

CSS MEDIATION RESOURCES

Approaching Religion in Conflict Transformation: Concepts, Cases and Practical Implications

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Foreword

Having been raised within a conservative Christian group in Finland, I was (without noticing) living through an educational experiment on the connection between religion and conflict. I learned that groups that focus on controlling human behavior have also the tendency to avoid internal discussions and accept a lack of accountability from their leaders regarding how judgments are made and powers executed. This often leads to mistreatment of those who challenge or disagree with the views of the group. While most groups limit their influence to psychological pressure, the transition to physical violence is surprisingly short. I perceive a similar dynamic at play within many violent religiously-motivated organizations: strong differentiation from others, together with strict behavioral rules, lead to judgmental conclusions and a willingness to impose rules through violence.

The role of religion in current conflicts is much deeper than traditional political science or resource conflict theories usually acknowledge. Consequently, state-based mediation and national dialogue approaches are facing dead-ends in many of today's conflicts. Fragile states are failing over and over again, becoming breeding grounds for extremism. Existing diplomatic approaches and solutions have clear shortcomings, and strategies that are based on force seem only to produce greater challenges and more violence, at least in the medium and long term.

In this world of increasingly complex conflicts and growing fear and alienation, there are no simple solutions. The United Nations (UN), and all of us who seek to make positive contributions to peace, need to expand our toolboxes on mediation and dialogue in order to better engage with the role religion plays in conflict. In producing this CSS Mediation Resource, Owen Frazer, Richard Friedli, and all the contributors to the publication, have done us a great service. The following pages provide some very helpful ideas and examples that can help us to better grasp the challenges and opportunities present in conflicts with religious dimensions.

One way we can strengthen our efforts to address the challenges of today's conflicts, is to improve integration of local religious and traditional structures into conflict resolution and state building processes. Particularly when it comes to preventing and countering violent extremism, religious leaders have a significant role to play. This requires actors in the field to share more openly their lessons learned and jointly develop more effective support mechanisms for local leaders. This CSS Mediation Resource provides a very useful text for such sharing of lessons, as it provides a framework on how to structure our thinking about the role of religion in conflict transformation. The document is therefore closely in line with the purpose of the "Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers", which is to strengthen and support the positive role of religious and traditional peacemakers in peace and peacebuilding processes at the local to international level.¹

Besides lessons learned, focus on local actors and structural responses, the personal dimension continues to matter in all contexts. The experiences of Canon Andrew White with the Iraqi Interreligious Congress and Dr. William Vendley with the Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone described in this publication highlight the element of trust that can only be built through personal commitment. Amidst violence and fear, trust can become a powerful tool that starts to transform people and societies and may lead to deeper reconciliation. At its best, faith becomes a source of strength in overcoming unbearable difficulties. However difficult, there are ways to structurally empower religious communities and peacemakers in this work. This publication is one very useful step in this direction.

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¹ The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers was initiated by the UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU) and established together with the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), *Religions for Peace (RfP)* and Finn Church Aid (FCA).

Summary

This paper is written for policy makers and conflict transformation practitioners working on conflicts with religious dimensions. It aims to support policy and practice by providing a conceptual framework to strengthen analysis of the role that religion plays in conflict. It draws both on academic writing on the nature of religion and on case studies of conflict transformation initiatives to propose a framework that is a useful balance between academic complexity and the simplicity necessary for it to be of practical application. By helping policy-makers and practitioners to be more specific about religion's role in conflict, the proposed framework can help to support the design of conflict transformation approaches that take account of the role of religion.

Five ways of thinking about religion in conflict are identified in the paper. These five ways of thinking were arrived at by analyzing five case studies of violent, social and political conflict to see which elements of the academic literature on religion were of most practical relevance. As the paper is based on the premise that the way conflict transformation practitioners think about religion in conflict shapes how they choose to address it, the five case studies focus specifically on how conflict transformation practitioners thought about religion in the conflicts they were working on. The case studies concern particular periods in the history of the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy's faith-based reconciliation efforts in Kashmir, the Ansifûna initiative of Salafi prisoners in Morocco, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, and secular-Islamist confrontation in Tajikistan.

The ways of thinking about religion proposed are religion as community, religion as a set of teachings, religion as spirituality, religion as practice and religion as discourse. Several of these ways of thinking about religion may be relevant in any one context. They are therefore not mutually exclusive, and in many cases may be complementary.

Religion as community emphasizes the collective, community-forming aspects of religion. In times of conflict, religion may be an important resource for preserving or strengthening social cohesion, both within and across groups, and thus for increasing community resilience. Conversely, the same dynamic of strengthening social bonds often leads to the emergence of boundaries between groups. Where the identities of groups in conflict have a religious component, conflict lines may be drawn along religious identity

lines. Religion can become an identity-marker, serving to designate who is "friend" and who is "foe".

Religion as a set of teachings characterizes religion as a set of inherited teachings on how things are and how they ought to be. Such teachings can be something around which a society unites. However, where different groups in society subscribe to different ideas and teachings, or where a particular group follows teachings that contradict the status quo in society, it can lead to conflict. It is not uncommon for actors in conflict to justify their actions with reference to religious beliefs and doctrine. This is true both for actions that may escalate conflict and those seeking to promote peace.

Religion as spirituality focuses on personal experiences of the ultimate. Such spiritual experience may act as a motivator for social and political action, whether conflict-inducing or peace-promoting. Shared experiences of spirituality may also contribute to strengthening bonds between individuals and communities.

Religion as practice sees religion as something lived in everyday life, in food, dress, etc. and in a series of coded practices of enactment (customs, rituals, ceremonies). Society may be interpreted as a community of communication and ritual. Significant and perilous phases of life such as birth, marriage, or death are given a stabilizing form through rites of passage. Conflicts, which often represent significant and perilous phases in the lives of individuals and of communities, may be regulated through rites of passage (reconciliation, transitional justice, commemorations of war dead).

Religion as discourse can be understood simply as the words and language used to communicate. A deeper understanding of the term views discourse as a manifestation of a whole way of thinking about, and acting in, the world. In conflict, the use of religious language and rhetoric is sometimes attributed to political actors instrumentalizing religion in order to broaden the appeal of their message. However, there are also many cases where the use of religious discourse is a genuine manifestation of a particular worldview. In these cases, if actors are using different discourses, this may complicate communication and understanding between them and special efforts need to be made to find ways to address these difficulties.

Using the five ways of thinking about religion in conflict analysis

These five ways of thinking about religion can be combined with the concept of “dividers” (sources of tension) and “connectors” (capacities for peace) to generate a series of questions useful for exploring religion’s role in conflict and for deepening an analysis of conflict. The questions are presented in the table below.

From analysis to action

While not every question may be relevant in every context, the answers to those that are should help to identify important dividers or connectors that may otherwise have been missed. Prioritizing the most important factors can suggest important entry points for working to transform the conflict. In addition to supporting or strengthening the multiple ways in which religion can act as a connector in conflict, practitioners can adopt specific approaches to address the challenges raised where religion acts as a divider in conflict.

For example, when religion is acting as a community identity marker it is possible to draw on approaches

that are used to address ethno-nationalist identity conflicts. If religious teachings are being used to justify conflict-fueling behavior or divisive positions, such arguments can be countered by credible religious authorities offering alternative interpretations of such teachings. In contexts where discourses clash, a mediative approach that treats both discourses as manifestations of equally valid worldviews can be used to create a space for encounter between the discourses.

When working in conflicts with religious dimensions, conflict transformation practitioners must be sensitive to the fact that actors in conflict contexts may think about religion and its role in conflict in different ways to their view. Practitioners should take care not to impose their personal understandings of religion on actors in the contexts in which they work. They should also recognize that religion has the possibility for flexibility and change. History demonstrates that identities, doctrines, practices and discourses do change over time and that conflicts with religious dimensions do get resolved. Only with the possibility for flexibility and change can there be space for conflict transformation.

Key questions for analyzing religion’s role in conflict

	Dividers	Connectors
Religion as community	Are communities divided along religious identity lines? What are religious leaders and institutions doing that fuels tensions and conflict?	Is there a shared religious identity which connects people across conflict lines? What are religious leaders and institutions doing that builds connections between people and reduces tensions?
Religion as a set of teachings	How are religious teachings being used to justify and/or motivate conflict-fueling behavior? How are references to different sets of teachings, or different interpretations of a set of teachings, contributing to disagreements?	How are religious teachings being used to justify and/or motivate peace-promoting behavior? How are religious teachings being used to identify common ground?
Religion as spirituality	What divisive behavior is explained by actors as motivated by their spiritual experience? How are shared spiritual experiences being used to strengthen exclusive group identities?	What peace-promoting behavior do actors explain as motivated by spiritual experience? How are shared spiritual experiences being used to create connections between people?
Religion as practice	What practices are sources of contention and division?	What practices help to create connections between people?
Religion as discourse	Which discourses and narratives are clashing? What are the differing worldviews behind opposing discourses? Are problems of understanding contributing to divisions?	Which groups in society “speak the same language” and have similar worldviews? What historical or contemporary examples are there of disagreements being overcome despite groups having different discourses?

1. Introduction

The role of religion in conflict is receiving increasing attention from peace practitioners and policy makers. Rightly so. Not only is the media full of news and commentary on the role of religion in current conflicts from the Middle East to South East Asia, but academic research also indicates that the proportion of conflicts with a religious dimension is increasing.²

This paper was written within the framework of a program entitled “Culture and Religion in Mediation”. It arose out of a feeling amongst staff that, despite working on a programme dedicated to the role of religion in mediation and conflict, they remained confused about the concept of religion itself. Suspecting that others active in the field of conflict transformation may be struggling with the same challenge, the idea to write this paper was born.

In the pages that follow we explore the question of what is a useful way of thinking about religion in the context of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. We do this by analyzing five case studies of violent, social and political conflict to see which elements of the academic literature on religion are of most practical relevance.³ As the paper is based on the premise that the way conflict transformation practitioners think about religion in conflict shapes how they choose to address it, the five case studies focus specifically on how conflict transformation practitioners thought about religion in the conflicts they were working on. We look in turn at particular periods in the history of the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy’s faith-based reconciliation efforts in Kashmir, the Ansifuna initiative of Salafi prisoners in Morocco, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, and secular-Islamist confrontation in Tajikistan.

The paper is an inter-disciplinary endeavour between two authors, one with a background in mediation and conflict transformation and the other with a

background in the sociology of religion. We hope to provide practical insights for practitioners as well as theoretical background for those interested in delving deeper into the topic.

Aim of the paper

The paper is written for policy makers and conflict transformation practitioners working on conflicts with religious dimensions. Our aim is to propose an approach to thinking about religion which is helpful for working on conflict. By strengthening conceptual tools for analyzing the role of religion in conflicts we therefore also hope to improve corresponding initiatives to transform conflict. We believe such a contribution is timely – take for example the ongoing debate about religion’s role in the conflict involving Islamic State in Syria and Iraq – and hope it can help to move people beyond simplistic debates about whether or not religion is a cause of conflict.

