

## Religion and Mediation: The Role of Faith-Based Actors in International Conflict Resolution

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### Abstract

Religion has often been thought of as playing a crucial role in generating conflicts, particularly internal ones. While it may often be a source of conflict, its role in the overall peace process has all too often been overlooked. In this paper we emphasize the importance of religion and religious actors in the process of mediation. We examine the general conditions that facilitate mediation in international relations and assess how much these hold true in the case of faith-based mediation. We find that aspects such as legitimacy and leverage have a major impact on the success or failure of mediation. We examine how these factors manifest themselves in the case of religious mediators, and we show that legitimacy and leverage are still crucial to successful mediation but have a very different meaning and content in the case of religious actors. We explore the consequences of these differences and explain how religious mediation may work best in tandem with the more traditional forms of mediation.

### Keywords

Mediation, conflict, religion, faith-based actors, effective mediation, peace-building

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In a world of violent conflicts, where all regions and major religions have been associated with death and destruction, mediation remains one of the most widely used tools of conflict management in international relations. Although the underlying assumptions and values that inform the mediation process may differ significantly from one place to another, numerous communities with different cultural and religious traditions resort to mediation in their peace-building efforts (see Kadayifci-Orellana 2007a; Moore 1996; Bercovitch 1992). Different theories and perspectives have evolved to define the key to a successful mediation (Bercovitch 2000, 2001; Bercovitch and Langley 1993; Kleiboer 1996; Touval 1982). What is clear is that each mediation effort is unique, with its own history, nature and relationship of the actors involved, and context in which it takes place.

Scholars have sought for years to understand the process of mediation. Saadia Touval was among the pioneering scholars who studied mediation systematically and observed that certain characteristics associated with the nature of the mediators, including their identity, motivations, and the resources they can bring to the process, as well as the strategies they employ may influence the effectiveness of the mediation effort (1975, 1982, 1985, 1992a). Other scholars, following suit, emphasized the identity of the mediator as a critical component of a successful mediation (Bercovitch 2007; Bercovitch and Houson A. 1993). An assessment of who can be the most effective mediator assumes particular significance when addressing ethno-religious identity conflicts as these types of conflicts have unique features that influence their resolution (see Kadayifci-Orellana 2008). Faith-based actors are increasingly becoming involved in ethno-religious and other conflicts as mediators, and not without success. This article confirms that mediator identity is very important and analyzes the attributes, resources and motivation of faith-based actors and the conditions under which they play an effective role.

Involvement of faith-based actors in conflict resolution processes is not a new phenomenon. In fact, faith-based actors, including clergy (e.g. the Pope, priests, imams, rabbis), religiously inspired leaders (e.g. Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. among many others), and religiously motivated movements and organizations (e.g. Moral Re-Armament, World Council of Churches, etc.) have always played a role in resolving conflicts. Over the last two decades in particular, faith-based actors have become significantly more visible in resolving regional and international conflicts (see Sampson 2001, 2004; Nichols 1994). As Cynthia Sampson observed (1997), religious actors are increasingly playing an active and effective role as educators, advocates, intermediaries, observers, and pursuers of transnational justice. These actors have an impact on changing behaviors, attitudes and negative stereotypes; educating the parties; healing trauma and injuries; disseminating ideas such as democracy and human rights; drafting committed people to do peace work; challenging traditional structures that perpetuate structural violence; mediating between conflicting parties; reaching out to governments to incorporate elements of peace building in their policies; encouraging disarmament.

ment, reintegration of soldiers and developing a sustained interfaith dialogue (Abu Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2005; Tsejard, Abu Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2005). Faith-based actors are also providing training in conflict resolution and conflict prevention (USIP 2001, 2003). In various societies where there is a long tradition of social service, charitable works and community assistance, faith-based actors may have a long record of providing humanitarian aid and relief services.

Yet, until quite recently, research in the conflict resolution field failed to pay much attention to the role religion plays in peacemaking (as opposed to its role in making conflicts intractable) or to the unique characteristics and strengths of faith-based actors in mediation. One reason for this belated interest in religion is that secular, rational problem-solving approaches and methodological, epistemological perspectives developed by conflict resolution scholars viewed religion either as an instigator of conflict or ignored it altogether because religious issues involved in conflicts cannot be addressed from an empirical or positivist perspective. Nevertheless, the proliferation of ethno-religious conflicts since the end of the Cold War has made research and analysis on the relationship between religion and conflict resolution inevitable. The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 brought many of the questions regarding conflict and religion into a sharper focus.

Religion plays diverse roles in many of the current-day conflicts: religious texts, myths, vocabulary, and narratives may be employed to justify use of force, implant negative enemy images, define issues or delineate the parties. Religious values, rituals, traditions, texts and narratives may also be used to promote peace and co-existence, advocating human rights and democracy. Religious actors may use their political and social legitimacy to pursue peace or to incite division, conflict and violence (Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, 2007a, 2008). During the last decade conflict resolution scholars have produced some serious studies and analyses on the relationship between religion, conflict and peacemaking, which contributed to our understanding of current-day conflicts tremendously (Abu Nimer 1999; M. Gopin 2000, 2002, 2003; Lederach 1997; Johnston and Sampson 1994; Appleby and Little 2004; Juergensmeyer 2005; Kadayifci-Orellana 2002, 2005, 2008, among others). Others have focused on interfaith dialogue as a peace-building tool (Smock 2002; Abu Nimer, Khoury and Welty 2007; Kadayifci-Orellana 2007c). However, a systematic and comprehensive assessment of the conditions under which faith-based and religious actors are more effective in resolving conflicts has not yet been undertaken.

Mediation literature in particular has been slow in analyzing the contributions that religious and faith-based actors have made and can make in ending violent conflicts. In order to fill this gap, this article undertakes a preliminary analysis of the impact of faith-based actors in mediation. We first offer a brief overview of mediation literature. Then we define faith-based actors and discuss how they

differ from traditional, secular mediation approaches. The article concludes with an analysis of the conditions under which faith-based actors play an effective role.

## **Mediation as a Conflict Resolution Tool**

### *Defining Mediation*

Mediation refers to an approach to conflict management in which a third party, which is not a direct party to the dispute, helps disputants through their negotiations and does so in a non-binding fashion (Bercovitch and Houston 1993: 298; Carnevale 1986: 42; Touval and Zartman 1989: 117; Wall and Lynn 1993: 161). The overall aim of mediation is to stop violence and establish peaceful relations between conflicting parties. However, there appears to be no consensus on the definition of mediation, as mediation and mediator roles have been understood differently by various scholars and have different meanings in different religio-cultural contexts (Bercovitch 1992; Moore 1986; Kadayifci-Orellana 2007a). Broadly defined, mediation refers to methods of conflict settlement (Young 1967: 35). Chris Mitchell defines mediation as any “intermediary activity . . . undertaken by a third party with the primary intention of achieving some compromise settlement of issues at stake between parties, or at least ending disruptive conflict behavior (Mitchell 1981: 287). On the other hand, Moore (1986: 8) defines mediation as “an extension or elaboration of the negotiation process that involves the intervention of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power.”

