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New Wars and Religious Identity Politics

HEINRICH SCHÄFER

Within a framework of globalization and the development of different modernities, religion has become an important element in a new type of conflict: regional war between mobilized cultural (mostly ethnic) identities. Conflicts in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, Nigeria, East Timor and elsewhere mix ethnic, religious, political, social and economic factors. Many scholars have called this new type of war post-modern, privatized, unofficial, post-national or simply new. Concepts are still in flux, as the phenomenon is recent. Nevertheless, one thing is obvious: broadly speaking, such conflicts are distinct from classical modern warfare between nations.

Globalization and the reculturing of politics

These "new wars" stem from the different consequences of the transformation of modern political and economic structures under accelerated globalization.

In terms of economic structures, Dieter Senghaas [1] points to the failure of post-colonial development-nationalism in third-world countries as an important factor in the rise of a militant reculturalization of politics. Often, those elites who are largely responsible for economic failure seek to elude the opposition of frustrated middle classes and the marginalized by inciting ethnic conflict. In addition, strategies of reculturalization of politics focus on the reaffirmation of rights and identity over against strong influences from outside. The goal of such reformulations is a new and feasible political project for the actors involved.

Another context for militant ethnic and religious reorientation is the decline of the modern nation-state. It has given way to "new visions of collective identity", [2] such as multicultural or fundamentalist movements and communal religious or ethnic movements. And it paves the way for new forms of conflict, since the power and legitimacy of the nation-state are severely damaged. From above, transnational economic and political organizations reduce the state's ability and competence for effective action; while from below, the increasing lack of financial resources (e.g. tax revenues), the increase and privatization of violence, and the very social movements themselves scatter the state's authority. Inside, ineffectiveness and corruption dissipate state legitimacy.

Finally, growing social differences between the winners and losers in globalization are becoming increasingly apparent. Declining social classes all over the world have a clear sense of reduced opportunities. In the absence of a clearly articulated political consciousness of this situation,[3] the field of cultural relations – ethnic or religious – becomes attractive for the mobilization of people in order to achieve political goals. Religion and ethnicity can become a resource for political and military power.

Old and new wars

Modern war has its origins in the nation-state. Pacification inside the state (e.g. the end of feuds) brought about the creation of conscripted and (later) professional armies and potentially hostile relations with other states. Between the 15th and 19th centuries war developed into a highly governed and controlled activity. The kind of war described by Clausewitz is (at least in theory) a rational instrument of political power, and the various Geneva conventions aimed to regulate and minimize the impact of military activity on civilians. Modern war was organized according to three basic distinctions: public vs private, domestic vs external and civilian vs military.

Religion in classic modernity belonged only in the private sphere, and thus lost its importance as a rationale for war. The state's interests dictated and legitimized military activity. Along with nationalism, religion only served as a means to instil loyalty in troops and populations.

A first step in the dissolution of the three basic distinctions of modern war was the "total war" of the 20th century. Whole societies were subdued under the logic of war: an all-encompassing war economy turned everything important towards war and so everything had to be bombed. A second step was guerrilla and counter-insurgency warfare: in both (in very different ways) the civilian population and the use of propaganda came to be a central factor for military activities.

New wars go a step further. Mary Kaldor analyzed the conflict in Bosnia (1992–95) as an example of a new kind of war. Yugoslavia was transformed from communism to capitalist modernity with less precipitation than the Soviet Union, but with considerable friction. From above, the break-up of the state delegitimized ruling political elites. From below, economic decline and separatist politics fuelled insecurity. Over against this increasing scarcity of political resources, the discourse of elites changed from communism to nationalism, mediating nationalism through ethnic and religious identities.

