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# In a Material World: Analyzing Religious Peacebuilding in Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina


## Abstract

While intergroup peace is statistically far more common than is intergroup or inter-religious conflict, there has been a rise in recent years in conflict framed in religious terms. Peace and development practitioners have, in response, become increasingly interested in engaging religion, in various ways, in peace and development work. A theoretical field of religious peacebuilding has emerged simultaneous to this increased practitioner engagement of religion. Despite this increase in religious peacebuilding, at both practical and theoretical levels, we have not seen a measurable increase in social cohesion in contexts plagued by so-called religious conflict, as I show in my comparative examination of case studies in Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I argue that this is because the current theoretical approach to religious peacebuilding often views religion as solely ideological and uni-directional in how it relates to conflict and peace (as an independent, rather than a dependent variable in a given conflict setting). This stems from a shallow application of Scott Appleby's ambivalence thesis, which is in and of itself more robust than is often applied, in both theoretical and practical approaches.

I demonstrate in this dissertation that by re-anchoring religious peacebuilding theory in a material theory of religion, both the fields of theory and practice benefit by looking at religion as a more holistic and dynamic conflict variable- one that is shaped by conflict as much as it affects the course or tone of a conflict itself. I argue for an expansion of the ambivalence thesis, as I show that religion is not only ambivalent when it comes to belief or ideology, but it is also ambivalent in the ways in which it seeks to challenge or uphold the status quo in a given situation. This added dimension of ambivalence helps peace and conflict practitioners to engage religion in ways that deal with root cause issues of justice and rights, rather than simply looking at religion through the lens of violence and peace. This theoretical shift thereby makes space for more fruitful approaches to actively engaging religion in peacebuilding practice in particular, intentional ways. Beyond deepening the theoretical field of religious peacebuilding, this shift will also help to refine how international actors engage religion in peacebuilding for years to come, looking toward sustainable social cohesion rather than static peace agreements as the goal for societies in conflict.



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# In a Material World:

# Analyzing Religious Peacebuilding in Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Catherine R. Orsborn

November 2017

Advisor: Andrea L. Stanton

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Title: In a Material World: Analyzing Religious Peacebuilding in Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina
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**Abstract**

While intergroup peace is statistically far more common than is intergroup or inter-religious conflict, there has been a rise in recent years in conflict framed in religious terms. Peace and development practitioners have, in response, become increasingly interested in engaging religion, in various ways, in peace and development work. A theoretical field of religious peacebuilding has emerged simultaneous to this increased practitioner engagement of religion. Despite this increase in religious peacebuilding, at both practical and theoretical levels, we have not seen a measurable increase in social cohesion in contexts plagued by so-called religious conflict, as I show in my comparative examination of case studies in Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I argue that this is because the current theoretical approach to religious peacebuilding often views religion as solely ideological and uni-directional in how it relates to conflict and peace (as an independent, rather than a dependent variable in a given conflict setting). This stems from a shallow application of Scott Appleby's ambivalence thesis, which is in and of itself more robust than is often applied, in both theoretical and practical approaches.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"Surviving peace is a lot harder than surviving war. During war, you know your side- it's easy. After that, it's not so easy."[1]

In September of 2013, several rebel and militant groups, including both the Free Syrian Army and al-Nusra front, worked together to invade and take control of portions of Maaloula, a Syrian town outside of Damascus. Some from the militant groups claimed that they were there to liberate the city- known for its ancient Christian heritage and character, and under the control of the Asad government - from Crusaders.[2] This encounter took place 2 ½ years after the initial civilian pro-democracy uprisings in March 2011 that were met with violent government crackdowns, leading to the conflict that remains active as of June 2017. The town of Maaloula is home to a number of ancient churches and monasteries. I wandered the streets there myself eight years prior, in the fall of 2005, visiting the Mar Takla Monastery and listening with fascination to the Aramaic language still spoken in this city. At the time, it appeared quite tranquil, and while predominantly Christian, seemed to be a site for pilgrims from multiple faiths.

In the September 2013 clashes, numerous townspeople- both Christian and Muslim- fled, intentional damage to churches and monasteries was reported, and at least

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[1] Interview with respondent 4, Sarajevo, March 11, 2016.

[2] Sohaib Enjrainy, "Syrian Christian Village Besieged by Jihadists," September 5, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/09/syria-christians-maaloula-jihadists-opposition-army.html

10 Christians were murdered, with some residents reporting that Christians were shot for refusing to convert to Islam, as documented by Robert Fisk.[3] Some Christians from the town reported that their neighbors- and former friends- turned against them in this fight. Fisk describes one woman's account as follows:

> Hanna says that before the war reached Maaloula this month, both Christians and Muslims agreed that the town must remain a place of peace. "There was a kind of coexistence between us," Georgios agrees. "We had excellent relations. It never occurred to us that Muslim neighbours would betray us. We all said 'please let this town live in peace – we don't have to kill each other'. But now there is bad blood. They brought in the Nusra to throw out the Christians and get rid of us forever. Some of the Muslims who lived with us are good people but I will never trust 90 per cent of them again."[4]

The final portion of this quote demonstrates that one of the pernicious effects of violence that is understood or labeled as religious in nature, is that it shifts the way civilians view one another. Neighbors who did not previously look at one another in primarily sectarian or religious terms begin to prioritize this identity marker in how they view and relate to one another.

Other reports give additional, and sometimes alternative, narratives on the events, with some avowing that most Christian worship sites were unharmed, and others reporting that rebel groups went to great lengths to state that they were not intending harm to Christians:

> Some of the rebels, apparently aware of their public relations problem, said in interviews that they meant Christians no harm. They filmed themselves talking

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[3] Robert Fisk, "Syria Crisis: In Sacred Maaloula, where they Speak the Language of Christ, War leads Neighbours into Betrayal," *Independent,* September 25, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-in-sacred-maaloula-where-they-speak-the-language-of-christ-war-leads-neighbours-into-8839610.html

[4] Robert Fisk, "Syria Crisis: In Sacred Maaloula, where they Speak the Language of Christ, War leads Neighbours into Betrayal," *Independent,* September 25, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-in-sacred-maaloula-where-they-speak-the-language-of-christ-war-leads-neighbours-into-8839610.html

> politely with nuns, instructing fighters not to harm civilians or churches and touring a monastery that appeared mostly intact. They said they had withdrawn from most of the town, posted videos of shelling there by Mr. Assad's forces and argued that the government had given the fight a sectarian cast by sending Christian militiamen from Damascus to join in.[5]

As one analyst articulates, in describing the mixed sentiments and reactions of Syrian Christians in this case,

> Although many Christians do not trust the regime, the opposition too does not offer much promise. The opposition's extremist elements have killed, kidnapped, and expelled Christians, burned churches, and destroyed early Christian monasteries. The prelate also complains that the opposition has denied Christians the ability to remain neutral in this conflict.[6]

While some of the events themselves are unclear, one this is certain: there were numerous actors involved on both sides of the "battle lines" in Maaloula in September 2013, working with a diversity of motivations and tactics. Religious justifications and targeting are one thread of the narrative, and yet, there is far more to the story than a Christian vs. Muslim plotline. Most notably, Maaloula's location along the Qalamun mountain range bordering Lebanon, combined with it being situated on the main road between Damascus and Homs, made it a strategic site for control in the Syrian war.[7]

The Syrian conflict is the most well-known example today of a conflict that has taken on religious dimensions, in that numerous groups involved in the fighting frame

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[5] Anne Barnard and Hwaida Saad, "Assault on Christian Town in Syria Adds to Fears Over Rebels," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/11/world/middleeast/assault-on-christian-town-complicates-crisis-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

[6] Flavius Mihaies, "Syrian Christian Perspectives on the War," *SyriaSource*, *Atlantic Council,* January 7, 2016, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/syrian-christian-perspectives-on-the-war

[7] Peter Oborne, "Syria war: Maaloula's monastery destroyed after Assad forces drive rebels out," *The Telegraph*, April 15, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10768900/Syria-war-Maaloulas-monastery-destroyed-after-Assad-forces-drive-rebels-out.html

their own motives, dividing lines, and justifications for using violence in terms of religious identity or religious teachings. The ripple effect has been strong, both in the region, as new forms of sectarianism have arisen in Lebanon and other neighboring countries, as well as in the US and Europe, where debates over refugee admissions have taken on the language of religious difference and division, scapegoating Muslim refugees for the violence that groups like ISIS have perpetrated using the banner of Islam.

Moments like the Maaloula attack have contributed to shaping the narrative, as well as the course itself, of the Syrian conflict. This episode, and the way it was framed in international media, is part of the larger narrative being constructed and produced around the Syrian conflict more broadly,[8] as complicated and shifting alliances have often been simplified into sectarian battles and Christian-Muslim conflicts. The Syrian government continues to frame it as a "war against terror,"[9] and ISIS militants continue to target Christians and Yazidis in particular in highly theatrical ways (while targeting the greater Muslim population of Syria unendingly, but typically with less theatrics). How these

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[8] See, for example, Jamal Halaby, "Syrian Rebels Seize Control of Christian Village," *USA Today*, September 8, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/09/08/syrian-rebels-take-christian-village/2781763/; and "Battle for Syria Christian Town Continues," *BBC News*, September 11, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24051440; Robert Fisk, "Syria Crisis: In Sacred Maaloula, where they Speak the Language of Christ, War leads Neighbours into Betrayal," *Independent,* September 25, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-in-sacred-maaloula-where-they-speak-the-language-of-christ-war-leads-neighbours-into-8839610.html; Sohaib Enjrainy, "Syrian Christian Village Besieged by Jihadists," September 5, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/09/syria-christians-maaloula-jihadists-opposition-army.html; and Brian Dooley, "Ending Sectarianism in Syria: How to Secure a Lasting Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, April 13, 2016, accessed June 16, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-04-13/ending-sectarianism-syria.

[9] Robert Fisk, "Syria Crisis: In Sacred Maaloula, where they Speak the Language of Christ, War leads Neighbours into Betrayal," *Independent,* September 25, 2013, accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-in-sacred-maaloula-where-they-speak-the-language-of-christ-war-leads-neighbours-into-8839610.html.

stories get told impacts how they are understood on the ground, and sectarian faultlines are produced and reified through both events and narratives thereof.

There is a persistent myth among journalists, civil society, and beyond, that religious conflict is primordial and inevitable, despite evidence demonstrating that inter-group peace is far more common than is conflict involving religious or ethnic groups.[10] The "ancient hatreds" framework for understanding conflict is not only coming from the political right in the United States, although there are numerous examples of this narrative among conservative political platforms. The political left, along with those across the middle of the spectrum, also default to this way of framing; for example, Barack Obama's 2013 speech on the Syrian conflict referred to "ancient sectarian differences" as the driving force behind the fighting.[11]

While scholarly analysis indicates that peace prevails more than conflict, the primordialist thesis draws strength at a popular level, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, from the fact that in recent decades conflicts have been increasingly framed in religious terms, even if not technically religious in origin.[12] This paradox raises a number of theoretical issues related to our understanding of religion itself, and the relationships between religious factors and episodes of violence or socio-political conflict. Regardless of whether a conflict can be rightly considered a "religious" one, the presence of religious discourse and symbolism in a conflict seems to add a distinct

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[10] See James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization* 54.4 (2000): 865-68.

[11] B.C., "The Sects of Syria: Those Ancient Differences," *The Economist,* September 1, 2013, accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2013/09/sects-syria.

[12] Pew Research Center, "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High." January 2014, accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/

element to conflict dynamics, creating conditions in which religion cannot be ignored when attempting to rebuild social trust and cohesion.

Over the last two decades, there has been new energy in the fields of conflict mitigation, peacebuilding and development, around the explicit engagement of religion. By and large, foreign policy and development actors have become more interested in the role of religion in conflict and peace. While there are certainly multiple factors contributing to this increased attention to religion, one key dynamic at play is the fact that both conflict actors and observers have utilized religion and religious identity, rhetorically and symbolically, to frame a number of ongoing wars around the globe in the last two decades. A 2014 Pew Research Center report states that, "the share of countries with a high or very high level of social hostilities involving religion reached a six-year peak in 2012."[13] One only needs to call to mind the ongoing social and political conflicts in Myanmar, Syria, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria, to understand why the need to consider and engage religion is of urgent importance today.[14] In each of these cases, as in the illustration in Syria at the beginning of this chapter, religion is invoked regularly to describe or determine the perpetrators and victims of particular acts of violence, or to justify actions, or to make sense of a violent event.

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[13] Pew Research Center, "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High."

[14] For background on Myanmar and Nigeria, see Fletcher D. Cox, Catherine R. Orsborn, and Timothy D. Sisk, *Religion, Peacebuilding, and Social Cohesion in Conflict-Affected Countries*, Sie Cheou Kang Center for International Security at the University of Denver, 2014, accessed June 14, 2017, http://www.du.edu/korbel/sie/research/sisk_religion_and_social_cohesion.html; for background on Syria, see Paulo Gabriel Hilu Pinto, "The Shattered Nation: The Sectarianization of the Syrian Conflict," *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East,* eds. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 123-142; and on Central African Republic see Louisa Lombard, *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2016).

Post World War II, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, conflicts globally increasingly involve intra-state and non-state actors, rather than being between nation states.[15] Indeed, the scale and death tolls of these conflicts tend to be lower that the inter-state or major international wars, as they are often waged by actors with access to smaller arms and weaponry. However, they entail higher levels of brutality against civilians. Civil wars, and conflicts fought by non-state actors, are the predominant forms of conflict around the globe today.

Additionally, Jonathan Fox's 2004 empirical study of conflicts between 1945-2001 points to another key development in conflict over the past half century in particular. His study suggests that religious nationalist groups have been responsible for more conflict than non-religious groups since around 1980.[16] Additionally, Fox's data suggests that while religious conflict was less violence than non-religious conflict between 1955-1964, it has become more violent than non-religious conflict since 1965.[17] Monica Duffy Toft demonstrates that conflicts featuring religion have increased from accounting for 36% of civil wars in the 1970's to 50% of the ongoing wars in 2010.[18]

In this context, the UN Development Program and other UN agencies, along with USAID, the US Department of State, and numerous other major international and

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[15] This is illustrated by data examined in Andrew Mack, "A More Secure World?" *CATO Unbound*, February 7, 2011, accessed April 19, 2017, https://www.cato-unbound.org/2011/02/07/andrew-mack/more-secure-world.

[16] Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001," *Journal of Peace Research* 41.6 (2004): 715-731.

[17] Fox, "The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict," 726.

[18] Monica Duffy Toft, "Religion, Terrorism, and Civil Wars," in *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs*, ed. Shah, Timothy Samuel, Alfred Stepan, and Monica Duffy Toft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 136.

bilateral conflict mitigation and peacebuilding organizations have taken a strong interest in religion as an relevant conflict and peace dynamic, deserving of explicit attention.[19] Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry launched the State Department's Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, now called the office of Religion and Global Affairs, with a speech in August 2013 stating that, given the option now as a politician focused on foreign affairs, he would have majored in comparative religion.[20] Finn Church Aid launched the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers in 2013, supported by multiple national and international organizations, including the Organization for Islamic Cooperation.[21] This is a shift from the modern tendency within international peace and diplomacy to ignore or sideline religion entirely, as a "non-rational" factor. This greater attention to religion, as a consideration to be taken seriously by actors working in international peace and diplomacy, has been accompanied by programs and offices committed to religious engagement, in various senses of the word.

The broader field of peacebuilding operations has thus conceded that religion matters as a conflict dynamic and therefore as a consideration in designing sustainable peacebuilding interventions, particularly within the strategic peacebuilding and social cohesion frames. But *how*, exactly, does religion matter, and what is meant by religion, theoretically and operationally, within the peacebuilding frame? Peacebuilding

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[19]Karam, Azza, and Matthew Weiner, ed., "Religion and the United Nations," Special Issue, *CrossCurrents* 60.3 (2010).

[20] Secretary John Kerry, Remarks at the Launch of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, 7 August 2013, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/08/212781.htm

[21] "Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers," Finn Church Aid, accessed June 16, 2017, https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/donors/international-networks/network-religious-traditional-peacemakers/

approaches attempt to engage religion in varying ways, including elite or community-level dialogues, problem solving workshops, collaborative social action initiatives, educational programs, and the like. These forms of intervention are being increasingly used in current conflict settings, such as in the Central African Republic and Syria, and yet these approaches are largely understudied in any structured, theoretically-rooted way. Indeed, religious engagement has become a new norm, and yet, religious engagement efforts often employ a shallow understanding of religion in conflict and peace dynamics. There are disconnects between the fields of religious studies on the one hand, and conflict and peacebuilding studies on the other, in the way religion is treated theoretically and operationally. Subsequently, religion is often artificially isolated and extracted from questions about the root causes of conflict, and from other conflict dynamics more generally.

Because religion and conflict are both context-specific categories, this project will examine them as such by looking at two distinct cases that have been fields of practice for various religious peacebuilding efforts: Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Each of these countries saw war come to an official resolution in the early 1990's, but because conflict in each context was informed by particular socio-religious identity categories and rhetoric, peace accords left much work to be done to build (or re-build) cohesion, social trust, and a collective sense of national identity. This project offers the opportunity to assess not only religion and peacebuilding efforts during the period of active conflict, but also their ongoing impact and evolving efforts 25+ years on.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that religious engagement in peacebuilding is in no way new; rather, religious actors have long been engaged in

mitigating violence and conflict and building peace and justice in their contexts. The more novel development is that now bilateral and international organizations engaged in "official" peacebuilding processes are now taking the role of religion seriously, as a formal arena for official involvement, rather than seeing it as a sideshow or supplemental (and unofficial) form of engagement as was often the case in the past. Indeed, as argued above, religious engagement has now become a field of its own.

**Methodology**

This is primarily a comparative project, drawing on comparative methodologies from both social sciences and religious studies. I use both between and within-case comparative analysis in order to test and develop theory (in this case, "religious peacebuilding") in cases that have some key similarities, but are also quite different from one another in particular ways. Additionally, I utilize Wendy Doniger's methodological approach to comparative religion. As Doniger outlines in *The Implied Spider*, comparison does not attempt to seek out the *essence* of religious phenomena, but rather to examine what religious phenomena *do* and how they do it, in particular spaces. [22] Because religion is not a bounded variable in and of itself, the comparative religions approach is necessary for nuancing the case study analysis of how religion manifests in various conflict-affected settings.

One cannot study religion without doing comparison in some sense. Religion only exists by defining itself in relation to and against an "other." As J.Z. Smith points out,

[22] Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5.

"otherness" is an ambiguous category, which only becomes meaningful in terms of interrelation. Thus, to study religion inherently involves comparing and contrasting. The question is whether or not individuals are actually capable of carrying out comparison in a manner that allows the objects under scrutiny to speak for themselves. Pierre Bourdieu posits that there is no such thing as an objective observer. Western observers in particular are constrained by the fact that World Religions, as a field of study, is steeped in Protestant Western theological frameworks; this permeates the comparative endeavor, as I will explicate more fully in the next chapter.[23]

Despite the limitations and pitfalls of the comparative endeavor within religious studies, scholars such as Wendy Doniger and Peter Gottschalk, among others, have demonstrated ways in which one can "do comparison" without employing an ethnocentric, universalized understanding of religion. Doniger suggests that comparison allows us to take both microscopic and telescopic views of religious worlds: "the individual text is the microscope that lets us see the trees; the comparison is the telescope that lets us see the forest." In doing so, we must be careful to avoid searching for equality between the objects of comparison, as she states, "[i]t is this perverse use of the doctrine of sameness, applied to both texts and people, that the comparatist most overcome in order to argue for the very different humanistic uses of the same doctrine." In letting go of a presupposition that one will find sameness, Doniger posits,

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[23] On this point, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); J.Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*: *Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (*Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

scholars can discover through comparison things that are not in one's own culture, thus helping to test theories about one's own culture in the process in a self-reflexive manner.

The comparative endeavor offers much to scholars of religion. While it is impossible to do comparison perfectly, without reifying boundaries or essentializing phenomena, we cannot truly approach religion as such without this necessary form of analysis. Scholars who attempt to allow subjects to speak for themselves, with multiple voices and from specific locations, and who appreciate the fluidity of boundaries within and between religions, and between "the religious" and "the secular" will find the comparative endeavor ultimately rewarding, as I demonstrate in this dissertation.

The comparative enterprise within religious studies works well in tandem with a structured-focused comparison methodology drawn from the social sciences. A structured-focused comparison approach allows for comparison between two cases by focusing the inquiries on several specific points of comparison, distilled from the larger case contexts.[24] For this, I developed and utilized an assessment guide (Appendix I) to help break down the various categories of analysis for examining religion and social cohesion in each context under consideration. Additionally, this between-case comparison is paired with within-case comparison, as I examine a multiplicity of approaches and initiatives to engage religion in peacebuilding in both Lebanon and Bosnia.

[24] See chapter three of Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

I gathered my research data using three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews with those involved in religious peacebuilding initiatives, from project leads to funders to participants; content analysis of programs, including project descriptions, reports, monitoring and evaluation; and analysis of data from several surveys in both Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I supplemented my findings through a number of qualitative interviews in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Lebanon between March 2014 – February 2017. Most interviews were with nationals of the respective countries, although I also spoke with a handful of expatriates who worked on conflict mitigation and peacebuilding projects in each context. The respondents varied in their level of religious commitment and in their roles in each setting, including peacebuilding practitioners, religious leaders, and political officials. In each case, I reached out initially to individuals or organizations that I had identified as critical actors in the field of religious peacebuilding, and used snowball sampling from there to identify new respondents when in country.

**Case Selection**

I have selected two cases- Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Lebanon- that have had distinct experiences of the role of religion in their respective conflicts, though both are religiously plural societies. My case selection, in keeping with a strong structured focused comparative approach, allows for both similarity and variation between and within the two cases. Both cases have suffered civil wars that were at times defined and interpreted as religious in some way, and both saw formal peace agreements at the beginning of the 1990's, providing over two decades of post-conflict peacebuilding work to study. In both

cases, international, bilateral, and local peacebuilders have tested numerous religious peacebuilding approaches over the last two plus decades.

Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina were historically part of the Ottoman Empire, though their immediate post-Ottoman experiences differed vastly. Like elsewhere throughout the Ottoman Empire, Abrahamic religions were dominant in Lebanon and Bosnia, particularly Christian and Muslim communities. Lebanon currently has 18 recognized religious sects, and governing is divided primarily between Maronites, Sunnis and Shi'a. The 15-year long Lebanese civil war, which involved both inter- and intra-sectarian tensions, officially ended in 1990. However, deeply embedded sectarianism continues to produce inequalities, friction, and violence, and while sectarianism and religion are not equivalent categories in Lebanon, sectarianism employs religion in particular ways. Bosnia-Herzegovina has three main religious populations, which are divided upon ethnic lines- Croatian Catholics, Bosniak Muslims, and Serbian Orthodox Christians. Religious identity played a critical role in the Bosnian War, from 1992-1995, and the country struggles to continue re-building social trust and cohesion.

Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina certainly differ in numerous ways, as will become clear in this study, but their common experiences of neighbors turning against neighbors during bloody wars often framed in religious terms, and the subsequent engagement of religion in peacebuilding endeavors, deliver rich data for comparative research.

**Thesis**

As I will show through my case study research, religious peacebuilding has, by and large, failed to increase social cohesion in societies that have experienced conflict that invokes religion.[25] I argue that this is, in part, because the approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding in the last two decades have relied on limited, belief-centric understandings of religion and uni-directional interpretations of how religion interacts with other socio-political realities. I propose revising the theoretical approach to religious peacebuilding to anchor it in a material theory of religion, articulated most cohesively by Manuel Vasquez. This revised frame of analysis helps us to more accurately describe the co-creative relationships between religion, conflict and social cohesion, and thereby makes space for more fruitful approaches to actively engaging inter-religious work in peacebuilding practice.

This dissertation challenges what I see as two problematic theoretical assumptions for understanding and operationalizing religion in the realm of religion, conflict and peacebuilding. The first is viewing religion as primarily internalized, belief-centric, and textual; and the second is prioritizing bounded or reified religious group identities. These assumptions are born out in religious peacebuilding practice, as they lead to approaches that prioritize belief and internal dispositions, extracting religion and religious identity from the broader socio-political context.[26] Additionally, the heavy focus on texts and

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[25] For example, see the research report from a 2012-2014 study of seven conflict-affected countries conducted through the University of Denver's Sie Cheou Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation's Initiative on Religion and International Affairs: Fletcher D. Cox, Catherine R. Orsborn, and Timothy D. Sisk, *Religion, Peacebuilding, and Social Cohesion in Conflict-Affected Countries*.

[26] As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Two, the religious peacebuilding field- anchored by Appleby in particular- has focused on ambiguity as a driving theoretical force. There is general agreement, both in

internal dispositions, and on whether religion is being interpreted in peaceful or violent results in a lack of attention to issues of justice, including structural violence and power dynamics. This focus also leads peacebuilding actors to attempt to "extract" religion in peacebuilding efforts, treating it as somehow separate from the socio-political context (and actions as deriving from beliefs, rather than being part of an interactive process). This project works to de-center these theoretical assumptions about religion and instead to assert into the religious peacebuilding space a material theory of religion.

By looking at religion, conflict, and peacebuilding through the lens of a material theory of religion, we see religion as a dynamic, inter-connected conflict variable, being shaped by conflict as much as (or more than) it affects the way conflict is articulated or enacted. Religion itself *becomes* through various situations of conflict- thus, when we speak of religious groups after a 15-year war, we are not talking about the same groups or dynamics that entered the war, so to speak. Additionally, we see that religion is not only ambivalent when it comes to peaceful or violent interpretations of text and practice, but it is also ambivalent in its embodiment in forms that seek to uphold or to resist the status quo. In fact, it is more helpful to focus on *how* different actors draw upon religion to challenge or uphold the status quo in different ways at different junctures (not as a dichotomy, but a societal dynamic force), rather than simply focusing on whether textual and verbal interpretations of religion appear violent or peaceful. I argue that this second

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the theoretical field and in the areas of practice, that religion can contribute both negatively and positively to peaceful community relations. The central operating assumption is that religion can be violent or peaceful (or possibly, neutral). Thus, to engage religion in peacebuilding, one should enlist the peaceful actors to help create peace and to help the violent actors see the light (eliminate/suppress/reform the violent religious actors). This is a highly ideological approach to understanding religion, seeing text and belief as derivative of action (peaceful or violent). While it is certainly true that religion is ambiguous, we need to build on this and deepen our understanding of how and why, and move beyond the *ideological* ambiguity of religion into how it manifests in, and is shaped by, historical and contextual material realities.

form of ambivalence (resisting vs. upholding the status quo) is as important as the first (peaceful vs. violent interpretations), and must be taken into account in conflict assessments and in the design of peacebuilding initiatives.

**Ethnicity & Conflict: Laying the Theoretical Groundwork**

Research in religious peacebuilding relies upon several key intersecting disciplines, including that of conflict studies. The theoretical research on religion, conflict and peace is indebted to the broader field of ethnic studies and ethnic conflict, not in small part because the seminal text of that field, Donald Horowitz' *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, posits that ethnicity is a term that encompasses collective belonging based on a number of factors, including religion.[27] Along with Horowitz, Ted Gurr, James Fearon and David Laitin, Ashutosh Varshney, Daniel Posner, and a number of others have laid much theoretical groundwork for anyone studying the role of ethnicity- or communal identities more broadly- in situations of conflict. This section considers some of this groundwork, drawing out the key theoretical approach I will utilize in this project.

Varshney outlines four main theoretical approaches to studying ethnic conflict (leaving a fifth- realism- to the side since this is only relevant, he argues, in situations of all-out civil war). The four approaches are essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, and institutionalism. While strict essentialism, arguing for the primordial nature of ethnic hostility, and strict instrumentalism, arguing for an elite-driven quest to mobilize ethnicity in the service of obtaining material goods or power, have largely been discarded

[27] Ashutosh Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 274-277.

by the field, theorists have continued to develop more nuanced forms of each. For example, James Fearon and David Laitin argue for a constructivist-instrumentalist fusion, arguing that elites construct and play up communal identities in order to justify non-communal grievances.[28]

A constructivist approach focuses on the ways that group identities are constructed, rhetorically or otherwise, to fit a particular narrative at a particular time. Varshney argues that "[c]onstructivism is the new conventional wisdom in the field of ethnicity and nationalism. Its central idea is that our ethnic and national identities are constructs of the modern epoch."[29] Lest we presume constructivism to be instrumentalism by another name, Varshney points out that the critical difference between these theoretical models has to do with time: "Constructivism is not about the radical *short-run* fluidity of identities. It is about the *long-run* formation, and the consequent *stickiness,* of identities."[30] Thus, these narratives of group identity are not only for the given time in which they are constructed, but rather, have life far beyond those time frames.

However, he goes on to note that the constructivist approach, while doing a good job of accounting for the *formation* of identities, does not readily account for the lived reality of ethnic conflict. The predominant form of constructivism posits that each society has a historically constructed "master cleavage" (a group identity that emerges at some point, then becomes "sticky") that is then mobilized by political entrepreneurs when useful. Given this theory, one would expect conflict to be equally spread throughout

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[28]James Fearon and David Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity."

[29] Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," 285.

[30] Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," 288, emphasis in original.

societies, since the master narratives and widespread nature of political entrepreneurs would be the same throughout. This is not the case, however, as ethnic conflict tends to be locally or regionally concentrated.[31] Thus, Varshney argues, a constructivism paired with institutionalism- the idea that particular institutional structures can allow or constrain violent conflict- is the most promising theoretical development in the study of ethnic conflict.[32] I will draw upon this theoretical approach to group identity in conflict throughout the course of this dissertation.

But does the research in ethnic conflict map squarely onto the study of conflict that is labeled "religious," especially given Horowitz's assumption that religion is something of a subset *within* the broader category of ethnicity? As Varshney summarizes,

> Following Horowitz (1985), ethnicity as a term designates a sense of collective belonging, which could be based on common descent, language, history, culture, race, or religion (or some combination of these). Some would like to separate religion from this list, letting ethnicity incorporate the other attributes. From the viewpoint of political identities and group solidarity, this separation is a semantic quibble. It becomes critical, however, when ethnicity and religion clash.[33]

While it is true that religious identity at times can indeed act nearly identical to other forms of ethnic identity, I argue that, though often overlapping, religion and ethnicity are also distinctive categories of identity and mobilization. For the purpose of this dissertation, I argue for viewing religion as a unique, while interactive and intersectional, conflict variable. This project thus builds on, but is not constrained by, the

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[31] Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," 287.

[32] This hybrid approach is, for example, employed by Daniel N. Posner in *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[33] Ashutosh Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," 277.

literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflict in putting forth an interdisciplinary approach, centered in the discipline of religious studies, which I will unpack further in chapter two.

Additionally, Stuart Kaufman has argued that a symbolic politics theory helps to explain ethnic violence better than a rationalist or other social-psychological theoretical approach, as,

> the critical causes of extreme ethnic violence are group myths that justify hostility, fears of group extinction, and a symbolic politics of chauvinist mobilization. The hostile myths, in this view, produce emotion-laden symbols that make mass hostility easy for chauvinist elites to provoke and make extremist policies popular.[34]

Given the depth of symbolic politics within ethnic (and I would argue religiously-defined) strife, it is no surprise that post-conflict peacebuilding must engage symbol and myth in the aftermath of a conflict if lasting social and political peace is to be achieved.

**Assessing Peace: Strategic Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion**

How are we to articulate the concept of peace, for the sake of this project? First, it is critical to note that while both Lebanon and Bosnia and Herzegovina are post-war, neither are necessarily post-conflict, in that there is discernable unrest at societal and governmental levels. The concept of peace for the purposes of this dissertation is not the absence of active, ongoing battles, often referred to as "negative peace." Ceasefires are peace treaties are critical, of course, for the termination of protracted violence, but in and of themselves, they do not bring peace, in the positive sense. Additionally, the absence of overt violence can obscure the structural and cultural violence that persists just below the

[34] Stuart J. Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence" *International Security* 30.4 (Spring, 2006): 47.

surface. This lack of sustainable, holistic peace in both contexts supports my thesis that peace might be more likely to come with successful religious engagements.

Recent research on strategic peacebuilding articulates a concept of positive peace (rather than simply the absence of overt violence). As Atalia Omer states, drawing on recent work by Scott Appleby and John Paul Lederach on the subject, strategic peacebuilding

> entails a comprehensive, multidimensional, multifocal, and multidisciplinary process, normatively guided by a pursuit of justice or *justpeace*. The normative and comprehensive compass that strategic peacebuilding affords, with its focus on the continuous striving toward this neologism of *justpeace*, viewing it as a contested and continuously debated framework rather than a fixed telos, is especially helpful in exploring how religion might relate to "peace" as the cessation of direct violence.[35]

Justice, rather than the cessation of overt violence, must be part of the goal of a sustainable approach to peacebuilding. This approach requires managing direct violence, while simultaneously dismantling systems of injustice, socially and economically. Thus, root causes of violence are taken seriously and addressed in this approach to peacebuilding.

This focus on justice as part of the way we assess peace in a given context paves the way for utilizing social cohesion as a tool for measuring the type of peace articulated above. William Easterly, et al., define social cohesion as "the nature and extent of social and economic divisions within society."[36] Their data analysis confirms the hypothesis

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[35] Omer, Atalia, "Religious Peacebuilding: The Exotic, the Good, and the Theatrical," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding*, ed. Atalia Omer, et. al. (Oxford University Press, 2015): 16. The article she refers to is John Paul Lederach and R. Scott Appleby, "Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview", in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19-44.

[36] William Easterly, et. al., "Social Cohesion, Institutions, and Growth," *Economics & Politics* 18.2 (2006): 105.

that social cohesion is correlated with better institutions and, subsequently, economic growth.[37] How, then, can one foster social cohesion in a society? Easterly, et al., argue for an emphasis on creating a common identity and utilizing the education system to provide public knowledge about the social contracts within a given society.[38]

Regina Berger-Schmitt concurs with Easterly, et al., on the importance of social cohesion for promoting political stability and economic growth. He points to a few distinguishing characteristics of social cohesion, including the strength of social relations, a sense of belonging to the same community, equality of opportunities, and the extent to which there are low levels of disparities, social cleavages and social exclusion within a society. He thus identifies two key dimensions of social cohesion: the inequality dimension, which looks at disparities and social exclusion, and the social capital dimension, which looks at the level of social relations and common identity.[39]

Jane Jenson adds a third dimension to the two that Berger-Schmitt proposed: social cohesion's relationship to institutions and governance.[40] She defends the intentional vagueness of the concept of social cohesion, as she argues that, while the concept is based on data, this vagueness allows for malleability within specific contexts. Jenson proposes three sets of indicators that can be useful in measuring social cohesion

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[37] Easterly, et al., "Social Cohesion, Institutions, and Growth," 113. In testing their hypothesis, they specifically focus on wealth inequality, measured by the share of the middle class, which they argue can serve as a proxy for social divisions.

[38] Easterly, et al., "Social Cohesion, Institutions, and Growth," 116-117.

[39] Regina Berger-Schmitt, "Considering Social Cohesion in Quality of Life Assessments: Concept and Measurement," *Assessing Quality of Life and Living Conditions to Guide National Policy* (2002): 406.

[40] Jane Jenson, *Defining and Measuring Social Cohesion,* vol. 1 (Commonwealth Secretarial, 2010), 4.

within societies: those that measure social disparities, those that measure cultural and ethnic homogeneity, and those that measure participation and belonging.[41]

Joseph Chan, et al., argue in favor of a more narrow definition of social cohesion. They assert that both academic and policy discourses around the term lack a clear operational definition, and thereby limit its usefulness, particularly within the policy realm.[42] A good definition, according to these authors, is both minimal in scope, meaning it includes only the essential constituent parts, and close to the ordinary usage of the term.[43] They argue that the current approaches to defining social cohesion conflate its content with the conditions that facilitate it. Thus, they offer the following definition of the *content* of social cohesion:

> Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestation.[44]

Thus, they offer a mechanism (Table I) for analyzing social cohesion that includes the vertical and horizontal levels of society, as well as the objective (actual manifestations of social cooperation, participation, and so on) and subjective (feelings of belonging, trust, and willingness to help others) levels. These various levels of analysis include and interact with religious values and religious communities in important ways.

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[41] Jenson, *Defining and Measuring Social Cohesion*, 21-23.

[42] Joseph Chan, et. al., "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research," *Social Indicators Research* 75 (2006): 279.

[43] Chan, et al., "Reconsidering Social Cohesion," 280.

[44] Chan, et al., "Reconsidering Social Cohesion," 290.

Measuring social cohesion: a two-by-two framework

| | Subjective component (People's state of mind) | Objective component (Behavioural manifestations) |
|---|---|---|
| Horizontal dimension (Cohesion within civil society) | General trust with fellow citizens | Social participation and vibrancy of civil society |
| | Willingness to cooperate and help fellow citizens, including those from "other" social groups | Voluntarism and donations |
| | Sense of belonging or identity | Presence or absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages |
| Vertical dimension (State-citizen cohesion) | Trust in public figures | Political participation (e.g. voting, political parties etc.) |
| | Confidence in political and other major social institutions | |

Table 1[45]

This framework from Chan, et al., informs my case study assessment guide, as it provides a concrete and holistic way of framing social cohesion in relation to sustainable peace. Social cohesion is thus the way I will concretely assess and articulate peace throughout this project. While I will continue to use the terminology of peacebuilding, as it is the most common within the field of theory and practice, my analysis will use social cohesion as a key measure of peacebuilding success and sustainability.

**Situating Religious Peacebuilding: The Ambivalence Approach**

The theoretical field of religious peacebuilding is still in its nascent stages, but it has indeed become a field of study in and of itself. A hallmark of this development is the

[45] Source: Chan, et al., "Reconsidering Social Cohesion," 294.

publication of an Oxford Handbook dedicated to Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding, released in the spring of 2015.[46] Two key framing texts emerged in the year 2000. Scott Appleby, the current Dean of Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs and the former Director of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, received his doctoral training in the history department at the University of Chicago in 1985.[47] He published important texts on the subject of religion and modernity throughout the 1990s, including, with Martin Marty, the multi-volume *Fundamentalism Project.* His book *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, published in 2000, lays the groundwork for much of the theoretical scholarship in the field of religious peacebuilding.[48]

Additionally, the same year Appleby published *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, Marc Gopin released *Between Eden and Armageddon*, also asserting that religion has the malleable capacity to contribute to violence or to peace. Certainly studies had been written about the role of religion's relationship to violence and peace prior to this (in particular, one should note David Little's *The Invention of Enmity*, on the role of religion in Sri Lanka and more broadly), but these previous texts tended to be case studies rather than intentionally theory-building works. Religious peacebuilding as a theoretical field draws heavily upon Appleby, and to a lesser extent Gopin, to the present day. In this

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[46] *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding*, ed. Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[47] See http://keough.nd.edu/profile/r-scott-appleby/, accessed June 17, 2017. It is worth noting that the scholarly conference in preparation for the Oxford handbook on Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding was convened at the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame, as noted in the preface to the volume. This demonstrates the importance of the Kroc School as a "hub" for the development of religious peacebuilding theory more broadly, and signifies the importance of Appleby, its director at the time, as a key founding theorist in this field of study.

[48] Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

section, I will summarize the key arguments that Appleby and Gopin make in advancing an ambivalence approach to understanding

The crux of Appleby's ambivalence argument is that religious content can be purposed toward both peaceful and violent ends, depending on what texts or traditions are prioritized- by religious leaders in particular- in various contexts. Appleby asserts, in line with many key scholars of religion, that the 'sacred' is in and of itself ambivalent, in that it is not wholly peaceful or violent. He argues that there are many authentic reactions to the "experience of the radical mystery of the numinous,"[49] which can be a powerful source for religious violence and for religious peacebuilding. Appleby and Gopin both observe that, in nearly every religious tradition, the spiritual life force has both creative and destructive capacities. In situations of so-called religious violence, co-religionists and commentators are often quick to emphasize that violent acts do not come from a place of genuine religious commitment. Appleby argues, however, that it is critical to view even certain acts of violence as genuine religious acts, as religion itself is not inherently peaceful, if viewed through historical and theological lenses.[50]

Appleby puts pressure on common assumptions about religious fervency. He argues that "militant religion," a phrase that typically used to describe violent expressions of religious extremism, can also be fervently committed to peacebuilding.[51] Thus, he contends that the oft-drawn dichotomy between religious violence and religious

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[49] Appleby, "Religious Violence: The Strong, the Weak, and the Pathological," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding*, ed. Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little (Oxford University Press, 2015): 36.

[50] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 30.

[51] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 7-10.

peacebuilding assumes too sharp a contrast between the deeply held commitments that lead religious people toward violence or peace. Religious 'militants,' he argues, can be deeply committed to the defense of human dignity, and this may at times lead to violence on behalf of the oppressed in efforts to create just societies.[52] Religious violence, then, can emerge from an exclusivist "dark side" of religion, but it is critical to recognize that violence can also emerge from a deeply held sense of justice, as religious actors utilize violence at times to promote justice where it is lacking.

According to Appleby, the primary differences between a 'militant' religious peacemaker and a 'militant' religious extreme exclusivist are their attitudes toward violence and the understanding of one's role in conflict. While a religious peacemaker ultimately aims at ending violence and reaching "reconciliation or peaceful coexistence with the enemy," a religious violent extremist "is committed primarily to victory over the enemy, whether by gradual means or by the direct and frequent use of violence."[53] While the tactics may at times look similar, the goals for these different types of religious actors are distinct.

Additionally, the different paths that religious actors can follow are not fixed for any individual or collective actors. Appleby states that,

> …the broad patterns of [inclusion, tolerance, and nonviolence; and exclusion, intolerance, and violence] recur as options confronting people caught in situations of economic deprivation, social inequality, and heightened racial, ethnic or religious tension.[54]

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[52] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 11-13.

[53] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 13.

[54] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 15.

These patterns do not necessarily exist as distinct dichotomies, but are negotiated within specific situations with which religious individuals and communities are confronted. Religious actors do not typically choose a single exclusivist or peace-seeking path to follow, but rather, negotiate these within different contexts that arise.

The ambivalence of religions allows for malleability of what portions of text and history can be made sacred or brought into focus. For example, current ISIS leaders have popularized a portion of a Qur'anic text to justify beheadings, leaving out the second half of the verse.[55] On the flip side, Islamic Relief- a global development organization that began in the 1980's- prioritizes and works from Qur'anic teachings on social justice and compassion.[56] Appleby cites John Henry Cardinal Newman in asserting that religions contain "leading ideas," which are then interpreted within various historical and geographical contexts, interacting with a "multitude of opinions," which shift and are shifted by their contact with the fabric of society.[57] Appleby and others in the field have stressed the important role of religious leaders in navigating the terrain of religious ambivalence, as they are able to use their platforms to amplify and popularize certain ideas or ways of thinking about religious belief and practice. Appleby and David Little have identified four specific roles that religious leaders tend to play in conflict

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[55] The portion of the verse used by ISIS is found in Surah 47, verse 4, translated by Yusuf Ali as "Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks." However, the verse goes on to provide historical context for this, stating, "At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens." The verse goes on further, but it is key to note that ISIS leaders only pull out and amplify the single portion of the verse that seems to support brutal treatment of captives or enemies, broadly understood. For the translation, see http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=47&verse=4; see also http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/isis-uses-half-quran-verse-justify-beheadings-see-whats-half/ for an explanation of this interpretive tactic.

[56] See http://irusa.org/mission-vision-and-values/, accessed June 17, 2017.

[57] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 32.

management, as heralds, advocates, peacekeepers and educators.[58] The considerable role that leaders have played in generating conflict and soliciting participation in violence should give us some idea of how powerful religious elites can be in shaping what religious content gets prioritized and in mobilizing the masses. As Appleby notes, religious leaders play a key role in reconstructing narratives of the past.[59]

In ethno-religious conflicts, Appleby argues that ethno-nationalist extremism combines with "weak religion" to produce religious violence, as weak religious communities are more easily manipulated and their symbols, which lack robust content, are something like vessels waiting to be filled with meaning.[60] Appleby would argue, then, that often when religion is used to motivate violence in circumstances of ethno-religious competition, religion actually "contains" *less*, rather than *more*. Religion is more malleable, or easily influenced, when it is not "strong."

Appleby thus argues that, "'religious illiteracy'—the low level or virtual absence of second-order moral reflection and basic theological knowledge among religious actors, is a structural condition that increases the likelihood of collective violence in crisis situations."[61] This, of course, goes against the secularist assumption that by emptying religion of its strength within society, religious violence can be avoided. For Appleby, the strengthening of religion, or the building of,

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[58] Scott Appleby and David Little, "A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuildling in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 6.

[59] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 170.

[60] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 58.

[61] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 69.

> communities of faith in which the historical argument about the proper ethical interpretation of the sacred remains vigorous and is sustained through many formal and informal channels, moves its adherents away from narrowly conceived ethnic, nationalist, and tribal self-definitions and toward a more tolerant and nonviolence social presence.[62]

Thus, the fostering of robust internal debates within religious communities provides the impetus for tolerant and peaceful approaches to crises.

Appleby has made an important impact on the field of religious peacebuilding by centering the concepts of ambivalence and ambiguity, and by bringing a more robust understanding of religion into the field of conflict and peace studies. In many ways, he is seen as the father of the field of religious peacebuilding, and most scholarship in this young field of study cites him as a key founder of the theoretical approaches to thinking about the role of religion in promoting violence or peace.

Marc Gopin is currently the Director of George Mason University's Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Revolution, and a professor at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason. He received his Ph.D. in Ethics from Brandeis University in 1993, and has since worked as a conflict resolution practitioner, professor, and theorist; *Between Eden and Armageddon* was his first major book project.[63] Gopin argues that values such as justice and forgiveness can emerge from religious contexts and when they are rooted in religion, people are in certain situations more deeply committed to these values, even when they don't fall into line with 'rational

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[62] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 79.

[63] See https://crdc.gmu.edu/about/staff/marc-gopins-bio/ and http://www.marcgopin.com/about/, accessed June 17, 2017.

choice' ideologies.[64] As Gopin asserts, "people change when a new hermeneutic is inserted into the symbolic and ritual life of the community."[65] Whether peace-seeking religious ideas take root depends not solely on whether religious leaders promote them, but on their adoption by the grassroots.

In creating peaceful pluralistic religious societies, Gopin argues that pro-social communal values (including religious ones), rather than secular universalism, must be the starting point.[66] He asserts that, "the most effective way to enlist the guards in the cause of peacemaking is not to destroy what they need to protect but to hermeneutically engage their traditions in a way that *enhances* their sense of pride in what they guard so carefully."[67] Instead of excluding seemingly conservative religious forces, then, it is more fruitful to engage religions in the hermeneutics of peace and co-existence, pushing beyond the fleeting surface of pluralism into a deeper *religious* commitment to peaceful co-existence.[68] Religions can help mitigate conflict, but also have an important role in capitalizing upon pro-social values to create sustainable and peaceable social cohesion within divided or diverse religious societies.

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[64] This is not to say that religion is inherently or distinctively irrational, but rather that it can provide a moral impetus for people to act in ways that do not necessarily seem most fair or self-serving.

[65] Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88.

[66] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon,* 199.

[67] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon,* 88.

[68] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon,* 127.

Gopin asserts that when peace activists try to diminish religiosity in order to build peace, religious people are left with only "conflict-generating theology."[69] He thus argues for secular peacebuilding practitioners to center and celebrate pro-peace religious ideas and activism, rather than sidelining religion or diminishing its contributions. In societies where a large portion of the population is religion, it is critical that secular peacebuilding efforts take religion seriously.

Gopin cautions, however, against placing too much stock in the functions of religion, while acknowledging that religious communities and leaders can play important roles in many peacebuilding processes. Conflicts are never only about religion, and thus peacebuilding cannot rely entirely on religious actors or the importance of many other variables is discounted.[70] Gopin points out that,

> [d]espite the fact that there are liberal elites in each religion who embrace tolerance and coexistence, if this is not embedded in the experience of the majority, then we must understand this and work with it, rather than pretend, as many liberal institutions do, that it is not there.[71]

Thus, religious values themselves, which are often influenced by elites but are also configured in important ways at the grassroots level, can help to bolster peacebuilding efforts.

