordination’ (1990, p. 104) and fail to ponder the social and, I would add, religious constructs that surround actions and interactions.

As individuals in Western society, we have been exposed to, and shaped by, secular and religious norms, be that from our family, community or through our schooling. In this research I discovered that women were using their autonomy to join the church, Louise, an incomer, had come to the Free Church as an adult, not as a child. She holds a position of authority in her employment and can be viewed as inhabiting a religious space that bears no resemblance to her secular world with reference to gender equality. I propose that Louise is using her agency to uphold religious norms that she views as valuable. Agency is not only situated in conducts that challenge the patriarchy of conservative religions but can also be achieved by upholding these religious norms. For Louise the benefits of belonging to a patriarchal church community are greater than any struggles she may have with the finer details of the roles prescribed for her. Louise appears to compartmentalise the religious and social areas of her life by seeing her roles within the church as, not submissive, or inferior, but as a test. Society has placed her in a position of authority within the workplace, but religion is a test of her modesty and commitment to God. This is something she has freely consented to and not undertaken through allegiance to her cultural identity or through social coercion. This aligns with Mahmood’s view that actions that may appear to be submissive and at odds with the secular construct of gender equality can be accepted ‘if it is determined that they are undertaken by a freely consenting individual who is acting of her own accord’ (2012, p. 11).

Stark and Finke proposed that ‘women seem more inclined than men to favour higher-tension faiths’ (2000, p.198).[[108]](#footnote-108) Women of Back Free Church of Scotland and Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland congregations do not perceive themselves as inferior to the men. This concurred with Jagger’s proposal that the women ‘do not necessarily see themselves as oppressed’ (2019, p.16). Freedom (from patriarchal authority) is not a synonym for autonomy, women who belong to conservative religions can be understood as acting on their own accord if they choose to belong ‘unencumbered by social and cultural influences’ (Mahmood 2012, p. 149). Furlong (1991) makes an interesting contribution to the debate when she suggests that women may not desire authority as, within conservative religious groups ‘it was portrayed as a sign of woman’s worldliness and greed’ (1991, p. 3). Within these groups, men hold authority not through superiority but because God says so. God has placed authority in the men’s hands, not in the hands of the women. Brasher suggested that this authority can be perceived as ‘a burden that men have to shoulder’ (1998, p. 173). Alderage-Clanton also suggested that ‘[m]en suffer under the load of an exclusively masculine conception of God and the accompanying patriarchal culture. In such a culture they assume the major responsibility for church, state, and home’ (1990, p. 82). This suggestion of authority being a burden was alluded to in two of my interviews with men. Both struggled when asked by their respective ministers to become an elder.[[109]](#footnote-109) Donnie agreed to take up the role, but James declined:

I became a member of The High Church of Scotland and then went up to deaconship. I was getting pushed by my minister to go for eldership. There's a big difference between deaconship and eldership and you've got to have the time to be an elder (James, 65, Stornoway, 2019).

Both men saw the role of elder as one requiring a great deal of commitment, notably a commitment to God in assisting with the spiritual well-being of the congregation. I propose that both men made a rational choice in their decision-making. James felt that due to his existing council and charity obligations, eldership was not a responsibility he could fulfil. Donnie, despite reservations, made his choice because the other elders were ageing:

I believe that God has placed us in Tong. The older elders in Tong are so thankful for myself and Lachie and all those young men coming through. They’re thankful that myself and Lachie have come along and we are just so glad to serve God and the community (Donnie, 36, Stornoway 2018).

All knowledge is socially situated, and power and privilege can hide behind systems especially when they are meant to be objective. Leamaster and Bautista wrote of Mormon women’s views that male authority was ‘a burden they were glad they did not have to bear’ (2018, p. 8). The suggestion of authority as a burden was not evident in any of the interviews I carried out with the women of Lewis. [[110]](#footnote-110)

Research has highlighted differences in gender identities situated in conservative religious households (Irby 2014; Brasher 1998). Irby noted differences between the different conservative religions when it comes to men’s role within marriage. Irby argued that Catholicism and Judaism are aligned in positioning the man as the ‘protective father’ (2014, p.1273), much as they situate the woman as the nurturing mother. Women are viewed as caring for those around them, women are guardians of the household. With that in mind ‘women are thought to have the agency to marshal, supervise and enable the atmosphere and environment of the home’. (Lindores and Emejulu 2019, p. 46). Prior’s (2003) work examines Catholic women with this literature corresponding with my research findings. Prior suggested that, for Christian women, the Bible as the ultimate source of authority ‘was presented to them as an ideal to which they could and should aspire’ (2003, p. 57). As with the conservative Presbyterian churches within the Catholic Church roles for women are limited. The Bible provides them with a task which underpins the family enabling them to navigate between the patriarchal and equality driven spheres of their lives.

Benton proffered the following conservative Christian belief that ‘the God who wants godly offspring from his peoples’ marriages (Malachi 2:15) has assigned crucial functions to mothers’ (2014, p. 22). Furlong argues that within conservative Christian denominations women are expected to use Biblical women as something to both model their behaviours on and avoid. She offers that the attributes of the Virgin Mary ‘should rub off in a subtle kind of flattery of the female sex, particularly of those who conform most closely to the public image of the virgin - that is as humble, passive, chaste and submissive’ (1991, p. 8). Conservative Protestant denominations situate the man on a scale between ‘primary decision maker, to the symbolic form of a spiritual guide’ (2014, p. 1273). The emphasis on the man as the head of the household, the figure of authority on whom decision making falls could be viewed as a heavy load to bear. This can be understood as a positive behaviour one where masculine traits are those of provider and protector of the family, traits that can be viewed as coveted by women (Connell and Messerscmidt 2005).

Leamaster and Bautista discovered an anomaly in their findings when it came to women who hold positions of authority in their working lives. They noted that ‘women whose life status and occupations seemed to provide them with the resources and motivations to oppose gender traditionalism actually expressed strong support for gender traditionalism’ (2018, p. 9). Louise holds a job of status on the island, running a land trust organisation, yet she expressed strong support for traditional gender roles within the church. Leamaster and Bautista proposed that some of the women they interviewed worked because of financial need and expressed guilt and a desire to fulfil the role of a stay-at-home mother. This related to the Latter-Day Saints Church’s traditional gender roles within the family structure where women are urged to ‘focus on motherhood and family duties above all else’ (2018, p. 4). Benton (2014) explained the importance of motherhood from a different perspective ‘[s]o when motherhood is tellingly referred to as a ‘career break’, spot the lie. It would be closer to the truth to say that a mother’s paid employment is a ‘motherhood break’ (2014, p. 20). Burchill discovered that for her participants, the women who continued to pursue their careers ‘did so on a part-time basis’ (2008, p. 45) fitting work in around childcare. The mothers in my research were all employed full-time outside of the home. None of the participants spoke of the idealised role of a stay-at-home mother. They were able to continue with their careers by sharing childcare with their husbands. I offer that they were able to move between the patriarchal religious and equality social spheres by compartmentalising the two.

Although Louise and her husband Andrew spoke of their croft not providing financial stability and the need for them to have other income streams, this was not the sole reason for Louise being a working mother. She spoke of a loss of identity when she had her first son and her desire to re-start her career, something she was able to do before her son was a year old. Leamaster and Bautista suggested that women, such as Louise, engaged in ‘ideological compensation’ (2020, p. 10). Although they may not conform to a traditional gender role in the home, they compensated by emphasising their commitment to gender inequality in the church. Louise, during both her interview and a later email exchange, spoke of her belief in the gender roles set out by church doctrine:

I'm from a generation that understands that all opportunities are there for me as much as the next person… I've got a job of responsibility, and this is how I manage my team. I also am chair of a board of trustees and again am used to being in a strategic role…. With regards to holding office within the church I would say in a worldly sense that would be exactly what I would do and what would be expected. I do it for other organisations, so why wouldn't I do it for the church? However, I believe the Lord has created His church with a structure that is correct, but how it plays out day to day will vary from church to church (Louise, 34, Back 2018).

Min argued that, today, Christian identity is a smaller part of an individual’s total identity. He related this to America Christians; here Christian identity remains a part of their American identity, one of freedom, consumerism, individualism with the result that ‘American Christians are hybrids’ (2014, p.49). Analysing Louise and Andrew’s transcript I deduced that their Christian identity was indeed a part of their overall identity but a large part, not small.

There is one interesting aspect that I noted in Louise and Andrew’s interview. Andrew is a Sunday School teacher, a role that usually, as Ross noted ‘has traditionally been a preserve of women’ (2002, p. 226). Andrew and Louise share childcare at home, as do many parents today. Irby raised the notion of men taking on a new form of conservative Protestant masculinity which ‘represents a domestication of men that creates “soft patriarchs”’ (2014, p. 1274). There are ‘a multitude of ways of being “woman” – past and present – so also “being male”’ (Swanley 2005, p. 171). Gender roles as laid down by the scriptures have at their core a dichotomy of masculine and feminine, yet these are not only fragmented but are underpinned by authority: husband, wife, slave master, son, father. I suggest that as traditional gender roles at home are adapting with regards to childcare then the roles within the church, such as being a Sunday School teacher, are viewed as being open to both men and women.[[111]](#footnote-111) However, what must be noted, is that although men may begin to take on such roles within the church, women cannot take on the men’s roles. This research indicates that within the conservative churches any change will be slow. Change may also be slower in rural communities where Connell and Messerschmidt found ‘an increasing subtlety and fragmentation in the representation of hegemonic masculinity’ (2005, p. 835). There are more nuanced changes within many domestic settings where social patriarchy is being rejected by both men and women, but this does not transmit into the religious domain of the Gàidhealtachd.

Walby references the 1978 work by Nancy Chodorow in which she proposes that gender inequality can only be overcome is ‘for men to mother, or parent as well as women’ (1990, p. 95). What is being suggested is that men become more like women, not for women to become more like men. An interesting proposition that is slowly being implemented in some families within Scotland today. However, it must be noted that there are still complex individual nuances. Masculinity is not a fixed characteristic and can change between social settings (Connell and Meserschmidt 2005). However, it is important to acknowledge that the notion of family and heterosexual marriage lies at the heart of conservative churches, and this shapes the gendered lives of those who belong. The “soft” patriarchs may be more domesticated in the home, but they remain staunch patriarchs in the church.

I was left questioning what women gained from their roles in the church as responsibility for refreshments and cleaning did not appear to be much of an advantage. One benefit, that I discerned from Louise’s interview, may be that belonging to the Free Church of Scotland shields them from some of the stresses of twenty-first century life. Under this sacred canopy life reverts to an imagined idealised society. Brasher (1998), Furlong (1991) and Day (2017) all refer to religion as being a bastion of tradition. For the ‘Generation A women’ in Day’s study the church ‘supports the sacred institutions of their day’ (2017, p. 38). Basher wrote that ‘religious communities generally function to conserve values within cultures, they tend to be harbours of tradition’ (1998, p. 169). The sacred canopy may well serve to protect the women and their families from the more frightening parts of the modern world, providing ‘at least one refuge where everything remains the same’ (Furlong 1991, p. 8). Yet, with my analysis, I have considered that national existential insecurity may only be a perception, and one that is perpetuated through religious symbolic language to children and others within the group (Stoltz, 2020).[[112]](#footnote-112)

Karen McCarthy argued that a conservative religion may be understood as ‘the religion of the stressed and the disorientated, of those for whom the world is overwhelming’ (1994, p. 175). She proposes that rationalism promised by Enlightenment failed to give us the meaning of life through science and rational thought. Therefore, conservative religions may offer answers to those who feel disenfranchised by today’s secularised societies. On analysing my transcripts, I suggest that what the participants are searching for is clarity and control over their lives and this is what belonging to this conservative denomination brings. The world is ever-changing, and, for some, change brings concern. The Church of Scotland’s ordination of gay clergy four years ago had led to the founding of this new Free Church of Scotland congregation. The sacred canopy appeared breached. I learnt that the island had experienced the tragedy of two teenage suicides and six teenage suicide attempts in the nine months from December 2017 to August 2018. Lewis is not exempt from the blight of young people taking their own lives.[[113]](#footnote-113) This may not be a new phenomenon in contemporary British society, but it is one that the media is highlighting to the public.

This concept of a sacred canopy acting as a refuge was in line with the first of the strategies identified by Avishai’s, where women comply to the gender prescribed roles but for reasons that lie outside religious belief. Belonging to a conservative religion may liberate or empower them, protecting them from ‘the problems generated by the forces of modernity’ (Avishai 2008, p. 411). This strategy brought to mind Louise. Following the birth of their eldest child, Louise felt isolated and overwhelmed by parenthood. The following quote offered me an explanation as to why she initially signed up for the Alpha course and the hopes she has for her sons:

I felt nowhere that there was really good in the world, but if there was really good, that had to be balanced out, you couldn't just say there was really good in the world, but there's no evil. There has to be both……. I know this is, right now, this is where we're meant to be, with our children, here, and this has given them a grounding, I think, that will prepare them for life…. you don’t have to second guess people (Louise, 34, Back 2018).

I argue that for some, religion has a bearing on both negative and positive emotions. The impact that religion has on mental health may have, as Pehr Granqvist suggests, its roots in attachment. In times of crisis, we are programmed to look for a place or person we have an attachment to, a safe haven. For some, safety can be found in religion ‘the very aspects of religion that are most consistently linked to [good] mental health is particularly those that express attachment components, including belief in a personal, loving God.’ (2020, p.788).

Louise and the other women can gain consistency and support for their values from religion, values such as heterosexual marriage, fidelity, and family. This correlates with Woodhead’s view that ‘both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches placed increasing emphasis upon the value of the family and domestic life’ (2005, p. 11). Ross adds a new dimension to the debate on the importance placed on family values and women’s religious lives ‘[f]or the Protestant traditions, marriage was seen by the reformers, particularly Luther, as a real vocation in its own right’ (2002, p. 228). In doing so the tradition of entering a religious order was removed for Protestant women with their role being situated in the home. This is another illustration of a calling from God and as such offers a way to navigate between the secular and the religious spheres of life.

My interview with the young people from Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland was of special interest as they have grown up in a period where equality and anti-discrimination are legislated for, I was interested in the choices they made in relation to lived religion. The group comprised of three young people, all seventeen years of age, and in their final year of school. They were about to sit their final exams, with the girls holding offers from universities on the mainland and the boy having an apprenticeship with the Merchant Navy. The reasons given for initially attending church resonated with Hervieu-Leger’s (2000) notion of religion as a chain of memory:

**Sophie:** I think that's also to do with the culture of the Island…. It’s very Christian culture but I guess it's just-

**Adam:** it's a big Christian influence.

**Chloe:** So, like your mums your dads, your grannies, everybody goes

**Sophie:** Everybody goes.

(Stornoway 2019)

That attending church was a family practise offers an explanation as to why this group began going to church, attending Sunday School as young children. It did not explain why they continued to attend, and why the girls had become communicants. It may be due, in part, to the fact that many of their peers also attend. Brierley suggested that ‘[o]nce the habit of churchgoing is established in a person’s life, they tend to keep on going if they can’ (2017, p. 71). However, he also pointed out that young people are the largest age group amongst those who stop attending church. Bartoszuk and Deal offer that ‘adolescents and emerging adults attempt to establish their own identity in regard to relating to others and dealing with the stresses and demands of life, religion can also play a role.’ (2016, p. 144). As previously mentioned, the island has people returning to both the social and religious communities when they have their own children. The excerpt below shows that youth attendance for other year groups was in decline, yet it was high amongst this specific group’s peers.[[114]](#footnote-114) It may give one explanation of why this group chose to attend church:

**Adam:** The youth attendance has gone down last year, over the past two years….. There's quite a lot of our age people in our church, like in our year especially.

**Chloe:** And I feel connected with these people.

(Stornoway 2019)

This group may have made this choice as their peer group attended. This correlates with Stolz’s view that religiosity is a socialised occurrence. As will be discussed in Chapter 6 there is a familial tendency, but one must not overlook the importance of education and peer group influence. The religious language of this cohort has not witnessed a ‘decreasing intensity’ (Stoltz 2020, p. 21) but that differs from year group to year group. I propose that this is proof of Stolz’s argument that religiosity is affected by more than one influence (2020). I spoke of this during an informal chat with Reverend Ferrier and he agreed that this group, in particular, encouraged others in their school year to attend. He did mention, with humour, that he had asked the girls to desist from “flirty conversions” (Reverend Ferrier 2019). He did not, I must add say that he had asked the same from the boys.

One other thought is that, in some part, the large teenage congregational cohort is down to Reverend Ferrier. As a younger minister he has made the young people feel an integral part of the church community. Sandy mentioned on several occasions that Reverend Ferrier gave ‘great’ children’s sermons and would greet all of the children by name. This is no mean feat as, at the services I attended, there were about thirty to forty children in Sunday School, and another fifteen to twenty teens in attendance. Sophie, Chloe, and Adam also spoke of Reverend Ferrier and the ways in which he had made the teenagers feel an integral part of the church:

**Sophie:** I think it’s because of our church. It has a lot of the youth, so it like kind of just…

**Chloe:** Accommodates more of us rather than just ignoring.

**Sophie:** There's so much going for us. They have so many fellowships, so many youth activities it does make people want to go.

(Stornoway 2019)

It was apparent was that this group were made to feel appreciated and respected. This links with Roberto’s proposal that ‘[y]oung people bring their friends to worship because they are valued and the worship services engage them’ (2012, p. 109). Berger made reference to the merging of social and religious spheres appropriate fifty years after it was first mooted ‘[i]n the sphere of the family and of social relationships closely linked to it, religion continues to have considerable “reality” potential’ (1967, p. 133). This clearly applies for this community; Berger’s proposal remains relevant. The young people of Lewis have strong links to religion, through their families, and this spills into their social spheres. However, one must not forget that socialisation through the family is not the only influence on young people, their social group carries weight. If it was only religion as a chain of memory that maintained or increased religiosity, this would be true of all year groups at the Nicholson Institute. I propose that religiosity for this group remains strong as many influences are brought into play. The group socialised twice a week at Fellowship and Bible Study and the local youth club[[115]](#footnote-115) was run by another Stornoway church. I was surprised at how many young people attended both Free churches, but throughout the interviews I was made aware that many fell away from religion when they left the island for higher education or work. Further evidence of the importance of both education and social groups with continuing religiosity (Stoltz 2020).

From both interviews with Donnie and Andrew I was aware that moving away from the island to a large city gave them a new set of peers, the majority of whom did not have a conservative religious upbringing. Donnie and Andrew both mentioned turning away from religion during their late teens and early twenties. Andrew talked of ‘putting all things God to the back of my mind’ (Andrew 2018). Connie told of her sadness that her oldest grandson no longer attended church and her hopes that he would return to faith. Both Donnie and Andrew returned to their religious convictions – both are now communicants and hold prominent posts in their respective congregations. Interestingly, it was not until they had children of their own that they rediscovered their faith. Both spoke of the importance of giving their children a religious upbringing:

We're bringing up two young girls trying to, you know, teach them. We pray with them; we do but we can't save them and if we are too strict on them they’ll go the other way. (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

Donnie is aware of the importance of parental socialisation but at the same time is conscious of other factors which may lead the girls away from faith. Both Donnie and Andrew spoke of a pivotal moment in their lives that saw them turn back to religion. For both men the turning point was apocalyptic.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Day wrote of the ways in which many denominations are trying to attract young people to church, from new musical styles to the simplifying of Christian doctrine. Day’s study revealed that ‘Generation A tried to prevent the Church from moving towards more youth-orientated liturgies’ (2018, p. 40). Day suggested that this move towards attracting younger people is ‘wholly misplaced’ (2018, p. 202) and that congregations should have concentrated on retaining the baby boomer generation. Brown wrote that the decline in church attendance can be traced back to the 1960s when ‘British women secularised the construction of their identity, and the churches started to lose them’ (2009, p. 192). As the early baby boomers stopped attending worship, there was a ripple effect as their children did not grow up attending Sunday School. Religion’s chain of memory was fragmented.

On Lewis religion is not confined to church and even within the younger age groups, religion is, for many, a lived daily experience. Connie and Donnie both spoke of daily family worship, a period where, each day, the family would come together to read a Biblical passage and to pray. During a fieldwork visit in September 2019 I was sitting in a café writing up my fieldwork diary. At the next table were two teenage boys. They were having a very animated conversation. One of the boys had decided to be confirmed into a Presbyterian church and the other was excited for him. I have spent a lot of time with teenagers over the years, with my children, their friends, family and through work, and this was the first time I have heard boys of that age talking freely about their faith. I was never more aware of the sacred canopy that shielded the community than I was that early autumn afternoon.

I found myself aligned with Day’s opinion that trying to attract the younger generations through dilution of Christian tradition was not stopping the decline in attendance. Brierley’s 2016 Scottish Church Census[[117]](#footnote-117) reveals that church attendance in Scotland is declining and is predicted to further decline by 2025. What is of interest is that when I examined the decline in congregational numbers for the more liberal Church of Scotland, I learned that ‘numbers have declined - 40% between 2002 and 2016, faster than any other group of churches’ (2017a, p. 55). The census also showed that around 15% of Free Church of Scotland congregations are ‘witnessing significantly increased attendance and membership’ (2017a, p. 100). The conservative denominations continue to attract new members by holding fast to doctrine.

The conservative Presbyterian churches continue to deliver a strong Christian message, demanding adherence to Biblical authority. Iannaccone proposed that the conservative churches have a strictness which benefits them in three ways ‘they raise overall levels of commitment, they increase average rates of participation, and they enhance the net benefits of membership’ (1994, p. 1183). A similar point by Rose demonstrates the benefits of a strict Church, ‘where worship is highly ritualised......there are strong codes of behaviour or even dress’ (2009, p. 35). People know what is expected of them and that brings reassurance.

The evening before the youth group interview, I attended a Fellowship meeting in the Fàilte Centre, in Stornoway. Reverend Ferrier asked a teenage boy, of around 15 years, to lead the prayer. The lady in front of me was a consultant surgeon from the local hospital. She had been confirmed into the Free Church of Scotland the weekend before, having previously been a member of the Church of Scotland. The male/female differentiation was never more apparent, as this well-educated, accomplished woman was led in prayer by a schoolboy. I used this event as a means of opening up the conversation around the different roles in the church:

**Sophie:** We do have our distinct roles.

**Chloe:** Yeah. But I don't think it means that we are not valued as much.

(Stornoway 2019)

Brasher suggested that young Christian women see the religious and secular spheres of their lives as different entities, ‘[t]o them religious congregations are special sites where different rules apply’ (1998, p. 174). The rules within the church community come directly from God. The rules within the secular section of their lives are more ambiguous. The role of wife and mother, as caregiver, is lain down in the scriptures. However, the laws surrounding gender equality in society are man-made. Women who work may use religious compensation (Leamaster and Bautista 2019) to offset a perceived neglect of their caregiver duties. Male authority remains inside the canopy. Interestingly, Sophie took control of the conversation, with Adam making little contribution unless directly asked. The boys may hold authority under the sacred canopy, but the girls directed the interview that afternoon in the An Lanntair café.

One participant had a different perspective of authority in the Free Church of Scotland and that was Rosie. When I interviewed Rosie, she had been living in Glasgow for two years, attending the Glasgow School of Art. She was an active member of Glasgow City Free Church of Scotland. This was surprising as the majority of those from Lewis attend Glasgow’s other Free Church, Dowanvale. Rosie had made a choice based on two factors. Firstly, she could be more anonymous, be her own person, and secondly this church congregation allows women to Precent the psalms and lead prayers at worship.

It was the first time like when I was trying to decide which church to go to, I went to this one and then, I heard a woman Precent…. And I was like shook, I was like “I’m staying”. Like that means I can continue going to the Free Church denomination but still feel like I've like I have control over that. I’ve got something to kind of contribute (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018).

With Rosie’s choice of church there is, within rational choice theory, what Segre calls ‘strategic social action’ (2014, p. 284). I offer that the beliefs, desires, and goals of the congregation are taken into consideration before Rosie made her decision. The following excerpt from my fieldwork diary shows another inclusive aspect of worship at Glasgow City Free Church of Scotland.

