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FAITH, SECULARISM, AND HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT

Finding the Place of Religion
in the Support of Displaced
Communities

Alastair Ager and Joey Ager

▶ **Faith, Secularism, and Humanitarian Engagement**

Religion and Global Migrations

Series Editors: Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Jennifer B. Saunders, and Susanna Snyder

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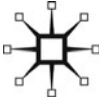
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Preface

The vision for this book has evolved over a remarkable decade in which religion has emerged from being something of a taboo issue, in discussions of development and humanitarian strategy, to an increasingly mainstream topic of debate. This evolution reflects many forces and, as we will argue, often constitutes a co-option of religion to serve existing agendas, rather than as a means to radically reappraise existing understandings. Nonetheless, we greatly welcome engagement in this subject as an opportunity to explore issues ranging from the management of pluralism in a globalized world to the means of enabling a fully humane humanitarian response to circumstances of forced migrants.

The emergence of religion as a legitimate topic for discussion concerning humanitarian strategy means that some of our attention in this book can be directed at identifying means to enable more effective humanitarian engagement with local faith communities and their agendas, interests and capacities. We thank the many individuals and organizations that have helped us explore these issues in recent years, including Helen Stawski (Lambeth Palace and latterly, Islamic Relief Worldwide), Joel Hafvenstein (Tearfund), Yossi Ives (Tag International), Khalid Roy (Islamic Relief Worldwide), Nigel Timmins (Oxfam) and many other members of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, as well as Toby Volkman of the Luce Foundation (which supported fieldwork in Jordan on which we draw in this volume). We are grateful for the mentorship of Kevin Malone, Executive Director of

the San Diego Organizing Project, and the grassroots Latinas and Latinos (Teresa, Tony, Lita, and many others) who live out the meaning of faith-based community organizing every day in North San Diego County.

Our argument suggests that the current conceptualization of engagement with religion generally reflects an uncritical acceptance of a secular framing. Much current thinking displays both a weak appreciation of the dynamics of religion, and of the contributions to contemporary scholarship from fields as diverse as theology, sociology and political science. In this context, we are grateful to Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh for the invitation to the Refugee Studies Centre meeting on faith-based humanitarianism, held at Oxford University in 2010—that first projected us into our writings in this area; to Bryant Myers (formerly of World Vision) for his facilitation of an invitation to present the Missiology Lecture Series at Fuller Theological Seminary in 2013; and to Cecilia Lynch of UC Irvine, whose contribution as discussant for those lectures pushed us to more direct consideration of issues of power and legitimacy within our analysis. A number of other academics contributed—knowingly or unknowingly—to our thinking through seminar presentations and discussions. These include John Torpey from CUNY, Tim Shah and Katherine Marshal from the Berkley Center at Georgetown, Michael Barnett from George Washington University and Alister McGrath from Oxford.

Finally, we deeply appreciate the family and friends that have supported and encouraged us in this endeavor. Special thanks to Ken Ross and his formative influence though coordinating the Faith and Knowledge seminar series at the University of Malawi in the 1990s. We are grateful for the many young socially engaged activists—Sojourners interns and CARE leadership program alums among them—that have chivvied us along in our writing. Charlie Bevan has represented our core target reader for us, throughout: committed to social justice, intellectually informed and critical, deeply sensitive to the diversity of local representations of faith. We also acknowledge the challenges and tensions—but ultimately the deep joy and satisfaction—of writing as an inter-generational team of father and son. Dialoguing on issues of reason, faith and power extended many of our prior personal understandings and perspectives. Our deepest appreciation to Wendy and Emily for helping to promote and contain that dialectic and for their continuing encouragement.

Prologue

Faith. Secularism. Humanitarian engagement. The terms that comprise the title of this book are drawn from very different discourses which commonly address very different concerns by very different disciplines. However, the central contention of this volume is that, in the contemporary global context of forced migration, grappling with these concepts—and especially the linkages between them—is vital in shaping appropriate approaches to the support of displaced communities.

Humanitarian engagement refers to the broad range of strategies that may be adopted to address the welfare of populations affected by adversity. Here we are principally interested in populations displaced by war, conflict or disaster. In these circumstances, humanitarian needs are on a scale so extensive that the response typically involves a significant degree of international coordination. The central concerns of global humanitarianism today consider how to deploy resources from multiple international partners, how these relate to the resources and responsibilities of national governments, and how all of this links to the needs and capacities of the displaced communities themselves and of the local communities with whom they reside.

Secularism is a form of both constitutional arrangement and political philosophy that governs approaches to religious plurality. As a principle within international relations, it can be traced back to the Peace of Westphalia secured in the 17th century through a series of treaties which established the principles of sovereign states. Contemporarily, it is understood as a strategy to establish principles and

a shared language through which diverse groups—of varying religious traditions and none—can work to achieve common goals. In these terms it is not surprising, given the complexity of actors engaged in humanitarian response noted above, that it is a secular framework which has come to characterize the goals, standards and processes of the contemporary humanitarian regime.

'Faith' is a term widely used to refer to the allegiance of an individual or group to a certain religious tradition. Religious organizations were active in the founding and scaling-up of the contemporary international humanitarian regime: the religious impulse is acknowledged as a common spur to humanitarian action (including in many traditions in the global south). The now widespread categorization of certain agencies active in humanitarian work as 'faith-based organizations' (or, latterly, 'faith-inspired organizations') sees the term 'faith' used as the principle marker of religious affiliation, which is a convention we follow here. However, analysis is not appropriately constrained to the idea of faith as a matter of belief (a formulation that favors a narrow post-Christian understanding). It is social, contextual, historical and lived religion that is of relevance here. And its principal relevance for us in this book has less to do with the agendas and resources of international organizations that draw from a religious affiliation and much more with the agendas and resources of the displaced and refugee-hosting communities themselves.

The key interaction between faith and the humanitarian engagement with which we are concerned is thus not the *introduction* of a faith agenda into humanitarian contexts; rather it is the greater *recognition* of faith as being on the agenda of many refugee and conflict-affected populations as a key source of identity, coping and recovery. With improved engagement with local resources and institutions a major theme of the current humanitarian reform process, exploring more effective means of working with local faith communities is of clear relevance. However, it also represents a major challenge. A secular frame has widely been seen as the key foundation to position the language, goals and processes of humanitarianism outside and above the fray of conflicting beliefs and ideologies. Can meaningful engagement with religion be accommodated within this structure, or does secularism inevitably disempower and marginalize religious perspectives and resources? Or does this secular framing of humanitarian action itself require adjustment to accommodate religious engagement in what some see as a dawning post-secular age? These are some of the key questions we seek to explore in the following pages.

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Why Humanitarianism Doesn't Get Religion … and Why It Needs To

Abstract: *Religion has long been a major influence on humanitarianism. However, forces of globalization, professionalization and secularization established a clear secular framing for global humanitarian action through the 20th century. This secular approach serves to confine religion to the private sphere, marginalize it from strategic influence and limit its contribution to actions that instrumentally serve secular priorities. While there is now renewed interest in establishing partnership with faith groups as a means of strengthening local humanitarian engagement, the presumptions of this secular framing continue. Charles Taylor's analysis of secularism as a particular form of Western thought helps to locate two fundamental presumptions of contemporary humanitarianism: modernity and neutrality. These are shown to be fragile bases for formulating humanitarian strategy for the realities of the 21st century.*

Keywords: *instrumentalization; marginalization; modernity; neutrality; privatization; secularization*

On the schedule it was listed as any other stakeholder consultation. We had meetings with multiple groups planned as part of the situation analysis of child protection in North Darfur. This included numerous meetings with children themselves, of course, both those displaced by the ongoing conflict, to IDP camps like this one on the outskirts of El Fasher, and those living in towns swollen and tense as a result of such migration. But the analysis needed to be appropriately informed by discussions with the many adults whose actions and agendas shaped the experience of these children: parents, teachers, animators, volunteers, police and the like. This meeting with sheiks and umars packing into the meeting tent represented our commitment to engaging with religious leaders on the question of the threats to the well-being of children in the camp and the appropriate means to ensure their protection. With consistency our goal, we ran through the framing questions that we had used in previous meetings. We were received respectfully and patiently. The usual list of concerns about food, shelter, health and education emerged, articulated in terms familiar to all humanitarians and refugee populations. It had been a useful, confirmatory meeting. It was nearly done. But my brief speech offering thanks for their time and insight prompted an unanticipated diversion from the planned agenda. The speaker rose to his feet and began with echoing thanks. However, before the interpreter had put this into words for me, I could sense a shift in tone and intensity. Murmurs and gestures signaled that the assembly was swiftly aligning itself with the man's sentiments. The translation remained a sentence or two behind the surging narrative, but it was clear that, while my concern for children was appreciated, the Western lens through which I viewed childhood was not. I had introduced a 'khawja'[1] curriculum for children in activity centers. I had not valued the duties of children expected within Islam. I had not facilitated securing copies of the Qur'an to enable the proper upbringing of children. There was more animation in the meeting on this topic than any other but, insecure on this theme, I redoubled my attempts at thanks and closed the discussion. I tried to explain that I was not responsible for the activity centers myself; I stated that I didn't represent any humanitarian agency but was rather working to highlight the needs of communities in Darfur to humanitarian agencies. Even as I spoke, this seemed a rather facile distinction. I was, after all, part of the humanitarian infrastructure. It was an infrastructure that provided no space for discussions of faith and religion. That was dangerous territory in Darfur—or indeed, anywhere. The irony was that, as a person of faith, I had accepted this position so readily and uncritically.

The discussion with the sheiks and umars was duly recorded, but did not significantly influence the formulation of our situation analysis, which saw religious concerns coded within a broader context of traditional culture. It was some time later that I realized how article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[2] acknowledging 'the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion…[and] the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right' would have been a legitimate basis for engagement with their concerns. As it was, my uncritical acceptance of a secular humanitarian 'script'[3] had silenced their religious concerns, along with any other meaningful engagement with a perspective seeing children as members of local communities of faith.

* * *

A brief recent history of religion and humanitarianism

Calls to humanitarian engagement—actions to relieve the suffering of those in danger or need—are widely represented in many religious traditions. Recent scholarship has acknowledged the significance of such influence in the multiple histories of humanitarian thought across many cultures.[4] Accounts of the development of Western humanitarianism— our major focus in this book—typically acknowledge the contribution of religious thought and institutions.[5] Until recently, however, discussions of religion in the context of humanitarianism had become muted, arguably silenced. Religion had become an area of discomfort, even distaste, for humanitarians. Before we can address some of the challenges of rapprochement, we need to understand the basis for these concerns.

Western humanitarianism is significantly rooted in the vision and work of the first Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Henri Dunant. Dunant's vivid account of the Battle of Solferino in 1859 included calls for the establishment of organizations mandated to address the relief of suffering in such contexts, and of a treaty providing for their recognition and protection as a neutral entity when operating in these circumstances. The International Society of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention of 1864 were the direct fruits of these proposals, and laid the foundation for the contemporary International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) movement and the Geneva Conventions which define the core of contemporary humanitarian

law. For Dunant, addressing the needs of those suffering irrespective of their allegiance was key to the understanding of humanitarianism. This core commitment became codified as the principles as neutrality and impartiality, concepts which have come to be seen as barriers to engagement with religious institutions. For the cultural context into which Dunant was writing, however, religion was not so clearly distanced from these principles. Speaking of the opportunity and moral obligation to tend to the wounds of the injured during pauses in the fighting at Solferino, Dunant drew upon both civic and religious responsibilities:

> Why could not advantage be taken of a time of relative calm and quiet to investigate and try to solve a question of such immense and worldwide importance, both from the humane and Christian stand-point?[6]

Further, he makes explicit use of religious principle to challenge the presumption of partiality. When an Italian doctor appears to be providing differential standards of care to allied and enemy combatants, he notes that a countess:

> made haste to show her disapproval by declaring that she gave exactly the same attention to the Austrians as to the Allies, and made no difference between friends and enemies. 'For', she said, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ made no such distinctions between men in well doing'.[7]

Dunant's references to religion in the predominantly Christian context of late 19th-century Europe appear not to have distracted from the principles he was seeking to establish regarding humanitarian engagement; indeed, they appear to have been used to reinforce them. However, such language becomes more problematic in contexts of greater plurality. By the time of the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[8] in 1948, for example, there was recognition of the challenge of forging agreement between persons:

> who come from the four corners of the globe and who not only belong to different cultures and civilizations, but are of antagonistic spiritual associations and schools of thought.[9]

Jacques Maritain, the Catholic philosopher engaged in the process of developing the text for the UDHR, noted that ultimately agreement was reached 'on condition that no one asks us why', with a pragmatic focus on:

> principles of action implicitly recognized…by the consciousness of free peoples…that…constitute *grosso modo* a sort of common denominator, a sort of unwritten common law.[10]

This notion of an unwritten common law is not without its problems, as we will discover later. However, the negotiation of language free of religious references, and of apparent universal appeal, established a model for the form of secular script increasingly adopted for the expression of humanitarian principle, strategy and practice throughout the remainder of the 20th century. There are a number of factors that appear to have contributed to this trend. Globalization, for example, leads to an increasing linkage between states and peoples within a globally interdependent system, with greater awareness of and exposure to plurality of beliefs and practices. Professionalization is another factor, shifting the emphasis within the sector from voluntary efforts and service to common standards and processes, codified in universal terms. Humanitarian agencies become increasingly focused upon funding, not from personal supporters (commonly with symmetrical faith or value affiliations to that of the agency) but from governments commissioning and contracting for services to be conducted on behalf of a state.

Processes of secularization within Western societies reinforce this adoption of a secular frame for humanitarian engagement. A number of agencies 'rebrand' to reflect these changes. For example, building upon work assisting children displaced by the Sino-Japanese war in the 1930s, Christian Children's Fund was established as an international humanitarian agency in 1951 and developed a strong funding base, especially within church groups among the southern states of the USA. Having operated as ChildFund in Afghanistan, for security and profiling reasons, and reframed its strategic approach to sources of support and programming approach, the organization changed its name to ChildFund International in 2009. Many voluntary agencies can trace this form of trajectory from explicit religious beginnings through processes of professionalization and secularization through the course of the 20th century. To be clear, many explicitly 'faith-based organizations' (FBOs) have retained a key role within the humanitarian sector. However, a number of studies have indicated they have increasingly assumed a language and mission largely indistinguishable from secular humanitarian agencies.[11]

Though seldom explicitly articulated in these terms, a working consensus appears to have emerged: Religion, given its potential divisiveness, alignment to violence and intolerance, and its belonging to the realm of 'ultimate ideals',[12] is not an appropriate domain for humanitarian engagement. In order to 'enjoy the confidence of all',[13] agencies need to operate above the fray of religious ideology and practice, consigning religion's

protected free exercise to the private sphere. The next chapter considers how such a secular script shapes intervention practice across multiple sectors of humanitarian work.

Reappraising the relationship with religion

Although the above history of secularization continues to be reflected in humanitarian language, strategy and programming, signs of a reappraisal of religion have emerged over recent years. The fragmentation of the established consensus began within the broader global development agenda. In 2000, for example, Ver Beek noted that, since themes related to spirituality had become a 'development taboo', the resulting lack of policy on engagement with faith 'reduces the effectiveness of development research and interventions'.[14] In 2006, Tyndale argued that addressing the question of religion appropriately broadens the conception of human development beyond GDP, refocusing on values such as compassion, identity, and justice,[15] a sentiment echoed in Matthew Parris's widely-cited 2008 Times article 'As an atheist I truly believe Africa needs God'.[16] These were not just the critiques of individual commentators; key institutions had begun to engage with such questions. In 1999 the World Bank, in conjunction with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, established the World Faiths Development Dialogue, signaling the onset of wider discussions within the UN system.[17] In subsequent years, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) took a leading role in UN-wide consultations with faith-based partners in relation to the Millennium Development Goals[18] and UNICEF initiated work on more effective partnership with local faith communities and faith-based organizations for its work with children.[19]

   While beginning in the context of broader development discussion, such re-evaluation of engagement with religion and religious institutions has increasingly found its way into humanitarian dialogue, especially in the context of engagement with displaced populations. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh notes how issues of religious identity, belief and practice have become frequent foci of discussion in a number of fora regarding response to situations of forced migration.[20] This trend is most vividly illustrated by the convening of a *Dialogue on Faith and Protection* by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, in December 2012. This event drew together over 300 government representatives, UN and

NGO officials, religious leaders and academics. The action plan arising from the dialogue directed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to address more intentionally the religious needs and capacities of refugees and more effectively engage with the resources of faith communities in host communities. In the closing session, High Commissioner Guterres noted:

> the need for humanitarian actors, including UNHCR, to deepen their understanding of religious traditions across faiths and to become more 'faith literate'. This means a better understanding not only of the central role of faith in the communities we work with, but more concretely of faith structures and networks, and of the different approaches needed for effectively engaging with different types of faith-based actors.[21]

This shift in attention has not just been a matter of talk. Major institutional donors have begun to rethink their relationship with religious actors and religious agendas. The UK Department for International Development, for example, launched the five-year research program on Religion and Development in 2005, committed to double funding to faith-based groups in 2009, and in 2011 articulated its *Faith Partnership Principles*.[22] Dutch, Swedish and American governments have all increasingly committed to exploring the relationship between faith and development. The German government's most recent development strategy lists 'respect and protect cultural and religious diversity' as one of its eight defining pillars.[23]

The reasons for such shifts are complex. A recent global analysis of over 2,000 censuses, surveys and population registers concluded that eight in ten people worldwide identify with a religious group.[24] The endurance and resurgence of religion has made it an ever more difficult factor to ignore for development actors and humanitarians alike. While the events of 11 September 2001 in the USA galvanized the centrality of religion in global public affairs, the desecularization of political theory had been underway for some time before then.[25] The global economic downturn and associated increase in reliance on non-state actors, including religious groups, is also a plausible influence. Within the field of humanitarianism, the emerging agenda to more effectively engage with local and national resources in crisis-affected countries certainly appears to have been encouraged by such economic and political trends. Whatever the cause, there are increasing calls for 'rethinking secularism'[26] and even adjustment to the potential dawning of a 'post-secular age'.[27]

The impetus for humanitarian work to engage more effectively with religious ideas and institutions is thus being played out in the context of a wider ferment regarding the place of religion with local and global society. To disentangle the complex of issues raised by such moves leads us to reflect on the manner in which secularism has shaped contemporary understanding of the nature, purpose and rationale for humanitarian support of refugees and other displaced populations. To do that, we need first to consider more carefully what constitutes secularism.

Understanding secularism

The terms 'secular' and 'secularism' are widely used, but with many different meanings to describe very different phenomena. This can significantly confuse discussions on the place of religion in a public sphere, such as humanitarian assistance. A clear understanding of secularism is a pre-requisite for a clear understanding of religion and its potential and legitimate role in such public affairs.

There has been increasing scholarship in this area in recent years, but it is widely recognized that Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* has served as the most influential thesis in clarifying the nature of secularism. Accordingly, we adopt Taylor's framing of secularism here. He distinguishes between three very different uses of the term. These refer, respectively, to: a form of organization of the state; a reduction in religious belief and practice within a society; and a context of understanding that establishes certain conditions for belief.

In the first use, regarding a form of organization within the state, the term refers to constitutional or other bases for separation of religious language and principle from public discussion. This acknowledges circumstances where 'public spaces have become emptied of God'[28] or, more generally, where 'norms and principles…as we function within various spheres of activity—economic, political, educational, professional, recreational—generally don't refer us to God or to any beliefs'.[29] Mechanisms of separation or differentiation of religion and public power may reflect discrete purposes. For example, American secularism is historically rooted in the defense of religion from the intrusion of the state; French and Turkish secularism is motivated to defend the state from religious influence; Indian secularism aims to balance the public place of the multiple religious traditions within its borders.[30] However,

Taylor's interpretation notes the extension of the norms of such separation of religious and civic language beyond the institutions of the state to the business meeting, lecture room, and concert hall. This form of 'functional secularism'[31] is represented in humanitarian practice by the adoption of a script for professional behavior that, for the most part, comfortably makes no reference to religious ideas. As noted earlier, there are examples of exceptions to this trend, but in terms of Taylor's definition, the crucial observation is that, while humanitarian language *can* make reference to religion and religious institutions, it is generally understood as a sufficiently complete account without this.

Taylor distinguishes a second use of the term, which describes trends of decreasing adherence to religious belief and practice within a society. In these terms, 'a secular society' refers to a context with low levels of reported religious affiliation or institutional attendance. In this way, we may describe much of Europe, for example, as increasingly secular. It is important to note that there is no essential linkage between secular in the first sense and in this second sense. Here, the focus is on belief and practice of the individual; in the former instance, it is about the potential exercise of one's belief and practice in public contexts.

