THE USE OF A RELIGIOUS DIMENSION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION BY NGO'S, WITH CASE STUDIES FROM NIGERIA AND MYANMAR

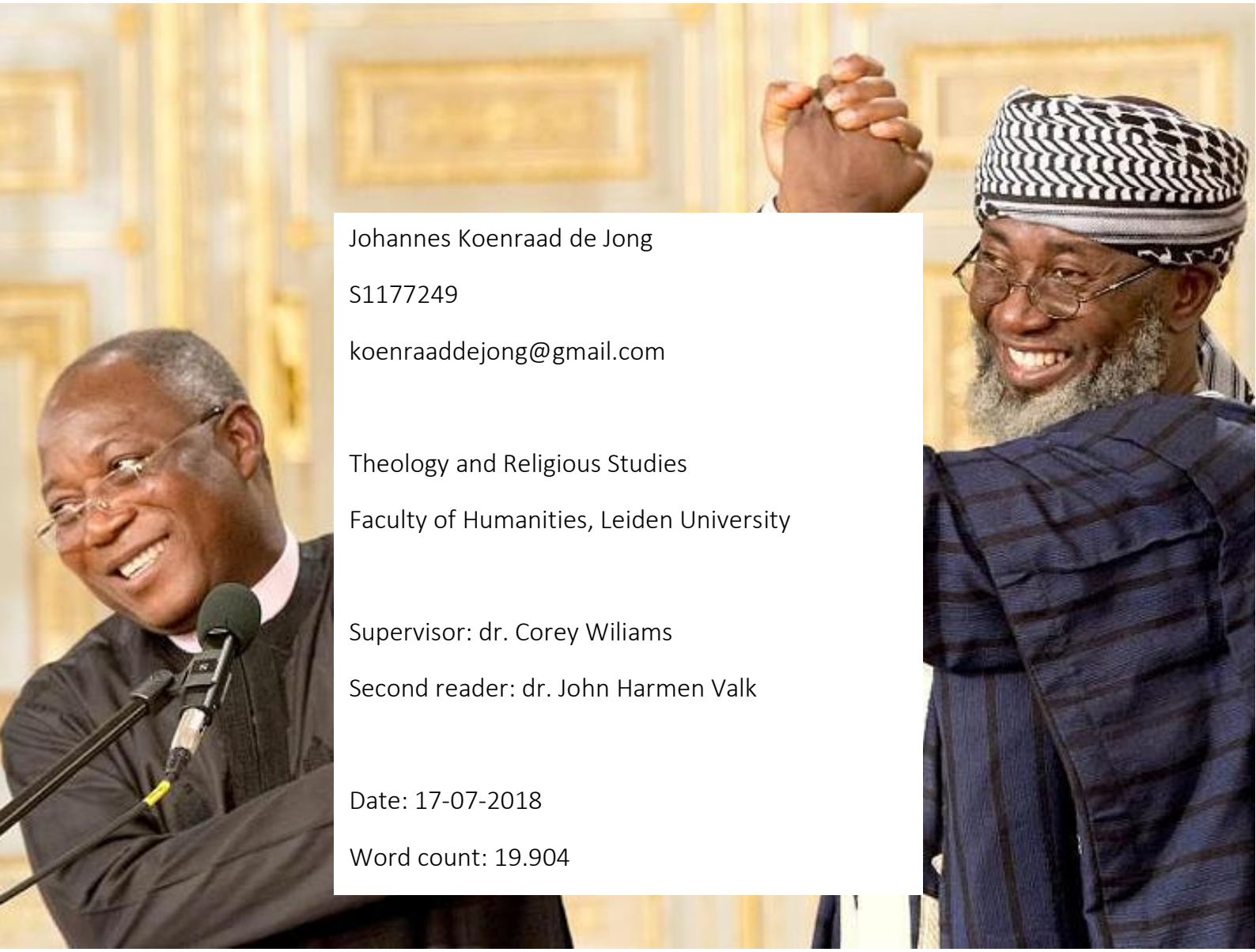

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Front page: James Wuye and Mohammed Ashafa, founders of the Interfaith Mediation Center in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

In 1995, mortal enemies Pastor James Wuye and Imam Mohammed Ashafa, after suffering heavy losses in fighting each other, agreed that the violence in Nigeria had to stop. To accomplish this they decided to found the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC).[1] The IMC sees as its mission the use of an interfaith approach to ensure peaceful coexistence, irrespective of religious persuasion, and with respect for the faith of others. Evidence of its success are the many rewards it received for its work in conflict resolution through dialogue and for the projects it brought to a successful conclusion.[2]

A different organization, but with similar goals, is the much larger organization King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). This intergovernmental organization with a multi-religious board of directors "promotes and uses interreligious dialogue to support conflict prevention and resolution, sustainable peace and social cohesion; to promote mutual respect and understanding among different religious and cultural groups; and to counteract the abuse of religion to justify oppression, violence and conflict".[3] The usefulness of KAICIID is internationally recognized by its inclusion in the organization of meetings by UNICEF, the European Union, and the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development.[4]

What causes these organizations to belief that religion and conflict are so connected that focusing on a religious dimension in conflict resolution would help solve these conflicts? And why do these organizations with a focus on religious dimensions even exist? That they believe in the important role of religion might be caused by the religious background of the organizations themselves. After all, things that are considered to be of great importance to oneself will very likely be considered important to other people as well. There also has been written quite a lot of academic work concerning the presence of a religious dimension in

[1] "History," Interfaith Mediation Centre, accessed June 7, 2018, http://www.imc-nigeria.org/history2/.
[2] "Past Projects," Interfaith Mediation Centre, accessed July 10, 2018, http://www.imc-nigeria.org/past-projects/; "Early Warning System," Interfaith Mediation Centre, accessed July 10, 2018, http://www.imc-nigeria.org/early-warning-system/; "Awards & Affiliations," Interfaith Mediation Centre, accessed July 10, 2018, http://www.imc-nigeria.org/new-page/; "Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War," Peaceworks (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, January 2006), 17–24.
[3] "KAICIID," KAICIID, accessed July 10, 2018, http://www.kaiciid.org/.
[4] "Our Partners," KAICIID, November 13, 2014, http://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are/our-partners.

conflicts, as can be seen in the second chapter of thesis. The question why organizations like NGOs (IMC) or organizations connected to neutral governments (KAICIID) with a focus on the religious dimension in conflicts and conflict resolution exist and are effective can be described as follows: since the relationship between the government with its security sectors and religious actors is often distrustful, a physical and theoretical neutral space might aid in bringing conflicting parties together to talk and to address their goals and grievances. It is not likely that one of the conflicting parties will be able to create such a neutral space, so only a clearly independent nation or organization will be able to convene a meeting in a neutral atmosphere.[5] The remaining question is, what such a neutral party, which focuses on the religious dimension of conflicts, should look like and which method it should use to be most effective. This will be the main question of this thesis. By looking at case studies from Nigeria and Myanmar, the usefulness of such organizations will be further analyzed.

Religion is for this thesis a concept of major importance, since the focus will be on NGOs that are involved with the religious dimension in conflicts. This concept, however, is very hard to define, some people even considering it a concept which only exists in the minds of scholars. Jonathan Z. Smith claims that "religion has no independent existence apart from the academy." Brian C. Wilson and Timothy Fitzgerald agree with him and say, respectively, that the inability to define religion is "almost an article of methodological dogma" in the field of religious studies, and that since there is no coherent concept of religion, the term should be scrapped since it is a form of mystification.[6] It is, however, undeniable that many people believe in supernatural entities and in interactions with these entities, leading them to act in various ways. While it might seem impossible to define religion in a satisfying way, since a religious dimension will overlap with other dimensions in human life, ignoring this dimension completely because of not being able to get a good definition doesn't seem very useful when

[5] Peter Mandaville and Melissa Nozell, "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism," Special Report (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, August 2017), 7, https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/08/engaging-religion-and-religious-actors-countering-violent-extremism.

[6] Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Brian C. Wilson, "From Lexical to to Polythetic: A Brief History of the Definition of Religion," in *What Is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explenations* (Brill, 1998); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

studying human interaction.[7] For research purposes a working definition of religion, relevant to the research subject, should be used. In this thesis, the focus will be on the religious dimension in conflicts and in conflict resolution, and the definition of religion reflects this focus. As described in the second chapter of this thesis, religion is a source of identity and it can function as both a motivating and a legitimizing factor in conflicts. On the other hand it can motivate people to opt for a peaceful solution to a conflict and to act accordingly. It can be distinguished from other identity forming factors that influence the way people act by its supernatural elements and by references to these supernatural elements in its adherents thoughts, words, and actions.

When an NGO focuses on religion, or on a religious dimension, it can mean that it focuses on the beliefs of people in order to get them to act or to stop acting in a certain way. It can also mean that this NGO realizes the influence of people with a position of religious authority, and asks those people to help the NGO with what it tries to accomplish. In the case of the NGOs considered for this thesis, the resolution of a conflict is their goal.

1.2 NECESSITY OF THE SUBJECT

More research regarding the subject of NGOs dealing with the religious dimension of conflicts is needed. First of all because, even though religion is an important aspect of many conflicts, governments have often neglected to recognize and deal with this dimension in a way that led to a solution to or a lessening of the conflict.[8] To give an example: when U.S. diplomats tried dealing with Iran during the Iranian revolution, they hugely underestimated the influence of religious leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini and the role religion played as a source of identity. A consequence of this was that they made inaccurate assessments of how religiopolitical forces in Iran would behave: they did not expect that Tehran would take U.S. diplomats as hostages, they did not expect Iran to continue its counterproductive war with

[7] William T. Cavanaugh, "Does Religion Cause Violence? Behind the Common Question Lies a Morass of Unclear Thinking.," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 35, no. 2 and 3 (2007), https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/springsummer2007/does-religion-cause-violence.
[8] Edward Luttwak, "The Missing Dimension," in *Religion, The Mising Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8–19.

Iraq, and they did not expect Khomeini to call for the murder of Salmon Rushdie in a time when Western investment was needed.[9]

While in some cases the role of religion is not recognized enough, overstating the role of religion can also be a problem. As Elizabeth Shakman Hurd states: ascribing to religion a larger role than it actually has and making it the main focus of conflict resolution would lead to the overlooking of other major factors in these conflicts. Furthermore, making 'religion' the main focus of a conflict creates power relations in groups by giving religious leaders more power than they might have had before. It also creates and fortifies divisions by labeling and focusing on the differences between the groups.[10] If there are so many risks to focusing on the religious dimension, why then still do it? Not because religion is the main factor in the conflict, not because it is the cause or the solution to the conflict, but because religion is an important dimension in human interaction, and therefore plays a role in conflicts which cannot be ignored.[11]

A second reason why more research regarding the subject of NGOs dealing with the religious dimension of conflicts is needed, is that this topic has not received a lot of academic attention, even though there are NGOs with this focus. Research has been done concerning the role of religion in conflict and concerning its role in conflict resolution. Research has also been done concerning NGOs and their effectiveness in diplomacy. NGOs and their focus on a religious dimension in conflicts have not received as much academic attention. This alone warrants more research concerning the subject.

