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From a Quiet Revolution to the Tolerance of Ambiguity: Religious NGOs in International Development Discourse

International discourses on development indicate a remarkable shift. For decades, secular notions of social change have dominated development theory. In an unanticipated juncture, more recent scholarship recognises the importance of religion in development dynamics, providing evidence for a cooling down of the "secularization fever" (Barnett and Stein 2012: 3) that has affected development theory across the globe. This shift is accompanied by proclamations of a postsecular "religious turn" in international development politics. If plausibility can be provided for a religious amnesia in classic concepts of development, nowadays, credit is given to religious social agency. In a radical shift of arguments, one can hear that "it is only a slight exaggeration to say 'no religion, no humanitarianism'" (Barnett and Stein 2012: 3). Despite such claims, religion remains contested, if not marginal, in current development politics. While there are exceptions, religion still is a comparatively underrated factor in current development politics (Oehlmann, Frost, Graeb and Schieder 2016). Although assertions of a "religious turn" in international development politics have been brought forward since the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Program at the beginning of this century, in the formulation of the Agenda 2030 published in 2015, religion is not explicitly featured in the sustainable development goals.

The "discovery" of religion and religious non-government organisations (RNGOs) is part of what we term a postsecular quiet revolution in the world of development. However, this revolution has not yet come to an end due to the hybridity of RNGOs. Like other NGOs, RNGOs engage in "secular" fields and institutions of development. However, they differ from other NGOs in terms of their religious background.

Does this religious background actually make a difference? Some observers believe that it does and credit specific capacities to RNGOs, including, for instance, their grassroots reach as well as the integrity and motivation of staff due to the faith identity of these organisations (Amri 2014; James 2009; Rice 2006). Others, by contrast, see no difference between RNGOs and their "secular" counterparts, suggesting that RNGOs

and NGOs engage in similar ways in international development (Carrette 2017; Ware et al. 2016).

This volume addresses the potentially distinctive character and capacities of RNGOs in the world of development, asking whether religion makes a difference. Its contributions tackle this question from different disciplinary angles and with regard to different religions and regional contexts. In the remainder of this introduction, we chart some of the main episodes of the slow and mostly reluctant discovery of religion in the world of international development and describe the hybridity of RNGOs. Based on this hybridity, we suggest that a greater tolerance of ambiguity might allow RNGOs to come into play more strongly for the goals of international development. In the final part of this introduction, we map the contributions of this volume and present an outlook.

A Quiet Revolution

Around the turn of the millennium, former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan (1938–2018), spoke of a "quiet revolution" in development politics. In his view, the quiet revolution included a change towards participatory bottom-up strategies in international relations and the field of development politics (Annan 1998). For a long time, development policy was dominated by state-driven agency guided by technocratic visions of catch-up development. Since the 1960s, development concepts were framed in a grand narrative whose codes were defined by economic and modernist repertoires, nurturing images of linear, predictable social change. The "revolutionary" component of Annan`s diction refers to the irruption of non-governmental organisations (NGOs`) into such etatist development concepts. Disquieting experiences of inefficiency caused reorientations in global development policy in the 1980s and affected questions of agency, structures and intentions of development. Disillusioned by the grim economic outlook of post-colonial states, international development policy implemented structural adjustment programmes and promoted economic liberalisation processes. A significant feature in all these shifts was the continual entrance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) into public political arenas. Participation of civil society affected all fields of development policy, at local and global levels. NGOs were recognised as development partners coping with the political "agencies of restraint" (Kappel 2000: 227), the proverbial institutional weakness of postcolonial states.

At the level of civil society, religious groups of different backgrounds played an important role in questioning the postcolonial architecture; partly due to the 'bad governance' performances, partly due to increasing social misery, poverty and unemployment (Bayart 2009: 256–257). Obviously, religion remained an influential part of private and public life and marker of identity in postcolonial societies. Drawing on statistical material on religious belonging, for instance, in contemporary Africa (PEW 2010), one "could hypothesize that religion has even become the primary identity for most Africans, perhaps above national identity, which is seen as more unstable" (Abbink 2014: 87). In retrospect, the importance of religion seemed to be growing in contexts of politically weak postcolonial states, by providing a sense of identity and security, and addressing existential needs for survival.

In this context, NGOs came into play as allies against the exploitative ethos of state elites. NGOs were surrounded by an aura to subvert the postcolonial "politics of the belly" (Bayart 2009). They were seen as noticeable partners against authoritarian regimes accumulating national wealth and supporting patrimonial forms of redistribution. The supposed impact of non-governmental actors resonated in prospects of an "NGOisation" of development. Whether the appearance of NGOs marked a profound breakthrough of civil society or was, actually, a romanticisation of grassroots-oriented social change, remained unresolved (Nuscheler 2012: 555).

Surely, Annan`s perception of a "quiet revolution" still transported both the uncertainty and the high expectations about the "revolutionary" role of NGOs in the future texture of global development governance. Yet, the second, more discreet component of his formula relates to another marker in the field of development policy around the turn of the century. Concealed in the ambiguous "quiet revolution" is the agency of religious-based non-governmental organisations (RNGOs), a specific type of NGOs. Almost invisible in the previous history of development decades, RNGOs began to feature within development discourses. Religion appeared as a factor for social change. Again, the subtle part of the quiet revolution encapsulated another ambivalence that concerned the role of religion in development politics: whether religion is "a help or hindrance to development" (Mtata 2013), whether it mobilises or obstructs social change.

The Reluctant Discovery of Religion

Engrained in the notion of a quiet revolution is the slow and "reluctant discovery" of RNGOs. Early voices asking for a deeper recognition of the religious impact on socio-economic change remained scarce (Lueken 1989). Also, the religious legacy of RNGOs remained an unspecific referent in development circles. Since post World War II the few pioneering RNGOs operating within UN developmental networks were simply seen as any other intermediary organisation and therefore not recognised as "religious" (Lehmann 2016). And seen from a broader RNGO perspective, the historic narrative around RNGO is anchored within global Christianity.