Understanding trends towards lower levels of religious belief and practice is relevant to humanitarian work in both strategic and operational terms. The 'secularization thesis' posited reductions in religiosity to inexorably follow from economic development and modernization.[32] However, this expectation has now largely been abandoned.[33] The view that religion will become an increasingly marginal experience in people's lives is simply not borne out by global demographic trends.[34] This has major implications, not just for strategic models of global development and their related humanitarian strategy. At the operational level it highlights the fact that humanitarian agencies rooted in the global north— typically within more secularized societies—are predominantly serving populations in a global south of persistent religious affiliation. Those developing policy for refugee humanitarian assistance, those providing technical assistance for implementing those programs and the refugees being supported by them, are therefore typically drawn from contexts of radically different degrees of secularism.[35]

The potential implications of such differences of worldview held by individuals—and, of concern to us here, the scope, aspirations and character of humanitarian engagement with refugee populations—brings us to Taylor's third definition of secularism. He states that secularism can

be seen as a 'context of understanding' that establishes certain conditions for belief. In these terms secularization describes:

> a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and, indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace…[which determines] the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious search takes place.[36]

While the earlier perspectives on secularism are relevant to our analysis, it is this formulation that is potentially of greatest value to us in understanding the potential for—and barriers to—engagement with religion in the public context of humanitarian support to refugee communities. Crucially, it locates secularism not 'out there', in terms of population and societal trends, but 'in here', both in terms of our institutions, our minds and our imaginations. Taylor's work is not principally about spaces, nor about religious affiliation, but the assumptive world that the West has come to share. By focusing his account on a millennium of history within Western societies shaped by Christendom, his analysis is not truly global. However, given the influence of thinking and institutions from these contexts on the global humanitarian regime (and, as we will argue, the neoliberal principles that shape humanitarian thought) it provides an effective frame for our core purposes.

There are many insights of Taylor that are relevant for our subsequent analysis, but we highlight three of the most pertinent here. First, Taylor mobilizes a strong argument that it was trends in assumptions regarding the conditions of belief that led to a reframing of the place of religion in public life rather than the refutation of science. In other words, it was the formulation of the secular frame that led to science being 'read' in a manner seen to be at odds with religion, rather than the practice and insights of science prompting the evolution of secular thought. As we will observe later, the reading of scientific accounts as opposed to—rather than complementary of—religious accounts presents consistent challenges for engagement with religion in the humanitarian sphere. Seeing this as an artifact of current assumptions regarding 'conditions of belief' is potentially a valuable insight. Second, and related to this, Taylor maps the development of a conceptualization of the individual as influenced by, but in some ways set apart from, the world. The construction of this 'buffered self' is crucial in maintaining a critical, informed and skeptical account of the forces shaping the world while

retaining a confidence in rational self-determination. The enchantment of religious worldviews emphasizes transcendence and connection with the world of the spirit(s). In contrast to this transcendent structure afforded the religious believer, secularism assumes an immanent framing in which: 'everything important is this-worldly, explicable in its own terms...social and political orders are constructed by humans solely for mutual benefit'.[37] Principles of social justice, human rights, and humanitarian principles are instruments constructed on the basis of utility and contingency. Third, this construction of an immanent frame and 'the buffered self', which enable self-sufficient humanism, reflects an evolution of understandings squarely within Christian thought. While secularism may be seen as antagonistic to religion, the way that it understands religion and the human condition reflects Christian principles. Each of these observations provides insight into the challenges of engaging with religion for institutions—such as humanitarian organizations—so shaped by secular thought and principle. We will return to deeper consideration of some of these issues in later chapters, but it is to the outworkings of such framing of humanitarian assistance to refugee communities that we now turn.

Refugee communities and secular humanitarianism

We noted earlier that the development of secular humanitarianism through the course of the 20th century potentially brought many benefits to refugee communities and others served by humanitarian agencies. The formulation of explicit humanitarian principles provided a basis for access to assistance irrespective of belief, allegiance or constituency. The professionalization of humanitarian work brought more efficient and effective relief to communities. The ability to secure humanitarian space for the relief of suffering is attributed by many directly to the capability of agencies—by virtue of their explicitly secular mandate—to stand apart from conflicting parties in contexts of political insecurity.

With these apparent benefits, the reticence to engage with religion is understandable. What harms may be advanced by such secular framing of humanitarianism? We consider this question in more detail in the next chapter, but for now it may be instructive to return to the vignette that opened this chapter to reflect on the manner in which the secular frame treats religion in such circumstances.

First, we suggest that secularism generally serves to *privatize* religious belief, sentiment and expression. Religion is not necessarily discounted, but its dynamics and challenges are seen to belong to private worlds of believers and/or adherents, which have no legitimacy within public space. This generalization of the separation of public and private spheres—the first form of secularism considered by Taylor—does not ignore religion. The meeting in El Fasher was explicitly convened with religious leaders. However, it contained religion, ensuring that the realm of its legitimacy was kept outside of humanitarian space.

Second, the secular frame frequently serves to *marginalize* religion. The discordance of the narrative of global humanitarianism with that of local religious communities would have less bearing on humanitarian engagement if these discourses were equally empowered. However, the severe asymmetry of power relations in refugee settings—where communities are understood principally as 'beneficiaries' and the key drivers of the system are 'donors'—means that the framing of the more dominant party disempowers the framing of the other party. The secular script thus does not merely contain religion; it disempowers it by pushing it to the margins of consideration. The *sheiks* and *umars* found some public space for the airing of their concerns, but it was at the edges of the meeting, and beyond the perceived margins of the humanitarian agenda.

Third, sometimes as an alternative to privatization and marginalization but also as a potential accompaniment to these processes, secular humanitarianism often *instrumenalizes* religion. Reflecting a Weberian approach, religion is assessed in terms of its benefit or detriment to predetermined goals. The religious leaders in El Fasher were being consulted but, in truth, not in a manner to expose emerging humanitarian objectives to critical scrutiny and reformulation. They were stakeholders to be consulted: their cooperation valued to the extent that they would promote emerging programming objectives and advise on mechanisms to achieve these. Instrumentalization recognizes the resources that are available through local faith communities, and seeks to co-opt these for non-religious purposes. This arrangement can be open and of perceived mutual benefit. However, again, gross asymmetries in power risk co-option that is extractive, disrespectful—and undermines local religious communities.

This critique of processes of secular humanitarian engagement disempowering local religious discourse is of direct relevance to the achievement of core humanitarian goals. In other words, it is not just sensitivity

to local religious expression that should make us mindful of these processes. In purely pragmatic terms, this critique indicates major obstacles to humanitarian aid effectiveness in relation to both coherence and local engagement: key issues, for example, on the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit agenda. Barriers to the understanding of local circumstances and agendas potentially constitute a major threat to achievement of these goals. A number of commentators have drawn upon former World Bank director James Wolfensohn's opening words at a 1999 conference on sustainable development to emphasize this point:

> Over and over again, we have found that when we ignore the way of life of the poor, their values, relationships and culture, we cannot improve their material condition.[38]

In the context of humanitarian assistance, it is acknowledged that such engagement remains typically rare, but crucial. In a briefing regarding the consultation process ahead of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, it is stated 'in particular, we want to hear the voices that *often go unheard* [emphasis added], such as affected populations'.[39]

The concern is not, however, just about negotiating forms of humanitarian assistance that are coherent with local perceptions of need. It is increasingly acknowledged that more effective mobilization of resources within displacement-affected communities is crucial to the future of humanitarian assistance.[40] Local faith communities and religious groups frequently represent a major proportion of the capacity of civil society available to support displaced populations. Our work in Irbid in Jordan in 2014 identified over 20 groups of varying religious affiliations engaged with humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees. The majority had little or fragmented engagement with the humanitarian response being coordinated by national governmental, intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations. These groups were mobilizing significant human capital (e.g. in terms of volunteers), social capital (e.g. through pastoral and other religious networks), physical capital (e.g. in terms of buildings used for refugee activities or distributions), and financial capital (e.g. in terms of funds secured from benefactors), even without reflection on the potential value of the 'spiritual capital' mobilized through shared prayer, *iftar* and other forms of corporate religious practice.[41]

Much other work has now documented similar examples of the potential value of more effective humanitarian engagement with local faith

communities. There are significant challenges in securing this, however. While recent attention has focused mostly upon logistical and governance issues, it is our view that there are much more fundamental questions that need to be addressed regarding the framing of humanitarian assistance.

The secular framing of humanitarianism structures an understanding of religion that—in reflecting a particular Western perspective—is not conducive to meaningful partnership with local faith communities. To understand the potential basis for more appropriate partnership, we need to consider how rethinking the secular conceptualization of religion may enable more effective engagement with displaced communities of faith. To achieve this, we next reflect on two fundamental presumptions within humanitarian thought that result from its secular framing through the course of the 20th century: modernism and neutrality. We will argue that these presumptions, although superficially reasonable, under closer scrutiny prove deeply problematic. Indeed, rethinking them is necessary if humanitarianism is to adapt to the realities of the 21st century.

The humanitarian presumption of modernity

The first presumption reflects the conceptualization of humanitarianism within the broader discourse of global development. Humanitarianism is nested within development as an academic discipline, as a field of professional practice, and as a concern of governmental donors. The core ideas of the global development agenda thus inevitably influence the manner in which humanitarianism is understood, and there have been recurrent attempts to strengthen such linkages (e.g. though the conceptualization of the 'relief to development' continuum and, more recently, through the promotion of resilience to crisis as a key developmental goal). Locating humanitarianism within the broader project of technical assistance to support global development ensures that it is inculcated by the concerns and values of modernity. At the fringes of the development discourse, for sure, there is some space for post-modern concerns regarding plurality, hegemony and relativism. However, the key institutions, strategies and agendas continue to reflect very much a modernist vision.

The core prescriptions for development—economic growth and social development—reflect an explicit vision of modernization. Despite periodic shifts in language—from framing in terms of first, second and third

worlds; through developed and developing nations; to high-, middle- and low-income countries—a linear conceptualization of development is at core retained. The task of development agencies is to facilitate the progress of nations along this path (for a variety of interests, but with trade and economic growth a central feature). Humanitarian goals reflect the concern that crisis does not serve to unduly disrupt such progress. Further, economic and social under-development is understood as a common root cause of crisis, and modernization thus a key preventive measure.

Viewed through a secular lens, modernization easily translates into antagonism with religious thinking and institutions. This is particularly the case when rationalist discourse is mobilized in the cause of modernity with no reflection on its historical or cultural origins. Rationalism—a product of 'the buffered self', evolved within Western political and intel-lectual history—asserts the primacy of material causes. The root causes of conflict are material. The primary interests of refugees are material. There are technical solutions required to support development, recovery and resettlement, which require material assistance and social reform. In this frame, religious institutions are commonly seen as principally conservative. Reflecting the notions of post-1905 French *laicité*,[42] religion is conceived of as anti-modern and irrational. As a source of superstition and traditional authority, it is to be constrained from public influence.

Contemporary humanitarian statements and strategy largely reflect this presumption, as we will consider in more detail in the next chapter. However, there are many difficulties in sustaining the credibility of this position. First, there are clear challenges in making such a position explicit. There are disturbing echoes of colonialism if the circumstances of 'advanced societies' are explicitly asserted as models for more 'primi-tive societies'. The African theologian John Mbiti considered the lasting legacy of European power in Africa as 'the colonization of the African mind'.[43] In the colonial period, the power to define 'civilization' lay with Europeans, who specified processes by which African institutions and identity would be transformed towards this uncritically articulated ideal. As we have noted elsewhere,[44] ironically the religious expression of the West was in that era part of that vaunted ideal, whereas in the contem-porary discourse it is the secularization of the West that has become the assumed norm. Either way, the strong presumption of progress towards the modern clashes uncomfortably with the common mantra to 'respect local cultures and norms', establishing an experiential paradox with which many humanitarians clearly wrestle.

Second, there is clearly ebbing confidence in the prescription of linear modernization, and growing acknowledgment of the plurality of development paths. For example, in their review of 'persistent implementation failure' in the development arena, Pritchett and colleagues have pointed to the need to

> eschew the assumptions and Hegelian teleology of classic modernization theory, with its presumptions of a common historical path culminating in convergent institutional forms

and rather to focus upon

> enhancing functioning...achieved via whatever means enjoys political legitimacy and cultural resonance in the contexts wherein such change is being undertaken.[45]

'Cultural resonance' is the prompt here to reflect on the potential role of religious engagement in such development processes, especially with a historical awareness of the role of religious discourse and communities in progressive social movements in many Western nations.

Third, as noted earlier, the idea that religion will decline with modernization (and development) may prevail within humanitarian thinking, but this has widely been abandoned as a construct within the social and political sciences. Religion's endurance, and even resurgence, in the West and the global South—in parallel with modernization and development—has demanded a revision of the assumptions that modernity would

> infiltrate, occupy, and diminish the world of the spirit, fostering the 'disenchantment' that Max Weber made central to his understanding of modernity.[46]

Furthermore, the demise of secularization theory has led to the recognition that, if religion is here to stay, the focus of thought for the modern public sphere should increasingly be discovering modes of constructive engagement between diverse *Weltanschauungen*.[47] Habermas, for example—for whom religion played virtually no role in his social theory until the mid-1990s—argued during a speech on receiving the German Book Trade Peace Prize in 2001 that

> the secularization thesis has lost its explanatory power...religion and the secular world always stand in a reciprocal relation.[48]

The assertion of reciprocity clearly calls for engagement, and engagement that acknowledges, as Barnett and Gross Stein have noted with respect

to humanitarian dialogue, the need to cease to operate as if 'the secular were the baseline and the religious were the "deviation" '.[49]

This brings us to the final challenge to the presumption of modernity within humanitarianism: its lack of self-consciousness in its particularity. Treatment of religion in the materialist, rationalist terms that are convivial to modernity distorts the experience and expression of faith. Religious reasoning, whose basis may extend beyond pure rationalism into revelation, tradition, scripture or mysticism, is considered to be extra-discursive to the rational public sphere. It is therefore defined as beyond the legitimate scope of humanitarian discourse. Values, beliefs and religious attitudes are seen as effects of more 'basic' units of reality, essentially material factors. To use a stark example of this tendency, initial accounts of religious terrorism typically made reference to material poverty's part in motivating action. However, religious extremism has been consistently seen to find a secure footing within the more educated sectors of society, confounding modernist, rational expectations of the origins of religious zeal in material deprivation.[50] The core observation here is that, while rationalism and modernity provide a legitimate discourse with which to construct humanitarian goals and processes, it is a partial, historically and culturally rooted set of presumptions that needs to be as open to scrutiny as any other.

The humanitarian presumption of neutrality

A second key presumption of humanitarianism relevant to its understanding of religion is neutrality. We observed the origins of this with regard to the contemporary humanitarian regime in the work of Dunant and the establishment of the Red Cross Movement earlier. It is important to recognize the relationship between the principle of neutrality and the principle of impartiality. The latter is, alongside response motivated by an awareness of shared humanity with those suffering in contexts of crisis, the core characteristic of humanitarian action. Assistance provided to those with which one shares allegiance or identity but withheld from those of other affiliations is not humanitarian aid. The key relevance of neutrality is that it is a perceived requirement of being able to provide aid impartially. As IFRC documentation notes:

> In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all . . . the principle of neutrality prohibits the Movement from engaging at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.[51]

Although the emphasis here is with respect to 'controversies', in practice this principle is generally operationalized as avoiding any association with groups that could be represented as suggesting alignment with their views with respect to politics, race, religion or ideology. We have witnessed this sensitivity result in clarification that a UN official's visit to a New York meeting on religious engagement was being made in a 'personal capacity'; an intergovernmental agency official be advised to omit his religious qualifications from his business card; and a coordinator of humanitarian programs in an urban setting decline any meetings with local faith groups engaged in provision of assistance to refugees hosted in the locality.

The pursuit of neutrality as a means to facilitate impartiality of assistance is understandable, but it has resulted in a rather generalized concern regarding engagement with religious actors in humanitarian contexts. As we document in the next chapter, the dominant script regarding religion in contexts of humanitarian response has become that of assumed partiality in response, despite the fact that evidence for this as a common feature of faith-based humanitarianism is rather weak.[52]

There are many other issues raised by the presumption of neutrality. First, if the focus of concern is the *prima facie* case regarding the neutrality of an institution or organization, rather than the neutrality of actions or statements on specific controversial issues, who can claim such neutrality? Can humanitarian agencies funded by bilateral donors with clear political interests and allegiances within a conflict do so? What of groups that deem support of UDHR-mandated freedom of religious practice by the provision of copies of the Qur'an as outside of their mandate? Further, are there some 'controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature' (ethnic equity of access to services, gender parity in school enrollment and so on) with respect to which engagement is not seen as compromising of an agency's neutrality? The most recent iteration of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) now features a qualifier for the principle of neutrality, which suggests that:

> Some organizations, while committed to giving impartial assistance and not taking sides in hostilities, do not consider that the principle of neutrality precludes undertaking advocacy on issues related to accountability and justice.[53]

Our concern here is this: What actions can be taken on issues related to accountability and justice, on the neutral basis of reason alone? We

are drawn back to the realization that it is as problematic to assume a position of neutrality free from cultural, political and ideological influence as it to posit modernity as an unchallengeable framing of human development. The discussion at the UNHCR Dialogue on Faith and Protection in December 2012 acknowledged that, while some organizations considered secularity as a guarantee of neutrality, others saw it as an obstacle to neutrality. Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Alexander Aleinikoff recognized the pressure that the dialogue put on the former position, suggesting the case had been made that 'a secular humanitarianism is partial because faith means a lot to people and one cannot not take faith into account'.[54]

Second, the whole idea of neutrality on matters of religion may only be possible on the basis of a European conception of religion that, though assumed to be universally applicable, actually bears little resemblance to religion globally. We will explore this theme in more detail in Chapter 3, but here it is sufficient to note that this Euro-centric conception carries three core assumptions: that religion is primarily propositional, that it is 'spiritual', and that it has a certain social position.

As early as 1959, Kitagawa argued that Western students of global religion 'have tended to interpret non-Western religious phenomena, and attempted to fit them into their non-regional abstract of *Religionswissenschaft* [the study of religion]'.[55] In fact, in the academic field of the history of religion, there is something of a consensus that in the worldview of most non-European contexts there is no such equivalent category as 'religion', and that it was the formation of modernity during the period of the European Enlightenment that gave rise to the conventional category.[56] Modernity's requirement that equivalent examples of a categorized phenomenon be rationally compared led to 'religions' being defined in such a way as to make this rational comparison possible. The most important consequence of this demand was that religions were seen to be primarily propositional—that is, to do with extractable truth-claims (doctrines) that are intellectually believed or disbelieved.

Furthermore, religions are assumed to be particularly interested in the 'spiritual' domain, while humanitarian response predominantly addresses the 'physical' realm. The Platonic spiritual–physical divide that exists in Western thought creates an 'excluded middle' when compared with the holistic, seamless nature of worldviews of traditional societies.[57] The nature and purview of religions in contexts marked by such a holistic worldview is not limited to the 'spiritual': such a limitation has little

meaning in this context. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff's concept of 'integral liberation'[58] attacks the reductionism of such separation: for him, prayer cannot be divorced from the 'social' question of poverty and hunger. Similarly, philosopher Alistair MacIntyre's concept of 'virtue-ethics' closely analyses a typical non-Western notion of ethics: a virtuous decision cannot be isolated from the social context in which the decision is made. Ethics are not free-floating intellectual ideas, but have concrete realities integrated into their construction.[59] The pursuit of ethical outcomes in such a context is untenable without engaging with the key basis of the social construction of values—that is, religion.

Finally, the European conception of religion has particular expectations about the role of religion and the role of the state in defining belonging and identity. The modern international order, characterized by sovereign, politically-defined nation states, emerged in the aftermath of the Hundred Years War in 17th-century Europe. The process of creating sovereign nations transferred much of the power and meaning of the church in people's lives from the clergy to the princes. In this new world order, the meaning of religion had changed, so the very definition of the word had to be radically altered. Prior to this shift, religions in Europe were socially dominant, defining identity, community and social order for adherents. Following the treaties, identity became primarily a matter of nationhood: each nation was prohibited from interfering in the religious matters of another nation, and, importantly, vast civil powers to order and discipline society were taken from the churches and given to secular leaders. The Peace of Westphalia provides the genesis of two lasting truisms in the Western conception of religion: that a failure to separate religion from political power necessarily results in violence; and, relatedly, that religion is not primarily concerned with context, belonging and identity, but with privatized, intellectual ideas.[60] The meaning of 'religion' changed from 'a community of believers' to 'a body of beliefs'.