Gopin, like Appleby, points out that religious communities have a certain level of social capital within a society, making it possible for messages to be disseminated across large portions and different levels of society. However, the downside to social capital is

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[69] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon,* 16.

[70] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon,* 29-30.

[71] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 88.

that it can create cohesion within fragments of society (bonding) without leading to holistic social cohesion (bridging). Social capital is thus a double-edged sword for religious peacebuilding efforts; it must be utilized and navigated cautiously if it is not going to impede these efforts in the long run.

Gopin writes as a practitioner more so than Appleby, whose background is more clearly situated within the academic realm, rather than the field of practice. Atalia Omer credits Gopin with bringing religion more squarely into the field of conflict resolution, in both theory and practice.[72]

Appleby and Gopin have thus laid critical groundwork for this emerging field of study. Both argue that we must not write off those acting violently in the name of religion as "not really religious," a common impetus for observers (and particularly for religious actors) who want to assert that "true religion" promotes peace. While from an adherent's point of view, this case can certainly be made, the scholar of religion must recognize the multiplicity of religious expression and the complexity of naming authenticity in the realm of religious ideology and practice.

In sum, according to the ambivalence approach, religious content is malleable, ideas and the roles of religious leaders matter, and religious social capital is a critical component for any peacebuilding efforts in any society where people identity as religious. These factors contribute to the fact that religious actors can and do promote peace *or* foster violence in different contexts. Through these anchoring texts, Appleby and Gopin have both contributed to the underpinnings of the field of religious peacebuilding, particularly in popularizing the assertion that religions are internally plural

[72] Omer, Atalia, "Religious Peacebuilding." 5.

and malleable. This approach pushes back against a static view of religion and looks at the many ways in which religion can come into play to either further peace or stimulate violence.

**The Trouble with Religious Peacebuilding**

Atalia Omer, a colleague of Appleby's at Notre Dame who received her Ph.D. in the Study of Religion from Harvard University in 2008,[73] has recently offered a robust and thoughtful critique of the theoretical field of religious peacebuilding. One of her primarily arguments is that the field relies too heavily on a phenomenological approach to religious ambivalence, leaning on a narrow interpretation of Appleby. She notes that, "It is this insight [of religious ambivalence] that sparked the industry of religious peacebuilding and carved out space for a theological and hermeneutical focus on peace-promoting motifs and resources within religious traditions." However, the adoption and application of the ambivalence thesis subsequent to Appleby and Gopin has been fraught with problems, as much work in this field has relied heavily on a shallow reading of religious ambivalence.

While the ambivalence thesis is effective in debunking essentialist accounts of religion, many who have drawn upon Appleby have inadvertently put forth another version of essentialist thought, by arguing that the role of the religious peacebuilder is to uncover and dust off "true religion," which is a force for good (even though, as Omer notes, this is based on a problematic- and incomplete- reading of Appleby). Additionally, there is a related tendency to see the relationship between religion and conflict or peace

[73] See http://sociology.nd.edu/people/atalia-omer/, accessed June 17, 2017.

as unidirectional.[74] Here, religion is still seen as static in the causal equation, even while acknowledging its internal plurality.

Omer argues that the primary pitfall of religious peacebuilding as a field of study in not in too heavily centering religion, but rather in failing to see "the full spectrum of its potential contribution."[75] She goes on to argue that,

> [t]his is not merely a problem of scope; it also reflects deep theoretical blinders born out of the misapplication of the insights and potentialities of the "ambivalence of the sacred." While construing the militancy of the nonviolent religious warrior as the inverse of the religiously motivated suicide bomber frees religion from material or ideal reductionism, it also generates conceptual and practical blind-spots that need to be deconstructed for scholarship in the field of religious peacebuilding to grow in a meaningful way.[76]

Additionally, Omer points out that the field of religious peacebuilding, both in theory and in praxis, has accepted rather than challenged the secular frame in which peace and conflict studies have historically operated, assuming the stark division between the Religious and the Secular that a modern approach to religious studies entails.[77] This has many implications for the way in which peacebuilding actors go about doing religious peacebuilding, and the way in which scholars approach the topic. Omer argues

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[74] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding," 9.

[75] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding," 15.

[76] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding," 15.

[77] Scholarly analysis of the emergence of the Secular, and the parsing of it from the realm of the "religious" is critical to a modern understanding of religion, and particularly the way religion is understood and employed in political science, international studies, and peace studies more broadly. I will examine how this coincides with a World Religions approach to the study of religion later in this chapter. For more on the discussion of the emergence of the Secular itself, which I will not spend time on here, see Jose Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularism," in *Rethinking Secularism*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, 54-74, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*: *Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Elizabeth Shakman-Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International* Relations, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007; and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

that, "because religious peacebuilding operates within the secularist discourse, it focuses overwhelmingly on direct and obvious violence, overlooking how religion relates to structural and cultural violence."[78] Additionally, the acceptance of a clean distinction between the Secular and the Religious allows practitioners and scholars to isolate religious factors from the rest of the elements of a conflict, which are viewed as secular (read, rational) conflict factors. The delineation of the Secular from the Religious has its own history, as the concept of the Secular emerged from a particular religious frame; a reflective approach to this distinction, and to the Secular as a constructed rather than neutral category, helps to shed much light on the critical issues that arise when considering religious peacebuilding. Religion is not an isolated element of conflict, but rather is intertwined with, and has a dynamic relationship with, other dimensions of conflict.

I would add to Omer's critique that two other key operating assumptions in the current field of religious peacebuilding limit its depth, and therefore its efficacy. First, religion is treated primarily within the realm of the internal (beliefs, texts, etc.). Second, it is seen as uni-directional: as a source of violence or peace, rather than as part of a multi-directional process within a given context, shaping *and being shaped by* its socio-political environment.

The pitfalls of the current field of religious peacebuilding can be remedied by anchoring more fully in a strong comparative theory of religion. As noted previously, religious peacebuilding as a field of study has largely emerged apart from the theoretical

[78] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding," 11.

field of religious studies. A re-orientation toward religious studies gives more life and more potential to religious peacebuilding as a field of study and of practice.

**Chapter Structure**

Chapter two begins by tracing the history of religion as a category of analysis. Through this, I demonstrate the need to de-center the highly Western-Protestant priorities of belief and the internal experience of religion when studying religion in comparative context. I then explain in depth the materialist theoretical approach to religion, demonstrating why this approach is relevant and beneficial to the study of religion, conflict and peacebuilding.

Chapter three begins with a journey through the articulations and manifestations of religion in Lebanon from the end of the Ottoman Empire through the present. I demonstrate the ways religious identity groups experienced "moments of groupness"[79] through particular socio-political events, and trace how these moments became organizing myths with some "stickiness" moving forward. I examine the multiple conflict drivers of the Lebanese civil war(s) from 1975-1990, with particular attention to the ways in which religion and religious group identity was invoked in specific ways at various junctures.

In Chapter four, I turn to the work that has been done since the Ta'if Agreement to engage religion (through leaders/institutions, identities, and symbols, especially) in social and political peacebuilding processes. I examine how peacebuilding actors at various levels are articulating the role of religion in conflict and peace, and how

[79] See Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

specifically they are attempting to engage (or not) religion in peacebuilding efforts. I find that religion is instrumental in Lebanese socio-political conflict in that it happens to be the way that otherwise "typical" conflict drivers are framed, but religion/religious identity is in and of itself changed through the dynamics of socio-political conflict, and thus emerge constantly transformed by the context in which they are being formed.

In Lebanon, I argue that there are two main strains of (intertwined) religious peacebuilding approaches: the elite-centered approaches tend to seek to uphold communal representation/boundedness and seek a peace that prioritizes consensus between communities; the grassroots actors tend to seek to dismantle communal identity politics more thoroughly, prioritizing individual human rights and justice to unity between communities as such. Thus, the ways in which different religious peacebuilding actors articulate and operationalize both the role of religion and what peace looks like, differs vastly, as some mimic and reproduce the sectarian system while others seek to displace it.

In Chapter five, I begin with a tour of some of the key "moments of groupness" for the religious communities in the area now known as Bosnia and Herzegovina, including an analysis of how some of these moments stuck. This tour demonstrates that the religious tensions that showed up in the conflict of the early 1990's does not stem from "ancient hatreds", nor does it stem from religious ideology in and of itself, but rather the religious ideologies that were used to creating bonding cohesion and to justify violence during the war, were themselves shaped through a series of socio-political events.

Chapter six analyzes the approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding since the war, and argues that religion itself was shaped through the war, and in turn shaped community approaches to social and political life. Bosnia has been a lab for engaging religion in peacebuilding over the last 20 years. It was the first place where, immediately post-conflict, a national inter-religious council was immediately formed to help facilitate the reconciliation process. In a country where group identity lines during conflict were clearly correlated with religion (as well as ethnicity), and where religious symbolism and language played heavily into the spectre of violence, this seemed like a clear case where involving the religious institutions, leaders, symbolism, and language in the peacebuilding processes would be absolutely necessary. Just over 20 years after the Dayton Accords, where are we? How, specifically, was religion engaged in the peacebuilding processes over the last 20 years, and to what effect? I argue here that religion is inherently political, and can serve to uphold or resist the status quo (spectrum). We see both strains of religious engagement in Bosnia, with the elite religious institutions serving to uphold a stagnant political system that grassroots actors (religious and otherwise) are working to change.

Chapter seven integrates and analyzes key findings across the case studies, including both similarities and differences between the contexts. In both Lebanon and Bosnia, people talk about the importance of extracting religion from politics, or of instrumentally engaging religious leaders to highlight and push out the good/peaceful religious interpretations. In Lebanon in particular, there is a stark divide between people in the PB space who want to preserve the status quo through the consensus model, and those who want to resist the status quo and push for individual rights. Thus, the first

group right now is more focused on religious peacebuilding because, for the most part, it serves the consensus model. And we're seeing a rise in extremisms in both contexts, as socio-political dynamics serve to reify bonded social cohesion at the expense of bridging cohesion, and for the purpose of consensus-based peace, rather than bonding cohesion.

Embodied separation, by neighborhoods, schools, and the like, is a influential component of life in both Bosnia and Lebanon, with sectarian difference being more fully inscribed into the socio-political system in Lebanon than in Bosnia. There are inter-religious peacebuilding efforts that use an embodied and emplaced approach to religion in practice, and these are promising (teams rebuilding damaged houses of worship, etc.), but lack widespread engagement. Conceptually, there are important attempts at inter-religious understanding, but they are undermined by the embodied and emplaced separation/segregation. The praxis, therefore, does not match the ontological approach.

Overall, Religion emerges as a dynamic conflict variable. I argue that religious identity politics often follow/emerge from other politics, but then they re-make the other politics. Consensus, or unity-seeking religious peacebuilding tends to prioritize elite representation of groups and reinscribe group boundedness, and it opens the space for rogue resistance groups that don't feel represented here to express themselves, sometimes violently.

Chapter eight, the concluding chapter, argues that by looking at religion, conflict, and peacebuilding through the lens of a materialist theory of religion, we see religion as a dynamic, inter-connected conflict variable, being shaped by conflict as much as (or more than) it affects the way conflict is articulated or enacted. Religion itself *becomes* through various situations of conflict such that, when we speak of religious groups after a 15-year

war, we are not talking about the same groups or dynamics that entered the war, so to speak. Additionally, we see that religion is not only ambivalent when it comes to peaceful or violent interpretations of text and practice, but it is also ambivalent in its embodiment in forms that seek to uphold or to resist the status quo. In fact, it is more fruitful to focus on *how* different actors draw upon religion to challenge or uphold the status quo in different ways at different junctures (not as a dichotomy, but a societal dynamic force), rather than simply focusing on whether textual and verbal interpretations of religion appear violent or peaceful. This dynamic is impacted by the state position toward religion, varying circumstances, etc. I argue that this second form of ambivalence (resisting vs. upholding the status quo) is as important as the first (peaceful vs. violent interpretations), and must be taken into account in conflict assessments and in the design of peacebuilding initiatives. This chapter provides suggestions for how to improve the field of religion and peacebuilding- in theory and practice- going forward.

**Significance**

The debates over how to think about religion in situations of conflict that invoke religious symbols and rhetoric, or that come to be defined as fights between religiously-described groups, are not likely to end anytime soon. Additionally, when analyzing religion in conflict or violence, there is a tendency across both pop and media culture, and in international scholarship, to identify textual or creedal root causes of violence perpetrated in the name of religion, despite studies showing little link between belief and committing acts of violence. This dissertation offers an alternative approach to this

broader discussion, showing how, anchored in a materialist theory of religion, religion acts as a dynamic, mutually interactive conflict variable.

What do we achieve by talking explicitly about religion in contexts of conflict and peacebuilding? In certain contexts, communities make and invoke religion as a powerful mobilizing force, particularly to define group boundaries in particular spaces and times. However, it is not just instrumental. This project approaches religion not as an essence, or a bounded conflict variable, but rather by observing and analyzing the processes through which religion impacts and is impacted by- indeed, itself *becomes*- in situations of socio-political conflict. This finding helps to further develop the theory of religious peacebuilding, bringing it beyond a shallow ambivalence approach, which in turn impacts the way religion is engaged in peacebuilding in practice. I argue for a shift toward prioritizing structural and systemic violence in considering religious engagement, which if followed, will allow for deeper, more sustainable engagement of religion in building peace in a given context. This will deepen the analysis of religious peacebuilding theory, contributing to this burgeoning academic field. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this shift will also help to refine how international actors engage religion in peacebuilding for years to come, looking toward sustainable social cohesion rather than static peace agreements as the goal for societies in conflict.

I now turn to the key theoretical approaches to understanding religion and offer a new theoretical frame to guide the research at hand.

## **Chapter 2**: **Religious Peacebuilding, in Theory**

20th century peacebuilding approaches often associated religion with non-rationality, as was the case for twentieth-century international politics more generally. While in the 21st century, the interest in, and explicit engagement of, religion in peacebuilding has been rapidly growing, the theoretical field of study in this arena has developed at a slower pace than the field of practice. Religious peacebuilding, as a field of scholarly analysis and of practice, has heavily relied on textual and internalized approaches to understanding religion in examining the interplay of religious and violence, and in developing models for engaging religion in promoting peace. This trend shows up in the way peacebuilding practitioners think about and engage religion. Indeed, in my interviews for this project, many "secular" peacebuilding actors say their views have shifted on the importance of religion in recent years and they are more likely to consider/include religion in their approaches, but their comments reveal a tendency to treat religion in a somewhat essentialist and instrumentalist way. Additionally, despite the increased interest in engaging religion, my interviews with secular and religious peacebuilding actors alike reveal a predominant sense of the need to "rescue" religion from politics, seeing that interaction as unnatural and problematic.

Religious peacebuilding, while certainly an interdisciplinary field of study, has predominantly situated itself in peace & conflict studies, rather than in religious studies. This has led to a fairly limited understanding of the category of religion within the field,

and has thus left much to be desired in religious peacebuilding theory and practice, as it has been confined primarily to a professional, rather than academic, field of study. My theoretical approach in this dissertation is to put this field of study into more robust conversation with the comparative study of religion in particular. By rooting religious peacebuilding theory in a more robust comparative theory of religion, we will be able to further develop religious peacebuilding theory in ways that will have important impacts on the field of practice.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the theoretical field of religious peacebuilding is lacking in its attention to religion *as such*. This chapter offers a deeper analysis of what the comparative study of religion can bring to the table, focusing on how the emergence of a robust material theory of religion can help fill the gaps and pitfalls of the current approaches to religious peacebuilding in theory and in practice.

**A Shift Toward Religious Studies**

Grounding the field of religion, conflict and peacebuilding in a materialist theory of religion can help us address the key problems in the field of religious peacebuilding outlined above. Certainly, some scholars within this field have already begun to forge this more fully contextualized, embodied and dynamic approach. For example, as Omer points out, David Little's recent work has exemplified a more contextual and theoretically nuanced approach to engaging religion in peacebuilding.[80] Omer states that,

[80] Little is a retired Harvard Conflict Studies professor who spent much of his career as an in-house scholar at the US Institute of Peace, focusing on the intersections between religion, conflict and peace. While he published numerous texts (primarily through articles, along with a handful of book projects) on religious peacebuilding prior to 2000, when Appleby and Gopin both released their major books in this field, Little's

in Little's work, "It is not about religions in abstraction as systems of meanings informing behavior but as interpreted and embodied in the complex interplay between social practices and institutional formations."[81] Thus, there is promising work happening in the field of religious peacebuilding, and the theoretical shift I propose here will help to further orient future research and practice. This section will first briefly outline the comparative study of religion, in order to then situate Manuel Vasquez' material theory of religion within the broader conversation about how we think and talk about religion.

**Religion: What's in a Word?**

There is a widespread assumption in popular culture that we all know what we are talking about when we use the word "religion." However, when we interrogate the term, we find a vexed category. I will take us only briefly into the history of the emergence of religion as a category of analysis, in order to situate a material theory of religion in this broader context. Walter Capps states that, "little objective understanding of religion existed before inquirers learned how to make it intelligible."[82] And thus, this section examines how inquirers have made the concept of religion intelligible, and indeed, ubiquitous, thus revealing the constructed nature of religion as a category itself.

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work prior to 2000 tended to be based in case-studies, rather than focused on theory-building. Thus, while he is a senior scholar in this field, much of his theoretical contribution to the theoretical field of religious peacebuilding *as such* came after the emergence of Appleby and Gopin's more theoretical texts. For Little's biography, see https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/david-little, accessed May 30, 2017.

[81] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding," 10.

[82] Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), xi.

Theorists in the past several decades have offered critical perspectives on the history of the field of religious studies as a Euro-Christian discipline and have questioned the universal applicability of the term 'religion.' Daniel Dubuisson argues that,

> [a]s a field of knowledge, academic discipline, or branch of science, the history of religions is itself a historical phenomenon. This signifies, commonsensically, that it appeared at a precise time—the second half of the nineteenth century—and a precise place—western Europe.[83]

While thinking about the various ideas and practices typically associated with religion has a long, and largely indiscernible, history, the study of religion as an academic field of inquiry emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Western Europe.

Thus, while there is a popular tendency to think of religion as something that has always been a key & comparable feature of most, if not all, civilizations, the history of the field shows that this is not the case. Indeed, Brent Nongbri argues that the modern terminology of religion does not correlate with ancient or pre-modern language or practice- there is no ancient language, in his analysis, that has a term that resonates with what the modern term "religion" typically entails, though it is common to (wrongly, he argues) translate a number of words from ancient languages as "religion."[84]

Tomoko Masuzawa argues that the idea of religion emerged alongside a discourse of secularization, and entailed a process of 'othering':

> The modern discourse on religion and religions was from the very beginning—that is to say, inherently, if also ironically—a discourse of secularization; at the same time, it was clearly a discourse of othering. My suspicion, naturally, is that

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[83] Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2.

[84] Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2, 26.

> some deep symmetry and affinity obtain between these two wings of the religion discourse; that they conjointly enable this discourse to do the vital work of churning the stuff of Europe's ever-expanding epistemic domain... [85]

This parsing of that which is "religious" from that which is "secular" is a modern development. This tendency to parse the religious from the secular heavily influences the way we now categorize, study and engage with religion, reflecting the Protestant emergence of the concept of religion itself as internal, belief-centric, and somehow separable from that in life which is "secular." Nongbri argues that the Protestant Reformation in particular helped to shape this modern concept of religion as apolitical, as Locke and others worked to settle disputes about God in the context of the Protestant Reformation and Wars of Religion by confining religion to the personal and spiritual.[86] Nongbri goes on to point out that the ancient words that are often translated as "religion" (including the Arabic *din*) do not separate religion from the secular- in fact, the separation imagined in these concepts was absent entirely.

David Chidester and Nongbri both trace the exportation of the Christian notion of religion through colonial and missionary conquests.[87] This led to what Chidester calls a "multilayered discourse about otherness,"[88] which intertwined with the fact that religion became a category in the field of Christian imperial conquests and Enlightenment institutionalism. Nongbri notes that "European Christians were beginning to recognize

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[85] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 20.

[86] Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 6.

[87] David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

[88] Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 16.

themselves as a fractured, diverse group, and the 'heathen' were beginning to be seen as divisible into distinct groups."[89] Thus, the concept was projected on cultures across the globe, as well as projected back on ancient cultures (i.e., Roman and Greek) in order to validate the claim to conceptual universality.[90]

Masuzawa, Dubuisson, Nongbri and Chidester demonstrate the invented and politically charged nature of the concept of religion. In light of this fraught history, how might we imagine a working definition of religion for discourse and research? J.Z. Smith offers a helpful lens through which to look toward defining religion. Definition is a natural human enterprise. It is about "discovering" and creating limits around a concept,[91] and these limits are necessarily contingent. As Smith poignantly articulates, map is not territory, but maps are all we possess.[92] The early mapping of religion attempted to account for and explain the "religion" discovered in realms outside of Christian Europe, while utilizing a distinctly Christian framework for understanding.

For some early theorists of religion, such as E.B. Tylor and James Frazer, religion was a pre-rational reaction to the inexplicable in the natural world. [93] For others, such as Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, religion emerged as an illusion that served to distract people from their own psychological issues and alienation. [94] Mircea Eliade took religion

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[89] Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 118.

[90] Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 150.

[91] Smith, *Map is not Territory,* 291.

[92] Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 309.

[93] Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31-45.

[94] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 76, 123-139.

to be an autonomous reality that is "wholly other" and breaks into the world. The methodological tradition of phenomenology follows Eliade's cues; in his approach, religion must be studied and taken seriously on its own terms.

For Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, religion was a key part of the social fabric, helping to create and maintain societal ethics, and interacting with the other "interwoven strands" of social life.[95] Weber and Marx agreed that religion played a critical role in economic life, though Weber saw it as igniting a work ethic necessary for capitalism, while Marx, on the other hand, saw religion as complicit in alienating workers in the class struggle. Freud, Durkheim and Marx all saw religion as a product of non-religious causes, while Weber saw ideas and beliefs as causal in and of themselves.[96]

Clifford Geertz argued for religion as part of the culture of symbolic meanings. He saw culture as "webs of significance" spun by man,[97]and religion as one part of this web. Geertz did not look for a large-scale theory on religion to tie everything together, but rather prioritized local knowledge and experiences, relying heavily on the cognitive and internalized significations of actions- essentially, reading them as texts.

While the theorists discussed above disagree sharply on how to understand the origin and function of religion, they are in agreement that religion has an essence of some kind; that we know what we are talking about when we utter the term "religion," and they

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[95] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 91, 150; Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. by J.W Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1954 [1912]), 47.

[96] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 183; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001).

[97] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), 5.

demonstrate a general consensus that religion finds its proper territory is internal, in the realm of ideas and symbols. This assumption stems from the distinctively Christian origins of thinking about religion as such, and the emergence of the category of religion itself is indebted to these theoretical inquiries. As Talal Asad states, "there *cannot be a universal definition of religion*, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes."[98] This realization- that religion as a category is itself historically constructed- has led scholars to debate whether or not the category of *religion* has lost its meaning altogether.

**Why Talk About Religion At All?**

If there cannot be a universal definition of religion because of the cultural baggage of the concept, can we still talk about religion? And what benefit does talking about religion add? Daniel Dubuisson argues that we should stop using the term "religion" altogether. He states that, while certainly the Western world is not alone in asking metaphysical questions, organizing rituals or developing theologies, "it made from this collection of attitudes and ideas an autonomous, singular complex, profoundly different from everything surrounding it."[99] The Western study of religious has thus applied its own "web of concepts" widely, affirming its own identity through this

[98] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 29. Italics mine.

[99] Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 12.

imposition.[100] For Dubuisson, the study of religion as such is a practice in Christian self-affirmation, and to continue to use this terminology is to continue to promote Christian ascendancy. He calls for a shift to the phrase "cosmographic formations," as this phrase does not carry with it the cultural and political baggage of "religions." Dubuisson does not deny the widespread existence of many phenomena to which the term religion often refers, but rather takes issue with the ethnocentric, culturally specific *terminology* of religions.

Dubuisson offers the alternative notion of cosmographic formations, demonstrating how this way of thinking about the phenomena we typically associate with religion allows space for variation and diversity. While Dubuisson's suggestion is theoretically admirable in that he critiques the cultural and intellectual history of religion while offering a possible solution to this problem, his proposed solution does not fit the reality in which we reside. First, it would be impossible to diffuse the concept in any universal manner. Second, and more importantly, the terminology of religion no longer "belongs" to western academics; it is utilized and maintains meaning on the ground, and thus, I would argue, it is not up to academics to do away with the concept.

David Chidester argues that we are stuck with the terminology of religion because it is historically embedded.[101] This embeddedness of the term religion means that Euro-Christian academics, while certainly complicit in creating the term, do not fully own it. It

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[100] Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 11.

[101] Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 259.

is rhizomic,[102] rooting itself in contexts outside of the one from which it arose, and has grown new parts of itself. Thus, while religion is not a natural category, it has become a *meaningful* category for many. We are stuck with the category of religion, and therefore the work of the scholar of religion is to study that meaning-making: where, why and how does the concept of religion become meaningful?

The embeddedness of religion calls for a relational and process-oriented approach to its study, in acknowledging both particularity and universality simultaneously. Tyler Roberts, building on the work of J.Z. Smith, calls for an embrace of incongruity and a resistance to the inclination to locate religion in a static way. Locative approaches to the study of religion, Roberts argues, "cast religion as a uniquely stabilizing, ideological discourse of formation and ground the academic study of religion in a secularist opposition to religious discourse." Drawing on an analogy from J.Z. Smith, he goes on to state that,

> Locativists take the theologian as the paradigmatic religious figure. But thinking philosophy's vigilance through religion demands thinking religion and the study of religion in terms of the pilgrim, who, as Smith has it, only obliquely and hesitantly approaches his object of concern and in the end is able only to make 'fleeting contact.'[103]

The study of religion thus involves approaching the subject with an expectation and acceptance that one cannot "capture" religion in any meaningful way, but rather must study the processes and events through which it is perceivable, if only for a short time.

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[102] The philosophical meaning of this term was put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004 [1980]).

[103] Tyler Roberts, *Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism After Secularism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 149.

Roberts describes this location of religion as always a moment in a process, always slipping away.[104] Thus, the need to fully categorize, locate, or understand religion is an impossible task, and not the task that the scholar of religion should pursue.

J.Z. Smith argues that because religion is an "inextricably human phenomenon," we must take an anthropological approach to its study. Religion, for Smith, is just one way in which humans communicate worlds of meaning.[105] He goes on to state that,

> [w]e have not been attendant to the ordinary, recognizable features of religions as negotiation and application but have rather perceived it to be an extraordinary, exotic category of experience which escapes everyday modes of thought. But human life—or, perhaps more pointedly, humane life—is not a series of burning bushes.[106]

Thus, I draw from Smith the notion that religion is integrated into the everyday, mundane life of humans, and is negotiated within this context. This is part of the basis for Manuel Vasquez's materialist theory of religion, which serves as a theoretical anchor for this study.

**Religion in a Material World**

Manuel Vasquez's *More Than Belief* synthesizes and builds on a recent turn toward materialist approaches to religion within the field of religious studies. For Vasquez, as for Chidester, Smith, Robert Orsi and others, the study of religion must go beyond the examination of high doctrine, instead exploring the quotidian world in which

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[104] Roberts, Encountering Religion, 213.

[105] Smith, *Map is not Territory,* 290.

[106] Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 308.

religion is made and operationalized. Vasquez argues for a non-reductive materialist framework:

> A scholar working within a non-reductive materialist framework, thus, begins with the acknowledgement that the practitioners' appeals to the supernatural, god(s), the sacred, or the holy have powerful material consequences for how they build their identities, narratives, practices, and environments.[107]

Vasquez asserts that, in this particular interpretation of cultural realism, selves and culture are as real as the physical world, and, "although social facts are the emergent result of the practices of individuals, they precede and transcend specific subjectivities, enabling, shaping, and delimiting the latter's activities."[108] He argues that social systems of symbol and meaning-making are inextricably embedded in physical and socio-political material contexts. They constrain behavior and possibility, while making room for human agency within- and sometimes pushing beyond- these boundaries.

While much of the field of religious studies has relied heavily upon Western Protestant understandings of religion as a primarily internal matter of belief, lived publicly through symbols primarily in reference to (and as an outgrowth from) texts and creeds, a material approach to studying religion looks at the processes by which "the religious" comes to be understood *as such* in specific contexts, as both embodied and emplaced. Vasquez summarizes his particular materialist approach as follows:

> The sort of materialism I would like to advance **approaches religion as the open-ended product of the discursive and nondiscursive practices of embodied individuals, that is, individuals who exist in particular times and spaces**. These individuals are embedded in nature and culture, and drawing from

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[107] Manuel Vasquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

[108] Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 5.

> and conditioned by their ecological, biological, psychological, and sociocultural resources, they construct multiple identities and practices, some of which come to be designated, often through contestation, as religious at particular junctures. In other words, a materialist approach is interested in the processes behind the naming and articulation of religion as relatively stable and patterned reality recognized by both insiders and outsiders.[109]

This approach to the study of religion is thus process-oriented and dynamic, in that a material approach to religion allows for a multi-directional, interactive relationship between the many ideological, socio-political and material factors that together comprise the concept we interpret as religion. He argues against a Geertzian view of religion as a network of cultural symbols- a popular way of conceptualizing religion in current social scientific approaches to religion- arguing that,

> [i]n the end, despite the focus on locality, everyday life, and cultural complexity, Geertz's excessive symbolicism ultimately yields a one-dimensional view of religion. He sees religion primarily as a set of expressive texts to be enacted and decoded, not as shifting clusters of embodied practices emplaced in social and ecological fields.[110]

Vasquez instead argues for a multi-dimensional and multi-directional understanding of how religious symbols are developed and understood.

Vasquez traces

> a widespread tendency in religious studies to treat inner subjective states as autonomous and to see 'external' practices, institutions, and objects (including the body as both creative actor and constructed artifact) as derivative manifestations of those states.[111]

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[109] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 8, emphasis mine.

[110] Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 220.

[111] Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 90.

This points to a key theoretical shift essential to creating a more robust and holistic approach to the study of religion, conflict and peacebuilding: the shift from seeing religion as primarily internal (centered around belief), with social and political actions and realities deriving *from* belief, to a material approach to religion that allows for a back-and-forth relationship between the internal and the external and understands religious practice beyond just a physical demonstration of internal beliefs.

Additionally, a materialist approach allows for religions to manifest in ways that, in Vasquez's words, "impose hegemony and animate resistance, sometimes simultaneously."[112] This dimension of religion is critical for religious peacebuilding, as we look to nuance the ambivalence thesis by examining how religion is shaped through context and works to uphold or resist societal status quos, in tandem with varying interpretations of religion toward peaceful or violent action in so doing.

The material approach does not discount that texts and ideas play a key role in understanding religion, but as Vasquez argues,

> what a practice-centered approach demands, rather, is that we always place texts in their contexts of production, circulation, and consumption...the appropriation of texts by situated actors, ranging from institutions invested in maintaining orthodoxy to individuals at the margins of society, contributes to the reproduction of sedimented practices and the creation of new ones.[113]

Thus, while texts and ideas are relevant and important, we must study them in context in order to understand why and how certain concepts are developed, prioritized and mobilized.

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[112] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 254-5.

[113] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 255; 256-7.

Vasquez agrees with the constructivist approaches to religion in part, though criticizes strong constructivism for its lack of attention to the world beyond language and mental structures. Like constructivist approaches within the discipline of conflict studies laid out in the introductory chapter, a contructivist approach to religion emphasizes the power of discourse to generate and reify boundaries and identities. Additionally, Vasquez concurs with Russell McCutcheon's criticism of the "private affair" approach to religious studies that often dominates the field (and, I would add, is the primary- and sometimes sole- mode of understanding religion in other disciplines). However, Vasquez asserts that there is indeed data for religion- it is not, in other words, un-observable by virtue of being a socio-political construction.

Another central feature of Vasquez's materialist theory of religion is emplacement, defined as "the interplay between culture and nature in the diverse ways in which individuals and groups draw from religion to negotiate spaces and build places."[114] By studying religion through bodies, places and spaces, and socio-political dynamics, we find a much more holistic approach to religion than a theoretical approach that limits religion to the space of cognitive belief, internal experiences, and bounded group identities.

Invoking Bourdieu's conception of the *habitus*, Vasquez asserts that,

> As embodied and historical agents, individuals act always embedded in socially structured situations, amid already-established power relations, which condition their needs and interests, provide them with specific resources, skills, and propensities, open and/or close possible courses of action, and delimit the horizons of the possible and the impossible.[115]

[114] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 15.

[115] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 241.

Agency and invention exist within certain limits that are contextually inscribed. This is where Vasquez's theory diverges from Bourdieu. He argues, building upon Michel de Certeau, that part of Bourdieu's shortcoming is his assumption that doxa is somehow fully realized in establishing the *habitus* wherein behavior and thought is permitted and constrained. In reality, there is always human agency apart from the seats of power, contesting and remaking doxa in their own unique ways.[116] Citing Orsi, Vasquez argues that one must account for the fact that "religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life."[117] From this perspective, one does not have to rely on major crises to prompt religious or social change, as change is always happening, even if at times on the peripheries. Vasquez also critiques Bourdieu's assumption that the body is a blank slate that responds to cultural molding. He thus argues for a "more robust view of embodiment", along with a more dynamic logic of practice.[118]

Vasquez puts forward a theory of religion that prioritizes lived experience while acknowledging the socially constructed and maintained structures by which the religious is articulated as such. He reiterates that this is not meant to discredit or displace textual or ideological approaches to understanding religion:

> It is not that doctrines and personal beliefs, texts, and symbols do not matter or carry their own material density. Rather, I have argued that we can only appreciate their full materiality if we contextualize and historicize them, if we

[116] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 248.

[117] From Orsi 1997: 8, quoted on Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 247.

[118] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 246.

> approach them as phenomena produced, performed, circulated, contested, sacralized, and consumed by embodied and emplaced individuals. Only when we see these discourses, beliefs, symbols, and texts as mobile yet relatively stable artifacts operating among and interacting with other material objects within the times and spaces constructed by the practices of situated individuals and groups can we avoid the threat of textualism, the temptation to make semiotic systems purely self-referential.[119]

Thus, "content" matters, but not as singularly derivative, and contextual/material factors are just as critical in thinking about how religion comes to be understood and enacted in varying contexts. If the role of the scholar of religion is to ask how particular situations and modes of being come to be defined as religious (by insiders and outsiders), a materialist theory of religion is necessary. The scholar must shift from thinking about religion as something that happens inside the heads of persons, to thinking about religion as something that is made through, and interactive with, the world beyond internal beliefs and experiences- seen both contextually and historically. Action derives from multiple sources, not simply from mental constructs, and is shaped by the socio-political-material-spatial realities in which we live.

Drawing on, while diverging in important ways from, Eliade's sense of place, Durkheim's social networks, Marx's social construction, Bourdieu's *habitus*, and Asad's religious genealogies, among many others, Vasquez has offered a comprehensive materialist theory of religion that helps move us from internally-focused, text-centric approaches to understanding religion to a lens on religion that allows us to look holistically, while analytically, at the lived, embodied, emplaced, process-oriented reality of religion as it manifests in various ways in the world.

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[119] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 321.

Additionally, in thinking about religion from a process-oriented perspective, Bruce Lincoln's typology of religion is helpful for focusing on the *how* (process) rather than *what* (essence) of religion throughout this study. Lincoln articulates three dynamic strains of religion, which will prove helpful in providing a critical theoretical frame for this study. He identifies religions of the status quo, designed to maintain the current social situation; religions of resistance, which define themselves in opposition to the status quo religious ideology but are focused on self-preservation; and religions of revolution, which define themselves in active opposition to the dominant social fraction.[120]

Status quo religions can be strong supporters of structural, and somewhat less overt, forms of violence, while religions of revolution can use violent and non-violent means to call for justice and recognition. I would add that these categories are always shifting- again, demonstrating a process over time, rather than being static facts of existence. The ambivalence of religion does not occur in a vacuum, and thus understanding the connections between religion, conflict, and peace, requires attention to questions of justice, inequalities and power in particular locales. This typology, paired with a materialist approach to religion, provides a more robust and fruitful theoretical basis for studying the roles (and processes) of religion in conflict and peace.

Lincoln's categorization, while perhaps in and of itself too stagnant a categorization, helps to deepen Appleby's ambivalence thesis, connecting the various possibilities for religious violence or non-violence to context-specific questions of justice

[120] Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors: Rethinking Religion after 9/11* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 79-86.

and power. While Appleby, Gopin and Little all see religion as more than ideas, much of their theoretical work reveals an emphasis on ideas or beliefs as the core of religion, echoing some of the aforementioned problems with the World Religions approach to understanding religion. Additionally, none of these authors spend much time in their own texts situating the concept of religion in and of itself. While the authors themselves take a much more nuanced view of religion, the lack of religion theory in their key contributions to the field has contributed to a shallow approach to religion within the field of religious peacebuilding more broadly. Thus, I argue that drawing on a material theory of religion will add much-needed depth to the way in which religion is conceptualized and analyzed within religious conflict and peacebuilding studies.

A material theory of religion pushes us to examine process, not essence. It drives the scholar of religion away from seeing religion as internal and abstract. Additionally, from this perspective, we do not see religion as an improper incursion into politics- as many are apt to see it- but rather an interactive part of the socio-political environment. Thus, there is no need to "rescue" religion from politics to harness it for the good- rather, we can examine *how* it has emerged in particular contexts as part of the socio-political interactions therein. This is particularly helpful in examining the complex web of religion in situations of socio-political conflict, which is what this dissertation has set out to do.

**Understanding Groupness: Who's in?**

How does a material religious framework help us to think about religious group identity, particularly within conflict-affected societies? Many tend to think of religious

identity as natural and stable, and as all-or-nothing: you're a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu, a Jew, or you're not. But when it comes to group identity, who belongs, how, and what that belonging means, all shift across time and space. Vasquez, Chidester, and Rogers Brubaker, among others, argue for a networked approach to "groupness," rather than attempting to discursively maintain clear bounds of identity and belonging. Chidester suggests utilizing open definitions of religious traditions as invented or imagined communities, steering clear of talking about religions as homogenous systems or groups. He argues that, "[r]ather than bounded cultural systems, religions are intrareligious and interreligious networks of cultural relations."[121] Religious identity, in this line of thinking, involves a network or web of interactions, rather than a bounded set of ideologies, practices or persons.

Drawing on Dicken, et al., Vasquez argues that,

> Networks mark relatively stable but always contested differentials of power, of inclusion and exclusion, of cooperation and conflict, of boundary-crossing and boundary-making. Networks are socio-politically, culturally, and ecologically embedded relational processes that constrain and enable practices as diverse as place-making and identity construction.[122]

Thus, for Vasquez, religious groups are better understood as processes rather than bounded entities. In a similar vein, Brubaker challenges what he calls the tradition of "groupism," or thinking about groups of people as homogenous, clearly demarcated entities. He suggests, instead, that we utilize "a relational, processual, and dynamic

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[121] Chidester, *Savage Systems,* 260.

[122] Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 298.

analytical language" when thinking and talking about groups.[123] He speaks of groupness as an event, and encourages scholars to acknowledge moments of what he calls extraordinary cohesion at various points, without treating these levels of groupness as always present. Thus, for Brubaker, groupness is something that *happens*, rather than *is*.[124]

Brubaker's understanding of group identity as an event dovetails with Vasquez's discussion, drawing on Victor Turner and others, of the "sacred's potential to generate *communitas.*"[125] Group identity and values are often reified through participation in spaces or group practices deemed sacred, such as when Serbian fighters gathered in monasteries to receive blessings before battle. An embodied and emplaced approach to religion makes space for understanding these "moments of groupness" in contextually and historically specific ways, rather than simply as mental constructs.

There is much scholarly work demonstrating that religious identities (in all its malleability) are formed through friction. Notably, Daniel Boyarin's work *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* shows the ways in which Christianity and Judaism came to be understood as separate categories of religious identity through mutually constitutive encounters. Neither would have emerged as a distinctive category of belief and practice without the other. This is but one example of studies demonstrating how

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[123] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

[124] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 12.

[125] Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 314.

religious categories of identity emerge in interaction with another (also emerging) category of identity and through moments of socio-political pushes and pulls.[126]

Additionally, religious group identity is often operating and interacting at two (and sometimes more) levels. While religion is formed and lived in locally specific ways, it is also often interacting with transnational networks of co-religionists and identity tropes that span across borders. This is becoming even more apparent in our technologically interconnected globalized world, but it was also true before the advent of the internet and transnational media, as we will see in the Lebanon and Bosnia case studies. Europeans, for example, felt a strong connection to the Maronites in Lebanon as co-religionists, though they quickly realized that European and Maronite lived religion was quite different.[127] One interviewee called this transcendent tendency the "genius of religion"[128] as imagined and real connections are forged with both human & thought networks across borders.

This approach to groupness debunks an essentialist understanding of religious conflict. In applying it to the realm of conflict studies, however, we must also temper the pull toward strong constructivism. Yes, religious group identity is a socio-political

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[126] For example, see Nicholas B. Dirks on the emergence of Hinduism as a religious category in India in *Castes of Mind*: *Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[127]See Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2, 9-10, and Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," *Middle East Report* 26 (1996): 1-2.

[128] Interview with Lebanon Respondent 10, Beirut, July 9, 2015.

construction- it is an imagined community.[129] And yet, it becomes meaningful and accumulates a certain "stickiness" (to draw on Varshney) even though the boundaries are often porous and the group's Other is also not static, as the shifting opponents and alliances during the 1975-1900 Lebanese civil war and those during the Bosnian conflict in the early 1990's illustrate. A material religion approach to understanding religious group identities works in tandem with the constructivist-institutionalist hybrid approach to understanding ethnicity laid out in chapter 1, orienting the research in the next chapters and providing the field of religious peacebuilding more generally with a sense of religion that is more robustly embedded in social and political life.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined and reflected upon the current theoretical underpinnings of religious peacebuilding, demonstrating the current gaps in theory and practice. I argued for a material theory of religion as a more authentic and fruitful basis for the study of religious peacebuilding. The material approach moves us past essentialist and uni-directional understandings of religion, and it also anchors our understanding of religious groupness as malleable and developed in interaction with socio-political realities. These theoretical shifts will ultimately allow us to refine and revise religious peacebuilding theory. In the following chapters, I will apply these theoretical approaches to conflict and religious peacebuilding in my examinations of efforts in Lebanon and Bosnia specifically.

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[129] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

## Chapter 3: Tracing Religio-Politics in Lebanon

No one wants to talk about religion in Lebanon.

Sitting at a restaurant in Beirut's busy Hamra district in March 2015, I tried to explain my dissertation topic to my server, who had asked about what I was working on in Beirut. The first two things she said in response to my jumbled explanation of my research topic were remarks I heard over and over from Beirut residents, at coffee houses, in taxi cabs, and in shops, whenever the conversation took a turn from the price of a rug to religion and politics in Lebanon. First, she said that religious leaders cannot have anything to do with creating peace because they own this country for themselves and are the ones who create divisions to sustain their economic and political power. Second, she told me that religious difference isn't really a problem here, and besides, from her perspective, all religions are the same at their core.[130]

The simultaneous belief that religious leaders contribute to creating conflict and that religion isn't really a problem is a paradox that persists across Lebanon. Some explain it by saying that most Lebanese religious leaders have nothing to do with true religion. These observers say that religion is split between sectarianism, which is a tribal identity category, and spirituality, which is the heart of religion and is something that is intensely personal and other-worldly. But is the distinction this simple? Can one neatly

[130] This view, of course, differs from how many Lebanese would see religions, and from how many exclusivist, monotheistic theologies have developed elsewhere in the world.

split religion into the categories of sectarianism and spirituality to solve the seeming paradox of religion having either everything or nothing to do with conflict in Lebanon?

There has been a lot of religious peacebuilding- understood in varied ways- in Lebanon, in response to what has been widely framed as an intractable religious conflict. Many peacebuilding practitioners are engaging religion in various ways in peacebuilding processes in Lebanon, some out of a sense of necessity, and some operating under a belief that religious leaders and values have unique transformative power when it comes to social reconciliation.

This case study, which is split into two chapters, explores the following questions: what *do* religious leaders, institutions, identities and beliefs have to do with conflict in Lebanon? How, specifically, have peacebuilding actors engaged religion in peacebuilding processes. And to what effect? In order to answer these questions, we need to shift to interpreting religion and conflict in Lebanon within the materialist theory of religion laid out in chapter two of this project. Thus, another key question at the heart of this chapter is, how has religion *become* in Lebanon? The present chapter traces some of the key "moments of groupness" in Lebanese religious life and examines how certain moments of group identity had staying power. Chapter Four goes on to examine how peacebuilding attempts have interpreted, treated and drawn upon religion, and analyzes what we can say about how these efforts contribute to- or fail to contribute to- social cohesion in Lebanon.

**Why, and How, Should We Talk about Religion in Lebanon?**

Popular narratives have imagined the war in Lebanon as a conflict between Christians and Muslims (as broadly defined religious categories), or between different religious sects (smaller groups that emerge from within the broader categories). However, who was fighting whom changed over time in Lebanon, with Palestinian militias fighting Christian militias at some points, while Christian militias fought one another at other times, demonstrating shifts between ethnic, sectarian, and intra-community conflicts throughout the course of the war. Conflict in Lebanon has never been a constant series of clashes between two neatly defined, opposing groups, but rather different confrontations between a number of sub-groups that defined their own identities, allies, and their enemies differently at different times.[131] The narrative of a religious war, then, is far too neat for what happened (and continues to happen) on the ground in Lebanon. And yet, religious identities, symbols, institutions, leaders, and spaces have consistently come into play in important ways. One interview respondent, a high-ranking commander during the civil war years, described the way in which he and his colleagues justified their attacks in religious terms:

> To be a leader of your community, you have to be the most prominent one to defend them. So you cannot defend someone who is not afraid. You defend someone by making him afraid of the other. Or nourishing this fear, not directly

[131] For example, within both Maronite and Shi'a sects, there were multiple leaders and parties vying to be representative of that particular sect. Michele Aoun and Samir Geagea in particular fought one another, while simultaneously fighting other sects or sub-groups. I will unpack these divisions in greater depth in the civil war section of this chapter.

maybe, but so many ways- many tools….To be number one you have to be the most extremist of the leaders of your community.[132]

This reflection points to the way that religious boundaries, and the content of religious identities, were produced through the dynamics of war and conflict, as part of the socio-political processes at work in Lebanon, as I will examine in further depth in this chapter. Through this chapter, we will walk through how religion came to look and act the way it does in Lebanon, but as a preface to that more in-depth analysis, it is worth a preliminary overview of some of the key elements of what it means to be religious in Lebanon. While religiosity and piety are part of what religion means in Lebanon for some, more salient to everyday life are the ways that religious identity contains and delineates one's social and political access.

Historically, religion is deeply fused and intertwined with national identity in Lebanon. There are 18 recognized religious sects in Lebanon. There has not been a census since 1932, when the political system was set up to reflect proportional representation- at all levels- for these recognized sects. This set up reveals that two key elements of religious life in Lebanon. First, religious identity exists within boundaries prescribed by the state- you *must* belong to one of the recognized sects in order to have access to voting and other expressions of citizenship, as well as having access to social, family and personal legal services. The census determined the amount of representation each sect has in the Lebanese political system, revealing that individuals do not participate in the Lebanese system *as individuals*, but rather as members of their sect.

