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Religion in conflict and peace

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with religion in conflict and peace. The key word here is 'and'. As a starting point for the overview of the field it should be recognized that religion has a role in both peace *and* conflict. Religion is a crucial (albeit sometimes misunderstood) factor behind political violence and armed conflicts, but it is simultaneously also a force for more constructive peaceful developments. The term *Ambivalence of the sacred*, coined by Scott Appleby for this duality in regard to religion, indicates the important and basic point that the effect of religion varies (Appleby 2000). This is a pivotal starting-point for an overview of the scholarly work on religion in peace and conflict. It is not uncommon to meet either of the two extreme positions: the attitude that religion (and not uncommonly then the particular religious tradition that the person making the statement happens to follow) is inherently good, constructive and peaceful, or alternatively (and not uncommon amongst those that do not adhere to any religious faith-tradition) that religion lies behind most or even every armed conflict or act of violence. As we shall see in this analysis, research on religion and conflict shows a more nuanced, and actually much more interesting, picture. Religion – through its precepts, belief-structures, demographic patterns, actors, organizations, and mobilization structures, can contribute to both peace and conflict, but under particular conditions. What those particular conditions are, which determine whether religion becomes a force for peace or for war, is exactly what I set out to identify in this chapter. This also leads to another point that can serve as a spring-board for the coming analysis: the role of religion in the context of peace and conflict is both conditional and marginal. With the word conditional, I imply here that the role religion will come to play in particular contexts is contingent on a set of particular conditions, which will be extensively discussed in this chapter. And with marginal, I do not mean to suggest an approach of negligence of the religious factors, but rather that we should, as we enter the study of peace and conflict, acknowledge that armed conflicts are

multifaceted and highly complex social and political phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single factor. Armed conflicts are multi-causal processes, in which religion can play a role, but not the only one, and often not the most important one. In other words, we must take religion into account when trying to understand why conflicts occur, escalate, and end, but the analysis of religion will never be enough to understand armed conflicts and political violence. Religion is often not the decisive factor behind decisions of war and peace, but it does influence the dynamics of these processes, in ways that the analysis below will try to tease out. Understanding the conditional and marginal nature of religion as a factor influencing conflict and peace is essential, as it helps us to avoid some of the traps in previous debates, that is, it helps us to prevent over-emphasizing or neglecting the religious factor.

Following this logic, this chapter consists of two parts: Part one discusses research on religion and conflict, and Part two on religion and peace. Thus, this chapter discusses the different conditions under which religion influences peace and conflict. In the end, I draw these areas of research together in trying to identify a set of important avenues for future research on religion in peace and conflict.

PART ONE: HOW RELIGION INFLUENCES CONFLICT

Religious factors can affect the risk of armed conflicts and organized violence at several stages. Here, we apply the analytical distinction between onset and escalation of conflicts. Religious factors may help to create the underlying structural conditions and proximity causes that spark wars and violence (*conflict onset*). There are also religious factors that contribute to intensification of conflicts, polarization and increase in hostile demands (*conflict escalation*) including religious factors behind the intractability and challenges of peacefully resolving

conflicts. These two dynamic processes of conflicts will in the following serve as frameworks for analyzing how religion is related to conflict.

Religion ➔ conflict onset

A first aspect to digest is related to religion as a cause of armed conflict. Are there any particular conditions that increase the risk of religion contributing to the onset of political violence within or between states, and if yes, what are these conditions? Whether the risk of civil war and political violence can be explained by the religious structure of societies is something that is debated in the scholarly community. There is, by now, a considerable body of research on the conditions under which *religious demography* influences the propensity of civil conflict. Hence, a lot of scholarly attention has been paid to the overall structural religious compositions of societies, in particularly how religious demography influences propensity for armed conflicts. There are several different lines of arguments in this field of research, some of which are incompatible with each other. The most well-known theory (and one of the most controversial) is proposed by Samuel Huntington, through his proposition that the world is moving – and this was an expectation expressed at the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the post-Cold War era – towards a *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1993, Huntington 1996). Huntington suggested that the traditional fault lines – particularly between communism and liberalism – was waning and that in its place, culturally based identity conflicts would emerge, organized along large cultural blocks – civilizations – and these were to dominate the new landscape of conflicts. Thus, his theory is essentially a prediction of what could be expected to happen when the ideological cleavages between East-communism and West-liberalism faded away (Huntington 2000). Civilizations, according to Samuel Huntington, and not nation-states, or transnational ideological alliances, are the emerging, main, and basic building-blocks in international relations. Thus, the question of war and peace

can only be understood through the lenses of a civilizational perspective. Civilizational identity boundaries essentially follow the large religious faith traditions, and thus civilizational collectives are effectively transnational religious groupings. Religious identities and religious values would provide a new landscape for international relations. Huntington's controversial proposition has stimulated a large body of empirical research. Overall, empirical research on civilizations and conflicts has focused on testing two of Huntington's central propositions: 1) that inter-civilizational relations are more conflict-prone (and intractable and violent once they get started) than intra-civilizational ones; and 2) that there is an increase in civilizational conflicts after the end of Cold War. Empirical research over the last decades has, by and large, shown that the clash of civilization theory is unable to rightly predict empirical patterns of armed conflicts in various forms (Russett, Oneal et al. 2000, Chiozza 2002, Tusicisny 2004). The trajectories of ethnic conflicts have been particularly in focus of empirical analysis (Fox 2004). For example, a recent empirical study shows, again against the predictions of the Clash of Civilizations theory, that civilizational differences do not increase risk for civil war onset among ethnic groups, after the 1989 time period (Bormann, Cederman et al. 2015). Yet, this non-finding is basically in accordance with several other studies, examining other levels of political conflicts. Thus, civilizational differences cannot account for the trends and prevalence of militarized interstate disputes (Russett, Oneal et al. 2000). Moreover, interactions between states representing different civilizations do not contribute to a higher risk of escalation into interstate conflict than interactions between states that belong to the same civilizational sphere (Chiozza 2002)**.** The effects of civilizational differences over time are marginal (Tusicisny 2004). Disputes between ethnic groups and governments, in which the identities follow civilizational cleavages, are indeed more likely to escalate than intra-civilizational conflicts within states, and although this seem to lend some support to Huntington's claim, it appears to be major cultural divisions rather than civilizational

differences by themselves that account for the intensity of intra-state conflicts (Roeder 2003). Thus, whereas identity-politics, religious dimensions of armed conflicts, and religious extremism have indeed increased over time, civilizations as such have not replace states in the post-Cold War world order. In many instances "intra-civilizational" conflicts have been as challenging or even more so, in comparison to conflicts between civilizations. Moreover, a basic problem with the Clash of Civilizations theory is that it does not convincingly specify the causal process through which civilizational divide would increase the risk for conflicts or make them more bloody or intractable once they start.