This historical framing of religion shapes Western humanitarianism assumptions about religion in non-Western contexts. The consequences of this distortion are significant. Chief among them is that theory and policy rooted in the assumption that religion is normatively private cannot account for and, crucially, predict the influence of religion in that context. The global resurgence of very public religion in recent decades has repeatedly defied Western analysts viewing religion through this lens. The late 1960s and 1970s saw early signs of public religion defying secularism's assumptions: the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979 on a wave

of religious zeal was unforeseen by the US intelligence community;[61] Nasser's defeat by Israel in 1967 represented a humiliation of Arab secularism.[62] The deeply Catholic Solidarity movement in Poland, the *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan ushering the exit of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and the events of 11 September 2001, marked a transformation in global politics—each in different ways asserting the public relevance of religion.

Despite this trend, the public power of religion is still often forgotten, and predictions about society and global affairs revert to the framing of more secular, material factors. In 2006, when Hamas won the Palestinian elections, Condoleezza Rice conceded, 'I don't know anyone who wasn't caught off-guard'.[63] Enduring humanitarian crises in West Africa, East Africa and the Middle East all have powerful linkages with religious groups and religious discourse. In these contexts, separating religion from the political, economic and cultural dimensions of the crisis is untenable. Humanitarian response needs a framing that reflects such integration, rather than enforcing a secular divide, which defines religion in terms unrecognizable in local contexts.

21st century humanitarianism: rethinking the secular frame

There are multiple circumstances driving humanitarianism to reconsider its engagement with religion. Religion has re-emerged as a core theme in the contemporary world. Religion substantively frames the experience of the majority of the world's displaced. The resources and capacities of religious groups and local faith communities are increasingly recognized as relevant to processes of local relief and settlement. Religion is here to stay, is an authentic voice for many, and cannot legitimately be confined to the private sphere: What, then, should characterize humanitarian policy and practice toward religion?

A process of deliberation, open to all

The current operationalization of secularism within the global humanitarian system bears the hallmarks of the constitutional forms of secularism of Western societies where—through their historical struggle with powerful religions—it is primarily focused on controlling religion and

limiting its public power.[64] Charles Taylor has argued that for modern democracies another form of secularism is necessary, and we argue that the same applies to contemporary humanitarianism. This other form is dedicated not to the question of controlling religion *per se*, but rather to 'the response of the democratic state to diversity'.[65] Modern Europe is vastly more religiously diverse today than it was at the time of the French Revolution, or even in 1905. He argues that there is a historical tendency to conceptualize secularism over-simply as an 'institutional arrangement', and that certain formulae—the 'Wall of Separation' in the USA or *les espaces de la Republique* in France[66]—are deployed as 'argument stoppers' that stifle debate over revision of the arrangement to reflect demographic changes. He suggests that, in place of these formulae, states aiming to be secular in an age marked by wide diversity should first determine their goals, and then pursue these in context. Democratic states today largely pursue three goals regarding basic belief: freedom from coercion in the area of belief ('free exercise'); equality between different belief groups; and, ensuring that 'all spiritual families are heard'. The outcomes of these commitments, in an age of extended diversity—a diversity not just of different faiths but also of those of no faith—may differ from the outcomes of the classical formulae.[67]

This analysis is insightful for modern humanitarianism. Taylor's critique of formulaic secularism's inability to cope with growing diversity seeks to define a public space for the modern era where *all* worldviews, religious and non-religious, coexist with comity: that is to say, a democratic public space. Just as modern democracies are rethinking their framing of secularism, today's humanitarianism is confronted with the challenge of operating in public spheres where many worldviews coexist: most characteristically, humanitarian agencies' own typically non-religious worldviews and the frequently religious worldviews of communities, groups, and civil societies encountered in humanitarian contexts. Religious worldviews permeate the public sphere of humanitarian situations, through the role that religious institutions play in public life in these contexts and the centrality of faith in the lives, rhythms and mind-sets of local communities. Formulaic secularism that seeks to separate religion from humanitarianism by exclusion is neither feasible nor appropriate in contexts where religion is intertwined with every element of public space.

The challenge for humanitarianism, then, is how to pursue its goals in this light. If it is to be democratic rather than authoritarian, deliberation

in humanitarianism must be open to all, including the typically religious subjects of its programs of assistance. If it is to be truly impartial, it must put away the lens that subjugates religious worldviews, and learn to work in the complex reality of genuine pluralism.

A dialogically skillful humanitarianism

Supporting survivors of sexual violence amidst the inter-ethnic conflicts and displacement of South Sudan. Providing emergency protection for the Yazidi populations seeking refuge in northern Iraq. Assisting access to education for internally displaced Colombians. Fostering resettlement of Bhutanese refugees in communities in Columbus, Ohio. The sphere within which humanitarianism operates today is an undeniably plural one. We have charted the multiple critiques that render a modernist vision of convergence along a common developmental path increasingly difficult to sustain. This has led Thomas to suggest that 'taking cultural and religious pluralism seriously is now one of the most important…challenges of the twenty-first century'.[68]

Central to the task of operating in a sphere characterized by diversity of basic belief is the development of the dialogical skills necessary to engage with differing worldviews. It is important to recognize, as Severin Deneulin has suggested, that 'apparent conflict between worldviews…should not be an obstacle to fruitful engagement'.[69] The goal of developing practical methods for coordinating with differing worldviews can be approached in a number of ways. One crucial but under-appreciated avenue for effecting change is engagement with forces *within* a tradition itself. An approach to religion that concentrates only on areas of commonality between worldviews has little sustainability in the long term, as conflicting views cannot be sidelined indefinitely and the most strongly held values are likely to emerge in one form or another. Humanitarian agencies that only work with 'secularized' faith groups have little power to engage the most controversial issues and risk alienating 'unsecularized' faith groups.[70] Although caution needs to be exercised, to avoid an instrumentalist approach, the recognition that religions are less monoliths and more wide constellations of meaning and debate opens the door to engagement with relevant debates, not only from without but from within. For example, Christianity's debate over the understanding and place of homosexuality throughout the 20th century has seen a wide variety of perspectives articulated.[71] Consequently, a humanitarian

program aimed at engaging this social issue in a community with significant Christian affiliation may be well served by engaging with the debate within the Christian tradition itself. Nussbaum affirms this approach to one frequently raised area of concern—the relationship between religion and women's rights. She critiques the Marxist-atheist tendency among fellow feminist thinkers to dismiss any religious viewpoint, arguing that this 'alienate[s] people who could become some of [feminism's] most influential allies'.[72] Islamic Relief Worldwide has been especially sensitive to the potential of engaging in debates within Islamic tradition, with exploration of traditions of jurisprudence in relation to issues such as family separation and youth in conflict with the law.[73]

An institutional taboo that prohibits secular humanitarianism engaging with—or even being at risk of being seen to be engaging with—areas of religious debate puts such avenues for change out of reach. But a pluralist and democratic approach to the public sphere where all parties are understood to be in the process of interpretation—including humanitarian agencies—leaves the possibility open. Indeed, the shift from a worldview-blind humanitarianism, seeking ideological neutrality, to the recognition that agencies bring their own content to their work—enabling them to seek what Myers approvingly calls the 'convergence of stories'[74]—is an essential element of the required dialogical humanitarianism.

We suggest that the practice of dialogue—where all parties declare their own views openly, aiming to listen to and understand other perspectives and traditions[75]—is paramount to successful contemporary assistance. Dialogue within the plural public sphere requires understanding across differing traditions. MacIntyre, indicating the commitment required to secure this, indeed proposes that the language of another tradition must become a person's 'first second language'[76] for understanding and translation to be possible. Here, just as in the case of dialogue between religious traditions, the goal is not intellectual agreement, but mutual understanding, on the basis of which commonalities can be found and practical collaboration planned.[77]

Maritain's analysis of the processes, challenges and successes of the formulation of the UDHR is relevant here. Where commonality is found and built upon, it may not be at the explanatory level—that is, the reasons and justifications for a given value in a given community—but rather at the level of the practical outworking of those values. This insight is instructive, on the possibility and nature of collaboration between

diverse humanitarian actors and the even more diverse constellation of religious groups and local faith communities engaged in humanitarian response. Dialogue entails honestly engaging and describing different discourses with the aim of finding workable commonality. In the context of a humanitarian polity that seeks relief of human suffering as its core focus, the views, traditions and heritages of all actors can be both respected and held to account for their diverse contribution.

Notes

1 'Khawaja' is an Arabic term which literally means 'lord' or 'master', commonly used across Sudan and Egypt to refer to 'white Westerners'.
2 UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child.* New York: United Nations.
3 We use this term to refer to specific conventions of communication and other forms of discourse that reflect—often implicitly—particular assumptions and understandings. Because scripts shape interactions they have the power to legitimize the ideas, agendas and interests of some and delegitimize those of others.
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5 For a fuller discussion of the role of religion in the history of humanitarianism, see: CALHOUN, C. (2008) The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action. In: BARNETT, M. AND WEISS, T. G. (eds.). *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press; STAMATOV, P. (2010) Activist Religion, Empire, and the Emergence of Modern Long-Distance Advocacy Networks. *American Sociological Review*, 75 (4), pp. 607–628; and BARNETT, M. N. AND STEIN, J. G. (2012) *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
6 DUNANT, H. (1939) *A Memory of Solferino.* (English Translation). Geneva: International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.
7 DUNANT, H. (1939) *A Memory of Solferino*, p. 97.
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13   The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies states that: 'the purpose of complying with the principle of Neutrality is to enjoy the confidence of all'; see IFRC. *Promoting the Fundamental Principles and Humanitarian Values: Neutrality.* Available from: http://www.ifrc.org/en/ who-we-are/vision-and-mission/the-seven-fundamental-principles/ neutrality/ [Accessed: 30 March 2015].

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2

The Place of Faith in Humanitarian Engagement with Displaced Communities

Abstract: *The secular framing of humanitarianism privatizes, marginalizes and instrumentalizes religion. Mental health and psychosocial support is a key programming area with displaced communities. Faith-based organizations have been active in supporting such interventions, but there is little evidence of religious perspectives being meaningfully incorporated in programming. This is despite mounting acceptance of the relevance of religious resources, beliefs and practices for community recovery. Analysis of the work of local faith groups working with Syrian refugees in Jordan similarly indicates how a secular script obscures and constrains the contribution from religious sources. The language used in documents exploring key areas of humanitarian strategy— humanitarian reform and disaster risk reduction—also demonstrates the uncritical presumption of a secular perspective which obstructs engagement with faith.*

During a training course for northern Ugandan teachers on psychosocial activities in schools, trainees were asked by the expatriate trainer to suggest appropriate activities for the 'opening circle' with students that marked the commencement of the session. 'Pray together', suggested one participant. This clearly was not the response anticipated by the trainer, drawn from a culture with strong proscription of religious activity in schools. There was an awkward pause, reflecting not just the chasm in expectation, but also the lack of acceptable language—for both trainer and trainees—to address it. The trainer appeared visibly relieved when a further suggestion, 'Play a trust game', was made. This quickly became the focus of more confident discussion by the trainer. The following day we visited the offices of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative,[1] listed for us as one of the local stakeholder groups of which we should be aware. At the time Gulu was a bustling epicenter of international and national humanitarian entrepreneurship, with over 200 NGOs registered for operation in the town. As with many other organizations in this flux of programs and initiatives, I had heard very different appraisals of the work of the ARLPI and was keen to get a sense of their work for myself. In the light of the non-discussion of the preceding day, I was struck by a flyer on a desk in the reception area advertising an event which promised to bring together Anglicans, Catholics, Muslims, Orthodox, Pentecostals, and Seventh Day Adventists for an end of year 'Prayer for Peace'. I was still musing at the liturgical creativity that would be demonstrated at such a gathering when I was called through to my meeting. Just 30 minutes with senior staff of the organization opened my eyes to the potential source of such creativity: the rootedness of the organization's approach. The ARLPI clearly represented great plurality, but appeared to manage this within a very clear sense of shared identity. Our discussions centered on the role of Acholi traditions of forgiveness and reconciliation through the mato oput ceremony[2] and the potential for its bringing healing to the conflict-torn community. This approach to justice was in stark contrast to the use of the mechanism of the International Criminal Court as was favored by many in the international community.[3]

*   *   *

In the previous chapter, we argued that, while there is increasing interest in the engagement of faith-based organizations and local faith communities in work with refugee and other crisis-affected populations, there are significant barriers to this being appropriately and effectively secured.

Principal amongst these is the secular framing of the global humanitarian response, which was normatively established during the course of the 20th century. In particular, we suggest the presumptions of the contemporary humanitarian regime regarding modernity and neutrality frame religion in a way that leads to the privatization, marginalization and instrumentalization of religious belief and practice. Further, such presumptions lack a critical awareness of their particularity and the fragile rationale for their imposition on refugee communities.

What evidence is there, however, that this secular framing does indeed influence the goals, strategies and activities of humanitarian programming? We have located the argument in the preceding chapter largely at the level of principle and philosophy. Does this work through to the level of humanitarian action, with demonstrable negative consequences to refugee communities? Addressing these questions is the core focus of this chapter. We seek to present three forms of evidence. First, we examine the goals, framing and reported activities of a sector of humanitarian work with refugee communities that might be perceived to be most amenable to religious engagement: mental health and psychosocial support. Second, we consider a specific geographical context—the municipality of Irbid in northern Jordan, that as of late 2014 was hosting some 150,000 Syrian refugees—to consider how the operationalization of humanitarian principles relate to the practice of faith and the role of local faith communities in that setting. Third, we consider evidence that secular framing disempowers religious discourse in two current humanitarian debates: humanitarian reform and disaster risk reduction.

Religion in humanitarian programming: the case of mental health and psychosocial support

The field of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in humanitarian emergencies has shown remarkable development over the last two decades. Mental health was once a notable omission from the health priorities to be addressed in the context of humanitarian response.[4] Humanitarian work was focused principally on addressing material needs, implicitly judging non-material needs as of lower priority and greater complexity and variation.[5] Now, however, MHPSS has been firmly established—within a broader framing of the psychosocial well-being of communities impacted by crisis—as a key sector of humanitarian response.

The place of MHPSS within prioritized humanitarian action has been noticeably codified since the establishment and widespread endorsement of the IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings.[6] These guidelines specify a 'minimum response' to a range of mental health and psychosocial issues, which relate not only to health but also to broad cross-sectoral concerns in such areas as water and sanitation, food and nutrition and education. With these IASC guidelines now translated into many languages, and key principles from them adopted within the revised Sphere Standards[7] governing humanitarian response, MHPSS activities may now be considered mainstream.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) have played a major role in such developments. A number of representatives of these organizations took part in the extensive consultations leading up to the formulation of the IASC Guidelines. The IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support that supports implementation of the guidelines includes representatives from ACT Alliance and World Vision.[8] FBO engagement has by no means come only from Christian organizations; Islamic Relief Worldwide, for example, has become increasingly active in developing MHPSS as a component of its humanitarian work.[9] There has also been significant local and national FBO engagement in provision of psychosocial support programs to refugee and other crisis-affected populations.[10]

With this strong engagement from the faith-based sector—and the explicit focus on non-material needs—one might anticipate that the language and understandings of faith traditions would richly inform MHPSS interventions in humanitarian settings. However, the framing of these interventions in humanitarian contexts demonstrates, we argue, the very secular influence and presumption described in the preceding chapter. By failing to engage with the religious experience of local faith communities, the religious discourse of refugee populations is not only marginalized, but also key capacities supporting the resilience and recovery of communities are ignored.

MHPSS actors have not completely ignored issues of faith and religion. They are regularly acknowledged as key sources of resilience. However, the incorporation of such issues has generally been in a technical vocabulary that serves to marginalize religious language and, in consequence, religious actors. Williamson and Robinson's model of well-being[11] has, for example, been widely used in defining the scope of psychosocial interventions (which distinguishes between the biological, material,

mental, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual domains). This is an attempt to integrate experience of faith and religiosity within a broad conceptualization of well-being, and appropriate actions to promote it. However, despite recognition that this is the principal frame that many societies will adopt to reflect upon mental health and psychosocial well-being, 'spirituality' is the final domain addressed in the discussion, the shortest and, in framing potential areas for action, is subjugated to the cultural domain. In what is clearly intended to provide a bridge to engagement with issues of spirituality and religion, this observation seems particularly relevant in the light of the preceding discussion:

> For most people, spiritual beliefs and practices are intimately related to their sense of well-being. Many Northern practitioners who address psychosocial issues among people affected by armed conflict would make a distinction among psychosocial issues, physical health, and spiritual issues. However, among many conflict-affected populations, these would not be meaningful distinctions.[12]

The framing of religious experience as an inextricably integrated aspect of well-being for most populations is recognized, but the model sustains its separation as a discrete domain to maintain coherence with western assumptions and the formulation of humanitarian interventions.

A similar analysis may be used to critique the framework of the Psychosocial Working Group,[13] which specifies three key resource domains underpinning the mental health and psychosocial well-being of communities: human capacity; social ecology; and rights and values. In the text accompanying the framework, religious belief and affiliation are noted as important 'resources', but these are then assigned to super-ordinate categories that re-constitute faith in terms of its social benefits (such as maintaining social capital), or as a basis for meaning, concepts more convivial to a secular script.

The concept of social capital itself provides a good example of how technical, secular language may serve to diminish the power and local meaning of faith and religious experience. Woolcock's work on social capital with the World Bank has been very influential in putting issues of social relations and trust on the agenda of mainstream development theory, and is drawn upon heavily in analyses of psychosocial well-being.[14] Woolcock acknowledges the theological foundation for his analysis of social capital[15] and it has become a construct widely used by FBOs in advocacy and programming.[16] However, does such translation principally serve to empower religious discourse or to marginalize it, neutralizing

the particularity of the religious concepts that gives them their power? As we have argued elsewhere,[17] instrumentalizing the benefits of religious congregation to 'enhancing social capital' is to subjugate local religious understandings to elite, materialist assumptions, ultimately at odds with the claim of bolstering local institutions and responses.

The documentation of MHPSS programming further indicates interventions are generally disconnected from the understandings, agendas and institutions of local faith communities. The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Network is the leading global professional network for the field of mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian emergencies. The MHPSS Network website provides a repository of key documents related to practice in this field, including policy papers, technical reports and meeting records, and is thus a source likely to be strongly indicative of current programming emphases. We reviewed the several hundred documents held on this site[18] and found only 16 occasions when specific reference to faith as a factor related to MHPSS was noted, with the majority of these being brief, unelaborated statements. In only seven cases was there any substantive engagement with issues of faith. In terms of documenting field-level engagement with local faith communities on MHPSS issues, the Firelight Foundation's *From Faith to Action* report[19] is exceptional. However, while densely referencing engagement with local faith communities, the twelve strategies drawn from the analysis of successful engagement with such groups (e.g. focus on the most vulnerable, strengthen the capacity of families, reduce stigma and discrimination) are drawn squarely from the 'secular script'[20] of general MHPSS work. They include no reference to any role, resource or capacity—such as prayer, worship, pastoral visitation, etc.—that might be considered of particular significance for local faith communities or FBOs, compared with other groupings within civil society. Analysis with respect to the term religion yielded a similar picture. Only ten documents showed more substantive engagement with religion, for example, in relation to the relevance of religious resources for community coping or the implications of religious traditions on the perceptions of the nature of self and community.

This weak engagement with religious experience and forms in MHPSS work with refugee and other crisis-affected populations contrasts with a growing literature pointing to the potential role of religious resources in such contexts.[21] For example, a scoping study by the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) on Faith and Local Communities—a collaborative

network of academics and representatives of secular and faith-based humanitarian organizations—recently distilled evidence of three major mechanisms by which engagement with local faith communities may support community resilience and recovery.[22] The first mechanism is the mobilization of physical and human resource assets of local faith communities to facilitate mental health and psychosocial support interventions. Examples were identified of mosques and church buildings being made available for programs and people—particularly volunteers—being mobilized to support activities. The second mechanism is the manner in which religious belief can support coping in situations of crisis. Even prominent secular writers such as Peter Walker have noted that the weight of evidence of the positive impact of religious coping in adversity raises important questions for humanitarian interventions.[23] The scoping study noted the increased interest in engagement with religion, reflected in such statements as this from a UN official recognizing the role of religious belief for refugees:

> sometimes their belief in God is more therapeutic than other interventions and they can better express their issues through their religion—through their spiritual beliefs we can help them find solutions.[24]

The third mechanism by which religious engagement may support mental health and psychosocial well-being is through religious practice. Belief reinforces the role of personal or shared framing of adversity with respect to religious understanding. This can be a significant influence, but in many contexts religious affiliation may more directly reflected in personal or shared practices. Practices supportive of psychosocial well-being are embedded deeply in the life of many religious communities. Rituals and rites may define passage through phases of life; communities united by religious affiliation may offer mutual support; religious leaders may offer interpretations of crises and advise on the means of surviving them. The JLI scoping study documented how, in the context of a humanitarian emergency in Zambia, religious leaders had continued their religious practices within the community, leading services and conducting weddings and funerals, seeing this as an important element of sustaining community resilience.[25] Pastoral care and counseling, prayer and worship are other examples of religious practice that evidence suggests is supportive of psychosocial well-being in contexts of adversity.