The second chapter of this thesis contains a description of the existence and role of a religious dimension in conflicts and the peacemaking ability of religion. Because these issues can be seen as the most important reasons for NGOs involved in conflict resolution to opt for a focus on the religious dimension in conflicts, it is logical to make them the starting point of this

[9] Barry Rubin, "Religion and International Affairs," in *Religion, The Mising Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27.
[10] Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 111; Mandaville and Nozell, "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism"; Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century*, Culture and Religion in International Relations 269425721 (New York [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Tinashe Rukuni, Noel Kansiime, and Wilkister Milimu, "Moving Trends in Peace and Conflict Studies," *The Fountain: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 47–62.
[11] Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 111.

thesis. There are many conflicting academic opinions regarding these issues, and not all of these opinions will receive equal consideration, but by making use of the most recent academic work, which often summarizes and analyses previous points of view, this analysis will, hopefully, be balanced and complete. Works being used are handbooks on religion and violence and on religion and peacemaking like the 'Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence', the 'Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence', and 'Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings'.[12] When necessary other articles were used to support or to contradict the statements made in these handbooks.

In the third chapter, the description of the role religion has in conflicts and peacemaking is followed by an analysis of the role NGOs with a focus on a religious dimension of conflicts can play in conflict resolution. In this chapter general theories on conflict resolution are used to see where and how a religious dimension might be used in order to stop a conflict or to prevent other conflicts from starting. This analysis leads to an image of what an NGO with a focus on the religious dimension of conflicts should look like, if it is to help stop a conflict.

In the fourth chapter a methodology for analyzing the use of a religious dimension by NGOs concerned with conflict resolution is presented. This methodology has been used in the fifth and the sixth chapter to analyze the use of a religious dimension by NGOs in Nigeria and Myanmar. The choice for these two countries was made because of the conflicts and clearly visible presence of a religious dimension in these countries. While these countries are in different places of the world, West Africa and South-East Asia, and while they differ in history and politics, there are some comparable characteristics which make them interesting to compare. Both Nigeria and Myanmar have only recently gained their independence from the British Empire. Both of them have large religious minorities who often don't mix well, leading to violent clashes, and in both countries there is a strong ethnic dimension to the conflicts as well. A comparison between the countries and the conflicts might therefore not only lead to insights concerning the usefulness of a focus on a religious dimension in conflicts, but it might also show how specific historical events play a role in the integration of religion in conflicts, or how specific historical events might lead religion to cause a conflict.

[12] Dennis Hoover and Douglas Johnston, *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings* (Baylor University Press, 2012); Andrew R. Murphy, *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (Chichester [etc.]: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In the final chapter these findings are discussed. There the case studies are also compared to the theory concerning the focus on a religious dimension on conflicts by NGOs, as presented in the third chapter.

2. RELIGION, CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

2.1 A RELIGIOUS DIMENSION IN CONFLICTS

RELIGION AND CONFLICT IN PUBLIC OPINION

When people think about religion, one of the first things they think of is conflict. This often concerns Islam. A 2016 Pew survey in Europe found that one third of the respondents in North-Western Europe have an unfavorable view of Muslims in their country and in East and South Europe this number goes up to half, and even two thirds of the respondents.[13] These numbers might be considered a consequence of these nation's efforts to determine a national identity, especially since the only group seen as more unfavorable were the Roma. Just like Roma, Muslims are often not seen as part of this national identity, especially when they are immigrants holding on to their language and customs. While Muslims are usually not seen as linked to an extremist group, over 50 percent of the respondents are concerned that refugees, especially Muslim refugees, will increase the likelihood of terrorism.[14] This finding does support the statement that the perception of religion and violence are connected. An ABC News/Washington Post poll in 2010 found results similar to those in North-Western Europe in a poll related to the building of a Muslim Community Center in Lower Manhattan in New York. Using results from previous polls, this poll found that 37 percent of the respondents had a favorable opinion of Islam and 49 percent an unfavorable opinion, but also that only 31 percent believed that mainstream Islam encourages violence. 54 percent even called it a 'peaceful religion'. One should keep in mind, however, that people were asked about *mainstream* Islam, which might have led them to give a more positive response.[15]

There are a couple of reasons why people would connect religion to violence. First of all there is the historical connection between religion and violence. The stories about religious wars and religious intolerance are too many to count. One has only to think about the Crusades, the Roman Catholic Inquisition, the French Wars of Religion, or, more current, Al Qaeda,

[13] Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, and Katie Simmons, "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorims, Fewer Jobs," *Pew Research Senter*, July 2016, 4.
[14] Wike, Stokes, and Simmons, 33.
[15] PDF with questionnaire can be found at: Gary Langer, "Muslim Center Near Ground Zero: Cordoba House Controversy Could Pose Political Risks," *ABC News*, September 8, 2010, https://abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/cordoba-house-controversy-poses-political-risks/story?id=11587366; previous poll results can be found at: Anthony H. Cordesman, "ABC News/Washington Post Poll on U.S. Views of Islam" (Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), April 21, 2009), https://www.csis.org/analysis/abc-newswashington-post-poll-us-views-islam.

Hamas, Boko Haram, or ISIS, just to mention a few reasons for people to connect religion to violence.

A second reason why people connect religion to violence is the way religion is portrayed in the media. According to Lee Marsden and Heather Savigny newspapers and broadcasters are in competition with each other to produce the most dramatic pictures or the most sensational headlines. This also is the case in their reporting on religions and conflicts. Since the end of the Cold war people became more aware of religion as a source of identity for billions of people. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 led media (and academics) to become more aware of the role of religion in politics, security, and international relations, and because the most sensational news is negative news, most articles concerning conflicts displayed religion in a negative way.[16]

The third reason why people connect religion to violence is caused by violent groups and individuals. They often use religious arguments to defend their position and to legitimize their use of violence. One example of this is when ISIS, in its magazine Rumiyah, quotes the Qur'an following the 2017 bombing at the Manchester Arena by mentioning the second verse of the fifty-ninth chapter (Al-Hashr) of the Quran: "but [the decree of] Allah came upon them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror in their hearts".[17] Another example comes from the revered Buddhist monk Sitagu Sayadaw from Myanmar. While in his English statements he portrays himself as peace-builder, participating in interfaith discussions, in his Burmese language sermons he portrays Islam as a religion of violence and he describes the Rohingya Muslims as foreigners. In October 2017 he delivered a sermon for military people at a training school in which he gave a religious justification for the killing of non-Buddhists. In this sermon he mentioned the Sinhalese Buddhist king who, agonizing over the bloodshed he had caused in battle, got a visit by enlightened beings that told him there was no need to grieve, since almost all the people he killed were non-Buddhists. They could not be considered human beings and their deaths would not generate bad karma.[18] While this is not necessarily a call for killing, it does lower the bar.

[16] Lee Marsden and Heather Savigny, "Introduction: Media, Religion, and Conflict," in *Media, Religion and Conflict* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 9,11.
[17] *Rumiyah*, vol. 10, 2017, 5, https://clarionproject.org/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq-50/.
[18] Matthew J. Walton, "Religion and Violence in Myanmar," *Foreign Affairs*, November 6, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/burma-myanmar/2017-11-06/religion-and-violence-myanmar.

THEORIES BEHIND RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

The belief that religion and violence are strongly connected is not a belief held by the general public alone. Many scholars from various fields share this belief. From theologians to students of literature, from psychologists to anthropologists, from sociologists to students of political sciences. In all of these fields academic articles have been written about how religion and violence may be closely connected.

The sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer, who's book *Terror in the Mind of God* might be the most widely influential academic work on religion and violence, describes religion as an instrument for people to give profundity and ideological clarity to real negative experiences in their lives. By offering a grand scenario of cosmic war between good and evil, religion gives meaning to the negative experiences. Religion can give them a sense of destiny and it can empower them.[19] In a context of a cosmic war, individuals willing to help the 'light side' can use symbols and rituals, following the examples of people, creatures, and gods fighting in the same war. In some cases, this symbolic action can lead to real violent action. What makes this type of violent action different from more secular types of violence is that it is symbolic, absolutist, and unrestrained by historical time.[20]

To see where the ideas for symbolic violence originate from, one only has to look at the sources being used by religious individuals. These can be holy books, holy people, sacred imagery, or just people with a position of religious authority. Many religious traditions provide such sources containing images of violence. The images can serve as a way to support the idea that people are fighting a cosmic war with the forces of good fighting on their side. The stories of martyrs may serve to incite feelings of wanting revenge, giving a rationale for one's own violent impulses.[21] A second scholar working on the issue of religion and violence, Afe Adogame, supports Juergensmeyer in stating that religion can support and amplify violent processes, but he adds that religious violence might sometimes be explained in the same terms as other types of violence, and that religious violence cannot be seen as separate from

[19] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God, The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkely: University of California Press, 2001), 248.
[20] Juergensmeyer, 164–66.
[21] Margo Kitts, "Religion and Violence from Literary Perspectives," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 419.

the moment in history and structure of culture.[22] This means that when looking for the cause or the solution to a conflict involving religion one should not only consider the religious dimension in a conflict, nor should one ignore it, but one should also consider all the other possible dimensions. One more way Afogame sees religion and violence as connected is in the ability of religion to create boundaries and to start a competition between the different ideologies. This competition will lead to conflict, sometimes peaceful, but also sometimes violent.[23]

The psychiatrist Jerrold Post describes the role of individuals in the connection between religion and violent outbursts. According to him religious violence is possible because individuals are prepared to subordinate their individuality to a collective identity, which can be found in, for example, religious group membership. If this group becomes violent depends on the charismatic leader of this group and his or her (mostly his) disposition.[24] Another reason for a group to become violent, is the hostility of the 'outside world' towards these groups. This hostility feeds the group's paranoia about the outside world, which increases the hostility even more, and eventually may lead to violent outbursts.[25] According to Keneth Pargament the violation of something held sacred, perceived as a significant trauma, may lead someone in a rage. Such a rage is described by Kohut as a narcissistic rage of which the main characteristic is a total lack of empathy towards the creator of the trauma. [26] This may explain the vicious terror we see in groups like IS.

Daniel Philpot looks for answers to the connection between religion and conflict in the concepts of institutional independence and political theology. Institutional independence can be high or low, and consensual or conflictual. High independence means no or almost no integration between religion and state, while low independence means the opposite. In

[22] Afe Adogame, "Fighting for God or Fighting in God's Name! The Politics of Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria," *Religions*, 2009, 176–77, https://doi.org/10.5339/rels.2009.commonground.13.
[23] Afe Adogame, "How God Became a Nigerian: Religious Impulse and the Unfolding of a Nation," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 490, https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2010.512742; Adogame, "Fighting for God or Fighting in God's Name! The Politics of Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria," 188.
[24] Jerrold Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[25] James W. Jones, "Religion and Violence from a Psychological Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 387; Ralph W. Hood Jr., Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, eds., *The Psychology of Religion, Fourth Edition: An Empirical Approach*, 4th ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 266–69.
[26] Kenneth Pargament et al., eds., "They Killed Our Lord: The Persecution of Jews as Desecrators of Christianity as a Predicator of Anti-Semitism.," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 2 (2007): 143–48.

consensual cases, both parties are satisfied with the situation, while in conflictual cases, either one or both parties are unhappy with the situation. The political theology is the way religious groups view issues like legitimate authority, freedom of religion, political order, justice, and the justified use of force. [27] In cases of violent conflict, both communal violence and religious terrorism, integrational political theologies can often be found, and so can conflictual integrated religion-state relationships.[28] While the cause and effect in this case are difficult to discern, there is a clearly visible relationship between violence and institutional independence and political theology.

