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Religious Peace Activism—The Rational Element of Religious Elites' Decision-making Processes

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Abstract

Religious elites are active for peace in many violent conflicts. Normative explanations often do not suffice to explain their engagement. In this paper we draw on the findings of social-movement research to identify the factors that induce rationally acting religious elites to be active for peace. It is their relationships to the government, other religious elites, and believers that can motivate them to call for peace. However, they will do so only if they anticipate—based on the overall influence of other religious peace (co-)activists, the structure of the religious community, and the frame environment—that they will not be penalized for their engagement. Religious norms are an important motivation behind religious peace activism, but rational decision-making also has to be taken into account if religious engagement for peace is to be explained fully.

Keywords: Religion, conflict, peace, elites, rational choice, framing

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Zusammenfassung

Religiöses Friedensengagement— Das Rationale Element in der Entscheidungsfindung religiöser Eliten

Religiöse Eliten engagieren sich in vielen Gewaltkonflikten für Frieden. Normative Rechtfertigungen für ihr Verhalten können dies oftmals jedoch nur unzureichend erklären. Zur Identifizierung von Faktoren für ein Friedensengagement rationaler religiöser Eliten stützen wir uns auf die Erkenntnisse der Sozialen Bewegungsforschung. Die Beziehung religiöser Eliten zur Regierung, zu anderen religiösen Eliten und den Gläubigen motiviert sie zu Friedensaufrufen, für die sich jedoch nur dann engagieren, wenn sie davon ausgehen können, dass von anderen religiösen Friedensaktivisten, der Struktur ihrer Religionsgemeinschaft und dem Frame-Umfeld keine Gefahren für ihr Engagement zu erwarten sind. Religiöse Normen sind zwar eine bedeutsame Grundlage für religiöses Friedensengagement, zur Erklärung des Zustandekommens von Friedensengagement sollte jedoch die rationale Entscheidungsfindung religiöser Eliten berücksichtigt werden.

Religious Peace Activism—The Rational Element of Religious Elites' Decision-making Processes

Alexander De Juan and Johannes Vüllers

Article Outline

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3 The Motives behind Religious Engagement for Peace
4 The Risks and Opportunities of Religious Frames for Peace
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1 Introduction

In many violent conflicts, religious actors have effectively contributed to peace. Clerics have mediated between the parties to the conflict. Peace movements have gathered in churches, mosques, and temples. Believers have protested for human rights, democracy and peace under the banner of religion. The commitment to peace on the part of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani in Iraq; the Dalai Lama in Tibet; or the interreligious networks in Nigeria, Uganda, and the Philippines are but a few current examples.

Most existing studies on religious engagement for peace are limited to the analysis of the peace activities themselves. They focus on describing the special potential as well the different types of religious engagement for peace.[1] Other works are mainly empirical in nature. They focus on describing religious activities in single cases.[2] However, an obvious question is neglected in all of these studies: under what circumstances is religious activism for peace observable?

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[1] Abu-Nimer/Kadayifici-Orellana 2008; Carter/Smith 2004; Sampson 1997; Appleby 2001; Little/Appleby 2004; Harpviken/Roislien 2008; Johnston/Cox 2003; Ter Haar 2005.

[2] Cejka/Bamat 2003; Palm-Dalupan 2005; Steele 2003; Wooster 1994; Poethig 2002; Sampson 1994; Smock 2006; Nichols 1994; Johnston 1994; Haynes 2009; Little 2007.

In answering this question, one can focus on various dimensions of religion such as identities, ideas, organizations, and elites (Harpviken/Røislien 2008; Basedau 2009). We will concentrate on the latter. Religious elites are people whose status enables them to influence religious norm-setting processes more effectively than the average believer. Members of the official clergy, the leaders of religious movements and sects, and influential missionaries belong to the religious elite.[3] They have in common that the believers accept them as legitimate interpreters of the common religious scripts and traditions (Appleby 2003). Consequently, they are crucial in determining the role religion will play in a given violent conflict.

We focus here on a special type of religious engagement on the part of elites that is often neglected in academic debates: religious calls for peace, which can countervail violent propaganda and thus counteract mass mobilization. Such calls can be especially effective when they address *religious* calls for violence. If rebel groups are trying to use religious rhetoric to mobilize believers, clerics and their religious calls for peace can effectively contribute to peace.[4] The latter figures are the ones who possess the necessary religious credibility among the believers to challenge radical religious interpretations of conflict.[5] Against this background, we will focus on the following question: under what circumstances do religious elites call for peace as a challenge to the radical religious propaganda of rebel groups?[6]

It is often taken for granted that such calls for peace are based on religious peace norms as well as the beliefs of individual religious elites (Gopin 2000; Butselaar 2005). No doubt such factors play a crucial role. They might help to explain the engagement of individuals such as Mahathma Ghandi or Desmond Tutu. However, they do not constitute a comprehensive explanation of the circumstances under which religious elites become active for peace. In many conflicts, rapid changes occur in the behavior of large parts of the clerical establishment. Religious elites who have been active in the dissemination of radical religious interpretations suddenly begin advocating peace when the social or political framework changes. Such shifts have taken place in Rwanda, Thailand, and Iraq. They cannot be explained on the basis of religious norms and beliefs alone. Instead, they are indications of rational decision-making.