Different definitions of mediation reflect the complexity and dynamism of the process. In spite of this complexity, there are a number of characteristics which are common to most mediation efforts. Some of the main characteristics of mediation are listed by Bercovitch as follows (1997: 127):

1. Mediation is an extension and continuation of peaceful conflict management.
2. Mediation involves the intervention of an outsider – an individual, a group, or an organization – into a conflict between two or more states or other actors.
3. Mediation is a non-coercive, nonviolent and, ultimately, nonbinding form of intervention.
4. Mediators enter a conflict, whether internal or international, in order to affect it, change it, resolve it, modify it, or influence it in some way.
5. Mediators bring with them, consciously or otherwise, ideas, knowledge, resources, and interests of their own or of the group or organization they represent. Mediators often have their own assumptions and agendas about the conflict in question.
6. Mediation is a voluntary form of conflict management. The actors involved retain control over the outcome (if not always over the process) of their

conflict, as well as the freedom to accept or reject mediation or mediators' proposals.

7. Mediation is usually an *ad hoc* procedure only.

### *Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of Mediation*

When, then, can mediation work, and when will its efforts be in vain? Different criteria may be offered to answer this question, and they all relate to how best to measure the effectiveness of mediation. Traditionally, mediation effectiveness was evaluated with reference to its goal of conflict reduction (Kleiboer 1996). This still remains at the heart of most studies on mediation. As noted by Touval (2003: 94):

One may inquire into the effectiveness of mediation in achieving its proclaimed goals, the degree to which conflict reduction or resolution has been achieved, or the stability of the settlement. One may also inquire into the efficiency of the settlement, whether a better outcome for all concerned was possible.

Many scholars attempted to examine the factors that may influence the effectiveness of mediation (Touval 1982; Bercovitch 1992; Bercovitch and Houston 1993, 1996, 2000; Bercovitch and Langley 1993; Bercovitch and Wells 1993; Kleiboer 1996; Elangovan 1995). For instance, Saadia Touval (1982) in his highly influential work *The Peace Brokers: Mediators in the Arab Israeli Conflict 1948–1979*, identifies various key attributes of a successful mediator including having influence with disputants, serving as a communicator between them, helping identify areas of common interest, and finally working on enlarging that common interest. Rubin, on the other hand, identifies three key requirements necessary for any mediation effort: *disputant motivation*, *mediator opportunity*, and *mediator skill* (Rubin 1992: 251). Others, working on ideas initially developed by Zartman, have pointed out the importance of a “hurting stalemate” or a “ripe moment” (Grieg 2001, 2005; Regan and Stam 2000; Zartman 1985; Bercovitch 1989). Mediator roles and behaviors, mediator motivation, resources of the mediator, history of relations between the parties, the relations between the parties and the mediator, and the nature of the dispute have also been assessed as key factors contributing to the success of mediation (Roel and Cook 1985; Bercovitch 1997; Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002; Bercovitch and Houston 1993). Yet others have preferred a contingency approach that is adaptive, responsive and can reflect different problems, parties and situations (Bercovitch 1986; Bercovitch et al. 1991; Bercovitch and Houston 1993; Bercovitch and Langley 1993; Bercovitch and Wells 1993).

Upon closer examination it becomes clear that many of these factors are markedly related to a feature Touval raised in his writing, which is the *identity* of the mediator. The following section briefly introduces the discussion regarding the

importance of mediator identity and links that to resources, motivations and strategies of mediators as the critical factors that influence mediation.

### *Mediator Identity*

Although there is no general agreement on the degree, it is often recognized that mediator identity is an important element for the effectiveness and success of any mediation effort. What mediators do, can do, or are permitted to do in their efforts to resolve a conflict may depend largely on who they are (Bercovitch 2000; Crocker et al. 1999). For example, the identity and characteristics of a mediator are cited by Young (1986) as predictors of success. Even scholars like Ott (1972), while relegating personal attributes to a secondary position, recognize the impact that mediator identity may have.

It is generally accepted that mediators enter conflict to help those involved achieve a better outcome than they would be able to achieve by themselves. “The identity of the mediator affects the mediator’s influence, trust, and legitimacy” (Bercovitch 2007: 185). Mediators endowed with legitimacy and who enjoy the parties’ trust can influence the effectiveness of the mediation. In an empirical analysis of this argument, Bercovitch and Houston (2000) observe that mediators who enjoy the trust of the parties and are perceived as legitimate and credible are often the more successful mediators.

Although mediation may be viewed as a foreign policy tool used by states only (Touval 2003), in fact, a wide range of actors serve as mediators in regional and international conflicts. These include individuals who are not government officials, political incumbents, or representatives of international organizations such as the United Nations or Red Cross, among others (Bercovitch 2007, 178–182). Increasingly, NGOs, especially those based around a particular faith, are playing vital roles at different levels of conflict resolution attempts, including mediation, particularly in the context of their growing links with transnational organizations and their professed interests in human security issues (Richmond n.d.: 1). Each mediator has different strengths and short-comings in different contexts (see for example Touval 1992; Slim 1992), and each brings different resources and capabilities according to their rank and status and have varying types of power and leverage (Bercovitch and Houston 1993).

### *Mediator Resources*

As stated earlier, mediator identity is closely linked to the resources, experience and competencies they can bring to bear. But to exercise any degree of influence on a conflict, mediators need ‘leverage’ or resources. Leverage entails the ability to become a relevant actor in conflict management by putting pressure on the parties or offering them inducements to accept a proposed settlement (Kleiboer 2002: 127).

Touval (1992: 233) stresses that “to be successful, mediators require leverage.” Centrality of leverage was emphasized by Touval and Zartman (1985) as an integral component of any mediation effort. They assert that “leverage is the ticket to mediation.” Others added that “leverage does not only depend on resources alone but also on the *willingness* of the mediator to deploy them and the *skill* with which this is done” (Kleiboer 2002: 127).

When mediators enter a conflict, they usually bring with them into the mediation process their own interests and agenda and at times their power and leverage. When this is the case a dyadic conflict relationship is transformed into a triadic relationship, and a mediator becomes directly involved in bargaining with the parties (Jabri 1996: 83). Leverage or mediator power enhances a mediator’s ability to influence the outcome. Leverage is derived from tangible resources such as economic incentives or military and political support (Slim 1992). Non-state actors or less powerful mediators may also use intangible resources such as credibility, legitimacy, trust, moral standing and their persuasive powers as a source of leverage. The different sources of leverage that mediators bring to the process may play an important role in determining the nature of the mediation process and the outcomes that are achieved.

### *Motivation for Mediation*

Another element that is closely linked to mediator identity is mediator motivation. Motivation is critical as it determines whether or not a mediator will intervene and whether or not such mediation can contribute to building trust and credibility amongst the parties and the mediator. Effective mediation requires consent, high motivation, and active participation (Bercovitch 2007: 172). The credibility and legitimacy of a mediator are very important attributes that can often contribute to an effective process. If the parties believe that the mediator is sincerely interested in reducing violence and resolving the conflict it is more likely that they will trust the mediator. Some mediators have a genuine humanitarian interest; others may have strategic interests when mediating. What the parties and a mediator do have in common though is one compelling desire to reduce, abate, or resolve a conflict (Greig 2005).