Historically, RNGOs emerged around the 1950s in a context in which global development policy was taking shape. Some pioneering organisations with a Roman-Catholic background formed part of the early networks linked to the UN. Christian NGOs became more engaged with the proclamation of the "first development decade" in 1960 which had a particularly strong impact on mainline Christianity. This legacy is still felt today, as the vast majority of RNGOs at the UN has a Christian background (Koehrsen and Heuser 2020). The emergence of Christian development agency deserves a closer look.

The announcement of the first development decade by the UN was a conscious step into a global framework of development. It gave way to the formulation of development theories, and paid closer attention to methods and practices in the implementation of development projects. Predominant discourses of development, however, tended to exclude religion from the picture and mostly focussed on economic development. Against this backdrop, religious actors raised criticism against prevalent notions of development which they perceived as too economic-centred and neglecting broader concepts of self and visions of social life.

In global mainline Christianity, political theologies of different kind requested a Christian contribution to social change in the so-called Third World. Contextual theologies described root-causes of poverty and "underdevelopment", asking churches to venture away from benevolent charity programmes to consider structural issues and demanding participatory practices in development-related projects. In this broader horizon of social transformation, churches offered their participation as agents of change.

Ideas for a professionalisation of Christian development agency materialised already around 1960. Two major Christian NGOs were founded in Western Europe to be part and parcel of the new development policy era.

In 1959, *Bread for the World* was founded in Germany, seconded in 1964 by ICCO (Interchurch Coordination Committee for Development Projects) in the Netherlands. Others followed in due course. Their establishment undermined the functional separation into secular and religious spheres, heeded in political development discourses of the time. Equipped with enormous fundraising capacity and a definite mandate to operate in developing countries, these RNGOs inserted peculiar faith-based perspectives into the global tapestry of development and social change at large. Driven by the performances of Christian NGOs, the idea of contributing to development expanded within Christianity, reaching a rising number of Christian communities.

These developments climaxed on a global scale in the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Uppsala (Sweden) in 1968. The outcome of the WCC Uppsala Assembly marks the "formal beginning of the intentional and organized engagement of the ecumenical movement for development cooperation" (World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance, 2018: 25). The Uppsala Assembly formulated some key terms and principles of church-related development work. It affirmed mutual participation and transparency in development projects across diverse socio-cultural contexts. The Uppsala claims constructed a more complex notion of development, overcoming the sole development criteria based on needs of the *homo oeconomicus*. The Uppsala Assembly emphasised the need for grassroots legitimacy of any development work. This included responsiveness to local communities and the call for accountability in the use of resources. In addition to principles of responsible administration and accountability, critical self-evaluation was part of the Uppsala call for professionalisation of church-related development work (Moltmann 2008). Uppsala 1968 shaped the development agency in mainline Christianity. In some respect, it prefigured quintessential requirements for sustainability discussed today. In any case, in a long-term effect it oriented Christian international development towards issues of justice rather than models of charity: Christian NGOs became interested in transferring the power to the recipients of development work in the long run.

However, the continuing dictum of secularisation still nourished a neglect of religion in development circles. The "reluctant discovery" of RNGO gained pace only in the late 1990s. In a review of development theories and policies at that time, Kurt A. Ver Beek still testified a negligence of religious dimensions in development policies. In a self-critical note, he stated that "little is known about the role of spirituality in the development

process, and little or no guidance is given to development practitioners as to how address spiritual issues, resulting in less effective and even damaging development efforts" (Ver Beek 2000: 38). The religiousness of RNGOs received some more attention with the coining of the UN *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) in 2000. Inspired by turn-of-the-millennium enthusiasm, the MDGs designed a plain purpose of international development policy. They articulated eight main goals, a clear time frame and a prime purpose of action, namely to halve poverty in the Global South by 2015. In order to do so, the MDGs envisaged consolidating grassroots participation. By expressing several key goals, the MDGs no longer strategised development in the linear, material growth-based vision of previous development decades. On the part of RNGOs, the MDGs found strong support as the "longest standing paradigm that has ever emerged in developmental thinking" (ACT Executive Committee 2013: 2). Inversely, the MDGs accelerated a sensitivity for RNGO-participation in development politics.

RNGO agency gradually became more discernible in the context of a new era in developmental geopolitics. In the early 2000s, the growing awareness of RNGOs became apparent in a number of new initiatives on a national and international scale. Bretton-Woods institutions pioneered the scenario (Haynes 2007). From 1998 until 2005, the World Bank organised a consultation process, headed by Wold Bank president James D. Wolfensohn, and the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. The joint initiative resulted in the foundation of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD).

Already in 1999, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) staged a programme on "Social Capital, Ethics and Development" that brought together political and religious leaders as well as political economists. In analogy the World Bank department on Development Dialogue on Value and Ethics was founded in 2000 in order to build up stronger relations with RNGOs. Subsequently, numerous national development agencies built up clusters on religion and development and conducted research projects about the impact of religion on development. In Europe, the Swiss Development Cooperation launched a long-term research project about religion and development in 2002. On the one hand, this project provided case study approaches on development in diverse countries, and in view of different religious actors, cultural and social contexts. On the other hand, the findings supported the ambivalence of religious agency in development processes, including sometimes destabilising effects and support of fundamentalism (Holenstein 2009). Similarly, the British Department for International Development instigated the 'Religions and Development Program'

from 2005–2010. Its research focus was on religious norms and values in a multi-religious perspective, resulting in a set of 'Faith Partnership Principles' (Rakodi 2011). Other initiatives by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs or, in case of US development policy the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, founded in 2006, provided platforms for interaction of political development agencies with RNGOs (Berkley Center 2012). They expressed a need for long-term cooperation and aimed at creating awareness for the peculiar challenges in development cooperation between state and religious institutions. Above all, the mapping of potentials and risks longed for more intense studies on the specific profiles of RNGOs, their diverse approaches, and institutional backgrounds. A few years later, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development authored a Future Charta that conceptualised earlier findings. In 2014, the Ministry coined its novel concept of a value-based development policy: "Religion Matters" sought to safeguard cultural and religious plurality and to fully respect RNGOs as potent partners in development cooperation (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2016).