To summarize, religion should not be considered the only, or even the most important, dimension of a conflict, but it would be wrong to not consider the religious dimension when researching violent conflicts. After all, As Mandaville and Nozell and the above mentioned academics have said, religion can act as a source of collective identity and solidarity, as a narrative that helps organize and gives meaning, as a justification or "moral warrant", and as a way to imbue a higher or eternal purpose to a conflict.[29] And while this does not mean that religion causes violent conflicts, it does mean that religion can be an important dimension in these conflicts.

2.2 A PEACEMAKING ABILITY OF RELIGION

When analyzing how religion might help to solve conflicts one can look at the role a religious dimension can play in conflicts, as we have done above. Another possibility is to see if and how religion can bring peace. To see if a religious dimension can be used to bring an end to conflict. In this section we will see how religious beliefs are often used to promote kindness to other humans and to nature in general, we will see that these beliefs are used as foundation for various humanitarian organizations, and we will see how organizations using religion for conflict resolution deliver positive results. Academic theories concerning religion and peacemaking are presented in this section as well.

[27] Daniel Phillpott, "Religion and Violence from a Political Science Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 397–409.
[28] Phillpott, 407.
[29] Mandaville and Nozell, "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism," 4–5.

RELIGION BEING USED TO PROMOTE KINDNESS AND PEACE

Throughout history many people have mentioned their religious beliefs to support their actions in working towards peace. This shows that while religion does not necessarily lead to peace, it can serve as an instrument for people to explain their peace building activities and to ask others to do the same.

For example, Martin Luther King Jr., in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize stated: "*I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will proclaim the rule of the land. "And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid."(Micah 4:4)*".[30] He named this as a major motivating factor in his work. Another famous example is the current Dalai Lama who, when speaking for the Smile Foundation in New Delhi, said, in the context of speaking about universal responsibility and compassion, that modern education should be combined with ancient Indian knowledge to achieve peace of mind He said that this would not change the past, but that it could change the future and make this century "*a more compassionate, peaceful, happier century than the one that went before".*[31] The religious aspect in this statement is the referral to the ancient Indian knowledge, which is a cultural concept, but no less a religious one. Another religious aspect of this statement is that it is made by someone who got his authority from his religious position.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS USED AS FOUNDATION FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Some of the people that based their good actions on their religious beliefs created humanitarian organizations to increase the amount of good they could be doing. These organizations are closely connected to a religious body, from which they may or may not receive financial support, and they have a mission statement containing religious references. Often their staff members are selected on their religious affiliation. These organizations usually focus both on humanitarian assistance (mostly assisting victims of conflict and natural disasters) and human rights (monitoring and denouncing violations of human rights and

[30] Martin Luther King Jr., "Acceptance Speech, on the Occasion of the Award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.," December 10, 1964, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance_en.html.
[31] Dalai Lama, "Talk about Universal Responsibility and the Compassion and Smile Foundation," November 19, 2017, https://www.dalailama.com/news/2017/talk-about-universal-responsibility-and-compassion-at-smile-foundation.

naming and shaming of the violators).[32] Many of these organizations are Christian, of which Caritas is a good example. Caritas states in its mission statement that it is *"inspired by the gospels and by the teachings of the Catholic Church, and by the hopes of people living in poverty".* It aims to motivate people to help in humanitarian crises, to promote human development in the most disadvantaged communities, and to promote the wellbeing of the "human family" in general.[33] A similar organization can be found in Islam with Muslim Aid. In its mission statement it states that it is a "*relief and development agency, guided by the teachings of Islam"*. Its main goals are for a large part comparable to those of Caritas.[34] The same is true for Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh and many more religious organizations.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH THE USE OF A RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

Religion can motivation people to do good and it can motivate them to create humanitarian organizations. While this already is a way for religion to be useful in conflict resolution, there is one more way religion might be useful in conflict resolution. Since religion can be an important dimension in conflicts, focusing on this religious dimension should lead to at least some results in conflict resolution. In a publication by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) some successful attempts of conflict resolution by this institute are mentioned. In Kashmir, seminars and roundtables have been organized to bring civil society leaders together and to let them discuss what the different faith traditions teach about positive and peaceful issues. These seminars and roundtables have brought people from different backgrounds together and they have led to friendships between various leaders, often these leaders were religious authorities making the religious dimension an important part of the talks. The same method of bringing people from different groups together has also been used in Iraq, with the creation of the Iraqi Institute of Peace, in Nigeria with the Interfaith Mediation Centre, established by Pastor James Wuye and Imam Mohammed Ashafa, and in Southern Sudan with the New Sudan Council of Churches. Although these cases were successful in bringing people together, they did not really create peace. For peace to have a chance of happening, not only

[32] Elizabeth Ferris, "Faith-Based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations.," *International Review of the Red Cross* 858 (June 2005): 320.
[33] "Mission" (Caritas), accessed November 27, 2017, https://www.caritas.org/who-we-are/mission/.
[34] "About Us," Muslim Aid, accessed November 27, 2017, https://www.muslimaid.org/about-us/.

talks, but also actions are needed. Actions which are only possible in cooperation with (inter)national political and other parties.[35]

Another organization describing its successes is the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). In Nigeria, KAICIID has supported the coordination of interfaith initiatives and it has created the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace. In Myanmar, KAICIID has created a network for peace and interreligious dialogue (PMI), trained many religious leaders and civil society activists on promoting peace and interfaith harmony, developed and published an interfaith study guide for peace and dialogue for Myanmar, and conducted a needs assessment study. While this only is a small selection of KAICIID's activities, it does show that this organization uses similar methods to the ones USIP uses. The difference is that KAICIID focusses more on working with governments than USIP does, and that KAICIID has a more faith based approach.[36] It is very difficult to show a direct connection between the creation of these organizations and the resolution of conflicts, but these organizations do show that religion can bring people together in trying to solve conflicts, and that a religious dimension can be addressed in attempts to solve conflicts.

ACADEMIC THEORY CONCERNING RELIGION AND PEACEMAKING

The focus on a religious dimension in conflicts is not only used in peacemaking efforts because it has proved its efficiency in practice, but also because there is some academic theory underlying this focus. According to Rukuni, Kansiime, and Milimu, in an analysis of "*the nexus between religion and peace building*" with a focus on Kenya, religion can instill feelings of empathy and compassion. Its teachings can inspire conflicting parties to change their views from violent to non-violent. Religious people and institutions also often have very close ties to their communities, making it easier for them to see what the dimensions of a conflict are and how the conflict most successfully can be transformed to something more peaceful. Religious leaders also have strong connections with all layers of society, which helps them to address a conflict from many sides.[37] These findings by Rukuni, Kansiime, and Milimu, mean that religion can play a role in conflict resolution through the use of its contents, but also through

[35] "Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War."
[36] "KAICIID Operational Update: November 2017,". All country specific factsheets and updates can be found at: https://www.kaiciid.org/publications-resources.
[37] Rukuni, Kansiime, and Milimu, "Moving Trends in Peace and Conflict Studies," 54–56.

the use of its functions. One can use the positive religious messages or the people who got their authority, their charisma, from a religion to influence a conflict. There are some risks to be kept in mind when using a religious dimension or, specifically, religious authorities in conflict resolution. In some cases it might make the conflict worse by adding another dimension to it. It might also cause people to see their religious leaders as puppets from other organization, thereby removing their credibility and their ability to do anything about the conflict. A point also made by Mandaville and Nozell.[38]

In conclusion one could say that religion can serve as a force for good, but also as a source for bad. Religion can fuel a conflict and religion can help stop a conflict. And while it is often not clear what the precise role of religion in conflicts is, if it serves as a cause or as a legitimization, its presence in conflicts does warrant an analysis of how it can be used in conflict resolution.

[38] Mandaville and Nozell, "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism," 9–10.

3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION BY NGO'S

In the previous chapter we have seen that religion can play an important role in conflicts and in conflict resolution. To see how religion can be integrated in conflict resolution some knowledge of the different methods being used in conflict resolution is necessary. The methods being used depend on the theories of how a conflict begins. Marc Howard Ross created a complete overview of theories of practice in conflict resolution based on the supposed causes of various conflicts.[39] For this thesis it is interesting to see where a religious dimension would fit in these theories, and what this would mean for NGOs focusing on the religious dimension.

The main theories of practice concern themselves with community relations, principled negotiation, human needs, psychoanalytically rooted identity, intercultural miscommunications, and conflict transformation. All of these theories have in common that they are based on the assumptions that some preconditions have to be met to make progress towards an agreement, and that the development of cooperation in a local setting can influence the larger conflict. They also state that a third party may be helpful, but that the real resolution has to come from the parties involved with the conflict. This conflict resolution is a long-term process, which does not stop when an agreement has been signed. That there are multiple theories of practice does not mean that some are right and some are wrong. A conflict might have multiple causes, and therefore, multiple solutions and different conflicts might have different causes, so, different solutions.

[39] Marc Howard Ross, "Creating the Conditions for Peacemaking: Theories of Practice in Ethnic Conflict Resolution," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 6 (2000): 1002–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/014198700750018397.

TABLE 1: MAJOR THEORIES OF PRACTICE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION[40]

	Causes and/or nature of ethnic conflict	Goals	Effects on participants in interventions	Mechanisms for achieving effects	Transfer: impact on the wider context
Community relations	Ongoing polarization, distrust, and hostility between groups exacerbate existing conflict	Improving communication and understanding; promoting tolerance and acceptance of diversity; encouraging structures which safeguards rights of all	Build community self-esteem through successful local institutions and projects making decisions on issues important in daily life	Self-esteem, efficacy and reinforcement from prior successes through local institution building	Increased community capability and self-esteem facilitates cooperative problem solving on matters of mutual interest
Principled negotiation	Incompatible positions and zero sum view of conflict	Positive sum agreements between the parties – i.e. ones which provide mutual gain	Build analytic ability to identify mutual interests and devise solutions which offer mutual gain	Separate people from the problems; focus on interests not positions; generate possibilities for mutual gain; use objective standards to judge outcomes	Spread of skills to others; increased sense that agreements are possible; benefits to communities from prior agreements
Human needs	Unmet or frustrated basic needs	Shared recognition of core needs and exploration of ways to meet them through joint action	Discovery of shared goals and objectives; recognition of common needs; greater sense of choices and options	Problem-solving workshops led by skilled third parties who encourage analytical dialogue	Transfer of new perspectives from influentials and near influences changes the idea of what is possible for the wider community
Psychoanalytically informed identity	Threatened identity rooted in unresolved past loss and suffering	Changed relations through mutual recognition; development of a sense that agreement is possible; lowering fears to permit exploring options	Overcome barriers to dialogue by focusing on deep identity issues involved in past losses so the parties learn what possible agreements can offer	Mourning past losses and suffering; track 2 and other channels which focus on identity threats and fears; symbolic and ritual action to affirm group identity	New understanding of the conflict through changes in discourse and symbolic actions which feed new understandings into the policy process
Intercultural miscommunication	Incompatibilities between different cultural communication styles	Effective intergroup communication; weakening of negative stereotypes	Builds awareness of other cultures; develops new metaphors; information exchange to overcome cultural barriers to effective communication	Increased awareness of communication barriers; use of third-party 'translators'; deconstruction of historical accounts	Improved communication makes it easier to reach agreements and increased public support for cooperation
Conflict transformation	Real problems of inequality and injustice expressed through socially and culturally constructed meanings	Changing relationships and moral growth which produce justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation	Transforms relationships to produce self-reliant persons; empowerment and recognition	Elicitive (instead of prescriptive) training which develops culturally relevant models of conflict resolution; mediation aimed at empowerment and recognition	Empowerment leads to transformation of relationships in the larger society built on culturally appropriate models

[40] Ross, 1022–23.