While a shared humanitarian interest may be the only genuine reason for mediation in a few cases, other mediators have less altruistic motivations. Considering mediation as a part of foreign and domestic policy issues taking place “within the context” of international politics, Touval (2003: 92) observes that the state is “no longer perceived as focusing its efforts on ending the conflict, but rather as pursuing a broadly conceived foreign policy in which the effective reduction of the conflict among the disputants plays a part, but only a part.” Bercovitch (2007) agrees with Touval and argues that this interest usually intertwines with other, less altruistic, motivations ranging from a desire to gain access to major

political leaders and open channels of communication to a desire to spread one's own ideas and thus enhance personal stature and professional status. Where a mediator is an official representative of a government or an organization, as is often the case, another set of motives may prevail. Such persons may wish to initiate mediation because they have a clear mandate to intervene in disputes (e.g., the charters of the Arab League, The European Union, the African Union, and the Organization of American States each contain an explicit clause mandating that their members seek mediation in regional disputes), or they may see mediation as a way of extending and enhancing their own influence by becoming indispensable to the parties in conflict or by gaining the gratitude and presumably the political goodwill of one or both protagonists (e.g., the frequent efforts by the United States to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict) (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002).

### *Mediation Strategies and Approaches*

Another important factor conducive to effective mediation is mediation behavior and performance. Bercovitch and Kadayifci (2002), for instance, note just how critical mediation strategies are for the success of mediation efforts. Bercovitch (1992: 16) defines mediation strategy as the overall plan used by mediators to resolve and manage disputes. The literature on mediation classifies mediator behavior into three categories depending on how active the mediator is (Bercovitch 1997; Kressel and Pruitt 1985; Kochan and Jick 1978; Bartos 1989). The most passive strategies are *communication-facilitation* strategies where a mediator plays the role of “go-between,” such as passing messages from one disputant to the other and providing disputants with unbiased information (Young 1967: 38). Communication-facilitation strategies are strongly supported by scholars such as Burton, who claim that all disputes are products of misunderstanding and that clear communication among disputants through mediators is thus the key to dispute resolution (Burton 1979). *Procedural strategies* refer to strategies that aim to create favorable environments wherein disputants can negotiate, such as arranging a place and time for negotiation. *Directive/manipulation strategies*, on the other hand, aim to persuade disputants (with incentives and alternative outcomes) to agree upon the proposal suggested by the mediators with considerable authority.

The first two strategies are considered non-directive, where a mediator empowers the disputants to take responsibility for the negotiation process and reach their own agreements (Lee 2002: 4). This ownership of the process increases the ultimate legitimacy and authority of the outcome as it is the product of the parties' own efforts. Non-directive strategies, however, have been criticized as too time consuming and ineffectual as they essentially leave the parties to find their own way out of an impasse, and often this is just not possible. Non-directive strategies have little or no impact on intransigent parties or an intractable conflict.

Directive strategies, on the other hand, have their own advantages and shortcomings. According to Brian Muldoon (1996), when mediators use directive strategies, their control over the process as well as the substance of a conflict becomes extensive at the expense of the disputants. Thus, he argues, this strategy motivates disputants to resolve their disputes as soon as possible before they cede even more control to mediators (Muldoon 1996: 154). However, others respond to that argument by stating that, since mediation is a voluntary process, parties can reject a mediator's proposal or even mediation itself when mediators put too much pressure on disputants (Touval and Zartman 1985: 13). In addition, when disputants' perspectives differ from those of mediators, the duration of the mediation process will increase to allow mediators to convince the disputants.

Mediation is a complex process. Under different conditions and at different stages of conflict, different mediation strategies may work more effectively. Going back to the issue of trust and credibility, Muldoon stresses that directive strategies are more successful and effective when the mediators are trusted, or put differently, perceived as legitimate by the disputants. Otherwise, the parties will not be willing to concede their positions (Muldoon 1996: 154). In mediation it is very important for mediators to have the trust of the parties. In non-directive mediation strategies information and good offices provided by mediators require the disputants' trust. However, it may not be as critical as in directive mediation strategies, which involve the mediator offering proposals and even putting pressure on the parties to agree to them. Mediators who utilize such strategies retain much authority over the mediation process. A proposal provided by a mediator who is not trusted by the disputants will not be supported or accepted by them. The more trust mediators gain and possess, the more resources, tangible and intangible, that are available to them.

### **Faith-Based Mediation**

What, then, of mediation undertaken by religious actors, or as we prefer to call it faith-based mediation? Faith-based mediation refers to the third party intervention efforts where religious creed, objects (i.e. symbols, texts, images, principles etc.) and institutions play an important role. Use of religious objects and involvement of faith-based actors in mediation is not a new development. For example, the Pope successfully mediated the Beagle Channel conflict that erupted between Chile and Argentina in 1985 (Garrett 1985). Other religious actors in different parts of the world, such as Quakers, Interfaith Mediation Center in Nigeria, *inter alia* (Abu Nimer and Kadayifci 2005), have also mediated conflicts.

Sierra Leone is another case in point where the religious identity of the mediator played a key role. In Sierra Leone, religious actors such as the Inter Religious

Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL)<sup>1</sup> have taken active roles in promoting reconciliation and mediation efforts and were instrumental in the negotiation and signing of the Lome Peace Agreement (Turay 2000). One reason for the formation and involvement of IRCSL was that both mosques and churches were key players in the spiritual, cultural and socio-economic development of Sierra Leone before and after independence. When the conflict broke out, both ordinary Muslims and Christians urged their religious leaders to take a more active role in stopping the violence (Turay 2000). Founded in April 1997, IRCSL leaders used their religious credibility and influence to resolve the conflict peacefully by actively pursuing dialogue with the coup leaders, listening to their complaints as well as condemning the coup and human rights abuses committed by the junta (Turay 2000).

Furthermore, IRCSL launched a campaign for a negotiated settlement and recommended the convening of a national consultative conference, the closing of the border with Liberia, and the appointment of a peace ambassador. “The Council’s active role in encouraging and promoting the negotiations that resulted in the Lome Agreement was recognized by giving IRCSL a predominant role in the Council of Elders and Religious Leaders, which was to be established to mediate disputes of interpretation of the accord” (Turay 2000). Although the Council was never set up, members of IRCSL did become involved in reconciliation, relief, human rights training, democratization, and reintegration programs, especially of child combatants and children. Among other things, during the negotiations IRCSL was also able to convince rebels to release fifty-four abducted children. One of the crucial factors contributing to the success of IRCSL was its religious identity and affiliation, as they were considered credible and respected mediators both by the government and rebels, as well as the population in general.

