

Maiju Lepomäki

Supporting the Peace Mediation Efforts of Religious Leaders

An Empirical Study of Co-operation between Finnish NGOs and the Ministry for
Foreign Affairs of Finland

University of Tampere

Faculty of Management

Master's Programme in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research

Master's thesis

March 2017

Abstract

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LEPOMÄKI MAIJU: Supporting the Peace Mediation Efforts of Religious Leaders: An Empirical Study of Co-operation between Finnish NGOs and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Master's thesis, 98 p.

Supervisor: Marko Lehti, docent

March 2017

The complex, protracted nature of contemporary conflicts poses increasingly significant challenges to the resolution of armed conflicts. Traditional peace mediation has proven largely inefficient in responding to the modern security challenges presented by conflicts revolving around religious and ethno-political affiliations or other issues related to perceptions of group identity. As new strategies of addressing these modern security threats have become necessary, the field of mediation has witnessed a growing emphasis on localised mediation and local ownership of peace processes, often spearheaded by non-official diplomacy. The conventional ideal of neutral, outsider third parties is more and more often replaced by new types of insider mediators. These include local religious leaders, whose mediation capacity is seen as rooted in the trust and credibility they enjoy in their communities.

The increasing global attention on the peace efforts of religious leaders has also been highly visible in Finland, which has begun to promote the work of religious peacemakers as part of its mediation policy. In light of this shift, the thesis set out to study how Finnish diplomats and non-official practitioners view the role of religious leaders, how the NGOs support the peace efforts of religious leaders and how the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) supports this work. In order to do this, the study conducted an empirical study of the work of three Finland-based non-official organisations (NGOs) active in the field: Finn Church Aid, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission. It also studied their co-operation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the effect of this collaboration on each party. This was done through the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews and written project documents, which were examined through the framework of conflict transformation, focusing

specifically on John Paul Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid and Andrea Strimling's model of co-operation between official and non-official diplomats.

The study found that despite certain differences of opinion regarding the type of religious leaders that can most effectively advance peace, the mediation experts from both the MFA and the NGOs have a similar view of the strengths and the general role of religious leaders in peacemaking. It argued that the NGOs play a central role in connecting local religious leaders to other actors, including states and international organisations. It also concluded that the NGOs' work has benefited from their co-operation with the MFA, which has similarly profited from its co-operation with the NGOs. The thesis found that, in addition to the growing acknowledgement of the importance of multi-track co-operation in the field in general, this partnership has been enabled by certain context-specific factors, such as the parties' similar or non-conflicting interests and goals, an existing structure of co-operation between the state and civil society, professional cultures that do not pose significant challenges to co-operation, mutual recognition of the power-related benefits of co-operation and strong working relationships between individuals.

Keywords: peace mediation, conflict transformation, religious leaders, faith-based diplomacy, multi-track diplomacy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Docent Marko Lehti for all of his valuable comments and guidance in writing this thesis and Dr. Hanna Ojanen for a second reading and helpful feedback.

I wish to thank all of the participants I had the opportunity to interview for this study: Mahdi Abdile, Kimmo Kiljunen, Pekka Metso, Jussi Ojala, Janne Oksanen, Antti Pentikäinen, Kristiina Rintakoski, Aaro Rytönen and Minna Saarnivaara. This study would not have been possible without all of these individuals taking time out of their busy schedules to talk to me.

I also want to express my gratitude to the staff at the Secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers for the opportunity to work with them and to benefit from their expertise in the autumn of 2016.

Finally, I am grateful to my family, friends and fellow PEACE students for their support and encouragement – not just during this writing process, but throughout all of the years and experiences leading up to it.

Thank you.

Maiju Lepomäki

March 2017

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AJWS	American Jewish World Service
CAR	Central African Republic
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
EIP	European Institute of Peace
EU	European Union
FBO	Faith-based organisation
FCA	Finn Church Aid
Felm	Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission
IRCSL	Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone
IS	Islamic State
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PVE	Prevention of violent extremism
RfP	Religions for Peace
TFIM	Tradition- and faith-oriented insider mediator
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAOC	UN Alliance of Civilizations
UN MSU – DPA	UN Mediation Support Unit in the Department of Political Affairs
UNPOS	United Nations Political Office for Somalia
US	United States
USIP	United Institute of Peace
WCC	World Council of Churches

Definitions

Peace mediation

Peace mediation is conceptualised broadly as a set of activities of a third party helping two or more disputants prevent, manage, resolve or transform conflicts, with the consent of the parties. This is close to the United Nations (2012, 4) definition of mediation as a “process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements”, or the definition of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2011, 5) as “one of several diplomatic tools for the prevention and resolution of conflicts and for confidence-building”. The definition adopted here, however, wishes to avoid emphasis on agreements or a focus on official diplomacy. While more traditional approaches among academics or practitioners define mediation in narrower terms, often focusing on negotiation and facilitation tasks, the broader conceptualisation of mediation is closer to those of peacemaking and peacebuilding. While this obscures terminological boundaries, it also reflects the international shifts in the field, with increasingly diverse groups of (often non-official) actors adopting a variety of new, unconventional approaches to resolve or transform conflicts.

Peacebuilding

While scholars sometimes use the term “peacebuilding” to refer to post-conflict activities, it is used here to refer to a broad range of approaches and processes taking place before, during and after the conflict. These activities aim to foster positive peace and lasting political and economic transformation, with a focus on addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict.

Conflict transformation

Conflict transformation aims for long-term, sustainable transformation of the dynamics sustaining and driving violent conflict. It is adopted as the theoretical framework and lens through which conflict, peace and the mediation and peacebuilding activities of religious leaders are approached. Chapter 4 elaborates on this framework of concepts.

Religious and traditional leaders

The term refers to individuals who hold high positions in traditional and religious hierarchies in their communities, be these hierarchies based on religious or spiritual values, long-standing local customs

and practices or, for example, clan-based or tribal structures. While the focus here is on religious leaders, the categories are often intertwined and mutually supportive; religious leaders often draw inspiration from various traditional, spiritual and/or religious customs and aspects of local culture. Religious leaders can also be seen as a subgroup of the broader category of tradition- and faith-based peacemakers, placing the focus on authoritative figures whose position is primarily based on religious hierarchies. Moreover, it is important to note that the study's focus on religious leaders does not in any way suggest that the role of other religious actors on lower hierarchical levels is less important. Rather, the scope of the thesis does not permit an assessment of all the various actors that make up the broader, highly diverse group of "religious actors".

Religion

The study does not intend to delve into philosophical discussions on the meaning of religion. Rather, the focus is on actors that use religious and spiritual values as an inspiration for peace work and the religious societal structures in which this work is carried out. What becomes important here is the communal role of religion and its role in social organisation and identification in communities. Religion is therefore approached as a system of beliefs, values and customs connected to the sacred and the spiritual.

1. Introduction

Over the recent decades, the use of religion to promote war has become an increasingly pressing global concern. In a post-9/11 world, religion has more and more often come to be associated with violence, extremism and fear. Despite the growing concern about the violent potential of religion – or perhaps because of it – the other side of the coin remains largely overlooked in the media and public discussions. Academics and practitioners, however, have begun to turn their attention to the potential role that religion can play in ending violent conflicts and promoting peace. While official diplomacy, traditional peace mediation and UN-dominated operations have traditionally approached conflicts from a Western, secularist point of view that perceives religion as having no place in peace- and statebuilding processes, it has increasingly been argued that ignoring religion altogether has contributed to failures in responses to several violent conflicts.

Conventional diplomatic approaches have therefore proven inefficient in addressing identity-related conflicts and phenomena like violent religious extremism. As it has become clear that these modern security threats more and more often exceed the reach of traditional diplomacy, the need for new tools and strategies has become pressing. One result of this has been the growing emphasis placed on local ownership, context-sensitivity and efforts to transform conflict dynamics “from the inside”; a shift partly advocated by non-state actors consolidating their position in the field of diplomacy. Attention has therefore turned to new types of insider mediators, one subgroup of which are religious leaders. These types of authoritative religious figures have been suggested to have particular strengths that grant them a great deal of potential to carry out various peace mediation, peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities in their communities.

This trend has also been acknowledged in Finland. While non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Finn Church Aid (FCA) and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm) have worked with religious leaders in their projects for quite some time, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) has also begun to recognise the role of religion and religious actors in its official policy. The recent official attention on the theme as well as the growing capacity and expertise of Finnish civil society actors in engaging religious leaders in peace work are noteworthy developments that to date have not been the object of extensive academic research. Furthermore, the issue is topical not only in Finland but on a global scale. Several scholars as well as practitioners in the field have

recognised the potential of religious leaders in acting as efficient mediators that can exert influence in their communities from the inside. As the involvement of religious leaders and other non-official diplomats has gained wide support, the role of the official track in supporting their role is often emphasised. However, there remains little research on how this could effectively be executed.

With these developments in mind, the motivation for this study arises from an awareness that a significant shift is taking place in Finnish mediation – one that has so far received little attention outside of a fairly small circle of individuals consisting mostly of Finnish NGO practitioners, diplomats and academics. Yet, this shift is particularly noteworthy for a number of reasons, three of which are particularly important for the current study. First, this new focus adopted by the MFA constitutes a new way of approaching mediation in the Finnish context, a fresh way to frame the Finnish contribution to international mediation. By advancing the normative basis of mediation from the angle of religious peacemakers, Finland adds a new dimension to its traditional self-image of a neutral, small bridge-builder between the West and the East. Second, this shift demonstrates the impact that NGOs can have in shaping, enacting and interacting with mediation policies. The concrete efforts to build the mediation potential of religious leaders on the ground are carried out by NGOs, but what they actually do, why this is important and how this influences foreign policy are questions that warrant more attention. These questions are about more than the way NGOs can support official diplomacy – in the Finnish case, they reveal a relationship of mutual impact and benefit. FCA and Felm have assumed increasingly active mediation roles during the past years and their work has been central to the way Finnish mediation has evolved. Third, the attention that is placed on religious leaders entails a rather bold way of approaching mediation – not just in Finland, but in the largely UN-dominated international peace architecture. It challenges certain Western ideals, many of which are still deeply ingrained in attitudes built on the ideals of liberal peacebuilding. Finally, the developments taking place could hardly be more topical in today's world, where religiously framed violence and misguided responses to such violence feed the growing confusion about the relationship between religion and conflict.

The current thesis studies how FCA, Felm and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (hereinafter the Network) view and support religious leaders' mediation and conflict transformation work in their projects and how they collaborate with the MFA in doing this. The aim of the study is twofold: first, by analysing the interviews conducted with experts from the three

organisations and the MFA, the study compares their views on the role of religious leaders in peace work and on their own relationships with each other. Second, the study examines project documents and reports in order to study the NGOs' work in the field and their role in supporting religious leaders. By conducting qualitative analysis on the interviews and the documents, the study evaluates how the views and concrete work of the NGOs and the MFA shape their co-operation with each other, and how this co-operation helps them promote the positive engagement of religious leaders in peace processes. The thesis considers the following two-part research question: How do Finnish mediation professionals from FCA, the Network, Felm and the MFA view the role of religious leaders in peace processes, and how do they co-operate in supporting religious leaders' peace efforts? As the role of religious leaders in peacemaking has mostly been analysed from the point of view of their impact on actors in their own societies, the current study aims to examine their role from a broader perspective, assessing their co-operation with third party actors, such as NGOs, who are in turn affected by their relations to states and international organisations. In doing so, it stresses that the peace efforts of religious leadership are not independent of outside dynamics and the global reality in which they operate.

The study hopes to contribute to discussions on the topic and to generate further deliberation on the themes addressed. As it concludes that the acknowledgement of the conflict transformation role of religious leaders constitutes a notable shift in Finnish approaches to mediation, and that Finnish NGOs in particular have played a significant role in bringing about these developments, the thesis aims to make this change more visible and to track some of the *whys* and *hows* of the process behind it. It does not claim to be a comprehensive, objective analysis of the peace work of religious leaders, but rather to investigate perceptions on their role and efforts to support them in the Finnish context. Nor does the study mean to provide a thorough critical analysis and review of the efficiency of the NGOs' work, but rather to illustrate their niche in the field, based on their work with religious leaders and their co-operation with the MFA. Although the study is specific to the Finnish context, some of the findings may provide useful insight for broader multi-track diplomatic efforts to promote the inclusion of religious leaders in peace processes. In particular, analysis of the Finnish case may have implications for how the peace work of religious leaders could be more effectively supported in other contexts through closer co-operation between the official and non-official tracks.

In order to begin to analyse these topics, it is first important to place them in the wider context of the constantly evolving challenges of contemporary conflicts and the re-evaluation of traditional mediation approaches. Chapter 2 of the study therefore first introduces the background in which the studied phenomena take place, considering some of the most significant critique aimed at traditional mediation and diplomacy in recent years. It also provides information on the Finnish NGOs analysed as well as the recent developments in the MFA's mediation policy. The literature review in Chapter 3 then presents and compares research on the topic, while Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 5 elaborates on the methodology adopted, explaining the reasoning behind the choice of methods and the ways in which data collection and analysis were conducted. Finally, Chapter 6 examines, analyses and discusses the data, after which Chapter 7 summarises the conclusions drawn from the research results.

2. The Re-evaluation of Mediation and the New Roles of Non-official Actors

This chapter discusses the broader context of contemporary armed conflicts and the role religion plays in them. It briefly traces the developments that have taken place during the past decades in approaches to mediation, diplomacy, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and considers how these trends have made way for new methods of mediation and the inclusion of more unconventional types of mediators. It then sheds light on the history of mediation in Finnish foreign policy and introduces the context in which the increased attention on the role of religious leaders in peace processes has come to take place in the Finnish case.

2.1. Traditional Mediation in the Face of New Challenges

In the post-Cold War era, the dynamics of war and violence have changed significantly, and the international community has been confronted with new challenges in responding to armed conflicts and global security threats. Today's wars are typically intrastate conflicts (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015). They are characterised by asymmetric power relations, weak state authority and legitimacy, a collapse of state monopoly on violence, various competing non-state actors and targeting of civilians (Aggestam and Björkdahl 2009, Kaldor 2006, Lederach 1997). Their increasingly regional and transnational character does not respect state borders, but destabilises large areas in ways difficult for states and intergovernmental organisations to address (Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse 2011, 265-292). Moreover, the internationalisation of armed conflicts is on the rise, which further hinders the resolution of conflicts (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015). Instead of progressing in linear, logical and predictable ways, violent conflicts are increasingly complex, non-linear and fluid (Brusset, de Coning and Hughes 2016). Their asymmetric nature causes significant challenges to negotiations (Fixdal 2012a), and peace agreements mostly fail to prevent relapses into violence (Jarstad and Sundberg 2007).

Such modern intrastate armed conflicts increasingly revolve around issues of group identity, which are often constructed around ethnic, nationalist or religious affiliations. These intergroup conflicts are characterised by protracted, long-term animosity, enemy images, severe stereotypes and deep-rooted fear – factors which, combined with the close proximity of conflicting groups, make for fertile ground for provocative propaganda, uncritical support for group leaders and the creation of a cycle of violence (Lederach 1997). In many cases, the roots of ethno-religious divides, bitterness and

hostilities can be traced back to colonial times and the creation of political systems favouring groups sympathetic to the coloniser (Kadayifci-Orellana 2008, 266-267). Antagonistic identities can then be sustained and manipulated for political purposes with myths, memories, narratives and discourses of identity and historical enmity (Aggestam and Björkdahl 2009, Buckley-Zistel 2006). These hostile discourses reinforce existential fears which further push individuals to seek security in their identity groups (Aggestam and Björkdahl 2009, Lederach 1997).

While the number of armed conflicts has been on the decline since the end of the Cold War, the number of casualties in the post-Cold War period peaked in 2014-2015 according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015, Dupuy et al 2016). The rise in the death toll is mostly caused by conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Dupuy et al 2016). Moreover, the number of all conflicts (those with more than 25 yearly battle-related deaths) rose to 50 in 2015, reaching a new high since 1992 (ibid.). This number, however, does not reflect new conflicts being started or spreading to new areas, but rather the proliferation of local Islamic groups pledging allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in a way that affects the statistics (ibid.). Indeed, the geographical concentration of conflicts in areas in which the IS is one of the actors demonstrates the extent to which religious extremism contributes to the rising numbers of casualties, simultaneously illustrating the inadequacy of traditional mediation approaches in responding to these challenges.

Despite the clear effect of religious extremism on the contemporary conflict landscape, interreligious conflicts in general have followed their own pattern. It is noteworthy against these general conflict trends that the number of religious identity conflicts among parties from different religious traditions (including inter-sectarian violence) has remained fairly consistent (Svensson 2013, 23-24). While this suggests that interreligious conflicts are not in fact on the rise but simply receive more attention than before, Svensson points out that the consistent number of interreligious conflicts stands out against the backdrop of the decreasing frequency of armed conflicts and may hint at their more persistent nature (ibid., 25).

In light of the complex issues brought about by conflicts related to religion and communal identity, it seems increasingly clear that new tools and strategies of approaching violent conflict are needed. It has often been suggested that conventional methods of mediation and diplomacy can be unhelpful or even counterproductive in these types of conflicts, as traditional diplomacy often

misunderstands the very nature of protracted conflicts in which the identity of individuals is not tied to citizenship but to different matters altogether (Lederach 1997). Rothman (1997, 9) argues that conventional, interest-based approaches and prioritising compromise at the outset can actually worsen identity-based conflicts. Johnston (1995, 3) agrees that while traditional diplomacy has best been applied to conflicts stemming from power politics and material and national interests, it has become ineffective in dealing with identity-based conflicts over intangible issues.

Lederach (1997, 15-16) indicates that modern, protracted conflicts tend to be approached in inappropriate ways due to an inadequate understanding of the limitations of traditional diplomacy as well as political and legal restrictions on the response of the international community. Furthermore, as statist diplomacy approaches these conflicts through authoritative group representatives, it fails to understand the extent to which the conflicts are characterised by the multiplicity and fluidity of groups, the diffusion of power and the lack of legitimate structures of authority (ibid., 16). As war is more and more often waged between private actors, state-centred diplomacy lacks the tools to approach these new types of agents. Even when these private actors are controlled or supported by states behind the scenes, they tend to avoid taking official responsibility for their involvement. Indeed, practical examples of strictly conventional, power-based and state-centred diplomacy are now quite few and far between.

2.2. Non-official Diplomacy and New Types of Third Parties in Mediation

The shortcomings of official diplomacy have created the need and opportunity for non-state diplomacy organisations to take on a more active and central role in the field of mediation. This type of non-official diplomacy is often called Track 2 diplomacy to distinguish it from official, Track 1 diplomacy. This conceptualisation can also be expanded to include a larger number of different types of unofficial tracks, as is done in Diamond and McDonald's (1996) multi-track diplomacy model, which includes nine tracks of diplomacy from the government to the media. Some academics and practitioners also often distinguish between Track 2 and Track 3, with the latter referring to peace initiatives by individuals at the grassroots level. Track 1.5 is sometimes used to describe communication between official representatives facilitated by a non-official party or other types of diplomacy involving both official and non-official parties. However, nuances and differences exist in the way these terms are used.

Academic literature has pointed out both strengths and weaknesses in non-official diplomacy. Some have suggested that while it plays a crucial role at all stages of conflict resolution and should be made part of mainstream diplomacy, non-official diplomacy lacks a solid theoretical foundation and faces various practical challenges, such as lack of economic, political or military leverage, resources and diplomatic experience (Bercovitch and Jackson 2009, 147). Track 2 diplomats may also be unable to empower the weaker party in asymmetric conflicts (Wigell 2012, 18). However, despite a potential lack of political, economic and military leverage, leverage can also be gained through intangible resources such as the respect and trust of conflict parties (Wehr and Lederach 1996, Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). Furthermore, while Track 2 actors cannot exercise the kind of power and authority that official actors have, they have the advantage of being free from national interests and strategic goals that may restrict Track 1 actors (Philpott and Cox 2010, 3). They are also often able to employ more unconventional methods, to engage parties that official actors cannot talk to and to operate in situations to which official parties do not have access (Bercovitch and Jackson 2009, 150; Wigell 2012).

As part of the recognition of the limitations of official diplomacy in responding to the complex crises of the past decades, the 1990s witnessed an emergence of private diplomacy organisations assuming increasingly central roles in mediation. At the same time, many NGOs previously focused on development and related peacebuilding tasks began to expand their work to the spheres of mediation, peacemaking and conflict transformation. One subgroup of such NGOs is faith-based organisations (FBOs) – such as FCA and Felm – whose roots are in humanitarian assistance and development work. When considering the broader picture, these roots go back a long way. In fact, Barnett and Stein argue that the establishment of humanitarianism in the early 19th century owes a lot to religious discourse and organisations (2012, 4). Over the century, interest in conversion waned and many religious organisations started collaborating with secular organisations and working towards common goals (ibid.). After the Second World War, many religious organisations began to downplay their religious identity in order to attract funding that favoured secular organisations (ibid., 5). However, since the 1990s, evidence – mainly regarding the work of Christian agencies in the Western world – suggests that faith-based activities and the number of new FBOs have increased (ibid.). Forces of globalisation and the institutionalisation of transnational aid have affected FBOs all over the world. While the number and visibility of FBOs has risen, a shift in

attitudes has been observed among states, donors and international organisations; as co-operation with religiously affiliated organisations has become commonplace (James 2009, 6-7). In addition to these trends, interfaith co-operation among FBOs has been on the rise (ibid., 19).

Currently, there is a great number of FBOs from different faiths operating all over the world. These include organisations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision, Islamic Relief and American Jewish World Service (AJWS), to name a few well-known examples. There are also several global networks supporting co-operation among FBOs and promoting interreligious collaboration and dialogue, such as Religions for Peace (RfP) which is the largest international organisation consisting of representatives of the world's religions, or ACT Alliance, a coalition of over 140 churches and FBOs working in development, associated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). FCA and Felm also actively co-operate with such coalitions, particularly the WCC, the LWF, RfP and the ACT Alliance. While many FBOs have focused on humanitarian assistance and development work, they have also been involved in mediation. One of the best-known contributions to faith-based mediation is the work of the Community of Sant'Egidio, which acted as a mediator in the Mozambican Civil War, significantly contributing to the signing of the Rome General Peace Accords. WCC was involved in mediation in Nigeria and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Sudan as early as the late 60s and early 70s (Smock 2001). The Quakers also mediated in the Nigerian Civil War in the 1960s (Sampson 1994). Other examples of mediation carried out by interreligious groups include the work of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Turay 2000).

The emergence of more prominent FBO actors is only one dimension of the way that the range of different non-official actors engaged in mediation has grown more varied and versatile, as the strengths of non-official actors – be they NGOs, private individuals such as religious leaders or other non-state actors – have become increasingly recognised. However, it should be kept in mind that the relationship between official and non-official diplomacy is not based on an either-or choice; rather, the official and non-official tracks can complement and support each other. Literature on non-official diplomacy has widely recognised that instead of ignoring – or even competing – with each other, official and non-official actors can both benefit from co-operation (see for example Diamond and McDonald 1996, Miall 2004, Strimling 2006).

Emphasis on the role of the non-official sector and growing attention on local peace efforts on a more general level have also been at the core of peacebuilding debates. Rising criticism for solutions imposed from the outside has increased doubts about the merits of liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding. These approaches have often been criticised for serving the interests of interveners rather than the population dealing with conflict. Critics have pointed out they impose Western elite agendas on local populations and prioritise rationality, individualism and European or global Northern views (Krampe 2013, Richmond 2013 and 2014). These efforts have frequently failed to establish lasting peace and ended in relapses into violence. They have been criticised for misunderstanding the context as well as the needs, history and cultural traditions of the local population (Richmond 2013, 379). According to Richmond (2014), liberal peacebuilding assumes an ideological basis more suited for stable, capitalist states, and statebuilding tends to produce an imported, negative hybrid peace that results in the lack of autonomy from international elites. He therefore calls for a better understanding of “peace formation”, local forms of agency that seek peaceful change from inside of the society (ibid.).

