



Demystifying Religion in Mediation

Identifying Gaps in Training, Knowledge and Practice

Al Amana International | Cassandra Lawrence, Dr. Sara Singha, Najla Mangoush, and Rev. Douglas Leonard



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Foreword

When the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers was established in 2013, the intention of the new entity was to support the building of collaborative action as a response to the complex realities peace mediators face in current conflict contexts. With this in mind, the Network believes that local communities need to be given a greater role in mediation and dialogue processes in order to achieve sustainable peace. This goal and approach requires a paradigm shift in understanding the religious dimensions to conflict and peace. This model has received particular attention in the development of the trainings offered by the Network and its partners.

Al Amana International (AAI) was among the first of the 50 members of the Network to lead the work of training development. AAI is a sister organization of Al Amana Centre, sharing resources and providing mutual support. As the courses developed, so did the request for them. In collaboration with the UN Mediation Support Unit, Center for Security Studies/ETH-Zurich, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the first pilot courses on religion and mediation were developed. The developing process was coordinated by AAI and the Secretariat of the Network hosted by Finn Church Aid. These trainings, designed for UN field mission and headquarters' staff, focused on nuancing conflict analysis and peace processes by expanding knowledge of religious and tribal drivers of peace and conflict. The methods used in the trainings included case studies, practitioner led discussions, and exercises. In the course of a few years, these pilot courses have grown to courses held annually.

In addition to this work, the Network Secretariat commissioned AAI to conduct this baseline study on the existing training gaps in the field of religion and mediation. This baseline is to be used as a tool for future joint planning among Network members and partners. As a result of the research process of this report, AAI, in collaboration with CSS/ETH-Zurich, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the University of Groningen, convened the first practitioners exchange for organizations and individuals responsible for developing curriculums and conducting courses addressing the role of religion and secularity in conflict.

We hope this study, which is based on 60 interviews with practitioners and trainers, serves as a helpful tool in planning how to better train religious and traditional actors, mediation practitioners, academics, civil society actors, and students on religion, conflict and mediation. We hope this report also provides useful information on trainings for those who support capacity building of peace mediators.

A key recommendation from this study is to integrate first-hand expertise from Tradition and Faith-oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) and religious and traditional peacemakers, to training materials and course curriculums. First-hand experiences greatly adds to the understanding of lived religion in conflict contexts. By supporting the inclusion of first-hand experiences in course content, the participants of a course or training gain valuable and nuanced understandings of how religion plays out in the daily life of communities.

This recommendation reflects one of the key purposes of the Network: to effectively support local TFIMs. According to an earlier report conducted by Berghof Foundation, religious and traditional actors are often well positioned to understand conflicts and provide solutions to these conflicts. To support the positive connections between religious and traditional peacemakers and wider peacebuilding actors, the Network is setting up a platform for TFIMs. The TFIM Platform's goal is to enable the UN, other mediation support entities and peacebuilding actors to work more closely with the insider mediators best positioned to support the foundations of a sustainable peace process.

This report was initiated in collaboration with the Network and Al Amana International's founding director Rev. Douglas Leonard. The report was completed under the leadership of Cassandra Lawrence, Najla Mangoush and Dr. Sara Singha. Duncan Hanson contributed to the editing of the report.

The Secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers remains thankful to Al Amana International for collecting and analyzing the urgently needed information on training gaps. This information has already deepened our work with members and mediation entities. These reports build our ability to respond collectively, when creating equitable peace platforms and bring peace one step closer.

Antti Pentikäinen

Executive Director and Convener

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Executive Summary

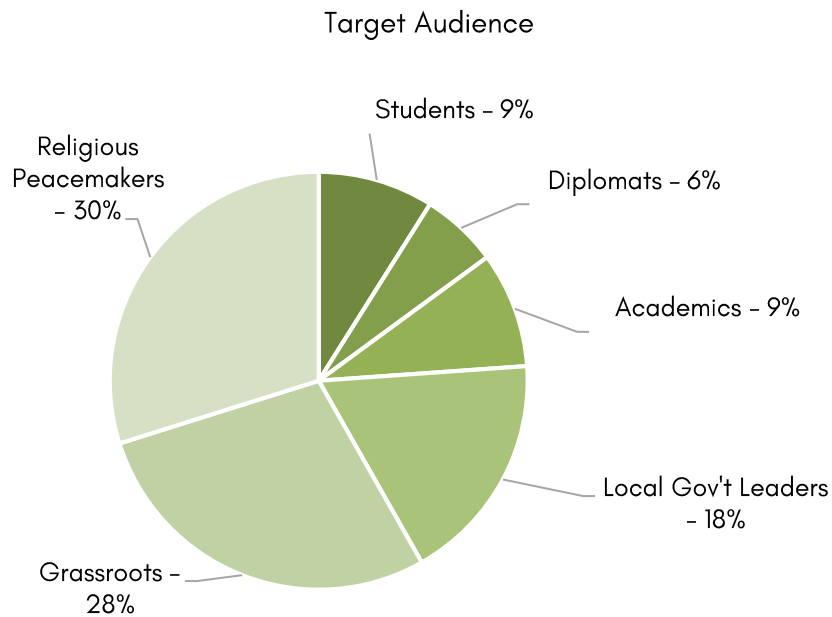
This report has three parts. In the first part, we analyze religious perspectives and worldviews in mediation practice. In this section, we focus on the religious dimensions of conflict and the use of religious language, practice, and belief structures in relation to conflict. In the second section, we highlight the gaps between lived religion and mediation practice. Along with data collection, we use relevant quotes from interviews with practitioners and mediation specialists to process and integrate ethnographic evidence from the field. Significantly, these interviews reflect both human experiences of “lived religion” and the theoretical frameworks necessary for understanding conflict resolution and mediation. In the third section, which is made of appendices to this report, we provide a bibliography as well as a comprehensive list of current trainings, courses, and workshops. The appendices can be used to identify conceptual and practical gaps which must be filled to enable discourse on conflict mediation to grow robustly and encourage a synthesis between training, research, and practice.

We do not attempt to answer the question of whether religion is the cause of conflict nor try to determine the roots of religious-based violence and terror. Instead, we focus on the complex relationship between religion, conflict, and mediation to explore the following questions:

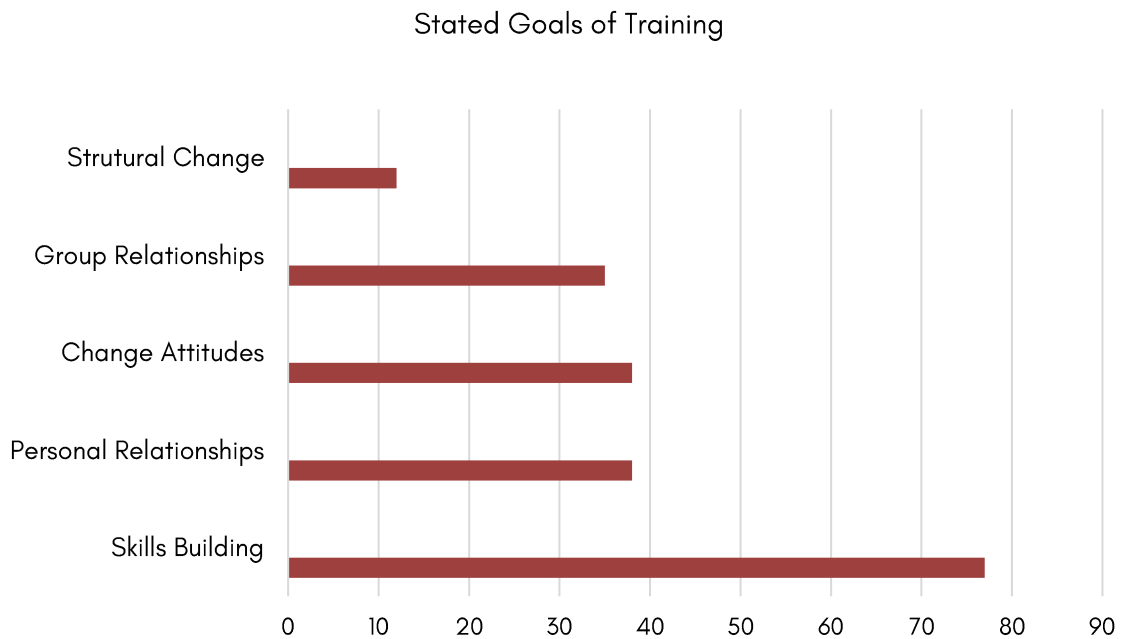
1. Which aspects of religion and mediation require more investigation by practitioners in the field?
2. How might mediators work more effectively with religious individuals and movements to engender sustainable peace?
3. When religion does play a role in conflict, how can mediation strategies be evaluated and their significance be fully understood?

A major purpose of this research is to map trainings available on religion and mediation in order to identify any existing gaps. To that end, we analyzed 26 courses or workshops provided by institutes and agencies and 65 university courses offered around the world. An analysis of these courses, listed in appendix 2 and 3, reveals a few trends. Of the community workshops 60 percent were offered by NGO’s, 30 percent by academic institutes, 23 percent by faith-based organizations, and 7 percent by multilateral organizations. No courses offered by governments were included. The two government courses we identified are offered to foreign service officers once a year in one to two day sessions, usually offered as part of weeklong trainings. Any government-sponsored courses for trainings concerning specific geographical conflict areas were offered on request and completed with little to now public reports.

Some courses listed in these graphs fell into multiple categories, hence the over 100 percent coverage.

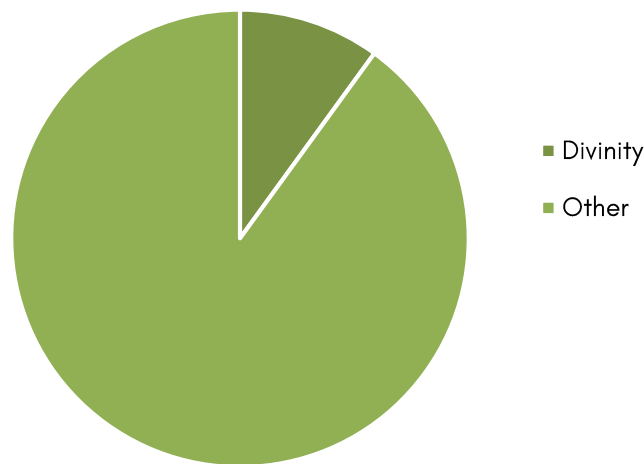


Each training outlined the target audience for their participants. A majority of trainings focused on training religious leadership and grassroots communities.



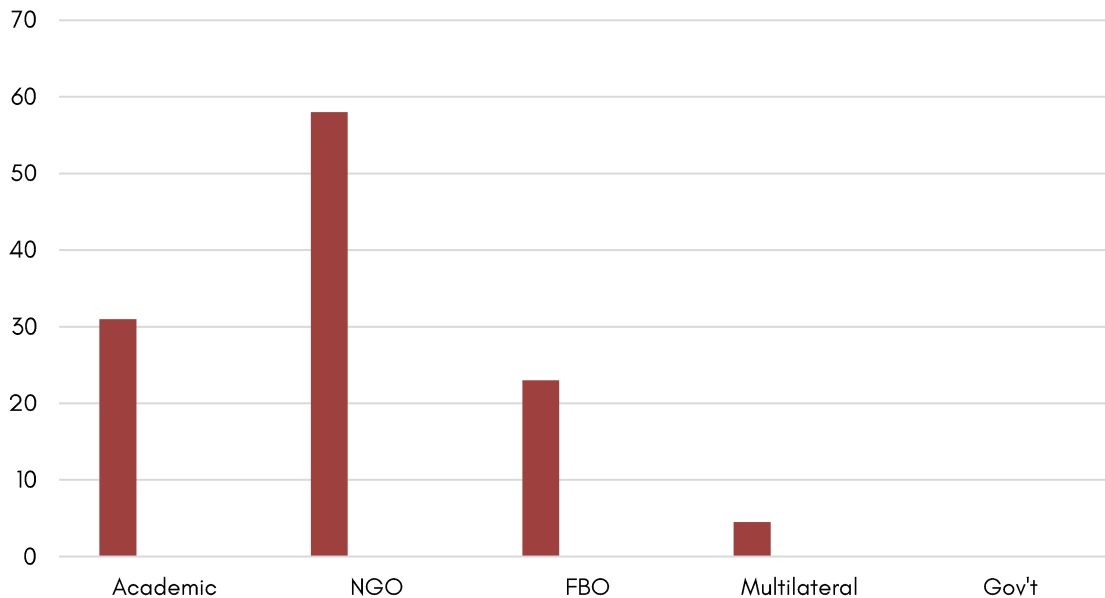
Only 10 percent of courses seeking structural change mixed participant types, blending grassroots and governmental participants. Most other courses specifically targeted only one group.