Methodology and structure of the paper

The five case studies form the core of this paper. Each case study offers a brief snapshot and analysis of a specific engagement which aimed to transform an aspect of a conflict where religion was playing a role. The case studies were selected to showcase a variety of conflict transformation approaches that deal with religion as well as a variety of contexts and religious traditions. Drawing on the academic literature on the nature of religion, we analysed the approach and theory of change adopted in each case in order to make explicit the way in which the initiator of the engagement was approaching religion.⁴ Based on this analysis we distilled a list of five broad ways of thinking about religion in situations of conflict. In section II we present these five ways and offer a commentary on each. In section III we present the case studies and comment on the conflict transformation actor’s approach to religion in that context. Finally, in section IV, we conclude with some general reflections on implications for conflict transformation.

² Svensson, I., (2012), *Ending Holy Wars: religion and conflict resolution in civil wars*, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, p.48.

³ A conflict is “a clash between antithetical ideas or interests – within a person or involving two or more persons, groups or states pursuing mutually incompatible goals.” (Berghof Foundation, (2012), *Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation: 20 notions for theory and practice*, Berlin, p.10). Conflict transformation is concerned with changing the underlying conditions that have led, and may lead again, to violence. (Ibid, p.22.). We use the latter term here in a broad sense to include activities some of which may also be classed as conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution or reconciliation. We favor it over the even broader term “peacebuilding” as we focus on engagements that seek in some way to transform the relationship between actors and how they deal with conflict and its legacy, whereas peacebuilding activities may also include other kinds of activities which seek to create an environment conducive to peace.

⁴ A theory of change is an explanation of how and why a set of activities will bring about the changes a project’s designers seek to achieve. (See Lederach, J.P., Neufeldt, R. and Culbertson, H., (2007), *Reflective Peacebuilding: a planning, monitoring and learning toolkit*. Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame and Catholic Relief Services Southeast, East Asia Regional Office, p.25.)

Defining religion

Attempts to define religion have generated a huge literature and it is now generally accepted that a definitive definition of religion is not possible. This is because there is no universal concept of religion. Religion can therefore only be understood within the historical and social context in which it is used.⁵

Broadly, attempts to define religion fall into two categories: substantive and functionalist. Substantive definitions attempt to say what religion 'is' by identifying one or more essential characteristics, such as belief in a higher being. Functionalist definitions, are concerned with what religion 'does', such as its role in promoting social cohesion or in giving people a sense of order in the world. The problem with nearly all definitions is that they end up being too narrow, excluding things that many people would consider a religion, or too broad, including things many people would not consider as a religion.⁶

Given our interest in religion in the context of social and political conflict, it is most interesting to look at approaches which have investigated the societal reality of religion. Within the field of religious studies this has been investigated from many different perspectives: from historical, systematical, phenomenological, sociological, ethnological, psychological, feminist, spiritual, ethical, geographic, and theological points of view. For those interested in exploring the academic literature further, we present in the table in the annex an overview of the main academic approaches to religion. It is a daunting list. For each approach, we offer a couple of key authors. It should be noted that several authors will have written about more than one approach, and that there is quite some overlap between the different approaches. Although attempting to disentangle and categorize these 25 different approaches risks distorting the understanding of them, we have nonetheless attempted to group them by certain "family resemblances" using the overlapping categories on the right-hand side.⁷

Given there is not one all-encompassing definition of religion, we are first interested to understand what phenomena people are referring to when they say that religion is playing a role in conflict, and then to understand the practical implications of these phenomena for conflict transformation. We take as our starting point that different people have different understandings of what they mean by religion and that there is no guarantee that they are talking about the same thing when they say "religion" is playing a role in conflict.

Our approach is what scholars call constructivist. We adopt the pragmatic conclusion of Jacques Waardenburg, a Dutch scholar in comparative religious studies, who proposes that the areas and practices that should be understood as "religion" are simply the ones described as "religious" by interlocutors and communities.⁸ For the purposes of our paper, religion is whatever the subjects of our case studies saw as religion.

We suggest that there are three factors which shape understandings of religion in conflict:

1. **The nature and role of religion in society:** as a religion is always rooted in a particular culture and time, how it plays a role in a particular conflict will be intimately connected to the specific nature of its role in the society in which the conflict is occurring.
2. **How relevant different dimensions of a religion are in a specific conflict:** there may be many dimensions to a religion in a particular society, however, they will differ in their direct or indirect influence on the conflict being examined.⁹
3. **The personal understanding of religion held by the analyst:** in the field of conflict transformation it is commonly acknowledged that no analysis is ever objective. When it comes to religion and conflict, this is especially true. Religion has a very personal dimension to it. The personal understanding and relationship to religion held by the person doing the analyzing or planning a conflict transformation engagement is very likely to shape how they perceive the role of religion in a particular conflict.

5 Scholars now widely accept that the concept itself is a product of a particular history and culture, having been shaped by its European and Christian origins.

6 Hock, K., (2002), *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, pp.14–16.

7 We speak of "family resemblances of religions" in the way that Ludwig Wittgenstein speaks in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) of the various kinds of games and their "family resemblances": "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.— And I shall say: 'games' form a family." (*Philosophical Investigations* I, 66; tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1953.)

8 Waardenburg J., (1986), *Religionen und Religion: Systematische Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, Berlin, 250–255; and 2009 (unpublished), Honorary doctorate lecture at University of Jena 15 July 2009.

9 The notion of dimensions of religiosity was proposed by Charles Glock and Rodney Stark and picked up and developed by thinkers such as Ninian Smart, and Linda Woodhead.

2. Five ways of thinking about religion in conflict

2.1 Overview

The following table offers an overview of the different ways of thinking about religion in conflict. The left hand column lists the different ways of thinking about religion, the middle column identifies which case studies these apply to, and in the right hand column we include references to relevant academic approaches to the topic which are cross-referenced to the table provided in Annex 1.

As can be seen in the table, several ways of thinking about religion may be relevant in one case. These different ways of thinking about religion are, therefore, not mutually exclusive, and in many cases may be complementary.

We do not claim that our list of five ways of thinking about religion is exhaustive. Other cases, or other readings of these cases, may suggest other ways of thinking about religion in conflict.¹⁰ We hope, nonetheless, that our list provides a useful starting point and would encourage practitioners to add to it, as they find useful.

Table 1: Ways of thinking about religion in conflict and in which case studies they can be found

	Ways of thinking about religion	Relevant case studies	Most relevant academic approaches
1	Religion as community	Iraq; Sierra Leone; Kashmir; Morocco	Functionalist (1) State-forming (4) Sociological (5)
2	Religion as a set of teachings	Iraq; Kashmir; Morocco; Sierra Leone	Ultimate concern (3) State-forming (4) Utopian (6) Semiotic (9), Ethical (15) Theological (22) A-theist (23)
3	Religion as spirituality	Kashmir; Sierra Leone	Ultimate concern (3) Spiritual (21) Ethical (15)
4	Religion as practice	Kashmir	Ritual-related (2)
5	Religion as discourse	Iraq; Tajikistan	Semiotic (9) Cultural-linguistic (10) Constructivist cognitive-sociological (12)

(The numbers in the right-hand column refer to academic approaches to religion detailed in Annex 1.)

¹⁰ In a review of the many different ways in which religion is approached in the social sciences, Linda Woodhead identifies five dominant concepts of religion in use: religion as culture, religion as identity, religion as relationship, religion as practice, religion as power. (See Woodhead, L., (2011), "Five concepts of religion", *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp.121–143.)

2.2 Commentary on the ways of thinking about religion

2.2.1 Religion as community

This way of thinking emphasizes the collective, community-forming aspects of religion. In times of conflict, religion may be an important resource for preserving or strengthening social cohesion, both within and across groups, and thus for increasing community resilience. Conversely, the same dynamic of strengthening social bonds often leads to the emergence of boundaries between groups. Where the identities of groups in conflict have a religious component, conflict lines may be drawn along religious identity lines. Religion can become an identity-marker, serving to designate who is “friend” and who is “foe”.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) famously defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”.¹¹ Among other things, this definition emphasizes the integrative, community-building nature of religion. Followers of Durkheim, developed an approach to the theory of religion, which is often labeled as structural functionalism. This approach mainly inquires as to the normative significance of societal order for its members and how its perpetuation can be assured (Durkheim termed this stabilizing function “attestation”). It emphasizes how religion serves to create and perpetuate structures and institutions in society such as family and the state, temporal and spiritual authorities, the roles of men and women, the societal rites associated with birth, marriage, and death, and the imposition of sanctions against those who dare to deviate. In this way, religion also plays a role in constituting institutions and power structures in society and in determining where sources of authority lie. The term “civil religion”, introduced originally by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and revived by US sociologist Robert N. Bellah in his study of the USA, has been used to characterize the relationship between religion and society and between religion and politics.¹²

Theories in the sociology of religion also emphasize that religious traditions have a function in defining identities – both personal identities and collective

roles. As such, they define the criteria for affiliation (with both the in-group and the out-group) as well as the related social roles and moral standards.

In conflict, this identify-forming aspect can be very relevant when conflicts take place along identity lines. Examples abound: from the confrontation between Sunni and Shia communities in Iraq to the conflict between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. Religion can also be an important component in defining, not only group identities, but national identities. In Thailand, for example, the notion of “Thainess” (kwam-pen-thai) is closely bound up with Buddhism. So much so that “to be Thai is to be Buddhist” is an oft-repeated phrase.¹³ There are plenty of other historical examples where religious identity has been an important component of exercises of nation-building. Today we can see “religious nationalist” movements, such as Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka or Hindu nationalism in India, explicitly invoking a religious dimension to notions of nationhood. While such religious nationalism is often concerned with strengthening the nation, it also generates tensions with minority religious groups in the country who feel excluded by such religiously-exclusive notions of nationhood.

2.2.2 Religion as a set of teachings

Religions can be thought of as a set of inherited teachings on how things are and how they ought to be. Such teachings can be something around which a society unites. However, where different groups in society subscribe to different ideas and teachings, or where a particular group follows teachings that contradict the status quo in society, it can lead to conflict. It is not uncommon for actors in conflict to justify their actions with reference to religious beliefs and doctrine. This is true both for actions that may escalate conflict and those seeking to promote peace.

Early attempts to define religion focused on this way of thinking, attempting to define the characteristic beliefs that marked something out as a religion. Burnett Tylor’s proposition that religion is the “belief in spiritual beings” is sometimes taken as the starting point in such definitional attempts.¹⁴ Such substantive approaches to defining religion run into the problem that they are either too narrow, and exclude things commonly thought of as religion, or they are too broad and include things not commonly consid-

¹¹ Durkheim, E., (1915), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, tr. Joseph Ward Swain, London: George Allen & Unwin, p.47.

¹² Bellah, R., (1967), “Civil Religion in America”, *Daedalus*, Vol. 96 No.1, pp.1–21.

¹³ Fleming, K., (2014), *Buddhist-Christian Encounter in Contemporary Thailand*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, p.16.

¹⁴ Hock, K., (2002), *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, p.15.

ered as religion. However, it is not necessary to pin down which beliefs define “religion” in general to acknowledge that many religions have their own set of teachings (sometimes called doctrine or dogma).

