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When My Peace Is Not Your Peace

Role of Culture and Religion in What Counts for Peace

1 Introduction

Evaluation connotes finding out the absolute or relative added value or contribution that an intervention brings to a given situation. Money, time, a target population, defined geographical areas, and a set of activities set the boundaries of measurement of the value of the change or contributions of the intervention outcomes. Of these boundary parameters, money is the major determinant of what project interventions can be carried out, where, when, how, by whom, with whom, and for how long. Hence, donors demand evidence to justify their investment of resources, and implementers focus on providing the evidence that demonstrates the quality and value of the investments (Scharbatke-Church 2011). In sum, the primary purpose of an evaluation is accountability; learning through knowledge generation from demonstrable proofs of practice and of theories of change comes second. In theory, “...accountability relationship classically flows upwards to the donor but can also be ‘downwards’ to programme participants or ‘horizontal’ to partners” (Scharbatke-Church 2011, 472). In practice, the direction of flow of accountability tends to be upwards only; it is donor-aimed and the responsibility for its delivery is implementing partner driven; seldom are project participants the audience of accountability reporting.

Learning outcomes are measured in two dimensions. Project interventions must result in “practical learning for improving theoretical learning to add to knowledge [and] accountability learning in order to prove the merit of one’s effort” (Guijt 2008, 105). That proof of merit must be evidenced through the measures of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, especially in respect to cost and in comparison with the stated objective. Intervention outcomes and impacts, as well as sustainability are the other measures of success or failure. At the bottom line, quality and value are what count (Scharbatke-Church 2011). Hence, evaluations have become, in effect, the measure of the value of what change a given sum of money can make to an identified problem.

The search for valuable change presumes the existence of verifiable standards and measures of what was against what is or should be. By extension, those measures must fit into a dualistic worldview in which change has either happened or not happened; there are no in-betweens. This need for clear proofs

requires that the supporting evidence must be quantifiable or at least objectively verifiable. Attribution or at least demonstration of contribution is important, as the observed changes must be traceable to the interventions initiated. Since the lifespan of peacebuilding projects are short (hardly beyond 3 years), interventions that prioritize the delivery of tangible products and countable outcomes are favoured over those that aim at building relevant peace infrastructure (Hopp-Nishanka 2012) and processes. This is “because it is easier to measure the result as product than the outcomes as process” (Lederach 1997, 133).

This approach to evaluation raises a number of questions that peacebuilding¹ evaluation and religious peacebuilding² evaluation in particular must confront – the fundamental social science question of validity: “Am I measuring what I think I am measuring” (Baker 1999, 109). In the context of peacebuilding, however, the challenge goes beyond the ability of the evaluator or the clients to answer that fundamental question satisfactorily, since defining peacebuilding is a challenge arising from the very broad and different dimensions that different actors choose to apply (Scharbatke-Church 2011). “What is religious peacebuilding?” is even more complex. Hence, in defining what is to be measured, a second level of challenge for peacebuilders is the ownership question – whose peace are we evaluating? This further leads to the questions: Whose definitions are being used to describe the peace? Is there consensus between donors, and/or implementers on whose peace are the interventions seeking to secure and what constitutes peace? A third layer of questions look at specifics of the evaluation: what are the definitions of quality and value in the evaluation? Does, what constitutes value and quality to donors, necessarily have the same equivalency for project participants? In other words, are there common grounds on what desirable change is and how that change is measured?

Additionally, the demands of objectivity in the establishment of the before and after conditions as proof of success or otherwise of the theory and practice of the intervention warrant that the planning, implementation, monitoring, and

1 Peacebuilding aims to create conditions for lasting peace and the prevention of future conflicts through the positive transformation of the cultures, structures, systems, and other root causes that generate and sustain the conflicts into ones that promote peaceful coexistence among feuding groups.

2 Religious peacebuilding draws its inspiration and motivation from the beliefs, values, practices, and rituals derived from the scriptures of one or more faith traditions; uses the institutional platforms, networks, and resources; or leverages the moral voice and authority of religious actors (including the clergy and lay persons and organizations working in the name of the faith) to facilitate the creation of the conditions for peace and the prevention of violent conflicts in divided societies.

evaluation of the interventions, including social engineering ones such as peacebuilding, adopt models and language of the military-scientific worldviews of intervention design and implementation. Accordingly, assessments, context analyses, and problem identification lead to clearly stated strategic objectives, intervention strategies, targets, benchmarks, indicators, outcomes, and impacts. In other words, “Projects are seen as discrete, concrete, and measurable units of activity bounded by parameters such as time and completion of tasks” (Lederach 1997, 130). These are to be achieved through precise military or surgical-like operations that pinpoint and remove problems with carefully planned interventions.

With increasing donor pressure for evidence that justifies investments, demonstrating high feasibility of value for money requires that indicators must be predetermined in very precise ways to secure access to the funding. Because the outcomes must be tangible, visible, measurable, or at least objectively verifiable, carefully crafted theories of change (Weiss 1995), logical frameworks, planning matrices, and intervention metrics establish and demonstrate the chain of causality between means and ends, in order to reassure donors their money will be well spent. Prior statement of assumptions helps to narrow the scope of uncertainties and to eliminate all conditions that suggest the infeasibility of the project. The aim is to ensure near perfect conditions that would deliver planned results. In a self-fulfilling way, success is guaranteed through tight control of the scope of error and determinants of feasibility.