Department or School Offering Courses



While there is an even distribution of courses offered among multiple departments, less than 10 percent of courses are offered through divinity schools and/or theology programs. We were only able to account for departments listed in the descriptions of the courses.

Organization Type Offering Trainings



The largest number of these courses are offered by secular NGO's, a somewhat smaller number are offered by academic institutions, and less than 25 percent are offered by faith-based organizations. The research found that government trainings are rarely listed online and are frequently offered on an ad hoc basis. Such courses were not included in the data of the report

Combining the resource and training map with interview data, we make the following six recommendations:

1. Introductory trainings and workshops on religions should be deepened to reflect the nuances of lived religion in specific contexts.
2. Traditional and faith inspired mediators as well as mediators with local expertise should be invited more often to participate in conflict analysis and mediation.
3. More trainings/workshops should be offered which focus on the interplay between trust building, community stakeholders, mediators, and long-term sustainable peace.
4. There should be more and deeper analysis of monitoring and evaluation peace processes of conflicts in which religion is a significant factor.
5. Increase the active participation of both practitioners and mediators whose experiences in the field can enrich resource materials and trainings.
6. Establish new collaborative spaces in which mediation practitioners, mediation trainers, and religious leaders as well as policy analysts and academics can examine the role of religion, religious individuals, communities, and institutions in conflict zones.

Overview

“How do we foster a pedagogical project that respects and empowers people to understand, participate in creating and strengthen appropriate models for working at conflict in their own context?”

– John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace*

This report ‘maps’ the ways religious engagement can affect conflict resolution and mediation. To provide an overview of the field, we first analyzed the resources and training materials currently available to academics, analysts and practitioners. Then we incorporated interviews with academics, mediation practitioners and trainers and religious actors, all of whom are working to build long-term, sustainable peace. From these conversations emerged an understanding of the gaps that exist, not only in the trainings that are currently available, but also within mediation practice and its engagement with religion. This report explores these conceptual and practical gaps in order to enable conflict mediation discourse to grow robustly and thereby to encourage a holistic synthesis between training, research and practice.

Since 1979, armed conflict has declined globally, yet the overall ratio of conflicts in which one or both parties identify their side in a conflict with their religion has steadily and significantly increased.¹ Whether religion itself is actually causing more conflict or if increased media attention on religion is exacerbating the perception that religion is feeding conflicts is debatable. It is, however, clear that governments often lack the ability to address conflicts linked to religion. In fact, several countries have only recently established offices to engage with religious communities and to advise governments about conflicts involving religious drivers. Nevertheless, the demand for professionals to consult with and/or design religious engagement programs has grown exponentially. Many of these programs intentionally address religion as a vital part of their training for community leaders, religious and traditional peacemakers, development agencies and NGO’s as well as governments.

We do not attempt to determine whether religion is a cause of conflict or what extent violence and terror have religious roots. Instead, we explore the following questions:

1. What aspects of religion and mediation require more investigation by practitioners in the field?
2. How might mediators draw more effectively on religious worldviews to engender sustainable peace?
3. When religion does play a role in conflict, how should mediation strategies be evaluated and their possible impact on conflict be understood?

As a primary mediator on the international stage, the United Nations plays an important role in setting global norms concerning the use of religion in peace mediation. According to a definition of mediation used in one United Nations agency, mediation is a “process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements.”²

Working with this definition of mediation, European and US academics have developed a pervasively

¹ Melander, Erik. *Organized Violence in the World 2015* An assessment by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d. http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/61/c_61335-1_1-k_brochure2.pdf. p1

² Susskind, L., & Babbitt, E. (1992). “Overcoming the Obstacles to Effective Mediation of International Disputes,” in *Mediation in international relations*, (Palgrave Macmillan), 30–51.

secular model for conflict resolution. As a result, many mediation models and terminologies essentially ignore much of the relevant literature and case studies that have been written by field practitioners. This is a significant deficit in a world in which lived experience of religion varies tremendously within the same country, region, village and, often, even tribe. While there are references in the appendix of this report to articles by practitioners, which address the role of religion in conflict, broadly speaking, most writing about mediation and conflict barely mentions the role of religion in conflict. When religion is addressed at all, it is usually subsumed under the broader topic of cultural considerations in mediation. As a result, mediators cannot rely on their academic preparation to understand the impact religion has on a conflict or even discern that such an impact might exist. The shortcomings of the dominant pervasively secular model for conflict resolution will be further explored in the body of the report.

Literature Review

The annotated bibliography to this report³ lists books and articles cited in the syllabi of the various courses we identified in our mapping. This bibliography reflects the shortcomings in the current field of religious conflict and mediation. It shows there is a disconnect between the locations in which many conflicts occur and the locations in which most analyses of those conflicts are being written. For example, for all the conflict that occurs in the African continent, there are scarcely any scholarly voices included in this list that reflect an indigenous African perspective. As one practitioner stated recently, “there are a lot of articles and books on Nigeria written by experts who’ve never set foot in the country.”

Similar critiques have been made concerning conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. In spite of the conflicts that are occurring in many places in that region, few of the authors in this bibliography are writing in Arabic. Neither are many of the authors in this bibliography discussing mediation strategies that are specific to the Islamic context or analyzing the influence of Islam or of Islamic religious leaders. “Despite the wealth of knowledge that has been acquired, the Network (for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers) has observed that support for and coordination with Tradition and Faith-orientated Insider Mediators is mostly ad-hoc, non-systematic, and in some contexts non-existent. Knowledge of these actors’ activities is dispersed, limited to specific cases, specific conflict phases and types, and specific countries, and often remains at the level of anecdotal evidence.”⁴

A large majority of scholars in the field on conflict mediation come from the Global North and have been trained in European or US academic institutions with the result that they have strong perspectives, which they are often not even conscious of having, about the role of religion and religious leaders in mediation. European and US trained mediators often view African, Middle Eastern and Asian realities in a linear or compartmentalized manner that simply do not fit the contexts they are working in. Moreover, they expect and demand strict boundaries between religion and the public sphere which are not acceptable or even comprehensible to the people they are working with. They also often fail to understand the challenges of living under authoritarian regimes or unstable governments. As our interviews suggest, mediation practitioners often find that the conflicts they are dealing with cannot be helpfully addressed with a linear or compartmentalized manner and that the people they are working with do not accept the notion that there should be any distinction between religion and public life. Practitioners and field workers find they are working in highly complex and multi-layered situations for which their training and coursework have not prepared them. If they have ingenuity, creativity, and an open mind about religion and religious institutions and leaders, they can often work effectively but, if they do, it is in spite of, and not because of, their academic training.

Our bibliography shows a vast uncharted territory in the literature that would be immensely helpful to field workers and practitioners as they learn to navigate unfamiliar mediation spaces. Further, the lack

³ Appendix 1

⁴ Mubashir, M., & Vimalarajah, L. (2016). Tradition- & Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation: Potential, Constraints, & Opportunities for Collaborative Support (I).

of sources discussing religion and conflict mediation in languages other than English only underscores the reliance in academic writing on Western models for conflict mediation.

Course Map Analysis

A key purpose of this research is to map the trainings available on religion and mediation in order to identify the gaps. We analyzed 26 courses or workshops provided by institutes and agencies as well as 65 university courses offered around the world. An analysis of these courses, listed in appendices two and three, shows some interesting trends. 60 percent of community workshops were offered by NGO's, 30 percent by academic institutes, 23 percent by faith inspired organizations, and 7 percent by multilateral organizations. No community workshops were offered by governments. These findings were limited primarily by the fact that most community workshops are not reported publicly or online. Courses are often offered on an ad hoc basis for a specific requesting organization or community.

Every course's stated goals included enhanced knowledge of the "other" and/or conflict dynamics and conflict transformation. 75 percent offered skills training, 30 percent tried to build personal relationships among participants or sought changed attitudes. Less than 10 percent of the courses sought to address needs for structural change. All of the courses that sought to address needed structural changes were community courses offered for multi-sector participants (grassroots and government officials). None of the courses offered for religious peacemakers (30%), people from the grassroots (29%), local government leaders (18%), academics or university students (9%) or diplomats (6%) addressed structural change issues.

Of the 65 university based courses identified through JSTOR (an online library) and the American Theological Library Association, case studies were used in over 75 percent of the courses⁵. Less than 10 percent were experiential or used multimedia. This second group of courses were offered to a balanced audience of graduate and undergraduate students. Of these courses, 44 percent were offered in social science departments, 15 percent each were offered in political science and religious studies departments. 16 percent of postings did not mention a department and only 10 percent were offered through a divinity or theological school.

Connecting these pieces, it is striking that less than 10 percent of conflict mediation courses are offered through divinity programs and only 23 percent of community workshops are offered by faith-inspired organizations. Addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by religion in mediation from inside religious belief, rather than from an exterior secular base, is a perspective that deserves further exploration. In this report, we outline how addressing religion from an outsider, secular framework limits the analysis and nuanced understanding of the role religion plays in peace and conflict.

Interview Analysis

Interview data reveals that the daily function of religion in society, politics, identity, and conflict is often not reflected in academic writing. Mediators both confirm and dispute academic theories because they are often working in hybrid situations that both engage and challenge academic theory. Mediators often draw on personal experience to create practical mediation strategies applicable to the context in which they are working.

Similarly, our interviews with religious peacemakers provide significant insights based on their experiences with "lived religion." Our research shows that religious communities often do not separate religious belief and political action into mutually exclusive categories. One of our interviewees noted,

⁵ A mix of search terms were used including religion and mediation, religious leaders, indigenous leaders, conflict resolution, local mediation strategies, conflict resolution challenges, and more.

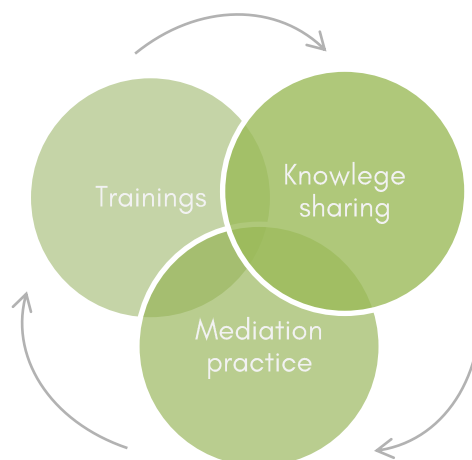
“When a foreigner asks if I am secular or religious, I simply answer that we are secular-religious and move on.” Thus, for many practitioners and religious peacemakers, there is no categorical divide between faith and politics. In many cultures, the impetus to engage in civic life is also a religious mandate. This is especially true for Islamic societies in which the religious and political combine in the social sphere. It is also evident in many Buddhist and Hindu societies in which religious concepts like *karma* (action/fate/destiny) impact reform movements and political decisions. By contrast, many Westerners believe they can make a clear distinction between what is religious and what is political. While these distinctions are significant in the academic world, our interviewees suggest that such differences are not as clearly delineated in societies in which religion plays a public role. Furthermore, interviewees from secular organizations frequently exclude experiences with religious and traditional peacemakers in their responses. In addition, interviewees from secular organizations often do not recognize the religious context in which some of their work happens. For example, one interviewee reported not having worked at all with religious actors, then proceeded immediately to list the imams and religious communities with whom that interviewee was engaged on secular peacebuilding projects.