Ante bellum society in Bosnia, on the other hand, did not in itself embody centuries-old hatred, as some politicians put it. It was ethnically and religiously heterogeneous and thus provided the raw material for political polarization. The distinctive element in the groups to be polarized was not language but religion. Bosnian Muslims are ethnic Serbs who converted during Ottoman rule and went on to become the economically strongest members of Bosnian society. Orthodox Serbs and a Catholic Croatian minority generally had weaker social positions. The Ottoman empire's millet system (different religions in one administrative unit) created the space for the coexistence of these groups in Bosnia. This "good neighbourhood" *(komsiluk)* was even called an institutionalized communitarianism by Xavier Bougarel. Intercultural ties, via intermarriage and an encompassing city-based secular culture, were fostered by the communist secularism of Tito. On the other hand, social differences persisted between the more urban Muslims and the more rural Serbs and Croats.

It is very striking that six months before the elections of 1990, 74 percent of voters welcomed the possible proscription of nationalist parties in order to preserve good neighbourhood. Afterwards, however, political mobilization occurred along ethnic-nationalist lines. People had little choice other than to gather around their own ethnic tradition. But this tradition was mobilized into a dynamic of political polarization and heated up by religious institutions. It would not be long before snipers fired on the peace movement in Sarajevo, paramilitary groups organized and a new war broke out, the main goal of which was the elimination of a "secular, multicultural, pluralistic society".[4]

According to Kaldor, the most important characteristic of the war in Bosnia is that it was a war of different power groups (not *the* state) *against* civilians. This turns the concept of modern warfare (according to which regular troops fight against each other) upside down. It also changes the concept of guerrilla and counter-insurgency warfare, for the state is no longer the most important military actor. Instead, private actors have become increasingly important: paramilitary groups under criminal leaders cooperate with the state and conduct their own business by means of warfare and collateral damage. Foreign mercenaries (e.g. mujahedin or US military firms) engage with different parties for the sake of money, recognition by political elites, or simply adventure.

Local militias seek to protect villages from these groups. The regular troops of interested states or state-like structures also engage in the fighting, as well as international regular military units (e.g. UN, NATO or US troops). In Bosnia as in many other places (e.g. Rwanda and Somalia), regular troops were in no position to protect civilians, even if they wanted to. The most important military actors were irregular forces that acted flexibly and were widely dispersed, but remained in close contact by means of communication technology. Their target was the civilian population.

In order to gain political control of the population, terror against civilians was systematically employed to achieve religious/ethnic "cleansing" and the division of territories. Amid economic circumstances that did not allow for much more than living on humanitarian aid, fleeing or becoming criminals, members of paramilitary groups decided on the latter. Meanwhile, regular troops and mercenaries are mostly paid from outside by governments or diasporas, and irregular troops are financed to a great extent by illegal "war taxes", extortion, robbery, pillage, smuggling (weapons, drugs, diamonds, etc.) and black-market activities. Thus, the economic logic of war also gets turned around. Members of paramilitary forces – especially higher ranks – find in war and common insecurity a source of income. Consequently, their goal is not to re-establish civil institutions and public security, but to maintain for as long as possible a state of common insecurity and the rule of the strongest. As war is business and civilians are the main target, it is no wonder that irregular forces neither establish clear fronts nor seek to battle enemy forces. On the contrary, they may even deal with the enemy for economic benefits.

One thing is always very probable: any group of irregular forces will repress, terrorize or exterminate moderate civilians. According to Kaldor,[5] while members of other ethnic groups are targeted, another very important target group are those who seek to moderate conflicts and help their neighbours: Serbs who hide or defend their Muslim neighbours, Jews who help Muslims flee, and many other courageous people.

