ORIENTATION

WHAT DO THEY HAVE THAT OTHERS DON'T?

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When violent interreligious conflict erupted in Kaduna, Nigeria, in 1992, Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye were drawn into the fighting, trying to kill each other in the name of religion. After the violence had stopped, the two religious leaders reluctantly agreed to meet. Over the years, they built a relationship with each other and agreed to join forces in helping to heal the chasm between their communities. They founded the Interfaith Mediation Centre in 1995, an interreligious grassroots organization that successfully promotes reconciliation and conflict resolution between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Meanwhile, their interfaith methodology for prospective civic peace activists is used in Africa and beyond.

While the example of Ashafa and Wuye illustrates religious peacemaking within religious conflicts, other examples demonstrate the effectiveness of religious peacemaking also in transforming violent conflicts with no apparent religious dimensions. The engagement of the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio, for example, was vital in helping to end the civil war in Mozambique (1977–1992), a proxy war during the Cold War.

INCREASING RECOGNITION: RELIGION MATTERS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are recognizing the role religion can play in addressing conflicts. Religion becomes a major factor in conflict and conflict resolution when, for instance, parties are defined along religious lines and where religion is an integral aspect of social and cultural life, as noted by Appleby (2001/1996), Gopin (2009), Sampson and Lederach (2000), Smock (2008), Abu-Nimer (2015), Lederach (1997), and Schliesser (2018). These scholars point out that religious traditions can bring moral, social, and spiritual resources to peacebuilding, and inspire a sense of engagement and commitment to the process. “Religion is a source not only of intolerance, human rights violations, and extremist violence, but also of nonviolent conflict transformation, the defense of human rights, integrity in government, and reconciliation and stability in divided societies” (Appleby 2001/1996: 821). Religious texts and prophetic stories provide examples of peacemaking, forgiveness, and compassion that can lead to a change of attitudes and behaviors, as well as encourage making peace with the “other”. Religious values, principles (such as forgiveness, patience, mercy, accountability), and rituals can facilitate healing and trauma management.

The impact of religious peacemaking and conflict resolution is also more and more being taken into consideration at the international policy-making level. In July 2017, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect launched a “Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes”. In this Plan, UN Secretary General Guterres points out that “Religious leaders can play a particularly important role in influencing the behavior of those who share their beliefs” (UN 2017: Foreword), thereby recognizing them as significant agents in conflict and conflict resolution. In a similar vein, the 2018 UN and World Bank Study “Pathways to Peace” states: “The more successful cases [of conflict prevention] mobilized a coalition of domestic actors to influence incentives towards peace, bringing in the comparative advantages of civil society, including women’s groups, the faith

community, and the private sector to manage tensions” (UN and World Bank 2018: xxi).

So, while the role of religious actors in conflict resolution is increasingly recognized, the concrete contribution of religious actors remains opaque. What exactly is it about religious actors that makes the partnership with them seem significant? What are their specific characteristics and contributions to conflict resolution?

RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: CONTRIBUTIONS

Attempts at systematizing the potentials of religious actors face a number of difficulties. Besides the inherent ambivalence of religion itself, we need to consider the internal plurality of any given religion as well as the vast variety of religious actors and FBOs. Furthermore, FBOs differ in the way they relate faith and praxis. Ron Sider and Heidi Unruh developed a typology of six different types of FBOs active in development, ranging from faith-permeated development work to quasi-secular organizations (Sider and Unruh 2004).

While keeping the plurality of religious actors in mind, we can still point to certain characteristics and contributions common to many of these actors. Not all of these characteristics are exclusive in the sense that they only pertain to religious actors, nor does every religious actor display all of them. Below, we differentiate between “formal” and “material” contributions—even though the borderlines can be a bit blurry at times. In Chapter 3 we discussed six different ways of approaching religion in conflict, namely: religion as community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, as discourse, and as an institution. Our intention behind this was to make the different dimensions of religion that can have an impact on a conflict situation more visible. In this chapter, we now shift our focus from religion in general to religious actors and their concrete contributions. To show how close both perspectives are connected, we link the specificities we found in religious actors with the six ways of approaching religion in conflict. Some of the characteristics we point out align with one of these dimensions, while others cut across different aspects or broaden a certain aspect.

FORMAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Trust: religion as community, religion as practice

For religious actors to be effective peacebuilders, religious leaders, institutions, and discourses must be perceived as legitimate and credible by the parties involved in the conflict. Religious leaders and faith-based actors often enjoy a high degree of credibility and moral and spiritual legitimacy. This is especially visible in contexts such as Rwanda and Pakistan where religion plays a significant role in society. In the joint attendance of Sunday church services or Friday prayer and in the participation in youth groups or women's groups, religious and social activities merge.