While some relief and development interventions, as in health, education, agriculture, and microeconomic projects, may lend themselves easily to such linear logic and rationalistic approaches to planning and evaluation, peacebuilding does not so easily fit this quasi-experimental approach to intervention planning and management (White and Sabarwal 2014). The focus on predetermining intervention outcomes with time-bound indicators runs counter to the process orientation of peacebuilding that emphasizes the creation of spaces of dialogue, healing, and the rebuilding of relationships (Lederach 1997; Ashworth 2014). To do otherwise is to sidestep the use of “traditional peacebuilding tools [that create] a safe place for telling and acknowledging the truth and [drawing] on local processes for reconciliation” (Ashworth 2014, 239). This turns peacebuilding into another quick-fix intervention that leaves no space for the slow and longer-term healing and reconciliation processes that religious peacebuilding in particular requires. Critically, the processes of bringing religious values and norms of acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation in alignment with the hurts of victims do not only take time, they are also highly individualized, as some people reach the point of forgiveness and reconciliation much earlier than others. Therefore, a one-size, quick-fix approach that fits into a particular time frame and activity

plan would not make peace happen on the scale that makes it evaluable in short periods of time.

Scharbatke-Church, (2011) laments that “[...] peacebuilding evaluations are generally not delivering accountability and learning in the manner in which they should [because] the average evaluation is not grounded in the basics of good evaluation practice [and] the core drivers of evaluation – accountability and learning – are rarely held at the heart of the process” (460). In other words, rather than focusing on “peacebuilding’s perceived ‘distinctiveness’” (Scharbatke-Church 2011, 460), greater attention to the techniques of evaluation would make peacebuilding as evaluable as any other social science, goes the argument. Incidentally, the adoption of a purely technocratic approach to ensuring the evaluability of peacebuilding projects, and religious peacebuilding interventions in particular to meet the needs for accountability and learning is where the sub discipline meets its nemeses. Unlike other social interventions that can produce externally observable outcomes, peace or the absence of it is in a large part intrinsic, experiential, and subjective; peace is not what we see; it is what we experience and believe to be true. However, the conventional approaches look at evaluation from the perspective of the “outsider” rather than the insider whose lives have been affected by the ‘not peaceful’ situations in which they are trapped or from which they have recently transited.

The outsider perspective risks equating the presence of presumptive enablers of peace such as the rule of law, freedom of speech, and even economic opportunities as measures of peace, regardless of the reality since their presence does not translate into equitable access to services, freedom from unjust and discriminatory practices, or the elimination of ineffective or unresponsive institutional performances that create more structural violence on segments of the population than meets the eye. The existence of these enablers does not mean they work to advance peace. As a respondent in an interview in Liberia observed, the liberation of the airwaves in Liberia after the civil war expanded the opportunities for freedoms of speech such that “[...] now people are no longer afraid to speak up their minds. But when you speak who listens? So, people speak, but no one listens. People come and make speeches, very good speeches, but there is no implementation” (Pul 2016, 28). In other words, the ability to speak freely does not lead to genuine communication and dialogue that promote introspection, truth-telling, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. Similarly, a judiciary that is perceived to put justice on sale (Allafrica.com 2019; *Daily Observer* 2019; LICHRD 2014) does not represent the rule of law; neither does it ease the pain of victims of crimes of war, rape, and other forms of injustice for those who cannot afford the price of the justice system (Pul 2016). In such instances, invisible, intangible, and unexpressed but deeply felt suffer-

ing of the oppressed provide no indicators of peace or the absence of it. Similarly, the role of religion as the container that holds and manages the diffusion of the hurts may not be visible either.

Ignoring this deeply personal and experiential view of peace risks turning it into an external entity that can be objectively assessed outside the self. The assessor and the assessed are unconnected in their experiences of what happened, how life was and is being lived. The assessed responds to questions on what has changed, but do the assessors' noted outcomes of reported changes, usually in knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, and practices connote longer term, internalized changes that "disarm the hearts" (Pul 2017, 15) of those affected by the incidents of war and violence? As Twose and Mahoney (2015) found in their study of reconciliation in Liberia, while individualized responses of study participants give off a certain impression on the state of peace:

When all responses were considered together, the dichotomy between claims of individual reconciliation and perceptions of societal reconciliation was striking. The sharp difference forces one to wonder whether, when stating their personal views, people simply give the socially desirable, "correct" answer, while reflecting on the country at large may have enabled them to respond more honestly. As such, the number of people who claim to be reconciled and to have moved on from the past should be interpreted with some skepticism (Twose and Mahoney 2015, 103).

2 Disentangling Labels, Religiousness of Conflicts

If the literature on peacebuilding evaluation is replete with such kaleidoscopic accounts of the challenges of measuring change, it is because the evaluation efforts ignore the inherently distinct characteristics of peacebuilding in general and religious peacebuilding in particular that do not lend themselves to the conventional, decontextualized, and objectivized criteria of evaluation. In most indigenous religious worldviews in Africa in particular, the resolution of conflicts is grounded in religious beliefs, values, symbols, and practices that provide meanings and directions rooted in perceptions of the transcendental nature of relationships between the living, the dead, and the unborn; humans and nature, especially mother earth; and the eternal and the temporal. These factors govern how people choose to deal with conflicts. Conventional evaluation efforts also ignore the fact that the adoption of a purely technocratic approach to evaluating religious peacebuilding in particular throw up a number of challenges. Of the lot, four major ones, related to the need to disentangle labels and confront the

religiousness of conflicts; the fluidity of religious identities in conflicts; the symbolic and substantive nature and role of religion in peacebuilding; and the basic need to agree on what to measure, given the differing meaning of peace. These are discussed in this chapter.