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3 Usually the term "elite" is used to characterize a superlative (the most influential). However, we also include clerics of lower ranks in the category of "elites." The essential element of the definition is the differentiation from the masses. Due to their status within the religious community, elites' influence on religious norm setting is higher than that of the majority of the believers (Appleby 2000).

4 Besides, religious elites can be active for peace in different ways. They can act as neutral observers or as mediators between the parties to the conflict, and they can provide organizational resources for peace movements (see Sampson 1997).

5 Religious engagement for peace refers to all the activities of religious elites that are intended to prevent or end violent conflicts, regardless of whether contribute to the perpetuation of unjust social and political structures.

6 In this article we only consider the peace activities of national religious elites. We presume that the engagement of international religious organizations is based on other mechanisms than the activities of religious communities that are involved in the conflict themselves are. Hence, these other forms of engagement for peace have to be analyzed separately.

Hence, we argue that the simple reference to religious altruism and charity is in many cases not a persuasive explanation of religious engagement for peace. Often strategic considerations make religious elites become advocates for peace. Their relationships to the government, to other religious elites, and to believers can influence their behavior. Furthermore, the risks of peace activities have to be taken into account. In acute violent conflicts activists for peace may be denounced as traitors and threatened physically. The higher the probability that religious elites will prevail over religious calls for violence, the lower these risks. The probability of success will be especially high if religious calls for peace are supported by a broad coalition of local and high-ranking religious elites, if the religious congregations are connected through formal interlinkages, and if the various religious communities are strongly networked.

In order to establish these theses, we first elaborate on the relevance of religious calls for peace, drawing on social science research and the concept of collective action frames (CAFs). The success of rebel groups depends on their ability to disseminate persuasive mobilizing messages. Accordingly, religious calls for peace can be interpreted as counter-frames to such mobilizing religious messages. In this context we briefly outline the different forms of religious engagement for peace. Subsequently, we identify the factors that can motivate religious elites to actively counter religious calls for violence. We differentiate between those factors that can motivate religious elites and those factors that can affect the risks of religious calls for peace. The concluding section summarizes the central theses and the results.

2 Religious Engagement for Peace as a Counter-framing Method

The current research on the causes of civil wars focuses on structural factors; it concentrates on economic, political, and ethnic determinants (Fearon/Laitin 2003; Hegre/Sambanis 2006). However, it tends to neglect the dynamics of mobilization. People's readiness to support violent movements does not depend simply on structural grievances. The majority of a population will only engage in violent conflict if its members have congruent perceptions of how their situation is to be interpreted and how it can be changed (Barker et al. 2001; Snow et al. 1986: 465-466; Polletta/Ho 2006; Fearon/Laitin 2000). Such collective conflict interpretations only evolve simultaneously on a broad scale if they are formulated and spread centrally (Barker et al. 2001: 4-5; Morris/Staggenborg 2004: 173). In social-movement research the term "framing" is used for such interpretation and dissemination. It results in so-called collective action frames (CAFs). CAFs are schemes of interpretation that explain reality in a simplified way in order to mobilize support and to demobilize antagonistic parts of the population (Snow 2004: 384; Benford/Snow 1988; 2000). Violent movements use CAFs to mobilize people to go to war. Only if they are able to persuade the population of their interpretation of the conflict, if they convince the people that they are able to change their situation and that violence is the best way to do so, will they be able to mobilize support. Against this background,

peacemaking can consist of a rhetorical act. Peace activists can challenge the mobilizing CAFs of violent movements and defend their own interpretation of the conflict. If their counter-frames prevail, they will be able to demobilize people and to contribute to peace. Given the structural focus of the current research on the causes of violent conflicts, such rhetorical peace activism is often neglected.

Religious peacemaking can be particularly important and effective in conflicts with a strong religious dimension. When incorporated into CAFs, religions can contribute to the escalation of conflicts. Otherwise fragmented groups can be united on the basis of common religious beliefs, myths, and rituals. On the other hand, religious identities can mark insurmountable differences between groups. Hence, they can be effective in the definition of in-groups and out-groups (Appleby 2000: 61; Seul 1999: 565). Further, if conflicts are perceived as being religious in nature, they can hardly be resolved in a peaceful way. Religious beliefs are nonnegotiable and indivisible. If conflicts are integrated into a transcendental context, peaceful conflict resolution is practically ruled out (Hasenclever/Rittberger 2003; Svensson 2007). Finally, the promise of transcendent rewards and punishments can increase individual readiness to bear the sacrifices of violent conflict and to use violence. Combatants will tend to be more ready to kill and die for higher religious goals than for political or economic programs (Appleby 2003; Hasenclever/Rittberger 2003).