At the same time, the trust enjoyed by religious actors is often-times linked to religion as practice because many FBOs have a long history of service addressing community needs. When Sant'Egidio was asked by the warring parties in Mozambique to mediate between them, it could not only draw on a web of relationships with locals, but also on a history of social services and catering to the urgent needs of the poor. The respect and trust associated with religious actors is furthermore connected to their perception as neutral agents. They are seen as not pursuing their own personal gain, but rather as committed to peace only (Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, and Abu-Nimer 2005). In the case of Sant'Egidio and Mozambique, the success of their mediation efforts therefore depended to a large degree on this community's record of friendship across boundaries and their own integrity.

Relationships and identity: religion as community

Connected to the level of trust and credibility they enjoy, religious actors often display strong relationship-building skills as "religious leaders are uniquely positioned to foster nonviolent conflict transformation through the building of constructive, collaborative relationships within and across ethnic and religious groups for the common good of the entire population of a region" (Appleby 2008: 127). Relationships are in turn innately connected to identity formation. It is through relationships—through the other—that we understand ourselves (Buber 1996). This specific ability of relationship building helps religious actors not only in building

communities and forming identities, but also in playing a leading role in social change processes. Faith-based actors can move parties towards an agreement by building trust between disputants and by engaging the moral and spiritual resources that emphasize shared identities and experiences as well as common moral and spiritual values (Kadayifci-Orellana 2017).

For a better understanding of this specific characteristic of religious actors and of how it can foster sustainable conflict resolution, we found social network analysis helpful (Granovetter 1973). Social network analysis differentiates between “strong-ties groups” and “weak-ties groups”, both of which impact our sense of identity. Strong-ties groups provide reliability and meaning to their members, who are closely connected to one another, for instance, in traditional villages or religious communities. Due to their self-referentiality and strong group coherence, however, new ideas often haven difficulties gaining a footing. Weak-ties groups, on the other hand, refer to communities with loose contact between their members, such as in chat groups. They are less reliable for the individual member, yet they allow for the rapid dissemination of new information and concepts. Religious actors often originate from strong-ties groups. Given their strong relationship-building skills, they are able to function as “connectors” between these groups (Gopin 2009: 79). This competency is of crucial importance in processes of social change. Successful conflict resolution needs nothing less than a paradigm change in thinking and behavior that in turn depends on the acceptance of new concepts in a given community. For this to be successful, connectors are necessary, that is, people who enjoy sufficient credibility in strong-ties groups to ensure that a new idea is not dismissed from the onset, while at the same time are able to quickly reach a large number of people. While it is well possible to stop immediate violence through outside intervention, sustainable peace cannot be had without relationship building within and between communities.

Networks: religion as an institution, religion as spirituality

Religious actors can often rely on well-organized, sometimes extensive networks, providing them with financial, institutional,

and human resources. Religious leaders and organizations have access to community members through mosques, churches, temples, community centers, and educational institutions. In some cases, their involvement can bring international support from their sister organizations. Religious groups also tend to have a broader base than many secular NGOs. This broad base provides a wide pool of committed individuals who are willing to work as volunteers.

Religious communities are, without question, the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class and nationality. They are uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of our time: resolving conflicts, caring for the sick and needy, promoting peaceful co-existence among all peoples.

(World Conference on Religion and Peace,
cited in Heist and Cnaan 2016: 6)

Next to a wider, sometimes national, or even international support structure, religious actors can rely on local, grassroots networks. Through their sermons, lectures, and educational programs, they can reach out to large number of people in their societies. As so-called “middle-range” leaders, they are often in a unique place to reach out to both grassroots and high-level leaderships. The ability to connect to and mobilize local members and congregations gives religious actors a strategic advantage over many secular NGOs. This ability becomes of crucial significance not least in the event of crises, be it conflict or natural disaster, as religious actors cannot only provide first-hand insight and information but can often help to connect international agents with local people well familiar with the language and culture, spirituality and discourse, as well as with the urgent needs and challenges in a particular situation.

Funding: religion as an institution, religion as spirituality

While part of the network discussion, funding deserves special attention. “Giving USA 2018” reports that even though charitable giving for international affairs decreased compared to the previous year, faith-based development organizations were still amongst the top recipients of aid money. Food for the Poor, for instance, received \$ 987.6 million in private contributions; World Vision got

\$786.01 million (*Giving USA 2018*). It is furthermore of interest to look at where the money comes from. Many faith-based and secular international development organizations accept financial support from governments, yet they differ in their approaches. While government support is often a major source of income for secular NGOs, FBOs tend to limit government support in order to maintain their independence (Smillie and Minear 2004). For many FBOs, the main source of the money comes from private sources, including collective donations, such as collected during a religious service. Various faith-based actors like Quakers, Sant'Egidio, and Islamic Relief Services have well-established regional and global networks to which they can turn for institutional and financial resources. Next to the community aspect, the spirituality dimension of religion becomes relevant. Different religions consider tithing, almsgiving, and charity an integral part of their tradition. Giving to the poor thus becomes an intrinsic part of one's own spirituality.