Not only is there an evidence base encouraging engagement with religion in displaced communities to promote psychosocial well-being, there is—in principle—a strong policy commitment to do so. While a number of the 25 'minimum responses' articulated in the IASC MHPSS guidelines could involve engagement with local faith communities and faith-based institutions, the one directly naming such resources is response 5.3: 'Facilitate conditions for appropriate communal cultural, spiritual and religious healing practices'.[26] The action sheet corresponding to this response identifies a number of key actions, including 'Learn about cultural, religious and spiritual supports and coping mechanisms'[27] and 'Facilitate conditions for appropriate healing practices'.[28] With a suggested indicator of 'Steps have been taken to enable the use of practices that are valued by the affected people', there is a clear policy mandate from the guidelines for integration of religious resources.

How is it that such substantive engagement is so rarely documented in humanitarian programming when there is such a clear evidence base and policy encouraging it? It is our contention that it is the secular framing of humanitarianism that is at the root of both the lack of conceptual imagination and lack of confidence in the local engagement required. One field-based reflection by Alison Schafer describes the challenges of responding to the spiritual needs of crisis-affected populations in the context of the Haiti earthquake.[29] In response, many humanitarians expressed deep concern with the terms of any engagement with religion, despite the evidence base and the policy environment.[30] However, one observation was deeply resonant with our central argument of the need, not only to embrace other epistemic traditions, but to be mindfully critical of our own:

> Considering such dilemmas fully brings to the fore the real task of realizing our own implicit values as humanitarian workers or organizations, and the equal, opposite risk of ignoring the spiritual and religious dimensions in our work.[31]

Such moves—and those required to help refugees find solutions 'through their spiritual beliefs', as indicated by the UN respondent above—requires comfort and competence outside of the secular frame. Behailu Abebe's work, examining religious coping mechanisms amongst the northern Tigray populations displaced by the Ethiopian–Eritrean conflict, provides a vivid illustration of this.[32] Abebe documented how devotion to saints, drawing upon their mythical histories for examples of

resilience through times of hardship, was prominent in local communities. The convening of religious associations—such as *mähebar and sewä sanbat*—were also strong elements supporting community recovery. These were marked by regular social gatherings, mutual obligation, prayer and resource-sharing.

These responses bear remarkable parallels with some widely-accepted, technical MHPSS processes, such as the negotiation of a shared narrative framework of meaning and the development of social structures for mutual support. Humanitarian workers clearly need to be aware of, and find means of engaging with, such processes. However, this must be done in a manner that does not seek to 'explain away' these religious processes in secular, technical terms. This would be reductionist, instrumentalizing and ignorant of the particularities of the current, western framing of 'meaning making', for instance, as an uncontested explanatory factor. Rather, engagement must bear the hallmark of the dialogical frame outlined at the end of the preceding chapter. Effective humanitarian engagement in psychosocial support in this context would require the adoption of Coptic belief as 'the first second language'[33] of those seeking to provide external assistance, with such work firmly framed as bolstering indigenous efforts towards community recovery, not driving an exogenous agenda. Such a commitment is not fanciful. It is after all a requirement to operationalize the IASC injunctions to 'learn about cultural, religious and spiritual supports and coping mechanisms' and 'facilitate conditions for appropriate communal cultural, spiritual and religious healing practices'.

Exploration of this territory is arguably at the heart of a humanitarian approach that fulfills its stated respect for plurality, equity and locality.[34] However, it is clearly threatening to the secular framing of humanitarianism and its presumptions to acknowledge the need for dialogue with cosmologies outside the modernist frame. When we read Abebe's account of the value of identification with mythical historical figures, of the power of votive offerings, and of the strength drawn from the presence of the *Täbot* (a replica of the tablet of the Ten Commandments) in the community amongst the displaced of northern Tigray, we are drawn back—to use Weber's term—to an 'enchanted' world. This is a world where spiritual forces interact with human choices, motivations and outcomes, concepts alien to the self-sufficient materialism envisioned by the 'buffered self' of modernity.[35] It is a world within which arguably the vast majority of the world's refugees understand and seek deliverance

from their adversity. It is the world in which a Dinka elder accounts for his community's survival through conflict and displacement in these terms:

> Our hope comes from God. He is the air that we breathe. He is the sand that we walk on. Without him, we would not have made it, but through him we will have a future.[36]

Religion in local humanitarian engagement: the case of refugee assistance in Irbid, Jordan

In the summer of 2014 we engaged in fieldwork[37] in the municipality of Irbid in northern Jordan, a setting that was hosting approximately 150,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict. During this period, six UN organizations, 22 international NGOs and three Jordanian NGOs were formally listed within UN coordination mechanisms as providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and refugee-impacted communities across the municipality.[38] Our principal interest, however, was in the engagement of local faith groups and other local civil society organizations in providing humanitarian assistance, and their relationship with the international humanitarian actors that dominated 'formal' response. We identified 19 of these groups or organizations operating within the boundaries of Irbid, and conducted extended interviews with representatives of all but two of them. We also observed the humanitarian activities of many of these local entities.

The fieldwork was informative about many dimensions of the interface of local, national and international humanitarian actors. Local groups were very active, mostly operating outside of the mechanisms and knowledge of formal humanitarian sectoral coordination. We documented major activities in terms of provision of shelter, food, non-food household items, health, education, livelihoods support, protection and peace-building. Organizations were mobilizing significant material capital (buildings and facilities), human capital (volunteers and staff), social capital (community linkages and trust) and financial capital (charitable donations collected both locally and overseas) to support such work. However, the main concern here is on the framing of religion in these groups and the implications for their activities and relationships with wider humanitarian response. In this regard, the research leads us to make three major observations.

Firstly, the very notion of framing entities as 'local faith communities' or 'faith-based organizations' was problematic in this context. We argued in the previous chapter that the compartmentalization of religion into a distinct sphere that can be separated from the public roles of an individual or group is itself a very Western notion. Designations of 'faith-based' (or even 'faith-inspired') reflect an understanding of religion as principally about belief, and belief as separable from action and identity. In Irbid, however, the understanding of religion was very different, much more clearly aligned to shared identity and practice. In these terms, a number of groups with clear Muslim linkage did not see themselves as 'faith-based organizations':

> All organizations [registered with the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization] are secular basically. If an organization chooses to add the word Islamic or orthodox to its name there is no law that prevents this...Many choose to add the word Islamic, for example, because the founder is a sheik...[many] feel safe when their funds are going through these Islamic organizations, because sheikhs are trusted.[39]

> This separation between Islamist and secular is deceiving. We are all religious people. If I say 'there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his prophet', does my organization become Islamic?[40]

The term 'faith-based' was generally understood locally to reflect a distinct religious mission:

> Our organization was established by youth from the local community in 1991—motivated youth who felt a religious and civic obligation. No, we are not a faith-based organization. We do not discriminate...for one particular religion.[41]

Secondly, many local organizations perceived international humanitarian actors themselves as anything but neutral. The engagement of European and north American organizations—largely funded by European and north American governments—was seen to reflect the agendas and concerns of European and north American interests:

> What is the mandate of these humanitarian organizations but that of the garbage collector that follows behind every crisis made worse by the USA?[42]

Concerns among international actors regarding the neutrality of local actors were thus considered with some contempt. Many local actors had

little interest in engagement with wider humanitarian response efforts, with deep skepticism of its effectiveness and approach:

> I have attended some [coordination] meetings. In my eyes they're a decorative thing. People attend once and then disappear. It's all for show.[43]

The third, and for our purposes the most significant, observation was with regard to those local groups that *did* seek to partner with international agencies, and the manner in which religious affiliation was considered in such circumstances. The political context of the Syria crisis—and more broadly across the Middle East—had clearly rendered religious identification an issue of considerable sensitivity. This included concerns that Protestant Christian organizations may engage in proselytism in a manner that undermines Muslim affiliation but also, in the context of the Arab Spring and subsequent political instability, concerns regarding Islamic extremism. These worries were seen to influence both donor and Jordanian government processes and decision-making.

This contributed to local groups that partnered with international organizations being socialized into the use of a fairly explicit secular script, understood as 'professionalism'. This was elicited by questions regarding the manner in which religion related to humanitarian services provided: the response typically involved both a statement of non-discrimination in the provision of services on the basis of religion and positing of a 'separation' between what was generally referred to as 'social work' and 'religious work'. International FBO staff were amongst the most diligent in policing this careful use of language. Emphasizing the former, a representative of an international Islamic organization noted:

> We are an Islamic organization yes *but* we operate as an international organization...we do not discriminate for example against Christians. We are neutral and we operate in a manner similar to other [secular] international organizations.

With regard to the latter, a Christian FBO staff member observed:

> There is a reason why work done in mosques is not registered with the Ministry of Social Development. Their neutrality is disputable because they have a clear religious agenda. They do not separate religious work from social work. We, however, orient ourselves exclusively with social work.

In this narrative regarding public, impartial, neutral professional activities, religion was assigned a private place within the realm of the

motivation (or 'inspiration') of workers. Statements reflecting this positioning of religion included: 'Religion motivates people to help'; 'For us, the Christian identity is a source of inspiration'; 'Our values are honesty, charity, humanity, all inspired by Islam'; 'We have personal reasons, each of us here, to be doing the work we do…maybe, yes, some inspired by Islam'.

In meetings with local faith groups during the course of the research, it was typical for this script to be clearly articulated in the early stages of discussion, particularly when discussions were seen as potentially relevant to securing partnership with, and funding from, international sources. As discussions continued it was common, however, for alternative scripts to emerge which integrated religious language within an account of provision of humanitarian assistance. A coordinator of a community center stated initially, for example, that 'Religion should be personal. It should not affect professional decisions'. However, after further discussion, she noted 'Values in Islam are embedded in our everyday lives and naturally they have informed the services we provide'. She then went on to elaborate how her local reputation for piety had been crucial in ensuring release of young girls from their homes to attend computer literacy classes, after initial concern from conservative fathers. Such accounts of the nuanced negotiation of religious sensitivities and responsibilities appeared key to the success of this and a number of other activities observed, but were apparently outside of language and experience deemed legitimate in reporting mechanisms. As discussed in Chapter 1, the secular framing of humanitarian work by international agencies potentially does more than impose a linguistic schizophrenia on local faith actors. Rather, it risks marginalizing or, indeed, ignoring key factors in determining the effectiveness of local humanitarian initiatives. A local organization implementing a women's empowerment program noted:

> When women suffering from gender-based violence come to me, I tell them you have rights in sharia…that Islam says a man should not hit his wife. CEDAW has nothing to do with my messages…I use the Qur'an.[44]

By such means religious discourse was maintained between local service providers and the community, but generally not used with international partners. Such contextual response thus remained largely invisible to humanitarian coordination mechanisms or was coded in the most

generalized 'cultural' terms, for fear of eliciting concerns regarding the promulgation of religion and proselytism.

Concern regarding religion as a source of division or partiality was clearly a major driver of such containment. There were a number of instances of conflict noted, including an incident where a student had sought to photograph Syrians receiving assistance at a Catholic church with the stated intent of shaming sheikhs from the Gulf on the basis that 'the Christians are helping and you are not'. Donations of goods with Christian symbols on them for distribution had created offense, especially in the context of videos circulating documenting evangelical groups from the US seeking conversion of Muslims displaced by the war. There was concern expressed by some groups about others known to be affiliated with the transnational Muslim Brotherhood: 'They're the biggest organization in the Arab world. They have a huge network and they have funds coming from God knows where'.

However, local accounts suggested significant capacity for negotiating the complex plurality of religious actors. Dilemmas had been resolved through consultation with religious teachers, through the steady development of trust as a result of collaboration and, as was widely suggested, by recognizing the common humanity reflected in Muslims—Sunni and Shia—Christians, and indeed, Jews all being 'people of the book'. 'If someone asks is it OK to take food from Christians, we would tell them the prophet used to eat at his Christian friends' houses'.

Generally, religious groups and related civil society organizations appeared to be making a significant contribution to humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Irbid. However, their capacities were poorly understood and utilized within the overall humanitarian response. Much of this may be attributed to challenges in establishing effective means of partnership working and coordination, as observed in other studies of local humanitarian engagement.[45] However, with much of the unique contribution of local actors tied to their religious linkages and the clear evidence of international humanitarian actors' discomfort in engagement with issues of religion, the secular framing of humanitarian discourse appears to have contributed appreciably to such conditions. There was evidence of much greater facility in managing religious diversity at the local level than was evidenced in discussion with international partners, who for the most part—it was widely acknowledged—were not meaningfully 'on the ground' in Irbid.

Religion in humanitarian strategy: the World Humanitarian Summit and the World Disasters Report 2014

We have mapped the influence of a secular humanitarian script in the specific programming context of MHPPS interventions and in the specific geographical context of Irbid, hosting approaching 150,000 Syrian refugees, in northern Jordan. The final section of this chapter considers how secularism shapes the understanding of faith and religion in the context of fora discussing humanitarian strategy.

In 2013 the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon, called for a World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 where humanitarian stakeholders would come together to agree an agenda for humanitarian work to address emerging challenges that was 'inclusive, effective and accountable'.[46] How is religion reflected in the processes to negotiate this agenda? The core themes of the consultation[47]—humanitarian effectiveness (including accountability to needs and expectations of affected people); reducing vulnerability and managing risks (including promoting community resilience); transformation through innovation (addressing technological innovation but also 'how the international humanitarian system could be made to be more self-critical'); and serving the needs of people in conflict (with a major emphasis on provision for displaced populations)—certainly leave room to address many of the issues regarding appropriate community engagement raised in Chapter 1 and in the preceding discussion in this chapter.

In initial briefing papers, however, neither of the terms faith or religion are used, although the specification of the role of civil society organizations and local community organizations is clearly of relevance to potential faith engagement. In the scoping papers developing each of these themes, the promotion of stronger linkage with local capacities and a broader range of actors remains a consistent emphasis. However, the secular script is maintained by the exclusion of any specific reference to religion (or local faith communities or FBOs), while 'militaries, national and international businesses, digital humanitarians and diaspora groups, among others' are noted as actors for whom there is a need to 'ensur[e] their capacity, resources and expertise are best leveraged for a more effective humanitarian response'.[48]

Submissions and online consultations in the lead-up to the summit illustrate areas of commonality and contention amongst humanitarian

actors. In the course of a global online discussion on the question of what is most critical to ensure that humanitarian action is meeting humanitarian needs, for example, 'there was complete agreement that there needs to be a greater focus on local and national actors'.[49] Further, among the leading recommendations to emerge from the consultation was the need to 'understand and embrace indigenous coping mechanisms'.[50]

Documentary submissions have reinforced this theme, with Christian Aid proposing that 'donors must reform approaches that undermine local and national capacity',[51] while ACT Alliance proposes 'a shift in power towards locally-led response' as a key priority, including greater flexibility in working processes to allow a greater range of partnerships with local community organizations within an extended humanitarian system.[52] Reflecting our earlier analysis, such reform, shifts and partnership will, in most settings, inevitably require active participation with actors with explicit or implicit religious affiliation. But religion itself remains remarkably silenced within the general summit discourse. Used as a search term, as of February 2015 just seven contributions to the preparatory dialogue for the summit were identified, mostly in the context of listings of categories with respect to which non-discrimination is important (e.g. 'a willingness to relieve human suffering, regardless of culture, origins or religion') or as a basis for conflict. 'Religious' identified slightly more contributions (17), either in reference again to a category of inappropriate discrimination or with a concerned tone with respect to 'religious differences', 'religious and ethnic divisions', 'religious and ethnic factions', 'religious fundamentalism' or the concern that 'religious organizations have been reported to take advantage of the situation to gain entry and influence [the] community for their own interests'. There was just one reference to engagement with 'religious leaders', in the context of the public discussions require to shape social norms with respect to female genital mutilation.[53] As with the preceding analysis with respect to MHPSS programming, a similar picture resulted when using 'faith' as a search term.

The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 affords a wonderful opportunity for humanitarianism to reframe its current understanding of, and engagement with, religion. However, as things stand, it is hard not to conclude from the above analysis that humanitarianism is in a challenging cleft: resolving to more effectively engage with local communities and organizations and to give greater voice to local actors at the same time as reinforcing discourse that pushes the religious framing, institutions

and narrative of local communities outside of the humanitarian narrative. Religion is a source of discrimination or division, a variable to be controlled for or neutralized. We do not see language here reflecting religion as an immanent force within displaced communities, the source of moral orientation, the basis of community mobilization, the foundation of shared identity and pathways of resilience.[54]

This persistence of the uncritical presumptions of secular humanitarianism in the face of efforts to relate more effectively with local communities is also present in the 2014 *World Disasters Report* (*WDR*). There is much in this report focused on the theme of culture and risk to be admired. It is rare amongst contemporary strategy reflections to explicitly address issues of religious practice and their relevance for humanitarian assistance (in this context in relation to work on disaster risk reduction and the protection of communities). In particular, as the leading annual source of reflection from the IFRC regarding humanitarian strategy, we warmly welcome the use of the forum of the *World Disasters Report* for the stated goal to bring religion—and other sources of belief—'into the open' for discussion. However, in committing a full chapter to the topic 'How religion and beliefs influence perceptions and attitudes towards risk', the report serves to provide the most explicit illustration of the unselfcritical presumptions of global humanitarianism.

We can use key concepts from the previous chapter to illustrate this. In Chapter 1 we ended with calls for the development of a humanitarian public space within which all worldviews—religious and non-religious—may coexist with comity, and the nurturing of a dialogically skillful humanitarianism to negotiate within this complex space. Much of this prescription seems compatible with the intention of WDR 2014, with its careful consideration of multiple religious traditions and the influence of non-religious institutional beliefs. However, our analysis called for a more critical stance towards presumptions of modernity and neutrality within the humanitarian enterprise. Without such adjustment, the space may be open to all, but the agenda is set; there may be dialogue, but the core understandings of some are not open to scrutiny.

When the report seeks to engage with religious accounts of natural disasters—whether the *makhluk halus* controlling eruptions threatening displacement of the population living below Mount Merapi in Indonesia or US faith communities mobilizing scripture to endorse climate adaptation—these are generally being considered against the standard of current disaster risk-reduction thinking. The outworkings

of religious belief and practice are instrumentalized with respect to this standard, as either 'constructive' or 'harmful'.[55] Despite earlier attempts to acknowledge the potential parallelism of 'insider' and 'outsider' accounts ('the . . . "indigenous" and the . . . "expert" systems each appear to be coherent and logical in themselves'[56]), the humanitarian narrative of the report makes clear presumptions about knowledge that is embedded in belief systems and that which is self-evident. Note, for example, the observation:

> In many parts of the world, particularly those where local cultural practices and worldviews are deeply embedded in everyday life, beliefs often exert considerable influence on the ways that people perceive risks and respond to them.[57]

In which parts of the world is this not the case? Apparently, in policy-making environments where:

> Belief systems generally play no part in national-level policy relating to environment risk or longer-term environmental threats.[58]

Or, indeed, amongst international organization and donors who seek to avoid 'introduc[ing] a degree of subjectivity into analyses that should be informed solely by science'.[59]

Beliefs here have become something that others have, that may or may not be beneficial to the required actions that have been identified as 'beyond belief'. We need to note that respect for engagement with local faith communities on religious understandings regarding disasters does not force us to neglect the essential role and contribution of science.[60] The central question here, rather, is the blindness to the beliefs that underpin the analysis presented, and its positioning of the humanitarian community on issues such as climate change and disaster risk reduction. On these topics, relevant beliefs in high income countries—particularly neoliberal themes regarding economic growth, personal freedoms, patterns of consumption, limits of redistribution of wealth, accountability to populations in low-income counties impacted by historical carbon emissions from high-income nations and so on—simply abound. The role of science within climate change discussions is, as we have noted, crucial; however, to suggest that any donor government could legitimately claim its analysis was 'informed solely by science' indicates remarkable blindness to the values and suppositions of a Western materialist framing of the issue.

The narrative of the WDR 2014 seeks to open up engagement with alternative discourses. However, it does this in a manner not mindful of the historical, philosophical particularities of its 'taken for granted' assumptions. It is a vivid example of the voice of Charles Taylor's 'buffered self': illustrated by describing processes and contingencies in the world of the other, but believing that its own account can stand above such a context. This is the defining characteristic of 'self-sufficient humanism', which Taylor sees as a legitimate choice—but amongst many others—for framing the world. Religious traditions provide alternative framings, that may not only be supportive of disaster risk reduction (DRR) work but prompt new and valuable insights. The WDR 2014 missed the opportunity to pose questions of the form: What can we learn regarding the role that faith and religion play in community processes of identity, mutual obligation and shared purpose that can refine the goals, objectives and strategies of DRR?