Intervention designs set the boundaries for evaluations. In the field of peacebuilding, however, such boundaries are not only porous; they are also fluid. Indeed, there are no objective standards by which such analyses are conducted. Contexts change rapidly and actors can lithely switch roles between victims and perpetrators of violence. Besides, identity conflicts such as ones in which religion is involved, are socially constructed with interpretative boundaries that defy simple characterization. Preliminary questions such as how the conflict became defined as a religious one or a conflict that merits a religious approach to its intervention designs must be asked and answered. This calls into question who defined the conflict as religious? What in the conflict makes it a religious one? To what extent would the ordinary people trapped in the conflict consider it a religious one? Do they believe that the people championing the conflict are acting in defence of their faith or they are merely instrumentalizing religion as a tool for mobilizing conflict actors and resources? In other words, a good religious peacebuilding evaluation cannot sidestep asking the questions about how the conflict got labelled as a religious conflict? Who decided on the labelling? Does the religious label given to a conflict necessarily reflect how those involved see and relate to the conflict? In sum, the first challenge in evaluating religious peacebuilding is to establish how religious the conflict is and the peacebuilding process thereof.

On the intervention side, who determines what constitutes “religious” in the peacebuilding effort. Is the effort a religious one because of the issues at stake e.g. contentions over religious beliefs, values, and practices; the actors involved i.e. individuals and institutions clothed with religious functions who champion the peacebuilding effort; the objective of the conflict, e.g. contests over sacred spaces including fights over ownership of, access to, or inclusion in common sacred spaces of worship and veneration; or because of the instrumentalization of religion for political and economic ends, as when political and economic leaders use religious sentiments, symbos, and affiliations as the leverage for mobilizing fighters and/or peacemakers?

Conflicts in Africa have suffered from labels that misdirect peacebuilding interventions and evaluations. The 2013 spikes in Central African Republic’s (CAR) protracted political conflict gained notoriety as a religious conflict that pitched Muslims against Christians. This labelling became entrenched despite the prevailing evidence that “There is no long history of religious hatred in this country. It exploded out of nowhere after Muslim mercenaries from Chad and Sudan

joined the Seleka alliance that swept to power” (Wood 2013). Before that, “The Christian majority and Muslim minority had always lived in harmony until March 2013 when Seleka leader Michel Djotodia seized power” (Laeila and Dia 2013, 2). Indeed, at the height of the conflict many Muslims and Christians saved their neighbours of the opposite religion by alerting them on planned advance of armed groups (BBC News, 4 November 2013) or offered them protection from such attacks (Pul 2017; Laeila and Dia 2013). This labelling also ignored the fact that the existence of elements of local fighters, the Seleka and Anti-Balaka, predated the onset of the 2013 conflict were either instrumentalized or pressed into fighting under a religious banner (BBC 2013; Harding 2013; Pul 2017). This labelling further ignored the deeper historical, political, and economic discontent regarding issues of belongingness and citizenship; political and economic exclusion of geo-ethnic areas; intergenerational herder-farmer conflicts that have intensified, thanks to climate change and unstable political environments that have increased movement of cattle from Chad, Cameroun, South Sudan, and other surrounding countries, which locals resented as invasions into the lush pastures of CAR. Also masked in this religious labelling are the external political influences, some with deep colonial roots that created political instabilities and periodic outbreak of violence since CAR’s independence, and all of which happened without any religious motivations imputed. Similarly, no one blamed the conflict on the state failure of CAR since independence that allowed for the sprouting of ethno-regional armed groups struggling for social, political, and economic inclusion.

In this labelling, the western press ignored the vehement protests of most Central Africans, led by religious leaders of both the Christian and Muslim sides (Reese 2014); as well as the warnings of discerning diplomats that rejected the religious label given to the conflict (Wood 2013). Ordinary Central Africans point out that calling their conflict a religious one is a misnomer that hides the real political and economic motivations around which the fighting gangs are mobilized. They point to the fact that among the so-called Christian front Anti-Balaka forces, there are Muslims, just as there are Christians in the fighting forces of the Seleka. Neither of them has claimed doctrinal allegiance to Christianity or Islam, and both Christians and Muslims were victims of their atrocities. In the eyes of Central Africans’ therefore, the conflict that is described as a religious conflict is not theirs. In the words of a respondent in an evaluation field study in CAR:

Before the conflict there was no problem between Christians and Muslims or the different ethnic groups. However, politicians introduced the conflict. Before Seleka came, there was no problem. When they came, they brought bad governance: they stole from Christians.

Anti-Balaka did the same thing, stealing from Muslims mainly. Therefore, the conflict qualified as a religious one, but it is not; it has nothing to do with religion (Pul 2017).

The CAR experience parallels the Nigerian context where the perceptual split of the country into “the Muslim North and the Christian South” is grossly misleading to the point of inaccuracy, convenient though it may be for the journalist” (Onaiyekan 2012, 3). It is an aberration that has, nonetheless, perpetuated “the unfortunate tendency to overlook the very important fact that in the normal lives of our people, there is a commendable measure of peaceful and harmonious living together across religious lines” (Onaiyekan 2012, 4). This misnomer also masks the reality that it is “The failure of the state [that] gave rise to terrorist groups in all regions of the country” (Niworu 2013, 245); a development which is not “[...]unconnected with the search for political power, a sure avenue to economic power and influence in the society” (Niworu 2013, 246) by groups seeking a foothold in a state that makes little room for them.