This new war is not premodern. It is not really a regression to "medieval" conditions. Its actors rely on transnational contacts and allegedly promote national interests. According to Kaldor,[6] such alleged national interests moulded the way in which the Bosnian war was perceived by international observers. International diplomacy dealt with the war as a conflict between competing nationalisms instead of a war waged by power groups against civilians and civilized life. Its discourse constructed ethnic-national units and their representatives, while

1990 pre-election conditions showed completely different (more social and economic) fault lines among the population. Such an essentialist view corresponds perfectly to the ways in which modern nation-states regulate external affairs. Precisely for this reason it fails to recognize the power relationships in informal warfare between paramilitary (and proto-national) troops and civilians. On the contrary, diplomacy recognized "warlords" (e.g. Karadzic) as representatives of a potentially national population. Thus, "ethnic cleansing" created facts and the policy of territorial division acknowledged them. If the genocidal character of what happened had been perceived and reckoned with, priorities might have been different. The foremost priority should have been the protection of civilians, the inclusion of local civil-society organizations in policy planning and negotiations, and the creation of safe territories for the reconstruction of democratic institutions (e.g. an international protectorate), all under a more powerful UN military presence. "The real challenge was not to preserve peace, but to enforce humanitarian law."[7]

Identity politics

Many of the new conflicts follow the logic of an ethnicization of social relationships.[8] According to this approach, it is erroneous to think that ethnic belonging itself is the reason for conflict. Such an opinion corresponds to the nationalist theory (going back to Herder) that nations themselves are rooted in ethnicity. Instead, in a process of ethnicization, actors overstate ethnic traditions for the sake of political power. Much like religious fundamentalism, this process is anchored in traditions of everyday life, selects certain symbols and stresses them as emblematic for certain "ethnic identities", and combines them with political programmes over against others. Such ethnic identities are at the same time traditional and constructed; they correspond to feelings of belonging and emphasize artificial contradictions. They are traditional in terms of central contents of their discourse: they use old and well-known symbols, refer to collective memory and operate according to habitual practices of certain populations. They are constructed in terms of the boundaries that they draw by overstating certain contents over against alleged enemies: they use symbols to mark differences and contradictions and to produce self-recognition through the exclusion of others. Emblematic labels serve for both aspects of this process.

In such a way, traditional ethnic belonging can be transformed into a resource for political power. In situations in which economic or political resources are too scarce to achieve political goals or control over economic goods, elites can construct conflictive scenarios and mobilize people in terms of ethnicity and/or religion. Such a situation can involve the breakdown of a nation-state, developmental crises and collective confrontation with an extremely strong external pressure. As the once overarching distinction between left and right becomes more and more meaningless, and as political opposition to globalization becomes more and more global itself, a political articulation of the social contradictions between the winners and losers in globalization is not clearly developed. The void of political self-definition is ready to be filled with ethnic and religious identity discourse, and socio-economic problems transform into symbolic violence.

Collective identity is a resource for those with and those without economic and/or political power.[9] But identity politics bring with them the danger of an uncontrollable development, for they bargain with a good that cannot be bargained with: identity. It is neither true nor false that new wars lack rationality. For ethnic-nationalist, religious and (para) military elites, a new war is primarily a purposive rational enterprise to further political and economic benefits – even if at the same time they identify with their ethnic or religious backgrounds. For the mobilized marginal population, however, ethnic and religious identity is much more than a political calculus. Their religious and/or ethnic identity represents for them truth, life and dignity.

Goldstein and Rayner[10] describe the differences between identity and interest-related conflict. Conflicts about material interests have a clear focus and can be addressed quite easily because they involve "third things" like material goods and political positions. Strategies point towards material betterment, which people value less than life itself. Negotiation is possible. Interest-related conflicts correspond to the highly developed rational choice framework of modern politics. Identity conflicts, on the other hand, are very hard to address politically. Negotiation is much more difficult, especially under the presuppositions of a rational choice framework. This is because identity conflicts resist the clarification of goals and reasons, and tend towards mystification. Moreover, they involve the intricate logics of self-esteem, dignity and recognition, the sense of belonging and the habitus of actors. Actors orient their strategies (e.g. from negotiation to suicide bombing) with dispositions anchored beyond the limits of the individual in religion and community, which means that individual life is not of primary importance. But it is precisely this trait of collective identity affirmation that answers the demands of individuals when they are uprooted and lack the cognitive and emotional dispositions to get along in a new situation.