Religion will have such amplifying effects if believers are persuaded of the religious nature of a conflict. Analyses of the sociology of religion demonstrate that religious norm-setting processes are strongly influenced by religious elites. Abstract and complex myths, religious writings, and traditions need to be continuously interpreted in the light of a changing reality. Otherwise they cannot be applied to concrete events and situations. In every religious community there are people who are accepted by the believers as legitimate interpreters of religious dogmas. They explain concrete situations in the light of their specific systems of belief. They apply abstract religious ideas to reality and provide the believers with concrete religious norms and guidelines (Appleby 2000). Hence, religions will contribute to violence if these religious elites are successful in disseminating radical religious interpretations among the believers. In such cases religion becomes a part of CAFs and contributes to mobilization (De Juan/Hasenclever 2009). This could be observed in Bosnia, where members of the Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church mobilized believers on the basis of radical religious messages. Many Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka played a similar role in the conflict with the Tamil minority. In Nigeria, Muslim and Christian clerics have on several occasions incited violent clashes between the two religious communities. In the Philippines and Thailand, Muslim clerics have supported rebel groups within the Muslim minorities through radical religious calls for violence against their respective central governments (Bartholomeusz 2002; Ibrahim 1991; Sells 1996).

Accordingly, religious engagement for peace can consist of religious elites' attempts to prevent such radical religious norm setting.[7] The elites try to counter the religious calls for violence uttered by radical rebel groups and their associated religious elites. Trough their engagement they aim to provide the believers with alternative, moderate interpretations of a conflict. The more persuasive these interpretations are, the smaller the radical frame's chance of a successful mobilization. Firstly, segregation among religious groups can potentially be counteracted through an emphasis on common religious values. This kind of counteraction can be observed in Iraq. The current communal violence is based on the radical intra-Islamic differentiation between Shiites and Sunnis. Among the latter, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi declared the Shiites to be "nonbelievers" in order to successfully mobilize the Sunnis. However, in 2004 his former mentor Abu Muhhamed Al-Maqdisi started to publicly question his interpretation. Contrary to Zarqawi, Al-Maqdisi emphasized that Shiites are Muslims and that any attack on Shiites would be illegitimate (Yehoshua 2005). Secondly, religious engagement for peace can consist of the negation of the religious nature of conflicts and attempts to call attention to the possibilities for peaceful means of conflict resolution. In many Muslim countries today, religious contests in which moderate clerics publicly challenge other religious elites' declarations of holy war can be observed (Wiktorowicz 2004; Snow/Byrd 2007). Finally, religious peace activism can call religious legitimizations of violence into question by emphasizing the religious imperative of nonviolence and peace. In Sri Lanka, for example, the embedding of the conflict with the Tamil minority into the narrative of an uncompromising war for the holy land has been an essential condition for the suspension of the Buddhist imperative of nonviolence. In this context, engaged Buddhists have challenged the religious legitimization of violence and stressed the priority of the imperative of nonviolence over the imperative of defending the religion (Bartholomeusz 2002).

Hence, religious elites can play a decisive role in fostering peaceful means of conflict resolution when they challenge radical religious calls for violence. However, they are not active in this way in every conflict with a religious dimension. Under what circumstances, then, is such religious engagement for peace observable?

3 The Motives behind Religious Engagement for Peace

The motives behind religious engagement for peace are rarely questioned in the academic debate. Many studies instead investigate the reasons behind religious calls for violence and try to develop causal models that explain the circumstances under which religious elites become active in favor of violent movements (Appleby 2000; De Juan 2009; Toft 2007). Acade-

[7] Religious elites can also be active for peace in a preemptive way, for example, by fostering relations and contact between different religious communities to prevent the development of stereotypes. However, in this article we concentrate on the engagement in violent conflicts.

mic interest in the causes of religious engagement for peace is limited. The reason for this seems to be an overly optimistic perspective on religion. Whereas religious calls for violence are often traced back to specific structural factors as well as the instrumentalization of religion by self-interested elites, it seems to be a generally accepted fact that religious engagement for peace is always grounded in personal religious beliefs and altruism. Without doubt these factors play a decisive role in many cases. However, in many violent conflicts religious activities for peace rest not on personal convictions but on strategic considerations. Religious elites are integrated into different relationships that might influence their behavior. Of special importance are their relationships to the government, to other religious elites, and to believers. In the remainder of this section, we illustrate how these relationships can influence clerics' actions. We do not strive to provide a comprehensive account of decision-making, but rather to demonstrate that rational decision-making can influence religious elites' behavior.

Religious Elites' Relationship to the Government

Religions elites need material and organizational resources to fulfill their religious and social responsibilities. Proselytizing, offering religious education, operating churches, mosques or temples, and providing social services is costly. Furthermore, religious communities need specific legal conditions that enable believers to freely practice their religion. This legal framework is determined by political elites (Philpott 2007). If religious communities are dependent on the government's goodwill in order to access these resources and if they do not expect to profit from the victory of the opposition movement (either because its members belong to another religion or because a victory by the rebels does not seem likely), there is a significant probability that their religious elites will support the government when it is threatened by oppositional movements. If they do not, they run the risk that political actors will cease their support to the community. Furthermore, there might be a substantial risk that the government could be overthrown and that support to religious elites would end as a result. Thus, if religious elites are dependent on government support, they will try to condemn every call for violence against the ruling regime and will call on believers to refrain from violence and to accept the status quo (Hasenclever/De Juan 2007; Johnston/Figa 1988).