Combining the resource and training map and the interviews, we conclude with six recommendations.

1. Introductory trainings and workshops on religions should be deepened to reflect the nuances of lived religion in specific contexts.
2. Traditional and faith inspired mediators as well as mediators with local expertise should be invited more often to participate in conflict analysis and mediation.
3. More trainings/workshops should be offered which focus on the interplay between trust building, community stakeholders, mediators, and long-term sustainable peace.
4. There should be more and deeper analysis of monitoring and evaluation peace processes of conflicts in which religion is a significant factor.
5. Increase the active participation of both practitioners and mediators whose experiences in the field can enrich resource materials and trainings.
6. Establish new collaborative spaces in which mediation practitioners, mediation trainers, and religious leaders as well as policy analysts and academics can examine the role of religion, religious individuals, communities, and institutions in conflict zones.

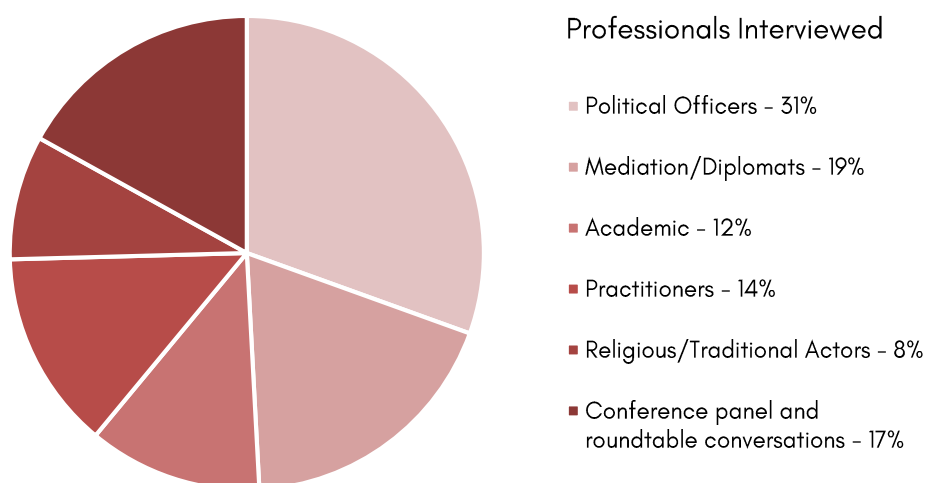
In conceptualizing the interplay between mediation practice, intellectual analysis of mediation, and mediation trainings it is important to understand their interdependent nature. The graph below shows how information and knowledge are shared in these three areas. At the same time, the graph highlights how gaps in the three areas affect the understanding of whole.

Mediation Practice and the Creation of Mediation Knowledge



Methodology

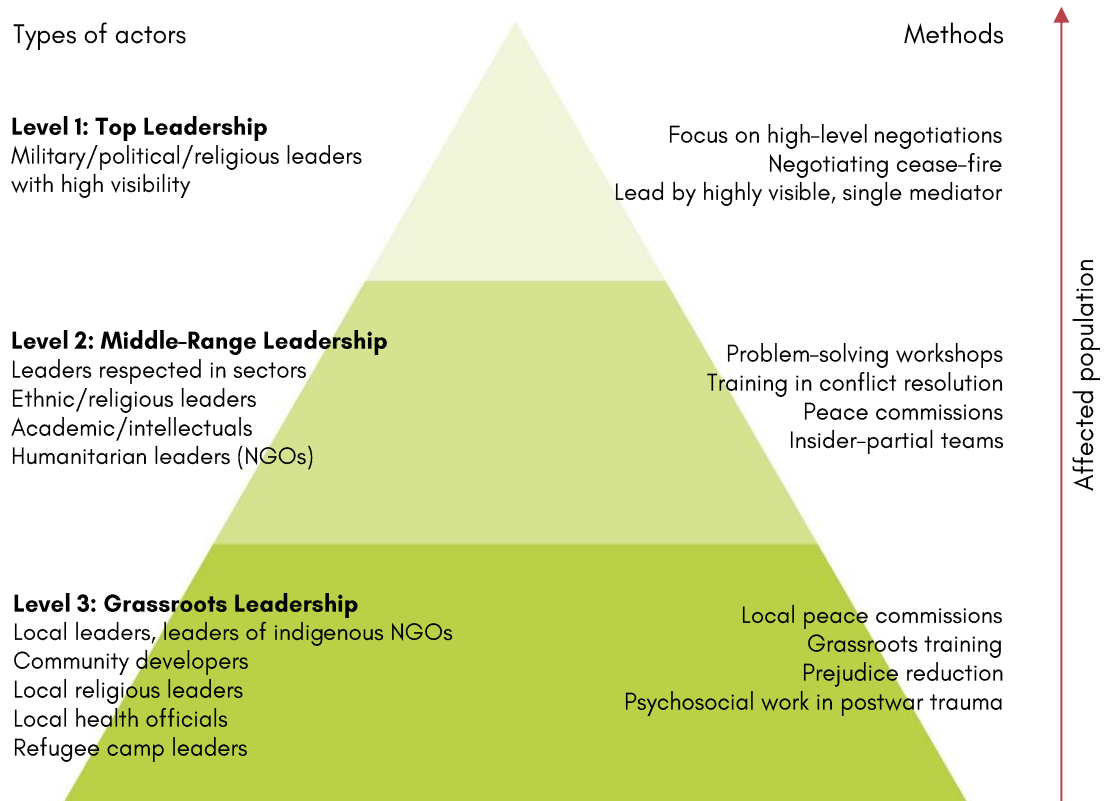
To create a framework for analysis, we consulted existing literature in the field of conflict and mediation. Instead of focusing on a single case study or a single country study to analyze the literature, we utilized a variety of interview material. We conducted over 60 qualitative, off the record, interviews with academics, diplomats, mediation practitioners, and religious peacemakers to provide a nuanced overview of religion in mediation. We chose these four groups of people because their combined perspective and experience provide a comprehensive view of contradictory narratives in the field. Interviewees were gender balanced and represented multiple nationalities.



We define academics as scholars who provide theoretical frameworks and foundations for conflict mediation in academic literature as well as mediation trainings and workshops. Definitions of mediation practitioners vary from country to region and vary further according to context. Some organizations require a 40-hour training certificate or special degree for the title. Some practitioners of mediation view their position as naturally including conflict resolution and use another title to designate themselves (such as priest, pastor, rabbi, imam, peacemaker or diplomat.)

Using the classification system of John Paul Lederach, we understand that mediators can be placed along a wide spectrum from high-powered, state-level mediators (who Lederach describes as Level One mediators) to negotiators involved in community-level peacebuilding (who Lederach calls Level Three mediators). High-powered mediators are mostly nation-state level or multi-government representatives in strong directing positions. In contrast, community level mediators are more often facilitators, who blend dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation practices. There is similar diversity among religious and traditional peacemakers ranging from religious peacemakers who implement high-level directives from established religious institutions such as the Vatican, to religious and traditional peacemakers who function exclusively at the local level, handling everything from mundane disputes to conflicts linked to larger communal dynamics. Though diplomats, by definition, represent nation states, we believe it is helpful to our analysis to recognize that some of the diplomats and foreign service officers we interviewed have done work focused on local communities.

Approaches to Peacebuilding



Derived from John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1997), 39

Limitations

From the beginning of this project, we understood that there were a number of limitations to our research. One restricting factor was that all interviews were conducted in English. This limited our ability to interview non-English speakers including community members and religious peacemakers.

Thus, in the international context, we primarily interviewed people who respond to conflicts as outsiders, rather than local community mediators. Our research did not benefit from the perspectives of local community members on the receiving end of international interventions.⁶

In addition, we also focused on educational models, courses, and workshops for mediation used in universities and diplomatic and international communities. We did not include the many conflict resolution tools that operate on a local level. As a practical matter, our research was mostly restricted to organizations, courses, and workshops accessible via the internet. This means that we necessarily

⁶ To see Tradition and Faith-oriented insider mediator perspectives please see the Network/Berghof report. Mubashir, M., & Vimalarajah, L. (2016). Tradition- & Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation: Potential, Constraints, & Opportunities for Collaborative Support (1).

overrepresented sources with a web presence and we did not analyze information transmitted either through word-of-mouth or through local publishing mechanisms. As a result, the information analyzed in this report is largely Western-centric.

By definition, our research cannot include information that has been designated as secret or classified by a government.

Report Structure and Framework

Our report has three primary parts. First, we analyze religious perspectives and worldviews in mediation practice. In this section, we try to deepen our understanding of religious dimensions of conflict and of the uses of religious language in relation to that conflict. In our second section, we emphasize the gaps between lived religion and actual mediation practice. Along with data collection, we use salient quotes from our interviews with practitioners and mediation specialists to process and integrate ethnographic evidence from the field. Significantly, our interviews reflect both human experiences of “lived religion” and theoretical frameworks necessary for understanding conflict resolution and mediation. Third, in the appendices, we provide a bibliography as well as a comprehensive list of current trainings, courses, and workshops.

Section I:

Religious Perspectives and Worldviews in Mediation Practice

“During the Irish revolution, people didn’t care about excommunication because church structures didn’t matter in the conflict. People didn’t fear hell. They were already living in it.”

– Interview with mediator

“We must not only understand religious tenets and doctrine. We must also understand the way religion is lived in the day-to-day horizontal relationships between people in the community.”

– Interview with academic

Religion and conflict or religion and violence has been part of the common discourse at least since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States. Though many of these movements began earlier, since 9/11, such terrorist organizations as al-Qaeda, Daesh, the 969 Movement, and Boko Haram have been the subjects of many discussions about religion, religious communities, and diplomacy. Academics struggle to answer whether there is something inherently violent about religion. For example, in his book, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer argues that religious extremists are enacting their part in what they conceive is a “divine battle.” In this “cosmic” conflict, many individuals are drawn to acts of martyrdom and sacrifice irrespective of the violence and displacement their actions might create for others.

The historian of global religion, R. Scott Appleby, argues that religious violence and extremism are not central to religion or religious perspectives but is instead product of an extremely narrow and intolerant interpretation of an otherwise broader religious tradition.⁷ Appleby also suggests that many analysts focus more on the disruptive elements of religion instead of mediation practices. He notes that the people in the Global West and North could learn from studying religions and religious practices more deeply. Appleby argues, "There's a great issue about trying to translate certain mediation practices and concepts that are couched in Western terms. A lot more work has to be done in terms of studying those religious and traditional practices, concepts, and metaphors of mediation practice."⁸

EFFORTS TO SHOW
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WORLDVIEW

Due to the relative newness of conflict transformation as an alternative to the use of force, the field frequently needs to demonstrate its merits as an effective counter to a militarized approach. Efforts to show that conflict transformation actually works sometimes results in forgetting the deep reservoir of knowledge and experience for transforming conflict that exists within every religious worldview. Conflict transformation encompasses reconciliation, mediation, dialogue, and other blended approaches with the aim of transforming relationships and approaches to conflict into nonviolent processes. 'Conflict transformation' as a term was invented in 1980 by John Paul Lederach. In his intensive work in Central America he found that the popular term 'conflict resolution' had a limited impact and therefore began to think of conflict transformation as a way "to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunity for creating constructive change process that reduces violence, increases justice, indirect interaction and social structure, and respond to real life problems in human relationship."⁹ In this report, we focus on mediation as a tool within the conflict transformation field in order to highlight the range of approaches.