[132] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

Religious affiliation is on the identity card of every Lebanese. A Lebanese individual does not have access to the institution of marriage, for instance, as an individual, but only through membership in a religious community, as all marriages are conducted through the religious bodies, rather than through civic courts. Second, the fact that the census numbers of 1932 are still the only existing metrics (though sectarian representation allotments did shift slightly through the Ta'if agreement) reveals a reliance on past realities and ideas of Lebanon for current modes of governance. Demographics have certainly shifted dramatically since 1932, and this reality has led to much strife in the present day as now larger sects do not have the political access their numbers would prescribe, were there to be another census, as every Lebanese knows that the country is now majority Muslim.[133] Suffice it to say, using the 1932 data serves the system itself, rather than the general populace, and there is generally political consensus on keeping the 1932 census data in order to avoid opening Pandora's box, so to speak.

One's ability to participate politically is also directly tied to one's membership in a religious community. The political system itself reserves specific roles for representatives from particular religious communities (i.e., the President must be a Maronite Christian, while the House Speaker must be Shi'a Muslim and so on; this carries through military leadership and the allocations of seats in the Parliament on down to a number of less glamorous public service positions). Voting access is based on one's sectarian affiliation, as well as one's geographic affiliation (villages) and, for women in

[133] See, for example, analysis in "Census and Sensibility," the Economist, November 5, 2016, accessed April 19, 2017, http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21709535-new-data-reveal-looming-crisis-lebanons-ruling-elite-exposing-fiction.

particular, one's family ties. Media outlets are controlled by sects, and schools are, for the most part, homogenous when it comes to sectarian identity.[134] Thus, religion in Lebanon is hardly limited to the internal beliefs of a person, or to the rituals and practices of a community. It infuses many aspects of life, to the point that many no longer recognize it as "religion", understood from a primarily Euro-modern perspective.

The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) data show that Lebanon and has a fairly low level of government regulation of religion (4.9/), although this number arguably fails to take into account the ways in which government does indeed exert control over religion through the control given to religious institutions themselves (thus, providing the state with somewhat indirect control that is not reflected in the ARDA number). The state also determines what can and cannot be considered an official religion. Additionally, ARDA data shows a very high level of social regulation of religion in Lebanon (referring to the ways in which societal forces restrict and constrain free religious practice), at 9.3/10, demonstrating that Lebanese society strongly restricts freedom of religion in a variety of ways.

Does it make sense to talk about Lebanon's civil unrest as *religious* in any way? Some scholars on Lebanon would say no, that it is clearly economic and socio-political, and that the narratives of religion are primarily laid upon the context by outsiders seeking to describe it in religious terms. According to this perspective, the religious conflict

[134] For instance, over 50% of Lebanese students are enrolled in private schools, most of which are sectarian in nature. This percentage goes up in Beirut, where an estimated 68% of students were enrolled in private schools in 2012. Source: *BankMed Special Report: Analysis of Lebanon's Education Sector*, June 2014, 9-10, accessed April 19, 2017, https://www.scribd.com/document/334756961/Lebanon-Bankmed-Education-Lebanon-Study.

narrative is a false one, though one that gets reified through the narratives we tell.[135] However, this view rests on a simplistic understanding of religion: religion as primarily a matter of internal belief, removed from the rest of life. If we instead think of religion as material, interwoven with other aspects of life and actually itself made *through* those other aspects of life (the social, the political, the bodies interacting with other bodies in the real world), then we have a different way of thinking about what constitutes the "religious."

A material theory of religion, as I am utilizing here, immediately asks us to take a holistic approach to understanding what religion is and how it works in a given context. Religion in Lebanon is complex and multidimensional. Certainly the Lebanese conflict is not religious in the sense that it is not primarily driven by beliefs coming out to clash with one another in ideological battles. But socio-political conflict in Lebanon has important religious elements in the material ways in which it has played out, thereby shaping (and re-shaping) what religion means in this context. Religion is strategically bound up in the creation of boundaries, as the creation of social and political boundaries is part of what religion has meant historically.

Labeling a conflict as religious in part should not be at the expense of other factors; on the contrary, it is always layered upon some other factor. In the case of Lebanon, it is overlapped and intertwined with one's socioeconomic, geographic, and political modes of being and belonging. What it means to be Maronite in Lebanon, many would now say has very little to do with belief about the transcendent and is therefore not

[135] Author interview with Respondent 24, July 10, 2015.

a “real religious identity.” A materialist theory of religion challenges us to rethink what we mean by religious identity. When we shift from a purely ideological view of religion’s role in society, we can see how something can indeed be a “religious conflict”, in a certain sense, without the conflict having anything to do with a clash of ideological belief.

One can scan any body of literature on Lebanon and see the terms “communalism,” “sectarianism” and “religious community/sect/group” used, sometimes interchangeably. While these concepts are overlapping and intertwined, it is useful to unpack some of the differences, as this differentiation (as far as it is possible) will become more salient throughout this chapter. Sectarianism and religion are not equivalent, but one cannot talk about one without the other. When religious identity becomes mobilized in socio-political ways, and particularly when that is institutionalized in some way, we are dealing with sectarianism. In cases of strong sectarianism, belonging is far more important than belief.

In Lebanon, we see shifts over time from self-described religious communities mobilizing into sects with the hardening of boundaries, the politicization of religious belonging, and the differentiation of religious leaders from sectarian/political leaders. Additionally, my interviews revealed a tendency from Lebanese themselves, when asked about religious dynamics, to focus on the larger religious categories (Christian, Muslim) rather than the smaller sectarian categories (Armenian, Shi’a, and so on). This is true of outside observers as well, to subsume sectarian groups into the broader religious

categories when commenting on how religion plays into Lebanese socio-political dynamics.

Thus, throughout this chapter, I will explore the interwoven and complex notions of religion and sectarianism in Lebanon. While most of the people I spoke with, through formal interviews as well as through informal conversations, asserted strongly that the sectarian system is not religious, there is no escaping the fact that religious institutions and leaders in Lebanon are inextricably tied into the sectarian system. The sectarian system emerged from a pact between representatives of explicitly defined religious communities. While this simplistic explanation does not capture the complexity of how the sectarian system came to be, and how it has morphed over the years since its inception, it is important to bear in mind when considering the present form and impact of sectarianism in Lebanon. As one respondent noted, the challenge is "how to build a non-sectarian state on a sectarian basis," given the long legacy of sectarianism in the country.[136]

Nader Hashemi has observed that,

> [s]ectarian identities could not be politicized unless differences in beliefs, values, and historical memory compelled religious groups to collective action around particularistic identities. The critical question, however, that demands an answer in explaining sectarian conflict is: why now? Why do sectarian conflicts erupt at particular moments in time and not at other moments?[137]

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[136] Author interview with Respondent 16, July 8, 2015.

[137] Nader Hashemi, "Toward a Political Theory of Sectarianism in the Middle East: The Salience of Authoritarianism over Theology," *Middle East Institute essay series* (2015), accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.mei.edu/content/map/toward-political-theory-sectarianism-middle-east-salience-authoritarianism-over-theology.

This is an important dimension of the study at hand, as sectarian meaning and mobilization is a response to very specific political and social dynamics, making it a more salient form of belonging for the general populace at certain times; it is not a constant in the Lebanese context or, arguably, in any context.

Hashemi, drawing on Vali Nasr, points to the important role of state actors, including the presence of a weak state, for cultivating and benefiting from sectarian mobilization. This reveals, as Hashemi argues, the "salience of authoritarianism over theology in understanding the dynamics of Sunni-Shi'i relations today," an observation that carries into other Lebanese sectarian dynamics as well. The role of the state in helping to curate sectarianism is a critical one, which I will explore later in this chapter.[138]

Indeed, Hashemi and Postel argue elsewhere that, "A common tactic to preserve and perpetuate political rule in a weak state is to manipulate social and political cleavages via a divide-and-rule strategy. This gives ruling elites greater room to maneuver in the short term, at the cost of social cohesion in the long term."[139] I will argue here that this prioritization of elite interests carries over from political leadership to religious leadership in Lebanon as well, precluding social cohesion in a similar fashion.

Bassell Salloukh argues that "sectarianism was institutionalized in the form of multiple corporate consociational power-sharing arrangements," most notably the

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[138] Hashemi, "Toward a Political Theory of Sectarianism in the Middle East."

[139] Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, ed., *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9.

National Pact and the Ta'if Accord.[140] This observation reveals two important features of sectarianism- one is that it is, indeed, *institutional*, meaning it is not simply a reflection of horizontal dynamics in society, but very much a feature of vertical state-society relations. The other is that it involves *corporate* politics, meaning the individual citizen is formally subsumed into the group to which s/he belongs.

Religion doesn't get replaced by the sect, but the sect becomes another dynamic that takes on a socio-political life of its own, still very much connected to its origins in religious identity, institutional infrastructure and social dynamics. Thus Lebanon both is and isn't a "religious conflict, " particularly considering that what we often mean when we say "religious conflict" rests on theoretically limited assumptions about the nature of religion. Religion is wrapped up in socio-political conflict in complex and dynamic ways. It follows that trying to make peace (however defined) also involves religion in critical ways. This is not because religion is an isolatable factor, coming from the outside to make conflict and/or peace, but because it is integrally intertwined with the nature of society and identity in a reciprocal way.

Should one think of sectarianism as "religious" in any sense of the word? Religious identity in Lebanon is tied up with the seats of religious authority, and at various times, the rhetoric of religion is employed to reinforce sectarian group boundaries. Those who would confine religion to the realm of the transcendent and ideological would say no, sectarianism isn't about difference in belief or religious practice and therefore is not religious. Indeed, some describe the relationship between

[140] Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 2.

religion and sectarianism as a two-tiered system, with sectarianism being a layer added to religion, which is at its core neutral (or, according to some, nonviolent).[141] However, when we expand what we *mean* by religion- beyond the realm of belief- it's not such an easy answer. A simple yes or no assumes a clean division between the religious and the secular.[142]

This is not simply a theoretical question. To say that sectarianism "isn't religious" can lead those engaged in religious peacebuilding to try to somehow extract religion from the ways it is intricately intertwined with sectarianism. Sectarian and religious identities aren't the same thing, but they are deeply interconnected in critical ways.

While different religious communities have long existed in this space, the way communal boundaries were defined, and the importance of religious identity in social dynamics, have changed over time. Rather than being an "age old conflict" between groups in the Levant, the production of sectarianism in the nineteenth-century in fact reflects a "new historical imagination"- a new political order based on religious differentiation, legitimated through evocations of the past.[143] This challenges the notion common in contemporary analyses of the Levant that sectarianism is an ancient, tribal mode of operation: age-old rivalries that are preventing real modernization. Rather, it is modern ways of thinking about religion and group identity that produced sectarianism.

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[141] Author interview with Respondent 12, July 1, 2015.

[142] The parsing of "the religious" from "the Secular" is another theoretical conversation entirely, which others have thoroughly discussed elsewhere. See, for instance, Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age,* and Jose Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularism."

[143] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism,* 2.

A deeper understanding of how religion and sectarianism have manifested over time in Lebanese conflict history must precede any discussion of religion and socio-politics in Lebanon.[144] Anchoring in a material theory of religion helps us to situate religion in Lebanon as both intermingled with all other aspects of life, and as a malleable reality that has gone through many processes of becoming throughout Lebanese social and political history. To understand religion in Lebanon through a materialist theoretical lens, one must trace the various moments of groupness that occurred throughout Lebanese history to understand how boundaries were negotiated and the ways religion was invoked (and created in certain ways) in these events and processes. A better understanding of how religion functions in the Lebanese context lays the groundwork for a more fruitful conversation on how religion has been playing into efforts to build social cohesion, and why these have and have not been effective in different ways.

**The Social Cohesion Frame**

As articulated in depth in chapter one of this dissertation, I find social cohesion to be a better litmus test for evaluating the progress of a society away from violent conflict than the more vague, and often less measureable, notion of peace. While peace can be negative, in the sense that it can be measured by the absence of consistent armed conflict or acts of violence, social cohesion draws on a more positive assessment framework. It looks at the horizontal (between people and groups) and vertical (between society and the state) dimensions of a context, and also looks at both the formal and informal ways these

[144] I say conflicts plural intentionally, as there have been a multiplicity of conflict fronts and actors prior to, throughout, and after the civil war.

relationships play out. Additionally, a key component of social cohesion is how much social inequality persists. A state can be "at peace" while maintaining deep social inequalities, and thus while there may not be overt violence, there is indeed system violence at work, which can lead to outbreaks of overt violence if these are not dealt with.

While social cohesion is my way of assessing the progress of peace work in Lebanon, it is not necessarily the way in which many involved in peacebuilding- and particularly in "religious peacebuilding" are articulating their own goals and objectives. This will become apparent through discussions of my interview data later in the chapter.

**Research Methodology**

I conducted semi-structured field interviews in Lebanon between March 2014-July 2015. I interviewed 24 individuals, concentrating my interviews primarily in Beirut and its suburbs, with a few interviews in the mountains north of the city and in Saida, though I interviewed a number of individuals who originate from and work in other areas.[145] A small handful were expatriates (from Europe or from other Arab states) who lived in Lebanon working for international organizations. I selected respondents from different sects in order to get a sampling of perspectives, and I spoke with persons who reported different levels of religious commitment- some were religious leaders, while others identified as people of faith but had varying levels of engagement with the

[145] Beyond logistical and safety considerations, I focused my research interviews on Beirut because metropolitan Beirut holds an estimated 1/3 of the country's population.

institutions affiliated with their faith tradition. Still others identified themselves as secular.[146]

I spoke with peacebuilding actors, religious leaders, and political officials. Interviewees spoke from both individual and organizational perspectives on how they have engaged religion in peacebuilding work, and how they think about the impact of this work within the Lebanese socio-political context. This included practitioners working for bilateral, international, and local organizations, including both governmental and non-governmental entities. Many were born and raised in Lebanon, and my respondents spanned several generations. Some had been working in peacebuilding or doing inter-religious work for decades, while others were newer to active engagement in this work.

I selected my interview respondents through preliminary outreach to individuals or organizations that are key players in the field of religious peacebuilding, based on my initial desk research. Once on site, I recruited new interviewees through snowball sampling, taking recommendations from those with whom I interacted on the ground in Lebanon. These interviews allowed me to understand how those working in peacebuilding spaces, and in explicitly religious peacebuilding spaces, articulate and understand the work that they are doing.

My analysis in this chapter combines the findings from these interviews with a study of, materials from a large sampling of peacebuilding organizations. These materials included evaluations, internal planning documents, and public project and

[146] Though it is important to note that while a number of Lebanese consider themselves to be secular, through the eyes of the state and society, they must still be part of a sect in order to participate in the nation, and thus all Lebanese who identified as secular still also had a sectarian affiliation.

program descriptions and advertisements. These materials help to supplement my interviews by demonstrating how practitioners involved in these approaches frame their objectives, goals, and scope of work for both internal purposes as well as for external audiences. Additionally, I drew upon survey data, including the World Values Survey Wave 6 surveys, and desk studies of recent writings on the Lebanese socio-political situation.

**Scope and Structure**

This case study proceeds as follows: first, I outline the social and political history of religion and conflict in Lebanon, in three stages from the Ottoman era to the present. One could, of course, break down each of these periods of time much further, as each time period includes a number of different phases and events. However, my purpose in this division is not to exhaustively cover the details of Lebanon's modern history, but to highlight several defining moments throughout Lebanese history that contributed to the development of the sectarian and religious identity politics seen in Lebanon today. In the next chapter, I examine the various approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding in Lebanon before analysing the success and shortcomings of these efforts, vis a vis social cohesion in Lebanon. Through this, I will uncover for the reader key principles useful for better analyzing the relationships between religion and social cohesion beyond the Lebanese context, providing a refined theoretical basis for such research.

**Locating Religion in Lebanon: Nation Building and Beyond**

Lebanon is a "community of communities," meaning that it is not a country made up of individuals, but rather a country made up of distinctive sectarian communities that relate to the state and to one another as such. Nearly every person I spoke with agreed upon this description. This community of communities, for some, is what Lebanon is at its core- an interminable given. For those who take this perspective, the challenge of peacebuilding in Lebanon involves navigating and balancing the needs and desires of communities *as such*. Others, however, spoke of this as *the* problem that Lebanon must overcome in order to move forward. For those in this camp, a country cannot have a cohesive national identity if it is a nation of community identities that are stronger than, or at least equal to, the national identity. For these actors, overcoming the sub-group identities are the only way forward for a cohesive Lebanese nation that is inclusive, coherent, and just, given that at present, Lebanese individuals only have rights in so far as they are members of recognized sectarian communities, as well as through their membership in families and villages.

In understanding inter-communal violence, we must ask how Lebanese communal identities came to be defined as such, and how they came to assert socio-political meaning. Religion is strategically tied up in the creation of boundaries. Indeed, the naming of religions as such, and the identification of people with particular religious

group identities, have always been part of a socio-political boundary-making process, as discussed in Chapter Two of this project.[147]

To say national identity is inclusive of religious identities is Lebanon is a bit misleading: as many interview subjects reiterated over and over, Communal belonging is central to national belonging in Lebanon. One has to be part of a religious community to have full access to citizenship and state services in many ways. Communal belonging mediates access to and participation in politics (you must vote as a member of your community, which is indicated on your ID card, and the MP positions are allocated by sect), as well as access to personal and family legal services, such as marriage, inheritance, burial, and the like.

To understand how communal and sectarian politics emerged as a key driving force in Lebanese society, we must first understand how religion manifested, and indeed *became,* in Lebanon during the socio-political conflicts marking its history. Our ability to analyze peacebuilding efforts that invoke religion rests on the way in which we understand how religion shows up in Lebanon's conflict history. *How* was religion or sect in Lebanon produced as a prioritized identity marker through its history? This section traces the moments and processes that formed and, at times, crystallized communal and sectarian group identities (and the content or meaning thereof) throughout key phases of Lebanese history. Indeed, it shows that what it meant to be religious in Lebanon changed over time, in response to socio-political dynamics and "moments of groupness," and the

[147] See Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; and Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions.*

meaning of religion itself was often shaped through friction and conflict, as much as it contributed to the various historical conflict dynamics.

***Ottoman Era & the Creation of a Communal System***

The Ottoman Empire existed as a multi-religious state. While Sunni Islam was the official religion of the Empire, non-Muslim communities had their own courts, as part of the *millet* system, to deal with a wide range of personal matters, rather than being subjected to *Shari'a*, as was the case with Muslims living under Ottoman rule.[148] In exchange for protection and autonomy, Christian and Jewish communities paid a personal tax (*jizya*), in part to demonstrate their loyalty to the Empire.[149] Jews and Christians were thus integrated into the political and social life of the Ottoman Empire (including important roles in trade and finance), while also being treated as separate groups.

The Empire conferred authority to Jewish and Christian local religious leaders to run their courts and to collect the poll tax.[150] In this way, religious leaders were treated as the representatives of their communities and were given a large degree of control over "their people." This was not, however, unique to the way Christian or Jewish communities were treated, as in general, the Ottoman Empire treated people not as individuals, but as members of communities or units, as Albert Hourani observes:

> In principle, Ottoman society was divided sharply into rulers (*asker*, literally soldiers) and subjects (*reaya*, literally the flock)." "The ruler and his *asker* looked

[148] Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 220.

[149] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 217, 220.

[150] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 220.

> at the *reaya* not as a collection of individuals to be dealt with directly, but rather as a number of groups.[151]

Under Ottoman rule, then, groups were seen as distinct units, sometimes specified by religion and otherwise specified by other group organizing mechanisms (village, family, and so on). However, Maria Couroucli notes that these group identities, while legally specified under the Ottomans, also had some fluidity that began to dissipate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The recent anthology *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean* provides extensive research on the shifts in the way religious communities in the Mediterranean interacted over shared religious spaces. Couroucli argues in the introduction to this volume that, while the Ottoman Empire constituted a multi-confessional political construct, the introduction of the nation-state model into the Middle East instigated a quest for homogeneity, resulting in religious division and, in some cases, outright animosity toward those of religions different from the homogenous body politic.[152]

The division of groups into clear-cut categories of belonging, between and within nation-states, combined with colonial encounters within societies, spurred a quest for the clarification of what it means to belong, to a nation or to a sub-group within that nation. Couroucli argues that, "During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, within most circum-Mediterranean nation-states, Christians, Jews, and Muslims strived to achieve religious homogeneity within political territories, putting an end to a long history of

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[151] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 219.

[152] Maria Couroucli, Introduction to *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, ed. Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

cohabitation."[153] Couroucli describes the multi-confessional nature of the Ottoman Empire, albeit with differing statuses for different religious communities, in comparison to the more homogenous nations emerging in Western Europe during the same era. Unlike in many Western European societies, religious minorities were officially recognized under the Ottomans.[154] Intermarriage and mixed families were common in the Ottoman Empire, and interactions with the religious Other was an everyday reality for many.

Couroucli is quick to point out that this reality of cohabitation under the Ottomans should not be oversimplified, as communities living together does not necessarily mean that persons or communities treat one another as equals or with respect.[155] Living together looks different in disparate spaces, and the bounds of religious identity are often complex and, at times, fluid. Mixed families through intermarriage and the sharing of sacred spaces by individuals and communities were realities of life in much of the Ottoman Empire. This challenges the notion of distinct boundaries between the religious communities of the Eastern Mediterranean, including those in Mount Lebanon, but the point that the state interpolates its citizens through the lens of religious community remains.

While certainly Lebanon's history does not begin with the Ottoman era, in order to tell the story of how sectarianism became a force to be reckoned with in Lebanon, one

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[153] Couroucli, Introduction to *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, 3.

[154] See Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 207-248.

[155] Couroucli, Introduction to *Sharing Sacred Spaces*, 4.

must begin in the late modern era. After all, sectarianism is arguably a modern story. The Ottoman era saw a number of critical changes in the Levant, particularly as European actors began to enter the geographical space. Ussama Makdisi has convincingly argued that it was through the dynamic nineteenth century European-Ottoman encounters (both conflicting and collaborative) with the local population of Mount Lebanon, particularly between 1840-1860, that sectarianism was developed and took root, laying the foundation for the ways sectarianism now operates in Lebanese social and political life.[156]

The Ottoman territories were divided into *Vilayets*, or administrative centers. Mount Lebanon was part of the *Vilayet* of Beirut, while portions of the territory that later became Greater Lebanon (the Bekaa Valley, Baalbeck, and elsewhere) were under the *Vilayet* of Damascus.[157] Leila Fawaz has observed that "Ottoman control was hardly felt in Mount Lebanon, where no direct Ottoman authority existed before the nineteenth century. The Ottomans kept an eye on it, but left it alone."[158] Prior to the 1800s, then, the area of Mount Lebanon was not a central focus of Ottoman governing elites.

The two predominant groups residing there were Druze, who held most of the higher ranking administrative and military positions, and Maronite Christians, who worked in commerce and finance, as well as production roles, and were primarily commoners.[159] Certainly, there were conflicts between individuals and communities

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[156] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

[157] Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 25.

[158] Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 15.

[159] Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon,* 2nd Edition (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 4.

prior to the developments of the nineteenth-century in Mount Lebanon, and in the Levant more generally, but the centrality of religious identity as the mode of group organization was a modern innovation. Religion in Mount Lebanon had long been lived out in a highly fluid way, with Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians both venerating Mary in shared sacred spaces,[160] and religion was not the primary identity category for social organization. Even if religion was one key identity category for social and political organization under the Ottoman Empire, that did not necessarily map directly onto the way life was organized on the ground, often beyond the firm grasp of Ottoman powers. Makdisi argues that social standing, primarily divided between elites and commoners, was much more important for social organization than was religious identity, as elites across sectarian lines had common interest in maintaining financial and social power.[161]

In the 1840s, as an effort to maintain control in light of the encroaching European influence in the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire began restructuring social dynamics through the *Tanzimat* reforms. These reforms used the language of revitalization of the Islamic tradition, maintaining a distinctness from European powers, while also giving citizenship and increased civil rights to Christians and other non-Muslim communities in Ottoman-controlled areas. This was viewed as part of the modernization process, attempting to strengthen the Ottoman Empire in the model of other contemporary strong states, and also served to instill Ottoman affinity and ownership within these religious minorities. Hourani points to the important merchant roles of Christians and Jews, prior

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[160] Couroucli, Introduction to *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*.

[161] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 35.

to and especially following *Tanzimat*, aiding in Ottoman negotiations with foreign bodies.[162] Thus, certain religious minorities benefitted as elites within new Ottoman social and economic structures, and had the added benefit of easier access to European citizenship, which exempted them from numerous taxes and laws of the Empire. Additionally, the reforms came with a more explicit separation of religious groups, with Ottoman and European powers dividing Mount Lebanon into two districts, separating the Maronites from the Druze, in 1842.

Makdisi argues that the new emancipation of Maronites through the *Tanzimat* reforms is what led to ethno-religious uprisings, as British, French and Ottomans vied for control of the Mount Lebanon region through the local inhabitants by attempting to win their loyalty.[163] Tensions built on both inter- and intra-religious rivalries and led to Maronite peasant uprisings in 1858 and a bloody war in 1860. These skirmishes reflected the newly constructed organizing structures, as neighbors who previously lived alongside one another in peace turned on one another. Makdisi asserts that this violence was not only inter-communal, but also intra-communal for both communities, as part of each community's own boundary-making process in the midst of social and political change. This intra-communal social violence, he points out, was "a fundamental part of broader religious violence across sectarian communities."[164] This tension, as part of the boundary-making processes that accompany social conflict, is an important but often

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[162] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 235-36.

[163] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon," 24.

[164] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism,* 3.

overlooked feature of conflict in Lebanon from the *Tanzimat* period to the present. The *Règlement Organique* put a formal end to the strife in 1861, and in essence institutionalized communal representation, as communal leaders came to an agreement *as representatives of their communities*, building on the foundation of communal representativity under the Ottomans.[165]

Leila Fawaz argues that the Lebanese civil war in 1860 was both a reflection of changing dynamics and loss of balance between local communities, combined with the incursions from regional and international actors, without which, she argues, "no war-and, hence, no peace—is feasible."[166] In this same vein, Makdisi has argued that the violent episodes between 1840-1860 were not

> symptomatic of the failure of a nation or nationalism but as an expression of a new form of local politics and knowledge that arose in a climate of transition and reform in the mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and that laid the foundations for a (later) discourse of nationalist secularism.[167]

These local politics and knowledge reflect a shift in international and regional engagement and attention on Mount Lebanon, combined with a modern Euro-Christian approach to understanding religious identity.

The dynamic process of shifting the meaning of religious identity in Mount Lebanon drew on a Christian-Islamic civilizational narrative that had become a popular explanatory frame in the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth-century, Makdisi argues, Lebanese society was opened to "Ottoman and European discourses of reform that made

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[165] Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 13; Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 161.

[166] Fawaz, *An Occasion for War,* 228.

[167] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 6.

religion the site of a colonial encounter between a self-styled 'Christian' West and what it saw as its perennial adversary, an 'Islamic' Ottoman Empire."[168] This pervasive modern narrative shaped, and was shaped by, Ottoman and European encounters in Mount Lebanon. Religion thus "became the site of the colonial encounter in the Ottoman Empire in that European officials defined the parameters of reform through a modernization discourse couched in terms of a religious civilizational clash,"[169] thus enshrining religious difference through these internal-external socio-political interactions. Makdisi goes on to argue that, "This encounter profoundly altered the meaning of religion in the multiconfessional society of Mount Lebanon because it emphasized sectarian identity as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims."[170] Thus, the result of these nineteenth-century dynamic interactions in Mount Lebanon set a new course for religious identity as a socio-political organizing force for the local population.

Part of the European interest in the Mount Lebanon region stemmed from the European narrative of Mount Lebanon as a Christian enclave.[171] In early encounters between Europeans and the local residents of Mount Lebanon, Europeans viewed Maronites as their brothers and sisters in faith, as Catholics loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, but as "nominal" Christians. This desire to save local Catholics from themselves and from Ottoman powers, was used to justify further European involvement in the

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[168] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 2.

[169] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 9-10.

[170] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 2.

[171] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 1.

region. As Makdisi argues, "European insistence on essential differences between Christianity and Islam provided one of the key legitimating factors to their intervention in the Middle East."[172] European powers relied on an understanding that "real religion" is a matter of right beliefs- beliefs that were not, in the opinion of European visitors, sufficiently reflected in the Maronites and other Christians of Mount Lebanon. Religious identities in Mount Lebanon- as elsewhere outside of Europe- were understood in much more material, rather than belief-centric, ways. Thus, a modern Euro-Christian conceptualization of religion[173] heavily shaped the early modern European interactions with the Christians of Mount Lebanon. While Sunni and Shi'a Muslims were not a strong presence in Mount Lebanon, both Maronite and Druze elites interacted with them elsewhere, often in exploitative ways. This history plays into the ways that the communities interacted when they did come into greater contact through the process of creating the Lebanese state.

Throughout the nineteenth century, following the *Tanzimat* reforms and the surrounding changes in Mount Lebanon's social and political dynamics, both Maronite and Druze populations began to prioritize religious community and identity above and beyond other forms of kinship with their neighbors. Thus, over time, the *ta'ifa*, or sect, became the prevailing loyalty and mode of social order.[174] This led to popular mobilization, sometimes in contradiction with the project of the elites. According to

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[172] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 2.

[173] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions.*

[174] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 1-2.

Makdisi, "The elites tried to project a stable and ordered vision of the religious nation, while popular elements sought to appropriate religious discourse for social liberation."[175] Ruling powers created new organizational structures as part of the interplay between European colonial encroachment and Ottoman pushback.

It would be a mistake to stop here, however, and accept that through the skirmishes of the mid-1800's, sectarianism became a static organizing force in Lebanon. The nature, and the very meaning, of sectarianism is itself always changing. In this way, we see religious identity shifting as well, as it intertwines with the emergence of the sect. What Makdisi refers to as sectarianism in 1860 laid the groundwork for, but is not the same as, the sectarianism in the founding of Lebanon as a nation-state, or the sectarianism in the civil war, or immediately post-Ta'if, or in the present day. And yet, the foundation is critical, as an "expression of a new form of local politics and knowledge"[176] upon which sectarianism was built, manifesting itself in multiple forms from the late modern period to the present. The Ottoman period, including the increased interaction with European powers in its later years, laid critical groundwork for the current sectarian structures and modes of religious identity and expression we see in Lebanon today, through the key "moments of groupness" found in the tensions, interactions and clashes outlined above.

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[175] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 2.

[176] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 6.

***Transitions to Statehood: Codifying Sectarianism***

By 1864, Mount Lebanon had stabilized and was governed by an administrative council comprised of representatives from the Maronite, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Sunni Muslim and Shi'a Muslim communities. The Ottomans had established much of Lebanon as a *Mutasarrifiya*, a subdivision of the *Vilayet,* and this *Mutasarrifiya* was further broken down into districts. The *Mutasarrifiya* of Lebanon was ruled by a Christian administrator, demonstrating the agreement between the French and the Ottoman authorities.[177] Under this arrangement, Lebanon experienced what many have called the "Long Peace,"[178] without much conflict to note.

By the early 1860s, Maronite Christians had become a clear majority in Mount Lebanon, and were also becoming increasingly wealthier than the Druze population.[179] The years between 1860 and 1914 were characterized by further reform and modernization, and specifically, by growth in commerce and industry in the Middle East, which came along with increased population movement. [180] In the case of Lebanon, there was a large outflow of people, with an estimated 300,000 people leaving Lebanon (often for the Americas) by 1914.[181] Beirut, however, grew in industry and in population, and Mount Lebanon became economically tied both to Beirut and to the European market.[182]

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[177] Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 42.

[178] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 42.

[179] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 47.

[180] Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 280-286.

[181] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 294.

[182] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 42.

The balance of social power shifted further away from cultivators, toward those who owned or controlled land, and stratification increased between the wealthy and the poor. European cultural influence also rose, and Christian and Jewish populations in particular took to European styles of dress, differentiating them in a more visible way from Muslim populations in many parts of the state.[183]

The decline of the Ottomans, particularly in light of the Russian defeat of the Ottomans in the war of 1877, brought both economic depression and a renewed desire for independence in Mount Lebanon.[184] The Sykes-Picot Accords of 1916 divided up the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces between the British and the French, with Lebanon falling to the French. Thus, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire brought about the birth of *Grand Liban* (Greater Lebanon) in 1920; this was a result, in part, of Maronites petitioning the French mandate authority for such an arrangement.[185] The European powers, and in particular the French, collaborated with Lebanese elites to forcibly create the Lebanese republic, under the French Mandate, in 1926.[186]

Violent outbreaks followed the imposition of the French Mandate, as Greater Lebanon's Muslim population in particular (though joined by some Maronites, and by other Lebanese Christian sects) rejected the legitimacy of the French Mandate and called for an independent Arab state or for Greater Lebanon to join with Syria.[187] The French

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[183] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 295-7.

[184] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 50-51.

[185] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 14.

[186] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 80.

[187] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 80.

Mandate nurtured sectarianism through both politics and culture. Under the mandate, the French worked to control not only political institutions, but also undertook a campaign of cultural diplomacy, which required collaboration with local political and religious elites. Indeed, Lebanese religious councils, in collaboration with French authorities, served as censorship bodies for cinema and other forms of entertainment and culture.[188]

As Jennifer Dueck has observed, the French government aimed (often unsuccessfully) to keep their political and cultural entrees separate; thus, they "relied almost exclusively on nongovernmental intermediaries for cultural interaction with the local population. These intermediaries included both religious and secular associations, which had diverse objectives and served different target populations."[189] The role of French cultural influence under the mandate supplemented political control and gave power to religious bodies in particular to vet and distribute various cultural artifacts.

The founding constitution, which gave Maronite elites the most power, was later supplemented by the 1943 National Pact (*al-Mithaq al-Watani*), adopted as part of the process of Lebanese independence from European powers and often referred to as the unwritten constitution of Lebanon.[190] This Pact divided power among the religious communities, giving the Maronites the presidency, the Sunnis the prime minister position, and to the Shi'a, the speaker of the Parliament, and these divisions of power and

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[188] See Elizabeth Thomspon, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 206.

[189] Jennifer Dueck, "International Rivalry and Culture in Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate," in *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy,* ed. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 145-6.

[190] Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 72; Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 16.

position reserved for members of specific sects continue through the upper military positions to numerous other public service jobs. The activities and rights of citizens were tied to their religious communities, from personal status laws to political participation. Lebanese citizenship was thus defined by membership in a religious community.[191]

The Pact also attempted to settle, though quite vaguely, the dispute between Muslims and Christians living in Greater Lebanon about whether Lebanon should embrace a distinct Phoenician heritage or Christian identity, or join the pan-Arabist movement that was emerging. The Pact indulged both, by asserting a unique Lebanese identity and heritage with an "Arab face."[192] Salloukh, et. al, note that there is dissonance between the text of the 1926 constitution and the spirit of the National Pact. The constitution elevates the power of the president above the other offices, while the Pact spread power more evenly between the government offices, and thereby between confessional groups.[193]

Khalidi asserts that two factors explain the survival of the Pact in its early period. First, Lebanon was in the pre-modernization stage. Second, the Lebanese leaders belonged to the same "ruling elites" of other Arab nations.[194] As internal pressures of modernization and external pressures of other Arab nations escalated, however, the 1943 Pact lost its ability to contain and control the Lebanese population.

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[191] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 1.

[192] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 16.

[193] Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism,* 17.

[194] Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Studies in International Affairs, 1979), 100.

This period of transition from the Ottoman Empire to a Lebanese state was critical in shaping new meanings and expressions of religious identity, which was becoming more subsumed into the sect. Increased European involvement precipitated a stronger emphasis on religious identity and difference, as non-Muslim religious communities in particular benefitted from capitalizing in numerous ways on religious affinity with European powers. The Pact, by dividing power among the religious communities, formalized the emergence of the sect as the primary form of national belonging and participation.

This critical period of nation-building, or creating the "imagined community" of Lebanon, solidified the religious community as a key organizing mechanism for the state and instituted religious community representation as the means through which individuals, as *members of communities*, gain access to the state. These ways of structuring and imagining religious identity vis a vis the state played in many ways into the civil war that broke out in the mid-1970s in Lebanon, calling the possibility of national cohesion into question.

***1975-1990: Civil War***

The literature on the causes of the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war offers multiple, contested views on the most salient contributing factors. While some argued that internal issues, including socio-economic inequalities and rising poverty rates were most important, others have argued that intervening external factors, including the influx of Palestinians into Lebanon and the impact of other regional powers, including Syria, were

the more important contributing factors.[195] Suffice it to say, a number of both internal and external dynamics were at play in Lebanon in the 1960's and 70's, and dramatic and sustained conflict broke out in 1975 that continued- on different fronts and between different actors- until the Ta'if Accord, put into effect in 1990.

Income inequality and increased levels of poverty were a key contributing factor to the social unrest in Lebanon in the latter part of the twentieth century. Carolyn Gates has argued that the development of "peripheral capitalism" in Lebanon, beginning in the nineteenth century, paved the way for multiple levels of inequality and unrest by the middle of the twentieth century. Peripheral capitalism, in the case of Lebanon, is characterized by an external orientation (a capital economy built to fulfill the needs of imperial powers, rather than national interests), dependence on external entities and forces, and underdevelopment of the economic infrastructures within the country itself.[196]

Gates argues that this form of economic development benefitted a small political-bureaucratic elite while disenfranchising much of the rest of the population, and eventually led to,

> long-term unemployment or underemployment of the growing labour force, increasing socio-economic, regional and sectarian inequalities, large-scale emigration, dependence on volatile foreign conditions, discord and upheaval, inter alia.[197]

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[195] For further discussion of this recurring debate within the analysis of Lebanon's various conflicts, see Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 21.

[196] Carolyn Gates, "The Historical Role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon," *Center for Lebanese Studies* (September 1989): 8.

[197] Gates, "The Historical Role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon," 5.

These combined factors contributed to communal inequalities and polarization as well, as there was a wide-spread perception that Christians were benefitting from this arrangement far more than the Muslim population.[198]

This drastic wealth inequality and poverty rates by the 1960's led to popular unrest and mobilization, for worker's rights in the early 1970's, especially in 1972 with the Ghandour strike, and with the Protein Company in 1975.[199] Additionally, popular sectarianism revealed itself through the elite politics of 1975-1990:

> Whereas compromises between the elites were meant to divide power among different communities, they in fact divided power among the elites of various communities at the expense of the divided and disenfranchised majority. Whereas the elites compromised in the hope of containing sectarian conflicts, many of the citizens used sectarianism to express their discontent with the product of elitist compromises.[200]

Thus, Makdisi asserts, the sectarian politics and mobilization during the civil war was both between sects, as well as within, with communities mobilizing against their representative elites.

Additionally, Salloukh, et. al., point to both the failure to manage "the inherent contradictions of Lebanon's confessional politics," and the fact that the state failed to maintain a monopoly over the use of legitimate violence as important contributing factors.[201] The disruptive regional changes, including the creation of the United Arab

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[198] Gates, "The Historical Role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon," 36. Gates does note that the perception that Christians were primarily middle and upper class, while Muslims were primarily working class, is not backed up by the data; however inaccurate, this perception was indeed widespread.

[199] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 2.

[200] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 2.

[201] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 20.

Republic in 1958 and the establishment of the PLO in 1964, which brought an armed Palestinian contingent to Lebanon, were also key contributing factors to the outbreak of civil war.[202]

The role of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the mass displacement of Palestinians throughout the region and the political mobilization of Palestinian leaders, is a critical factor in the lead-up to and ongoing dynamics of the Lebanese civil war. As Samir Khalaf articulates,

> Palestinians were likewise [like Christian communities] threatened by the fear of being liquidated. Lebanon, by the mid-seventies, was their last abode so-to-speak. It had become at the least their most strategic stronghold. After the loss of its Jordan base, the PLO was more entrenched in Lebanon.[203]

The first serious clashes in Beirut in the 1970s were between Palestinians and Christian militias,[204] demonstrating the tension that the presence and power of Palestinian refugees and political-military elites brought to the already-strained Lebanese nation. Meanwhile, the Ba'thists were gaining power in the 1960s in both Iraq and Syria, and Beirut became an oasis for dissenters fleeing these countries.[205]

Several events are often considered flashpoints for the break-out of full-fledged war, including rioting that broke out during a Fishermen's strike in Saida (opposing foreign capitalistic tampering with the local fishing industry) and killed Marouf Saad, a

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[202] Zahar, Marie-Joelle, "Power Sharing in Lebanon: Foreign Protectors, Domestic Peace, and Democratic Failure," in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy After Civil Wars*, ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 230-31.

[203] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 35.

[204] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 222.

[205] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 210.

very popular leader in Sidon.[206] Just a couple months later, Pierre Gemayyel (leader of the Kata'ib party) was attending a new Maronite Church in Ain al-Rummaneh, a Christian area in east Beirut when four men present there were killed in a drive-by shooting. That afternoon, a bus full of Palestinian militiamen returning from a parade drove through the same area and Christian militiamen attacked the bus, killing all the passengers, operating under the assumption that the Palestinian commandos were implicated the morning attack and were coming back for more.[207] These incidents, serving as triggers within the larger context of internal and regional change and unrest, led political parties and existing militias to increase mobilization and recruitment, and to establish paramilitaries where they did not yet exist.[208]

Salloukh, et. al., assert that, during the civil war, what were once confessional distinctions turned decidedly into sectarian fault lines.[209] Sectarian militias and mass communications served to harden sectarian boundaries and narratives. Khalaf observes that,

> Precipitously many of the original nonsectarian sources of unrest receded and the conflict began to acquire a life of its own and was deflected into directions unrelated to the initial sources of hostility. The fighting also became bloodier and more belligerent as it evolved into a struggle over the 'indivisible' and more contentious principles of communal identity, cultural heritage, national sovereignty, pluralism, and sectarian coexistence.[210]

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[206] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 227-28.

[207] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 229.

[208] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 230.

[209] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 20.

[210] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 231.

Khalaf refers to the war as a "'revolving-door' of relentless cycles of violence, quite often provoked by 'unidentified assailants.'"[211] There were at least 186 factions at war in Lebanon by 1984,[212] some more prominent and involved in more high-profile confrontations, with others playing more peripheral roles, and sectarian in-fighting increasing the number of players. Interviewees referred to Lebanon's "27 wars" that took place both between and within sects, as well as between neighborhoods, showing that a clean analysis of the civil war as strictly (or reductively) sectarian is inaccurate.[213] Indeed, as Marie-Joelle Zahar articulates, "The two warring factions are often labeled Christian and Muslim, but it is more accurate to describe them as pro- and anti-status quo."[214]

Alliances and collaborations were always shifting. While in the early part of the war, Shi'a in the South showed solidarity with the Palestinian guerrilla movement, this started the shift in the late 1970's.[215] Infighting among Shi'ites broke down primarily along the faultline between Amal and Hizbullah, formed in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion and backed by Iran.[216] Khalaf calls the Maronite militia "turf wars" the most ruthless, particularly between Samir Ja'ja (Geagea) and Michele Awn (Aoun).

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[211] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 43.

[212] This figure is according to Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 240.

[213] Author interview with Respondent 24, July 10, 2015.

[214] Zahar, "Power Sharing in Lebanon," 231.

[215] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 213.

[216] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 46; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon,* 229.

Additionally, new Arab parties (including Ba'athists, Socialist, Arab Nationalist, among others) had begun recruiting in the 1950s and 60s, leading to increased affiliations with these parties among portions of the Lebanese population.[217] Additionally, the PLO and the Lebanese National Movement formed an early alliance (in what some refer to as the "Two Years' War" between 1975-76) around common interests. Traboulsi observes that, "During the 'Two Years' War', the Palestinian faction had invested in the project to impose the reforms of the LNM. In this new phase of the war, the roles were reversed, with Lebanese factions mainly serving a Palestinian agenda."[218] Dynamics shifted with the withdrawal of Palestinian leaders in 1983 and the subsequent decline of the Sunni community's prominence in political and military representation.[219]

The war had many casualties, beyond the estimated 71,328 killed and 97,184 injured.[220] The spatial dimensions of Lebanon were drastically affected, with huge numbers of people displaced through "sectarian cleansing" of certain areas- Traboulsi cites 157,500 Muslims and 670,000 Christians displaced over the course of the war[221]- and the erosion of common spaces for people from different sects to gather.[222] Khalaf remarks, "The war did not only destroy common spaces. It also encouraged the

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[217] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 213-14.

[218] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 219.

[219] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 235.

[220] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 244.

[221] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 244.

[222] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 246.

formation of separate, exclusive, and self-sufficient spaces."[223] The homogenization and decentralization of social geography has had lasting effects on Lebanese society and politics.

The effects of the war included extreme psycho-social impacts on the Lebanese people, for whom fear and uncertainty became a given part of life throughout and following the war. A 1983 survey demonstrated some of these effects, with 66% of respondents reporting that they had been compelled to take refuge in a shelter at some point over the duration of the war thus far, and 74% reporting some form of deprivation.[224] Additionally, the war created its own infrastructure for many services that should have been provided by the state, developing a "war system" that has been perpetuated long after the war came to a formal end.[225] The lasting effects of the war have continued far beyond the fighting itself.

Additionally, religious and sectarian identity took on new shapes and meanings through the course of the war. Khalaf's 1983 survey showed that 85% of respondents did not report a change in their religious practices, but did report increased confessional or sectarian identities.[226] While religion was not a "root cause" of the Lebanese wars between 1975-1990, religion certainly played into the violence in a variety of ways. One interviewee articulated that religion was heavily employed to justify violent actions during the war. According to this former general, leaders needed to use theology to

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[223] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 246-47.

[224] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 253.

[225] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 251.

[226] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 271.

justify what was going on, to control one's "troup", and to be the most compelling (and often extreme) voice for his people.[227] He noted the way in which communal histories played into justifications for acts of violence during the war:

> I was a Maronite in my head, if you like. I was a Phoenician, which became somehow French. My father's history book- and I still have it- says in the beginning, 'our ancestors, the Gauls.' So somehow in the beginning a part of us was French. ...Jesus came to Tyre and Saida- do you know he walked here in the Bible? The Bible speaks of Lebanon 70 times...I needed data to back my critical options or opinions.[228]

This sentiment was echoed by many Lebanese Maronites with whom I spoke; they grew up with a sense that Christians had a special connection to the land in Lebanon. Communal histories and religious language were utilized across sects to justify acts of violence and what was heralded as self-defense during the war. Through the course of the 1975-1990 conflict(s), what it meant to be religious changed in a number of ways, interacting with other conflict dynamics. Sectarian identities were hardened at different junctures, through the many moments of crystallizing and mobilizing group identities as conflictive.

Traboulsi observes that, "The war, partially the result of sectarian conflicts, was to become the crucible in which those sects were reproduced."[229] He goes on to argue that, "When the militias finally 'cleansed' their territories and came to control 'their own people' and run their affairs, pressure on the individual to define himself/herself in terms

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[227] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[228] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[229] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 235.

of a unique social and cultural sectarian identity reached its climax."[230] Thus, the geographic and demographic changes throughout the war also came with a stronger bonding cohesion within communities, with increasingly extreme identifications with one's sect and only one's sect.

It is important to note here the particular ways in which Lebanese religious communities are structured, in order to better understand the meaning of these hierarchies being socially and politically institutionalized in Lebanon. The Maronite Christian community is in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, and is led by the Maronite patriarch. Bishops and clergy are under the leadership of the patriarch. The highest level leader of the Sunni community in Lebanon is the grand mufti of the Republic of Lebanon, with other clergy (including local scholars, imams and judges) exercising spiritual and legal leadership at the local levels. Leadership of the Shi'a community is a bit more complicated, although certainly the Maronite and Sunni hierarchical structures are not without their own complexities. While the Higher Shi'a Council is officially (state recognized) the leader of the Shi'a hierarchy, Hizbullah in particular (under the clerical guidance of Shaykh Fadlallah until his death in 2010) has asserted its leadership over the Shi'a community, particularly since 2006, even though it was not recognized as the clerical leadership of the Shi'a community by the government.[231] The Druze have a spiritual leader, along with a political leader like the

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[230] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 239-40.

[231] Alexander D. M. Henley, "Religious Authority and Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 16, 2016, accessed February 21, 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/16/religious-authority-and-sectarianism-in-lebanon-pub-66487.

other communities (which often have several persons vying to be the political representatives of the sects), the Greek Orthodox have an Archdiocese in Beirut led by a Metropolitan bishop, and the other religious communities have their own hierarchical structures as well, which often act in cooperation with (and are represented in) the government in various ways.