With the so-called Patronage of Islam Act, the government of Thailand has made the country's Muslim religious establishment more dependent on the state: a centralized, state-controlled religious structure has been established, and the religious elites within this structure are paid by the state. Accordingly, in the conflict over the autonomy of the Malay-Muslim states in the south of the country, many of these clerics have supported the government against the rebels. Religious interpretations of the conflict have played a major role in the mobilizing ideology of the Muslim rebel groups. Muslim clerics within the official Muslim establishment have publicly challenged these religious interpretations and called for peace (Che Man 1990; Yusuf 1998; Gilquin 2002).

During the colonial period in Mozambique the Catholic Church was highly dependent on the government's financial and political support. When a growing independence movement began to challenge the regime, Catholic clerics started to condemn violent protests and to preach submission to the colonial power. Supporting the independence movement was declared an act against God's will. With these religious interpretations these clerics challenged the religious support given to the movement by many local clerics, who drew on liberation theology to legitimize protests against the government. Similar situations can be observed in many other African and Latin American countries, for instance, Angola and Nicaragua (Azevedo 1992; McKenna 1997; Schubert 1997; Sawchuk 1997).

In Indonesian West Papua, conflicts between Christian and Muslim communities have on several occasions escalated into violent clashes. Within Christian militias, religious interpretations of the conflict have grown in importance. Rebel groups have tried to mobilize the population on the basis of radical religious interpretations. However, out of fear of government punishment, the religious elites of the Catholic Church have publicly condemned any religious legitimization of violence against the state (May 1991; Rutherford 2005).

Religious Elites' Relationship to Other Religious Elites

Within religious communities, different theological positions, worldviews and concepts of social order among the various religious elites can clash (Johnston/Figa 1988: 42; Haynes 1996). Hence, clerics will try to prevail over competing religious elites and to maximize their own community's access to material and organizational resources. Such intrareligious competition can form the background to religious engagement for peace. This competition manifests itself in mutual challenges of the others' theological interpretations. Competing religious elites try to strengthen their own position by publicly challenging the religious interpretations and credibility of their religious rivals. If one of these competing factions is engaged in religious calls for violence, engaging in religious calls for peace can be a promising strategy for its opponents (De Juan 2009).[8]

In Chechnya, intrareligious competition played a decisive role in the engagement of various religious elites for peace. Most Chechens belong to one of the major Sufi Tariqahs: Qadiriyya or Naqshbandiyya. Before the first Chechen war, many Qadiriyya clerics supported Dschochar Dudajew's nationalist government because they expected that Dudajew would strengthen their position against the Naqshbandiyya. In the run up to the war, these clerics disseminated radical religious interpretations of the conflict and supported Dudajew's uncompromising stance towards the Russian government. Many Naqshbandiyya religious

[8] Engagement for peace is but one strategy in such intrareligious competition. An alternative option would be calls for violence against the rebel groups and associated clerics. The relative value of these two strategies depends on the individual context (for example, the interests of the political elites in the government). Hence, intrareligious rivalries can foster peace engagement but do not do so every case.

elites openly challenged the religious interpretations and messages of their religious rivals and called for peace and compromise with the central government (Gammer 2000; Rotar 2001; Yemelianova 2001). It was only when the actual Russian invasion began that they too began calling for violence.

In many Muslim communities clerics have lost their traditional monopoly over religious interpretation. New communications technology has provided believers with direct access to religious knowledge. In this way, a crucial basis for the traditional religious authority of the clerics has been lost: the monopoly over the preservation and dissemination of religious knowledge (Robinson 1993). In many places a new stratum of religious intellectuals has emerged that has acquired its knowledge independently. These individuals do not recognize the traditional authorities. Some are trying to forcefully Islamize politics and society; some try to achieve these goals by violent means and by mobilizing support among believers. Members of the religious establishment have vehemently challenged the religious interpretations and worldviews of such radical groups. They condemn radical calls for violence and instead call for peace in order to protect their personal position within the religious community. This can be observed, for example, in Algeria and Egypt.

In many conflicts religious elites engage for peace after having supported—for a long time—the radical religious interpretations of violent movements. Such shifts can be traced back to the fact that rival religious elites have started to support the same violent movement. In this situation clerics might react by abandoning their previous calls for violence and publicly challenging the new violent interpretation of their religious rivals. In Thailand, for example, the founder of the Malay-Muslim rebel movement the National Revolutionary Front (BRN) distanced himself from the group in 1984, once other religious elites had gained influence within the movement. He founded the so-called BRN Ulama and started to call for peace, summoning the rebels to lay down their arms. Similarly, in Iraq the militia leader Muqtada al-Sadr was supported by the influential cleric al-Hariri. However, when al-Sadr increasingly claimed the religious leadership of the movement himself, al-Hariri started to distance himself from al-Sadr and to condemn his violent politics (Gilquin 2002: 119; ICG 2006).

Religious Elites' Relationship to Believers

The social influence of religious communities also depends on how many members they have. The more people belong to a religious community, the greater the community's influence on the constitution of society. Usually believers and their religious donations form the financial backbone of the respective religious community and religious establishment (Miller 2002: 438). Hence, a central aim of religious elites is to secure the size of their religious community, especially if its religious influence is not artificially protected by the government. The elites will try to prevent any conflict between their own religious interpretations and the reality of believers. Religions are meant to provide explanations. If religious messages con-

tradict the perceptions and life situations of believers, religious elites run the risk that people will turn to alternative clerics and their religious interpretations (Silberman et al. 2005, Benford 1993). In such a situation clerics will often act strategically.