By then the political narrative of RNGO discovery opened another decisive page. In 2015, the UN implemented the Agenda 2030, heralded as a decisive passage into a "great global transformation" (Nuscheler 2012). The global arena of development politics went into the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet, the story of a reluctant discovery of RNGOs continues on another page.

The Great Global Transformation

Officially designated as "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", the SDGs present a comprehensive set of general aims and a broad range of targets (http://www.un.org/sustainabledevel opment/). Signed by 193 countries, the Agenda 2030 seeks continuity with the Millennium Development Goals, at first glance. As such, the first goal of the SDGs affirms to end poverty in all its forms and everywhere. However, in the MDGs, the optimistic prospect to drastically curb poverty rates by 2015 turned out to be illusionary (Grin, Rotmans, Schot, and Geels 2010). Soon any hopes of eradicating poverty levels were contradicted by a persistent "bottom billion", signalling "large islands of chaos" in which one billion poor people live alongside six to seven billion people under remarkably better conditions (Collier 2007). "The twenty-first-century world of

material comfort, global travel, and economic interdependence will become increasingly vulnerable to these large islands of chaos. And it matters now. As the bottom billion diverges from an increasingly sophisticated world economy, integration will become harder, not easier" (Collier 2007: 3–4). The agenda's preamble already indicates ways to handle such "islands of chaos". First, it mentions sustainable development as an integral process. Second, and in difference to the MDGs priority on the Southern hemisphere, the SDGs pursue sustainable development on a global scale. Third, the "great transformation" envisions sustainability by a collection of 17 development goals with related 169 targets. By consequence, the SDGs widen the scope of development and invite for more flexible approaches in development practice. Sustainable development signifies an enormous complexity of parameters and practice characterised by an interplay of sustainable modes of production, consumption, and resource use. The SDGs combine social and ecological justice, addressing violations of human rights, gender inequality, and measures to combat climate change. Amongst others more, the agenda promotes well-being for all and across generational lines. The visionary-like SDG 16 is committed to establish "peaceful and inclusive societies", providing "access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". In sum, the Agenda 2030 offers an aspiring platform welcomed by large sections of RNGOs, as the contributions in this volume illustrate.

In fact, the Agenda 2030 is the result of a consultative process. In contrast to the implementation of the MDGs, which were coined by a selected number of experts, it is characterised by a multi-stakeholder, participatory and value-oriented approach to sustainable development. Amongst the stakeholders in civil society contributing to the formulation of the Agenda 2030 were numerous RNGOs, representing diverse faith traditions and religious communities. Surprisingly, however, the Agenda 2030 contains no single reference to religion. How about all the studies and programmes on the impact of "religion" that had appeared following the adoption of the MDGs? By the time of the adoption of the SDGs, religion had become a prominent topic in academic debates about development: the once criticised religious illiteracy had turned into an appreciation of the connection between religion and development (see, for instance, Boehle 2010a; Bornstein 2002; Berger 2003; Carrette and Miall 2017; Clarke 2013; Haynes 2007; Marshall 2014; Mtata 2013; Sider and Unruh 2004; Stensvold 2017). In development theory, RNGOs were increasingly profiled as identifiable development actors in their own right. The Agenda 2030 orientation towards human rights, rural and grassroots issues consolidated long estab-

lished options in the development work of RNGOs (Clarke 2008; Baum-gart-Ochse and Wolf 2019). This had stirred a growing interdisciplinary attention given to RNGOs, accentuating the transformative potential of religion (Deneulin and Rakodi 2011; Lehmann 2016). Academic contributions were even suggesting a substantial "religious turn" in developmental geopolitics (Jahnel 2018), as the quiet revolution seemed to be breaking through in an overwhelming diction as a "newfound enthusiasm" (Occhipinti 2015: 333) over RNGOs.

Against this backdrop, it is astonishing that the involvement, collaboration and participation of RNGOs is only stated implicitly in the envisaged Great Global Transformation. The impression of a "religious turn" in international development politics appears as premature, if not a chimera. The "newfound enthusiasm" about the transformative potentials of RNGOs had continually been met with a hermeneutics of suspicion, as the assumed potentials were subject to substantial critique (Jones and Petersen 2011). One can discern a cyclic return of criticisms that highlight the dualistic features of RNGOs in international development. As such, still today RNGOs cannot escape the "help or hindrance" (Mtata 2013), the numinous "visible and invisible actors" (Carrette and Miall 2017) and the "polarizers or mediators" (Baumgart-Ochse and Wolf 2019) dualisms in development politics. In sum, the Agenda 2030 continues with the reluctant discovery of RNGOs, as the "quiet revolution" prolongs into the Great Global Transformation.

RNGOs' Abilities in Sustainable Development

Apparently, the development agency of RNGOs is troubled by an innate ambiguity. This ambiguity nuances the "newfound enthusiasm" about religion and identifies limitations of RNGOs in development work. This demands a more accurate look at RNGOs.

Generally speaking, RNGOs share some of the advantages and also some of the disadvantages of NGOs. Both NGOs and RNGOs are part of and engaged in mobilising civil society. They access the social and moral capital of a society for the sake of greater grassroots participation in pursuing common goods. They seek to provide resources for long-term social transformation, including advocacy in critical issues of sustainable development. On the other hand, RNGOs also share weaknesses of NGOs. In most cases, they pursue small-scale projects that have little impact on broader structural development issues. Like some NGOs, RNGOs are also

known for applying moralising strategies in fund-raising activities (Nuscheler 2012: 558–561). But how to classify the (potentially) distinctive abilities of RNGOs?