Critically, the Nigerian example challenges peacebuilding evaluators to isolate the transposition of default religious characterization over ethno-regional, political, economic and cultural grievances that underwrite the conflicts. As is the case in other colonies, British colonial policy in Nigeria reserved and actively supported the spread of specific brands of religious creeds in different parts of the country (Brukum 1997; Bening 1990). Therefore, different geopolitical regions took on imposed ethno-religious characters – a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south. It is perhaps pertinent to note, also, that Sudan’s pre-2005 civil wars were invariably characterized in the same terms as Nigeria’s – the Muslim north against the Christian south. And yet fighting in Sudan and South Sudan has not stopped after the separation of the two. With a slight twist, the same quick-fix religious labelling occurred in northern Ghana’s 1994 ethnic conflict, famously referred to as the Guinea Fowl War. Although Assefa (2001) acknowledged that “the conflict was not about religion per se” (184) he nonetheless found justification to argue that “[...] religion also played a role in reinforcing the fault lines in the conflict [since] the leadership of the acephalous groups is predominantly Christian [...] while the chiefly groups are primarily Muslim” (167). Given the imposed nature of these religions, should the fight of a group for socio-political and economic inclusion in the state gain an automatic religious tag because their fighters are predominantly drawn from one religious group or because they use their religious values to inspire and justify their cause of war? Be it as it may, the danger inherent in the categorization of conflicts as religious ones on the basis of ethno-regional dominance of exogenous creeds may indeed mask the deeper and more destructive non-religious factors that fuel and sustain the conflicts.

3 Fluidity of Religious Identities in Conflicts

The tendency to read religion into geo-ethnic conflicts when that is not the case, runs against the reality that the exogenous religions, Christianity and Islam, introduced by trade and missionary enterprises never seeped deep enough into the psyche and cultural set up of ethnic groups in Africa to make them fight in defence of the exogenous faiths. This is because in many parts of the continent, “The Africans often had a rather flexible approach to Christianity” (Rothermund 2006, 127) and Islam because “[...] Islam like Christianity could not replace traditional African religion” (Brukum 1997, 14). So pervasive is the lack of depth in the roots of these exogenous faiths in the traditions across Africa that “[...]some anthropologists question whether imported religions – Christianity and Islam – have really affected African ancestral beliefs or given Africans different ways of understanding the contemporary societies in which they live (Etounga-Manguelle 2000, 67).

This notwithstanding, the propensity to see the religious configuration of Africa only in the Christian-Muslim paradigm leads to a dualistic categorization of its participants in conflicts – fighters and victims alike – as belonging to one or the other religious categories; they can only be Muslims, Christians, occasionally Hindus, Buddhist, or Animists, but not hybrid believers. Once placed in this religious straitjacket, they cannot be one and the other at the same time; they must be either one or the other. In this dualistic worldview, religion and culture are viewed as asynchronous or even mutually immiscible realities in which a person has to shed one identity in order to embrace the other. This goes contrary to the experiences of those whose peace donor-sponsored interventions seek to salvage and protect, as their religious reality is different. As a respondent in a recent evaluation fieldwork in CAR explained in respect of religious belongingness and participation in peacebuilding efforts:

The only religious leaders who did not participate are the animists, but that can be explained – the animists are not many. The fact is that they are mixed into or subsumed among the Christians and Muslims. The problem is that people are socially compelled to belong to either Christianity or Islam because of burial rites when they die. However, belonging to either of these is actually a practice of mixed beliefs, as people comingle their acquired and declared faiths with their ancestral ones (Pul 2017, 32).

In such contexts, membership of a religious category does not stem from what you believe in; it is what you were born into. In practice, religious identity is fluid, as membership of multiple religious categories or cyclical migration across religious lines is often a norm, not an exception. This is because religion, in

much of Africa is a functional tool and the practice of poly-route monotheism (Pul 2016) is the order, not the exception. In other words, although one may believe in the existence of one God in accordance with a professed creed, one also holds that there are many routes to the same God. Hence, when a practicing fetish priest walks into a Catholic Church in Ghana and takes the microphone to ask “[...] worshippers to join him in thanking God for his mercies towards him” (The Chronicle Newspaper 2013, 1) few are surprised or scandalized, since the practice of being “Christian during the day and voodoo at night” (Fihlani 2017, 2), as is the case in Benin, is not uncommon a practice. Similarly, in Liberia being a Christian or a Muslim and participation in the rituals and ceremonies of the indigenous religious-cultural Poro and Sande Secret societies are not deemed incompatible. In the same way, it is not seen as apostasy for Christians or Muslims to seal a peace agreement with the performance of traditional religious rituals, as in the burying of the okro stick for some ethnic groups in northern Ghana, which entails ritual sacrificing of animals or the chewing of the cola to bond and bind the parties (Issifu 2017; Mohammed 2014). In one such instance, the Christian church that sponsored the peace process saw no wrong in providing financial support to the performance of the rituals because it is the only way to make the commitment to peace hold. In the same way, when Christian and Muslim fighters go to battle strapped with amulets and other forms of spiritual protection against bullets, they received from the fetish priests, it is not a denial of the God they worship on Sundays or Fridays. It is a seamless continuation of what they believe and practice.

In such fluid religious environments, a dyadic categorization of people as members of one religion or the other is not only misleading, such categorical assignment of issues and actors may not reflect the realities of those whose peace we seek to secure or evaluate. Indeed, nailing down the religious identities of individuals or groups can be all but simple. Even names often belie the religious identities of actors in conflicts and peacebuilding. In CAR, people frequently have Muslim names, but are Christians, and vice versa. For instance *Michel* Djotodja, whom the Seleka propelled into power as interim President in 2013, *Sylvain* Bordas and *Sylvain* Adamu Ndale, both Seleka rebel commanders, are all Muslims bearing Christian names while *Mamadou* Nalie is a Christian with a Muslim name (Pul 2017). In field interviews, respondents never missed a chance to point out that among the Selekas, there were Christians, and among the Anti-Balakas, there were Muslims as well. No census of membership of either group exists to establish the proportionality of cross-religious membership of the armed groups. Nonetheless, the evidence from fieldwork, however small, cautions against the categorical characterization of conflicts as religious only by rea-

son of the perceived dominance of one religious group over the other in the composition of the groups at war.