Hizkias Assefa, a religion and conflict analyst, notes, "Bringing the spiritual dimension into the peacemaking process can create access to the more deep-seated, effective base of the parties' behavior, enabling them to examine critically their own attitudes and actions." He also comments that, "People's conflict behavior is often based on more emotional considerations and thus may not be changed simply by rational negotiation processes and subsequent agreements. Cognitive decisions and commitments," he argues, "do not necessarily translate into feelings and actions."¹⁰ In other words, if practitioners of conflict resolution remember the complexity of their experience and the richness of their specialized knowledge, the burden of having to prove the utility of conflict resolution may give way to its creative resurgence.

At the Interfaith Kosovo conference, Alberto Quattrucci from the Sant'Egidio Community endorsed Assefa's ideas in his lecture. He noted that, "simplification generates violence by diminishing the complexity of the other."¹¹ As such, we do not wish to simplify or codify the entire field based on our research in this report. In contrast, we hope to illuminate underexplored areas. In our admittedly limited perspective, we are aware that there are further limitations to our understanding to which we are still blind. We, therefore, look forward to developing a deeper understanding of the complexity of mediation

7 Appleby, "Religious Violence: The Strong, the Weak, and the Pathological."
8 Ibid.

9 Lederach, John. The little book of conflict transformation: Clear articulation of the guiding principles by a pioneer in the field. Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 2015.

10 Hizkias Assefa, in Smock, David. Ed. Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War. United States Institute of Peace, 2006. <http://www.usip.org/publications/religious-contributions-peacemaking-when-religion-brings-peace-not-war>.

11 Alberto Quattrucci, Sant'Egidio Community, in public comments at Interfaith Kosovo Conference May 30, 2016.

practice that does exist. In the next section, we first explore the parameters of “religious conflict.” Second, we analyze current mediation practices, discuss the distinct worldviews among various stakeholders. We will also discuss how mediation can locate mutually agreed outcomes where religion is a driver for conflict and/or peace.

Religion, Religious Conflict, and Mediation Strategies

Religious Terminology

Despite growing evidence that religion is a factor in conflict, it is also possible to maintain that religion does contribute significantly to peace building. Religious and cultural distinctions can create divisions between communities that are fighting over scarce resources, such as access to clean water, food, or the use of arable land. In that context, cultural distinctions — ethnic, linguistic, tribal, or racial — are often exacerbated by religious differences, which are sometimes so deeply embedded in culture that they are difficult to extricate. As evaluated by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, organized violent conflict in which religion plays a role is increasing in conflicts worldwide. Yet, conflicts with religious drivers and the role of religious peacebuilding are also two underexplored aspects of mediation practice.

**RELIGION IS NOT STATIC.
IT ENCOMPASSES A
BROAD VARIETY OF
BELIEFS, DOCTRINES,
PRACTICES, RITUALS,
SACRED TEXTS,
AND VALUES**

As our awareness of religious diversity expands, so should our understanding of religious language and how it functions in particular societies. Words such as “spirituality,” “transcendence,” “faith,” “god,” and “belief” are part of common religious parlance. While these terms have distinct meanings in the academic context, for most practitioners and religious adherents, these words convey roughly similar sentiments — faith in an ineffable, transcendent being, this transcendent being’s active role in human history — and a set of rituals that define the relationship between this being and religious believers.

For many Western intellectuals, “religion” is a theological construction based on what they know of Western Christianity. For Western intellectuals the study of religion is necessarily entangled in power dynamics ranging from colonialism to Western hegemony and war. However, it would be reductionist to conclude that religion, a robust and rich expression of culture, philosophy, anthropology, and spiritual discovery is just an “instrument of power.” Religion is not static. It encompasses a broad variety of beliefs, doctrines, practices, rituals, sacred texts, and values. Its influence on human societies is difficult to overstate. In this report, our analysis of religion and its function in particular societies tries to offer a nuanced view of the ways in which religion, religious worldviews, faith perspectives, and beliefs can affect, shape, inspire, and guide conflict mediation and resolution.

Contrary to the popular belief that most societies are becoming more secular, there is much evidence that suggests that religious people and institutions are increasing in numbers and are growing more relevant in their particular societies and contexts. A recent Pew Research Center study found that, in 2010, 84 percent of people in the world self-identified as religious. Analysts also suggest that in many conflict zones in the world, religion is a key part of daily life, experience, interaction, and decision-making. For example, in both Pakistan and Nigeria, 90 percent of poll respondents said that religion is “very important” in their lives.¹² In addition, religion is a significant factor in the way people and societies interact with and interpret the world. As a pivotal force for many individuals that influences how they engage the world, “religion” and its role in conflict, peace, and mediation should not be ignored.

¹² World Values Survey, “WVS Documentation Wave 6 (2010-2014).”

Evidence from mediation practitioners also reveals that religion, religious actors, and religious institutions have the potential to engender peace in conflict zones.

Religious and Traditional Practices of Conflict Resolution

Almost every religious tradition has a rich vocabulary relating to conflict resolution. Nearly every religion emphasizes peacebuilding through values such as compassion, human dignity, and nonviolence. Concepts of empowerment, forgiveness, and justice are present in most sacred texts including Vedic and Buddhist literature, in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. For example, many words in the religious vernacular are embedded with notions of mediation and resolution. Judaism has the concept of *tikkun olam* that means to 'heal, repair, and transform' the world and *shalom* as the 'joining together of opposites in wholeness.' In the New Testament, Greek words such as *apokatallasso* and *diallasso* denote the significance of the restoration of favor as well as the renewal of harmony.

In Western Christianity, the word *concilium* refers to a consultation or a council convened to solve differences with others. In Eastern Christianity and Islam, the word *salima* means 'peace, security, and freedom.' The Arabic word *salaha* also means to do what is right and has the additional connotation of restoration and restitution. In Sub-continental traditions *dharma* (Hinduism and Sikhism) and *dhamma* (Buddhism) address the significance of both duty and law. *Ahimsa* in Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism, emphasizes compassion, tolerance, and non-violence.

In addition, many religions connect personal and relational transformation. In other words, many religions espouse the idea that the individual soul seeks to find divine relationship with God in order to build peace, trust, and enhance community. This idea is often repeated in the sacred texts of various religious traditions. In the ancient Hindu texts, we read of the cycle of life and rebirth (*samsara*) as the *atman* (the individual soul) makes its journey to Brahman (the ineffable Godhead) to discover interconnectedness and wholeness.

Buddhist texts emphasize the desire for the individual to achieve unity with nature while leaving behind the emptiness of ego and materialism. In the Islamic tradition, no single concept holds more importance than the principle of complete submission (Islam), which implies a communal agreement of both consent and compliance. Finally, in the Christian tradition, the concepts of grace and agape denote forgiveness, reconciliation, and living in community. Therefore, there is evidence that "religious language" or the language commonly used by religious practitioners contains inherent expressions of both conflict resolution and mediation. Secular mediators and others leading peace processes might do well to learn enough about these religious concepts for making peace to invite their use.

In the next section, we explore how to equip mediators to respond to religious conflicts or how to effectively utilize religious methodologies in responding to disagreements that involve religious institutions or religious drivers. How do mediators who are unfamiliar with a religious worldview frame the correct language, symbols, and strategies that will resonate with religious actors/institutions/communities involved in conflict? What methods can they utilize and how can they measure success? Finally, we explore the space that exists between academic theories of religion and conflict and the narratives of practitioners.

Defining Religious Conflict: Challenges and Opportunities

While deep knowledge of theological and doctrinal issues may not be necessary for mediation, a practical overview of how religious peacemakers work and of their influence in the community as well as of the rituals, traditions and social hierarchies embedded within the culture is necessary for effective communication. For example, it is important to know what it would mean in a particular culture to send a female mediator where the religious and/or cultural norms do not permit men to take instructions from women. In the same way, it is important for a mediator to know enough about social etiquette to avoid

acting disrespectfully, even if only by accident. As one of our interviewees recalls, that a mediation effort in South East Asia fell apart when a mediator did not know he should remove his socks at a Buddhist temple. The fact that he kept his socks on in the temple became the focus of media attention, instead of the negotiations. The negotiations had to be suspended.

In this section, we discuss how the knowledge that mediators have of religion impacts their mediation strategies. At the intergroup level, what is considered religious when looked at one way often appears to be secular or non-religious when viewed through another lens. For example, is a conflict between two religious groups over access to clean water a secular or a religious conflict? If all actors and institutions involved in the conflict are religious does that mean that the conflict is automatically religious?

**A HOLISTIC APPROACH WILL
ALSO HELP FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINISTRIES TO, FIRST,
UNDERSTAND THE
IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN
SOCIETY AND, SECOND, TO
ADVOCATE FOR “RIGHT-
SIZING” RELIGION’S ROLE IN
BOTH CONFLICT
AND MEDIATION**

For many state actors, religion is an afterthought of conflict analysis. One mediator we interviewed notes that she was assigned to Israel and Palestine without any religious primer and/or training about the particularities of the religious dimensions of the conflict. She said she went to Israel/Palestine without the religious negotiation techniques, sensitivities, or strategies that might have been effective in that context.

However, it is significant to note that we spoke with several trainers, including trainers in the United States Department of State Office of Religion and Global Affairs, who are cognizant that religion does have a role in conflict mediation and that this role is often overlooked or ignored. They said that people assigned to work as mediators in conflict zones would benefit from more extensive training about the function and structure of religion and religious institutions in the places in which they will be serving. Ultimately, such a holistic approach will also help foreign affairs ministries to, first, understand the importance of religion in society and, second, to advocate for “right-sizing” religion’s role in both conflict and mediation.

Mediator Knowledge of Religion and Secularity

Our investigation reveals that there is a direct relationship between the lack of religious knowledge — belief, faith, practice, and ritual — and a lack of effectiveness in conflict mediation. Yet, how does a lack of religious training and knowledge hinder success in conflict mediation?

Many practitioners in the United Nations system and others from European government ministries reflected on this in our interviews. As one practitioner noted, “Most of us have been educated in British and French schools so it’s actually a Western European paradigm of suspicion that is instructing the way we look at religion.”¹³ This indicates that the particular framework and analysis of religion that form the mediator’s perspective also has the potential to impact mediation strategy.

Another mediator claims, “I’m afraid a lot of us come out of the secular tradition and we probably do not pay enough attention to how religious leaders could play a role or impact the conflict.”¹⁴ As both

¹³ Interview with diplomatic officer January 2016
¹⁴ Interview with diplomatic officer December 2015

these mediators show, our perception of religious belief and practice impacts the way we encounter and engage with religious people and hence, how we approach religious conflict. Religion scholar, Karen Armstrong asserts in her recent book *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, that religion has become the most recent scapegoat for the world's problems.¹⁵ This suggests that many people, including those engaged in mediation, view religion as part of the problem and not as a potential part of the solution to conflict.

A second issue with defining religious conflict relates to the secular nature of most international bureaucracies. On both multilateral and country levels, bureaucracies and government agencies have unclear mandates for engaging religious actors and institutions. This is particularly true for US diplomats who are required to act within the constraints of the Establishment Clause in the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States. That clause stipulates that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" and has been interpreted since the time of President Jefferson to mean that there is a "wall of separation between church and state." As a result, American mediators are not always clear about their own parameters when engaging with religious issues and conflicts. The fear of violating the Establishment Clause sometimes stops US mediators from working with religious actors and institutions even when religious actors and institutions would be best suited to ameliorate a conflict.

FOR MANY BUREAUCRATS, A
SECULAR **WORLDVIEW** IS A
PANACEA TO THE ISSUES AND
CHALLENGES CAUSED BY
RELIGIOUS **BELIEFS**

This uncertainty is not limited to American diplomats. We heard similar uncertainty from interviewees in the United Nations and several European agencies. Even if most European governmental traditions have no equivalent to the Establishment Clause, there is often a prejudice that religious people are inherently irrational or incapable of dialogue and debate. While this sounds like an archaic way to describe religious people, it is still an implicit or sometimes even an explicit part of many diplomatic narratives.