Quaker involvement during the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 is another example where the religious identity of the mediator had a significant impact on the mediation process. The president of Niger, a member of the Consultative Committee created by the Organization of African States (OAS), suggested that with their unofficial status and long conference experience, Quakers might be able to convene a secret meeting of lower level officials from both sides to search for possible areas of agreement (Sampson 1994: 93). Quaker involvement was considered successful as both the rebels and the government were persuaded to convene a peace conference. The importance of the role played by the Quakers was acknowledged by the Biafran representative who states: “although Biafrans were the more recalcitrant side when it came to the negotiations... the Quakers did

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<sup>1</sup> Organizational Members include: Islamic Council, the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress, the Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Sierra Leone, the Council of Imams, and the Sierra Leone Islamic Missionary Union, Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostal Churches and the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (an umbrella for eighteen Protestant Denominations). For more information see Turay *nd*.

succeed in persuading us to go to the peace conference and keep talking while war was going on” (cited in Sampson 1994: 109).

There are a number of characteristics that distinguish these faith-based interventions from secular ones. These include: a) explicit emphasis on spirituality and/or religious identity; b) use of religious texts; c) use of religious values and vocabulary; d) utilization of religious or spiritual rituals during the process; e) involvement of faith-based actors as third-parties. This article focuses on attributes of faith-based actors in the mediation process and answers the question: Do faith-based actors have specific attributes, resources, motivations, and strategies that can contribute to their effectiveness in responding to ethno-religious conflicts? We argue that indeed, various characteristics of faith-based actors do equip them to successfully mediate conflicts. These include the attributes of the mediator, resources they bring into the process, their motivation and strategies they employ. The following section will expand on these characteristics.

### *Attributes of Faith-Based Actors*

#### *Definition*

Faith-based actors can be defined as organizations, institutions and individuals who are motivated and inspired by their spiritual and religious traditions, principles, and values to undertake peace work. This broad definition covers a wide range of actors who differ in the way they operate, organize and view their roles in the field of conflict resolution. For example some of the faith-based actors, such as St. Egidio of Catholic Relief Services, may explicitly identify themselves as religious. Others such as Kisima Peace and Development in Somalia, which works among a predominantly Muslim community, may take the role of religion as a given and may not emphasize their religious basis. In other cases, such as Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), mediators are motivated by their religious values and belief systems, and by doing peace work they may be “fulfilling spiritual purposes of one’s faith” as stated by Landrum Bolling of Mercy Corps (USIP 2001: 2). These actors may utilize religious texts, values, rituals and prayers as strategies in their approach to mediation. Other faith-based organizations, such as the Interfaith Mediation Center in Nigeria, may be represented by a wide spectrum of religious actors such as imams, rabbis, and priests (Abu Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2005; Tsjard et. el. 2005; USIP 2001, 2003; Sampson 1997).

#### *Scope of Operations*

There are considerable differences among faith-based actors in the area of peace building and mediation. Some may have a global scope, where they operate in various parts of the world such as Catholic Relief Services; others are operating at a regional level only, such as Wajir Peace and Development that operates in Kenya and neighboring countries; or at local level such as Zene Zenema (Women to

Women) that operates in Bosnia. Their activities may include religious services for their faith-groups, or they may operate only among their own religious communities, or their activities might not include religious services and they may be operating among communities regardless of their religious affiliation. They may have short-term goals, such as providing relief after conflicts and catastrophes, or they may have mid-term or long-term goals. Thus the term “Faith-Based” is used as an umbrella term that incorporates actors united by the significant spiritual role and where faith plays a part in their organization, operation and motivation.

### *Legitimacy and Credibility*

As stated earlier, the issue of mediator identity is closely related to the issue of the credibility and the legitimacy of both mediation efforts and the mediators themselves (Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, 2007). For a third party intervention to be successful, a mediator must be trusted and seen as legitimate by both parties (Lederach 1995; Kadayifci-Orellana 2006; Jonah in Francis 1998: 47). The question of legitimacy is closely linked with another crucial characteristic of the mediator: impartiality and neutrality. Various scholars have focused on the impartiality and neutrality of the mediator as the distinguishing characteristic of the process. For instance Bingham (1985: 5) defines mediation as the “assistance of a ‘neutral’ third party to a negotiation.” Folberg and Taylor (1984: 7) see mediation “as the process by which the participants, together with the assistance of a neutral person or persons, systematically isolate disputed issues in order to develop options, consider alternatives, and reach a consensual settlement that will accommodate their needs.” Young (1967: 81) claims that that “the existence of a meaningful role for a third party will depend on the party’s being perceived as an impartial participant (in the sense of having nothing to gain from aiding either protagonist) . . .” and adds that “a high score in such areas as impartiality would seem to be at the heart of successful interventions in many situations.” Former Secretary of State Haig too was of the opinion that “the honest broker must, above all, be neutral” (Haig 1984: 266). This view is also supported by Jackson (1952) as well as Northedge and Donelan (1971) who claim that the parties will have confidence in a mediator only if he or she is, and is seen to be, impartial.

Others such as Wehr and Lederach (1996) challenge this ‘impartiality/ neutrality-based’ view of mediation that stresses the need for distance, anonymity, and impartiality of the mediators. Who is accepted as a legitimate mediator may differ according to who the parties are and the issues involved (Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, 2007). In some cases, like in that of Burundi (with the US as the mediator), an outsider that can embody a moral principle and a perception of not having a vested interest in the region is precisely what enables effective mediation (Wolpe and Cohen in Francis 1998: 48, 51). Whereas in other cases, as it was with Sierra Leone and Nicaragua, mediation by an insider who knows the conflict

and the parties well and has a vested interest the resolution of the conflict is seen as giving the mediator more credibility and legitimacy (Wehr and Lederach 1997; Jonah 1998: 47). This view is also supported by Lederach (1996), who, based on his experience in Central America, argues that a mediator who knows the disputants, the dynamics of the conflict and who has a vested interest in its resolution is the key to a sustainable resolution.

In such cases, where mediators do not leave the place after the termination of the conflict and have to live through its difficulties, the parties to the conflict consider them trustworthy actors. Indigenous mediators are also cultural insiders who have a better understanding of the way the disputants make sense of the world and the way they think. Religious leaders and faith-based actors are often like the insider mediators with the moral and spiritual legitimacy to influence the opinions of people. They are highly respected and their opinions are generally held in high regard within their communities. Local imams, sheikhs, priests or rabbis know the history and the traditions of the parties, and they also know the physical and emotional needs of their communities. Therefore they are better equipped to reach out to the people, mobilize them, to re-humanize the “enemy” by using religious values such as justice for all, forgiveness, harmony, human dignity, and ultimately to motivate them to work towards peace.

### *Mediator Resources and Faith-Based Actors*

#### *Leverage*

Faith-based actors have a different form of leverage in mediation; theirs is a unique moral and spiritual leverage (Kadayifci-Orellana 2008). The unique leverage of faith-based actors is also recognized by Johnston and Cox (2003) who suggest that a reputation for change based on a respected set of values and a well-established influence in the community provides such actors with the moral legitimacy to serve as mediators. For example, in many conflict-ridden countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Sierra Leone, and Iraq, religious leaders have a prominent role and are greatly respected in their societies. This status gives them unique leverage to do something about a conflict and re-frame it in ways that are acceptable to their communities.