As the hegemony of official actors has been challenged and the ownership of peace processes contested, third party roles have had to make way for new types of mediators. In conventional state-centric mediation, states were traditionally the most prominent mediators in the international arena. Great powers in particular were seen to hold the necessary power to persuade conflict parties into agreement with a carrot-and-stick approach. For small states, by contrast, mediation has offered a way to showcase their relevance and to boost their self-perception and their image in the international arena (Höglund and Svensson 2009, 179; Svensson 2014, 22). The traditional perception has been that small states are more neutral and non-threatening, but lack coercive power, whereas large states have more power, resources and the ability to use carrots and sticks, but are more likely to enter conflicts in order to pursue their own interests, resulting in unwanted interventions (Bercovitch 2011, 82). However, while state mediators may be fairly wealthy, they sometimes lack the motivation to supply the needed resources at critical moments, as the resolution of the conflict is not vital to their national interests (Svensson 2014, 26).

More precisely, it is not the state but an individual representative of the state who mediates. Whether the individual represents a state, and international organisation or some other intervening body, Francis (2002, 30) notes that he or she is often portrayed as a “tireless, resourceful mediator

who somehow persuades the warring parties to see sense and averts or halts the worst of human tragedy". The undertones hint at "better" outside knowledge, a need to "talk sense" into the parties and to show them the "correct" way of handling conflict. In traditional approaches to mediation, the mediator is an unbiased outsider. Fairness and neutrality are regarded as ideal attributes of a mediator, who supposedly has no self-interests in the outcome of the negotiations. In practice, neutrality is more complicated; even if mediation is partly driven by genuine altruism and concern for human rights, self-interests may still be at stake. Svensson (2014, 22) notes that regardless of whether unbiased mediators are concerned about their own reputation or the suffering of others, they are in any case likely to want the conflict to end as quickly as possible. This may compromise the quality of the agreement and the longevity of peace. Fixdal (2012b, 127) takes the view that the role mediators assume and the extent to which they can choose to be impartial depends on their power, resources and leverage.

The increased acknowledgement of the shortcomings of unbiased third parties has highlighted the need for new types of mediators. Several scholars have suggested that impartiality may be unimportant or downright disadvantageous. Francis (2002, 37-38) suggests that an over-emphasis on impartiality prevents a realistic assessment of existing power asymmetries and strips the mediation work from all moral judgement. Svensson (2014) notes that unbiased mediators often lack the resources to bring about the concessions necessary for a peace agreement. Furthermore, Zartman and Touval (1996) argue that an impartial mediator may be perceived as more motivated to find an agreement and that a good relationship with one of the parties may not only aid communication but may even be perceived by the adversary party as evidence that the mediator will be able to talk the other party into a settlement. Kydd (2003) suggests that an unbiased mediator lacks credibility, whereas a mediator that is biased towards one party will be regarded as credible. Maoz and Terris (2009) in turn calculate that the higher the mediator's credibility – perceived honesty and ability to deliver agreements –, the higher the chances of mediation success.

These ideas have paved the way for a new type of mediator that approaches the conflict from the inside. Based on their work in Central America, Wehr and Lederach (1996) propose a mediator type whose role as a mediator is rooted in internality and partiality as opposed to externality and neutrality. The entry of an insider-partial mediator to the conflict is based on the trust they enjoy with all sides, as illustrated by Figure 1.

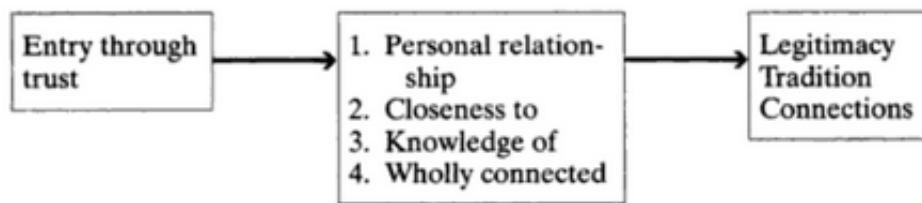


Figure 1. Confianza-based model. Source: Wehr and Lederach 1996.

Mitchell (1993), for his part, indicates that instead of approaching mediation as an activity conducted by a single person, it should be seen through various intermediary roles, functions and tasks that can be fulfilled by a variety of actors. These include exploring possible solutions, initiating the peacemaking process, advocacy, repairing intra-party divisions, disengaging external stakeholders, training and empowering the parties, fact-finding, facilitating meetings and monitoring the fulfilment of terms, among several others (ibid., 147).

The re-evaluation of third party roles as well as the broader questioning of the efficiency of traditional models of mediation have forced the field of mediation to let go of some of its old ideals and to adopt new definitions for what constitutes mediation. With local ownership and context-sensitivity prioritised, it has proven necessary to think of new, more effective ways to transform conflict dynamics “from the inside” and to engage new types of local actors in mediation. This need, combined with the increasingly pressing role of religion in many current conflicts, has paved the way for a shift towards more active inclusion of religious leaders in peace processes.

2.3. Mediation and Faith-Based Peacebuilding in Finland

This chapter discusses Finnish Track 1 and Track 2 mediation activities. First, it considers the attention given to mediation in Finnish foreign policy in the past and in the present. It considers what kind of meaning the promotion of mediation has had for Finland’s position in the international arena and what measures it has taken to promote mediation in foreign policy today. Second, it introduces the two FBOs examined in this study, FCA and Felm, briefly touching upon their relationship with the state, especially in regard to funding.

In 2010, former Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Stubb stated that Finland aims to become a great power in mediation, following the example of countries such as Norway and Switzerland (MFA 2010). However, Finland still has a long way to go if it wishes to reach that status, especially in terms of financial investment (Lehti 2014). Instead of concrete mediation experience as a state, Finland has concentrated on active lobbying and networking at the UN and in the EU and supporting the work of NGOs such as FCA, Felm and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) (ibid.). In order to understand the context in which an increased interest in the role of religious leaders in mediation has come to take place in Finland, it is first useful to trace the recent history of mediation in the Finnish foreign policy.

While mediation has only recently become a central part of Finland's foreign policy, it has been an important aspect of the country's foreign relations for a long time. Since the 1960s, Finland's active support to UN mediation and peacekeeping has been an important means of increasing the state's international profile while maintaining a stance of neutrality between the East and the West (Jakobsen 2012, 22-23). Piiparinen and Aaltola (2012, 93) argue that mediation was also part of the Finnish identity-building process as a neutral bridge-builder during the Cold War, and its geopolitical position between the East and the West offered an opportunity for Finland to mediate between the two superpowers and to sustain the UN's security architecture that benefited small states and enabled Finnish individuals to play an active role in UN peace processes. Vesa (2012) agrees that the small state role has been a central theme throughout Finland's UN membership. He emphasises that during the Cold War, gaining recognition for its neutrality was a priority for Finland; it assumed the role of a physician rather than a judge, as former president Urho Kekkonen stated in his first statement to the General Assembly. Currently, Finland's image in mediation is often seen as characterised by certain key features: its "small stateness", lack of imperial past, military non-alignment and lack of NATO membership as well as active participation in crisis management (Palosaari 2013).

One important dimension in Finland's mediation activities has been its co-operation with NGOs such as FCA, Felm and CMI. This co-ordination with civil society is part of a long history of involving civil society actors in the government's mediation efforts (Kanerva 2012). However, close co-operation with civil society is certainly not a unique characteristic of Finnish peace efforts. In the case of

Norway, this type of collaboration enabled the country to benefit from the expertise, contacts and other advantages of NGOs and is often considered the cornerstone of the “Norwegian model” (Skånland 2010). In recent years, Finland has made efforts to promote collaboration and information sharing with civil society through the Mediation Coordination Group (MFA 2011). Joenniemi (2014) suggests that there has also been a trend towards increasing participation of civil society actors in conflict resolution and foreign policy in general not just in Finland and Norway, but also in Sweden and Denmark.

Despite the similarities between Finland and Norway in co-operation with NGOs, Finland has never assumed the kind of state mediator role that Norway has played in several conflicts. Piiparinen and Aaltola (2012) argue that as Finland still lacks the capacity to take on such a role, it could instead focus on creating alternative strategies to respond to the changing nature of contemporary conflicts. Not only would assuming a state mediator role be very difficult or even impossible due to practical issues having to do with Finland’s Schengen membership, there is also an extensive body of literature suggesting that the traditional, neutral state mediators do not produce effective results (ibid.). What kind of role, then, can Finland play in contemporary peace mediation? Ruling out a role as a small state mediator, Wigell, Joenpolvi and Jaarva (2012) propose network-based mediation as a logical next step for Finland. By providing funds, expertise and technical assistance to these networks and by using its channels of influence in intergovernmental organisations, Finland could boost its international profile and its role as a Friend of Mediation.

Kerkkänen (2012) calls for the development of national capacity based on a holistic approach to mediation. In this endeavour, he emphasises the importance of developing mediation efforts that penetrate all levels of the society in conflict and address the underlying structures of violence (ibid., 116-117). Several academics have suggested that further co-operation with NGOs, think tanks and academic institutions would significantly benefit Finland (Kerkkänen 2012, Lehti 2014). Finally, Kerkkänen (2012, 122) argues that Finland does not have any specific assets that make it more suited for mediation than other states; a prominent role in mediation is simply a matter of developing capacity.

In recent years, the MFA has brought mediation to the centre of its foreign policy agenda. Joenniemi (2014) suggests that the promotion of mediation in the government’s official policy stems from

earlier mediation experiences in Transcaucasia and the Balkans and the more recent success of former President of Finland and Nobel laureate Martti Ahtisaari, who received a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to resolve international conflicts in 2008. Official interest in mediation was further increased by the work of the Country Brand Delegation, led by Jorma Ollila, in envisioning a more active and visible mediation role for Finland, as well as Finland's campaign for non-permanent UN Security Council membership for the period 2013-2014 (Joenniemi and Lehti 2014). As Finland has assumed a more active, high-profile role in the promotion of mediation in international organisations such as the UN, the EU and the OSCE, the UN has arguably taken centre stage. Finland's work through the Group of Friends of Mediation, formed together with Turkey in 2010, has led to the adoption of three General Assembly resolutions and the writing of the Secretary-General's report A/66/811, which calls for better inclusion of religious and traditional leaders in peacemaking.

In 2013, increased global interest in the role of religious actors in peacemaking was demonstrated in the establishment of the Network, which supports the inclusion of local religious actors in peace processes and connects them with states, intergovernmental organisations, civil society organisations and regional and sub-regional bodies. The Network was formed by FCA in co-operation with the UN Mediation Support Unit in the Department of Political Affairs (UN MSU – DPA), the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Religions for Peace (RfP). FCA serves as the Secretariat and the legal entity of the Network. The MFA and FCA are also the primary sources of funding for the Network (Network 2016a). Indeed, supporting the Network is one of Finland's three flagship projects in mediation activities (MFA 2016).

While the attention given to peace work conducted by religious leaders is a fairly recent development in Finnish foreign policy, non-governmental organisations such as FCA and Felm have promoted the participation of religious actors in peace processes in their own work for a longer time. FCA is the largest non-governmental development co-operation organisation and the second largest provider of humanitarian assistance in Finland (FCA 2016a). It is a partner organisation of the MFA. FCA's work is guided by the rights-based approach and divided into three thematic areas: the right to livelihood, the right to education and the right to peace (FCA 2016b). It was established in 1947, originally as a recipient of aid to administer emergency aid to the country struggling after

the Second World War (FCA 2016b). It evolved into an aid provider in the 1960s, gradually becoming a more and more prominent development actor. It currently operates in 15 countries (FCA 2016a). While it is connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, FCA is an independent non-profit organisation, and its mandate does not include missionary work.

Felm, founded in 1859, is a mission organisation belonging to the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church and a civil society organisation engaged in development co-operation, emergency relief, church work and advocacy (Felm 2016a). Guided by the rights-based approach just like FCA, its core values are partnership, love of one's neighbour, responsibility and justice, and it currently operates in 30 countries in Africa, South America, Asia and Europe (Laisi and Rintakoski 2014, Felm 2016b). Felm is also a partner organisation of the MFA. It is one of Finland's first civil society organisations as well as one of the largest working in global development (ibid.).

The increased global attention on the interlinkage of development, peace and security and the professionalisation and diversification of NGOs involved in mediation can also be seen in the way FCA and Felm have evolved, particularly during the past 10-15 years. As both organisations have focused their work on fragile areas often plagued by protracted conflicts, the complex security situation and needs on the ground have brought peace work to the FBOs' agenda. In FCA's case, the evolving field of international diplomacy, the changing nature of contemporary conflicts and Finland's prioritisation of mediation led to the establishment of the Network. As for Felm, the organisation has increasingly engaged in mediation in situations of protracted conflict and is currently involved in two of Finland's largest investments in peace work, Myanmar and Syria. In the latter, a great deal of its work is not related to religious issues at all, but in its other projects, such as those in South Africa, Nepal and Pakistan, it works closely with religious actors and local church partners (Laisi and Rintakoski 2014, Felm 2016c).

The work of both FCA and Felm is based on a fairly similar Nordic, Lutheran tradition. This way, they belong to quite a specific subgroup of FBOs, which are a highly diverse group of actors, some of which have very little in common. In fact, it can be argued that FBOs such as FCA and Felm bear a closer resemblance to many secular NGOs than they do to some more conservative FBOs that subscribe to stricter religious views. Another factor that unites the two Finnish FBOs is their long co-operation with the state, which also funds a great deal of the organisations' work. In 2015, Felm

received approximately 27 % of its funding from the MFA, with parishes being its largest funders (30 %), and the rest coming from other sources, such as Christian organisations and private individuals (Felm 2016b). During the same year, FCA received the majority of its funding (approximately 33 %) from the Finnish government, with 27 % coming from private donations, 22 % from international funding, 18 % from parishes and the Ecclesiastical Board (FCA 2016b).

While the collaboration and the donor-recipient relationship has worked well in the Finnish context, funding is not always a straightforward issue for FBOs. Appleby (2015, 187) states that FBOs both shape and are shaped by global development practices; while they are influenced by secular and international norms and standards, they also often have to stay true to their religious foundations to appeal to more conservative donors and underline the unique qualities of their religion. However, Hopgood and Vinjamuri (2012, 55) suggest moderate FBOs are often able to gain funding from both religious donors who value their faith-inspired identity and secular donors who gravitate towards the product they offer. The extent to which these forces pose a challenge to the work of the FBO varies, of course, as the compatibility of these demands is affected by the history, values and working practices of each individual organisation. As evidenced by their partnerships with the MFA and their funding from both government and religious donors, the two Finnish FBOs enjoy trust among both secular and religious actors. Yet, the recent cuts made by the government on development aid in 2015 have affected the funding of the NGOs – although mostly that concerning development co-operation rather than mediation – and have made it more pressing for the NGOs to actively look for ways to broaden their funding base. FCA, for example, has now reached a situation in which most of their funding comes from international sources (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016).

3. Religious Leaders in Conflicts and Peacemaking: A Review of Literature

The current chapter presents an overview of some of the existing research on the role of religion and religious leaders in conflicts and peacemaking. It first compares viewpoints on how religion can be used to incite violence on the one hand and to encourage peacemaking on the other. The interlinkage of religion, conflict and peace is a complex topic that cannot thoroughly be explored in a few paragraphs. However, there are certain main arguments and starting points on which scholars base their conceptualisation of the function of religion in conflicts that should be pointed out. After tracking some of the most common arguments used to explain the role of religion in conflicts, the chapter further examines research on the roles religious leaders and organisations can assume in peace processes and the areas in which they can contribute to peace.

Scholars have differing views on the part religion plays in conflicts. Many agree that while religion aggravates and contributes to violent conflicts, it is rarely their original cause; instead, conflicts more often stem from various social, political and economic reasons (Juergensmeyer 2008, Smock 2010a, Svensson 2013). Indeed, religion is often a disguise for strategic and economic self-interests of corrupt governments and rebel leaders (Francis 2002). By contrast, Appleby (2000, 67) maintains that the role of religion in conflicts is sometimes downplayed by those who underline economic, political and cultural factors. Johnston (2003, 4) believes it can function as a root cause as well as a vehicle for mobilisation. Several scholars have focused on the way religion can effectively be politicised to promote intergroup violence with the help of religious concepts, images and sacred texts (Appleby 2000, Kadayifci-Orellana 2008). Juergensmeyer (2001, 146) argues that religious violence employs images of divine, cosmic struggle, and these have great political power – they are simultaneously personal, transcendent to human experience and applicable to the social level.

There is a wide range of literature that studies the various ways in which religion contributes to the identity formation of groups in conflict. Svensson (2013, 17) states that religion can take the form of cultural identity, which has to do with the traditional sphere of a religious group, or that of convictional identity, which entails active religious ideology. Said and Funk (2002, 37-38) note that religion is particularly effective in shaping the norms and values of a group in a conflict situation, as it makes claims about what is right and what is wrong and provides explanations for the most

fundamental existential issues of life. Indeed, Gopin (2002a, 63) suggests that it is in times of conflict that groups tend to be the most defensive of and attached to their own religion.

Religion has been proven to be a powerful tool for mobilisation. Political leaders often use religion to manipulate group identities; religious narratives, myths and symbols are often highly effective in dehumanising and building enemy images of *the Other* (Galtung 1990, Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, Rothbart and Korostelina 2006). Gopin (2002b) finds that antagonistic identities of religious communities can be built around experienced trauma and fear of things not yet experienced. Furthermore, “manufactured injury” can be manipulated by leaders to mobilise groups for political causes (ibid., 96-98). Lederach (1997, 15) points out that strong enemy images and deep polarisation in turn increase uncritical support for group leaders and cohesion inside the group. Furthermore, it is important to note that religious factors do not exist independently of the surrounding complex conflict dynamics. Rather, religious divisions often overlap with ethnic and other divisions, further hindering the resolution and transformation of conflicts. (Smock 2010b, 17).

While earlier literature has been more focused on the relationship between religion and violence, the other side of the coin – the way religion can contribute to peacemaking – has recently begun to receive more and more attention. Various academics have suggested that just as sacred texts and concepts can be used to incite violence, different religions also have moral elements that can be effective in promoting peace (Gopin 1997, Boulding 2000, Carter and Smith 2004, Kadayifci-Orellana 2006, Hertog 2010). Many scholars emphasise that academics and practitioners should therefore recognise the common religious values that encourage peace and harmony and apply them in facilitating reconciliation and interreligious dialogue (Gopin 1997, Kadayifci-Orellana 2008). It has also been suggested that because of the central part it plays in the construction of group identity and intercultural frictions, religion should be incorporated into conflict resolution theory and frameworks (Gopin 1997, Abu-Nimer 2001, Said and Funk 2002). However, Gopin (2002a, 201) notes that taking religion into account in conflict resolution does not entail naiveté about the violent potential of religion or blind support to any religious institutions, but rather sophisticated co-operation between secular and religious actors. Others see the issue from a different perspective. Svensson (2013), for example, takes the view that while it is not religious identities per se that make conflicts difficult to resolve, significant religious *incompatibilities* between parties must be minimised by “desacralisation” to allow for the more positive use of religion in peacemaking.

Johnston and Cox (2003, 12) state that neglecting religion in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconciliation is unlikely to produce an outcome perceived as just by the parties. Gopin (1997, 6-7) points out that local religious actors may not respond to Western or secular discourse, regardless of how much one might wish that they did; therefore, it is crucial to find ways to communicate with them in a manner they can respond to. Furthermore, engaging moderate religious leaders may be a useful means of curbing violence and more extremist religious beliefs (Zartman and Khan 2011). Sampson (2007, 276) emphasises that new approaches to mediation, reconciliation and reconstruction of societies are particularly important in the kind of intrastate conflicts in which the parties live close to each other and their everyday lives continue to collide.

For these and other reasons, the peaceful potential of religion is increasingly employed by various religious actors from faith-based NGOs to individuals in their peace efforts. FBOs earlier focused on humanitarian relief and development issues have begun to include conflict transformation and related activities in their mandates (Sampson 2007). They now more and more often play a peacebuilding role in various conflicts, not limited to those perceived as religious (Smock 2001). According to Sampson (2007), there is also a wider trend of interreligious councils, networks and other bodies becoming active in the peacebuilding arena. These types of religious bodies, councils formed by religious leaders and NGOs could have a lot to contribute to preventing conflicts with religious dimensions (Johnston and Cox 2003).

Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana and Abu-Nimer (2005) find that FBOs have been able to positively contribute to mediation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in numerous ways in war-affected communities. However, they face certain unique challenges as well as advantages in the areas of peacebuilding and mediation. As for their particular assets, many scholars suggest FBOs are often trusted in the communities they work in, especially when they have been operating in the same area for a long period of time; this trust along with the global connections many FBOs possess grants them a unique position in the field (James 2009). In addition to positive practical experiences dealing with certain FBOs, Barnett and Stein (2012, 23) argue that this is also due to the role religion, spirituality and traditional structures play in the areas, as the religious and the secular are not institutionally separated the way they are in the West. Because of their influence at the grassroots

level and their global connections, James suggests they have a distinctive ability to bridge grassroots legitimacy with an international reach (2009, 19).

Still, faith-based aid and peacebuilding efforts are not always unproblematic and well received by the local community. Omer (2015, 17) stresses the need for critical reflection on the risks of conducting active missionary work in a post-colonial context. Barnett and Stein (2012, 7) note that in some cases, interreligious tensions exist; historical, negative experiences of Western intervention and Christian missionary work or the perceived imposition of Western values in Muslim-majority countries may create mistrust, while current Islamophobic notions in the West generate fear that Islamic aid is used to support radicalisation where Islamic FBOs work. Appleby (2015, 197) argues that there is a risk that an FBO using humanitarian aid for proselytism complicates or endangers development and peacebuilding work, and some religious elements may also clash with secular human rights standards, for example regarding women's reproduction and birth control issues. These questions are equally central to the work of religious leaders – whether they accept or condemn human rights abuses in violent conflicts is often critical to mediation, peacebuilding and interreligious relations (Appleby 2000, 75). However, there is no reason to assume that human rights are necessarily in conflict with religion – religious traditions offer plenty of ethical elements for religious leaders to draw on in order to promote respect for human rights and to build consensus for mediation and conflict transformation processes (Little and Appleby 2004).

Like multireligious bodies and NGOs, religious leaders have also become more active in peace work in recent years; they can play a dynamic role in all stages of a conflict and contribute to prevention, mediation, conflict management and transformation as well as post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and advocacy for socio-political change (Sampson 2007). Appleby (2000, 16) calls for wider acknowledgement of the potentially effective and influential role religious actors can take not only in preventing and managing violent conflicts, but also in promoting human rights and more participatory forms of government. Sampson (2007, 309) suggests that while religious peacebuilding previously focused on conflicts in which religion did not play a significant role, religious actors are now also involved in conflicts characterised by deep religious differences.

Several other scholars have also brought attention to the particular capabilities religious leaders have in fostering peace in their communities. Many conclude that their leverage over conflict parties

is largely rooted in the respect, legitimacy and trust they often enjoy within their communities (Wehr and Lederach 1996, Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). They also tend to know their own communities well and understand their needs (Wehr and Lederach 1996, Kadayifci-Orellana 2008, 278). Johnston and Cox (2003, 14) add that the reputation of religious leaders as apolitical actors with respectable values as well as their ability to mobilise support from local to international levels can aid peacemaking. Kadayifci-Orellana (2008, 280) suggests they may also have the power to transform traditional, discriminatory structures in their own communities.

Various scholars, such as Carter and Smith (2004), Little and Appleby (2004), Little (2007) and Hertog (2010) have discussed the part religious leaders play in peacebuilding and peacemaking. Another important area in which religious leaders can exert influence is that of conflict transformation, which has been studied for example by Lederach (1995), Merry (2000) and Sampson (2007). Moreover, many scholars have focused on interreligious dialogue as one of the most important ways in which religious leaders can promote peace (Gopin 1997, Smock 2002, Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty 2007, Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). One of the most widely recognised areas in which religious leaders can make important contributions is that of reconciliation. Lederach (1997, 24) calls for a paradigm shift that moves away from a focus on resolution and instead turns the attention to rebuilding and restoring relationships. Religion can play an important role in restoring the social fabric and rebuilding trust in communities; in order to do this, religious authorities can encourage values such as forgiveness, empathy, mercy, repentance and compassion (Lederach 1999, Appleby 2000, Johnston 2003, Sampson 2007, Smock 2010a). Johnston and Cox (2003, 14) underline the ability of religious leaders to rehumanise opposing parties, while Kadayifci-Orellana (2008, 274) and Schirch (2005, 59) note their ability to facilitate the healing of trauma, for example through rituals and ceremonies.