This chapter has focused on the argument that humanitarian discourse is framed in a manner that reflects secular presumptions, and serves to privatize, marginalize and instrumentalize matters of faith and religion. This is not only to the detriment of humanitarian programming with refugee and other crisis-affected communities, but undermines strategic attempts to develop stronger linkage with local response. The brief vignette that opened this chapter illustrates how this tendency is reflected in the small, everyday exchanges of humanitarian engagement. An expatriate trainer displays no apparent awareness of the modernizing, materialist 'filter' reinforced by her respective reactions to the proposed use of prayer, or a trust game, as an opening exercise with displaced children. But the message to the trainees was clear: The language or practice of religion played no part in the support of children to deal with the disruptions of a twenty year conflict. Humanitarian response was formulated on the basis of principles that were seen to transcend such idioms. Religious sensibility was not argued against: it was simply ignored—left outside of the humanitarian frame of legitimacy. This may be defended on the basis that prayer could be divisive or excluding, but it is hard to maintain this argument in the light of the inter-faith prayer work of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative that is noted. We suggest that small choices of language can aggregate to marginalization of a major sphere of experience for local communities. Further, humanitarian workers appear poorly equipped to consider these issues in a meaningful manner. Consequently, in the next chapter we consider more

explicitly what humanitarianism can draw from stronger engagement with religion—particularly in terms of theological understanding—for work with refugee and other displaced communities.

Notes

1   See details at www.arlpi.org.
2   *Mato oput* is a traditional Acholi reconciliation process. Kizito Menanga discusses its application in the paper 'Ethical Foundations for African Traditional Reconciliation Mechanisms: A Case Study of the Ugandan Mato Oput Process'. Available: http://www.urbanleaders.org/655LandRights/0 5LocalResponses/Nairobi/Mato%20-%20Oput,%20Fr.%20Kizitodoc.doc. [Accessed: 18 April 2015].
3   See the Statement on the Position of ARLPI on Ongwen Dominic's Case at www. arlpi.org as a vivid illustration of this approach.
4   See AGER, A. (1999) Psychology and Humanitarian Assistance. In: HARTLEY, J. AND BRANTHWAITE, A. (eds.). *The Applied Psychologist* (2nd edition). Milton Keynes: Oxford University Press; PSYCHOSOCIAL WORKING GROUP (2002) *Psychosocial Intervention in Complex Emergencies: A Conceptual Framework. Psychosocial Working Group Working Paper.* Edinburgh: QMU, Edinburgh. Available at: http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/1310/ PWG_Conceptual_Framework2.pdf [Accessed: 30 March 2015].
5   HARRELL-BOND, B. (2004) *Imposing Aid.* Oxford: Open University Press.
6   IASC (2007) *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.* Geneva: IASC.
7   SPHERE PROJECT (2013) *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.* Available at: www.sphereproject.org/.
8   IASC (2012) IASC *MHPSS Reference Group Global Meeting Report*, 2012. Available at: http://mhpss.net/?get=175/1353509004-MINUTESIASCMHPSS RGGlobalMeeting2012.pdf [Accessed: 30 March 2015].
9   ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLDWIDE (2013) *Syria: Two years, too Long. Key Recommendations for Easing Suffering of the Syrian People.* Birmingham, UK: IRW.
10   Many partners of REPSSI, the [African] Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative, are faith-inspired groups, for example. These include several cross-national faith groups—such as the Salvation Army and Church Alliance for Orphans—as well as many small national FBOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) with strong religious links. The report *From Faith to Action* specifically profiles case studies of effective engagement in psychosocial and related support for vulnerable children by local faith-inspired groups in sub-Saharan Africa. Activities profiled range from those

of local groups, such as the Kisumu Urban Apostolate Program in Panipieri, Kisumu, Kenya; the Teso Islamic Development Organization in Soroti, Uganda; and the Nehemiah Project in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, to a number of inter-faith and regional organizations.

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51   CHRISTIAN, A. (2014) *Making the WHS Worth the Climb.* Available from: http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/node/471236 [Accessed: 30 March 2015].

52   ACT ALLIANCE (2015) *The World Humanitarian Summit: Putting People at the Centre.* Available from: http://www.actalliance.org/resources/publications/J3734-ACT%20Alliance%20position%20paper%20for%20World%20Humanitarian%20Summit_AW.pdf/view [Accessed: 30 March 2015].

53   See http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/search/apachesolr_search/religious [Accessed: 30 March 2015].

54   Regional consultation exercises highlighted this omission of a specific focus on engagement with faith, and a concept paper on *Religious/FBO Engagement* was subsequently developed by the WHS Secretariat to specify processes of reflection and consultation in the period from April 2015 up until the summit in May 2016. This is clearly to be welcomed, although the initial omission and its redress as a result of regional consultations arguably reinforce the preceding analysis of the influence of western secular framing. It remains to be seen whether events convened in the build-up to the summit in May 2016 significantly challenge this order.

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56 IFRC (2014) World Disasters Report, p. 27.
57 IFRC (2014) World Disasters Report, p. 44.
58 IFRC (2014) World Disasters Report, p. 52.
59 IFRC (2014) World Disasters Report, p. 55.
60 An issue revisited in Chapter 4.

3

Engaging with Theological Reflection to Strengthen Humanitarian Response

Abstract: *Theological reflection—particularly regarding the experience of forced migrants themselves—is largely absent from current humanitarian discourse. Framing the experience of exile and the provision of welcome in religious terms is consistent with many faith traditions. However, the coloniality of humanitarian discourse typically serves to disempower these authentic local accounts of experience. Privatization, marginalization, and instrumentalization of religion do not simply serve to insulate humanitarian programming from religious influence but also to undermine the legitimacy and authority of the reasoning and reflection of people of faith in contexts of humanitarian crisis. The theological imaginary, in particular that formed in contexts of migration and marginalization, is a potentially powerful source of insights to challenge the current conceptualization of humanitarian assistance to refugee communities.*

The eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano had resulted in major devastation on the island of Montserrat, and significant population displacement. More than two-thirds of the population had moved to other Caribbean islands or to the UK. Those remaining—disproportionately poor and elderly—were displaced to the north of the island previously under-populated as a result of its harsh topography: roads and settlements having to cling to steep ridges of prehistoric larva flows. I visited well into the planned 'reconstruction' period, which—following a period of significant sensitivity regarding the political and economic viability of the territory—was a major focus of UK government assistance. Physical rehabilitation had been to the fore, along with efforts to sustain health and education services that would encourage return to the island. However, social reconstruction soon emerged as a major theme that required urgent attention. The physical and economic infrastructure of the island had been destroyed, for sure, but there was also a fear that so too had the soul of the island. Interview upon interview mourned the loss of a way of life, a way of being, which had sustained the islanders through previous hardships. Parents and teachers felt that the world into which their children were being socialized was harsh; the community values that shaped identity being torn apart as extended families were fragmented by relocations. Conversations often turned to the means by which some sense of the previous way of life, the previous sense of what it was to be *Montserratian*, could be restored. Three themes typically emerged in such discussions. Arrow, the musician who had globally popularized soca rhythms, had recently returned to the island to play a concert that had brought virtually all current inhabitants together in a celebration and statement of resilience. Plans for the restoration of a cricket pitch were seen as crucial to provide a focus for the game that brought all generations and social groups together. Then there were the churches. I had visited one on my first Sunday on the island, enticed by the spirited worship that I could hear from my guesthouse room. Creeping into the back proved no mechanism for anonymity in this welcoming Pentecostal congregation. I was struck by the presumption of welcome and fellowship, humbled by the prayers for peace and deliverance. And it was clear from the announcements that the pastoral ministry of the church—within the congregation and in visiting the public assistance housing schemes in the locality—was taken very seriously. I became aware how different the narrative of this congregation was from that which structured the situation analysis I'd read on the plane. It wasn't

that there were no common features. Loss of homes, indebtedness, separation, uncertainty about the future were vivid in both. Here, however, there was a theological imagination at work that saw such hardships played out simultaneously at both a personal and cosmological level. The journey of this community was connected to that of others in an explicitly eschatological frame. My reflections were reinforced soon after when I met the coordinator for the Council of Churches on the island. I noted the various instrumental assets that religious institutions were making available to support the islanders' recovery: the regiments of volunteers they could mobilize, the space they could provide for social gatherings, the rich local knowledge of resources and vulnerabilities. However, a recent religious ritual conducted on the island pointed again towards a broader theological imagination. Three Anglican churches had been rendered uninhabitable subsequent to the eruption of the volcano, and thus four congregations had for some considerable time been sharing a service together in the northernmost parish on the island. At communion time, four communion cups were prepared and each congregation gathered together in a different section of the church. However, in early 1999, with one parish under meters of ash and two others considered uninhabitable for an indefinite period, it was agreed to move on to accept the new reality, and thus identity, facing the islanders. The communion cups were rededicated, and the congregation drawn from across all four parishes shared a single cup at communion.

*   *   *

Religion deeply impacts the motivation, identity, behavior and worldview of forced migrants, the communities that host them and, in many instances, the organizations—local and international—that serve them. In today's landscape of global migration, with the numbers of people forcibly displaced having grown to well over 50 million,[1] there is growing recognition of the importance of identifying innovative solutions to the challenges of increasing and protracted displacement. Much attention has begun to be given to the question of how international humanitarian organizations can forge more effective partnerships with local actors. This has given greater profile to the vast, largely grassroots networks of religious communities and faith-based organizations that routinely provide protection, emergency response, shelter and food displaced persons worldwide.[2] In 2014 *Forced Migration Review*, the most widely read publication on forced migration, committed a special issue to the

topic of faith and responses to displacement with 36 contributions.[3] In 2015, the World Bank co-convened a meeting on faith and sustainable development that featured humanitarian response as one of the major conference themes.[4] Despite this growing interest in engagement with religious actors, however, little attention in mainstream humanitarian circles has been paid to explicit theological reflection on displacement. Engagement with the discipline of theology is of clear relevance if deeper understanding of religious motivation and experience within communities is required. However, this is even more evident if we consider theology, not as some external academic enterprise, but as constituted by the inner reasoning and reflection of people of faith. Theological reflection—particularly regarding the perspective of forced migrants themselves and the implications of this for humanitarian response—remains largely absent from current discussion.[5]

In this chapter we seek to argue that strengthening partnership with organizations and displaced communities of faith will require two metaphorical migrations for a humanitarianism socialized within a secular, Western professional discourse. The first is a journey from an extrinsic, positivist analysis of religious experience to an intrinsic, dialogical and relational one; and the second is from the judgment of humanitarianism's neutrality—ideological, political and epistemological—to increased consciousness of its placedness and particularities. Accordingly, the goals of this chapter are three-fold. First, we seek to underscore the importance of practitioners engaging with religion by dialogically entering theological epistemologies. Second, we show how the coloniality of the current humanitarian discourse distorts the construction of religion in contexts of displacement. Third, we consider implications and opportunities for greater exploration of the theological imaginary in support of humanitarian response.

The relevance of theological reflection for humanitarian response to displacement

Recognition of the value of—as well as the challenges presented by—religion in contexts of displacement is by now increasingly widespread. It is our contention, however, that engaging with religious communities and individuals in extrinsic terms, with an analysis conceived principally in terms of concepts such as social capital, embeddedness and shared

meaning, is insufficient. Specifically, it is an insufficiently powerful form of engagement to facilitate effective partnership and mutual understanding between secular humanitarianism and faith-based actors or displaced people of faith. Such an approach typically requires translation on the part of faith actors to a secular script of humanitarianism, limits insight into the full depth of the thoughtworld of people of faith and concretizes an epistemological chasm between faith and humanitarianism. To build partnership, dialogue is necessary; for dialogue to be possible, some degree of common understanding is required. The humanitarian regime is in only the earliest stage of developing sufficiently sophisticated tools to enable this understanding: in place of an extrinsic analysis of religion, humanitarian practitioners in today's deeply plural world need to skillfully dialogue with worldviews and communities built on a variety of epistemological foundations.

The urgency of effective engagement with religion is almost irrefutable. As noted earlier, the majority of displaced people who humanitarian practitioners seek to support belong to communities of faith, and thus interpret events, processes and relationships with reference to their theology. Evidence suggests not just a continuation of high levels of religious affiliation globally[6] but also a recognition that social and political analyses have for many decades underestimated the influence of religion.[7] Researchers such as Scott Thomas and Timothy Shah have tracked the dramatic resurgence of interest in religion in global affairs in recent years, seeing it as a corrective to the imbalanced secular framing of political science and international relations.[8]

This post-secularizing trend is particularly pertinent to modern displacement given that the religious faith of displaced people appears deeply relevant to their resilience and well-being. Religious narratives, rites, rituals and personal spiritual practices have frequently been shown to sustain continuity and identity in the flux of exile.[9] Fernando and Hebert found that faith in God and religious practice were considered as the most significant resources available to survivors of the 2004 Tsunami.[10] As one respondent in Paristau's study of survivors of gender-based violence in displaced communities in Kenya noted:

> Look at us, we have lost everything we had, we don't even have shelter, we have been rejected by our neighbours while we are forgotten by our government. God is all we have now and we are going to call upon His name and He will hear us.[11]

Additionally, engagement with faith is necessary given the global pattern of proximate displacement—internally or to neighboring countries—in which FBOs and local faith communities (LFCs) form a substantial component of civil society in the low and middle income countries that currently host the majority of the world's displaced people. As Ferris has noted:

> Contributions…organized by local religious organisations or volunteers … are not recorded anywhere in the UN's statistics on humanitarian contributions. Nonetheless, the sums of money mobilized by these small mosques and congregationally-based charitable organisations are undoubtedly substantial.[12]

The report on the contribution of local religious resources to community resilience collated by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities[13] documented many instances of faith-based responses to displacement relevant to preparedness, meeting basic needs such as food and shelter, the provision of psychosocial support and longer-term settlement. The substantial work of local faith organizations or groups—with Islamic, Protestant or Catholic affiliations—in supporting the Syrian population displaced within the municipality of Irbid, Jordan was noted in the previous chapter.[14] Similar trends can be seen in high-income settings, particularly in the prominent role of faith communities in processes of refugee settlement.[15] Given the strategic, political and economic commitment from the international humanitarian community to engage more effectively with local institutions and resources, the task of learning effective communication and partnership with religious groups—a task that we argue can hardly be accomplished without engagement with explicit theological reflection—is of crucial importance.

Engagement with the language and ideas of religion and theology, then, is necessary because religious traditions of reflection deeply frame the interpretation of key themes confronted by people who experience displacement: 'home', 'belonging', 'migration', and 'exile'. These themes are well-trodden theological paths within most religious traditions. How can such concepts be authentically engaged without entering dialogically into their theological construction? Indeed, reflection on these themes raises foundational theological questions: Where do humans find their ultimate belonging? How should guests, travelers and migrants—the 'other'—be treated? How does one understand continuity in one's identity through the uprooting experience of displacement? It is of vital

importance for practitioners today to develop the tools for dialogue with such theological reflection. These may then be used in relationship with people of faith grappling with such questions, to support the development of genuine and deepened partnerships of response.

To take a pertinent example, a central theme of theological reflection related to displacement is that of 'the guest' or 'the stranger'. This theme raises existential-theological questions of identity and ethical questions of response. To give hospitality to strangers has long meant more than the simple provision of resources; rather, it has implied the humanness of the other, and has frequently reflected a theology of divine presence. In Homer's Odyssey, this mysterious relationship is affirmed: 'Rudeness to a stranger is not decency...All wanderers and beggars come from Zeus'.[16] Islamic tradition, throughout the Qur'an, Hadith, and the long history of jurisprudence, bears many commitments to conferring *aman* (safety) on guests and refugees. The Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) hijrah to Mecca in 622 provides the framework for a tradition of refugee protection within Islam that has been argued[17] to be stronger than modern international law:

> And if anyone of the disbelievers [polytheists] seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the word of Allah, and then escort him to where he will be secure.[18]

One of the most frequently repeated ethical themes in Jewish scripture combines precisely ethical instruction and historical-existential claim. 'You shall love [the stranger] as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt'.[19] Rabbinical tradition, too, has often supported the rights of strangers, including fugitives. Maimonides, himself a Córdoban refugee fleeing religious persecution, advised that 'The court is obligated to straighten the roads to the cities of refuge...bridges should be built so as not to delay one who is fleeing to [the city of refuge]'.[20]

Christians share such reflection on this theme through identification as strangers in this world, a belief that theologians trace deep into the faith's roots to Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden, Abraham's migration from Canaan, and the journeys and exiles of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.[21] In the New Testament, the theme of the Hebrews' history of displacement is developed via the identification of the divine person of Jesus with all strangers.[22] Jesus was born in a stable because there is no room for him elsewhere; during his ministry he had 'nowhere to rest his head',[23] and in Matthew's gospel he eschatologically and ethically

identifies himself with strangers: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me'.[24] Reflection on this theme can be seen too in Hindu theology: in the Taittiriya Upanishad, one of the ten Mukhya (primary) Upanishads commented upon by Adi Shankara, we find the culturally foundational mantra *atithi devo bhava* or 'be one for whom the guest is God'. This suggestion of immanent divine presence again places the theme of 'the guest' in existential-theological context.

Efforts to engage themes such as this are a recurrent feature of refugee narratives and response,[25] for example, working to establish a sense of belonging in the context of the loss of 'home'. This example is supported by McMichael's work with displaced Somali women in Australia, which suggests that the 'plurilocality' of religious faith can offer a secure sense of home in the midst of the uncertain migrant journey of a 'stranger'. She notes how, for the Muslim women she interviewed:

> Islamic practice and theology provides a plurilocal home that can be carried through space and time…women stated that religious faith and practice was the most important way of coping with emotional distress in their lives.[26]

Our concern here is this: if theological reflection frames understanding and construction of essential themes of displacement; can provide measurable support to the displaced; undergirds the practice of vast segments of local civil society; and is not going away in step with 'progress'—what then is the appropriate response of humanitarianism? Our question thus becomes not whether, but *how* to engage constructively with the language and understandings of religion.

Coloniality and the construction of religion in humanitarian discourse

In the previous chapter we showed how the processes of privatization, marginalization, and instrumentalization serve to constrain the influence of religion on humanitarian programming. Here, we revisit consideration of these processes with a more explicit focus on how they shape understanding of the sort of 'reasoning and reflection of people of faith' described above. These three approaches share in common some sense that religion needs to be dealt with, and thus concede in some manner the validity—or at least permanence—of religion in the modern world. In this way they can be distinguished from efforts to specifically reject or

ignore religion. Free exercise of religion is protected within humanitarian law and, with the exception of some prominent campaigning atheists, is rarely the focus of major debate.

However, *how* religion and religious language should be dealt with clearly is—as we have noted in preceding chapters—a focus of significant concern. Strategies for dealing with religion are not merely seen as a matter of managing diversity of belief and affiliation. The emergence of the secular framing of humanitarianism during the course of the 20th century reflected not only forces of globalization and professionalization as noted in Chapter 1, but also significant decline in personal religious profession within Europe and, to a lesser extent, the US during this period. Allied to the presumptions of contemporary humanitarianism discussed previously, there appears an interest to contain religion in order to avoid harm. As representatives of Islamic Relief Worldwide recently noted:

> The humanitarian sector has a strong secular bias…[leaving] FBOs often feeling that there is an actively anti-religious feeling within the international sector…In Lebanon, initial questions to Islamic Relief staff and partners about how their faith inspires their work were immediately met with strong pronouncements on the importance of non-discrimination, with any discussion of faith being first understood in terms of its potential risk to humanitarian principles.[27]

Privatization represents a strategy to manage the potential harms and risks of religion by consigning all reflections on religion to the private sphere of personal spirituality and piety. In the example above, there is no challenge suggested to the profession of Islam. However, humanitarian work is *de facto* a practice of the public sphere, within which religion needs to be constrained. The protection of humanitarian principles is therefore seen as contingent upon controlling the manifestations of Islam. While being conceded as fully legitimate within the private, personal sphere, they are illegitimate in the public space of humanitarian response. Crucial to the argument of this chapter is the fact that such privatization is both a form of—and reaction to—theological reflection. The division of the public and the private reflects a particular, contested understanding of religion. Its unthinking imposition on other systems of thought and practice reflects a partial presumption regarding—to use Taylor's terms—'self-sufficient humanism' rather than acknowledging it as 'one option amongst many'.[28]

Privatization of religion in humanitarian response somewhat inexorably leads to its marginalization in dialogue with communities. Here, again, the claims, insights and concerns of religion are not rejected outright; they are pushed to the margins of legitimate discussion. Accounts of how humanitarian agencies managed requests for rebuilding of mosques following humanitarian crises illustrate this well. Rebuilding places of prayer in Sri Lanka during the civil war were deemed 'not in the remit' of a secular humanitarian organization, notwithstanding the recognition of the role of the mosque in the life of the community.