In his description of a lack of communication in Israel/Palestine between some government officials and local religious peacemakers, one interviewee stated, "We did not engage religious leaders in addressing this conflict because we need rational participants."¹⁶ Another interviewee noted, "[Most of the] bureaucrats [with whom I worked] have this sense of themselves, a mythos that they are the ultimate rationalist problem solver."¹⁷ In other words, for many bureaucrats, a secular worldview is a panacea to the issues and challenges caused by religious beliefs.

A third complication for analyzing religious conflict in some situations is the intentional manipulation of religious symbols and language to influence societal decision making. In Pakistan, for example, it is common for political parties to frame dissension and/or conflict with religious language to increase support for their party. One recent event that illustrates how religious language can escalate a conflict occurred in Pakistan in February 2016.

¹⁵ Armstrong, Karen. *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*. 2014

¹⁶ Interview with European diplomat June 2016.

¹⁷ Interview with former US Foreign Service officer February 2016.

In 2011, the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was assassinated by his bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri, because he promised to re-evaluate the country's controversial Blasphemy Law. Qadri, a Muslim supporting violent extremism, was hailed as a hero and garlanded in the street by religious conservatives for killing Taseer. In 2016, in a surprising legal decision, Qadri was unexpectedly arrested and hanged for his crime.

His hanging incited violence and mass protest all over the country. Some political parties who were out of favor with the current government used this civil unrest to further their own agenda. Using religious rhetoric, they escalated fervor among Pakistani youth by describing Qadri's hanging in Islamic language. They claimed Qadri was a "martyr" (*shaheed*) because he died defending Islam from Taseer who, they said, was trying to destroy the Blasphemy Law and was, therefore, a heretic. Eventually, this rhetoric culminated in violence against religious minorities as many Muslim youth viewed Qadri's hanging as an opportunity to "defend Islam" from "outsiders" and "infidels." Within a few hours of Qadri's death, what had begun five years before as a national crime — the assassination of a local governor by his bodyguard — became a matter of contention between conservative and less conservative Muslims, between the Islamic world and the West, between Islam and Christianity and, not least, between religion and secularism.

Although the assassination of the governor was not a religious conflict in the traditional sense, it was a conflict that was inflamed by the purposeful misappropriation of religious symbols, language, and narratives. Recognizing the role of religion in fanning tensions, the government of Pakistan turned to Christian and Muslim religious peacemakers instead of secular conflict mediators or military power to de-escalate violence. The government asked local religious peacemakers to use sacred texts — Biblical and Qur'anic — and employ scriptural reasoning to inspire peace and end the violence. Although the method was not designed for this purpose, scriptural reasoning might well have encouraged participants from two different religious traditions to work together to resolve their disputes.¹⁸

By locating narratives with common themes in the sacred texts of different religions, scriptural reasoning enables people from different religious communities to find common ground. After Qadri's hanging, local religious peacemakers led mixed Muslim-Christian gatherings for scriptural reasoning in various cities and towns. The process took many days to take root. Whether scriptural reasoning was the tool that led to the resolution or was just a contributing factor, religious peacemakers were successful in ending the violence. Mediation specialists who analyzed the conflict noted that the methods and language of religious peacemakers resonated with the people in a way that secular organizations and actors were unable to do.

¹⁸ Scriptural Reasoning is a method of inter-religious education that is not frequently used in mediation although according to one of the scholars interviewed, it could have the potential to affect change in conflict driven contexts if led by facilitators who have been carefully trained in the method.

**YOU WILL NEVER HAVE
ALL THE KNOWLEDGE, BUT
YOU SHOULD KNOW
ENOUGH TO KNOW THERE
ARE OTHERS WHO DO,
AND YOU HAVE TO WORK
WITH THEM**

Another practice, mediation space, developed by the Centre for Security Studies in Zürich, Switzerland, encourages stakeholders to engage in mediation with the expectation that no one will be asked to change or modify their religious worldview.

How to relate with religious peacemakers and institutions during a conflict is one of the key questions that were highlighted in our interviews. Interviewees identified the need for mediators to be religiously literate so that they could draw on the religious worldviews of the conflicting parties in the resolution of a conflict. As one interviewee suggests, “You will never have all the knowledge [about religion], but you should know enough to know that there are others who do, and that you have to work with them.”¹⁹

One limitation of religious literacy is that religion is lived out in infinitely many ways around the world. Marc Gopin, director of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University in Arlington, USA, argues that knowledge of religion, religious values, and beliefs should be integrated into existing Western conflict resolution practices. He notes that concepts integral to most religious traditions such as nonviolence, human dignity, the sanctity of life, and compassion are effective methods of framing mediation strategy. However, to achieve this level of integration between secular and religious methods, mediation specialists require comprehensive knowledge of religious terms, concepts, beliefs, and practices.

Religion 101 vs Lived Religion

An often overlooked aspect of religious knowledge is the sheer diversity of lived religious practices and worldviews. Religious literacy training for diplomats and mediators is effective to the degree that they teach knowledge that is specific to a context. Gopin argues that it is imperative for mediation specialists to have a broad understanding of the religious traditions they are working with as well as context-specific knowledge of the way those religious traditions are lived out by those involved in a conflict. Knowledge about a religious tradition in general is what one learns in Religion 101. On the other hand, almost by definition, knowledge about lived religion cannot be taught in a Religion 101 class. Examples of lived religion would include the role of the Catholic Church in a particular country; how Buddhist religious communities in Burma approach the role of women and men in peacebuilding; the variety of textual interpretation within the traditions involved in two sides of a particular conflict, such as Sunni and Shi'i interpretations of Shariah law as it pertains to the conflict in Yemen; the definitions of brother, sister, neighbor, and stranger among the Amish in Pennsylvania, USA, and the corresponding behavioral norms; and the historical engagement that religious peacemakers in El Salvador and Nicaragua have had with issues such as war, peace, and conflict in those countries.

Whether the conflict can be helped by the involvement of Buddhist monks in Burma or Catholic priests in Latin America, the breadth and depth of religious literacy training needed by a diplomat or mediator depends on the concrete situation. Teaching religious knowledge in such a way that breadth and specificity are balanced is not an easy task.

Our research suggests that the best way to use religious knowledge in conflict mediation depends on context, is often malleable, is culturally specific, and, no matter how much a mediator learns about a religion, is not always effective. One practitioner in the field attests to this stating, “In my experience in Afghanistan, I thought I knew everything. But, by the fifth time I visited the country, I felt I didn't know

¹⁹ Interview with academic December 2015.

anything. You are constantly in learning mode.”²⁰ Because of these nuances, it is essential as Gopin suggests, for mediation specialists to grasp both the breadth and depth of the various religious traditions in the contexts in which they are working. While some individuals and institutions are overtly religious, others may incorporate faith practices and ideology more subtly into their lives. Additionally, people involved in a conflict might discount their religious identity as unimportant or irrelevant. Yet, that identity might in some obscure way have affected how and why the conflict emerged in the first place.

Similarly, negative experiences that people or groups have had with a religious group or institution can impact the success of mediation techniques. People marginalized by a religious tradition, such as, depending on the specific tradition, women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, or youth, might have trust issues with religious leaders and, therefore, might not want them involved in a mediation which involves them or their group. In her book, *Re-Centering Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice*, Mary Trujillo discusses the role of mediators who work with marginalized communities. She argues, “We need to think about the role of conflict resolution in addressing the chronic undercurrent of conflict that is always present, even when it is not overt...as an institutionalized entity mediation tends to function on the dominant side of our intercultural conflict. It has not worked out for itself its inherent intercultural conflict.”²¹

The overarching theory, as discussed in this section, is that how boundaries are negotiated and constructed determines the success of conflict situations. As an academic who is engaged in making policy recommendations, Gopin suggests that brokering a relationship between religious leaders and policymakers is instrumental in conflict mediation. Gopin argues that supporting religious peacemakers is beneficial for conflict torn regions; knowledge of the historical development of religious groups — including their experiences of persecution, exclusion, and war — should inform mediation strategies; recognizing how particular strategies will affect the lives of different religious traditions and influence their freedom is necessary for developing an effective mediation strategy; and permitting religious groups and peacemakers to voice their concerns is part of successful conflict mediation.

In other words, acknowledging the role of religious peacemakers and their influence in a community as well as recognizing the traditions and practices that affect people’s perspectives and worldviews increases the likelihood that a mediator will be able to help build sustainable peace. One practitioner notes, “We’re going to have a set of security ceasefires across the country, in situations where we can’t just bring in huge numbers of international monitors and verifiers. We will have to rely on traditional and tribal leaders.”²²

20 Interview with practitioner April 2016.

21 Trujillo, Mary Adams. *Re-Centering Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice*. Re-Centering Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 33.

22 Interview with UN diplomat December 2015

Section 2:

Mediation Culture and Practice: Practitioner Voices

One of the main challenges this report seeks to remedy is the growing disparity between academic theory and practitioner experience. Empirical studies of conflict and mediation suggest that faith-based organizations and religious persons and institutions can be immensely effective in fostering reconciliation. For example, the Quakers helped broker peace in 1967-1970 during the Nigerian civil war; and in Sudan, the conflict was greatly ameliorated by the intervention of the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1972.

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The process of mediation is by definition creative and adaptable. It offers participants, both insiders and outsiders, the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue and reach a mutually acceptable resolution. Successful mediators must remain cognizant that all moving parts — marginalized voices, cultural norms, religious restrictions, and social mores — are significant within a mediation. In addition, mediators must be keenly aware of the attitudes, experiences and values they personally bring to a mediation while remaining adaptive, accommodating, and cooperative. This is why conflict resolution specialist, John Paul Lederach, argues that the best approach to mediation is nuanced and culturally specific. For mediation to find resonance, it must engage culture and religion seriously and understands the freedoms and constraints it has in the culture in which it is being pursued.

Other religious traditions, in addition to Christianity, have also achieved immense success in conflict resolution. In Buddhism, the spiritual leader, Thich Nhat Hanh popularized a strategy for social change which he calls, “engaged Buddhism.” Hanh roots his strategy in the Buddhist tradition of engaging in peaceful non-violent protest against unfair government policies and regimes. Hanh has used this strategy to lead mass protests against terrorism, violence, and war. In other contexts, religious peacemakers have utilized their sacred texts to condemn radicalism, to encourage gender equality, and inspire peace. In Bangladesh, it was Muslim imams who encouraged women to use birth control. Recognizing that the rise in population was creating economic instability and inequality, these imams used their Friday prayer services to promote birth control thereby also effectively empowering gender rights, gender equality, women’s health, and reducing infanticide. In effect, religious individuals, peacemakers, and institutions have the power to engender long-term social change and peace in their communities.

In this section of the report, we engage practitioners and utilize their narratives to accentuate three thematic areas:

1. The importance of lived religion,
2. The challenges of effective communication, and
3. Re-evaluating mediation timelines in a religious context.

Lived Religion: Discourses and Mediation Practices

"The first thing I always say, is the people who are diplomats or members of political organizations, need to learn about religion. There is still this deep-down conviction that, because they had personally a religious experience, they know what they have learned as a child or are educated, is enough to understand religion. I think this is a big, big weakness, because they don't take religious training seriously.