The strong communal identities that were formed and institutionalized through the creation of the Lebanese state played into the way that war dynamics were interpreted and carried out. While socio-economic factors, combined with the pressures of regional crises, were arguably the key factors leading to unsustainable societal frustration, violence was often carried out and seen through the les of sectarian division and power. The war itself continued to shape and harden increasingly politicized and militarized sectarian identities, reinforcing this frame as the war went on.

***Ta'if and Beyond: Reconstructing Peace in Lebanon***

The Ta'if Accord, which formally ended the war, was drawn up in the fall of 1989 when Lebanese members of parliament met in Saudi Arabia, along with a number of non-parliamentarian religious and sectarian leaders, but remained in a limbo state until the fall of 1990, when it was implemented by force.[232] It was, in some sense, a new National Pact. While it didn't ultimately change the *style* of leadership, it did change some key mechanisms of the nation state, as well as replacing certain individuals with new

[232] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 21.

leadership.[233] Salloukh, et. al., argue that Ta'if reinforced the sectarian order, consecrating sects "as the main pillars of political identity and mobilization in postwar Lebanon."[234] Additionally, Zahar notes that the members of parliament who were key in drafting and agreeing to Ta'if were not active conflict actors, but rather had been spectators of the war, more or less.[235]

Specifically, Ta'if shifted balance of executive power from presidency to the Council of Ministers. It's restructuring of power also reflected the rising importance of Shi'a community & the strong role of Syria as "the postwar umpire of Lebanese affairs."[236] The Ta'if split seats in Parliament evenly between Muslims and Christians, divided among the various sects. Additionally, the writers of the Ta'if employed sectarian and clientelist calculations in the distribution of all major public posts.[237] As was true with the 1943 Pact, the Ta'if acknowledged the (Maronite) President, the (Sunni) Prime Minister and the (Shi'a) Speaker of the Parliament as the primary representatives of all major demands raised by their sectarian communities, making each the foremost negotiator for each sect.[238]

Khalaf points to the Ta'if as an unfulfilled agreement, writing in 2002 that, "Foremost, Ta'if embraced the principle of abolishing religious affiliation for filling all

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[233] Makdisi, "The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon: Reconstructing the Nation-State," 3.

[234] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 21.

[235] Zahar, "Power Sharing in Lebanon," 232.

[236] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 21-22.

[237] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 23.

[238] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 21-24.

government positions, yet few practical steps have been taken thus far to accomplish it."[239] This is still the case to this day. Khalaf goes on to assert that,

> Ta'if does not constitute a paradigm shift or a radical departure from earlier attempts at political reform or conflict resolution. Indeed, it embraces some of the deeply ingrained traditions and defining elements that have long sustained its political culture: its consociative attributes, and the ethos of no victor and no vanquished.[240]

The Ta'if, then, returned Lebanon to a former version of itself without dealing with the underlying causes that led to or perpetuated the war. This observation comports with Salloukh's assertion that the Ta'if reinforces, and indeed furthers, the sectarian logic of Lebanon. Salloukh argues that the Ta'if was a pact between sects, rather than between communities. This is an important shift from the National Pact, which imagined the agreement as one between religious communities, represented by religious leadership.[241] This shows the way in which religious communal identity had shifted since the mid-1940's. By the end of the civil war, sectarian identity had emerged as something that built upon, but was also distinct from, religious communities, as sects now had political leaders, often working in concert with more explicitly religious leaders. The meaning of religious identity in Lebanon changed through the civil war period, emerging from it as decidedly sectarian. The Ta'if was an agreement among sects (with its quotas for each sect, among other elements), while the Pact was an agreement among confessions.[242] This again demonstrates the close intertwinement of religious identity

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[239] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 54.

[240] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 289-90.

[241] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism.*

[242] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism.*

and the emergence of sectarian politics. Additionally, it is worth noting that some groups (Maronites, Shi'a, etc.) were seen as distinctly Lebanese, even if they were competitive for political voice, while others, such as the Armenian Christians and the Palestinians, were viewed as foreign. These dynamics played into the battles throughout the civil war.

In leaving the dismantling of the sectarian system as a vaguely described goal for an undefined time in the future, the Ta'if "created a structural dilemma: recognizing the sectarian/political elite as custodians of the sectarian order while expecting them to reform it."[243] Zahar notes that,

> As was the case with the 1926 Constitution and the 1943 National Pact before it, Ta'if emphasized confessional compromise and inter-communal cooperation as temporary measures to facilitate transition to an integrated, non-confessional democracy; however, no steps were taken in the direction of a non-confessional regime. Rather, confessionalism became deeply institutionalized once again."[244]

Zahar goes on to observe that, "Although the Lebanese Civil War prompted a reformulation of the power-sharing formula, it did not question its fundamental logic," and also avoided casting blame on any of the war actors, allowing militias to transform themselves into political fronts without expressing responsibility or remorse for actions during the war. Many have noted Lebanon's resilience in the midst of political crisis, regionally and internally, over the years since Ta'if. This resilience, Zahar and Joy Aoun have asserted, is a negative one, prioritizing elite consolidation of power and control over democratic transition.[245]

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[243] Salloukh, et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 21.

[244] Zahar, "Power Sharing in Lebanon," 233.

[245] Zahar, "Power Sharing in Lebanon," 236; Joy Aoun and Marie-Joelle Zahar, "Confessionalism, Consociationalism, and Social Cohesion in Lebanon," in *Religion, Peacebuilding, and Social Cohesion in Conflict-Affected Countries,* Fletcher D. Cox, Catherine R. Orsborn, and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., University

Thus, while the Ta'if promised transition from sectarianism eventually, the post-conflict rebuilding processes did not include any major steps in that direction. Many interview respondents commented that there was no formal or widespread reconciliation process after Ta'if. War memories and histories set in in highly sectarian ways, and no war actors made any public admission of fault.[246] Sectarianism was reinscribed through post-war institutions, including schools in particular. The war narratives, taught differently in different schools based on communal affiliation, and most often taught informally, rather than from textbooks, reinforced the idea of historical injustices for one's sect.

Additionally, the Ta'if established *Pax Syriana*, which lasted until 2005. This arrangement gave Syria the latitude to use political and military power to help keep Lebanon calm, and included Syrian efforts to limit the power of certain political parties, including Michele Aoun's faction along with the Lebanese Forces, both of which had fought Syrian intervention in the last days of the war (though the LF did agree to the Ta'if eventually).[247] It articulated a "distinct relationship" between Beirut and Damascus, and subsequently, Syria played an important role in Lebanese politics.[248] Christian political movements in particular expressed frustration with Syrian control, and developed political narratives in accordance with this position.

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of Denver Josef Korbel School of International Studies Sie Cheou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy (2014).

[246] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[247] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 246-248.

[248] Salloukh et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 23-25.

After the Ta'if, religious and sectarian identity has continued to shift in Lebanon. The assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, and the subsequent withdraw of Syria from Lebanon, made way for new political alliances and mobilization. A number of street mobilizations pushing for Syria to leave Lebanon permanently, led to concentrated mass protests on March 8 (pro-Syria) and 14 (marking the "Cedar Revolution," the date of the formal expulsion of Syria from Lebanon) of 2006. These consolidated into two primary political alliances, reflected new political divisions along Sunni-Shi'a lines, with Christian parties represented in both political alliances.[249] Some referred to the ideological battle of the Shi'a dominated March 8 Alliance (which was pushing for political change) and the Sunni-dominated March 14 Alliance (which was pushing for maintenance of the status quo in Lebanon) as a façade for the new Sunni-Shi'a dynamics in the sectarian system.[250] This led to militias reorganizing along sectarian lines, and to the "sectarian ghettoization" of urban neighborhoods and gerrymandering for the benefit of sectarian political blocs.

Additionally, all of this played out against the backdrop of challenges to the army's power as a national force, as became evident in the 2006 war with Israel. The

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[249] At their inception, the March 8 Alliance included Nabih Berri's Amal Movement (Shi'a); Hezbollah, led by Hasan Nasrallah (Shi'a), the Marada Movement (Suleiman Frangieh, Jr.; Maronite); and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation; while the March 14 Alliance included Saad Hariri's Future Movement (Sunni), the Kataeb Party aka the Lebanese Phalanges Party (Sami Gemayel, Maronite), Walid Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (officially secular, primarily Druze), and some Independents. A short time later, Aoun and the Free Patriotic Movement joined the March 14 Alliance, then switched to the March 8 Alliance after the 2005 parliamentary elections. Jumblatt and his Progressive Socialist Party left the March 14 Alliance in 2009. See Haddad, "Lebanon: From Consociationalism to Conciliation," 406; Paul Salem "Defection Shakes Lebanon's March 14 Majority," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, August 6, 2009, accessed February 9, 2017, http://carnegie-mec.org/2009/08/06/defection-shakes-lebanon-s-march-14-majority-pub-23474.

[250] Author interview with Respondent 15, July 1, 2015; Simon Haddad, "Lebanon: From Consociationalism to Conciliation," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics,* 15 (2009): 398.

2006 war, fought primarily between Israel and Hizbullah (though most would argue on behalf, and with the support, of Lebanon more formally), led to new dynamics, with a large number of Shi'a leaving the South to escape the attacks. Hizbullah's strong performance in this war emboldened it to demand greater representation and power in Lebanon's Council of Ministers. Additionally, the alignment of the March 8 and 14 political blocs with external powers[251] was exacerbated when the uprisings began in Syria during the Arab Spring.[252]

Salloukh, et. al., argue throughout their analysis of sectarianism that it is a well-orchestrated and well-maintained system of social and political control,

> an ever-expanding but holistic complex ensemble, one that operates at the structural, institutional, and individual levels, and aims at entrenching and reproducing sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilization, while sabotaging challenges to the material underpinnings and ideological hegemony of the sectarian system.[253]

As Hashemi and Postel have argued, it is authoritarianism, rather than theology, that has contributed primarily to sectarianization.[254] The Ta'if Agreement did not change this, and indeed, after Ta'if, sectarian politics were reinforced and extended, even as sectarian belonging and alliances shifted in interaction with socio-political events. As through the war itself, sectarian identities were shaped through the peace agreement, which paved the way for the further entrenchment of the sectarian system in Lebanese

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[251] For March 14, this includes Saudi, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States; for March 8, it includes Syria and Iran. See Salloukh et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism.*

[252] Salloukh et. al, *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 29-30.

[253] Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 174.

[254] Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds, *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.

life, prescribing the mechanisms through which religious life would be filtered, informed and constrained.

**Conclusion**

This review of Lebanese socio-political history demonstrates the ways in which religious and communal identities were shaped by socio-political dynamics, or moments of groupness, over time. Sectarianism was never a given or intrinsic way of thinking about religious identity or organizing society, but rather was formed and hardened through the socio-politics of Lebanese history, including the ways in which the state has related to subjects (or citizens) through the filter of group identity. This, in turn, shaped the ways in which conflict and identity were articulated and the sticking power of communal identity politics. Religion is instrumental in Lebanon in that it happens to be the way that otherwise "typical" conflict drivers are framed, but religious identity is in and of itself changed through these dynamics. The group boundaries are fluid, but they still exist and are helping define particular groups in particular ways for particular times. These boundaries then extend beyond the course of active conflict- again, not in some static, consistent way—and remain part of the "problem" for peacebuilders, even if we concur that Lebanese conflict was not "about" religion. Engaging religion in trying to build sustainable peace in Lebanon is deeply connected to the dynamics outlined thus far in this chapter, as the religion in Lebanon that peacebuilding actors are engaging today is a product of this particular socio-political history.

## Chapter 4: Engaging Religion in Lebanese Peacebuilding

Lebanon's civil war came to an end with the Ta'if Agreement, and yet, Lebanese society and politics remains in dysfunction in numerous ways. The effects of the war have extended well beyond the end of the war itself, and many observers have attributed the divisions and dysfunction to Lebanon's communalism. Thus, there have been numerous peacebuilding approaches in the last several decades in Lebanon that draw upon religion in some way, whether explicitly or implicitly. The goal of this chapter is not to evaluate the initiatives themselves, or even their net impact, but rather to identify and differentiate the approaches to religious peacebuilding in Lebanon, how they imagine the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding in their work, and pull out trends to analyze how these approaches imagine religion and intersect with social cohesion in Lebanon more broadly.

### Mapping Religious Peacebuilding in Lebanon

The field of peacebuilding initiatives that engage religion can be sub-divided in a number of ways: engaging elites vs. grassroots; seeking common citizenship vs. inter-religious or inter-sectarian understanding; changing social perceptions vs. changing institutions.[255] Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive of one another.

[255] Several studies outline these different types of approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding. See, for example, David Smock, "Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not

Some are focused on harnessing the power and authority of religious elites to win hearts and minds for peace and unity. These range from elite-level religious dialogues to NGO engagement of grass-tops religious leaders to further local and regional peacebuilding and development projects.

Some initiatives, which will be more explicitly outlined below, focus on creating interactions between "regular people" (often with a focus on youth) that challenge or provide a counterpoint to sectarian segregation- this is seen in the programmatic work of Adyan and other similar programs. These people-to-people initiatives include programs where individuals from different sects go together to a neutral environment for a given period of time, to get to know one another and to break stereotypes. Some of these programs involve ongoing efforts to create opportunities for interaction in people's everyday lives. Some initiatives explicitly do not overtly name or discuss sectarian identities, but bring people from different backgrounds together to work together on projects for the common good.

Some, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), tend to engage religion as an instrumental good- engaged as a means to an end- while others see religious ideologies and practices as much more integrally intertwined with social conflict and therefore seek to engage religion on a deeper and more holistic level, as seen in the programmatic approaches of Hayya Bina, although these cross into the

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War, *Peaceworks* 55 (January 2006), accessed April 20, 2017, https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/01/religious-contributions-peacemaking-when-religion-brings-peace-not-war; Katherine Marshall, "Interfaith Journeys: An Exploration of History, Ideas, and Future Directions," *Georgetown University: World Faiths Development Dialogue* (February 2017), accessed April 20, 2017, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/interfaith-journeys-an-exploration-of-history-ideas-and-future-directions; and Omer, et. al, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*.

instrumental at times as well. Some involved see it as a "sideshow." In fact, many of the people deeply involved in long-term dialogue efforts see it as totally unconnected to impacting the actual conflict dynamics. However, some argued that you have no choice but to work with religious actors in Lebanon, stating that trying to overlook this reality is a sort of "colorblindness." One respondent stated that, "if someone wants really to bring change in a society, namely here in the Lebanese society, he or she cannot overlook sometimes the overwhelming role played by be it religious institutions or from a more theological...by clerics...Religion is something that is too serious to be entrusted to clerics."[256] Thus, for some, religious engagement is not a choice but a necessity.

Some actors are focused on changing individual and communal relationships (as seen in most of the dialogue groups) and some (such as Adyan) on identifying and building upon shared beliefs or common values, while others are more focused on changing institutions. The numerous and varied efforts all aim to make a better Lebanon, but articulate different visions of what "better" looks like for Lebanon, and take different approaches to doing interfaith or religiously engaged peacebuilding work. While respondents had different opinions on whether religion is simply instrumental or more integral to conflict dynamics in Lebanon, the vast majority agreed that one cannot do peacebuilding work in Lebanon without engaging with religious leaders in some way (which is not the same as, but often overlaps with, interfaith peacebuilding efforts):

> Religious people in this country are part of the social fabric so we want them present at the table when we're talking about some of these things. Now some

[256] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

groups don't like that- those groups want not to involve religious leaders, let's keep them out of the realm of politics or whatever it is. But the truth of the matter is that in this country, they have a very strong economic influence, they have a very strong moral influence, and they are at the heart of the social network and the social fabric. And as long as the laws don't change, they have a strong legal influence because they are in charge of the family courts.[257]

This reflection points to the important and intersectional ways religious leaders assert and maintain authority in Lebanon; their influence is not limited to spiritual matters or even to matters of personal and family status laws, but rather spans well beyond these into other social and political spaces as well as into the economic sector. It is thus impossible to separate out religious life in Lebanon from other aspects of life, as the institutions and leaders themselves are so deeply entrenched throughout the social, political and economic ecosystem.

A number of differences in methods, theories of change, and ultimate goals emerged through my interview conversations. Some explained the key problem as the lack of knowledge of the religious other. This interviewee stated that, "...in a country that has a number of religious identities, not knowing the other becomes obviously a hurdle."[258] For many, this includes knowing both the people who identify with that religious community, as well as the content (beliefs, practices, and so on) of the religions themselves. Others identified the problem as the sectarian system itself, and the sectarian

[257] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

[258] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

identity categories maintained therein. One practitioner working in inter-religious dialogue articulated the mission of their organization as working to "protect the religion from politicians [and see to it] that religion is not being misused by others."[259] Many named corruption and the lack of a strong central government as the key problems, noting that elites utilize and play upon religious difference to distract from these root problems that Lebanon is facing.

Within this context of diverse approaches to religion and peacebuilding in Lebanon, two key peacebuilding tracks emerged. The elite-led (or, alternatively, elite-stamped) approach, on the one hand, most often seeks to uphold communal representation/boundedness and articulates a concept of peace that prioritizes unity and cooperation between these distinct communities. The grassroots approach, on the other hand, more often looks to dismantle communal identity politics, prioritizing individual human rights and justice over unity between communities as such. This is not surprising, as elites across the board have more to gain, while ordinarily citizens have more to lose, through reforms of the sectarian system itself. These approaches to peacebuilding often overlap and are intertwined with one another, but this difference in posture reveals some of the key challenges for those who want to leverage religion for peacebuilding in the Lebanese context.

Both approaches articulated above (elite- and grassroots-led) draw upon a similar toolbox of methods. Many utilize dialogues between people from different groups, acting either as individuals or as representatives of their communities. Additionally, several

[259] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

initiatives work to explicitly engage religious leaders, at regional, national, and local levels, to help bolster projects/programs or to directly quell violence, through public speeches or publications.[260] Others focus on history and war memories, working to create common understandings of what happened in the civil war across sectarian divides.

Among the elite inter-religious networks, one key player is the National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue. One interviewee who has been engaged as a communal leader in the national dialogue since during the civil war described to me what he called the first Lebanese Christian-Muslim religious summit, held in Kuwait in 1989, at the bequest of a committee of the Arab League.[261] According to my respondent, all of the religious leaders were asked to go to Kuwait to meet with the Arab committee appointed to help negotiate an agreement on the war. 18 of the religious leaders went, all on the same flight and staying at the same conference center. Some wanted to leave early, but this interviewee said that he then piped up, saying that if the religious leaders left now, it would be easy for the outside world to describe the Lebanese war as a religious war. Instead, this interviewee agreed to draft a statement, to which all the leaders signed on the next day. The statement condemned the civil war, said explicitly that it is not a religious war, and asserted that Christians and Muslims want to live together in peace and do not give "any sort of cover to any of the militias in Lebanon",

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[260] This is a common approach among peacebuilding and development actors because research has shown that religious leaders and institutional voices (through speeches, publications, and the like) have a strong impact on either inspiring or tamping down on expressions of violence. See, for instance, Timothy D. Sisk, ed., *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict, and Peacemaking* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

[261] "Arab League Panel Opens Talks on Lebanon Crisis," *Los Angeles Times,* February 22, 1989, accessed May 31, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-02-22/local/me-253_1_arab-league

urging a political settlement from the Arab league.[262] This, the interviewee claimed, was the first Christian-Muslim agreement in Lebanon, and it helped pave the way for the Ta'if agreement. In 1993, after Ta'if, many of the same actors reconvened for the second Lebanese Christian-Muslim Summit and decided to form a national committee. This was the birth of the National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

Another notable initiative is the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue, which is involved in regional interfaith relationship building, in order to, according to one respondent, move "towards a better understanding of the religious other and [to strengthen] our interfaith dialogue and interfaith work."[263] Part of the work of this group is to equip religious communities with tools to, in the words of one of the leaders, "protect our communities from what happens outside,"[264] demonstrating a sense of solidarity among those sects or political groups seen as Lebanese (rather than foreigners) to resisting external dynamics that would throw off the equilibrium within Lebanon. This respondent went on to note that the events invoking or involving religion in the world beyond the Levant has a strong impact on internal religious self-identity and relationships. For instance, the reactions to the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed rippled through Lebanon and Syria,[265] and thus one of the dialogues this

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[262] Author interview with Respondent 9, July 3, 2015.

[263] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[264] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[265] Though the "ripple" was much more complex than portrayed in Western media, with clerics in Lebanon working to quell the violence, and some protests were not necessarily organic, as many have argued that the Syrian government played an important role in fostering the violent protests in Damascus. See Irwin Arieff, "Syria disputes US charges it incited cartoon mobs," *Free Republic* February 25, 2006, accessed February 21, 2017, http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1585196/posts?page=2. It is important to note here

group put together was between Danish and Arab people from different faith backgrounds.

A plethora of NGOs work at the grassroots level to improve inter-religious or inter-sectarian relationships. Some are local (created and run by Lebanese nationals), while others are bilateral (primarily European or America), regional, or international. As one respondent noted, "Many NGOs are being created more and more to deal with this issue, to bring people together- Muslims and Christians, and now more to brings together Sunni and Shi'a; [the Sunni-Shi'a division] is now really worrying for everyone, especially the minorities in the area because if anything happens in Lebanon it will spread all over."[266] Grassroots-focused NGOs are numerous and continue to increase, saturating the scene with programs and initiatives.

While these initiatives have focused primarily on engaging elite religious clerics, those involved in these efforts reported skepticism about how effective they are in promoting widespread, sustainable cohesion within Lebanon. As one respondent said, "They have no power, in the end. So, each one of them represents officially the religious leadership of his own sect in this dialogue committee and they are well-known in this field…[but] they are preaching to believers."[267] Some noted that this is indeed the goal: "From a religious point of view, the solution is not from communities dialoguing, but

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that sometimes vague references to "outside influences" in Lebanon is a cover for critiques of Saudi or Iranian influences in particular.

[266]Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[267] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

from an intra-community dialogue."[268] Thus, the *intra*-community education and discussions are where some see the most promise, as the "ambivalence" of any religious tradition leaves much room for divergence of approach within each religious community, and much of the strife emerges from internal battles for representativity or power, for asserting the most "true" face of a given religious tradition.

Indeed, several respondents pointed to the increasing importance of work in intra-religious dialogue, within the context of religious institutions: "We're dealing with a system of values and norms, but [we are] also dealing with institutions [when working with religion]..the value systems promoted by these religious systems are failing and if we don't engage religion in peacebuilding then it will turn against us."[269] Another noted that intra-religious work has to come first, as Christians and Muslims in Lebanon are both largely ignorant about their own religions. This respondent posited that Daesh/ISIS has given the Lebanese Muslim community an opportunity to return to the text and to intra-religious learning and examination.[270]

The biggest division that emerged from my interviews was between the grassroots and elite-centered approaches, with the former focusing on institutional change as a means of achieving justice, while the latter focuses heavily on achieving and maintaining consensus, which often means shying away from challenging the institutional status quo. While the ambivalence of religion allows room for difference in expressing any given

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[268] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[269] Author interview with Respondent 7, May 5, 2015.

[270] Author interview with Respondent 14, July 8, 2015.

tradition in a way that promotes peace or violence, another dimension emerges here, as religion can be mobilized toward maintaining or challenging the status quo. This divide runs through the peacebuilding infrastructure, and thus while numerous organizations are technically working in the same space (that of "peacebuilding"), their perspectives, goals and methods are vastly different.

**The Religious Peacebuilding Infrastructure**

One key legacy of the civil war is a strong NGO infrastructure in Lebanon. Numerous international organizations have set up camp in Beirut and beyond, with a strong ongoing United Nations presence; this reality both supports and complicates locally-led efforts at peacebuilding work. The NGO infrastructure in Lebanon drives many of the peacebuilding initiatives that engage religion, explicitly or implicitly, and thus a survey of a selection of these organizations will help to flesh out and ground the analysis of this work.

One major NGO working at both the grassroots as well as institutional levels is Adyan, which means religions in Arabic. Founded in 2006, and officially registered in 2008, by Christian and Muslim Lebanese leaders, the organization works through a number of programs to tackle the persistent sectarian division in Lebanon. This organization works through youth clubs for co-existence, citizenship curriculum development and implementation in partnership with the Ministry of Education[271], and

[271] The National Charter for Education on Living Together, developed by Adyan, was officially introduced in partnership with the Ministry of Education in 2013 and is being implemented in stages, with the goal of this curriculum eventually being adopted country-wide. See www.adyanvillage.net/Content/uploads/Resource/140305104646765.pdf, accessed October 22, 2016.

other programs for bringing Lebanese together into a shared understanding of and commitment to citizenship. Adyan maintains strong partnerships with international organizations and governments, and while their work in Lebanon is primarily conducted in Arabic, they have a strong English language web presence, suggesting an outward-facing orientation, along with the inward-facing work.

Our Unity Is Our Salvation (*Wahdatouna Khalasouna*) is an NGO collective working through a number of sectors on advancing civil peace. It has member organizations working on environmental issues, women's rights, and a number of other issues, all with the aim of increasing peace in Lebanese society through a multi-sectoral approach, according to … their website? Charter?. Together, this collective will make calls to religious clergy to "quiet down their followers," among the many other activities of this group.[272]

Hayya Bina works on grassroots peacebuilding through a number of efforts, integrating clerics within other programs (e.g., teaching English to lower income women without access to formal education opportunities) when possible. They also work to directly engage clergy through a program called "clerics without borders", bringing clergy together around the ideas of peace and justice. Another grassroots organization is Fighters for Peace, which involves ex-fighters speaking in schools and universities, as well as putting together public press conferences addressing people who are considering joining violent factions, in order to dissuade them.

[272] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

Several NGOs focus primarily on youth. Offre Joie has been bringing youth from different sects together through summer camps, solidarity actions, and joint service projects since its emergence in 1985, five years prior to the Ta'if. For example, under this NGO's banner, youth and adults from different religious groups recently came together to rebuild a mosque in Tripoli that had been attacked.[273] The Forum for Development, Culture, and Dialogue (FDCD), which is considered the youth arm of the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue, works on peacebuilding and conflict resolution through yearly work and study camps, bringing together youth from across the globe.[274] This organization also works on citizenship projects across the Arab world, prioritizing equality and women's rights, among other issues, in their workshop curriculum. Much of their work recently has focused on Syria, rather than Lebanon. Another group, Groupement Libanais d'Amitié et de Dialogue Islamo-Chretien (GLADIC) was founded in 2012 with the stamp of approval from the Lebanese Ministry of interior and municipalities. Its flagship program, called Christian Islamic Living Together, is conducted through the University of Saint Joseph to introduce 16-18 year-olds to inter-religious dialogue in coordination with public and private schools.

Many respondents working on the levels of grassroots and grasstops noted the important roles local clerics play in quelling outbreaks of violence. On this front, the FDCD has taken on an evaluation of the sermons, media statements, fatwas, and the like, of clerics in Syria and Lebanon. They intend to hold workshops for clerics when the

[273] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

[274] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

research portion of the project is complete, to look at the results and consider how they might adjust their public speech to advance peace. There are several projects underway to engage clergy to produce speech and writing that promotes peace and unity, for their own religious constituencies and for the consumption of the broader public. This is important in a context where clerics are free from state control of their sermon topics (which is not the case in some other national contexts in the Arab region, like the Gulf, where states dictate what religious leaders can and cannot speak about).

While some organizations do not explicitly focus on inter-religious dialogues or relationship-building, many do intentionally engage religious leaders in development and peacebuilding projects in various ways. This is true for several international organizational efforts, including Catholic Relief Services and UNDP, among others. Through track-two dialogues in high conflict areas in Lebanon, UNDP engages influential religious leaders and works to build strong networks for conflict mitigation, involved religious and community leaders. For example, they worked with the Sunni Mufti of Baalbeck and Hermel on reconciliatory initiatives between families of killed or abducted soldiers from different sects.[275] Additionally, one respondent noted a "charter of honor", signed by religious officials, political actors, and members of parliament from Baalbeck and Hermel in September 2014, denouncing violence and pledging cross-sectarian solidarity. One example of the outcome of this effort was a beheaded Sunni

[275] Muzna al-Masri, "Between Local Patronage Relationships and Securitization: The Conflict Context in the Bekaa Region," *Lebanon Support & UNDP Conflict Analysis Report* (January 2015) 25; Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

man's family travelling to pay condolences to the family of a beheaded Shi'a soldier.[276] This is a critical display of solidarity in a culture that places great value on condolences, thus demonstrating the important ways that cultural norms intertwine with expressions of religious difference and solidarity.

Another ongoing approach of a number of NGOs and religious institutions involves public collective displays of unity. A local NGO, Adyan, has led a symbolic spiritual solidarity day, which moves locations around the country from year to year, since 2007. Additionally, NGOs successfully pushed for Lebanon to adopt the Annunciation of Mary as a national shared Christian-Muslim holiday, and a number of groups and religious institutions work together to put on public celebrations of this holiday. The National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue was involved in making this official ask of the government, and now, one respondent noted, "Lebanon is now the only country in the world that brings together Muslims and Christians on that day...everybody participates, even the Druze."[277] Several interviewees spoke of the heavy emphasis placed on public symbolic displays of unity, including joint prayers, joint position statements on specific issues, joint marches for peace, and joint symbolism.[278]

Several NGOs and universities have taken up work to create and disseminate a shared narrative of the Lebanese war. Speaking about the importance of re-creating shared war memories for the next generation, one respondent stated, "I am 60 and I lived

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[276] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[277] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[278] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

the civil war, and nobody is going to change my mind regarding my reading of that war. But it would be very helpful for those who are 30 and younger, a unified reading- just a series of events- should have been available."[279] The Lebanese Renaissance Foundation developed what it heralds as an objective research study on casualties of the war (drawing on newspaper reports) and disseminated it at universities, but this had little traction, in part due to the massive amount of work that was still needed to complete the research and to make it easily accessible to others. Actors focused on this approach argue that developing shared war narratives across sects (including a common understanding of the level of casualties across all communities) is one of the key ways Lebanese will be able to build social cohesion across sectarian boundaries into the future: if there is a shared sense of history and pain.

Some groups articulate the goal of their work as trying to re-infuse sectarian identities with religion, arguing that sectarianism is religion without the spiritual, value-driven content. Thus, adding back in the spiritual content will save sectarianism from being used as a divisive political tool. Particularly in locations where religious language has been used to invoke or justify violence or enmity towards an "other", such as incidents and ongoing clashes framed in terms of sect over the last couple of years in Tripoli and in the Bekaa valley,[280] practitioners are finding it critical to have religious leaders and language as part of the solution. These practitioners will argue for religious

[279] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

[280] See https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/28/world/middleeast/a-sectarian-wedge-pushes-from-syria-into-lebanon.html and http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0515/Sectarian-violence-in-Lebanon-echoing-Syria-s-conflict for examples (accessed February 21, 2017). Violence in both areas has come in waves, rather than being a constant, and it has been framed in sectarian terms by both news coverage and by perpetrators of the violence.

literacy (knowing one's own religious texts, etc.) as an essential part of the approach to peacebuilding. Those arguing for this approach talk about how religious literacy helps to "re-infuse" the tribal model of religious identity with spiritual substance, which many referred to as the "real" religion. Those advocating for this approach would argue that the challenge is less about knowing about the religion of the Other, though many would argue that this is also important, and more about having a more multidimensional- and "full"- understanding of one's own religious identity.

A majority of respondents agreed that "religion is not the real problem" and asserted that faith or spirituality is something different entirely than religion as we see it in the public square in Lebanon. While most interviewees thus saw religion as instrumental in conflict- as a tool utilized and manipulated by politicians, rather than the problem in and of itself - a few saw it as more intricately tied up in the conflict dynamics. As one interviewee, a former general in a Christian militia during the civil war, put it,

> It's not faith that is the source of conflict, it's religion-- by religion, I mean the social and political and identity and rite things of the faith- that are the source of the troubles...we become tribes more than sects even, we think as tribes and we act as tribes.[281]

I understand this interviewee to be referring to religion in its institutionalized form, considering faith to be something different- something more pure. The problem, according to another interviewee, is when "religion became ideology….the faiths have no religion- it is a question of the human being about life, about the sense of the world, and

[281] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

have have many response about this question...religion are human institutions" that created societal chaos and disunity.[282] Understanding how those who work in the field of religious peacebuilding in Lebanon conceptualize the relationship between religion and conflict, helps to shed light upon the theoretical underpinnings of the various approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding efforts.

There is no shortage of programs and initiatives to engage religion for peacebuilding in Lebanon. Indeed, one respondent noted that the field is in a state of saturation: "In Lebanon, we have a kind of overdose...a state of saturation. In a sense there is so much people dialoguing and at the same time the level of tension- and I'm not just talking about clashes in the street or theatrical clashes- the level of tension and the increase in the identitarian, the religious identities, is so high that where we are today is this kind of [saturation]."[283] This saturation, however, has not produced social cohesion across Lebanon, and it is notable that this is a reality shared by Bosnia, where the post-conflict "peacebuilding wonderland" has also saturated the field with numerous efforts to engage religion in peacebuilding, with limited results to show at national scale.

**Assessing Lebanese Social Cohesion**

Given the multiple approaches and plethora of programs and initiatives aiming to improve religious literacy, build better relationships between people and communities, engage clergy to promote messages of unity and peace, and reform curriculum in the

[282] Author interview with Respondent 5, July 6, 2015.

[283] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

school systems to inculcate a shared national narrative and vision, one might imagine that social cohesion in Lebanon would be improving- if gradually- over time. However, my interviews along with World Values Survey data and several recent studies of Lebanon tell a different story than the one that might be expected. Both vertical and horizontal measures of cohesion and trust are very low, as demonstrated by the data that follows.

The most recent World Values Survey was conducted in Lebanon between 2010-2014, and thus reflects opinions and sentiments from this time frame, which have likely shifted over the last several years, given the increased intensity and spillover from the Syrian war. The data shows that Lebanese are nearly evenly split on whether they trust people of another religion,[284] showing a fairly high level of horizontal distrust.

Vertical distrust was also high, with many noting that confidence in the government is extremely low, with only 22.7% of respondents expressing "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the government.[285] The data showed sectarian divides when it comes to feelings of national pride or belonging. Overall, 79.6% of those surveyed said they are proud of their nationality; however, this number was much lower for Roman Catholics[286], at 46.2%, showing a sectarian divide in feelings of national

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[284] World Values Survey (Wave 6 2010-2014), *World Values Survey Association,* accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp. The religious categories were limited to Muslim (generic), Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Other/not specific, or no answer, and thus while some of the data shows trust levels between sects (for the Christians), the rest of the data is not broken down further into inter-sectarian (rather than broadly inter-religious) categories.

note that the question explicitly asked about people of another religion, not people of another sect.

[285] World Values Survey (Wave 6 2010-2014).

[286] The World Values Survey (Wave 6) uses the following religious categories for their data analysis in Lebanon: Muslim, Orthodox, Other/not specific, Protestant, Roman Catholic, or no answer. This is, of course, a key limitation on the survey since these categories do not accurately map onto the religious groups present in Lebanon (including the very important lack of differentiation between different Muslim

pride. Higher levels of pride in nationality correlated with higher levels of importance of religion. This suggests that perhaps a stronger sense of religious identity is seen by many as an integral component of what it means to be Lebanese- to be part of a "community of communities." One's bonding cohesion with one's own religious group correlates with a sense of nationalism, but not necessarily with a sense of bridging (cross-sectarian) cohesion, which is not seen as necessary to Lebanese nationalism.

Similarly, high levels of people surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I see myself as part of the nation," but Catholics were much lower on this, at 46.2%. Again, importance of religion in life correlated with higher levels of considering oneself part of the nation, though it is worth noting that Maronites in general tend to consider religion quite important. I would point to this as a key outcome of how Maronite identity developed within the Arab context, with a need to hold tight to religious identity as a way of differentiating from the surrounding culture.

The data also revealed that religion in Lebanon means different things to different people (as is the case anywhere else), and that Lebanese do not self-identify as particularly religious. This may come as a surprise to people who see the strong role sectarian identities play in politics and social life, but for many, these two realities are not in conflict, but rather see the decline in religiosity as an outgrowth of the politicization of religious identity through sectarianization. This reveals a key feature of the sectarian system in Lebanon: religious identity is high, while religious practice may not necessarily

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sects). The Roman Catholic category in this survey likely included Maronites, Armenians, and Greek Catholics.

correlate, and may indeed be quite low. This is one reason many interview respondents asserted that Lebanon needs more religion, not less.

Additionally, geographic segregation is an ongoing reality, and while many hoped after the war to return Christians to the "Muslim areas" and Muslims to the "Christian areas", this did not happen fully. As one respondent noted, "Although the Christians in the Chouf could get back their lands and what was left of their houses, they never came back seriously. The go for weekends, in summer mainly. They don't feel yet comfortable enough because nothing serious was done."[287] And since 2005-2008, "we see a sectarian cleansing not done by force, but by the environment."[288] Further geographic segregation has taken place since 2008. This contributes to a lack of social cohesion, as there are few organic opportunities for cross-sectarian interaction and relationship-building. Most of these opportunities must be constructed, and are thereby often "opt-in," limiting their impact to a very small segment of society.

Generational dynamics also suggest that social cohesion is actually worsening with time, rather than improving among younger generations. Many interviewees noted that the older generations are actually more willing to engage in dialogue, because they have memories of Lebanon before the civil war, which they describe as a Lebanon that didn't prioritize people's religious identities. This observation challenges the idea that

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[287] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015. It is important to note here that the Chouf mountains are primarily seen as Druze territory, though there are indeed many Christian families that have homes in the area; however, the idea of being able to "go back" may have less to do with sectarian segregation and lack of comfort, and more to do with the fact that economic shifts are such that professional opportunities in the Chouf are quite limited. Thus, multiple factors are at play in these geographic and demographic shifts.

[288] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

sectarian boundaries were hardened prior to the war and led to the violence; rather, it was through both the actual experience of the war, and the subsequent creation of war narratives and histories that the sectarian divides were truly generated and solidified. While, as discussed above, the battles during the 1975-1990 often did not reflect clean sectarian boundaries, the war narratives that are prevalent in post-war life do. One respondent asserted, "maybe we could focus on tomorrow's Lebanon, not the past," questioning the effectiveness of the focus on re-making war memories.[289]

On this note, many respondents noted that youth consciousness of sectarianism is worse than the older generation, according to many, "because we did not tackle the issue of the memory. We did not work on improving reconciliation. We did not bring youths together. They might sit next to one another in pubs or universities, but it's not social living together. It's coexistence- and I hate that word. It's either living together or nothing."[290] For example, many Christian students at American University of Beirut, for instance, which is in an area (Hamra) seen as predominately Sunni Muslim, had never before been to a predominately Muslim area of Lebanon, and the fact that most students commute rather than residing on campus limits the ability of university life to provide deeper and more sustained opportunities for cross-sectarian relationship-building. Additionally, several university-affiliated respondents attested to the fact that campus politics mimic the sectarian system.[291] Rather than running for campus posts as

[289] Author interview with Respondent 22, March 12, 2015.

[290] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[291] Author interview with Respondent 15, July 1, 2015.

individuals, there are electoral lists, which mimic the existing political blocs, if not publicly then implicitly.

It is important to note that survey data in 2006 showed that Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hizbullah, was the most popular figure in the Arab region, demonstrating widespread Sunni support of him as an anti-establishment figure (which, at that time, overrode sectarian loyalties).[292] Additionally, several respondents reported a high sense of unified nationalism during 2008, in the wake of mass mobilizations after the expulsion of Syria from Lebanon, but said it only lasted a week, after which the groups divided starkly into pro- and anti-Syria (March 8 and 14 blocs). One respondent commented that the only reason this divide did not produce another civil war was because Christians were on both sides, although this opinion dramatically oversimplifies the shifting alliances and actors on the ground in and after 2008.

Beyond reporting social division and geographic segregation, a number of respondents spoke of the dismal state of inter-religious relations. One reflected that "interfaith relations were excellent before the war." He noted the way Muslims and Christians alike in south Lebanon honored the Virgin Mary at Christmas, and found a kind of solidarity and camaraderie in this. This respondent felt that interfaith relationships have deteriorated rapidly over the last several years. He noted that Muslims are no longer visiting shrines to Mary in the south, lamenting this as a sign of the decline in positive interfaith relationships. Additionally, he noted that in neighboring Syria, Christians there were no longer seeing their Muslim neighbors protecting them like they

[292] Hashemi and Postel, *Sectarianization,* 11.

had experienced in the past. While in the past, he noted that Syrian Muslims had been strong in their support for their Christian neighbors, prioritizing their safety over the safety of one's own family, there are only a few Syrian cities where he reported this being the case over the last few years. While there was a case he cited in Qalamoun where "Muslims stood in front of a church when the Islamic brigades came," he noted that this is the rare exception.[293]

A recent report by Joy Aoun and Marie-Joelle Zahar reinforces the claim that Lebanese social cohesion leaves much to be desired, pointing to the ways in which the Lebanese economy, consociational politics, and international donor intervention have together perpetuated sectarianization of Lebanese society and reinforced bonding, over bridging, cohesion.[294] On the vertical axis, we see a society that is deeply untrusting of its government, and on the horizontal axis, we see continued geographic and other forms of demographic segregation along with low levels of social trust, bolstered and perpetuated by a deeply embedded sectarian system that works to maintain these boundaries and divisions.

**Barriers to Impact of Religious Peacebuilding Work**

Part of the reason the numerous initiatives have not been able to break through in creating greater social cohesion in Lebanon is that there are multiple strong barriers to current peacebuilding initiatives, including and beyond those that explicitly engage

[293] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[294] Aoun and Zahar, "Confessionalism, Consociationalism, and Social Cohesion in Lebanon."

religion. Four barriers in particular surfaced through my research and interviews: External factors, including regional politics in particular; religious extremism, and the subsequent focus of peacebuilding actors on extremism; over-reliance on the role of religious leaders (or communities); and finally, and I would argue most importantly, the entrenchment of the sectarian system.

### 1. External factors

Commentators on the Lebanese conflict have often pointed to the strong impact that regional and geo-political events have on internal Lebanese dynamics. This remains a key intervening factor today, in the wake of the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011. As one interviewee noted, "we have found that a lot of what is going on in Syria is affecting the interfaith relations, not only in Syria but what is going on in other places as well."[295] The way in which sectarianism has been exploited in the Syrian conflict is rippling out, impacting sectarian identity in other parts of the region.

One can observe the effects of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon on a number of fronts, given both the physical proximity of Syria to Lebanon as well as the history of Syrian political engagement in Lebanon (and the existing divisions among the Lebanese regarding that involvement). Specifically, three major contributing factors stand out: the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon (estimated to be over a million, or 1/5-1/4 of the

[295] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

Lebanese population)[296], the fact that fighters (including Hizbullah) are moving back and forth across the border between Lebanon and Syria, and the geopolitical involvement and subsequent narratives thereof. This last factor includes both the "proxy war" between Saudi and Iran that many argue is being waged through the Syrian conflict (which is often articulated and interpreted through a Sunni-Shia sectarian lens), and the on-the-ground sectarianization of the conflict in Syria.[297]

The influx of refugees in particular has put an extreme strain on the already weak Lebanese economy and infrastructure, including Lebanon's already strained electric and water systems, for example. This, combined with the sectarianization of the Syrian conflict, has led to a deepening of existing sectarian tensions in Lebanon, along with the emergence of some relatively new forms of sectarian tension. For example, the influx of primarily Sunni Syrian refugees into some cities has caused tension with poorer Shi'a communities, as government and international resources are diverted to aid newly arrived Syrians rather than the existing Lebanese poor. Joy Aoun and Marie-Joelle Zahar note that,

> most Lebanese political and religious leaders are more concerned with internal stability and security than providing services and support to Syrian refugees but, paradoxically, the longer the refugees' needs remain unmet, the more pressure

[296] Amnesty International, "Syria's Refugee Crisis in Numbers," available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/, accessed February 18, 2017.

[297] Bassell Salloukh, "The Geopolitics of the Struggle for Syria," *E-International Relations (*September 2013), accessed February 18, 2017, http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/23/the-geopolitics-of-the-struggle-for-syria/.

> their presence will exert on ill-equipped host municipalities and the communities therein.[298]

Thus, both the Lebanese government and international aid groups have no choice but to work to address the needs of incoming Syrian refugees. International aid has indeed shifted primarily toward the Syrian refugees and away from the Lebanese poor, and international peacebuilding organizations have also shifted much of their attention to ISIS and the more overt forms of violence and discord threatening Lebanon, which has shifted attention away from addressing pre-existing sectarian tensions and root causes. This can add to the resentment that non-elite Lebanese might already feel toward Syrians [ should be some literature on this, how interventions should aid everyone to not make targets of the refugee population]

Additionally, ISIS' explicit targeting of Syrian Christians has bolstered a narrative among Lebanese Christians about an existential threat against them, and has resulted in stronger in-group cohesion as well as a number of Lebanese Christian groups taking up arms, sometimes in collaboration with Hizbullah.[299] Finally, there are intra-communal divisions emerging in response to the ongoing Syrian conflict. Sunnis in particular are pulled between loyalty to the more traditional Sunni political parties in Lebanon and divergent extremist Sunni groups like ISIS. Those involved in organizations like Jamaa Islamiyya, which has denounced ISIS, have been caught in between, and thus we see

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[298] Aoun and Zahar, "Confessionalism, Consociationalism, and Social Cohesion in Lebanon," 15.

[299] Alessandria Masi, "Christians Threatened by ISIS in Lebanon Turn to Hezbollah for Help," International Business Times, April 21, 2015, accessed February 18, 2017, http://www.ibtimes.com/christians-threatened-isis-lebanon-turn-hezbollah-help-1889610.

multiple levels of fracture and competing loyalties within Lebanese Sunni communities.[300]

Another respondent pointed to the Syrian conflict as the main reason for recent disintegration of inter-religious relationships in Lebanon:

> The infrastructure of the Christian Muslim relations has been destroyed unfortunately due to the conflict. We have to do a lot of work to rebuild that again..I will say this conflict has made interfaith relations very fragile and easy to break at any minute.[301]

A religious leader suggested that the Syrian conflict's heavy impact on internal Lebanese relationships demonstrates the way in which Lebanon's fate is inextricably intertwines with the rest of the region: "Maybe the situation of Lebanon is proving for all of us that this country until now is not ruled by its own people."[302] This response suggest that, on top of being vulnerable to regional shifts, Lebanon is subject to the whims of foreign powers, rather than having the autonomy to control its own destiny.

One interviewee notes that the "religious lobbying" prevalent throughout the Lebanese war continues today, noting in particular the tactics both Sunni and Shi'a leaders in Lebanon used to get Lebanese to fight in Syria: "how to convince someone who is Lebanese that he should be part of this conflict? The Shi'ite community said we have the Shi'ite in Damascus that is in danger, and we should defend it, and we should

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[300] Aoun and Zahar, "Confessionalism, Consociationalism, and Social Cohesion in Lebanon," 16.

[301] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[302] Author interview with Respondent 6, July 5, 2015.

defend our religious identity through this religious fight." And on the other side, "the [Syrian] regime is not fighting the opposition, the regime is fighting Sunnis."[303] Thus, articulating the Syrian conflict as a religious or sectarian one has continued to provide fighters on every side, and has had important ripple effects in Lebanon.

One respondent commented that, "the confessional rift in Lebanon is not enough to create a conflict except if this is exacerbated by events outside of Lebanon."[304] Another said, "Of course the confession element plays out and is very important, but not so much because of existing internal Lebanese dynamics but because of what this means in terms of repercussions of events that are happening outside."[305] According to the majority of respondents, the role of regional factors, and particularly the current Syrian conflict, continues to serve as a barrier for the success of religious peacebuilding work in Lebanon.