This evening I attended Glasgow City Free Church for their evening service. This is the church that R. K McL attends and has female precentors and prayer leaders. There are around 50 people in the church. Once again everyone is very friendly and come up to speak to me. In front of me are two transgender women. Interesting as the Free Church does not have to reputation for being inclusive nor liberal in their thinking. From my observations the women appear to be regular attendees, they are welcomed and are included in conversations with others. Does this inclusivity, and giving women a role in the church, show that the wishes and views of the congregation (urban) carry more weight than that of the church as a whole (mainly rural)? (Fieldwork Diary, February 24th, 2019).

Within the wider Free Church of Scotland organisation, I propose that Rev, Gow has created what Segre (2014) refers to as social micro system, one within a religious setting. I judge that Rev. Gow has considered the goals and beliefs of both his church and his congregation and has acted in concert with his parishioners believing that their interdependence of action can generate change, albeit slowly. There is evidence of co-operation through game theory. Such cooperation relies on the existence of social norms. Gender identity is reinforced from ‘the norms of behaviour imposed on men and women by culture and religion (Raday 2003, p 669). From the above excerpt it is apparent that the norms in the churches on Lewis are very different from the norms in this church in Glasgow. The culture of a large city is starting to exert some influence on the religious behavioural norms of this conservative denomination. I must add at this juncture that I have based this view on observation of the service and congregation alongside my interview with Rosie.[[118]](#footnote-118)

Glasgow City Free Church of Scotland’s practice of allowing women to Precent and lead prayer compares with that of The Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI)[[119]](#footnote-119) which began in London in 2012. This initiative ‘accepts women leading prayer and welcomes people of diverse gender and sexual orientation’ (Nyhagen 2019, p. 3). When it comes to a conflict between religious and secular views, individual conservative religious organisations making changes to resolve gender inequality, affords women the choice to remain in their chosen religious denomination. Rosie remains a communicant of the Free Church of Scotland and this is important to her. She can maintain her faith without compromising her feminist beliefs:

Even before I probably knew what the word was, I've always been a feminist. Like, I found it a really frustrating. It's actually why I chose the church even right now, because women actually get to do stuff (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018)

I found Rosie’s stance energising because, as Jagger notes ‘there is a difficult relationship between Christianity and feminism, and at times the [Anglican] Church[[120]](#footnote-120) has contributed to the backlash against feminism as a movement’ (2019, p. 39). Rosie has found a church which allows her to be both a feminist and a Free Church of Scotland communicant. Neither her faith nor her feminist beliefs have altered.

The changes that are being made with regard to gender appeared, in my view, to be a positive move. How far change will progress, only time will tell. I suggest that higher levels of tolerance, with regard, not only to women but those in the LGBT+ community, will only happen where there is no perceived challenge to the authority of the church. Laxity in adherence to doctrine can lead to schism. Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland is proof of that. Yet, what was highlighted was that gender is not a dichotomy and is permitted fluidity in this church. Melanchthon may have been writing about Indian Christian churches when she asked, ‘what constitutes a real woman?’ (2006, p.213) but I believe her question can be asked of the conservative Presbyterian churches. It may be that this is a question, as Melanchthon points out, many churches have not considered. She emphasises that ‘a church that claims to stand in partnership with women should support such a quest’ (2006, p.213). The voices of those who do not fit neatly into a preconceived dichotomy of woman / man must now be heard.

Rosie’s frustration with the patriarchal aspect of the Free Church of Scotland was apparent throughout her interview, especially when she spoke of her first long term relationship during her last two years at school. This relationship was, in Rosie’s view, emotionally abusive and controlling, yet the boyfriend was well liked by her parents and by the wider church community, as he was ‘from the right sort of family’(Rosie 2018). What struck me most about Rosie’s interview was the number of times she employed the word ‘power’, using itten times. This was not a word that I or any of the other participants, used when discussing patriarchy. The word used in all other interviews was authority:

There's just a massive sense of power that, with guys in the Free Church. I think it's why I get very concerned for how many young guys want to go to the ministry because it's that power, it's that I don't trust most of them. I'm not gonna lie (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018).

Power, used here in relation to Rosie’s interview, conjured up, for me, a more sinister understanding; it was not legitimised. This is an example of masculine hegemony as a control and it has left Rosie with a different perspective, no longer recognising the legitimacy of the patriarchy within the Free Church of Scotland. From my time spent with her I recognise Rosie does not cling fast to the doctrine and religious practices of the Free Church of Scotland. She belongs to the group of women, identified by Avishai, who ‘adapt their religion to the realities of their lives, women subvert and resist official dogma through partial compliance’ (2008, p. 411). Rosie has joined a congregation that does not fully uphold the practices of the Free Church. Her faith remains important to her, but she no longer attends church every Sabbath.

**5.1.b ‘Because the Bible Told Me So’**

The Bible is our “word of God”. It is the recollection and regathering of the meaning of God’s salvific deeds. It is not only a text to be read, it is also a word proclaimed, which reinterprets the text for life…. just as event becomes word, and word emerges into text, so text, in turn, calls for a new word, to reread it.’ (Croatto 1987, p. 82).

The Free Church of Scotland’s ministry has been exclusively male since its inception, underpinned by androcentric beliefs about the entitlement to authority as prescribed by the scriptures. The following is taken from the Free Church of Scotland website and exemplifies the Bible as the ultimate source of authority:

Perhaps the most obvious feature of the Free Church is the centrality of the Bible in all that we do. The Free Church believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. ([www.freechurch.org](http://www.freechurch.org))

The Bible has historical and traditional authority in defining the role of women in a religious sphere. It is important to note that female inequality is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, however, are women marginalised and make ‘interesting stopping places’ (Connolly 2018, p. 91) within the scriptures. Ward proposed that some of what is written in the Bible has been taken as absolute, focusing on Paul’s teachings on the subordination of women, which have been ‘read as giving men in general authority over women, and as such have been generally harmful to women’ (1999, p. 213). However, as Paul also taught that all should be equal in the eyes of Christ it stands to reason that the subordination of women is unsubstantiated (Ward 1999). Barton also pointed out that inconsistencies can be discerned within the scriptures, however, he argued that ‘we can conclude at least that Jesus opposed the abuse of women – no small thing’ (2019, p. 479).

Scriptural teachings aside there may be another reason why women have no positions of authority in the conservative denominations. As the Bible was written using male language for God, Ruether proposed that this may result in ‘the view that males are more God like than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church or society’ (2002, p. 3). Writing of the ordination of female priests in the Church of England, Aldredge-Clanton pointed out that:

…down through history people have used the Bible to support the status quo…some of those opposing the motion would say “I believe the Bible is literally true.” However, they chose only a few verses from the passage to take literally. So, what they really mean is, “I believe that those portions of the Bible that I believe are literally true are literally true” (1990, p. 15).

Taking a literal interpretation of the scriptures may stop women, such as Sophie and Jean, questioning the interpretations laid down over the centuries, thus preventing them rejecting the guidelines set down by God (Schüllser Fiorenza 2006; Melanchthon 2006).

With any text, the aim of its author is a closure of meaning, offering the reader an explanation in written form. The Bible is God’s work and therefore contains God’s explanation, but God’s explanation is revealed through the interpretation of men. I propose that by taking a feminist hermeneutic approach the reader can have a different perspective. If one takes 1 Corinthians and the passages quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the reasons behind Paul’s letter are being ignored, we are overlooking the events surrounding him. It has been proposed that Paul wanted to stop glossolalia in the temples (Barton 2019). As women tended to participate in this practise more than men the meaning behind the letter may have been misinterpreted. The scriptures also position women as minor characters, characters that are often silenced. In her work on the Gospel of St Mark, Connolly argues that on the occasions when women speak to other women ‘the outcome for males is disastrous’ (Connolly, 2018, p89). Biblical interpretation aside, the Bible was written during periods of bias, in times that ‘idealised men and scorned women’ (Schüllser Fiorenza 2006, p. 82). For the conservative Presbyterian churches the text of the scriptures is valuable because it verifies and confirms authority.

It was important that I also considered the Bible’s idealised representation of men and the affect that has on those men who attempt to uphold God’s perception of them. I was drawn to Sawyer’s work and her proposal that:

[r]ather than narrowing down this particular critique on patriarchal religion and focusing on women as unique victims, as the Other in this scheme, we need to deconstruct the implications of a ‘Supreme Being’ theology for both women and men’ (2005, p. 166).

Donnie spoke in his interview of the difficulties of being an elder but, that as it was his duty, he had agreed to take on the role:

[a]nd I became an office bearer shortly after that and I was made an elder, a few years ago which is difficult. An elder should be someone who's retired, I think. So, it's difficult for a young person with a young family and family commitments to fulfil. (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

Analysing this data made me consider Donnie as having little autonomy. He has added a patriarchal authoritarian role to that of his roles as a father, husband, and employee. As an elder he has added the spiritual responsibilities for the church community to his workload. In Biblical texts that go back to the Old Testament stories of Abraham we can trace the obedience of the son (man) to the authority of the father (God). Donnie’s obedience comes before his own needs. As Sawyer argues ‘[a]lthough male power is clearly evident in human affairs supported by social and political legislation, in the face of God male power is emasculated’ (2005, p. 170).

The Bible is an important part of lived religion for those who worship in the Free Church of Scotland. Those attending worship and Fellowship who do not bring their own Bible are in the minority. I made use of a Gideon Bible left in the bedside cabinet of my rental cottage. Primary school children bring their own copies to Sunday worship. The Bibles belonging to the older members of the congregation appear to be frequently used, with well-thumbed corners. This is in opposition to research findings by Field (2014) where he noticed that, within the UK, not only has readership of the Bible declined post war, but that ownership has also fallen. He noted that individual ownership ‘has been largely passive (the product of handed-down copies or presents), despite the advent of modern translations.’ (2014, p. 517). The Bibles the children brought to worship all seemed relatively new and appeared to have been purchased for the child, not passed down.

Although women are allowed to lead prayer at female only Fellowship in the Free Church of Scotland, Bible Study is led by the minister. It is he, after all, who has been called by God to deliver the correct theological message. Nyhagen notes that for some Muslim women ‘[o]btaining religious knowledge …was seen as a tool for empowerment’ (2019, p.6). The idea religious knowledge being the key stone in the struggle for female equality in conservative religions is also alluded to by Ruether. She writes ‘[w]omen must gain education and agency in some social institutions that enables them to gain a voice…Women must gain education and agency in the church as those allowed to learn, speak, and be heard as theologians’ (2002, p.4). Research also reveals that women pass religious knowledge on to their children (Nyhagen, 2019). I found evidence of a woman passing on religious knowledge in Donnie’s interview. Donnie had, at this point, been talking about his dad and family worship:

but my mum was probably more advanced than he was in our faith. And then she taught us well. You know, in terms of the bible and things like that and prayer. (Donnie, 36, Tong, 2018).

Although men are the spiritual guardians of the family and play a role in both formal and family worship women play a role in the religious education of their children. They may play a larger role and may have greater knowledge but that does not situate them as the spiritual guardian of the family. Whatever level of knowledge they possess they cannot impart that to men in formal worship yet a man or young boy with less knowledge can.

Connie, Louise, Andrew, and Donnie all spoke of reading the Bible at home, a practice that goes back to the very heart of the Reformation. Luther argued that the Bible offered such clarity that all who read it could understand the edicts from God (Barton 2019). Today, the messages found in the Bible hold as much relevance for the aforementioned participants as they did during the Reformation. It was the Bible that Louise turned to when the demands of new motherhood overwhelmed her:

I'd read like *The Baby Whisperer* and was like, “It's nice, it's a bit wishy-washy, but it's nice,” and Gina Ford [a British author of childcare books] was just a bit too scary, and I was like, “Do you know what? I know the Bible's right; I can't go wrong with that.” So, he had this insight Bible has lots of you know, the easy sort of headings, and I thought, “Well, that saves me, sitting and reading passages, because I don't understand that.” And there was like parenthood, and you know, anxiety and all these sorts of things. And I just started reading it, and I was like, “This is actually quite helpful.” (Louise, 34, Back 2018).

Louise’s use of the Bible as a means of support relates to Schüllser Fiorenza’s view that ‘whether as a source of well-being or of a dependence on authority, the Bible is still central in many wo/men’s lives.’ (2002, p. 83). My analysis of data concerning the Bible was difficult as I was forced to tackle two opposing factors. Throughout analysis I was careful not to disregard the continuing influence and importance of the Bible within the lives of those in the church communities. At the same time, I was aware that I must not ‘attempt to reconstruct some sort of social reality’ (Gilfillan Upton, 2002, p. 107) from Biblical canon.

Donnie spoke of choosing to read the Bible whenever he had some free time. With a job, two young daughters, and the roles of elder and Mission Hall chairman, free time was in short supply. I was also interested when Donny spoke of his time as a university student in Glasgow. Donnie had attended church as a child but had stopped as a teenager. It was around this time that he also began experimenting with recreational drugs and alcohol. The following excerpt relates to that period of his life:

And sometimes I remember coming home like three in the morning and crying, and having a bible under my bed, which I never read. Never read it at all but got security from this bible that was, that was under my bed. And - and holding on to it a few times, but that was as far as it went. It’s just a security thing. (Donnie, 36, Stornoway (2018).

For Donnie, the Bible became an extension of the sacred canopy, offering protection from a life which at that point, by his own admission, was spiralling out of control. After a weekend partying in the city Donnie sought out his Bible, returned to the island and to the church. I was interested in the way in which Donnie perceived this pivotal episode in his life, explaining to me that God saved him that morning. His social, cultural, and religious identities shaped his reaction to a crisis and his re engagement with the Bible. Donnie’s views on the Bible changed as he rediscovered his faith:

every time I was reading the bible it was an old, dusty book, but now every time I was reading the Bible it was an old, dusty book, but now, it’s alive, it is a living book. (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

Reverend Ferrier has established youth Bible study sessions where the young people are encouraged to ask questions, debate the scriptures and their meanings. Barna Group’s (2015) research into Christianity and Faith in Scotland looked at the importance of the Bible for Millennials. Their findings for this demographic related to my analysis, noting ‘[a]nother marker of engaged Millennials is how they see the Bible as an indispensable guide to navigating today’s complex world’ (2015, p.72). Their findings showed that this cohort read their Bibles regularly with ‘96 per cent report reading the Bible at least once a week’ (2015, p.72). What also struck a chord with my research is that Barna Group discovered that debating the scriptures with their peers was key to maintaining engagement (Barna Group 2015). It may also be noted that for young adults:

[m]ore open individuals might be more inclined to question rapture theology (premillenialism) and the supposition that the Bible is free of errors (inerrancy) by examining multiple sources and opposing data. (Bartoszuk and Deal 2016, p. 150).

At our meeting in the An Lanntair café, the group told me of a book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: New and Revised* by Josh McDowell (2004) which they all professed to have read. They told me this book had given them a greater understanding of the Bible, by enabling them to read the scriptures in relation to present day situations. I purchased the book, a weighty tome, but found it difficult to navigate.

The teenage group attended the weekly Bible study session held by Reverend Ferrier. The book they use at the session, and recommended to me, continues to give a man’s interpretation of the scriptures. From my analysis and observations of this group it was clear that their study group was using interpretation as a tool for maintaining structures of male domination. I wonder if using a different hermeneutic approach, a feminist exegesis may have granted them a better understanding of the importance of contesting patriarchal authority:

‘there is much to be said for reading against the grains of the biblical text, and learning strategies that neither deny the presence of texts that are violently hostile to women, nor collude with the sentencing of women to generations of destructive behaviour authenticated by institutional authority.’ (Gilfillan Upton, 2002, p. 110).

Challenging the patriarchy would not necessarily lead to them disposing it. Using a feminist critique may strengthen their views on religious gender inequality. By gaining a different perspective the girls could be afforded a greater degree of autonomy as they consider the social and historical constructs of the scriptures (Gilfillan Upton 2002). Louise’s interview depicts the internal conflict that she has around patriarchal constructs:

The things I wrestle with are probably more around the traditions held than the church structure. I believe women praying in public is a positive thing, I believe there is no necessity for etiquette around dress or anything like that. Traditions and heritage should be protected but not if it keeps 50% of you congregation mute. (Louise, 34, Back, 2018).

However, as discussed, Louise continues to uphold the patriarchal aspects of the church through the use of ideological compensation. I also found the language used to be of interest. In her first sentence she differentiates between tradition and church structure. It appears that tradition, for Louise, does not hold the same religious gravitas.

Barton wrote that the Bible is ‘a mêlée of materials, few of which directly address the question of what is to be believed’ (2019, p. 3). He argued that by accepting the Bible as the ultimate authority there is a conviction that what is written in the scriptures is factual. Yet as Ward points out the scripture’s acceptance of gender inequality, slavery and capital punishment ‘render it suspect as a literal guide to moral conduct’ (1999, p. 120). Taking what is written in the Bible and proffering a literal translation with present day relevance can be contentious. This was apparent when Rosie spoke of the second fire at the Glasgow School of Art.[[121]](#footnote-121)

Some guy wrote on Heb News[[122]](#footnote-122) …that there was this conspiracy as to why the Art School went on fire was because someone had made an art project where people could write on the Bible or something like that. And there was God like seeking revenge…This guy was just kicking off, about the gay pride parade as well. Like, leave them alone, right? (Rosie, 21, Glasgow 2018).

In this situation a man interpreted what had happened, two accidental fires which destroyed an iconic building, stating his belief of what had happened. A building destroyed by God as punishment for people openly expressing their sexuality, and the sale of a piece of art nine years earlier. The following is an extract from a letter written by this man[[123]](#footnote-123), and sent to the Letters section of the Hebridean News:

Numerous Biblical warnings were given by those who were protesting, urging exhibitors and visitors to seriously consider what they were doing. In the gospel tracts being circulated were the following Bible verses, ‘Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed …therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel.’

(Hebrides-news.com 10h July 2018)

He stated that the Bible gives clear warning on the punishment that will befall those who defame the Bible. Ignore such warnings at your peril. The fires and the destruction of the School of Art validated his Biblical views. His letter is an example of confirmation bias, as the fires confirm his prejudices.

Society is changing and change, for some, can be unsettling. The Bible is a constant for those who worship in the Free Church of Scotland. Hervieu-Léger noted that ‘what religion with is its code of meaning, brings about is a world of collective meanings’ (2000, p. 86). The Bible is blueprint for the religious code that shields the people of Lewis.

**5.2 Adultery and Suicide**

A series of unprecedented events occurred in 2017 which led to Back Free Church losing their assistant minister, and, eventually, Reverend MacLeod also. Following Reverend MacLeod’s move to a new parish on the mainland, all connections I had made in the congregation fell silent. Emails and texts went unanswered. The community closed ranks and, as an outsider, I was excluded. I could appreciate the reasons that may have lain behind the silence. This may well have been out of concern as to how I would portray these events in my research. Or, perhaps, they may have felt that they did not having the time to continue with this research project. They had a new minister to find for Broadbay, a time-consuming task.[[124]](#footnote-124) Before I could actively look for another congregation, the owner of my rental cottage suggested his own church community. It was through talking to Sandy that I decided to look at the reasons behind Reverend MacLeod’s move. I had initially assumed the move was to enable him and his wife to be closer to their three daughters, all of whom were now working and studying on the mainland.

As a consequence of the events which led to Reverend MacLeod moving to a new congregation, the primary question of my thesis changed. The main focus was repositioned onto gender differentiation in the Church with reference to patriarchy. It was at this juncture that I sought advice from the Ethics Board at Canterbury Christ Church University. There was concern that the evaluation of data would now be scrutinising the circumstances surrounding a suicide. The majority of those involved in the proceedings surrounding this death still live on the island. After reviewing a project amendment form the Ethics Board upheld my ethical clearance.

**5.2.a The Bad Wife**

In January 2017 a fellow island minister, and friend of Reverend MacLeod committed suicide. This minister, The Reverend Dr. Iain D Campbell, known locally as IDC,[[125]](#footnote-125) was a well-known theologian and ex Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland. His wife had discovered that he had been unfaithful, committing adultery throughout their marriage, with seven women. His death shocked the island. Following his suicide, Mrs Campbell discovered the extent of his infidelity through a confession left by IDC on his computer. She approached the synod asking them to investigate. The Church had, initially, hoped to keep the scandal quiet and at first, his death was reported as “sudden”. When his widow’s claims became public knowledge, she found herself the target of vitriol, condemned for tarnishing her husband’s reputation. Mrs Campbell was vilified for bringing her husband’s affairs to light. She had to leave the island, her home, her adult children and her job.[[126]](#footnote-126) It was to be a year before she returned. Before the Church acknowledged the circumstances surrounding his death, fellow ministers preached from their pulpits about the evils of gossip:

He [Reverend Ferrier] told us all from the pulpit one Sunday that we were not to listen to all the malicious gossip and lies that were being spread about IDC. He should never have done that. I did not agree with him doing it and he was so angry. He defended him [the deceased]. Then, when we found out all about it, he never mentioned it again. He never said a word. (Sandy, 77, Stornoway 2019).

Reverend MacLeod was another minister who defended IDC. He subsequently discovered that one of the women accused of adultery was a member of his Broadbay congregation. In August of 2017, Back Free Church suffered a second blow when the assistant minster also confessed to adultery. He immediately left the island. He has remained a member of the clergy and, as I write this, is awaiting a new posting following a period of contrition. The Reverend MacLeod left Lewis in December 2018. When I last spoke to him, he talked of “difficulties” in the parish and of the problems he was experiencing ministering to the congregation without the help of an assistant minister.

What is of relevance, for this research, is the manner in which the adultery and suicide of IDC were handled. There was a marked difference in the approach in which those involved were treated. These differences were gender based and evidence of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is not, as Connell and Messerschmidt point out ‘normal in the statistical sense’ (2005, p. 832) but in the conservative Presbyterian communities it was normative, legitimising the subordination of women to men. The Free Church of Scotland takes a hard stance against adultery and in 2015 the synod petitioned the Scottish Parliament to maintain the adultery laws. However, despite this stance the synod was reluctant to investigate his infidelity, choosing instead to revere him in the media through glowing obituaries.

Initial reports into IDC’s death made no mention of suicide. Free Church of Scotland doctrine considers suicide to be a sin. Ward explains why in the eyes of God suicide is sinful:

God has created each human life with a natural inclination to survive, and that inclination is meant to support God’s wish that each life should survive until God decrees it should be ended. Suicide is regarded as a disobedience to God’s will, a rejection of the gift of life (Ward 1999, p. 219).

Obituaries describing the deceased as a well-respected minister and theologian were printed in newspapers. As rumours began to circulate, his widow came under increasing criticism, accused of being at fault.[[127]](#footnote-127) In twenty-first century Scotland the onus and blame were being laid firmly at her door. The following quotes, from her peers and neighbours, were printed in a sensationalist article in a tabloid newspaper:

A lot of people are saying the problem was at home. He put on a cheery face when he was out but domestically it was a different story.

Even though she’s a widow people are saying Iain had a difficult home life and there’s a lot of anger towards her. (Pisa, *The Sun* 13th March 2017)

*The Times* also focused on Mrs Campbell’s behaviour, although the quote used appears to offer her a form of retribution for not nurturing her husband when he was alive. In contrast it quoted a senior member of the Free Church of Scotland clergy. By quoting a man who had an authoritarian position gave it a sense of gravitas as opposed to those used by *The Sun*, which could be interpreted as gossip:

The Rev Donald Macleod, former principal of the Free Church College, wrote in an obituary that Dr Campbell “was in pain, and sometimes pain is more powerful than faith”. He also called upon Mrs Campbell, 54, to “do [her deceased husband] proud”, which was seen as an instruction to keep quiet about Dr Campbell’s supposed infidelity (*The Times* 11th March 2017).

Reverend MacLeod was affecting what Manne calls “himpathy”, ‘the inappropriate and disproportionate sympathy powerful men often enjoy in cases of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, homicide and other misogynistic behaviour’ (Manne, 2018).

The ways in which the print media covered the events surrounding IDC’s suicide brought to the fore my limited knowledge surrounding media representation of gender. To gain a better understanding I enrolled and completed a seven-week MOOC through Strathclyde University titled Gender Representation in the Media. It enabled me to examine the ways in which the media reports on events and how the language and images it uses differ between the genders. In all the media reports, much was made of IDC’s status on the island. Mrs Campbell, by contrast, was described as a wife and mother. It was those roles that defined her, not that of a teacher. Any reference to her employment focused on allegations of bullying. Photographs of Mr and Mrs Campbell showed them together as a couple, happy, smiling, with IDC’s protective arm around his wife. This depiction of IDC as an upstanding member of the community and a supportive husband creates the ideal medium for ‘himpathy’. It also brought to mind Benton’s view that ‘Christianity raised the status of women to where they had a right to the protection of men’ (2014, p.120). IDC was portrayed as the protector, the protector of his wife, his family and Christian values. His reality, following his death, was obscured by himpathy.