> I…did not take notice of the value to the people of having a mosque, or maybe of the loss of community to them in not having one. I had worked with them, and against the local authorities, to let them build village-like settlements rather than rigidly aligned camps, but I had not taken the further step of seeing their religious needs.[29]

Duncan Green of Oxfam notes how following the Tsunami in Aceh, a community identified the rebuilding of their mosque as the key investment that would support their recovery. The agency was concerned that this potentially was not an appropriate use of funds. On this occasion, a resolution was found, but at the expense of marginalizing the religious account of the utility of the building:

> The 'fudge' in the end was 'yes, we will help you to rebuild your mosque as long as you call it a community centre'.[30]

The humanitarian principles that such marginalization is purporting to protect seek to ensure that humanitarian actors 'enjoy the confidence of all'.[31] It is a curious distortion of this laudable goal that local agendas and forms of thinking are displaced to the margins, while Western, secular constructions of religion enjoy relatively unchallenged power.

The validation of a mosque on the grounds that it serves as a community center links to the third approach to containing religion identified earlier: instrumentalization. Awareness of the utility of engagement with religious groups and institutions plausibly accounts for much of humanitarianism's renewed interest in the place of religion in contemporary humanitarianism. This approach recognizes the value of engagement with religion, but primarily in terms of its instrumentality to existing (unchallenged) humanitarian goals, principles and practices. The focus is on the physical and social resources of faith communities, and far less on forms of theological reflection within them that provide a basis for transformation. This emphasis is evident in the vocabulary that now

frequently adopted to justify humanitarian engagement with religion: religious communities have important 'resources', 'tools', or 'outreach capacities', are 'embedded', have significant 'reach' within communities, and can provide an important 'contribution' to coordinated response. This language implies that the work of humanitarianism is defined and executed by external actors, and that local faith-based organizations and religious 'beliefs' and 'values' can be co-opted if deemed coherent with this agenda (or excluded if challenging to these bodies' agenda and mode of practice). 'Partnership' is seen to be of value when religious concepts or resource held by religious communities are useful in furthering existing strategic responses to displacement.

The logic of the instrumental approach dominates contemporary debate on how best to advance partnership with religious organizations and communities, although in practice agencies and practitioners continue to also deploy the strategies of privatization and marginalization. In whatever configuration these processes are adopted, they do not simply serve to insulate humanitarian programming from religious influence, but also to undermine the legitimacy and authority of the reasoning and reflection of people of faith in humanitarian contexts. This presents major challenges for establishing appropriate forms of partnership in humanitarian contexts.

Firstly, partnerships with religious entities founded on strategies of privatization, marginalization and instrumentalization are highly conditional. For example, the possibility of marginalizing explicit religious reflection from the public dimension of the work of an FBO requires an often-imported spiritual/physical, public/private dualism that may only cohere in Western terms. We noted in Chapter 1 some of the consequences of these assumptions observed by religious scholars, including Heibert's insight regarding the 'excluded middle' between spiritual and physical worlds[32] that results and Boff's critique of the 'reductionism' of this separation.[33] Yet partnerships between FBOs and secular agencies, and indeed, many accounts of religion in humanitarian discourse, tend to begin from such situated Western epistemology, however unconsciously. To be clear, conditionality is in most circumstances not the intention of practitioners or organizational policy; rather, it is a consequence of what Anibal Quijano describes as the 'coloniality' of power.[34] The first step in constructing partnerships and relationships of equality and mutual respect[35] is to unthink Eurocentricity and decolonize dominant epistemology related to religion. Joseph Kitagawa's work demonstrated in the

1950s that European study of religion (the same *Religionswissenschaft*[36] that underlies dominant secular humanitarian treatment of religion and faith communities) has:

> from the time of the Enlightenment...been operating with Western categories in the study of all religions of the world, in spite of its avowed principles of neutrality and objectivity.[37]

Even without delving into the many complexities of the debate over defining religion, there is a more fundamental dispute to raise: that of the existence of an object in the world called religion. The ostensibly universal category called 'religion'—clearly a categorization fundamental to this discussion—is in fact widely seen by scholars of religion as a deeply situated modern European invention.[38] If we are searching for a starting point from which to begin constructing a process of engagement with 'religion' in the world, this European category is not it: our starting point is further back still, and concerns dialoguing partners engaged in a process of acknowledging and naming their foundational epistemologies.

To acknowledge the situatedness of the category of 'religion', though, is only half of the story. The Western claim to such a hypothetical category is not a coincidence of history, but instead a crucial step in the development of the apparatus of coloniality. What Scott Thomas calls the 'invention of religion'[39] as a universal propositional category took shape as an attempt to 'construct a decontextualized, ahistorical phenomenon and divorce it from questions of power'.[40] Through colonial expansion, this falsely ahistorical category has been exported to non-Western countries and continues to retain much of its power in the West as an ostensibly universal category undergirding all questions of religion. Colonialism has included not just the brute externalities of force, violence and slavery, but also what Virgilio Elizondo describes as the effort to 'destroy the conquered's inner worldvision, which gives cohesion and meaning to existence', including the destruction of religious symbolism and knowledge.[41]

Quijano's key insight in the early 1990s into the epistemological consequences of colonialism was 'to link Eurocentrism with knowledge', realizing that a taproot of coloniality is the power to define the *only* valid epistemology and, crucially, that 'without decolonizing knowledge and changing the terms of the conversation, the rules of the game would be maintained'.[42] In our context, the rules of the game constitute the foundational conditionality governing interaction between humanitarian actors and faith. A hidden coloniality cannot coexist with coequal exchange:

it must be named, engaged and decentered. Quijano describes this vision as the 'destruction of the coloniality of world power'. Challenging assumptions of the dominant discourse is crucial to this:

> First of all, epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings as the basis of another rationality that legitimately pretends to some universality.[43]

This is our core task then—to unthink Eurocentricity and decolonize the epistemology of humanitarianism, in order to clear the way for real communication between agencies and theological reflection, and for the construction of new terms of engagement.

Secondly, there is good reason for concern about the effectiveness of partnerships based on these approaches. A 2005 review of Norwegian NGOs suggested that the imposition of a separation of theological reflection from public action results in 'split[ting] the very integrated value base that arguably gives FBOs their added value... NORAD throws them into a somewhat schizophrenic mode'.[44] In this way, the logic of the instrumentalist approach—engaging the social capital of faith but leaving out the theology—bites the hand that feeds it. Seemingly, FBOs are routinely required to enter this 'schizophrenic mode' as a requisite of partnership, a conditionality suggested by the fact that FBOs have been found to have increasingly assumed a secular language and mission largely indistinguishable from non faith-based humanitarian agencies.[45]

Major international events—from the fall of the Shah, through the attacks of 9/11, to the rise of Islamic State—have led to much reflection in a related field, international relations, regarding the capacity of prevailing notions of religion to predict religious groups' decision-making and behavior.[46] Given the apparent falsity of the foundational assumptions of secularization theories,[47] global political analyses of trends in religion that do not challenge these assumptions have increasingly fallen from favor. As David Brooks has written: 'Secularism is not the future; it is yesterday's incorrect vision of the future'.[48] Scott Thomas argues that at the root of the incapacity to predict religious behavior is a 'crisis of modernity'. Specifically:

> the post-modern world opens up the possibility...of there being multiple ways of being modern...and challenges the idea that in our era there is still a grand narrative—the Western concept of modernity—a single overall character and direction to the meaning of progress, modernity or development for all countries.[49]

If humanitarian partnership with faith cannot embrace the 'multiple ways of being modern', it will accept only one: that which is defined by the more powerful partner. In this way, the modernities in which religious communities continue to exist are a mystery to Western actors, severely limiting the effectiveness of communication and partnership.

Towards decolonial engagement

In order to negotiate these and other challenges, it is necessary to discard the promise of neutrality built on a hidden Eurocentricity and enter the global and often chaotic meaning-making marketplace of interaction between alternate epistemologies. Humanitarians need to 'think with' not just 'think about' people of faith, engaging in empowering ways with alternate religious modernities and developing the practical skills necessary to build effective partnership. We are looking to theology as a 'transborder discourse'[50] to guide this exploration, responding to Robert Orsi's urging that to 'make sense of religion as lived experience…a new vocabulary is demanded…a language as hybrid and tensile as the realities it seeks to describe'.[51]

Two words of caution are necessary here: there can be no exhaustive description of a set of 'religious epistemologies' that humanitarian practitioners can memorize in order to build effective partnership. What we are calling for here is both consciousness of the deeper layers of the meaning of pluralism, and the development of the skills necessary to achieve practical action in a truly plural world. Neither should this section be understood to describe 'useful' examples of religious reflection for the tasks of humanitarianism: to do so would fall into the trap of instrumentalizing theology to humanitarian goals. To avoid this, this section rather seeks to exemplify some epistemological bases that ground the reflection of some faith communities, particularly as they may contrast with dominant Western epistemology, and sketch some implications of these for contexts of displacement.

Context and knowledge

One example of an alternate foundational notion concerns the place of context in constituting valid knowledge. Nicolas Wolterstorff has written of the journey of theology in the Western academy in which students are taught that 'Before entering the halls of learning we are

to strip off all our particularities—of gender, race, nationality, religion, social class, age—and enter purely as normal adult human beings'.[52] In this way, Western epistemology has typically aimed to generate universal knowledge, globally verifiable and applicable and generated through the investigation of 'neutral' students. Indeed, this culture of knowledge has been internalized too in Western theology of the 20th century, which, under the influence of the vogue Derridean-style 'linguistic turn', has focused closely on the universal meaning of sacred texts.[53] By contrast, people of faith can be seen to construct theologies, as Latino theologian Luis Pedraja has put it, 'in their own language, from the particularities of a given time, place, culture and social location'.[54]

In fact, all theologies are contextual; the differences are that some recognize this fact, and others obscure or deny it.[55] Contexts of displacement and emergency are seldom simply experienced as separate physical experiences, but can be seen as the material from which theological reflection is formed. Flight from home, experiencing the trauma of war, or the death of loved ones are hardly contexts that can be insulated from the meaning-making process. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is typically in contexts of relative existential comfort and social power that ostensibly ahistorical theologies are developed. The task for humanitarian practitioners today, socialized in the dominant approaches to religion listed above, is to engage religious reflection on its own terms—without interpreting it immediately through the lens of the practitioner's apparent universal knowledge. We will describe in more detail the task of such a dialogue in the final chapter; for now, we simply seek to signal the importance of this challenge.

Recognition that knowledge is produced in and by what Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz calls *lo cotidiano* (the everyday) is deeply challenging to an epistemology of generic knowledge. For example, practitioners trained to base analysis, evaluation and engagement with displaced communities in generic or universal terms are operating in a different epistemological space to a community whose faith reflection, for example, suggests that a natural disaster is the consequence of sin. What are practitioners to do when faced with this belief? As illustrated in the preceding chapter, reactions characterized by the three approaches outlined above may lead them to quickly move on from such a conversation, perhaps to demonstrate the proper, scientific reasons for the disaster the community has experienced, or perhaps to consign this faith reasoning to a footnote describing the private attributions of the community. It is our understanding that

such reactions not only fail to meet displaced communities 'where they are', but, consequently, lack sufficient power to productively and publicly engage faith reflection as a real asset in humanitarian response. Rabbi Yossi Ives has argued concerning this very situation:

> The idea of punishment for sin, which is commonly derided by Western ideas, in fact encourages communities and individuals to take personal responsibility for disaster. This responsibility can be an essential asset leading to changes in behavior that mitigate negative consequences of the crisis and, importantly, the development of preparedness for possible future instances of disaster.[56]

Religions for Peace echo these sentiments in suggesting the power for 'changing attitudes and behaviors' generated through 'understanding deliberative processes' within communities, pointing to the success of such an approach in campaigns against the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM).[57]

While we must beware falling into the trap of instrumentalizing religious reasoning to the goals of the humanitarian practitioner, this example depicts the potential implications when practitioners recognize the validity of the faith-knowledge produced in a religious community, out of the material of concrete experience, rather than privilege solely generic, neutral reflection.

The relation of opposites

A second epistemological base, that may constitute an alternate modernity, concerns the relation of opposites. Classically, Western thought presents a series of dualisms: man/woman, nature/nurture, sacred/profane, etc. This foundational dualism creates a deep preference for categorical purity in Western modernist thought that, according to Manuel Vasquez, paints hybrid (mixed) forms as 'corrupt pathological responses to dislocation, alienation, and poverty'.[58] Hybrid forms, however, may be an inescapable fact of a plural globalized society, and certainly of migrants: Feminist, post-colonial Asian theologian Kwok Pui-lan eloquently describes the 'tensions, contradictions, and fragments that characterize the border subject'.[59] Indeed, Manuel Vasquez argues that one reason modernity has not succeeded in supplanting religion is faith's capacity to:

> link realities that modernity dichotomized and that globalization destabilized—the global and the local, tradition and modernity, the sacred and the profane, culture and society, and the private and the public.[60]

Humanitarian practitioners may encounter hybrid forms that present themselves to modern humanitarians as unresolved, tense contradictions. Orlando Espin establishes an important principle for engagement with hybridity in theology by charting a transition that he underwent as a theologian regarding the 'popular Catholicism' of Dominicans on the Haitian-Dominican border. He writes that the people he worked with as a pastoral assistant 'were Catholic, but not in the way I had been used to or trained to appreciate'.[61] Though he saw the popular Catholicism of the people originally as a 'bastardized form' of his own religion, after 20 years he began to see the faith of the people as 'the real faith of the real church'.[62] In this transition we can see demonstrated both the need to recognize and validate hybrid forms of supposedly 'pure' religious identities, and the relation of this hybridity to the circumstances in which knowledge is formed—hybridity is a function of the contextual production of knowledge. The humanitarian practitioner faces two challenges: first, to engage the 'real' faith of the people alongside whom they are working, not the 'pure' faith taught in the books; and second to validate hybrid identities without inference of pathology. The contextual production of religious reflection by people of faith is a fundamental characteristic of global religious expression. It needs to be engaged with if humanitarian agencies are to encounter religion in the terms that drive identity, belonging and trajectory within local faith communities. Though humanitarian practitioners in contexts of displacement are certainly well served by the study of sacred texts and systems of belief of religious communities, partnership and dialogue requires encounter with the living process of reflection and interpretation by people of faith. For this reason, humanitarian practitioners seeking to engage with religion are in a process of rethinking the generic understanding of knowledge, and embracing the validity of contextually produced knowledge. To achieve this, the practitioner needs an analysis that does not seek to rationalize or resolve the ostensible tension of hybridity.

Identity theories: the individual and the group

A final epistemological base that may undergird non-Western alternate modernities concerns the relation between the individual and others. Especially since Descartes, Western modern thought has deeply held a philosophy of individualism that can differ substantially from many non-Western cultures of identity. The isolated Cartesian self, whose

individual act of thinking seemingly offers the one verifiable base of reality, is a radically divergent existential self from other-oriented identities found in many non-Western cultures. Practitioners socialized in an environment dominated by this existential individualism may struggle to engage deeply, understand and predict a culture that operates within a different epistemology of self.

Importantly, non-individualist identity is not simply a matter of being situated *with* others. Scottish theologian John Macquarrie's now classical writings on existentialism noted that the Cartesian 'atomistic' individual also undergirds a Western portrayal of collectivism, where separately defined beings exist in some mutual relation.[63] Rather, the contrasting epistemology we are describing *forms* or *defines* the very existence of the individual in terms of its relation to the whole. The individual is created by the whole.

A prominent example of such a philosophy is the South African dictum *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, 'a person is a person through other persons'.[64] Here, the individual doesn't have isolated meaning, but exists by relation to others and the whole. Many religious communities globally express similar identity theories. The related metaphor of a body, whose parts are defined by their membership to the whole, can be found in Muslim and Christian theologies. Such theologies assert the existential definition of the individual as functional—to support the purpose of the whole—and deeply connected—the pain of the one is felt by the whole. Christian theologies of the 'body of Christ' evoke this co-identity: 'we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another'.[65] Similarly, the Prophet (PBUH) described the *Ummah* as one body:

> The Believers, in their mutual love, mercy and compassion, are like one body: if one organ complained, the rest of the body develops a fever.[66]

These roots of identity have significant consequences for displaced communities. In Irbid, the treatment of Syrian refugees has been often guided by a co-identity that transcends modern national borders. When asked about tensions between serving Jordanians and incoming refugees from Syria, a sheikh managing a relief agency responded, 'We are all one Ummah. We are all Muslim'.[67]

Identity theories not rooted in the existential individualism that has defined much of Western philosophy, and at odds with the assumptive frame of Western humanitarianism, require careful study for their implications for humanitarian programming and response. As in previous

examples, failure to become conscious of differences between Western and many non-Western cultures of identity can result in unintended coloniality. In a globalizing age, it is clear that identity theories interact and develop: there is a mixture, in which no culture of identity is insulated from others. The question we are concerned with here is the role of humanitarians in this mixing. Returning to the example of *Ubuntu/Umunthu*, Malawian theologian Harvey Sindima's work[68] has examined 'the impact of liberalism on African thought and values, which resulted in a serious identity crisis' for Africans. This insight presents a serious challenge to contemporary humanitarians, namely whether their work deepens, causes or works to resolve this identity crisis. Engagement with effected populations within their own epistemology, not within an assumed and external framing, is a first step to ensuring that this interaction 'does no harm'.

This chapter has sought to move beyond an extrinsic approach to theological reflection as a source of social resources relevant to the tasks of humanitarianism, and to make the case for humanitarian practitioners to enter into the epistemological world of faith. For practitioners, the options are only two: to remain at a distance from theological reflection, hoping to function in a narrow neutral space, or else to acknowledge that there is no such neutral space in an emergency. To admit the continuing relevance of faith in the landscape of displacement is to name the urgency of engaging, understanding, and working alongside faith. This cannot be accomplished entirely from the outside: instead, practitioners of the 21st century will be increasingly defined by their skillful negotiation of the demanding territory of pluralism. The key skill in this space is dialogue, to which we turn in the final chapter.

Notes

1   See *World Development Report 2012*. Available from: http://econ.worldbank.org/
   WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/EXTWDR201
   2/0,,contentMDK:23004468~pagePK:64167689~piPK:64167673~theSitePK:777
   8063,00.html [Accessed: 31 March 2015] for an analysis of contributing trends,
   as well as annual updates on estimated numbers of refugees and internally
   displaced persons from UNHCR.

2   See FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, E. AND AGER, A. (eds.) (2013) Local Faith
   Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Humanitarian Situations: A
   Scoping Study. *Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities and
   University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, Working Paper 90*. Oxford: RSC.

3   FORCED MIGRATION REVIEW (2014) *Faith and Responses to Displacement* [Online and in print] FMR 48. Available from: http://www.fmreview.org/faith.

4   WORLD BANK AND THE JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE ON FAITH AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES. Faith & Sustainable Development, 7–9 July 2015. Available from: jliflc.com/conferences/religion-sustainable-development-building-partnerships-to-end-extreme-poverty//.

5   GROODY, D. (2009) Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees. *Theological Studies*, 70, p. 640.

6   PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2012) *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life. Available from: http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/.

7   See BERGER, P. L. (1999) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion in World Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans—and STARK, R. (1999) Secularization, R.I.P. *Sociology of Religion*, 60, pp. 249–270—for early examples of this reappraisal.

8   See SHAH, T., STEPAN, A. AND DUFFY-TOFT, M. (2012) *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs*. New York: Oxford University Press; THOMAS, S. M. (2005) *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

9   See, for example, WALKER, P. ET AL. (2013) The Role of Spirituality in Humanitarian Crisis Survival and Recovery. In: M. BARNETT AND J. G. STEIN (eds.). *Sacred Aid*. New York: Oxford University Press; FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, E. AND AGER, A. (eds.) (2013) *Local Faith Communities*; QASMIYEH, Y.M. AND FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, E. (2013) Refugee Camps and Cities in Conversation. In: J. GARNETT AND A. HARRIS (eds.). *Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis*. Farnham: Ashgate; AGER, J., ABEBE, B. AND AGER, A. (2014) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Emergencies in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Engaging with the Faith Sector. *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 12 (1), pp. 72–83.

10 FERNANDO, D. M. AND HEBERT, B. B. (2011) Resiliency and Recovery: Lessons from the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 39, p. 6.

11 PARSITAU, D. S. (2011) The Role of Faith and Faith-based Organizations among Internally Displaced Persons in Kenya. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24 (3), pp. 493–512.