Given the poor empirical support that previous studies have provided to the civilizational clash thesis, it is probably not the most fruitful way of trying to understand how religious demographic conditions set the context for risk of political violence and armed conflicts. Yet, civilizational divides is just one aspect of religious demography, and there are other forms in which religious demography can influence the risk for conflict. One of the most influential studies on civil wars, Fearon and Laitin (2003), included *religious fragmentation* as a variable, and found that it did not increase the risk of civil wars. Religiously diverse countries have actually not been more at risk of an outbreak of civil war than religiously homogeneous countries (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Thus, religious heterogeneity does not contribute to the risk for outbreak of large-scale intrastate conflicts. Indeed, zooming in to the category of ethnic conflict, it seems to be not the religious differences, but rather the linguistics that account for the risk for civil war onset (Bormann, Cederman et al. 2015). Taking both relational perspectives into account – that is, the relationship between that group which dominates the government and the identity of other ethnic groups – religious differences do not seem to be a predictor of civil conflict. Yet, it is possible that religious diversity may not have a direct effect on the risk of political violence. Religious observance – a measure that

combines individual devotion and religious organization and social capital – is found to be positively correlated with religious tolerance, but only in areas that have high degree of both religious diversity and integration between different religious groups. In areas that are more homogeneous, or that are diverse but not integrated, there is not effect of religious observance. In other words, it is religious segregation, rather than religious diversity, that is the determining condition for explaining when religion (or more specifically, degree of social religiosity) has a benign effect in increasing the support for religious tolerance (Dowd 2014). In fact, in a study that examines religious diversity and conflict in Sub-Saharan African context, Dowd (2015) finds that Christian and Muslim communities in religiously diverse and integrated settings tend to be more supportive of key features of liberal democracy than in a religiously homogenous or segregated settings.

Other measures in the realm of religious demography include *religious polarization*, and *religious domination.* Indeed, both religious polarization and religious domination have been expected to increase the risk of armed conflict, as these conditions, in comparison to religious diversity, are prone to strengthen in-/out-group formations (Reynal-Querol 2002, Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2002). The empirical evidence is, however, mixed and does not confirm any strong relationship between religious polarization or dominance, on the one hand, and the onset of a conflict, on the other. The strongest support is found in relation to religious dominance of one or two groups. This might be explained through the perceived threat felt by the smaller groups in the face of the dominant, possibly discriminating religious groups, and this leading to strengthening of unity among the smaller groups against the dominant one (Rummel 1997; Ellingsen 2000; Reynal-Querol 2002; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005; Pearce 2005).

Another important aspect of religious demography is the extent to which religious identities overlap with other group-identities, such as language cleavages, class structures, and ethnic identity-markers. The research findings on the impact of *cross-cutting religious identities* on the risk of civil war and intrastate conflict reveal a mixed picture. The causal pathways may go in different directions. On the one hand, cross-cutting identities can mitigate the risk of ethnic fractionalization. If there are identities that entail both religious and ethnic dissimilarities, the salience of out-group differences may be deeper and thereby the risk for onset of civil war can increase. Cross-cutting identities, on the other hand, decrease the possibility to utilize identities for mobilization and recruitment, and thereby modify the effects of ethnic fragmentation in divided societies (Selway 2011). Empirically, studies find different effects of cross-cutting identities on the risk of civil war. Indeed, overlapping identities – where religious identity differences interact with group dissimilarities in terms of language and welfare – appears to increase the risk of an onset of civil war (Basedau, Pfeiffer et al. 2014). On the other hand, if we focus on language and religion cleavages only, then cross-cutting differences seem to have no effect on the risk of political violence and armed conflicts (Bormann, Cederman et al. 2015). Thus, given the mixed record of previous research, we can conclude that the conditions under which cross-cutting identities can mitigate risk for civil conflict remain to be specified. Deeper and more comprehensive analyses need to be conducted on other forms of cleavages that in combination with religious identities increase the risk of political violence. Moreover, the specific conditions under which cross-cutting religious identities help to mitigate the risk of civil war need to be identified.

However, it should be noted that while religious demography may not impact the risk for internal armed conflicts directly, it may do it through political factors that make demographic

cleavages salient. At times, religious demographic factors can come to play a central role in political discourse. Religious demography *per se* cannot fully account for the causal pathway to conflict, unless political salience of identity issues is taken into account. Thus, the political strategies of repression and accommodation are key factors in order to understand the conditions under which the religious demographic of a country influences the risk of civil conflict (Nordås 2014).

Overall, research on the structural religious demographic has done better in explaining changes in civil war risk propensity between countries and contexts, than in accounting for changes over time. More dynamic models are needed to explain how *shifts* in religious demographic affect the risk for civil war and political violence. What happens, for instance, in a society that experiences a rapid change in its religious demography, in terms of religious diversity? We know, for instance, that shifts in the settlement patterns of Christian-Filipino population in the traditional Muslim-Moro land in Southern Philippines provided some of the structural underlying causes for the intractable conflict between the separatist groups and the government.