Adultery was not the only transgression in which the men of Lewis appear to be given free reign. When speaking with the Jo, she told me of her disquiet with the way in which the police would turn a blind eye to ‘religious’ men when caught drunk driving:[[128]](#footnote-128)

J. was not a church goer and came from a mixed religious upbringing. She spoke of the hypocrisy of some of the men in the church. J. informed me that many of them went out drinking and driving but “if you are a man and have a bible on your dashboard the police will not stop you no matter what you do”. She said she had experience of this. When sitting in her car at a junction a car drove into her from behind. J. said that although the man smelt of alcohol as he was on his way to church the police just waved him on. (Fieldwork Diary, 19th February 2019).

This is evidence of piety being a defence for any wrongdoings, be it secular or religious laws that are being broken.

When examining marriage within conservative religions, Irby compared the role of married Catholic and Jewish women with that of women in conservative Presbyterian denominations. Traditionally, in Catholicism and Judaism, the role is one of homemaker, centred around the family (Irby 2014). However, Irby pointed out that conservative Presbyterian marriage places importance on ‘the gendered relationship between the husband and wife’ (2014, p. 1271). The primary role is not to nurture the family but to nurture the husband. Mrs Campbell appears to have fallen short in her duties as a wife, berated for making her husband’s homelife unhappy. The idealised Christian wife has a long tradition. In the 1850s *The Edinburgh Christian Magazine* wrote articles on the subjects of ‘Good Wives’ and ‘Good Mothers’ (Brown 2009, p. 62). Women’s role models were to be found, not only in real life, but in the scriptures. However, as mentioned in previous section, it is important we do not ‘overlook the implications of constructed masculinity’ (Sawyer 2005, p. 166). The patriarchy declared in the scriptures can be interpreted as leaving men with little autonomy, as subordinates to God and as such placed under extreme pressure. Although it can be considered that gender specific responsibilities may effect behaviours, the way in which IDC and the women involved were treated emphasised the patriarchal constructs and gender inequality of the church institution.

The Free Church of Scotland synod was eventually compelled to act, as Mrs Campbell had IDC’s confession. There was to be a thorough investigation into his actions. However, before that could commence, they took some of the women involved to task. Four of those named were put under obligation to appear before a Church court, overseen by men. The women had no right to counsel and had to defend themselves. These trials by men recalled Furlong’s view of the story of Eve ‘we interpret this magnificent story mythically rather than literally, it claims that the ills of humankind derive from women’s power to tempt’ (1991, p. 17). This has been interpreted as furnishing men with the right to discipline and subordinate women because to fail to do so would bring about the men’s downfall. As Raday notes:

[r]eligion not cultures have codified custom into binding source books that predate the whole concept of gender equality and have both the legal and the institutional structures to enforce their principles (2003, p. 669)

This was never more evident than in the women’s trials. As a result of the hearings one woman was exonerated, two were reprimanded and the fourth was exiled from the Free Church of Scotland for a year. The punishments handed out are rooted in Calvinistic tradition where ‘the church must act as a disciplinary body, with the power to exclude from its fellowship for scandalous conduct’ (Ward, 1999, p. 273). Repent and you can be brought back into the fold, excommunication is not eternal.

The investigation into IDC’s adultery and suicide was held behind closed doors. The reasons behind his actions can only be speculative. I therefor chose not to evaluate the findings of the synod’s inquiry. Alderage-Clanton offered one explanation as to why some men may engage in deceitful behaviours. If they hold positions of authority in both the Church and the community, and added to that, as Ibry suggested, they take on a role as head of the family, they may find themselves burdened by expectation. Without treating men as victims of circumstance it is important that one considers that men may feel unsatisfied with life when reflecting on the implications placed on them through hegemonic masculinities. Masculinity, as discussed, is multi layered and, within a patriarchal structure the maintenance of power does invoke the subordination of women. For those who embrace gender equality within the home this is ‘likely to involve specific patterns of internal division and emotional conflict’ (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 852). However, Alderage-Clanton wrote that ‘[i]f they are able to live up to these expectations, these men may develop God-complexes……under the illusions of this fantasy men take risks’ (1992 p. 82). IDC took many risks, over many years.

The men of the Free Church of Scotland held authority over how the events were reported and dealt with. They had the authority to punish the women involved. At no point were the husbands subjected to the same vitriol as IDC’s widow. They were not blamed for their wives’ actions, not blamed for being bad husbands. I could find no reports justifying the women’s affairs. There was no suggestion that the women had been pushed into the affairs through unhappy home lives. The investigation into IDC’s actions took place behind closed doors.

Yet for all the authority they possessed the men of the Free Church did not have power over the actions of IDC’s widow. She used her power to demand an investigation. She was seen and eventually heard. This resulted in her being offered an apology. However, to continue her fight for an investigation and an apology she had to leave the island. At home, her control over the situation was diluted by others using the power tool of shame. They sought to shame her as a bad wife, ‘the historically white, Christian, male tactics of ostracism and shaming’ (Morris,1992, p.201) were put to good use. Throughout my research into IDC’s death, it was the women who were perceived to be in the wrong. I could not get the perspectives of the women involved as, within the media, they were silent. IDC was portrayed as a man pushed into the affairs by a wife that was failing to care for her husband, the bad wife, and pulled into the affairs by temptresses. I found myself asking the same question Walby had posed thirty years earlier ‘[w]hy are women criticised for forms of sexual conduct for which men are considered positively?’ (1990, p. 109).

**5.2.b The Temptress and Objectification of Women**

‘There would be no bad men if there were no bad women’ (Kennedy 2018, p. 21).

A group of people standing in front of a sign

Description automatically generated

When I first began investigating the different ways in which the conservative Presbyterian churches viewed men and women, I wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the doctrine that underpinned patriarchy in the Church. I focused my literature search on the Free Church of Scotland’s website freechurch.org as I wanted to know the content of literature they suggested to new and present members re gender roles. The resources section led me to their online bookshop, 10ofthose.com. There were no books which explained the theology behind women’s silence in church. I was, however, directed to two books aimed at women; *Women and Lust: Exposed, Forgiven and Embraced* by Sarah Taras and *Menopause: Help for the “Hot and Bothered*” by Amy Baker. The books were published in 2017 and 2012 respectively.

I had not set out to investigate lust but having come across a book which specifically references women and lust, along with the ways in which the women had been treated in the events following IDC’s suicide, I decided to look further into this concept. Interestingly, when I searched for men and lust in the resources section. I received the following message: ‘We didn't find any results for the search "men and lust’ (10ofthose.com). It appears that lust rests solely in the female domain.

I found the pictures used on the front covers of both books to be provocative. The image of a younger women, hands crossed in a submissive manner was unsettling. The picture of the older woman with long grey hair and bare shoulders has a sexualisation element to it. We cannot see what this woman is wearing but it suggests she is topless. In the book Baker wrote that ‘[f]or the beloved of God, grey hair is a crown of splendour’ (2012, p. 8). Yet how many women think of grey hair in this way? It is a visible sign of aging and Baker was quick to point out that ‘aging is bad news’ (2012, p. 4) a clear contradiction in her message. In both images the women’s body language is closed. Neither image show their faces, rendering them nonentities. As we cannot see their faces, we cannot read their emotions; there can be no engagement between the women and the reader. The passivity of both women sets the tone for the books.

*The* *Women and Lust* book focuses on fantasy, a guide to help women stop constructing sexual scenarios in their imaginations. Taras warned the readers that ‘sexual fantasies rarely stay only in the mind’ (2017, p. 7). In Taras’s book women use sexual fantasy with men as a means of feeling ‘desired and adored’ (2017, p. 5). The language used in relation to women is demeaning, words such as failure, helpless, anxiety and mistakes. In comparison Taras used words such as save, understanding and problem-solving when referring to men. There is one particular phrase I found troubling, ‘the object of his desire’ (2017, p. 7). This is objectification of women; their sexual fantasy is not about being in control of their sexuality, but of being an object who meets a man’s sexual requirements. Women are not to be empowered by their sexuality and sexual desires.

The menopause is a time of change for all women whether they experience adverse symptoms or not. Baker related aging to the consequences of sin, ‘[s]in really does bring death and destruction, and the aging process is powerful evidence of this truth’ (2012, p.4). However, she offers reassurance to the reader that, by trusting God, she will be given grace, dignity, and a responsibility to pass on wisdom to younger women. As a mentor the reader should ‘[e]xplain how you organize your schedule and home. Help them focus on the good qualities of their husbands and children’ (2012, p.11). This aspect of femininity, of an idealised wife and mother, places a positivity spin on women’s gender roles as ‘improving our lives by making them richer’ (Nyhagen and Halsaa 2016, p. 163).

As I write this section of my thesis a new female group has come to the focus of the media, Tradwives. This group defines itself as being anti-feminist. The women all take on traditional roles in the home. Ebner (2020) has written about this subject proposing that ‘the techniques used to radicalise them are similar to those used to groom Isis brides’ (2020, p.15). Baker’s request that older women instruct young women on how to organise a home and to look only at the positive qualities of their families resonates with the Tradwives movement. The harking back to an idealised time is not a new phenomenon. Brown (2009) mentioned that in both the 1850s and 1950s the role of the wife was venerated through literature and the media.. In 1950s America there was a ‘vigorous reassertion of ‘traditional’ values: the role of women as wives and mothers.’ (2009, p. 5). How far back one must travel for the perfect wife is unknown. In Scotland in the 1850s articles were written for men advising on the wifely qualities they should look for. The best wives were those who showed ‘industry, humility, neatness, gentleness, benevolence, and piety’ (2009, p. 62). Over one hundred and seventy years later it is women who are striving to be the perfect wife.

Baker ends her book with seven principles by which the menopausal woman can find fulfilment in later life. Aside from using sleepless nights as a time for prayer, using free time in charitable pursuits and the aforementioned mentoring, the reader is advised to ensure their husband’s needs as a friend and lover are being met, the house is kept clean and adult children are given support. By following these seven principles Baker assures us that ‘life can become a crescendo’ (2012, p. 20). This book also brings to the fore the objectification of women. Despite acknowledging that, for some, the menopause can bring changes in libido, tiredness and emotional issues, the first principle is to ensure that the husband’s sexual needs are met. It appears that the woman must remain the object of desire even if she feels no desire herself. However, with age, the danger of becoming a temptress appears to have abated as Baker makes no mention of sexual fantasy or lust.

As I further attempted to gain a better understanding of the doctrine surrounding gender roles, I examined transcripts of old sermons given by ministers of the Free Church of Scotland.[[129]](#footnote-129) The sermons offer a rich source of data, with some going back many years, covering a variety of topics. One sermon by the Reverend Ivor MacDonald, a minister from Coatbridge, near Glasgow, was of relevance. Reverend MacDonald gave a series of sermons on Proverbs at his congregation’s Fellowship meetings. This particular sermon, Proverbs Chapter 7, focused on a temptress leading a young man astray.[[130]](#footnote-130) There is no date given as to when this sermon was delivered, however, at the start of the sermon, he makes a direct reference to ministers becoming disgraced. I have no means to ascertain if there was any connection to IDC’s suicide and the timing of this sermon. I found it interesting that, although the sermon was delivered at a Fellowship meeting where both men and women would have been in attendance, he presented this sermon directly to the young boys whilst making further reference to ministers:

You can be a good Presbyterian boy and sit under lots of sermons. You can be a minister and preach lots of sermons but unless you are attending to the Word of God then you are heading for a downfall (Reverend Ivor MacDonald, Coatbridge ([www.freechurch.org](http://www.freechurch.org))

Reverend MacDonald recounted the tale of a young man’s ruin. He talked of traps, describing the woman as a hunter and a lioness. The young man, by comparison, is described as foolish, caught up in the romance of the meeting, and unable to resist the snare set by the temptress. This Biblical passage places the blame for sexual transgressions on the woman. With the Bible being the ultimate source of authority in this conservative denomination, the label of temptress is awarded legitimacy. In describing the man as powerless, he is handed a defence. Evidence that ‘the exclusively male hierarchy has always sought to define women in its own terms as dangerous temptresses’ (Prior 2003, p.61). Connell and Messershmidt discuss the way masculinity is reinforced by the ‘prestige conferred on boys with heterosexual partners and sexual learning imagined as exploration and conquest’ (2005, p.851).

The theory of men being handed a defence is also featured in Kennedy’s 2018 book; *Eve was Shamed*. This book examined the ways in which the British legal system has failed women through placing the emphasis of blame firmly on them when it comes to sexual assault or harassment. There are parallels between the judiciary and the synod. There is an inequality in the British Justice system with the keystone being male power; this is after, all an institution which continues to be dominated by men. Kennedy noted that men resort to sexual assault or harassment as a means of venting their power or hiding their lack of it:

Sexual assault and harassment are usually assertions of power and abuse of it, but sometimes it is about men hating their own feelings of powerlessness. …For many men who have little power, watching women being successful and instrumental is a source of impotent rage, which finds expression in non-physical abuse (2018, p. 187)

The title of Kennedy’s book is in reference to Eve and women’s responsibility for original sin. Yet, as has already been discussed, Eve owned her ‘sin’ and asked for forgiveness, Adam on the other hand blames only Eve, portraying himself as a victim.

Women are often blamed for the sexual assaults that they have suffered. The media can paint a picture of a temptress who “asked for it” by the way she dressed or by being drunk. This brought to mind Mahmood’s description of women’s sexuality from an Islamic standpoint:

‘while men and women are both urged to discipline their sight, behaviour and thoughts so as to prevent the stirring of illicit sexual passions. It is women who bear the primary responsibility for maintaining the sanctity of relations between the sexes. This is because juristic Islamic tradition assumes that women are the objects of sexual desire and men the desiring subjects’ (2012, p. 110).

As Kennedy observed, ‘the inclination to blame the victim, whatever her age, lives on’ (2018, p. 114). From the pages of religious texts to the vellum scripts of law, men are perceived as being the weaker sex when it comes to sexual temptation. The idealised role of the mother as being ‘the heart of family piety, the moral restraint of men and children’ (Brown 2009, p. 179) was considered to have fallen by the wayside in the 1960s. I propose that this role is one that women are assumed to still hold fast when it comes to sexual transgression.

One other aspect of the Bible being used from the pulpit to endorse the patriarchal aspect of the church community came to light during Rosie’s interview. She spoke of the manner in which the associate minister at her father’s church made no reference to women when he preached:

There are even issues with like even with the language used. Like, so there's an assistant minister in my church, and he's like the least feminist guy I've ever met. Like even in his Bible and stuff when he reads it if it says like men and women in the Bible, he will only read the men part. Either that or he’s got no Bible and likes changing it. It's like, yeah, it's just-- I don't know, it's really frustrating (Rosie, 21 2018)

The assistant minister is not just a man with authority. This is a man who not only uses the Bible to legitimise the silencing of women in church but actively silences them in the scriptures. I can only guess at the reasons behind his removal of women from his readings. The majority of those at worship follow the readings in their own Bibles so the absence must have been apparent. I propose that as woman tend to appear as minor characters in the Bible, and are often silenced, any omission goes unnoticed. I must add that this assistant minister is the one who admitted to adultery and is now awaiting a new posting following a period of contrition.[[131]](#footnote-131)

**5.3 Chapter Summary**

Through the analysis, I identified two concepts that, when combined, answer the questions:

* How do women find agency within the constraints of patriarchal Presbyterianism?
* How do women navigate between the patriarchal Church and the equality driven social spheres?

The first of these is the ultimate authority of the Bible. For those in the congregations of Broadbay and Stornoway the Bible remains relevant, it is not a closed repository. Through reading the Bible, attending Fellowship and listening to sermons, people find structure. They are afforded guidance for lived religion with particular reference to the different gender roles allocated in church. Their critique of women holding no position of authority, their understanding of women being seen but not heard is not through male superiority, but because God has deemed it thus. Yet the Bible is not just relevant in religious belief and practice. As noted by Louise and Donnie, the Bible gives assistance in problems experienced in their everyday lives. It is situated at the core of lived religion, becoming an extension of the sacred canopy of congregational life.

The second concept is that of choice. It is through making choices that people have joined, remained, or left the congregations. It is through choice that they have accepted the roles created for them. That these choices have limits placed on them due to a lack of female authority is not contested in this thesis. The women chose to consent to this aspect of religious life. The women may use different strategies when navigating the patriarchal religious sphere. Children may have little say over attendance at Sunday school but as teenagers they make the choice whether to continue or leave, whether to commit and become a communicant or to remain an adherent. Religion for this group may begin as a chain of memory but they have the choice to break or preserve the chain.

Men may hold authority in the Church, but women hold some power, especially power over other women they believe are not reaching the standards set for them by those in authority. They have the power to chastise those they see as not upholding the religious doctrine of island life. They may be called a bad wife or temptress by those in authority or in the community, but by standing by what they believe, as Jessica and Mrs Campbell have done, they take back an element of control. To do so both had to make choices, Jessica to leave the Church, Mrs Campbell to leave the island. They have choice but it comes at a cost.

Gender equality has different meanings for different people and in different situations. What was apparent throughout this research was that the women gained autonomy and could navigate between the social and religious spheres of their lives by understanding religious gender equality as gender difference (Nyhagen and Halsaa 2012). Women and men had distinctive yet compatible roles with each dependent on the other. However, one must not overlook the fact that for the religious norms to benefit both genders difference must be treated with respect. This aspect was not always apparent especially when it came to adultery.

The following chapter examines links between religious belief and practice and cultural identity. The rules surrounding Sabbatarianism are considered in greater detail. Jessica may have conformed to appease the women of her church but as will be discussed, the rules are also upheld by those with no religious affiliation. Religion as a chain of memory is also given further attention as the data surrounding the religious paths the participants follow are scrutinised. I alluded in this chapter to the perceived apocalyptic consequence, for not following God’s path, that brought both Donnie and Andrew back to faith. The following chapter takes a closer look at the presiding fear of hell held by some male participants, a fear that only men raised.

**CHAPTER 6**

**The Gàidhealtachd: Tradition and Belief**

*eas eir an toiseach*

*Stand fast before them*

This chapter will explore the remaining questions specified in the introduction chapter of this thesis:

* What links are there between cultural identity and religious observance in the remote conservative Presbyterian communities on Lewis?
* What authority does religion hold for the people who live on Lewis?
* What effects do tradition, both cultural and familial, bring to religious belief and practice on Lewis?

Culture is a core social construct with religion incorporated as one aspect and a diversity based on both ethnic and religious differences (Raday 2013, p.665). Despite Scotland being one nation, it has, as has been discussed a duality of ethnicity. Chaplin argues that ‘the much more liberal Presbyterian opinion, in recent years, has distanced itself from their doctrinal views’ (2010, p. 83). While this might be the situation with the mainland churches, all the island Presbyterian church communities, no matter the denomination, are distinct from their Scottish compatriots culturally, socially, and religiously. The Presbyterian church communities of the Gàidhealtachd co-exist, with the more liberal Church of Scotland taking a conservative stance in having no women clergy, deacons, or elders. Research into Scottish culture (Craig 2005; Sutherland 2019) noted the impact Presbyterianism exerts on the Gaelic communities, these include a strong Protestant work ethic, sense of duty and a high moral standpoint. There is also an emphasis on personal salvation with a belief of hell purporting that those who do not commit to God are dammed. [[132]](#footnote-132)

To answer the questions above I begin by examining the practices surrounding Sabbatarianism. This aspect of religious belief encompasses all on the island; religious and non-religious, inhabitants and visitors. It may have its origins in religion, but this characteristic of island life is now embedded in the secular and cultural spheres of Lewis society.[[133]](#footnote-133) There have been, in the past, many protests against trading, sailings and flights on the Sabbath. These protests will be examined in chapter 6, section 1.b. Many have taken up the fight against the dilution of Sabbatarianism by an increasingly secular Scottish society. The battle cry of the protesters remains ‘eas eir an toiseach, stand fast before them’ (*The Telegraph*, 1st September 2019).[[134]](#footnote-134)

That religious belief and practice is in decline in Scotland as a whole is not contested in this thesis but, as has been demonstrated in the history chapter, the Lowlands and the Gàidhealtachd are comparable to two separate countries. As Laniel noted ‘the Christian Church’s influence on most countries, its impact is not uniform and affects many institutionalised religious practices differently’ (2016, p. 373). The religious decline in the Lowlands is not in direct correlation with that in the Gàidhealtachd. This chapter will study the extent to which secularisation has influenced the communities on Lewis and how this differs from the rest of Scotland. Secularisation will be examined with regards to Sabbatarianism and gender, the rate at which changes are occurring, and the views of those, religious and non-religious on such transformations.

The chapter will continue by studying the link between strictness and church attendance. Through this study I aimed to discover if the high attendance numbers at all forms of formal worship could be linked to the conservative nature of the Presbyterian churches. Authority is important in religion (MacBride 2016) and by scrutinising the links between strictness and attendance I will uncover the role authority has within the community with reference to religious belief and practice. I also scrutinise the links between religious affiliation on Lewis and cultural identity. Culture can be perceived as giving the individual the instruction manual on how to live in a particular society. As people act and interact with each other they reinforce the cultural standard, commonly, acting for the good of the group. It therefore follows that the participants who share a common religious identity, reinforce religion as a part of the cultural blueprint (Laniel 2016). This is strengthened through language and fellowship.

This research looks not only at the bearing of the history of the Gàidhealtachd on cultural identity but will also take explore religion as a source of memory, the familial history of the people. This will involve studying the effects tradition, both cultural and familial has on the religiosity of the Lewis communities. The majority of those who participated in this research followed a similar religious path as that of their parents and grandparents before them. This was true whether the individual came from a non-religious, adherent or communicant background. This was an aspect of my research that Reverend MacLeod was particularly interested in, especially when it came to those in the Broadbay congregation who remained adherents. He spoke of adherents as having a faith but not confirming that faith publicly in front of the congregation:

They do have, you know, a personal relationship with Jesus but they, again, are hiding that, aren't prepared to say, you know, "I'm letting go. I'm now walking the path of discipleship." And if you can find the answer to it, send me a postcard (Reverend MacLeod, Back 2018).

As mentioned, that Reverend MacLeod held an interest in aspects of my research was fundamental in my gaining access to his congregation.

**6.1. The Sabbath**

**6.1.a. Rules, Enforcers and Enforcement**

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

(Exodus 20: 8 King James Version).

As one of the Ten Commandments, maintaining the Sabbath as a day of rest has been observed by the Gaelic people down through the generations. As has been discussed in the history chapter, the translation of the Bible into Gaelic helped situate Presbyterianism and Biblical authority in the Gàidhealtachd. The Gaelic Bible was used to aid literacy, and, through education, the Reformation reinforced the Bible’s authority and the moral codes of the Commandments. The Reformers were steadfast in their belief that the Sabbath should be free from unnecessary work, and that ‘all should come to church to hear the sermon’ (Lyall, 2016, p. 205).

This day of rest is still observed on the island, respected by the majority of the population. However, the exactitude in observance has been slowly eroded over the years. I am of the opinion that this erosion occurs in two separate spheres, the public and the private. With the increased use of social media and the internet the boundaries between both have become blurred. As was discussed in the previous chapter, social media in the form of a public forum, was used to chastise Jessica for her private plans to hold an event on the Sabbath. What emphasis the difference between Scottish and Gaelic culture is the way the churches still hold a degree of influence over the actions of the people. Laniel argued that ‘as the social control exercised by the Church lessons and its sphere of social influence becomes specialised to faith, the Church loses a part of its capacity to dictate and regulate the uses of its material and immaterial heritage’ (2016, p. 374). This is not what my analysis has revealed; on Lewis the Presbyterian churches maintain a degree of social influence and this is apparent with the continuation of Sabbatarianism. The churches have not lost all their capacity to dictate and regulate and this makes religion an integral part of the cultural tradition of the Gàidhealtachd.

The importance of the Sabbath to the religious communities of Lewis is apparent in the below quote from the Free Presbyterian Church website. To call the Sabbath, Sunday is to diminish its significance:

Those who call the Sabbath day “*Sunday*” are in effect helping to rob God’s holy day of its sanctity and secularising it to having a rank no higher than any other day of the week. …… thus, the replacement of *Sabbath* (or *Lord’s Day*) in favour of “*Sunday*”, especially within the pale of the visible church, can only be construed as being yet another piece of Satan’s armoury used in an attempt to bring down the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ (Boyd, fpchurch.org.uk).