**2. A Heavy Focus on Religious Extremism**

According to a number of respondents, another key barrier to the ability for peacebuilding programs to have strong and lasting impact is the uptick in religious extremism. One respondent remarked that, while the Syrian crisis has really negatively impacted sectarian relations, "the most dangerous thing in this whole thing is religious

[303] Author interview with Respondent 6, July 5, 2015.

[304] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[305] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

extremism."[306] Clearly, this barrier is directly intertwined with the issue of external factors.

The rise in religious extremism has had a particularly strong impact on the Sunni community, where there is "this very sensitive issue of the risk of losing the base, especially in areas where people might be the most attracted to Daesh. Their main objective is to portray themselves as the real leader of the Sunni community."[307] A parallel trend is happening in Lebanese Christian communities as well, as one respondent noted that Christian militias and vigilantes in Baalbeck, trying to prevent the intrusion of ISIS, have ramped up rhetoric against the Syrian refugees, accusing them of hiding terrorists in their camps. This respondent noted that, "this situation right now, somehow you can see a trend in the Lebanese society of people going back to their confessional roots in a sense."[308] The rise in religious extremism on any "side" is being met with similar trends in other communities, thus perpetuating extreme bonding cohesion.

One person commented that, "right now, if there's one thing that all NGOs are working on, it's the rejection of the threat of ISIS."[309] Much of the funding for Lebanese peacebuilding has been funneled into the fight against Muslim extremism, and thus even NGOs that would not have previously prioritized efforts to counter extremist ideology and action have reallocated funds and energies toward these programs, as this emphasis is

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[306] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[307] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[308] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[309] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

currently the most appealing to funders.[310] This demonstrates the ways in which funder interests can drive NGO activities, shifting the priorities of local groups. This has been a perpetual challenge in both Bosnia and Lebanon, as funder interests have often driven post-conflict peacebuilding and development efforts in both cases. This can mean that the donors' reading of a conflict often overrides local needs and values.

**3. Over-reliance on religious leaders**

Another important barrier to religious peacebuilding effectiveness, according to respondents, is that too much stock is placed in the religious leaders. One pointed to the fact that the Maronite Patriarch had not (at the time of my interviews) been able to broker a deal between Aoun and Geagea, for the presidency: "The church has had very little leverage over the candidates...So to say the religious leaders have that much influence, it goes up and down and depends on the candidate. Ultimately, their role is hostage to that division."[311]

Elite dialogues have been important for creating a common space, but several respondents commented on the importance of recognizing the limits of these efforts: "If you don't put these things in law and you don't protect them institutionally, these efforts are very vulnerable. Not that I don't see hope coming from these initiatives, no, on the contrary, but hope without political change and institutional structures, can fall back into

[310] Author interview with Respondent 19, July 2, 2015; Author interview with Respondent 14, July 8, 2015.

[311] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015. Note that Michele Aoun was elected president in October of 2016, after more than two years of presidential vacancy.

things that are not very healthy and fall back to war."[312] Thus, while most respondents believe that these initiatives play an important role, there are clear limits to what they can be expected to accomplish.

Another respondent noted that, "during more than three generations, the religious institutions were accomplices and silent."[313] While now, this person noted, religious institutions and leaders are more outspoken against violence, the media does not cover it. One interviewee commented on the disconnect between talk and action by religious:

> You know, there is a French word that says 'pompier de' [literally, firefighter]- you light the fire and you extinguish it. I have a feeling that religious authorities in Lebanon have been playing this game for 40 years and people are very happy when they see them all aligned saying outlined stances of unity and even though a week before each one of them was behaving in a different way. So it is true that now they are playing a pacification role, but you won't get a solution until their role gets confined to religious matters.[314]

One respondent asserted that the effectiveness of religious leaders is entirely dependent upon political elites' need for certain figures and messages at any given time: "Now we have a lot of religious figures who are wise enough, who are charismatic enough, I believe I am one of them, but it is not our time now." As for the ones who are currently lifted up, "Maybe they are not [great] but they are needed now just to gather the

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[312] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

[313] Author interview with Respondent 5, July 6, 2015.

[314] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

body, to make the body come to each other and stick to each other."[315] This respondent gave the example of the fighting in Tripoli during the civil war. Battles- about nineteen in total- raged between two neighborhoods, and "no one could stop it, and then suddenly it just stopped. We say like this, those who used to send the message that we should start the fighting, now they send the message that we should stop the fighting."[316]

Another respondent commented, "Can we expect that...interfaith dialogue will lead really on a conceptual level to anything? Personally I think not. But will using the clerics as icons help sometimes in calming down a situation? I would say yes."[317] This respondent, among others, argued for the importance of getting into the specifics when it comes to strategically engaging religious leaders. For instance, the respondent asserted that a Muslim cleric in Lebanon often has more leverage in people's personal lives that a Christian cleric does. While this is a reflection of this particular respondent's perception of relative clerical power, the reality of some imbalance of clerical authority between and within different religious communities can lead to an disparity in many dialogues looking to engage different religious leaders, as the weight and scope of leaders' influence differ.

One respondent also noted the new ways in which religious leaders are exerting influence: "It's a new situation- clerics who are al-fresco, clerics who are on the public stage, are not necessarily the most influential."[318] This respondent went on to say that, "Lebanon, ok, clerical institutions are recognized as kind of national institutions: Muslim

[315] Author interview with Respondent 6, July 5, 2015.

[316] Author interview with Respondent 6, July 5, 2015.

[317] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[318] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

and Christian clerics speaking on television, appearing in public functions, but are they the ones that exert the higher level of influence? Is the dialogue between these guys...will the results of a dialogue between these guys go downstream and have...the expected influence? Unfortunately, it's not the case."[319] These are political dialogues, serving a political agenda, and "their religious load is depleted."[320]

Calibrating the potential impact of religious leaders is thus an important part of the religious peacebuilding assessment process. Some asserted that religious leaders, at this point, really only have an influence on their followers. One articulated this reality as follows: "For the time being I think that the religious leadership will have an effect mostly on their own adherents who are not directly involved in conflict. But those who are involved are already involved and they wouldn't listen to them."[321] Another noted that social media has dramatically changed the types of religious leaders exerting influence, and their mechanisms for doing so, citing the quality of internet in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon as one place where religious speech is getting a lot of traction online.[322]

However, there are also limits to the reach and impact of religious leaders' ability to exacerbate violence or inspire peace, as another respondent noted, warning against placing too much stock in these efforts:

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[319] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[320] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[321] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[322] Author interview with Respondent 14, July 8, 2015.

Interfaith, inter-religious, inter-sectarian dialogue in a situation of conflict are band-aids. Sustainable peace cannot be brought to any society if we don't reach a point where citizenship prevails. So obviously in emergency cases, you need to apply these band-aids. But in the long run, I don't think that they really offer a solution...we are going back to the same logic of the system where to exist you need to belong to a sect. Yes, these are band-aids to be applied from time to time, in extreme situations we need them, but they should be considered as a tool in a larger toolbox.[323]

Another reflected their observation of this issue as follows:

What is the percentage of religious influence? Let's take the case of the Sunni. Ok, the Sunni, the Hariri establishment presents itself as the moderate establishment. But when this establishment has no more funds, its religious message goes down, and this is what you are seeing now.[324] How do we explain nowadays the marginalization of the moderate trends within the Sunni community and the emergence of all the radical trends? Because finally the religious message itself needs to be encapsulated with a set of services-- it's not enough to tell people you should not kill your Shi'a neighbor, but you should also...provide him with a job, with a political perspective. Otherwise we find that people are sinking

[323] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[324] The respondent is referring here to ongoing financial troubles within the Hariri establishment and Saudi business supporters, which in 2016 resulted in layoffs within the Future Party (led by Saad Hariri). See Tom Perry, "Cash crunch at Saudi firm casts shadow over Lebanon's Hariris," *Reuters*, September 5, 2016, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-idUSKCN11B1X7.

> in this deep despair. Or finally and so they will join, or easily be attracted by radicals, or radicals will be the ones offering both money and a key for heaven.[325]

Thus, the efficacy of religious leaders lies not only in what they say, when, but also how it is amplified and received, which is contingent upon a number of factors that are not controlled by the religious leaders or by peacebuilding organizations themselves.

**4. Entrenchment of the sectarian system**

The biggest barrier to peacebuilding efficacy that emerged through my interviews was the sectarian system itself. One respondent commented that, "[the diffusion of power among sects] further radicalizes this dimension of society, which in turn becomes an inhibiting factor for the formal political system to conduct the needed reforms."[326] Thus, while deeply embedded sectarian tensions are not in and of themselves the root causes of Lebanese social and political strife, they act as barriers to the very institutional reforms needed to disembed these divides.

The majority of respondents agreed that sectarianism has gotten worse in the last several years. One stated that,

> We're trying to get out of religion and sectarianism in Lebanon, but recent events have brought us back into this magma. We're trying to act on our own political beliefs, but there is a way to fight this. You could fight it by military or physical means, which is suicidal, or you can fight it by trying to promote values by people

[325] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[326] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

and organizations and even by politicians. So yes, we cope [with sectarianism], but we don't condone.[327]

Another interviewee stated that sectarian identities are preserved so that leaders can utilize them to leverage power: "So, at any point in time if you're a leader who wants to either rally support around you or differentiate yourself from another group, you may use that identity- that sectarian identity- as a tool...and also as a way of creating...a network of mutual support."[328] Political elites, according to this analysis, utilize and maintain sectarian identities to further bonding cohesion, often at the expense of bridging cohesion in Lebanese society. As one respondent articulated, "the system feeds on these divisions"[329]

Despite there being agreement among respondents that sectarianism is a barrier to peacebuilding efficacy in Lebanon, I found disagreement on how, exactly. Here, two divergent goals for Lebanese religious peacebuilding emerged. While some actors and initiatives see dismantling sectarianism itself as the only route to social cohesion and sustainable peace, others prioritize the preservation of unity and consensus *through* the sectarian system. Thus, for the latter group, while the current sectarian system is indeed problematic, it is because there is corruption that needs to be deal with. Sectarianism in theory is not the problem. This is a key finding from the Lebanese case study, as there are strong forces in society- within and outside of the religious peacebuilding

[327] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

[328] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

[329] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

community- working in these competing directions. Religion in Lebanon is inextricably intertwined with this reality. One cannot engage organized religion in Lebanon without dealing with institutions, and those institutions (the Maronite Church, for example) are inherently related in some way to the sectarian system, monitoring and controlling issues of legal status and rights, among other factors.

Several pointed to the problem with the fact that there were paragraphs of the Ta'if agreement that were left unfinished- including the eventual move away from sectarianism as a political system. One person noted that this was not due to actual problems preventing the full implementation of Ta'if, but rather, it was empty talk to begin with: "it was almost an unspoken agreement that some things will never be applied."[330] Another commented that, "[there's a] possibility of evolution into deconfessionalization but it will take a long time...The generation of the civil war is still the generation that is occupying the cabinet in Lebanon...And I don't know if it will ever be complete. Lebanon has been created in such a way that some level of this arrangement will have to persist."[331]

While for some, the emptiness of the promise of Ta'if (to shift from the sectarian system) was seen as highly problematic, others noted that the empty promise was, and still is, necessary for maintaining Lebanon's fragile peace: "It is better to have inefficient agreement than war."[332]

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[330] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[331] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[332] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

One respondent pointed to "an equilibrium of fear, [which] is somehow protecting us from further unfolding of events." This person went on to describe this situation as follows: "Yesterday there were clashes between Sunni and Shi'a just south of Beirut. Twenty years ago this may have spread to other areas, but I have a feeling the leaders didn't want it to spread because they cannot control the consequences."[333] Thus, at least for the short term, there is a benefit in carefully balancing the power of sectarian leaders, to assuage further devolvement into violence:

> I know this doesn't serve a long-term purpose, but it's good to have groups that are roughly equal in weight in power because they neutralize each other. One knows that he would not gain power by resorting to weapons and arms. Right now I think we are in a safe zone, but we are still really far from what we want the state to be.[334]

The weakness of the Lebanese government plays into the entrenchment of the sectarian, as one respondent noted, "the problem is that the government is weak, and when governments are weak, tribes are strong."[335] This respondent talked about how clientelism has increased in recent years, forcing people to go to their religious or sectarian leaders- rather than directly to the appropriate government office- if they need something, "from a phone line to building outside of your legal percentage on your own block. Anything you need from your government, you don't go to the government

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[333] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

[334] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

[335] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

officials, you go to your leaders who are in the end from a certain religious group."[336] This reflects the ways in which Lebanese lean heavily on members of their own sect within various government offices, rather than approaching the government as individual citizens. Another respondent commented on how most Lebanese subsist on electricity from private generators, rather than relying on the public utilities system. Even if the cost of state-provided electricity were half the price of the generator, this respondent remarked, everyone would still go with the generator, as the trust in the state's ability to provide this service is completely absent.

One respondent noted that,

> Individuals can do a lot of work, NGOs can do a lot of work. Organizations having one color-being related to one specific group- or having multi-colors like Adyan, can do a lot of work. But at the end of the day, if you don't have a strong government, a just government, a trusted government, a government which can give you the feeling that it can provide you with your basic needs and it will treat you equally with the others, if you don't have this government no one will support it because if you have a weak government, an unjust government, it's a threat for the community. And then to be able to face any bad luck or any bad chance is to be more sticking to my own people, and then maybe the umbrella of the religious sect is the best tool to make this kind of lobbying.[337]

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[336] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[337] Author interview with Respondent 6, July 5, 2015.

The continued failure to elect a President the time of my interviews[338] shows how little power the president had, but according to one respondent, "it shows how little power everybody has...The system is going down. We're drowning. And of course the Lebanese are unable as usual to define their own way to get out of it, so everyone is expecting a hand down to help- Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the US...We should be able to do something from within."[339] Another respondent commented, "No one wants to go back to civil war. There is a government of national unity that has decided that unity is more important than electing a president, or having national elections."[340] This was a prevailing sentiment, that unity is prioritized by the system above all else, including justice, democracy, and individual rights.

Indeed, one respondent pointed out that Lebanon has never shifted from the economics of war: "The government is paralyzed, and everything continues. It's not a country that depends on institutions so much, you don't have electricity- you have generators. It's still the economics of war. You know, during the war the economy of generators was created, and it's still there. That's why there is no reform of the electricity- it's the generator mafia. There's also a mafia of the water tanks and the private providers, they are making some people in the government very rich...But they

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[338] Lebanon had a presidential vacancy for a total of 29 months, when the Parliament continuously failed to elect a new one. (Presidents are elected by the Parliament, and generally an election is not held unless a consensus has been reached among MPs as to who will win.) In October of 2016, Michel Aoun was elected to fill the post. See https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/world/middleeast/michel-aoun-lebanon-president.html?_r=0, accessed February 9, 2017.

[339] Author interview with Respondent 1, July 2, 2015.

[340] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

use this [confessional language] as an excuse- oh, we cannot upset the Christians."[341] According to this perspective, political and religious elites point to confessional and sectarian divisions as the problem- the barrier to peace- when in fact it is in their interest to maintain these very divisions. This respondent's comments reflects the way the government is able to shift blame for its own lack of provision of public goods and services, faulting sectarian dynamics rather than owning up to the governments failures to provide for its people.

One respondent noted that this is the self-preserving goal of sectarian elites, including those who are publicly committed to building social cohesion at the national level: "It seems that a lot of times the issue of peace is used as a pretext to maintain elite interests, in the name of consensus and peace and not to upset anyone, you have a model that has become very inefficient, is a model that has the faction of disunity and favors and making sure that everybody has a piece of the pie. No one has interest in building an efficient functioning public institution."[342] Thus, several suggested that elite-stamped peacebuilding programs are distractions, or empty verbiage. Indeed, several of the key issues on which religious leaders have acted (not just spoken) in unity are in opposing civil marriage[343], and in opposing the desegregation of schools by sect. These examples demonstrate the ways in which some religious and sectarian leaders have, over time,

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[341] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[342] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[343] See http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/70066 and http://www.independent.co.uk/news/old-enemies-from-lebanons-civil-war-unite-to-maintain-the-social-divide-1153532.html, accessed June 17, 2017; and Maurus Reinkowski and Sofia Saadeh, "A Nation Divided: Lebanese Confessionalism," in *Citizenship and Ethnic Conflict: Challenging the Nation-state*, ed., Haldun Gulalp (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 107.

unified in efforts to maintain bonding cohesion, often against the will of grassroots multi-religious activists.

Another respondent argued that everyone but the Sunnis is directly benefitting from the rhetoric of sectarianism, including in particular Christians who are currently focused on decentralization as a solution to Lebanon's socio-political strife.[344] One of the key benefits, to the political and economic elite, is financial, as one respondent commented, "Historically, Lebanon has always been the little place to keep an open financial system because everyone needs it. Everyone needs a place to go and put their money, relax, and so on...it serves the interests of everyone."[345] This again demonstrates the importance of external forces on Lebanon's internal affairs, including the regional designation of Lebanon as a vacation spot.

Several expressed deep frustration with the way in which the logic of sectarianism seems to prevail over any attempts at sustainable peacebuilding, commenting on the preservation of sectarianism as similar to dictatorship in its prioritization of stability over peace: "because dictators can bring stability and the dictators are much better stability providers than democratic regimes."[346] Thus, some expressly articulated their goal to be ending the sectarian system, in the interest of peace. One respondent stated, "I think a civil government, a civil system, civil society is the only way to protect our communities and to have a just and peaceful outcome that we may reach."[347]

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[344] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[345] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[346] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[347] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

On the other hand, some respondents were much more positive about sectarian politics as the right way for Lebanon's communities, long-term: "All of the Lebanese who are talking about the sectarian system as something bad, they are talking about the system itself or how the system is being used? I believe it is not the system itself, but what they have witnessed in the system...it's the corruption in the system, not the system itself."[348] This respondent expressed fears about Druze, Maronites, and others losing their identity and communal rights if the system were dismantled.[349]

Some of the successes noted by those working in the field of religious peacebuilding clearly play a preserving role when it comes to sectarianism. Commenting on the way in which religious leaders have good relationships and indeed, are working together across sectarian lines, one actor working directly in interfaith relations told me that, "We have seen how Muslims and Christians have come together on so many issues related to humanitarian aid...and neither Muslims or Christians accepted the issue of civil marriage. They agreed- the religious leaders agreed on it [in opposition to it]. While the people were in support of it, the religious leadership did not want it."[350] This interviewee's comment seems to raise another paradox: religious leadership (rather than "Christians and Muslims" as this respondent inaccurately states initially, since it is the leadership rather than the people who have taken these positions) has worked together to

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[348] Author interview with Respondent 6, July 5, 2015.

[349] For example, the Druze constitute an estimated 5% of the Lebanese population (see https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2008/108487.htm, accessed June 17, 2017), but are represented at a slightly higher proportion in the Lebanese Parliament, occupying 8 of the 128 total seats. Additionally, Maronites widely express support of religious authorities controlling personal status laws.

[350] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

bring positive change through humanitarian projects, and yet the other place they find consensus is around standing together in opposition to potential advances in individual civil rights (civil marriage). This demonstrates the emphasis on consensus among religious leadership, as well as the drive to maintain the status quo.

From my interviews, it became clear that the humanitarian projects religious leaders choose to work on together are important and positive, but largely "safe"- they would not work on controversial humanitarian issues that cross into structural injustices. Additionally, the work to oppose civil marriage demonstrates the stake that religious leaders have in maintaining much of the structural status quo. Thus, the seeming paradox of religious leaders working together to further humanitarian causes, while also working against the desires of the Lebanese people, simply demonstrates the careful balance that religious leadership in Lebanon walks- doing good for society (and opposing overt violence) without shaking up the structures from which they benefit (along with the political and economic elites). The entrenchment of the sectarian system, combined with the other key barriers mentioned above, makes it exceedingly difficult for any peacebuilding efforts to break through.

**Our Aim is to Slow Down the Fall into Abyss**

Beyond identifying these barriers to success, how do those engaged in religious peacebuilding, in its various forms, see their own impact? The vast majority of those I interviewed agreed that religious leaders can play a very strong role in exacerbating violence or inspiring peace through interpretations of scripture, but in a limited way, as

noted above. As one respondent reflected, "Religion is extremely important in Lebanon...I absolutely believe that the spiritual leaders in Lebanon play a fundamental role in preventing the exacerbation of conflict."[351] This respondent gave an example of Sunni leadership helping to defuse a radical Sunni leader in confrontation with the army in Saida, noting, "I think that the spiritual leaders in Lebanon have played a very important role and will continue to play a very important role in maintaining stability, as long as they are not using inflammatory language."[352] These reflections demonstrate the extremely negative way of framing goals of religious peacebuilding work in Lebanon at present, aimed at disaster prevention, rather than focused on building something positive.

One interviewee, while somewhat skeptical about the broader impact of initiatives to engage religious leaders for peacebuilding, yielded that "ultimately, these initiatives *are* essential because they have an impact on the discourse."[353] Thus, many highlighted the effect the current work with religious leaders has on public rhetoric in particular as an indicator of success.

When considering the impact of person-to-person or other grassroots programs, some focused on individual change as the key indicator of success, while others talked about a slow, ripple effect of shifts in understanding and education about the Other:

> I think that not everything is always a success but a lot of it provided to be a successful by the fact that many people do start accepting the religious other and

[351] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[352] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[353] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

> having a better understanding...when you have this kind of ignorance of the religious other [like in Syria today] you get distortion. So ignorance leads to the distortion of the image of the other and this in consequence leads to him going to his own ghettos….So I think what you know we can say about the interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding- that we are fighting this kind of ignorance and trying to have people get together and understand each other.[354]

While none of these initiatives can impact everything at once, one respondent noted that, "If you have these institutions and these actors engaged proactively to promoting peace and tolerance then you have somehow a multiplying effect within society."[355] Another reflected on three key factors that indicate broader impact of peacebuilding initiatives, generally:

> I think the trickling up has to do with a few factors. One, it has to do with the efficiency and effectiveness of civil society. Two, it has to do with the space that civil society has and how it uses that space. And third, it seems to me that it would be important for the trickle up effect to work to start peeling off particular individuals from the political hierarchy to buy into this new way of doing things. They would at least temper their own coalition's statements.[356]

While many stated that it is impossible to see or measure the results of these programs, respondents noted that evaluations can show the impact on individual attitude

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[354] Author interview with Respondent 2, July 7, 2015.

[355] Author interview with Respondent 4, July 3, 2015.

[356] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

shifts[357] and that they are laying the groundwork for the future: "A lot of these initiatives have been incubators of new ways of looking at things...but they are still hostage to bigger and stronger dynamics that continue to dominate society. They might be the seeds of things to come."[358]

Others were less ambitious when it came to thinking about impact, with one pointing to the counterfactual of what Lebanese society would be like without so many NGOs and programs,[359] and another stating that, "we are throwing onto the political market each year 17-20 members of political groups. Now we cannot measure their improvement unless they get into power….Our aim is to slow down the fall into abyss."[360]

While many talked about the aforementioned barriers to peace and felt that, without these intervening factors, their initiatives and programs could have more impact toward peace, a few saw their inter-religious work as disconnected entirely from socio-political peacebuilding. As one said, "There are different hats, but one head- there is one goal, it is Christian-Muslim understanding. Christian-Muslim dialogue."[361] Thus, while most respondents saw their work- whether directly or indirectly engaged with religious leaders, values, and communities- as directly contributing to peacebuilding in some way, a few of those more explicitly involved in inter-religious dialogue did not articulate that

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[357] Author interview with Respondent 7, May 5, 2015.

[358] Author interview with Respondent 3, July 7, 2015.

[359] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

[360] Author interview with Respondent 8, July 2, 2015.

[361] Author interview with Respondent 9, July 3, 2015.

same goal, but rather indicated that inter-religious relationships are themselves the goal, not a means to achieving or maintaining peace in a pluralist society.

A respondent directly involved in inter-religious dialogue work noted that, while there is indeed a saturation of dialogue, people are striving to keep their identities in the face of increasing globalization. This respondent noted that the global narratives are stronger than any local or regional initiatives, so while these dialogues might temper their effect, they are fighting a huge uphill battle to counter narratives of religious or sectarian division.[362]

Another respondent argued for the preservation of unity, rather than focusing energies on advancing democracy as such:

> We are not after a perfect democracy, but we are after a perfect conviviality. How can I use democracy to protect my national unity? National unity is my target, which I care for. How can I protect and survive this national unity? That's my aim. I use democracy in this way in order to protect my national unity. Lebanon is the only country in the Middle East where the rights of communities are preserved, not only the rights of individuals...So yes, our political system, sectarianism is not good, but so far, it is the only way to find, to preserve the rights of communities, and to give them the chance when others are eliminating the rights of communities, to give them the chance to feel free when expressing

[362] Author interview with Respondent 20, July 7, 2015.

themselves and living in their own beliefs. This is the good thing about sectarianism in Lebanon.[363]

This emphasis on unity and consensus was strong in other interviews with those actors who were themselves religious elites, or prioritized work with religious elites as part of their peacebuilding and inter-religious relationship building efforts. The focus for many involved directly in inter-religious work was essentially damage control and building of individual and institutional relationships, rather than seeing these efforts as working to change institutions or socio-political structures in any way. This is critical, because there is an assumption that explicitly interreligious work in a context like Lebanon would naturally have peace, or increased social cohesion, as one of its goals, and yet, a different sentiment entirely emerged through many of my interviews: those working in these spaces often do not see their work having a ripple effect into society, but rather see the work as important for those on the inside of this "bubble," protecting them and their relationships while social and political strife continues unabated. This leads to some of the key findings that emerged from my observations and analysis of the religious peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon.

**Key Findings: What can we say about religious peacebuilding in Lebanon?**

1. **Religion is shaped through, and in turn shapes, conflict in Lebanon**. The World Values survey data shows that many Lebanese identify with spiritual beliefs and with sectarian identities, but do not identify as explicitly religious. The meaning of religion

[363] Author interview with Respondent 9, July 3, 2015.

itself has been changed through conflict, and the fact that one cannot engage with religious institutions in Lebanon without the sectarian system coming in tow is an important factor shaping this reality.

Religion cannot be confined to the realm of the personal/internal and the apolitical, because religion itself is made *through* politics. Lebanese and Lebanon observers often separate out religion from sectarianism because there is a common assumption that religion cannot be this politicized. This belief is reified in the realm of inter-religious work, as practitioners and Respondent s attempt to parse the truly *religious* from the political and sectarian. However, religion is made through, and exists in, a dynamic relationship with the socio-political, as demonstrated in this chapter's journey through Lebanese history.

Adam Gaiser argues for a narrative identity approach to understanding Islamic sectarianism in particular, which "treats intra-religious divisions as participatory discourses in which individuals ultimately choose to locate themselves in a plot ('emplot' themselves)—or not to do so—and which can thereby imply certain kinds of practice/behavior."[364] He goes on to argue that this is a "dynamic and conscious process of adoption, maintenance, and manipulation of certain types of narrative identities in particular places and at particular times by particular persons or groups of persons,"[365] a

[364] Adam Gaiser, "A Narrative Identity Approach to Islamic Sectarianism," *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East,* eds. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61-62.

[365] Gaiser, "A Narrative Identity Approach to Islamic Sectarianism," 62.

finding that comports with what a material approach to studying religion in Lebanon reveals.

The persistence of global & regional narratives is important to the Lebanese story. While on the localized and quotidian level, religious tension is rarely present, the regional and global discourse on religious division (i.e., the clash of civilizations narrative) is often stronger than the local realities of coexistence and cooperation. Religion is always local. And yet, local manifestations of religion are often highly informed by external global or regional narratives that connect oppression and conflict to religion in explicit and implicit ways.

**2. Institutional change is necessary for religious peacebuilding efforts to be truly effective in improving social cohesion.** Otherwise, the changes that are made are too fragile and undermined by the dominance of sectarian logic. Cross-sectarian ties (often initiated through peacebuilding programs) can be part of pushing for this institutional change. However, their work is extremely uphill, since elites work against sectarian cooperation that is anti-status quo. Institutions, not just initiatives, are necessary for sustainable social cohesion. As one respondent noted, peacebuilding programs and initiatives are building the infrastructures of a new kind of Lebanon, but they need institutional engineering to make a lasting difference. Successful programs judged on their own merits cannot make sustainable change if they do not shift the institutions and structures constantly maintaining and reproducing sectarianism.

The overview of Lebanese history in the first part of this chapter demonstrates how the institutionalization of the sect, and its subsequent self-perpetuation, constrains social cohesion as it continues to sow both horizontal and vertical distrust in many ways. Additionally, the biggest barrier to social cohesion that emerges from my study is the sectarian system itself – this is distinct from the existence of different sects, which I argue is in and of itself is not the barrier, but rather the ways the sectarian mode of functioning has been entrenched and hardens boundaries and inequalities, while creating more and more distance between the state and individuals.

It is clear that Lebanese elites do indeed understand and know one another. The issue is not interpersonal division, but indeed, the elite cooperation to maintain sectarianism and thereby elite control of communities. When programs are primarily focused on changing beliefs (about one's own religious tradition, and about the Other), structural barriers to social cohesion are often left to the side, thus precluding sustainable change. Improved relationships between people of different sects are important in and of themselves, but do not have the power to "trickle out" to improve social cohesion without structural shifts.

3. **Many overt religious peacebuilding initiatives (particularly those that are elite-centric) are playing by, and either advertently or inadvertently reinforcing, the logic of sectarianism**. As one respondent argued, everyone in Lebanon has to play the sectarian game to get ahead, NGOs included, and thus their efforts are often wrapped up

in sectarian agendas.[366] Religious leaders cannot extract themselves from the sectarian system in doing inter-religious work.

Religious leaders in Lebanon are often upholding the status quo of communal representation, mimicking the sectarian system itself and re-inscribing the status quo. Two key examples of how this manifests are the religious institutions' collaboration in opposing civil marriage and in preventing schools from being desegregated by sect. Rather than promoting a genuine societal transformation that deals with the injustices of the past and present, religious elites play by the sectarian logic, speaking of unity and, indeed, united themselves in opposition to shifting the status quo of sectarian representation and control. It is clear that the language of sectarian elites and state-sanctioned religious elites is highly controlled and carefully calibrated to maintain a minimal amount of national unity without sacrificing sectarian loyalty, thereby losing their sense of control.

In a recent Carnegie paper, Alexander Henley asserts that,

> Because high-level religious leaders in Lebanon are generally drawn from elites and emerge from institutional apparatuses, and in a number of cases are dependent on the state, there is no cultural expectation that they be followed blindly—or at all. They are not 'of the people,' nor are they necessarily regarded as being 'for the people.'[367]

This comports with the findings of my research, as religious leaders are deeply embedded in and benefit in many ways from the status quo of sectarian politics in

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[366] Author interview with Respondent 15, July 1, 2015.

[367] Alexander D. M. Henley, "Religious Authority and Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* Paper, December 16, 2016, accessed February 21, 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/16/religious-authority-and-sectarianism-in-lebanon-pub-66487.

Lebanon, thus creating distance between their efforts and the desires of the Lebanese people.

Henley goes on to argue that,

> the reality is that religious leaders often have to walk a fine line in terms of rhetoric and behavior among their own community, the political elite, and other communities. In order to avoid being ostracized and isolated, they usually take pains to remain in favor with the elite, in that way maximizing their own influence through their ability to engage in gentle persuasion or soft negotiation. At the same time, they avoid straying too far from the dominant political values of their own community, let alone the values of coexistence that are a part of Lebanese political life.[368]

Religious leaders do not have to overtly create sectarian strife in order to help curate sectarian divisions; indeed, they must show their commitment to unity in order to preserve their place in the Lebanese order, but it is the implicit ways that they benefit from status quo maintenance that have a stronger impact on Lebanese society and politics, holding back much of the justice-seeking social cohesion work that is of interest to the people at large.

4. **Points 2 & 3 create a paradox for religious peacebuilding efforts**. If an effort or initiative is aligned with the sectarian system, or has a vested interest in upholding it, then their work serves to uphold the status quo and the interest of the state. If they are not so aligned, they have a very hard time making an impact that trickles up in any way. One respondent noted that as long as civil society level programs are not connected vertically

[368] Henley, "Religious Authority and Sectarianism in Lebanon."

to impacting political institutions or engineering, they are allowed to do their work, because they are not seen as a threat.[369]

As Salloukh, et. al., have argued,

> By binding Lebanese to their sectarian/political patrons and clientelist networks, and by making them materially dependent on the latter's patronage benefits, the political economy of sectarianism operates in such a way as to sabotage experiments in non-sectarian forms of political mobilization and organization, forcing most Lebanese to privilege their sectarian identities over alternative and more appropriate class, professional, or local affiliations.[370]

Thus, the dilemma at hand is that political elites will only allow programs and initiatives to gain traction that do not challenge their authority and control. Anything that truly challenges the sectarian system gets squashed, and yet challenging the sectarian system is the only way that these programs could actually achieve their desired effects.

While most Lebanese politicians and sectarian leaders are verbally promoting social cohesion from their platforms, certain actors have at times diverged from this common message, as Aoun's call for Christians to rally in the streets in the summer of 2015 shows.[371] Christian and Shi'a politicians often reference the risks of leaving any community behind in Lebanon, focusing on their own community's rights being curtailed. Thus, the current political rhetoric is about maintaining an amenable balance of power and participation, rather than regularly spouting overtly negative rhetoric about other groups. That said, the electoral system promotes bonding, rather than bridging,

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[369] Author interview with Respondent 15, July 1, 2015.

[370] Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 7.

[371] See Nour Samaha, "Lebanese Christian party rallies for representation," *Al Jazeera English*, August 12, 2015, accessed May 31, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/08/lebanese-christian-party-rallies-representation-150812200456604.html

strategies for political parties to gain seats.[372] This points to the way in which bonding cohesion, or reifying the sectarian boundaries, actually *serves* the status quo version of cohesion in Lebanon. The current model of unity, enshrined in Ta'if and more deeply entrenched thereafter, is dependent upon sectarian boundaries with powerful elite representatives and guardians. The sectarian system requires elites to take part in this careful dance, promoting enough unity to stay in play in Lebanon (and to avoid war), while simultaneously maintaining enough bonding cohesion (i.e., sectarian loyalty) to remain as the representative of a given sect.

Additionally, it is useful to consider Bruce Lincoln's categories of religions of the status quo, religions of revolution, and religions of resistance, when considering how religion manifests at present in Lebanon. While religious and sectarian elites predominantly reflect manifestations of religion aimed at maintaining the status quo, this is not immediately clear from the surface. For example, Nasrallah and Aoun both use resistance or even revolutionary language at times, but nearly always act in the service of maintaining the status quo of political and religious elite social and political control. Generally, only those who *benefit* from the status quo in Lebanon are invested in keeping it, and thus Lebanon is ripe for religious narratives that resist and revolt. Thus, there are resistant and revolutionary forms of religion always present and rising to the surface when opportunities present themselves (such as, at present, on the Syrian border, as well as on the southern border at moments of particular tension with Israel).

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[372] On bridging vs. bonding strategies, see Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

5. **Those interested in advancing social cohesion in Lebanon need to calibrate and specify the roles and effects of religious actors in peacebuilding.** As one respondent pointed out, a focus on local religious leaders will yield more results, as local leaders may be more invested in and willing to work for real, sustainable peace than national religious leaders.[373] Additionally, one must distinguish between preventing or extinguishing overt violence, and the longer term goal of sustainable social cohesion. As one respondent said, "when you need to negotiate a ceasefire, ok you make concessions. But you should not mix up ceasefire building and peacebuilding."[374] The same strategies of engaging religion in times of immediate/urgent crisis are not the strategies that will help build social cohesion over the long term. Thus, there is a need to differentiate the roles and impacts of religious leaders, and to note that their impact will ultimately be calibrated by how useful their message or work is to the political elites, and on the urgency and overtness of particular episodes of violence. As one respondent noted, "sometimes, you just need a fatwa."[375]

There is some promise in embodied approaches to religious peacebuilding, including the adoption of Annunciation Day into the national calendar as a multi-religious holy day, and the cooperative public rebuilding of houses of worship that have been damaged or destroyed. However, the effort for mainstreaming Annunciation Day as a cross-sectarian national holiday is stymied by the fact that very few are aware of its

[373] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[374] Author interview with Respondent 10, July 9, 2015.

[375] Author interview with Respondent 11, July 9, 2015.

existence, and it is widely still seen as a (somewhat obscure) Christian holiday. If and when efforts to integrate cross- or trans-sectarian modes of being and belonging into the Lebanese nation-state are successful, we are likely to see increased social cohesion in the country, and yet efforts to do so are often confined to small peacebuilding or activist circles.

**Conclusion**

My analysis of current religious peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon reveals a notable divide between efforts working to tame, control, and preserve a status quo, under the banners of unity, consensus, and communal rights; versus efforts challenging the status quo and seeking to remake social norms, under the banners of justice and individual rights. Efforts in inter-religious engagement are bound by the logic of the sectarian system itself. They often go one of two ways- they either work (explicitly or implicitly) to reinforce and uphold the sectarian system, or they work to resist it. It is highly challenging to straddle the middle, and ultimately, work that tries to take a middle path is rendered ineffective or is constantly undermined by the deeply-embedded sectarian logic. There is a fragile but carefully calibrated effort among sectarian elites to prioritize bonding cohesion without losing the minimal amount of bridging cohesion to maintain Lebanon's precarious national unity.

The religious peacebuilding space is varied, as are the ways religion shows up in socio-political conflict, and all of this is dynamic, as religion becomes something new and takes on new meanings and modes of operation over time. In both analyzing religion

in conflict and in peacebuilding, we are better served by looking at the ways religion serves to preserve or challenge status quos in various contexts, rather than asking if religion is promoting violence or peace. It gives us a more nuanced approach to peacebuilding, if we can see how religion is being employed to challenge or uphold a norm- it helps us look beyond the immediate and overt instances of violence.

Salloukh, et. al., argue that, "although wrapped in velvet clientelist and ideological gloves, the violence of the sectarian system is profound though not always discernable or physical."[376] The current religious peacebuilding approaches are good for dealing with overt, urgent violence, but are less effective at addressing deeper systemic or institutional violence. Without dealing with the systemic, less obvious forms of violence, the overt violence will continue to emerge. The distraction of extremism often sidelines efforts to address systemic violence, and much of the energy and capacity of religious peacebuilding gets rerouted to manage the most obvious violence, at the expense of creating long-term change.

The Lebanese socio-political conflict are not "about" religion, and yet, it takes place through the lenses of religion and sect. Religious identities become salient through very particular political processes, and this process in turn changes the religious identities, as it is a dynamic relationship. In other words, it is not just religion being "used" by politicians as if religion itself is somehow static, but it *becomes* itself through the socio-political conflict processes. What it means to be religious is shaped by socio-political dynamics, in both conflict and peace, and many root-cause issues (such as

[376] Salloukh, et. al., *The Politics of Sectarianism*, 6.

economic disenfranchisement and inequalities) take on a sectarian or religious lens in the Lebanese context. In this way, religion is *inherently* political. Efforts to engage religion in peacebuilding are thus essential, not optional, as there is no clean divide between the religious and the socio-political. However, current approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding in Lebanon have been limited in their ability to increase social cohesion. While these efforts have proven to work in quelling direct and immediate forms of violence, from the civil war until the present day, they have not been able to effectively move Lebanese society further than this, and have in some cases served to further entrench the sectarian system.

## Chapter 5: How Did We Get Here? Tracing Bosnia's Religio-Political History

As you walk through the center of Sarajevo, you quickly comes across a number of religious structures, including the Gazi Husrev Beg Mosque, founded in 1531; the old Orthodox church, built in the 1530s; a synagogue, built by the Ottoman governor of the time in 1580-81; and a Roman Catholic cathedral, built in 1889. Along with a number of other religious structures, these four houses of worship are located within a half square kilometer of one another, nestled amongst the shops and restaurants that comprise the bustling center of the city.[377] This heritage is a source of pride for many residents of Sarajevo to this day. The geography of sacred space in any given city can show the nation's commitment to religious expression and pluralism, and yet, it does not always mean that this pluralism is without tension.

Bosnia has been a lab for engaging religion in peacebuilding over the last 20 years. The high levels of international intervention immediately post-war were unprecedented, and many focused, at least in part, on healing religious divides.[378] Indeed, Bosnia and religion-focused conflict resolution efforts have become closely linked in research, with more focus here than in Lebanon on intentionally engaging religion in the

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[377] Andras Riedlmayer, "From the Ashes: The Past and Future of Bosnia's Cultural Heritage" in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 103.

[378] Roberto Belloni and Francesco Strazzari, "Corruption in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo: a Deal among Friends," *Third World Quarterly* 35.5 (2014): 855.

post-conflict climate. Immediately post-conflict, a national Interreligious Council was formed to help facilitate the reconciliation process. In a country where group identity lines during conflict were clearly correlated with religion (as well as ethnicity), even if these lines were constructed, and where religious symbolism and language played heavily into the specter of violence, Bosnia seemed like a clear case where involving the religious institutions, leaders, symbolism, and language in the peacebuilding processes would be absolutely necessary.

Bosnia is often seen as one of the paradigmatic religious conflicts of the 20th century, and yet, in 1990 right before the conflict, emerging from years of socialism, very few within Bosnian society would identify as particularly religious. As one of my respondents stated, "in Bosnia, you are a believer from 1992."[379] How, then, can we explain what happened here? Do we simply say that religious symbolism and identity were mapped onto ethnic identity, as a cloak of sorts? This may be part of the answer, and yet, there is much more to the story. This answer does not satisfy how and why religion came to factor so prominently into the articulation and dynamics of the war at the particular time that it did. Additionally, religious identity was itself shaped through the lead up to the conflict in the 1990s, through the war itself, and beyond. How religion functions in Bosnian society now, and what this means for peacebuilding initiatives that engage religion, is shaped largely by these processes of meaning-making.

To start to unravel these questions, we must understand the history of religion-making in Bosnia, as it intertwines with (and is in many ways inseparable from) cultural

[379] Interview with Respondent 9, March 15, 2016.

and ethnic identities. Through this chapter, we will look at this through socio-political moments of groupness in Bosnia's history, then analyze how some of these moments became "sticky," to invoke Ashutosh Varshney's terminology.

**Talking about Religion in Bosnia**

Bosnia, like Lebanon, was part of the Ottoman Empire, which affects the ways in which religion developed in this context. Additionally, the 20th century context of Yugoslav socialism shaped religion in Bosnia in unique ways. Under the Yugoslav socialist project, religion was highly privatized. While the free exercise of religion was permitted, public displays of religion were discouraged and religion was not integrated into political life.

For many, the combined factors of the near equivalence of religious and ethnic identity, and the privatization of religion under the socialist government, created a context in which numerous people confined religion to their homes and with their families, precipitating increased bonding cohesion. Many of my respondents referred to their pre-war selves as "Eid and Baklava Muslims," or as "Christmas and Easter Christians."[380] Many noted that religion was primarily seen as private and cultural; it later became much more public and politicized, transforming the way religion functioned in Bosnian society, as I will expound upon later in this chapter.

In modern day Bosnia, religion has been mapped onto by ethnic identity nearly completely. Serbs are Serbian Orthodox, Croats are Catholic, while Bosniaks are

[380] It is notable that both focus on religious celebrations, rather than more pietistic religious observances, such as Lent and Ramadan.

Muslim. "Muslim" legally became an ethnic category in Bosnia in the 1970's, in response to the increased politicization (and institutionalization) of Serb and Croat ethnic identities, a point that I will examine further in this chapter. Regardless of what one believes (or does not believe), or how one practices (or not), religio-ethnic identity is a key organizing structure for Bosnian socio-political life, from electoral and governance structures to employment quotas to geographic distribution and schooling, demonstrating many similarities to Lebanon's socio-political organizing structures.

Bosnia is divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska. Bosniak and Croat citizens make up the bulk of the population in the former, and Serbs make up the primary population in the latter, though both entities are multi-ethnic. Within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are 10 cantons, eight of which are either Croat or Muslim, while two are mixed.[381]

The highly complex electoral system in Bosnia and Herzegovina institutionalizes ethno-religious divisions. The Presidency is shared between the three primary ethnic groups (Serb, Croat, and Bosniak), with one candidate from each group being elected through a plurality vote, and then rotating between occupying the Presidency and two Vice Presidency slots. This closely mirrors the Lebanese consociational structure of government, giving explicit preference to the predominant ethnic groups in an effort to balance the power between them. No one who is not from one of the three primary ethnic groups can run for this office, and thus the Jewish and Roma minorities, for instance, are rendered ineligible.

[381] Ahmet Alibašić & Nedim Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia: Learning to be Free!" *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19:1 (2017): 22.

Citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina are not compelled to vote for their ethnic candidate, but can only vote for one candidate (so a Croat could not, for instance, vote for both a Croat and a Bosniak candidate from the electoral lists). The seats in the House of Representatives, one of the bodies of the Parliamentary Assembly, are proportionally representative of the main ethnic groups in the country.[382] It is worth noting here that the numbers from the 1991 census are still being used to determine quotas and electoral laws; there was a census in 2013, but the ethnic data from that census have still not been released, as it would likely cause political turmoil.[383] This is similar to the situation in Lebanon; although the census data being used in Lebanon is much older, the same operating principle applies: that the political structures rely on a very specific snapshot of ethnic/sectarian belonging, rather than being malleable over time to changing demographics. Florian Bieber has observed that, from 1990 until the present day, voters in Bosnia have opted for ethnonationalist parties, even when other cross-cutting platforms are available and viable in elections.[384] In showing that ethno-religious political parties were not the only options, Bieber's research demonstrates that ethno-religious political identities became embedded and embodied in Bosnian political life over time.

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[382] For a good breakdown of the Bosnian electoral system, see The Guardian's datablog on Bosnia-Herzegovina in advance of its 2014 elections, see https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/oct/08/bosnia-herzegovina-elections-the-worlds-most-complicated-system-of-government, accessed June 17, 2017.

[383] Interview with Respondent 10, March 16, 2016; Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 21.

[384] Florian Bieber, "Undermining Democratic Transition: the Case of the 1990

Founding Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14:4 (2014): 549.

Bosnia has institutionalized religious freedom (including the freedom to change one's religion) for both individuals and communities in society, with such guarantees enshrined in the constitution, although there are numerous cases in which these guarantees are challenged or transgressed.[385] Personal status laws (including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and the like) are treated by civil, rather than religious courts, and thus unlike Lebanon, Bosnians do not rely upon clerics for personal status concerns. Ahmet Alibasic and Nedim Begovic argue, however, that this

> model of separation combined with equality, however, does not preclude the state's control and cooperation with religious groups. The main terms of the state's control over religious life are elaborated on under the procedures for awarding the status of legal personality and for registering religious communities at the Ministry of Justice.[386]

Thus, the state indeed exerts authority over religious life by determining what counts as an accepted religious community in Bosnia.

Data from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) shows that Bosnia has fairly low levels of *government* regulation of religion (3.7/10). The state does exert control over what counts as religion by determining what can and cannot be considered an official religion in Bosnia. The *social* regulation of religion is higher, at 5.6/10, showing that social forces act to restrict religious practice in more ways than do official government interventions or regulations.

While the Muslim and Jewish communities in Bosnia are autonomous, for the most part, the Catholic and Orthodox communities answer to outside authorities

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[385] Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 23.

[386] Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 24.

(Catholics to the Holy See in Rome, and Orthodox to the Serbian Orthodox Synod in Belgrade). Religious leaders and institutions played varied and ambivalent roles in the lead up to and during the Bosnian war. One respondent observed that, "before the war, there was a lot of media hype of religious leaders recruiting people to join their side in the fight. After the war, these same leaders were telling people to make peace."[387] Thus, while the employment of religion in war tactics is indisputable, the specific roles of religious institutions and leaders were wide-ranging.

For Bosnia, religion is in no way a "root cause" of conflict, and yet, it played into and was shaped by conflict in the region over time in critical ways. We see here the ways in which the Bosnia case resides at the intersection of instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to understanding the role of religion in socio-political conflict. As a historically non-religious society, which has become more religious over time in terms of personal practice and belief, Bosnia is a key example of how religion functions as a dynamic conflict variable, religion in Bosnia took shape through socio-political processes and became an important factor in defining conflict, as well as in defining the current state of Bosnian society.