4 Ensuring Relevance and Validity

Indiscriminate acceptance of religious labels of conflicts sets the traps for failing the validity test in the evaluation design, providing yet another example of how evaluations often fail “to create opportunities to see the conflict through the eyes of that community and [to identify] the community’s own resources for addressing or transforming conflict, as well as for healing trauma and reconstituting relationship” (Ashworth 2014, 239). For instance, the labelling of the CAR conflict did not only “misrepresent what began as ethnic and political violence” (Wood 2014, 2); it misdirected peacebuilding agencies to focus on a conflict that did not exist, in the eyes of the victims of the violence. The result is that the theories of change and intervention strategies that were elaborated based on these assumptions became irrelevant to the intervention needs of the communities that were targeted. It took the midterm evaluation of Mercy Corps’ two-year USAID sponsored ASPIRE project to realize the target population did not accept the religious labelling of their conflict. The implementing partner had to change course to focus its interventions “on economic development through the micro project and to use joint Christian-Muslim groups for the enterprises [because] “[...]. the conflict is no longer seen as a Muslim-Christian conflict (Pul 2017). In sum, the design and evaluation of peacebuilding interventions have a task to go past the simplistic religious labels foisted on conflicts. Beyond isolating how religion is a cause of conflict, evaluators must also confront the challenges of deconstructing religion as a solution for peace.

5 Nature and Role of Religion in Peacebuilding

The challenge lies in isolating what constitutes a religious action for peace versus actions derived from cultural, secular, or other values and belief systems that are not necessarily derived from an institutionalized religious creed. In the current literature, the role of religion as represented by systems of beliefs, symbols, and values, is seen in multiple dualistic terms. It is either a factor of conflict or an instrument in peacebuilding; religious actors are either promoters or inhibitors of peace; they cannot be one and the same. This dualistic way of viewing actors ignores the reality that to put groups in conflict situations in identity silos amounts to denying the reality that is their lived experiences. In seeing re-

ligious actors in conflict and peacebuilding as neither nor, donors, implementers, and evaluators fail to see the duality and fluidity of the roles that religious actors play in conflicts or in peacebuilding.

Additionally, most western theories of the causes and resolution of conflicts take individualized, adversarial, and competitive perspectives (Abu-Nimer 1996; 2003; Avruch 1998). They emphasize the rights of the individual over the interests of the community; retribution over restoration; justice over mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. Accordingly, they stand diametrically opposed to the collectivized and collaborative approaches to resolving conflicts in other non-western societies where individual interests may even be submerged in the interest of the collective good.

Western conflict resolution systems through arbitration, the courts, mediation, and negotiation emphasize establishing who is right versus who is wrong; retribution over restoration; and punishment of the wrongdoer and reparation to the victims over forgiveness. On the contrary, an important “[...] distinguishing African characteristic [of conflict resolution] is the positive-sum integrative thrust of the practices [with a very strong] emphasis on recuperation and reinsertion of the errant member back into its place in society [to promote] restoration of the harmony and integrity of the community” (Zartman 2000, 220). Even in cases of arbitration or adjudication, the chiefs or council of elders that preside over the processes and have the power “[...] to make binding judgments [for the feuding parties always aim to] “[...] reintegrate the offender in the community and its norms” (Zartman 2000, 222). In this emphasis on restoration rather than retribution, members of the larger society take responsibility for any commissions or omissions that may have contributed to the “defection” (Zartman 2000, 221) or errant behaviour of the member or group. This is because in these cultures, conflicts are not about individuals or groups; it is a collectivized experience that radiates from the individual protagonists to the family, clan, lineage, and to out-groups with which the parties may have affinal or conjugal relationships (Wilson-Fall 2000). In such societies, socio-political and economic organizations, culture, and religion are intertwined so much so that “The sacred and spiritual [are] an indistinguishable part of a total way of life of social, political, economic, and moral dimensions” (Dubois 2008, 1). Accordingly, in peacebuilding, these “indigenous legal traditions, [which emphasize] mechanisms for acknowledgement [of wrongs], truth telling, accountability, healing and reparations, continue to assume a prominent role in the lives of African societies and individuals” (Mekonnen 2010, 101)

Time is another important factor in religious peacebuilding. In cultures where “it is often the traditional perspective that is used as a model to resolve conflicts” (Wilson-Fall 2000, 50), such conflict resolution processes are founded

on “a concern for long-term rather than short-term solutions” (Wilson-Fall 2000, 49). This is why “...peacebuilding faces the task of linking the long past with the emerging present [since peacebuilding] must simultaneously be long-term slow and short term intensive” (Lederach 1997, 131). Unfortunately, most projectized peacebuilding interventions have limited time and budgets for achieving peace that resonates with what the target population counts as peace. Because of their short-term, fast paced nature, external interventions may actually destabilize internal and indigenous conflict resolution processes, allowing some or all the parties to externalize their responsibilities for building peace. Rather than working at it, as they look to “external actors to change the balance of power, thereby undermining the mutual interests involved” (Deng 2000, 124) in the search for authentic and durable solutions.