In such circumstances (former) governmental, political or intellectual elites, traditional leaders, religious personalities and skilful criminals can serve their material interests by mobilizing people through ethnic and religious discourse. The higher the insecurity that they themselves produce, the more attractive is their offer and the fewer possibilities are left for alternatives on the basis of everyday cooperation or religious syncretism. And the more people can be engaged in collective violence, the more cohesion is produced by the bonds of guilt and hatred. Such an environment fosters a typical combination of factors for identity politics in the context of new wars. The main actors are more and more non-governmental groups, movements and organizations; the main resource for mobilization is discourse and the main resource for implementation is symbolic and physical violence; and the main contents of discourse are ethnic and/or religious. The conducing logic is Janus-faced: purposive, materially oriented rationality among the elites, and ethnic or religious identity affirmation among their followers.

Religion

Religion is an important part of ethnic identity, especially in non-European modernities and traditional societies.

On the macro level, the development of ethnic units and the boundaries between them followed religious differences, for in traditional societies religion was of pivotal importance. Even the missionary activities of Christianity and Islam did not change this pattern, but followed pre-existing social boundaries, including ethnic ones. Thus, material religion might have changed in certain social units, but it still goes together with boundaries between neighbours. Only in rapid migrational movements and multicultural societies like Canada or Malaysia does this picture seem to change. There have been multicultural and multireligious formations before (e.g. under the Ottomans, or Muslim rule in Spain); and even in a multicultural setting, religion often plays an important role as a cultural identity marker of ethnic groups. As the example of the USA shows, civil religion can overwhelm different religious identities as an ideology of national unity and implicitly confirm the dominion of one ethnic group over the whole multicultural setting.

On the micro level of collective identities, religion can be understood as a specific condensation of culture. We can think about a collective cultural identity as a broad network of dispositions to perceive, to judge and to act, common to all actors of a certain culture and, at the same time, comprising some specific differences according to individuals, groups, etc. Religion traditionally is a region of this network, where the fabric of signification is very densely woven. Even in European secularized societies, religion serves as a common reference, be it positive or negative. In the event of an ethnic revival, religion mostly acquires the role of an important, if not pivotal, operator for mobilization.

Symbolic violence

In a context of decaying nation-states and the growing significance of non-governmental actors, public discourse becomes increasingly important in general and, more specifically, for the exercise of power.[11] Especially in new wars, social movements and organizations (like paramilitary groups) act against one another. Ethnic and religious identity mobilization operates with symbolic boundaries.[12] As an identity is being constructed, some people are included and others excluded. This is normal and does not lead to problems in everyday life as long as communication is flowing and expectations are basically positive. But when there are very scarce resources and increasing polarization of interests, identities reaffirm themselves and the gaps between them widen. Actors perceive any competing identity as a threat, not to some delimited interests, but to their own identity – to everything they are.

In these clashes of mobilized identities, symbolic violence gains an important role. First of all, it means not recognizing the identity of others as legitimate. Thus, it implies negative ascription (labelling). Strong actors opt for racism, the weak for the "strategy of exclusive self-recognition",[13] which means fundamentalism.

Religion plays an important role in these processes, especially in combination with ethnic identity. Religious socialization – in life-cycle rites, schools, family traditions, etc. – closely combines with the formation of cultural habitus. In ethnic mobilization, therefore, religion for many people represents an anchor point for ethnic self-recognition. Habitual dispositions to combine religious and cultural practices (learned since primary socialization) can become salient and most significant in situations of conflict and construction of (counter) identities. Deep-rooted experiences of belonging can thus be used as widely recognized emblematic markers for political identification. It helps even more that religion provides many ancient and long-standing means for dramatizing and representing identities, like processions, shrines, life-cycle rites, everyday rites, meaningful buildings, etc. Often, these practices and objects are combined with places or territories, but with modern mobility and growing diaspora, religious symbols become transnational as well – even though they still might be linked to significant places like Mecca or Rome. In times of crisis, these anchor points provide a source of emotional security for individuals and, at the same time, they link these people to strategies of politically interested identity mobilization. In this context, religion offers a double usage to those who manipulate it. It is generally open to combining with arguments from reason and common sense; thus, it is possible to link to secular political discourse and even to further secularist goals. On the other hand, religion does not have to be reasonable in a "worldly" sense. Consequently, religion is a strong means to overcome instrumental rationality, such as presupposed in rational choice scenarios about human action. The example of Palestinian suicide bombers shows that the sense of belonging to a community and concrete expectations of paradise introduce another kind of rationality, the criteria for which reside far beyond individual benefits.[14] Finally, religion also comprises a certain tendency to make actors believe that their positions are absolute (not relative to others), which leads to fundamentalist mobilization.