Let's say I am a diplomat in Beirut and, because I went to Sunday school or went to mass, I think I can understand religion. However, it doesn't work this way. Religion as we live it or experience it in the West is very different from the what people identify as religion anywhere else. The focus on doctrine and belief in Western culture is far from reflecting what people experience or live as religion anywhere else. For people outside the West, religion is a lot more about what you do than what you believe in your private space or in your place of worship"

– Interview with academic ²³

The term "lived religion" has an academic history and was first popularized by anthropologists and historians including David Hall and Robert Orsi. In his groundbreaking book, *Between Heaven and Earth*, Orsi argues that religion is a complex and vibrant relationship between God, humanity, and the spaces in-between. In other words, religion is not the static collection of ritual and doctrine that we find in the pages of most textbooks. In contrast, religion is mediated through personal experience, communal belief, cultural practice, and tradition. As Orsi notes, "Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions and persons, texts and rituals, practice and theology, things and ideas – all as media of making and unmaking worlds."²⁴

**THE STORIES WE TELL
ABOUT OTHERS EXIST
ALONGSIDE THE MANY
AND VARIED STORIES
OTHERS TELL ABOUT
THEMSELVES**

The heart of Orsi's analysis of religion resonates with what mediation practitioners tell about their experiences working in conflict zones. As Orsi states, "[religion] includes the work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters (and re-interpreters) of their own experiences and histories, recognizing that the stories we tell about others exist alongside the many and varied stories others tell about themselves."²⁵ This framework for discerning how religion functions in particular societies enables an understanding that is both complex and nuanced. It recognizes the internal diversity of traditions. Rather than limiting religion just to doctrine and formal liturgies, lived religion also incorporates popular beliefs and practices as well as all the things that people do and self-identify with, including developing theologies of violence and reconciliation.

²³ Conducted March 22, 2016.

²⁴ Orsi Robert, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant for to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), pp. 169-174.

²⁵ Ibid.

Inside Mediators and Local Knowledge

Like Orsi, Lederach notes substantial differences between contemporary Western conflict resolution and traditional approaches to conflict resolution that are rooted in local religion and culture. He notes that mediators who have access to insider knowledge and are well-versed in local cultural meanings are likely to have better outcomes. Other scholars also note the significance of building local relationships to engender sustainable peace.

In our interviews with practitioners, this notion was articulated in many forms. One scholar notes:

“There have been lots of misunderstandings, based on the fact that they [mediators] have never received any training nor even have any awareness of what is religion or how different religious groups live in different contexts. I think it is part of the problem.

I avoid a text based approach to teaching religious literacy. I'm not saying that the texts are unimportant, but that they have to be localized in different cultural, linguistic, and national contexts, and most of the time diplomats receive only a very general training, ... the equivalent of Islam 101.”

– U.S. based academic ²⁶

This indicates, as both Orsi and Lederach also suggest, that there is a profound understanding of religion that occurs in between the spaces that are usually occupied by doctrine and ritual. That robust expression of religion that Orsi identifies is what Lederach calls, “insider knowledge” and is necessary for conflict mediation within religions and cultures. One interviewee who worked in Afghanistan with the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding notes, “In Afghanistan, I wish people would study religion socially to see the difference between Islam in textbooks and Islam on the ground. In this culture, Islam is syncretic and is influenced by local beliefs and culture.” This practitioner also states, “[for effective peacebuilding] we should invest time, energy and resources to cross cultural engagement and learn about a whole set of worldviews that comprise religion.”²⁷

As this interviewee indicates, insider knowledge is necessary to inform the creative aspect of mediation in conflict zones. Understanding how culture blends with and impacts religious worldviews has the potential to make mediators and mediation more effective. One interviewee who has worked as a peace and development officer notes:

THE COST OF NEUTRALITY IS OFTEN IGNORANCE

“I think it is really one of the many requirements for a good facilitator. You have to have a pretty in-depth understanding of the cultural context of the conflict. I think often there is a tension between neutrality and knowledge. Because in track one they usually like to pick people who are not from the country and sometimes not from the region, because they want to avoid the perception that a person has an inclination or prejudice for or against somebody. So, the cost of neutrality is often ignorance.”

– UN Staff ²⁸

²⁶ Interview with U.S. based academic, March 22, 2016.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with UN staff December 2015.

In a recent article discussing the role of neutrality, Bernard Mayor, a professor of dispute resolution, argues that there are six basic elements that most disputants seek in mediation:

1. Voice
2. Procedural Justice
3. Vindication
4. Impact
5. Validation
6. Safety

He briefly describes these elements and their importance for conflict resolution. According to Mayor, **voice** enables individuals and communities in a conflict to be heard by people in authority; **procedural justice** offers disputants fair opportunity to resolve conflict; **vindication** provides the chance to find justice; **validation** offers catharsis for feelings and points of view; **impact** is empowering to those embroiled in conflict; and finally, **safety** offers protection for individuals and communities post-conflict. To achieve these aspects in conflict resolution requires, “in-depth understanding of the cultural context of the conflict.”²⁹ Hence, neutrality is indeed ignorance and can create a failed mediation process.

Part of the value of discovering the cadences of lived religious expression is the ability to find creative ways to engage religious peacemaking. For example, while Western approaches to conflict resolution tend to emphasize individualism, in Buddhist, Islamic and traditional societies the emphasis is on communal justice and relationships. As a result, conflicts and reconciliation processes that are restorative for the community find more resonance in these contexts. In one interview, a practitioner who worked reforming a madrasa system confirms that peacebuilding was a communal enterprise.

In his experience, showing religious leaders the importance of re-interpreting Islam for the community was the most effective way to encourage social reform. He notes, “We were directing the process [of madrasa reform] but in an interactive way. We were working with religious leaders and letting them guide the process and take ownership by exploring and inspiring the heritage of the madrasa. When they saw the effect on the community, how the new methodology of teaching Islam was helping people become “better Muslims,” they became more engaged in the process [...] The nature of Friday speeches eventually changed completely, because religious leaders were invested in the madrasas.”³⁰

**WE NEEDED TO
LEARN HOW
RELIGION WORKED
ON THE GROUND TO
MEDIATE
SUCCESSFULLY**

As we discuss in this section, for most mediators, knowledge of the religious traditions they are working with is largely textually based. As our interviews show, an academic understanding of religious tenets and beliefs will often differ tremendously from lived religious practices.

Second, the textual or external understanding of religion may not function in a particular situation. Sometimes, especially during conflict, even a textually normative understanding of a religious tradition can be overtly rejected by religious and traditional peacemakers. For example, in India, many Hindu religious peacemakers and reformers are leading the movement for social equality for the Untouchables (Dalits) and thereby explicitly rejecting the traditional textual interpretation of the caste system found in Vedic literature.

Third, there is risk for a mediation process in either utilizing religious language and symbols or

²⁹ Ibid.
³⁰ Ibid.

intentionally not using them. In some cases, the decision one makes about using religious language and symbols can derail the entire process.

As one interviewee suggests, “In central Africa when conflict happens, it almost always leads to religious conflict and violence. This means that people are targeted because they are from a particular faith. Failed mediation always happened in this context when we did not know how to engage peacemakers from different faiths to resolve this conflict. Without their help and intervention, there was no chance to end the violence. We needed to learn how religion worked on the ground to mediate successfully.”³¹ A working knowledge of the complexities of lived religion and how it functions in a particular situation is vital to a successful use of religion in mediation.

The Challenges of Effective Communication and Trust Building

One challenge related to lived religion that emerged in our research is effective communication. We will explore two broad themes in this section:

1. How can mediation strategies be tailored to specific cultural and religious context?
2. How do mediators communicate effectively with people in conflict zones?

Communication with local religious peacemakers and communities requires, not only a knowledge of lived religion and culture, but also an understanding of social hierarchies and elements of power.

In his analysis, Adejimola offers the following framework for effective communication in mediation:

1. Many communication channels should be opened and utilized in settling disputes.
2. Language and communication skills should be used effectively during the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups, communities, and parties in conflicts or disputes.
3. Building trust between stakeholders is a crucial element in a successful mediation process.
4. Parties in conflicts or disputes should be able to talk freely about their feelings, concerns, interests, needs, and fears.
5. The cultural values of the parties involved in conflicts must be understood and respected.
6. The language must package and communicate justice and peace.

In one interview, a practitioner described working with First Nations people in Canada. In this instance, all the previous training in communication which this mediator had received did not address the vast cultural differences between her ways of communicating and those of First Nations people. After spending time with First Nation people, she had to re-think and re-frame her entire process of conflict resolution. “It took us a long time to learn about the culture and we realized that we needed to be patient and work slowly to redesign the training for their culture. What we had designed was not going to resonate with First Nations people and was not going to be effective.”³² In addition, building trust in the community took longer than anticipated because of linguistic styles and approaches. To her surprise, one participant said, “I cannot follow anything you say because you are very linear with your speech.”³³

This comment made her realize she first had to learn how people in the community communicates with each other for her to communicate effectively with them. After months of observing their rituals, she found she had to change the elements of her trainings and workshops if she were to have any chance of bonding with the community.

“I realized that it is important for them to begin each training day with drums and songs. It was

³¹ Interview with Peace and Development Officer December 2015.

³² Interview with Mediation Specialist.

³³ Ibid.

challenging for us as mediators to follow their cultural norms but we realized this training was for them not for us. So, we had to deliver our training in a way that was meaningful to them.”³⁴ After this realization, this mediator changed her method of communication, which helped her broker trust and thereby enabled the two groups to communicate effectively.

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In another interview, a practitioner addressed the importance of effective communication while recounting her experiences in Afghanistan. She noted that cultural sensitivities were so inflamed in the region because of the US-led ‘War on Terror’ and military operations in the country that mediators had to use language very carefully. She explained, “historical memory is an important element in any negotiation or mediation. For example, people say Islam is a religion of violence, and my response is that as Western people, we have a long history of occupation and colonization in the Muslim world. This memory is still strong in the minds of many Muslims and denying the West’s occupation and colonization of Muslim homelands will only shut down communication.”³⁵ Because of such historical memory, religious peacemakers were suspicious of Western mediators and did not initially trust their methods or their language.

This mediator also noticed that there was an element of “hurt feelings” surrounding how Islam was generally described in Western media. Moreover, she discerned that “telling Muslim religious leaders that there is violence in the Qur’an is not an effective way to get them to re-think or re-frame their positions. That argument hurts their feelings and does not help them trust mediators.” In summary, this mediator reported she had to reframe her methodology to find ways to communicate in a way that was respectful but still honest about the negative encounters people in each culture have had with people from the other culture.”³⁶

Because of this, she had to communicate with religious peacemakers in a way that was honest and respectful to their cultural history; that acknowledged the often-negative encounters between the West and Islamic societies; and that was honest to her perspective and to her perceptions of Afghani experiences.

Adejimola argues that language is one of the most significant but under researched aspects of conflict resolution. Language utilized by mediators determines whether there will be trust and long-lasting relationships. It can either derail or strengthen the process of reconciliation. Adejimola claims, “since language and culture are interwoven, mediators are expected to show understanding and respect to the cultural values of the affected people.”³⁷ This statement resonates with many of the practitioners we interviewed. Each mediator should be prepared to change their method of communication to find resonance with the community they are engaging. Adejimola suggests that this is why, “both verbal and non-verbal communication are very significant in understanding the problems, interests, desires and fears of the speakers and the parties they represent.”³⁸

As most of our interview data with practitioners suggest, linguistic sensitivity that is culturally specific

³⁴ Interview with Conflict Resolution practitioner.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

and respectful of individual and communal historical experiences is needed for religious mediation. This means that mediators should develop awareness of their own cultural assumptions before they engage religious peacemakers and communities in conflict zones.

Re-evaluating Religious Mediation Timelines in Context

In this section, we address how the effectiveness of religious mediation can be evaluated. Because of differences in cultural and religious worldviews, timelines and assessments for religious mediation vary and so must our analysis of them. Most practitioners that we interviewed agreed that there are two large and overlapping issues for mediators engaging religion: First, building trust in mediation with religious drivers requires time. This is an element of the mediation process that is not always recognized or understood by peacebuilding organizations and institutions that must operate with grant-writing deadlines and specific reporting cycles. Second, in many instances, successful mediation is difficult to measure. This is because mediation with religious engagement affects attitudes and may alter belief systems in ways that are not easy to quantify and chart. We will explore each of these challenges in dialogue with interviews with practitioners and diplomats.