The interference of external actors usually sidestep the existence of cultural and religious common ground that could have served as the nursery bed for homegrown solutions to the conflicts. In the example of the protracted conflict in the Dagbon Chieftancy disputes (Yendi Peace Center 2011; Agyekum 2002) and the Sudan conflicts (Bereketeab 2015), religion which was a binder within and between the feuding groups had no place in the externalized mediatory efforts. More than 90% of the people of Dagbon are Muslims. Many in community-level peacebuilding workshops highlighted the need for intra-Dagbon dialogue leading to forgiveness and reconciliation, devoid of external interferences because “a dialogue between the two gates is the only way out to the Dagbon crisis” (NCCE ND, 4). They argued that “the government should be using the Dagbon traditional methods of conflict resolution to tackle the dispute” (Conteh 2015, 1) instead of relying on external agents such as the Otumfuo Committee of Eminent Chiefs to resolve the Dagbon crisis. This is because [...] for healing and reconciliation to occur, those who played any role in the death of the Ya-Naa and other people should be identified and that their acceptance of responsibility be used as the base for building reconciliation [because that is what will] enable us get to the truth of what happened so that we can put the past behind us. (Boi-Nai et al. 2011, 1).

Similarly, Christianity was a binder and rallying force for the South Sudanese during the wars of independence with the north. Religious leaders and institutions that played pivotal roles in maintaining the semblance of a unified front of South Sudanese during the war were side-lined after the attainment of independence (Onger and Wilson 2014). They continued to cry out for peace but were largely ignored in the game plans of the local war leaders and their international supporters and mediators. As in the case of Dagbon, the shared beliefs and values of religion have failed to create the common ground for dialogue, reconciliation, and peace. In sum, religious identities are not fixed, neither are the

values and the roles that individuals with a religious cloak may play in any given conflict context. Hence a snapshot approach to evaluating religious peacebuilding may miss the ever-changing nature and roles of issues and actors clothed with religion in such conflict or peacebuilding processes.

6 Agreeing on What to Measure

Another challenge that interreligious peacebuilding evaluation has to deal with is reconciling the meanings of peace. Appleby (2000) notes that the world's religions do not have "a universal set of values or priorities in pursuing peace [instead] religious traditions hold different worldviews and emphasize different peace-related values" (141). The lack of consensus on how to pursue peace initiatives poses challenges for establishing commonly accepted and objectively verifiable measures for evaluating peacebuilding in general, and interreligious peacebuilding in particular (Anderson and Olson 2003; Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). Hence, even when communities and donors agree that there is a religious dimension to a conflict and its resolution, agreeing on what change to look for and how to measure it remains a challenge for evaluation purposes. A number of reasons account for this.

6.1 Differing Meanings of Peace

Peace is experiential and therefore subjective in its definition since what is considered peace is relative to one's experience, not an observation of what has gone before, is taking place now, or is anticipated for the future. It is not some objectively verifiable phenomenon because those looking at a conflict situation from the outside have only snippets of the view of what has gone on before; they have not lived it. As a respondent in a research interview in Liberia put it, "Looking at it from the outside and saying Liberia is peaceful is just not enough. It is what people are feeling inside; what their perspective is; what their problem is" (Pul 2016, 17). This personal and subjective definition of peace means peace does not only have different meanings that are contextualized; the experiential view of peace makes evaluating it more difficult, especially from a religious peacebuilding perspective, where its definition is rooted in the lived religious experiences, values, and beliefs of those who participated in or survived the periods of violence. Peace is what they live with, not what another can tell them they have; it comes from within, not without; it emanates from the experience of interior peace first before radiating outward to the neighbour, the

group, the community, the society. It is the product of the experiences of reconciliation, forgiveness, penance, etc. In this, personal beliefs, values, and motivations are more the primary determinants of the experience and definition of peace. Hence, from a religious peacebuilding perspective, the beliefs, values, and doctrines of actors add other layers of how peace is defined, as their views, voices, needs, and interests define its colour, tones, and contours.

For those affected by violence, regaining a sense of peace is a process, not the products of events or short-run projects. On the contrary, evaluations are snapshots, not movies. They capture an assessment of the situation at a given point in time and with a given methodology. They do not provide the panoramic view that captures fully the historical and ever evolving nature of the conflict and the associated peacebuilding efforts; neither do they capture in full the experiences of those who have lived through the conflict. Unlike other social sector interventions that have relatively stable operating environments, the contexts of peacebuilding can swing rapidly, widely, and in unexpected ways. For people who have lived with these swings of the war environment for a long time, any slight movement towards the state of life before the conflict is read as a return towards peace, even if the external assessors disagree with them. This is because those who have lived through violence have the view of the movie – movies in which they are active participants, not distant spectators – while the outsiders hold onto the snapshot perspective. A religious leader in the DRC captured this perspective succinctly when he described the conflict situation in the country in October 2010 as follows: “If you look at the situation from the perspective of a snapshot, you would say there is no progress. However, if you view it from the perspective of a film, you will definitely see that there has been some progress towards peace” (Pul et al.2010, 29).

This perception of peace in relative terms requires that peacebuilding evaluation capture the various images, moods, and voices of the movie in a snapshot without losing sight of the past scenes and the unknown ones of the future. Unlike the elements of secular peacebuilding that have clearly defined objectives, activities, timeframes, and concrete deliverables, those of religious peacebuilding have indeterminate objectives, activities, timelines, or set deliverables. Achieving forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation do not happen at the sound of a gavel; they are individualized processes that go with the pace, moods, and experiences of those involved. The initiation of the process may be as important, if not more important than the results; and the fact that victims and offenders agree to talk may be more important than the outcomes of the talks – outcomes that may never materialized.