One debated question about the impact of religion on war has been whether particular religious traditions are inherently more violence-prone that others. In particular, the special role of Islam has stood in center of the debate. One articulation of an argument along these lines suggests that Islam suffered from a lack of a reformation period, equivalent to the one that Western Christian traditions have had, and that the lack of separation between religious and political spheres is a fundamental challenge for the Islamic tradition to harbinger pluralistic and peaceful societies (Lewis 2002). Huntington expected that Islam would be the civilization most engaged in conflict with neighboring civilizations (stating that Islam has

‘bloody borders’)[1]. A more nuanced argument is developed by Monica Toft, through her attempt to explain the prevalence of Muslim conflicts in the larger empirical landscape of religious civil wars. In the category of civil wars fought over religious issues and identities, Islam is over-represented in comparison with its share of the world’s population. Toft set out to explain this puzzling prevalence by developing the idea of ‘religious outbidding’ (Toft 2007). The decentralized nature of Islam lends itself to competing interpretations and different religious entrepreneurs, and the market of ideas provides a radicalization process through the outbidding process: more radical voices outbid the moderate ones. This can help to clarify why Islam has dominated the large-scale intrastate political violence over religious issues. More broadly though, and beyond merely Islam, the religious tradition of *monotheism* have been suggested to be particularly exclusive and by its nature more prone for zero-sum ideological battles and ultimately, violence. For instance, the lack of religious conflicts in East Asia in traditional times can be explained by its more inclusive religious ideologies. According to David Kang (Kang 2014), the inclusive nature of the religious traditions in East Asia implied that they were not as exploitable by political leaders as a means of differentiating groups or justifying violence. Despite the multiplicity of religious traditions and identities in East Asia, religious violence has largely been absent Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and China. This suggests that the conclusions in international relations regarding peace and war, drawn largely from the experiences of the monotheistic traditions of Christianity and Islam about the potential of religion to mobilize support in times of war, are not globally generalizable. In fact, an analysis implicitly built on the experiences of the monotheistic traditions may lead the scholarly community to distort the relationship between religion and war. By contrast to the emphasis on one particular tradition, other scholarly, most prominently

[1] For an empirical evaluation of the role of the Islam in general conflict patterns, see de Soysa, I. and R. Nordås (2007). "Islam's Bloody Innards? Religion and Political Terror, 1980-2000." International Studies Quarterly **51**: 927-943..

Mark Juergensmeyer, makes a point by showing the basic similarities across religious traditions in regards to the religious nationalist movements (Juergensmeyer 1994, Juergensmeyer 2008). Thus, there is much commonality between "religious nationalists", be them in the Middle East, South Asia or the former Soviet Union. In fact, they are "united by a common enemy" – Western secular nationalist – and a common hope for the revival of religion in the public sphere (Juergensmeyer 1994):page 6. Thus, the basic political (and religious) aspiration of religious nationalism is to question, challenge, and ultimately replace Western-based secularism. Even though there are different arguments in the debate on specific religious traditions' impact on the propensity for conflict, a general conclusion to be drawn at this point is that, even if there are certain cultural trajectories that may make certain traditions (or types of traditions) more at risk for being radicalized and used as basis for political violence, we can conclude that referencing to a specific religion is not enough to explain the propensity for war. There is simply too much variation within any given religious tradition (Islam, monotheism, etc) for one religious tradition to be sufficient as an explanation for violence and armed conflicts. There is also the empirical fact that religious violence, at different times and contexts, has occurred in all major religious traditions (at least those that have had longer relationships with political power), a fact that should make us question the validity of the singular-religion argument.

A last structural explanation to be mentioned in this section is the impact of religious grievances on the risk of war. Suppression of religious rights can create underlying grievances that spark political violence and civil wars. Thus, any comprehensive picture of the risk for war derived from religious factors would miss out on essentials if religious grievances were not discussed. Religious freedom is an important area of empirical research on religion and international relations. The way in which governments regulate religion, actively support and

favoritize certain religious institutions within a society as well as the way in which wider social climate and cultural practices restrain, inhibit, and restrict religious freedoms of minorities and other religious groups and individuals need to be taken into account (Grim and Finke 2006). Research shows a connection between the occurrence of religious terrorism and the lack of religious freedom. In particular, the degree of government regulation of religion helps to explain the risk for terrorist activities by a religious actor, driven by religious ideologies or motivation and framing its mission (at least partly) in religious terms. Importantly, this is something different than an actor who utilizes religious symbols or rhetoric for other goals and ambitions (Saiya and Scime 2014). When government suppresses manifestations of religious beliefs or aspirations, it may backfire and increase the support for radical religious forces in a society. Religious suppression may push those with religiously-anchored political aspirations underground and in the longer run lead to a more radical undercurrent of radical religious mobilization. On the other hand, religious freedom can open up space for political dialogue, the creation of moderation through the weight of bearing official responsibility, the establishment of cross-cutting ties within the political system and socialization of norms of democratic deliberation, and empowerment through peaceful organization channels. In line with this argumentation, a recent study on all religious minority groups in the developing world from 1990 to 2008 finds that religious discrimination by the state leads to perceived religious grievances by those being discriminated against (not surprisingly). Yet, it is also found, more surprisingly, that neither religious grievances nor religious discrimination lead to violence by the religious group (Basedau, Fox et al. 2015).

Religion ➔ conflict escalation

We have discussed how religion influences the risk for armed conflicts becoming initiated and outlined some of the most important structural factors that make certain contexts more at

risk for war than others. We now turn our attention to the risk for escalation of conflicts once they have started.

So far, we have discussed risk for armed conflicts in general. Yet, there are also different types of armed conflicts, some in which religion plays a more prominent role than in others. One type of escalation is through sacralization of conflict –referring to a process in which an originally secular conflict becomes drawn into the religious sphere. It is important to note here that religious aspirations can be hiding political, economic, or other types of non-religious ambitions. In other words, religiously defined conflicts can sometimes (some would even suggest as a rule) be a public facade hiding more material (economic, political, individual) interests. In other words, that a conflict is framed religiously does not necessarily imply that the underlying causes, or the parties' true intentions, are related to religion. Religion can be instrumentalized in the mobilization process of conflict, as a way of trump up support, draw on institutional religious networks, and create sacred legitimacy for an ultimately profane cause. Religion can enter into the political sphere of social conflicts and political violence through two processes. Political elites and other leaders can instrumentally utilize religious rhetoric, organizational structures, or symbolism in order to mobilize support. Alternatively, religious actors can themselves enter into politics: trying to utilize the political methods to advance their religious goals and ambitions. Mark Juergensmeyer makes a useful distinction between these two processes: the 'politicization' of religion, and the 'religionization' of politics (Juergensmeyer 1996). Thus, much depends on the elites' ability to frame a conflict in religious terms. Not all attempts to frame a conflict religiously are necessarily successful, though. Examining the variation in outcome of attempts to mobilize religiously in the Philippines and Thailand, the ability to frame a conflict religiously is found to depend on the credibility and authority of the religious leadership, and whether or not there