RNGOs' grassroots orientation places strong emphasis on basic needs in the field of poverty eradication, but they may also engage for goals that are related to the newly established focus on environmental sustainability in the SDGs (Koehrsen 2018). RNGOs are known for their ability to establish trust-building relationships at the margins of any society. Their expertise in mobilising civil society in the fields of education and ecology, of public welfare and in conflict mediation facilitated their increasing integration into participatory bottom-up discourses (Boehle 2010b; Olivier 2016). In addition, RNGOs can rely on local networks needed in the global outreach of the Agenda 2030: they can usually draw upon the support of long-standing local faith communities (Berger 2003; Kirmani 2012; Ware et al. 2016). RNGOs are intertwined with global and local networks, at times built-up in long-standing, historic relationships between institutional partners in both Northern and Southern hemispheres. This enables them to use existing communication channels, indispensable for advocacy activities. Due to their normative orientations, RNGOs can also produce effective counter-publics that challenge established elites or confront official development policies. Furthermore, they often have established extensive fundraising networks over many years that facilitate the continuous influx of resources from private and public donors. Other advantages are sometimes lower administration costs, coupled with management expertise of small-scale, but also of large-scale projects. Moreover, the integrity of leadership and the access to skilled staff appear to constitute additional features (World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance 2018: 55–57). Put together, RNGOs seem to unite characteristics of trusted social agency in sustainable development.

However, disillusionment about RNGO-based development projects is also part of the RNGO narrative (Nuscheler 2012; Stockmann 2016). Entangled in the implementation of projects are cases of corruption. Hierarchical structures and gender imbalances sometimes mitigate the success of development projects. RNGOs "should therefore be self-critical when affirming their own strengths and distinctive values" (World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance 2018: 75).

At closer look, there is one characteristic suspicion against RNGOs: they would follow a hidden proselytism agenda (Bornstein 2002; Clarke 2008; Haynes 2013). Such controversies can be identified in secular development milieus, on the one side; and on the other side, they are even raised between

religious actors in projections about development ideologies of other-religious communities (Barnett and Stein 2012). The reservations are serious in matter, as they suggest that RNGOs are violating the humanitarian ethos of development by promoting their religion or exclusively favouring the adherents of their faith tradition. Instead of subscribing to the consensus of impartiality, non-discrimination and equality, development activities of RNGOs run the risk of limiting the outreach to specific constituencies (cf. World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance 2018: 70–75). However, RNGO development approaches depend on the types of RNGOs involved as well as on their ideological anchorage (Sider and Unruh 2004). The contributions in this volume show that RNGOs differ in degree and shape; they also show that the controversial issue of proselytism is treated with utmost care within (most) RNGOs (see, for instance, the chapters by Gez, Maya and Benvenisti and by Langewiesche in this volume).

The dispute over proselytism is intimately connected to another major concern often voiced by secular development actors: in their perspective, the normativity of RNGOs is seen as problematic, indicating limitations in developmental vision and practice. This concern relates to a central feature of RNGOs: their religious identity and normativity. It is precisely the normative distinctiveness of RNGOs that caused their rather slow discovery in developmental geopolitics. Contributions in this volume highlight the fact that RNGOs do not play out their religious identity card by all means. They differ enormously in making their religious identity in public. Most, though not all (see, for instance, Dehn; Petersen in this volume), RNGOs open their humanitarian ethos to all humans irrespective of their religious belonging. More importantly, normativity guides all development practice and social action, including those of secular actors (Paech 2012; Ziai 2014; Marshall 2014; Stockmann, Menzel and Nuscheler 2016). No development practice can escape normative foundations. Notwithstanding, the religious identity of RNGOs continues to provoke qualms over their legitimate participation in development politics.

Given the aforementioned criticisms, any romanticisation of RNGOs seems out of place (Heuser 2019). RNGOs appear as hybrid actors moving between the world of religion and secular development circles. Therefore, we suggest to handle RNGOs by a "tolerance of ambiguity".

Tolerance of Ambiguity

Tolerance of ambiguity paves a way for another variant of the "quiet revolution": It challenges "othering" discourses on RNGOs, still prevalent in the political development milieus of the Agenda 2030 era. As described above, the "quiet revolution" has lead to the reluctant discovery of RNGOs. The integration of religious agency in development discourses intensified from the 1980s and accompanied the "NGOization" of development governance. However, its slow acceptance endures in the era of the SDGs.

The critical perception of RNGOs mostly refers to their ambivalent, or "hybrid" profile (Berger 2003), blending the arguably separated – worlds of religion and secular development. RNGOs undertake development activities potentially guided by a religious background and mix them with secular language and development practices. On the one side, RNGOs are characterised by their rootedness in distinct religious traditions and their connections to specific religious communities. On the other side, they have become successful players in the national and international arenas of development, and are equal partners in development initiatives. Tolerance of ambiguity deals with this hybridity and the uncertainty that it may cause. It allows "secular" development actors to engage in collaborations with RNGOs and avoids the "newfound enthusiasm" as well as the "hindrance" discourses. Rather than perceiving the normativity of RNGOs as problematic, tolerance of ambiguity depicts it as central to their developmental productivity. Tolerance of ambiguity involves the ability to navigate between different discourses of development. By offering this term, we suggest a constructive understanding of the ambivalent nature of RNGOs. Their hybrid character even facilitates their adaptability to diverse political and religious cultures.

Elsewhere we termed RNGOs as "boundary agents", with reference to (mainly protestant) Christian RNGOs (Koehrsen and Heuser 2020; cf. Koehrsen 2017). This volume presents empirical case studies which allow for expanding the notion. The contributions provide evidence that non-Christian RNGOs can be understood as resourceful "boundary agents": RNGOs adapt their visions, their language, and their approaches to changing contexts and allow for mediating between different stakeholders of international development (e.g. state actors, religious donors, grassroots recipients). The hybridity of RNGOs facilitates their collaboration with other development actors in various fields. Despite their hybridity, they have clear normative and religious foundations that guide their develop-

ment objectives and encourages them to promote particular notions of development in international development discourses. Through their religious value systems, RNGOs turn into what we call "developmental entrepreneurs" (Koehrsen and Heuser 2020a). Our plea for tolerance of ambiguity acknowledges the autonomous boundary agency of RNGOs and testifies the sometimes precarious balancing of their hybridity (Baumgart-Ochse and Wolf 2019). Tolerance of ambiguity considers the innate multidimensionality of RNGOs' development practice and refers to the ability of bearing equivocalness.