3.1 CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND A RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

None of the theories claim to be a complete resolution to a conflict, but they all claim to be able to help stop a conflict. The problems when applied to conflicts with a strong religious dimension can be seen especially in the 'principled negotiation' theory. The principled negotiation theory finds the solution of a conflict in the separation of people from their problems and in showing that mutual gain is possible instead of a zero-sum situation. The problem with this is that when religion begins to play a major role in a conflict, it can very easily become a zero sum game. It can become a war of good against evil, of light against darkness, where every concession is seen as a betrayal of one's own cause. In other words, the conflict might be considered part of a cosmic war. When the core interest of one party is the downfall of the other it will be very difficult to find anything strong enough to bring them together. The theory of 'principled negotiation' might be effective in conflicts with a strong religious dimension when this religious dimension is acknowledged, but left out of further conflict resolution. When the focus of the conflict resolution is on issues where the participants might have thought they differed in opinion, but in reality follow quite similar reasoning, mutual gains may be found, leading to a diminishing of anger towards the 'other'. An example of this is when conservative Christians and conservative Muslims who, while often opposing each other, find some common ground in speaking out against the secularization of society or in a defense of their right to have conservative opinions concerning issues like abortion or gay marriage. The only item to be avoided are the religious truth claims, because they are by their nature irreconcilable with opposing truth claims. Convincing people of the possibility of mutual gains, the main argument behind the 'principled negotiation' theory, might not be possible when absolute religious truth claims are involved.[41]

The main idea behind the community relations theory is that when understanding, respect, and cooperation between communities are increased, a just and sustainable solution to conflict can be found. The goal is not to find a common ground and to show how the groups are not very different after all, like the case is with 'principled negotiation', but just to show why each group has a right to exist and be proud of their identity, while at the same time recognizing the other groups' right to exist. When in a multi-religious nation not a single

[41] Ross, 1011–13.

religion forms an absolute majority, toleration of the other might be the best thing to hope for. This goal can be reached by an improving of communication between the groups and the creation of structures which protect the rights of all. When the rights of every group are protected the chance of one group trying to dominate the others is much smaller, and fear for this happening will also be much less. When fear is gone it is a lot easier to accept the existence of other groups. Especially if knowledge of the other has increased and has lead to the disappearance of the idea of a demonized other.[42]

The 'human needs' theory is based on the idea that there is a difference between (1) 'needs', which are 'universal human motivations conditioned by biology' and which are pursued by all means possible, (2) values, which are 'ideas, habits, customs, and beliefs characteristic of particular social communities', and (3) interests, which are negotiable 'aspirations of individuals or identity groups within a social system'.[43] When the needs are unmet or frustrated, identity being one of them, conflict can erupt. This theory states that through workshops and talks organized by a third party, various parties can learn to recognize and respect common needs, to discover, eventually, that they have the same ultimate goals. Through the use of this methods the disputing parties may also get a sense of reassurance that, even though the conflict may not be resolved right away, both parties are, at least, interested in trying to solve the conflict.[44] This is one of the aspects the 'human needs' theory shares with most of the other theories. If dialogue between the parties is accomplished all involved parties might be reassured, knowing that everyone wants to find a solution. If in a conflict identity is largely defined by a religion with absolute truth claims, a common goal might be more difficult to find, since the 'need', to which no concession is possible, might be the destruction of all other parties.

According to the 'psychoanalytically informed identity' theory, identity, or the sense of self, is intertwined at a primitive level with the identity of the group. Loss, or perceived loss, by this group can be perceived as an individuals loss. The usual response to such loss is mourning, but when mourning is not possible, maybe because the loss is to big to handle, it can become a political force. When over time the loss is still not resolved it may lead to feelings of hatred and support for violent actions against the perceived cause of the trauma. As long as the

[42] Ross, 1009–11.
[43] John Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (Springer, 1990), 36–38.
[44] Ross, "Creating the Conditions for Peacemaking," 1013–14.

(perceived) loss is not mourned, the hatred will remain.[45] Religions may serve as a strong identity marker and it is, therefore, according to this psychoanalytical theory very well possible that an individual as part of a religious group might experience a (historical) attack against the religious group as a personal attack, warranting a violent response. Coming to terms with the perceived loss will be the only way to really resolve it. Here dialogue is key. When both parties join together in recognizing the perceived loss of the other, a process of mourning might start, because the historical identity of the mourning party is recognized.[46] An added value of this recognition will be that both parties will feel like their problems are taken serious, opening the floor to even more dialogue.

In many cases miscommunication is a key factor in the creation of conflict. The 'intercultural miscommunications' theory of practice uses this as point of departure to propose a way to solve conflicts. Miscommunication can be caused by cultural differences, leading to problems in the understanding of actions. Other causes of miscommunication are a lack of understanding of the other group's language or general lack of knowledge about the other group. A clear example of this is the use of a headscarf. While for some this headscarf is a symbol of devotion and strength (showing an identity marker), others will interpret a headscarf as a symbol of gender inequality. As a symbol of female subjugation to a masculine society. Again, dialogue might be the best solution. Talking to each other, when necessary aided by a third parties who can, literally and figuratively, translate between the parties, can remove many of the causes of a conflict.[47] One should keep in mind, however, that in some cases a conflict is not caused by miscommunications, but that the hatred for the other party is real, and remains even when all the facts about the other are known.

The last theory of practice, 'conflict transformation', proposes a solution to conflicts not by a focus on the cause of a conflict, but by focusing on the individuals involved in the conflict. This theory understands conflicts as 'social and cultural constructions whose meanings can be transformed as people change their knowledge, perceptions, and models of what is at

[45] Vamik D. Volkan, *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1988); Vamik D. Volkan, "An Overview of Psychological Concepts Pertinent to Interethnic and/or International Relationships," in *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships: Volume I: Concepts and Theories*, ed. Vamik D. Volkan, Demetrios A. Julius, and Joseph V. Montville (Lexington MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 31–46.
[46] Ross, "Creating the Conditions for Peacemaking," 1014–17.
[47] Ross, 1017–19.

stake'.[48] This is also where this model differs from the other models which focus on and try to remove the causes of a conflict. When the mindset of the people involved is changed an evolution and disappearance of the conflict will follow. Instead of letting an expert tell the debating parties how to resolve their issues, a prescriptive approach, this theory advises the conflict resolution experts to do no more than to show the parties how conflicts work and to let them come up with solutions to their conflict themselves, an elicitive approach. By doing so the participants to the conflict will realize their problems and accomplish 'moral growth', causing the conflict to follow this growth and disappear.[49] The problem with this theory is that when violence in a conflict is considered justified by the participants, helping them to develop an interpretation of the conflict fitting their own cultural background might not decrease it, but instead it might increase the zeal of the participants, strengthening their conviction that violent conflict is the morally right path.

One thing that becomes clear from these theories is that there always is an important role for the local community leaders. These leaders can be religious leaders, but that does not mean that they are only effective in solving conflicts through a religious dimension. The authority these people have causes them to help shape the public and political discourse around a wide range of issues, so a focus on just their religious leadership would be a waste of their capacity for peacemaking.[50]

Using a third party might be useful in the methods described above. There are some specific attributes of ethnic and religious conflicts, however, which make the involvement of a third party somewhat tricky. When a third party is linked, or seen as linked, to the state or to one of the groups involved it is no longer seen as a neutral party, which most definitely will hinder any peace talks. This neutrality is especially important when it is active in the organization of interreligious peacebuilding workshops for local community leaders. These workshops, along with inter communal dialogue, is one of the most common instruments in conflict resolution. A model for such workshops has been proposed and described by Mohammed Abu-Nimer.[51]

[48] Jean Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures.* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 19.
[49] Ross, "Creating the Conditions for Peacemaking," 1020–21.
[50] Mandaville and Nozell, "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism," 10.
[51] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 685–704, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038006003.

Their goal is to facilitate a change of view for the participants. From a narrow, exclusionist view to a tolerant and open-minded attitude. By bringing people from various backgrounds together, these workshops aim to influence head, heart, and hand of the participants.[52] The method for the workshops is the following five-step model. First, there is a getting to know of one another by letting the participants tell stories about who they are and why they participate in the workshop. Second, the various definitions people use, and expectations of other groups are being discussed. Third, the participants have the opportunity to share their own experiences with peacebuilding, and they are asked to describe both the positive and negative aspects of their own religious traditions and communities. Fourth, listening, facilitation, and mediation skills are used to teach participants new kinds of responses when meeting the other. Fifth, concrete plans are developed to encourage participants to use their workshops learning in a real-life situation.

While this framework of how leaders of various religious communities can be taught about conflict resolution is very informative and helpful for NGOs active in conflict resolution, a second observation made by Abu-Nimer is even more interesting. He describes the responses people participating in a workshop had when interacting with other cultures and religions. These responses are categorized in six types: the ethnocentric responses, which are denial, defense, and minimization, and the ethnorelative responses, which are acceptance, adaptation, and integration. This categorization is normally used for intercultural interaction and does not fit interreligious interaction perfectly. Especially adaptation and integration are for religious participants hard to fathom. In the case of adaptation it would mean a temporarily adopting of another frame, or multiple frames, of reference. This would mean a denial of one's own strongest convictions. Integration would mean the same, but in a more permanent way.[53] While it does happen that people adopt multiple religious frames of reference at the same time or continue switching from one frame to another, these are not the most common responses to interaction with other religions.