The use of the word ‘Sabbath’ is of importance to the conservative churches, and can be found in question 59 of the Shorter Catechism:

**‘Question 59: Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?’**  
**Answer**: From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath. (freechurch.org)

All the older participants spoke of the Sabbath or the Lord’s Day. Boyd also writes that, in the Bible, the word Sabbath is used more frequently than Lord’s Day, with the latter only appearing once in scripture. Boyd proposes that as both appear in the Old and New Testaments that using them will:

…guard us from the error of Dispensationalism and accords with the sound doctrine of Covenant Theology. As it is the equivalent word for Sabbath that is used in the Old Testament Hebrew and in the New Testament Greek, it is incumbent upon us to stay as close as possible to the meaning of the original word. (Boyd, fpchurch.org.uk).

Keeping in mind the views of the participants I chose to use ‘the Sabbath’ – as opposed to ‘Sunday ‘– throughout this thesis.[[135]](#footnote-135) The evening worship was as well attended as the morning service. The evening services are not intergenerational. The younger children do not take part. There is, however, a strong teenage cohort at Stornoway High Free Church who attend both services.

A sign on the side of a building

Description automatically generated

The above quotes are taken from the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland website, but the belief is common to all conservative denominations. Back Free Church’s notice board signpost’s the times of worship on the Lord’s Day. Photograph taken August 2016.

Gonzales wrote, ‘It is often affirmed that it was Constantine who made Sunday a day of worship’ (2017, p. 7). However, Gonzales proposed that although Constantine did indeed initiate many of the practices surrounding Sunday as a day of reverence, the setting aside of such a day comes from the desire of early Christians to maintain some Jewish traditions, (Gonzales 2017). One such tradition was observing the Sabbath as a day of worship. The Sabbath is of such importance to Judaism that all other days are named from that point, Sunday is the first day after the Sabbath, Monday, the second and so on. Gonzales suggested that the first English translations of the New Testament translated Sunday as the first day of the week, not the first day after the Sabbath. Hence, it was in translation that the Christian Sabbath was moved from Saturday to Sunday, (Gonzales 2017).

For those with little or no faith Sabbatarianism has become internalised as a feature of island life. It is frowned upon to hang washing out to dry on the Sabbath, shops and leisure facilities are closed but pubs are open. In 1998, the landlord of The Whalers Rest, John Murray, made an application for a Sunday alcohol licence. He cited the Licensing (Scotland) Act of 1976. As Lewis is part of Scotland, he was entitled to have the same opening hours as publicans on the mainland. The licence was duly granted, and other landlords followed his lead. Visitors can now play golf or go out to eat, but for those who live on Lewis, these two activities are either not permitted or are censured by the wider community. Golf is governed by the rules laid down by the Stornoway Golf Club but eating out is sanctioned by social shaming, as discussed in the previous chapter. Reverend MacLeod was concerned about the erosion of this day of rest. He spoke of the opening of the Starbucks coffee shop in Lews Castle, an opening that was met with little comment. He offered two explanations as to why this occurred, first being the excitement of having a Starbucks franchise on the island and, second, that Starbucks had contributed financially to the renovation of Lews Castle. Reverend Macleod was also displeased that major Scottish football matches were played on a Sunday:

With the Sabbath games, how many people are on the Stands of Ibrox instead of being here at church? This is not right (Reverend MacLeod, 2018)

However, as I have mentioned, within Reverend MacLeod’s own life things have changed with regards to Sabbatarianism, his daughters have more freedom than they had as children to do things other than attend church.[[136]](#footnote-136)

Sandy and Ella reminisced about the times of their youth. They joked that the people of a certain Lewis hamlet kept their roosters in the henhouse on the Sabbath to stop them crowing. It may be the case that this anecdote and the keeping the of budgerigar and canary cages covered from a Saturday evening to a Monday morning are urban myths. However, Sandy and Ella’s stories of life in days gone past reveal a strict adherence to the laws surrounding Sabbatarianism and show how much change has occurred during their own lifetimes:

**Sandy:** People are out now. Kids kicking a ball in the park. It used to be they'd chain the swings up and they'd lock the parks on a Saturday night.

**Ella:** The swing park used to be locked.

**Sandy:** They chained the swings and chained the roundabout and chained everything…It's definitely changed. I see that with the school here. The way I put the chairs away at night.[[137]](#footnote-137) There's a day where that would not have happened. There's no way that that would have been done until it's after midnight……. No way would I work on the Sabbath. I wouldn't even clean our shoes on the Sabbath……. The men wouldn't shave. They shaved the last thing on Saturday night.

**Ella:** My cousin had a bath on a Saturday. Her hair was washed and the dinner for the Sabbath-

**Sandy:** Dinner was all prepared…. All prepared just to heat it.

**Ella:** Come twelve o'clock [at night] she started washing the dishes.

**Sandy:** Nothing was done. Nothing, they didn't do any unnecessary work.

(Sandy and Ella, Stornoway 2019)

Both Sandy and Ella were raised as members of the Church of Scotland, a denomination which no longer enforces Sabbatarianism as part of its practice. Yet on Lewis all religious persuasions[[138]](#footnote-138) tread the same path with regards to what is permissible on the Sabbath. The activities that are acceptable on the Sabbath on Lewis are similar to those that were permitted in the UK in the early lockdown stages during the coronavirus pandemic. People can go for walks but not stop for a picnic, can exercise and enjoy being outdoors, but not socialise with those out with their immediate households.

Religion is a social construct, and one must regard the fundamental divergence between religious belief and the culture in which it is embedded’ (Ward 1999, p. 1). The rules surrounding the Sabbath as a day of rest are as much of a part of the cultural aspect of the Gàidhealtachd as the religious. The swings are no longer chained on a Saturday night and people do go out for walks or go surfing in the Minch. However, the major social changes that have taken place have all been financially instigated. Tourists would leave the island on a Saturday afternoon as there would be nothing they could do on the Sabbath, nowhere to eat and nowhere to visit. All cafes, tourist sites, monuments and leisure facilities would be closed. The tourist industry was being hit financially, especially the hoteliers. They would find their rooms empty on weekend nights, losing out on the lucrative short break trade. The pubs are open in line with the Scottish Sunday licencing laws. However, as will be discussed in the following section the commencement of ferry services and flights on the Sabbath were met with huge protest. Religion has an authority that encompasses all on the island.

It is not just those who have a religious affiliation who want Sabbatarianism to continue, the non-religious people of the community I interviewed are also holding fast to this tradition. The non-religious do not hold onto this tradition as a means of upholding religious authority, they do so as it is as much a part of the secular culture of the island as the religious. This was evident when analysing Angie’s interview. I interviewed Angie with Jessica. I had originally met Angie in the Blue Room[[139]](#footnote-139) at a Glasgow Rangers football match. She agreed to meet with me when I was next in Stornoway. We arranged to meet during her lunch break in the local hospital where she works in administration. When I arrived to carry out the interview, I discovered she had brought Jessica, a colleague, with her. This highlighted a difficulty I had in recruiting participants who were non-religious as they were under the impression that they would not be suitable for a research project on religion and the church. This was also an assumption amongst church goers.

At a Fellowship meeting I mentioned to a couple of elders that I had met a woman from the island in Glasgow and that I was having coffee with her the following day. The response I was given was, to a degree, “why are you talking to her, she has nothing to do with the church?”.[[140]](#footnote-140) Angie was born and raised on Lewis. Her immediate family, parents, husband, and children, all identify as non-religious. The involvement of non-religious participants was paramount to this project, bringing a balance and secular perspective. In this section of the interview Angie spoke about how she spent her time on the Sabbath. This was the only topic she gave her opinion on; I suspected this was the only topic she felt comfortable discussing, the only topic on which she, perhaps, felt she could hold a view:

**Angie:** I stop on the couch[[141]](#footnote-141)

**Me:** But do you hang your washing out?

**Angie:** I do. [laughs] I do. But I, well, Sunday is my day off. I've always loved my Sunday off. I don’t get dressed unless I’m over in the caravan [her mobile holiday home on the mainland] and well there, yes, I will be getting dressed, but normally I don't. I just sit in the house and do the dinner, and that’s it, my own housework. I don’t go anywhere. I hate galivanting…having to move out of the house, and when you have to put your clothes on

**Jessica:** It’s just a day for chilling out

**Angie:** Slouch with the grandkids, that’s what I do

(Angie, Jessica, Stornoway 2018)

Sunday, for the religious and non-religious alike is a day of rest. It is this free time that they are holding fast to, as Kourkouta et al noted, ‘free time can be considered as a desirable situation rather than a pleasant experience’ (2018, p. 18). Free time can be viewed as a necessity, a time to stop and recharge. The free time that Angie and the people of Lewis have is very different from the rest of the Scottish public. The internalised cultural feature of Sabbatarianism legitimises the Sabbath as a day of rest. There are no demands on Angie’s time; she does not have to take the grandchildren to birthday parties or to a sporting fixture. People can be certain that no one will ask them to do anything specific, there are no obligations to invite friends for a meal or to socialise. For Angie, there is no duty to attend church, although it is religious doctrine that has shaped the way this culture has developed.

Sabbatarianism was one reason the local hairdresser gave to me to explain why she and her husband had relocated to Lewis. Following the birth of their son they moved to Lewis. They knew no one on the island, but were drawn to it by its scenery, and the opportunity for their son to have ‘an old fashioned, running free’ childhood (Jo 2019). Jo spoke of the joy of having no commitments on the Sabbath. She knew from her family in a Scottish city how the Sabbath could revolve around taking the children to social activities. There was, for her family in the city, no time to relax and be together as a family. As Jo works Saturdays, the Sabbath is family time and something she misses when she visits family on the mainland. The Sabbath on Lewis, for the non-religious, can be commitment free.

Andrew also spoke of the erosion into the traditional upholding of the Sabbath as a day of rest:

Andrew spoke about facilities and shops opening on a Sunday. He was quite angry that the golf club, to which he is not a member, was making a decision about this, without putting it to a public vote. At present the golf club is open to visitors on a Sunday but not members. This is purely for the tourists. Andrew said he would vote against opening on the Sabbath, yet he doesn’t play golf, he doesn’t get a vote. He is angry that this decision is being made by the members of the club as he believes that the wider island population would vote against a Sabbath opening. He understood the financial need to open for tourists although it did not sit comfortably with him. (Fieldwork Diary, June 6th, 2018).

What was of interest was that Andrew wanted the islanders to have a say in the matter, not just the golf club members. He was off the opinion that even those who were non-religious did not wish to see an erosion of Sabbatarianism. In this it is difficult to ascertain if religion is being used as a cultural defence or if cultural tradition is defending religious belief and practice.

In 2014 the documentary maker David Cairns made a film about island life on the Sabbath.[[142]](#footnote-142) Cairns had been raised in the 1970s in the Highlands when Sabbatarianism was still a feature of Highland life. This is no longer the case as secular activities – Sunday shopping, the opening of leisure centres, cinemas, and restaurants – became, from the 1990s, normal practice on the mainland. Scotland does not have the same legislation as England and Wales concerning Sunday trading. Shops have always chosen their own opening hours on Sundays as there is no legislation in place to prevent them from opening seven days a week. It was, however, the custom for Scottish shops to close at lunchtime on a Saturday until they reopened on a Monday. However, by the end of the 20th century, demand for Sunday trading increased and shops began to keep the same opening hours, Monday through Sunday. Cairns was interested to discover if the Sabbath of his childhood remained on Lewis. He was raised in a non-church attending household, but his parents observed Sabbatarian practices. As an adult, as he explained in a newspaper interview, he hankered after the Sundays of his childhood:

I hate that Sunday is beginning to feel as busy as any other day of the week…. I’d be really happy not to be able to go shopping on a Sunday – it would force me to spend the day on other things, more important things (Brocklehurst 2014, p. 4).

Cairns required permission to film on a Sunday from those who observed the Sabbath. As he points out in a newspaper interview, there was an irony that he was working on the Sabbath filming those who do not (Brocklehurst, 2014). Interestingly, despite observing the rules themselves, many of those asked gave their permission to be filmed.

Culture can be a defence for religion ‘it is part of the belief structure of most religions that there should be a particular society which protects and sustains their basic values and beliefs’ (Ward 1999, p. 1). This is apparent through the continued observance of the Sabbath as a decreed day of rest. For those of a religious persuasion, be they communicants or adherents, the Sabbath is a day for worship and reflection. The churches all hold morning and evening worship services in English and at least one Gaelic service. All the services I joined, both at Back Free Church and Stornoway High Free Church, were well attended, and by people of all ages. The majority of those at morning worship returned in the evening. Initially it appeared to me that those at church were missing out on the chance to stop and recharge. This was an aspect Day covered in her research into Generation A women. Women we lead busy lives, running a home and caring for others (Day 2017). Referring to the workload of women, Day noted, ‘[s]ingle, partnered, widowed, a mother or childless, it is no different. We rarely stop, rest or have fun’ (2017, p. 116). For those women who attend church on the Sabbath, worship is in itself a time to relax. Day wrote about her own experiences, explaining, ‘Sunday services were felt as a welcome relief after the week’s labour. On the seventh day we, briefly, rested and watched the men perform work for a change.’ (2017, p. 114). This easing of the load, this day of rest may well have a part to play in the continued attendance of woman at church and the slowing down of secularisation (Nyhagen and Halsaa 2016).

Watching the men perform is pertinent for this research, as, during worship or Fellowship, women have no active roles to play. They can sit, observe, and worship as no other demands are placed on them. However, this period of rest, for the Generation A women, is short lived, they are busy when worship ends, as they become occupied with the refreshments (Day 2017). The women of Lewis who attend church on a Sunday and maintain Sabbatarian practices have a day that is free from household chores as well as having no obligations during or after worship. The following quote from the wife of a retired Free Church of Scotland minister epitomises the Sabbath as a day of rest:

I used to think wasn’t God wonderful to have given us the Sabbath. I can sit without feeling guilty that I’m not washing or ironing or cleaning (Brocklehurst 2014, p. 3)

These women do not have chores to attend to after the service, and teas and coffees are not served on a Sabbath, though they are a feature following midweek Fellowship meetings. At these meetings I watched as the women on the refreshment’s rota left before the final blessing. Teas and coffees were poured, and cakes laid out on the table in preparation. As Day has pointed out ‘the tea and coffee service after the main service is an important part of the church attending event. It is….part of the larger event of religious belonging’ (2017, p. 126). ‘Providing the refreshments is an important aspect of Fellowship and has its roots in the cultural Gàidhealtachd tradition of hospitality. The end of Fellowship heralds the resumption of normal service as they wait on the men once more.

Many go to church not just for the spiritual but the for the social aspect. Day points out that, for Generation A women, the social characteristic of attending church was significant, ‘[t]heirs was not inconsequential ‘chatting’ but important social labour that reinforced the sense of belonging’ (2017, p. 123). At the services I attended people stood around chatting in the carparks before and after the services. There was a sense of community and belonging. It was at these periods that people would reach out to me, a stranger, and ensure I was made to feel welcome. As my fieldwork progressed, I began to feel a sense belonging, not least before and after worship as I began to build relationships with some of the congregation. Brian Mountford (2011) noted that this want for community acceptance applies, even to individuals, like me, who have no Christian faith. He writes that people attend church for a variety of reasons, not least ‘a desire for connectedness with other human beings’ (2011, p.8).

I was aware of a slackening of the rules surrounding Sabbatarianism when I attended an evening service of worship at Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland. This was a Communion weekend[[143]](#footnote-143) for the congregation. As a Communion weekend, both the morning and evening services were given by visiting ministers After the evening service refreshments were served as a part of the communion for visitors and church members. This was not something that I had expected to witness, unnecessary work on the Sabbath. From Sandy and Ella’s reminiscences this would not have occurred during their youth.

Initially I considered if this slackening of Sabbath adherence was because this was a congregation that had its roots in the Church of Scotland. As such it allows for different practices, the use of music during worship, the singing of hymns as well as psalms. These were conditions Reverend Ferrier had to agree to when he accepted the post of minister. Yet, on reflection, the visiting ministers were conservative, they did not have a liberal religious background. I had listened to them preach and, after refreshments had been served, both took part in a question-and-answer session. Both ministers othered different religions in their talks. The following is an extract from my fieldwork diary:

Reverend Ferrier [actual minister] asks them [visiting ministers Reverends Peters and Macleod] lots of questions about their lives, from childhood to now. It was very interesting, but a few things make me uneasy. There is a lot of talk of ‘good men’ being called and ‘good men’ doing God’s work. Women are never mentioned. Reverend Macleod (from Dornoch FC of S, a Gaelic minister) speaks of how he received his calling to go into the ministry. He was a teacher and was “sent to work in the Holy Roman Empire” he is talking about South Uist, a predominantly Catholic Island. He then speaks of working for a year in “the papal school”, this is a South Uist primary school. This anti Catholic speech does not sit easy with me, no wonder sectarianism is alive and well in Scotland.

Reverend Peters (from a small Presbyterian denomination in Newcastle) then speaks of what he would like us to pray for. He mentions that his brother works and runs a mission group in Glasgow that is converting Muslims to Christianity. Reverend Peters wants to start doing the same in Newcastle as there is such a large Asian community in the city. We are to pray for his success in setting up such a group. Why are these men wanting to convert Muslims? Surely, they know to renounce Islam is punishable by death. Why the intolerance to other faiths? (Fieldwork Diary 17th February 2019).

I pondered Ward’s argument that ‘a serious commitment to truth in religion entails an acceptance of plurality and tolerance’ (1999, p. 107).

The session did not end until 10.30pm and people were quick to leave, especially those with younger children. I did not get a chance to ask about the refreshments and the breaking of the Sabbath. I can only surmise that it was part of the communion of people, part of the hospitality and socialising that is so important during a Communion weekend. In times gone past it was easy to ensure that people complied with the rules of the Sabbath. There were no Sunday newspapers, only essential work was carried out, on the croft or in the hospital. Outwardly the Sabbath is still observed as a day of rest, yet at home, things may be different. Angie spoke of hanging her washing out and doing household chores on the Sabbath. Ella and Sandy described how, traditionally women would not even wash the dinner plates until after midnight, ensuring the chores were carried out on the Monday. The Sunday papers are still delivered on a Monday, but it is difficult to police the work people are carrying out behind closed doors. The internet means that many can work from home, any day of the week. People can access the Sunday papers online and, through social media, socialise. Technology may be chipping away at adherence to the rules surrounding Sabbatarianism, in a way that the advent of radio and television did not. Rosie spoke of not being allowed to watch television when she was a child. Parents could enforce that rule as televisions could be unplugged. It is more difficult to police now when even a phone is an entertainment device. There are ways in which parents can block devices but as Benton pointed out ‘there is always a way round these controls if a child is determined enough’ (2014, p. 149). Burchill argued that close kin and friendship networks can become ‘a powerful basis of social control’ (2008, p. 56) when it comes to upholding the rules surrounding the Sabbath.

Sabbatarianism brings the interlacing of religion and cultural traditions into sharp focus. I considered Ward’s argument that religiosity was, historically, as much a social construct as one of faith. This continues in Lewis; people meet and socialise at church and at Fellowship. Where my research findings differ from Ward is that this social aspect of religion has not evolved into an ‘interactive plurality of traditions’ (1999, p. 127). There is minimal religious diversity on the island. Sabbatarianism may be changing, with small concessions being made but the fundamental beliefs of the conservative churches continue to affect those who visit and live on the island. One may choose to be non-religious or practise another faith, but the Sabbath remains sacrosanct, revered as both a cultural and a religious tradition. Presbyterianism is grounded on the individual’s relationship with God, and this may invoke thoughts of religiosity as a solitary private affair. However, this personalised interaction with faith is a portion of the church community’s identity as the Presbyterian Church ‘does not mediate with God’ (Laniel 2016, p. 712). Family and personal worship reinforce group identity, carrying as much relevance as formal worship. All the participant church members spoke of the importance of family worship and prayer. This, as Laniel proposes ‘reinforces behaviours especially where there are strict conservative rules’ (2016, p. 712). Ward writes that ‘the church is not an ethnic community’ (1999, p. 186) but I propose that for the Gaelic people religion is as much a part of their cultural identity as their language, history, and geographical setting. Sabbatarianism is used as a cultural defence, who after all, on this island is going to argue with the authority of the Bible and the men in black?

I enjoyed the tranquillity of the Sabbath on Lewis, something I share with the participants in Chaplin’s (2010) research. He discovered that no matter the age nor religious affiliation people liked the quietness of the Sabbath. It is a day where there are fewer cars on the road, fewer people outdoors and less noise. The everyday hubbub is quietened with less obligation to be active. I am writing this section of my thesis during the coronavirus pandemic and five weeks into Britain’s first lockdown. The lockdown reminds me of a Sabbath on Lewis with the inability to socialise, the quietness of my surroundings and even the social shaming of perceived transgressions. Social media is full of people shaming those who they perceive are not following the rules. The leisure centres and golf clubs are all closed. Activities are simpler as people go on walks or cycle within a short radius of their homes. Our everyday has taken on the appearance of Sabbatarianism.

**6.1.b. Protest**

Protest over services that are eroding this traditional day of rest continue into the 21st century although it appeared that some breaches, such as the Starbucks coffee shop’s Sabbath’s opening hours, slipped through the net. The most recent protest concerned the An Lanntair cinema. On a Sunday in January 2018, 183 tickets were sold for the showing of the Star Wars film, *The Last Jedi*. It attracted the attention of the national media with *The Daily Telegraph* running a story on the protest, despite only two protestors turning up. However, notwithstanding that the protest appeared minor, people on Lewis were unhappy with the screening:

David Green, the chairman of the venue’s board, said some staff had faced pressure from their families over the move but argued that no one should be able to dictate to others “what they can and what they cannot do.” (Johnson, *The Daily Telegraph*, 28th January 2018).

With such little noticeable protest for this screening, the cinema’s board decided to open the An Lanntair on the last Sunday of every month. *The Daily Telegraph* also made mention of the long running campaign to have the Ionad Spòrs Leòdhais, the island’s leisure centre, open on the Sabbath. Campaigners from the group, Families into Sports for Health (FiSH), have raised sufficient funds to have a trial opening. FiSH is associated with the National Secular Society.[[144]](#footnote-144) Reverend MacLeod spoke of this and proposed that the continued closure was due to limited council funds, not religious adherence. This was confirmed in a news article by the BBC in 2017 where the council reported the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar council had declined the offer from FiSH and that, ‘its decision not to open the site was for “operational reasons” not a religious one’ (bbc.co.uk, 14th November 2017). Budget cuts through the government’s austerity programmes have left council funds in short supply.

McKenna also covered the protest in *The Guardian* on 4th February 2018. He made some compelling arguments against the opening of the An Lanntair and expressed his hope that the other leisure facilities would remain closed. It was interesting to read the perspective from someone who is from the mainland, and is not a member of the conservative Presbyterian churches:

Freedom of choice does not mean freedom to trample on a tradition that has served a community well and that has not impinged on the rights of others……What point, other than to knock down an old custom in these parts, was being achieved here? It certainly isn’t an economic one, as some have averred, or even one about freedom of choice. When you have all the choices in the world at your disposal but refuse to cede one of them out of respect for the beliefs of another then that isn’t choice – it’s intolerance and betrays an absence of common humanity (*The Guardian* 2018).

McKenna did not refer to a religious practice but to a tradition. This alters one’s perception of people railing against their perceived religious control over a community, to one where people are attacking a cultural tradition. It was interesting that the language used changes the encroachment of rights; from the religious impinging on the secular to modernity impinging on tradition. To distance religion from certain, perceived, negative practices and stereotypes and to then attribute these to culture is an example of culture coming to the defence of religion. On Lewis this may then be understood as culture being used as a tool to increase respect for religious practices (Nyahgen and Halsaa 2016). As with the funeral processions examined in the previous chapter, a religious practice has been absorbed into secular culture. David Cairns also spoke of the cultural aspect of Sabbatarianism, ‘[u]ltimately, it isn’t just the quiet Sunday I miss: It’s a whole culture- people who had lived in just the same spot for generations, faith, a strong sense of community and identity’ (Brocklehurst 2004, p. 5). Observing the Sabbath as a day of rest is a part of the social culture of the island, it is an integral part of the Gàidhealtachd.