New wars

In new wars religion serves as a resource to mobilize people behind (ethnically framed) political interests. As an example, we take a closer look at the Bosnian experience.

As a result of the Ottoman *millet* system and Tito's Yugoslavia, urban culture in Bosnia was quite secular in pre-war society. Spoken language was not an identity marker, since Serbocroatian was common to all. Religious differences were the only important markers of difference between ethnic groups, even though much of the Muslim population is ethnically Serbian as well. Under Ottoman rule the Serbian Orthodox Church became an important agent of self-affirmation for the regional non-Muslim population. Nonetheless, religious differences in urban life lost their importance amid increasing secularization and religious intermarriage. And all over the place "good neighbourhood" *(komsiluk)* in everyday life had its counterpart in syncretic religious practices. Nevertheless religion was still a strong *possible* resource for differences. The conflictual history of the region had contributed to the development and spread of ethnic-religious myths like that of the Christ-like Serbian King Lazar, which anchor deeply in the collective memory and can link to remembrances of particular events like second world war atrocities. And they can serve as a rationale for counter-action later on, as was the case with the alleged destruction of Serbian monasteries and genocide against Serbs by Kosovar Albanians in 1986.

Again, because they are rooted in everyday socialization – mothers' tales and family chats at lunch – these socio-religious myths have a strong potential for mobilization.

Such myths are of direct use to political interest groups, church leaders and elites in their strategies of ethnic identity mobilization by discourse. A good example of the political construction of an ethnic-religious myth can be found in the activities surrounding the 600th anniversary of the battle at Kosovo Polje in 1989. According to Sells,[15] this celebration served as the culmination of many activities with the same focus: to construct a belligerent ethnic-religious Serbian identity. The alleged destruction of monasteries was one element. Another was that the bones of Nazi-killed Serbs were ritually exhumed and nationalist propaganda depicted Muslim Serbs, Croats and Albanians as genocidal. At the commemoration of the battle these symbols were put together by Slobodan Milosevic and leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The medieval Prince Lazar, killed by the Turks in the 1389 battle, was depicted as a Christ-like figure so that the defeat could be called the Serbian Golgotha. The historical Serbian heartland of Kosovo thus appears as the Serbian Jerusalem. Against this background, the Nazi killings of the second world war and alleged attacks against Orthodox religious symbols (the symbolically most important monasteries) became religiously *and* militarily charged symbols.

This symbolic operation reaches still deeper when seen in the context of "Christoslavism". The belief that Slavs are Christian by the very fact of their being Slavs uses religion to absolutize ethnic identity and substitutes ethnic belonging for religious orientation. In consequence, all those Serbs who (historically) converted to Islam are not Serbs any more, but "Turks". And as such they are to be made fully responsible for the death of King Lazar on the Serbian Golgotha.

This combined political, ethnic and religious discourse produced (or invented) a new combined religious-ethnic identity: the strictly Orthodox Serbian identity. The most important boundary was drawn over against Serbs with a Muslim credo. This means that these people were most dangerous for this new identity, precisely because of similarities and not differences. As a partly invented identity, the Orthodox Serbian identity had to focus on preserving itself from "alien contamination".[16] This could be done very effectively by means of ethnic-religious "cleansing" by military force. It is precisely to this that the combination of symbols in the Kosovo Polje commemoration points. The effect of this symbolic conglomerate on (potentially mobilized) Serbian people is quite obvious: "All Muslims have the blood of King Lazar and the Serbian people since 1389 on their hands."