**The Social Cohesion Frame**

As I argued in Chapter One of this dissertation, utilizing a social cohesion framework better measures societal progress toward peace than utilizing the more vague concept of peace. Social cohesion looks at the vertical and horizontal, as well as the

[387] Interview with Respondent 7, March 14, 2016.

informal and formal, ways in which social groups relate to one another, and society to the state. Additionally social cohesion considers injustice and inequalities, while one can conceivably measure peace in a more negative sense, as the absence of overt conflict.

While social cohesion is my way of assessing the progress of peace work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is not necessarily the way in which many involved in peacebuilding- and particularly in "religious peacebuilding"- are articulating their own goals and objectives, as will become apparent through discussions of my interview data later in the chapter. I will continue to use the term "peacebuilding" to refer to the efforts in the field, as this is consistent with how actors themselves talk about their work, but social cohesion is my *measure* of efficacy of these efforts, taken as a whole.

**Research Methodology**

I conducted field interviews in Bosnia and Herzegovina in March 2016, then followed up with phone interviews, between April 2016-February 2017. I interviewed 17 individuals, concentrating the bulk of my interviews in Sarajevo, with a few interviews in Banja Luka and some in Maglaj, along with some interviews with people previously involved in Bosnian peace processes who are now residing in the United States. Several respondents that I interviewed in Sarajevo worked and lived outside of the city. I selected respondents from different ethno-religious groups in order to get a sampling of perspectives, and I spoke with persons who reported different levels of religious commitment- some were religious leaders, while others identified as religious but had

varying levels of engagement with the institutions affiliated with their faith tradition, and others identifying as secular.

I spoke with peacebuilding actors, religious leaders, and political officials. Interviewees spoke from both individual and organizational perspectives on how they have engaged religion in peacebuilding work, and how they think about the impact of this work within the Bosnian socio-political context. Many were born and raised in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and my respondents spanned several generations. Some had been working in peacebuilding or doing inter-religious work since the war began, while others were newer to active engagement in this work.

I selected my interview respondents through preliminary outreach to individuals or organizations that emerged as key players in the field of religious peacebuilding, based on my initial desk research. I reached out to these individuals and organizations prior to arrival to make contact and set up interviews. Once on site, I recruited new interviewees through snowball sampling, taking recommendations from those with whom I interacted on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those I interviewed were very willing to recommend other players in the peacebuilding field, and thus, my cohort of interviewees grew naturally from these initial points of contact. This methodology is similar to the approach I took in Lebanon, although it was slightly modified to fit the Bosnian context, and I was able to interview more people outside of Sarajevo that I was able to outside of Beirut.

My analysis in this chapter combines the findings from these interviews with a study of materials from a large sampling of peacebuilding organizations. These materials

included evaluations, internal planning documents, and public project and program descriptions and advertisements. These materials help to supplement my interviews by demonstrating how practitioners involved in these approaches frame their objectives, goals, and scope of work for both internal purposes as well as for external audiences. Additionally, I draw upon survey data from three surveys, including two from the University of Edinburgh along with the UNDP National Human Development Report 2009 on Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Scope and Structure**

This case study is divided into two chapters, and proceeds as follows: in the present chapter, I outline the social and political history of religion and ethnicity in Bosnia from the Ottoman era to the present, focusing on several key historical periods. This is not meant to be a complete overview of Bosnia's history, but rather reveals several key socio-political moments that helped to shape ethno-religious identities and make them politically meaningful at different points in time. I then shift in Chapter Six to an overview and analysis of a sampling of recent and current approaches to engage religion in peacebuilding in Bosnia, analyzing the challenges and impact of these efforts in terms of social cohesion in the country. Through this, I will provide the reader with several key insights relevant to understanding the complex relationship between religion and peacebuilding in and beyond Bosnia.

## Tracing Religion in Bosnia's Socio-Political History

The first part of this chapter is a tour of some of the key "moments of groupness"[388] for the religious communities in the area now known as Bosnia and Herzegovina, including an analysis of how some of these moments stuck and, in many ways, fused with ethno-political identities. This examination demonstrates that the religious tensions that showed up in the conflict of the early 1990's do not stem from "ancient hatreds," nor do they derive from religious ideologies as such. Rather, religious ideologies were used to create exclusive bonding cohesion and to justify violence during the war were themselves shaped through a series of socio-political events throughout Balkan history.

### *Bosnia on the Edge of Empires*

Bosnia has been a multi-religious context for centuries, and over the years, different religious communities have been dominant, leaving other religious communities with varying degrees of freedom and autonomy.[389] This reality undercuts any one group's ability to claim exclusive native dominance.[390] While the ethnic and religious histories of the Balkan people is disputed, historians assert that south Slav peoples arrived in the Balkans between the 6th and 7th centuries, with large conversions to Christianity in

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[388] See Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

[389] For more on this, see Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 20-21.

[390] This reality in Bosnia is true of many other contexts as well, as the realities of regional and global migration patterns over the years have led to multiple different ethnic and religious groups laying claim to the same geographic territories at different times throughout history. Thus, group claims to nativity are much more precarious than they often appear.

the 9th century. The Christian population was split into western and eastern Christianity, mirroring the schism of the church. The split population began using different scripts for writing, thus materially reifying the sense of difference between the two primary Christian communities.[391]

The area now known as Bosnia was a trade crossroads in the Balkans. Seen as a meeting ground (or, from the perspective of some, a 'no man's land') between Catholic Dalmatia and Orthodox Serbia during the Middle Ages,[392] Bosnia was overtaken by the Ottomans in 1483, and large numbers of Bosnians converted to Islam over time.[393] The Serb Patriarchate, which had been set up in the Kosovo region in 1346, was abolished by the Ottomans in the 15th century but re-established- still under the Ottomans- in 1557. It remained until 1766, when the Ottomans again abolished it for fear of it being used to cultivate anti-Ottoman revolutionary sentiments and action.[394] The Serbian church was then re-subsumed under the jurisdiction of Constantinople until the Serbian Patriarchate was re-established in 1920.

The pre-Ottoman borderland identity of Bosnia also came with a lack of strong religious institutional oversight. Thus, Bosnian Catholics among other groups developed their own local religious traditions that were seen by the outside Catholic religious

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[391] Sells, Michael, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 32.

[392] Fine, John V.A., "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia: Middle Ages to the Present," in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 3.

[393] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed,* 32-35.

[394] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 53.

authorities (including in particular the Hungarian Catholics, as Austria-Hungary gained control of the region for a period) as heretical. Subsequently, outside authorities established greater institutional oversight as an effort to bring them back in line. The local Catholics rebelled against this oversight, breaking ties with Rome and forming their own Bosnian Church in the 1250s. While the Bosnian Church leaders did return to the fold of the official Catholic Church about a century later, the boundaries and beliefs of the local Catholics (including their leadership) remained porous and open to regular interaction with other religious communities.[395]

In this period, the three major groups (Serb, Croat and Bosniak) all spoke dialects (with their own unique scripts) of the same language, which was until recently referred to as Serbo-Croatian.[396] Additionally, in medieval Bosnia, no one known as Serbs or Croats lived in Bosnia proper, as the local population of varying religious traditions considered themselves to be Bosnian. Thus, any wars at this point were international, not internal ethnic wars.[397]

During the final five years of the pre-Ottoman Bosnian state, as the Ottoman Empire advanced toward the Balkans, the king sought to eliminate the Bosnian Church entirely in an effort to attract European aid to the Bosnian cause. Thus, when the Ottomans conquered most of Bosnia in the 1460s, the Bosnian Church had mostly disappeared.[398] During the early Ottoman period, more Orthodox Christians were

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[395] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 4.

[396] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 5.

[397] Fine, The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia, 8.

[398] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 5.

entering Bosnia from Serbia (fleeing an earlier Ottoman takeover there), and Catholics fled to Dalmatia and Croatia (which were still not conquered by Ottoman forces), thus creating major demographic shifts in the Christian populations. Additionally, converts to Islam came from all of these religious communities, but this was a very slow process of conversion, as it was not until the 17th century that a majority of Bosnians had become Muslim.[399]

While there are different perspectives on the notions of religious tolerance and coexistence under the Ottoman millet system, Michael Sells notes that,

> The truth is that while for many centuries religious coexistence was undoubtedly more accepted under the Ottomans than almost anywhere in Christendom, the was certainly no sense of religious equality. If there was no ethnic conflict, it was not because of 'tolerance' but because there was no concept of nationality among the Sultan's subjects, and because Christianity stressed the 'community of believers' rather than ethnic solidarity.[400]

Thus, we can acknowledge the unique nature of religious coexistence under the Ottomans without romanticizing it, while also recognizing that it looked different in different geographic and cultural contexts and changed over time. Christians and Jews had special status as "people of the book," as the *millet* arrangement allowed for a certain level of autonomy for religious communities and particularly for the religious elites. At the same time, non-Muslim religious communities (and the individuals that comprised them) also experienced discrimination and sometimes harsh treatment and higher

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[399] Fine, The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 6.

[400] Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), xlii; note that the concept of "religious equality" is anachronistic for the pre- and early modern eras in particular, as it has its own modern history that intersects with the development of "world religions" as a concept, examined in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

taxes.[401] This includes in particular the practice of devşirme (often translated as the 'levy of boys'), in which select Christian boys were enlisted into military or administrative service for the Ottoman state and compelled to convert to Islam.[402] This practice indeed entailed forced conversion, while also, some argue, providing advancement opportunities for men from Christian families. Scholars of the period disagree on whether or not this was met with acceptance and praise or resistance from Christian communities, as records show that reactions from Christian populations were mixed.[403]

Demographic changes by the 15th century led Muslims to Balkan cities, while the countryside remained mainly Christian. While tax registers between 1520-1539 reveal that more than 80% of the residents of the Balkans were Christian, Muslims were more numerous than Christians in most Balkan cities.[404] The Ottomans did not seek out mass conversion to Islam, though there were certainly waves of conversion, in part because it was beneficial to have non-Muslims living in the territories to pay higher taxes and provide other benefits,[405] although there is mixed evidence of how this played out in reality. The Orthodox Church in particular received many benefits from this arrangement, as they were given more control over their own people, collecting taxes from them and

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[401] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 47.

[402] Cynthia Simmons, "A Multicultural, Multiethnic, and Multiconfessional Bosnia and Herzegovina: Myth and Reality, " *Nationalities Papers* 30:4 (2002): 627; Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-2011* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 72.

[403] See, for example, analysis of historical scholarship on this issue from Kathryn Ann Hain, "Devshirme is a Contested Practice." *Utah Historical Review* 2 (2012): 165-176.

[404] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 25.

[405] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 49-50.

dispensing justice through religious courts.[406] The Bosnian Franciscans also had their own *millet*, though a number of Catholics in the region converted to Islam, as their ties to Rome led to a less desirable arrangement for local Catholics than that of local Orthodox Christians.[407] According to Mark Mazower, "Ottoman rule was bringing Balkan Christians not only religious autonomy but increasing prosperity as well."[408] It is important to note that the reference to "Balkan Christians" here means the leadership, not the masses.

While institutional religious separation and autonomy was a reality in the Balkans under the Ottomans, lived religion saw much more cross-pollination among religions. Christians commonly visited Muslim sacred sites and vice versa, and particularly in areas outside of the reach of the institutions, there was more institutional "slippage" as well, with non-Muslims frequently opting to utilize Islamic courts. John Fine notes that,

> The interaction between religious communities on the village level during the Ottoman period, supported by the local priests, most of whom were locals….allowed the development of what truly is a Bosnian culture, shared by Bosnians of all faiths and distinct from that of the neighbouring regions (now states).[409]

Shared religious life was thus a reality, working within the simultaneous experience of religious division at the institutional levels.[410]

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[406] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 49-50.

[407] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 6.

[408] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 50.

[409] Fine,"The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 8.

[410] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 54, 58-61; Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 8.

The 18th century entailed both chronic fighting on numerous fronts, and increased decentralization in Bosnia, leading to a very weak central state or sense of national identity. Ethnic distinctions within Bosnia became much more pronounced in the 19th century. Religion and ethnicity were becoming more fused, and religio-nationalism began to develop. Fine asserts that,

> The concept of ethnicity itself had raised its dubious if not evil head in Bosnia only in the nineteenth century, when Christian Bosnians began to take up ethnic and national ideas that penetrated Bosnia from Serbia and Croatia. With this development, new dimensions were added to one's religious identity. If you were a Catholic, you were also a Croat; if an Orthodox, then also a Serb. Now, for the first time, the names 'Serb' and 'Croat' were applied to people in Bosnia.[411]

A particular form of nationalism was thus beginning to emerge, developing and reifying ethno-religious identities in a way that had no been seen before in this context. Peasant uprisings began in the mid-1800s, with a particularly notable revolt in 1875 in Herzegovina, proceeded by major declines in Ottoman power in the region. These revolts were not explicitly nationalistic, as they focused on the rights of the peasants, but the calls for independence coincided with nationalist sentiments that were on the rise in the region, precipitated by the Balkan enlightenment.[412]

Austria-Hungary began to occupy Bosnia in 1878, precipitating a crisis in Catholic and Muslim communities on the local level, as the Catholic Austrian authorities brought with them a secular, European approach to education. Muslims feared mass conversions to Catholicism, and the Muslim elites became more interested in asserting

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[411] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 9.

[412] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 30, 74-76.

authority over the religious lives of village Muslims.[413] This trend was echoed by Catholic authorities as well (both from Rome and from local Franciscan elites), as fear of major changes spurred a much stronger interest in asserting more religious control over their own flock.[414] Under Austrian authorities, Bosnian Muslims became more organized in a centralized local hierarchy, as Austrians hoped to create distance between Bosnian Muslims and Ottoman authorities. Thus, the Austrian emperor appointed the first Rais al-'Ulama (Grand Mufti) of Bosnia in 1882.[415]

Fine argues that, "the tensions that came to the fore with the Austrian occupation...are within religious (becoming ethnic) communities, not between them."[416] This is important to note, as it is often the case that tensions *within* religious communities, and assertions of control from institutional elites, often precede tensions *between* religious communities, as seen in the increased control different religious authorities attempted to assert over their own communities in this time period. Multi-direction conversion took place during the 15th and 16th centuries in particular, with conversions between Islam and the Christian sects, but also from one Christian sect to another as well (i.e., from the Bosnian Church to the Orthodox or Catholic).[417] Additionally, there were clashes, toward the end of Ottoman rule in particular, between external institutional religious authorities and local religious communities. One such case

[413] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 10.

[414] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 10.

[415] Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 25.

[416] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 11.

[417] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 6.

was between the Catholic leadership in Rome and the local Franciscans in Bosnia, as the latter were seen as too loose in their tolerance for diverse and heterodox practice among lay Catholics.[418] In order to exert greater control, the Pope (with the support of the Austrian emperor) appointed an archbishop to Sarajevo- something that had not been done previously.[419] In the other communities, this intra-religious tension was also seen through competing authorities vying for control and community representation, both leading up to and during the war in the 1990's.

The Ottoman Empire officially fell in the Balkans in 1923, as the modern political map of the Balkans emerged, leading into the multiple Yugoslav eras.[420] The Autro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia, paired for a length of time with formal Ottoman rule, in many ways nationalized the millet system of governance, as it reified the religious communities as socio-political entities, subscribing these religious distinctions into socio-political life in a very material way.

***Ethno-political Identities in the Yugoslav Eras***

The Yugoslav state existed in various forms from approximately 1918-1991, first as the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, then as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, then, after World War II, as the Socialist

[418] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 10.

[419] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 10.

[420] Mazower, *The Balkans*, 79.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.[421] While at the emergence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, enthusiasm for South Slav unification was mostly limited to intellectual and societal elites, the growth in higher education in the Balkans prior to World War I helped cultivate the spread of this enthusiasm for unified South Slav identity.[422] World War I created tensions for this vision, as ethnic nationalism grew in the Balkans, but the Kingdom was created nevertheless, known in 1918 as "the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes."[423] The multi-confessional, multi-national Kingdom included the regions of Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia and Dalmatia, Vojvodina and Croatia-Slavonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and they adopted a constitution for the new entity in 1921, asserting that this people spoke a single language ("Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian").[424]

Lenard Cohen notes that,

> Some momentum toward the formation of a Yugoslav identity did take place during the 1920s simply owing to the cohabitation and routine interaction of different South Slav elites and citizens in a unified state, but on balance the countervailing force of disappointment and bitterness regarding overcentralization and ethnic inequalities proved to be far more influential.[425]

Thus, while political elites were successful in creating the official political body, they faced numerous challenges trying to spread a sense of common identity among all of the peoples that made up the Kingdom.

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[421] Lenard J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press,1995), 1.

[422] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 8.

[423] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 13.

[424] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 13-14.

[425] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 15-16.

In 1929, King Alexander renamed the entity the "Kingdom of Yugoslavia," and abolished the existing constitution, further centralizing authority and banning political organizations with religious, regional or ethnic goals. While he did experience initial success in this effort, ethnic movements continued to gain momentum, and the King was assassinated in 1934 by Croatian Ustashe and Macedonian fighters working in collaboration with one another.[426]

The second half of the 1930s saw greater stability for the Kingdom, and a 1939 agreement with Croatian forces essentially federalized the country, giving Croatians their own "national unit". This created some temporary balance between the two largest ethnic groups- the Serbs and Croats- and this era saw an increased sense of common Yugoslav identity, in the midst of decentralization.[427] Under the Kingdom, religion was not prohibited, but it was not particularly welcomed, nor was it a key part of how different ethnic groups identified themselves in public, political ways. While a Bosnian identity still existed, the Kingdom did not formally recognize a Bosnian entity or "nation."

In the early 1940's, the fascist Ustashe military ruled in the Croatian state, promoting a dedication to "greater Croatia," a vision that included expelling the Serbs. A "Chetnik" guerilla army of Serbs fought back against this destruction, and while some of them nursed an idea of "Greater Serbia," the army, under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, was of mixed ethnicity and was eventually able to ward off the Ustashe fighters.

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[426] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 16-17.

[427] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 19-20.

World War II sparked bloody interethnic violence and civil war across the region.[428] In 1941, following the partition of Yugoslavia, Bosnia was joined to Croatia; at the time, it was 20% Croat, 35% Muslim, and 42% Serb. The Croatian leadership began wooing Muslims while cleansing the Serbs, and the local Franciscan priests had by and large supported the violent Croatian Ustase rulers.[429] Thus, religious rhetoric supporting ethnic violence emerged more strongly within the context of World World II and the disintegration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

In 1945, Tito reestablished the Yugoslav federation, which had been destroyed by Nazi Germany in 1941.[430] Tito's motto of "brotherhood and unity," under which Yugoslavia was liberated and its constituent regions re-joined to one another as 6 republics, was meant to cast a regional sentiment of unity among the republics. However, as Yugoslavia became increasingly decentralized, ethnic identity increased and became more central to political activism.

In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there was freedom of expression of religion but no public display of beliefs or ritual. Devoutness was seen as incompatible with holding membership in the Yugoslav Communist Party. In the 1950s and 1960s, Muslim Communist Party members were discouraged from giving children traditional Muslim names and there were no workplace accommodations for religious observances.

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[428] Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 21.

[429] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 11.

[430] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 5.

Tone Bringa observes that,

> The Yugoslav' authorities' curb on the expression of religious beliefs in public was a combination of the basically atheist outlook of their communist ideology and their fear of any expression of separatist nationalism. The authorities were well aware that for many 'Yugoslavs' adherence to one particular religion was intimately linked to their identification with one national community (or 'nation').[431]

Because of this, before 1990, religious beliefs and rituals were expressed privately, often in people's homes, largely dominated by women. Under Tito's Yugoslavia, religion was private & individual, while the religious institutions (specifically, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Croatian Catholic Church, and the Islamic Community in Bosnia) served as the keepers of culture in many ways, and indeed, paved the way for ethno-religious mobilization later. A number of respondents talked about their own experience of religion under socialist Yugoslavia. A Muslim activist described their own family as "Eid and Baklava Muslims", while a Serb activist talked about being "Christmas and Easter Christians." In other words, religious identity before the war was for many part of the landscape of life, worn lightly, but not at the forefront of one's identity. Religious identity was thus re-shaped through the war.

Some argue that because religion existed on Balkan life's periphery before the war, and was for many an "empty" cultural container, it was easy to manipulate (or "fill") by religio-political entrepreneurs looking to mobilize otherwise similar people against one another. Serbian Orthodox leadership early on bought into the politicization of religious identity as part of an ethno-national project, led by Serbian politicians, and the

[431] Tone Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 28-29.

church hierarchy quickly became supportive of these efforts. The images of priests blessing soldiers and weapons and of monasteries harboring fighters remain visceral in the minds of many I spoke with. Additionally, the emergence of a Muslim ethnic identity *as such* was a key development in the 20th century that contributes in important ways to the utilization of religion in subsequent conflict and strife.

***Emergence of a Muslim Ethnic Identity***

Muslims in the region did not have their own ethnic identity until the latter part of the 20th Century, seeing themselves as members of their political-national entities, and as "Bosnian" more generally, but not as a separate nation based on religious identity until the late 1960's, when this shifted. The increase in the importance of ethnic identity regionally led Muslims to seek an identity label of their own, akin to the Serb and Croatian labels that were gaining prominence. Thus, in 1968, they were officially recognized under the label "Muslim," which was meant to signify a religious community and now, an ethnic identity.[432]

Ashutosh Varshney notes that,

> In the post-1945 Yugoslavia, Croats, Macedonians, Serbs, Slovenes, and Montenegrins were called nations; Albanians, Hungarians, Bulgarians were nationalities; and Austrians, Greeks, Jews, Germans, and Poles were 'other nationalities and ethnic groups.' In the 1971 constitution, Muslims of Yugoslavia were promoted from a nationality to a nation.[433]

[432] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 12.

[433] Varshney, *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict*, 277.

The Yugoslav government recognized this new national category of "Muslims" in order to give Muslims an equivalent alternative to Serb and Croat classifications (which were the other options; "Muslim" became the only option now for non-Serb, non-Croat Bosnians).[434] Thus, the emergence of a Muslim *political* identity a in Bosnia-Herzegovina results from the changing socio-political climate between 1945 and 1971, during and following World War II.

While this, according to Sells, "finally gave Bosnian Muslims a political voice alongside Catholics and Orthodox Serbs…it did so at the cost of further reinforcing the identity between religion and nationality."[435] Bosnian Muslims had held onto their secular identity prior to this, attempting to make a stand against the erosion of a secular Bosnian state. However, the political climate essentially forced a politicized religious identity category for Bosnian Muslims as the only way to hold weight against the increasingly nationalist Serb and Croatian powers, in order to secure institutional space for their community in political and social life.[436] This demonstrates one way in which a certain form and function of religious identity became materially manifest in Bosnian life, a legacy for years to come.

This push for a strong public religious identity did not reflect the ways in which many Bosnian Muslims viewed themselves, which was primarily as Bosniaks, rather than prioritizing their religious identity.

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[434] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 14.

[435] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 14.

[436] Maya Shatzmiller, "Introduction," in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), xxii.

As Bringa observes,

> Among Bosnian Muslims, there were devout believers who held deep religious convictions, there were people who practiced certain key rituals and honoured major religious holy days out of respect for tradition, there were those who believed in God but had never learned how to practice Islam, and there were those Muslims by 'ethnicity' who declared themselves atheists. In other words, among Bosnia's Muslims there was a continuum of degrees of conviction and practice similar to what is found in Christian-defined societies in Western Europe.[437]

The decision to take on "Muslim" as an ethnic identity, then, did not naturally follow *religious* developments within the community, but rather reflected *political* developments (both inside and outside the community). An increased religiosity followed, to some degree, as the shift in the way Bosnian Muslims became politically identified *as Muslims* led to shifts in how Islam was lived out within Bosnian society. There was an uptick in religious expression (attending sermons and religious rituals or services, and so on) toward the end of the 1980's. This was also true for other religious communities, as communist structures were losing control of society.[438] Bringa notes that while many welcomed this increased openness for public religious expression, which had been tamped down in socialist Yugoslavia for fear it would breed ethno-nationalism, it also served to highlight the distinctions between the three primary ethno-religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.[439]

This brief tour of Bosnian history demonstrates that the Balkan conflict does not in any way reflect "age old" religious animosities brewing, but rather, religion was

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[437] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 29.

[438] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 29.

[439] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 26, 29.

employed in a specific way to support a nationalist project and others were driven to follow suit in taking on the badge of religious identity as a primary form of social and political expression. Simultaneous to Muslim development as ethnic identity, Serbian Orthodox narratives were also shifting and hardening. Ethno-religious identities sharpened in response to one another, paving the way for war to take on religious tones when it broke out. These processes and events changed what it meant to be Muslim in Bosnia, in interaction with the flexing of other ethno-religious identities in the region. Additionally, the emergence of a Muslim ethnic identity in Bosnia helped to prioritize *religion* as one of the key differences between groups. This material reality of religio-political identity becomes critical in understanding how the Bosnian war played out.

***Preparing for War***

The Yugoslav state continued to weaken, as demands for decentralization and autonomy increased, and the 1974 revised constitution reinforced this trend by shifting federal power to more localized institutions. In the midst of these regional and geopolitical shifts, political movements within Yugoslavia took on an increasingly nationalist tone. The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), for example, readopted the Croatian symbols used during WWII, displacing the Yugoslav symbols they had been utilizing. The Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) and the Bosnian Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) both took on nationalist rhetoric and membership as well.[440]

[440] Elizabeth M. Cousens, "From Missed Opportunities to Overcompensation: Implementing the Dayton Agreement on Bosnia," in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace* Agreements, ed. Stephen John Stedman, et. al. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002): 534.

Following Tito's death in 1980, the Yugoslav presidency became rotational between the different Yugoslav republics. Strife between the republics became more pronounced, including a struggle between Albanian and Serbian powers in the late 1980s. This fueled Serbian nationalist rhetoric, and Slobodan Milosevic, a Serbian communist party official, utilized this to claim control over Yugoslavia in 1987. In response, both Slovenes and Croats declared independence in 1991. Confrontations subsequently increased between Serbian and Croatian forces, particularly in areas where Croatian nationalism had been prominent during the time of the Ustashe and where Croat leaders had not acknowledged Ustashe atrocities during World War II.[441] These confrontations often left Bosnians, and particularly Muslim residents of the region, caught in the middle, though sometimes being targeted more explicitly by actors such as Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

Dino Abazović argues that during the early post-socialist period, there were two simultaneous and interactive processes occurring: the "nationalization of the sacral" and "sacralization of the national." He states, "In other words, ethno-national political ideologies have demanded (and have been granted) the support of organized religious doctrines in order to legitimize new establishments."[442] Both national political entities and religious institutions took refuge, of sorts, in these processes, as religion re-entered the public square with force.

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[441] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 7.

[442] Dino Abazović, "Reconciliation, Ethnopolitics and Religion in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Post-Yugoslavia*, ed. Dino Abazovic and Mitja Velikonja (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan 2014), 39.

Prior to the war, then, the groundwork had been laid for religiopolitical entrepreneurs to draw on religious narratives in their framing of the struggle for power and territory, as religion was produced materially in ways that served key socio-political purposes. As mentioned previously, expressions of nationalism had become increasingly religious in tone. Sells points out that, "at the heart of the agitation by Serb radicals against the Muslims of Yugoslavia there has been a mythology which presents Slavic Muslims as Christ killers."[443] The mythology that Sells refers to here references the death of the Serb Prince Lazar in a 1389 battle with Ottoman Sultan Murat (who also died in the same battle). Prince Lazar's death became an anchor of Serb national mythology, though this national myth was not continuous from 1389, but rather was revived and repackaged in the 19th century by Serb nationalist writers and artists, including Vuk Karadzic.[444]

Milosevic often appeared with pictures of Prince Lazar, portraying himself as the savior of the Serbian Christians from Muslim and other "occupiers." As Stuart Kaufman points out, this is a key example of symbolic politics being used to inspire and embolden narratives that would come to life to justify violence in particular ways.[445] Thus, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs (including writers, artists, politicians and religious elites) built the scaffolding for a Serb nationalist identity that would clearly draw on religious tropes. In the demographic shifts of the 1980's, a number of Serbs moved out of Albania

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[443] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 31.

[444] For an in-depth account of the Serb nationalist revival of this mythology, see Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 38-52.

[445] Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?" 51.

and Kosovo, while the Muslim population in each context grew. This fed a Serb narrative that Muslims were planning genocide against the Serbs, and the story of Prince Lazar became more and more popular. This narrative was not limited to Muslims in Albania and Kosovo, but rather was projected onto all Slavic Muslims.[446]

A Serb festival in 1989 demonstrated what Sells refers to as several "streams of rage" that were routed into violence against Bosnian civilians in the following years. Sells argues that,

> Three streams of rage-- disinterment of remains of Serb victims of genocide in World War II, procession of Lazar's relics through Bosnia and around Kosovo, and pilgrimage of Serbs to visit the relics in Kosovo-- were channeled into a single raging torrent. Within three years, those who directed the festivities in 1989 were organizing the unspeakable depravities against Bosnian civilians.[447]

The building of a national Serbian mythology that drew upon religious symbolism and narratives was thus lived out materially through these events before the nationalist rage took a large step further into the violence in the early 1990's.

Serb nationalists continued to spread the view that Ottoman rule was oppressive, depraved, and backwards, and this "became the foundation for a new religious ideology, Christoslavism, the belief that Slavs are Christian by nature and that any conversion from Christianity is a betrayal of the Slavic race."[448] These nationalists posited that those who converted to Islam under the Ottomans were either forced or decided to do so out of cowardly or selfish opportunism.[449] These narratives, and the material ways in which

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[446] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 55-57.

[447] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 69.

[448] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 36.

[449] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 35.

they were enacted in public spaces, served to increase ethno-nationalist cohesion, bolstered by religious stories and symbols, while pushing the sense of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious Bosnia further and further away.

All of this led to major shifts in the way religion was understood and lived out in Bosnia. One respondent, reflecting on the lead up to the war, commented that, "as Yugoslavia fell apart, it felt like there was a need to put back on your religious or national identity in some ways. This made it hard for mixed marriages. It didn't used to matter, then it became the only thing that mattered."[450] This demonstrates the starkness of the shift that took place in the immediate lead-up to the war for many Bosnians. For Bosnian Muslims, Perica observes, while religious fundamentalism was not a driving force of Muslim nationalism in Bosnia in the early 1990's, ethnic nationalism (mapped onto religious identity) was:

> Religion boomed, but so did a 'new' history, without which a nation cannot exist. School textbooks glorified the Ottoman era. The Bosniaks have become a martyr-nation, victim of a genocide perpetrated against Muslims by the two neighboring Christian nations.[451]

The re-entry of religion into the public square was closely intertwined with ethnic nationalism, and thus what it meant to be "religious" in Bosnia took on an entirely different tone over this time period.

In the spring of 1992, Bosnia voted for independence in a referendum and Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized internationally as a sovereign state, while Bosnian Serb

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[450] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

[451] Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

nationalists declared their own independent "Republika Srpska" with a separate headquarters, backed by Serbia, and with Karadzic as its president.[452] After the vote, Serb nationalists opened fire on those celebrating in the street outside the Parliament building in Sarajevo, and the Yugoslav National Army, which was Serb controlled, began a full-fledged assault on Sarajevo, which involved ethnic cleansing and the destruction of cultural and religious artifacts and buildings.[453] The burning of the Vijecnica, the National and University Library, was a particularly striking blow to the rich and varied cultural heritage of Sarajevo.

As Andras Riedlmayer argues,

> This systematic assault on culture can be explained as an attempt to eliminate the material evidence-- books, documents, and works of art-- that could remind future generations that people of different ethnic and religious traditions once shared a common heritage and common space in Bosnia.[454]

The erasure of common spaces and culture furthered the sense of division, with repercussions far beyond the course of the war itself.

By the fall of 1992, the Serbian military occupied 70% of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and mass killings of non-Serbs were committed across the country. Sells notes that,

> When through historical circumstance such rage was diverted from the Albanians in Kosovo to Slavic Muslims in Bosnia, there was nothing the Bosnian Muslims could possibly do to convince their attackers of their peaceful intent; even their peaceful smile could be read as the smile of a Judas.[455]

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[452] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 9.

[453] Riedlmayer, "From the Ashes," 98-99.

[454] Riedlmayer, "From the Ashes," 114.

[455] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 60.

These mass killings were bolstered by a growing sense among Serbs that they were fulfilling a religious duty, protecting their own and exacting revenge.

In 1993, Croat nationalists began to follow the path of Serb nationalists in targeting Muslims, as the observed Serbs gaining territorial concessions rather than being punished for their horrific treatment of the local Muslim population.[456] They revived the Ustashe, the Croatian militia that, supported by the Nazi regime, was quite brutal during the Second World War.[457]

During the Bosnian war itself, religion was drawn upon to identify victims, as well as to justify violent actions. Sells remarks that,

> In the world of Omarska [a town in Bosnia], if an inhabitant of Bosnia had a name identifiable as Muslim or parents with names identifiable as Muslim, that was considered guilt enough, whatever the beliefs or practices of that individual and whether or not that person was categorized as 'Muslim' in the nationalities census. Those organizing the persecution, on the other hand, identified themselves and their cause through explicit religious symbols. The symbols appeared in the three-fingered hand gestures representing the Christian trinity, in the images of sacred figures of Serbian religious mythology on their uniform insignia, in the songs they memorized and forced their victims to sign, on the priest's ring they kissed before and after their acts of persecution, and in the formal religious ceremonies that marked the purification of a town of its Muslim population.[458]

This reality in Bosnia, which is similar to the Lebanese case, demonstrates the deep and widespread ways religious symbolism and identity came into play in the war, transforming conflicts over territory and political control into "religious conflicts," between increasingly polarized ethno-religious groups. While certainly there were many

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[456] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 20-21.

[457] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 30-31.

[458] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 15.

Serbians opposing the ethnic- and religio-nationalists, Serbian nationalists cracked down on dissent. Sells remarks that one of the features of religion-based violence in BiH was the "elimination of all dissent within a particular religious group and destruction of the people outside of it."[459] Intra-religious tension was certainly high and those with power worked hard to stamp out divergence and dissent.

Additionally, numerous religious and cultural artifacts were specifically targeted for destruction through the course of war,[460] and a number of my respondents noted the ways in which mosques were targeted for destruction, even when the areas in a city or town surrounding the mosque were left intact.[461] One respondent noted that in his town, all of the houses of worship were intentionally targeted during the war.[462] These anecdotes are confirmed by Gregory Most's research on the destruction of houses of worship during the Bosnian war, which shows that this happened at very high levels country-wide.[463]

Alliances between the religio-ethnic groups shifted throughout the war, with Serbs and Croats collaborating in certain cities, Croats and Muslims in others, and all three groups fighting one another in other contexts, as politics shifted over time- a trend seen in the Lebanon case as well. One Croat respondent, who comes from a smaller city

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[459] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 17.

[460] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, 21-22.

[461] Interview with Respondent 14, March 11, 2016.

[462] Interview with Respondent 6, March 14, 2016.

[463] Gregory M. Most, "The Destruction of Churches and Mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Seeking a Rights'-Based Approach to the Protection of Religious Cultural Property," *Buffalo Journal of International Law* 3 (1996): 180-208.

a few hours outside of Sarajevo, reflected that the Croats and Muslims were working together to defend his town against the Serbs in the first year of the war. However, once word came from the Herzegovina region that Croats and Muslims were fighting there, things shifted in his town and the larger Muslim population began to take Croats into war camps. This respondent was in a war camp for nine months, and noted that he could see his own home from where he worked, and he personally knew the vast majority of his captors.[464]

The international response to the Bosnian conflict favored the demands of ethnic nationalists, rather than prioritizing the calls of the Bosnian government calling for a multi-ethnic state. Both internally and externally, a narrative of an "Islamic component" was also prioritized, even though any Islamic nationalism arose late in the conflict and, some argue, was primarily imported from outside actors.[465] Bringa notes that there was a widespread perception in Europe that Islam was foreign and/or a product of a past era.[466] This played heavily into the international perception and discussion of the Bosnian war, which was bolstered also by an obsession with Islamic fundamentalism, as Bringa states, "It is important to note that in Tito's Yugoslavia, Islamic fundamentalism (or just 'fundamentalist') was considered synonymous with Muslim nationalism and a parallel to Serb and Croat nationalism."[467] Internal and external observers, who saw any political or public expression of Islam as somehow "fundamentalist" in nature, thus shared this

[464] Interview with Respondent 6, March 14, 2016.

[465] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 15-16.

[466] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 25.

[467] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 24-34.

obsession with seeing Islamic fundamentalism as a key component of the Bosnian conflict.

The Muslim identity of Bosnians was thus prioritized more by those outside looking in than by the Muslim population itself, at least in the first couple years of the conflict. Muslims across the globe saw Bosnian Muslims as being victimized because of their religious identity and began sending humanitarian and military aid to the population,[468] while Western observers fixated on their Muslim identity as partially to blame for the conflict (some as victims, some as perpetrators). As Maya Shatzmiller observes, "no matter how the secular Bosnian Muslims viewed themselves, their neighbours and other Europeans regarded them, in the first place, as Muslims."[469] This prioritization of Muslim identity by outsiders led to local reification of this narrative in certain ways, as leaders like Mustafa Ceric, head of the Islamic community, pushed for more public Islamic identity and education, and Qur'anic quotes and Islamic symbols began to show up in the armed forces, particularly in 1994-1995.[470]

In 1993, Alija Isakovic, the head of the congress of Muslim leaders, is quoted as having said, "Now that multiethnic Bosnia has been destroyed, the Muslim state must create its own political and constitutional framework in the same way as the Bosnian Serbs and Croats have done."[471] Thus, again, Bosnian Muslim identity as a

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[468] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 18.

[469] Shatzmiller, "Introduction," *Islam and Bosnia*, xii

[470] Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 19.

[471] Quoted by Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia," 17.

nationalist/ethnic identity continued to develop in interaction with and response to Serb and Croat nationalist trends.

Middle Eastern religious actors, primarily from the Gulf, also fed into the "Islamicization" of the Bosnian Muslim cause as well, patronizing Bosnian Muslims and seeing them "as ignorant of the true faith and therefore in need of instruction and proselytizing."[472] This led to a reorientation of Bosnian Muslims toward the worldwide community of Muslims in a way that was not previously seen in Bosnia. Additionally, Karadzic played into Western fears of Muslims and orientalist tropes, referring to Bosnian Muslims as Turks and fundamentalists, and playing up acts of terrorism and a general "Muslim threat" to Christian civilization. These factors demonstrate not only the important ways in which Bosnian Muslim identity was shaped in reaction to other emerging ethno-religious identities, but also the important role that outsiders (and particularly religious outsiders) on all sides played in feeding the religious narratives of the conflict.

Bringa notes that, there was not a rejection

> of a specific Muslim identity anchored in Bosnian society, but it does mean a stronger stress on the Islamic heritage of that collective identity...In Bosnia, however, the more public use of Islamic symbols has to be seen in relation to the increase in public use of religious symbolism among the Catholic Croats and the Orthodox Serbs.[473]

Thus, the war certainly was not religious in the sense of being waged "between" Christianity and Islam writ large, as shared interests of the primary actors involved were

[472] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 27.

[473] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 32-33.

far more territorial than religious.[474] However, the rhetoric and framing of the war, both from the inside and from the outside, became increasingly religious as ethnic identities hardened and took on religious symbols and identity markers in processes of differentiation and conflict with the other, demonstrating the ways in which religious identity is produced and refined in situations of friction.

The war raged on until the NATO strikes of September 1995 broke the siege of Sarajevo. All in all, estimates indicate that approximately 236,500 people died between 1992-1995 in Bosnia. 164,000 of these were Bosnian Muslims, 31,000 were Croats, and 27,500 were Serbs.[475] Thousands of places of worship were intentionally destroyed, including 1024 mosques and Muslim religious sites, 182 Catholic churches, and 28 Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries.[476]

By 1995, as Bosnians themselves were exhausted and brutalized by war, international actors had begun working together to try to find a way to end the bloody conflict. Elizabeth Cousens articulates the two main goals of the international actors engaged in Bosnia in 1995 as follows: "first, that a war would not resume, and second, that Bosnia would rebuild for itself a just peace, which international observers by and

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[474] Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina," 28

[475] It is important to note here that while Muslims did make up the largest portion of the population at the beginning of the 1990's (most estimates say around or just over 40%), the number of Serbs was not far behind that of Muslims (at just over 30%), and thus the disparities in the fatality numbers do not simply reflect demographic differences. Croats made up an estimated 17-18% of the population. See http://josip.purger.com/other/bih/index.htm, accessed June 17, 2017. Key factors contributing to the higher levels of fatalities among Muslims are the fact that Serbs (and Croats, in certain cases) controlled more of the heavy weaponry and had stronger external support.

[476] Cited in Perica, *Balkan Idols,* 166, drawing on data reported by the Belgrade-based journal *Republika*.

large considered a multiethnic one."[477] The years following the peace agreement did not see these goals come to fruition. While elections were being held, displaced people were returning to their homes, and the cease-fire continued, there were numerous elements of the peace agreement that remained (and many argue still remain) stagnant.[478]

Cousens notes that the Bosnian war ended with a "coerced compromise," as a local and regional response to international force, rather than what is referred to as a "mutually hurting stalemate," which meant that the international parties heavily involved in bringing about the agreement itself would be required to work equally hard to see through its implementation.[479] There were numerous reasons that this did not happen, with the problematic nature of the peace agreement itself being one.[480]

While there was some return of refugees and internally displaced persons following the Dayton Agreement, many returns that were planned as part of the agreement (which would have reset the demographic shifts caused by the war) were not seen through, in part because there were numerous politicians pushing against remixing areas that had become ethnically homogenous.[481] Additionally, other efforts from ethno-religious nationalists served to reify boundaries of exclusion. For example, Sells points to an incident in 1997 when the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church endorsed the

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[477] Cousens, "From Missed Opportunities to Overcompensation," 531.

[478] Cousens, "From Missed Opportunities to Overcompensation," 531.

[479] Cousens, "From Missed Opportunities to Overcompensation," 538-9.

[480] Cousens, "From Missed Opportunities to Overcompensation," 543.

[481] Cousens, "From Missed Opportunities to Overcompensation," 549.

Declaration of the Association of Writers of Serbia, which included the following statement in the accompanying press release:

> The account by SRNA [the Serbian News Agency] states that His Holiness, Patriarch of the Servs, Pavle, gave his blessing for the Declaration, which was signed by sixty intellectuals, including fourteen members of the Serb Academy of Science and Art...The Declaration states that the Hague Tribunal has 'acted solely as an instrument for persecution of Serbs.'[482]

Despite the Dayton Agreement ending the conflict formally, this demonstrates the hardening of positions of nationalist groups in the days and years following the end of the war. Overall, the Dayton Agreement was partially implemented, with international help, but was not carried out to the full extent needed in order to accomplish the goals of rebuilding a just society.

While there is no longer active fighting, the logic of religio-ethnic conflict and division lives on in Bosnian society, providing a challenge for those seeking to build social cohesion in the country. Many expressed a fear of opening a Pandora's Box if they pushed for too much change too fast. Thus, Bosnians were left with a ceasefire, but what many of my respondents referred to as a "frozen conflict."

**Conclusion**

The lead-up to the war, and the course of the war itself, reshaped religious identity in Bosnia. Through the disintegration of Yugoslavia, religious expression re-emerged strongly in the public square- a sharp shift from the private way in which religion was conceptualized and practices under Tito- and simultaneously emerged as a political force.

[482] Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, xvi.

Religion became public and politicized simultaneously, and as the fusion of religion and ethno-nationalism grew for Serbs, so did it grow for Croats and Bosnian Muslims, in a symbiotic relationship that led to deeper bonding group cohesion, at the expense of bridging cohesion or a sense of common national identities. Religious leaders allowed themselves to be used (and some arguably led the charge), perpetuating the idea of "what is good for my community is good for me" (and, one might add, what threatens a co-religionist is a personal threat).[483] Thus, these moments of groupness that took place before and during the Bosnian war influenced the way religion would be perceived and lived out in Bosnian life for years to come, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

[483] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

## Chapter 6: Religious Peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for Better or for Worse?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Bosnia is inundated with peacebuilding work. Within the first week of my research there, I was invited to four separate peacebuilding gatherings or events in or a short drive from Sarajevo. The grassroots peacebuilding work is ongoing and appears tireless, in Sarajevo and beyond. After the war, numerous relief organizations and groups, both foreign and domestic, undertook humanitarian and peacebuilding work in Bosnia. While many of the international organizations have become less directly involved in peacebuilding, they still support numerous projects and a number of the locally-led projects and organizations stemmed from this international intervention. Many of these were religious actors, with ties to religious institutions and authorities. Perica asserts that, "the religious peace-building operation in the Balkans expanded into the most massive such operation in the history of humanitarian work and peacemaking."[484] Bosnia is, indeed, a peacebuilding wonderland of sorts, and has been a particularly interesting case for those interested in religious engagement in peacebuilding.

### Mapping Religion and Peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The peacebuilding work in Bosnia, like in Lebanon, can be categorized in multiple ways. There is work happening that is either led or endorsed by the government,

[484] Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 179.

and there is work that is driven fully by civil society and grassroots actors. Some of the initiatives that explicitly engage religion are focused on clergy and religious institutions, while others emphasize the importance of person-to-person interaction across lines of religious difference. Some focus in the realm of belief, while others primarily consider opportunities for engagement and joint action, without talking about religious belief or practice.

Those engaged in peacebuilding work in Bosnia have differing opinions on if and how religion should be engaged in this work. Several respondents asserted that religious leaders play an important role in people's lives in Bosnia. For example, one respondent noted that religious leaders often work into their sermons who people should vote for.[485] Thus, according to this perspective, engaging religious leaders is non-negotiable if one wants to make progress toward peace, in part to stop them from acting as spoilers to the process. Other respondents argued that it is best to avoid religion entirely, or to only carefully and sparingly call attention to religious identity or engage religious leaders or institutions in this work.[486] One respondent, who has been working in peacebuilding since the war, said that he used to have extremely negative feelings about religion, but has come to believe that religion might be the one thing that brings reconciliation. From his perspective, right now, it is still bringing division, but it has the *potential* to bring reconciliation.[487]

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[485] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

[486] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016, and interview with Respondent 5, March 11, 2016.

[487] Interview with Respondent 9, March 15, 2016.

The most notable effort in terms of explicitly religious engagement in peacebuilding is the Interreligious Council. The leaders of the four primary religious communities in Bosnia (Serbian Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish) were, according to many respondents, among the first to enter the peacebuilding process in Bosnia, and played a key role in facilitating the political peacebuilding process.[488] Religions for Peace International helped to formally establish the Council, though respondents told me that it began through self-organized coffee meetings between the Sarajevo-based leaders of the four primary religious communities during the war; international actors helped to formalize what had already begun. When the Interreligious Council was formally established, the leader of the Jewish community, a very small community had been in Bosnia for approximately 450 years, became a key partner in the Interreligious Council, taking on the role of the first president. The Jewish community was seen as the most neutral in relation to the war. The Jewish leader served a three-year term, which was extended from the original assignment of a one-year term, and then the presidency started rotating among the rest of the communities.[489]

During the war, Sarajevo religious leaders started to work together through joint prayers and on humanitarian issues. After the war, they drew inspiration from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to start working on reconciliation through religious leaders and communities.[490] While one respondent noted that it was successful

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[488] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016. See also Ina Merdjanova and Patrice Brodeur, *Religion as a Conversation Starter: Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the Balkans* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009).

[489] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

[490] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

early on, the leaders later felt that it was too complicated to do from a religious point of view because the sense of forgiveness and reconciliation was too different in different religious traditions. This led them to give the planned Truth and Reconciliation Commission over to civil society, though it never came to fruition.[491]

One respondent, an international peacebuilding practitioner, spoke about the specific challenges of forming and maintaining the Interreligious Council just after the war. He noted that, "the fact that you had nearly 100% coincidence of national and religious identity…there was no way for the religious leaders to speak to a distinct faith community without also speaking to a national community."[492] This made it very difficult to work with the religious communities within some sort of separate realm, away from the politics of ethno-nationalism.