are counter-frames available. It also depends on the religious infrastructure: successful religious mobilization depends on whether there is an organizational structure that can enable a religious framing of a political campaign (De Juan and Hasenclever 2015). The conclusion is essential: ”it is not religion and religious differences as such that increase the risk of conflict onset and that impact on conflict intensity and conflict duration but interpretations of the sacred offered by political and religious elites and as accepted by their constituencies” (De Juan and Hasenclever 2015):page 204. The question is, how is a conflict perceived among the population when the rebels take up arms? When can an armed conflict be considered to be religious and ‘holy’? A contextual reading of the burial practices, public discourses, local recruitment patterns, and other social and cultural indicators can be useful in order to account for the perceptions of religious stakes in conflicts (Barter and Zatkin- Osburn 2014). Attempts to frame a conflict religiously may succeed, or not, depending on whether the conflict is perceived as religious by the population in the territory in which the conflict occurs. This may account for variations, for example, in Southern Thailand and the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines, in the culturally anchored approach of religious-social practice (Barter and Zatkin- Osburn 2014). In line with this, there is some evidence – although this is clearly an under-studied area of research – arguing that the causes that drive armed conflicts in general are not necessarily the same that lie behind religiously defined conflicts. In fact, religious grievance or religious discrimination do not affect the risk of armed conflicts in which there is a religious incompatibility (Basedau, Fox et al. 2015).

The relationship between the state and the religious sphere is a condition that has been identified as an important explanation for why the religious influence becomes destructive and violence-prone. As suggested by Monica Toft and Daniel Philpott, it is the intimacy of the state and religion sector, as well as the character of the religious message, that can help to

account for when religious forces are mobilized for democracy and peace vis-à-vis when they are associated with terrorism, civil wars, and autocracy (Philpott 2007, Toft, Philpott et al. 2011). Most problematic, according to their analysis, it is when the state and the religious sphere are intimately related and violence-accepting interpretations are influential in the religious tradition. Consequently, separation between state and religion is a key for understanding whether religion contributes to peace or war. Similar lines of argument – pinpointing the dual factors of religious content on the one hand, and relationship between religion and state, on the other – have also been developed (Little 2011). Yet, religiously motivated violence cannot occur everywhere, it depends both on the depth of the grievances and the political opportunities to raise concern. In comprehensively authoritarian states, the room for raising dissent is severely restricted, whereas in democratic or democratizing societies, the possibilities to create unrest are significantly larger. In contexts where religious movements feel threatened or provoked by challenges to central religious commitments, principles, or values, and where there are opportunities to launch protests, religious violence, such as riots over blasphemy issues, is more likely to occur (Hassner 2011).

Horowitz (2009) shows that religious considerations and motivations can help to explain the longevity of the military campaigns, beyond the strategic logic and material factors. Thus, something significant happens to the conflict dynamics when it is framed in religious terms. Even if material interests may many times lie behind conflicts fought in the name of religion, these types of conflicts cannot therefore be understood without taking the religious considerations seriously into account. Yet, the escalation and duration of conflicts, even those of religiously defined ones, may not necessarily be driven by religious factors, at least not if these are seen in a restricted form implying immaterial religious ideologies. For example, religious militants seem more willing to carry the costs of war and thereby counter-insurgency

measures do not have similar effects on religiously defined groups, as other groups, such as nationalists. Utilizing disaggregated data from Russias North Caucaus, Toft and Zhukov (2015) examine whether Salafi-Jihadi groups are more resilient to coercive counter-insurgency actions by government than nationalist group. It is not the religious motivation *per se* which is driving the result, but rather the relative dependence on internal or external support structures. "By offsetting local support with revenues and manpower from elsewhere, Islamists can continue fighting even where the population faces heavy penalties for supporting them" (Toft and Zhukov 2015:223). This is in line with earlier research on religiously framed terrorism, particularly self-proclaimed Islamist terrorism: it is the organizational structure, rather than ideology, that explains the lethalness (Piazza 2009). Overall, religious ideologies carry relatively little empirical explanatory power, when it comes to accounting for conflict escalation and violence. Actually, extreme groups with political aspirations in congruence with religious precepts and derived from religious sources are *not* more likely to take up violence than others. Examining inter-organizational variations, it seem to be other ideological traits that are more important as explanatory factors for the decision to take up arms, such as the ideology of gender exclusion (Asal, Schulzke et al. 2014).[2] Religious terrorism, including suicide terrorism, is driven to a large degree by strategic logic, that is not necessarily religiously, but strategically based (Pape 2003). It should be stressed that the distinction between religious terrorism and other forms or terrorism could be problematized (Gunning and Jackson 2011).

[2] It should be noted that the empirical basis for these conclusions are rather limited: Examining a sample of 60 ethnic organizations with extremist ideologies and national political aspirations during the time period 1995 to 2004 in the Middle East, the empirical scope of this study makes conclusions necessarily to be cautious: it is geographically limited and focuses only on extremist groups that set out to represent an ethnic group Asal, V., M. Schulzke and A. Pate (2014). "Why Do Some Organizations Kill While Others Do Not: An Examination of Middle Eastern Organizations." Foreign Policy Analysis..