Finally, religion is not just a legitimation of political violence. It is a driving force that gives it direction. According to Kaldor,[17] in new ethnic warfare it is important to make certain religions uninhabitable for certain people. Genocidal action is incomplete if it leaves the symbols for religious identification intact. People of a region can be driven out, but they wish to return as long as their memory links them to it with pleasant bonds. Therefore, systematic rape and physical atrocities are possible weapons to destroy the willingness of people to reclaim their homes. Another is the systematic destruction of sites of religious identification. No wonder (para) military forces composed of Bosnian Serbs systematically destroyed non-Serbian sacral sites, removed the rubble and turned them into something else, such as car parks. Religious symbolic violence is an important element in extinguishing a sense of belonging, uprooting people and making a region psychologically uninhabitable.

Religious polarization does not tear everything apart. Traditional syncretism in the context of good neighbourhood provides strong roots of faith and solidarity in everyday life. Even under the extreme stress of ethnic-religious "cleansing" there are religious people willing to risk their lives to help those from other religions. These attitudes – though strongly traditional – are closely related to the cosmopolitan worldview of the peace movement, NGOs, etc., that search to mediate and reconstruct civil society under the conditions of new wars.

Perspectives

New wars involve ethnic and/or religious identity politics. Against the background of decaying nation-states and scattered post-colonial economies, political forces reorganize along ethnic and/or religious boundaries. Thus, religious actors come to be significant for politics and warfare. Respective conflicts are waged largely by a mixture of regular and irregular forces, most of which make a living out of the disorder that they themselves produce. One of the most important characteristics of new wars is that the civilian population is the main target. A very specific target is that part of the population which resists being mobilized for one of the fighting parties, but instead searches to reconstruct legitimate and legal institutions, defend human rights, maintain or reconstruct inter-religious tolerance, and foster multicultural, pluralistic and democratic societies. Thus, new wars can be seen as a specific means by which particularists (fundamentalists) try to eliminate cosmopolitan orientations from the political landscape.

Religion plays an important role in increasing polarization and hatred. In this sense, it is a significant resource for particularists. Yet religion has capacities to foster cosmopolitan attitudes even at the grassroots. These reside partly in its ability to relativize any human action over against the sacred and partly in the close connection of traditional folk religion with the unorthodox practical logic of everyday life.

Enforcement of cosmopolitan law

According to Kaldor,[18] habitual international strategies of intervention treat elites as the representatives of the people and the fighting parties as if they were fighting each other: Orthodox Serbs against Muslims, Hutu against Tutsi, etc. If we follow Kaldor's analysis of the Bosnian war (and her references to Rwanda and other places), we can perceive another practical logic of new wars: politically interested particularist elites against civilian populations (especially those of cosmopolitan orientation). This might not be wholly the case in any particular conflict, but it is most important that this viewpoint allows for a completely different approach to new conflicts: it makes cosmopolitan local actors the key figures for the re-establishment of law and justice.

Kaldor[19] proposes a "cosmopolitan alternative" for intervention in new wars. Fundamental to this is a focus on international law instead of geopolitics. Consequently, the major goal should be the restitution of democratically legitimate government. The rule of law can then be the basis for the execution of a legitimate monopoly of force by the state. Key partners in such a process are local cosmopolitan activists like NGOs, civil and human-rights groups, non-particularist intellectuals, etc. Such a political strategy relies on a strong and combined military and police presence of international ground forces to protect civilians active in the process of political reconstruction. This military presence should be recognized as legitimate by the civilians concerned. Finally, humanitarian aid that asphyxiates local economic activity should be transformed as fast as possible into support for the construction of a feasible local economy and political institutions. The goal of the whole process is not to go back to the pre-war situation, but to establish political institutions and civil actors that promote a society based on democratic and pluralistic standards. This is not to be taken as a universalist formula, but the intention that local political structures are shaped according to the will of the majority of the people who live in that place.