While the ethnic-religious conflation made working with religious communities as such a huge challenge, this respondent observed that it,

> was further complicated by the socialist history. So you did not have the kind of depth of social infrastructure in the society that you find in other places. You didn't have faith communities that were providing a lot of health and social service work- that had all be stripped away and was being done by the state. Leaders were doing things in spite of (not because of) the society. A lot of people had been returning to their religious institutions as a national statement.[493]

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[491] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

[492] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

[493] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

Thus, from this perspective, a weakened central state made room for bonding cohesion and mobilization along religious lines.

One of the first legal projects of the Interreligious Council was the freedom of religion law, which was adopted in 2004. According to one respondent, the Council drafted approximately 95% of the text of the law.[494] Another respondent involved in the process noted that this effort came about specifically because the leaders of the religious communities all agreed that it was important to restore freedoms to practice religion openly.

The law itself prohibits discrimination against any religious community, granting each "equal rights and obligations,"[495] While much of the content of the law focuses on religious community rights rather than the rights of individuals, it does allow for freedom of conscience or belief. Additionally,

> According to the law, (a) the state may not accord the status of state religion to any church or religious community; (b) the state may not interfere in the affairs and internal organization of churches and religious communities; (c) no church may obtain any special privileges from the state; and (d) the state may provide material assistance but without discrimination on any grounds.[496]

Thus, the law both prohibits discrimination and clearly outlines a separation between religious communities and the state, although the law also gives the government the right to decide which religious communities are to be recognized as such in Bosnia.

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[494] Interview with Respondent 13, March 22, 2016, also noted in Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 23-24.

[495] Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 24.

[496] Alibašić & Begović "Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post War Bosnia," 24.

The respondent involved in the drafting of the law stated that,

> That was an important and really effective way of countering the political national trap and finding an area where each of these communities had a similar experience under socialism and communism where their rights to practice were circumscribed…and all facing being in the religious minority and majority in different parts of the country.[497]

Finding a common space for joint political action, then, was a key part of keeping the Interreligious Council together and engaged. While the work on the religious freedom law was a careful foray into the political space, one respondent noted that now, religious leaders have mostly stayed away from the political processes (with the coaching of the Interreligious Council). They send messages of peace, but are less overtly getting involved in politics. This is something that many local religious groups support, as they fear what could happen if religious leaders are heavily tied into politics.[498] One respondent involved in the Interreligious Council noted, in reference to political involvement, that "We try to stay away…We do not interfere in any political movements. But they influence the public and their influence reflects on us…they created a negative atmosphere and fear of others, and we have to fight that fear. It is a secondary influence, we are not directly addressing [politics] but we have to deal with it later."[499] Thus, even though they work to stay out of politics, the realities of Bosnian socio-political life inevitably pulls the Interreligious Council into certain political debates.

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[497] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

[498] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

[499] Interview with Respondent 17, February 8, 2017.

One of the key principles of the Interreligious Council, according to one respondent, is consensus. They do not take on a project unless it has consensus from all of the religious communities.[500] This respondent asserted that if they did take on projects that did not have full consensus, they would not be successful and the Council itself could be at risk.

Several respondents described the early days of the Interreligious Council as a period of trying out different methods and strategies to get religious communities to work together and to have a ripple-out effect. One noted it became easier as time went on to find things that the religious institutions and leaders could and would do, and the courage of the religious leaders themselves to speak out publicly increased over time as well.[501]

One respondent commented on the positive aspects of religious overlap with ethno-national groups in Bosnia, stating that, "we are focusing on peacebuilding and trustbuilding process among three nations who were involved in war conflict. But most of the time those three nations are also different religions. So we use this religious background to connect people."[502] The religious dimension of ethno-national identities in Bosnia thus, from this perspective, provides a unique entry-point for peacebuilding efforts.

Another respondent recalled an interaction he had with a Serb priest who came to a workshop with instructions from his Bishop to "report back," but became invested in

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[500] Interview with Respondent 17, February 8, 2017.

[501] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

[502] Interview with Respondent 17, February 8, 2017.

the conflict resolution approach. When the priest tried to engage his Bishop in the work, he was rebuked, so was unable to participate formally in the activities.[503] This story demonstrates the layers of religious, cultural, and ethno-nationalist norms at play when trying to do peacebuilding work that engages religious actors in a meaningful way. This respondent notes that, "one thing I learned through this whole process was that there was absolutely no way you could categorize [an] entire religious community."[504]

While some noted that at the beginning, the Council remained a Sarajevo-based group, facing major challenges and resistance when trying to expand into other areas,[505] the Council now has 12 branch offices outside of Sarajevo, with three more under construction at the time of my interviews.[506] While the Interreligious Council has undertaken a few legal projects, as noted above, most of the work attempts to be politically neutral, and focuses on modeling religious engagement (through religious leaders meeting and demonstrating camaraderie and solidarity publicly), developing programs that allow for religious leaders and laypersons to interact with one another and to explore commonalities, and responding to local incidents of violence directed at religious communities. They have seen a decrease in the number of attacks in cities where they are active, and attribute this to local religious leaders showing up when incidents occur and trying to help deescalate hot spots.[507] They have also been working

[503] Interview with Respondent 16, January 20, 2017.

[504] Interview with Respondent 16, January 20, 2017.

[505] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

[506] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

[507] Interview with Respondent 10, March 16, 2016; Interview with Respondent 13, March 22, 2016.

with local police to prioritize responding with justice in cases of these attacks, taking away the need for revenge.

Additionally, the Council has projects focused on the rights of women within religious communities and society more generally, working with UN Women and other groups to lead reading groups focused on understanding religion texts and traditions within the context of global human rights norms.[508]

**The Religious Peacebuilding Infrastructure**

While the Interreligious Council is the most high-profile effort in explicitly religious peacebuilding, there have been, and continue to be, numerous other efforts to engage religious actors, institutions, and ideas in peacebuilding efforts. Some peacebuilding actors ran conflict resolution workshops at the end and just following the war; one respondent was conducting these primarily with religious actors, holding several workshops that brought together people from every religious group in Sarajevo. This respondent noted that, "it was quite a feat to bring together that kind of representation during the siege itself."[509] Simply getting people from different backgrounds into the same room was considered an accomplishment in and of itself during and just following the war.[510]

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[508] Interview with Respondent 12, March 21, 2016.

[509] Interview with Respondent 16, January 20, 2017.

[510] This comports with the "contact hypothesis" in Conflict Resolution, which asserts that interpersonal contact between conflicting groups will lessen prejudice over time. For more on this particular theory of change, see Gordon Allport, "The nature of prejudice," (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1954); and Pettigrew, T. F.; Tropp, L. R. "A Meta-analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90.5 (2006): 751–783.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) launched an initiative in 2014 called Dialogue for the Future: The promotion of coexistence and diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The program was requested by all three presidents, and was launched by the presidents with a declaration at a conference in April 2014. The stated strategic focus of this project is,

> to address the deterioration of relations amongst communities and substantially decrease the threat of renewed conflict and violence by promoting peaceful coexistence, which is characterized by increased trust, respect for diversity, strengthened civic and inter-cultural dialogue amongst citizens, in particular youth.[511]

One of the UNDP programs involves bringing together university students from different ethnic backgrounds to work together on key development problems. One respondent involved in the work noted that, "when they see common problems and work together, they'll figure out that they are all the same, they're all human."[512] For example, when there was extensive flooding in Bosnia in 2014, UNDP took a number of young people from across ethno-religious groups to peace camps in some of the most-affected sites, where they worked together on reconstruction. This respondent noted that, while there was no explicit engagement with religion in the program design itself, the Serb students were very curious when the Muslim students slipped away for prayers, and organic inter-religious engagement resulted.[513]

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[511] "Dialogue for the Future: Promoting Coexistence and Diversity in BiH," accessed February 10, 2017, http://ba.one.un.org/content/unct/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/what-we-do/joint-projects/dialogue-for-the-future.html.

[512] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

[513] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

Another specific "Dialogue for the Future" project is to hold youth forums, which include training on non-violent communications. Through this, youth have been given opportunities to engage with local decision-makers and politicians, and they are working to increase these interaction points ahead.

Several NGOs recently formed a collective effort called Pro-Future. Those leading this effort have mapped the needs and challenges for peacebuilding in Bosnia, then assigned different participating NGOs different roles (sometimes working together, sometimes in their own "lanes", so to speak) to exert collective impact. They work in 36 municipalities, and have paired off the municipalities (with each in a pair having a different ethnic majority). Each municipality is required to have three people represented in a working group, with one of those people being an employee of the municipality and the other two being affiliated with different NGOs. They do their work in a number of sectors, including particular foci on youth, schools, and war victims. I attended one program where they brought three war survivors (of different ethnic groups) from one municipality to another, to share their stories with a group of school children. They do these programs on a regular basis, in multiple cities and villages, working with the war victims on their own personal narratives, while simultaneously working with the schools to make time and space for the youth to hear these stories and to reflect on them afterwards.

In its third year of implementation, funded primarily by USAID, Pro-Future has become the largest peacebuilding project in Bosnia, and is aiming to work with 60 municipalities by the end of the project. A large number of organizations are involved,

including Caritas, Catholic Relief Services, Mozaik, Parliament of Citizens in Banja Luka, the Inter-religious Council, and an independent group in Tusla. Evaluative research on previous CRS and Caritas peacebuilding projects went into the design of this effort, drawing on lessons learned and best practices from previous program efforts.[514]

Additionally, the Pro-Future project has begun working with the Interreligious Council on public forums for religious leaders to talk about peace from the perspectives of the different religious traditions, and to hold ongoing "open doors" days at houses of worship, inviting people from different religious communities to visit and learn about each tradition more deeply.[515]

Several smaller initiatives pull together people of different backgrounds on a regular basis for dialogue and engagement. These involve numerous small, informal gatherings in order to slowly build deep, sustainable relationships across lines of difference. One respondent spoke about using faith and religiosity as a tool, as Bosnian tradition is a great resource on the role of faith in peacebuilding. This respondent described their work as digging religion out from the fear and trauma.[516]

One program, "Believers for Peace," has conducted trainings over the past 7 years with over 1500 Islamic studies teachers, to help them use Islam and Peacebuilding manuals in Islamic schools. Additionally, Believers for Peace has held conferences to

[514] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

[515] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

[516] Interview with Respondent 3, March 10, 2016.

help strengthen the capacity of religious leaders to use religious sources to effectively promote peace.

Another respondent discussed the importance of seminary programs designed for inter-religious exchange, at the institutional and clerical levels.[517] While there is much work between the institutional leadership of the Muslim and Catholic seminaries, according to this respondent, the Orthodox do much more of their inter-religious work through the Inter-religious Council, rather than at the seminary level. This respondent noted that there are good everyday relationships between the Muslim leadership and the Orthodox priests, and they can discuss theological matters, but they avoid discussing non-eternal matters.[518]

There are a number of more localized programs as well. One respondent described a survey they did in 2006-2007 in Sankimost, a city in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina, and found that religious leaders had the highest level of trust from the community. Thus, they began a slow process of building trust between the religious leaders, then had them go public after 5 years of internal conversations, then have built programs from there to engage young people. They have their own independent Interreligious Council, but when the national Interreligious Council came to work with the religious leaders in this area, they did not get to know the local Interreligious Council, and thus were unsuccessful in recruiting religious leaders for their initiative.[519]

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[517] Interview with Respondent 14, March 11, 2016.

[518] Interview with Respondent 14, March 11, 2016.

[519] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

In every program, this locally-focused initiative asks participants to reveal their religious identity, to help them feel comfortable in their own skin and to build trust and security among the group.[520] It has also been important, according to this respondent, for the religious leaders to publicly speak together on a regular basis, to normalize their cooperation and camaraderie.[521] However, the conversations between religious leaders have rarely discussed the past, which this respondent sees as a continued barrier to the healing process necessary for building social cohesion.[522] According to this respondent, they are having these conversations (about the past) privately, when it is just the religious leaders meeting with one another, and eventually will be able to help lead the conversations publicly, but it takes time.[523] The key, according to this individual, is that their peace work is not about programs, but is really "24/7."[524]

As this overview makes clear, there are many different strains of peacebuilding work actively engaging religion in the Bosnian context. Some are government-endorsed, while others draw primarily from the grassroots civil society actors, aiming to keep their distance from the government. Still others operate in something of a hybrid space between government and grassroots. Additionally, a number of the initiatives- particularly those framed as explicitly religious peacebuilding initiatives- prioritize religious identity and difference as the key "problems to solve," while a smaller handful

[520] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

[521] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

[522] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

[523] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

[524] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

of initiatives engage religion while seeing it as one intersectional factor within a wider milieu. An examination of the ways that these varied organizations and initiatives conceptualize goals and success helps to reveal the significance of these differences in approach.

Asking those involved with these efforts about their goals and expectations reveals a lot about how religion is being imagined in the Bosnian peacebuilding space, as well as how this work is impacting and interacting with broader socio-political dimensions.

One respondent who worked closely with the Interreligious Council at its inception stated that, "for a lot of that time, the most fundamental measure of success was that the council held together. Even if they felt like they couldn't meet each other or have public meetings for a while, none of them felt compelled to pull out."[525] Thus, early on, success was measured by the Council members simply staying engaged.

Another respondent observed that, when peacebuilding work is explicitly faith-based or faith-rooted (rather than simply engaging religious actors), determining the benchmarks of success looks different than it does for "secular" peacebuilding work:

> There's a couple different aspects that influence this. One is motivations. Faith-based people can be motivated even in light of not seeing results…also, that sense that what takes place depends upon the involvement of the supernatural. That has some influence also on the outcome. There's a much more personal

[525] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

understanding of that- a real force and investment, on the part of something greater. So, success and failure continue to get looked at differently.[526]

From this perspective, religious engagement and faith-rootedness of those involved in peacebuilding efforts fosters a deep commitment to the effort that might otherwise be hard to sustain. One respondent involved early on in the Interreligious Council described the tensions of balancing work with religious institutions and hierarchical structures with a desire to engage with the grassroots efforts that were happening. This respondent noted that there was indeed tension, particularly in the years just following the war, and that "if work wasn't sanctioned by or if the leaders didn't see [the grassroots efforts] as trustworthy and loyal" then the Interreligious Council could not engage with it.[527]

We see through this survey of efforts to engage religion in peacebuilding in Bosnia a plethora of programs and approaches. How, then, should we think about the ways in which these efforts interact with social cohesion more broadly in the Bosnian context? A look at the current state of social cohesion in Bosnia helps to situate this analysis.

**The State of Social Cohesion in Bosnia-Herzegovina**

While there have been numerous sustained efforts, coming from both institutional and grassroots levels, to rebuild social relations in Bosnia, social cohesion in the country

[526] Interview with Respondent 16, January 20, 2017.

[527] Interview with Respondent 15, January 13, 2017.

has not significantly improved since the end of the war. One respondent pointed to the persistence of transgenerational trauma, noting that, "people who are Croat, who have never lived in Croatia, consider Croatia their country."[528] He noted that, for most living in Bosnia, there is a shared sense that they are still living in the war period, in a way.

This reality persists despite extensive societal support for efforts to build social peace. One survey, conducted in 2011 in four key cities in Bosnia by a team from the University of Edinburgh, found widespread support for building understanding, peace, trust, and reconciliation, as trust-building initiatives. These all polled higher than support for "identification of liability/guilt", historical accuracy, or apology, although support for all of these objectives were deemed important or very important by a majority of people surveyed.[529]

Survey participants differed in their feelings about explicit religious involvement in peacebuilding initiatives. 56% of respondents indicated that they are personally very religious, and "respondents who self-reported being personally religious tended to favour reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives more than respondents who said they were not religious."[530] Additionally, those who reported higher levels of participation in religious services were more likely to affirm the importance of a reconciliation process,

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[528] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

[529] Wilkes, George Wilkes, et. al., "Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Survey of Popular Attitudes in Four Cities and Regions," *Center for Empirical Research on Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo & Project on Religion and Ethics in the Making of War and Peace, The University of Edinburgh*, 2012, accessed November 30, 2016, http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/reconciliation-and-trust-building-in-bosniaherzegovina(330541cd-f11e-44c4-a760-f6ebfd226431).html.

[530] Wilkes, et. al., "Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Survey of Popular Attitudes in Four Cities and Regions," 13-14.

while those who reported not being religiously active were more likely to indicate that a reconciliation process would not make a difference.[531] Respondents in Mostar and Banja Luka affirmed their believe that religious leaders and lay leaders have a special role to play in reconciliation; these numbers dropped in Bugojno and Sarajevo.[532]

The data does not show stark divisions between Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks *as such* in their responses, but rather the more determinate indicator of their attitudes (toward supporting or not supporting peacebuilding efforts) was whether the individual was part of the ethnic majority or minority in their city. Those who were in the majority were more likely to see value in the role of religion in reconciliation processes than did those who were minorities in their respective cities.[533]

A follow up study in 2013 confirmed the widespread support for trust-building and reconciliation efforts, particularly among those who self-identified as more religious.[534] However, most respondents (60.8%) named the economy as the highest priority facing the country, and while just 39.9% felt that political change was most

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[531] Wilkes, et. al., "Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Survey of Popular Attitudes in Four Cities and Regions," 19.

[532] Wilkes, et. al., "Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Survey of Popular Attitudes in Four Cities and Regions," 20.

[533] Wilkes, et. al., "Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Survey of Popular Attitudes in Four Cities and Regions," 21.

[534] G. Wilkes, et. al., "Factors in Reconciliation: Religion, Local Conditions, People and Trust: Results From A Survey Conducted in 13 Cities Across Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2013," *Center for Empirical Research on Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2013): 5, accessed November 30, 2016, http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/factors-in-reconciliation-religion-local-conditions-people-and-trust(7be43bce-c29d-43dd-992c-18dab2ef5248).html.

important, only 29% said that improving social relations was a key priority for the country.[535]

In interpreting this survey data, it is important to understand the way in which the term "reconciliation" is employed. According to the survey authors,

> Reconciliation is used here as a term which implies activities, practices and processes involving the building of relationships, both 'horizontal' relationships across the wider population and 'vertical' relationships, begging questions about the perception of a need for accountability between representatives and the populations they seek to represent.[536]

While the aforementioned survey series focused on understanding whether or not there is widespread desire for reconciliation, a 2009 UNDP report reveals the very low levels of social trust, stating that, "the report finds that BiH's social fabric is characterized by fragmentation and segmentation rather than cohesion and solidarity."[537] This report reveals that only about 10% of people feel that most people can be trusted.[538] Of those surveyed 88% believe the most significant level of social tension is between rich and poor; 86% believe it is between management and workers, and 79% believe it is between different ethnicities (note that respondents could select more than one

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[535] Wilkes, et. al., "Factors in Reconciliation: Religion, Local Conditions, People and Trust," 6. Note that respondents were allowed to check more than one box when indicating which national issues were of importance to them.

[536] Wilkes, et. al., "Factors in Reconciliation: Religion, Local Conditions, People and Trust," 10.

[537] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "The Ties That Bind" *National Human Development Report 2009, Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2009): 3, accessed February 10, 2017, http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/ties-bind.

[538] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 3, 22.

response).[539] This demonstrates that social trust is not only low between ethno-religious groups, but across multiple levels of social fragmentation.

The lack of trust between ethno-religious groups can be correlated with the lack of social interaction people of different ethno-religious groups have with one another, as division has been made materially manifest in multiple ways throughout politics and society. While large numbers of respondents reported spending time with people of their own ethnicity nearly everyday (44.6%) or a few times each week (30.5%), only 20.8% reported spending time with persons of other ethnicities a few times each month, with more reporting that their interaction is seldom (35.1%) or never (12.6%).[540] It is worth noting that, while people reported low levels of trust in other ethnicities (ranging between 10.2% and 12.3%), they also reported fairly low levels of trust in people of their own ethnicity (ranging from 20.7% to 22.3%). People reported higher levels of trust when asked about family and close friends, demonstrating that familial, localized ties are very strong (pointing to high levels of bonding cohesion).[541]

While GDP growth has been stable in Bosnia since 2000 and unemployment has been improving, unemployment remains high and is particularly alarming among youth, where unemployment is twice as high as for the general population.[542] While this report did not assess social exclusion, the last National Human Development Report that did, in

[539] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 3, 22.

[540] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 35.

[541] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 3, 42.

[542] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 14.

2007, revealed that over 50% of the population reports experiencing some form of exclusion.[543]

Overall, the UNDP report shows widespread frustration and distrust, not limited to ethnic division, and high levels of bonding cohesion, as homogenous networks continue to grow. Informal networks have also grown, with "štela" (a term used widely in Bosnia, referring to gains made through nepotism and clientalism) playing a critical role in access to jobs and social networks.[544] Taken together, the surveys analyzed here show a desire for increased social cohesion, but a lack of progress and political will in that direction.

Beyond these measures of social distrust and fragmentation, there are several contemporary factors contributing to maintaining, or in some cases increasing, social discord. At present, one respondent observed, war memories are getting re-hashed and re-interpreted within the frame of current global events. Islamophobic rhetoric has taken root and is more widespread, and young Bosnian Muslim identification with the global ummah has become more common.[545]

Trust in the state is very low, and there have been several incidents in recent years that have exacerbated frustration between ethno-religious communities and the state. For instance, recently, high judicial prosecutors banned everyone wearing religious symbols from coming into the court building, a move that many saw as being directed explicitly

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[543] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 17.

[544] UNDP, "The Ties That Bind," 18.

[545] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

toward Muslim women wearing hijab. While the Muslim community publicly opposed this decision, LGBT and women's rights activists also mobilized to support the rights of individuals to wear what they want.[546]

It is clear that both vertical and horizontal measures of social cohesion are currently quite low in Bosnia. While bonding cohesion continues to increase, the gaps between groups have grown wider and have been exacerbated by lack of trust in the state, which precipitates further bonding (over bridging) behavior, as smaller units of people feel they must look out for themselves to secure rights and privileges.

**Barriers to Impact of Peacebuilding Efforts**

Despite the numerous efforts aimed at building peace over the last decade and a half in Bosnia, social cohesion remains low. There are several barriers that contribute directly to the lack of broader impact of religious peacebuilding efforts in particular.

1. **Embodied Separateness**

Bosnia is characterized by both physical and political separation between ethnic groups. One respondent remarked that, "we established small medieval kingdoms after the war."[547] This is embodied in geographic segregation, as well as through the education system.

[546] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

[547] Interview with Respondent 3, March 10, 2016.

Some have pointed to a "soft war" through schools in particular, through the divided education system.[548] A number of respondents pointed to the "two schools, one roof" system of education, where in mixed municipalities, children of one ethnic group will go to school in the morning, then children of the other ethnic group will use the same building in the afternoon, without the students mixing in classes.[549] Additionally, as one respondent noted, students from Serbian schools take excursions to Belgrade, rather than to Sarajevo, and go visit monasteries in Serbia, rather than sites within Bosnia-Herzegovina.[550]

Furthermore, one respondent noted that in the Republika Srpska, the non-Serbian Bosnian children are not allowed to call their language Bosnian, but rather must call it "the language of Bosniaks." This, they noted, is part of "the continued effort to deny our children the right of self-identification."[551] It is clear that there are both real and perceived efforts to maintain distance between ethno-religious communities through the education system. This is mirrored in the geographical segregation that is rampant throughout the country as well, demonstrating the ways in which difference manifests itself materially, embodied and emplaced in Bosnian life.

Additionally, the identification of Bosnia's social cohesion problem as ethnic or religious, rather than structural injustices, reinforces this embodied separation and shields

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[548] Interview with Respondent 10, March 16, 2016.

[549] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

[550] Interview with Respondent 14, March 11, 2016.

[551] Interview with respondent 14, March 11, 2016.

the state from blame for lack of cohesion, since it is an "ethnic problem," rather than one that can be adequately owned and addressed by the state.[552]

**2. Ambivalence of religious leaders**

While religious leader have often been involved in peacebuilding and dialogue efforts, their engagement is ambivalent in a number of ways. First, it is important to note that there are still a number of religious leaders who do not support peacebuilding efforts, even on the surface. Some in the Interreligious Council noted that they do not enjoy full support from the top Bishops in the Catholic and Orthodox communities, and there are a number of places (i.e., with Catholics in the South and with Orthodox in the Northwest) where they are not able to do work.[553]

As one respondent observed, "every religious community is an interest or political party, basically."[554] Thus, often, religious leaders behave more or less like politicians. [555] While generally, religious leaders aren't participating directly in politics, there is often implicit engagement with the political system. For example, last election the top religious

[552] Belloni, et. al., speak to this issue, pointing to a speech by Valentin Inzko, High Representative of the International Community, in which he suggests that the large street protests in 2014 were coming from "Muslims" or "hooligans," spurred on by ethnic leadership, thus validating the claim that frustration is best understood as an ethnic or religious problem, rather than one of economic mismanagement and political corruption. See Roberto Belloni, et. al., "Bosnia-Herzegovina: Domestic Agency and the Inadequacy of the Liberal Peace," **in** *Post-Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Peace Formation and State Formation*, ed. Oliver P. Richmond and Sandra Pogodda (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). 58.

[553] Interview with Respondent 17, February 8, 2017.

[554] Interview with Respondent 10, March 16, 2016.

[555] Interview with Respondent 12, March 21, 2016.

leaders tried to issue a joint statement, but at the last minute the Islamic Community withdrew and issued a statement implicitly supporting a party.[556]

One respondent argued that each religious leader has at least three different stories- one for the international community (as a peacemaker), one for their community publicly (painting their own community as the first victims), and a third for own community behind closed doors.[557] This paints a mixed picture of religious leadership in Bosnia and how they engage in peacebuilding, as double- (or triple-) speak can make it very difficult to ascertain true motives and goals. One respondent observed that, while the religious leaders in the Inter-religious council are outwardly supporting peace, they are undermining one another and "stabbing each other in the back" all the time. Beyond the "double speak", there is also fear among religious leaders to do certain public appearances for fear of backlash from other leaders or their community.[558]

Walking a careful political line (between maintaining a commitment to unity and peace, while looking out for the needs and desires of one's own religious community) feeds into an avoidance of difficult issues, which prevents them from making real progress. For instance, one respondent noted that religious leadership does not want gender justice to be part of these conversations (a reality that shows up in Lebanon as well).[559] The "avoidance of politics" in this way, while playing into politics in other ways, as articulated above, limits the reach and efficacy of these efforts.

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[556] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

[557] Interview with Respondent 11, March 17, 2016.

[558] Interview with Respondent 4, March 11, 2016.

[559] Interview with Respondent 12, March 21, 2016.

Additionally, religious leaders have joined together at times to work against certain civic efforts. For instance, religious leaders campaigned together against people declaring themselves "Bosnian-Herzegovinian" for the purpose of the census.[560] This effort would have muddied the divisions between ethno-religious groups, and thus the religious institutions worked against the effort, despite widespread grassroots interest in it.

One respondent noted that people expect too much from religious leaders, and that sometimes this makes it very difficult for them to meet expectations. While many religious leaders are committed to working for peace, there are some who promote division as well.[561]

Perica notes that, "religious authorities carried out…an ambiguous strategy that involved simultaneous backing of the nationalistic factions while playing the role of peace mediators before the international observers."[562] Indeed, there are instances of the institutional religious authorities collectively denouncing other clerics involved in peace advocacy as "Marxists, communists, and Titoists,"[563] demonstrating a desire to control and contain the ways in which religious peacebuilding was being carried out in the country. Additionally, a 1999 televised roundtable between the religious leaders featured them leveraging "charges against secular forces while denying any clerical liability and [they] saw no connection between religion, ethnic nationalism, and genocide in Yugoslav

[560] Interview with Respondent 9, March 15, 2016.

[561] Interview with Respondent 3, March 10, 2016.

[562] Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 180, drawing upon a 1999 USIP report on Bosnian Peacebuilding.

[563] Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 182.

lands."[564] Later, reports indicated that the Interfaith Council refused a proposal to teach ecumenical courses on religion in Bosnia's public schools, opting instead for religious catechism be taught in separate classes by religious authorities.[565]

### 3. Limited reach of efforts

One respondent observed that there are thousands of projects, and each one is successful (measured through evaluations most often), but none have an impact on the broader dynamics.[566] While this may be an overstatement, it was a common reflection among peacebuilding actors that their work only reaches about 5% of the population. They reflected on excellent individual change, but when people return home, they receive so much pushback that the transformation is reversed, rather than rippling out.[567]

Another respondent noted that, while there are hundreds of NGOs, very few are really active toward long-term peace. Additionally, government-stamped NGOs refuse to criticize the government, and thus are ineffective in much of their work, when the real transformation would need to come from changes to the system itself.[568] These top-down efforts also fail to effectively engage civil society, and thus never see broad ownership.[569]

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[564] Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 183.

[565] Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 185.

[566] Interview with Respondent 9, March 15, 2016.

[567] Interview with Respondent 9, March 15, 2016.

[568] Interview with Respondent 10, March 16, 2016.

[569] Interview with Respondent 9, March 15, 2016.

As Roberto Belloni, et. al., argue, there is clearly civilian desire and bottom-up efforts for institutional change toward greater justice and peace. These desires are manifested through more hidden networks (including the ones under study in this dissertation), and make themselves known in more public ways only periodically, with some positive, though minimal, results.[570] However, the ruling elites and the international community have often pushed back against these bottom-up pushes for change, preventing them from entering the official political process, and thus preventing high level, systemic impact.[571] Belloni, et. al., posit that the international community has two particularly problematic priorities when it comes to peacebuilding in Bosnia: the preference for ethnic security over other concerns and values, and the acceptance and accommodation of ethnic identities in a way that has prioritized stability over change.[572] I argue that this is true for the ways in which religious institutions, and international efforts focused on religious engagement, have ordered their priorities as well, causing this same effect from multiple sectors preventing grassroots change efforts from having larger effects on social cohesion.

Funder constraints also affect the reach and long-term effectiveness of projects, since they often operate within specific timeframes and limited funding parameters. Some respondents also felt that the need to cooperate with funders has constrained their ability to do the deeper, more sustainable work of peacebuilding.[573]

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[570] Belloni, et. al., "Bosnia-Herzegovina: Domestic Agency and the Inadequacy of the Liberal Peace."

[571] Belloni, et. al., "Bosnia-Herzegovina: Domestic Agency and the Inadequacy of the Liberal Peace," 48-9.

[572] Belloni, et. al., "Bosnia-Herzegovina: Domestic Agency and the Inadequacy of the Liberal Peace," 57.

[573] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

Another factor at work here is the way in which many efforts to engage religion in peacebuilding treat religion as the source of conflict, even if those involved would argue that conflict does not stem from religion. For example, the Pro-Future project outlined above works to bring religious communities into one another's sacred spaces, demonstrating a belief that by creating opportunities for religious encounter, conflict between groups will subside. This type of approach assumes religion itself is causing conflict, and thus limits the reach of the efforts by isolating it in peacebuilding practice.

**4. Enshrining of ethno-religious difference through Dayton**

While the Dayton Accords brought peace on one level (in that the active fighting stopped), it established a stagnant political system. One respondent reflected this in saying, "we are not post-conflict; this is a frozen conflict."[574] Through the Dayton process, ethno-religious difference was enshrined in the political and geographic infrastructure, and thus efforts to build trust and cohesion between groups run into the very real barrier of a stagnant and divided political system.

Ethnic identity is entrenched in the political structures, as Dino Abazović argues,

> The peacebuilding/nation-building efforts cannot be successful because they go against Bosnia's very governing structure…Declaring a unified state of Bosnia-Herzegovina while recognizing two antagonistic entities, proclaiming democracy while entrenching ethnically based institutional structures and reaffirming individual rights while legitimizing ethnic majoritarianism, from the outset raised serious concerns as to which political concept in Bosnia-Herzegovina would prevail[575]

[574] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

[575] Dino Abazović, "Reconciliation, Ethnopolitics and Religion in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Post-Yugoslavia,* ed. Dino Abazovic and Mitja Velikonja, (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan 2014), 36.

The system itself thus prevents the democratization and affirmation of individual rights, two key efforts of those looking to further social cohesion and justice in Bosnia, and also makes real the division between groups in a very material way.

Political parties operate mostly along ethnic lines. The three presidents represent the three different communities, and this political separation tracks all the way down, for the most part. Elections are won by appealing to particular ethno-religious groups, rather than by trying to develop inclusive platforms.[576] Ethnicity is indeed enshrined into the constitution, creating what one respondent called a "checkmate positions", where you are required to have agreement at all levels. This does not allow for a citizen-based country, as everything is divided into three (and leaves no room for Jewish or Roma citizens).[577]

According to several respondents, the media also perpetuates narratives of division, and one respondent pointed to the fact that the media is government-controlled. "The governments don't want us to reconcile- they say they do, but the way they act does not match that."[578] Thus, many are skeptical of the commitment of political leaders to truly seeing peace that accounts for inequalities and injustices in society.

One respondent noted the politicization of religion, premised on an "us vs. them" way of thinking about religious identity and belonging. She asserted that this religious division goes against fruitful peacebuilding initiatives and has contributed to the lack of

[576] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

[577] Interview with Respondent 14, March 11, 2016.

[578] Interview with Respondent 8, March 15, 2016.

political will for peace.[579] This respondent went on to say that, "Whatever initiatives you do, the administrative divisions and complexities prevent you from getting too far."[580] The system is designed for self-preservation.

5. **Corruption and clientelism**

Several respondents spoke of the extreme corruption and clientelism at work within the political system and beyond. There is a lack of merit-based appointments, and one respondent argued that the country would function without the government ministries the same as it does now- in other words, it is stagnant.[581] Another respondent stated that, "politics would influence so much if it was not so criminalistic."[582] The perception of political corruption is widespread, and perpetuates the vertical divides as citizens have very little trust in their government.

These observations from respondents are indeed corroborated by numerous studies of Bosnian political and social life. Roberto Belloni and Francesco Strazzari have argued that, while there are strong laws on the books against corruption in Bosnia, state and international actors have done little to prosecute high-profile corruption cases. They argue that, "corruption is the cost international actors have been ready to accept in the name of stability, at least in the first post-conflict phase. Later, with corruption already engrained in the social fabric, governance reforms have been devised by international

[579] Interview with Respondent 5, March 11, 2016.

[580] Interview with Respondent 5, March 11, 2016.

[581] Interview with Respondent 10, March 16, 2016.

[582] Interview with Respondent 3, March 10, 2016.

officials and more or less openly accepted by local ones, but corruption has continued to prosper under the surface of formal institutions."[583] A strong desire for stability has thus overridden the focus on combatting corruption, contributing to low levels of social cohesion over the years in post-conflict Bosnia.

**"Change Shouldn't be Rushed"**

The above barriers, among others, help to explain why, despite numerous peacebuilding efforts in Bosnia over the last two decades and beyond, social cohesion- by both vertical and horizontal measures- remains low. While efforts to build peace are plentiful, these barriers impede their potentially positive effects. This reality impacts the ways in which those involved in peacebuilding- and particularly religious peacebuilding- think about the purpose of their work, and the ways in which they conceptualize the role of religion therein.

It is, of course, difficult to articulate goals and to measure success in any peacebuilding efforts, but it is also critical to understand how those engaged in such efforts see their own goals and theories of change. One respondent observed that, while the new generation has never been involved in conflict themselves, they have spent their twenty-odd years of life segregated, as ethno-religious division has been materially inscribed into life at so many levels. As is the case in Lebanon, their parents have a sense of pre-war unity, but the younger generation does not, and thus the work is not about

[583] Roberto Belloni and Francesco Strazzari, "Corruption in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo: a Deal among Friends," *Third World Quarterly* 35.5 (2014): 856.

reconciliation for this generation, but rather establishing inter-group trust in the first place.[584] This, then, is the goal for certain peacebuilding actors- to establish social trust.

Some argued that one should not focus on goals broader than individual relationship-building. One commented that, "I found myself concluding [after one particularly revealing workshop incident] that I think even though we tried to jump into problem solving and trying to basically help deal with issues, if we accomplished anything at all, it was probably in terms of building or rebuilding relationships between people. I decided to make that my focus. We did work on some issues, but relationship building continues to be part of my focus. Unless you establish or maintain relationships of some kind, I think there's really little you can do."[585] This was the articulated goal of a number of efforts across the country.

Others pointed to instances of individual attitude change as evidence of success. One such example was a Croat coffee shop owner in Mostar, who was in a camp during the war and reported that he hated all Serbs and Muslims afterwards. His coffee shop would only serve Croatian coffee (which is one letter different from other types of Balkan coffee) and he had photos of Croat war heroes lining the walls of his shop. After a peacebuilding program worked with him on hearing the stories of other war survivors, he changed his views, started a romantic relationship with a Serbian woman, and is now retired and working to help others get to know one another across ethno-religious lines.[586]

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[584] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

[585] Interview with Respondent 16, January 20, 2017.

[586] Interview with Respondent 2, March 8, 2016.

One respondent asserted that the goal should be to strengthen individuals as believers, to prepare them to do the work of peacebuilding. As one respondent stated, "personally, I think it's important for leaders to be promoting peace, but I believe in the strength of civil society; in the individual believers. We are the ones who are leading our religious leaders."[587] The goal, then, is to strengthen and empower the individual believer to engage in peacebuilding work in their personal capacities.

Another respondent noted that their project measures success through post-event surveys that ask participants to self-report attitude changes and the like, while also maintaining relationships with participants over the long term in order to monitor and evaluate longer-term shifts in attitudes and behaviors. This respondent stated that, "This is something you cannot measure- those human relations, those feelings, but we hear those stories, when they describe that their local community is relaxed after those board programs. Also this depends on minority or majority. We have a priest and imam just walk through the city, and the position of the minority community can be better. So, [we evaluate our work] through the success stories and through the surveys."[588] Again, this points to small-scale changes in relationships as the goal and the measure of success.

One respondent who has been involved in peacebuilding work in multiple capacities since just after the war said he has seen progress in his 20 years of work.

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[587] Interview with Respondent 3, March 10, 2016.

[588] Interview with Respondent 17, February 8, 2017.

While Dayton enshrined a certain unhealthy status quo, there has been very gradual change. But change "shouldn't be rushed", according to this respondent.[589]

While goals and assessment were somewhat varied, there are a plethora of programs in Bosnia aimed at building better relationships between citizens, with the general aim of cultivating peace (this was a clear assumption, if not explicitly articulated by all respondents). Overall, there is a diversity of ways those involved in the religious peacebuilding space approach the work and think about goals and success, but most are looking primarily at internal program success, with a hope of a ripple-out effect, rather than assessing how it is feeding into larger societal change.

The lack of a material approach to understanding and engaging religion in Bosnian religious peacebuilding stands out starkly in these conversations with interview respondents. For many, building and maintaining inter-religious relationships is key, and happens only outside the realm of politics. Religion is thus treated as a primarily internal matter, to be safely shielded from the socio-political extensions of religious identity. For some, peacebuilding is a stale issue of sorts, unachievable and tired, and thus, the focus is on individual relationships, setting aside the goal of institutional, high-level change. For many who take this view, change will happen eventually, as a new consciousness is raised among people, one individual or small group at a time.

[589] Interview with Respondent 1, March 8, 2016.

**Key Findings: What can we say about religious peacebuilding in Bosnia?**

**1. Religious identities were produced as politically meaningful through the socio-political processes preceding the war, and, in turn, shaped the way religion was employed and understood in the war and post-war periods in Bosnia**. Religion itself *became* through the lead-up to and course of the war, as the emergence of a Muslim ethno-political identity particularly illustrates. What it meant to be religious, and particularly its implications for socio-political life, changed over time through encounter with one another during increasingly politicized historical moments. This, in turn, shaped the way religion was employed in and following the war as well.

An additional factor at play here is the important role of outside actors (whether other governments or religious bodies) played in cultivating, framing, and sometimes exacerbating conflict. Indeed, this is especially true when they were outside *backers*, not just theoretical connections. These connections, along with the outside "gaze" (i.e., defining the Bosnian Muslim community as Muslim first) transformed religion for those living within the boundaries of Bosnia. Thus, even though religion is always lived out locally, it cannot be extracted from outside influences.

2. **The lack of institutional commitment to improving social cohesion is an irreconcilable barrier that makes it impossible for many of the efforts to have the desired impact**. Institutional entrenchment of ethno-religious identities perpetuates ethno-religious division, and thus efforts to build better relationships between individuals

and groups of different ethnic backgrounds will always be limited in the scope of their effect, since the looming institutional barriers prevent large-scale reconciliation. Ethno-religious division is thus materially inscribed into Bosnian life, making it impossible to think about or understand what it means to be religious apart from this embodied reality.

This institutional entrenchment of ethno-religious identity was enshrined in the political system through Dayton. It continues through the policies of embodied separation seen in geographic separation and segregated schools to this day. Thus, ethno-religious division is integrated into the Bosnian state itself, which has no interest in changing these realities that help to maintain the status quo, benefitting only institutional elites. The role of religious elites in this is similar to the roles that international peacebuilding organizations have played more generally, according to Belloni, et. al., as described above: the prioritization of stability outweighs the commitment to just notions of peace, and serves in turn to reify ethno-religious difference.

3. **Religious institutions and leaders have played important roles in milestone peacebuilding moments in Bosnia, but subsequently slipped into preservation roles.** For example, the Interreligious Council played an important role in getting to Dayton, and subsequently in establishing the political infrastructure for initial peace, including playing a strong role in the development of the religious freedom law. In particular, the Jewish Community played a critical role as a religious community that was not directly involved in the war. And yet, now religious institutions and leaders are careful to stay

"safe" and to maintain unity, but at the expense of playing an active role in furthering social cohesion more fully.

The Interreligious Council now plays a preservation role, refraining from challenging the continued structural issues that act as barriers to social cohesion in Bosnia. The commitment to consensus and to staying out of politics drives the work of the Council, and thus imagines religion and religious institutions as somehow separate from political life. Through this approach, the Council thereby, perhaps inadvertently, helps to preserve political stagnation. This builds on the Interreligious Council and other entities' "extraction" of religion from the rest of life, as delineated further above. By treating religion as an internal matter of belief, rather than seeing its integration with all aspects of socio-political life in Bosnia, efforts to engage religion to bring peace are rendered toothless in many ways.

4. **As is the case in Lebanon, points 2 & 3 combined bring up a paradox for religious peacebuilding.** Ina Merdjanova makes the case for the "repoliticization" of Interreligious Dialogue for peacebuilding in Bosnia, stating that, it "has to address more explicitly political and economic concerns and issues related to poverty and various forms of inequality and exclusion" in order to be effective in making any progress toward peace.[590] Religious leaders, who have some capacity to influence institutions, display a

[590] Ina Merdjanova, "Overhauling Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding," *George Fox University Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 36.1,3 (2016): 30, accessed February 15, 2017, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol36/iss1/3

reluctance to address institutional and political concerns, while the grassroots programs that want to see institutional change are limited in their ability to make impact. Thus, the status quo maintains, bolstered by political and religious elites who either benefit from its maintenance, or value unity and consensus over justice concerns.

This demonstrates the way in which religion is imagined and operationalized in Bosnian religious peacebuilding. Religion is most often treated as an internal matter of faith, which has been tarnished by its entanglement with politics, and thus, the way to address the conflict is to "rescue" religion from this entanglement somehow. The focus here also assumes that religion itself is one of the key conflict drivers, rather than seeing the ways it is intertwined with, and produced by, socio-political realities. This internal/extractive approach goes against a material understanding of religion, which recognized the ways in which religion is inherently integrated into socio-political life, and cannot therefore be treated as somehow separate from the rest of life.

5. **While grassroots religious peacebuilding efforts are unable to break through the institutional barriers to make broader societal impact, they play an important role in fostering resilience at the grassroots level.** As I noted in my analysis, Bosnian peacebuilders are a small but tireless group. The sheer number of programmatic efforts and ongoing events demonstrates the resilience that is being built and maintained through these efforts.

I asked some of the grassroots peacebuilding actors if they felt they had seen progress, and most said not really, so I asked what kept them going and, as one

respondent said, “what other choice do I have?” Thus, while I argue that, due to institutional and political barriers, they are not able to produce large-scale social cohesion, these efforts play a very important role in cultivating resilience and in materially building an alternative way of living and thinking about socio-political life in Bosnia. While I do not concur with the idea that cultivating this consciousness among small groups of individuals will have ripple out effects, as the institutional constraints are too strong for this mechanism of change to be viable, the peacebuilding efforts are key for maintaining individual and group resilience in the face of a difficult socio-political climate.

**Conclusion**

Religious identity, and the political meaning thereof, was shaped through socio-political processes in Bosnia, and particularly by incidents of and sustained episodes of conflict. This in turn shaped community approaches to social and political life, and to religion more broadly. Religion thus *becomes* through these political/social conflict processes, and acts as a dynamic rather than static force.

In Bosnia, engaging religion in peacebuilding is highly varied, and those pushing these efforts with the hope of increasing social cohesion face a number of barriers, which in turn affect the way actors approach the religious peacebuilding work itself. Religious peacebuilding actors often look to pull religion “to the side” for engagement uncomplicated by politics, and yet are unable to have a positive socio-political ripple effect due to this attempted extraction and treatment of religion as a primarily internal

matter. Institutional approaches in particular become, perhaps inadvertently, guardians of the status quo, preserving ethno-religious distinction, division, and bonding, while speaking publicly of the need for bridging work, but failing to take the action on complex political issues that is needed to see progress on bridging cohesion.

All of this points to the inherently socio-political nature of religion itself. Religion can serve to uphold or resist the status quo, but it is never entirely apolitical, particularly considering the way it is always shaped through socio-political processes. The assumption that we see operating in Bosnia is that extracting religion from the political is what is needed in order to build better relationships between religious communities (and thereby contribute to peace). However, the reality is that religion was made through politics, and thus extracting it now and expecting the change to come from this remade form of inter-religious understanding ignores the past process by which it was itself developed/shaped. I argue, then, that religion is inherently political and trying to "treat" it in a way that isolates it from politics is unproductive (or, at times, counterproductive indeed).

## Chapter 7: Integrated Findings and Discussion

In the last four chapters, I have provided individual assessments of how (and why) religious peacebuilding efforts have contributed (or not) to building social cohesion in the Lebanese and Bosnian contexts. This chapter analyzes those findings in tandem, and in conversation with the larger theoretical framework of religious peacebuilding laid out in Chapter Two. By looking at these case studies together, we have a richer understanding of how a material religion perspective better explains the ups and downs of current and previous efforts to engage religion in peacebuilding.

Drawing on the findings of my research, I argue for a shift in how we theorize religion, conflict and peace. While the ambivalence thesis is an important component of the field of religious peacebuilding, I argue that it is not sufficient in and of itself. We need an additional dimension of analysis, specifically regarding whether religion works to uphold or challenge the status quo, in order to conduct deep research about a given context. This will additionally aid in better designing nuanced programmatic approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding work.

This chapter will first look at how several specific theoretical approaches shaped the case study analyses. I will then examine several key comparative observations drawn from the Lebanon and Bosnia case studies before laying out several key findings that emerged from the case study analysis. Finally, I will outline more fully my proposed theoretical shift in how we approach the analysis of religion, conflict and peacebuilding. I

will demonstrate how this theoretical shift will have a pragmatic impact on policy approaches when engaging religion in peacebuilding efforts.

## Theoretical Considerations

I began this dissertation by laying out several theoretical approaches that would anchor my approach and analysis of the country case studies under consideration in this project. Specifically, I laid out theoretical approaches for how we conceptualize group identity in conflict situations, how we think about religion, and how we assess the vague notion of peace. I also examined the current state of religious peacebuilding theory, which overlaps with the aforementioned theoretical areas, arguing that the current theoretical approach to religious peacebuilding is useful, but it does not capture the fullness of the realities on the ground in conflict scenarios with strong religious attributes. I return to these theoretical approaches here in order to more clearly articulate how the case study findings interact with the theories, and what these findings tell us about religious peacebuilding more generally. This section will thus briefly examine the core theoretical approaches at work in this dissertation, explaining how they helped in the case study analysis.