It should be borne in mind that such teachings are largely inherited and are communicated across the generations in different ways. The importance of the role of scripture in Christianity has often led to a strong focus by Western academics on analysis of religious texts. During the period of Western colonialism and missionary expansion, holy scripture was an important criterion distinguishing the “higher” religions from non-literate animism. The translation and explanation of Hindu and Buddhist texts are – apart from interpretations of the Bible and the Quran – among the principle disciplinary concerns in the Western study of the history of religions. However, within the individual religious traditions, the meaning and weight attributed to these scriptural traditions have often varied, as their significance has differed from case to case. For instance, the functional equivalent of the Quran in Christianity is not the Gospels, but Jesus Christ. For both are manifestations of the eternal wisdom of God: in the Quran, this divine dimension becomes a book; in Christ, it becomes human. However, for both these prophetic religions the texts still have normative power, and their readings are constitutive elements of a way of life.

As well as helping to explain the world and the cosmos, religious teachings often offer a vision of the way the world should be. This ethical dimension can provide a powerful foundation for promoting cohesion in society by providing the basis for commonly agreed norms and laws. A common vision and common ideals can also be powerful resources for overcoming conflict, as many of the case studies attest. The identification of shared, peace-related values in different traditions is often at the heart of much inter-religious and interfaith work.

Religious teachings can also be a source for confrontation. They can be used to expose the current state of affairs to criticism and dissent (“contestation”). The energy of liberation theology, for example, flows from such criticism of religion. As part of this subversive “contestation”, religions may then stigmatize and challenge the existing order, and the powers that be, as unjust and exploitative structures. Examples in the history of religion range from the movement begun by Jesus and his followers that became Christianity, to the Zen Buddhist kamikaze fighters in World War II or the contemporary radical movements within

political Islam. Similarly, when different groups in society take as their reference point different sets of teachings (whether commonly thought of religious or not), this can result in incompatible claims being made and give rise to confrontation.

Actors may also use religious teachings as a reference to explain or legitimize their actions. Religiously-motivated peacebuilders often explain their actions with reference to religious teachings.¹⁵ Conversely, we have also seen violent Islamist groups justifying suicide bombing tactics with reference to Islamic beliefs,¹⁶ Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka justifying their pro-war stance with reference to Buddhist teachings¹⁷ and Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army using violent means to pursue a political agenda based on the 10 commandments.¹⁸

2.2.3 Religion as spirituality

Focusing on religion as spirituality is to focus on personal experiences of the ultimate. Such spiritual experience may act as a motivator for social and political action, whether conflict-inducing or peace-promoting. Shared experiences of spirituality may also contribute to strengthening bonds between individuals and communities.

Spirituality emphasizes the personally internalized experience of faith and the lifestyle that comes with it (faith, hope, resilience, ability to deal with disappointments). Such experiences may be part of individual daily practice, but are often also experienced as community life (for instance, in a monastery, ashram, fraternity, Zendo, or Sufi circle). Such lifestyles are also found in a secular context (e.g. NGOs such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace). In the scholarly literature, these secular examples are identified with “a-theist spirituality”. In accordance with the definition of spirituality presented by the World Conference of Religions for Peace, religious and secular forms of “spirituality” share the characteristic of

15 To give just one example, a religious peacemaker in Sudan, Reverend Dr. William O. Lowrey, explained his engagement in peacemaking work with the Nuer and Dinka in Sudan with reference to how Christian scripture teaches that Jesus’s mission in the world was one of reconciliation and that his followers are bound to pursue the same mission. Little, D., (2007), *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p.208.

16 Kruglanski, A. W., Chen, X., Dechesne, M., Fishman, S. and Orehek, E., (2009), “Fully Committed: Suicide Bombers’ Motivation and the Quest for Personal Significance”, *Political Psychology*, 30, pp. 341–344.

17 DeVotta, N., (2007), *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, Washington: East-West Center, pp.2–3.

18 BBC News, “Joseph Kony: Profile of the LRA leader”, 08.03.2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17299084>, accessed 03.07.2015.

“an awareness of responsibility rooted in an ultimate concern”.¹⁹

Paul Tillich (1886–1965), a Protestant theologian and philosopher of religion, emphasizes in his theory of religion the ethical impetus that is premised on the “ultimate concern”. Unconditional engagement marks the boundary between the non-negotiable space of transcendence and the relative, conditional, and historical areas within which the psychological, economic, or political and religious-institutional realities reside. For his part, US psychotherapist and ethicist Abraham A. Maslow (1908–1970) interprets the “peak experiences” of religious founders as examples of individual and public refusal to compromise and spiritually-inspired political radicalism.

Religion as a spiritual motivator can be a powerful force. There are diverse instances in history of such spiritual experiences bringing about socio-political protests and reforms or even revolutions. The rejection of the Brahmin-priests’ authority and of the caste system in general by Gautama Buddha is a political example of such personal religious transformation.

As with the other ways of thinking about religion, religion as spirituality may be both conflict-inducing and peace-promoting. Spiritual motivation (e.g. a feeling of “doing God’s will”) can be the justification for both violent and conflictual actions as well as acts of peacemaking and reconciliation. Similarly, the togetherness fostered by common spiritual experiences can both help to transcend divisions where the experiences are shared across dividing lines, or reinforce them where they are not shared but rather serve to further highlight in-group and out-group differences.

2.2.4 Religion as practice

Seeing religion as practice is to see it as something lived in everyday life, in food, dress, etc. and in a series of coded practices of enactment (customs, rituals, ceremonies). Society may be interpreted as a community of communication and ritual. Significant and perilous phases of life such as birth, marriage, or death are given a stabilizing form through rites of passage. Conflicts, which often represent significant and perilous phases in the lives of individuals and of communities, may be regulated through

rites of passage (reconciliation, transitional justice, commemorations of war dead).

Religion is often most visible as something that is practiced. How people dress, what they eat, how they greet, the rhythm of their days and weeks can all be part of a lived religion. Such practices serve as a demonstration of piety. They also serve to strengthen social bonds and act as markers of identity.

Certain practices can take on particular symbolic status and become rituals. Answers to everyday problems can have more significance when they are incarnated and embedded within social rituals. Take, for example, how rituals around circumcision or the preparation of halal meat developed in part as ritualized answers to hygienic problems.²⁰ Partaking in rites is closely linked to the repetition of sacred formulae, names, and deeds, which serve to “actualize” the saviors, ancestors, or divinities time and again across the span of a year or a lifetime: the cycle of life from birth to death, the course of the year from winter to spring, the feasts of holy persons, pilgrimages, or fasting seasons. In this way, religion serves to preserve the socially-constructed world in which everyday human life progresses. And, in situations of crisis such as natural disasters, illness, or death, which lead to the reality of everyday life being questioned (*anomie*), rites can help to re-establish meaningful order (*nomos*).

In all traditions of humankind, the *rites de passage*, as described by Arnold von Gennep (1873–1957), guard the perilous transitions at birth, at the entry to adulthood, at the moment of marriage, or in dying.²¹ All three periods are dramatized in the course of the ritual acts in such a way as to ensure the renewed cohesion of society. Traditionally, these transitions have been governed by the religions. In Hinduism, such initiations or *upanayan* take a highly complex form (e.g. in the ritual handover of the “sacred thread” to a boy of the Brahmin caste). The Catholic Church for its part describes the liturgies of baptism, confirmation, marriage, or anointment of the sick as sacraments.

In the context of conflict, practices themselves can become points of contention where one group’s practices are contested by another. For example, tensions between Japan and China have regularly been fueled by visits by Japanese politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine which honours Japanese leaders during World

¹⁹ Jack H. (ed), (1980), *Religion in the Struggle of World Community*, Unabridged Proceedings of the Third World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP III), Princeton 1979, 124 (see commentary: 123–128).

²⁰ Thanks to Anne Isabel Kraus for this example.

²¹ Van Gennep, A., (2004), *The Rites of Passage*, London: Routledge.

War II. The leaders were convicted as war criminals by an Allied tribunal and the shrine is perceived by China as a provocative commemoration of Japan's wartime aggression.²² For the Pokot community in northern Kenya, cattle-rustling is an intrinsic part of the rites of passage for a young man's transition to adulthood. Following ritual circumcision, he becomes a "morani" (warrior or hero) once he successfully participates in a cattle raid.²³ Emphasis is often also placed on the contribution rituals can make to peacebuilding. Such rituals may be newly created or may draw on existing traditions. Often they form a part of processes to deal with trauma and transitional justice. Lisa Shirch in an article on this subject highlights a number of examples including the "peace walk" (Dhammayietra) led by Maha Ghosananda in Cambodia, rituals used by Mozambican communities to cleanse soldiers and rebels returning from the war, and the ritualized memorial project "Memoria Abierta" in Argentina.²⁴

2.2.5 Religion as discourse

Discourse can be understood simply as the words and language we use to communicate. A deeper understanding of the term views discourse as a manifestation of a whole way of thinking about, and acting in, the world. In conflict, the use of religious language and rhetoric is sometimes attributed to political actors instrumentalising religion in order to broaden the appeal of their message. However, there are also many cases where the use of religious discourse is a genuine manifestation of a particular worldview. In these cases, if actors are using different discourses, this may complicate communication and understanding between them and special efforts need to be made to find ways to address these difficulties.

If discourse is understood simply as the words and language used by actors to communicate, then different religious discourses are distinguished by different sets of vocabulary connected to other dimensions of religion such as beliefs, ideals and rituals. However, thinkers such as Michel Foucault have contributed to the idea that discourse is a whole system of language, thought, practices and ideas and that how these systems are constructed has important implications for

power and knowledge. The acceptability of ideas and actions is assessed in light of their consistency within a particular discourse.

With their publication, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman promoted the idea that there is not one fixed way that the world is, rather that societies construct reality for themselves. A particular discourse within this understanding, is therefore not simply a set way of communicating, but is a manifestation of a whole way of thinking and making sense of the world. In his book *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck proposed that a religion should be conceived as "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought".²⁵

This approach to discourse is similar to the symbolic cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz (1926–2006). In his classic publication on "Religion as a Cultural System" he defines "religion" as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."²⁶ With this "thick description", Geertz introduced a decisive paradigm shift in the theory of religion: from social structure to cognitive significance, from cultural function to motivational substance. While influential, Geertz's definition of religion has also been critiqued, notably by Talal Asad. Asad argues that Geertz's definition neglects the role of power in discourse. He argues that defining what is and is not deemed "religious", even in a given context, is determined by who holds the power to make such determinations. What is "legitimate" religious discourse cannot therefore be separated from the power structures in society.²⁷ In other writings, Asad has introduced the notion of "discursive tradition". With specific reference to Islam, he argues it should be understood as a discursive tradition which seeks to instruct adherents in the correct form of beliefs and practices in the present context, based on the past (when the beliefs and practices

22 Slodkowski, A. and Sieg, L., "Japan's Abe visits shrine for war dead, China, South Korea angered", Reuters, 26.12.2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/26/us-japan-shrine-abe-idUSBRE9BP00Q20131226>, accessed 23.06.2015.