Services: religion as practice

To many religious actors, engaging in community service is an expression of the practice dimension of faith. When it comes to service delivery, studies find that both FBOs and secular NGOs provide similar services. While the kinds of services provided—including food provision, clean water, refugee services, education, orphanages, medical services, microfinance, or infrastructure—are similar, a recent study notes differences in the number of activities that these organizations are engaged in. FBOs were covering a wider range of services rather than specializing in certain areas as secular NGOs tend to. “Faith-based organizations on average provided significantly more kinds of services (4.2. types of services per organization) compared to the secular organizations (2.6 types per organization, $p < 0.05$)” (Heist and Cnaan 2016: 9). Further research is required, but the findings indicate a higher concern for holistic service provision on the side of FBOs.

Studies also show that numerous collaborations exist between NGOs and FBOs, as seen, for example, in Kano and Lagos states, Nigeria. The NGO BAOBAB focuses on women's human rights. Based in Lagos, BAOBAB has outreach teams in 14 states across Nigeria who work with Muslim FBOs with the aim of developing

better understanding of women's rights in the context of Sharia. In Kano state, the Ganuwa Group comprises different NGOs, FBOs, and other interested parties who work together to promote HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. The key reason for these collaborations "stem from increasing realization amongst NGOs and development agencies of the crucial role that FBOs can play in the delivery of programmes that have implications for the religious beliefs of target populations" (Davis et al. 2011: 38).

MATERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Normative concepts and values: religion as a set of teachings, religion as practice

Religions are normative. They come with dogmatic claims (What is true?) and ethical implications (What is good?). Though often misused for the purpose of inciting violence and conflict, religious teachings also contain powerful normative concepts and values that can be used to further peace and reconciliation. Faith-based actors have a unique spiritual and moral leverage that is often unavailable to secular peacebuilders. Spiritual resources include values, principles, norms, and rituals rooted in religious traditions which can be used to encourage parties to embrace a new reality, change their behavior, and form new relationships with others, even with former enemies. The Christian tradition, for example, offers the concepts of forgiveness, grace, and love that encompasses even the enemy. By teaching love and reconciliation instead of hatred and exclusion, religious values are disseminated that call for concrete behavioral implications. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) or the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) have inspired countless Christians to work for peace and justice. Equally, the Jewish and Muslim traditions contain potent resources, including the concepts of love, compassion, forgiveness, and the pursuit of justice and doing good (Kadayifci-Orellana, Abu-Nimer, and Mohamed-Saleem 2013). These teachings serve not only as motivations for concrete actions, but also as ethical orientation and practice as they help to transform attitudes and stereotypes, as well as ways of thinking and acting.

Holistic perspective: religion as spirituality, religion as discourse

Religious actors usually bring a specific kind of anthropology, that is, understanding of the human person, as part of their discourse to the field, as they embrace a holistic perspective on well-being. This means that well-being relates not only to physical and material aspects, but to spiritual and emotional dimensions as well. Religious communities often provide care for the soul *and* for the body. Their holistic perspective gives them an advantage over many secular NGOs who focus primarily on material support. In post-genocide Rwanda, for example, Christian churches offer reconciliation initiatives linked with development projects, such as giving a cow to a victim and a perpetrator. Together, they care for the cow and share the income generated by selling its milk. Psychological and spiritual support of those affected by violence is supplemented here with practical help for daily life, resulting in welcome synergistic effects that enhance the sustainability of both kinds of efforts.

Meaning: religion as spirituality, religion as practice

Through their sacred narratives, spirituality, and practices, religious communities give meaning to everyday life. We want to illustrate this by pointing to the experience of Oledai, a village in Western Uganda, an area that experienced violent insurgency between 1986 and 1993. Oledai PAG (Pentecostal Assembly of God) Church was established in 1994, caring for both the spiritual and practical concerns of the community. At about the same time, different NGOs also moved in, supported by the \$233 million worth World Bank-funded Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). The aim of these NGOs was to “empower communities ... by enhancing their capacity to systematically identify, prioritise, and plan for their needs and implement sustainable development initiatives” (Manor 2007: 264). Ten years later, the NGOs and their initiatives had disappeared. Oledai Church, however, was flourishing, having more than quadrupled in size. How is this difference in impact to be explained? For anthropologist Ben Jones, the main criterion is meaning. While the NGOs remained extrinsic to the local community, Oledai Church successfully engaged the hearts

and minds of its members, becoming part of the community and making its members feel at home. The NGOs' initiatives, on the other hand, displayed "mostly technical functions and represent an ideological agenda—of rights, empowerment or participation—that had little purchase. In a fundamental way the work of NGOs lacked meaning" (Jones 2012: 200).