When it comes to the type of conflicts religious leaders can most effectively mediate in, academic literature has – somewhat surprisingly – not devoted a great deal of attention to the issue. Instead of the type and characteristics of conflicts, scholars have directed their attention towards the characteristics and tools of the mediation efforts and mediators themselves. The focus is mainly placed on the position of a religious leader in their community rather than the position of religion in the conflict. Still, most academic literature appears to have studied conflicts in which religion plays a central role, although Svensson (2013, 184-185), for example, suggests that religious peace

efforts have focused, and have been the most effective, in less protracted conflicts in which religion does not play a significant role. Sampson (2007, 309), conversely, argues that religious actors more and more often act in persistent conflicts with significant religious differences. Little (2007, 5), among others, stresses the diversity of conflicts in which religious peacemakers are involved.

All in all, some academics caution that it is still too early to draw strong conclusions on the role religious leaders play in promoting peace (Carter and Smith 2004; Smock 2010a, 43). However, suggestions have been offered on how their peace efforts can be made more efficient; for one thing, Gopin (1997) suggests that activities such as interfaith dialogue should be combined with other approaches to achieve substantial results. Furthermore, what many agree on is that in order to enable and strengthen the influence of religious leaders and other faith-based actors, co-operation between religious and secular actors, and between local religious leaders and political authorities, is crucial (Wehr and Lederach 1996, Appleby 2000, 212; Gopin 2002b, 226-227; Smock 2010a, 43). Yet, academic literature rarely elaborates on what kind of forms this co-operation should take. This is what the current study aims to contribute to by considering the implications of the Finnish case for efforts to facilitate collaboration between secular and faith-based actors at different levels, as well as official and non-official actors.

4. Conflict Transformation: A Theoretical Framework

As the mediation and peacebuilding work of religious leaders often involves transformation of antagonistic relations and deconstruction of negative images, discourses and myths used to perpetrate violence in complex, protracted violent conflicts, it can conveniently be examined through the lens of conflict transformation. With the focus on sustainability, long-term change and local ownership, transformation approaches offer a useful perspective on how religious leaders can contribute to the development of localised methods of handling disputes and building peace. Indeed, many scholars who have discussed the role of religious leaders in peacemaking and mediation are closely linked to literature on conflict transformation. Moreover, it appears that non-official diplomacy, in particular, has embraced the concepts and ideas of conflict transformation. While academic debates on the transformation of conflicts have influenced NGO practitioners, they have, vice versa, contributed to literature on the topic. One such link between the two realms is John Paul Lederach, whose work as a practitioner drawing from the Mennonite peacebuilding tradition has influenced scholarly literature on the topic and particularly resonated with practitioners.

This chapter presents a summary of some of the most significant contributions to the study of conflict transformation and discusses its core theories, ideas and approaches. It introduces Lederach's model of different levels of peacebuilding actors to illustrate why religious leaders have an important role to play in a peace process and how they can advance it. As it has been acknowledged by various scholars in the field that conflict transformation efforts do not take place in a vacuum but need support from Track 1 actors, attention is then turned to how such co-operation can be enabled. In order to establish a perspective through which this can be analysed in the Finnish context, the chapter goes on to present Andrea Strimling's conceptualisation of factors promoting and hindering co-operation between official and non-official diplomats.

4.1. Introduction to Conflict Transformation

Conflict resolution efforts increasingly place focus on the transformation rather than resolution of conflicts, and a distinct paradigm shift can be detected in the way armed conflicts are approached. Conflict transformation aims at transforming relationships, discourses, attitudes and interests, often the very structure behind the conflict. While it sees conflict as a natural and necessary part of social

life, conflict transformation seeks to alter the underlying systems, cultures and institutions that lead to the expression of conflict in violent terms. Rather than try to adjust the positions of the parties and compromise between their differing interests, conflict transformation attempts to change the nature and functions of violence (Väyrynen 1991). Instead of seeking solutions from the outside, it adopts a holistic, long-term approach that builds on the capacities of the people and resources inside the conflict (Lederach 1995).

Conflict transformation is especially useful in complex, protracted violent conflicts that resist resolution. Instead of focusing on finding a resolution, it aims to change the conflict from destructive to constructive. This process, however, is often uneven and asymmetrical, as different parties transform at different paces, and progress is followed by regression and then progress again (Kriesberg 2011, 50). Since conflict transformation sees conflict as a natural and important part of social and political life, its aim is not to eliminate conflict, but to turn destructive forms of conflict into constructive ones. It sees conflict as a dynamic process rather than a static condition that needs to be removed. From the point of view of conflict transformation, conflicts are intertwined in a complex web of small and large conflicts, past and present, with multiple different actors and with enemies and allies of varying degrees. They are also fluid and move from stage to stage with fluctuating levels of intensity that rarely follow a consistent or predictable pattern. Furthermore, parties use numerous violent and non-violent actions and strategies to achieve their goals (ibid., 52). Various theories have been developed on the ways the de-escalation of tensions between parties may happen, be it through mutual or initially one-sided co-operative gestures, formal mutually beneficial agreements or policies, a stalemate situation or sufficient ripeness for a step towards peace (ibid., 54). Often a significant transformation is the result of various factors. Conflict transformation efforts are needed at all stages of a conflict cycle: before, during and after the violence. Francis (2002, 10-11) and Ropers (1995, 22) note that supporting these efforts at an early stage should be paid great attention, as promoting peace and changing structures of domination and oppression is a great deal easier before violence erupts and intensifies.

According to Kriesberg (2011, 50), conflict transformation as a field of study and practice emerged in the 1990s. Its theoretical base owes a great deal to John Burton's ideas on conflict resolution and Edward Azar's work on protracted social conflict. The idea of transforming destructive conflicts into constructive ones can be traced back to the work of Morton Deutsch (Ramsbotham 2010, 53).

Conflict transformation also draws on theories of conflict formation developed in the 1970s by scholars such as Johan Galtung; Adam Curle then built on this to develop theory on the transformation of asymmetric relationships (Miall 2004, 4). Later on, these ideas have been developed further by scholars such as Francis and Lederach. Scholars such as Kumar Rupesinghe, Kriesberg and Väyrynen have also made significant contributions to the study of conflict transformation, while Ronald Fisher, Friedrich Glasl and Christopher Mitchell have developed theories on the escalation, progression and cycles of conflicts.

As Kriesberg (2011, 51) notes, conflict transformation can be perceived not only as a distinct field of study and practice conducted by scholars and practitioners who identify as belonging to the field, but also as a set of ideas or practices that can be implemented in any conflict resolution, mediation or peacebuilding process. Indeed, the concepts of conflict resolution, management and prevention as well as mediation, peacebuilding and peacemaking are often intertwined and used in different ways by different scholars and practitioners. In general, some advocates of conflict transformation see the term conflict resolution as falsely conceptualising conflict as a state that needs to be replaced by peace and settled with an agreement without accounting for the underlying structures and dynamics at play. The term conflict management, then, can be seen as too pessimistic and as assuming that resolving conflict is an unrealistic goal, as violent conflict can at best be controlled and contained. There are also varying views on other terms that should be used to describe peacemaking activities; for example, Francis (2002, 28) criticises the term conflict prevention for “the emphasis which is given to the avoidance of turbulence” instead of confronting and dealing with conflict and overcoming violence and oppression. Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998, 3) suggest that terms such as conflict resolution and preventive action usually refer to a specific set of activities undertaken by specific actors, while conflict transformation includes the overarching concepts and work carried out by the various actors. It is a “fundamental conceptual shift in the way global security issues are addressed” (ibid., 156).

Kriesberg (ibid., 58) sees conflict transformation as “part of the broader field of conflict resolution”, while some scholars advocate for the use of the word conflict resolution on the basis that it is the earliest, most commonly used term among practitioners and the most widely known term among the general public (Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse 2011, 9-10). Miall (2004, 3) suggests that while conflict transformation draws from concepts of conflict management and resolution and is

built on the same theoretical tradition, it is nevertheless characterised by distinctive elements that warrant the recognition of conflict transformation as its own field. In other words, while it may be best seen as a reconceptualisation of previous approaches rather than a brand new one, a theory of conflict transformation is emerging (ibid.). In any case, both Miall (ibid., 17-18) and Kriesberg (2011, 67-68) agree that conflict transformation still needs further research and theorising, particularly when it comes to the impacts of conflict transformation efforts on conflicts – although these types of evaluations are difficult to conduct. It is not the aim of this study to draw categorical lines or make claims about the superiority of any particular term. However, conflict transformation is chosen here as the most suitable approach to the issues under analysis. Whether it is seen as a distinct field, as part of the field of conflict resolution or as an analytical framework, conflict transformation arguably provides the most useful collection of tools, theories and concepts to analyse the topic of the thesis.

4.2. Approaches to Transformation

The transformation of conflict happens in numerous areas and at different levels, both on its own and as a result of organised efforts. Väyrynen (1991) argues that it is crucial to consider the functions of violence; this perspective brings the attention to the social order and the wider economic and political context in which violence occurs. One way to conceptualise changes in conflict is through Väyrynen's theory on actor, issue, rule and structure transformations, whose starting point is that actors, issues and interest of a conflict are not static but rather change over time. Therefore, conflict theory that regards them as static fails to account for the dynamic nature of conflicts and risks providing an inadequate analysis of the way conflict works.

In addition to Väyrynen's categories, Miall (2004) emphasises the importance of *transformations in the context*, citing the end of the Cold War as an example of a significant change in the global context that affected the dynamics of various regional conflicts. He argues that theories of conflict transformation in general should pay more attention to the context in which conflict takes place. On the domestic level, factors such as culture, institutions, social norms and rules and the arrangement of governance affect the societal context (ibid., 8). On the regional and international level, global economic, political and social forces impact certain areas while marginalising others;

which suffer from weakened states and economies (ibid.). Both domestic and global factors therefore impact the dynamics of conflict and can both prevent and support their transformation.

Francis (2002, 8) underlines that realising true democracy and ensuring the participation of all sectors of society on the local, national as well as international level is an integral part of structural transformation. She considers it necessary to promote political activity and peacebuilding efforts at lower levels of society in order to foster democratisation (ibid., 9-10). As Ryan (2007, 128) points out, promoting democratic practices is usually considered an integral part of conflict transformation, but not the solution to all problems. This, however, should entail increasing citizens' possibilities to participate in politics rather than converting them to Western forms of democracy, such as multi-party competition (ibid.). Indeed, democratisation activities are not only difficult to carry out in practice, but also somewhat controversial and criticised by various scholars, who believe the implementation of democracy is given too much emphasis, or the timing, speed and forms of democracy are inappropriate in the context (ibid.). Democratisation and other significant political or economic reforms can have stabilising as well as destabilising effects, and it is important that such changes are carefully evaluated and not forced or rushed.

Several conflict transformation scholars have focused on issues of identity in violent conflict, as perceptions of identity and divisions between *us* and *them* are often seen as an integral part of protracted armed intergroup conflicts and a key contributor to their intractability. These types of conflicts are often characterised by strong enemy images, negative stereotypes, scapegoating and dehumanisation of opposing parties (Northrup 1989). Discourse, narratives, myths and tales contribute to the way the past is remembered, identities conceptualised and boundaries drawn between groups (Buckley-Zistel 2006). Strömbom (2013) concludes that public debate and questioning of perceptions of *self* and *other* have significant implications for the transformation of protracted identity-based conflicts. In order to transform the structures that enable and produce violent conflict and to promote peaceful relations in the long run, it is essential to consider how collective identities are formed and to redefine antagonistic relationships.

One way of encouraging reconceptualisation of identity and group relations, and an aspect that has received a lot of attention in conflict transformation literature, is dialogue. Its purpose is to (re)build trust, solidarity and understanding, to reconceptualise identity boundaries and to improve

relationships between antagonistic groups. Feller and Ryan (2012) suggest dialogue must be made a high priority in peace processes and should also be recognised as such by high-level, official actors. Ramsbotham (2010) underlines the significance of linguistic intractability; the way “radical disagreements” are manifested in discourse and dialogue. He suggests that understanding the agonistic dialogue among adversaries is crucial for the transformation of violent conflict, but different strategies are needed in different contexts; for example, grassroots dialogue can build “the whole foundation for future transformation” but may fail to yield results when political intractability is at its highest (ibid., 247). Overall, grassroots dialogue has been the focus of many conflict transformation studies, and its usefulness is largely acknowledged. Maddison (2015) notes that a great part of transformation happens in low profile inter-communal dialogue rather than more public processes such as truth commissions. In the same vein, Northrup (1989) underlines grassroots dialogue as a safer space for deconstructing negative images of the perceived enemy. When it comes to public truth and reconciliation commissions, there are several examples of both successes and failures as well as a large body of literature on their merits and drawbacks, as summarised by Ryan (2007, 82-93).

Dialogue can be facilitated in various ways, but the main purpose is to provide a forum for sharing experiences and increasing mutual understanding; this process is meant to enable the adversaries to work towards peaceful coexistence. One means of encouraging dialogue, sharing knowledge and training and building the capacity of individuals for constructive action are various types of workshops (Francis 2002, 21-25). Another is constituency-building, which is used to connect different levels and groups of society to each other (ibid., 33). There are also various projects whose attempt is to encourage intercommunal co-operation and communication and to forge more positive relations between antagonistic groups; these can involve anything from building and agriculture projects to sports teams or musical groups (Ryan 2007, 94-96). Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998, 111) underline the capabilities of NGOs in encouraging and facilitating informal dialogue and moderate views. They may also play a key role in the arrangement of workshops and other practical ways of working towards this goal.

4.3. Different Levels of Peacebuilding

Conflict transformation theorists tend to agree that the engagement of various levels of society from the elite to the grassroots is needed in order to achieve a significant, lasting transformation (Kriesberg 2011, 56). Collaboration between actors at different levels of society can be conceptualised in various ways; one example is Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid, which demonstrates the role of middle-range leaders in influencing both the grassroots and elite levels in protracted conflicts. This model can be used to help explain why the positions of religious leaders in their societies may offer them specific opportunities to promote peace in their societies.

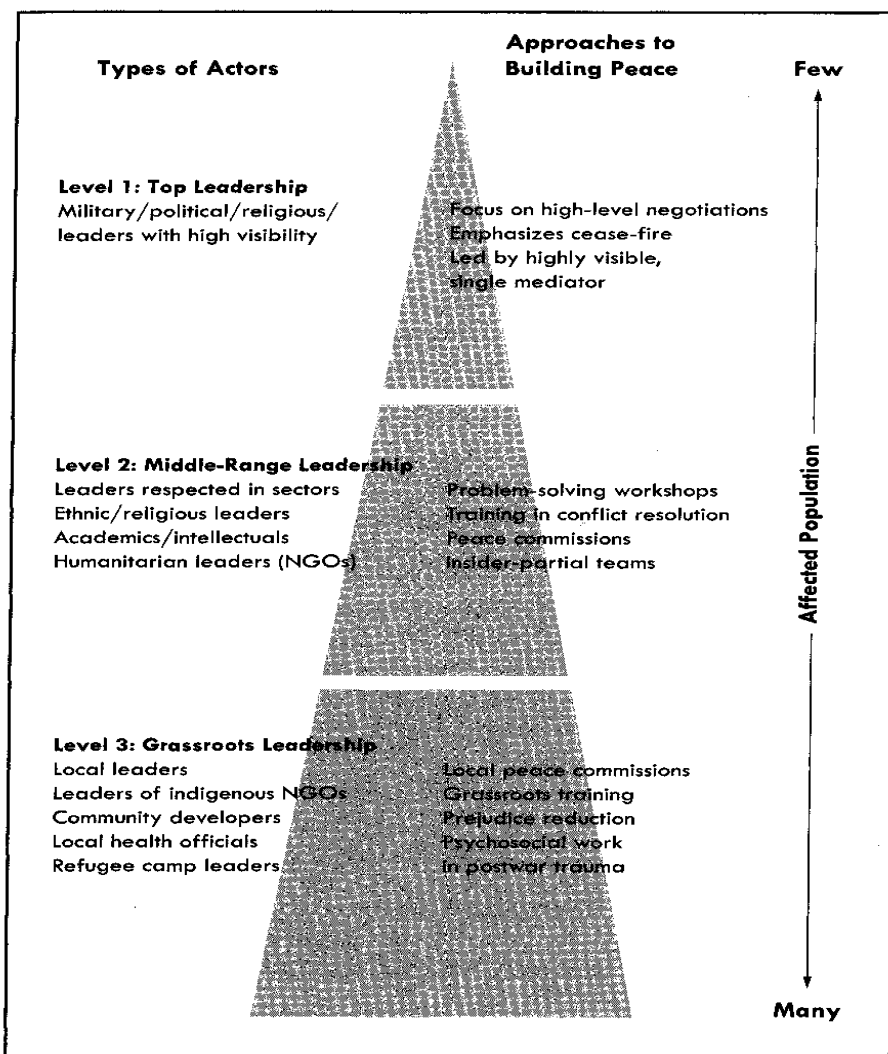


Figure 2. Approaches and actor levels of peacebuilding. Source: Lederach, 1997.

The top level of the pyramid is comprised of political and military leaders, the highest representatives of the government and opposition groups as well as the highest religious leaders. It tends to include a fairly small number of individuals with high visibility and legitimacy. Their power and influence comes at the cost of freedom, as they usually have to stick to their publicly stated goals in order not to risk losing face or being perceived as weak. However, Lederach (1997, 40-41) notes that while the international community usually reaches out to these elite-level leaders, power is sometimes more diffused and less hierarchical than it seems. The bottom of the level includes grassroots leadership involved in the every-day life of local communities, such as NGO staff, refugee camp leaders, health officials and other local leaders. These people tend to have a good understanding of local politics and the reality and struggle of the population; they see the animosity and violence among the people of their local communities, which are often microcosms of the society at large (ibid., 42-43).

The middle level, then, contains individuals whose leadership position is not based on public structures of authority, political or military power, but rather respect. They may be authoritative figures from sectors of education, business or agriculture or networks and institutions important in the particular setting. They may be religious leaders or heads of universities of major NGOs, well-known activists or artists or leaders of ethnic minority groups. The common characteristic and advantage of middle-range leaders is that they are known by and have connections to top-level leaders while simultaneously being closer to the grassroots. They understand the reality of the local communities but are generally not burdened by issues of survival and fulfilment of basic needs like the grassroots community and their leaders. Moreover, they are not bound by the political restrictions of elite leadership and can use their influence and networks more flexibly and inconspicuously (ibid., 41-42).

The general pattern is that the higher individuals are positioned in the pyramid, the more decision-making capacity and information on the broader picture they have and the less they are affected by the consequences of their decisions. Vice versa, individuals at the lower levels have to live with the consequences of elite decisions over which they have no control, but they are also less likely to see the broader picture (ibid., 43). Opportunities for peacemaking are different at each of the three levels. The top of the pyramid is dominated by a top-down approach and official, highly publicised diplomacy and negotiation processes aiming at a ceasefire, then further political transition to peace.

The base of the pyramid operates from a bottom-up perspective and promotes peace through grassroots processes and initiatives that often also attempt to deal with the trauma of violent conflict and the problematic relationships among people. As examples Lederach mentions peace- and conflict-related seminars initiated by the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM), the travelling “Circus of Peace” show arranged by The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), conflict resolution workshops and post-war trauma programmes organised by the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL) and the Somali case of peace conferences and discussions among subclan elders (a context central to the work of FCA as will be seen in subsequent chapters) (ibid. 52-54).

Lederach (ibid., 46) argues that middle-range leaders can use their position to create an “infrastructure” for achieving and maintaining peace. He identifies three of the most common middle-range approaches. The first is problem-solving workshops, in which unofficial representatives of parties analyse problems together and discuss possible solutions in an informal manner. The second is conflict resolution training, which provides skills, knowledge and an opportunity to reflect on the experience of conflict. The third approach is the formation of peace commissions, often made up of middle-range leaders from opposing sides, the facilitate discussion and other collaborative efforts between different groups. By participating in these types of activities, middle-range leaders can share knowledge, broaden participation in peace work, bring official peace processes closer to the people at the grassroots and show an example as opinion leaders.

Religious leaders can be found at all levels of the pyramid depending on their position and the institutional structure and networks of the religion they represent. Placing religious leaders – or any other influential individuals for that matter – into these categories is not a straightforward task, as vertical leadership positions are not permanent but fluid and often ambiguous. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy from a conflict transformation point of view is the premise that by connecting authoritative religious figures to each other at different levels and creating links from local communities to high-level decision making, the vertical institutional networks of religions may have a significant impact on building support for peace processes, restoring relationships and supporting the long-term transformation of discriminating structures that sustain conflict. The model helps analyse the positions and particular opportunities religious leaders have for action at different levels

of their societies and reflect on the implications that these theoretical categorisations have for the promotion of the peace processes by religious leaders in practice.

Yet, Lederach's model is fairly simplified. Francis (2002, 245), for example, suggests that while it is a significant contribution to thinking about the characteristics of groups at different levels of the society, it should be seen as "an entry point and stimulus for further thinking". She notes that the model does not take into account the multiple hierarchies societies have or the different drivers of conflict, including economic forces that are out of government control (*ibid.*). Francis and Ropers (1997, 17) also argue that while the vertical emphasis of the model is important, it diverts attention from the horizontal dimensions and the multiplicity of heterogeneous actors involved in the conflict and its transformation efforts.

Francis notes that Lederach's conceptualisation could provide the basis for more elaborate models on how different spheres of influence interact with each other, how those at the grassroots affect higher levels of leadership and how community organisations address political questions (2002, 246). Keeping these issues in mind, the study at hand places the model in the Finnish context, considering how the work of key Finnish non-official actors and their co-operation with the state relates to the pyramid from the grassroots to the international level, and how these actors at different levels interact with each other. It will also examine how the interviewees perceive the role of religious leaders at different levels of the society, whether they also see mid-level leadership as they key group and who they actually talk about when they talk about religious leaders.

4.4. Multi-track Co-operation

While conflict transformation approaches emphasise local ownership of peace processes, they do not ignore the part played by external parties – in fact, the support of states as well as regional and global intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations can be highly important, as they can provide resources and assistance, offer incentives for co-operation between the adversaries and help prevent violence by for example ending military support to one or more parties (Kriesberg 2011, 56-57). This is also related to Miall's (2004) idea of transformations in context – since modern, protracted conflicts are also sustained and aggravated by global structures, the role of international and official actors cannot be neglected in pursuits for long-term peaceful change. Miall (*ibid.*, 15-

17) also finds that despite the broad acceptance of the merits of multi-track diplomacy, conflict transformation still lacks an adequate understanding of how activities in the different tracks fit together and support each other in practice. Francis (2002, 33-34) agrees that mutual support and strategic collaboration between different levels and categories of actors could make peacebuilding much more effective. Similarly, Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998) highlight the need for collaboration between state and non-state actors as well as among NGOs.

While academic literature – whether focused on the transformation or resolution of conflicts – largely recognises and stresses the positive consequences of co-operation between the official and the non-official track, less has been written on concrete examples and practical execution of such collaboration. In addition to Miall, Strimling (2006, 97) also notes the need for more empirical evidence on the issue. Furthermore, she points out that research mostly focuses on the contributions of informal dialogue processes to official diplomacy, but rarely on the support official diplomacy offers to non-official processes. These are gaps that the current study aims to address from the Finnish perspective.

It is likely that a lack of co-ordination between Track 1 and Track 2 actors jeopardises conflict transformation, as multiple competing intermediary efforts have been found to pose a significant risk to peace efforts (Kriesberg 1996). However, Strimling (2006, 100-101) points out that co-operation between official and non-official actors comes with both risks and benefits, both of which increase as the co-operation intensifies. On the one hand, increased mutual respect and trust, an improved understanding of each other's work and a better awareness of opportunities for complementary strategies lead to more efficient action by both official and non-official actors (*ibid.*). On the other hand, official diplomats are wary of sharing sensitive information and of appearing to legitimise the work of private citizens in ways that are not approved of by the government, whereas non-official actors may risk undermining the effectiveness of their own work, as perceptions of their integrity and impartiality often rest on their non-official nature (*ibid.*).

Strimling's co-operation spectrum divides co-operation into four categories of increasing intensity: communication, co-ordination, collaboration and integration. In order to reach a certain stage of co-operation, each preceding category must come first: co-ordination requires communication, while collaboration requires communication and co-ordination, and so on. According to Strimling

(ibid., 120), the last category of integration is generally not possible for state and non-state actors, and the third category, “in which intermediaries take one another as equal partners in some joint initiative (outside of official negotiations or facilitated dialogue processes)” is still unlikely, but possible in the future. She perceives communication (information and idea sharing) and co-ordination (primarily synchronisation of timing and resource sharing) as the two most important categories and as more likely to be achieved than the third stage of collaboration.