Of course, such a strategy confronts local and international antagonism. Local particularist elites do not want to negotiate power on this basis, and the dynamics of religious mobilization can be turned against international intervention as well. International powers tend to emphasize geopolitical criteria for interventions, rather than international "cosmopolitan" law. This is especially the case with US unilateralism, which looks at ethnic-religious conflict through the lens of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory,[20] and undermines the enforcement of international law by constantly breaking it and refusing to take part in a human community of legal standards. This ends up as particularist as the main protagonists in the new ethic-religious wars and tends to produce more problems than solutions.

Religion and cosmopolitanism

There is no doubt that cosmopolitan and long-standing ecumenical strategies fit well together. Obvious ecumenical counterparts are those pragmatic humanists who look for good neighbourhood and mutual understanding in terms of practical humanitarian legality and legitimacy. But without addressing the dynamics of religion in an ethnic-religious conflict it is not possible to decide on opportunities for action and the possible hazards that this action might face.

In the context of new wars we have seen a marked tendency of religion to polarize actors and to escalate cultural conflicts. Religion is drawn into the logic of identity politics, which is characterized by a complex mixture of interest-oriented and identity-oriented elements. The Janus face of the conflicts consists in the fact that the interests of political protagonists are channelled through the mobilized religious and ethnic identities of ordinary people. Purely political negotiations with protagonists do not address the religious and ethnic mobilization motifs of the people; thus, negotiations give in to the logic of particularist elites: territorial division. Mobilized religious identities, on the other hand, do not fall from heaven. They are rooted in everyday experiences and at least partly legitimate social grievances as well. There is not much sense in talking dogmatics or political opinions with particularists or fundamentalists. The problem is to understand the social and political overtones in their specific religious language and to make the long hermeneutical way back from religious enunciations to social practices by sound socio-religious analysis.

More specifically, traditional religion can play an important role in rescuing opportunities for linkage. Where particularists claim universal validity, traditional religion focuses on everyday experience; where purity is proclaimed, traditional practices are syncretic; where particularists promote long-term pretension, folk religion looks for short- and mid-term solutions to practical problems; and where political power is at stake, it will not be much more than a slight influence on decisionmaking. Traditional and practical everyday religion is a tool for problem solving and establishing a basic feeling of dignity. But as particularist or fundamentalist constructions are based on traditional religion, both have quite a lot of vocabulary in common – and traditional religion has the advantage of being closer to everyday life. This gives a certain plausibility to the semantic relinkage of mobilized religion to everyday problem-solving in the context of the pluralistic reconstruction of civil societies. Under the conditions of international intervention by UN forces and the reconstruction of legitimate political institutions, the pressure on people for ethnic-religious mobilization eases and new opportunities for a regular life arise. Relinkage to traditional religion might help in this context to demobilize exclusivistic and belligerent religious dispositions in order to assist people on their way back into ordinary life – a task that again has to be worked on together with local religious cosmopolitans.

Recommendations

What challenges do new wars pose to ecumenical policy? In general, the Colombo consultation (1994) made much headway. As for general recommendations, we can follow the advice of its authors.

Political action

The main target and victim in new wars is the civilian population, especially those who promote cosmopolitan perspectives for social and political life. It is the policy of the ecumenical movement to support and promote church and non-church groups that fight for the well-being of disadvantaged people in conflicts. It might be of use not to view the victims from one's own perspective and project one's own ideas of problem-solving onto them, but to develop a capacity for perceiving their needs from their own standpoint. More specifically, it might be of interest to link up with local strategies of specific groups to reconstruct legitimate political and social institutions in affected regions.

Military terror against proactive pluralist civilians is the most serious obstacle to the restitution of basic conditions for political and economic stability. It therefore seems to be justified within Christian social ethics to promote a stronger and more offensive military presence for UN forces in conflict zones, in order to defend civilians and stop the terror. Local partner churches might also be encouraged to cooperate with UN intervention forces.