23 Ngang, D., (2012), "Culture as the Cause of Conflict. A Case Study in West Pokot District, Kenya", *Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice*, Vol. 6 No.1, p. 57.

24 Shirch, L., (2015), "Ritual, Religion and Peacebuilding", *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 522–524.

25 Lindbeck, G., (1984), *The Nature of Doctrine*, London: SPCK, p. 33.

26 Geertz, C., (1973 [1966]), "Religion as a Cultural System" *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, reprinted in abridged form in Lambek, Michael (ed.) (2002), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 63.

27 Asad, T., (1993), "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

developed) with a view to securing them in the future.²⁸

What is particular about an understanding of religion as discourse rather than a set of teachings or practices is that it emphasizes the notion of a constructed system with its own internal logic. The implication for conflict is that when different discourses, whether labelled religious or secular, confront each other, there may be important difficulties of understanding. Statements that may make sense in one system will be viewed as irrational or illogical in another. For example, the notion of a secular state that separates religion and politics only makes sense within a discourse that allows for the possibility of such a separation.

Those who are perceived to speak authoritatively within a particular discourse have the power to legitimize and delegitimize particular actions in the eyes of those who adopt the same discourse. Both conflict-fueling actions and peace-promoting actions can be considered legitimate if they are perceived as consistent within the discursive tradition represented by the authority figure.

²⁸ Asad, T., (1986), "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" reprinted in Kreinath, J. (2012), *The Anthropology of Islam Reader*, Oxford: Routledge, pp.93–110.

3. Case Studies

3.1 Overview

This section presents in turn the five case studies, each of which exhibits one or more of the five ways of thinking about religion detailed in the previous section. For comparative purposes, each case description seeks to follow a similar structure (the context, the conflict, the process, the outcome of the process, the theory of change underlying the process, and the approach taken to religion).

Three points with regards to our case study analysis should be borne in mind.

First, we aimed as accurately as possible to summarize the perspective of the the conflict transformation practitioner and the thinking behind their chosen approach. We therefore did not examine the perspectives and understandings of religion held by all the

different conflict actors in each case. Rather, we focused on how the conflict transformation practitioner perceived religion, and how this perception influenced their process design. In order to ensure that this viewpoint was represented as accurately as possible, each case study description was reviewed by the conflict transformation practitioner, or someone close to them.

Second, we did not attempt to assess the impact or efficacy of the conflict transformation engagement.

Third, and finally, the case studies represent short snap-shots of complex sociopolitical contexts. Our analysis is performed without in-depth knowledge or personal experience of the contexts and processes presented. The accounts offered draw on secondary literature and inputs from those involved. We are aware such an approach has severe limitations and we do not pretend to offer a comprehensive analysis of the conflicts in question. However, we hope that the reduction in complexity is justified by the insights we offer regarding the ways of thinking about religion.

Table 2: The case studies and the corresponding ways of thinking about religion that were identified

	Case	Ways of thinking about religion relevant to the case
1	Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress	Religion as community Religion as a set of teachings Religion as discourse
2	Faith-based reconciliation in Kashmir	Religion as community Religion as a set of teachings Religion as spirituality Religion as practice
3	Salafi prisoners in Morocco	Religion as community Religion as a set of teachings
4	The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone	Religion as community Religion as a set of teachings Religion as spirituality
5	Secular-Islamist confrontation in Tajikistan	Religion as discourse

3.2 The Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress 2007²⁹

The Context

Iraqi society has many different fault lines, including tribal, religious (around 60 to 65 percent of the population is Shi'a, 32 to 37 percent is Sunni and around 3 percent is Christian or of other religions) and ethnic ones.³⁰ Social and political tensions between different groups have a long history. Under the repressive rule of the Sunni-dominated regime of Saddam Hussein they remained largely contained. However, with the US-led invasion in 2003 and the overthrow of the Hussein regime, the repressive state machinery collapsed and levels of violence escalated.

The Conflict

The origins and the development of the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress (IIRC) were shaped by this complex political environment, in which not only regional ethnic and economic disputes, but also intra- and interreligious confrontations, violent attacks, and conflicts were a daily reality.

In 2004, the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority transferred power into Iraqi hands with the establishment of an interim government. The government failed to gain widespread acceptance amongst the Iraqi population and various armed groups sought to challenge the presence of the US and its allies and the legitimacy of the fledgling Iraqi government. Many of these groups were established along sectarian (Sunni and Shia) lines and were sometimes led or formed by religious leaders. Tensions within and between Shia and Sunni communities escalated as different groups competed for power and influence. Many in the Shia majority saw the chance for Shia dominance of the state while many Sunnis feared that Shia dominance would result in reprisals and repression against them. The decision by the Sunni al-Qaeda in Iraq to begin targeting Shia communities particularly exacerbated sectarian tensions and levels of violence escalated further as sectarian militias began to carry out attacks not only on coalition and government forces, but also on communities from

religious traditions other than their own.³¹ By the end of 2006 Iraq was experiencing its most violent period since the invasion of 2003 with civilian casualties at around 3'000 per month.³²

Between 2003 and 2006, Iraq experienced three forms of government and as many prime ministers, had no working judiciary, an untested new constitution, no law enforcement standards, no clear national budget, 19 provincial administrations (none of which recognized the national sovereignty of the newly-installed permanent government), no working public utilities and over one million internally displaced citizens. One of the only semi-constants in everyday life was the daily practice of religion. Religious groups and their leaders were also the ones trying to fill the void left by the state in terms of civil, legal, medical and social services. While many people could not identify with the politicians, they knew and respected their local religious leaders.³³

The Process

Canon Andrew White has been an Anglican clergyman and pastor of the largest Christian Church in Baghdad since 1998. He ran an organization called the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East (FRRME) and had good contacts to Iraqi religious leaders of all faiths. Michael A. Hoyt was the senior chaplain for US military forces in Iraq, reporting to the Commanding General of the Multi-national Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) (first General George Casey and later General David Petraeus). White and Hoyt recognized the legitimacy and influence that religious leaders enjoyed amongst the population and together they devised an initiative to address the sectarian violence by bringing these different leaders together.³⁴ Although previously the US had been wary of overt engagement with religious leaders, fearing that the post-invasion landscape could be "hijacked" by religious extremists, the FRRME initiative was based on the belief that without involving religious leaders, no political solution to the conflict would be possible. It coincided with efforts by the Iraqi government to promote dialogue and develop policies on

29 The authors are sincerely grateful to Chaplain Michael A. Hoyt, Colonel, U.S. Army-Retired, for his contributions and comments.

30 *Iraq: Buttressing Peace with the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress*, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, August 2013, p. 12, <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/iraq-buttressing-peace-with-the-iraqi-inter-religious-congress>, accessed 24.06.2015.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

32 <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database>, accessed 24.06.2015.

33 Hoyt, M., (2013) "The Religious Initiative for National Reconciliation in Iraq, 2006–07" in Seiple, C., Hoover, D. and Otis, P., *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 262–263 and email from Chaplain Hoyt on 18.12.2013.

34 Moore, S.K., (2013), *Military Chaplains as Agents of Peace: Religious Leader Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Environments*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, pp. 189–191.

reconciliation and justice, and with the US military “surge” aimed at defeating the insurgency.³⁵

After many bi-lateral meetings with religious leaders, and after winning the support of US and Iraqi authorities, FRRME and its partners succeeded in getting 50 religious and tribal representatives from Sunni, Shi’a and Christian communities together at the first Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress in Baghdad in June 2007. At the congress the delegates discussed the security and governance situation in Iraq. The outcome was the Iraqi Inter-Religious Accords in which the delegates denounced violence, recognized the government of Iraq and called for national unity. This marked the beginning of a longer-term process of engagement with religious leaders to promote reconciliation in Iraq.³⁶ A follow-up conference with a select group of senior religious leaders from Iraq was held in Cairo in August 2007. At this conference “The Baghdad Accords” were endorsed and the High Council of Iraqi Religious Leaders was established. Representatives of additional important national leaders such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani, Ayatollah Mohamed Yaqubi and Muqtada al-Sadr joined the process.³⁷ In 2008 the council produced a joint *fatwa* condemning violence, terrorism and supporting the elected government of Iraq, the constitution and the rule of law. The *fatwa* also called for unity between religions and condemned persecution of any faith.³⁸

Outcome of the process

The council continued to meet on a regular basis and to engage in regular dialogue with the Iraqi government. From 2008 there was a significant decrease in the number of conflict deaths.³⁹ While many other factors contributed to this development, the efforts of the Iraqi-Interreligious Congress may have played a role in reducing the levels of violence.

Assumptions and theory of change

The analysis of FRRME and its partners was that there was a strong religious dimension to the conflict: the religious identity of different communities was a

key factor in determining conflict lines and religious leaders and religious discourse were playing a strong role in fueling sectarian tensions and violence. They also recognized that religious leaders represented an important potential force for change.

Owing to their standing in their respective communities, religious leaders were identified as exerting an enormous influence. Some of this influence, as in the case of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi army, was direct in so far as they were leaders of armed groups. In other cases, their influence lay in how they shaped the thinking and attitudes of their followers in their communities. The theory behind the initiative was that the “best of faith could out-perform the worst of religion”. In other words, appealing to religious leaders on the basis of the aspects of their religion that supported peacemaking would persuade them to promote reconciliation over sectarian hatred. By bringing key religious leaders together in dialogue, common theological principles such as human dignity, respect and ultimate accountability to a loving God would provide a common foundation for the path towards reconciliation and social harmony. If the religious leaders could find a common formula for living together and commit to it publicly, their influence would mean that their followers and related groups would also agree to live together, acceptance of the Iraqi government would grow and levels of violence would be reduced. Furthermore, an on-going dialogue between religious leaders and the government would serve as a communication channel between the government and ordinary citizens.⁴⁰

The initiative relied heavily on the perception that FRRME, in the person of Canon Andrew White, enjoyed the respect and confidence of a wide-range of religious leaders owing to his long-standing personal contacts with them, his integrity as a man of faith and his position as representative of a relatively neutral religious group.⁴¹

Even though FRRME and the MNF-I Command Chaplain acknowledged the risks and degree of unpredictability in possible outcomes with this type of reconciliation initiative (success was by no means guaranteed), their perseverance, and the trust placed in them as men guided by religious principles, persuaded others of its merits and to see it through.⁴²

35 Iraq: *Buttressing Peace with the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress*, p.6.

36 Moore, op.cit., pp.194–195.

37 Iraq: *Buttressing Peace with the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress*, p.8.

38 Paraipan, M. “Iraqi Religious Shiite and Sunni Religious Leaders: A Fatwa Against Sectarian Violence”, *World Security Network*, 8.10.2008, <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Broader-Middle-East/manuela-paraipan/Iraqi-Religious-Shiite-and-Sunni-Religious-Leaders-A-Fatwa-Against-Sectarian-Violence>, accessed 24.06.2015.

39 <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database>, accessed 24.06.2015.

40 Hoyt (2013), p.262 and email from Chaplain Hoyt on 18.12.2013.

41 Moore, op.cit., p.202.

42 Hoyt (2013), p.268.

How was religion approached in this case?