12 FERRIS, E. (2005). Faith-based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 87 (858), pp. 311–325.

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4
Towards More Effective Dialogue between Humanitarianism and Religion

Abstract: *More effective engagement with religion requires not only greater critical reflection upon the presumptions of humanitarianism and openness to theological reflection regarding the experience of refuge and displacement. It also requires a commitment to skilled dialogue with local faith communities. The perspectives of Habermas, Taylor and West offer distinct insights into the terms of this public dialogue. Core humanitarian principles—interpreted with respect to both their historical origins and contemporary realities—provide a key framework for structuring exchange. Seeking understanding rather than agreement offers a principled means of dealing with challenging areas of difference. New skills will be required for a humanitarianism principally focused on linking resources to local concerns rather than coordinating the targeting of external assistance driven by global agendas.*

Searching for an analogy, I reached over to the two empty bottles resting between us on the table. Stoney Tangawizi Ginger Beer, widely available in East Africa but virtually unknown elsewhere, seemed a good representation of a common way of speaking, using the idioms and concepts familiar to local communities. I asked my colleague, a national staff member of an international humanitarian organization working in Uganda, to imagine that this represented the way that he spoke in his home area. 'When you visit a refugee resettlement area or an IDP camp, do you use this language?' I asked. 'Surely', he replied, and described his experience of drawing on ideas and stories familiar from his youth to explain the goals of his agency's programs in supporting children's development and well-being. 'Well let's think of another way of speaking', I said, and took the Diet Coke bottle that had been served to our table alongside the Stoney ten minutes earlier. I explained that this was another way of speaking—no better, no worse than the local idiom—but that it was the language that the international organizations used to describe their programs. My colleague lent forward in his chair, warming to the analogy. 'You have learned this language, too?' I asked. 'Certainly', he answered, and went on to describe his impending visit to Washington, DC to make a presentation to a World Bank forum. 'I have learned that language well'. He smiled as he described his fluency in both these ways of speaking, indeed both these ways of being: the locally rooted Ugandan and the global professional. I asked him if religious teachings and prayer played a role in the first way of speaking, sliding the Stoney bottle across the table as it visited imaginary communities displaced through the internal struggle with the Lord's Resistance Army in the north or fled across the border from the Democratic Republic of Congo to the West. 'Of course', he answered, suggesting that this was part of the lexicon of life for the communities he served. Whether Catholic, Presbyterian, Pentecostal or Muslim, virtually all, he thought, recognized their importance. 'What of the language of the Coke bottle?' I asked. He smiled, but somewhat warily, leaning forward to recount a tale of the reproof that his office had received following the visit of senior USA-based manager of his organization a few months earlier. The continuing local practice of opening meetings in prayer had been considered not in line with the expectations of a professional humanitarian organization, and instructions had now been issued to discontinue the practice. 'You continue to use the language of the Stoney bottle when you are working in the

field?' He nodded and shrugged. 'What if you used that language in the office?' I asked. His response was swift and heartfelt: 'I would be soon looking for a new job'.

*   *   *

We begin this chapter with a brief reprise of our preceding arguments. Humanitarianism is, for a variety of reasons, exploring greater engagement with religion in contexts of forced displacement. Although there remain significant reservations about engaging with religious actors for many within the humanitarian system, there are clearly a number of potential benefits of such engagement. For many refugee communities, their understanding of displacement, identity and recovery from crisis is framed by their faith tradition. Local faith communities constitute a major element of local civil society, a resource that the current humanitarian strategic reform process recognizes as crucial for a model of effective working. However, the prevailing conceptualization of religion and, indeed, of humanitarianism itself represents a major barrier to achieving meaningful and appropriate partnership. A commitment to skilled dialogical engagement with local faith communities is required if this barrier is to be surmounted. This engagement requires greater critical reflection regarding of the presumptions of humanitarianism, and openness to the insights of theological reflection regarding the experience of refuge and displacement.

This chapter seeks to articulate the means by which such dialogical engagement can be established. We first consider general principles regarding engagement with religion in the public sphere. We then specifically turn to a review of how we should understand humanitarian principles in the context of dialogue with religious groups regarding assistance to displaced communities. Finally, we consider how differences in approach, perspective and view between participants can be addressed within the form of open dialogue for which we are calling.

Engaging religion in the public sphere

Humanitarian engagement with refugee communities is a fundamentally public act. It may, as we have seen, be inspired by a variety of private motives. But provision of shelter, food distribution, psychosocial support, livelihoods strengthening, legal protection and so on to

displaced populations occurs firmly in public space. We have seen that secularism generally serves to restrain religious expression from the public sphere and thus inhibits the influence of religion on humanitarian engagement. However, we have also seen that the legitimacy—and feasibility—of restraining religion within the public sphere has been widely challenged. The most notable challenge has been the widespread debunking of the secularization thesis, which wrote off the persistence of religion with economic and social development. As a result, social theorists have increasingly begun to consider the principles that should govern today's engagement with religion. If religion is allowed into public space, what rules are necessary to constrain it? This, at a much grander scale, likely reflects the key concern of many humanitarians regarding the issue of faith engagement: if the secular framing of humanitarian discourse is relaxed, what limits the power and exercise of religion to potentially erode key humanitarian values? We will look at this latter, narrower question shortly, but it is informed by considering the former, wider question.

At the outset, we need to emphasize that successfully engaging religion within the public sphere does not involve 'turning the clock back'. Arguing for greater public engagement with religion should not raise either expectations or fears that the hegemonic role that religious institutions once held within non-plural societies will be re-established. In a globalized world the successor to secularism cannot be theocracy or any other monopoly on power, but rather a truly plural post-secularism that recognizes and even celebrates ideological diversity.

There are multiple models for accommodating religion within the public sphere, but a public dialogue on this issue arranged by the US Social Sciences Research Council and collaborating institutions in 2009 serves to highlight three particular approaches that are useful to help structure our subsequent discussion.[1] These are approaches suggested by the contributions to the dialogue by Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Cornel West respectively.

Habermas presents his position as a revision of that proposed by the political philosopher John Rawls. He states two principal 'rules' for religious engagement in the public sphere. First, 'all citizens should be free to decide if they want to use religious language in the public sphere'.[2] Second, however, if they wish to influence the decisions of public administrative bodies, 'they have to accept that the potential truth contents of religious utterances must be translated into generally accessible

language'.[3] Habermas suggests that this proposal 'achieves the liberal goal of ensuring that all publicly sanctioned decisions can be formulated and justified in a universally accessible language'.[4]

This formulation arguably bears some resemblance to the prevailing humanitarian consensus amongst major agencies where, as Michael Barnett and Janice Gross Stein have observed,[5] there is very little to distinguish between the formal public utterances and organizational practices of faith-based and secular actors. Religious actors are pleased to be at the table, and generally content to formulate principles, goals and strategies in secular terms. It is important to recognize that in this model it is religious actors that bear the responsibility to translate principles and standards into terms acceptable for public authorities. In these terms, Habermas conceives religious discourse being positioned *beneath* public secular discourse. He seeks, however, to frame this in positive terms, pointing to the potential for moral insight regarding 'the spring tide of informal public communication from below…[through which] religious communities can become a transformative force in the centre of a democratic society'.[6]

Charles Taylor's proposed approach to public engagement with religion is radically different. Distinguishing his approach, Taylor characterizes the preceding position of Habermas as follows:

> There is secular reason, which everyone can use and reach conclusions by, conclusions, that is, with which everyone can agree. Then there are special languages, which introduce extra assumptions that might even contradict those of ordinary secular reason. These are much more epistemically fragile; in fact you won't be convinced by them unless you already hold them. So religious reason either comes to the same conclusions as secular reason, but then it is superfluous; or it comes to contrary conclusions, and then it is dangerous and disruptive. This is why it needs to be sidelined.[7]

Taylor considers that in the approach advocated by Habermas secular reason is afforded a privileged position over religious thought. It is the public discourse into which claims from other perspectives need to be translated in order to be deemed legitimate. He argues, however, that this assumed superiority is unjustified, suggesting—as we have proposed throughout this book—that secularism makes particular assumptions that are not derived from 'reason alone'. The equivalence of status of religious and secular discourse is crucial for shaping expectations of dialogue. If, as Taylor proposes, 'the distinction in rational credibility between religious and non-religious discourse seems…utterly without

foundation'[8] and that 'there are no timeless principles that can be used to determine public policy by pure reason alone', then religious and secular discourse must live *alongside* each other: interwoven, challenging, seeking mutuality.

Generalized to the humanitarian context, this approach does not lay responsibility for translation into secular humanitarian discourse with religious groups or with displaced faith communities. Rather, the responsibility for translation lies with all actors, for there is no language that is free from supposition.

We'll consider the implications of this for the understanding of core humanitarian principles shortly. However, at this point it is important to clarify that the suggestion that humanitarian principle—and thus practice—cannot be determined by 'reason alone' is not to say that their formulation should be free from reason. As noted in the preceding chapter, a call for equitable engagement with religious discourse is not a call to abandon rationality. Science provides crucial evidence to inform the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions. Rather, it is necessary to acknowledge that the evolution of a particular form of secular thought—one that invokes self-sufficient humanism and the 'buffered self'—has enabled scientific knowledge to be read in terms that engender moral-political authority. Thus, it is not the findings of science that have established secularism as an epistemic position of assumed superiority, it is the socio-historic context of the development of that form of scientific knowledge.

The implications of Taylor's analysis is that in humanitarian practice dialogue needs not simply to reflect pluralism but also to preclude privileging secular accounts over religious ones. Essentially this is a 'level playing field' argument. However, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the field clearly is not level. We consider, in this circumstance, that it is appropriate to reflect briefly on a third perspective on religion in the public sphere articulated at the same meeting.

Cornell West, in a contribution reflecting on the prophetic role of religion, articulated a view that saw the place of religious discourse not as beneath or alongside secular discourse, but as *ambivalent* and *distinct* from it. In these terms, the role of religion is (in part) to call the powerful to account. This reflection is of deep relevance to humanitarian work with refugees, as it engages not only with the suffering and vulnerability of the displaced, but also with the analysis of the political, social and economic systems that have contributed to such circumstances (and with which the humanitarian regime is itself implicated).

The prophetic role of religion is articulated in the public space, where it calls attention to injustice and—crucially—articulates a different imagination. As Walter Bruggeman has suggested:

> Imagination is a danger, thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination to keep on conjuring and proposing alternative futures to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.[9]

It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that the current processes of humanitarian reform require some fresh imagination of this form. In these terms, the primary place of religion is not to offer resources to global actors whose framing of displacement, marginalization and insecurity reflects the interests of the neoliberal states that fund them. Rather, it is to challenge this framework. West's elaboration of this prophetic role for religion is highly salient to its contribution to humanitarian action. For not only does it give voice to key humanitarian motivations:

> there is a prophetic way of being in the world, a call for help, grounded in the cries of an oppressed people that warrants attention, and, in fact, to be human is to love the orphan, the widow, the stranger, to treat…the other with dignity, with loving kindness[10]

but it also challenges the *status quo* through witness and sacrifice:

> Prophetic religion is an individual and collective performative praxis of maladjustment to greed, fear, and bigotry…allow[ing] suffering to speak…[it] is risk-taking, and it has everything to do with the enabling virtue, which is courage—the courage to expand empathy, expand imagination, think critically, organize, mobilize, and maybe, like Brother Martin Luther King Jr., pay the ultimate price. But it is all in bearing witness. Bearing witness, that's what the call is about.[11]

This analysis is a reminder that while harmonious working and collaboration regarding shared objectives may be the form of engagement most typically sought through dialogue, on occasions we should welcome religious engagement as a source of challenge of fundamental assumptions regarding protection, identity and development.

Accordingly, in the analysis that follows we generally adopt a framework for dialogue reflecting Taylor's understanding of non-religious and religious discourse being viewed as of equal standing in deliberations regarding humanitarian response, with an emphasis on their mutual exchange. However, the other approaches are of utility in specific

circumstances. West's view of the prophetic role of religion points to circumstances when the role of religious groups—alongside other civil society actors—is to confront assumptions and inspire the imagination. When there is coherence between secular and religious interests, Habermas's approach indicates the opportunities—even within structures that subjugate religious accounts—for faith groups to translate key insights into shared implementable actions.

Indeed, the complex reality is that strategies for dialogue will likely be informed by each of these approaches. Mutual exchange should be the norm, but there will be times when standing apart from, or going along with, secular framing will be appropriate for religious actors. In the context of preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit, for example, the consultation has—as we saw in the previous chapter—reflected openness to discussion, but largely on the basis of a secular framing of humanitarianism. Contributions from faith-based agencies have largely sought to translate religious insights into such terms. To promote more effective engagement with faith groups in the longer-term, there is a case for contributions that challenge the terms of the debate. The critique of humanitarian presumptions regarding Islamic agencies[12] and documentation of the impact of civil disobedience by Christian refugee activists in Australia[13] featured in the recent Forced Migration Review Special Issue on faith and responses to displacement provide relevant models of such challenging but constructive contribution. We see this also in the work of the *Religion Matters* initiative in Germany, where there is a stated interest, not in co-opting religious actors to support delivery of the government's development (and humanitarian) strategy, but rather in fostering engagement with 'fresh perspectives on values, religion and development'.[14]

Reimagining humanitarian engagement in a post-secular world

These examples lead us to the central question of how humanitarian engagement with refugee communities can be transformed by true dialogue and partnership with diverse religious actors in a post-secular age. Secular actors and secular discourse are not privileged in this circumstance, but neither are they excluded. Rather, as Barnett and Stein urged, without operating on the basis that 'the secular were the baseline and the religious were the "deviation"',[15] there is a dialogue of

marked diversity and inclusivity. What are the likely implications of this for humanitarian practice with refugee populations? Earlier chapters have discussed some of the likely consequences of such engagement in terms of resources, perspectives and conceptualization. Here we seek to consolidate such analysis by reflecting on the implications for the current framing of humanitarian response, specifically with regard to humanitarian principles as formulated by the Red Cross Movement, endorsed by the UN, and most recently reaffirmed within the Core Humanitarian Standard.[16] We will consider in turn the principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.

Humanity

The CHS states the principle of humanity in the following terms:

> Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.[17]

This closely mirrors the language of the ICRC statement of humanitarian principles from which it is derived, though excludes language suggesting that humanity involves promoting 'mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples'.[18] This dilution of the original statement is interesting, as it removes direct reference to the context of pluralism—within which mutual understanding and cooperation is necessary—that was explicit in the original statement. We suggest that reclamation of the search for shared understanding, rather than the presumption that a certain (secular) discourse already provides this, may be helpful in driving the forms of dialogue required in humanitarian settings. Certainly, religious teachings provide a rich source of insight into commonality within diversity: the multiple texts cited within the UNHCR-facilitated document *Welcoming the Stranger* are directly relevant to the response of local communities to refugees of different geographies and faiths.[19] Within the complexity of Muslim–Christian–Jewish relations in the Middle East, we saw the commonality of these groups as 'people of the Book' regularly acknowledged in reflections on obligations to the displaced in Irbid.[20] Pictet, in his commentary on the principle of humanity as understood within the Red Cross Movement, noted that:

> It can be summed up in a single sentence: Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. This fundamental precept can

be found, in almost identical form, in all the great religions, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism and Taoism. It is also the golden rule of the positivists, who do not commit themselves to any religion but only to the data of experience, in the name of reason alone.[21]

The imperative to protect and respect humanity is thus almost universally central to religious traditions. Religious affiliation and identity shapes understandings of what it is to be human, and thus what respect for humanity must involve in conditions of refuge and displacement. As noted by the UNHCR Commissioner at the opening of the 2012 Dialogue on Faith and Protection:

> For the vast majority of uprooted people, there are few things as powerful as their faith in helping them cope with fear, loss, separation, and destitution. Faith is also central to hope and resilience. Religion very often is key in enabling refugees to overcome their trauma, to make sense of their loss and to rebuild their lives from nothing. Worship and religious traditions help uprooted people reconfirm their identity as individuals and as members of a community. Faith provides a form of personal and collective support among victims that is crucial for their ability to recover from conflict and flight.[22]

Notwithstanding the challenges that we have recognized in doing so, engagement with faith is not an optional extra for humanitarian response if humanity is to be a core motivating principle. If the 'common humanity' of displaced peoples is often understood in relation to their religious experience, action principally motivated by serving humanity cannot easily distance itself from faith.

We need to acknowledge, however, that the challenges envisioned regarding religious engagement are not solely around religious literacy and accommodating complex diversity. Religious affiliation is associated with the perpetration of sufficient inhumanity to justify ambivalence regarding engagement with religion in many crisis contexts. We address this more fully later in this chapter, but it is relevant at this point to acknowledge the inhumane treatment of others by some religious groups and the salient role religious language can play in promoting or sustaining this. The role of religious narrative in the work of ISIS in the Middle East or, previously, in such contexts as the Sri Lankan civil war[23] or the Rwandan genocide[24] renders extreme caution regarding engagement with religious actors understandable. A coherent response to this challenge needs to be formulated. As a first step towards this, Frances Stewart's careful analysis of local conflicts suggests that religious

identity typically provides a basis for intolerance less on the basis of religious principle than as a marker for political mobilization in contexts of marked economic inequality.[25] This is a sentiment echoed by High Commissioner Guterres in his closing remarks to the 2012 UNHCR Dialogue on Faith and Protection:

> Violence and persecution are also perpetrated in the name of religion...The truth is that where religion is used to undermine the rights of people, this normally is not done by religious leaders but by politicians who use religion for their purposes.[26]

This may not be a universally accurate 'truth', but deductions made from these premises are sound:

> To oppose religious intolerance, faith groups should be better integrated into conflict prevention and reconciliation strategies.[27]

It seems reasonable to suggest that the danger of religious discourse being used to motivate inhumane practices is likely to be greater in circumstances where there is limited and ineffective engagement with religion.

However, the promulgation of hate by religious groups demonstrates that the principle of humanity does not represent a source of common identification for all groups. The challenging task then is to decide who is excluded from dialogue, and who has the right to exclude them? We cautiously suggest two key principles in this task. First, this boundary of exclusion should be drawn as widely as possible. It can be argued that some of the fuel for religious fanaticism has stemmed from the marginalization of religion in secularizing societies.[28] If religion is not a declining force within a society and these processes have failed to contain extremist religion, the emerging view appears to be to more fully and openly engage religious communities and forge working alliances towards shared goals and agendas.[29] Consequently, in the humanitarian context, engaging the widest possible range of religious actors around the shared principle of humanity is likely to be an effective strategy to appropriately isolate certain groups.

Second, we suggest that the clearest test for alignment regarding the principle of humanity will often be adherence to the principle of impartiality. If groups offer assistance to persons of widely differing affiliations and allegiances, this may be reliable evidence of recognition of their shared humanity. It is important to consider in more detail, therefore,

the understanding of this principle of impartiality with respect to the activities of faith groups and institutions.

Impartiality

The principle of impartiality states that:

> humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no adverse distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion.[30]

We saw in Chapter 2 that the most common reference to religion in humanitarian policy notes how it can serve as a basis for discrimination in receipt of services, in violation of this principle. It is not clear whether religious belief represents a particularly greater risk than nationality, race, gender, class or political opinion as a basis 'adverse distinction', but it is clearly a prominent factor shaping humanitarian agencies' relationships with faith-based organizations and other religious groups. The evidence base for systematic exclusion of beneficiaries from humanitarian assistance on the basis of religious belief is rather weak, with numerous counter-examples provided anecdotally in field reports across a range of settings.[31]

It is nevertheless a key issue, given that partiality represents such a serious threat to humanitarian access. Explicit commitment to impartiality has thus been prominent in formal processes to more effectively engage faith actors in humanitarian response. A recent UNHCR note on faith partnerships stresses the foundational principle of beneficiaries' 'equal treatment and the right to equal protection' and poses questions to prompt adherence such as 'Is aid delivered without imposing conditions?' and 'Are persons of concern willing or reticent to be aided by organizations of the same or different faith?'[32] Such statements are of value and have been widely adopted in inter-faith dialogues and others fora seeking to establish the credentials of faith-based organizations as trusted actors.