If the opening of the cinema and the Starbucks coffee shop brought little or no protest the same could not be said of the commencement of ferry services to and from the island on the Sabbath. One minister in particular became infamous through protesting, earning himself the moniker “Ferry Reverend”. Reverend Angus Smith was a Lewis minister opposed to all Scottish ferry services on the Sabbath. On Sunday 6th June 1965 he led a protest against the first ferry sailing from the mainland to Kyleakin on the Isle of Skye. Following a service of worship, the Reverend Smith led the congregation to the ferry slip road and lay down preventing cars from disembarking. He was eventually lifted out of the way by police and arrested for causing obstruction. Not all agreed with Reverend’s Smith’s actions, and he was condemned for breaking the rules of the Sabbath. The following appeared in his obituary in *The Daily Telegraph*:

But not all Smith’s fellow Sabbatarians supported the demonstration. After all, by demonstrating on a Sunday the protesters themselves were breaking the Sabbath. The Rev Archibald MacVicar, clerk to the Church of Scotland described the occasion as “the most massive breach of the Lord’s Day that Skye has ever known”, while a Free Church elder accused the demonstrators of making an “exhibition of themselves and the island”, adding: “It was sad to see them following each other like sheep.” (*The Daily Telegraph,* 1st September2019).

It appears that what constitutes necessary work on a Sabbath is open to interpretation. Despite his actions the ferry sailings to and from Skye continued. It was, however, to be another forty-four years before the ferry company, Caledonian MacBrayne, began a similar service to and from Lewis. The island was the last one in Scotland to keep its harbour closed on the Sabbath.

Protest over the erosion of Sabbatarian practices continue, supported by religious and non-religious members of the community. Yet there are two sides to the argument and there are those who continue to protest against the continuation of Sabbatarianism. There is a misconception that it is only incomers to the island who oppose maintaining the Sabbath as a day of rest, ‘people who are Lewis born and bred question the moral integrity of moving to a place, not liking the way it is and trying to change it’ (Brocklehurst, 2017, p. 6). As discussed in the previous section, one aspect of island life that attracted Jo and her husband to Lewis was Sabbatarianism. Likewise, some who are Lewis born and bred rail against Sabbatarian practices and constraints. The landlord of The Whalers Rest, John Murray, used the commencement of Sunday flights in 2002 to take advantage of a business opportunity. He began bringing Sunday newspapers to the island and selling them from the bar of his pub. Mr Murray ‘faced hundreds of protesters at Stornoway airport when he brought the newspapers over from the mainland in 2002’ (Herbert, 2017, *Scottish Daily Mail*). The purchase of a Sunday newspaper came with a caveat ‘you had to buy a pint and a nip [glass of whisky] to get one’ (Herbert 2017, *Scottish Daily Mail*). Mr Murray was a shrewd businessman, and, despite the high price, he did a roaring trade (Herbert 2017). This ad hoc newsagent was closed when Mr Murray retired and sold the pub.

In 2017, Mr Murray was once again in the newspapers over Sunday trading. This time, as he was retired, he was supporting another trader, Leona Rawlinson. Ms Rawlinson found herself at the centre of controversy over her decision to open her gift shop, Tweed Tastic, on the Sabbath, a decision backed by the National Secular Society (BBC News 2017; Herbert 2017). Ms Rawlinson was not faced with protestors outside her shop, instead she received a letter, accompanied by a Bible, from The Lord’s Day Observance Society.[[145]](#footnote-145) It was reported by the BBC that the letter ‘congratulated Ms Rawlinson on the success of her business in Stornoway, but…many islanders, including those who do not hold religious beliefs, wanted Sundays to be protected’ (bbc.co.uk 14th November 2017). The decision to cease Sunday trading did not come about because of the letter but because locals began to boycott the business. The tourist trade does not provide enough revenue to maintain a business, the shop owners require local custom. It did not pay to alienate the Lewis communities.

My research has demonstrated that the protests are multi-layered. It is not just the religious community protesting about an encroachment into religious practice, it is also a protest against the erosion of a cultural tradition. One final layer is the protest against the infringement on freedom of rights. This is the freedom for individuals to do whatever they chose to do on any day of the week, including the Sabbath. Yet as McKenna has pointed out, when there are already so many choices available to us, it appears unjust to protest against, and attempt to change, a traditional practice. Be that practice religious or cultural it only curtails certain activities one day a week (McKenna 2018).

**6.2: Facts and Figures**

On Sunday May 8th, 2016 Brierley conducted the fourth Scottish Church census. The date was chosen as it was an average Sunday (Brierley 2017a), there were no Bank or school holidays and, being springtime, no inclement winter weather to lessen attendance. Any church that had a special event, a baptism or Communion were asked to substitute the date and Brierley noted that some churches did in fact do this. Forty percent of Scotland’s churches, across denominations, participated in the census. One important aspect that Brierley highlighted was that it was congregational attendance that was examined, not church attendance. It is the number of people in a congregation that attended worship that was counted. This is an important distinction as ministers in rural areas may hold services in two or more churches on any given Sabbath. Reverend MacLeod would preach at Back Free Church and Tong Mission Hall to the congregation of Broadbay.

Although showing a decline from the previous census in 2002, the figures were ‘better than expected’ (2017a, p. 36), with around 7.2% of the Scottish population attending worship on that particular Sabbath (Brierley 2017a). Following the 2002 census, forecasts had been made into the rate of decline. The 2016 actual figures were 11% higher than predicted (Brierley 2017a). One reason given as to why the numbers were more favourable was immigration to Scotland from Eastern European countries where Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion. Many of these immigrants attend Scottish Catholic churches. This is especially true in Aberdeen, ‘largely because of the number of Polish immigrants, mostly Roman Catholic employed in the oil industry’ (2017b, p. 23). The long-term nature of employment contracts within this industry enables people to put down roots and become a part of a church community. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, section1. a. the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit may have a detrimental effect on the numbers of those attending Roman Catholic churches in the forthcoming years.

**6.2.a: Strictness and Attendance**

When analysing attendance numbers, I carried out an examination of the data in two areas, denomination, and age. I concentrated on these two areas as there were two questions I wanted to examine further. Is there a relationship between strictness and attendance? Is there a correlation between strictness and age of attendee? In Scotland there are eighty-three different religious denominations of which the Church of Scotland (liberal) is the largest, representing around 41% of all congregations. The Free Church of Scotland accounts for over half of the conservative Presbyterian congregations (Brierley 2017a). When examining data with regard to denomination I compared the Church of Scotland figures with those of the Free Church of Scotland. I did so as a means of assessing any differences in attendance between liberal and conservative churches. What the census numbers reveal is that between 2002 and 2016 the Church of Scotland saw congregational attendance fall by 40%, ‘faster than any other group of churches’ (Brierley 2017, p. 55). The Free Church of Scotland had a decline of only 20% over the same period, (Brierley 2017a). However, Bruce (2017) wrote that ‘[t]he conservative Protestant churches has apparently fared worse, in losing two-thirds of their children; one-third to no religion and one-third to mainstream churches’ (2017, p. 351). This does not correlate with my findings.

Brierley’s data revealed a large variance between the figures with regards to denomination, with distinct correlation to strictness. Literature that has examined conservative Christian affiliation has focused on American churches (Iannaccone 1994; Min 2014; Schnabel and Brock 2017), however, their findings were also relevant to my research. Iannaccone pointed out that in America, just as in Scotland, ‘[l]iberal denominations were declining much more rapidly than conservative denominations’ (1994, p. 1180). The Free Church of Scotland asks its congregation to adhere to the authority of the Bible. In doing so people must follow a lifestyle that those, outside of the community, may deem outdated: Sabbatarian practices, patriarchal aspect of worship as well as looking to the Bible as a means of support. The following excerpt from my fieldwork diary evidences the connection between strict adherence to Biblical authority and attendance:

A.M. had an interesting view on why congregation numbers are stronger on the island and this he put down to other churches using ‘man made’ tools to spread the word of God and that, for him and LM., this is totally wrong. They both believe that the churches can only succeed if they preach a ‘pure’ version. The word of God is enough to bring people to God and to worship therefore a Free Church service and fellowship is only from the Bible, no hymns, no music. (Fieldwork Diary, 6th June 2018).

The data from the Lewis communities corelated with Iannaccone’s findings. He wrote of conservative churches commanding, ‘complete loyalty, unwavering belief, and rigid adherence to a distinctive lifestyle’ (1994, p. 1181). What research has revealed is that a ritualised way of life within the church community can bring reassurance (Iannaccone, 1994; Rose, 2009). People know what is expected of them in the Free Church of Scotland, men and women have their distinct roles, many of the older members still adhere to the traditional mode of dress when attending worship, people know where to sit, and the order the service will take. Knowing one’s role and what is expected of them can increase commitment (Iannaccone, 1994).

One other aspect of church attendance figures that I wished to look at was Jagger’s suggestion that some men viewed the church as being a feminine space and this was contributing to a decline in male numbers (2019). I have not found this with my analysis, and this may be one reason that numbers remain high. First, a conservative Presbyterian church building (inside and out) is, as discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.2.c, an austere, plain building with no adornment. There is no feeling of femininity, no pastel colours or ornate flower arrangements. Second the pews contain as many men as women. With the pulpit being surrounded by men, all facing the congregation, the space alludes to a patriarchal hierarchy. Secularisation in these communities does not have a gendered aspect to it. Men are not turning away from the church because it is a predominantly feminine space. Women, although given the idealsied role of wife and mother, do not have sole responsibility for the spiritual upkeep of the family. Most of the children I saw at church were there with both parents.

Anselm Min wrote in 2014 that the greatest issue facing Christianity was erosion of Christian identity. People no longer know what is means to be a Christian:

Today Christian communities all over the world, but especially in Europe and North America are in great disarray, uncertain about themselves, confused about what they are and what they really believe, fragmented among contending ideological groups, demoralised and without much hope and enthusiasm about what they are and what they ought to be, about their sense of mission and identity (Min 2014, p. 30).

This was an area touched upon by Louise and Andrew in their interview ‘[t]hey both believe that Christians are undergoing extreme persecution, and this is something that has been prophesied about. (Fieldwork Diary, June 6th, 2018). Both felt that on the island religion was not an aspect of identity that was persecuted, as long as that religious identity was Presbyterian.

Few will commit to something they do not understand. Conversely, in the Free Church of Scotland doctrines have not changed. The church states that we ‘do not compromise on scripture’ (freechurch.org). Those in the Free Church of Scotland know where they stand, the guidelines are clear. They know about their mission and identity. The Church of Scotland has witnessed change in many doctrinal areas: the ordination of women, same sex marriage, no Sabbatarianism, music in the church, and now the suggestion that worship may no longer be held on the Sabbath. The following extract is from my fieldwork diary. I had attended a special anniversary service at my parents’ church in Gourock. The service was attended by the Moderator of the General Assembly, The Right Reverend Susan Brown. I spoke to her after the service:

The Right Reverend Brown explained her vision for the future of the Church of Scotland. She proposed that there were no longer Sunday services, that each church would do what suited their community best. That might mean a service on a Tuesday at 7pm or it might mean services of half an hour every afternoon after school pick up (Fieldwork Diary, September 9th, 2018).

There is a tendency within many churches to make changes to encourage people back into attending worship (Day 2017). However, Min linked this with the erosion of Christian identity. If the churches are continually changing to fit into today’s pluralistic, multiple-choice way of life, they could end up with ‘neither definitive convictions nor much enthusiasm to commit themselves to anything’ (2014, p. 33). As the church makes changes it can be difficult for people to know what is expected of them, and knowledge is crucial when it comes to commitment. At the time of talking to the Right Reverend Brown, I could not envisage her proposal working. I suggested that by letting people decide when and where worship should occur, they would be removing the authority from the Church. Crucially, as McBride pointed out, ‘authority matters in religion’ (2016, p. 410). It is those in authority who direct the actions of the community. By offering that authority up to the whole community, who will ultimately make the decision? Will worship be held before school pick up on a Wednesday, after 8pm on Tuesdays or before 11am on a Friday? The traditional public ritual of worship on the Sabbath helps to reinforce the bonds of a church community through shared knowledge and shared experience (MacBride 2016). Norman suggested that the Church of England has become more secular internally due to embracing liberal causes. Each church has been encouraged to look at different ways in which to engage with their communities. As churches become more innovative and some ‘conducting new services in which personal participation is *de rigeur’* (2002, p. 117). Something he that suggested ‘is not likely to appeal’ (2002, p. 117).

**6.2.b Age and Attendance**

Schnabel and Brock (2017) examined the decline in American religiosity and suggested that the downward trends were situated in ‘average religiousness’ (2017, p. 686). The numbers of those now declaring no religious affiliation was on the rise, due in part to those moving from a more liberal stance to none. This corresponds with Bruce’s proposal that in Scotland ‘by far the most significant change over the twentieth century has been the rise of religious indifference’ (2017, p. 368). However, Schnabel and Brook discovered that the figures for those following a stronger religiosity remained constant. When examining the numbers attending the Free Church of Scotland there appears to be no correlation with Schnabel and Brock’s findings as the Free Church membership has shown a decline in the years from 2002–2016. This can, in part, be ascribed to the age demographic found on Lewis. This is an island with an aging population. The 2011 population census revealed that those over sixty-five years accounted for 30% of the Lewis population (cne-siar.gov.uk, 2011). This is higher than that found in Scotland as a whole, where the figure is 15.5% (scotlandscensus.gov.uk). Reverend MacLeod spoke of the number of funerals, he had presided over during his ministry in Broadbay:

I've been here eight years and I've conducted probably now about 110 funerals. There's an element of depopulation across the island, it is elderly, in terms of the population, there are more senior citizens than there are young people (Reverend MacLeod, Back 2018).

Donnie spoke of the number of funerals of congregants in the first half of 2018. This was a blow to the congregation, as many of those deceased were church elders. It also reduced the number of people contributing financially to the church:[[146]](#footnote-146)

I believe that God has placed us in Tong and the older elders in Tong are so thankful for myself and Kenny and all those young men, because they're getting on and they're like what's our [congregation] future? This year alone, nine funerals (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

Despite an ageing population, the congregations of Broadbay and Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland have healthy numbers of young people attending worship. At the services I attended at Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland, thirty to forty children would leave for Sunday School after the Children’s Sermon. Reverend MacLeod spoke of an increase in young families moving into the area. Many of these were people returning to the island to raise their children close to family, and to give them a childhood similar to their own. Donnie, Louise, and Andrew spoke of returning to the island to raise their children:

We'd actually moved home, myself and my wife had moved home to raise our own family (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

We decided we were going to move to either Ireland, or Lewis,[[147]](#footnote-147) because we didn’t want to raise a family in the city (Louise and Andrew, Back 2018).

Both congregations hold Sunday School sessions and youth groups. This is something that many Church of Scotland congregations have stopped holding. Reverend David Mitchell,[[148]](#footnote-148) a Church of Scotland minister on the mainland, talked of the ways in which his church was attempting to engage with the families in the area:

We gave up a Sunday School because half nine on a Sunday morning is not the time for families to come out to church. So, basically, we got the advice of our youth department [Church of Scotland], We have a youth office in Dunoon.[[149]](#footnote-149) They came out and sat with us and said, "Look, try doing four events a year." So, we do four events a year, we just advertise. There’s one at Halloween, Easter, Christmas, and one in the summer, and we just invite everybody in the village to come along with the kids. There are fifty kids in the primary school just now, between primary school and preschool, and they all come (Reverend Mitchell, Tighnabruaich 2018).

The sessions that David has been holding for the past three years continue to enjoy good attendance. However, none of those who attend have come to church. It is also interesting that one of the events they have chosen to celebrate is Halloween, a day which has its roots in the Celtic pagan festival of Samhain.[[150]](#footnote-150)

Why then the discrepancy between both denominations when it comes to church attendance? I suggest that this can also be ascribed to the conservative nature of the Free Church of Scotland and the fact that people, and that includes children, know what is expected of them. This correlates with Rose (2009) and her argument that strictness, and knowing what is expected of you, raises commitment through a sense of security. A second reason for the differences may be found in Bartoszuk and Deal’s suggestion that young adults within conservative religious groups ‘were more likely to make strong commitments’ (2016, p. 148). The Free Church of Scotland also places an emphasis on family worship at home. Connie and Donnie both made mention of it:

Table fellowship or, you know, house fellowship, that kind of thing. I think that's important (Connie, 70, Tong 2018).

I think my father is like an example of that, someone who when we were younger as a young family, he took the family worship……we're bringing up the two young girls, trying to teach them, we pray with them, we do Bible with them but we can never convert them …The Bible is key to my whole life now, I want the girls to have a good understanding and you know it’s up to them how they use that (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

Analysis of these interview transcripts corresponds to Wuthnow (2020) and his view of religious authority permeating family life. He noted that not only does family religiosity continue to draw strength from emotional religious ritual but that ‘it may be the depth and range of these emotions that enhance religious traditions enduring power’ (p. 128).

Having examined the data surrounding the lived religiosity of the communities on Lewis I propose that family worship is also formal. There is a set time laid aside most days, for Connie this was in the morning before her grandson left for school. These are family traditions passed down through the generations. It is important to pay attention to the way individual religiosity in the home as well as in the church. Due to the cultural aspect of the Gàidhealtachd people still live around extended family networks with the traditions and intergenerational approach to worship strengthening religiosity. For the participants in this research their belonging and participation in the Free Church of Scotland was linked to their religiosity at home. This was an aspect that was missing from the communities in Tighnabruaich, where the majority lived in nuclear families and where intergenerational worship had become a thing of the past.

Connie spoke of her sadness that her eldest grandson, at the time of the interview he was at university in Glasgow, had ‘taken a step back’ (Connie, 2018) from religion. She talked of his leading the family in worship when he was at school. He would choose the Bible reading for them to discuss. What is interesting when examining the data was that, within the home, both genders took an active role in family worship. This may be one way in which women ‘do religion’ in their homes. In such a setting they may have autonomy which affords them agency. This aspect requires further research, and I am left pondering if the home as a domestic setting, where women are valued as mothers and care givers, shifts the narrative. The Biblical passages at the beginning of chapter five advised women to remain silent in church, they did not say they were to hold their tongues at home.

As I have previously discussed, the children bring their own Bibles to worship and, from an early age, they are taught the scriptures both at Sunday School and at family fellowship. This aligns with Burchill’s findings where she noted that at Sunday School ‘children’s activities are more strictly focused on spiritual matters’ (2008, p. 196). Religion is not confined to formal worship at church, it encompasses daily family life. For these communities, Christian identity has not been eroded. Family tradition lays the foundations and constructs religious identity.

The congregations of both Back Free Church of Scotland and Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland have an intergenerational method to worship. This approach has its genesis in both Jewish and Christian tradition, enabling religious practices to be passed down through the family from generation to generation (Roberto 2019). I offer that this practice is strengthened by extended family networks. The majority of those I spoke to had other close family members living on the island, as well as distant kin.[[151]](#footnote-151) Connie lives with her daughter and grandson, Sandy and Ella’s two sons and grandchildren all live within walking distance, Donnie’s parents and parents in law live on Lewis. This is very much contradictory to the family network situation in other parts of western society where ‘adults and children have minimal contact or common activities’ (Roberto 2012, p. 109). On Lewis the communities, both church and secular, are intergenerational.

There are benefits to such an approach, both socially and spiritually. From the passing on of tradition to the promotion of shared values, having exposure to different age groups fosters relationships. One positive aspect of intergenerational worship is that it helps narrow the generation gap. Young people are made to feel welcome and valued and older people can use their experience to pass on knowledge and act as mentors. The intergenerational approach to worship has fallen out of favour within the Church of Scotland, be that due to the breakdown of close family networks or the secularisation of the community is out with the remit of this research.

When it came to attendance with reference to gender, data analysis revealed an anomaly with other research findings, (Brown 2002; Woodhead 2005). Not only were congregations intergenerational but the man / woman numbers were almost equal. As discussed in Chapter 3, Brown (2006) proposed that it was women leaving church that had contributed to secularisation and falling congregational attendance numbers. Woodhead counterargued women were slowing down secularisation by their continued attendance. Yet within the church communities represented in this research, neither appeared to be true. Numbers were high, across the age groups and between the genders. I offer that one of the reasons behind my findings is the passing down of religion through the chain of memory. Although this doesn’t account for a continuation, or a return to, religiosity in adulthood it lays the foundations.

**6.3 Family Tradition**

Adding to the previous section on intergenerational worship, this research has uncovered another reason why the conservative churches are declining at a much slower rate than their more liberal contemporaries, and that is, religion as a chain of memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Throughout my conversations it became apparent that people followed the religious path of their parents and grandparents before them. From my data analysis religious affiliation appeared to be a family tradition. Stolz’s (2020) view that parental socialisation was the most important predictor for adult religiosity is shown in my research.

I was drawn to Bruce’s suggestion that any religious affiliation starts in childhood ‘acquiring a religion in adulthood is rare: only seven per cent of those raised with no religion later claimed a religious identity’ (2017, p. 351).[[152]](#footnote-152) I met no one who had joined the church having been raised in a non-religious family. This is an anomaly as, within other conservative religions, Roman Catholicism and Judaism, for example, there are people who convert in adulthood.[[153]](#footnote-153) Bruce made a second suggestion which did not correspond with my findings:

…almost all the movement between childhood and adulthood had been in a liberal direction: either from conservative to more mainstream churches or from some religion to none (Bruce 2017, p. 351).

All the members of Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland had moved from the more liberal Church of Scotland. Their path was from liberal to conservative. I interviewed no one who had moved from a liberal denomination to the non-religious group. Rosie was the only participant whose course correlates with Bruce’s findings, as she moved to the more liberal Glasgow City Free Church of Scotland. As mentioned, Rosie made her choice based on two points, the first that she could be her own person and not Reverend MacLeod’s daughter, and the second, that this was a church that allowed women to Precent and lead the congregation in prayer. It is important to note, however, that she remained in a Free Church of Scotland congregation and did not move to the much more liberal Church of Scotland.

In today’s western societies religion appears to have lost its institutional influence. However, this is not the case on Lewis where religion continues to wield influence and does so by taking a conservative stance. Bruce et al. offer an explanation as to why conservative religions continue to hold such prominence in the Gàidhealtachd. They propose that religion offers ‘an explanation for their problems (sin) and a solution (piety) (2004, p.9). The liberal denominations seek ways to increase church affiliation and are doing so by adapting their system of authority. Religious belief and practice are no longer linked to church tradition but to individual choice. The authority of the conservative churches does not remove individual choice. I suggest that it is the strength of the authority which draws people to make that choice, in line with Hervieu-Léger suggestion that the lineage of belief is dependent on the continuation of tradition, be that authority or practice (Hervieu-Léger 2006). Altering tradition contributes to the fragmentation of memory. Remove authority from the church, offer belief without reference to tradition, tradition without reference to belief and there is no longer ‘a natural place in the continuity of generations’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000 p.174).

Nyhagen and Halsaa also noted the connection between family and religiosity. Although some of the women participants in their research spoke of a later religious conversion, the majority talk of being from a religious family (2016). My participants spoke of attending church and worshiping as a family, correlating with Nyhagen and Halsaa’s findings:

I was brought up in a Christian home. My mum is a Christian, my dad is a Christian …they’re adherents and would always do family worship at home and stuff. …I had a blessed childhood (Donnie, 36, Tong 2018).

I took the children with me; they were quite young, but I took them with me, and they were coming with me morning and evening (Connie,70, Tong 2018).

For the children who attend worship in the communities featured in this research, religion is a part of their family and cultural tradition. They are welcomed into the community through baptism but will ultimately choose, later in life, whether they continue to tread the same path as their parents and grandparents. The symbolic religious language is passed on to them through family and formal worship (Stoltz 2020).

Further evidence of the importance of family tradition came from an informal conversation I had with Sandy. He told me that when they had first established Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland, they had done a leaflet drop in the Cearns housing estate in Stornoway. They had done so to try and boost congregational numbers. This estate has an established community. The majority who live there are indigenous to Lewis, having moved to the estate when it was built and there are second and third generations living in extended family networks. Chaplin (2010) noted the importance of religion to those who live in the Cearns with many reporting a religious affiliation as either communicants or adherents. That the leaflet drop brought no interest shows that people follow their own religious tradition and rarely change the path they are on.