The issue of leverage is of course of crucial importance in traditional international mediation. It is often related to rank. In a series of empirical studies Bercovitch and Houston (1993) find that there is a positive association between high rank and successful mediation outcomes and remind us that some mediators, such as a president, a prime minister, or a secretary of state, are better able to marshal resources in the course of mediation than those of lesser stature. High-ranking mediators are more persuasive than middle-level officials; they possess leverage and can use social influence that could be crucial in persuading the parties to

make concessions or move toward an agreement. The same argument applies to faith-based mediators. Religious leaders in particular and faith-based actors are often viewed as high-ranking leaders in communities, where sources of legitimacy are based on custom and religious traditions (Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, 2007a, 2007b).

#### *Financial and Human Resources*

Faith-based actors can also wield significant financial and human resources. Faith-based actors, such as Quakers, St. Egidio Community, Mennonites, Islamic Relief Services, among others, have well-established regional and global networks which they can draw upon for institutional, financial and human resources. Religious leaders have access to community members through mosques, churches, temples, community centers, and educational institutions, such as Bible or Quran schools. Through sermons, lectures, and education they can reach out to large number of people both at the grass-roots level and at the level of top leadership, as their status is recognized at both levels. As Lederach (1997) states, mid-range leaders who have a unique position in their societies where they can reach out to both grass-roots and top level leaderships are often more effective agents of conflict transformation towards a sustainable peace. We see faith-based mediators very much as mid-range leaders with access to the grass-roots and the higher levels of leadership.

In addition to being viewed as legitimate and credible actors, a religious orientation often opens doors as there are sister religious organizations with whom these groups and leaders can collaborate (USIP 2001). Thus they can become connected with and inspire local religious communities which in turn enhances their effectiveness (USIP 2001). The involvement of local religious groups in a mediation capacity can bring international support through the religious connection to sister groups in other parts of the world. This enhances their credibility and contributes to their legitimacy as mediators.

Moreover, religious groups will usually have a broader base than many international NGOs, as more people are adherents of a particular faith than a certain NGO. This broad base provides a wide pool from which to draft committed and unwavering staff that can devote the necessary time to mediation and reconciliation as part of service to God. The same broad base also endows them with financial resources through charities, donations and so forth which would not be available otherwise. Availability of personnel and finances are critical for continuation of the mediation process in the post-agreement phase, when most traditional mediators pull out due to lack of finance or time pressure.

#### *Time as Resource*

It is usually held that the role of a mediator ends with the signing of an agreement. This approach views mediation as a short-term, isolated event. Once the immediate threat to human life is removed, mediators prefer to direct their atten-

tion to other more urgent or ‘hot’ conflicts. The fact that mediation is an expensive and time-consuming process is of course a factor in this decision. However, the signing of an agreement between two governments is not enough to secure peace between two communities engaged in an intractable conflict. Indeed, empirical research has revealed that over one third of all internal conflicts will recur at least once within a two year period (Walter 2004: 371). Resolving conflicts and establishing enduring peaceful relationships is an interdependent process in which various conflict management mechanisms and actors are involved. One of the critical aspects of this process is to establish sustainable cooperation and peaceful relations between rival groups.

Indeed, implementing mediated agreements and reconciling communities is much harder than getting parties to sign a piece of paper. Once a mediator pulls out, parties are often left on their own to implement the agreements without a mechanism to monitor, enforce or facilitate this difficult process (Zartman 1997: 208; Kadayifci 2002). Therefore, if the aim of a mediation effort is to help parties resolve their conflict and build long-lasting peace, the mediator’s role cannot be limited to somehow getting the parties to sign an agreement.

On the contrary, for mediation efforts to be lasting and effective, mediation must not be seen as a short-term, isolated event. Mediators should continue to offer their assistance in the post-agreement phase through actions such as facilitating communication, clarifying and removing misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and providing practical know-how when necessary. Not many mediators can afford to continue their involvement with a conflict on a fulltime basis. What is needed is to build peace at different levels of the society and to incorporate these developments into the overall process of conflict resolution. Mediators are needed who can work on a sustained basis with local structures and actors and become part of a broader approach to mediation. Faith-based mediators, who work at a more leisurely pace, can reach such diverse actors as religious leaders, voluntary associations, women’s groups, youth groups, local NGOs, and human rights groups, among others.

Viewed from this broader perspective, we can see that faith-based groups and religious leaders have several advantages over official, traditional mediators. Their involvement with the parties is not limited to the conflict. Faith-based actors often have a long history of service and involvement in community affairs, which indicates their commitment to the communities and adds to their credibility and legitimacy so central in any mediation effort. Many religious actors also stay involved even though an agreement might be signed and help the parties to heal, build social institutions, and seek justice. In addition to human and financial resources, such a long-term commitment requires time. Religious actors can often afford to invest in long-term involvement in communities as they have the financial and human resources and motivation derived from their religious or spiritual belief systems.

*Motivation for Mediation and Faith-Based Actors*

Another difference between faith-based mediation and traditional mediation is the motivation to intervene. Perceived motivations of mediators impact the parties' willingness, commitment to peace and own desire to resolve a conflict (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2002a). Motivation of a mediator is also closely related to the perception of evenhandedness, neutrality and, thus, legitimacy and credibility. As stated earlier, one of the distinct characteristics of faith-based mediation is the spiritual and religious motivation behind it. The USIP Special Report which evaluates the contribution of faith-based NGOs to international peace-building also observes that "although in some cases peacebuilding projects of faith-based actors resemble very closely those of secular NGOs, in most instances the diverse religious orientations of these faith-based organizations shape the peacebuilding they undertake" (USIP 2001: 2; USIP 2003: 5–6).

As people of faith, religious leaders and faith-based actors are more likely to be perceived as evenhanded, trustworthy, and possessing a strong moral and spiritual commitment than their secular counterparts. Recognition of this spiritual motivation often adds to the effectiveness of mediation efforts. For example, intervention of IRC SL was welcomed by the government, rebels and the population in general as they were perceived to be inspired primarily by their religious beliefs in the promotion of social justice and resolution of the conflict (Turay 2000). Their religious motivation allowed them to be regarded as neutral mediators with no ulterior motives but to do the work of God. For that reason they were able to gain the trust of both parties. Their consistent record of preaching reconciliation and emphasizing forgiveness and peace was also an asset. Religious leaders, as the moral and spiritual guides in their communities, have the moral and spiritual authority to warn those who commit violence and invite them back to the religious, spiritual path. This gives faith-based mediators a considerable degree of leverage and a significant impact on changing the conflictual behavior of the parties. Rev. Fornah Usman's, who was a regional minister and IRC SL member, explains this aspect of their work as follows:

We are always preaching the ministry of reconciliation. No matter what those guys may have done, there is room on the side of the Lord to forgive them and to bring them back on the road they are supposed to be on. We don't want to take sides in a conflict, because as religious ministers we are supposed to be on top of the situation. If any of the factions is not doing something right, we must be in a position to tell them the wrong things they are doing. For those things that we correct we can applaud them (Cited in Turay 2000).