The other responses (denial, defense, minimization, and acceptance) are seen as much more likely to occur and also did occur in the interactions Abu-Nimer observed. Denial is the outright rejection of the existence of the other's culture or religion. Defense is a response

[52] Head: cognition, heart: emotion, hand: behavior
[53] Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion," 697.

which tries to increase the distance between one's own group and the other groups by claiming a special position of one's own group and proclaiming the inferior position of other groups. One type of the defense response is also called 'reversal'. In these cases people will start identifying with the other group, and start denying the ideas of the group they previously belonged to. In religious terms this is known as conversion. The third response, minimization, is a response which minimizes the differences between different cultures and religions, or which accepts the differences, but minimizes the importance of them. The problem with this response concerning religion is that it often does not take the convictions of the other serious. A statement like 'we are all God's children' might appear friendly and people might find it acceptable to put their own convictions on the same level as the convictions of others, but these others might not share the believe that both sets of convictions are at the same level and they might feel that their own absolute and unnegotiable truths are pulled down from their pedestal. The fourth and final (acceptable) response is acceptance. This response leads people to accept and respect the rights of people with a different faith to practice and believe in their own ways. In a situation of conflict resolution this response probably is the best one possible.

3.2 CONFLICT RESOLUTION BY NGOS

The most important actors to get involved in attempts of conflict resolution are the parties involved in the conflicts. They often need help from third parties, because if they would see a way out of the conflict, the conflict would already have ended. This help can come from NGOs acting as a neutral party. Not only are they often neutral, but, because of their worldwide experience, they are becoming increasingly efficient in conflict resolution. They are even capable of getting results when one of the conflicting parties is the state.[54]

NGOs can, through their local connections, find the causes of a conflict and decide what method to use. Because of their neutrality and their experience, they can organize workshops and peace talks, thereby bringing the conflicting parties together and helping them to find a solution to the conflict. NGOs also often have an international network, making it possible to put international pressure on governments and to provide humanitarian aid when necessary.

[54] Kumar Rupesinghe, "Theories of Conflict Resolution and Their Applicability To Protracted Ethnic Conflicts," *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 18, no. 4 (October 1, 1987): 538, https://doi.org/10.1177/096701068701800405.

After all, as we have seen in the second chapter, religion can be a dimension in a conflict, but there always are other issues at play as well.[55] A complete approach to conflict resolution should reflect this.

[55] Anthony Ware, "Context-Sensitive Development: How International NGOs Operate in Myanmar" (School of International and Political Studies, Deakin University, 2011).

4. METHODOLOGY

Before continuing with a description of the Nigeria and Myanmar cases, some words have to be spend on the methodology used. The chapters begin with a description of the history of and the conflict in these countries. The chapters then continue with a description of how NGOs involved with conflict resolution might use the religious dimension in these conflicts to find a solution. In this analysis some NGOs already active in the conflicted areas are discussed at as well, in order to see if they are using the methods presented in the third chapter of this thesis. To analyze these NGOs a method proposed by Marc Howard Ross was used. Three types of publications by these NGOs are analyzed to get a picture of the methods they claim to be using. There might be a difference between the methods they claim to be using, and how they are actually working, but a complete discussion of this would go beyond the scope of this thesis. The three types of publications are: (1) descriptions of the project and its conceptualization, as contained in project proposals and in books and articles that practitioners have written to outline their theory and method; (2) further publications by directors and key personal that elaborate on issues not described in the works concerning theory and method; and (3) detailed description by the project team of a project's specific activities. The first two sources of data describe the theory underlying a project, while the third source describes the actual operationalization of the theory, according to the project's practitioners.[56] If religion is one of the main focus points of an NGO, it most definitely will be reflected in these publications. In this part of the analysis, scholarly work concerning NGO work in the concerned areas was used as well.

The NGOs whose texts were analyzed were limited to ones focused on inter-communal relations. There are, for example, many NGOs only active in humanitarian aid following natural disasters, and those would not be relevant here. Both larger and smaller NGOs are considered, because, while the larger ones might have more international visibility and support, and thereby more power to act, the smaller NGOs have closer ties to local communities and can remain active even in times of conflict.[57] Further research in the

[56] Ross, "Creating the Conditions for Peacemaking," 1029. Concerning (3): Ross advices analyzing transcripts, videotapes, and notes, but due to space and time constraints, I only used the written material, more descriptions of practice can very likely be found on social media and online video platforms.
[57] Concerning local NGOs: Elizabeth Ferris, "Faith-Based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations.," *International Review of the Red Cross* 858 (June 2005): 322.

differences between NGOs, and what this means for their activities, would be an interesting subject for further study, but goes beyond the scope of this study.

5. THE SITUATION IN NIGERIA

5.1 OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT

Right now, Nigeria might be one of the most dangerous countries in the world to live in. While the number of deaths related to terrorism in Nigeria decreased with 3,100 between 2015 and 2016 due to an 80% decrease in killings by Boko Haram, the number of terrorism related deaths still counted 1,832 in 2016, and the country still ranks third on the Global Terrorism Index of 2016, just slightly below Iraq and Afghanistan. That there still are many people dying by terrorism related violence, is largely caused by the 12 other terrorist groups active in Nigeria.[58] Boko Haram is still a dangerous factor in the lives of Nigerian citizens. This can be seen in the Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED) which mentions 1,515 instances of violence in Nigeria in 2017, with a total of 4,323 fatalities. And while Boko Haram is only connected to 379 (25%) of these instances as primary (aggressor) or as secondary (defender) actor, these instances are responsible for 2,418 (56%) of the fatalities. Of these, 256 instances (68%) with 1693 fatalities (70%) had Boko Haram as defenders (being attacked or countered), which shows that the Nigeria society is becoming effective in countering this group.[59]

The Fragile States Index (FSI) of 2017 also shows that while the Nigerian situation has improved slightly, it is still placed thirteenth on this Index. The improvement is caused partly by an improved security apparatus (from 9.9 out of 10 in 2015 to 9.2 in 2017)[60], which supports the statement that the Nigerian society is becoming more effective in countering groups like Boko Haram. Other reasons for this improvement are a steady decline of human flight and brain drain since and a small decline in economic inequality and group grievance. Reasons why Nigeria is still ranked as high as thirteenth on the index are strong risers like economic decline, the worsening of human rights and rule of law, an increase in refugees and IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), and the constantly bad operating high-scorers like public services and state legitimacy.[61]

[58] "Global Terrorism Index 2017: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism," Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2017), 24.
[59] Clionadh Raleigh, ed., "Realtime Africa Data (2017)" (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2017), https://www.acleddata.com/data/realtime-data/.
[60] A lower score is better
[61] "Country Dashboard: Fragile States Index (Nigeria)" (Fund for Peace), accessed December 28, 2017, http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/country-data/.

Through a questionnaire among 400 randomly picked youths in the Delta State in Nigeria, researchers tried to find out what these youths believe the major causes of the conflicts in Nigeria are. Their findings were that struggling for land ownership, large scale corruption in the nation's political systems, and government approach in handling conflict are the major causes according to this state's youth.[62] A different research project looks at the influence of identity, ethnicity, and religion on conflict from 1999 to 2013. This research supports the statements of the youths and the findings in the FSI, by laying a big part of the blame at the feet of the politicians. They, through their corruption and inefficiency, caused a lack of good governance, national consolidation, and economic development, which in turn lead to political cleavages, social disintegration and, high levels of unemployment. This research project also lead to the finding that religion often playes a role in conflicts when religion gets connected with identity. Religion getting connected to identity can clearly be seen in two of the three largest tribes in Nigeria: the mostly Muslim Hausa-Fulani tribe in northern Nigeria, and the mostly Christian Igbo tribe in the south. The third tribe, the Yoruba tribe puts much less focus on religion as their identity marker. The reason why the Yoruba use ethnicity as a more important identity marker than religion might be that this tribe is made up of Christian and Muslim segments of almost equal size. A specific religious identity would therefore never include a majority of the tribe.[63]

Since religion is of importance in Nigeria it is important to see what the Nigerian religious landscape is like. Nigeria can be seen as a very religious country with 87% of the population describing themselves as very religious according to a 2010 Pew Research Rapport.[64] Christianity and Islam make up the majority of the people in Nigeria and while the official recent numbers are not always the same, there seems to be an almost equal division between Christians and Muslims. (Pew Forum 2009: 46% Christian, 52% Muslim, 1% Other/None; DHS 2008: 53% Christian, 45% Muslim, 2% Other/None; Afrobarometer 2008: 56% Christian, 43%

[62] Johnson Osagie et al., "Causes of Conflicts in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as Expressed by the Youth in Delta State," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. C (2010): 82–89, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.055.
[63] Haldun í‡ancÄ± and Opeyemi Adedoyin Odukova, "Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria," African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), August 29, 2016, http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-religious-crises-nigeria/.
[64] The numbers found through surveys like the Pew Research Rapport might not completely reflect how people identify, but only how they think they should identify. There is, however, no other way to get better findings, short of in dept interviews. The quantitative surveys are the next best thing.

Muslim, 1% Other/None).[65] Both majority religions are far from uniform, which makes it difficult do make any general statements concerning these groups.[66] Christians and Muslims also are not equally divided over the country. Generally speaking, in the north the majority is Muslim and in the southeast the majority is Christian. This causes the power relations in many parts of the country to be one of majority versus minority. If the majority wants to live under religious law, there is not much the minorities can do. If the minority wants to live under religious law, there is not much they can do to accomplish this. Such divisions might easily lead to conflicts. Of both groups, almost half says not to know a lot about the other religion, and while of the Muslims 60 percent claims to feel positive about Christians, of the Christians only 50 percent feels positive about their Muslim compatriots. When combined with the fact that 23 percent of the Christians claim that many, most, or all Muslims are hostile against Christians (compared to 16 percent the other way around), it is not difficult to imagine that there is a situation of fear between these groups. This is supported by the statistic that 50 percent of the Nigerians are concerned about religious extremist groups. 23 percent see Muslim groups as the biggest threat, while 15 percent are most afraid of Christian extremist groups, and 8 percent of both.[67] On the other hand, both Muslims and Christians consider it a good thing if both Christians and Muslims would be completely or somewhat free to practice their religion.[68] This does not necessarily mean that in their opinion every aspect of the other's religion should be allowed. It more likely means that they believe that the other religion, the way it is in their opinion, should be allowed. And as previously mentioned, many say that they don't know a lot about the other religion.

It would be way too easy to blame all conflict in Nigeria on religion. As the following field study at Boko Haram shows, religion is only one of the reasons for people to join a religious violent organization. In this field study with 119 former Boko Haram members and 60 peace builders, Anneli Botha and Mahdi Abdile show us that only 9.24% of the Boko Haram respondents mentioned religion as the main cause for joining the group, and 54.14% of the Boko haram respondents even stated that religion little or no influence on their decision to

[65] "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Washington: Pew Research Centre, April 15, 2010), 64, http://www.pewforum.org/2010/04/15/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa/.
[66] "Tolerance and Tension," 21–23.
[67] "Tolerance and Tension," 25–45.
[68] "Tolerance and Tension," 98.

join Boko Haram.[69] Other reasons for joining were poverty (15.13%), unemployment (5.88%), wanting to be respected (23.53%) or to belong (16.81%), revenge (male: 50%, female: 38.1%), and political motives (2.52%). This is all the more surprising if you consider that Boko Haram is widely considered to be a religious organization![70] These numbers, however, do not mean that religion does not play a large role in violent actions by Boko Haram. In official news outings Boko Haram still uses religious rhetoric and claims to want to be part of an Islamic State. While most people do not join Boko Haram for religious reasons, using religious arguments does legitimize the organization and gives it a reason to continue its fight against western influences.