Examining suicide terrorism, Henne (2012a) offers another set of argumentation and empirical findings in regards to the issue of religion's influence on terrorism. According to his quantitative analysis, it is religious ideology that helps to explain the relative high fatality numbers of religious terrorism in relation to other forms of terrorism. Indeed, it appears that even when accounting for the possible intervening factors and alternative explanations such as socioeconomic factors or the demographic structure of the group, suicide attacks by groups that are religiously motivated are more violent than the attacks of groups with nationalist or leftist ideology. Another study by Henne (2012b) also points to the importance of religious ideology. Here, Henne (2012b) examines the influence of different institutional religion-state relations in inter-state conflicts and finds that conflicts between a religious state (religion and state closely linked) and a secular state tend to be more severe than other interstate conflicts. Yet, it appears to be the severity of conflict that is influenced by ideological differences, not the frequency of conflicts. Indeed, this supports the argument presented below on the difficulty of ending religiously motivated conflicts.

Religious factors can impede peaceful conflict termination. Even if conflicts' underlying causes are not necessarily religious in nature, once the religious card has been played out, it is difficult to reverse the trend. In other words, conflicts that are framed religiously are more difficult to end peacefully. Empirical studies show that contentious religious issues makes conflicts less likely to be settled through negotiated settlements (Svensson 2007, Svensson 2012). Religious conflicts are more intense than non-religious conflicts, which has been shown in studies of ethnic conflicts (Fox 2004), as well as territorial conflicts (Pearce 2005).

We are at this stage relatively certain that religion serves as an obstacle for peaceful conflict termination in those cases where it has entered into the political controversy of the parties.

Research knows significantly less *why* this is the case. There are several explanations for why religiously defined conflicts would be more difficult to resolve than other types of conflicts. Hassner (Hassner 2009) suggests that *indivisibility* can be a key explanation, religiously defined conflicts (particularly those occurring of sacred spaced) tend to lead to indivisibility as religious aspirations cannot be compromised with or even stepped down from demands anchored in a divine sphere. Toft points to the role of extended *time-horizons* when fighting for sacred causes (Toft 2006), implying that religious militants may be ready to discount present-day costs against a longer expectation of time, which means that they will be ready to carry greater costs for their cause. Juergensmeyer, on the other hand, focuses on world-view and the "vocabulary of cosmic struggle" (Juergensmeyer 1993:155). But there may be other reasons that hinder religiously framed conflicts from being resolved. For instance, in many religiously framed insurgencies, for example, Kashmir, Patani, Syria, there have been several rebel-groups fighting for the (sometimes elusively defined) religious causes. To a certain extent, these can compete with each other, trying to pull resources from external donors and internal followers by portraying themselves as the most valid – and radical – spokesperson for the group. Radicalization, thus, can be the outcome of a process of inter-group competition in which different groups try to win the legitimacy over the other. The nature of the trans-national links that occur between religious identities (in contrast to national or ethnic identities), lends itself to internationalization of local struggles, in a way that brings in foreign fighters, capital, logistical support, or ideological networks. This kind of transnationalization of religiously defined armed conflicts can lie behind their intractability. Not at least several of the armed conflicts including Islamist militant groups could be example of this dynamic. Thus, it is not necessarily so that it is religious factors *per se* that explain why religious conflicts tend to escalate, and be so difficult to settle peacefully.

PART TWO: HOW RELIGION INFLUENCES PEACE

We have now surveyed the research findings related to the question of how religion impacts conflicts through increasing the risk for conflicts to start, escalate, and how it hinders peaceful resolution. In many ways, this shows the destructive role of religion in many settings around the world. But the relation between religion and conflict would be asymmetrical if we did not pay attention to the more positive role that religion can also play. Two broad areas can be identified, which have also spurned the interests of scholars. Religion can increase the chance for nonviolent uprisings, and religious actors are often important in peacemaking processes, including in re-interpreting radical and militant religious messages into more peaceful ones. We will now discuss these two areas.

Religion ➔ nonviolent revolutions

Religious factors can help to account for how groups mobilize against injustices, political repression and autocratic regimes. It is important to discuss the role played by faith-communities in mobilizing for nonviolent opposition. Empirical cases in which religious factors have been influential in the emergence and outcome of nonviolent revolutions include the role of the Churches in Poland and East Germany during the end of the Cold War, the role of the Catholic clergy in the Philippines 1986 People Power revolution, and the role of the Buddhist Sangha in Saffron revolution of 2007 in Myanmar. Thus, religion can be a key factor in understanding how nonviolent uprisings may unfold. Religious actors have played crucial and key roles in the organization of nonviolent uprisings. Three causal pathways through which religion affects the chance for popular nonviolent uprising can we identified. First, religious traditions commonly provide a normative basis that can be utilized for criticizing unjust practices or rulers. Protesters and activists can draw on these normative grounds when trying to create enough opposition against “the incumbent regime”. Religious

institutions can help to legitimate causes and provide a basis for questioning the basic legitimacy of a regime. Thus, religious actors in many of the societies around the world, have a high degree of moral power that can be utilized in times of societal crisis. If challengers can get the support of religious clergy and hierarchies, their cause may be enhanced. Second, religion has an organizational feature that can be utilized for mobilization purposes. The religious organizations are commonly wide-spread and far-reaching. In societies where there are few civil society organizations beyond the control of a contested regime, the religious sector can provide an organizational basis for nonviolent struggles (Nepstad 2011). They reach out to the grass-roots in the society, and in many places exist where the state is not present. Although the types of organizations vary – from a strict hierarchy such as in the Catholic Church to more independent units that collaborate such as in the Pentecostal movement or Muslim mosques – the fact that there is organizational structures creates a possibility for organization. During the Arab Spring in Syria, for instance, the Friday prayers provided a focal point that could help to organize the uprisings (Gelvin 2012: 112). Third, religiously based cultural practices can be used and transformed in a way that shapes the chances and forms for nonviolent organization. Historical cases have also illustrated how religious and cultural traits can be used in order to facilitate nonviolent resistance. For example, the case of *Ghaffar Khan* in Pakistan shows how honour cultures (such as the one found in the *Pashtun* context) can be cultivated for building a highly disciplined and effective nonviolent force in a patriarchal and traditional society (Johansen 1997).