Multireligious Case-Studies

This volume supports tolerance of ambiguity by adding to the scholarship about international development in two ways. First, it provides empirical studies on RNGOs still "underrepresented in the academic debate" (Braungart 2019: 8–9). Second, this volume forays into the multireligious arena of RNGOs. It seeks to situate RNGO agency in a multireligious perspective and offers insights into the development activities, normative backgrounds and organisational features of RNGOs from diverse backgrounds of faith and geographical regions.

The spectrum of religious traditions represented here has a strong corpus on monotheistic Abrahamic religions, portraying, for instance, Muslim and Jewish RNGOs. The studies about Buddhist and Hindu-based developmental engagement provides insights into an emerging sector of RNGOs. Some articles are comparative in nature, while others engage in internal debates over normative directions of development agency. The focus on empirical cases helps to be cautious when it comes to generalisations. As such, the sample of cases from different backgrounds includes particular descriptions of the peculiar competencies linked to single RNGOs. It is also concerned with at times heterodox, self-reflective voices of RNGOs in overall discourses on development. This becomes evident in cases of RNGO engagement with particular SDGs, be it, for instance, ecology and climate justice, gender, or migration. The studies show that RNGOs are oriented towards poverty reduction and basic existential needs; many are known for their advocacy in human rights protection and some are engaged in conflict resolution, specifically in inter-religious constellations. The cases reveal the organisational strengths of RNGOs in development politics. In many cases, RNGOs are able to generate significant financial resources. At the same time, most RNGOs are part of international

networks and are embedded in both political and religious contexts. Given their financial, organisational and network features, they are often capable of handling small-scale and large-scale development projects.

Outline of the Volume

The volume is organised around five sections. Following this Introduction on the slow discovery of RNGOs in international development discourse, Section I is mapping Religious NGOs and International Development Politics. In her opening contribution, KATHERINE MARSHALL reflects on religious engagement in development work in general terms. Recent discussions about religion in contemporary international affairs tend to focus on social tensions. They stress conflicts and violence driven by diverse forms religious extremism. Less appreciation is given to constructive aspects of religiously motivated agency in multiple arenas of development. Marshall seeks to map the complex roles of religious actors in the wider global agenda as reflected in the UN 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An underlying premise of her argument is that the global agenda of sustainable development is not possible without taking religion into account. The central message is that religious institutions and beliefs matter for each SDG. By defining terms, she differentiates between a belief-centred approach involving cognitive dimensions and "lived religion" that centres on practical expressions. In the context of development, this includes institutions and service delivery, various forms of partnerships, and the shaping of core ethical norms that underlie social cohesion. She points at the prime importance of context, also in order to avoid generalisations that contribute little to the understanding of religious agency. She observes that institutions are taking on new roles especially in fragile states and in times of violent conflicts. The chapter outlines various contemporary efforts to engage religious actors in more systematic ways. In order to facilitate purposeful religious engagement, Marshall highlights several topics that call for dialogue and development action. Among them, she includes religion and violence, corruption and employment opportunities, the issue of proselytisation, controversies on gender, human rights, and the quality of education. Against the backdrop of the SDGs, she asserts that the engagement with such highly complex topics is demanding but essential.

JEFFREY HAYNES argues that the ability of religious NGOs to make a difference depends on whether non-religious development circles accept them as relevant actors. His contribution examines the collaboration

between religious and non-religious actors against the backdrop of the MDGs and SDGs. Haynes sees increases in both openness for collaboration between religious and non-religious actors as well as the number of such collaborations, with the MDGs and SDGs creating a productive environment for these exchanges. However, despite increasing collaborations and the sharing of similar development goals in the context of the SDGs, there is still scepticism vis-à-vis religious organisations in secular development circles. Moreover, religious and non-religious actors differ in their perceptions of development (e.g. poverty). These differences may obstruct long-term collaborations, as Haynes shows for the case of the vacillating collaboration between the World Bank and the WCC. Whether and how religious perspectives (e.g. on poverty reduction) can be implemented in the development strategies of non-religious organisations and governments remains a central question. Haynes indicates that among actors from both sides, there is a need for openness and mutual learning.

RICHARD FRIEDLI´S contribution is a comparative approach to "transculturation grammars" in secular and religious NGOs. Friedli suggests two basic preconditions for development work: (a) flexibility as a balancing identity and (b) capacity to differentiate between the fundamentalist vs. fundamental shift. He illustrates these two preconditions for the case of Rwanda challenged by genocide and peace-building process. In Rwanda the shift from fundamental to fundamentalist grammars contributed to the genocide. The ongoing reconciliation activity therefore consists in returning to fundamental grammars. Friedli argues that knowledge about and respect for religion plays a crucial role for development activities. However, he also points out that it is not fruitful to distinguish in a general manner between religious and secular forms of action, as "both styles of acting can produce hardening or mitigating social repercussions" (Friedli). Instead, the crucial difference would concern "orthodoxy" vs. "openness" that relates to the aforementioned pre-conditions of development work.

SECTION II is charting RNGOs in diverse religious traditions. MARIE JUUL PETERSEN outlines the emergence and contemporary context of transnational Muslim RNGOs in the Sunni tradition. Muslim RNGOs are increasing in numbers and visibility in the field of development and humanitarian aid. Petersen presents historical trajectories of Muslim RNGOs, laying emphasis on the post 9/11 Islamic aid field. Based on case studies of two pioneering Muslim NGOs, the chapter explores the ways in which these organisations conceive of the nexus between religion and aid. One of the oldest, biggest and most influential transnational Muslim RNGOs is IIROSA, established in Saudi Arabia in 1979. IIROSA is formally part of

the Muslim World League and cooperates primarily with other Muslim organisations. It hardly entertains relations with Western development organisations. The majority of donors are Kuwaiti and Saudi Muslims; likewise, recipients of aid are mainly situated in Muslim-majority countries or in Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries. IIROSA envisions a strengthened umma in the sense of a transnational community of shared values, not a pan-Islamic political unit. The second RNGO is Islamic Relief, established in 1984 by Egyptian immigrants in the UK. Islamic Relief is arguably the largest Muslim RNGO. It is part of a wide range of networks and entertains formal collaborations with Muslim, Christian and secular development NGOs. Its projects are directed towards both Muslims and non-Muslims. Islamic Relief operates similarly to other, mainstream, development and humanitarian organisations and supports notions of sustainable development, professionalism and neutrality. Peterson concludes that for Islamic Relief religion is "not a defining factor but an 'added value' facilitating access, communication and a religiously sensitive approach to recipients". Her analysis shows how heterogeneous the field of international Muslim RNGOs is; it underlines different kinds and degrees of organisational religiosity as well as it demonstrates different concepts of development beyond the divides between 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim', or between 'religious' and 'secular' worlds.