### *Theorizing Group Identity in Conflict*

Theorizing "groupness" is a critical component of any conflict analysis, as group identities (and how they are perceived internally and externally) play heavily into how a conflict progresses. In Chapter Two, I laid out Ashutosh Varshney's theoretical approach

to thinking about group identities in ethnic conflicts in particular. Varshney combines a constructivist theory of ethnic identity (that group boundaries are constructed through rhetorical and situational means, rather than being bounded), with an instrumentalist theory of ethnic identity (that specific political actors utilize and aggravate group boundaries and tensions in order to achieve particular ends). This hybrid theoretical approach allows for an understanding of how group boundaries come to be more salient, and gain a certain stickiness, at particular times. I argued that this extends to religious group identities as well, which are often (as in the Lebanese and Bosnian cases) intertwined with ethnic or political identities.

In chapter two, I also laid out Rogers Brubaker's concept of groupness as an event, rather than as an ontological reality. Brubaker's focus on the event of groupness helps to flesh out Varshney's hybrid constructivist-instrumentalist theory, showing *how* group identities have developed and morphed over time through specific instances of encounter and socio-political change.

These theoretical approaches to group identities grounded my analysis of religio-political identities in both Lebanon and Bosnia. Both cases showed that group identities and boundaries are porous and shift over time. The salience of religious identities rose through particular historical events, and became especially critical in these contexts at the end of the Ottoman Empire, as nationalistic or independence-seeking movements adopted religious symbols and boundaries to advance their cause. During situations of conflict in both contexts, there were often shifting alliances, and in Lebanon especially, there were many moments when religious communal identities took a back seat to geographic or

other ways of imagining group boundaries. External observers and actors played major roles in defining or reifying group boundaries as well, as was seen in particular with external narratives on Muslims in Bosnia and with European narratives on Maronites in Lebanon, as I will further unpack later in this chapter. Finally, the intra-religious dynamics that played out during situations of tension in particular show the ways in which groupness is constantly being defined and re-defined from within and from without. These findings on how group identities play out on the ground in Lebanon and Bosnia can be extended to other case studies of religiously-framed conflict, helping analysts and practitioners alike to approach religious group identities from a more nuanced and complex perspective.

### *The Material Lens on Religion, Conflict and Peace*

I outlined Manuel Vasquez's material theory of religion in Chapter Two, arguing that this theoretical approach to thinking about religion helps us both to better understand the complex and varied roles religion plays in conflict (and vice-versa), and from there, to better conceptualize the ways in which we might better think about engaging religion in peacebuilding efforts. The crux of Vasquez's theory is captured in the following selection:

> The sort of materialism I would like to advance approaches religion as the open-ended product of the discursive and nondiscursive practices of embodied individuals, that is, individuals who exist in particular times and spaces. These individuals are embedded in nature and culture, and drawing from and conditioned by their ecological, biological, psychological, and sociocultural resources, they construct multiple identities and practices, some of which come to be designated, often through contestation, as religious at particular junctures. In other words, a materialist approach is interested in the processes behind the

> naming and articulation of religion as relatively stable and patterned reality recognized by both insiders and outsiders.[591]

Vasquez' definition here points to a *process* approach (through the "discursive and nondiscursive practices") to understanding how religion comes to be and to take on meaning in particular ways for particular contexts. Additionally, his definition points to an embodied and emplaced approach to thinking about religion, which is shaped and formed in specific places and times, often through processes of contestation (internally and externally). This view of religion calls for the analyst to peel back the curtain of what may appear to be stagnant religious identities and to look at how they came to be thought of as such. Finally, Vasquez's material approach to religion, as outlined in the above quote, calls for a view of religion as multi-directional, shaping and being shaped by embodied socio-political context. This is a shift from analyses of religion in conflict that view religion as a source (from which violent or nonviolent interpretations can stem) and see it instead as a dynamic, multi-directional conflict variable.

My case studies on Lebanon and Bosnia traced moments of groupness and socio-political circumstances that led to the formation and increased salience of religious group boundaries for particular historical circumstances. The case studies also showed how these boundaries, along with the *content* of religion, shifted over time (and continue to do so), in response to socio-political realities on the ground. Additionally, I showed how religion spanned far beyond the realm of belief in its development in these particular contexts, and thus argued that religious peacebuilding efforts that focus only or primarily

[591] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 8, emphasis mine.

on belief will fall short of making social change, a point I will unpack further throughout this chapter.

### *Social Cohesion and Peace*

As articulated in the introductory sections of this dissertation, peace is a vague concept in and of itself. While some think of it as the absence of violent conflict, most would hope for much more than this. The absence of violence is only the beginning of economic, social and political rebuilding processes. Indeed, Barbara Walter has shown that, over the past half century, countries that have experienced civil war are more likely than not to return to civil war after a peace agreement, with over 50% of countries relapsing into war.[592] This demonstrates that the move toward peace is not a smooth or single-track process, and in some cases, the lack of effective post-conflict rebuilding (and dealing with the underlying issues) keeps a country in a perpetual state of civil unrest.

We thus need concrete mechanisms in order to conceptualize and measure sustainable peace in tangible and meaningful ways. For the purpose of this dissertation, I employed the concept of social cohesion as a tool by which we can assess the state of peace in Lebanon and Bosnia. I drew particularly on Joseph Chan, et. al., in assessing social cohesion by looking at both horizontal (across-society) relationships and vertical (state-society) relationships, combined with consideration of both formal and informal

[592] Barbara F. Walter, "Conflict Relapse and the Sustainability of Post-Conflict Peace," *World Development Report 2011 Background Paper*, September 13, 2010, accessed April 27, 2017, http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01306/web/conflict-relapse-and-sustainability-of-post-conflict-peace.html

measures of these relationships. This approach informed my assessment guide (Appendix A), which I used in my analysis of both case studies.

By utilizing this tool, I was able to analyze the state of social and political peace in a more concrete and measurable way. Beyond the importance of having a tangible assessment tool for thinking about peace, the social cohesion approach compels us to dig beyond a surface-level view of peace as consensus and relative calm, and into the deeper, underlying issues of justice and inequalities that are critical to maintaining peace in any context. This informed how I analyzed the current state of religious engagement in peacebuilding in both contexts, and it can be used in other contexts to more deeply analyze how religion and religious actors impact peace by looking at religion in its interactive and malleable nature within socio-political contexts.

***Rethinking Religious Peacebuilding Theory***

I argued in the beginning chapters of this dissertation that the current theoretical approaches to religious peacebuilding are limited and in need of further revision and development. I draw on Atalia Omer's critique of how Scott Appleby's important ambivalence thesis has been applied, as she argues that,

> the preoccupation with theological retrieval and appropriation precludes a consideration of how historical contexts and interpretations of events from multiple perspectives might, and perhaps even should, challenge and transform religious traditions and political ideologies.[593]

Omer is referring here to the ways in which religious peacebuilding approaches tend to prioritize and essentialize the internal and ideological aspects of religion. Current

[593] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding: The Exotic, the Good, and the Theatrical," 4.

theoretical approaches to religious peacebuilding often focus on religion as a uni-directional source, rather than something that is shaped by socio-political context. Additionally, current religious peacebuilding theory hones in on violent and non-violent teachings and actions, often leaving aside the ways in which justice and inequalities come into play.

In the last part of this chapter, I will argue for a particular theoretical shift in the ambivalence thesis that allows for a more holistic view of the way religion interacts with conflict and peace in various settings- a shift informed by my own case analyses in Bosnia and Lebanon. Specifically, I will argue that a full analysis of religious ambivalence must include careful attention to how religious expressions work to uphold or challenge the status quo. This theoretical shift allows for a more complex analysis of how religion is interacting with other factors in a conflict scenario, thus identifying more useful entry points for practitioners seeking to impact how religious actors are contributing to peace for the long-term.

**Lebanon and Bosnia in Perspective**

Bosnia and Lebanon are distinct contexts, which is part of what makes them interesting for comparison. While they share several historical commonalities, outlined below, they also diverge from one another in important ways, contributing to different outcomes in the current relationship between religion and social cohesion in each context. In this section, I will unpack three key comparative areas that emerged from the study: the shift in both contexts of former neighbors becoming enemies, their experiences under

Ottoman control, and the state-society relationships when it comes to how religion is lived out and understood between private and public spheres.

***From Neighbors to Enemies***

While certainly, as the historical surveys demonstrate, there were numerous moments of tension, boundary-hardening, and politicization of religious identities, in both Lebanon and Bosnia, people of different religious backgrounds lived in close proximity to one another and had generally positive "quotidian" relationships prior to the recent wars. When the wars began, this quickly shifted, though not in hard-and-fast ways along religious lines. In Bosnia, for example, recall that one respondent reported his own former neighbors as his captors in a war camp in his hometown. Conflict "sides" were consistently shifting in both cases, with different militant groups aligning with one another in different places. In Lebanon, this constant shifting of "sides" was even more prevalent, with mixed-sect neighborhoods fighting against other mixed-sect neighborhoods at various points during the course of the 15-year civil war.

These realities in both contexts challenge a vision of religious wars as somehow manifesting ancient or inevitable enmities between groups. Group boundaries, and the socio-political *meaning* thereof, shifted over time, and it was only at particular historical junctures that these boundaries hardened and translated into conflictive factions. Religious identities came to mean something different when entrepreneurs of war manipulated them, but these "moments of groupness" contributed to a stickiness of these

boundaries (though still, and always, malleable in important ways), as they became institutionalized through political and social infrastructures.

The positive quotidian relationships that both Bosnians and Lebanese report from the pre-war days are now much more difficult to find, as the logic of war has been mapped onto society and politics in ways that perpetuate distance. Thus, while both contexts are post-war, it is difficult to call either of them post-conflict.

***Ottoman Effects***

Both Lebanon and Bosnia were part of the Ottoman Empire, and thus, legacies from the Ottoman era carried into conflict dynamics, and I would argue, into the present socio-political dynamics in both contexts. The millet system, as discussed in further depth in each case study chapter, made religious identities a key form of social organization under Ottoman rule, and thus contributed to the boundedness and socio-political meaning of (primarily Abrahamic) religious communities in each context. Additionally, this system vested religious authorities and institutions with significant amounts of control over, and representation of, their people. In both contexts, this laid important groundwork for the later politicization of ethno-religious identities, as they already had the experience of being a key unit of socio-political infrastructure.

Lebanon was more geographically central to the Ottoman Empire than was Bosnia, although Mount Lebanon, like Bosnia, existed as a peripheral region during much of the Empire's duration, meaning that Ottoman authorities granted local governance much autonomy, and there was less oversight over the lives (religious and

otherwise) of those living in these regions. Bosnia was considered a trade crossroads, highly important economically for the Ottoman Empire, as well as symbolically, as a European front. From a European perspective, both Bosnia and Lebanon were seen as "borderlands" of sorts, as meeting points between Christian Europe and the Muslim Ottoman Empire. As borderlands, there was much interaction between different peoples and cultures, and less direct oversight from religious or government authorities, at least at certain times.

Additionally, under the Ottomans, Christian institutions and elites in particular benefitted from being vested with certain amounts of control over their constituents, collecting taxes and speaking on behalf of their "flock." While lived religion often did not reflect these divisions or the boundedness by which the institutions were treated, the administrative treatment of the Christian minorities as bounded communities laid important groundwork in both contexts for communal identities and institutional religious representation.

While the Ottoman experiences in Lebanon and Bosnia had a number of similarities, the post-Ottoman experiences were vastly different in these two contexts. Ottoman decline came with economic depression and new forms of class-based and nationalist mobilization. While Lebanon came under the French Mandate, thus interacting with European powers while pursuing, and eventually achieving, independence, Bosnia was part of the multiple Yugoslav experiments. The French Mandate in Lebanon dealt with residents through religious and sectarian identities, while in Yugoslavia, religious and ethnic identities were played down by the state. The final

version of Yugoslavia, Socialist Yugoslavia, in particular shaped the way in which religion and state interacted, as well as the way religion was lived out in society.

***Religion Between Private and Public Spheres***

A key difference between how religion in Bosnia and religion in Lebanon manifested just before and during the recent wars is the public and private ways it was lived out differently in each context. Under Socialist Yugoslavia, Bosnia had freedom of religion, but public expressions of religion were strongly discouraged, and religion was not welcomed into the state infrastructure. This differs from the Lebanese experience, where religious communities were built squarely into the political and social structures through the National Pact and the 1923 Constitution.

In present-day Lebanon and Bosnia, there are similarities in the ways that political appointments are allocated based on religio-ethnic or sectarian group, and the electoral system reflects that accordingly, but religious belonging is much more integrated into the social life of Lebanese than it is of Bosnians. The Lebanese personal status legal system, controlled by religious courts, and the mandate to belong to a recognized sect and have it reflected on one's ID card are two key examples of how religion is integrated more fully into the public life of Lebanese. In both contexts, national identity is reflective of religious difference, with different ethno-religious groups (in the case of Bosnia) and sects (in the case of Lebanon) being clearly identified in the founding documents and peace accords, which is in turn reflected in the political infrastructures as mentioned above. In each context, then, bonding cohesion (within sects or ethno-religious groups,

*or* within particular localities) outweighs bridging cohesion, reflecting the way in which the state supports in-group cohesion over making strides toward more inclusive national identities and modes of belonging.

The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) data show that both Lebanon and Bosnia have fairly low levels of government regulation of religion (4.9/10 and 3.7/10, respectively), although I would argue that the number here for Lebanon fails to take into account the ways in which government vests religious institutions with more control and thus does indeed exert control over religion, but not directly since the institutions act as a filter. Both states determine what can and cannot be considered an official religion, exerting state control of religious institutions and representation in that way. In both cases, the social regulation of religion (referring to the ways in which societal forces restrict and constrain free religious practice) are higher, with Bosnia coming it at 5.6/10 and Lebanon coming in at a very high 9.3/10, meaning that this measure shows that Lebanese society places very strong and restrictive constraints on the freedom of religion.

Overall, Lebanon and Bosnia share some important commonalities in their histories as mixed religious societies that were under Ottoman control, but they diverge in important ways, including the private-public treatment of religion in the post-Ottoman era. The integrated findings from the case studies reflect both these shared and divergent socio-political and historical realities. The findings from these two cases, while specific to the particular contexts in certain ways, also point to broader issues that are shared by other cases of religiously-framed conflict. The malleable, process-theory approach to

understanding how and why religious identity becomes politically meaningful in particular ways at particular times is a finding that is true across a broad spectrum of cases. Additionally, the ways in which states, as well as social institutions, have asserted certain types of control over religious identity and expression, both historically and into the present, clearly factors into the political and social meanings of religious identities- a finding that crosses geographic boundaries as well, providing a more generalizable frame of analysis. Overall, the findings from Lebanon and Bosnia have implications well beyond the borders of these two nations.

**Integrated Findings**

In this section, I articulate the key findings drawn from examining the Bosnia and Lebanon case studies in comparative context. Commonalities in the cases lead to some contingent generalizations that would likely apply in other conflict contexts, while certain case specificities are also noted.

***Both Bosnia and Lebanon illustrate how religion is a multi-dimensional and multi-directional conflict variable.*** It interacts with other aspects of social and political life, and it is indeed shaped *by* socio-political historical processes and events. It is thus not a static (if malleable) variable exerting effects on social and political life in a unidirectional way (with religion as the derivative, for instance, promoting either violence or peace in society). Instead, what it means to be religious in each of these contexts changed over time, particularly as religious symbols and institutions were strategically targeted and employed throughout times of conflict, and then these new

forms in turn affected the ways that social and political dynamics played out, including in conflict scenarios. This demonstrates the inherently socio-political nature of religion itself, as a reality shaped through context rather than existing in a space somehow apart from the political and social realities in which it is developed. Thus, trying to "extract religion from politics" or find apolitical sources of religion is a futile exercise. Religion thus took on new meaning for identity, and itself gained new content, throughout times of war (and the lead up to conflict) in both contexts. For example, as was seen in the case study chapters, the politics of institutional reforms at the end of the Ottoman era helped to shift the meaning of religious identity by prioritizing it within political and social institutions and structures. Additionally, the emergence of a Muslim ethnic identity in Bosnia was part of this interactive process, as was the increased salience of Maronite identity under the French Mandate in Lebanon, and both processes reshaped the meaning of religious identity in the war and post-war phases.[594]

***Intra-religious dynamics are critical.*** We see in both cases that tensions within religious communities often precede and exist simultaneously to tensions between religious communities. These rivalries are apparent in both Lebanon and Bosnia now and historically, with numerous examples in both cases. Group elites carefully curate boundaries and crack down on internal dissent (as was in the case of individual Serbs resisting extreme Serbian nationalism during the war). This leads to a marginalization of fringe or border elements of religious identity and practice, prioritizing and curating the

[594] It's important to note here that this re-shaping was not a process that ended with a static result, as religious identity and meaning continues to develop and reform within current socio-political dynamics as well.

"mainstream" way of being religious from both inside and outside perspectives. This also has implications for who is seen as an appropriate or accurate representative of the religious community- again, often marginalizing voices of dissent or difference within religious communities themselves. Thus, paying attention to these internal diversities and conflicts is as critical, if not more so, than examining that of conflict between seemingly bounded groups.

***While religion is always lived and developed in local contexts, it is impossible to extract local experiences and understandings of religion from the broader global context.*** A feature of religion, at least in the contexts of Lebanon and Bosnia, is that it has global connections and reach. The dominant religious communities in each context, which primarily include sects of Christianity and Islam, have connections to the more broad global religious communities (as "world religions") and also, most have connections with institutional sectarian structures that span beyond the borders of the state. For instance, the Sunni community in Lebanon engages with regional Sunni institutions, while the Serbian Orthodox community in Bosnia answers to institutional elites in Belgrade. The role that the French in particular played in supporting and influencing the Maronite community in Lebanon (seen as a "Christian enclave") prior to and during the French Mandate had important implications for how this community understood itself in relation to religious Others in the region. International responses and rhetoric shaped and reified the religious lenses through which conflict was articulated and carried out, most notable in the case of how international observers prioritized the Muslim identity of Bosnians during the war in that context. Christian-Islamic

civilizational narratives were prevalent in describing conflict during the lead-up to wars in both Bosnia and Lebanon, and current regional and global narratives of religious conflict (between Sunni and Shia, between Christians and Muslims, etc.) have very real impacts on the way local relational dynamics are interpreted and lived out. Thus, all religion may be local, but it is never only so.

***Despite the prevalence of religious and other peacebuilding work, social cohesion in each context remains dismal.*** In each context, there is a plethora of peacebuilding work underway, from top-down and bottom-up approaches, involving government, non-government and international/bilateral actors, and engaging religious institutions and identities in a variety of ways. There is no shortage of effort, and yet, both vertical and horizontal measures of social cohesion are highly negative. Both Lebanon and Bosnia reveals a lack of social trust (horizontal), as well as widespread lack of trust in the government (vertical). Successful programs, evaluated on small scales, are not leading to systemic change. My case study analysis reveals some of the key barriers and the problematic approaches at work that keep things stagnant, all of which I will not repeat here, but the key finding that emerged in both cases is that religious institutional leadership is tied up with the state (more so in Lebanon than in Bosnia, but nevertheless, a reality in both) and thus have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. In order to maintain the current national order, bonding cohesion is required, at the expense of bridging cohesion. This is seen in the way the political and electoral infrastructure relies upon ethno-religious or sectarian group boundedness and identification.

***Embodied separation, through geography, schooling, and the political system, works in both Bosnia and Lebanon against attempts to bring people together.*** This includes the homogenization and decentralization of Lebanese social geography, a trend seen in Bosnia as well. Embodied separation goes hand in hand with the presence of stagnant peace agreements. In both contexts, many have referred to the peace agreements as "frozen" and unfulfilled. They put in place a status quo that, according to the agreements themselves, was supposed to change over time, but instead has become stagnant. Several noted that the Ta'if established "peace" without dealing with the underlying causes of the war. This has been accompanied by institutionalized and corporate/communal politics around religious identity, built into the national identity and into political institutions and structures. In Lebanon in particular, sectarianism is inscribed into most aspects of life, and access to the state and to numerous services is filtered through communal belonging, rather than stemming from individual citizenship. Without addressing these institutional challenges, and without addressing persistent inequalities and injustices, peacebuilding limited in ability to have impact.

***In each context, different peacebuilding actors demonstrated commitments to different ultimate goals, revealing a diversity of approaches to what peace means and looks like.*** Both contexts revealed a plethora of initiatives and approaches to engaging religion in building peace. While some approaches were complementary, others had competing goals. The main dividing line in both contexts was that some actors (particularly those coming from the grassroots) are working to change the system in some way (and emphasize equality and justice), while others (particularly those with state or

institutional ties) are working to maintain a sense of unity and consensus, which served to uphold the status quo. This harkens back to the typology of religion that Bruce Lincoln offers, outlined in Chapter Two, including religions of resistance, status quo, and revolution. Religious expression can certainly move between these types of engagement with the broader societal structures, but religious engagement in peacebuilding in both contexts demonstrated a divide between those seeking to uphold the status quo and those looking to dismantle it in some significant way, thus revealing an important fissure in work.

***There is a lack of connection between local and national efforts.*** While both top-down, nationally focused efforts and bottom-up, locally centered efforts exist in large numbers in Bosnia and in Lebanon, there is a large disconnect between them. Locally centered efforts are often more successful in creating cohesion at the local levels, but struggle to have any ripple-out effect, while national efforts may have the scale, but lack the rootedness in local contexts and thus often fail to have the desired effects. Thus, we see a continuation of bonding cohesion but a lack of bridging cohesion that is widespread in any way. Additionally, both case studies revealed some differences and tensions between top-down and bottom up approaches to building peace. Many working on the grassroots level expressed skepticism about the authenticity and impact of nationally-driven efforts, particularly considering those led by international organizations like the United Nations. Those involved in national peacebuilding platforms expressed a lack of confidence in locally-focused efforts, which might have the ability to make real change in

small localities, but this change will be eroded by national and systemic trends if they are not addressed.

***In Lebanon in particular, but in Bosnia in some instances as well, overt religious violence serves as a distraction from deeper, root-cause work.*** Lebanese NGOs and peacebuilding actors reported that much of their work now focuses on dealing with the immediate and urgent threat of extremist violence, particularly on the border with Syria. This tracks with a shift in international funding structures as well, which prioritize a focus on overt violence over other, less visible kinds (?). While part of this is about urgency and scale, it reflects a general downfall in religious peacebuilding approaches, which on the whole tend to pay attention to the more obvious forms of violence (including extremism in particular), while glossing over some of the structural violence that lies below the surface. This created a cycle of sorts, as overt violence continues cropping up, in part because the underlying issues of inequality and injustice are left untended. This is one of the key reasons I argue for a shift in our theoretical approach to religion and conflict analysis to include not only analysis of how religion is promoting violence or peace, but how it is- in various ways- upholding or challenging the socio-political status quo.

***Much of the work to explicitly engage religion in peacebuilding efforts takes a ideological approach.*** Through inter-religious dialogues, the production of texts aimed at promoting peaceful interpretations of religion, and the work on sermons and public religious messaging, there is a very heavy emphasis in this field on religion in the realm of beliefs and ideas (ideology and theology). Much of the actual programming of

religious peacebuilding initiatives involves curating or influencing sermons and religious texts, dialogues about beliefs between believers at various levels (institutional and grassroots; clergy and laity), and other similar efforts focused on engaging or influencing beliefs or ideas. This constrains the impact of these efforts, since they often fail to consider religion within the broader context of socio-political life. By limiting religion to ideology, the material ways in which religious identity and meaning in each context was produced, and thus the way it is now lived out in private and public life, are left to the side. This is intricately connected to the next point, as a focus on religious beliefs over other aspects of religious identity can lead to attempts to isolate or extract religion from the broader conflict arena.

***Paired with the ideological emphasis within religious peacebuilding work, there is also a tendency to try to extract religion from the conflict, treating it as a separate conflict factor that can be dealt with in isolation.*** This includes efforts to isolate and "extract" religion from the broader socio-political context to deal only with *religious* concepts and issues in religious peacebuilding settings. Several respondents in both cases spoke about the need to protect religion from politicians, which for many, led to a desire to deal with religion outside of the political realm. This extraction of religion from politics in particular is seen in the efforts of the institutional and clerical leadership in both contexts. Respondents from both the National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Lebanon and the Interreligious Council in Bosnia spoke of the importance of staying away from politics in their engagements and work in order to not "rock the boat." They noted the importance of staying on consensus issues and sending "messages of

peace" from their platforms without getting into controversial politics. While certainly this makes sense if the goal is to maintain unity and consensus between these particular actors, it makes it very difficult for religious peacebuilding efforts to have any impact on the broader socio-political dynamics, particularly if we accept that systemic and institutional changes are needed for social cohesion to improve in both countries. As Ina Merdjanova argues in her assessment of religious peacebuilding in the Balkans, a repoliticization of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding is needed *if* it is going to maintain a goal of attaining peace.[595]

***Religious leaders and institutions do indeed play important roles and have clout in these post-conflict settings. However, we need to unpack and situate what those roles are- they're not good at everything, and approaches to engaging religion in peacebuilding need to take nuance into account here.*** Institutional religious actors have been very successful in helping to bring about peace agreements, in building consensus, and in quelling overt violence. The Interreligious Council in Bosnia, for example, played a key role in helping to maintain peace initially and working to collaborate with the government to ensure inclusion of all religious communities in institutional structures. The high-level interreligious bodies in Lebanon also played and important role in the Ta'if, as well as continuing to help in quelling outbreaks of violence in the country. These efforts have been far less successful in these contexts at helping to cultivate social cohesion more broadly, particularly if they benefit from or have interest in maintaining the status quo. This is both a reflection of the scope of their influence and impact, but it

[595] Merdjanova, "Overhauling Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding," 30.

also reflects the very real ways in which religious leaders and institutions in both Bosnia and Lebanon are benefitting from division between religious communities in a certain way, and thus prefer to stay in preservation mode. The political posturing of religious leaders was a common theme in the case studies, and a sense that the religious leaders and institutions indeed reinforce the logic of ethno-nationalism (in Bosnia) or sectarianism (in Lebanon). This reveals a key paradox for religious peacebuilding. A certain level of bonding cohesion is needed to maintain control over these constituencies, and religious elites in these contexts benefit from moderate levels of boundary-maintenance. In Lebanon in particular, the financial benefits for religious elites are very real, and in both contexts, maintaining a national vision that gives rights to religious communities *as such* is of interest to religious institutional elites.

***An area for further study is the impact of peacebuilding efforts on resilience.*** There are many ways in which the plethora of peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots level in particular have more to do with community and individual resilience than they do with making a direct, measurable impact on social cohesion more broadly. This emerged as a key finding in both studies, as I spoke with numerous grassroots actors who do not necessarily believe they are making a broad impact, and some even assert that they are not trying to, but rather are concerned with helping themselves and those around them resist the status quo in small ways through their efforts. In Lebanon, there was a pronounced cynicism among religious peacebuilding actors in particular, but this was paired with a commitment to continue the work out of necessity- respondents spoke to a

lack of viable alternatives. Thus, further research might examine the ways in which these efforts are sources of resilience for an otherwise frustrated and cynical population.

**Summary**

Religion is multi-dimensional, multi-directional conflict variable that is impacted by (and exerts impact on) external and internal factors and dynamics. Social cohesion remains dismal, and this is in part because of continued stagnant peace accords that put in place what were meant to be temporary structures that have instead become permanent, crystalizing group belonging and difference into the fabric of state and society. Across the board, those "engaging religion" in peacebuilding tend to prioritize ideology and treat religion as something that can and should be extracted from the political. Religious elites and institutions in particular demonstrate a propensity toward preservation of the status quo. Some of this is intentional, seen in religious elites jointly opposing certain moves to make institutional change. Other modes of this are less overt, as elites articulate a desire to preserve consensus and to do so, must avoid controversial political and social issues, shielding their work from extensive engagement on injustice and inequalities.

While grassroots work that engages religion in peacebuilding does not often take this same consensus-oriented approach, reach of this work is limited by the institutional structures, and there is still a tendency to treat religion in an ideological and extractive manner. Additionally, extremism and overt violence serve as strong distractions across the board, consistently pulling funding and attention from root-cause issues. Thus, while messages of peace from religious elites are helpful in quelling overt violence, underlying

injustices and inequalities often remain untouched, leading to low levels of social cohesion and an increased likelihood of violent responses to injustices.

**Shifting Religious Peacebuilding Theory**

In both Bosnia and Lebanon, as argued in the case studies and reiterated above, religious institutions and elites are often working to maintain consensus and, in turn, the socio-political status quo. This is many times in conflict with grassroots peacebuilding actors, who are working for systemic or institutional change. I am arguing that this reality on the ground in many places calls for a shift in how scholars and practitioners theorize religion, conflict and peace.

The religious engagement in these contexts reflects a simplified application of the ambivalence thesis. While the ambivalence thesis that anchors much religious peacebuilding theory is right when it comes to malleability of religion and the need to avoid essentializing (whether it be as violent or peaceful), it doesn't account for the multidirectional ways in which religion is also shaped *by* socio-political context; it is not only itself a source factors. Additionally, the current ambivalence thesis tends to be seen as one-dimensional and highly ideologically focused (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1

The assumption, given this approach, is that moving religious expression along this spectrum (toward promoting peace) will result in better outcomes. However, even in contexts like Lebanon and Bosnia where we do indeed see religious leaders and institutions often speaking up for peace and nonviolence, we still do not see social cohesion improve. Of course, as asserted in this study, this is due to a multiplicity of factors. However, I argue that adding another dimension to this theoretical approach can aid in a more holistic approach to theorizing religion in conflict and peacebuilding. This added dimension is to consider whether religious actors are upholding or challenging the socio-political status quo (Diagram 2). They can do this violently or peacefully, but regardless, it is a critical dimension of how religious actors are situated in various contexts.

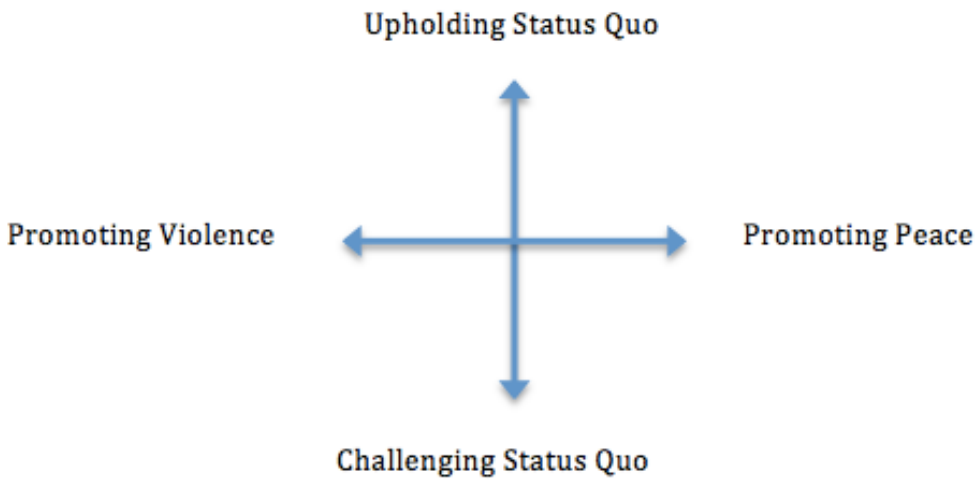


Diagram 2

Adding this dimension (of upholding vs. challenging the status quo) complexities how we see religion showing up and exerting influence in conflict situations, and more fully accounts for how socio-political context is also shaping religious identities and expression. Additionally, this adds the justice dimension, which helps in assessing if and how religion can contribute, or *is* contributing (or not), to improving social cohesion. This also accounts for religion beyond the ideological, looking at socio-political action and engagement in a more complete way. Overall, this revised theoretical approach, the need for which I derive from my case study analysis, will aid in both theory and practice when it comes to engaging religion in order to advance peace.

**Conclusion**

Examining the Lebanon and Bosnia cases in comparative context demonstrates the need to refine religious peacebuilding, in theory and practice, if it is going to make more progress in advancing social cohesion. This study reveals a key paradox in religious institutional and elite involvement in peacebuilding efforts, as elites have developed a stake in preserving the status quo and prioritizing consensus, while often leaving aside issues of justice and inequality that continue to perpetuate horizontal and vertical distrust and, at times, lead to more overt violence. A simplified ambivalence thesis approach to religious peacebuilding would likely miss this paradox, as the focus on ideology and the promotion of peace messages would lead one to believe that religious peacebuilding is doing its work effectively in these contexts. However, the added dimension of whether or not a religious actor is working to uphold or challenge the status

quo allows for a fuller view of how socio-political contexts shape and are shaped by religion, and how justice and inequalities play into the context and the work of those engaging religion in peacebuilding efforts.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion: Beyond Kumbaya- Materially Engagement of Religion in Peacebuilding for a Better Future

This dissertation set out to utilize a material theory of religion in analyzing practices of engaging religion in peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina. By looking at religion, conflict and peacebuilding in these particular contexts through this lens, we are able to see how religion interacts with conflict in a dynamic fashion, as it shapes and is shaped by conflict situations. Religion is thus *produced* through these processes, as much as- or more than- it exerts influence on the nature of conflict itself. Religion is also ambivalent in a variety of ways- not only in terms of peaceful or violent interpretations of traditions, but also in how it seeks to either uphold or challenge certain status quos. Indeed, as I argued in the last chapter, this second form of ambivalence is critical to understanding and engaging religious actors in situations of conflict, if the goal is social cohesion.

Religious engagement, particularly in contexts where religious symbols and identities were heavily invoked within situations of violence, is critical, and yet, it has not to date produced the results one would like to see in either Bosnia-Herzegovina or in Lebanon. This does not mean, however, that religious engagement should therefore be abandoned. It is both essential to, and can be helpful in, situations of post-conflict rebuilding, if it is engaged thoughtfully and effectively. Rather than abandoning religious engagement for lack of desired results, scholars and practitioners alike need to instead

rethink and refine *how* religion is imagined and invoked in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding scenarios.

This shift involves going beyond exclusively internal notions of religion, which drive highly belief-focused interventions, and also avoiding overstating group identities and boundaries, which as we have seen are highly malleable and contingent.

The findings specific to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Lebanon in this dissertation have important implications well beyond these contexts. In particular, these findings can speak into other deeply divided societies in which power-sharing arrangements are considered in bringing about political peace agreements. This field of research will only become more relevant, if the Pew numbers on religious conflict hold true and if we continue to see trends toward intra-state and non-state actors being the primary locus of conflicts into the middle and latter parts of the 21st century.

In deeply divided societies, which entail societies in which multiple religious, ethnic, or otherwise identified groups are vying for political and social representation, any resolutions or peace agreements will be followed by the large task of rebuilding social cohesion where it has been eroded. In situations where religion is a key factor, effective post-conflict engagement must pay careful attention to the ways that institutional structures can aid or inhibit social cohesion. This involves finding ways to incentivize cooperation and the public expression of multiple forms of identity. Additionally, it will comprise taking care not to over-prioritize stability at the expense of long-term cohesion, which entails socio-political justice and equality for both communities and individuals. Peace treaties, and the role of religious leaders or

communities therein, must be seen, then, as a first step, rather than expecting them to bear out long-term solutions on their own. Indeed, we have seen in the case studies at hand that this approach produces a stale status-quo, further entrenching a lack of social cohesion.

One might take Syria, for example: a conflict that has gone on for over six years, and in the course of this time, has produced new forms of religious identity and community affiliations that were not present or meaningful at the start of the uprisings. Any post-conflict peace-building efforts in Syria are going to have to take these new forms of religious identity and meaning into account. However, a narrow focus on peaceful versus violent understandings of religion will not be fruitful in producing a new and inclusive society. Simply focusing on the most overt forms of violence, while ignoring the structural violence that has been present throughout, will only seed future unrest. Power-sharing arrangements that see stability as the ultimate goal will not be sustainable long-term, and silencing the voices and grievances of those on the margins of any of the identity groups at play will only lead to more conflict down the road.

In the Syrian context, any attempts to extract religion from the political and to build peace by putting different religious groups in dialogue with one another- without engaging with the larger socio-political context and questions of justice- will produce the same stagnancy we have seen in Lebanon. Paying attention to the ways in which religious elites and institutions have been, or will become, tied up in the maintenance of certain unjust status quo realities, will be especially critical for those hoping to engage religion in promoting long-term peace.

While the findings from this dissertation are most applicable in other deeply divided contexts, such as Syria, there is certainly also specific relevance for other contexts that do not fit this pattern. Indeed, this study has important implications for how religion is conceptualized and employed in global Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policies. Many CVE policies focus nearly completely on Islamic extremism, often overlooking the other forms of extremism bearing religious credentials, and they tend to take up a one-dimensional approach to religion and violence, designing programs to "moderate" religious teachings and beliefs in order to combat the spread of violent extremism. They most often fail to look at the other dimension of religion & violence that I argue for in this study, namely, how religion is used to either challenge or uphold the status quo. CVE programs therefore prioritize the "moderate" elite religious voices, often ignoring the institutional baggage with which they come. Using the approach laid out in this dissertation, those engaged in CVE design can more fully situate the rise in violent extremism in certain contexts, and thus will be better equipped to address it at the root, rather than simply at the surface.

There are, of course, limitations to a study like this in and of itself, and to its implications for other contexts. For this study, there were, of course, many other respondents and programmatic efforts in each context that I was not able to include due to logistical constraints. This means that there are certainly perspectives and initiatives that were not taken into account in this research. Rather than being a comprehensive assessment of each context, this dissertation provides a snapshot, and analyzes this snapshot accordingly. Additionally, religion in each society develops in very context-

specific ways, making it difficult to assess direct causal connections to certain similar outcomes in two different contexts. There are always a multiplicity of internal and external factors at work hindering or enabling social cohesion. Thus, this study is not able to make social scientific predictions as such, but rather, points to trends and tendencies within two different contexts with contingent generalizations.

The battle at Maaloula detailed in the opening of this dissertation shows both the complexity of identifying and pulling out religious threads of a larger situation of socio-political unrest, as well as the ways in which the narratives told- internally and externally- about the role of religion in any conflict has a strong impact on the way that conflict unfolds. The default assumption of religious or cultural wars or animosities pervades public opinion as well as global policy, and those engaged in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding work have an uphill battle to displace these default modes of thinking and reacting. However, the plethora of religiously-engaged peacebuilding work over the past decade and beyond has also produced a growing body of knowledge that, if we approach it thoughtfully and analytically, will aid in the development of more fruitful engagement into the future, where we are going to need it. Rather than seeing religious peacebuilding as "supplemental,"[596] bracketing religion as belief and extracting it from a historicized socio-political context, those in the business of religious peacebuilding should thus expand the scope of how religion can contribute in meaningful ways to the broader efforts of building peace.

[596] Omer, "Religious Peacebuilding," 11.

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## Appendix: Religion & Social Cohesion Assessment Guide

This assessment framework guide assesses the various dimensions of religious engagement in national and social conflict dynamics and peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, the guide assesses factors that span beyond explicitly religious ones because religious factors necessarily overlap and interact with other socio-political conflict dynamics. This guide, then, demonstrates these overlaps and interactions, shedding light on the specific ways in which religion impacts, and is impacted by, other socio-political dynamics related to conflict and peacebuilding.

### 1. Religion in National Identity

- What is the nature of national identity, and how inclusive is it of various religious identities? Is it a particular ethno-religious identity? What percentage of the state population fits this identity category?
- Have past leaders instituted direct "nation building"[597] policies and reforms? How far back? And if so, were they successful in generating a more cohesive national identity, inclusive of religious identity groups?[598]
- Is there a higher degree of ethnic nationalism or civic nationalism[599] (are rights based on ethnicity or rights based on citizenship)? Or are identities

[597] Edward Miguel, "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania," *World Politics* 56 (April 2004), 327-62.
[598] Include an analysis of how I or others are defining success for the particular context.
[599] The "Barometers" are useful sources of data related to citizenship and identity. For example, see: http://www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com/aj/AJBrowserAB.jsp

principally ethnic, religious or otherwise, with no real sense of nationalism? Does the national identity map onto the state's borders?

- Is political participation inclusive? That is, can all groups of society equally participate in elections and politics? If not, which groups have restricted participation, and in what ways?
- What is the official way in which religion is reflected in the national identity (established religion vs. passive or aggressive secular state identity, etc.)?[600]
- What are the state's policies vis-à-vis freedom of religious belief?[601] Religious expression in the public square or state-controlled spaces?
- What is the state's level of state control over religious practice, expression, or institutions? Does it differ from religion to religion?
- Are there constitutional restrictions on who can vote or run for office, based on religious identity? [602]
- How deeply are religious divisions institutionalized within the state apparatus?
- To what degree have ethnic or religious identities become interrelated with a conceptualization of the "nation" and the state?[603] Do religious and ethnic

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[600] Drawing on typologies from Ahmet Kuru, *Secularism and State Policy toward Religion: The United States, France and Turkey*, (Cambridge: Columbia University Press, 2009); others.
[601] Freedom House indicators; Fox, Jonathan, and Yasemin Akbaba "Restrictions on the Religious Practices of Religious Minorities: A Global Survey." *Political Studies* (2014).
[602] Conflict dynamic: formal electoral rules shape how much it costs to vote or run in an election, which might exclude some groups from active participation in the political process.
[603] David Little, "Religion, Nationalism, and Intolerance," in *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict, and Peacemaking*, ed. Timothy Sisk (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

ideals in the country tend to inform more constructive or more destructive forms of nationalism?

- Are religious groups highly concentrated within particular geographic areas, or are they dispersed across the state within various areas?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do state institutions shape the actions of religious or sectarian elites? To what extent do elites shape state institutions' actions?[604] To what extent do formal state institutions constrain or enable interactions that create exclusion or cohesion?
- Do marginalized ethnic groups have venues[605] through which to voice grievances? If so, to what extent are such grievances actually addressed?
- What is the nature of the current political discourse[606] around "social cohesion" and nationalism in the case? According to leaders and party rhetoric, who will and will not be part of the developing "nation"?

**2. Religion in Social Dynamics**

- What can be said about the general nature of social cohesion in the country under consideration?
- Are there spillover effects from other conflict or fragile environments in the region? Are there ameliorative effects from other strong environments?

[604] Include a mapping of who these elites are.
[605] Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
[606] Vanessa Barolsky, "'A Better Life for All', Social Cohesion and the Governance of Life in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 1 (2012): 134–51.

- How do regional or international expressions of religion, or religious networks, impact articulation of religious identities or values in the local context at hand? Are some bigger players in this process than others (i.e., are certain religions/communities are over- or underrepresented in this process, and if so, which ones and how)?
- Is there evidence of a recent process through which there has been "invention of enmity" among competing ethnic or religious groups?[607] Or, are there "long antagonisms" and "ancient hatreds" among ethno-religious groups? Or, are there new forms of "modern hatreds"[608] emerging due to political or economic change?
- How do the actors define stories of "historical injustice"[609] among religious or ethnic groups? Are there particular historical injustices that groups believe have never been reconciled? What narratives of the past do various groups tell: of better or worse intercommunal relations?
- How significant is religious difference in relation to other identity-based cleavages in this particular context?
- What are the dominant political narratives? Do they involve "hate speech,"[610] religious or ethnics stereotyping or propaganda?

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[607] David Little, *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity* (United States Institute of Peace, 1993). See also, E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Past and Present Publications (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[608] Stuart Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).
[609] David Carment, "The International Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: Concepts, Indicators, and Theory," *Journal of Peace Research* 30, no. 2 (May 1, 1993): 137–50.
[610] Glaeser, "The Political Economy of Hatred."

- To what extent do religious groups active in the conflict or public space fit into a minimalist or maximalist expression of religious commitment?[611]
- To what extent do religious groups active in the public space fit into Bruce Lincoln's typology of Religions of the Status Quo, Religions of Resistance, or Religions of Revolution?[612]
- To what extend do religious demographics overlap with economic disparities and other measures of inequality? To what extent is there a sense of "relative deprivation"[613] among religious groups across the economic landscape?
- To what extend are faith-based organizations or religious institutions engaged in providing social services, rather than the state?
- What are the conclusions of social surveys or other attitudinal studies on measures such as social distance and social trust, particularly along religious identity lines?
- Is there evidence of strong, voluntary civil society groups that cut across religious identity lines?[614]

### 3. Religious Actors in Conflict Dynamics

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[611] Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion After September 11*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 59.
[612] Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 79-86.
[613] Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton University Press, 1970). See also, Francesco Caselli and Wilbur John Coleman, *On the Theory of Ethnic Conflict*, Working Paper (National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2006). Cynthia Arnson and I. William Zartman, *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed, And Greed* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005).
[614] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

- Do political elites have power over mechanisms that operate to "construct" religious identities such as the media or using political platforms to promote metaphors, myths that create "imagined communities,"[615] or help shape an "enemy image"[616] of other religious groups? Do they control particular economic sectors? Are some sectors the 'province' of particular groups?
- Do "predatory elites" use extant religious divisions to mobilize political support, or, "direct public frustration away from their own exploitative behavior."[617]
- Do state leaders have "enemy perceptions"[618] of other ethnic groups?
- Do political elites use "religious" conflicts as reference points to mobilize support for particular purposes?
- Do elites use power and institutions of the state to protect and promote the interests of their own group over the interests of others?
- Are there religious elite "spoilers"[619] in the peace process? (elites who view peace as preventing them from being able to achieve their primary aims, interests) Who? Has the state sought to incorporate "spoilers" into the state apparatus?

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[615] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[616] Stuart J. Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 108–38. See also, Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2 (1994): 44–76. Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*. Edward L. Glaeser, "The Political Economy of Hatred," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 45–86.
[617] Robert H. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also, Larry Diamond, "Democratic Rollback - The Resurgence of the Predatory State," *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2008): 298.
[618] N. Kaplowitz, "National Self-Images, Perception of Enemies, and Conflict Strategies: Psychopolitical Dimensions of International Relations," *Political Psychology*, 1990, 39–82.
[619] Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–53.

- How does the electoral system map – boundary demarcation and districting – relate to religious divisions? Is the electoral system likely to promote "bridging" or "bonding strategies"[620] in political parties to gain seats?
- To what extent do incumbent political elites "play the religious card" in order to maintain power and garner political support from more extremist religious political groups? To what extent do elites employ religion as a means to maintain or gain political power?
- What is the organizational structure of dominant religious institutions (*e.g.* hierarchical and bureaucratic versus localized)?
- To what degree does clientalism or patronage shape the behavior of religious elites?

**4. Description of Specific Interventions**

- What are the different types of initiatives that engage religion in peacebuilding in this context (elite-level dialogues, committees, or forums; civil society efforts; foreign entity-driven programs, etc.)?
- How, precisely, do peacebuilding initiatives engage religion in addressing particular conflict dynamics?
- What are the primary interventions that aim to directly improve social cohesion at the level of civil society (e.g. dialogue, local peacebuilding, etc.)? What are the primary interventions that aim to indirectly improve social

[620] Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

cohesion at the level of the state (e.g. governance reforms, aid to marginalized groups, etc.)?

i. How involved are local religious elites and organizations in these particular efforts?

**5. Conceptual Understandings of Religious Peacebuilding**

- How do actors involved in peacebuilding efforts that engage religion articulate the nature of religion in relation to conflict dynamics?
- Are there differences in the way religious actors vs. "secular" actors articulate the religious dynamics at play?
- How do civil society actors see the role of religious elites in peacebuilding efforts? How do religious elites see their own roles in peacebuilding efforts?
- How do peacebuilding and development actors *not* involved in religious peacebuilding efforts articulate the nature of religion in relation to conflict dynamics? The effectiveness of religious peacebuilding efforts?

**6. Evidence of Efficacy of Religious Approaches to Peacebuilding**

- What lessons have peacebuilding practitioners learned on effective and ineffective forms of social cohesion programming that explicitly engages religion or religious groups?
- What are the intervening factors that prohibit or facilitate effectively engaging religion in peacebuilding efforts?