6.2 Differing Measures of relevance

The challenge to religious peacebuilding is the level of outcome tracking and measurement. Evaluating peacebuilding in general is difficult enough because of the challenges of developing “[...] concrete, tangible, and easily measurable [...]” indicators. Hence, secular peacebuilders often settle for “more abstract [...] approximators of the intangible changes” (USAID 2010, 7) rather than objectively measurable indicators, in order to fulfil their obligations to demonstrate results that account for the resources received from donors. On the contrary, the preoccupation of religious peacebuilders is often not about seeing approximations of objectively verifiable evidence of change or the attribution of any change to what they have done. They act out of “[...] a response of necessity and a multiplicity of potential activities” (Lederach 2010, 31) in which their objective is to take care of the wounded and displaced, console the hurting, reconcile the estranged, rebuild relationships, and make peace happen. The aim is not the achievement of some tangible, time-bound results; it is an effort to give those most affected the possibility to “[...] feel as though they are persons again” (Lederach 2010, 41). Religious actors, in such instances, are on “[...] a journey to restore basic humanity [that] is needed and ordained by God” (Lederach 2010, 44).

In this journey religious peacebuilders do not see themselves as the ultimate agents of peace or their efforts as time-bound interventions to deliver peace. They see peacebuilding as an investment for eternity and a lifetime commitment. Motivation is intrinsic, not extrinsic. Whereas secular peacebuilders are likely to abandon the course once donor-funding dries up, religious peacebuilders will engage in peacebuilding work in the way they know best and with whatever resources they have. They may do less with fewer resources in less effective and efficient ways, but they will do what they have to do all the same, with or without external support. In that conception of duty, time is not finite, and the focus is on rebuilding relationships – with neighbours and the higher creator; not in signing peace agreements or achieving some tangible results. They do not see themselves as the source of any change and so may not actively look out for, much less design their interventions to lead to specific observable changes. As such, they do what they do and can and leave the rest to God.

This is because the process of healing, repentance, and “forgiveness is something that comes from God” (Starken & Caritas Internationalis 1999, NP). As such, the conflict actors and the facilitators of peacebuilding are both instruments, not actors *suis generis*, in the processes that lead up to forgiveness and reconciliation. They understand that “We do not forgive because we have to, or should, or have no other choice. We forgive because we have been able to come to see the world, even in its brokenness, from the perspective of God”

(Starken & Caritas Internationalis 1999, NP). This is because in a God-led process, “all reconciliation comes from God [...]” (Caritas Internationalis 2002, 15) and the steps towards its achievement put reconciliation before repentance and forgiveness, instead of the “repentance (followed by) forgiveness (followed by) reconciliation” (Starken & Caritas Internationalis 1999, NP).

To be sure, religious peacebuilders would also love to see the return of visible peace in the course of their work, but the achievement of this is not the reason why they labour. Indeed, they will most likely not attribute whatever achievement there is to their work; it is seen as the work of God – work whose design, execution, and results go beyond their human capacities. This self-effacing predisposition poses challenges to conventional measures of attribution or contribution of project investments in evaluations. Since religious peacebuilders may not have set out specific performance and outcome indicators for their work, any assessment of the contribution of their work to peace will have to come through outcome mapping processes rather than direct measures of progress and achievement. Evaluators must glean the contributions that religious peacebuilders make to a conflict situation from their stories of what they did, how, and why, rather than from indicator tables and carefully documented results.

6.3 Accountability: Whose Accountability and to Whom?

The transcendental view of religious peacebuilding evaluation adds a challenge of determining the stakeholders and criteria for accountability. The grounding question is whose accountability is the evaluation seeking and to whom is accountability due? Accountability goes with ownership, or stewardship of the ideas, processes, and resources destined for the implementation of the interventions. Only those who hold positions and resources in trust for others have a duty to account for their stewardship. Those in whose name the resources are acquired and managed are seldom responsible for or recipients of accountability. Hence, in peacebuilding evaluations, those most affected by the lack of peace are seldom involved in accountability reporting except when providing information to questions they are asked. Beyond that, “it is not yet common for peacebuilding agencies even to share the results of an evaluation with those who they seek to aid” (Scharbatke-Church 2011, 465).

The reality, in most cases, is that this category of participants is not only seen as a source of extractive information at the evaluation stage; they are also largely viewed as end-users in the entire project conceptualization and implementation processes. This is because donors and implementers of peacebuilding interventions narrowly define the criteria and direction of accountability to

ensure an upward flow only of responsibilities of accountability; a flow from project implementers to donors (Campbell 2018). Seldom are those most affected by the conflict viewed as persons to whom accountability is due, even though both donor agencies and their implementing partners used their conditions and names to secure and use the project resources.

The neglect to include end-users in the ownership of project interventions and definition of accountability responsibilities from them and due them triggers another level of challenge for determining accountability for inter-religious peacebuilding. Unlike with secular organizations, the involvement of peacebuilding individuals and institutions clothed with religious tag is often derived from their perception of a vocation rather than a project as the motivation for engagement. In other words, they don't engage because resources have been made available for engagement; they do so because they see a need, and they jump into it, often with limited resources and expertise; but they do it, nonetheless. Such religious peacebuilders have different levels of accountability than donors and intervention implementers. For them, accountability is to a higher other than project financiers. In their view, time is not a boundary setter for accountability and money is but a catalyst, not the *raison d'être* of their engagement in peacebuilding. They will do whatever they can for peace because it is their calling, not because it is a project with objectives that they have to achieve. The scale on which they do it may be smaller; the speed slower, the range of activities much more restrained and non-technical but they will do what they feel called to do. For some in this category, they are accountable to none but the ultimate master they serve. And since God has no measure for his achievements in time and money, they see no need to provide any measures for their success either. They don't gauge their contribution to peace because theirs is but an insignificant drop in the infinite plan of the creator. They tend to deprecate their roles and contributions and so have no measures for them. For them, accountability does not equate to the countable or verifiable; it is good enough to have done what they did.