Yet, not all religious groups choose to challenge regimes through nonviolent means. Some religious groups instead opt for armed struggle. It is important to understand what affects the strategic choice between armed or unarmed forms of political dissent for religious groups that seek to challenge the status quo. One important aspect is the political and ideological

characteristics of religious groups. In fact, gender ideologies help to explain why some religious groups choose nonviolent tactics: more gender inclusive ideologies are associated with higher chance that religious groups will choose nonviolent rather than violent means of struggle and conflict (Asal, Legault et al. 2013). Thus, when accounting for why religious groups chose violent and nonviolent action, gender ideologies seem to hold explanatory power in term of the choice of nonviolent means of dissent (Asal, Legault et al. 2013).

The relationship between the state and the religious spheres, as well as the content of the political theology, help to shape how nonviolent dissent against regime unfolds. Yet, the empirical results points in different directions. On the one hand, in studies that examine variations between states, nonviolent uprisings for democratic purposes seem more likely to occur in situations where state and religion are kept separate, and there is a relative tolerant and benign (but still public, and not private) interpretation of the political theology (Toft, Philpott et al. 2011). On the other hand, interdependence between a government and religious groups may have an opposite effect: at the same time interdependence implies that there are opportunities to utilize the moral authority, draw upon the connections, and use the moral leverage in order to mobilize and be successful in challenging regimes through nonviolent uprising. In fact, examining more disaggregated data on religious groups worldwide, preferential treatment of the government vis-à-vis a religious group (government religious favoritism) seem to rather *increase* the likelihood that a religious group will take up nonviolent means of dissent and protest (Butcher and Svensson 2014).

Religion ➔ peacemaking

Religion can also influence peacemaking processes. In fact, in many areas of armed conflicts and societal tension around the world, it is religiously based actors who have been in the forefront of preventing violence, managing conflicts and building peace. Religious actors can be motivated by their faith to engage in efforts to bring armed conflicts to peaceful ends. Religious networks can also provide particular entry-points into conflicts and provide access to key actors and individuals. Sometimes religious actors are motivated to act because armed conflicts occur within the realm of its dominations. Yet, religious peacemaking can be concerned with other issues than religion. For instance, many Churches have taken active stance against international weapon trade and other form of structural conditions that enable war and conflict to proliferate.

Religious peacemaking has some promises as most people of the world are associated, and identify themselves with a religious faith tradition. Also, religious organizations have mobilization capabilities. Religious organization can utilize their transnational character for peacemaking purposes, or their soft power to cultivate public attitudes of conciliation, understanding, and forgiveness. Lastly, religious organizations are field-based – they are present. Yet it should also be recognized that religious actors' involvement in some of the violence and armed conflicts may hinder their ability to play a peacemaking role (Reychler 1997). Religious peacemaking can work through different causal processes. Distinguishing between religious norms, identities, and organizations is a useful way for accounting for how religion can contribute to more peaceful societies. Religious peacemaking basically entails a process of challenging existing conflict-inducing norms and transforming these into ones based on tolerance and nonviolence, influencing faith identities, and by working in and through religiously based organizations (Harpviken and Røislien 2008).

Analysing the functional aspect of religious peacebuilding processes and the way in which religiously based organizations contribute to building peace, four main roles that religious organizations tend to enact when acting as third parties and peacebuilders in conflictual societies are identified: 1) *advocates*, who try to get attention to and work for addressing the underlying structural causes and grievances of armed conflicts, political violence, and crises; 2) *intermediaries*, in which religious actors mediate, listen, and facilitate resolution processes, including bridging informational divides and clarifying misunderstanding that may arise between antagonists; 3) *observers*, by which religious actors increase the transparency and verify conciliatory measure and implementation of joint agreements and deals; and finally 4) *educators*, through which religious actors act less by themselves directly, and rather try to empower local actor to have the knowledge and skills to be actively involved and engaged in peace processes (Sampson 2002).

Through which causal paths are religious mediators and peace-builders able to contribute to successful peacebuilding processes? Faith-based actors may be particularly effective go-betweens since they have high degree of legitimacy and leverage – two of the basic aspects in conflict resolution processes (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). The legitimacy of faith-based mediators is derived primarily from their moral, cultural, and spiritual basis within a given religious context. As insiders they have often gained a high local respect and a reputation of integrity that may increase their legitimacy as faith-based peacebrokers. They also possess certain forms, and sometimes particularly strong, influence over the antagonists in conflict. This type of leverage can be different than the leverage secularly based peacemakers possess. Religious leaders and other faith-based peacemakers have moral and spiritual leverage and through their institutional and spiritual realm, they can provide an important influence on their respective communities. Thus, there are certain spiritually based

values that can provide a religious anchoring of peacemaking processes, in a way that helps them to become more locally grounded, durable, and resilient in face of spoiler attacks and provocations. These include such religious norms as sanctity of life, certain spiritual practices of restraint, discipline and self-denial, including fasts, interior mediation, and prayers. A core religious value is compassion, ultimately derived (at least as far as the monotheistic traditions are concerned) from God's empathy with humanity. These values can be religious values that can be harnessed for the cause of conflict resolution (Gopin 2000). Yet, treating religion as a tool for normatively valuable causes such as peace or justice can also run the risk of 'instrumentalizing' religion (Powers 2010). Followers of faith-traditions believe and practice their religion because of the inherent religious values they share in their traditions, because of the meaning-bearing frameworks of religion that are fruitful for them as way to interpret their lives and fates, or because of own or others' experiences of encounters with a divine sphere. Religion, for a follower of a faith tradition, cannot be reduce to a motivation (or organisational basis) for a political cause, even if such a cause is of highest normative value, such as peace or justice. When such a reduction does occur, it may risk affecting the authenticity of the religious experience and framework. Paradoxically then, treating religion as a tool for peace, may make religion less effective in being such an instrument (Powers 2010). By contrast, through acknowledging and building on an authentic religious experience, religion can come to play a useful role in strategic peacebuilding, through for instance, countering extremist interpretations of religious precepts or providing underlying motivations and organizational resources for durable and patient peacemaking processes.

Faith-based diplomacy can be broader than a diplomatic practice that only relies on a secular basis (Johnston and Cox 2003). The main difference in comparison to secular diplomacy is that faith-based diplomacy appreciates and relies on spiritual resources and spiritual authority.