In many conflicts—after years of violence—a strong sense of war weariness develops among the population. The public begins to increasingly condemn acts of violence and their perpetrators. People distance themselves from violent movements. Personal experiences and suffering as a result of the war lead people to question the necessity and benefits of violence and to call for a return to peace.[9] Religious condemnations of violence and calls for peace can be very influential in such an environment. This can be observed in Sudan, where, in the middle of the war, Christian churches have been impressively successful in their proselytizing efforts. Within a few years they have massively gained in influence among the local population through their religious peace sermons (Wheeler 1997; Hutchinson 2001). According to the extent to which religious calls for peace gain in influence, those religious elites who have incited violence or acted passively in the past then come under pressure. If they do not adapt their behavior and their religious messages, they risk loosing their religious influence. After the Rwandan genocide in 1994, many believers left the Catholic Church. Catholic clerics had actively supported the Habyarimana regime and its politics. Many of them had played an active role in the genocide. Others had watched the militias passively. Even after the genocide, high-ranking clerics were hesitant to condemn what had happened. As a consequence, many people distanced themselves from the Catholic Church. Simultaneously, the Muslim community and many Pentecostal churches grew rapidly (Klüsener 2006; Doughty/Ntambara 2005).

The conflicts in Sudan and Rwanda demonstrate that religious elites might have much to win if they become active for peace and much to lose if they do not. Adapting their religious messages to changing conflict interpretations within the population in order to prevent a loss of religious influence during or after manifest violent conflicts can thus be a strategic decision on the part of religious elites. Such strategic behavior can be observed in many conflicts, especially in the post-conflict phase when manifest violence has ended and many people long to return to a peaceful life (Fox 2004: 23). On many occasions, religious actors who have long contributed to the escalation of a conflict have then reversed their religious interpretations of it. They call for peace and forgiveness and try to adapt their religious messages to the expectations of believers. In Bosnia, for example, many clerics have been active in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation, although they previously incited intolerance and supported the segregation of Muslims, Catholics and Serbian Orthodox (Steele 2003). A similar

[9] This can be observed in Uganda or in Chechnya. The previous support for violent movements on the part of the population decreased in the course of the conflict. The rebel groups evolved from mass movements to isolated guerrilla groups. However, violent conflicts do not always develop in this way. In many conflicts contrary developments take place and people's acceptance of peaceful means of conflict resolution diminishes. In these cases the effect on the religious elites would be expected to be contrary to that named above (see Cole 2007).

situation can be observed in Ireland. Religious elites in the Catholic and the Protestant communities long contributed to the escalation of the conflict between the two denominations. However, as the violence ended, the position of the churches became much more moderate and constructive. Instead of emphasizing the insurmountable differences between the communities, they began to underscore the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

4 The Risks and Opportunities of Religious Frames for Peace

If religious elites act rationally, their actions are also influenced by the potential costs of their engagement for peace. Clerics who are committed to peace in violent conflicts take some risks. There is a possibility that, if they call for forgiveness and tolerance in a setting where people are oppressed or violated, they will be stigmatized as traitors by those affected (Little/Appleby 2004). In addition to physical threats, there is danger that believers will abandon the clerics because they do not believe in their peace appeals, or that other influential clerics from within their community will condemn them. Finally, the risk exists that radical political groups will threaten them. Clerics are aware of these risks and take them into account in deciding for or against active peace engagement.

Accordingly, the question of what influences the level of risk arises.[10] It must be assumed that the risks will be lower if these religious calls for peace prevail over religious calls for violence. As long as clerics' radical religious messages of violence succeed in dominating the internal discourse in a religious community, the greater is the likelihood that clerics calling for peace will face the above-mentioned risks. In view of this, clerics will espouse peace when they expect that they are in a position to surmount the opposing religious calls for violence. Their chances of success are related especially to the strength of the religious peace coalition, the characteristics of the religious community, and the empirical credibility of religious calls for peace.

The Strength of Peace Coalitions

The risks for individual clerics are lower if they distribute peace messages within the framework of a broader and influential coalition of religious elites. This implies that the more clerics of different hierarchical ranks are engaged in a coalition, the higher the possibility that they can effectively challenge calls for violence from other religious elites directed at their believers. Such alliances provide credibility in various ways and have the ability to effectively

[10] For religious calls for peace to be successful, they have to consider several nonreligious surrounding conditions, such as the further development of the conflict or the behavior of political and civil elites. In our view, these factors are not crucial in the decision-making processes of religious elites. The factors mentioned in the following discussion are the most important ones, but it must be noted that other factors could have an influence upon the decisions of religious elites in specific cases.

transmit their messages to believers through diverse channels. Nevertheless, this holds true for both the dominant frame and the counter-frame within one religious community.