Religion as community

The perception that the religious identity of different communities was a key factor in determining conflict lines was at the heart of the decision to bring religious leaders from the different religious communities together. Religion was perceived to be an important element around which in-group and out-group identities in the conflict were formed. Attacks were sometimes carried out on religious buildings and other targets which represented symbols of the “other’s” religion.

The facilitators attributed a priority function to religious institutions and their representatives. They were perceived as trustworthy leaders and negotiating partners. Such religious authorities regard the communities over which they preside as divinely instituted and as inherently genuine. In line with the typology of religious communities as advanced by Max Weber, they are communities that cooperate with and extend legitimacy to state authorities. And in an insecure civil society, they gain credibility and followers due to their “ultimate accountability”. The two facilitators – Canon White and Chaplain Hoyt – also drew legitimacy from their status as religious leaders.

Rousseau and Bellah’s notion of *civil religion*, mentioned earlier, is helpful for thinking about this case in which the political draws on the authority of religious leaders. The Baghdad Declaration of the IIRC in 2007 may be regarded and interpreted as a commitment to such a civil religion. The subsequent Cairo *fatwa* issued in 2008 ratified and institutionalized this civil religion framework, according to which the state and religious authorities in Iraq – be they Muslim, Christian, or even US military authorities – are bound together by mutual support and obligation.

Religion as a set of teachings

The organizers hoped that through dialogue the participants would identify common theological principles which could form the basis for reconciliation.

Religion as discourse

The use of religious discourse reinforced the divisions along religious identity lines. By bringing the leaders together to develop and issue joint statements framed in religious language, it was hoped both to counter religious justifications for violence and to couch the appeals for peace in religious terms that would resonate with people.

3.3 Faith-based reconciliation in Kashmir 2000 – 2007⁴³

The Context

Kashmir is split between the two countries of India and Pakistan along the de facto border known as the Line of Control (LoC). Indian-administered Kashmir (IaK) comprises 63% of the whole territory and has a population of approximately 7 million people. Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK – also known as Azad Kashmir) comprises 37% of the whole territory and has a population of approximately 2.5 million people. Religion has played an important role in the conflict as a marker of communal identity.⁴⁴ In PaK nearly the entire population is Muslim. In the Kashmir valley of IaK around 95% of the population is Muslim and 4% are Hindu, while in Jammu 30% is Muslim and 66% is Hindu. In the IaK region of Ladakh, which borders China, 50% are Buddhist, 46% are Muslim and 3% belong to other religious groups.⁴⁵

The Conflict

The roots of the conflict go back at least to the 19th century when the British sold Kashmir to the neighboring Prince of Jammu in 1846. Kashmir was ruled as an independent principality until Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. While the majority of Kashmir was Muslim, its Hindu ruler, without consulting the population, decided Kashmir would not join Pakistan but be integrated into India. This decision was not well received by the Kashmiri population and laid the foundations for the emergence of Kashmiri separatism. In 1989 a Pakistan-sponsored violent separatist movement emerged. The harsh security-led response by the Indian government led to a radicalization amongst the Kashmiri population and the growth of Kashmiri nationalism. In the same year, increasing ethno-religious tensions and violence led Kashmiri Pandits (the Hindu minority) to migrate en masse from the Kashmir Valley to refugee camps around Jammu. A military stand-off between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and a

43 The authors are sincerely grateful to Brian Cox of ICRD for his comments on earlier drafts.

44 Cox, B., (2002), “Reconciliation Training for Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits”, International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, July 2012, <http://icrd.org/tp13> accessed 24.06.2015.

45 Indian/Pakistani Government Censuses as quoted by BBC News Online, “The Future of Kashmir?”, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/south_asia/03/kashmir_future/html accessed 24.06.2015.

repressive, occasionally violent, environment persists in Indian-administered Kashmir to this day.⁴⁶

A number of causes underlie the Kashmiri conflict. These include India's refusal to recognize the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, the territorial conflict between Pakistan and India over Kashmir, Pakistani sponsorship of militant separatists, tensions between the different ethno-religious groups in Kashmir, centralization of decision-making in Delhi and the stifling of political expression in Indian-administered Kashmir.⁴⁷

The Process

The Washington-based NGO the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) began its work in Kashmir in 2000. Exploratory trips to both IaK, PaK, Delhi and Islamabad were conducted in order to build relationships and assess the viability of introducing a conflict resolution approach known as "Faith-Based Reconciliation". Faith-based reconciliation is premised on the idea that the three Abrahamic religions share a moral vision and a basis for promoting reconciliation based on the principles of pluralism, inclusion, peacemaking, social justice, forgiveness, healing, acknowledging God's sovereignty, and atonement with God. In the context of Kashmir, the basic concept was adapted to include references to non-Abrahamic traditions, particularly Gandhian non-violence.⁴⁸

The initial assessments and contacts were positive and over the next years a series of "faith-based reconciliation seminars" were held with "next-generation leaders" from many areas of Kashmiri society: religious leaders, civil servants, officials of non-governmental organizations, student leaders, lawyers, doctors, business people, academics, journalists, and writers. Gradually the seminars included representatives from all the main religious groups (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist). The seminars were usually conducted over the course of four days and were facilitated by representatives of ICRD and local civil society representatives. Some of the facilitating team members' designated role was spiritual accompaniment through fasting and prayer. The seminars culminated in a ritual where religious texts were read, prayers were spoken, and participants were invited to

speak words of healing, apology and forgiveness, and embrace reconciliation as a moral vision for their lives. A bridge-building seminar was also conducted in Kathmandu that brought together graduates of the faith-based reconciliation seminars from both sides of the LoC to begin rebuilding a sense of community across the line.⁴⁹

In order to promote the vision of faith-based reconciliation throughout Kashmiri society, a core group of committed individuals was established with the mission of creating a popular movement for faith-based reconciliation, including through the setting up of spin-off cells who would meet and propagate the vision. In addition, The Kashmir Reconciliation Institute was established in Srinagar to support and promote the principles of Faith-Based Reconciliation and carry out reconciliation activities. At all stages of the process, contacts were maintained at various levels of Kashmiri, Indian and Pakistani political and civil society in order to explain and promote the approach.⁵⁰

Outcome of the process

ICRD's engagement in Kashmir came to an end in 2007 with a sense amongst those involved that the organization had helped to promote and popularize a vision and way forward for Kashmir based on "forgiveness, reconciliation, and social justice for all".⁵¹

Assumptions and theory of change

The approach of ICRD and its partners was premised on the idea that a sustainable solution to the conflict required not just a political settlement but a broader reconciliation framework that addressed the spiritual, moral and social dimensions of the conflict and which included forgiveness, healing and social justice. The concept of faith-based reconciliation provided such a framework. Given the religious nature of Kashmiri society, ICRD believed that faith-based reconciliation would find support as a moral vision in society because of its spiritual substance and because the values underpinning it were religious values common to all faiths. The identity of ICRD representatives as

46 Cox, op. cit.

47 Ibid.

48 Cox, B., (unpublished), *ICRD Internal Report on Kashmir Missions*, p.34. See also Cox, B., (2007), *Faith-based Reconciliation: A Moral Vision That Transforms People and Societies*, Xlibris.

49 Cox, B., (unpublished), *ICRD Internal Report on Kashmir Missions*.

50 Ibid.

51 International Center for Religion and Diplomacy website, <http://icrd.org/kashmir> accessed 24.06.2015.

“people of faith” gave them the legitimacy to promote this vision and these values.⁵²

Working on the assumption that the younger generation of Kashmiris would be best placed to carry forward this new vision for the future, they were the primary target audience. By conducting reconciliation workshops with a number of leaders of this generation and creating the infrastructure to propagate the vision (core group and cells and reconciliation institute), this vision for the future could spread throughout Kashmiri society, transforming the existing spiritual, political and social dynamics.⁵³

How was religion approached in this case?

Religion as community

The function of religious traditions as a source of identity – as exemplified in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim traditions of Jammu and Ladakh – was analyzed as an important dimension of the conflict at least since political decolonization (1947) and the attendant upheavals that accompanied the partition of India and Pakistan. The ICRD initiative therefore sought to select, and bring together, participants from these different religious communities.

Religion as a set of teachings

ICRD’s approach of faith-based reconciliation identifies the common teachings and principles of all three “Abrahamic religions” that relate to reconciliation, including topics of forgiveness, healing and social justice. In this case, they combined these “Abrahamic” concepts with the strategic principles of non-violent struggle that Mahatma Gandhi deduced from the Bhagavad Gita: *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, *yoga*, and *ashram*.

Religion as spirituality

A priority of the ICRD’s approach was to bring about a personal transformation of the participants. This relied in great part on a spiritual approach to create personal transcendent experiences that changed attitudes and created a sense of hope about the future.

Religion as practice

ICRD maintained a strong focus on religious practice. A number of the facilitating team were there with the express purpose of prayer and fasting. The methodology also consciously harnessed the power of ritual. The seminars spoke not only to the cognitive level but participants also anticipated the future they aspired to by enacting shared rituals. The final ritual of the faith-based reconciliation seminars, when religious texts were read, prayers were spoken, and participants were invited to speak words of healing, apology and forgiveness, and embrace reconciliation as a moral vision for their lives, was a key element of the whole of the process.⁵⁴

52 Cox, B., (unpublished), *ICRD Internal Report on Kashmir Missions*, pp.10–12 & p.21.

53 *Ibid.*, p.74

54 Cox, B. (2002), “Reconciliation Training for Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits”, International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, July 2012, <http://icrd.org/rp13> accessed 24.06.2015.