**6.3.a Why Commit?**

Those who identify as religious are situated in one of two distinct church groups, adherents, and communicants. Both groups are regular attenders, but adherents are not confirmed church members. Many of them attend Sabbath worship on a regular basis, siting in the same pews, going to weekly fellowship meetings, but have never publicly professed their faith. I questioned Reverend MacLeod about the adherent group as I wanted to gain an understanding of why they did not undergo confirmation. As adherents they are unable to partake in communion:

That is a great question and-and one that, I'm not sure that even they have the definitive answer. There are those who attend church, and I suppose they subscribe financially, and the church is important to them, but they haven't themselves committed to full membership. Their membership is one by association.They come to church, and they tithe accordingly, they support the church, but, haven't committed to becoming members. Now, some would say, "I'm not a Christian. I haven't come to faith. Although I attend church, church is important to me, but I haven't made a confession of faith." That's a personal matter for the individual (Reverend MacLeod, Back 2018).

Reverend MacLeod informed me that, of the regular attendees, the split between communicant and adherent was approximately 50:50.

After analysing the interviews where participants discussed religious affiliation, I propose two reasons why people chose not to be confirmed. Firstly, they are following a family tradition which reverberates with religion as a chain of memory. Continuing the family custom of adherence underpins a family identity:

In the case of religious memory, the normativity of collective memory is reinforced by the fact of the group’s defining itself, objectively and subjectively, as a lineage of belief (Hervieu-Léger 2000, p. 125).

The majority of participants spoke of their parents’ religious affiliation. The only one who made no reference was Louise, only one of my interviewees who was an incomer to the island.

As successive generations continue to follow the same religious path, family tradition is reinforced. This led me to question the decisions made by the communicants, a question I am unable to provide an answer for in this thesis. If they are maintaining a family convention in their religious choices how authentic is their commitment to God? David Kettle wrote that there is an obligation which ‘lies at the heart of the gospel’ (2005, p.515). This obligation is to follow the teachings of Jesus and adhere to the authority of God. By choosing to be confirmed one is choosing to undertake this obligation. Therefore, as Kettle pointed out, ‘choice and obligation are inseparable’ (2005, p. 515). The choice to be confirmed is a free choice yet it is not one made lightly by the participants in this research. If one is maintaining a family religious tradition in being confirmed, then it is difficult to assess if one has truly chosen an obligation to commit to God or has chosen to follow a well-trodden path. If it is indeed following a family tradition is this an unthinking choice borne out of family obligation? This area requires further research.

When analysing the interviews with reference to religion as a chain of memory I recognised Hervieu-Léger’s proposal that modern day societies no longer pass on memories, with the result that religious belief and practice is in decline. This is not the case on Lewis. This is a traditional society and as such:

…the domain of religious symbolism is structured entirely by a myth of creation, which accounts for the origin of both the world and the group, collective memory is given it is totally contained within the structures, organization, language and everyday observances of tradition-based societies

(Hervieu-Léger 2000, p. 124).

Through the passing down of collective memories, these traditional communities bring the past into the present. Yet some choose to create their own religious memories to pass on to subsequent generations.

One participant, Donnie, stood out as having deviated from his family’s religious tradition. He became a communicant despite his parents and grandparents being adherents.[[154]](#footnote-154) He believed that Jesus had saved his life, taking him away from a hedonistic lifestyle of drugs and alcohol, and, as such, he had given thanks by publicly professing his faith. This corresponded with Granqvist’s point of view ‘that an overwhelming majority of sudden religious conversions occur during life situations of significant emotional turmoil’ (2014, p. 781). What resonated throughout this section of the interview, and in a private discussion afterwards, was a fear of hell:

But you know if you are not confirmed you cannot enter heaven. That frightens me for them [his parents] and for my in-laws. Hell is a terrible place; I do not think people realise how terrible it is. I don’t want them to go to Hell, I want them to receive God’s blessing and feel his strength (Donnie,36, Tong 2018).

Donnie had a genuine fear that his parents would be denied entry into heaven. At the time of the interview, his father-in-law was terminally ill. What is interesting is that he was equally afraid for his father-in-law’s soul, as he was for the souls of his adherent parents. His parents, though regular church goers, were no more assured of a heavenly afterlife than his non-religious father-in-law. Donnie’s belief can be summed up thus ‘God speaks, and those who do not hear and obey are condemned’ (Ward 1999, p. 288).

The punishment of hell was mentioned on two occasions at services I attended. The services were at Stornoway High Free Church and occurred on a Sunday when Reverend Ferrier was preaching at another church during a Communion weekend. Both services were taken by a retired minister.

[t]he main sermon was a little bit more hell and damnation that I have heard before. He speaks of us having to always act in a gracious manner as God is always watching and at any moment, we could be struck down dead…. He ends the evening service by saying he was glad we had all made it back BUT to continue to live and behave as God desired as at any moment, we could be struck down dead. Hell is waiting for those who do not live by God’s rules. (Fieldwork Diary, 6th October 2019).

This fear of hell is the second reason, I am putting forward, for people remaining adherents as ‘the Bible is replete with talk of avenging angels destroying the wicked’ (Ward 1999, pg. 108). The topic of hell arose from the interviews with three participants, Donnie, Andrew, and Archie. Both Donnie and Andrew returned to faith following an episode of crisis. For Donnie, this was following a weekend of overindulgence. For Andrew it was watching a film:

We were watching a film about, it was basically, the Apocalypse, and I was petrified, and I realised that it was a case of, ‘You either accept Me now, or you won't get another chance.’ and, you know, I knew that was the case, and obviously, you come out and it's actually a leap of faith (Andrew, 34, Back 2018).

Andrew spoke of his terror of watching hell as depicted in the film. He spoke of this being a message direct from God to him, a warning to him to return to faith, and join his wife and parents at the Lord’s Table. However, not all share that conviction. Some have a concern that they are not good enough to become communicants and share a place at the Lord’s table. Reverend MacLeod spoke of asking adherent members of his congregation why they did not fully commit:

I have asked individuals why are you holding back? Some would say, ‘I don't feel good enough. I feel inadequate’ (Reverend MacLeod, Back 2018).

Archie is one such individual who feels lacking in the ways in which he leads his life. He has concerns about being destined for hell. He is originally from Lewis, but now lives and works in Glasgow. I have known Archie, socially, for many years. His faith is important to him although he is not a regular church attender. I asked him about becoming a communicant when we were at a charity event in Glasgow:

Look at me now, it is after midnight, and it is now the Sabbath and I’m standing here at the bar with a drink. I am out having fun. If I was to become a communicant, I would be lying to God that I was a just and good person and for that I would go straight to hell. I’m not good enough to break bread at The Lord’s table (Archie, 48, Glasgow 2018).

Archie’s fear of not being a good enough Christian in the eyes of God has prevented him from becoming a communicant. It is his opinion that he cannot stand up and publicly commit his life to God whilst he continues to break the rules of the Sabbath. However, this causes conflict as he acknowledged that by remaining an adherent, he would also be denied a place in heaven.

The belief in an afterlife is an important part of Christian conviction, with differing ideas about heaven and hell (Carter 2012; Ward 2005). No matter how one perceives them ‘heaven and hell are essentially deserved compensations for the kind of earthly lives we live’ (Talbott 2017, p. 1). Donnie and Archie’s views can be described as classical. Their perception is one of eternal damnation in that, ‘hell is a place of unending torment for the wicked’ (Carter 2012, p. 1). For both men it was very clear which type of people end up spending eternity in hell, those who do not commit their lives fully to God.[[155]](#footnote-155) This corresponds with Carter (2012) and Talbott (2017) as both write that it is choosing to turn away from God that condemns the soul to damnation. Talbott proposed that hell was the destination ‘if some person should freely act wrongly – or worse yet, freely reject God’s grace’ (2017, p. 10). For these persons, hell is not God’s punishment, they have chosen their fate. Carter puts forward a similar proposition:

It doesn’t’ matter which view of hell you may believe. All that matters is, hell is real and, if you refuse to accept Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you will end up there…God doesn’t want any to perish, but, he does desire that we accept him and turn away from our sinful lives (2012, p.7).

No matter the evil or wicked acts committed, not becoming a confirmed member of the church and therefore not taking your place at the Lord’s Table is of equal consequence. This corelated with Ward’s proposal that with Christianity being a sacramental religious community, ‘it’s rituals can become the exclusive and necessary means to salvation, without which no one can be united to God’ (1999, p. 185). For those of the Gàidhealtachd the ritual of a public confession of faith is a necessary requirement in the avoidance of hell. The overarching message is that of ‘the church being concerned very much with those who are not members and preparing the way for redemption for all’ (Ward 1999, p. 307). Berger put forward an interesting proposal linking the fear of hell to the origins of Calvinism and predestination. He proposed that this facet of doctrine ‘is probably the culmination of the masochistic attitude in the history of religion’ (1967, p. 75).

The topic of hell also arose with Reverend Ferrier. He also spoke of parishioners remaining adherents because of a fear of punishment:

He worries that for some they remain so as they are afraid that they are not ‘good enough’. For Hugh this is not what the Bible is about, and he believes that Hell should not be used as a threat. (Fieldwork Diary 22nd February 2019).

From my discussions with Free Church of Scotland ministers it seems changes in Biblical interpretation are taking place. The older ministers I have listened to preach of hell and damnation, the younger two do not. This correlates with Woodhead’s view that the imagery prescribed to God is changing:

[d]ominant images of God also undergo corresponding changes. Emphasis on the harsh, commanding, angry, and even arbitrary God worshipped and honoured as ‘King’ and ‘Judge’ gives way to emphasis on a gentler, kinder more considerate and loving God’ (2005, p. 12).

Religions, as Ward points out, ‘rarely claim to be based entirely on reason’ (1999, p. 105) but they do have an omnipresent figure and one that demands loyalty. Differing gender scriptural interpretations highlights the different connotations for God. For women God was seen as supportive, caring, and loving whereas for men God was judgement, retribution and power. However, I am left questioning if people make their decisions on becoming communicants rationally. Would they or will they make a different decision when hell is no longer used as a threat?

Two interesting points became apparent during examination of the interview data: firstly, there was no description of heaven and, secondly, no women bring up the topic of the afterlife. For the first point it appears that it is the dread of hell that is of importance, not the allure of heaven. When it comes to the women, Connie did speak of her concern that her son and her eldest grandson were no longer attending church or partaking of fellowship, but she did not mention hell as a consequence for not attending:

He [her son] was regularly coming here [church]. Even during the week, he would go to what [sic] we call the junior fellowship club. He would go to that during the week and went regularly to church, morning and night. And then of course when he became of age, and he started courting, he kind of went a wee bit back the way (Connie,70, Tong 2018).

Connie did not raise concerns that neither of her daughters attended church nor any of her granddaughters.[[156]](#footnote-156) Rosie’s was the only woman’s interview where the concept of hell was mentioned, and I was the one to introduce it:

I feel I hit a nerve when I asked about her views on hell. This was the one topic she would not discuss. She said it was a real thing and it frightened her, and she wouldn’t talk about it to anyone. (Fieldwork Diary 2019).

This may be aligned to the traditional aspect of the community. Brown notes that until the mid-twentieth century ‘religious rhetoric ‘spoke’ differently to men than it did to women. Hell was a man’s destination, but hardly ever a woman’s’ (2009, p.96). However, in the previous section I discussed the portrayal of women as temptresses. It appears that tempting men from God’s path does not merit an eternity in hell. I can offer no suggestion as to why this may be the case as Jezebels are spoken of in the Bible. This area requires further research and is outside the scope of this project.

Berger posited that the ultimate power religion has is over death and the afterlife. Death is something no man can avoid, thus fear of eternal damnation, or hope of eternal salvation holds great sway:

The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, towards it (1967, p. 51).

The sacred canopy envelopes all from the cradle to the grave, but one must live by the rules to prevent its rupture

**6.3.b Communion**

Communion is one of only two sacraments held by Presbyterian denominations, the other being baptism. Whereas baptism is an individual joining the Christian community, communion is ‘the main sacrament of the church and the proper means by which its spiritual life is renewed’ (Ward 1999, p. 190). Communion on Lewis is very different from the communion services held by the Church of Scotland on the mainland. There, communion is held four times a year and is an addition to a normal service. To partake of communion, one must be a confirmed member of the church. The pews have white cloth laid over them as a symbolic representation of the congregation sitting together at the Lord’s table. The wine and bread represent the body and blood of Christ and are passed along the pews from person to person. Many churches still use a communal goblet for the wine.



This is a picture of a Presbyterian church dressed for Communion. The pews are covered with a white cloth.

Image from crowncourtchurch.org.

On the islands of the Gàidhealtachd communion is not just an additional section of worship, it is a weekend long celebration of communion or unity. It has roots in the cultural traditions of the islanders. Protestantism has ‘always sought to promote a strong sense of community and fellowship’ (Ward 1999, p. 299) and this is aspect is highlighted during communion. Communion weekends are staggered throughout districts and islands as people and ministers travel to and from other areas. As Geoff points out ‘it is possible to take communion in other congregations up to a dozen times a year.’ (Geoff 2017). Traditionally, a communion weekend would commence on Thursday, the shops would be closed, and people would fast. Fasting is a customary ritual in many religions. It serves to ‘show piety, devotion, penitence, and self-control, to effect purification in preparation for certain tasks’ (Dietler 2011, p. 187). This ritual at the beginning of the communion weekend acted to focus peoples’ minds on human sinfulness and the great need for grace (Geoff 2017) preparing the communicants for sitting at the Lord’s table. The shops no longer close and fasting is no longer observed. People are no longer only employed on their crofts and work commitments make it difficult to take time off to observe the Thursday rituals (Geoff 2017).

Thursday still marks the beginning of communion with Fellowship meetings held on Thursday evening as well as Saturday. Formal worship is held on the Friday evening and is usually led by a visiting minister. Geoff describes what happens after this service has ended:

I preached on Friday night and then there was an after-service. Visitors and those not intending to come to the Table left. A reading followed before all who were coming to the Table formed a line, leaving their seats row by row, and making their way to the front in a queue, each took a lead token from an elder, a token which they would present as they came to the table on Sunday morning (Geoff 2017).

This is a visible exclusion of visitors and adherents from taking part in the sacrament. It acts to reinforce the notion of those who have been deemed suitable to take a place at the Lord’s Table and those who have not. What I find interesting is that people make the choice to become a communicant by self-assessing their ‘goodness’ and suitability. This ‘goodness’ is then emphasised and reinforced by the rituals surrounding Communion. This segregation continues at the Sunday communion service. In common with all Presbyterian churches the pews (the Lord’s Table) are covered with white cloth. However, there is an added demarcation in the Free Church of Scotland with the ends of the pews roped off ensuring ‘the table is ‘fenced’ or protected’ (Peckham and Peckham 2004, p. 22). This adds further emphasis on who is and who is not allowed to take communion, who has and who has not publicly committed to God. If as Ward advised ‘the sacraments are the actions of the community by which it establishes fellowship … in the Lord’s supper this fellowship is kept in unity’ (1999, p.310) then there is a visible indication of who does and does not belong to the confirmed church community, who is an insider, and who remains outside the sacred canopy.

Many churches offer refreshments after evening worship on the Sabbath. This is very much in keeping with Gàidhealtachd hospitality. Traditionally, those visiting from other areas and islands would stay with local families. They would be given food and shelter for the weekend and could catch up with all the local news and gossip. With much improved transport links this no longer occurs. The tea, coffee and home baked goods on the Sabbath evening gives everyone the chance to socialise. Stolz writes of religion being ‘strongly social’ (2020, p. 9) and this is apparent on Lewis where a Gaelic cultural welcome has become a religious tradition as people commune.

Communion ends on Monday morning. Lews Castle Museum has a photographic display which shows people standing at the harbour at the end of a communion weekend as the visitors board a ferry to return home. A minister would give a blessing and, as the ferry sailed out of port, those on board and those on the land would sing unmetered psalms until the ferry could no longer be seen.

**6.4 Chapter Summary**

Bruce wrote in 2017‘There are two choices which are important for understanding religion in modern Scotland. First, there is the choice to ignore religion…Second, there is the choice to prefer choice itself.’ (2017, p. 368). As this research has illustrated the first cannot be applied on Lewis. People cannot choose to either ignore or be indifferent to religion as it encompasses many aspects of life. Bruce’s second hypothesis, making choices just because there are choices around also has its limitations on the island. Choice is very much restricted on the Sabbath.

This chapter has analysed data collected through interviews and observations, alongside statistics from church censuses (Brierley 2017) with a view to answering the questions:

* What links are there between cultural identity and religious observance in the remote conservative Presbyterian communities on Lewis?
* What authority does religion hold for the people who live on Lewis?
* What effects do tradition, both cultural and familial, bring to religious belief and practice on Lewis?

Things are slowly changing on the island. Numbers attending worship are falling. The aging demographic of the population and the number of deaths can account for some of the decline, but not for all of it. However, the decline is at a much slower rate than predicted and is almost half that of the more liberal Church of Scotland (Brierley 2017). The numbers of children, teenagers and young adults in attendance at worship and fellowship are much higher than on the mainland. This correlates with Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) proposal of religion as a chain of memory and is reinforced by intergenerational worship. Young people are choosing to attend church, and some are choosing confirmation. Of those who leave Lewis for university and employment, some are returning to raise their own families. Among those who stop attending worship, some are returning to the fold, bringing their own children to Sunday School, and continuing their familial history.

Sabbatarianism is slowly being worn away. There are now much needed tourists visiting over the weekend, the playparks are open, people can be seen taking walks and some hang out their washing to dry. Yet these changes are slow in occurring. The cinema may have opened on the Sabbath for business, but Tweed Tastic is closed once more. Perhaps having two businesses contravene the rules in one year was a step too far. Those resisting change can be found in both the religious and non-religious groups. Both incomers and those who are born, and bred islanders protest against Sabbatarianism. Through examining Sabbatarianism one can see that culture and religion are interwoven for those who live on Lewis. Religion and culture cannot be separated and the norms that affect behaviour are situated in the traditions of both the community and the family. Religious authority encroaches into secular lives with organisations, such as the golf club, upholding the rules of the Sabbath.

The religious path people tread is, in part, down to personal choice, however, many follow the route of their parents and grandparents before them. Religion is ensconced in family tradition; religion is passed down along a chain of memory. Yet the fear of hell may lead some to change direction and take their place at the Lord’s table.

**CONCLUSION**

Tha a' chrìoch am fagas.

The end is nigh.

This chapter returns to the central research questions that initiated the study. To re-cap these questions are:

1. How do women find agency within the constraints of patriarchal Presbyterianism?

2. How do women navigate between the patriarchal Church and the equality driven social spheres of their lives?

3. What links are there between cultural identity and religious observance in the remote conservative Presbyterian communities on Lewis?

4. What authority does religion hold for all who live on Lewis?

5. What effect does tradition, both cultural and familial, bring to religious belief and practice on Lewis?

The previous two chapters of this thesis explored the data collected and the research questions were then discussed in the light of the literature reviewed. This section summarises the contribution that this study makes to the academic field in two principal areas: gender and religious identity. Following on from this, areas for future works are then identified This thesis then continues with a reflexive section and concludes with some final remarks.

**7.1 Contributions to the field**

**7.1.a. Gender Inequality**

The first and most significant contribution made by this research concerns gender inequality in conservative Scottish Presbyterian churches. The churches of Lewis are patriarchal in both dogma and tradition. This thesis showed that women choose to belong to the Free Church of Scotland and in doing so choose to uphold the patriarchy. Choice is fundamental to the ways that these women direct their religious lives. Although female agency is limited within the Free Church of Scotland, it is not removed. Women are empowered in female only spaces and in the roles they believe God has specified for them. Doing the refreshments or the flowers may not seem to be as important as overseeing the spiritual health of the community, but the women interviewed in this research believe that each role is essential in the maintenance and success of the church. As a result, women’s autonomy through their understanding and religious knowledge and belief helped mitigate conflict as they navigated between the equality driven social and patriarchal religious spheres of their lives.

One way in which women validate their lack of religious authority is in their belief of the Bible as the ultimate authority; the Bible remains relevant. Women can find empowerment through Biblical knowledge, although it must be added that they are selective in their scripture readings. This is an island community which relies heavily on the shellfish industry; no-one referred to the scriptures which forbid the eating of shellfish. Their view of women holding no position of authority in the church is because it has been decreed by God, not through male superiority. Yet, the Bible is not just relevant in religious belief and practice. As noted by Louise and Donnie, the Bible provides support for the problems experienced in their everyday lives. It becomes a part of the sacred canopy that offers them shelter. The relevance of the Bible in everyday life is imparted to the next generation through intergenerational worship at church and family worship in the home.

The women navigate between the religious and secular spheres of their lives by compartmentalising gender specific roles. Conservative religions place an emphasis on the woman’s idealised role as, foremost, a wife and mother. Yet many women are employed out with the family and some, like Louise hold jobs with positions of authority. Leamaster and Bautista (2014) argued that women whose jobs oppose gender traditionalism in the secular sphere will overcompensate in their gender specific role in the religious sphere. This thesis has also revealed that non-religious women also comply to the gender specific roles when it comes to funeral rituals. More research is needed in this area, but it may be that women comply as the rituals are perceived to be cultural not religious.

Research has highlighted differences in gender identities situated in conservative religious households (Irby 2014; Brasher 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The conservative Presbyterian churches also define the man’s role within the family. Here he is seen as not only the head of the family but also as the guardian of the family’s religious wellbeing. These roles can be viewed as a heavy load to bear but they may also cause the man to suffer from a God complex (Alderage-Clanton 1990). This research has found that when men do not live up to the expectations placed on them, it is the women who are perceived to have failed, not the men. Mrs Campbell was described as a bully at work and as someone who gave her husband an unhappy homelife. The wife of the assistant minister to Back Free Church of Scotland was never mentioned. It is also the women who lead the charge when it comes to calling out women, they believe are falling short in their duties and religious compliance. As discussed, this is not the case for all conservative religions.

What was significant in this thesis is that women, across the generations, chose to uphold the patriarchy of the church. Patriarchal hierarchies cannot be maintained without both men and women agreeing to them. Religion offers them a degree of agency and grants them a degree of comfort and sanctuary in a world that is ever changing.

**7.1.b. Religious Identity**

Tradition and authority are fundamental in shaping the religious identity of those in the Gàidhealtachd. The importance of tradition, both cultural and familial has been central to this research. Tradition has shaped both the secular and the religious spheres of the lives of those in the Gàidhealtachd. The boundaries between religious and secular traditions are blurred and many non-religious uphold traditions which have their roots in religion. Changes are occurring, and the strict adherence to Sabbatarianism is slowly being eroded and women are being allowed at the grave during an internment. Yet the women who chose to hang out their washing on the Sabbath, a visible sign of non-adherence, and those who chose to attend the grave are still in the minority. It must be recognised that there has been little change when it comes to patriarchal authority, within both the church and the political landscape.

Authority is central to the religious lives of those on Lewis. The Bible remains the text to which the people turn to for advice, comfort, and direction. Hell remains the ultimate penalty for those who do not fully commit to God. What is clear from this research is that the examination of conservative religious communities, in a rural setting, must encompass the historical and secular identities of those under investigation. The religious and the secular in the Gàidhealtachd are not polarities, they are interdependent, joined together by hundreds of years of history, tradition, culture, and language. Religion is culture in the Gàidhealtachd and is used as a cultural defence through Sabbatarianism and the patriarchal aspect of both the church and the political landscapes.

Yet changes are occurring and numbers attending worship are falling. This is an island with an aging population, and this may account for some of the decrease in numbers, but not all. That the conservative denominations are witnessing a slower than predicted decline has offered a degree of reassurance. The churches also have a large cohort of children, teenagers, and young adults in attendance at both worship and Fellowship. The positive impact in using an intergenerational approach to worship, alongside passing on religious knowledge and belief through family worship, may be the reasons behind the numbers of young people who continue to attend church through choice and choose to become communicants. Religion as a chain of memory can be witnessed in the numbers of those, who having left the island, are returning to the fold, bringing their own children to Sunday School, and continuing their familial history.