The clerics are the visible face of their frames; their credibility determines the credibility of the particular frame (Wiktorowicz 2004: 161; Benford/Snow 2000: 621-622). The holders of high holy offices are seen as the official spokespeople of their religious community due to their formal position. They symbolize theological knowledge and sacral authority (Wiktorowicz 2004: 161; De Juan/Hasenclever 2009; Carroll 1981; Nepstad 2004). Nevertheless, the hierarchical level is only one element of the potential accessibility and credibility of a frame. Furthermore, local religious elites such as priests, imams and gurus are often active over a long time period in their community and therefore well established. Their daily contact with people and their long-term charitable engagement make them credible (Appleby 2001: 826-827).

Religious peace messages prevail over religious calls for violence if they reach believers. What matters is that the messages can be transported to the latter. High-ranking clerics normally have access to the communications infrastructure of their religious community. This infrastructure includes supraregional networks, important religious schools, churches, and mosques. On the other hand, local clerics have a different kind of access to believers. Often they represent the only direct contact that believers have to an institutionalized religion. Local religious elites thus have a unique capacity to deliver their religious interpretation directly to the people through religious worship, discussion groups or common prayers (Polletta/Ho 2006: 201; Johnston/Figa 1988; Longman 1998).

Within coalitions of high-ranking and local religious elites, the risk for each individual cleric that believers will reject his/her message of peace and abandon him/her decreases. In such a coalition the individual messages of peace and condemnations of violence are supported and witnessed by many other potentially credible clerics. Additionally, as the influence of the peace coalition grows, its influence becomes a motivational factor in itself: clerics' willingness to support the messages of broad and influential peace coalitions grows as the former try to be part of the dominant religious discourse within their community. But the weaker the coalition, the higher the risk will be for the individual cleric. In many conflicts, for instance, in Thailand or the Philippines, similar processes can be observed: if religious peace coalitions achieve a certain strength and influence, more and more passive or violence-supporting clerics join.

However, the idea that peace engagement will exist if peace engagement has already existed appears to be a circular argument. Nonetheless, two important conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the above-mentioned motivational mechanisms must surpass a certain threshold to operate at all. That is to say, the greater the number of clerics from diverse hierarchical ranks who are affected by these motivational factors, the greater the number who will be prepared to engage for peace and the more likely it is that peace engagement will be observable at all. Secondly, as the impact of a peace coalition grows, the peace coalition itself acts as a motivational factor. Believers accept the calls for peace, and thus it becomes more

difficult to defend opposing interpretations to believers. Correspondingly, it is more likely that clerics will increasingly engage in peace efforts even though they themselves are not affected by the original motivational factors.

The Structure of the Religious Community

The structure of the religious community has an ambivalent influence on possible peace frames. Religious calls for peace can be extraordinarily effective in institutionalized religious communities. The institutionalized character of the community can increase the above-mentioned self-energizing effect. Conversely, the institutionalized structure can also suppress religious peace initiatives by increasing the risk of such engagement for religious elites.

Believers have access to the diverse interpretations of the different religious elites if communities have formal structures to connect the various parishes among themselves. Structures such as national religious organizations, regional and local councils, and miscellaneous supraregional, supra-ethnic, and supra-dogmatic affiliations create a "religious public sphere" in which diverse interpretations must be justified and in which religious calls for peace can challenge radical interpretations (Hasenclever/De Juan 2007). Furthermore, if formal mechanisms regulate the access to finances and material resources or the configuration of religious education in a religious community, religious peace coalitions can utilize these structures to effectively challenge radical elites. In this regard, Johnston and Figa have demonstrated that the absence of formal networks simplifies the propagation of radical interpretations by local religious elites because these elites do not have to fear sanctions (Johnston/Figa 1988: 44). Likewise, Fox noticed in his study that religious communities with marginal formal contacts among themselves are involved most often in violent conflicts (Fox 2004: 99).

The fact that these formal structures can increase the effectiveness of religious calls for peace is obvious, for instance, in Iraq or in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Ayatollah al-Sistani propagated his religious calls for peace over a wide network in all regions of Iraq. Simultaneously, he used his influence to marginalize the radical elements within the traditional structures (Gleave 2007: 65-70; Cole 2003). In the DRC the Catholic hierarchy used the church's communications media network to disseminate its calls for peace. For example, it distributed its peace calls through pastoral letters which were distributed to all parishes in the country. The importance of the internal structure is obvious in this special case, as only in the east of the DRC were religious calls for violence successful. In this region the individual parishes were more or less isolated from the central structure of the Catholic Church during the ongoing war. Thus, the peace-promoting communication from the central church did not reach them effectively (Longman 2001).

Furthermore, structures which provide the believers with access to diverse religious interpretations may not only increase the efficiency of religious calls for peace but may also enhance the willingness for peace engagement within the religious community. They may

advance the strength of the above-mentioned self-energizing effects of the peace engagement. Other clerics' motivation to join the peace coalition may increase with the growing impact of the religious peace coalition in the community and the growing assertiveness of the peace-promoting messages. The impact of these mechanisms is especially great if the various parishes of one religious community are connected among themselves, and if the religious authority of singular clerics is allocated through formal mechanisms. The peace coalition can effectively use its growing influence in the religious community to marginalize radical clerics and to distribute its calls for peace as a credible alternative in every parish of the religious community. Furthermore, during these long processes the willingness of the clerics to become part of the peace messages of the religious majority grows because they do not want to lose their own position within their community or the loyalty of their believers.