For a complete picture of the role religion plays in the Nigerian conflict not only the current situation should be considered, but also the role of religion in the history of the nation and its inhabitants. According to Afe Adogame, three important phases can be discerned: a pre-colonial, a colonial, and a postcolonial era. The pre-colonial era was an era in which indigenous religions were the major players. While not saying that this era experienced less conflicts, religion was less of a factor. According to Adogame, religious conflict is a subset of religious competition, and since the indigenous religions are similar in their religious ideas, rituals, and worldviews there is less reason for competition and therefore less reason for conflict.[71] Religious competition is also the reason why religion began to play a larger role in the colonial and postcolonial eras. Islam and Christianity did not immediately take over and start to claim territory at a large scale, other than missionary work and trade (slaves among other 'things'). After the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 artificial national borders were created by European superpowers and inter-denominational borders followed. Missionary competition began between Catholics and Protestants and between the different Protestant missions. Next to the inter-denominational conflict the artificial borders also led to a scramble by the various communities for land and physical and mineral resources. Missionary initiatives

[69] Anneli Botha and Abdille Mahdi, "Getting behind the Profiles of Boko Haram Members and Factors Contributing to Radicalisation versus Working towards Peace" (Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, KAICIID, and Finn Church Aid, October 19, 2016), https://www.kaiciid.org/publications-resources/getting-behind-profiles-boko-haram-members-summary.
[70] "Who Are Boko Haram?," *BBC News*, November 24, 2016, sec. Africa, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501.
[71] Adogame, "Fighting for God or Fighting in God's Name! The Politics of Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria," 178, 188; Adogame, "How God Became a Nigerian," 490.

came with a forced implantation of western civilization and nationalism, leading converts to be estranged from family and tribe.[72]

Islam, having arrived in Nigeria in the eleventh century, spread mostly via trade creating a specific type of semi indigenous Hausa Islam in northern Nigeria. While at first a religion for merchants, towns, learned man, and the ruling class, Islam slowly became a religion for all classes. In the late seventeenth century it moved peacefully to parts of southwest Nigeria. The integration in the Yoruba culture over there, made this type of Islam different from north Nigerian Islam. In the nineteenth century, the century of modernization, reform movements characterized by militancy and a strict interpretation of the Qur'an spread through the region, as it did in other parts of the world. One of the aims of these reform movements was the creation of a caliphate with Sharia law, leading to a forced incorporation of other groups into these Islamic groups.[73] Over time Nigeria became a country with many forms of Islam. The interaction with different local cultures all created different types of Islam and so did all the much newer reform movements. All these movements are in competition with each other and, even more, in competition with Christian movements. Since religious conflict can be seen as a consequence of competition, all these different movements will necessarily increase the amount of conflicts, in some cases even becoming violent. Leading to the large number of violent deaths described earlier in this chapter.

To summarize: there are many conflicts in Nigeria leading to a large number of deaths. The causes of these conflicts have to do with a corrupt and inefficient government, although their ant-terrorism measures seem to be working, and with the fractioned ethnic and religious landscape, leading to conflicts over landownership, emancipation of the smaller ethnic and religious groups, and a struggle for power by the larger groups. Without any majority through a consensus between some of the larger tribes, a successful national government capable of unifying the country, seems highly unlikely, and an end to the conflict through government interference could not be further away. This is where the non-governmental organizations come into play. They, because of their political independence and their focus on human rights and wellbeing, appear ideally suited to bring various groups together by creating platforms for

[72] Adogame, "Fighting for God or Fighting in God's Name! The Politics of Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria," 181.
[73] Adogame, "How God Became a Nigerian," 481–84.

interaction between the groups and by motivating locals to look for ways to solve the conflicts.

5.2 METHODS FOR NGO'S DEALING WITH THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT

There are couple of ways an NGO can be useful in the Nigerian conflicts. The first way is by focusing on improving community relations. As the respondents of the Pew survey have mentioned, they don't know much about the other group. An improved knowledge of the other party would be very helpful for both parties in order to see if their preconceptions are incorrect or if they are spot on. Their negative perception of the other party might be correct. In the latter case this type of negotiation would not be very effective. This second scenario is possible because there are religious extremists in Nigeria. Getting to know them and their motivations might lead to an understanding, but most likely not to an acceptance of their activities. In cases where the conflict has not become violent yet, and where people just don't understand the other party because they don't know the story behind their beliefs and habits, conflict resolution with a focus on community relations is likely to be much more effective. An organization working in this way is the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC).

The IMC sees as its mission the use of an interfaith approach to ensure peaceful coexistence, irrespective of religious persuasion, and with respect for the faith of others. The method being used to accomplish this contains the following aspects: (1) advocacy visits to leaders to solicit their collaboration and support for IMC's programs; (2) training and capacity building of Faith Based Organizations to ensure their effectiveness; (3) direct mediation and crisis response; (4) interfaith media dialogue; and (5) the strengthening of an early warning and response system, which might help in the prevention of conflicts by gathering data beforehand.[74]

That this organization is effective can be seen in reports of their successful mediation efforts in Plateau state where Christians and Muslims were involved in a violent conflict costing hundreds of lives on both sides. To be even more effective they also trained religious youth leaders, using religious arguments as motivation for peace building efforts and as a way to

[74] "Our Work," Interfaith Mediation Centre, accessed June 7, 2018, http://www.imc-nigeria.org/our-work/.

create respect and recognition between the religions.[75] Since dialogue and mediation are the IMC's main tactics in the process of conflict resolution, the IMC conforms to general theory on conflict resolution. While they also do many other things to end the conflict, the 'direct mediation and crisis response' is exactly what the 'community relations', 'principled negotiation', and 'intercultural miscommunication' theories of practice propose as the best way to a solution. Mediation is one of their most important tactics, however, it is just one of their instruments and on itself not sufficient to solve the conflict.

The problems creating and upholding the conflict are not only caused by a lack of knowledge of the other groups, but also by the large amount of groups in competition with each other. This brings us to the second way how NGOs can be helpful in solving the Nigerian conflicts. By creating a platform where (religious) leaders can learn to respect the ideas and claims of other leaders, an NGO might help these leaders find some common ground, making sure that they won't feel like they have to compete with each other. Maybe even leading to the creation of a more open religious marketplace where people can go to services from multiple churches to find what they want or need for their personal lives. Faith based NGOs like church movements can play an especially influential role in this by helping people get used to interreligious interaction in their services and in other activities. Examples of these are the Ogbómòsó Society of Chrislam (OSC) and the Ogbómòsó Egúngún festival. Williams, researching these two organizations found that religious identifiers of their followers could be be fluid. Meaning that people can move from one religious identity to another and even have multiple religious identities at the same time. While this sounds as nice solution to conflict these people are seen as a problem by other groups, causing these people to fear for religious prosecution.[76] The people with a fluid religious identity have learned to respect the different religious traditions, causing the multi religious faith based organizations to be helpful in conflict resolution, but in the eyes of strict adherents to only one religion, they may be the dangerous other.

A third way NGOs in Nigeria might help is through principled negotiation. Since one of the root causes of the conflict is the feeling not being taken serious by the government, ending

[75] "Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War," 17–24.
[76] Corey L. Williams, "Interreligious Encounter in a West African City: A Study of Multiple Religious Belonging and Identity among the Yorùbá of Ogbómòsó, Nigeria" (Ph.D., The University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom), 2016), 215, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1937397586?pq-origsite=primo.

the conflict and working together might help these small groups in the creation of a bigger profile and a stronger voice when dealing with government officials and actions. Shared human needs, like freedom of religion and identity, are present and not repressed in Nigeria and the human needs theory, therefore, is not applicable to this conflict. The same is the case with the theory of practice of psychoanalytically informed identity. This theory states that conflicts are created and upheld by individuals identifying with a group that experiences the feeling of past loss and is not able to grieve. In Nigeria, there might be some traumas in the history of ethnic and religious groups, but they don't appear to be the main reason for the conflicts.

Addressing the religious dimension in conflict resolution might be useful to bring parties closer together. Letting them participate in religious rituals together can create a bond through a recognition of the importance of faith for both parties. Religion can also be used to bring all parties to the table with religious calls for peacemaking. One last way the religious dimension may be used in peacemaking efforts in Nigeria, is by using the religious community leaders who, through their position, can influence people to come together and to come up with peaceful solutions to the conflict. This is true for the IMC, who's founders both are religious authorities, but also for many other Nigerian NGOs.

Next to the already mentioned organizations there are many other NGOs active in Nigeria. According to the Nigeria page of the Commonwealth Network there are 38 international NGOs (INGOs) and 81 national NGOs and civil society movements active in Nigeria.[77] This list, however, is incomplete. An organization like the IMC is not even mentioned. NGOs that are mentioned and that are active in conflict resolution are the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN) and the Catholic Justice, Development, and Peace Centre (JDPC). Both of them focusing on training people in conflict resolution and mediation, on capacity building, and on empowerment of target communities.[78] An example of a CEPAN activity is its training of youths in plateau state. The aim of this training was to prevent youths from being recruited in extremist groups. The way the religious dimension was used by this NGO can be seen in the

[77] "Nigeria," Commonwealth of Nations, accessed July 16, 2018, http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/sectors-nigeria/civil_society/.
[78] "Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN) | Peace Insight," accessed July 16, 2018, https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/nigeria/peacebuilding-organisations/cepan/; "JUSTICE, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE CENTRE (JDPC) | Catholic Diocese of Sokoto," accessed July 16, 2018, https://catholicdiocese-sokoto.org/jdpc.

keynote lecture of this training, where was mentioned: "Both Christian and Muslim preach peace, therefore, religion should be used as positive tool to resolved all the crisis we are witnessing in Nigeria and Plateau State by using the Holy scripture we claimed to believe in, to preach peace and promote oneness, and tolerance of one another without discrimination."[79] Here the religious dimension is used to show how there is a common goal in both religious communities. This common goals is peace.

[79] Yusufu Aminu Idegu and Jos, "CEPAN Trains Plateau Youths on Peace Building," *The Nation Nigeria* (blog), April 14, 2018, http://thenationonlineng.net/cepan-trains-plateau-youths-on-peace-building/.

6. THE SITUATION IN MYANMAR

The conflict in Myanmar is a very complicated one and the problems related to reporting on the Rohingya crisis (lack of access, difficulties concerning translations and translators, sources with hidden agendas) don't make it any easier to describe the history, players, and motives in this conflict.[80] Discovering the religious dimension in the Myanmar conflict also is more difficult than finding it in Nigeria. In Myanmar the religious dimension is almost completely hidden behind the ethnic and the nationalist dimensions. However, even if it is difficult and even if the knowledge of the Myanmar conflict is incomplete, finding a method for NGOs trying to solve the conflicts will require some background information.