	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <i>Low intensity</i> <i>High intensity</i> </div>			
	Communication	Coordination	Collaboration	Integration
Activities	Information sharing; idea sharing (e.g., joint analysis of situation, joint assessment of outcomes)	Synchronizing timing; sharing resources; coordinating contacts, etc.	Joint design and/or implementation of specific activities; active partnership on <i>ad hoc</i> or sustained basis	Integration of personnel, resources, strategies, operations, and identity

Figure 3. The co-operation spectrum. Source: Strimling 2006.

Strimling (2006) identifies five aspects that can both encourage and hinder co-operation between official diplomats and private facilitators. The first and most significant one is *interests*, both long-term and short-term, organisational and individual (ibid., 105). Similar or complementary interests provide opportunities for co-operation, while conflicting interests pose barriers to it. In terms of organisational interests, both official and non-official diplomats are likely to strive for similar overall outcomes, such as the cessation of violence, followed by peace and stability. They may, however, prioritise different goals in reaching that outcome; while official diplomacy is more likely to underline official agreements and advancements in the political or security track, non-official diplomacy may focus on the transformation of attitudes and relations. Individual interests, then, revolve around issues such as personal influence, respect, credibility and a sense of meaning in one’s own work.

The second category, *agency and coalitions*, has to do with the agency relationships between the different actors (ibid., 106). For example, official diplomats represent their government, while

private diplomats represent their organisations, but may simultaneously see themselves as representatives of local beneficiaries. At the same time, private actors are accountable to their funders and can, at least in outsiders' eyes, be regarded as representatives of the funding organisations. On top of that, there may be international alliances that both sides represent.

The third category of *alternatives* refers to the parties' perceived options for co-operation. While the risks associated with co-operation may drive official and non-official diplomats to seek other options, collaboration may also be increased due to factors such as changing international norms regarding multi-track co-operation, the increasingly complex nature of violent conflicts and growing awareness of the limitations of official diplomacy (ibid., 108-9). The fourth category, *cultural differences*, is divided into three primary aspects of culture: *language*, *assumptions* and *norms and scripts*. In terms of language, Strimling notes that non-official diplomacy tends to use different terms than official diplomacy, mentioning "conflict transformation" as one term more often adopted by non-official practitioners (ibid., 110). These differences of perspective and nuance may pose conceptual and practical obstacles to collaboration. In addition to language, different assumptions on the dimensions and drivers of conflict may affect collaboration between official and non-official diplomats if they frame conflicts in different ways or have disparate ideas about what causes conflicts and how to address them (ibid., 111). Finally, norms of interaction also affect co-operation; Strimling argues that official diplomats tend to favour formal mechanisms and consider factors such as status and rank more than their non-official counterparts (ibid.).

The fifth category, perceived power imbalances, concerns the power relations that create initiatives as well as obstacles for co-operation. One usual imbalance is official actors' greater availability of financial resources, whereas non-official actors are thought to have extensive civil society connections and more freedom of operation (ibid., 112). Governmental actors' vast financial or political power may cause concerns for non-official practitioners, but at the same time, access to financial resources or other support can increase their motivation for co-operation. Official actors may worry about granting private citizens power that they see as belonging to government officials. At the same time, they may strive for co-operation to benefit from NGOs' access and connections to civil society or their freedom and autonomy. In addition to these aspects, Strimling notes the importance of individual relationships in influencing negotiation and collaboration between official and non-official diplomats (ibid. 114-115).

These obstacles and incentives for co-operation provide different viewpoints for analysing the relations between the Finnish MFA and the NGOs studied. While Lederach's pyramid offers a way of conceptualising relations between different levels of religious leadership, Strimling's model helps consider the relations between outsider actors working with local religious leaders. This way, levels of religious leadership are not considered as independent from outside dynamics and the global context in which they exist. Rather, it is acknowledged that the links between local actors are not the only networks relevant to transforming the dynamics of violent conflict, but can be extended to NGOs, and through them, to state actors and international organisations.

5. Methodology

Chapter 5 presents the methodology used to discuss the study. It tracks the data collection and analysis process, explaining what kind of material was used and why. It discusses semi-structured interviews as a method, assessing their relevance to the current study. Finally, it examines the validity, issues of bias and potential limitations the study has, while also clarifying ethical considerations.

5.1. Material Used

The topic of the thesis is best suited for qualitative methods, as it deals with a phenomenon that would be difficult to measure in quantitative terms. The analysed material consists of interviews as well as written project documents, the latter of which were mostly provided by the Network. The interviews assessed NGO and MFA experts' views on the role of religious leaders in mediation, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, while project documents and reports from the NGOs provided more detailed information on the concrete work the organisations are engaged in.

The aim was to interview a small number of individuals with expertise on the topic, and the focus was on depth rather than breadth. The altogether nine interviews were planned with the aim of granting equal representation to different actors. They include views from two experts from Felm (Kristiina Rintakoski and Minna Saarnivaara), two from the MFA (Pekka Metso and Janne Oksanen), a former Special Representative on Mediation for the MFA (Kimmo Kiljunen) and four individuals from FCA and the Network Secretariat (Antti Pentikäinen, Aaro Rytönen, Mahdi Abdile and Jussi Ojala). It should be kept in mind that the last two organisations cannot be clearly separated in a reasonable way, since FCA hosts the Network Secretariat. Therefore, various people previously engaged in FCA's peace work (in this case Pentikäinen, Rytönen and Abdile) currently work at the Network Secretariat, with Ojala having also previously worked at the Network Secretariat.

In order to know who the interviewees are, it is useful to summarise (in order of interview date) their positions and the previous work that is particularly relevant for the current study. Jussi Ojala currently serves as the Executive Representative of External Relations and Fragility at FCA. Previously, he was FCA's Senior Advisor in Peace Work. Kimmo Kiljunen has worked as the Foreign Minister's Special Representative to regional peace mediation tasks and has a long career in

international mediation, often working in co-operation with the MFA. He has held various positions in international organisations, especially the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). He was also a Member of the Finnish Parliament from 1995 to 2011. Aaro Rytönen serves as the Head of the Network Secretariat. He has worked with churches and other religions for close to two decades and supported religious and traditional leaders in their peacebuilding and mediation work in Somalia, Mozambique, Central African Republic and elsewhere. During the years 2010-2012, he served as FCA's program manager for the Outreach and Reconciliation Project for Somalia. Antti Pentikäinen is the Executive Director and Convener of the Network in New York. He also serves as the Special Envoy for the Prime Minister of Finland on the Migration Crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. Previously, he has worked as the Executive Director of FCA, as an Adviser for Martti Ahtisaari, as the head of the finance and administration division of CMI and as the Conflict Transformation Director of RfP.

Janne Oksanen is a Desk Officer for Mediation and responsible (among other things) for issues related to the UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security at the MFA's Unit for UN and General Global Affairs. Pekka Metso is the Ambassador-at-Large for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Processes in the same unit. Having worked for the Finnish MFA for nearly 30 years, he has held several positions in Finnish embassies and missions around the world, most recently as the Finnish ambassador to Slovenia and to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has also worked with the United Nations, focusing particularly on human rights issues. Kristiina Rintakoski is the Director of Peacebuilding and Advocacy of Felm. She has previously worked as a Programme Director at CMI and as an Adviser for Martti Ahtisaari. She has held numerous positions in regional organisations in crisis management and peacebuilding and has also worked for the Political Department of the MFA. Minna Saarnivaara is a Senior Adviser in Peace and Reconciliation issues and the Project Manager of the Syria Initiative at Felm. She also works as an independent consultant, specializing in the Middle East. Mahdi Abdile is the Director of Research and Countering Violent Extremism at FCA and the Network and a Fellow and Senior Researcher at the European Institute of Peace. In Somalia, he served as FCA's Regional Representative and Peace Adviser. He was also seconded to the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia to support with the development of new mechanisms to promote tribal reconciliation and the inclusion of community advocates in the selection of MPs for the new Somali Federal Parliament.

The interviews were conducted in the period from June to November of 2016, six in person and three via Skype or on the telephone due to geographical distance. They were of different lengths depending on the interviewees' schedules and other time constraints. In addition, some unexpected and unavoidable events that were out of the hands of both the interviewer and the interviewee took place and cut Saarnivaara's interview short. All of the interviews were recorded. As the interviews were carried out in Finnish, the comments made by the participants were later translated into English.

The written data consists of concept notes and reports on specific projects from the past year, a report on the meeting of the Network's Advisory Group in June 2016 as well as broader mid-year reports prepared for the MFA and the Network's Core Group that review ongoing and finished projects in the years 2015 and 2016. A report outlining Felm's projects in peace work was also used. The focus of the analysis is on the Network's activities due to better access to the organisation's documents, which in turn was partly due to an internship completed at the Network during the writing process.

While the focus is on documents compiled by the organisations themselves, three additional studies offer further insight and information on FCA and the Network's projects. These are Mubashir and Vimalarajah's baseline study on tradition- and faith-oriented insider mediators, commissioned by FCA as the Network Secretariat and primarily funded by the MFA, as well as two studies on FCA's work in Somalia, namely those of Lepistö (2013) and Lepistö, Gisselquist and Ojala (2015). In addition to Ojala, Pentikäinen and Abdile also offered additional written material they had produced to further illustrate their views on the issues.

5.2. Semi-Structured Expert Interviews as a Method

Instead of measuring quantifiable facts, interviews attempt to find out how respondents view certain issues, events and phenomena and to analyse their experiences and observations, the lenses through which they see the issue at hand and the meanings they give to them. While interviews do not provide the kind of "hard data" that quantitative methods offer, they are able to ask and answer questions that quantitative methods cannot account for. Interviews can therefore be a highly efficient and useful method of studying phenomena. They allow us to "interact directly with the

individuals...who populate our theoretical models” and to test, construct and build on theories by revealing the beliefs and behaviour of individuals and the causal mechanisms behind them (Mosley 2013, 2).

In more precise terms, the method was semi-structured expert interviews. A semi-structured interview is organised more clearly in advance than for example the unstructured interview; it is often comprised of questions that have been planned in advance, but it does not follow them in a strict fashion (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has prepared a number of questions and has a specific topic in mind. The questions are open-ended, and the interviewee can answer them freely and as deeply and broadly as they like. The researcher often asks follow-up questions and modifies the questions according to the interviewee’s answers (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

There were certain main themes around which the interview revolved. The participants were asked questions related to how they view the role of religious leaders and their mediation and peacebuilding potential in violent conflicts, how they perceive the role of civil society and the MFA – and the co-operation between the two – in this and what they think about the effect this work has had on Finland’s international visibility in mediation. Participants shared their opinions on these issues as well as some concrete experiences they had from their own work in the field. While some sub-questions and follow-up questions were prepared in advance, the interviews flowed quite freely in the direction they naturally steered towards. Not everyone was asked the same exact questions, and the order and wordings of the questions varied.

The interviews conducted can be described as expert or elite interviews. Experts are individuals with special, technical and professional knowledge in an area. Elite interviewees are often defined similarly, but with potential emphasis on status, influence and power. Depending on the scholar, there may be certain differences between these two terms or they may be used interchangeably, with scientific tradition determining the choice of term. For example, according to Dexter’s (2006 [1970], 18-19) definition, an elite interviewee is any individual who is given “nonstandard treatment”; the researcher stresses their definition of a phenomenon and lets them, to a significant extent, present their own views of what they consider relevant. Dexter’s definition does not consider the power and position of the elite interviewee, and his definition is in this way close to

many scholars' conceptualisation of the expert interviewee. These statuses are to a large extent ascribed by the researcher, and the two categories are quite context-specific and difficult to determine in a straightforward and unambiguous manner. Although "elite" is the more widely used term in the Anglo-American tradition, the two categories often overlap; in fact, the elite can be considered a subgroup of experts (Littig 2009). While the participants of this study can be referred to by both terms, the method is referred to as the expert interview in this study.

Expert interviews can be a highly effective means of exploring a topic and gathering data on it. They can also be a source of insider knowledge that is difficult to find elsewhere. Tansey (2007) finds that elite interviewing is also a particularly useful technique for gathering data in process tracing; when studying certain political events, it is extremely helpful to receive information about it straight from the key actors involved in the process. This was also found to be true for the topic studied here, as it was important to interview a particular group of individuals to make sense of the chain of developments leading to the increased interest in the role of religious leaders in mediation in the Finnish context and to the establishment of the Network.

One of the first obstacles to conducting these types of interviews is often gaining access to the experts. Establishing a few key contacts may provide new opportunities and expand access to other interviewees. Recommendations from interviewees are often an efficient way of finding new, knowledgeable participants to the study; however, this type of "snowball sampling" increases the risk of bias, as interviewees are likely to recommend participants with similar views on a topic (Bleich and Pekkanen 2013, 87). The snowballing effect was also found to be true in this case. After the first step of identifying and establishing contact with key people that would have the most to contribute to the topic, the individuals who agreed to be interviewed were also able to recommend other people for further interviews. In the majority of cases, these were people that had already been considered and had or had not yet been contacted. A number of helpful recommendations were received, but not all were followed up on because of practical limitations having to do with time and the scope of the thesis.

In this case, the key actors to be interviewed were a fairly visible set of individuals in the sense that information about their work and areas of specialisation was quite readily available on the Internet. Some of the people on the initial list could not be reached, which made it necessary to explore new,

alternative participants. While none of the individuals contacted explicitly declined to be interviewed, a handful did not reply, and with some, busy schedules and time constraints prevented their participation.

5.3. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

As Merriam and Tisdell (2014, 169) note, qualitative data collection and analysis are usually simultaneous, overlapping processes; data is analysed as it is being collected. This was also the case in this study, as evaluating the data while it was being gathered helped decide what leads to pursue and what to abandon, which questions were important and which not so useful. Analysing large amounts of data can be overwhelming, and its gradual analysis makes the process much easier. This entailed an early start on reading and listening to the data, organising it and making notes on it. In addition to guiding the data collection process, this made it easier to form a general view of the data, to discern patterns in it and to identify emerging themes.

After the point of saturation was reached, data collection was ended. At this point, the data was analysed more intensively, through inductive and comparative reasoning. Emerging pieces of data were organised more systematically and turned into categories. Some figures and models helped to illustrate the organisation of data. Prioritisation of findings was necessary; while the interviews presented many interesting leads that could have been followed, a large portion of the data gathered needed to be left out of the presented findings to retain the planned scope. Ultimately, the information most relevant to the research aims was included.

5.4. Validity, Limitations, Bias and Ethics

The thesis makes no claims of representing common, usual or generalisable opinions on the topic, but rather those of people who work with the phenomenon studied here. As the participants are individuals who have chosen to work in organisations and positions in which they co-operate with religious leaders in mediation efforts, it was to be expected that they would have a positive outlook on the potential of religious leaders participating in peace processes. Therefore, the focus of the research question is not whether these mediation professionals think religious leaders can or cannot participate in mediation, but rather *how* and *why* they believe they can do so. Furthermore, it can be assumed that there are certain restrictions to what the participants can say as representatives

of their organisations – as is the case with most studies employing data from expert interviews. As far as other limitations go, the scope of the thesis was defined by a number of practical limitations having to do with time as well as logistical and financial limitations.

The most notable possible bias stems from the fact that establishing contact and conducting interviews with personnel from the Network Secretariat resulted in an internship at the Network and a personal involvement in the work of FCA and the Network. While most of the research had already been completed by then, this personal engagement in FCA and the Network's activities should be noted. Then again, work at the Network Secretariat provided a myriad of valuable information that would not otherwise have been available, thereby increasing the validity of the study.

Qualitative interviews, naturally, cannot present any objective, universal truths about a given topic, and there are various factors that may shape the data gathered. First, interviewer effects and the way the researcher is perceived by the interviewees may impact the information received; two researchers with similar research designs may acquire different sets of data from their interviews (Mosley 2013, 12). Second, the interviewer and the interviewee both bring their own conscious and subconscious assumptions and motives to the interview and interpret each other's questions and answers through a certain lens. Third, when analysing the data collected in the interview, the researcher inevitably offers their own interpretation of the issue at hand and presents it in a certain way; some aspects of the data may be emphasised while others are downplayed (Graue and Trainor 2013, 133-134). In order to present the views of the interviewees as accurately as possible, it is important not to let them disappear under the writer's own voice (King and Horrocks 2010, 137-139). Fourth, the translation of interview data presents limitations to the exactness of quotations, as it is always possible that certain elements or some between-the-lines meaning will be lost. Finally, there are numerous situation-specific variables that may influence the way the two parties engage in the interview at the particular moment.

Bleich and Pekkanen (2013, 88) note that while these types of issues with the validity and reliability of a study may raise concerns, they can be viewed as "measurement errors" of qualitative interviews; after all, margins of error are also present in quantitative data. Although it is not possible to eliminate these risks, it is important to be aware of them and to reflect on their potential effects

on the results in order to maximise the value and usefulness of the data produced. Transparency about the purposes and motivations behind the study and about the ways in which it is conducted is key.

The interviewees were openly informed about the purposes of the research, and all interviewees consented to having their interviews recorded. The Network Secretariat and Felm knowingly provided access to the material used. The finished thesis with quotations from the interviewees was sent to them before its handing in to provide sufficient time for the participants to address any concerns they might have about their views being misrepresented or about classified information being published.

6. Religious Leaders in Conflict Transformation: The Role of Official and Non-official Mediation

This chapter lays out the findings of the study. As it has already been argued that a shift can be detected in the way religious peacemakers have become a new focal point – albeit one among several – in Finnish mediation, Chapter 6 turns its attention to *how* and *why* this has happened. Why are religious leaders seen as important actors in mediation, and how has such a view come to take place? In order to answer these questions, the study explores how mediation professionals from the NGOs and the MFA view the role of religious leaders in peace processes and how they co-operate in supporting the peace efforts of such leaders. It should be kept in mind, again, that the chapter does not mean to provide an objective, exhaustive analysis of the tasks, strengths and weaknesses of religious leaders in mediation and conflict transformation, but to examine how these aspects are seen by the participants, and how this affects their work with each other. Unless otherwise stated, the references related to the participants identified in the previous chapter cite the interviews conducted with them.

6.1. Religious Leaders in Conflict Transformation

Religious leaders can assume a variety of different mediation and conflict transformation tasks, depending on the nature of the conflict, the setting and environment in which the conflict takes place and the role of religion in each particular context. The first part of Chapter 6 presents and compares the views the interviewees have on the peacebuilding and mediation role religious leaders can take in violent conflicts. It considers how they see the role of religious leaders in different phases of the conflict cycle and at different levels from the local to the national, paying particular attention to the types of peacebuilding and mediation tasks and activities religious leaders have the most potential to engage in. It then examines where these particular capabilities stem from, assessing the interviewees' ideas on both the strengths and challenges religious leaders have in their peace work. By comparing the perceptions participants from the MFA and NGOs have on the peace work carried out by religious leaders as well as their strengths and challenges, the chapter assesses whether there is a common, cohesive view of the role religious leaders play and the forms that co-operation with them should take. This, then, has implications for the co-operation between the NGOs and the way the MFA supports their activities in the field.

Conflict Transformation Tasks of Religious Leaders

The interviewees considered religious leaders to potentially be able to play a role in all phases of the conflict cycle from prevention to post-conflict processes. Many, however, emphasised the importance of prevention, as the strong moral authority of religious leaders is thought to play a key role in this phase: "Religion can have both a preventive and an escalating role; religious leaders – and religious actors – may have significant influence on whether a conflict arises" (Rytkönen 2016). Kiljunen (2016) underlined that it is crucial for religious leaders not to give their blessing to violence or to give it any justification during this phase. In the same vein, Metso (2016) noted that the best results are achieved with proactive action when signs of intergroup religious conflict are emerging, and Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) underlined the importance of religious leaders encouraging dialogue, tolerance and peaceful co-existence as central in preventing tensions from erupting. Oksanen (2016) also saw prevention as the main area of influence for religious leaders and as a central area of mediation in itself, also stressing mediation tasks carried out during the conflict, such as negotiating and searching for solutions.

Reflecting on the activities religious leaders can engage in once the violent conflict is ongoing, Pentikäinen (2016) brought up tasks such as facilitating communication and creating a backchannel connection between actors, negotiating concrete agreements, acting as a representative of a group and conveying messages between different groups. He noted, however, that in terms of achieving peace, the value of religious leaders may be more instrumental in nature rather than based on an ability to reach concrete deals; if a ceasefire is achieved, religious leaders can act as protectors and guarantors of the process (ibid.). Ojala (2016) underlined the role religious leaders can take in building trust in the peace process during the implementation phase, pointing out that many peace processes have failed at this stage due to the people not having faith in the political process or accepting it as their own.

As for the post-conflict phase, the interviewees acknowledged the role of religious leaders in promoting reconciliation and societal healing. Kiljunen (2016), for example, noted that the moral codes offered by religion and the credibility of religious leaders grant them significant potential to support post-conflict reconciliation processes. For his part, Pentikäinen (2016) brought up the Network's future plans to explore the potential for religiously motivated intra- and interreligious

reconciliation processes in certain contexts. Although the Network is not currently involved in such activities, they have been identified as a central area for religious leaders to advance peace. This would be crucial during political transitions to help promote communal healing, rehabilitation and forgiveness: “Many political actors at the UN are aware that religious actors have a role in this but there have been no systematic efforts to address the issue” (ibid.).

When reflecting on the part religious leaders play in different types of violent conflict, both Pentikäinen and Rintakoski underlined the role of such leaders in conflicts with religious elements to them. Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) argued that in conflicts with strong religious tensions or violations of religious freedom, there is a need for religious dialogue to support the official process and to ease tension – this dialogue cannot be had by secular actors among themselves. In the same way, Pentikäinen (2016) suggested that the more sectarian the nature of the conflict, the more essential the involvement of religious leaders. Yet, the peace work carried out by religious leaders is not limited to highly religious conflicts; as an example, Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) mentioned Tanzania, where Felm provides technical and financial support to bishops due to their potentially significant role in the resolution of land conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Ultimately, it was agreed by the interviewees that the role of religious leaders in conflict situations is highly context-specific.

The interviewees all agreed on the potential that religious leaders have to act at the grassroots level, with some raising their impact on higher-level decision making. Their activities may range from intra-family dispute resolution at the local level all the way to national processes. One common example of conflict transformation efforts that religious leaders were seen to have a lot to contribute to is interfaith dialogue, which religious leaders may be able to encourage at different levels. On the one hand, they may have a key role in shaping more positive and harmonious grassroots relations among the population in their communities. On the other, they can facilitate dialogue and meetings between higher-level religious representatives, whether it is between their own religious community and another one or, as Metso (2016) mentioned, between two religious groups the facilitator is not part of. Abdile (2016) noted that interreligious understanding between highly authoritative religious leaders may have a very positive impact on peace efforts – if such understanding can be reached.

When it comes to national political processes, it was stated that even though religious leaders may often not be able to directly impact their outcomes, they can nevertheless exert influence in their communities to indirectly support the process. Rytkönen (2016), Pentikäinen (2016) and Ojala (2016) highlighted the idea that involvement at the grassroots is needed in order to support and gain people's trust in national peace processes; this is where the work of religious and traditional leaders is crucial. Recalling FCA's work in Somalia, Pentikäinen (2016) explained: "Under every large conflict, there are tens, if not hundreds, of smaller conflicts. Tribal leaders can strengthen an axis of peace by resolving these smaller conflicts by employing traditional methodology that the tribes have. Then, by supporting this grassroots resolution capacity we create action that translates into the national level and can result in agreements that the community accepts as their own." Pentikäinen (2016) added that in very fragile states, religious and traditional leaders may be at the core of the legitimisation process of the state, in the development of a political roadmap and a social contract that can begin the statebuilding process.

Pentikäinen pointed out that such grassroots processes do not replace Track 1, but rather complement it; co-operation between the official and non-official tracks is therefore important (ibid.). In order for Track 1 processes to work in fragile states in the long term, it is crucial to acknowledge the need for informal, unofficial efforts to gather support for political processes and to build people's trust in them; this can also help create stronger state structures that are perceived as legitimate by the population and can sustain themselves. In this regard, Pentikäinen emphasised the social influence religious leaders have in their communities: "In many conflict situations, it is not self-evident that [religious and traditional leaders] have particularly great authority – they may have a social role and a security role but their political role is not clear. It cannot be affirmed that tribal leaders can reach a ceasefire or negotiate a constitution, but they inevitably have an impact on whether the security track can be moved forward or whether constitutional negotiations can be promoted in a sustainable way" (ibid.). Abdile (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) concurred, stating that religious leaders have a great deal of legitimacy in some contexts, but in others they do not – however, when they do have legitimacy, their support for peace efforts is important, even if they themselves cannot make political decisions.

Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) agreed that since peace processes tend to take place at the elite level, religious actors function as the link that brings the process to the population so

that it turns into concrete progress and leads to reduced dichotomy and changes in people's thinking. In addition to national political processes, trust building efforts at the grassroots are important to broaden support for international processes. For example, as Ojala (2016) recalled, FCA's activities in Somalia also entailed facilitating co-operation and meetings between Somali traditional leaders (Elders) and UN staff, including the UN Special Representative and head of UNPOS, Augustine Mahiga.

The interviewees generally considered religious leaders to be able to participate in various different aspects of peace work, be they peacemaking, peace mediation, conflict management, resolution or transformation or post-conflict peacebuilding. The representatives of Felm, however, expressed scepticism about whether religious leaders can actually take on an effective mediator role; rather, they see the role of religious leaders more often in peacebuilding and in national and other dialogue processes (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016). It should be noted, however, that this distinction is largely due to different uses of the term "mediation"; the type of peacebuilding and dialogue tasks Rintakoski and Saarnivaara referred to were perceived as part of mediation by many others and are aspects the MFA's mediation policy also underlines. These differences in choices of term appear to be indicative of broader terminological differences between the NGOs and the MFA and among practitioners and academics in general. As the field of mediation has made way for new types of actors and fresh approaches, the reconceptualisation of old approaches and rules has also resulted in the term having to account for new meanings and beginning to overlap with terms such as "peacebuilding". While this is a larger debate that defies easy answers, differences of what constitutes mediation may affect collaboration between actors (an issue which will be returned to later in the chapter).

Furthermore, this scepticism about the mediation potential of religious leaders is related to Felm's view that religious actors on lower hierarchical levels have much more peacebuilding potential than religious leaders. As Saarnivaara argued: "Religious actors are a completely different issue. There may be actors at different levels, some are mid-level or bottom-level leadership – they often have much better capabilities for action" (ibid.). Along the same lines, Metso (2016) noted that speaking of religious leaders leaves out a variety of other potential religious actors, highlighting the peacebuilding role of women and youth. However, the position of lower-level actors was not stressed to the same extent in the other interviews, and FCA and Network representatives also

raised the potential impact of religious leaders on national processes. Still, other interviewees also often used the term “religious actor” as a broader term, as it was agreed by all that the involvement of religious actors at all hierarchical levels is crucial (see “Definitions” for a brief discussion on the focus on religious leaders in this study). In the case of the Network, emphasis in language appears to have shifted to include actors at all levels since the organisation’s establishment. This is illustrated by the fact that the organisation is often referred to as the network of “religious and traditional leaders” in Finnish, which is perhaps a relic of the original plans and discussions about the focus of the organisation.

Furthermore, terminological differences may be due to the fact that neither theory nor practice defines “religious actors” and “religious leaders” very clearly; the categories are largely overlapping and the terms used interchangeably. Indeed, literature would benefit from greater conceptual clarity of the term. Lederach does not elaborate much further on what kind of religious actors constitute mid-level leadership, and neither do most other scholars. In fact, there often does not seem to be a clear, unambiguous way to categorise religious leaders and actors based on their hierarchical position; their authority is heavily context-dependent, and it may be difficult to create theoretical tools to determine and measure their position in the hierarchy. As for the identification of religious leaders in practice, Ojala (2016) and Rytkönen (2016) pointed out that the authority of religious leaders is revealed quite quickly in the process. Since the authority of religious leaders depends on the perception of the local community, NGOs do not have to – nor could they – decide who is and is not a leader. Rytkönen (ibid.) and Abdile (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) also distinguished between official and unofficial leaders; the former are easier to identify, but for the latter, there is no checklist of criteria to be fulfilled. Partner organisations that have worked in the area for a long time are also an important asset in finding and identifying religious leaders (ibid.).

Regardless of whether emphasis was placed on mediation or peacebuilding, the interviewees agreed on the high context-specificity of the peace work of religious leaders. Although the impact of each particular context is key, some common patterns and likely areas of influence can be identified to demonstrate where the conflict transformation potential of religious leaders lies. Figure 4 presents the main conflict transformation tasks identified in the interviews in general. It is not meant to be an exhaustive, objective list of all roles and tasks religious leaders can take on, but a general illustration of the areas considered most central by the experts interviewed. These tasks

are depicted on two different levels to demonstrate the dual focus on both narrower, more short-term mediation activities on the one hand and on broader, long-term transformative activities on the other.

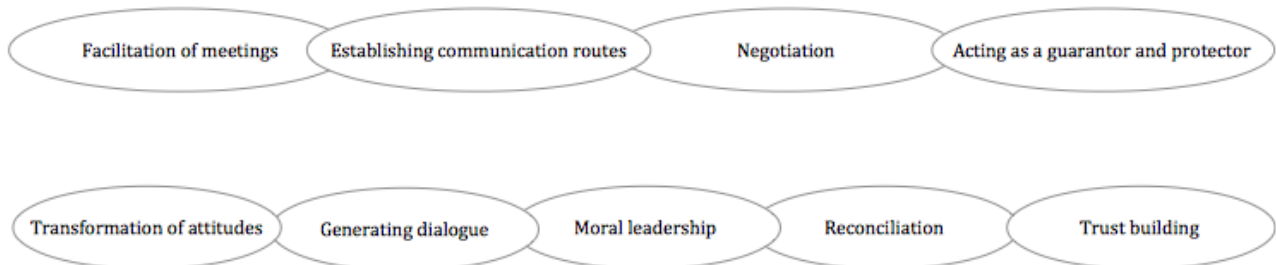


Figure 4. Mediation and peacebuilding tasks of religious leaders.

The bottom layer of the model illustrates the broader, cross-cutting, long-term tasks carried out to ease tension, to generate peaceful attitudes and intra- and interreligious understanding and to promote healing and reconciliation. These are activities that often take place during the whole conflict cycle from prevention to post-conflict peacebuilding. It is difficult – and arguably counterproductive – to draw clear distinctions between the different phases of violent conflicts in which these tasks are conducted. For example, reconciliation and healing are usually associated with the post-conflict stage, but are also overlapping processes that take place during conflict to prepare the ground for peace or to prevent further violence. This has particular relevance for complex, protracted conflicts with numerous smaller conflicts embedded in them and with many intertwined mediation, peacebuilding and healing processes happening simultaneously.

One aspect of the long-term peacebuilding tasks identified by the interviewees is the transformation of attitudes sustaining and driving violent conflict; this can, for example, take place in the form of peace education, the spreading of peaceful and tolerant messages and the deconstruction and reconstruction of negative enemy images in communities. This is closely related to the capability of religious leaders to act as opinion leaders; due to their position, they can have significant influence over the thinking patterns in their communities. Opinion leadership, then, goes hand in hand with the task of moral leadership. Religious leaders can act as moral leaders by providing moral codes, leading by example, condemning violence and drawing on religious values to promote peace. As discussed above, they also have an important role in encouraging and maintaining dialogue,

particularly intra- and interreligious forms. In addition to building trust between different groups in their communities, religious leaders can build their communities' trust in the official peace process to enable it to take root and to increase local ownership and participation. Finally, they have an integral role to play in promoting reconciliation and rehabilitation and in fostering forgiveness, healing and recovery in their societies.

The bottom layer then forms the basis for what can be conceptualised as more specific mediation tasks, which tend to be more short-term and temporary, and become particularly important in the middle of violent conflict. These types of mediation tasks build on the long-term peacebuilding efforts of the bottom layer. They begin with concrete conflict resolution and mediation activities; efforts to find solutions to conflicts on all levels of the society from the family-level to the national level. This can include activities such as negotiation – also that of concrete agreements – and the facilitation of meetings and discussions to provide a platform for dialogue between parties. In addition, religious leaders can facilitate communication between actors, for example, by acting as a messenger between them and by creating links, backchannel connections and methods of indirect, informal or private communication between conflict parties. They can also act as guarantors and protectors of the peace process and the agreements achieved; in order to increase the sustainability and the local ownership of the peace process, it may sometimes be beneficial to have internal actors with a high reputation protect and monitor the process instead of outside actors taking a carrot-and-stick approach.

All in all, the activities identified are intertwined and mutually supportive; no clear-cut boundaries can easily be drawn between the different tasks and activities. Here, the fine line between the definitions of mediation and peacebuilding again becomes important, as the interviewees referred to these tasks with both terms, depending on the individual and their point of view. This demonstrates the extent to which their choices of words are also related to the type of peace efforts emphasised; religious actors and leaders on lower hierarchical levels are arguably better equipped to engage in the kind of grassroots peacebuilding tasks emphasised by Saarnivaara and Rintakoski, while the more specific mediation tasks on the upper level of Figure 4 are likely to require the higher religious authority of mid- and top-level leaders, whose role is more central to the work of the Network and FCA than that of Felm. A high level of influence and connections is often needed from religious leaders engaged in the latter kind of activities, especially if they are facilitating negotiations

and sending messages between more radical groups or groups otherwise difficult to reach or resistant to peace efforts.

The Network and FCA's engagement of religious leaders is largely based on their role as insider mediators, a variety of local actors who attempt to transform the conflict system from the inside. Yet, Saarnivaara (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) stated that in some contexts, religious leaders have no possibility to act, because they are so deeply involved in the conflict or the other party. Indeed, the insiderness of religious leaders is a fine line sometimes; it requires a subjective interest and involvement in the conflict, yet not so much that the insider is incapable of any objective perceptions or of seeing the conflict system in a holistic way (Mubashir and Vimalarajah 2016, 16). The extent to which religious leaders are insiders or outsiders tends to be a matter of perspective and subject to shifting conflict dynamics (ibid., 29). Generally, it appeared the representatives of Felm considered it more important that religious actors have a certain distance to the conflict parties, whereas the representatives of FCA and the Network Secretariat did not stress the issue in the same way. Sometimes, religious figures who are insiders in their own context can mediate regionally in another context in which they are outsiders (Metso 2016; Mubashir and Vimalarajah 2016, 17). These differences of view again reflect the complexity of questions of insiderness, impartiality and partiality that also extends to academic debates.

While there are no great differences of opinion when it comes to their conflict transformation tasks, different aspect of peace work are emphasised by different actors. Broadly speaking, Metso and Oksanen highlight the need for dialogue, which is in line with Finland's emphasis on national and non-formal dialogue processes as tools of mediation. The Network and FCA's views are largely based on their conceptualisation of religious leaders as insider mediators. Felm steers towards actors lower in religious hierarchies, tasks traditionally conceptualised as peacebuilding, non-politicisation of religious actors and more distance to the conflict. These factors appear to be connected in their thinking, as it is religious actors and lower-level leadership that are seen as more capable of fulfilling the other three aforementioned conditions. The Network and FCA as its Secretariat, for their part, work with a wider range of religious actors, including those at higher hierarchical levels. This is also because the Network's activities are premised on the identified need for better co-operation between Track 1 actors and religious and traditional actors, making religious leaders and actors its particular focus and area of specialisation. Regardless of their somewhat different ideas on how

religious actors can most effectively contribute to peace efforts and who exactly the most central actors are, both parties stress context-specificity, meaning that the type of actors with the most potential to contribute to peace efforts largely depends on each particular case. Overall, the somewhat differing areas of focus of FCA and Felm are not in conflict with each other and are unlikely to pose obstacles to co-operation as it is. However, they might have implications for deeper collaboration in projects, should such take place. Despite these differences regarding the contribution of religious leaders and actors, the views of all the interviewees are based on a very similar, shared view of the role of religion in conflicts and peacebuilding.

When examined from the point of view of conflict transformation, the emphasis of the interviewees is indeed on the kind of tasks that promote long-term change, even though some call these activities mediation and others peacebuilding. In certain situations, religious leaders can also facilitate shorter-term resolution of practical issues, be they related to negotiations between conflict parties or local disputes about issues such as land use. The role of religious leaders becomes particularly central due to the aim of transformation approaches not to simply remove and eject conflict from a society, but to build and support local capacity in handling conflict in a constructive manner and in preventing and stopping the violence accompanying it. Because of their position in the community, religious leaders can contribute to creating and maintaining non-violent ways to address intergroup disputes, not just during an armed conflict, but also afterwards. This way, they can prevent relapses into violence and build the foundation for more peaceful relations between groups, particularly those separated by religious affiliation. The interviewees share the view of many conflict transformation scholars that early efforts are crucial, as changing the structures generating violent conflict is easier before violence escalates.

Even if they do not explicitly place themselves in the particular field and tradition, the NGO practitioners' perceptions on religious leaders and transformation processes closely correspond to those adopted by conflict transformation scholars. The NGOs, however, do not necessarily feel the need to adopt specific, technical definitions for terms such as resolution and transformation. In general, resolution is associated with shorter-term goals and practical and concrete issues, whereas transformation is seen as the overall objective and the broader process towards which the activities of religious leaders contribute. These two goals – resolution and transformation – co-exist in the NGOs' thinking. They essentially approach such terms from a practical point of view, with different

choices of term becoming suitable in different situations – in much the same way as the tasks of religious leaders can range from more specific, short-term resolution efforts to broader, long-term transformation. While the MFA has not embraced transformation approaches in a similar way, its views on the kind of peace efforts that religious leaders can effectively carry out largely correspond to those of the NGOs, emphasising the generation of inter- and intragroup trust and understanding, communication and dialogue.

Mediation Strengths of Religious Leaders

The conflict transformation tasks identified in the previous subchapter stem from the particular strengths many religious leaders possess. Because of their unique position in their societies, religious leaders on the one hand have a specific set of tools at their disposal and a range of specific strengths that other types of actors do not have. On the other hand, they also face a particular set of challenges and may be susceptible to certain weaknesses that cloud their peace work. While the strengths and challenges described below do not apply exclusively to religious leaders but also to many secular and other types of actors, they are advantages with particular relevance for the peace work of religious leaders and challenges to which they are likely to be especially vulnerable.

The strengths, then, are seen to be rooted in the traditionally pivotal position religion occupies in the societies where religious leaders are – or could be – involved in peace efforts. In rural contexts in particular, the central role religion has long occupied in the organisation of social life has made it possible for religious leaders to become influential and authoritative figures. These religious – as well as other traditional structures – may be strengthened by conflict if state structures are fragile or largely manufactured or sustained from the outside: “It seems that the more fragile the structure is and the more violence is taking place, the more these models of social organisation retreat back to tribal and often also to religious structures and boundaries, from which people then find support and a method of identification” (Pentikäinen 2016). Sometimes the state’s inability to enforce justice and the local population’s reluctance to accept Western laws lead to communities turning to traditional institutions and methods of dispute resolution, as found by Abdile in a study on customary dispute resolution in Somalia (2012). While these types of traditional methods and institutions often have notable problems that need to be addressed (ibid.), their importance to local communities must be acknowledged and may offer avenues for positive engagement of traditional

and religious authorities, whose inclusion becomes essential in order to reach the population at the grassroots and to initiate processes of conflict transformation. As Oksanen (2016) and Rytönen (2016) noted, traditional structures, often with a religious frame of reference, may be the best functioning system in these situations and offer something to build on.

Ojala (2016) added that in fragile states in which the official government is not trusted and does not deliver services, religious and traditional structures often fill this void, gaining the trust of the population. There may also be similar distrust towards the judiciary system or law enforcement, making long-standing religious institutions and figures the more trustworthy and less politicised or bureaucratic structure to turn to (Rytönen 2016). This trust becomes crucial in religious leaders' peace work and can be necessary in linking the political process to the grassroots through individuals the local community feels they can count on.

The long history of religion and religious structures in organising social and public life means religious leaders usually have extensive experience and knowledge of the local community: "Religious leaders are actors who have a very long history wherever they are; whether it has been a conflict or a natural disaster or just normal life, they have been there and stayed there. And I dare say this applies to practically anywhere with a perspective of about two hundred-three hundred years. Certainly, if we consider the Middle East or Northern Africa these time frames are even longer" (Rytönen 2016). Similarly, Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) highlighted permanence, noting that in many conflict situations with non-functioning state institutions, religious actors are the ones who have been in the area before and during the conflict and who will be there after it ends. Their long experience and knowledge of the local situation and the history of conflicts in the area can provide invaluable information for outside actors supporting peace efforts in the state (Pentikäinen 2016).

This unique position rooted in the historical function of religious structures in the every-day organisation of both public and private life grants religious leaders certain particular strengths, on which the interviewees had largely similar thoughts. The most frequently mentioned qualities were credibility, legitimacy, trust, knowledge of the local community and context, moral authority, access to the population and connections to various other actors at different levels of society. These

attributes are interrelated and reinforce each other; for example, knowledge of the local context and history reinforces a religious leader's credibility, moral authority breeds trust and so on.

Figure 5 demonstrates this pattern and the participants' perception of the source of religious leaders' strengths. While their position is largely rooted in the long history and relevance of religion in the society, it is simultaneously strengthened by eroding state structures further weakened by violent conflict. This leads to religious structures taking up activities traditionally conducted by the state, strengthening trust in religious institutions and individuals. These factors form the basis for the particular conflict transformation strengths possessed by religious leaders.

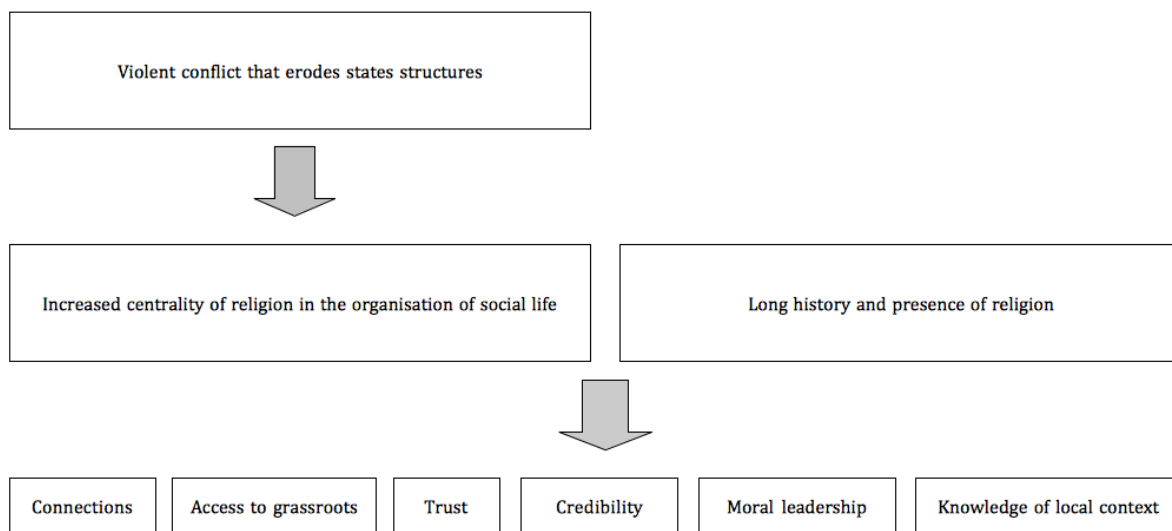


Figure 5. The strengths of religious leaders.

Two integral positive characteristics religious leaders were seen to have are their credibility in the community and the trust they enjoy in it. In much the same way people often tend to distrust the judiciary or the law enforcement system in these types of societies, politicians are met with wary attitudes. As Metso (2016) pointed out, “politicians are more likely to be seen as pursuing their own self-interests, while religious actors often have the kind of credibility in these communities politicians do not have”. The credibility and trust afforded to religious leaders also reinforces their ability to settle disputes or mediate: “Religion has such a long, powerful reason for existence inside the community that [religious leaders] have a huge influence on whether conflicts can be resolved or whether they escalate” (Rytönen 2016).

Another strength that these two attributes are closely connected to is the moral authority religious leaders have, which stems from the common value base that religions offer during violent conflict (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016). Religious leaders can then employ their moral leadership and draw upon these values to promote peace. At the same time, the role of religious values and images in conflicts is complex, and they can also be used for non-peaceful purposes. As Kiljunen (2016) added, due to its power in offering moral codes and creating value structures, religion may have both a positive and a negative influence in the society.

As Kiljunen (ibid.) and Oksanen (2016) pointed out, moral authority grants religious leaders a platform for influence by ensuring they are listened to. When reflecting on the leadership qualities of religious leaders, Kiljunen (2016) noted: "[A religious leader] may also lead by their own example but most importantly, they are listened to, from local communities to the top levels of society." Moral authority therefore comes with access to large numbers of people and a strong ability to influence the community's opinions and views. Indeed, good connections, broad networks and access to the larger grassroots community were seen as an integral part of religious leaders' strengths. Metso (2016) again compared them to politicians in this regard: "[Religious leaders] have better access [to the people] than political actors do – in many places, politicians often work in their own ivory towers. Religious leaders have to engage the people more because their mandate is based on their access to the population." This work among the grassroots community is generally seen as a central part of their leadership position; Kiljunen (2016), for example, noted religious leaders' strengths as opinion leaders stem to a large extent from their strong verbal skills and their experience working with masses of people. Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) pointed out that access to masses, connection networks and the possibility of working at different levels of the society offer religious actors unique potential for peace education, for spreading tolerant messages and for transforming negative images of *the Other*. In the same way, Pentikäinen (2016) stated that the connections, access and moral authority religious leaders have enable them to influence opinions on a broad scale and to bring messages and facilitate communication between different parties.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that the relevance of religious leaders depends on the role of religious structures in each context. If social organisation does not take place along religious and traditional lines; potential insider mediators have to be found among other types of groups and

actors – as Abdile and Rytönen (2016) underlined, it is not the job of organisations such as the Network to change local structures, but rather to find ways to make use of the existing ones in supporting peace efforts. In order to be sustainable, the transformation of each conflict must be owned and driven from the inside; this, in turn, requires a genuine acknowledgement of the religious and traditional structures that may already be in place. Overall, the interviewees' ideas on the strengths of religious leaders are largely similar and also in line with how scholars in the field generally conceptualise them. Although there may be some differences of opinion on the activities religious leaders have the most potential to take on, the root of their conflict transformation capacity is viewed in much the same way by participants from the NGOs and the MFA.

Mediation Challenges Faced by Religious Leaders

Just as it is important to recognise the specific strengths religious leaders have, it is equally important to be aware of the potential challenges related to their peace work. This is crucial when designing methods of co-operation with religious leaders and ways to address their support needs. To begin with, the interviewees agreed that all religions have values that can be used to promote both peace and violence. While they offer a set of values mediators and peacebuilders can draw from in their conflict transformation efforts, they also provide arguments that can be used to mobilise violence. Therefore, it is not self-evident that religious leaders all share the same peaceful goals. Furthermore, there are times when the goals religious leaders work towards are not violent, but simply unhelpful in terms of broader sociopolitical and -economic change and conflict transformation. These may be religious issues of more trivial or superficial nature. As an example, Rytönen (2016) recalled an experience with a group of bishops who, instead of bringing up current societal issues, used their meeting with the president to ask for national day celebrations to be postponed in order for drinking, fireworks and other celebrations not to coincide with Good Friday: "In my opinion, if religious leadership has a narrow perspective on what is happening around them and has a very limited focus on religious issues, that does not promote trust by the population or by the state; they then marginalise themselves" (ibid.). This, in turn, erodes religious leaders' authority and leadership in the eyes of both the grassroots and the elite, undermining their credibility to promote peaceful messages.

Another concern that was brought up is the potential exclusion of religious actors on lower levels of religious hierarchies, and the marginalisation of groups such as women and youth. Metso (2016) discussed the difficulties in making sure the co-operation that happens between religious elites translates into grassroots relations, and Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) highlighted the lack of democracy if a meeting of religious leaders actually means a handful of elderly men discussing amongst themselves with minimal participation from the community. The issues discussed in these meetings may never translate to the community at large: “Many of these processes always bring together the same [religious leaders] but do not extend to the lower levels or change anything. What is actually said about peace and tolerance on a local level in, for example, mosques and temples, is of huge importance”, Rintakoski (ibid.) stated, adding that many donors have also begun to notice this. Furthermore, she pointed out that the strength of churches is that they are everywhere; if dialogue is limited to elite discussions, this ability of churches to reach the masses is lost (ibid.).