Building Trust and Addressing Mediator Bias

Building trust is the foundation for effective mediation strategy. However, depending on the context, this is not an easy task, especially for outsiders to the culture and religion. Often, outsiders are met with suspicion and treated as instruments of hegemony and power who are trying to exert external force within a conflict. As political scientist, Jacob Bercovitch notes, “The identity of the mediator affects the mediator’s influence, trust, and legitimacy.”³⁹ Mediators who can acquire legitimacy in the community and build trust in themselves can influence the effectiveness of the mediation because they are perceived as credible. But building this legitimacy means that mediators must have a keen awareness of their personal assumptions as well as of their perceived power in the mediation relationship.

One interviewee candidly describes his experience with power dynamics while working with the Lakota Tribe. He notes that he was not familiar with Lakota history and culture when he first encountered the tribe. Once he had begun to learn about their history, it became apparent to him how his own culture and his assumptions about dialogue and communication about his status as a white male outsider affected his interaction with the Lakota.

“As a white male, there’s a perspective that it is assumed I will bring into the relationship, even if it’s not actually part of my worldview, and the more I can be attuned to what my presence means to the other, the more I might be able to understand their response to me in any given situation or discussion. I can’t escape bringing with me that persona. So, I have to acknowledge that it’s present. I have to acknowledge that it’s linked to a larger ethos. I think here of my government’s policies with which I as a white man am identified. Moreover, my race has a history of lack of self-awareness and privilege. And so, as soon as I walk in the room that creates a particular dynamic that is inescapable.”

– Conflict resolution practitioner ⁴⁰

He also indicated that multi-layered identities play a role in building trust and affect the reconciliation process profoundly. The relationships he built with the Lakota took years to cultivate. On one occasion, this practitioner recalls that he was asked to hold a worship service of reconciliation between the Lakota people and the Christian church. To gain their trust, he knew he had to express the Lakota experience

³⁹ Bercovitch, Jacob, “Religion and Mediation: The Role of Faith Based Actors in International Conflict Resolution” *International Negotiation*, 14, 2009.

⁴⁰ Interview with Conflict Resolution practitioner May 2016.

and history including distrust, pain, and loss with Christian churches and communities.

Because of his sensitivity to Lakota narratives and history, this worship service took almost two years to plan and execute. He had to frame the worship service in a way that would be acceptable to the Lakota and that would also truthfully and critically acknowledge the complicity of white Christian communities in the oppression of the Lakota people. When describing the worship service, he said, "I framed the entire service to recognize the voice of the traditional people, saying we [outsiders] had lied to them. I had to recognize and also reassure them that I knew this worship service could not be a one-time thing. It was a very small first step in acknowledging what had happened but it went a long way in the process."⁴¹

As this story illustrates, trust building can take years and may not fit neatly into project timelines and categories that are set by mediation organizations. Therefore, for long-term reconciliation and effective peacebuilding, the most significant factor can be recognizing the importance of the passage of time.

Another interviewee, a policy specialist with the UN Development Program/Bureau of Policy and Program Support/Conflict Prevention Team describes her experiences while developing a dialogue process in Ghana. She was working with local organizations to encourage dialogue but quickly realized that building trust would require a much longer process than she had originally thought. Close to where she was working, there was a large local network of religious peacemakers that was already working in their community on violence prevention education and training. So, she tried to secure their involvement in the dialogues that she was initiating through her own organization. Many people she spoke with were pleased to learn of the inclusion of religious peacemakers in the trainings and workshops she was trying to create.

However, as she describes, "to get people to agree to include religious leaders took five years. Then it took many more months to get the religious leaders to agree to attend and to work with me on training materials."⁴² In other words, the timeline for the project that she was overseeing had to be extended beyond what she had anticipated. She, as an outsider, had not expected it to be so difficult to build networks of trust and get people in the same room to engage in dialogue. This meant she had to be flexible, to change course when necessary, and to remain persistent in her work to build relationships in the community.

In another interview, a practitioner from the Quaker tradition (Religious Society of Friends) notes that her community has been active in religiously inspired mediation and reconciliation for hundreds of years. In her experience, the key element to successful mediation is building trust. She says "Building relationships takes an immense amount of time because you have to gain trust from different actors. My supervisor has been here for eight years and feels that he still needs to build new relationships. And my colleague, who has been here for six years, still says there is work to do when it comes to building relationships. Without strong relationships, you cannot do anything concrete."⁴³

She also argues that relationship building is the most significant element to establishing credibility. "I have learned there are Quakers who spend two years building trust and then things happen and they ask each other, did they really need to wait two years so they had time to build a relationship? The answer is yes. The ability to establish that credibility, to be neutral and impartial, is not possible without nurturing relationships deeply."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interview with Conflict Resolution practitioner May 2016.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Interview with Mediation Specialist August 4, 2016.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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As this interviewee suggests, developing the right timeline for building trust in conflict zones should not be undervalued. An organization or mediation specialist cannot say in advance how long it will take to build and nurture relationships based on past experiences with similar cultures, conflicts, or religious groups. Because each context is specific, building relationships in one community can take years while in another it might take only days. Without trust having first been established, effective mediation strategies will likely fall apart as soon as the mediation specialists leave the conflict zone. Therefore, peace organizations and mediators should prepare for long-term engagement with individuals and communities in conflict zones. Successful mediation may also mean changing the type of engagement, from flying in outside mediators, to equipping and supporting local mediation structures for prolonged permanently in place conflict resolution.

Measuring Outcomes

A second challenge mentioned by many practitioners is that effectiveness in conflict resolution cannot be neatly tied to measurable outcomes. Instead, it is often based in the communal understanding that is implicit in the faith/cultural tradition. Partly because of the Western predilection toward measurable success that is charted, graphed, and diagrammed, the difficulty in determining suitable measurable outcomes is an issue for both mediators and peace organizations. Yet, most practitioners find that this type of data is complex and does not fit into neat categories. For example, how does one measure attitudinal changes? Gopin argues this is connected to “interiority” which is part of every religious tradition. Interiority is the process through which “prayer, meditation, the experience of divine love, ecstasy, guilt, and repentance are recognized by a religious community as values that reflect the central importance of inner life.”⁴⁵

Gopin cited an experience with a Cambodian Buddhist monk in reconciliation. He recalls an occasion when this monk “moved a large room of religious people of many faiths practically to tears in a matter of minutes, simply by demonstrating for them the kind of meditation practices that help him attain a perpetual state of *metta*, loving kindness for others.”⁴⁶ Gopin reported that even the most conservative Christians in the room were moved by what they saw. However, Gopin asked, how can this type of experience which is rooted in interiority be translated into measurable outcomes?

As Gopin says, religion is fundamentally about narrative and symbol – the process of meaning-making in people’s lives and how they respond to those influences. Given that definition of religion, how does one effectively evaluate attitudinal changes in religious people related to reconciliation? One practitioner we interviewed describes how reconciliation in Afghanistan was enmeshed in changing worldviews. She noted, “[The process of reconciliation] included helping people to change their worldview after a long history of civil war. This was a long and complicated process. It was very difficult to change the mindset of people from a military situation to civil situation. It was very difficult to influence people to change their perspective about the other group who were responsible for so much violence and pain.”⁴⁷

45 Gopin, Marc, “Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution,” 6. Available from: web.pdx.edu/~ingham/syllabi/Perspectives/RelCRGolpin.doc

46 Ibid.

47 Interview with Conflict Resolution practitioner December 2015.

Religious peacemakers were part of this mediation process in Afghanistan and used their influence in mosques to change hearts and minds. The process was arduous but eventually this mediator could discern changes in the way people interacted and dialogued with others. This practitioner observed that, "this kind of preaching [in mosques] is influencing the decision-making and it is going to change how peace agreements happen. There is a direct relationship between this kind of teaching at Friday prayer services in mosques and the readiness of people to pursue peace, but it is not easy to show this on reports."⁴⁸

This difficulty in identifying measurable outcomes is found in many conflict situations ranging from small intra-religious disputes to larger multi-national disagreements. Attitudinal changes are imperative in communities that are suffering from civil unrest, violence, and war, but these transformations can rarely be measured.

For many religious peacemakers, reconciliation and conflict resolution are partially motivated by a sense of a larger transcendent purpose. In other words, there is a part of reconciliation which, Gopin writes, is part of interiority and which cannot be expressed in ordinary language. When two religious communities with a history of mistrust and violence come together in dialogue, it happens partly because of effective mediation and partly because of theological commitments, beliefs, and values. How does one accurately measure the influence of each factor and can such processes ever be fully quantified?

The challenge in religious mediation is that interiority does impact mediation strategies. As one practitioner said, "Religion is embodied in the daily lives of people in the region where I work and it is sometimes difficult to separate what is religious from what is nonreligious."⁴⁹ Another practitioner wrote, "It is extremely important to understand how religious values function in society for effective peacebuilding. Religion enables people to hold deep values. Ignoring these deeply held values would be a mistake because, after you leave, it is those values and beliefs that will enable reconciliation to remain in place."⁵⁰

Therefore, if evaluators want to measure the success of a religious mediation strategy, they must approach the measuring process creatively. Evaluative processes and measurements should incorporate narrative accounts from the field, practitioner voices, as well as case studies that show how reconciliation is understood. To evaluate whether mediators have been successful one needs to examine not just the outward changes in a society but also the interiority of a community. While this is a daunting and time-consuming task, it results ultimately in a more accurate portrayal of the value of religious mediation. That religious mediation often requires narrative and case study-based evaluation is part of the reason religious mediation is currently undervalued in the field of conflict resolution.

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.

Section 3:

Missing Voices in Mediation: Youth and Women

Engaging Youth

One group that practitioners we interviewed did not address was youth. However, the youth population is incredibly important for mediation.⁵¹ Because there is an acknowledged relationship between literacy and unemployment on the one hand and radicalization and violence on the other, it is likely that a high percentage of undereducated and unemployed youth, particularly males, are likely to become involved in conflict.⁵² Many illiterate and unemployed young males in conflict zones lack independence and money and are therefore easily manipulated and can fall prey to destructive societal pressures and the power dynamics of violence. Because of these reasons, youth in any society are a key element in the peacebuilding process. A recent analysis by Mercy Corps of conflict in Liberia shows that political violence among youth is often exacerbated by poverty, disenfranchisement, disempowerment, and exclusion.⁵³

A UN report on youth and conflict suggests that, “youth and adolescents who experience early aggression and a violent childhood are at the highest risk of perpetrating violence. Children without a caring adult presence in their lives are more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of violence in Africa and Latin America. Studies indicate that uneducated youth and school dropouts are more likely to engage in violence and self-destructive behavior.”⁵⁴ In contrast, the Academy for Educational Development reports that youth are likely to engage in peacebuilding when they have the opportunity for employment, enjoy strong communal relationships, and have a voice in the political process.⁵⁵

Using religion in mediation can provide a method of violence prevention as well as healing from the psychic and relational wounds of violence by engaging youth and making peace a more attractive choice than turning to violence. For example, many scholars of religion suggest that increased religious participation can ameliorate isolation for at-risk youth by increasing communal connections, providing emotional support for broken families, and promoting service work. In conflict zones, youth often play a dual role, first, as vulnerable members of the population, and second, as the potential for future generations of peacebuilding. Schools and educational facilities, such as madrasas in Islamic societies, can educate youth about engaging diversity in their communities and thereby lay a groundwork for future peacebuilding. Some organizations are already recognizing the significance of engaging youth in conflict torn societies. For example, the United Religions Initiative has a program, Conflict Resolution by Youth in Uganda. The program is headquartered in Bweya Central Parish of Wakiso District and operates both in central Uganda and in the Teso region in northeastern Uganda. The goal is to recruit and train youth to lead nonviolent conflict resolution among Bahai’s, Christians, Muslims, and members of the dominant tribe, the Iteso. Primary activities include youth-to-youth nonviolent conflict transformation. According to UN reporters, in Sierra Leone, “to further the goal of empowering youth to be positive contributors, methods are used to sensitize them toward civic responsibilities and peacebuilding. One way to achieve reintegration and harmony is through sports; coupled with peace-building curricula, athletic activity promotes the release of war-related tensions.”⁵⁶

51 While youth is a flexible category that depends on the cultural context, UN agencies define a youth as a person between 15 and 24 years old. The UN Youth Peace and Security Resolution 2250 defines youth as 18-29.