Sabbatarianism continues to be upheld by the religious and non-religious alike. However, some rules are being relaxed. The swings are no longer chained on a Sunday and there are now much needed tourists visiting over the weekend. Some even hang their washing out to dry. However, change is slow and leisure centres remain closed on the Sabbath. Both camps, those who advocate change and those who resist it, can count incomers and indigenous individuals amongst their numbers. Through examining Sabbatarianism one can see that culture and religion are intermingled for the islanders. Religious authority encroaches into secular lives with organisations, such as the golf club, upholding the rules of the Sabbath. Ultimately, as was seen with the protest against Tweed Tastic and the ignoring of the Sabbath opening hours of Starbucks, it is the islanders who will decide what can open and what must remain closed.

Religious identity is established through family tradition, passed down along a chain of memory. Whether one becomes a communicant or remains an adherent, whether one is religious or not is a personal choice. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants followed the route of their parents and grandparents before them. Yet, as has been discussed, the fear of hell may alter the choices some make. To take a place at the Lord’s table is a decision many continue to wrestle with.

**7.2 Future Areas of Work**

Throughout my field work I was conscious of the idealised religious beliefs and traditions which lead to tensions with the more egalitarian aspects of secular society: Sabbatarianism, views on homosexuality and gender equality. It may well be that the traditions of the conservative churches have been perceived as the problem rather than religion itself. It is the ‘sober suited men in black’ enforcing the rules not the edicts of the Bible? Does a lack of religious diversity cause this negative stereotypical imagery?

My thesis could only cover a limited number of questions. Therefore, this section suggests how some of the topics covered can be further developed. It opens up further lines of inquiry, offering ideas for future potential research projects. To recap, the principal aims of this study were to explore gender inequality in the conservative Scottish Presbyterian churches and the ways in which women gained agency, navigating between the secular and religious spheres of their lives. I also examined the links between cultural identity and religious belief and practice on Lewis. I looked at the manner in which religion affected the lives of those who lived and visited the island, be they religious or not. Throughout analysis reference has been made to authority and the concept of religion as a sacred canopy which protects all who belong to the conservative Presbyterian communities on the island.

While this thesis addressed female agency within conservative Presbyterian church communities there is scope for new critical evaluations of gender inequality within the private sphere. An essential question that arises from my analysis is how strongly have women internalised patriarchal views out of compliance? There are three areas to be considered; the first of which is the exclusion of women from the grave during burials. This was an area I did neither had the time nor the relationships with participants in which to peruse further research. What is of interest is the ways in which grief is managed during bereavement. As a culture, the Gaelic people do not outwardly show great public displays of grief, however, as was discussed, funeral rituals have been shown to be a part of the grief process. To remove these may be seen as denying women the right to grieve, the right to be a part of the final act, especially when the deceased is a close family member or friend. Further research is required to establish if this is a cultural tradition or if its genesis lies in religious belief. Examination should be made to discern why the women comply with the funeral rituals; do they conform more if they believe the rituals to be a cultural tradition or does religious tradition hold more gravitas?

I have examined the strategies used by women in ‘doing religion’ in the patriarchal church. What I had not fully considered was that this was a community where religion also plays a part in the home. Family worship takes place in many houses on the island. However further research is necessary to establish if this is also patriarchal. This thesis did not give consideration into this amalgamation of religious and family spheres with reference to worship. As Biblical passages make specific mention of women being silent in church is this command negated in the home? If women take on the role of religious teacher within the family is this because the role is usually perceived as being female? As was discussed in women are empowered by religious knowledge and gain agency through passing this on to other women and children. Participants such as Louise and Andrew share childcare in the home and it may be that families keep the home and church as separate spheres when it comes to religious authority. Family worship may be perceived as informal.

With reference to gender inequality, the acceptance of women as prayer leaders and Precentors in Glasgow City Free Church offers much in the way for future research. This is a church with a younger, urban, congregation. At the service I attended there were few people over the age of sixty-five years. This may be because it was an evening service, it may be because of its city centre location. The other Free Church of Scotland in Glasgow is based in Partick a residential area where people can walk to worship. Does a younger congregation signal a change in the acceptance of patriarchal authority? At the service I attended there were two trans gender women sitting in the pew in front of me. This also opens scope for future research as some LGBT+ individuals are viewed as going against religious doctrine. The outward acceptance of these women by others in the congregation was not something I had expected to witness.

**7.3 ‘Let me interrupt your experience with my confidence’[[157]](#footnote-157)**

Babones wrote ‘[re]lexivity, unavoidable in qualitative sociology, should be enthusiastically embraced’ (2016, p. 462). Using reflexivity has given me the tools to review my research, the decisions I have made and any affects these may have had on those under examination. By using symbolic interactionism and taking an ethnographic, iterative approach I have been reflexive throughout this thesis. Lumsden et al. differentiate between reflexive and reflective noting ‘the etymological root of the term reflexive means ‘to bend backwards upon oneself’, in contrast to reflection which entails thinking about something after the event’ (2019, p. 2). It was through the reflexive process that I came to understand that my actions helped answer the first two research questions of this thesis.

Including my own story at the very beginning of this paper was of paramount importance. Once I had made the decision to use an ethnographic approach, I felt compelled to analyse me using the same methods as I analysed the participants. As mentioned, by being present in the community I undertook a role that influenced social interactions, be I involved as a participant or simply on the side-lines as an observer. This enabled me to look at why I wanted to take on this particular research and any preconceptions I held. Using my fieldwork diary as data I carried out analysis on myself in the same manner as I analysed the participants’ interview transcripts. I did this by looking at the language I had used when writing the diary as well noting the ways in which I reacted to situations. By doing so I was able to explore my role as an observer of gender inequality in the church and ways in which religion affected those who lived and visited the island, including me. I observed that I too upheld the patriarchy of the conservative churches I was researching. I too was ‘doing religion’. I deduced that I navigated between my social and fieldwork spheres by utilising one of Avishai’s strategies. My response to the patriarchy was to ‘strategize and appropriate religion to further extra religious ends’ (2008, p. 411). From my outsider standpoint as an incomer, I was using strategic compliance, exercising religious observance to minimise my outsider position. When in the field I upheld the rules surrounding Sabbatarianism. At worship I took on the female gender specific role; I remained silent and was led in prayer by men. I also recognised that on at least two occasions I had allowed men to take an element of control over the direction of my research. I had permitted them to interrupt my experience with their confidence.

Johnson’s (2005) image of the patriarchal tree was important when I analysed the ways in which I interacted with the communities. As a woman I was also subjected to the patriarchal aspect of the church. The interaction I had with men outside the church community was on an equal footing.[[158]](#footnote-158) Wood proposed ‘the roots of patriarchy run so deep in the fabric of society it is difficult to change’ (2019, p. 2). When analysing my actions and reactions I discovered that I too, upheld the patriarchy. It is difficult, as an individual to break the roots of patriarchy, change can only begin when a group understands the constructs that upholds their patriarchal system (Wood 2109).

On further analysis I came to the conclusion that, during interviews, I did not challenge the men on gender inequality although I did challenge the women. Adjepong wrote that one must consider the views the participants hold of the researcher. In doing so the researcher ‘performs a reversed analytical gaze from the perspective of the subject of ethnographic inquiry’ (2017, p. 28). Rosie’s reply to my asking about discussing gender inequality with her father allowed me to perform that reversed action:

**Me:** I have never asked your dad because I don’t want to ask. I don't want to be controversial. 'Because it's meant to be a calling. If you're called to be-**RM:** Yeah, ask him.

**Me:** people are called to be ministers-

**RM:** be upfront ask him (Rosie 2018).

Throughout my fieldwork I did not want to be confrontational as I feared losing the participants. However, this concern was gender associated, I was not being ‘upfront’ with the men as I feared losing, their support yet I did not fear losing the support of the women. The men hold authority in the church, and I did not want to alienate them. As I examined my actions, I came to the understanding that I challenged the women as I held the preconception that their actions were submissive. Before I analysed the data from the transcripts, I perceived the women to lack agency. Ironically, by not challenging the men, I was relinquishing a degree of my own agency. I continued to uphold the patriarchy by viewing the men as having the control and seeing the women, myself included, as having none. Examination of literature on gender roles revealed that I had held unfounded opinions on which I had based my actions and interactions. By ‘doing religion’ I was upholding patriarchal authority, I did not challenge the status quo. I was at pains not to be ‘the secular other’ (Etherington 2004, p. 423). I viewed the deep roots as impenetrable.

One notable example of my ‘challenging’ the patriarch was my decision not to attend the women’s prayer group meeting.[[159]](#footnote-159) I have used symbolic interactionism to gain a better understanding of the situation, analysing my fieldwork diary as I would have an interview transcript. Blumer notes ‘[o]ne has to get inside the defining process of the actor to understand his action’ (1969, p. 16). An insight into the following sentence was reached by getting inside my own defining process and understanding my own actions and reactions:

I felt that I had no say in the matter and not for the first time do I feel that men are taking over my research and deciding what is best. (Fieldwork Diary 19th February 2019).

The first step of this analysis was to situate the interaction within a social space, this ensured that scrutiny of a micro social interaction took into consideration the effects of the macro social structures. The setting was important as much of the interactions ‘performed’ within a social setting are done with specific reference to the locality (Goffman 1969). This interaction took place following a Fellowship meeting. The setting, although in a village hall, was still a conservative religious setting. I was the only woman; the three other participants were all male figures of authority in the church. My knowledge of the patriarchal aspect of the church was fundamental in the choices that I made and in the way I presented myself.

Prior knowledge of a group or individual helps us to situate ourselves within a social interaction. One plays a part and how we are seen as an individual is through the perceptions and actions of others (Goffman 1969). My knowledge of the men involved was limited with my slender perception of them rooted in their church identity, as deacon, elder and minister. If, as Goffman argues, ‘[i]nformation about the individual helps us define the situation’ (1969, p. 13) then I had, with reflection, defined the situation as one where I held little autonomy. I undertook the role of woman, not the role of researcher, this prescribed the way in which I acted and reacted to the social situation and the conversation that ensued. All interactions became packed with religious, patriarchal symbolism. All my actions and interactions were founded on not alienating the men and by doing so I fostered a misrepresentation of myself and my identity as a researcher.

Lumsden et al wrote that ‘[r]eflexivity is valuable in that it draws attention to the researcher as part of the world being studied, while reminding us that those individuals involved in our research are subjects not objects’ (2019, p. 2). One major concern I had throughout my fieldwork was that I did not want to occupy the voyeur space. I kept in mind Adjepong’s quote ‘another white boy tourist in the land of coloured queers’ (2017, p. 27). I did not want to be another Lowland researcher in the land of the Gaels, I ensured that ethically my research was sound and at no point was I deceptive in the reasons why I was at worship or Fellowship.

Through discussion with more experienced researchers, I have been compelled to reflect on my decision not to attend the funeral. Through analysis of my fieldwork diary, I have evaluated my rationality in the choice I made. I used the knowledge and views that I held at that time. My main concern was ethical, did I have clearance to attend? Reflecting on this I now take on board Mapedzahama and Dune’s view that ‘[w]hile social research may be intrusive, it is not invasive’ (2017, p.2). My attendance may have been no more precarious than any other social situation or social interaction that I was observing. The researcher and participants establish a relationship which then sees a degree of fluidity and trust as the research advances and changes direction. This can entail that the consent becomes ‘an open-ended process that is constantly negotiated’ (Mapedzahama and Dune 2017, p 2). In making a rational decision I took on board my own views, and my own experiences. These go back to my childhood and upbringing. I have strong memories as a child of my mother closing the curtains when a funeral procession passed the house. This was, in her view, a private occasion. My parents were very disparaging of those who attended funerals despite having no connection to the deceased.

I stand by my decision not to attend that funeral but have taken on board the views of other sociologists and accept that I may have missed an opportunity to gather more data. I acknowledge that I should have considered that as the death was announced on the cards that it was in the public domain and as such any researcher would have a legitimate reason to attend (Spicker 2011). However, despite concerns that I should have moved towards a more individualistic approach when it came to the funeral, I cannot ignore my ethical concerns. My question remains, what would the ethical board’s expectations be in such a situation?

Reflecting at the end of each day through the use of my fieldwork diary helped ensure that all who became a part of this research remained subjects, each with their own history and individuality. Morgan and Guevera (2008) emphasised the importance of the researcher – participant relationship and proposed ‘the quality of the research often depends on the quality of the researcher's relationships with the participants’ (2008, p. 728). By establishing a connection with each participant, I ensured that they were situated in a different part of my own history. Louise and Andrew are fellow Queen Margaret University alumni,[[160]](#footnote-160) Donnie and I both lived in the same Glasgow neighbourhood as students. Connie and I had met our husbands at the same Glasgow ceilidh dance hall, although twenty years apart and Jessica and I had both lost siblings that we never knew. These connections and the rapport established ensured that I was not just another Lowlander, and they were not the ‘objects’ in a research project. We were individuals with a common bond.

I am aware that I am, to quote my initial supervisor, ‘a product of my age and gender’. To that I will also add social class. I was raised in a working-class area in an age where girls were not encouraged to question authority, and particularly, male authority. My choices on leaving school were limited, due to a lack of information and encouragement. Age has brought me the chance to continue with my education and this research has afforded me the opportunity for self-analysis and growth. I was ‘neophyte’ (Blumer 1969) to the field of sociology of religion when I began this project. Through the reflexive process, I have been better able to understand the decisions I made as my focus changed and my understanding and knowledge grew. As Goffman remarked ‘we all act better when we know how’ (1969, p. 80).

**7.4 Final Remarks**

This research has added much needed knowledge and understanding to the academic field. First and foremost, it offers up an understanding of gender inequality within conservative Scottish Presbyterianism. It has shown that religion is tied up in tradition, culture and identity. It is as much a part of the Gàidhealtachd as the Gaelic language. Change is slow and although religion has adapted, and continues to do so during the pandemic, following the edicts of the scriptures lies at the heart of everyday life.

Lewis is not an idyll that is removed from the pressures of the twenty-first century. Suicide has blighted the island over recent years. Conflict, scandal, and schism have never been far from the churches. This remains a patriarchal community, both in the church and in politics. It is an island with an aging demographic. To counter this the Scottish government have been relocating Syrian families to Stornoway. This has brought problems with ‘othering’ and protests over the opening of a mosque. It may hold close its traditions, but I was aware that religion and cultural traditions are complex and change over time, they possess a degree of fluidity. Yet one cultural aspect remains strong, this is an island that is famous for its Gaelic welcome, something I have been lucky enough to receive.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: Ethical Approval**



Red.resgov@canterbury.ac.uk

Mon 13/01/2020 10:34

To:

 Bennett, Yvonne

Dear Yvonne,

The Faculty ethics Chair has approved your amendment form for project reference 16-A&H-151C, and we will not require new forms to be submitted.

Please keep this amendment approval email notification, alongside the original ethics approval letter/email.

Best wishes for your continued research.

Research Integrity & Development Officer**|**Research Development [EE:RD] **|**Erasmus, Rm ER

On behalf of the Research Development Ethics

**Appendix 2**

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**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by **Yvonne Bennett.**

**This research project is examining what part religious beliefs and practices play within cultural identity and looking to see if they assist with community cohesion.**

I am a mature PHD student at Canterbury Christ Church University. My undergraduate degree and MA were both undertaken with the Open University and both are based in the field of Religious Studies. Prior to commencing my academic career, I was a District Nurse in Greenock (where I am from), West Lothian and Edinburgh. After the my 4th child started nursery school I retrained as a Montessori nursery teacher and worked for five years in a preschool in Sevenoaks. For the past five years, alongside my studies, I have been a volunteer teacher for the charity Kids Co. I worked in London with young adults aged 16-23 years and young single mums under the age of 20 years.

**What will you be required to do?**

I will be observing social groups connected to the Church. My participation level in any of these groups will be at the discretion of the group members. I will be looking for volunteers to be interviewed, either on a one to one basis or in a small group. The interviews will be semi structured and recorded. All data gathered will be strictly confidential and anonymous. Any removal of anonymity will be at the participants request and will be looked at on a case to case basis.

**To participate in this research, you must:**

be over 16 years of age

**Procedures**

* allow researcher access to group
* participate in an interview
* take part in group discussion

**Feedback**

I will present feedback on a regular basis to each of the groups when I return for my following fieldwork trip. If you require feedback at other times, please contact me and this can be arranged.

**Confidentiality**

All data and personal information will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University’s own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Yvonne Bennett After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

**Dissemination of results**

All results will be published in my thesis at the end of the project and can be provided on request.

**Deciding whether to participate**

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

**CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project: What role does the church play in aiding and maintaining social cohesion within a community?**

**Name of Researcher**: Yvonne Bennett

**Contact details:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Address: |  |  |
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| Email: |  |  |

**Please initial box**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. |  |  |
| 2. | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. |  |  |
| 3. | I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential |  |  |
| 4. | I agree to take part in the above study. |  |  |

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Name of Participant Date Signature

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Name of Person taking consent Date Signature

(if different from researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Date Signature

**Appendix 3: Example of a Transcript**

This is the transcript from the interview carried out with Angie and her colleague Jessica. This was the second interview I carried out and the first with members of the community. Alison identifies as non-religious and Jessica as Church of Scotland.

Pseudonyms have been used in this transcript to maintain participant anonymity.

**A.M and J.M Transcript 6th June 18 at 12.15 in staff canteen at Stornoway Hospital**

**Y:** I just want stories, just all about your life here and as much as you want to tell me [crosstalk]

**A.M:** Well that’s why she’s here cause she’s got lots

**Y:** And any connection to the church.

**J.M:** Yeah.

**Y:** Past, present, future, anything…

**J.M:** Yeah. Okay, well I was born in Lewis and I grew up here and my family. Well, my mum used to go to church and after the loss… I had a sister who died the day after I was born. She died of meningitis and I have a visual disability and it's due to rubella

**Y:** All right.

**J.M:** And, but they didn't know the damage, the extent when I was born so my mum kinda had to deal with all of that.

**Y:** Actually, I was going to say there's a sort of link because my brother died two months before I was born.

**J.M:** Oh, wow, gosh.

**Y:** In an accident. He drowned.

**A.M:** Oh, my goodness.

**Y:** I know, but it's funny because people give you the real sympathy thing. And I think, “I didn’t know him”

**J.M**: Well that’s it

**Y:** There are very few people that know.

**J.M**: Well, it's not something I really share with everyone but, Anyway, she started-- she was going to church and that, so, and we would all... There's four of us, four kids in the family and then my dad and we all had to go Sunday school and stuff like that. And that was fine I went to school and the church had organised like a an event, for the summer holidays they did it one year and did another year.

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** And I was about 14 and there's all kinds of meetings and stuff. Anyway, I became a Christian through that.

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** And but kind of as I got older, kind of carried on up through my teens. And I kind of realised that there wasn't really a lot of support for teenagers and it didn't really have like, I don't know. They just knew about, like church issues.

**Y:** Yeah, yeah.

**J.M:** The didn’t know about life skills.

**Y:** Yeah. Was that the same for the boys and the girls?

**J.M:** Yes.

**Y:** - or more so for the girls?

**J.M:** No, it was all round I would say, so I went -- I moved away, um, to Inverness when I was 19.

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** And I started kind of going to out and stuff. And I was, you know, quite enjoying it. I came back home and I was kind of living the life that, I've been living away and my church friends became-- Because some of my friends at home by then had become Christians or they were interested, and they were kinda saying to me, "Oh you can’t go out. You can’t go out here just like you go out on the mainland**”** And I said, "Well, I'm being false if I don't, kind of, you know." I said, "I'm not gonna live a double life. No, I'm not.”

So, anyway, I carried on doing that. Eventually I started going back to church and stuff but I still came with a really open mind about, you know, things. I just saw a lot of things that weren't right.

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** And I just kinda felt like that uncertain feeling that I had felt when I was younger. But then like, there started becoming a lot of kind of like divides within the church structure.

**Y:** Yeah.

**J.M:** First of all, I think it was early, in early 2000, beginning of 2000, about that time, there was a big split in the Free Church.

**Y:** Yeah, and that became Free Church Continuing.

**J.M:** Yeah.

**Y:** Yeah, that was over--

**J.M:** That was Donald MacLeod the professor who faced accusations.

**Y:** Yeah, the minister. A big conspiracy theory and stuff.

**J.M:** Yeah, so I think it kinda started to change then. I had people kind of go behind my back and speak to the minister about aspects of my life and who I was friends with and stuff like that. And I felt really angry about it.

Anyway, I carried on going and I was just getting really disillusioned about things in that but still believing what I believed. Then, the Church Scotland, split, I think it was 2008, ‘09 over, them ordaining, I believe, gay ministers, Scott Rennie from Queen's Cross congregation in Aberdeen.

**Y:** That’s right, he was ordained.

**J.M:** Yeah, and he married in secret and told the congregation that he was, gay and that.

**Y:** Yeah.

**J.M:** So, that was when those things start happening. And most of the people, everybody I knew in the church has split. Meeting in that primary school-

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** -up the road and they were looking for another building and, you know, they were saying to me, "Oh, come along, come along.” But I-I don't agree with-- I-I just think there's too many-- too many divides. And I think they're losing sight of what it's all about. You know, the Bible teaches that we're all supposed to love one another-- love one another and support each other and that, but in actual fact, they just go around judging everyone.

**Y:** Yeah.

**J.M:** And saying, "Oh, we don't-- we're not judging.” I mean, one of the - somebody from the church went on the telly and said, "Oh, we're not judging people that are gay” And I was like, "Now, you obviously are, you know, because you've created this and I think they--" Because….

**A.M:** It’s the same about that church, that up beside M. D’s. There was a minister that went down and he actually embarrassed himself because he turned around and said, "I don't really know what they preach.”[[161]](#footnote-161)

**Y:** Yes. Yeah, yes

**A.M:** What their beliefs are? So how can you criticise someone you don't know what they--

**J.M:** Yeah, that was them. That was them, that was on TV.

**A.M:** There's a mosque.

**Y:** Yes.

**A.M:** There's a mosque,

**J.M:** Yes, the mosque’s been built—

**Y:** I've heard. A few people have mentioned the mosque.

**A.M and J.M:** Yeah.

**Y:** I thought everyone was quite, live and let live and everything was fine, but the other person I spoke to was very—was anti it – felt it was being done for a political reason.

**A.M:** Yeah.

**Y:** but I'm not…I've not looked into that enough to know but--

**A.M:** Yeah, the church should just remember that. But it‘s their attitude

**J.M**: it was just the Free Church Continuing minister that actually said that comment

**A.M** Was it?

**J.M**: Yeah, and he admitted really, that he hadn't studied in depth and I thought, "Well, how, how do you say that?" You know

**A.M**: He just made himself look stupid

**J.M:** He did. Yeah, yeah.

**Y:** I mean, what would--? Because obviously within the Free Church they’ve not allowed women to, they have no roles. What are their views on homosexuality, do you know?

**J.M:** Oh, it's like no, I mean a lot of--

[laughter]

**A.M:** That took her a long time

**J.M:** A lot of people…some people left the Church Scotland to go to the Free Church- because of that

**Y:** Because of that?

**J.M:** -because of that, yeah. And I would say, like, the split that happened in the Church Scotland, their congregation has actually, they're like a branch of the Free Church.

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** And I-- So, they are totally against it. In my view is well, that's no reason to split a church. If it's wrong if God is God and he thinks it's wrong, we don’t know, we don't understand enough about it to question it.

**Y:** No.

**J.M:** And that we should show these people-- We should just treat them the way we treat everybody else here and that--

**A.M:** Exactly we’re all human [crosstalk]

**Y**: Exactly

**J.M:** Yes. No need to cause another split and I just feel that people have made it about them rather than about what they believe. Sort of thing. So, kinda since then, since the split, I haven't really found anywhere to go and but I, like, still believe, you know, I don't -- I don’t doubt.

**Y:** Yeah.

**J.M:** I don't have any doubts about that, but people have already, if you don't-- If you're not seeming to be attending certain things then, you know, they think you've kind of given up or something.

I know that I haven't and, um, I've spoken to two people in the last couple of weeks one person, had left for a while herself and she thought she'd never go back, but you know, she never kind of lost sight of it and that kinda thing.

And the other person I spoke to, she's actually-- she's from Aberdeen originally, but her father is a Church Scotland minister here they came- I don’t know twenty-- 25 years, maybe 20 years ago. I was just saying to her you know, if you’d stayed here[[162]](#footnote-162), your life would be quite different because of your, you know, position and stuff.

**Y:**  Yeah.

**J.M:** but she's really like, open-minded and that, so-- Yeah, I just think, I don't know, that's my own personal reason for like, not and like I said I don't go anywhere just now

**Y**: Yeah

**J.M:** I don't want to do-- [crosstalk]

**A.M:** There's a lot of things here that are, with the churches here-- you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't do that.