The inclusion of women in peace work is another notable challenge in hierarchical and often patriarchal traditional structures, and something that the NGOs studied underline in their work (a topic elaborated on in the following subchapter). It is also a central concern for the MFA, with Metso (2016) and Oksanen (2016) emphasising the important role of women and youth in peace work. Rytkönen (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) noted that in order to promote inclusivity in a sustainable way, inclusive approaches have to be woven into local structures from the inside, rather than attached to processes from the outside. While outside support is important to initiate and promote the process, participation and initiative from local religious and traditional actors is crucial.

In addition to inclusivity issues, there are also other ways in which religious and traditional structures may sometimes clash with international human rights standards. Religious leaders, as a highly diverse group of actors, follow and promote very different values. “It should be remembered that there are rituals and processes that do not adhere to international human rights standards”, Rytkönen (2016) remarked, adding, however, that this is further reason to participate in the traditional processes and to support new ways of thinking. From the MFA’s perspective, Oksanen (2016) noted that it is not Finland’s goal to increase the power of religious and traditional leaders in the states struggling with conflict – rather, they are one central type of actor who can contribute to mediation processes.

As for individual religious leaders who do not respect international human rights, it was suggested that rather than exclude these types of religious leaders, it is more worthwhile to engage them and to attempt to foster thinking and attitudes that respect human rights standards. When thinking about the difficulties of sometimes having contact with individuals with a questionable past, Ojala (2016) argued that while the past has to be acknowledged and responsibility has to be taken for past actions, it is better for FCA to focus on the future: "We try to live in the present [and consider] what can be done now and what can be done in the future and how the situation can be changed for the better." Furthermore, Ojala (2016) pointed out that the Network and FCA cannot cherry-pick the religious leaders they wish to engage with; they have to accept the fact that certain religious leaders are listened to and enjoy the trust of the people, even if they have radical opinions. These considerations illustrate the belief in engaging with individuals and processes with views that are problematic from a human rights perspective as an inherent aspect of the transformation approach adopted by FCA and the Network. This approach rests on the view that in order to truly transform the systems sustaining both direct and structural violence, it is not enough to involve those who share the same goals, but also those whose beliefs maintain the conflict system.

The interviewees from Felm brought up the difficulties in combining religion and politics. Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) argued that "some religious actors wish to stay far away from politics and political processes, and peace processes are always political". Moreover, Saarnivaara (ibid.) commented that in some cases, a political affiliation may negatively affect the community's perception of a religious leader. Conversely, highly authoritative religious leaders are sometimes also top-level political leaders (Abdile and Rytönen 2016). FCA and the Network Secretariat did not similarly underline issues related to the political involvement of religious leaders. Indeed, the intertwined nature of religion and conflicts in some contexts is another complex issue that impacts how the situation should be approached. Ultimately, this depends on the type and hierarchical position of the religious actor in question and their position and role in the community, as well as the role of religion in the political organisation of the state.

Besides reluctance to become involved in political issues, Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) also stated that there are situations in which religious leaders may simply not want to engage in the peace process, but instead wish to avoid responsibility. Abdile (Abdile and Rytönen 2016)

similarly noted that it is not a given that religious leaders will use their legitimacy to promote peace. At the end of the day, the choice as well as the responsibility lies with religious leaders themselves; As Kiljunen (2016) pointed out, it is up to them how they envision their own role.

While it was acknowledged by many that religious leaders determine their own role, whatever it may be, it was also mentioned that there are outside influences that hinder their work. Pentikäinen (2016) particularly highlighted religious leaders' vulnerability to instrumentalisation by various actors, including violent extremist movements. While acknowledging that radical, intolerant or violent attitudes in some cases come from religious leaders themselves, Pentikäinen argued it is the vulnerability of religious leaders to extremist ideas from the outside that poses a larger threat: "As the influence of extremist movements has spread globally, local religious leaders have often become victims; they are put in a very difficult situation" (ibid.). Religious leaders may be threatened, pressured or bribed to act in a certain way, which compromises not only their independence but their legitimacy in the eyes of the community (ibid.).

In addition to the threat of radicalised groups, religious leaders may be taken advantage of or instrumentalised for the self-serving goals pursued by a variety of political actors or governments. As an example of states attempting to gain control over religious leaders, Pentikäinen mentioned the competing Sunni Islamic forces supporting the Muslim Brotherhood on the one hand and Wahhabism on the other (ibid.). With plenty of money and weaponry being poured into proxy wars motivated by foreign policy goals, which use religion as a tool for struggles for power and political influence, religious leaders have in some cases been utilised by governments to spread strategic messages (ibid.). In the case of Saudi Arabia, for example, these are often ideas of Wahhabism, which Pentikäinen mentioned as an example of a religious branch in which a strict norm code, social pressure and intolerance of conflicting views has provided fertile ground for the IS to recruit members: "One way for religious groups to gain more power is to determine very strictly how people should live their lives and to apply social pressure and norms to make people monitor what others are and are not doing. My personal observation is that in these types of religious groups with a great deal of norms for how people should live their lives, psychological pressure will inevitably ensue. And in a group that allows psychological and religious violence, the likelihood of physical violence is then much larger" (ibid.).

The attempts of miscellaneous outside forces to influence religious leaders are often related to threats to their physical security. Their position often places them in crossfire, as they work with religious issues that are often sensitive and highly contested. While states may perceive them as sympathetic to rebel groups or radical movements, extremists are likely to oppose peace efforts that undermine their influence or views that are incompatible with extremist ideas. "If the security situation is very bad, anyone who sticks their neck out to oppose war or extremism makes themselves vulnerable to murder or retaliation. This has raised fairly little interest, but I for one am truly worried about the vulnerability of moderate traditional leaders in these states", Pentikäinen (2016) stressed.

A final challenge identified by many interviewees is presented by false perceptions or expectations of religious leaders' mediation and peacebuilding capacity or too much emphasis placed on religious leaders alone. Misconceptions not only risk failure in conflict transformation efforts, but may also make religious peace work difficult. "There may be situations where, whatever religious leaders do, they cannot prevent the conflict. It is not a silver bullet that solves everything", Rytönen (2016) stated. Others similarly underlined the importance of an honest, genuine understanding of the role of religious leaders in each particular context. Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) also noted that increased global interest in the peaceful role of religious leaders has led to certain delusions. She stressed the importance of realism, arguing that religious literacy and the current discussions on it are not very reflective, as religion is often seen as a solution to everything (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Rintakoski, among others, stated that religious leaders are only one of many groups that need to be included in the peace process.

In conclusion, the interviewees brought up various challenges in peace work carried out by religious leaders, with different people highlighting different aspects. The ones featured the most frequently were the risk that religious leaders' conflict transformation work excludes marginalised groups and the danger that their peace work is met with unrealistic expectations which overlook some of the significant challenges and support needs that must be met in order for religious leaders to be able to efficiently advance peace. In terms of the former, the inclusion of all parts of society is considered the cornerstone of conflict transformation approaches by both practitioners and academics. Yet, potential problems in the peace efforts of religious leaders not reaching women, youth and marginalised groups have not been extensively debated in literature. Lederach, for one, does not

elaborate on the potential role of middle-range leadership in involving women in religiously inspired peace work. While the key role of mid-level leadership in his thinking is based on their ability to reach the grassroots community better than top-level religious leaders, he does not debate the specific issues that may make it more difficult for some parts of the grassroots community to participate. As for the latter problem, the misconceptions of international actors about the work of religious leaders are particularly relevant from a conflict transformation perspective due to the risk that they undermine sustainable and lasting results by failing to understand the real support needs of religious leaders as well as their true possibilities of action. This lack of realistic and useful information about the local reality risks the achievement of positive long-term change. It is also an issue that highlights the need for interaction between academia and practice and the necessity of efficient flow of information from the grassroots to international organisations – a task that NGOs such as FCA, Felm and the Network can contribute to.

6.2. Value Added by NGOs

The second part of Chapter 6 analyses the role the NGOs studied have in working with religious leaders. As the initiative to promote the mediation potential of religious leaders has originated on the NGO side, it becomes relevant to study what these NGOs actually do when they work with religious leaders. Keeping in mind the conflict transformation tasks of religious leaders as presented in Figure 4, the chapter examines the value added by NGOs such as FCA, the Network and Felm, also considering the impact that the specific characteristics of FBOs such as FCA and Felm may have in working with religious leaders. When reading the analysis on the three NGOs, a few things should be kept in mind. First, both FCA and Felm are involved in a broad range of humanitarian and development work as well as other issues not related to the peace work of religious leaders. However, these activities are not discussed here; rather, the focus is on the specific activities they participate in that support the peace efforts of religious leaders. The Network, for its part, focuses more deeply in working with religious and traditional actors, as this is at the core of its work.

Second, it should be noted that FCA and the Network are not easily separated here, as the focus is on FCA's work with religious leaders, for which the Network is the primary channel. Since FCA functions as the Network Secretariat, there is overlap between the organisations; the work of the Network is also that of FCA. In short, when the study refers to the activities of "the Network", this

includes FCA as the Secretariat. Conversely, when the thesis discusses the work of FCA alone, it is usually done in reference to activities it was engaged in before the establishment of the Network. Furthermore, the Network has close to 50 member organisations, which means that when the study refers to the activities of the Network, it does not speak for each individual organisation. Rather, the Network is perhaps best seen as a separate, but fluid entity that is formed by the Network Secretariat (FCA) and a number of member and partner organisations depending on the project in question. At the same time, the Network should be seen as more than an extension of FCA or a sum of its parts, as a distinct entity with common goals and values that the organisations adhere to.

Based on the interviews and written data, there are a number of core tasks that the NGOs have in supporting the peace work of religious leaders. First, they act as a link between different religious actors and groups in the society by generating dialogue, building trust and conveying messages between them. This includes initiating dialogue with parties that Track 1 actors cannot communicate with and with whom it is difficult for local religious leaders to initiate contact. Second, they build the mediation and peacebuilding capacity of local religious leaders by providing training, facilitating peer-to-peer learning possibilities and offering other types of technical and financial support. Third, they promote the inclusion and conflict transformation potential of women and youth by supporting their involvement in religiously inspired peace efforts. Fourth, they act as a link between the local community and the official sector. This entails creating links and connections between the actors, conveying information between them as well as enabling and supporting their co-operation with each other. Fifth, the NGOs engage in advocacy and lobbying work to influence Track 1 actors; to bring awareness, convey knowledge and encourage action on important issues. By conducting these activities, FCA, the Network and Felm can support religious leaders in their mediation activities by reinforcing their strengths and minimising some of the challenges identified earlier.

Bridge-Building between the Local and the International Level

The engagement with religious leaders begins in the communities. As all three organisations emphasise local ownership, their main goal is to empower local actors, to provide a platform for them to engage in peace processes and to create channels of positive influence. As Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) stated: “For us, the central way to support [local religious actors] is to make sure they have the knowledge and resources to lead and carry out the work themselves.

They are the main actors, and we bring methodological know-how and have discussions on topics depending on the context.” Similarly, Rytkönen (2016) noted that the activities of the Network take different forms and are very practically oriented: “Our goal is to combine the know-how and the process ownership religious leaders have and to make [this resource] available to the international community. On the other hand, there are situations in which the role of the international community is not so important; then we have to support local peacemakers. This can simply be capacity building, but we do hope to be involved on a more concrete level. We have to first find out what the context-specific needs are and whether we can respond to them.”

FCA, the Network and Felm carry out a variety of tasks on the ground to strengthen the mediation and peacebuilding potential of local religious leaders. This entails arranging workshops, conferences, consultations and other meetings to bring together religious leaders and other relevant actors. The meetings and workshops may include coaching, mentoring and training in various types of peace work, facilitating dialogue between participants and forming advocacy groups and committees (Felm 2016c, Network 2016b), as well as consulting religious leaders on their support needs and creating action plans for strategic involvement in peace processes (Network 2016b). The idea, then, is to provide religious leaders tools to continue peace work in their own communities and to create collaborative networks and movements that can advance issues regionally; one example is the Tradition- and Faith-Oriented Insider Mediator (TFIM) Platform currently under development (Network 2016b, Network 2016c). The training offered to local actors depends largely on their type and position; while many religious leaders profit from training on conflict resolution, peacebuilding and mediation, Rytkönen (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) emphasised peer-to-peer learning and experience sharing between insider mediators who already have vast experience about mediation in their own contexts. Indeed, both organisations arrange workshops and platforms – whether physical or virtual – for local peacemakers to share experiences, to interact with each other (Felm 2016c, Network 2016b). Training can also be supported with online technology that allows for the continuation of peer exchange and learning after the meeting is over – while the use of online platforms has received fairly little attention in academic literature that otherwise has discussed workshops a fair amount, it is a method increasingly employed by practitioners. The workshops organised by the NGOs appear to have elements of all three of the categories identified by Lederach – even though they are not categorised using the same terms and concepts. They include problem-solving and solution-oriented discussion on issues and questions

determined by local stakeholders, conflict resolution training that offers tools for handling disputes and the formation of peace commissions that facilitate discussion, dialogue and co-operation between different groups.

In addition to local capacity building, another key function of FCA, the Network and Felm, as mentioned above, is to act as a link between the international community, the Finnish MFA, religious leaders and the grassroots community. They create a connection between the local community and the MFA but also between the community and the international level, including intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, the EU and the OSCE. The three organisations emphasise operation at the UN level and efforts to bring grassroots concerns to the attention of the UN. Felm's UN activities include dialogue, discussions on financing instruments, advocacy, sharing knowledge of the situation on the ground as well as conflict and stakeholder mapping (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016, Felm 2016c). In the case of FCA and the Network, work at the UN also includes establishing and maintaining communication routes to the UN, advocacy work and providing up-to-date information on local contexts and the work of religious leaders (Pentikäinen 2016, Rytönen 2016, Network 2016b). In addition to this, the Network conducts research on the needs of diplomats and Track 1 actors in developing their capacity to reach and engage religious actors and to respond to the religious dimensions of conflicts and peace work, and offers training for UN officials to improve this capacity (Network 2016b and 2016c). The Network has close ties to the UN due to the support offered by the UN Mediation Support Unit and UNAOC and their role in the organisation's establishment. This can also support Finland's work on the issue; Metso (2016) noted that the Network's New York office helps in bringing the work to the UN framework, while the Washington office supports co-operation with the US, particularly regarding religious dialogues. Another way for the NGOs to promote collaboration with international organisations is staff secondments; as a common example, both FCA and Felm have seconded staff to the European Institute of Peace (EIP).

This kind of collaboration with the official track is important, as the mediation and peacebuilding capacity of religious leaders does not emerge in a vacuum. Support to – or at least an acceptance of – their role by the international community is often essential. However, detailed information about their work, needs and concerns rarely reaches international organisations without specific efforts to deliver it. As Ojala (2016) noted: "There are gaps between the local, national and international level – messages are not received – and it becomes our job to create links and convey these

messages from the ground all the way to New York, for example, or to Brussels.” In order to do this, sharing information and knowledge about local issues and the situation on the ground with international actors such as the UN is crucial. This is meant to encourage informed decisions at the international level – decisions that in turn have a significant impact on the local situation: “[The fact that informed decisions are made] and there is knowledge about the reality on the ground carries great value added. This vertical link and dialogue becomes really important” (Ojala 2016). In addition to conveying messages and information, NGOs can facilitate communication and arrange face-to-face meetings between religious leaders and UN officials. FCA and the Network also organise advocacy visits for local religious and traditional actors to the UN and attempt to find opportunities for them to brief the Security Council. This can, for example, take the form of an Arria meeting (Network 2016b, Network 2016d).

Although FCA and Felm have their own practical approaches to how they conduct relations with the UN, they share similar goals for providing a platform for local voices: “There are so many examples of outsiders attempting to provide completely unrealistic solutions that do not take effect on the ground; our strength is that we function in Tracks 1.5, 2 and 3 to bring the political process to the grassroots”, Rintakoski stated (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016). However, Rintakoski (ibid.) added that since it is often difficult to change politicians, and since it is challenging for organisations such as the EU to reach unanimity on difficult issues such as those related to Syria (where a key project of Felm is taking place), it becomes more important to try to influence how they direct and use their money. This is where it becomes particularly important for NGOs to try to ensure funds are used in a conflict-sensitive manner and that local actors are included in the planning and implementation of projects. As it is often highly difficult to lobby the official track to act in a certain way, its funding is integral for NGOs to be able to carry out their own projects in an effective and conflict-sensitive way. This efficiency was also acknowledged by the interviewees from the MFA and Kiljunen, all of whom brought up the efficiency of the NGOs’ peace efforts and the possibilities this offers for the MFA in supporting the peace work of religious leaders through them.

One concrete example of FCA functioning as a liaison between the international and the local level, the official and the non-official track, is the case of Somalia. By acting as a link and a facilitator between the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) and the Elders, it enabled co-operation between the two – something that would have been difficult without the trust

relationship that FCA had established with the Elders (Lepistö 2013). The work FCA engaged in with the Elders helped UNPOS see the value and benefits of incorporating clan leaders into the peace process and gain support from local civil society actors (ibid.). At the same time, FCA was able to contribute to building and maintaining the Elders' faith in the process and to helping them overcome their distrust towards the UN office after the many political processes that had failed earlier (ibid.). This highlights the importance of trust building efforts, as a lack of trust and functional relations between international and local actors presents a gap that NGOs can fill in peace processes.

In order to act as a bridge between the local community and the international level, establishing partnerships with other organisations and creating transnational networks of collaboration becomes crucial. This is the fundamental idea behind the Network. Local organisations provide important knowledge and connections, and their support is often necessary for the successful completion of projects. Such organisations as well as local religious leaders can facilitate outside peace efforts in contexts that are difficult for outsiders to enter. International and transnational networks strengthen the organisations' capacity and reach, provide support and resources in different regions of operation and can further connect the Network with other actors in their areas. However, creating a network of local and international civil society actors is not a simple task; the more the size of the Network grows, the more challenges it faces in meeting the expectations of the various members and partners and in enabling and maintaining efficient communication between them (Network 2016c). This requires constant deliberation on the main focus and tasks of the Network as well as its focus and role in relation to member and partner organisations (ibid.).

Felm also has a wide network of religious actors, and finding partnerships and establishing links between different organisations and individuals is a central part of its work. Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) argued that Felm differs from FCA and the Network in the type of its networks, as it has a large number of church partners in particular: "We have an existing network of religious actors and access to their own peace networks of religious leaders; some of them are fairly unproductive and some are extremely useful in a preventive capacity – we see ourselves as quite a distinct actor as a mission organisation, because all of our work is negotiating and working with religious leaders and strengthening their links." Rintakoski also underlined the multiplicity of the partners Felm has: "We are a mission organisation and a Christian actor, but our partners may be Muslim, Hindu or completely secular organisations. We do not think religious actors are the key

– they are part of the solution to the extent that they can work with other actors, and this is why we connect our religious leaders to other actors that work for peace, and why we attempt to compare experiences about the ways certain issues have been resolved in a certain context and to make use of the experiences of parties of [other] conflicts” (ibid.). As mentioned by Rintakoski, individuals and other civil society actors may often be able to provide important expertise and insight on best practices and lessons learned. These may, for example, be local individuals from previous projects; their experience may be of great benefit for both the NGOs and the local communities and religious leaders involved in other projects – even though each context is unique. Felm, FCA and the Network all employ this strategy in their projects (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016, Abdile and Rytkönen 2016, Network 2016b, Network 2016d).

To ensure projects yield the desired outcomes, and are conducted in an efficient manner and with all the necessary knowledge and information, it is important to collaborate not only with other practitioners but also with research institutes and academics. This can highly benefit both theory and practice in the field by providing evidence for academic research and for improved implementation of future projects (Network 2015). For example, in recent Network projects, research has been conducted with partners such as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the Berghof Foundation and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

Felm and FCA as FBOs

It would be difficult to discuss the work of FCA and Felm without acknowledging the feature that separates them from many other Finnish NGOs and connects them to each other; namely their faith-based character - although they also differ somewhat in this regard (See Subchapter 2.3. “Mediation and Religious Peacebuilding in Finland”). The faith-based orientation of Felm and FCA has implications for their work with religious leaders and their co-operation with other actors. Although FCA as the Network Secretariat is an FBO, the term is not used for the Network as a whole, since it is comprised of both faith-based and secular actors.

The above-mentioned Somalia case is also worth considering from the point of view of the faith-based nature of FCA; Lepistö (2013) suggests that FCA being an FBO provided it a certain advantage over many secular organisations. The faith-based background promoted trust building with local

actors and provided it a different perspective on the conflict situation: it was able to recognise the impact of religious components in the Somali conflict, an aspect that had been frequently neglected in conflict analyses that focused only on political issues and actors (ibid.). At the same time, Lepistö suggests that the FBO status came with its challenges, initially inviting certain misconceptions in a conservative Islamic society (ibid., 32).

The interviewees reflected on the reactions they face as FBOs, identifying both benefits and challenges that come with the FBO status. Rytkönen (2016) acknowledged that a faith-based background has its advantages as well as its drawbacks: FBOs are often met with preconceived notions, which make some actors question co-operation with them. However, he noted that while the FBO status raises a lot of questions, addressing those questions in a thorough manner actually strengthens co-operation (ibid.). Moreover, Rytkönen mentioned a common value base and similar goals as uniting factors with other faith-based actors, pointing out that it is impossible to prevent negative attitudes altogether: "If there are spoilers who want to use our name against us, they will; we cannot do anything about that" (ibid.). Ultimately, Abdile (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) remarked that regardless of its status as an FBO, the relationship FCA constructs with local actors boils down to ownership; giving the local actors the space they need, listening to what they consider important and asking them what kind of support they themselves want.

Other interviewees from FCA, the Network Secretariat and Felm also argued that a faith-based background can support co-operation with religious leaders. From Felm's point of view, Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) suggested that being a faith-based organisation provides a common value base on which to build co-operation with local religious actors: "For Islamist actors, a secular actor may be more difficult to understand than a faith-based one – we have not experienced this as an obstacle but rather as something that makes our work easier." She noted religious dialogue as one central area in which faith-based organisations may have an advantage – also because of connections to other religious actors, commitment and the ability to see possibilities for co-operation (ibid.). When reflecting on dialogue with radical groups, she stated that while this type of dialogue is difficult for an FBO, it is most likely just as difficult for a Western, secular organisation, which may just as much be seen as representative of Christianity by an extremist group (ibid.). From FCA's point of view, Ojala (2016) remarked that he is particularly pleased with the multireligious nature of FCA and the fact that it employs staff from various faith backgrounds; this

is an asset that helps it advance common goals. Furthermore, a multireligious approach not just inside an FBO but as a collaborative approach among different FBOs may grant them specific credibility with local religious actors. Co-operation with secular actors was also seen as just as important by the interviewees.

Pentikäinen (2016) suggested that a faith-based background can also be a valuable resource at the level of the individual. Citing his own Laestadian Lutheran background as an example, he argued that a connection to a religious group is likely to be helpful in communicating with representatives of other religions and in understanding their worldview and way of thinking, even extreme forms (ibid.). He stated it provides a common language in which to conduct dialogue; a way of drawing comparisons and making oneself understood by the other party (ibid.). Pentikäinen underlined respect to differing views, noting, however, that this does not entail silently accepting everything the other says: “On the contrary, having a common language may bring courage to challenge destructive or twisted religious thinking – I have engaged in discussions with Wahhabist leaders on how, instead of criticising people based on external actions, they should support people’s inner growth. But I probably would not have dared to have that discussion without the background I have” (ibid.).

All in all, it is clear that there are both advantages and challenges in working in the field as an FBO. Most importantly, while a faith-based, Christian orientation may lead to certain suspicion among other actors, be they secular or faith-based themselves, it may also invite co-operation by actors who see it as an asset and share similar values. This common language and value base means that FBOs may sometimes have particular advantages for acting as a bridge between religious leaders and official actors, or between various local faith-based actors. However, it should be kept in mind that Felm and FCA are two very specific types of actors in the very broad category of FBOs, which includes a wide range of different organisations. Therefore, conclusions drawn from their work cannot be applied with certainty to all FBOs. Nevertheless, what can be concluded is that there are cases in which a faith-based background can provide FBOs an advantage; this is something to be acknowledged and built on when relevant. This advantage can then be supported through co-operation with other actors – both faith-based and secular – and is further strengthened by support from the official track, in this case the MFA.