ULRICH DEHN surveys the social engagement with regard to exemplary Buddhist movements and one Hindu oriented organisation. He explores their religious backgrounds and portrays the social thinking of their founders and main thinkers. Dehn addresses first far spread prejudices about the absence of social thinking and ethics in Eastern religions. Branches of Hindu religion and Buddhism are stereotyped as aiming primarily at individual salvation or enlightenment. The chapter deals with the most prominent Buddhist social movement at present, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), founded in 1989 and based in Thailand. It was preceded by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, related to the US-based International Fellowship of Reconciliation. INEB soon became a worldwide movement embracing many Buddhist thinkers and social activists from Europe, the USA, Australia and other countries. Dehn captures the concepts of some of its most important figures, such as Buddhadasa, Santikaro, Aitken, Thich Nhat Hanh and MARUYAMA. He states some inter-religious influences in the making of INEB, mostly related to Christian RNGOs. A second example is the social neo-Buddhist movement of B. R. Ambedkar in India. Ambedkar is a key figure in India`s postcolonial politics and linked to a mass conversion movement of Dalits. He set up

social projects to fight discrimination towards socially marginalised populations in India. Dehn also traces two Hindu organisations that are ideologically related to each other. He compares the Sarvodaya Movement in India, which stands in a (multi-religiously inspired) Ghandhian tradition, with the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka. The village-oriented Sarvodaya Movement of India relates to the caste system, which is not accepted by Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka with its stronger anchorage in a Buddhist context. Dehn`s analysis shows that both Hindu and Buddhist RNGOs support their foundational theories by inter-religious exchange and conceptual adaptations. In their social practice they do not differ substantially from non-religious NGOs, besides a weaker professionalisation.

YONATAN N. GEZ, ADI MAYA, AND IDO BENVENISTI explore a diverse range of Jewish RNGOs, working in East Africa. They consider the popular notion of tikkun olam as the guiding principle of Jewish RNGOs. Tikkun olam is described as an "often-vague Jewish imperative to make the world a better place, which has become the rallying cry of Jewish development activities". An undercurrent of their argument engages with the question of proselytism in development practice. In contrast to some Christian and Muslim RNGOs, Jewish RNGOs usually avoid proselytising activities. This, however, seems to contrast with their findings on 'Jewish outreach', observed in two case studies involving Jewish RNGO projects in Ethiopia and Rwanda. Despite Jewish aversion to proselytism, the authors analyse missionary-like activities in those projects, albeit towards Jewish volunteers and staff. Jewish outreach is not directed toward the local population. Jewish RNGOs seek to strengthen Jewish identity, specifically among secular or assimilated Jews, who feel disconnected to Judaism as a religion. Following Gez, Maya, and Benvenisti, Jewish international development practice can be seen as a response to isolationist Jewish exclusivism, on the one hand. On the other hand, Jewish RNGOs address internal Jewish dynamics aimed at countering the loss of religious attachment in the diaspora and in Israel.

SECTION III discusses inter-religious contexts and comparisons in more detail. Based on research about Christian and Muslim RNGOs in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina, LEIF SEIBERT critically studies the assumption that religion is inherently conservative and, therefore, cannot contribute to social change, possibly even prohibiting it. He describes this assumption as the "'cosmological constant' that defines religion *a priori* as a conservative societal force". In regarding unestablished and reformative actors in the religious field ("prophets") as using 'borrowed' religious symbols, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, like many of his peers, subscribes to this view. Seibert

challenges this perspective by exploring the role of RNGOs in the religious field of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He shows that unestablished religious actors enjoy a high credibility, effectively countering the positions of the religious establishment, and managing to challenge or even dictate the "rules of the game" in the local religious field. Given their importance in the religious field, these more reformative actors cannot be *a priori* excluded from it. Moreover, Seibert uses Habitus-Analysis to study the cognitive dispositions of 19 members from three RNGOS (Caritas, Merhamet, and SOZ). The analysis reveals that staff of the very same organisations endorse two divergent narratives about social progress: on the one hand, they regard progress as the result of properly religious mentalities; on the other hand, they describe progress as the condition for proper religious practices. The first narrative represents the cosmological constant view, regarding faith as a precondition for social change and thereby distracting attention from transformative action. However, the second narrative opposes this view: it provides no religious consolation that could stabilize the societal status quo and calls for action, thereby constituting a subversive faith. Finally, Seibert argues that it depends on our understanding of religion as to whether we perceive it as a changing or conservative force: however, if we regard religion *a priori* as a conservative force, we cannot witness its progressive power because we will always categorize its creative elements as "non-religion".

Sɪɴᴀʜ Kʟᴏss focusses on Hindu and Christian RNGOs and studies how religious identities of development organisations are socially constructed. In the context of Guyana, she finds that actors are labelled as "religious" according to their performances, and that this labelling can have strong implications for the activities of development actors. Here, the term "religion" is strongly politicised and has negative connotations. Thus, potential beneficiaries may avoid organisations that are labelled as "religious" and reject its development activities. In this case, "religion" makes a negative difference for development work, as it hampers development work on the ground. Therefore, it is found that development actors are likely to avoid labelling themselves as "religious" and instead use more positively charged concepts such as "spiritual". Kloß concludes that there is no universal difference that "religion" could make in development work: whether and what difference "religion" makes depends on the local cultural context and what "religion" means for local actors in this context.