3.4 Salafi prisoners in Morocco 2009⁵⁵

The Context

Modern Salafi movements first appeared in Morocco in the 1980s.⁵⁶ In an overwhelmingly Muslim country with a favorable political climate, Salafi movements' practice of reaching out to new followers through preaching and social work and avoiding any involvement in political life enabled them to spread and establish themselves in Moroccan society. As in other countries, Salafi movements in Morocco fragmented into many groups when Saudi Arabia (a traditional state "champion" of Salafism) came out in support of the US's 1990 war against Iraq and different groups took different positions. However, it was the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing "global war on terror" that significantly changed the political environment for Salafi groups in Morocco.⁵⁷

The Conflict

The discourse of the "global war on terror" contributed in Morocco to a conflation between Salafism and violent Islamism. This conflation was in large part due to ignorance and misunderstandings about the nature of Salafi groups. They were increasingly regarded with suspicion. While there was a small minority of violent groups who espoused Salafi ideology, many Salafis were opposed to violence against the Moroccan state or in Moroccan territory.⁵⁸

On 16 May 2003 a series of bomb attacks in Casablanca killed thirty-three civilians and twelve suicide bombers. The bombing was attributed to a violent Salafi group. In the ensuing crackdown, the Moroccan government imprisoned thousands of individuals suspected of links to Salafi groups, most of whom contested that they had been engaged in any violent activities, and some who contested that they were Salafis. Anti-terrorism laws were quickly introduced and in the following ten years over 3'000 people were incarcerated for suspected links to terrorism. Some were tried and received sentences ranging from one

month to capital punishment. Some detainees completed their sentences and were released, or were granted a royal pardon, but hundreds of people labeled as Salafis remain imprisoned and awaiting trial.⁵⁹

The Process

In 2009 an initiative known as *Ansifūna* ("be fair with us") was launched by a group of Salafi prisoners in Fez prison. Believing that misunderstandings about the nature of their religion, and a perception that it posed a threat to the state, was part of the reason for their imprisonment, the group set out to try and better communicate their Salafi philosophy and ideology, emphasizing that it did not endorse violence against the Moroccan state or society.⁶⁰ While believing their imprisonment to be unjust, they also felt they had a responsibility to clarify their positions and dispel misunderstanding. They began an informal dialogue amongst Salafi prisoners. As it progressed, the dialogue became more formal, leading to the drafting of a consensus document laying out their thinking, including the rejection of violence and the practice of *takfir* (declaring people infidels). This document was circulated in several detention centers and also publicized in the media.⁶¹ As the majority of detainees did not accept what they were accused of, the document was not about repentance or revising their positions; it was about demonstrating how they had been misunderstood and making an appeal for fair treatment.⁶²

The initiative was started by a group of Salafists led by Abdelwaheb Rafiki (better known as Abu Hafs), a well-respected figure in Moroccan Salafi circles for his preaching, community engagement and Salafi pedigree (his father, also a Salafi, had served as a nurse to the mujahideen in Afghanistan and both he and his father had spent time in prison). The initiative drew its credibility from Abu Hafs reputation but also from its basis in the Salafi tradition of reasoning and argumentation from original Islamic texts.⁶³

55 The authors are sincerely grateful to Mohamed Jeghlal, formerly of the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, for his inputs and comments on earlier drafts.

56 A broad term that not all those labelled as "Salafi" accept, Salafi movements or methodologies are based on a return to the origins of Islam as it was lived and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and the two generations of Muslims who came after him.

57 Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, (unpublished), Internal Project Report, p.3.

58 Frazer, O., Lakhdar Ghetas (eds.), (2013), *Approaches to Conflict Transformation: Lessons from Algeria, Denmark, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Tajikistan and Yemen*, The Cordoba Now Forum, p.14.

59 Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, (2013), Internal Project Report, (unpublished), p.3.

60 While the majority of Salafists do not endorse violence against Moroccan society or the state, many accept that the use of violence to defend Muslim societies from aggressors or oppressors is justifiable and would endorse, for example, the taking up of arms to oppose the presence of the US in Afghanistan or Iraq. This position of endorsing violence in certain circumstances has been at the root of much misunderstanding about Salafi ideology.

61 Frazer, O., Lakhdar Ghetas (eds.), *op.cit.*, p.14.

62 Interview, Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, 12.03.2014.

63 Ibid.

The initiative was controversial amongst the prisoners and Abu Haf's group encountered resistance, and even threats, from those opposed to it. These included violent Salafis who feared being isolated if the majority of Salafi prisoners signed up to a document promoting non-violence, and those who believed that any attempts at communication or dialogue with the authorities was unacceptable as they had all been falsely imprisoned. Ultimately, however, as well as a core group of 30 to 40 in Fez prison, it was estimated that the large majority of Salafi detainees in prisons across Morocco did subscribe to the principles outlined in this consensus document or similar subsequent documents drafted and circulated in other prisons.⁶⁴

Outcome of the process

Since 2009 some Salafi detainees, including some of the leaders of the initiative have been released, although not directly as a result of the initiative. Following their release they went on to work with a group of Moroccan human rights and civil society organizations with the aim of developing a roadmap for comprehensively resolving the situation of the remaining detainees held under anti-terrorism legislation.⁶⁵ Reflecting on the limitations of the 2009 experience, its initiators have been able to identify a number of challenges of conducting intra-Salafi dialogue within prison. Firstly, there is great physical risk for the dialogue initiators, particularly from violent Salafi actors, opposed to the initiative. Secondly, the credibility of dialogue is compromised by the fact that people are prisoners. They are constrained in what they can say and their statements may be motivated by a desire to facilitate their release. In Islam, and the Salafi methodology in particular, great value is placed on dialogue and argumentation without constraints. For this reason, the third challenge was that they, as initiators of dialogue, were insiders who were constrained both by being in prison and by being subject to the pressures of having to live within the Moroccan state. They concluded an internal dialogue may be best supported by Ulemmas and respected Salafi leaders coming from abroad who would be perceived as freer and more credible.⁶⁶

64 Frazer and Ghetta, p. 14.

65 Sanaa, K., *Morocco's Salafis: In Search of a Comprehensive Solution*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2013/05/15/morocco-s-salafis-in-search-of-comprehensive-solution/g3ho> accessed 24.06.2015.

66 Interview, Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, 12.03.2014.

Assumptions and theory of change

The analysis of Abu Haf's and his associates was that an improvement in the situation of Salafi detainees could in part be furthered through internal efforts within the group of prisoners. The negative public image of Salafis was largely due to the geopolitical climate causing Salafi groups to be associated with terrorism but was also reinforced by their general tendency of self-isolation from political life, which hampered their ability to present an alternative image of themselves. By publicly communicating about their beliefs and ideology and emphasizing their commitment to non-violence, the image of Salafis in the public mind could be altered, a space for dialogue would be opened, and the willingness of the authorities to engage with the situation of the detainees would increase. In order for a common public statement of their beliefs to be developed, an internal dialogue was necessary. This dialogue was premised on the idea that a common position amongst Salafi prisoners could be reached through discussions based on common religious reference points.⁶⁷

How was religion approached in this case?

Religion as a community

The label of "Salafi" was associated to jihadism and used by the Moroccan authorities to single out a group of people and detain them for suspected links to terrorism. Religion in this case served as an identity-marker, marking out who the authorities considered to be a potential threat to the state. This led the Salafi detainees to launch an attempt to speak with one voice as a community to counter what was being said about them.

Religion as a set of teachings

The initiative was primarily about the Salafi prisoners correcting misperceptions of their religion by offering a clear statement of their belief system. Reaching such a consensus statement will have required theological discussions about Islamic texts and principles and how they should be interpreted and applied to the specific context. The joint statement of the detainees aimed to clarify what implications Salafi teachings have for social and political questions. Above all, they wanted to make clear their rejection of violence and the indiscriminate anathemization of those who have different faiths.

67 Ibid.

3.5 The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone 1997–1999⁶⁸

The Context

In the eighteenth century the British started settling the territory that was to become Sierra Leone with freed slaves from the Americas and ruled it as a British Protectorate until independence in 1961. The Creole population, descended from former slaves makes up about 10% of the population. The other two main ethnic groups are Temne (30%) and Mende (30%) with smaller ethnic groups making up the rest of the population.⁶⁹ Around 60% of the population is Muslim, 30% is Christian and 10% adheres to traditional indigenous beliefs.⁷⁰ The history of Sierra Leone has overwhelmingly been one of religious tolerance and co-existence. In the latter half of the twentieth century, economic mismanagement and corruption saw the country becoming one of the poorest in the world.

The Conflict

By the late 1980s, dissatisfaction with the dire economic situation and the ruling elite, led to the formation of a number of rebel groups. The most well-known of these was the Liberian-backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) whose occupation of towns in the east of the country from 1991 marked the beginning of a brutal civil war between the government and the RUF that raged until 2002. Perpetuated by a war economy revolving around the diamond trade, the conflict was marked by a series of military coups and horrific abuses directed against the civilian population, particularly by the fighters of the RUF. Anywhere between 50'000 and 200'000 people were killed and 250'000 fled into exile.⁷¹

In 1996 there was a brief moment of hope when the new president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah signed the Abidjan Peace Accord. However, the RUF soon violated the accord, joined forces with a group of rebel soldiers under the leadership of Lt. Col. Johnny Paul Koroma and overthrew Kabbah in 1997. Nine months later a military intervention by the Military Observer Group

of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOMOG), supported by the UN, expelled the RUF from the capital Freetown and returned Kabbah to power but the civil war raged on.⁷²

The Process

In the midst of this civil war in April 1997, 9 Muslim and 19 Christian leaders came together to establish the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC-SL). Inspired by the work of the Interfaith Mediation Committee in neighboring Liberia, and supported by the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), they began advocating for a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the conflict. The Council issued public statements calling for dialogue and met with the President to encourage him to negotiate with the rebels. Following the RUF-backed coup of 1997, the IRCSL continued to campaign for peace and a return to democratic rule, becoming itself a target of attacks in the process.⁷³

Following the ECOMOG intervention and the return to power of President Kabbah, the UN Special Envoy urged the IRCSL to play an active role in bringing the parties together. The IRCSL sought contacts with both the President and the imprisoned RUF leader Sankoh to try and persuade both sides to come to the negotiating table. The IRCSL backed up these efforts with campaigns to build support for peace and negotiations amongst the general public. They also travelled to Liberia and succeeded in winning President Charles Taylor's backing for the peace process. As Taylor was one of the main backers of the RUF, his support was essential if the process were to succeed.⁷⁴

As an impartial intermediary, the IRCSL was able to win the confidence of both sides and to persuade them both to agree to goodwill gestures. President Kabbah had Sankoh released from prison and Sankoh released a number of child prisoners held by the RUF. Before the 1999 Lomé peace negotiations began, the IRCSL was invited to participate in the RUF's preparatory internal consultations. When the formal negotiations began, at the request of both parties, Council members participated as observers and took on the role of informal mediators and go-betweens. They kept the dialogue going whenever it looked as if the

68 The authors are sincerely grateful to Rev. Dr. Usman J. Fornah of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC-SL) for his comments on earlier drafts.

69 Little, D., (2007), *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p.279.

70 Figures vary depending on source. These figures provided by Rev. Fornah of IRC-SL.

71 Little, op.cit., p.285.

72 Ibid, p.286.

73 Turay, T., (2000), "Civil society and peacebuilding: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone", *Paying the Price: The Sierra Leone Peace Process*, Accord 9, London: Conciliation Resources, p.51.

74 Little, op.cit., pp.292–293.

negotiations had reached an impasse and, through preaching and prayer, continually urged the parties to make peace.

Outcome of the process

The negotiations ended with the Lomé Peace Accords of 1999. Unfortunately these did not mark the end of the conflict and fighting broke out again soon after. It was not until January 2002 that an end to the conflict could finally be declared. Since Lomé, the IRCSL has remained active in working for peace in Sierra Leone, particularly in the areas of reconciliation, human rights promotion and the demobilization and reintegration of former fighters, especially children.⁷⁵

Assumptions and theory of change

The IRCSL's first priority was to end the violence and killing. A number of ideas informed the Council's approach to reaching this goal.

It believed that by challenging the narrative of enmity and revenge with one of non-violence and forgiveness, a space and public support for peace could emerge. Public support for peace would then put pressure on both the government and the rebels to seek peaceful ways of ending the conflict.⁷⁶ The respected position of religious leaders in society, combined with the fact that religion was not perceived to play any role in causing or fueling the conflict, would at the same time enable religious leaders to act as neutral mediators between the two sides. The impartiality of the religious leaders would be reinforced by the perception that they were acting in the interests of the ordinary people of Sierra Leone in order to end the suffering the conflict had brought them. The message and credibility of the religious leaders, both towards the public and towards the parties, would be reinforced by their inter-religious co-operation. Sierra Leone has a history of religious tolerance and people from different religious groups respect one another's faith. By working together, religious leaders from different religious communities would remind people of how they were united by faith, despite all the divisions caused by the conflict.⁷⁷

How was religion approached in this case?