With resources and authority grounded in the religious sphere, faith-based diplomacy can work through other processes and reach a deeper level of commitment with parties in conflicts and crisis. In particular, it entails a broader and more holistic approach that seeks to transcend the present interactions between states and between non-state actors, in a way that goes beyond what secular diplomacy can do. A diplomatic practice rooted in, or informed by, religious knowledge, may also benefit from another appreciation of the time-factor in relationship-building processes. As faith-traditions have longer time horizons than secular diplomacy, they may foster greater perseverance. We have seen above that the time factor may be one reason for why religious conflicts tend to be so intractable: with longer time horizons, antagonists may discount the costs of the present against a wider horizon into the future (and a deeper and longer appreciation of the historical trajectory). This would affect negatively the possibilities for peaceful settlements and termination of conflicts. Here similar the logic of the religious dimensions can help to explain particular strength in religious peacemaking. Faith-based diplomats may preserve in their peacemaking efforts, even when others abandon what is seen as ineffective processes that do not yield any immediate results. One prominent form of faith-based diplomacy is faith-based mediation. Faith-based mediation occurs in all religious traditions. Empirically, civil society initiatives seems to be most prevalent in the Christian traditions, whereas inter-governmental actions (particularly Organization for Islamic Conferences, OIC), have dominated the peacemaking activities of the Muslim world (Johnstone and Svensson 2013). Zooming in on the Muslim peacemaking practice, two important basic facets of the Islamic tradition have been identified that can be harnessed for the sake of conflict resolution and the building of peace: the emphasis within the Islamic tradition on social justice, and the notion of the community (Ummah). Anchoring the practice of conflict resolution in a religiously informed framework may help to create

better conditions for peaceful transformations of conflictual group relationships (Abu-Nimer 2003).

What explains whether religious actors become active in processes of transforming conflicts, building peace and preventing violence, hatred, extremism, and intolerance? Important factors have to do with the social and religious context, in general, and the institutional and cultural basis for religious organisations, communities and leaders, in particular. One particularly important role in this regard is the knowledge, competence and living historical contingencies of religious traditions (Appleby 2001)**.** Individuals and societies with less religious knowledge are more likely to be misled and misdirected in their religious interpretations, towards more malign and violence-inducing religious interpretations. Thus, the degree of religious illiterate individuals among a population can make such a society more or less likely to be ripe for negative influences of extreme actors. The same dynamic could be said, of course, of religious peace-messages: they could also be manipulated and influenced by religious elites and the ability to do so would at least partly be a function of the a-prior depth of religious knowledge of the population. Yet, in general, interpretations of religious message conducive of peacemaking and peacebuilding require a deeper religious interpretation than often go beyond the superficial literal interpretations in the Holy Scriptures of the religious traditions (that invariably consist of elements that glorifies, sanctifies or legitimatize violence, "othering", or intolerance). Thus, a deeper religious knowledge can provide a firmer anchoring of religious tolerance and lay the basis for active roles of religious actors and organizations in peacebuilding processes. Hence, religious knowledge and beliefs can therefore serve as impetus towards more peaceful developments. There are some evidence pointing that religious piousness can be seen as a factor contributing to more tolerant interpretation of religious traditions. In fact, whereas Muluk, Sumaktoyo and Ruth (2012) find

that support of religious violence is related positively to support for Islamic laws, they also find that it is *negatively* related to the levels religious practice (Muluk, Sumaktoyo et al. 2013). Thus, more active religious practise is associated with less support for religious violence.

Two important instruments of religious peacebuilding are local institutions that can act to manage tensions locally, as well as the instrument of inter-faith dialogue. The role of institutions in cross-cutting religious or ethnic lines is an important predictor in decreasing the risk of communal violence (Varshney 2002). Local religious institutions can decrease the risk for communal violence, empirical evidence from Indonesia suggests. Examining the density of local religious institutions and showing that mass fighting between communal groups are less likely to occur where these types of institutions exist, research shows that there are powerful institutional dimensions of religion that can mitigate against violence (De Juan, Pierskalla et al4. 2015). Institutional explanation to religious violence and peace (non-formal, and not necessarily state-based mechanism of conflict resolution. Importantly, religious institutions may mitigate conflicts in general, but not those in which religious actors are participating: “the peace impact of religious institutions possibly declines once a manifest interreligious conflict begins “ (De Juan, et al. 2015:12). Another, also very important form of religious peacemaking is the inter-religious dialogues (Smock 2006). It has been utilized in order to bridge societal cleavages across religious fault-lines. Interfaith dialogue is an essential part of religious peacemaking, in particularly in context of group-based conflicts in which different religious identities seem to be in clash with each other. When contentious interfaith relationships complicate conflicts and hinder clear communication across the lines of the antagonists, interfaith dialogue can provide a possibility to de-escalate sectarian

tensions, clarify misunderstanding, and break stereotypes. Dialogue with actors and individuals from different religious tradition may serve to defuse tensions, and could be especially applicable to situations where religion has been drawn into the conflict dynamics and religious issues have thereby become contentious.

The field of religious peacemaking has developed a set of possible causal mechanism identifying how religion can influence the chance for peace. Yet, so far, the relationship between religious peacemaking and their outcome have not been studied systematically. Thus, we lack empirical studies that detail the causal pathway from religious peacemaking to some type of peaceful outcome, showing how exactly religious dimensions formed the decision of the antagonists to transform their conflict from a violent to a less violent one. Likewise, we lack systematic evidence for correlations between religious peacemaking and peacemaking 'success' (which of course can be defined in a multiple of ways). Studies (mostly impact assessments of various programmes) that have been conducted have not hitherto taking into account possible other explanatory factors (including contextual and actions from other peacemaking processes). They have also not been able to settle the problem of selection effects: surveying those that participate in a religious peacemaking program, or inter-faith dialogue, cannot tell us whether the program by itself have affected the recipients, or whether it is some type of individuals that are selected, or self-selected, into these types of religious peacemaking programmes. One study of how dialogue across religious and ethnic lines did affect their relationship in terms of attitudes and behaviour, showed some interesting (and surprising results). Using randomized intervention methodologies, we have shown that dialogue programmes reduce mistrust between ethnic groups, but also increase their sense of grievances (the perception that their group being discriminated against), as well as their identification with their own ethnic group (Svensson and Brounéus 2013). Thus, these

programmes both decrease mistrust but also simultaneously can help to strengthen their ethnic identities. This gives ground for treating dialogue as potentially fruitful, but also caution against its application, as such programmes may actually deepen identity-cleavages. Thus, any clear-cut empirical evidence that substantiates an overall positive effect of religious peacemaking, inter-faith dialogue, and faith-based peacebuilding, is still lacking.