Facilitation of Dialogue

Another important factor in the work of the NGOs is encouraging dialogue among different parties and stakeholders. This may be both intra- and interreligious. The NGOs' work on multi-track dialogue supports the MFA's interests in formally mandated National Dialogues as a tool of mediation; it is therefore an issue that receives a lot of interest from the official track. On the one hand, NGOs can play a key part in generating grassroots dialogue and various forms of informal dialogue that may prepare the ground for a National Dialogue process; since it is crucial to ensure these types of national processes are internally led, effective engagement of local peacemakers is key. On the other hand, informal dialogues can contribute to conflict transformation on their own, without the goal of leading up to a National Dialogue. Indeed, the importance of grassroots dialogue in itself is highlighted by various conflict transformation scholars.

Examples of interfaith dialogue projects include Felm's work with Muslim-Hindu relations in Nepal and its interfaith networks in Pakistan or the Network's promotion of Muslim-Buddhist dialogue in Southeast Asia (Felm 2016c, Network 2016b). In some cases, such as the Network's project in the Central African Republic (CAR), it is crucial to conduct intrareligious dialogue prior to initiating interreligious discussions in order to promote cohesion and harmony inside the religion (Network 2016e). There may be a great deal of internal dissonance inside religious groupings, and internal disputes sometimes need to be addressed first to create a basis for interreligious peace efforts. The protection of religious minorities and freedom of religion is also an aspect that closely relates to interfaith dialogue as well as interfaith harmony in a broader sense; Felm focuses on this in Nepal, and the Network in relation to the Marrakesh Declaration (Felm 2016c, Network 2016b).

The NGOs base their activities on a view similar to that of many transformation scholars on the importance of dialogue in sharing experiences and increasing mutual understanding between groups (or their representatives) and in providing local actors tools that can help promote these goals beyond individual projects. Interreligious dialogue, in particular, rests on the identified capability of religious actors to use their moral leadership and other strengths to advance the transformation of negative stereotypes and the rebuilding of trust and solidarity. Here, the values, morals and imagery present in religions can be utilised to carry out the (often ambiguous and intangible) tasks of transforming harmful narratives, discourses and myths intertwined with sacred

symbolism and imagery about war, heroes and enemies. After all, political debates or practical, resolution-oriented negotiations over concrete issues do not penetrate the underlying beliefs and emotions about *the Other*; these tend to be excluded from more traditional conflict resolution approaches.

In practice, the long-term objectives of dialogue are pursued through the arrangement of workshops, meetings and events providing a platform and momentum for such dialogue, or initiatives such as the Network's Interfaith Peacemakers' Fellowship Program, which engages Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslims peacemakers in interfaith dialogue and knowledge sharing by providing a safe space for interfaith networking and arranges workshops aiming to offer tools in areas such as religious literacy, conflict analysis, conflict transformation, early warning systems, and dialogue training (Network 2016b). The promotion of dialogue can also take the form of sport and arts activities, such as Felm's organisation of extracurricular activities for children in the Palestinian territories as part of its interfaith peace education work (Felm 2016c). These and other initiatives, such as those arranging interreligious encounters, encourage dialogue through concrete activities, through "doing" rather than just "talking".

Dialogue is conducted not only among parties to the conflict, but also between the parties and NGOs. The ability of NGOs to meet and engage in dialogue with parties that Track 1 actors cannot be in touch with, such as individuals categorised as terrorists, was highlighted by several interviewees. This is an area in which religious leaders become particularly important, as they are often seen as key actors in the prevention of radicalisation in their communities. At the same time, religious leaders may have more extreme views themselves or be connected to groups with such views. Ojala (2016) stated that when faced with the choice to engage or not to engage in a discussion with radicalised religious leaders, it is better to talk to them than to isolate them and leave them out of the process, as this may worsen the situation. These types of discussions often happen in contexts with several competing, radical groups with different goals and ideologies. When such groups are strictly excluded from dialogue and labelled as terrorists by the international community, they may be driven to pledge allegiance to groups such as the IS, making local ceasefires all the more difficult to achieve and halting the political process. Pentikäinen (2016) criticised what he calls the UN's system failure in addressing violent extremism: "At the moment, from the point of view of international law, terrorist groups should not be negotiated with. From a legal framework

perspective, UN officials cannot negotiate with groups or individuals labelled as terrorists - they should not even meet them, which is a huge problem in my opinion.”

From the MFA’s perspective, the issue is important because the Finnish state as an official actor is limited by similar restrictions. Metso (2016) mentioned curbing violent extremism as one central aspect in which NGOs quite often have more credibility than the state in practical work. As he noted, “it is usually much easier to spread violent radicalism without face-to-face contact, but when [the contact] turns into some type of dialogue, it may make the ground for radicalisation just a little bit less fertile. It is not a straightforward issue, but we must actively search for ways to make different types of dialogue possible” (ibid.). In spite of reluctance or limitations to engage in dialogue with extremists, Metso remarked that its importance is also increasingly recognised in parts of transatlantic discourse, as officials are beginning to find it more and more important to find some avenues to engage in dialogue also with those with whom dialogue is the most difficult (ibid.).

In addition to concrete efforts to involve radical groups in the promotion of interfaith dialogue, the Network especially focuses on thematic expertise on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) as one of the four main clusters of its work (Network 2016b). Like the interviewees, the Network as an organisation sees religious and traditional actors as essential to PVE efforts. Co-operation with the government and security sectors and authorities is also seen as essential in this regard; a recent example of activities in promoting this kind of collaboration is a workshop arranged in Kenya, which brought together religious actors and government representatives from various countries to receive training and to share knowledge and experiences on the issue (Network 2016b). FCA and the Network with its partners also carry out research on the root causes of radicalisation as well as other work related to extremist groups (ibid.). This work, however, is sensitive in nature and largely confidential in order to protect the security of all parties involved.

As Pentikäinen (2016) noted, not understanding the structures and mechanisms inside radicalised groups makes it impossible to resolve many central issues sustaining violent conflict (ibid.). From a conflict transformation perspective, this is a central issue, as the transformation of violent conflicts requires addressing the root causes driving radicalisation instead of simply countering it by military responses. This, however, requires international support. Pentikäinen argued that much depends on whether the UN can reinvent itself in responding to the changing nature of modern conflicts or

whether fragile areas will continue to be lost to violent extremist movements: “We are living in a world where one party wages war and is willing to use any violence necessary to achieve its results, while the other party holds meetings and writes papers and engages with the issue when it feels good” (ibid.).

Promotion of Inclusivity

Support to women and youth is another key aspect of the NGOs’ activities, and was emphasised by the NGOs as well as the MFA. It was noted by various people that religious and traditional structures are in many cases quite patriarchal, with leadership often consisting of elderly men. Felm promotes women’s inclusion in peace processes in its projects through various measures including the creation of groups and committees supporting women and youth’s education, microenterprises, livelihood opportunities and religious peacebuilding as well as the arrangement of seminars training women on peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Felm 2016c). In the Network, the inclusion of women and youth’s issues in projects is advanced and monitored by the Inclusivity Working Group (Network 2016f). It is addressed by ensuring inclusive engagement is streamlined across projects, by developing strategic steps to support the participation of women and youth in peace work and by creating models of co-operation between religious and traditional leaders and women’s groups. An example of the latter type of work can be found in the ongoing project in Libya, where women’s engagement in the tribal-led peace process is advanced by the organisation of women peacemakers’ consultations and workshops to design and plan their strategic involvement in intertribal peace efforts and support to women peacemakers advocating the issue in Libya and at the UN (Network 2016d). A precedent of this type of collaboration is from Somalia, where FCA advocated women’s inclusion in politics and tribal decision making (Lepistö, Gisselquist and Ojala 2015).

The approaches of the NGOs rest on the belief that inclusivity is not inherently and automatically at odds with religion. This is a notable element of their work, considering that secular approaches to diplomacy have tended to perceive the relationship between inclusivity and religion as problematic, or even impossible. The rights of women, youth and other marginalised groups are issues that are perhaps particularly complex and sensitive to mediators and peacebuilders with deeply ingrained secularist values. From a Western, secularist perspective, supporting the positive role of religious leaders is often seen as carrying the risk of reinforcing patriarchal structures that prevent

sociopolitical change and permit the marginalisation of women, youth, sexual minorities and other vulnerable groups. Indeed, those who argue that religion does not have a place in long-term development and transformation often regard oppressive structures as stemming from religion. Yet, this type of view risks blaming social injustices and structural violence on religion alone, resting on the expectation that removing religion from the picture improves the position of vulnerable groups, allowing for the establishment of societies that are “modern” and acceptable by Western standards. This inability – or unwillingness – to separate between oppressive structures and norms sustained by religious structures and those embedded in the society itself can jeopardise sustainable conflict transformation. After all, social injustices may be maintained and justified with religious arguments, even when they arise from other interests and motivations. Therefore, even if religion was somehow forcibly removed, it is highly likely that the societies and communities would find other ways to maintain patriarchal structures, with inequalities simply changing their form rather than disappearing. It then becomes important to empower marginalised groups and individuals in the context in which they exist, using the religious, traditional and cultural resources present in that particular context to promote equality.

Yet, just as it is important not to simplify oppressive structures by overstating the role of religion, it is equally important to conduct honest evaluations of the potential negative effect of religious structures and leaders on vulnerable groups in a particular context. Respecting local cultural and religious norms and values does not entail ignoring problems where they exist, and while religious values in themselves can be used to advocate equality just as well as inequality, it tends to be the religious elite that shapes the use of those values. Therefore, religious and traditional leaders become one key group for the NGOs to engage in order to advocate inclusivity. It should also be kept in mind that the views of religious and traditional leaders are rarely uniform; there are various competing forces inside communities and multiple differing attitudes not only between different hierarchical levels, but also among the elite itself. For example, in the Network’s Libya project, one step in promoting women’s inclusion in tribal peace efforts has been the identification of more pro-inclusive tribal leaders who can advance and speak for women’s participation in tribal meetings.

All in all, engagement of individuals and groups at all levels of the society that can transform harmful structures becomes a key aspect of the NGOs’ work. In addition to promoting long-term transformation efforts and broader socioeconomic development, it provides a way of supporting

the peacebuilding and mediation potential that women, youth and other marginalised groups possess. They are also considered to play a key role in preventing and countering violent extremism.

6.3. Co-operation between the MFA and the NGOs

The third part of the chapter assesses the co-operation between the MFA and the NGOs in supporting the peace efforts of religious leaders, discussing the effects that this collaboration has had on the work of the NGOs on the one hand and the international profile of Finland on the other. Since a significant part of the MFA's mediation work related to religious leaders takes place through supporting the NGOs, it is important to consider why the MFA views them as such important partners in these efforts. In light of the core tasks FCA, Felm and the Network engage in, as identified above, both the NGOs and the MFA have their part to play in ensuring the work of the NGOs and religious leaders reaches international organisations and contributes to Track 1 processes. Governmental support has the potential to be highly beneficial for the NGOs, as they act as a liaison between religious leaders and the official track. Figure 6 illustrates, in a very simplified way, the position and tasks of Felm, FCA and the Network on the one hand, and the MFA on the other, in relation to Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid. As Lederach's pyramid concentrates on the conflict transformation capacity of mid-level religious leaders in a national context and does not comment on the source of their conflict transformation capacity, Figure 6 places it in the international context and demonstrates the NGOs' role in empowering religious leaders and in building bridges between religious leaders and the international level.

By conveying information and messages and thereby facilitating communication between the local and the international level, the NGOs build trust and generate dialogue between them. At the same time, the NGOs lobby the MFA and the international organisations in order to promote action and informed decisions in official peace processes. As for interaction with the MFA, the NGOs bring information to the MFA about the local situation, which in turn offers them information about official processes; this benefits the work of both parties. The MFA may then attempt to influence international organisations by normative promotion of the positive engagement of religious leaders.

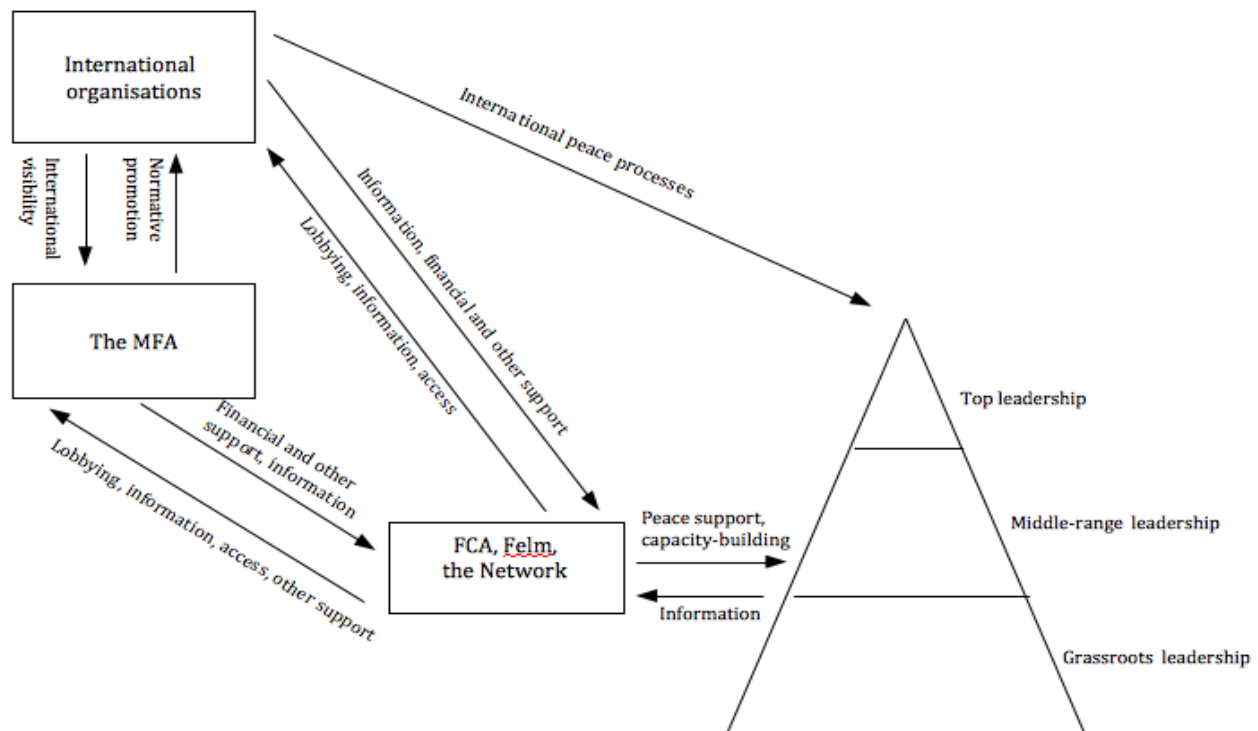


Figure 6. The role of NGOs and the MFA in supporting religious leaders.

The NGOs in turn receive support for their work from the MFA and international organisations; in addition to funding, this may grant them more visibility and legitimacy among international organisations and Track 1 actors, and more room and capacity for action on the ground. For the MFA, this co-operation and work with the NGOs results in increased visibility, reputation and influence in the international arena. It should be noted that the work of the NGOs does not only target mid-level religious leaders but also those at higher and lower levels. Here, again, Felm may focus on mid- and lower-level leadership and grassroots peace initiatives, the Network's activities also target religious leaders at higher levels. The figure also illustrates the importance of the NGOs as the primary channel through which the MFA can support the mediation efforts of religious leaders due to the advantages of non-official diplomacy in working with such local actors.

By demonstrating these forms of co-operation and interaction between the official and non-official track in the Finnish case, Figure 6 attempts to explain why collaboration between the state and NGOs is beneficial in supporting the conflict transformation work of religious leaders. While financial support is the most obvious way in which the MFA can strengthen the capacity of civil society actors, there are also a variety of other ways it can offer support. In terms of international attention, it can

promote the theme through what Oksanen (2016) called normative work; this entails promotion in consultations and discussions in international organisations such as the UN, the EU and the OSCE. As an example of how Finland's work at the UN may directly and indirectly benefit the NGOs, Rytkönen (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) mentioned the way Finland's UN Security Council campaign in 2012 offered visibility to FCA's work in Somalia. In addition to multilateral promotion, the theme can be advanced through bilateral partnerships with countries that have been active in promoting the issue and have experience in it (Oksanen 2016, Metso 2016). As examples of bilateral partnerships, Metso (2016) mentioned Switzerland and the United States, both of which work on the theme according to their specific – and quite different – characteristics and capabilities.

Despite the indisputable importance of funding, the interviewees perceived the co-operation between the MFA and NGOs as much more than giving and receiving financial support. Rytkönen (2016) stated that while FCA and the other NGOs have their own mandates and the MFA has its own, their goals are largely similar. He noted that the relationship between the MFA and FCA and the Network goes beyond that of a giver and receiver; mutual support is offered and information is shared, and synergies and opportunities for co-operation are actively sought out (ibid.). Rytkönen (ibid.) and Abdile (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) also commended Finland's embassy network for being supportive of FCA and the Network in the creation of links and connections in regions around the world. Rytkönen (2016) suggested that co-operation between the state and civil society is connected to a broader Finnish tradition and has been sensible for both parties; he described it as a "marriage of convenience".

If Rytkönen saw the co-operation between the state and NGOs as a marriage of convenience, Ojala (2016) described it as a marathon; the same people work together for a long period of time – often on various different issue areas – which makes it important to maintain good relations. Ojala (ibid.) indicated that it would be difficult to make a clear distinction between the official, MFA track and the FCA (and Network) track, as the co-operation has been very close and has started at such an early point. He noted that FCA has, in the past, done a great deal of lobbying at the MFA, which has led to closer connections and better opportunities for influence (ibid.). However, the current relationship is certainly not based on one-way lobbying, but on mutual co-operation, with both parties impacting each other and sharing a common vision (ibid.). In fact, both Abdile (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) and Ojala (2016) suggested the MFA has not taken enough credit for how much

they have supported the inclusion of religious mediators globally. “You could say Finland has been a pioneer in this”, Ojala (ibid.) noted, while pondering whether this modesty might have something to do with the Finnish mentality of not boasting about one’s achievements.

As for Felm, its collaboration with the MFA is currently particularly active in issues regarding its work in the MFA’s two priority projects, Myanmar and Syria. The co-operation with the MFA in these and other projects includes regular meetings, Skype briefings and mutual co-ordination – the MFA receives information from Felm that it would not receive from anywhere else, whereas Felm is able to follow the process and discussions on the official level (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016). “On the other hand, we aim to engage in dialogue with the MFA on its mediation policies and priorities and to share key messages from our partners”, Rintakoski (ibid.) explained. According to her, the relationship is simultaneously based on three aspects: first of all, the MFA provides financial support to Felm; second, it is the object of their advocacy work; and third, it is a close partner in co-operation (ibid.).

All of the interviewees were generally pleased with the co-operation that takes place between the MFA, Felm, FCA and the Network. From the MFA perspective, Metso (2016) stated that the role of civil society is crucial in enabling Finland to be active in promoting religious dialogues and mediation. When it comes to the Network in particular, Metso (ibid.) remarked that its development provides important opportunities for Finland to translate its policy line into concrete projects. The MFA is the Network’s largest donor, and it in turn provides important tools that state-led processes alone would not have (ibid.). Similarly, Oksanen (2016) noted that the most effective way Finland can promote the issue is by supporting Track 2 and 3 actors which know the topic well; these, he concluded, are the strongest actors in advancing the issue (ibid.).

Metso (2016) described civil society actors as equal partners in his work, saying that both parties have a great deal to offer and bring their expertise and experience to the table. In his view, people from NGOs have fresh, new ideas, which diplomats such as he are in turn able to place in the foreign policy framework: “This is how we find a common way to move things forward”, he explained. Metso (ibid.) considered the collaboration very close, adding that he sometimes feels he is in closer contact with certain people from FCA and the Network Secretariat than he is with many MFA colleagues. According to Oksanen (2016), the MFA’s co-operation with Felm, FCA and the Network

is a good example and continuation of the state's co-operation with civil society; he stated that, while the situation might be different elsewhere, civil society actors are considered central to mediation efforts in Finland. Metso (2016) similarly remarked that co-operation between the Finnish state and civil society has strong traditions and seems natural these days.

Metso (ibid.) pointed out that the co-operation between the MFA and NGOs ultimately boils down to the individuals working in the organisations: "I have immense respect for the people working in these organisations and I do believe it is mutual. It should never be forgotten that the situation could be entirely different if the mentalities of these people were different." Rytönen (2016) also noted the positive effect that the government and individual ministers such as Heidi Hautala and Pekka Haavisto as Ministers for International Development have had on this co-operation. The impact of individual people was also mentioned by many other interviewees and is a theme worth pointing out, even if it seems self-evident. It extends beyond the collaboration between NGOs and the state all the way to the role of individuals in promoting mediation and increasing Finland's international visibility in the field. In fact, Pentikäinen (2010) argues (in a written article) that Finland's international reputation in mediation is much better than its actual national contribution to the issue and that this is largely a result of the hard work carried out by individuals such as Pekka Haavisto and Martti Ahtisaari. Other interviewees also brought up the role of Haavisto, Ahtisaari and former foreign minister Erkki Tuomioja in advancing Finland's visibility in mediation, as well as the valuable co-operation FCA has had with individuals such as Kiljunen (Abdile and Rytönen 2016, Ojala 2016, Oksanen 2016). Conversely, Pentikäinen (2010) notes that in the same way personal relations can improve and speed up co-operation, they can also halt decision making.

While the collaboration between the MFA and the NGOs was seen as special, the interviewees also considered close co-operation between the state and civil society an international phenomenon, stemming from the increased recognition of the importance of non-official diplomacy and the growing collaboration between different types of actors. Metso (2016) estimated co-operation between the state and civil society to be fairly similar in the Nordic countries and in states such as the Netherlands and the UK – noting, however, that this most likely varies between different issue areas. Kiljunen (2016) stated that the international acknowledgement of the shortcomings of official diplomacy and the effectiveness of the non-official sector has made it necessary to invest in NGOs: "Civil society organisations go to the grassroots level and reach the so-called ordinary people in a

whole other way.” Official diplomacy still has a role to play, especially in post-conflict negotiations, but it also needs NGOs, which have access to places states cannot go and to actors states cannot meet (ibid.). Ojala (2016) remarked that up until the past decade, different actors globally worked in their own tracks; in the past five years, however, there has been a significant change, which he sees FCA as having been a part of in its own work. This has led to a more problem- and solution-based approach, as the focus has moved onto the problem instead of the type of organisation or diplomacy that each actor represents (ibid.). At the same time, the blurred boundaries between the official and the non-official sector have the potential to cause competition in the field of international diplomacy, as NGOs increasingly communicate directly with high-level officials and diplomats. Ojala (2016) suggested this requires a certain sense of humility from the state, also in the case of Finland: “We cannot always promote Finland’s agenda, although it has been nice to notice that our interests very often align.” In addition to this, he pointed out that the cooperation with civil society also requires the MFA to have a lot of faith in the work of the NGOs.

Despite the international trend of closer multi-track co-operation, the extent to which the MFA supports its partner organisations was regarded as exceptional by interviewees from FCA, the Network and Felm, and they recalled encountering mixed reactions to their collaboration with the MFA. As Ojala (ibid.) stated: “There are many Finnish civil society organisations which are, to a very large extent, financed by the state, and I have the impression that this works much better in Finland than it would somewhere else. We do also challenge the MFA and I believe other NGOs do, too, even if a great part of the funding comes from the Foreign Ministry. I dare say this would be suspicious in many other places of the world.” Ojala (ibid.) also recalled FCA being questioned about the issue when it applied for ECOSOC status and pointed out that while there are fewer risks associated with this kind of relationship in Finland than there would be in many other parts of the world, the question of independence is nevertheless something that has to be kept in mind (ibid.). Rytkönen (2016) echoed this view, noting that he has not witnessed this level of active co-operation and synergising elsewhere in the world. In fact, explaining the collaboration with the MFA in places in which the state attempts to keep a firm grip on civil society may raise suspicions that the state is attempting to control the organisation (ibid.). Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) also saw the co-operation between the state and civil society as a Finnish asset; a view she noted Felm’s international partners also took after witnessing their collaboration with the MFA, NGOs such as CMI and FCA, and research institutes.