The goal for peace-making in conflict areas is to promote the creation of legitimate institutions and local economic production. This requires the enforcement of cosmopolitan humanist law, including human-rights standards, etc. An indirect contribution to these strategies might be the public promotion of international institutions of law such as the International Criminal Court and the United Nations, in order to foster support for them among member churches and the broader public.

Religious action

Very important recommendations (e.g. to foster inter-religious dialogue) have already been made by the Colombo consultation. Here is one more specific idea. Particularist religious strategies mobilize people by polarizing religious symbolism. They choose elements of traditional religious practice to amplify them in one direction only. Thus, they take extreme forms, exalt "purity" and separate from traditional religious practice. It might be useful to help theologians and pastors of ecumenical churches to recognize the importance of traditional religions and syncretic practices for good neighbourhood and religious peace and to acknowledge the relativity of their own religious practices over against others. In this way they can be an example of recognizing the "other" where recognition does not seem to be possible.

The "essentialist" ideologies of ethnic particularists follow the logic of "we are right, because we are us". Some confessionalists have the same tendency and are easily caught up in alliances with the former. It might be of use for churches to take a close look at those tendencies within confessionalism that might overstate their specific identity at the expense of the capacity to perceive opportunities for cooperation with other churches and religions. The search for institutional unity tends towards essentialist views, too. It might be more useful and realistic to search for good opportunities for mid-range cooperation.

Religious mobilization plays an important role in particularist strategies of polarization and conflict provocation. In such a situation, any missionary activities can be caught in the dynamics of provocation and conflict escalation. Thus, it might be useful to refrain from any attempt at missionary activity and instead give a simple and human testimony of one's own faith as a basis for common life. This should of course include the firm assertion of the fundamental values of life. This does not mean an affirmation of the ecumenical movement as such, but the intention to provide criteria for mediation.

Civilians in new wars are not "collaterally damaged". Military actors target them intentionally. A theology of the cross might take this into account. Identification with the victims, then, is more than humanitarian aid. It is proactive defence.

NOTES

[1] Dieter Senghaas, *Zivilisierung wider Willen. Der Konflikt der Kulturen mit sich selbst*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1998, pp. 161ff.

[2] Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus*, vol. 129, 2000, p. 16.

[3] Mary Kaldor, *Neue und alte Kriege. Organisierte Gewalt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2000, p. 117.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 91ff.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 92ff.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[8] Klaus Eder, Bernd Giesen, Oliver Schmidtke and Damian Tambini, *Collective Identities in Action: A Sociological Approach*, manuscript, in preparation, 2003. Klaus Eder, "Protest und symbolische Gewalt. Zur Logik der Mobilisierung kollektiver Identitäten", *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen*, 11, 1998, H. 4, pp. 29–40.

[9] "Protest und symbolische Gewalt", p. 30.

[10] Jonah Goldstein and Jeremy Rayner, "The Politics of Identity in Late Modern Society", *Theory and Society*, 23, 1994, pp. 367–84.

[11] Klaus Eder, *Kulturelle Identität zwischen Tradition und Utopie. Soziale Bewegungen als Ort gesellschaftlicher Lernprozesse*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2000, p. 29.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 201ff.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[14] See Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers", *New Yorker*, 19 Nov. 2001, pp. 36–41.

[15] Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1998; and "How Serbs Used Monasteries to Entice Ethnic Hatred", www.alb-net.com/kkc/061499e.htm#15 (15 June 1999).

[16] Goldstein and Rayner, "The Politics of Identity", p. 372.

[17] Kaldor, *Neue und alte Kriege*, p. 159.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 92ff.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 177ff.

[20] Samuel Huntington, *Kampf der Kulturen. Die Neugestaltung der Weltpolitik im 21. Jahrhundert*, Munich, Europaverlag, 1996 (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996); and "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, 1993, no. 3, pp. 22–49.

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