Similar to the experience of IRC SL, the Quakers were also able to earn the trust of the parties to the conflict and were considered neutral and evenhanded mediators because they were perceived as motivated by their religious and spiritual convictions. As stated by Cynthia Sampson (1994: 111), "the Quakers were the sole third party that won the complete trust of both parties to the conflict, and

they sustained that trust for the duration of the war.” One of the reasons for this was that both parties were aware of the pacifist convictions of the Quakers, and therefore viewed their motivation as a spiritual one. The Quakers were credited with being more modest and discreet than some of the other third parties who sought to become involved in the Nigerian conflict and with having no agenda of their own to promote (Sampson 1994: 107). This can be clearly seen in the answers of representatives of the parties to the question: “what motivated the Quakers?” Their answers ranged from “God,” “belief in God and humanity,” to “an absolute dedication to humanity” (Sampson 1994: 110).

The Quaker’s unofficial status and denominational disinterestedness were also critical factors. In many instances, religious identity was used as a tool to promote communal divisions in Nigeria, and as a result, many of the other religious institutions were suspect. Conversely, although the Quakers were spiritually motivated, it was also clear that they had no vested interests in the outcome of the conflict. The Quakers were clear about their convictions that there is God in everyone and in their dedication to nonviolence. These convictions were the forces that led them to endure hardships, tensions, and face the dangers of traveling into conflict zones without having any protection or guarantee. Their willingness to take such risks without having any other motive, save that of God, earned the respect of both parties. A representative of Nigeria at the United Nations, Joseph Iyalla’s statement supports this view:

[The] Quakers were readily perceived as friends who did not favor one side or the other but understood the underlying commitments on both sides that gave rise to all this ferment. They were obviously regarded as having no particular ax to grind, but at the same time as being genuinely concerned. These were factors in the equation (cited in Sampson 1994: 106).

This unique position as servants of a divine God who are inspired by their religious and spiritual traditions and are willing to take risks without any other interests or hidden agendas is key to the understanding the legitimacy and possible sources of leverage of faith-based mediation. Combined with their long-term commitment and a record of service, faith-based actors become effective mediators in conflicts in communities where religion is a key factor.

#### *Mediation Strategies and Approaches and Faith-Based Actors*

Mediation strategies of faith-based groups and religious leaders reflect their religious principles and beliefs and are based on the cultural traditions with which the parties are familiar. Thus, one of the distinctive elements of faith-based mediation is framing intervention strategies within a religious context while employing traditional strategies used by other mediators. As observed by Abu Nimer (2001: 686), framing the interventions within a religious context and deriving tools from a religious narrative enables interveners to gain access and increase their potential impact on the parties.

Perceived as trusted, credible and legitimate, faith-based actors employ communicative, procedural or directive strategies to help parties reach an agreement. What is different in faith-based mediation is the use of religious and spiritual resources to motivate parties towards an agreement and transform conflictual relationships. This holistic and comprehensive approach to mediation draws upon religious and spiritual resources such as prayers, meditation, religious rituals, vocabulary, values and myths. Faith-based actors focus on religious values such as forgiveness, holding on to truth, personal accountability, love, patience, justice, compassion and mercy, among others. They also emphasize healing of psychosocial traumas as well as spiritual and psychological recovery (Bartoli and Jebashvili 2005: 6–8). During the process of mediation, faith-based actors invoke religious myths and stories to emphasize the importance of justice, peace and reconciliation. Besides focusing on ending hostilities and resolving root causes of conflicts, they also focus on repairing and transforming relationships. In addition to facilitation of communication, these actors aim to create empathy, forgiveness and understanding between the conflicting parties.

For example, in their efforts to mediate conflicts in Africa, the All African Council of Churches combines indigenous African and Christian reconciliation models to renew and recreate the relationships between the individual and God, with neighbors and social reality (Miller 1993: 5). This holistic approach to mediation aims to address both the material and the spiritual needs of the parties. In doing so, the mediator recognizes the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the parties. This also serves to build trust between the parties as well as between the parties and the mediator, thus adding credibility and legitimacy to the mediation process.

Such a holistic approach combines the three mediation strategies mentioned above, but each is used in a different context, and each is given a broader religious meaning. As communicators-facilitators, religious mediators such as the Quakers, IRCSL, AACC, etc. provide information and communication between the parties. For example, during their mediation efforts to resolve the conflict in Nigeria, the Quaker mission played a critical role by opening the lines of communication and was specifically requested to carry messages between the leaders of two parties (Sampson 1994: 95).

However, as Sampson notes, this communication-facilitation role was not just a passive one of simply carrying messages. On the contrary, it involved actively trying to remove obstacles to negotiations, such as suspicions, misperceptions and fears, through listening empathetically to the fears and concerns of the parties (Sampson 1994). According to the Quaker view, active listening is not only a mechanical method of conflict resolution, but a spiritual one, because it leads to hearing and understanding as well as finding the right words to utter (Sampson 1994: 95). This aspect of their mediation strategy was recognized as an effective

tool by the Biafrans who stated that they felt listened to and cared for. The Biafran leader, Ojukwu expressed this view as follows:

I saw them as highly objective, and then, being a church organization they never lacked in sympathy, which again helps in such a situation. Don't ever say to me, "Oh, 50 people were killed, oh, well that happens," and tell you let's go on. No, when you say to the Quakers, "this is what happened," there is a silence for a bit. There is a fellow human feeling for the tragedy, which is fully understood, and they then take that into consideration in their responses (cited in Sampson 1994: 108).

The Quakers also had a more direct impact on the peace process as advocates for a negotiated settlement, thus employing a more active strategy. This aspect of their work was recognized by both the Biafran rebels and the Nigerian government (Sampson 1994). Smith, the convener of the Kampala talks, supports this assessment of the Quaker contribution and states that "they played a considerable part before the Kampala talks in encouraging key people around Ojukwu to favor talking – and afterwards... Their total influence was very considerable in preparing attitudes that would favor talking to Gowon representatives" (cited in Sampson 1994: 109–110).

The Conciliation Commission of Nicaragua, which consisted of East Coast Indians and Miskito Pastors, also played multiple roles during its attempts to mediate Nicaragua's civil war in the 1980's. During the prenegotiation phase, the Commission addressed various procedural issues such as the safety of the rebel leaders and defined the role of the Commission. Accordingly, the Commission was responsible for the coordination of the time and place for the meetings and for facilitating communication between parties (Nichols 1994: 73). The Commission refrained from proposing the substance of accords, but the Commission also facilitated the discussion, clarified subjects that could easily be misinterpreted, made recommendations and testified that the accords are fulfilled (Nichols 1994: 73).