When discussing the support that the state provides to civil society actors, the topic of the recent financial cuts cannot be escaped. Kiljunen (2016) criticised the cuts made by the government on development aid in 2015 as shocking, noting that by cutting resources, the government is doing the opposite of what should be done to address current issues such as the refugee situation in Europe and the crises behind it. Ojala (2016) noted that although the cuts are difficult for civil society organisations working in development – such as FCA – individual officials offer them just as much – if not more – support, and have attempted to find alternative ways of helping out. When it comes to the issue of religious actors in mediation, Metso (2016) and Rytönen (Abdile and Rytönen 2016) argued that the cuts have not had a significant effect on co-operation between the MFA and NGOs in an area so high on the MFA's priority list. In relation to the priorities of the MFA, Rytönen (ibid.) brought up the extent to which the close collaboration has blurred the lines between the goals of the Network and those of the MFA: "It is somewhat of a chicken and egg situation. Have we managed to lobby the MFA so much that they see [this topic] as a political priority, or is it their political priority that we are enacting in practice?" Nevertheless, despite some of the NGOs' work being spared from significant damage, the downside of this type of significant donor-recipient relationship between the MFA and the NGOs is the civil society's vulnerability to the shifting policies of the government.

All in all, Kiljunen (2016) concluded there is still room for improvement and better co-ordination of co-operation between the state and civil society if the political will is there. Pentikäinen (2016) noted he is 95 % satisfied with co-operation with the MFA, but also identified several areas of improvement. He emphasised that NGOs have a lot of knowledge, experience and support to offer to the state; therefore, it could use their expertise more efficiently, to grant them a more prominent role in advancing certain processes and not to be afraid to conceptualise co-operation with civil society in a more unconventional way (ibid.). In his view, support to the potential NGOs offer goes hand in hand with a stronger role of the state and more systematic support not just to civil society organisations but to individuals able to engage in international mediation or other international tasks, such as those in civilian crisis management (ibid.). This requires support and commitment to mediation across party lines as well as genuine responsibility for and real knowledge of the processes the state is involved in. When reflecting on how the MFA could better support the Network, Rytönen (Abdile and Rytönen 2016) suggested that since the MFA often encourages the

Network to look for funding from international donors and foreign governments, it could do more to support the organisation in this and promote it more, the way the state does with Finnish companies. He also argued the MFA could encourage other state actors to support and co-operate with NGOs in the same way (ibid.).

In addition to the collaboration between the MFA and NGOs, co-operation between NGOs themselves is also crucial to ensure effective operation in the field. Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) identified CMI and FCA as Felm's closest partners, stating that the co-operation mostly includes knowledge sharing as well as regular meetings and briefings. FCA and Network representatives also focused on CMI and Felm as their main NGO partners. As for FCA and Felm, there are no common projects in which both FBOs are actively engaged in peace work. In this regard, Rintakoski (ibid.) doubted there would be much added value in two fairly similar Finnish FBOs working on the same project. While the interviewees expressed satisfaction with collaboration among NGOs in the field, it was acknowledged there is still some competition between them.

In the collaboration between NGOs, relationships and networks between individuals once again become central. As the field in which the NGOs operate is fairly small in Finland, the same people have often worked in several MFA partner organisations, some also in the MFA. For example, both Rintakoski and Pentikäinen started working in CMI with Ahtisaari at the time of its establishment. This co-operation then went on for a long time, with Pentikäinen going on to become the Executive Director of FCA before moving on to lead the Network, and with Rintakoski currently the Head of Peace Work and Advocacy at Felm. This type of common history among the people leading the organisations is likely to have affected the connections between the NGOs. Rintakoski (ibid.) mentioned it has also resulted in better knowledge of each other's work and methodologies between the organisations.

The mutually benefiting relationship and collaboration between the state and Finnish civil society actors is likely to have contributed a great deal to both the advancement of the NGOs' work and to Finland's reputation. Rintakoski (ibid.) described this as a process of learning together through shared experiences, pointing out that the co-operation has also helped the different actors to conceptualise and organise their work in the field internationally. Oksanen (2016) noted the activities of the FCA, Felm and CMI have brought Finland visibility and credibility in the international

arena; in the recent years in particular, the initiatives of the Network have also led to various enquiries and requests for Finland to take part in events related to the theme. Rytkönen (2016) also argued the MFA's support to the Network has been very beneficial for Finland's international profile in terms of value for money.

The role of civil society actors, and FCA in particular, in bringing the issue of religious mediators on the table and advocating it in the MFA is also acknowledged by the other interviewees. However, the interest in supporting religious leaders in mediation was not sparked overnight. Pentikäinen (2016), recalling a discussion with a colleague who has worked for both FCA and the MFA, argued that it seemed the MFA did not expect support to religious actors to emerge as the clearest, most concrete result and goal of its mediation policy. Rytkönen (2016) also suspected that at the time of the establishment of the Network, the MFA did not expect support to the peace efforts of religious leaders to become an area of expertise for Finland. He also suggested that these developments have significantly changed the way religion is viewed and talked about in Finnish foreign policy: "I remember the conversations in the spring of 2013, in particular; it was very clear that Finland wanted to emphasise traditional leaders [in the name of the Network]. There has been a huge change in this during the past two, three years. It has been very interesting to see how traditional leaders were underlined then, and now this does not come from the Ministry anymore; if anything, we want to emphasise it ourselves" (ibid.). These remarks highlight one factor easily forgotten when analysing the chain of events that led to the Finnish focus on religious leaders – namely that not all developments can be explained with clear causal relationships and logical, linear developments, and not all of the forces that have resulted in the current state of affairs are visible. Happenstances, coincidences and arbitrary developments are not completely absent even in the formation of foreign policy.

Rytkönen did not believe that the change in attitudes to religion has had much to do with individual foreign ministers, but is more likely something that has swept through the officialdom (ibid.). From the MFA perspective, both Oksanen (2016) and Metso (2016) agreed that religion has not had a notable role in foreign policy before. They also mentioned noticing a change in attitudes in the recent years, with the topic becoming a more widely accepted part of foreign policy (ibid.). Yet, Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) underlined that religion becoming increasingly acknowledged in foreign policy is not just a Finnish but also a global phenomenon, one that has

taken root as a result of events such as those of the Arab Spring. She also noted that religious issues have become something that diplomats have to be able to comment on, while the legitimacy of faith-based actors has simultaneously grown stronger (ibid.). These factors have made for great momentum for the Network initiative (ibid.).

Yet, the process of spreading knowledge on the part religion plays in mediation, peacebuilding and foreign policy is ongoing, both in Finland and internationally. Metso (2016), for one, expressed his frustration with the way the word *religion* sometimes confuses people and leads to misunderstandings about what Finland is actually trying to achieve. He mentioned an upcoming training session aimed at MFA officials on the topic, noting that not all officials and diplomats are familiar with the topic or Finland's work in the field (ibid.). "When we talk about religion, people sometimes picture something completely different, as if there is some sort of mission related to our work. But we approach this from the perspective of crisis management and mediation", Metso explained, adding that these misconceptions seem to be part of the reason religious mediation has in the past often been referred to with vague terms (ibid.). Rintakoski (Rintakoski and Saarnivaara 2016) also suggested there are not too many people in the MFA with a balanced and realistic understanding of religious actors and their participation in peace work. As another complicating factor, Rytkönen (Abdile and Rytkönen 2016) brought up the fast rotation of diplomats, which requires frequent rebuilding of relations and information sharing from scratch with new officials.

Metso (2016) mentioned terms such as "intercultural dialogue" and "civilisation" as examples of sometimes ambiguous and confusing expressions that avoid the word "religion", noting that this has in the past been an issue not just in Finland but also internationally, including the UN: "We should talk about things as is their weight in our conversations; that is why I mainly talk about religious dialogue in today's rhetorics." He underlined that haphazard attempts at generating understanding and the use of ambiguous terms such as "civilisation" do not offer any real solutions; what is needed is a systematic approach to address the role of religion in peace and conflicts (ibid.). Rytkönen's (2016) experiences from a UN training session arranged by the Network were similar. He pointed out that emphasis on the notions of neutrality and secularity are so deeply rooted in the UN approach that it often makes UN officials question the role of religion in peace work; it is believed that in order to be objective, religion must be excluded from the peace process. "It is somehow so deeply ingrained in certain UN circles – and also some MFA circles – that religion should

be excluded from the process because it complicates things, whereas our view is that the context is the way the local structures make it. It is not up to us to decide. We are not trying to create a theocracy, but we think ignoring religion makes it more likely that things go wrong” (Abdile and Rytönen 2016).

Promoting the positive role of religious leaders in mediation has offered Finland a suitable avenue to develop its international profile in mediation. As a small state with limited resources, approaching the competitive field from the right angle has been crucial. As it is evident that Finland lacks the resources to become the kind of global actor in mediation that for example Norway is, it has become all the more important to look for fresh strategies and perspectives to mediation. Here, co-operation with civil society and the development of the Network have been key. Describing the issues of religious dialogue and religious mediators, Metso (2016) stated: “What I have discovered during the past year is that this is an area with not much competition – other countries, including the Nordic states, have not defined the issue along similar lines. They mostly focus on how religion is incorporated into promoting freedom of religion and expression in the world, whereas we, in addition to this, have defined religious dialogue in terms of promoting conflict resolution”. He mentioned actually being fairly surprised that Norway as the superpower of mediation has not pursued similar approaches (ibid.). Moreover, Metso noted not having witnessed similar co-operation between the state and Track 2 and 3 actors on issues related to religion and mediation in Norway (ibid.). This suggests that while this type of collaboration surely exists in other fields – after all, the co-operation between the state and civil society is the cornerstone of the “Norwegian model” – it may not have taken root in this particular issue area the way it has in Finland.

Both Oksanen and Metso remarked that Finland has received plenty of recognition and positive attention as a result of its active work in promoting the role of religious leaders in mediation. All in all, Oksanen (2016) stated that concrete projects, normative work and the activities of NGOs and high-profile individuals have made Finland a prominent actor in mediation, despite its small size and limited resources. Metso (2016) described being rather surprised about the frequency at which different actors ask Finland for advice on issues related to religious mediation. Both noted that Finland now often receives invitations to various events and requests to take part in different meetings and discussions on the theme; as an example, Metso (ibid.) cited the Marrakesh

Declaration, for which Finland acted as an observer state alongside France, the United States and the EU, three much larger actors.

The co-operation between professionals from the three Finnish NGOs and the MFA can also be analysed from the perspective of the barriers and opportunities identified by Strimling (2006): *interests, agency, alternatives, cultures* and *perceived power imbalances*. In terms of *interests*, the interviews support the view that the priorities and interests of MFA and NGOs staff are fairly similar in terms of the activities they want to engage in to support the peace efforts of religious leaders. While it is likely that there are differences in the interests of the MFA and the NGOs, it appears that these differences are less significant than they would be in many other cases and fields. This is likely to be not just a reason for, but a result of, close co-operation between the NGOs and the MFA: the interviewees' perceptions suggest that the MFA's view of religion and religious leaders has shifted throughout the process. Yet, it should be noted that this is most likely not only a result of official diplomats' interaction with NGO staff, but also stems from their interaction with other official diplomats whose views align more closely with those of the NGOs – after all, it was noted by both sides that not all diplomats see the issue in similar terms. Furthermore, the effects of co-operation are not just one-sided, as evidenced by Rytkönen's description of the priorities and goals of the Network and the MFA as a "chicken and egg situation".

While these observations apply to the interests of MFA and NGO staff regarding the concrete work carried out with religious leaders, it can be assumed that professionals from both the MFA and the NGOs have their own goals for the benefits of this work to their own organisations. Still, these are not that often in conflict with each other. Since the work of the MFA and the NGOs is closely related and tied to each other, both generally benefit from the other's gains; Finland's increased reputation in international mediation increases the visibility and opportunities of the Finnish NGOs, while their successes reflect well on Finland. Therefore, while opportunities such as Finland's UN Security Council campaign offered a platform for FCA to increase its visibility, as mentioned by Rytkönen, the activities of the Network have also resulted in increased requests for Finland to participate in events and meetings in which it can raise its mediation profile, as explained by Metso and Oksanen.

Strimling's (ibid.) second category, *agency and coalitions*, tends to pose barriers to co-operation between official and non-official professionals in all contexts. Official diplomats represent the

government, NGO staff represents their organisations and so on; this limits the flexibility and depth of co-operation between individuals. However, in contexts, such as the Finnish one, in which traditions of co-operation between the state and civil society are already in place, these barriers are reduced. This also extends to relationships such as NGOs' responsibility to their funders; since the MFA is a major funder for all of the three NGOs, mismatching interests and pressures from the part of funders are not as likely to pose significant challenges to their co-operation with official diplomats. However, there is reason to assume that the Finnish model of collaboration might be problematic in many other contexts, as was noted by many interviewees.

The third factor, *alternatives*, is likely to have a positive effect on the collaboration between the MFA and the NGOs. While the rise of non-official diplomacy requires certain humility from the MFA, the changing dynamics of international diplomacy influence the whole field, as noted, for example, by Ojala and Kiljunen. According to Strimling's (ibid.) conceptualisation, this lack of alternatives has generally resulted in positive opportunities for co-operation between official and non-official professionals. There is reason to assume that the increased awareness of the need for multi-track co-operation also raises the likelihood of co-operation in the Finnish case; this assumption is supported by the interviewees' acknowledgement of the trends in the field and the importance of such co-operation.

In addition, it can be argued that in the Finnish case in particular, alternatives for such co-operation in the field have been fewer. Since the financial resources the MFA is able or willing to invest in mediation are significantly smaller than they are in certain other countries with a high mediation profile, alternative ways of maximising impact and efficiency have been all the more important. While co-operation between official and non-official actors is notably common in mediation superpowers such as Norway and may have served as an example for Finland, its necessity in the Finnish case is noteworthy. Furthermore, it was noted by Metso that the Finnish form of co-operation may be fairly unique in the particular area of religiously-motivated mediation efforts.

Strimling's (ibid.) fourth category of *culture* poses challenges to co-operation in the forms of different language, different assumptions and different norms. In terms of the first, the data suggests that differing lexicons have potential to hinder effective co-operation. Mediation and peacebuilding, in particular, were conceptualised fairly differently, with the concept of National

Dialogues opening up other possibilities for differing conceptualisations for what falls under the term “mediation”. As for the second factor, while Strimling suggests that assumptions about how to address conflicts generally pose challenges to co-operation between official and non-official professionals, it seems likely that the rise of non-official diplomacy and the trends in the field have blurred such cultural boundaries. This is also likely to depend on the country in question; such differences are much more likely in a global superpower such as the US, whose foreign policy is based on very different goals, structures and traditions than that of Finland. Such cultural differences between the foreign ministries in different states also translate to third cultural aspect, norms and scripts. Based on the interviews, official diplomats in Finland are less likely to emphasise formality, titles and professional hierarchies in a way that diplomats are often assumed to, and instead interact with their non-official counterparts in a fairly informal manner and on first-name basis. This is fairly different from Strimling’s view on the professional cultures of US diplomats and non-official intermediaries. The interviewees, like Strimling, also stressed the importance of personal relationships in influencing co-operation.

Finally, according to Strimling (ibid.), co-operation between official and non-official professionals can be both hindered and advanced by *perceived power imbalances*. Based on the interview data, the MFA and NGO personnel in the field have mostly concentrated on positive ways to benefit from each other’s power. Both parties recognised the advantages that co-operation has offered them, with the MFA representatives particularly focusing on the NGOs’ connections and access to parties the MFA cannot reach or engage with, and the NGOs acknowledging not only financial support but also the MFA’s role as their link to the official and intergovernmental track.

It can be concluded that there are various factors that have contributed to the high level of co-operation and mutual trust between the MFA and the NGOs in supporting the mediation of religious leaders. These include similar or non-conflicting interests and goals, an existing structure of co-operation, the necessity of collaboration, professional cultures that do not pose significant challenges to co-operation, mutual recognition of the power-related benefits of co-operation, strong working relationships between individuals and the growing emphasis on non-official diplomacy in the field in general.

When the co-operation between Finnish official and private diplomats is examined in relation to Strimling's co-operation spectrum, it seems fairly clear that the two first and most important stages of co-operation, communication and co-ordination, are fulfilled. All of the interviewees agree that ideas and information are shared between the MFA and the NGOs, situations are analysed and assessed in joint meetings and resources and contacts are shared. In addition, it also seems that the third category of collaboration that employs the "unique capacities of official and private actors" (Strimling 2006, 101) is at least partly fulfilled. Co-operation goes deeper than resource sharing and co-ordination of contacts; it has evolved into systematic co-operation and an established partnership that extends beyond specific projects and guides the operation of both parties on a sustained basis. Interviewees reported perceiving each other as equal partners, and the MFA representatives also regarded the NGO practitioners' input as contributing to official approaches. However, even though there is a pattern of sustained partnership between the different actors, this collaboration seems to depend on the individual diplomats in question. This means that the level of collaboration is not necessarily stable and solid in the long term, but instead depends on personal working relationships, active efforts from each party and the rebuilding of relations in an environment where professionals on each side are in fast rotation.

As for co-operation between the NGOs themselves, the actual level of competition and co-operation is difficult to assess from interview data – nor was it the primary focus of the study. However, the concrete examples of their co-operation should be noted; briefings and meetings between NGO representatives as well as co-operation in events such as the upcoming Helsinki conference on national and informal dialogue processes demonstrate the extent to which practical co-ordination takes place. The intertwined relations between personnel in organisations such as FCA, Felm and CMI is also likely to affect work among MFA partner organisations operating in the field. However, while the advantages of collaboration were acknowledged in the interviews, it was also mentioned that competition still exists.

The current chapter has discussed how FCA, the Network and Felm support the peace work of religious leaders, how they collaborate with the MFA in doing this, and how this collaboration affects both the NGOs and the MFA. It is evident that the co-operation has benefited both parties. Close relations to the MFA offer the NGOs possibilities they otherwise would not have, and support their capacity to work at the grassroots and their ability to reach international organisations. For Finland,

co-operation with the NGOs has arguably been one of the key factors that have allowed it to bolster its international visibility in the field, and the work of the NGOs has helped it find a cost-efficient, effective way to develop its mediation profile.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how the role of religious leaders in peacemaking is seen by Finnish mediation experts from three NGOs and the MFA, and how they work to support the peace efforts of such religious leaders in co-operation with each other. It concluded that, despite certain differences regarding terminology and the type of religious actors who are seen as the most important, the views of the NGOs are based on a largely similar view of the role of religious leaders in conflicts and peace, reflecting their common history and shared models of co-operation with the MFA. The views of the NGOs are also relatively similar to those of the MFA, in large part due to an interactive relationship of mutual impact, as identified by the interviewees.

It was also found that the interviewees' perceptions of the strengths and potential weaknesses of the peace efforts of religious leaders are quite similar to those of scholars who have focused on conflict transformation and the role of religious actors in it. The interaction between the academic and practitioner fields are evident in the ways that concepts and approaches are used, even if the practitioners do not explicitly speak of conflict transformation or emphasise it as a distinct field. What implications, then, does the work of NGOs like FCA, the Network and Felm and their co-operation with the MFA have for the – still somewhat loose and disconnected – field of conflict transformation? First, it is clear that the role of religious leaders is central to such work that heavily relies on the transformation of perceptions and relationships and on the ability of communities to find ways to co-exist in spite of their differences and handle conflict in a constructive manner. The particular strengths of religious leaders make them important actors in this regard, and while this potential has already been studied by a variety of conflict transformation theorists, it requires further attention and more widespread acknowledgement. When the focus is on long-term transformation, religious structures cannot be ignored in contexts in which they have an important role. In such cases, religious leaders play a key role in ensuring that such transformation efforts are carried out through genuine local ownership that extends to the level of action and not just discourse. This work then offers one avenue for academic literature to further explore the transformation of societies through actors traditionally left out of more traditional conflict resolution approaches, contributing to a more coherent theoretical field.

Second, in terms of Lederach's pyramid model, the doubt expressed by some regarding the efficiency and mediation potential of higher-level religious leaders as well as the likelihood that co-operation between them translates into the grassroots suggests that the ability of mid-level leaders to reach grassroots leaders and the larger grassroots community should not be taken for granted. In addition, Lederach's model does not address certain issues the interviewees perceived as particularly important, such as the ability of religious leaders to reach women, youth and marginalised groups. While it offers a useful starting point, it is not applicable in all contexts. Instead, effective engagement of religious leaders and other peacemakers requires mapping the role and potential of religious actors at all levels in a particular situation. Whether the position of mid-level leaders really is integral to sustainable transformation would require a comprehensive study that the boundaries of this one do not permit. Further research would help scrutinise how the links between religious leaders at different levels of the society actually function in different contexts.

What can be concluded, however, is that the role of NGOs – and potentially FBOs in particular – becomes important in linking religious actors at different levels. Recognising and understanding the role of NGOs and other outsider third parties in supporting the mediation efforts of religious leaders is crucial. By not making these relationships visible, Lederach's model arguably does not offer a comprehensive picture of the framework and context in which the peace efforts of religious leaders take place. By analysing the interviews and the written project documents, the study argued that the financial and technical support provided by NGOs can provide the means to strengthen linkages and networks of co-operation between religious leaders at different levels of the society, both vertically and horizontally. This becomes particularly important in ensuring that religious networks reach and involve women, youth and marginalised groups that are often not strongly represented by religious leaders. In relation to this, research on women and youth in religious peacemaking would offer valuable information on how the efforts of such actors can more effectively be supported, taking into account the specific obstacles they face – also in their own religious communities. While the current study focused on religious leaders, there is a broad variety of religious peacemakers with differing mediation strengths and challenges, which could be better understood through further research.

As for the co-operation between the MFA and the NGOs, the collaborative relationship was found to be one of mutual benefit and mutual impact when it comes to views on, and actual co-operation

with, religious peacemakers. The study argued that in addition to the continuing international trend of increased co-operation between official and non-official diplomacy, certain factors have further encouraged such co-operation in the field in the Finnish context. These include similar or non-conflicting interests and goals, an existing structure of co-operation, the high necessity of collaboration, compatible professional cultures, strong personal relationships and mutual recognition of the benefits of co-operation between the NGOs and the MFA.

In light of Strimling's co-operation model, the findings suggest that her analysis offers a useful perspective on collaboration between official and non-official professionals, but is largely US-focused. It appears clear that the Finnish model of co-operation between the state and civil society actors has developed in a context significantly different from that of the US and has therefore not been limited by similar obstacles. Foreign Ministries in different countries operate under different conditions, are driven by different interests and have different possibilities in forming their foreign policy. They therefore have different drivers and levels of motivation to co-operate with non-official actors. Moreover, characteristics such as working cultures are likely to considerably vary between states, and the impact of such factors should not be underestimated. Further research would offer a more in-depth understanding of the impacts of multi-track collaboration by other state and NGO actors and help evaluate the conditions needed for complementarity between the official and the non-official tracks in different contexts. Such research, however, has to take into account the context-specific variables that influence the likelihood and the particular possibilities for and obstacles to collaboration in different states and between different types of actors.

When it comes to the shifts in the field of international mediation, the findings of the study are in line with the views of various scholars and practitioners that the role of non-official diplomacy is becoming increasingly important in conflict transformation in general, and specifically in supporting the mediation and peacemaking efforts of local actors such as religious leaders. In this regard, the study offers an example of the kind of function that NGOs can fulfil in facilitating co-operation and consolidating linkages between official and non-official, international and local actors. In order to maximise local efforts and their reach in the field of official diplomacy, state actors can be important partners. The evidence from the Finnish case suggests that collaboration can benefit both parties, with NGOs providing official actors with access, knowledge and opportunities they might not

otherwise have, and with state support bolstering NGO efforts and offering them a channel of access to other Track 1 actors.

As for what this means for Finland in particular, the findings suggest that the partnership between the Finnish state and the NGOs differs from models of state-civil society co-operation in many other states. Despite notable similarities to for example the Norwegian model and other states that support state-civil society co-operation, the Finnish model makes more room for a stronger mediation role for NGOs as independent partners rather than as a support network whose main function is to enable and facilitate state mediation. Indeed, this strong role of NGOs was arguably critical in Finland assuming the focus on religious leaders as part of its mediation policy – a significant development that, as stated in the beginning of the study, is not only a new but also a rather bold way of approaching mediation in the international arena still marked by traditional Western liberal views on how peace should be advanced and by whom. The study highlighted what the benefits of this type of partnership can be: in the Finnish case, it led to significant results, some of which were seemingly not anticipated. For a state setting out to become “a great power in peace mediation”, one source of its power was found in an unexpected place.

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