6.1 STATE INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONFLICT

The history of Myanmar conflicts goes back to the independence of Burma, as Myanmar was then called, from Great Britain in 1948. The current conflict, however, began in 2012 with the rape of a Buddhist woman, allegedly by Muslim men, the revenge killing of ten Muslim men, and the subsequent violence leading to the death of over 200 people and the destruction of many houses.[81] The political and social situation surrounding this conflict has been called a case of 'apartheid' by Amnesty International, as they described how the Myanmar government played, and still plays, a major part in this violent situation. This is most visible in violations of the human rights of the minorities in Rakhine state, especially those of the Rohingya population. First, there is the denial of the right to a nationality. Especially the 1982 Citizenship Law is significant, because it excludes the Rohingya population from being a recognized as a national race, and therefore also denies their citizenship rights and status. Full citizenship is not possible for the Rohingya, but they can apply for the lesser forms of associate or naturalized citizenship. This process of applying for citizenship is made very difficult by the use of household lists, from which someone can very easily be removed, and, in some villages, it is very hard to get your newborn children on this list. Without this documentation it is almost impossible to apply for an NVC, a National Verification Card. An NVC does not guarantee the holder citizenship, but it does show that he or she is in the

[80] Lisa Brooten and Yola Verbruggen, "Producing the News: Reporting on Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 440–460, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1303078.
[81] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State." (Amnesty International Ltd, November 21, 2017), 22, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/document/?indexNumber=asa16%2f7484%2f2017&language=en.

process of applying for citizenship, and it serves as a way to identify an individual.[82] Second, freedom of movement is restricted for Rohingya and other Muslim communities. Since 2012 Rohingya are only allowed to travel outside of Rakhine state in cases of serious medical emergencies. To travel between townships travel permits are needed and in northern Rakhine State movement between villages is often restricted. In any case one has to be back home at night, or pay for permission to stay somewhere else. In central Rahkhine state Muslims are effectively banned form town centers and ethnic Rakhine villages. In the Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships of northern Rakhine State a curfew has been in effect since 2012, which restricts movement even more. The restricted movement between the villages and townships is enforced by fixed and not-fixed checkpoints, usually staffed by BGP (Border Guard Patrol). Extortion and physical violence by these security forces is not uncommon.[83] Third, the rights to health, education, livelihoods, and food are violated. Access to healthcare is restricted because of the previously mentioned movement restrictions. Even when Muslims are able to reach a hospital, like the large hospital in Sitwe, they are not allowed to take their mobile phones with them, making it difficult for them to inform their families of what is going on. In the hospital they will be put in a segregated ward, often unable to understand what the doctors are saying, because of their language differences. The movement restrictions naturally also influence access to education, especially higher education which might be outside of Rakhine State, and therefore unreachable for Rohingya students. The violence between the people living in Rakhine State, especially the fear of violence, causes a segregation of the various communities. Rohingya children are often not allowed to attend school, because of the non-Rohingya children studying there. And out of fear of violence many teachers stay away from areas with only Rohingya people. The movement restrictions also mean that city markets and farm lands can't be reached, which makes it much more difficult for Rohingya to grow, buy, or sell food and other goods. This leads to poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition.[84] Lastly, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is violated by restrictions put on worship by the Myanmar government. Mosques are being destroyed, and repairs of mosques have been restricted. The call to prayer is forbidden in many places, with as argument that this call might lead to

[82] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State.," chap. 2.
[83] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State.," chap. 3.
[84] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State.," chap. 4.

violence, and actual religious meetings are in some places, especially in northern Rakhine State, almost impossible because of the curfew rules.[85] All of these measures taken by the Myanmar authorities appear to have as goal a separation of the Rohingya population from other groups in society by hindering their movement and limiting their public visibility. By doing so they are committing inhumane acts against the members of a racial group, in a context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining dominance (according to the government officials: 'to prevent conflict', which of course might go hand in hand with establishing dominance), and as part of a widespread and systematic attack. According to Amnesty International, this makes the Myanmar government actions illegal according to international law.[86]

The conflict has also been called 'growing toward genocide' since many of its intentions and characteristics are in accordance with the definition of genocide in article six of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.[87]

6.2 COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

A series of articles, published in the Journal of Contemporary Asia, also looked at the violence in Myanmar, but instead of focusing on state actors, these articles chose to focus on the causes of communal violence in Myanmar, realizing that the outbursts of violence were not caused by government actors alone.

There are a couple of reasons why the anti-Muslim discourse in Myanmar, which lies at the core of the conflict, spread as quickly as it did. First, the new post-2008 situation of contentious politics of Myanmar made it possible for Buddhist and Rakhine political parties to increase their influence. Contentious politics is a type of politics that does not focus on an entire community, but rather on actors like individuals or organizations capable of building coalitions and mobilizing people behind an ideal. Second, throughout history there had been a feeling that Buddhism was under threat. It did not take a lot of effort to make this belief of danger salient once more, and to describe the Muslims as the main threat. Third, there were

[85] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State.," chap. 5.
[86] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State.," chap. 6.
[87] Aulia Rosa Nasution, "The Crime of Genocide on the Rohingya Ethnic in Myanmar from the Perspective of International Law and Human Rights," *Padjadjaran Journal of Law (PJIH)* 5, no. 1 (May 13, 2018): 182–206; "Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court," ICC: Resource Library, 1998, https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library#legal-texts.

social movements, like the 969 movement, with the monk U Wirathu as one of their prominent actors, and the Buddhist nationalist MaBaTha movement, that could easily use the volatile situation in Myanmar to bring various, previously unrelated, groups together in support of their nationalist and anti-Muslim agenda. They succeeded in bringing the military and influential elements within the *sanga,* the Buddhist community, together. Just like they succeeded in aligning the political ideals of some nationalists and pro-regime activists with the religious concerns of many ordinary citizens.[88]

These organizations active in brokering deals and aligning the ideals of various groups with the Myanmar society, made use of strong anti-Muslim narratives to reinforce anti-Muslim beliefs and even to create new memories of Muslims as a fearsome other.[89] They caused a switch from the idea of 'fear of the other', which is no more than fear of the unknown, to 'the other is fearsome', which is the idea that the other necessarily is to be feared. When the other, in this case the Muslim population, is made fearsome, any encounter with this other is potentially dangerous, and any aggressive act in opposing the other could be seen as virtuous self-defense.[90] This narrative, however, should be very convincing, because in cases where people remember positive encounters with Muslim co-citizens, they might be open for a positive view of this minority group in their society.

Another way anti-Muslim rhetoric was used to create a split in society, was the creation and spread of rumors concerning the violence committed by Muslim men against Buddhist women. While it is true that such violent acts did happen, the rape and murder of a Rakhine Buddhist woman on May 28, 2012 by "Bengali Muslims" being one of the best known, it was the use of these events in painting a negative picture of Muslim people in general, which was most effective in the creation of fear. Since the 1930s Muslim men have been seen as dangerous for Buddhist women, and the post 2012 rhetoric found, because of this history, a fertile ground.[91] When the idea of dangerous Muslims men attacking Buddhist women had

[88] Gerry van Klinken and Su Mon Thazin Aung, "The Contentious Politics of Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 367, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1293133.
[89] Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton, and Phyu Phyu Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, Narrative Making and Memory in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 380–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1290818.
[90] Schissler, Walton, and Thi, 385–86.
[91] Gerard McCarthy and Jacqueline Menager, "Gendered Rumours and the Muslim Scapegoat in Myanmar's Transition," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 401–3.

been planted, it became easy to extrapolate this idea to the idea of a dangerous Islam, which had to be opposed whatever the cost. Policy could be created to create a strong anti-Islamic state and to strengthen the borders to keep Muslim Bangladeshi out. Finally, the spread of rumors concerning the perceived common enemy could be used to demonstrate the commitment to a nationalist cause and thereby strengthen the bonds of social solidarity and shared community.[92] So in one way these gendered rumors split society, but it also created more cohesion between and within the non-Muslim groups.

It is not the case that the government of Myanmar did not respond to this communal violence, but their response was quite ineffective. This ineffectiveness, however, was not only the fault of the members of Myanmar's legislature. The building blocks for conflict were already in place with the mistrust of Muslims, fear of the other and people willing to use violence in order to get a Buddhist society. As we will see, the main problem with the legislative response is that it was unable and unwilling to combat these building blocks of conflict effectively.

Win and Kean mention six criteria that can be used when analyzing legislative response (pro-activeness, institutional mechanisms, partisanship, executive oversight, community engagement, and legislation) and all of them show that the legislative response was present in Myanmar, but that it also was constrained. In the case of pro-activeness, the legislative body first convened in 2011, and in the cases of communal violence it took some time to introduce this issue to the legislative agenda, causing the new legislation to be too late to have an impact in halting the violence. Also, creating new legislation when the tensions in society are high, as is the case when there is an outburst of communal violence, may be very risky for the people involved in the creation of this new legislation. They could be accused of collaborating with one of the parties involved. In the case of institutional mechanisms, Myanmar's legislative body encountered some constraints as well. Recurring communal violence was more a short term problem, while legislation was per definition more focused on the long term. Partisanship was something the members of the legislature tried to avoid. This made sure that many radical partisan laws were prevented, but it also caused many important topics related to the communal violence not to be discussed, leading to a lack of legislation to prevent this type of violence in the long term. Executive oversight was something the

[92] McCarthy and Menager, 405–7.

legislative body did not want to get involved with at all. Possibly because the executive branch was considered the domain of the military and not of the law makers. While it could be possible for lawmakers to be more involved with the executive oversight opportunities of their position, 25 percent of both houses of government are reserved for unelected military representatives and they might not like the idea of giving up the executive power the military possesses. At the area of community engagement the lawmakers could have done better. Community outreach was almost non-existent. All in the name of avoiding any appearance of being partial or causing the conflict to get even worse. On the issue of creation of legislation, the legislators failed to approve any laws which would prevent the outbreak of future communal violence, and in the end they created laws favoring the Buddhist ultra-nationals and hurting Muslim minorities.[93]

6.3 METHODS FOR NGOS DEALING WITH THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT

When we consider the situation mentioned above, and when we look at the general theory concerning conflict resolution and the use of a religious dimension, there are a couple of ways in which NGOs involved with conflict resolution can be effective in Myanmar. A preliminary remark to be made is that NGOs in their attempts to solve the conflicts should take into account that the government of Myanmar might try to hinder them for reasons they would call 'the prevention of further conflict', but which Amnesty International would call 'separation of the Rohingya Muslim population from larger society in an apartheid-like way'. The method most likely to bring any good results will involve a focus on intercommunal relations.

As described earlier in this chapter, there still is a lot to be achieved concerning community relations in Myanmar. The 'community relations' theory of practice appears, therefore, very applicable. When Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhist are being brought together so they can talk to and about each other, it won't take long for them to realize that not all Muslims are dangerous fanatics and that not all Buddhists want to destroy the Rohingya population. It would also likely lead to the realization that there are influential people and newspapers in

[93] Chit Win and Thomas Kean, "Communal Conflict in Myanmar: The Legislature's Response, 2012–2015," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 431–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1291847.