Religion as community

In the case of Sierra Leone, conflict did not occur along religious lines. However, it did occur in a society with high levels of religiosity where different religious traditions made a strong contribution to social cohesion within communities. The IRCSL harnessed this religiosity to try to bring people together and unite them in support of peace in the face of so many other factors that were tearing the fabric of society apart.

Religion as a set of teachings

In its work, the IRCSL drew on shared religious teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation.⁷⁸ Members of the Council also felt able to take extraordinary risks because their religions taught that the good work they were doing was protected by God.⁷⁹

Religion as spirituality

The IRCSL received significant support from the *World Conference of Religions on Peace* (WCRP), now known as Religions for Peace (RfP). RfP focuses on "religion" as a social movement for human rights and disarmament – and not as a source of individual piety. As an interreligious NGO it is independent of religious institutions and religion-specific organization but it is built on practical spirituality. At its world conference in 1979 in Princeton, New Jersey, it defined "spirituality" as "the awareness of responsibility rooted in an ultimate concern and displaying socio-cultural effects".⁸⁰ However, what the "ultimate concern" consists of is not defined. Depending on one's affiliation, such a reference to absolute authority might be one of the following: Jesus Christ, the revelation of the Quran, Gautama Buddha, the ancestors' space, or human dignity. It was this broad understanding of spirituality as a responsibility to pursue peace that motivated the IRCSL's engagement in the Lomé negotiations of 1999.

75 Weingardt Markus A., (2007), *Religion Macht Frieden. Das Friedenspotential von Religionen in Politischen Gewaltkonflikten*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, p.323.

76 Little, op.cit., pp.295 & 298.

77 Little, op.cit., pp.288–291.

78 Ibid, p295.

79 Ibid, p.288.

80 Jack, H., cfr note 16; Lücker M.-A. (ed), (1980), *Den Frieden tun. Die 3. Weltversammlung der Weltkonferenz der Religionen für den Frieden*, pp.65–69.

3.6 Diapraxis in Tajikistan 2002 – 2009⁸¹

The Context

Located in Central Asia, with a predominantly Muslim population made up largely of ethnic Tajiks and ethnic Uzbeks, Tajikistan spent most of the twentieth century as a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. Under Communist rule, religion was largely absent from political public life. Despite Soviet efforts to secularize society, Tajik culture's strong roots in Islam meant that religion remained an important element in people's lives.⁸²

The Conflict

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan declared its independence. Divisions in society along various ideological lines became apparent, including between the post-Communist brand of a secular worldview, as promoted by the state elites, and various strains of Islam adhered to by the population.⁸³

The country descended into civil war. Between 1992 and 1997 somewhere between 60'000 and 100'000 people died. The war was characterized by a struggle between elites from different regions over who controlled power. It also pitted the government, made up of former Communists looking to maintain the status quo, against the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), an alliance of pro-democracy and Islamist groups pushing a free-market reform agenda.⁸⁴

In 1997, a peace agreement between the government and the UTO was brokered by the United Nations. Under the terms of the agreement, the formerly Communist-dominated government remained in power, but the opposition was to be integrated into the government. A Commission on National Reconciliation was established and worked from 1997–2000 on the details of the implementation of the peace

agreement. However, it failed to bring about a real rapprochement between the two sides.⁸⁵

Despite the agreement, the UTO was increasingly sidelined by the ex-Communists in power and mistrust between the parties remained high. One issue that went unaddressed, and contributed to the mistrust between the parties and polarization in society more widely, was disagreement on the role and place of religion in society. Despite the UTO's presence in government, the strongly secular ex-Communists nonetheless succeeded in introducing restrictive policies on the practice of Islam.⁸⁶

The Process

In 2001, with the support of the German Foreign Ministry, the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) launched a project entitled "Creating a Peace-building Dialogue to Promote Cooperation and Co-existence between Cultures and Civilizations in the OSCE Area". This track 1.5 unofficial all-party dialogue set out to produce an objective analysis of the basis for mistrust and possible areas of confidence building, in particular on the role and place of religion. From 2002, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) began its support of the project in partnership with the Graduate Institute, Geneva.⁸⁷

In 2003, the CORE project submitted a report of its findings to the President. It analyzed the problem and identified three areas to work on – education, law and radicalization. However, the process had not yet succeeded in building trust between the main parties.

In the next phase, with the Swiss now the lead international partner, two parallel initiatives were integrated into the project: a series of OSCE seminars in the north of the country on law and religion, and the "Dartmouth Dialogue", which carried out dialogue sessions around the country on "Islam, State and Society".⁸⁸

The project now focused on practical action regarding the role and place of religion in society. Three working groups were established to work on the topics of religious education, law, politics and religion, and the

81 The authors are sincerely grateful to Jean-Nicolas Bitter for his comments on earlier drafts.

82 Zainiddinov, H. (2012), "The Changing Relationship of the Secularized State to Religion in Tajikistan", *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 457–458.

83 Frazer, O., Lakhdar Ghetas (eds.), op.cit., p.18

84 International Crisis Group, (2001), *Tajikistan: an Uncertain Peace*, ICG Asia Report No. 30, Osh/Brussels, 24.12.2001, p. 2.

85 Kartas, M., (2011), *The Tajikistan Dialogue Project*, CCDP Project Report, Geneva: The Graduate Institute, p. 6

86 Zainiddinov, op. cit., p. 463.

87 Kartas, op.cit., pp. 6–7.

88 Ibid, p. 9.

prevention of radicalization. The participant base was broadened to include practitioners. The working groups developed a uniform madrassah curriculum aimed at integrating madrassah students into Tajik society, a draft Law on Religion, advisory seminars and booklets on the regulations regarding mosques, a curriculum on confidence-building for the civil servants training institute, and radio plays on themes of tolerance and co-existence. In the next phase of the project, the working groups went from developing the ideas to piloting and implementing them.⁸⁹

Outcome of the process

The project was a valuable confidence-building experience between all involved, helping to remove the mistrust between parties with very different worldviews. After 8 years, the Swiss phased out their support for the process and the Institute of Dialogue in Tajikistan was established to take the work forward.⁹⁰

Assumptions and theory of change

Switzerland's engagement was based on an analysis that the failure to clarify the role and place of religion in society was an unresolved issue that perpetuated tensions between the ex-Communist government and the UTO. The different worldviews between the two parties meant that they had very different positions on what the role of religion in society should be. The ex-Communists believed that religion should have little or no official role, the Islamists in UTO believed Islam should underpin politics, and the democrats in UTO promoted freedom of religious expression.⁹¹

Working with the assumption that conflict parties with differing worldviews can find it difficult to solve their differences through simple dialogue because of difficulties of understanding the other's perspective and way of making sense of the world, the Swiss promoted an approach known as dialogue through practice (diapraxis) which places the emphasis on dialogue focused on developing and implementing joint actions to address the problems at hand. A focus on action helped parties to overcome their problems of understanding by forcing them to express what the

practical consequences of their beliefs were for a particular problem. By developing joint practical solutions, the parties were able to come up with solutions that were acceptable to all without necessarily having to understand the logic of why a particular solution was acceptable to others.⁹²

How was religion approached in this case?

Religion as discourse

The Swiss saw the confrontation as an encounter between two radically different discourses: one Islamic and one secular.⁹³ At stake were diametrically opposed narratives about the model of society and the understanding of family that it entails. School and educational matters were therefore highly sensitive and contentious topics. The two parties held positions that they perceived as mutually exclusive and thus were constantly in a state of confrontation.

These opposing discourses were taken as manifestations of two radically different worldviews. Each worldview was understood as a system of thought in its own right. They were thought of, not as a collection of fixed irreconcilable positions, but as frameworks within which a range of possible actions could be acceptable. By adopting a neutral stance that approached both discourses as equally valid, the Swiss were able to work with all parties to explore practical solutions that would be acceptable within their worldview.⁹⁴

89 Bitter, J.-N., von Blarer, D., (2011), "Tajikistan: Diapraxis between the Secular Government and Political Islamic Actors," *Politorbis*, No. 52, Bern and Zurich: Swiss FDFA and CSS, p. 86.

90 Ibid, p. 87.

91 Kartas, op. cit., p. 6.

92 For more on diapraxis as a methodology, see Bitter, J.N., (2011), "Diapraxis in Different Contexts: A Brief Discussion with Rasmussen", *Politorbis*, No. 52, Bern and Zurich: Swiss FDFA and CSS, pp. 65–68.

93 The secular orientation of the ex-Communists could be viewed as a quasi-religion. Paul Tillich has used this term to refer to such secular, unconditionally organized mind frames and radical systems of societal order – be they nationalist, ideological-atheist, or deep ecologist.

94 Maurer, P. (2011), "When Religions and Worldviews Meet: Swiss Experiences and Contributions," *Politorbis*, No. 52, Bern and Zurich: Swiss FDFA and CSS, p. 12.

4 Conclusion: implications for conflict transformation

Religion is a tricky topic in conflict transformation. It is often viewed as either irrelevant, and is ignored, or as too complex, and is left up to specialists to think about. Neither approach is satisfactory. To ignore it is to risk missing important dimensions of the conflict. To treat it as a specialist domain is to miss its cross-cutting nature. As the case studies make clear, religion may be relevant in conflict in multiple ways. Rather than working on it as a separate piece of the puzzle, religion should be approached holistically, with its role in conflict being analyzed and factored into the design of any conflict transformation initiative whenever relevant.

How should this be done? We believe we have identified a useful middle-way between over-simplification and complexity that is of practical use for conflict transformation practitioners. Our list may not exhaustively identify all possible ways of thinking about religion but we are confident that it offers a good starting point for analyzing religion's role in conflict. Although based on five specific case studies, these ways of thinking about religion will be relevant in many other cases as well.

Using the five ways of thinking about religion in conflict analysis

Identifying the “dividers” (sources of tension) and “connectors” (capacities for peace) in a conflict is a commonly used tool in conflict analysis. It is now a common-place observation that religion in conflict can act both as a divider and as a connector. The important question to answer is how does it divide and connect people?⁹⁵

The case studies offer numerous examples of how religion can act as a divider or connector in many different ways. Religious identities were a source of division in Iraq, shared practices connected people in Kashmir, religious teachings were a resource for peace in Morocco, spirituality was a motivator for peace in

Sierra Leone, and opposing discourses in Tajikistan divided the conflict parties.

The table on the following page combines the five ways of thinking about religion with the concept of dividers and connectors to generate a series of conflict analysis questions that will help to explore how religion acts as a divider and connector. While not every question will be relevant in every context, the answers should help to identify important dividers or connectors that may otherwise have been missed. Prioritizing the most important factors can suggest important entry points for working to transform the conflict.