Factors which increase the effectiveness of religious calls for peace could also decrease the risk that accompanies these calls. The institutional integration of religious elites acts in a preventive manner because it allows for the dissenting (radical) interpretations of individual clerics to be recognized for what they are. Other religious elites can then effectively condemn these radical clerics and/or question them in front of their believers. In this manner the impact of individual clerics depends on the support or lack of support for their messages on the part of other religious elites. But what happens if the religious messages of violence are not a dissenting opinion in the religious community? If the violent discourse is dominant, then these mechanisms could have an equally suppressive effect on individual's engagement for peace. They then make it easier for the mainstream to discredit the representatives of moderate peace-promoting messages. Simultaneously, the peace-promoting clerics could effectively be penalized: they could be either isolated from access to the religious community's resources or deposed from their rank.

The impact of these mechanisms has been obvious in strongly formalized communities like the Serb-Orthodox Church in Bosnia or the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. Since the 1950s the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka has been dominated by monks who have advocated an uncompromising approach towards the Tamil minority. A number of them have disseminated these fundamental principles in their sermons and their teachings since independence (De Silva/Bartholomeusz 2001). Those monks who have suggested concessions to the Tamils as elements of religious peace initiatives have been branded as traitors. Due to the hierarchical and strongly formalized structure of the community, the more radical majority of monks has been able to oppress the peaceful messages of the minority. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the monks who have taken a moderate, conciliatory position towards the Tamil minority, have—according a survey of Buddhist monks from the 1980s—had a weak and underprivileged status within the Buddhist community (Katz 1988).

An analogue situation existed within the Serbian Orthodox Church. When the church finally escaped a long period of manipulation and oppression at the end of Yugoslavia's Tito era, it tried to gain more influence. In the course of this process, a neoconservative opposition

secured influence within the church. At the beginning of the 1990s it then grew to become the dominant faction in the religious community and thus limited the role of the moderates within the church. During the war, this neoconservative wing played an important part in the religious legitimization of violence. Here, too, individual clerical opponents existed, such as Bishop Hrizostom in the northeast of Bosnia or the priest-monk Ignatije Midic. Both condemned the alliance between the church and the nationalists and the displacement of Muslims in Bosnia (Steele 2003: 136-137; Radic 1998: 197). Nevertheless, the religious majority effectively oppressed these voices.

These examples raise the question of how these radical viewpoints were able to gain influence in the respective religious communities when the structures should in fact have supported the previously dominant moderate clerics. Both cases show that this occurred mainly via external political support. Nationalist politicians supported the radical clerics in Bosnia and Sri Lanka. This political interference diminished the effect of the peace-favoring religious community's structure. Similar mechanisms have been observed in other countries, for instance, in Rwanda prior to the genocide or in Chechnya at the beginning of the 1990s (Radic 1998; De Silva/Bartholomeusz 2001; Van Hoyweghen 1996; Rotar 2002).

The Characteristics of the Frame Environment

Interpretations of conflict are never propagated in a vacuum but are rather integrated in a specific structural and cultural context (Benford/Snow 2000; Williams/Kubal 1999; Swidler 1986; Polletta/Ho 2006: 194; Williams 2004). People will believe in religious messages more easily when these messages correspond to their structural and cultural context and thus their daily reality. Accordingly, the empirical credibility of religious calls for violence or peace is predominantly affected by the attitude of believers towards believers of another religion. Religious calls for violence are usually based upon a religious definition of in and out-group, of friend and foe (Seul 1999). Therefore, religious frames for peace will be more successful under conditions in which the lived reality of believers does not correspond to such a distinction. In contrast, a frame environment with an in-group/out-group distinction between religious communities favors religious frames for violence. In such a situation there is a great risk that believers will distance themselves from clerics and their calls for peace simply because the peace message stands in contrast to daily experiences with or perceptions of the other religious community. As clerics try to prevent situations in which there is a substantial risk that believers will distance themselves from their interpretations, they will therefore be reluctant to engage for peace themselves in communities with weak relations to other religious communities. Accordingly, the likelihood of religious calls for peace decreases the more the respective religious communities are isolated from each other.

Conversely, religious calls for violence will be at odds with the daily life of believers if, for example, institutionalized interreligious dialogue forums exist at the level of the believers

and at the level of the clerics; if the communities share common religious traditions or rituals; or if a high level of social cross-linkages between religious communities exists, for example, familiar relations and mixed marriages. The latter increase the likelihood that religious calls for peace will be enforced.

In Thailand the interreligious relationship between Muslims and Buddhists was relatively harmonious over a long period of time. The religious communities shared local customs and rituals; reciprocal distinctions and isolations were the exception (Haemindra 1977; Horstmann 2004). These traditionally positive relations between the religious communities hampered the success of radical messages at the beginning of the rebellion in the 1960s. In Chechnya the opposite situation existed. Here, the interreligious relationship between Muslims and Christians was not deeply rooted. The dominant Sufi brotherhoods were mainly private organizations. Many of their supporters cut themselves off from Soviet society and avoided contact with "nonbelievers" (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1983; Khalilov 2002). Thus the number of ethnically mixed families in predominantly Chechen regions was exceptionally small (Bryan 1992: 197). Likewise, the interreligious dialogue between the Muslim and Christian-Orthodox communities was little developed and hardly institutionalized. Cooperation was of a pragmatic nature and above all spontaneous. Under these circumstances, the radical messages of religious distinction from rebels and clerics in the second Chechen war had a high level of empirical credibility among the believers.