Myanmar that are spreading fake news concerning the Muslim non-citizens.[94] The creation of ethnic institutions might also lead to a sense of community for the minority population, giving them a stronger and more confident voice. The religious dimension in this conflict is strongly connected to the ethnic dimension, but by telling about their religious beliefs during dialogue with the Buddhists, the Muslims may be able to explain the importance of their mosques and of their religious gatherings. If this sharing would be successful, and if the Myanmar government agrees to do some concessions (lifting unnecessary curfews, for example), the Muslim minority might get some trust in the good intentions of their Buddhist neighbors.

While the theory of principled negotiation can often be difficult to apply when a religious dimension is concerned, there might be a way this method can be effective in Myanmar. When, if the government allows it, various parties in Rakhine State agree to talk with each other they might realize that there are some common interests. Religious freedom, after all, is not the only issue for the Rohingya people. They also have a shortage of money, food, housing, and movement opportunities. The Rakhine Buddhist population, while in a much better position, are equally far from wealthy. They too have lived in fear for their lives, caused by attacks by the radical Muslim ARSA movement, and they, just like the Rohingya suffered from under-development, lack of infrastructure, and lack of economic and political power. Lastly, just like the Rohingya, the Rakhine are afraid of losing their culture, which is a minority culture in Myanmar. Realizing these common fears and problems can lead to the creation of positive sum agreements between the parties. This is also in accordance with the 'human needs' theory of practice, since having and proclaiming an ethnic and religious identity is a human need for both parties.[95] The religious dimension in the conflict in Myanmar is far from the main issue, but since a lot of the rhetoric mentions religion as an important factor, any debate concerning shared ideals and conflicting ideas will be fruitless when the religious dimension is being ignored. U Wirathu's statements concerning a Buddhist homeland and aggressive Muslim propaganda from all over the world should be discussed as well in order to convince both parties that the people they are talking with don't necessarily conform to everything they have heard about either Buddhists or Muslims.[96]

[94] McCarthy and Menager, "Gendered Rumours and the Muslim Scapegoat in Myanmar's Transition"; Schissler, Walton, and Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions."
[95] "Myanmar: 'Caged without a Roof': Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State.," 24,26.
[96] Walton, "Religion and Violence in Myanmar"; *Rumiyah*.

Using the theory of practice which focusses on psychoanalytically rooted identity might lead to some interesting results. There is a lot of loss and suffering on the side of the Rohingya to be resolved, but the fear of loss might also be felt among the non-Muslim Myanmar citizens. Interviews with Buddhist Myanmar citizens show a fear for Muslims, and while they have not suffered in the same way, they do experience fear, which is unrecognized by the other, the Muslim, party.[97] The religious dimension concerned with this type of conflict resolution is clearly visible. Throughout recent history the people adhering to the religious identity 'Muslim' experienced loss of freedom and loss of people. When other citizens realize the loss their co-citizens experienced, and if they agree to accept this as a real problem and if they want a solutions, this method might work. There also is some intercultural miscommunication between the disputing parties, since they often, especially in Rakhine state, live completely separated from each other. If this is the case a third party might not be necessary to bring the parties together and to explain the differences. The important party here would be the government, because only they can allow the different groups to mingle, and only they can allow documentation for the Rohingya people, who are, up to now, not an officially recognized ethnicity in Myanmar.[98] The role an NGO can play here is to convince the government to make these concessions, and to organize meetings between the groups. This way the groups can share and explain their beliefs and habits.

Conflict transformation might be effective as well, as long as the government is one of the parties involved in the talks. When all groups are brought together, and if they are really interested in finding a solution to this conflict, according to this theory, they will accomplish moral growth, leading to a changed relationship, increased justice, and reconciliation. This only seems not very likely, since the conflict is not necessarily bad for the Buddhist nationalists. And the government at the moment has a grip on the situation and doesn't appear to be planning anything which might anger the Buddhist party and cause a worsening of the conflict. This important role for the government will have to be dealt with in ever type of conflict resolution, and this is why an NGO, or any actor, trying to solve this conflict must have considerable international power in order to convince the Myanmar government to opt for peace. What all parties attempting to solve this conflict should keep in mind is that only

[97] Schissler, Walton, and Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions."
[98] Ware, "Context-Sensitive Development: How International NGOs Operate in Myanmar," 197.

improving community relations won't necessarily end the conflict when other problems connected to the conflict are not being dealt with.

6.4 NGO ACTIVITY

There is a lot of NGO activity in Myanmar. Many of the NGOs do not concern themselves with the conflict in Rakhine State. They have other, equally important, priorities like emergency relief in the area hit by the cyclone Nargis, financial transparency and accountability, gender equality and women's rights, HIV/AIDS prevention and help, or they work as an overarching organization which helps other NGOs to work together in the most effective way. These organizations receive support from the Myanmar government, which shows that the government is trying to improve the situation in Myanmar for many different groups. This can also be seen in the ways they solved conflicts with armed ethnic minorities through ceasefires and negotiations.[99] The progress made by the government in these areas makes it even more surprising that no solution appears to be looked for in the case of the Rohingya crisis. This can be explained by democratic pressure on the government to keep the status quo, and fear by the government that when they improve the position of the Rohingya populations they might run into trouble with groups they don't have a strong grip on, which would increase the conflicts and violence in the country. In the current situation they can use the argument that they are protecting the civilian populations, both Muslims and Buddhists, from each other.

Of the NGOs who concern themselves with the conflicts in Myanmar some only report on the conflict, like the International Crisis Group and Amnesty International, while others actually get involved with attempts to find a solution to the conflict. The youth peace movement 'The Seagull' can be mentioned here. According to the founder of this movement, Harry Myo Lin in an interview with The Elders, the root causes of the recent increase of conflict in Myanmar are as follows: 'Our country was closed off for a very long time. We didn't really have any exposure to other communities, to real news and to what's happening around the world. I think a root cause of hate speech is the lack of knowledge and trust between each group. I also think that some people misuse people's love for their religion; some use it as a political

[99] "Civil Society Briefs: Myanmar" (Asian Development Bank, February 20, 2015), Myanmar, https://www.adb.org/publications/civil-society-briefs-myanmar; "Myanmar: Country Information Links," Peacemakers Trust, accessed June 6, 2018, http://www.peacemakers.ca/research/SoutheastAsia/MyanmarLinks.html.

tool.' His organization, most active on Facebook, sees the solution to this in interfaith and intercommunity dialogue, not only between leaders, but also between people at the community level. The belief is that when people are engaged with each other and when they learn about other communities, trust and understanding will follow. Other activities by 'The Seagull' are the promotion of peace, democracy, and development, speaking out against human rights violations, and aiding in the publication of human rights reports about Myanmar.[100] It is difficult to find attempts by this organization to organize inter-communal dialogue which can mean that they operate more under the radar, or that they work in a more informal manner. It does not mean that 'Seagull' is ineffective. That they work more 'under the radar' might be a good thing in a context where people who are believed to be friends of Muslims will not get a very nice treatment.

Of the larger NGOs active in Myanmar, many are International NGOs (INGOs). Much of their work is aimed at extreme poverty alleviation in rural villages. To accomplish this they place emphasis on highly participatory development. They hope to create independent local daughter organizations capable of continuing their work in the long-term. Equity is their second central concept. They believe that everyone should be treated fairly and as equals. Equal treatment for all groups in society would remove one of the main reasons for the conflict in Myanmar: the inequal treatment (not being allowed their own identity) of Rohingya people. Their third central concept is sensitivity to the local context. By facilitating negotiations and consensus decision-making skills, by working to strengthen both bonding and bridging social capital, and by working together with religious organizations, these INGOs do their best to further peacebuilding. The final central concept of these INGOs is the use of the local language. Being able to speak to both local people and government officials without having to use a translator is a good way to get people to trust you and to convince them of the usefulness of starting a dialogue.[101] Some examples of INGOs working in this manner are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Graceworks Myanmar (GWM), the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, and Hope International Development Agency. While these organizations mostly focus on countering social division and exclusion, their use of a participatory and holistic approach makes sure that they recognize the value and importance

[100] "Fostering Interfaith Trust and 'Right Speech' in Myanmar," The Elders, accessed June 6, 2018, https://theelders.org/article/fostering-interfaith-trust-and-right-speech-myanmar.
[101] Ware, "Context-Sensitive Development: How International NGOs Operate in Myanmar," 192.

of the religious dimension in both the problems and in the solutions. The reason why they can be effective is, according to Mark Duffield, their strict adherence to the humanitarian concepts of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.[102]

[102] "Graceworks: Mission, Purpose, Values," Graceworks Myanmar, accessed July 16, 2018, https://www.graceworksmyanmar.org.au/mission.php.

7. NGOS AND THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF CONFLICTS

In this thesis we have seen that very often in conflicts a religious dimension can be found. We have also seen that this dimension doesn't have to be the main reason for the conflict, but that it always plays an important role. It can fuel or legitimize conflict and it can serve as a motivator to end conflict. Even though religion plays an important role in conflicts, it is only one aspect of the conflict. This means that religion can only be part of the solution. Other aspects have to be considered and dealt with as well.

NGOs are be the perfect parties to aid in bringing a conflict to an end, because of their focus on humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. One of their main strategies for conflict resolution is mediation. This is an important method in dealing with intergroup misconceptions and a useful method for bringing people together, but when other problems feeding the conflict are not resolved, a solution will not be found. This explains why there are not many NGOs that only focus on a religious dimension of conflicts, or that only use mediation to solve a conflict. For an NGO to be successful in conflict resolution with a religious dimension it has to focus on the other dimensions as well, or it has to work together with other NGOs that are taking care of the other dimensions.

In the cases studies of Nigeria and Myanmar religion plays a major role as identity marker for opposing parties. In Nigeria Christians and Muslims are in conflict with each other, and in Myanmar the conflict is between Buddhists and Muslims. While in Nigeria the conflict is between parties of approximate equal size, in Myanmar the Muslim Rohingya population is a minority, which makes it understandable that NGOs are using different approaches to these conflicts. Where they do use the same method is in their solutions to inter-communal tensions. Both in Nigeria and in Myanmar workshops are organized where both parties in the conflict can come together to see if and why their fears for the other are unfounded, and why working together will lead to better results for both parties. Through dialogue fears and misconceptions about the other group are be taken away, leading to a more peaceful interaction.

The biggest part of most NGO involvement, however, is not mediation but it is advising and training people to improve their own situation. It also is making sure that people have their basic needs like housing, food, and access to healthcare and education. It is making sure that

the government treats all groups justly. Lastly, NGO's are often active in finding international sponsors for money and support. Mediation is an important, but minor, aspect of the complete package of NGO involvement. This is also the answer to the main question of this thesis. To be really effective an NGO focusing on the religious dimension in conflicts and in conflict resolution should focus on other dimensions as well. The conflicts, after all, are not caused by one thing in particular, but by a combination of many different factors. To increase its efficiency an NGO can use a religious dimension in its own efforts of conflict resolution, either by using religious language, or by organizing religious activities for the people they are trying to help. As mentioned, mediation is also an important part of NGO activity, but it can only be really effective if other methods are used as well.

As a concluding remark I should say that many of the NGOs active in these two countries don't have a website and are not present on social media. A complete analysis of their activities is therefore impossible without fieldwork. This is an area where further research might prove interesting.

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