Sᴜᴡᴀʀᴛᴏ Aᴅɪ explores a church-based foundation (*Yayasan*) which locates itself in between specific Christian motivations and inter-religious action in developmental processes in Indonesia. Yayasan was founded by a Javanese Pastor in Central Java, with a majority Muslim population. Although recog-

nisable as a local Christian RNGO, *Yayasan* seeks to engage the community as a whole, irrespective of religious belonging. Informed by a Good Samaritan theology and also by Liberation Theology, the Pastor has initiated an educational programme for children of poor families, a socio-economic programme aimed at capacity building for community members, and also an inter-religious peace-building programme. Adi argues that these programmes are carried out to promote peaceful social transformation and interreligious tolerance. He reframes a prominent myth in Indonesia that the Christian RNGOs are primarily intended as means to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Intra-religious transformations and changes within RNGOs are in focus of SECTION IV. The contribution by DENA FREEMAN questions whether there is a fundamental difference between secular and religious development work. Studying how the religious NGO Tearfund reorients itself to bring a stronger evangelical focus into its development work, Freeman shows that even these efforts lead to a development work that is not substantially different from those of secular NGOs. In the 1990s, Tearfund starts the reorientation process that seeks for a stronger focus on the religious dimension of development. The process draws upon the theology of integral transformation: this holistic approach encourages believers to work towards the Kingdom of God and argues that the transformation should become manifest in spiritual as well as social transformations. Based on this approach, Tearfund restructures its development work around the idea of envisioning processes that are subsequently undertaken in its local partner churches. These processes focus on the local community and its needs (e.g. identifying local problems). They require the church to draft plans to solve local issues, undertake targeted action, and evaluate the activities in feedback processes. Although this approach is significantly different from the earlier development approach of Tearfund, the difference to secular development organisations remains unclear: In the meantime, many secular organisations have overtaken a similar approach, emphasising small-scale local projects. Consequently, Freeman concludes with regard to the development activities of religious NGOs that their "faith may provide the motivation for their work, but it does not shape its design or implementation".

ANDREAS HEUSER discusses the social agency of African Pentecostal megachurches. Recent studies remain sceptical about significant contributions of African Pentecostalism to development and social change. They perceive Pentecostal theologising of society as dysfunctional, portraying a dense texture of primitive impulse, negative theology, or enchanted vision of the world. Whereas most discourses on Pentecostal societal relevance

emphasise the controversial concept of Prosperity theology, Heuser identi-
fies Dominion Theology as a new Pentecostal master theorem of society.
Widely unnoticed Dominion Theology crosscuts Pentecostal megachurch
networks to exert hegemony over diverse "spheres" of society; this concept
includes the economic sphere with allusions made to the notion of "devel-
opment". The material base exemplifies two prominent megachurches from
Ghana, Action Chapel International led by Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-
Williams, and International Central Gospel Church, founded by Mensa
Otabil. In order to analyse Dominion Theology, Heuser chooses a 'thick
description' of a first "Africa Business and Kingdom Leadership Summit"
(2017), organised by Duncan-Williams. A clear Dominion Theology imprint
is visible also in a subsequent case study on Mensa Otabil's "Greater
Works" conferences (2017/2018). However, Dominion Theology euphoria
to transform society is contradicted by an empirical disaster, the insolvency
of a private bank with close links to Otabil. The ensuing public discourse
shows limits of the dominion theological agenda to "conquer the economic
sphere". The chapter finally demarcates some prospects on Dominion The-
ology as a Pentecostal social theory of change. First, Dominion Theology
evolves as a visionary Pentecostal script to analyse society, organised into
different spheres. This script has already made it into the arena of develop-
ment policies in Africa. Second, the public discourse on Dominion The-
ology reveals an internal Pentecostal debate on its future directions. This
debate is about constructive Pentecostal participation in social transforma-
tion. Third, Dominion Theology offers a broad repertoire of rhetoric codes
to express hegemony over economic and financial spheres. Yet, the transi-
tion from visionary to structural implementation and structural perma-
nency seems fragile. Dominion Theology paves the way for continuous
socio-political consciousness within Pentecostal networks; however, it has
not surpassed an experimental state in terms of sustainable social practice.

KATRIN LANGEWIESCHE provides an in-depth analysis of Humanity First,
a Muslim RNGO and its local branch in Burkina Faso. Humanity First was
founded by the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* to engage in religiously moti-
vated development cooperation. This chapter examines the history of
Humanity First since 1995 and its development activities. Moreover, it
investigates the religious values and moral motivations of its members. As
in general, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Burkina Faso faces a
twofold minority situation: it is a minority within Islam, mostly considered
heretic by majority Islam, and it represents a demographic minority. While
the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community puts a strong emphasis on missionary
commitment and supports proselytism, Humanity First is devoted exclu-

sively to humanitarian aims. Langewiesche argues that its activities benefit the entire population and are explicitly not associated with proselytising practices. Humanity First focusses on social welfare programmes; it funds hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other types of infrastructures for villagers. It organises medical camps and emergency aid in crisis situations. In order to situate the humanitarian work of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*, Langewiesche compares Humanity First with two other Muslim minority groups engaged in welfare activities around the world, the Tablighi Jama'at and the Gülen Movement. She evaluates their organisational structure and mobilisation strategies respectively. Common characteristics of all three movements are related to individual agency. Langewiesche identifies individual responsibility, personal piety, and a lesser importance of the material as such common features; she also points at a joint attitude of disengagement in formal politics. This is remarkable in view of the ongoing controversy on alleged involvement of the Gülen movement in Turkish politics. Langewiesche thus portrays the effects of Muslim minority RNGOs on social life, and situates their transformative potential within the wider transnational and political landscape.