52 See, for example, Urdal, *Demography and Internal Armed Conflict* and; Collier and Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”; There are debates about whether the percentage of youth in a society is the root cause of the relationship. For examples see Sommers, “Youth and Conflict: A Brief Review of Available Literature” and ; Hendrixson, “Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women: Constructing a New Population Threat.”

53 Mercy Corps, “Why Youth Fight: Making Sense of Youth Political Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 3.

54 U.N. Report, “Youth and Conflict,” 378. Available from: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch14.pdf>

55 Academy for Educational Development, “Youth as a Catalyst for Peace: Helping Youth Develop the Vision, Skills, and Behaviors to Promote Peace”; summarized in Bennett, Karki, and Nepal, “Youth and Peacebuilding in Nepal: The Current Context and Recommendations.”

56 U.N. Report, “Youth and Conflict,” 386. Available from: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch14.pdf>

Many organizations and leaders describe youth as vulnerable to violent behavior or radicalization. However, the same factors that make them susceptible to such forces also can motivate them to involve themselves in reform movements in which many emerge as potential leaders for social change. Youth movements often have power and potency; they frequently lead effective protests, which result in accountability from the government and the community. They participate outside of political and formal structures, precisely because they are not regarded as full participants in their society. Rather than thinking of youth primarily as a problem we unfortunately need to address, it is more effective to think of youth as an important resource for leadership in conflict resolution.

In our interviews, practitioners did not mention youth, which either means that they were not working directly with a youth population or that youth do not register for them as significant in the peacebuilding process. However, there are multiple case studies which show the importance of youth in peacebuilding, especially for strengthening communal relationships, nurturing emotional and psychological health, and building civil society. To add to this, youth who feel marginalized by religious structures and leadership was not addressed by the interviewees or mentioned in literature we reviewed.

Women in Conflict Resolution

By and large, the voices, perspectives and worldviews of women — both formal and informal — concerning conflict resolution processes were missing from the interview material and academic work we reviewed. In many religious and traditional communities, women's voices are marginalized. Many formal religious hierarchies simply do not have formal leadership spaces for women or seek their support in peacebuilding. However, scholars of religion and mediation analysts suggest that women are an integral part of conflict resolution and say that ignoring their contribution is detrimental to the peace process. The lack of visibility for women in many countries stems from cultural norms. Although they do engage in peacebuilding, in many societies their contribution is welcomed only on a community level rather than on a national or international level and therefore has less recognition. Nevertheless, the impact of women in conflict resolution on the grassroots level can be profound. In Somalia, women often mediate between diplomats and tribes as conflict resolvers. In Mindanao in the Philippines, there is a long tradition of women resolving conflicts between clans and the Philippines military. Nevertheless, in most traditional and religious societies, women's access to conflict mediation processes is controlled and restricted by cultural norms, social pressure, and patriarchal structures.

In a UN report on conflict, field researchers made the following observations about the role of women in conflict resolution. "Women are often marginalized in decision-making processes. At the local and national levels, they are expected to obey political and religious community leaders. At the international level, they have little say in the formulation and implementation of policies that are meant to protect their interests and well-being."⁵⁷ This means that women have low social capital and are often not permitted to utilize their skills or have an active role in decisions that affect their community. A UN report on youth and conflict suggests that women's "participation would most likely contribute to an improvement in social welfare and a more equitable resource distribution."⁵⁸ In most societies, traditional or otherwise, women are part of holistic healing through maintaining family structures and providing religious and spiritual education and care. Many women, even in

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⁵⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸ Ibid.

religious traditions that do not permit female religious leaders, are still active in their communities and lead ritual and faith practices in the home. This means that their focus on relationships and family enables them to access youth, to work across conflict lines, and to build communal relationships. As such, women's voices in the conflict resolution process should not be undervalued and practitioners should try, when possible, to engage women in peacebuilding.

From a research perspective, it is revealing that very few of the practitioners we interviewed addressed the role of women in conflict resolution. Moreover, none of the analysts or field experts discussed how the absence or presence of women affected the mediation process. The fact that women are active members of these societies — leaders in the community, teachers, doctors, lawyers, activists, reformers — and often at the forefront of the challenges that we discuss, their lack of visibility, even to practitioners, is profoundly noticeable.

As we learn from examples in tribal societies such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in Pakistan, it was a young girl, Malala Yousafzai, who ushered in social reform by promoting women's education. There is a gender stereotype that is prevalent among some of those engaged in conflict resolution, that women are not significant in the conflict resolution process or that they do not yield enough power to engender social reform. However, paradoxically some scholars argue that because many women in traditional societies are outside the hierarchical structure, their influence and impact on society can be far more powerful. Instead of following traditional methods to engage "social change," women are likely to build their own networks, seek communal support, emphasize attitudinal changes in the home, encourage and empower youth, and reinforce religious doctrines that value compassion, human dignity, and respect.

A further question is, how women who are mediators serving in diplomatic and international agencies should approach conflicts in societies in which women are excluded from the negotiations or mediation by the conflicting parties. This question frequently comes up in diplomatic circles with women wondering how to approach mediations in these societies. A universal answer may not be possible, but a deeper conversation on the question is needed.

Solutions

A baseline study conducted by the Berghof Foundation and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, addressed the role of women and youth in mediation especially regarding the patriarchal, cultural and religious limitations they experience. This study suggests that mediators "identify, in collaboration with the relevant actors, the parameters of the traditional (patriarchal) or religious context (if any) that prohibits or limits mediator roles for women and young people. Then establish and communicate, via a conflict-sensitive approach, the possible advantages of women and young mediators, using inspiring stories from similar contexts. If a congenial atmosphere can be generated, encourage the training of future mediators, especially women and youth mediators."

Given the ample evidence of how engaging women and youth in peace processes can lead to more durable agreements, many organizations are taking multiple approaches. Some organizations first engage more conservative elements to reach those closest to the margins and extremes. Engaging unlikely allies can be a precursor to intercommunity dialogue.

Section 4:

Policy Recommendations for Mediators Engaging Religion

In this report, we have explored the gaps that exist in the field between what we know as scholars concerning religion and religious behavior, and how religion is used in peace mediation. We utilize the existing literature in conflict mediation and support our conclusions through a careful analysis of interview material from practitioners and analysts in the field. We also identify some of the discrepancies between religion as presented in textbooks — which usually focuses on religious doctrines and practices — and the complexities of lived religion in particular societies. We have tried to show that an understanding of how religions function in particular societies is instrumental to successful conflict mediation. In this concluding section, we suggest some policy recommendations based on our field research.

Encountering Lived Religion Critically

Religion is a significant aspect of society and is rooted in the cultural, anthropological and sociological identities of individuals and communities. Therefore, whether the conflict is primarily about religion, involves religious actors and institutions, or has more subtly nuanced religious aspects, it is necessary to realize the ways in which theological belief, ritual, narrative and practice influence society. Observing how lived religion functions on the ground in a context is as critical to successful conflict mediation as learning about religious tenets and belief structures. Understanding lived religion in context is a key to understanding its vitality and utility in conflict resolution.

Engaging Religious Peacemakers in Mediation

Because of the role of religion and religious institutions in many parts of the world and, in particular, in traditional societies, it is often helpful to engage religious peacemakers in mediating a conflict. This requires that mediators have some awareness of their inherent institutional and personal biases about religion. Because lived religion is so distinct from society to society, there is no reason to assume that religious communities in one context will not be helpful to a peace process just because their religious counterparts in another situation proved to be unapproachable. Successfully inviting religious peacemakers to help in a mediation process usually requires that mediators learn about religious practice in that specific context. A mediator must learn about religious belief and practice in a religious community to gain access, build trust, and to immerse himself or herself in that community. Religious peacemakers are often held in high esteem and can open channels of communication for individuals and groups that are not accessible to outsiders. Getting access to religious peacemakers can enhance the mediation process.

Building Trust in Communities

Building trust was a recurring theme in our practitioner interviews. It is imperative for conflict organizations and mediators to realize that building trust takes time and, in many cases, more time than was originally expected or anticipated. Successful mediation requires reciprocal respect based on mutual trust between the mediator and the community. Building trust is a multi-layered activity that includes mediators acknowledging their cultural and perceptual limits and the historical and social experiences of the community they are trying to engage. In other words, the prejudices and preconceptions of both the mediator and those he or she is trying to work with should be discussed respectfully and engaged critically. Mediation works best when all parties are aware of their own baggage — the perceptions, mistrust, marginalization, exclusions and misunderstandings that are relevant in the mediation environment. This aspect of trust building is a continuous and self-reflective

process that does not have a predictable conclusion. Without awareness or acknowledgement of the baggage of the various participants in a mediation process, successful conflict resolution and long-term peacebuilding is unlikely to occur. Frequently, in our interviews trust was also built through mediator attendance of community events and visiting sacred sites.

Inadequate Evaluation Methodologies

The current method for organizations and mediators to measure success in religious mediation is inadequate. As our interview data reveals, it is difficult to measure, quantify and chart social change that occurs in conflict contexts. Attitudinal changes by all involved are by far the most dynamic sign of an effective conflict mediation. Yet, there are few ways to evaluate whether a conflict mediation strategy has caused attitudinal change.

Unfortunately, organizations with a grant cycle and reports to send to donors often depend on quantifiable evidence from the field that might be impossible to get. Moreover, the evidence from the field that is possible to get might be difficult to translate to people who are not in the field. Our recommendation is that the evaluative methods incorporate practitioner voices as well as narratives from the field to record the personal or relational transformation of conflicted communities. We recognize that this reporting is further complicated by the fact that peacebuilding is an ongoing process that does not offer finality as part of its conceptual framework. As a result, peacebuilding structures require significant extensive time and resources to be evaluated accurately. Nevertheless, as difficult as mediation processes are to evaluate, our research shows the necessity and efficacy of engaging religious individuals, peacemakers, and institutions in the peacebuilding process.⁵⁹

Incorporating Practitioner Experiences from the Field

Practitioners are eyes and ears on the ground in conflict regions. As such, they are aware of strategies that work and strategies that don't work in any given situation. Academic analysts and people who are outsiders to a conflict regions also have an important contribution to make. Nevertheless, our research leads us to conclude that while academic perspectives can add needed theoretical and conceptual knowledge to a mediation process, academic input is most helpful when it is integrated with practitioner voices and narratives. Case studies, workshops, and trainings should be designed by people with field experience. These people might be in a better position to recommend a mediation strategy than would be someone who is working from an academic knowledge of a religious tradition alone. In the long run, getting this input from practitioners will encourage robust dialogue between academics and practitioners. It is a dialogue which will ultimately benefit the entire conflict mediation field.

Increase Collaborative Spaces

A key instrument in addressing these recommendations would be the cultivation of a 'community of practice' among the various sectors interviewed for this report. This community of practice would engage in critical ongoing conversations on how better to equip mediators. The evidence basis for cultivating spaces for creative collaboration and problem solving, especially across traditional silos, is growing. Recalling the Venn diagram at the beginning of this report, the question for this community of practice would be: How can practitioners, academics, trainers, and policy makers engage in the critical and creative questioning that can move this underexplored nexus forward in meaningful and important ways?

⁵⁹ It's important to note the contributions to this topic made by DME's Effective Interreligious Action in Peacebuilding Program.

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