Strategies employed by IRCSL during the conflict in Sierra Leone also varied. Turay notes that "recognized by the regional foreign ministers for having 'kick started' the peace process, IRCSL became integral facilitators of the peace talks" and their main strategy was to remain neutral and supportive of the mediation process (Turay 2000). However, during the actual negotiations, IRCSL was able to employ more directive strategies as they had gained the trust of the parties. Turay states that when the negotiations were halted due to problems, IRCSL acted as 'go-betweens' to convince the parties to return to table, adopting a communication facilitation strategy. They also "used caucusing to air critical issues raised by the parties and to encourage them to co-operate and work towards finding common ground" (Turay 2000). During the discussions of very critical issues, when parties failed to even look at each other, they were able to break the ice and calm the parties by resorting to joint prayers.

Sant'Egidio, a Christian community located in the Vatican,<sup>2</sup> was instrumental in the formation of the Educational Agreement for Kosovo of 1996, which was the first official agreement of any kind between the Serb government and the Albanian community in the 20th century. Sant'Egidio also employed a combination of mediation strategies including facilitating the convening of the parties and focusing on concrete issues concerning schooling, health care, culture, sports, newspapers, etc. After the signing of the agreement, Sant'Egidio became one of the members of the commission formed to implement the Agreement. Although implementation of the agreement has been extremely difficult, Sant'Egidio continued to offer a channel for ongoing dialogue and negotiations (Bartoli 1999).

### **Conditions for Effective Faith-Based Mediation**

It is important to note that faith-based mediation cannot be effective in every conflict or in every community. Effectiveness of faith-based mediation depends on the presence of various conditions. For faith-based mediation to be effective, religious leaders, institutions and discourses must be perceived as legitimate by the parties. Legitimacy is here closely related to the identity of the disputants, the nature of the dispute, and the relationship between the parties and the mediator.

#### *Identity of the Disputants*

One of the conditions for successful faith-based mediation is that mediators are perceived as legitimate. If the legitimacy of their intervention and their methods are questioned, their efforts will most likely fail. Whether religion and religious leaders are considered legitimate actors and have any authority to intervene depends heavily on the identity of the disputants. The mediation literature recognizes that the characteristics of the disputants involved in conflict affect the mediation process greatly. The literature refers to structural properties of the states involved in conflict and how these affect their predisposition to engage in non-coercive forms of conflict management (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002: 32). The nature of the political system, for instance, has attracted much attention recently (Maoz and Russett 1993; Ember, Ember and Russett 1992; Dixon 1993).

Mediation literature mostly focuses on the behavior of democratic states and argues that democratic states are more inclined to use peaceful methods of conflict management (because of their internal cultural and political norms, liberal experience or electoral constraints) unless their direct security interests are threatened, whereas non-democratic states are more likely to utilize coercive methods of management (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002a: 32). This line of argumenta-

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Sant'Egidio, see <http://www.santegidio.org/en/index.html>.

tion leads to the conclusion that mediation between democratic countries is more likely to be effective than mediation between other kinds of polities.

Another factor that may have an influence on the mediation process is the internal coherence of the parties and the legitimacy of their representatives. Mediation has a better chance to succeed if the adversaries are recognized as legitimate spokespersons and legitimate leaders representing their respective communities (Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, 2007a). Otherwise, it is much harder for the mediators to engage in any meaningful form of conflict settlement because the representatives lack power or authority to make decisions and concessions.

But the reality of many conflicts today is that they occur between parties where democracy is not the norm. Moreover, many of these conflicts are intrastate conflicts taking place between different religious or ethnic groups within a single, largely fragile state. Many current day conflicts involve communities with different cultures and religious traditions, who have been traumatized by the impact of colonization and imperialism in the past and are lagging behind the West in material, technical and scientific terms. In these conflicts religion is increasingly being used to define the parties. Many of these societies suffer from extreme poverty, economic deprivation, and the pressure of a globalizing economy. Sudden infusion of modernity has disrupted traditional social, political, economic and familial lives. In many of these societies religion is still a key aspect of culture and tradition. As they are struggling to adapt to these sudden changes, many of these societies are holding onto their religion and culture, as they seem to be the only stable and dependable sources of identity. Such conflicts are not easy to manage and more difficult to resolve.

Religious leaders and faith-based institutions may have a unique advantage in such internal or ethnic conflicts, especially if religion plays a key role in the social life of the parties and in defining their identities. In many of these societies traditional religious leaders are highly respected and recognized as legitimate moral and spiritual guides. Their involvement thus has the potential to motivate ordinary people to pressure their leaders to accept a political settlement that resolves the conflict. We are aware of course that in many of these cases religious leaders themselves can foment violence, and it may be necessary to form commissions or councils consisting of religious leaders and representatives from all the religious communities involved (such as the IRCSL) or involve a religious group that is recognized by all parties as impartial, fair and legitimate (e.g. the Quakers). Although religious leaders or faith-based actors may not resolve the conflict alone, they can significantly contribute to the official mediation and other more formal methods of settlement. When the conflict parties are torn apart by intractable internal conflicts, have limited access to material resources, and are otherwise traditional in their social orientation, the involvement of religious actors may motivate the parties to negotiate, as was the case in Sierra Leone, or it may open a window to think of the other as a serious party and not the enemy, as was the case with the Quakers in Nicaragua.

### *Nature of the Dispute*

There is a general agreement in the literature that “the success or failure of mediation is largely determined by the nature of the dispute” (Ott 1972: 597). The importance attached to the issues in dispute will naturally affect the choices of conflict management modes and chances of a successful mediation. Certain issues such as beliefs, core values, identity, and territorial integrity have a high saliency and are apt to encourage decision-makers to accept higher levels of costs (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002: 33). These conflicts are much more complex and tend to last longer, and therefore are harder to resolve through diplomatic methods (Snyder and Diesing 1977).

Most conflicts today involve multiple issues, many a combination of tangible and intangible issues. In many of these conflicts, even when not openly so, religion may still play a significant role. When that is the case, religious groups can play a constructive role as peacemakers, or mediators. However, it is important to note that a religious dimension only opens a window or a door of opportunity that brings the parties closer to each other. Ultimately, addressing the legitimate needs of the parties and resolving the issues fairly and satisfactorily is *sine qua non* for any successful mediation effort. As remarked by Jean Paul Lederach, “[n]egotiation becomes possible when the needs and interests of all those involved and affected by the conflict are legitimated and articulated,” and “mediation can and should facilitate the articulation of legitimate needs and interests of all concerned into fair, practical, and mutually acceptable solutions” (Lederach 1995: 14).

### *History of the Relationships Between Parties*

In conflict situations, especially in intractable conflicts, transition from war-like behavior to peaceful behavior is very difficult since parties have invested significant resources to continue the conflict. This difficulty is magnified by the fact that most violent conflicts are now internal, meaning that the disputants who have been “killing one another with considerable enthusiasm and success” in some cases for a number of years, must learn to live together peacefully in the same territory (Licklider 1995: 681). It is very difficult to change the conflictual psychology of the communities because they are under the influence of a history filled with resentment, dehumanization, anger and rage. Transforming negative images into positive ones become very difficult as the individuals hold deep injuries and traumas due to the long-standing conflict (Kadayifci 2002: 465). Under such circumstances, elements of religious and cultural traditions may be used to create distance from a hate-filled past, endow the other party with human (not diabolical) qualities, and to condemn any form of violence.