Lastly, an important power of religious actors lies in their ability to re-frame existing violence-legitimizing messages and provide religious counter-interpretations that can challenge militants´ rhetoric. Religious actors and in particular leaders can help to transform religious messages from one of war to one of peace. How religious leaders can re-interpret religious messages so that it forms support for peace and not war has not been sufficiently well studied. The role of the leadership is ambivalent, or with other words, and a 'double-edged sword' (Bock 2001). The framing of religious ideologies in conflicts is an actor-oriented explanation for the dynamic of religious violence. Faith-based actors, under particular conditions, can re-formulate a militant religious ideology to arrive at an interpretation that is characterized by tolerance, compassion, and justice. This is what Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger describes as the 'dialogue strategy', and this entails a confrontation with militant and violent-enducing rhetoric, behavior, and structures, and a counter-challenge toward the legitimacy that is sought from religious sources (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000). In a similar line, empirical research has identified how religious leaders of militant groups, under pressure from regimes and after military failures, have been able to re-adjust and de-radicalize the aspirations and ideological motivations underlying religiously defined armed groups (Ashour 2009).

Concluding discussion: avenues for future research

The field of International Relations, and peace and conflict research in general, have historically been permeated by a secularism-bias, and have thereby tended to neglect and down-play religious factors. Religion, essentially, is a social and not merely private phenomenon, something that is commonly misunderstood in the Western or secular context. A deeper comprehension of religious social praxis can help to create a better basis for religious and cultural pluralism (Thomas 2003). Over the last decade, the relative neglect of religion has been replaced by an on-going and thriving research endeavor in which research tries to tease out the more exact causal pathways through which religion influences the behavior of state and non-state actors, in a way that influences risk for war and chance for peace. To see the breadth and scope of research on religion in war and peace, we need to have a broad appreciation of how research on religion has examined the international relations, how research has been able to identify the religious factors that influence the war and peace, and how research has developed and utilized various approaches and methods in studying these complex but intriguing questions (see Hassner and Svensson 2016 for an overview of this field).

The analysis presented here on religious dimensions of war and peace is still in its infancy. What this overview has tried to make clear is that many interesting and revealing research insights are gained when religious factors are introduced in explaining the dynamics (both onset and escalation) of armed conflicts, as well as dynamics of peace. Although a significant and important scholarly sub-field has grown over the last decades and identified the basic tenants of religious dimensions of war, as well as religious peacebuilding, many central questions remains unanswered. Let me end this chapter by pointing out three of the most urgent, still unanswered, research questions.

First, the research on, one the one hand, religion and war, and on the other, religion and peace, have been relatively separated. For example, as we have seen in this chapter, religious factors exist behind peace and war dynamics, although they should not be deemed to be decisive and overplayed. The empirical bearing that explanations relating to religious demography (including civilizational divides, religious diversity, religious polarization, cross-cuttingness, and whether any particular religious traditions are more or less likely to be exploited as basis for political violence) illustrate how religion influences conflict dynamics. Yet, relatively little of these explanatory factors have been integrated into the analysis of religion and peace. And the same could be said in reversed direction: insights about religious organization, sacralisation and de-sacralisation, religious actors and mobilization, the role of dialogue, etc are all factors that have been in focus on the debate on religion and peace, but is largely absent (or at least have played a relatively minor role) in the debate on religion and war. Yet, obviously, the question of war and peace are intimately related: we cannot understand how to create peace unless we know why wars are started in the first place, and without knowing the difficulties of reaching peace, we cannot understand why antagonists start and continue conflict. Thus, if we zoom out and examine the broader scholarly debate, there is a clear need to integrate studies on war and peace, as driven (partly) by religious factors. This is an avenue for future research which could be particularly fruitful.

Second, we know that religious issues can be drawn into a conflict that originally, or at its core, may be more material or mundane. Explicit religious grievances expressed by rebels or governments may hide political, economic or private interests. Religious ideologies may come in as instruments to challenge or maintain power. Moreover, failures of earlier revolutionary ideologies to produce desired results, or the fact that these ideologies fall out of respect because their representatives show themselves to be inapt or corrupt, may lay the

ground for religious actors to enter into the conflict scene. Yet, once a conflict has been sacralized, its dynamics shift in nature and evolution. Previous research has identified some of the trajectories of how conflicts, even if they were originally about other goals and ambitions, become religiously framed and defined. How religion enters – sacralization – and how it may diminish in significance and relevance in a conflict – de-sacralization – are processes that have not fully been explained, and we currently do not know how they unfold, and even more importantly, why. It is still so that "the question remains as to which specific characteristics of the 'religious landscape' and surrounding conditions in fact influence religion to either stimulate conflict or contribute to peace" (Basedau and de Juan 2008:5).

Third, as the last years have so vividly illustrated, religiously defined conflicts with rebel-groups with self-proclaimed Islamist-Salafist ideological aspirations are a partly new and pressing issue. Research-wise, there have been a lot of intellectual efforts going into trying to understand why these types of conflicts erupt, and how they can be countered from a military and strategic perspective. Yet, how to manage or resolve conflicts where religion – at least in the surface level – plays a fundamental role in general, and the jihadist armed conflicts, in particular remains an intellectual challenge for the field. Could there be conflict resolution processes in jihadist armed conflicts? Are jihadists even ready to sit down at the negotiation table? For some of the conflicts, such as ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the most convincing answer would be negative, for others, such as the Philippines and Tajikistan, the Islamists were able to come around to support a political settlement. To identify the key scope conditions under which the general conflict resolution theories are applicable to partly new empirical landscape of jihadist armed conflicts, remains a task for the research community interested in understanding the role of religion in peace and conflict.

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