While all preceding contributions take a case study approach, SECTION V sets a focus on RNGO activities in selected fields of sustainable development. CLAUDIA HOFFMANN charts the quest for gender equality (SDG 5) in recent development discourses. The article follows international declarations on gender to be one of the major "cross-cutting solution areas" in development politics. The general survey on issues of gender equality in development contexts is followed by a case study on Mission 21, based in Basel, Switzerland. Mission 21 has a historic legacy, as its origins are linked to Basel Mission, one of the oldest Protestant mission societies in Europe. This long-standing heritage layers down in measures by Mission 21 to achieve gender equality. Mission 21 continues Basel Mission policy and aims at quality education as a main contribution to gender equality. The focus on education is kept irrespective of religious contexts and local conditions that sometimes support gender inequality. Hoffmann thus states that historic mission organisations predate current debates on gender equality. Following her analysis, such RNGOs can even claim a comparative advantage over secular NGOs and partly also governments in the educational sector. In view of Mission 21, the shaping of current development projects benefits enormously from long institutional experiences in the field. In sum, the implementation of education-related projects by RNGOs that have close links with modern mission history are successful in reducing gender inequality. The chapter thus questions classic stereotypes on Christian mis-

sion as powers of domination, as some historical Christian RNGOs antici-
pated current development discourses and practices.

The chapter by PHILIPP ÖHLMANN, MARIE-LUISE FROST AND WILHELM
GRÄB investigates the potential of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in
South Africa for sustainable development. With AICs, they focus, first, on a
long neglected and politically marginalised section of churches that repre-
sents the majority population in Southern Africa; and 2) with a sample of
rural and township-based AICs they draw on notions of development and
sustainability from the perspective of AICs themselves. Their sample under-
lines the importance of spiritual dimensions of development (e.g. spiritual
healing) as well as family and gender-related ethics, and questions of unem-
ployment and poverty as core values in AIC approaches to sustainable
development. The authors identify a high ability of AICs in coping with
pressing issues at the grassroots level. AICs depart from liberating the indi-
vidual from life's adversities and fundamentally affirm a person's agency.
AICs prove a capacity to transform behavioural sets of individual people
and (small) communities. They assist people and families affected by the
rampant HIV/AIDS pandemic; they address and redirect intra-family con-
flicts and domestic violence. AICs also implement network structures in
contexts of social need, for instance, in establishing burial associations.
Öhlmann, Frost and Gräb identify such individual and social coping-strate-
gies as basic markers of how AICs shape development priorities. These are
an integral part of the churches' holistic and spiritual worldviews. The
authors conclude with an exploration of the potential of AICs as partners
of international cooperation for sustainable development. AICs tap values,
attitudes and motivations of individuals and communities at the grassroots
level and make them the core of their actions, resources needed for
enabling comprehensive, long-term change.

The contribution by JENS KOEHRSEN addresses the role of Muslim NGOs
in environmental sustainability. Reviewing empirical studies on this topic, it
discusses the potentials and challenges of Muslim NGOs to promote envi-
ronmental sustainability. Crucial resources for this endeavour are the envi-
ronmental teachings of Islam and the grassroots reach of these organisa-
tions. Religious scholars often stress the rich scriptural resources of Islam
for tackling environmental issues. Moreover, unlike other (secular) NGOs,
Muslim NGOs can reach local populations in Muslim-majority countries
where they usually enjoy high credibility. Existing studies mention
numerous initiatives of Muslim NGOs to advance environmental sustain-
ability, among them radio campaigns, tree-planting activities, environmental
awareness and education programmes, the dissemination of environmental

knowledge through religious leaders, the issuing of fatwas to declare logging illegal, and the implementation of sustainable resource management in Muslim organisations. Nevertheless, there are also important challenges to this environmental engagement. The Islamic environmental ethics that environmentally concerned Muslim scholars and activists highlight reflect their own perceptions of Islam but not necessarily that of the broader Muslim population. As such, at the grassroots level, there is often low acceptance for Muslim environmental initiatives that have, consequently, little impact. In total, while bearing specific potentials for reaching wider populations through its grass-roots reach, Muslim environmentalism often remains limited to the environmentally concerned Muslim organisations and activists.

CHRISTINE SCHLIESSER'S contribution examines the role of religious NGOs in building sustainable peace. Religion is frequently perceived as divisive and leading to conflict. Acknowledging the ambivalent role of religion, Schliesser points to the positive potentials of religion in creating sustainable peace that have received comparatively little attention. To examine the constructive resources inherent to religion, Schliesser discusses the reconciliation activities of the Presbyterian Church (*Église Presbytérienne au Rwanda or EPR*) in post-genocide Rwanda. Supplementing the official top-down "Politics of Reconciliation" of Rwanda's government, the Christian churches engage in various bottom-up approaches to facilitate sustainable peace and reconciliation between perpetrators and victims of the Rwandan genocide (1994). Based on the case study of the EPR, Schliesser highlights several capacities of Christian NGOs in peacemaking: (a) the Christian message of peace, healing and forgiveness, (b) the creation of spaces where emotions are socially acceptable in order to address traumatic experiences, (c) a mixed approach that combines specifically religious (e.g. prayer, worship, sermons, Lord's Supper) with secular resources (e.g. mediation, trauma therapy, conflict resolution), (d) building long-term relationships and trust with both perpetrators and victims, and (e) a holistic approach that connects spiritual healing with practical and material help (e.g. development projects).

Taken together, the contributions illustrate that RNGOs constitute hybrid actors, as they move between the world of religion and "secular" development circles. As actors with a religious background, they may draw upon religious networks as well as the normative and motivational resources of their faith. Nevertheless, they often parallel other NGOs in their development activities. They show little difference in the type of projects that they implement and the way in which they undertake them. In

the end, to what extent a RNGO brings in specific abilities into the world of development depends on its individual characteristics and the context in which it operates. Despite the arguable post-secular turn in development politics, religious organisations still feel encouraged to hide away their religious identity in international development settings. Against this background, a tolerance for the ambiguity of RNGOs may help to create an atmosphere in which RNGOs feel more comfortable when drawing on their religious resources to promote sustainable development.

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