During a conflict, religious leaders can use religious tools and texts to construct a new story, a new narrative of the conflict in which issues and differences are represented as meaningful parts of a divine project. With the aid of religious

imagery and vocabulary, the negative sagas, myths and tales with which the population is familiar may be replaced with a different image of the conflict. Past wars and victories can be interpreted within the perspective of a religious tradition and employed to recreate a more peaceful and amenable history of the people. By locating these victories and wars in their collective memory, religious and political actors engage the population in the politics of interpretation (Kadayifci 2007: 180–191). By retelling these religious myths, sagas, and stories, they rewrite the history and shape the spaces (i.e. national homeland) and events that constitute the basis of religious identity. Such stories create the imaginative boundaries that contain the identity of the people and influence self-interpretation and modes of exclusion and inclusion (Kadayifci 2002). These religious efforts may help to reconfigure the imagination of the population and help bring about some reconciliation within and between the conflicting communities.

When mediation takes place within a context of hostile perceptions, misunderstandings, and different interpretations of causes and issues, it will be hampered by enormous obstacles (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002: 29). If mediation is to be successful and peace sustainable, it is necessary to change the negative perceptions of each party in order to establish constructive relations between the communities. This requires justification for transforming the negative perceptions concerning the “other” as well as addressing the needs and interests of the parties. As stated by World Conference on Religion and Peace representative William Vendley, “conflict fomented by a religious community can best be contested by a creative minority from that same faith community” (USIP 2001: 2).

In order to transform these negative images into constructive ones, then, there is a need to utilize existing authorities (e.g. religious leaders, and traditional peace-makers), religio-cultural vocabulary with which the population is familiar, constructive values embedded in the religious traditions (e.g. forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation, etc.), and religio-cultural myths, images, and symbols that support reconciliation, peace-making, and compassion towards the “other.” Religious leaders as the moral and spiritual guides have the authority to interpret religious texts and invoke their religious imagery and symbolism more effectively than secular leaders. Therefore, they have the potential to be key players in conflict transformation. Thus if the religious leaders, who are respected in their communities, endorse a mediation process or become mediators this will contribute significantly to the legitimization and effectiveness of that process. There is something about religious leaders and institutions that almost anyone involved in a conflict can trust. This trust can work marvels in transforming an intractable conflict and mobilizing support for a peace process.

Using religious symbolism in the course of mediation can open a window to the deeper emotional and spiritual realities of those involved in conflict and in the lives of the negotiators themselves. For example, in the mediation processes that the All Africa Conference of Churches orchestrated to temporarily end the

Sudanese civil war in 1972, the mediators offered prayers at critical junctures and invoked instructive Christian and Islamic texts. This made it possible to promote some reconciliation amongst the parties. Also the Conciliation Commission of Nicaragua, which consisted of Protestants inspired by the Mennonite tradition, quite often employed a common language of conciliation and the image of justice and peace from the Mennonite perspective during the mediation process between the government and the Indians (Nichols 1994: 74).

Nichols (1994) describes the impact and effectiveness of religious symbolism during the negotiations in Nicaragua. Nichols notes that sessions would open with prayers and readings from the Bible. Also, a variety of Christian themes were explicitly set forth in the opening devotions during the negotiations, both from the Bible and from the Moravian book of daily inspirational readings. “These included references to the vocation of serving rather than being served; Job’s acceptance of evils visited on him despite his personal integrity, distinctions between worldly and divine wisdom and the *harvest of righteousness* awaiting those who sow in peace; and the example of Christ who, rather than exalting himself, *humbled himself and became obedient unto death*” (Nichols 1994: 74–75).

This spiritual and religious dimension of the peacemaking process opened a window to a transcendent dimension at both the personal level (prayer, forgiveness, and reconciliation) and in political terms (peace, and political and social accords), which allowed the representatives of both parties to speak with each other and to see beyond their individual preoccupations to goals shared by the other (Nichols 1994: 84). The choice of biblical texts and images emphasized the holy vocation of the negotiators as peacemakers, and thus created unique opportunities for human contact across a great political gulf. When that gulf seemed to be insurmountable, Christian virtues emphasized by the Commission became unique spiritual bridges to which both sides frequently resorted (Nichols 1994: 84).

The community of Sant’Egidio, a noted faith-based organization that devotes much time to mediating difficult conflicts, used religious symbolism during the Mozambique Peace Talks. The negotiations were held in the serene surroundings of the Sant’Egidio headquarters in Italy. The representatives of the Italian government and Bishop Jaime Gonçalves referred to the symbols of fraternal mutual recognition and children of the same people, especially by recalling the biblical story of Joseph, to unite the Mozambican people as one big family throughout the negotiations. Effectiveness of such symbolism is evident in the final document signed by both parties, which states that both parties recognize each other as “compatriots and members of the same great Mozambican Family” (Sant’Egidio n.d.). Mediation efforts of Sant’Egidio resulted in the signing of the general peace accord in October 1992, which is one of the few examples in the past decade of an African conflict brought to an end through peace talks.

Religious symbols, religious chants and religious themes adopted by faith-based actors can mobilize community action, bring support for the wider peace

process, and generally transform a negative and malignant conflict into a more positive one. Religious leaders acting as mediators in international conflicts inspire belief, faith and perseverance. These qualities can make a conflict more manageable and a peace process more effective.

## **Conclusion**

Religion has often been portrayed as having a negative impact on conflict and peacemaking processes. Religious bigotry and hatred are indeed amongst the main drivers of so much conflict in the world today. Many would see religion as the main cause of conflict. Religion is after all about differences, morality and justifications. Yet religion has another dimension to it, one that has usually been neglected, and that is its role in peacemaking and mediation. We have tried here to emphasize some of the implications of this role.

There are two main areas where faith-based actors and religious mediators have a significant impact on any peacemaking process. One is of course the respect, legitimacy and trust accorded to religious mediators and their ability to use these to effect a settlement. Faith-based actors bring a new dimension of trust and legitimacy and thus leverage into the process. They are respected, often even admired, and readily followed. This gives them tremendous leverage over certain parties in conflict. Religion is here seen as a major resource, as a major source of leverage for good. Whereas states bring with them into the mediation process tangible resources such as power and money, faith-based mediators bring with them intangible resources such as respect, trust and loyalty. Both can work effectively to transform a conflict. Religion may be used in conflict to build peace and reconciliation.

The second area where religion may be used to promote peace is in the development of interfaith dialogue. This is a relatively new phenomenon, and it involves religious leaders repressing groups in conflict, developing lines of communications between hostile parties, removing a climate of fear, and developing common ethical principles. Interfaith dialogue enables religious leaders to deal with even the thorniest issues in conflict in a manner that their secular counterparts could only envy. Hopefully the common ground that religious leaders may find can then be transferred to the political leadership to exploit and expand. Either way, it seems clear that in our complex and convoluted world, faith-based mediators may have a significant role to play in the process of peacemaking.

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