The larger social environment also plays a significant role in the decision-making processes of religious elites. One important dimension is civil society. The configuration of civil society in relation to the religious demography is important for religious frames for peace. Institutionalized civil societies with overlapping religious boundaries are able to increase the effectiveness of such frames. They contribute to interreligious understanding, enhance contact, and create forums for exchange between believers (Varshney 2001: 375). Under such conditions religious elites can credibly point to commonalities and can rebut stereotypes by referring to existing contacts between the different religious communities. The importance of civil society has been impressively demonstrated in a study by Varshney. At the beginning of the 1990s, many cities in India experienced violent riots between Hindus and Muslims. Yet in other Indian cities with comparable demographic conditions no violence occurred. Varshney plausibly links these findings to the different structures of the various civil societies. No violence occurred in civil societies with close formalized contacts between believers from different religious communities (Varshney 2001). Under these conditions the peace frame had the highest level of empirical credibility and also corresponded to the interests of the majority of the population.

In light of the importance of the relationship between religious communities, the crucial role played by the specific moment of the engagement for peace is clear. Sustained periods of peace can result in the development of positive group relations, both at the civil society level and at the interreligious-relations level, and can subsequently reduce the empirical

credibility of religious calls for violence. However, once existing conflicts have escalated into violence, the danger exists that civil society structures and the relationship between various believers will change rapidly. Mixed marriages become more rare; interreligious dialogue breaks off; and civil society structures are reduced to individual communities. Furthermore, the daily life of people then corresponds with the religiously delimiting and violence-supporting messages. In such a phase, religious calls for peace will be less likely to succeed. From the perspective of clerics, the inevitable risks of engaging for peace will increase; religious calls for peace will thus become rare. Only after long periods of violence do the chances of success once again increase. A hurting stalemate (Zartman 1985) may increase people's calls for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, as explained above. In such a situation not only the clerics' motivation to advocate for peace but also the chances of success of the corresponding calls for peace will increase (Jessop et al. 2008; Kelleher/Johnson 2008).

5 Conclusion

In contrast to the extensive studies on religious escalation, religious engagement for peace has previously received little academic attention. This is especially true with respect to the causal explanations for such engagement; that is, the question of why religious elites engage in peaceful conflict resolution. In the recent debate the implicit assumption that the behavior of religious elites is based upon their normative convictions has dominated. Thus, clerics espouse peace because this complies with the peaceful imperative of their religion. From the perspective of social science, however, a sole link to individual religious beliefs is not a satisfactory explanation. Furthermore, the justification for the complete omission of rational elements in the analysis of religious elites' decision-making processes is not clear. Often clerics are excluded from rational analysis because it is assumed that they act upon their religious beliefs and moral considerations. Nevertheless, elites may also act rationally and purposefully in pursuit of their religious goals. It is conceivable that religious elites, regardless of their underlying religious beliefs, decide to engage for peace because it may seem strategically useful in a given situation. Moreover, it is not plausible that the relationships in which believers are integrated are not taken into consideration by religious elites.

Given these shortcomings, our argument in this article has been that rational considerations could play a role in religious engagement for peace. In our view, religious elites often appeal for peace when they are unilaterally dependent on political elites who are being attacked by rebels. Additionally, religious competition within a religious community may cause peace framing to be regarded as a promising tool for winning believers. Finally, believers could also persuade religious elites to undertake peace framing by exerting a high level of pressure. When we assume that religious leaders act in a rational way, it seems plausible that they assess the chances of success and the risks of a possible peace engagement as part of their decision-making process. Their decision to support peace or violence will largely de-

pend on the frame environment. In situations in which clerics anticipate that their messages will be effectively challenged by other clerics and that their engagement will reduce their own religious influence, the likelihood that religious calls for peace will be made decreases. Crucial in this regard is the relative strength of the religious peace coalition, the structure of the religious community, and the particular frame environment.

None of the above-mentioned factors (the elites' relationships to the government, to other religious elites, and to the believers; the strength of the religious peace coalition; the structure of the religious community; the frame environment) works in isolation. They influence each other and together affect the behavior of religious elites. They can reinforce or oppose each other—for example, when the motivation for action emanates from the three levels of the elites' relationships mentioned above but the risks of peace engagement are extremely high. This leads us to the conclusion that, in every single case, the importance of all factors and their interaction with one another needs to be taken into account. Only in this manner can we understand how rational decision-making processes influence the behavior of religious elites.

This does not mean that normative aspects are irrelevant. Undoubtedly, many clerics are engaged for peace because this is in keeping with their inherent religious beliefs. Nonetheless, our argument is that this explanation only applies in some cases. Often the behavior of religious elites can only be understood if it is acknowledged that strategic considerations also influence their decisions. When one acknowledges this rationality on the part of clerics, their religious engagement for peace in many conflicts can be accurately explained.

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