Rituals: religion as spirituality, religion as practice

Rituals structure our daily life. Especially in times of turmoil, these rituals help to provide stability and meaning. Religious rituals like prayer and meditation can therefore become significant resources for support and inner structure, even as outer (political, economic, etc.) structures are collapsing or changing. Rituals and ceremonies in themselves are ambivalent, however. They can be employed to create insider-outsider boundaries and to encourage conflicts, such as the Rwandan *génocidaires* taking communion to strengthen themselves for their "work". Yet they can also be used as powerful resources for coping with conflict. Catholic communities in post-genocide Rwanda, for example, have creatively adapted the Christian Sacrament of Reconciliation. The *gacaca nkirisitu* (Christian *gacaca*) has thus become a ritualized pastoral process for perpetrators and survivors on their path to reconciliation (Carney 2015). In the context of overcoming conflict, religious rituals may thus be used, adapted, or created to help facilitate healing processes.

Dealing with trauma: religion as a set of teachings, religion as spirituality

The generation of meaning becomes all the more virulent during the experience and in the aftermath of atrocities. Due to gross violations of human rights and excessive violence, individuals and communities involved in conflict are usually traumatized and have deep injuries. These can be passed on to the next generations, resulting in intergenerational trauma. Painful memories of conflict, loss of loved ones, and injuries suffered cause deep emotional and psychological stress. Healing these injuries and trauma thus becomes a major component of peacebuilding efforts, especially for reconciliation at the grassroots level (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2008). For if these wounds are left unaddressed, they can not only

result in severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but also breed bitterness, hatred, and revenge, thereby perpetuating the spiral of violence as former victims turn into perpetrators.

Religious traditions and their emphasis on transformation and a new beginning can help to integrate experiences of loss and hurt into a framework that restores meaning. Religious perspectives offer hope and an eschatological horizon that assist traumatized victims in dealing with the past and the present. At the same time, concepts such as forgiveness and grace include powerful resources for dealing with guilt, shame, and failure, existential experiences inevitably encountered in the context of conflict and reconciliation on the side of both victims and perpetrators. In Islam, for example, Islamic values of peacebuilding, reestablishment of harmony and order, and respect for others, together with Islamic ideas on fate, predestination, and total sovereignty of God serve as the basis for healing and reconciliation (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2008). Organizations such as the Nigerian Interfaith Mediation Center focus on healing the trauma of injuries inflicted during times of conflict.

Memory and reconciliation: religion as a set of teachings, religion as spirituality, religion as practice

“Culture, history, memory, authenticity ... —these are the currency of the local peacebuilder” (Appleby 2008: 128). Of these, we would like to draw special attention to memory. During, but even more so after violence, questions of dealing with the past and of remembering arise. Without memory, there is no path to reconciliation and sustainable peace. How we remember the past, what we remember—and what we don’t remember—has an impact on how we live in the present and the future. Yet memory is not ethically neutral. Rather, it can be just or unjust, as Paul Ricœur’s (2004: 68) call for a “*juste mémoire*” (“just memory”) reminds us. A just memory does not simply mirror the victors’ narrative but includes the victims’ perspectives.

Nevertheless, remembrance in itself and as the mere representation of the past rarely leads to a genuine new beginning. For this, concepts such as forgiveness and reconciliation are helpful, even if not always possible. Forgiveness liberates both victim and perpetrator from the haunting past—and from each other. Through forgiveness, the victim regains self-determination over his/her own

life, while the perpetrator is no longer defined merely by his/her deeds but acknowledged in his/her shared humanity. As genuinely religious concepts, forgiveness and reconciliation can be actively strengthened through the teaching and practice of FBOs, religious actors, and communities, as displayed, for example, by Christian churches in post-genocide Rwanda. Forgiving does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean impunity. Yet it can pave the way for the genuine healing of relationships and communities as prerequisites for sustainable peace.

In this chapter, we gave an orientation on some of the specific characteristics and contributions—both formal and material—associated with religious actors in conflict resolution. While religious actors have no magic wand to solve conflicts and while their role must not be overstated, it is clear that they bring significant resources to the field that no one genuinely interested in conflict resolution can afford to ignore. The following case studies illustrate the specific contributions of religious actors in concrete contexts of violent conflict.

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