**Y:** Yeah, a lot of prescription

**A.M**: yeah

**Y:** Yeah.

**A.M:** I mean, you not that long ago you had something from somebody on Facebook.

**J.M:** Yeah, I did 'because I was meeting-- I was meeting a friend on Sunday, and we're gonna meet and I put on, 'because I didn't really know what was open in town-

**Y:** Mm-hmm.

**J.M:** -on Sunday and I put a note - I put a thing up and I said , "Can you recommend any family friendly places that are open?” and kinda nobody really and, um, I got private messages from a few people, and one of my friend’s said to me, "Oh you’re brave putting that out on Facebook” And I said “well why?” [laughter]

**A.M:** Yeah, asking for somewhere to eat!

**J.M:** [laughs] And then I was like, "Why?" she just said, “Oh well, you know, I just wouldn't do that because, you know people will think that it wasn’t right, and that.” But this is-- this is what they’re like. They go around worrying about what the next person is gonna say.

**Y:** Yeah.

**J.M:** Yeah, you know, and that.

**A.M:** It's quite a sad life to be honest.

**J.M:** It is. Well, it is really.

**A.M:** Yeah. It is really

**Y:** Come and see me on a Sunday.

[laughter]

**A.M:** I stop on the couch

[laughter]

**Y:** But do you hang your washing out?

**A.M:** I do. [laughs] I do. But I, well-- Sunday is my day off. I've always loved my Sunday off. I don’t get dressed unless I’m over in the caravan. and well for now, yes, I will be getting dressed.

**Y:** Yeah.

**A.M:** But normally I don't. I just sit in the house and do the dinner. And that’s it, my own housework. But I don’t go anywhere. I hate galivanting and , you know

**Y:** Yeah, yeah

**A.M:** Yeah. Having to move out of the house, and when you have to put your clothes on

**Y:** Yeah.

**J.M:** It’s just a day for chilling out

**A.M** Yeah

**Y**: Yeah

**A.M:** Slouch with the grandkids, that’s what I do

**J.M:** Yeah, but I-I feel-- I have to say I feel a lot, like-- I feel a lot freer and I can be my own person

**Y** Yes.

**J.M:** You know.

**A.M:** And you still have your beliefs.

**J.M:** Yeah, and I still have my beliefs.

**A.M:** Yeah.

**Y:** And that’s not changed.

**J.M:** Yeah,

**Y**: and now the cinema's open.

**J.M:** Yeah. [laughs]

**A.M:** What cinema?

**J.M:** An Lanntair

**A.M**: Oh An Lanntair?

**Y:** Yes. Open on a Sunday.

**A.M:** Yeah.

**J.M1:** So it's um, och

**A.M:** they should put that up on Facebook next

[laughter]

**Y:** See what they say

[laughter]

**J.M:** I'm gonna see, just to wind people up

[laughter]

**A.M:** They’d shoot her

[laughter]

**Y:** I'm gonna just pause that.

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1. From this point will be referred to as Lewis. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sabbatarianism is the upholding of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. Shops and leisure facilities are closed. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Gàidhealtachd encompasses the geographical area of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It also includes the history, culture, traditions, language and religious beliefs of the Gaelic people, the indigenous peoples of the area. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sabbatarianism affects visitors to the island. No leisure facilities or shops are open. Some hotels and guest houses are closed on the Sabbath. Although visitors are able to eat out the numbers of places open are reduced. However, ferries and flights do now operate a restricted timetable on the Sabbath. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This will be examined further in Chapter 3 sections 3.a and 3.b. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A ceilidh is a social event with Scottish music, singing, and traditional dancing. The dances are taught at secondary schools throughout Scotland as part of the P.E curriculum. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Stuart had a relapse in 2017 and a further relapse in 2018 which resulted in major surgery. As a result, I was given a three-month interruption from this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Skye is the largest island in the Inner Hebrides archipelago. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A family member, David, is the minister for the 4 parishes around Tighnabruaich. He has taken an interest in my research. I have interviewed David and used some of this data as a comparison. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibrox Stadium is the home ground of Glasgow Rangers Football Club. The Blue Room is the pre- and post-match hospitality suite for the directors, players and their guests. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Skye is the largest of the Inner Hebridean islands and is connected to the mainland by a bridge. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. My initial research question was ‘Do people on Skye become more conservative in their religiosity as a way of maintaining cultural identity in response to a changing demographic?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Canny is the Scots word for careful. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On Sundays, to enable those with a hire car to return the car full of fuel, one petrol station is open between the hours of 10am and 3pm. This is also used by locals to buy both petrol and provisions.

    Journeys on and off the island on a Sunday were at the request of the tourist industry. As tourists had no way off the island on a Sunday many would leave on Saturday. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Chapter 5 section 2.a [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Minch is the sea between the Outer Hebrides and the Scottish Mainland. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. I use ‘Sabbath’ as to call the day ‘Sunday’ is seen as demeaning this day of worship. Sunday will be used when it is a quote. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A manse is a house provided by the congregation for the minister and his family. It is part of his stipend. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This is the correct spelling. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Presbyterianism has, historically, been a religion which ‘rejects anything gentle or joyful’ (Hanley, 1986, p.66). During the Reformation churches were destroyed as a means of rejecting the colour and ornamentation of Catholicism.

    The author Peter May, in his novel, *The Blackhouse,* based on the island, sums up the austerity of the churches when he writes ‘Tall, plain windows. No colourful stained glass in this austere Calvinistic culture. No imagery. No crosses. No joy.” (May 2011, p.103). *The Blackhouse* is the first novel in his Lewis Trilogy. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Spatial appropriation by gender will be discussed in chapters 3 and 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Sook is Scots for suck. A sooky sweet is a hard-boiling type sweet that you suck, tradition has it you only get one to last through the entire sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Skelp is Scots for smack [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See <https://youtu.be/k3MzZgPBL3Q> for link to Gaelic psalm singing in Back Free Church of Scotland. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The Kirk session oversees the congregation and its parish. It consists of elders presided over by a minister. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Chapter 2 section 3.c. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Office for National Statistics figures for 4th quartile 2018 Public sector employment: 16.4% UK 21.5% Scotland [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. All population data is from 2011 Scottish Census [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The coffin is not placed inside the church during the funeral service and women, traditionally, do not attend the cemetery for the burial. This will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 5, section 1.b. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. At the time of writing there are ten Syrian families living on the island. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The data was gathered from the 2011 census and is available at: <https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/media/5560/lewis-profile.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Chapter 4, section 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Kirk is Scots for church. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Information taken from the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar website. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Bill Shankly (1913-1981) was a well-known Scottish football player and manager. He is best known for his time as Liverpool F.C ‘s manager. During his time at the club they won, amongst other trophies, the UEFA Cup. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I was able to read an original copy of this book at the British Library. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The Barna Group is an American evangelical Christian polling firm. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Churches_of_Scotland_timeline.svg> for a Scottish churches’ timeline. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Laird is the Scots word for lord. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This is now known as The Free Church of Scotland. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This tradition remains. The High Free Church of Scotland in Stornoway have a ‘Cuppa ‘n’ Ceilidh group. This group meets once a month and combines dancing with Fellowship. They also hold Buffet Testimony evenings which also combines a social activity with Fellowship. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/the-declaratory-act-controversy/> for the Declaratory Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The following excerpt can be found on the Free Presbyterian Church website. ‘All office-bearers in the Free Church of Scotland subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith which states: ‚There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God ‘. (Chapter 25, Section 6, [www.fpchurch.org.uk](http://www.fpchurch.org.uk)). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Quote from Associated Presbyterian website ‘it is correct to allow Christians to make their own decisions on matters that are not fundamental to the faith’ ([www.apchurches.or](http://www.apchurches.or)g). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Two of the three churches not in the Gàidhealtachd are to be found in Dundee and Edinburgh, both cities with large Gaelic communities. The third church is to be found in Vancouver, Canada, this may well be a result of the Highland Clearances, when many Gaels left for Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The Declaration can be viewed in its entirety at [www.freechurchcontinuing.org](http://www.freechurchcontinuing.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The court’s judgment can be viewed in full at [www.scotcourts.org](http://www.scotcourts.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Further investigation would be necessary to determine if this has any connection to the Scottish slave owners or to the mass immigration during the Highland Clearances. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Caiche is the old Scots word for hand tennis or Fives as it is known in England. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The Old Firm is the name given to a Rangers v Celtic fixture. The origin of the title is unclear, but it may be in reference to the clubs being part of the original football league, founded in 1890. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The Bill was controversial and in 2019 a new Bill, *The Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Repeal) (Scotland) Bill* was passed. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. This will also be discussed in Chapter 3 section 3.3b [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Twitter debates surrounding the SNP and Scottish Independence reference Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic. Those who wish to remain in the Union will be called ‘Huns’ (a derogatory word for a Rangers supporter) by those who are pro-independence. Likewise, those who are SNP supporters will be called ‘Tims’ (a derogatory word for a Celtic supporter) by those who oppose the SNP. These terms will be used without any of those in a Twitter debate mentioning which, if any, football team they support. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The Scottish National Party were known in Scotland as The Tartan Tories. They were viewed as being both conservative and Conservative. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. In July 2021 the SNP have decreed that term sectarianism be replaced with anti-Catholic racism. This has changed the narrative, making one side the victim and the other the aggressor. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Hibs (Hibernian F.C.) and Hearts (Heart of Midlothian F.C.) are Edinburgh football clubs. There is a sectarian rivalry between the clubs with Hibs having been established for the Irish Catholic immigrants and Hearts for the Protestant working classes. At first Hibs were banned from playing in the Scottish league as they were deemed an Irish club. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The Orangemen are members of the Orange Order This order was founded in County Armagh in 1795 during a period of sectarian conflict. Named in tribute to William of Orange who defeated the Catholic King, James II. Members take an oath to maintain Protestant Ascendancy. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Danny McGrain, a Protestant, was a leading Celtic player during the 1970s. He often spoke in interviews of

    how he had been spotted by a Rangers scout when he was still a boy. The scout did not recommend him to Rangers, wrongly assuming from his name – Daniel Fergus McGrain – that he was Catholic. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. I was working as a district nurse in Edinburgh and was carrying out a new patient assessment. I was sitting in the lounge of a flat in Leith talking to the patient. The T.V was on in the background and the news broke. The patient’s son ran in from the kitchen and we all sat and watched events unfold. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See chapter 6, section 6.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. That much research on conservative churches is focussed on America may be due to the connections between the churches and political affiliation. This is out with the remit of this thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This can be found on the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland’s website. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Two of the victims of the Manchester Arena atrocity were from the Outer Hebridean Island of Barra. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Although I do not examine evangelical revivals these were a feature of early – mid twentieth century religiosity on Lewis. The younger participants all spoke of wishing they had experienced them. Interestingly the older members of the community did not engage in conversation when I mentioned the subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. The perception that all Irish immigrants that settled on the West coast were Catholic continues to have implications today. Sectarianism is on the rise and is being referred to as anti-Catholic and Irish racism by pro-independence politicians. That the majority of those with Irish heritage are Protestant is not being overlooked. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Indy Ref 2 is the colloquial term for a second independence referendum. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The Scottish Parliament is situated in the Holyrood area of Edinburgh. It is commonly known as Holyrood. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. I am referring to the religious element of the ritual. Sociologically things have changed. Fewer are baptised as infants; many do not wear traditional christening robes. Many brides do not cover their shoulders and some churches allow the service to be filmed. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See Chapter 5 section 1.a. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See Chapter 5 section 1.b. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. My first memory of the leaving of flowers and messages was following the death of Diana Princess of Wales. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. All the roles of authority in the church are held by men, from minister to deacon. However, all men have the authority to lead prayer or to Precent. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. I am using ‘locally constructed’ as the interaction of participants in their family and community. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Höllinger and Muckenhuber analysed data from the World Values Survey, covering the period from 2010-2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See Chapter 5, section 2.a. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. This is an old Scottish saying which means we are all equal. A direct translation is we are all John Thomson’s children. The source of the saying is unknown. Some say Jock Tamson is colloquial name for God whilst others believe it is a reference to a John Thomson the minister for Duddingston Kirk in Edinburgh from 1805- 1840. The Rev. Thomson was a very popular minister who is said to have referred to his parishioners as his *bairns*. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Although both scholars belong to different fields in academia, Chaplin proposes that the uniqueness of the island means that the research process and theoretical frameworks that he used would hold relevance in other studies carried out on island life. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. This final step is referred to by Carpenter (2013) when he writes of the importance of researcher axiology. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. My interest in the research question is explained in my biography. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. The term astructural bias was coined by Reynolds and Reynolds in 1969 and refers to a lack of a theoretical foundation. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Adams et al. (20015), Mosher et al (2017) note that auto-ethnography is increasingly being used in research in the field of nursing. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Pullman is often referred to as being a new atheist, alongside Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. Although Pullman has atheist beliefs, he does not denounce Christianity and describes himself in interviews as a ‘Church of England Atheist’ (Catholic Herald, 2017) or a Religious Atheist (Peter Jukes, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See Chapter 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ethnography provides the researcher with an insider perspective, yet as an atheist and as a Lowland Scot I was an outsider in religious belief and Gaelic culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. I was struck by the similarities between the two islands. Both Corsica and Lewis have a distinct cultural identity. Corsicans, although French, have their own nationalist identity with a wish for greater political autonomy from France. Scotland continues to push for independence. Both islands have their own language, literature and music. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See Chapter 1 section 2.c. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See Appendix 1 for ethical clearance letters and appendix 2 for participant information sheet and consent form. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. The participants were given a copy of the information sheet which had all my details on it should they wish to discuss something further or withdraw their consent. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See Appendix 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. See Chapter 5, section 1.b. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. I used a transcription company to transcribe the interviews. I did, however, listen to each interview whilst reading the transcription. There were many errors caused by the transcriber not understanding certain Scottish phrases or idioms. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. I am making reference to the King James Version of the Bible as this is the Bible used in the Free Church of Scotland. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. I had organised a meeting with Angie (she identifies as non-religious) and a meeting with Maggie (Church of Scotland) when I was on the island in February 2019. Both women cancelled their meetings within ten minutes of each other. The meetings had been scheduled for the following day and I was already on the island. This was at the time that Reverend MacLeod had left for the mainland, and I became aware of the events surrounding a suicide of a prominent member of the clergy. Although neither woman belonged to Back Free Church of Scotland, both lived in the community of Broadbay. I assume that, despite having no religious connection their social connection made them feel that they could no longer be a part of my research. Despite attempts to contact them before my subsequent visit in October 2019, I did not hear back from either of them. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. From 2015 -2017 all three main political parties were led by women. Ruth Davidson was head of the Scottish Conservative Party, Kezia Dugdale, head of the Scottish Labour Party and Nicola Sturgeon, head of the Scottish National Party, SNP. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The Moderator of the General Assembly is the minister or elder elected to chair the annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland’s Synod. Following this they spend a year as the symbolic head of the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See Chapter 1 section 2.c. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Some hotel restaurants and cafés at tourist sites are open on Sundays. The majority of those who frequent these establishments on a Sunday are tourists. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. There has been much written about girls, pre-teen and teen, criticising their peers in social/ online settings, Wiseman (2003), Currie et al (2007) but little on women. To aid my search I placed a post on the CCCU PGRA social media page asking other PhD students for advice on relevant literature within their fields of study. The papers suggested by fellow students, were all related to women in the workplace, specifically those in management. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. ### The aim of Christian mission is to spread Christianity to new converts, both nationally and internationally.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. See Chapter 7 for reflection on this decision. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See page 178 for further discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. I have used the term non-religious as opposed to atheist or agnostic as this is how David self identifies. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See Chapter 7 for reflexive analysis on my decision not to attend the funeral. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. A wake in Glasgow is held immediately after the funeral. It usually takes place in a hotel or pub and is a celebration of the deceased life. It is similar to a wedding reception or a baptism with refreshments and alcohol being served. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is a small denomination with only 4 churches on Lewis. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. For most people this would be cost prohibitive. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Precenting is where an elder will sing the first line of a psalm and the congregation will follow his lead. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Stark and Finke (2000) related tension in faith to levels of strictness. Low tension equates to liberal religiosity and high tension to a higher degree of strictness and a conservative religiosity. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. An elder is an overseer of the church. Elders assist the minister with the spiritual guidance of the congregation. Although the role is below that of the minister, he does have the authority to overrule the minister on any issue due to the bottom up system of governance. The role of elder is a lifetime position. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. I did not discuss this with the women as the topic only came to my attention as I read and analysed the transcripts. It was one of many topics I wished to follow up on my final fieldwork trip in April 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. The younger men, Andrew, Donnie and Archie all took on more of the childcare at home than the older men, such as Sandy. When I met Donnie for his interview, he had to leave in time to pick up his daughters from school. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. In May 2020 I attended an online conference held by the Free Church of Scotland, *Education - Our Children*. The main concern the conference organisers had was in the way LGBT+ inclusive education was being embedded throughout all areas of the national curriculum. As homosexuality is perceived as sin within this denomination it was the view of the organisers that the religious beliefs of the family were being undermined by the state and that the children were being exposed to sinful concepts. It can be argued that parents can inform their children, in the home, about their own beliefs and views. By doing so children will be introduced to different opinions. Yet does that leave children open to bias, be that from parental religious beliefs or from guardians who are homophobic? There is added concern that Scotland’s new Hate Speech Bill will affect the ways in which parents will be able to teach their religious beliefs at home. There is an unease that the state will encroach on the traditional aspect of family worship thus diluting the religious identity of the community. As this Bill has let to pass into legislature academic debate surrounding it has only just begun. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. I learnt of these events from chatting in the hairdresser’s and a gift shop. No one in the congregations mentioned them to me. It was not a subject I felt I could broach with the young group as both suicides involved young people in their year group. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. This was anecdotal evidence from Reverend Ferrier. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. The Shed is a purpose-built drop-in youth centre. It is open Monday – Saturday and has trained youth support staff. The Shed is financed and run by the Church of Scotland and is situated in Stornoway town centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. See Chapter 6 section 3.a. for further analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. The Church Census was carried out on Sunday 8th May 2016. The day was chosen as it was ‘as average a Sunday as any’ (Brierley, 2017, p. 26). This was the fourth such Census to be carried out. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. After much deliberation I decided against talking to the Reverend Gow over this unusual aspect of worship as I am of the opinion that this needs more investigation than I could give it in this thesis. I hope to be able to do this at a later stage and will form the basis for a new piece of research. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. See <http://inclusivemosque.org/about/> for further information on IMI. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Although Jagger was writing about the Anglican church her findings correlate with the findings of this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. In 2011 the Glasgow School of Art was destroyed by a fire during renovations. This building was a designed by Charles Rennie Macintosh and was of historical importance. Monies were raised to rebuild but in 2018 a second fire once more destroyed the building just as the works were reaching conclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Heb News is short for Hebridean News, a local newspaper. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. This man was not a participant in this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. To appoint a new minister a committee is formed from the congregation. This will involve both elders and deacons. Part of the selection process involves members of the committee attending services that applicants are taking in their own churches. Any ministers that are shortlisted will be asked to take a service at the church with the vacancy. The congregation will then vote on whether to offer the minister the post or not. This is a lengthy procedure. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. I will refer to the Reverend Dr. Campbell as IDC. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. One newspaper article wrote of Mrs C. as being a bully at work. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. I did not find out how the rumours began. When I first heard, from Reverend MacLeod, that there were problems in the community, and I might hear gossip I decided not to investigate. This research was not the place for gossip. I decided to include the suicide following Reverend Macleod’s move to the mainland and my attention being brought to the circumstances that caused the move. All data has been collected from the media. Once again, any follow up questions stemming from my analysis of the media stories was curtailed due to the coronavirus pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Scotland has strict drink driving laws. In Scotland the level of alcohol per 100mm of breath is 22 micrograms. In the rest of the UK the level is 35 micrograms. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. The Free Church has launched a website containing over 1000 old sermons. These are available at: [www.legacy.freechurch.org](http://www.legacy.freechurch.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. The transcript can be found in appendix ii. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. I did not discuss this with any of the participants as this assistant minister was also the subject of a police investigation. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. The Westminster Confession of Faith contains many clauses which specify who will be and who will not be accepted into heaven. This includes those who, despite doing good deeds, have not publicly professed their faith and joined the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. I am using Oduyoye’s definition of culture as ‘a people’s world-view, way of life, values, philosophy of life’ (oduyoye, cited in Pui-Lan 2002, p. 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. This quote was taken from the obituary for the Reverend Angus Smith. See section 6.1.a. for discussion on Reverend Smith. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Sunday will only be used when it is situated in a quote. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. See Chapter 1 section2.b p.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. As Stornoway High Free Church of Scotland meet in the local primary school hall they have to set out and put away the chairs at the services on a Sunday. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. I am also including all non-religious groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. The Blue Room is the hospitality room for the Glasgow Rangers Board of Directors. Before and after matches refreshments are served to guests of the directors and the dignitaries from the visiting team. Angie and her husband had won tickets to attend the Blue Room as a raffle prize at The Lewis and Harris R.F.C Supporters Club. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. I did not tell the men that I was talking to Angie about my research but rather that we were meeting as acquaintances. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. This is a Scottish phrase which means to stay at home. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. The film, Last Sunday, was made for the BBC. A clip can be viewed at:

     <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p028lbzy>. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. See chapter 6. section 4.b [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. The National Secular Society is a nationwide organisation which believes in the total separation of religion and state. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. The Lord’s Day Observance Society upholds the Sabbath as a day of rest, supporting those who oppose the dilution of Sabbatarianism. It is now known as Day One Christian Ministries. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. At the AGM I was surprised at the amount of money raised through weekly envelope collections. This community has over £36500 in the bank. This is remarkable as 75% of what they raise each week goes to the main church at Back for its upkeep and there are only 53 people who give with the majority of those being OAPs. What is also of note is that 3 years ago they spent almost £15000 doing renovations to the hall. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Louise is from Belfast and Andrew from Lewis. The decision to move to Lewis over Ireland was due to house prices. At the time of their move there was a housing boom in Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. David Mitchell is a family member and minister to a rural community in Argyllshire about 80 miles west of Glasgow. The demographic of his congregation is similar to that of Broadbay and therefore makes a good comparison community. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Dunoon is the closest town to the Tighnabruaich communities. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Halloween has been celebrated in Scotland since before the advent of Christianity. It has taken on a new perspective in America, but its roots are Celtic. Immigrants from Scotland took this tradition with them to America and Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. The majority of those on the island have clan names. There are a great many MacLeods MacDonald and Morrison families. To avoid confusion some, have family nicknames, the family who own and run MacDonald butcher shop are known as Braggie. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Bruce wrote this essay for a book on sociology of Scotland, and his proposal is related to the Scottish demographic. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. The United Synagogue reported that ‘[e]ach year the London Beth Din (Ecclesiastical Court) of the United Synagogue receives a number of applications from non-Jewish people to convert to Judaism.’ (United Synagogue 2020). The most recent data accessed on Roman Catholic conversion was from The Faith Survey (2020) which recorded that 7% of Roman Catholics in 2014 were converts.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. I did not meet any adherents who came from a family of communicants. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Not committing fully to God includes those who are not confirmed as well as those who have committed heinous crimes. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. I had planned to ask Connie about her views on her daughters and granddaughters non church attendance when I returned for a final fieldwork visit in March 2020. Likewise, I would have asked the participants on their views of women and hell. Unfortunately, the visit was not possible due to the coronavirus pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. I heard the above quote on the BBC podcast *Fortunately* by Fi Glover and Jane Garvey. The podcast, released on the 18th September 2020, began by with Glover reading out an email from a listener on her feelings of imposter syndrome whilst serving as a Captain in the military. She wrote the above quote which I felt symbolised my experiences during fieldwork. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. My interaction with men out with the church community was limited to men from the Lewis and Harris RFC supporters club. It is interesting that despite football continuing to be a male dominated sport, and the club being run by men, that I was treated as an equal. This may, in part, have been down to the position my husband holds within the club. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. See Chapter 5 section 5.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. I attended Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh in 1989. At that time, it was a college not a university. It was here that I studied for my District Nursing Diploma. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. This is the protest over the opening of a mosque in Stornoway. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Although her friend had been raised on Lewis she had returned to the mainland. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)