In Sudan church leaders played very active and central roles in the search for peace during the wars of independence from 1983–2005, in the run up to the elections in 2010, and in the referendum in 2011 that granted the south its independence. They have continued to be active in the search for peace, since the outbreak of the civil war in December 2013 between politico-ethnic groups in what is now South Sudan. Despite their influential role, “Church leaders [have not] consider[ed] themselves “peace-builders”. They considered themselves pastors and shepherds, whose first obligation was to reflect Christ's fidelity to the Church through their own fidelity to the people” (Ashworth 2014, 241). As heads of churches in South Sudan have noted, they are engaged in the search

for peace because “As Shepherds, we experience the suffering of our people, their pain is our pain, and it propels us to work towards peace” (SSCC 2017, 1). The leadership of the Episcopal Conference in South Sudan would add that they feel compelled to go “between the warring parties and [...] stand in the gap” of dialogue because they “have a spiritual, ethical and moral responsibility to help our nation out of this endless political crisis” (ECSS 2017, 3). In parallel, religious leaders engage in the public sphere even though “We are not politicians and we do not want to give detailed political recommendations. Nevertheless, we dare to speak to political leaders as Jesus instructed us” (SSCC 2017, 3). In other words, their primary obligations are to the people, and they are accountable to God, not to donors for their actions or inactions in the face of conflicts.

To the extent that project interventions and resources help them expand their reach, increase their speed of intervention along that path to accountability, and/or enhance their effectiveness in service delivery to their target populations, they are receptive and thankful. Beyond that, they would not see donor funding and associated project interventions as the only means to that end. They would continue to do what they believe is a duty to do and in the best way they can even if with little resources, less impact, and less visibility; it is a vocation, not a job. A respondent in a field study in CAR echoed this with the view that “The Inter-Religious Platform takes the lead in organizing intercommunity dialogues because their leadership has a deeper and permanent connection with the people. These religious leaders are largely members of the community and will remain and work here long after the project funding ceases to exist” (Pul 2017, 26). Their engagement is timeless because religion “is an institution that never disappears. It is an institution that will be there forever. People will continue to be believers; therefore, they will be a sustainable source of peacebuilding” (Pul 2017, 35). They seek little rewards because “religious peacebuilders are not discouraged by their modest achievements, but instead see their role as responsible to God to do what they can, rather than to be successful in material terms.” (Funk Deckard 2012, 14). In short, they count nothing to be accountable; they just do what they have to do. For them, accountability does not equate to countable; it is about doing your best and leaving the rest to God.

7 Conclusion

Evaluations seek to isolate changes that project investments make to a problem situation. Donor demands for verifiable changes lead implementing partners to emphasize categorical diagnoses of the problems to produce metrics that are measurable. In peacebuilding, the need for quick frameworks of analysis leads

to the mislabelling and distortions of the conflict narratives, especially when religious tags are used. This masks the real issues and interests of the conflict leaders and deflects the objectives of peacebuilding interventions and evaluations to focus on issues that do not reflect the lived experiences of the people whose peace the interventions seek to secure. The misdiagnosis of conflicts is exacerbated when religious identities from historical accidents are used to pigeonhole the parties in conflict, without regards to their non-fixated and instrumentalist approach to how they view and practice religion. It masks the reality that religious identity itself is very fluid in many contexts, allowing for spiritual and ritual migrations across faith lines in the search for healing, reconciliation, and peace.

In such contexts, the views of donors and implementers on what to measure as indicators of peace is often fields apart from that of beneficiary communities. Hence, what counts as peace for the insiders may be discounted in the metrics of the outsider and vice versa. Additionally, the use of individualized and dyadic frames for viewing the conflicts and the parties involved blurs the reality that in non-western societies conflicts are seldom individual affairs or simply secular versus religious. The secular and the sacred are always intertwined and in ways that link the dead, the living, and the unborn of the feuding communities. Hence, the search for peace is neither secular nor sacred; it is both, and resolutions that do not pacify the dead and account for the unborn will not hold. For local religious peacebuilders who understand this, time is not of the essence in their efforts for peace. Accordingly, while access to donor resources is welcome help, it does not set the targets, pace, or accountability standards for them. They do not work to the dictates of donor timeframes and accountability is to a higher order. For the conflict-affected, true measurement of their peace requires more community-centred and open-ended methodologies that minimize cases where participants give responses that please donors, implementers, and evaluators while suppressing the simmering pains of conflicts in their hearts.

Evaluators of religious peacebuilding must be wary of reliance on conventional approaches to evaluating religious peacebuilding that focus on using verifiable metrics or their approximations to track and report change. They must approach the task with open minds, recognizing that those who have lived through conflict know best what to call peace. In other words, those who commission evaluations and those who carry them out must be aware of their own cultural frames of peace and how such frames may cloud their judgement of what constitutes peace or its absence, when protected onto contexts dissimilar from theirs. They must learn to bracket their own expectations and definitions of peace. To arrive at this, theories of change of religious peacebuilding interventions in particular must be derived from the expectations of peace as defined

by those who have lived with and experienced the evolution or movie view of the conflict and witnessed to the role of religion in its triggering, sustenance, or resolution. This calls for theories of change to be grounded in the expectations and measures of peace that the affected populations define, instead of some generic, abstracted metrics. The use of grounded theory approaches, which are akin to outcome harvesting methods of evaluations, in which those who commission or carry out the evaluation do not begin with a theory of change and try to prove its validity or otherwise, is recommended. This is because evaluating religious peacebuilding will be better served if evaluators begin with an exploratory approach and allow the theory of change and associated indicators to emerge from the data so mined. A good baseline study done using this approach can provide a participants' list of grounded indicators that better measure what changes in their contexts are meaningful measures of peace. It is the only way to tease out from the participants, what role religion has played in their definitions of what is peace and their engagements towards achieving and sustaining it.

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