From analysis to action

As well as supporting or strengthening the multiple ways in which religion can act as a connector in conflict, there are also many ways to approach the challenges raised where religion acts as a divider in conflict.

Being specific about religion's role will help to clarify how conflict transformation approaches should be adapted. Over-generalizing about the role of religion in conflict sometimes leads people to the conclusion that the most appropriate tool is interfaith dialogue. While this may be a useful tool in certain circumstances, the range of options are much broader. A few examples of different approaches are listed below, with remarks on their potential applicability beyond conflicts typically thought of as “religious”.

When religion is acting as an identity marker we can draw on approaches that are used to address ethno-nationalist identity conflicts. This can include work on prejudice reduction, increasing opportunities for sustained contact between identity groups, reforming discriminatory policies, addressing economic inequalities, mediation of disputes, etc.

When religious teachings are being used to justify conflict-fueling behavior or divisive positions, such arguments can be countered by credible religious authorities offering alternative interpretations of such teachings. This approach is currently very evident in attempts by Muslim scholars to counter the arguments of violent Islamist movements.⁹⁶ At its core, this approach is little different to doctrinal arguments

95 CDA's Do No Harm Program (2010), *DNH Guidance Note, Using Dividers and Connectors*, Cambridge: CDA, <http://cdacollaborative.org/publications/do-no-harm/dnh-guidance-notes/dnh-guidance-note-using-dividers-and-connectors>, accessed 03.07.2015.

96 Glenn, C., Nada, G., Nozell, M. (2015), “Muslims Condemning Violent Extremism? Count the Ways”, *The Olive Branch Blog*, United States Institute of Peace, <http://www.usip.org/olivebranch/2015/03/17/muslims-condemning-violent-extremism-count-the-ways>, accessed, 03.07.2015.

Table 3: Key questions for analyzing religion's role in conflict

	Divider	Connector
Religion as community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are communities divided along religious identity lines? • What are religious leaders and institutions doing that fuels tensions and conflict? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a shared religious identity which connects people across conflict lines? • What are religious leaders and institutions doing that builds connections between people and reduces tensions?
Religion as a set of teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are religious teachings being used to justify and/or motivate conflict-fueling behavior? • How are references to different sets of teachings or different interpretations of teachings contributing to disagreements? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are religious teachings being used to justify and/or motivate peace-promoting behavior? • How are religious teachings being used to identify common ground?
Religion as spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What divisive behavior is explained by actors as motivated by their spiritual experience? • How are shared spiritual experiences being used to strengthen exclusive group identities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What peace-promoting behavior do actors explain as motivated by spiritual experience? • How are shared spiritual experiences being used to create connections between people?
Religion as practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What practices are sources of contention and division? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What practices help to create connections between people?
Religion as discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which discourses and narratives are clashing? • What are the differing worldviews behind opposing discourses? • Are problems of understanding contributing to divisions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which groups in society “speak the same language” and have similar worldviews? • What historical or contemporary examples are there of disagreements being overcome despite groups having different discourses?

that make reference to “non-religious texts”. Think of the ongoing debate around international interventions where opposing sides have used the UN Charter either to argue for intervention (Chapter VII provisions on protect international peace and security), or to oppose it (Article 2 (7) non-interference in domestic affairs).⁹⁷

When discourses clash, a mediative approach that treats both discourses as manifestations of equally valid worldviews can be used to create a space for encounter between the discourses. This space can be used to build trust and find creative practical solutions to issues of disagreement that are acceptable to both sides because they do not require either party to alter their worldview. This was the approach used by the Swiss in the Tajikistan case. It is equally applicable to conflicts where one or more discourses are thought of as religiously-inspired (e.g. the conflict between the Somali government and al-Shabaab), and to those where they are not typically considered religious, e.g. the conflict between the Peruvian

government and the Shining Path communist insurgency.⁹⁸

Religious sensitivity in practice

In the case studies, we examined ways of thinking about religion from the viewpoint of the conflict transformation practitioners in each case. This point is important because there can be a big difference between how an actor in conflict may understand religion and its role in the context they are in, and the understanding of the conflict transformation practitioner or any other observer. Practitioners seeking to work on the religious dimensions of conflict must be sensitive to this difference in perspectives. It is important that practitioners avoid imposing personal understandings of religion on the contexts in which they work. Being sensitive to the multiple ways of thinking about religion can help in this respect.

97 United Nations, (2004), *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility. Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, p. 65.

98 Bitter, J.N., (2003), *Les Dieux Embusqués. Une approche pragmatique de la dimension religieuse des conflits*, Genève, Paris: Librairie Droz, pp.46–156.

Practitioners who consider themselves religiously motivated should be careful not to assume that their religiosity is something they have in common with religious actors they engage with. Some actors may perceive a commonality, which may help to build relationships, but others may not. Practitioners coming from outside with a secular background should be sensitive to the fact that, while they may not be at risk of importing “religious” ideas, values or practices, they are nonetheless coming with their own system of ideas, values or practices that will likely differ to those of actors in the context. In particular, they should be sensitive to the fact that the very idea of “secular approaches”, e.g. separating religion and politics may not even be regarded possible, let alone desirable, by the actors that they are working with.

The possibility for change

Conflict transformation is all about possibilities for change. Those who wish to argue that religion is an obstacle to conflict resolution sometimes emphasize the absolute and fixed nature of religiously-grounded claims, positions, and practices. It may be that some actors in certain conflicts also see religion in this way. However, the conflict transformation practitioner can take a different view. History demonstrates that identities, doctrines, practices and discourses do change over time and that conflicts with religious dimensions do get resolved, the North-South conflict in Sudan and the Aceh conflict being just two recent examples. Approaches such as the cultural-linguistic approach which characterizes religion as like the grammar of a language, setting the rules for what is possible but not dictating specific actions or attitudes, articulate how religion can be flexible and open to change.⁹⁹ Similarly Asad’s notion of “discursive tradition” emphasizes how it is possible for a continuous tradition to adapt and change with the times.

Recognizing this possibility for flexibility and change is important for practitioners if they are to believe that a space for conflict transformation exists in conflicts with religious dimensions. Believing that many such spaces for conflict transformation do exist, we hope that this text has provided some ideas and tools that will help practitioners as they search for these spaces and as they work to support positive change in conflicts where religions plays a role.

99 Bitter, J.N., (2011), “Transforming Conflicts with Religious Dimensions: Using the Cultural-Linguistic Model”, *Politorbis*, No.52, Bern and Zurich: Swiss FDFA and CSS, p.29.

Annex: An overview of academic approaches in religious studies

	School of thought	Authors e.g.	Keywords Characteristics of religion	Broad categories	
1	(structural) functionalist	Edward Malinowski E. Evans-Pritchard	Securing survival, shaping the environment and guaranteeing social roles	Structural-functionalist: societal cohesion	Sociological organization
2	ritual-related	Victor Turner Martin Riesebrodt	Potential for conflict resolution Actualize promises of salvation		
3	ultimate concern	Paul Tillich	“Ultimate concern”, both transcendental (spirituality) and immanent (e.g., nationalism)		
4	state-forming	Robert N. Bellah	Civil religion	Culture-constituting form	Sociological organization
5	sociological	Emile Durkheim	“Mana” integration force as “fait social” that ensures social bonds (“attestation”)		
6	utopian	Karl Marx Ernst Bloch	Survival strategy, liberation theologies “Sighs of the oppressed” vs. “sinful structures”		
7	cultural studies	Joachim Wach Tomoko Masuzawa	Traditional interpretation: culture-specific focal point in life and post-colonial criticism		
8	cosmopolitan	Ulrich Beck	Logic of global compassion		
9	semiotic	Geertz Clifford	System of symbols;		
10	cultural-linguistic	George Lindbeck	Linguistic-cultural grammar; worldview		
11	discursive tradition	Talal Asad Alasdair MacIntyre	Inherited discourse	Psychological dimension	Constructivist: response models for societal needs
12	gender sensitive	Judith Butler Fatema Mernissi	Patriarchal distortion of religions		
13	constructivist cognitive-sociological	Peter Berger Thomas Luckmann cf. Max Weber	A model (code) for surviving materially, socially, and ideationally by legitimizing the plausibility structures of a society (cosmos)		
14	systemic	Niklas Luhmann	Cult system Community system		
15	syncretistic	Hyun K. Chung	Combining beliefs/practices from different traditions		
16	ethical	Abraham Maslow	Comprehensive response of all existence to ultimate reality	Psychological dimension	Perception of transcendence
17	psychoanalytical	Sigmund Freud	Product of human drives Sublimation (neurotic): Ego/Super-ego/Id		
18	psychological	Carl Gustav Jung Viktor Frankl	Conscious-unconscious (individual and collective) as “defiant power of the spirit”		
19	Phenomenological	Friedrich Schleiermacher Jacques Waardenburg	Power transcending human understanding	X-factor	Perception of transcendence
20	comparative	Max Müller Friedrich Heiler	Religions as types of life mastery between exceptional-sacral and everyday profane.		
21	survivalist	Edward B. Tylor	Belief in spiritual beings		
22	spiritual	Ursula King Matthew Fox	Political energy field – “holistic” religion		
23	theological	Rudolf Otto Marcia Elide	Experiencing the utterly other (numinous) and awareness of chosenness (hierophanies)		
24	a-theist	R. McCutcheon	Shared security: “The Sacred is the Profane”	X-factor	Perception of transcendence
25	cognitive	Pascal Boyer	Neuro-psychological features of religious phenomena		

About the Authors

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About CARIM

The Culture and Religion in Mediation program is a joint initiative of CSS and the “Religion, Politics, Conflict” sector of activity of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The program aims to address violent conflicts where religion plays a role through a combination of direct process support, research and knowledge management, and capacity-building activities.

About the CSS

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is a center of competence for Swiss and international security policy. It offers security and peace policy expertise in research, teaching, and consultancy. The CSS is part of the Center for Comparative and International Studies (CIS), which includes the political science chairs of ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch).

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“Peacemakers need more tools on how to better engage with the role religion plays in conflict. The authors of this publication have done us a great service by providing very useful ideas and examples that can help us to better grasp the challenges and opportunities present in conflicts with religious dimensions.” *Antti Pentikäinen, Convener of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers*

“This publication offers policy-makers and practitioners a much-needed and valuable orientation for thinking about the interplay between religion and conflict.” *Jean-Nicolas Bitter, Senior Adviser, Religion, Politics, Conflict, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*

This paper is written for policy makers and conflict transformation practitioners working on conflicts with religious dimensions. It aims to support policy and practice by providing a conceptual framework to strengthen analysis of the role that religion plays in conflict. It draws both on academic writing on the nature of religion, and accounts of conflict transformation initiatives, to propose a framework that is a useful balance between academic complexity and the simplicity necessary for it to be of practical application. By helping policy-makers and practitioners to be more specific about religion’s role in conflict, the proposed framework can help to support the design of conflict transformation approaches that take account of the role of religion.

CSS Mediation Resources is a series that aims to provide methodological guidance and insights to mediators, negotiators and peace practitioners working to address violent political conflicts. It is produced by the Mediation Support Team of the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich, with contributions from occasional guest authors. Previous issues include:

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