However, the power of these guidelines to shape the practice of local groups remains an open question, and their wording points to a larger issue; 'Making no adverse distinction' on the basis of religion refers to an intentional act on the part of service providers. The above statements point to the potential ineffectiveness of services on the basis of 'reticen[ce] to be aided by organizations of … [a] different faith': an issue of trust on the part of beneficiaries. The expansion of the understanding of impartiality is welcome; however, it clearly raises challenging questions

not only of faith-based actors. If the perceived motives of humanitarian actors can be viewed as a barrier to impartial action, how do secular groups, and those funded by governments of clear political alignment work to ensure trust? Mapping the sources of funding for humanitarian operations and the contexts of deployment of such investment sharply highlights the security and broader political agendas driving the international humanitarian regime.[33]

Such complexity suggests that to ensure impartiality, attention needs to be paid not only to avoiding exclusion but also to measures that explicitly promote inclusion. Diligence may need to be shown to the latter concerning religious minorities, where the social capital of faith communities may effectively reach majority populations but be ambiguous for others. Benson and Carine Jaquet note such sensitivities, for example, in the provision of assistance to Catholic and Baptist communities in refugee camps in northern Myanmar.[34]

Independence and neutrality

The principle of independence is expressed in the following terms:

> Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.[35]

and neutrality as follows:

> Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.[36]

We have suggested that humanity and impartiality serve as vital, valid and relevant principles to govern judgements regarding the engagement of faith actors in the public space of humanitarian action. Independence and neutrality prove rather more difficult principles to operationalize in humanitarian contexts, and not solely in relation to religion. We noted earlier that the CHS now acknowledges an 'exception' to a strict reading of the principle of neutrality for organizations 'undertaking advocacy on issues related to accountability and justice'.[37] We have also observed that many humanitarian organizations receive a majority of their funding from governments of clear political alignment in the global system, a fact that on the ground in such settings as Irbid, presents as a clear compromise to the stated independence of these actors. We share with Pictet the understanding that the principles of independence and neutrality

have a rather different status to those of impartiality and, in particular, humanity.[38] Adopting the conceptualization of Thürer, the former may, indeed, best be viewed as a means to achieving the latter:

> the principles of…neutrality and independence…are primarily operational and instrumental in character, and serve the overarching goal of humanity.[39]

We have no interest in challenging principles that may be vital for the effective operation of some agencies, especially in circumstances of conflict where explicit non-alignment with belligerent parties is crucial for securing space and security for humanitarian operations. However, these terms are frequently used in a much broader, universal sense when reflecting on the legitimacy of actors for humanitarian engagement. Discussion in the build-up to the World Humanitarian Summit, for example, suggests a greater preoccupation with neutrality of religious groups concerning 'controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature' than engagement in hostilities.[40] With a strict reading of this principle, this is fully justified. Religious groups will find it hard (and, indeed, are likely to be unwilling) to argue that they are disconnected from public debate on such issues. But so too, as we have seen, will many other humanitarian organizations.

It seems appropriate—to adopt the language Taylor uses regarding the separation of church and state in the USA—to challenge the institutional totems of humanitarian principles and reflect more on the purpose for which they were formulated. Taylor suggests that principles established with the aim of accomplishing certain goals, such as the exercise of liberty, need to be reconsidered when they are fetishized at the expense of thorough consideration of the purposes they were instituted to serve.[41] In this case, we clearly need action in crises involving displaced populations that relieves suffering and restores dignity, and does so irrespective of the political, ethnic or religious identity of that population. Facilitating actions that reflect humanity and impartiality is thus the central goal. The established independence and neutrality of actors may be valuable in securing this goal, but there may be circumstances when it is secured without these conditions being met. Indeed, our argument from preceding chapters is that it is very difficult for secular actors to argue cogently for their full independence and neutrality. Beyond contexts of belligerent conflict—where they likely remain crucial—these must therefore be judged not to be necessary conditions for the fulfillment of humanitarian aid reflecting the principles of humanity and impartiality.

This understanding of the principles of independence and neutrality is not a novel proposition.[42] And it is coherent with growing awareness of the inevitable situatedness—political, historical and epistemological—of all humanitarian actors. However, this shift in common interpretation is not without its dangers. Any sense that the principles of neutrality and independence are being 'relaxed' brings the risk of humanitarian action that erodes appropriate commitments to the other principles of humanity and impartiality. Such fears appear to have shaped the manner in which the 'exceptionalism' for non-neutrality on certain issues was handled in the formulation of the CHS.[43] There was widespread recognition that the mandate of many humanitarian actors does not leave them neutral on issues of perceived social injustice (such as gender inequity in school enrollment or harmful traditional practices). However, formal acknowledgment of the 'non-neutrality' of agencies is understood to risk opening the floodgates to agendas outside the core Western consensus on social reform. Hence, the totemic language of neutrality is retained despite the evidence reviewed throughout this book challenging the very notion of secular humanitarianism as a neutral enterprise.

There are similar challenges with independence. Consider a scenario identified in our fieldwork in Irbid.[44] An international secular agency receiving funding from a Western government with a clear political interest in local containment of refugee displacement declines to partner with a local faith-based organization mobilizing funds within its local community on the basis that the status of the latter compromises humanitarian principles. This routine pattern suggests a profound asymmetry in the application and interpretation of the principle of independence.

This leaves humanitarianism in an awkward place. As one participant in the process of negotiating the CHS reflected:

> We will not find organizations with 'clean hands'—with no actual or perceived allegiances to any stakeholder. We must accept organizations who, like us, have somewhat 'dirty hands'—that is evenly dirty—with whom we can nonetheless work effectively towards shared goals.[45]

Dealing with differences

In considering appropriate means of facilitating dialogue with faith groups we need to acknowledge another major challenge faced in the

context of humanitarian assistance to refugees. We have already acknowledged the potential for religious affiliation to be used to ferment conflict. However, there are many other attitudes and practices of religious groups that may be seen to be in tension with the general consensus of humanitarian practices and goals. On issues of gender empowerment, for example, religious institutions are widely seen as patriarchal and outmoded. Antagonism towards sexual minorities is recognized in the teachings and actions of numerous religious actors. Many religious groups consider proselytism central to their religious obligation, an issue that is perhaps the most sensitive of topics in the context of humanitarian assistance. It is self-evident that use of coercion to convert someone to another religion or faith is in contravention of humanitarian principles, representing not only conditionality in providing assistance but also an exploitation of the vulnerability of beneficiaries. There are a host of other issues where religious groups may be broadly characterized as representing conservative forces aligned against modernizing humanitarian agendas.[46] How should humanitarian agencies deal with these?

It is clear that there are occasions when both secular and faith-based organizations should define 'red lines' that rule out partnership. Nevertheless, it is our belief that in most circumstances, however uncomfortable for some, continuing dialogue represents the only path to effective humanitarian response. The call is, indeed, for 'a process of deliberation, open to all'.[47]

Though deeply challenging, there are three reasons why dialogue with difference is non-negotiable for contemporary humanitarianism.

Firstly, defining faith groups in narrow doctrinal terms, rather than as living constellations of people, tends to underplay the dynamic dialogue that generally occurs *within* religious communities. We saw in Chapter 1, for example, how Martha Nussbaum has considered women active within religious communities to potentially comprise 'some of [feminism's] most influential allies'.[48] Greany similarly notes:

> how [even] faiths and institutions which have a history of repression of, and discrimination against women, and which continue to be dominated by patriarchy in many areas of belief and practice, can act as catalysts for and supporters of positive social change for women.[49]

Emma Tomalin observes how:

> different expressions of 'religious feminism' are increasingly present within all religions. In some cases, these aim to tackle religiously-based gender

inequality by providing alternative interpretations of religious texts and teachings. In highly religious contexts, and in places where the promotion of development and women's rights agendas may be perceived as 'Western interference,' engagement with religious texts, leaders and organizations may support more appropriate and successful approaches to gender-aware development.[50]

Kull, for example, documents this form of contribution in her account of Islamic feminism in Indonesia, and the use of gender-sensitive interpretations of the Qur'an and jurisprudence have been used to address issues such trafficking.[51] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, reflecting on the dynamics within faith-based groups and organizations that can support greater empowerment of minorities, contests the unchallenged representation of faith-based institutions as inherently more conservative than secular organizations. She cites evidence that attitudes regarding service provision to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) asylum-seekers do not substantially differ between faith-based and secular organizations.[52] Local faith communities—able to access resources outside of the governmental channels upon which many non-governmental agencies are dependent—provide key support to LGBT asylum seekers in the USA.[53] Restricting engagement with religious groups on the basis of assumed positions on particular issues may therefore result in a failure to connect with key resources supportive of targeted change.

Second, effective dialogue reveals the presumptions and situatedness of all participants, including non-religious actors. We do not seek to undermine the value of secular agendas, but to relativize their status to one perspective among many, which, like others, are open to challenge. More than simply an obstacle, engaging with difference serves as a reminder of the inescapable plurality of modern global society, and is the context within which powerful alliances are forged. Faith communities have, for example, mobilized significant bases of support for global social movements ranging from debt relief to climate change. Generally, commonality of purpose has been secured through wrestling with plurality not through its denial. As Habermas has suggested: 'Frictions between religious and secular voices provoke inspiring controversies on normative issues and thereby stimulate as awareness of their relevance'.[54]

Third, effective dialogue presents perhaps the only viable opportunity to name and engage some of the challenging perennial questions of humanitarianism and religion. For example, as noted above, among the most frequent sources of tension is proselytism. Once again, it is clear that

conditionality in the provision of assistance violates the core principles of humanitarianism. But there is a wider context here that may only be negotiated dialogically. Philip Fountain has recently noted that the policies and practices put in place to prevent coercion in provision of assistance reflect some of the deeper, situated presumptions of secular humanitarianism.[55] The presumption of modernity is reflected, for example, in the definition of religion as an aspect of experience separable from other activity, and having legitimacy only within the private sphere. Under this definition, evangelism or *da'wa* by religious groups is problematic in humanitarian contexts even where there is no evidence of coercion: Conversion reflects an encroachment into the private sphere through public means. However, as Fountain observes, similar encroachment is generally unchallenged in other forms of assistance premised upon perceived moral necessity (such as transformation of gender relationships or dissemination of human rights awareness).[56] His analysis echoes that of Barnett in recognizing a strong 'missionary impulse' at the root of secular humanitarianism. Indeed, as we have observed previously, the flux of refugee contexts may be recognized as providing a particular opportunity to facilitate individual behavioral and attitudinal change and broader readjustment of cultural patterns.[57] Exploitation of such conditions appears less likely to be considered coercive if the direction of change is coherent with secular expectations of advancement. Openly engaging in discussion of proselytism in the context of what forms of advocacy for change need to be constrained, and on what basis, thus promises a deeper understanding of both secular and religious viewpoints.

Practicing dialogue

This book has called for a fresh perspective regarding engagement with local faith actors in the context of humanitarian assistance. It is a perspective that views religion not primarily through the lens of secularism but in a manner that reflects local religious experience and insight. It is also a perspective that encourages critical engagement with the presumptions of the existing secular frame. We recognize that adopting this perspective is challenging for humanitarian actors. However, we suggest that it is a perspective crucial for humanitarian success in the context of the dawning post-secular age marked by the resurgence of religion as a force within the public sphere.

We consider that a key outcome of this perspective is the adoption of a more dialogical approach to engagement with local actors, faith-based or otherwise. Through the existing cluster approach to humanitarian coordination, engagement with local structures has proved often to be weak.[58] To operationalize real dialogue will require significant commitment to create mechanisms for exchange that influence humanitarian priorities and practices. We are encouraged by the development of space in recent years for dialogue at the global level on the issue of engagement with faith-based organizations in humanitarian contexts. These have established the case for—and modeled—fora in which diverse opinions can be accommodated safely and respectfully, new alliances established and areas of common interest and action defined. Our challenge today is to integrate this dialogue into the everyday practice of humanitarianism, especially at the local level.

It is beyond our scope here to delineate a comprehensive program for humanitarian dialogue relevant to constructing meaningful partnerships between actors of radically differing worldviews. Rather, it has been our aim to identify the urgency and relevance of dialogue with difference for successful post-secular humanitarianism. However, we close this book with a sketch of the characteristics of a dialogically skillful humanitarianism.

First, dialogue is a skill, not a program.[59] It would be a mistake to conclude that, if humanitarian actors simply create a separate space for communication with other perspectives, this will result in stronger partnerships with religious communities. Alone, it will not. Rather, what we are calling for is a dialogical approach to humanitarian practice that integrates real engagement, listening, relationship, awareness of self, and other key themes we have discussed in this book into every part of humanitarian response. There is clearly a need for a structural response to this call on the part of agencies and organizations: we adopt a Freirian philosophy of dialogue here that affirms that, 'if the structure does not permit dialogue, the structure must be changed'.[60] However, at the center of the call to dialogue is the professional humanitarian, and the extent of their adjustment to global post-secularism. Maladjustment, under the old assumptions of secularism, will perpetuate the dilemma of what to do about religion in humanitarianism. It is our belief that agencies and organizations should invest in staff, training and models of response that move beyond basic 'faith literacy' to put dialogically skilled humanitarian personnel at the forefront of

modern humanitarianism. This is not only a response relevant to the challenges of engaging with religion, but to the broader contemporary goal of putting 'local actors at the center of effective humanitarian action'.[61]

Second, true dialogue reveals who we are as we participate, at the same time that it illuminates the other. This book has aimed to contribute to dialogue by drawing attention to the presumptions of secular humanitarianism as much as it has sought to provide insight into religious perspectives within local faith communities. These goals are mutual if viewed in a dialogical frame. A key test for whether true dialogue is taking place, therefore, is whether it is experienced as having revealed something of one's own situatedness. Dialogue of this kind is thus not found in an assessment or investigation by humanitarians into the 'culture' or 'beliefs' of local communities. Rather, it is a process that consists of mutuality and exchange between humanitarians and the displaced communities or other populations with whom they seek to work. This form of engagement does not ignore obvious imbalances of power or provocative subjects, but seeks to confront them. Dialogue, in these terms, is the antithesis of hegemony. It is co-creation and co-investment; it is space delineated in common terms through a collaborative process, acknowledging that who determines the context for dialogue determines the potential for real exchange.

Third, the goal of dialogue is understanding and relationship, not agreement. Pope Francis's theology of 'encounter',[62] a key touchstone of his papacy, suggests that, although agreement, action, and decision are essential steps in partnership, they are impoverished steps if not preceded by encounter. Rooted in the work of Don Luigi Giovanni Guissani, the theology of encounter centralizes the development of relationship and understanding in the context of tension and difference, recalling Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the moral challenge posed by 'the face of the Other'.[63] The goal of forming relationships does not feature strongly in the professional lexicon of humanitarianism, but is crucial to enable dialogue. If humanitarianism is serious in its commitment to empower local actors, it will require, as one technical submission to the World Humanitarian Summit has suggested, 'turning the system on its head'.[64] This would see humanitarian coordination rather less concerned with operating as a 'traffic cop' regarding the resources offered by international humanitarian agencies and rather more as a connector of local resources and capabilities.

This role requires significantly greater attention to the capacity to develop relationships of trust between and amongst local and international actors than the predominantly technical understanding of coordination that currently prevails. Community organizing models, including faith-based community organizing approaches, heavily emphasize the skill of forming relationships with public purpose. This organizing model differs significantly from traditional humanitarian response, having a focus on justice, the power of people affected by a problem to overcome it, politics and power analysis.[65] Humanitarian practitioners that aim to engage with the central challenge of this book—determining the change in approach and perspective required to build real partnership between practitioners and local religious actors—may draw increasingly from organizing as a discipline that considers questions of power within, not without, their remit. Key organizing principles are reflected in many of the approaches to developing trust and local engagement with religious actors reported in the Forced Migration Review special issue on faith and responses to displacement.[66]

While there are many challenges to enacting this form of dialogically skillful humanitarianism, translation is perhaps the most crucial. Beyond its narrow technical linguistic sense, translation means the accurate and equitable 'bearing across' of the true meaning of ideas, cultures, and societies. Translation is necessary to permit encounter and understanding. While it may appear that the technical task of translating speech and text is a neutral necessity, in fact, translation:

> always involves questions of power relations, and forms of domination…it cannot therefore avoid political issues or questions about its own links to current forms of power…no act of translation takes place in an entirely neutral space of absolute equality.[67]

Where the goal is understanding and relationship, translation in dialogue must not reinforce existing imbalances of power. As we noted earlier in the chapter, therefore, in the context of humanitarian assistance we share Taylor's view of the inappropriateness of Habermas's assumption: that it is for (largely local) religious groups to bear the responsibility of translating their insight and experience into terms accessible to (largely international) secular organizations. If the humanitarian system is serious about local engagement, it must be prepared to engage in forms of translation that makes it purposes, values and systems accessible to local groups of widely differing traditions and epistemologies relevant to refugee assistance and recovery.

It is easy to prescribe dialogue. It is difficult to enact it. Without the development of dialogical skill, 21st-century humanitarianism will lack the tools to powerfully respond to the 'Age of Migration'. As religious people move and are moved around the globe in numbers unprecedented in human history, agencies dedicated to the well-being of refugees and committed to empowering local capacity will need to make the languages of the displaced—and the communities with which they reside—their 'first second language'.[68] And those languages are predominantly religious. There appears to be an increasing will to foster stronger engagement between humanitarianism and religion, but a lack of awareness of the extent of translation that is required if humanitarianism is to respond to the radical plurality of the post-secular world. The success of humanitarianism—and thus the well-being and protection of refugee populations—will be dependent upon the ability of skillful humanitarians, not only to be open to learn of the insights, perspectives and capabilities of others, but also to be open to challenge of their own presumptions and certainties. In truth, this is no fundamental reappraisal of the task of humanitarianism. Rather, it points to the relevance of reasserting the notion of mutuality—'mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples'[69]—that, whilst edited out of contemporary formulations, lies at the heart of the definition of a truly human humanitarianism.

Notes

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3   MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 25.
4   MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 26.
5   BARNETT, M. N. AND STEIN, J. G. (2012) *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism.* New York: Oxford University Press.
6   MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 25.
7   MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 49.
8   MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 53.
9   BRUGGEMANN, W. (2001) *The Prophetic Imagination.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, p. 40.
10 MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 96.
11 MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* pp. 99–100.

12   KIDWAI, S., MOORE, L. V. AND FITZGIBBON, A. (2014) The Role of Religion in the Formation of Cross-Community Relationships. *Forced Migration Review*, 48, pp. 20–23. Available from: www.fmreview.org/faith/kidwai-moore-fitzgibbon.

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14   Religion Matters! Religious Representatives in Dialogue. Available: www.bmz.de/en/what_we_do/issues/religion-and-development/index.html [Accessed: 28 March 2015].

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17   Core Humanitarian Standard. Available: http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/ [Accessed: 28 March 2015], p. 8.

18   IFRC humanitarian principles—Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement proclaimed in Vienna in 1965 by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

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20   EL NAKIB, S. AND AGER, A. (2015) *Local Faith Community and Related Civil Society Engagement in Humanitarian Response with Syrian Refugees in Irbid, Jordan.* Report to the Henry Luce Foundation. New York: Columbia University.

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34 BENSON, E. AND JAQUET, C. (2014) Faith-based Humanitarianism in Northern Myanmar. *Forced Migration Review. Faith and Responses to Displacement* [Online and in print] FMR 48. Available from: http://www.fmreview.org/faith.

35 Core Humanitarian Standard, p. 8.

36 Core Humanitarian Standard, p. 8.

37 Core Humanitarian Standard, p. 8.

38 PICTET, J. (1979) The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, p. 8.

39 THURER, D. (2007) Dunant's Pyramid: Thoughts on 'the Humanitarian Space'. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 89, no. 865, March 2007. Indeed Thűrer and Pictet also see impartiality as somewhat instrumental in securing humanity. We understand this position, but—especially in the context of engagement of religious actors—prefer to see impartiality to be signaled as of crucial value, not least as a guarantor of humanity.

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Cross, no. 273, November–December 1989; THURER, D. (2007) *Dunant's Pyramid: Thoughts on 'the Humanitarian Space'.*

43   Nigel Timmins, personal communication.

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53   Note, for example, work groups such as the *LGBT Faith and Asylum Network* at http://www.lgbt-fan.org/ and *Global Faith and Justice at* http://www.lgbtglobalfaith.org/asylum/.

54   MENDIETA, E. AND VAN ANTWERPEN, J. (2011) *The Power of Religion,* p. 25.

55   FOUNTAIN, P. (2015) Proselytizing Development. In: E. TOMALIN (ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development.* Abingdon: Routledge.

56   FOUNTAIN, P. (2015) *Proselytizing Development*, p. 90. Note, echoing our analysis of Chapter 2, Fountain's singling out of the 'far-ranging, pervasive, and penetrating' dissemination of consumer capitalism as a cause for which there is notable lack of caution regarding proselytizing influence.

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58   HUMPHRIES, V. (2013) Improving Humanitarian Coordination: Common Challenges and Lessons Learned from the Cluster Approach. *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, 30 April 2013. Available online: http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1976 [Accessed: 5 May 2015].

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63 LEVINAS, E. (1969) *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, p. 50.

64 The title of a paper prepared by Oxfam for submission in the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016.

65 See, for example, the writings of former PICO Network Organizer, Marshall Ganz and colleagues, such as HAN, H., ANDREWS, K. T., GANZ, M., BAGGETTA, M. AND LIM, C. (2011) The Relationship of Leadership Quality to the Political Presence of Civic Associations. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9 (1), pp. 45–59.

66 See, for example, HAMPSON, J., CREA, T., CALVO, R. AND ALVAREZ, F. (2014) The Value of Accompaniment. *Faith Responses to Displacement: Forced Migration Review*, 48, pp. 7–8 and SQUIRE, J. AND HOPE, K. (2014) Journeys of a Secular Organisation in South Lebanon. *Faith Responses to Displacement: Forced Migration Review*, 48, pp. 24–25.

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68 Drawing once again upon this concept of Alasdair MacIntyre discussed in Chapter 1; MACINTYRE, A. (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* p. 387.

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