

Faith-based humanitarianism

The response of faith communities and faith-based organisations in contexts of forced migration



Credit: Sven Torfinn / Panor

Workshop report

International workshop 22 September 2010



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Aim¹

Although faith communities and faith-based organisations (FBOs) are often at the forefront of humanitarian responses to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration across the globe, little is known about the scale, nature and impacts of their interventions. This international workshop brought together scholars, practitioners and forced migrants from different faith perspectives and diverse disciplinary backgrounds to explore the motivations and practices of faith communities and FBOs in their response to forced displacement. Drawing on primary research conducted across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South-East Asia, Europe, the United States and Australia, presenters examined interactions between FBOs, secular humanitarian organisations and displaced populations (including internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers and refugees). The presentations also analysed the role(s) that religion, religiosity, and concepts of faith and secularism play in the lives of forced migrants themselves. Whilst discussing a range of faiths, the contributions primarily focused on Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and secular responses to forced displacement. This report provides a summary of the presentations and participant discussions, following the thematic structure of the workshop. Since one of the aims of the workshop was to highlight the need for further academic and policy engagement with faith-based humanitarianism in contexts of forced displacement, it concludes by presenting some avenues for further research and consideration.

Keynote Presentations

Improving responses: distinctiveness, partnership and professionalism

Dr Elizabeth Ferris (The Brookings Institute) delivered a challenging address which started by questioning what we mean by the term ‘faith-based organisations’ (FBOs). Dr Ferris acknowledged that while their premise may be fundamentally different from non-faith or so-called secular organisations, the term locks together multiple faith denominations and organisations which may in fact bear little resemblance to one another. Indeed, she suggested that distinctions are often more readily identifiable between organisations operating at each end of the spectrum of the same religious tradition. In turn, the increasing similarities between organisations considered to be ‘faith-based’ and those considered ‘secular’ was emphasised. One former Director of Christian Aid was said to have captured this asking: “Are we just Oxfam with hymnbooks?”

The notion of ‘distinctiveness’ was further explored by stressing that staff in large FBOs are increasingly drawn from the same pool of professional humanitarian experts as the staff of secular organisations. Nonetheless, church-led governance structures often differ in expectations, methodology and theological comprehension from an increasingly secular staff group. Conversely, many individuals of faith work within the secular humanitarian sector. The debate on professionalism is highly charged and usually defined with reference to western standards of accountability, management and log frames. Dr Ferris called for caution in the assumption that FBOs are inherently unprofessional, and urged reflection on the prioritization of values within the definition of professionalism. Although large FBOs are often highly visible in the humanitarian field, the overall contribution of faith communities remains unknown when one considers the various coalitions, interfaith networks, and bilateral and private donorship initiatives which exist around the world. The increase in direct congregation-to-congregation assistance, which bypasses international humanitarian flows, suggests a need for improved financial tracking to understand the scale and sustainability of such linkages and to ensure greater accountability.

¹ First draft by Helen McElhinney (Workshop Rapporteur); revisions and final version by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh; thanks are due to Héloïse Ruauvel for her feedback and comments on earlier drafts of this report

Overview of the responses of Muslim faith-based organisations

Dr Hanny El Banna (founder of Islamic Relief and Chairman of the Humanitarian Forum) opened the workshop by outlining the tenets of Islam which are central in framing responses to forced displacement. He then highlighted that Muslim FBOs are increasingly compared with ‘fundamentalist’ elements attempting to manipulate humanitarian situations, as has clearly been the case in the recent disaster in Pakistan. Despite increased restrictions on Muslim organizations post-9/11, Dr El Banna noted some successes such as the collaboration between Islamic Relief and Save the Children, Christian Aid and DFID. While Muslim FBOs had previously typically engaged in religiously complementary contexts such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Tsunami response and the Pakistan earthquake, Dr El Banna also highlighted the increasing tendency for Muslim FBOs to develop programmes in response to crises in non-Muslim contexts, as evidenced in the response to the crisis in Haiti. Addressing the reductionist label of ‘faith-based’, Dr El Banna queried whether the term was uniting or divisive in nature, omitting as it does different interpretations and expressions of faith. He suggested adopting the alternative label of ‘value-based organisations’ to refer to all humanitarian organisations, an approach which he suggested would acknowledge the extent to which many non-faith-based actors are driven by the values of ‘secularism’, whilst allowing the many similarities between the organisations to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Evolution of sanctuary

Contemporary notions of asylum and refuge have emerged from ancient and faith-based traditions of sanctuary. Prof. Philip Marfleet (University of East London) demonstrated the lineage and evolution of such concepts drawing upon examples of inviolable sanctuary space within Greek and Roman civilizations, and the tensions which emerged over matters of sanctuary between emerging nation states and the authority of the Church in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Prof. Marfleet also explored a range of examples from the twentieth century pertaining to draft resistance movements and the growth of cities of sanctuary in the USA, discussing the extent to which such movements are increasingly dependent upon the initiative and commitment of individuals of conscience, rather than the Church or State. He highlighted that in terms of patterns of world development, the majority of forced migrants are in the Global South, and that most individuals seeking protection and sanctuary are coming from faith or belief traditions.

Thematic Sessions

Session One: The first session consisted of three presentations around the theme of ‘Faith, religion and humanitarianism: bridging the gap or maintaining distinction between religious and humanitarian affairs?’

Prof. Alastair Ager (Columbia University) presented a deconstruction of functional secularism within humanitarian discourse – defined as a presumption of secular public discourse and the legitimization of the religious discourse only in the ‘private’ domain. Prof. Ager argued that a critical lack of reflection upon the dominant secular notions promulgated has served to delegitimize dialogue on key issues of religion and to restrict awareness of the articles of faith underpinning the secular humanitarian response. Highlighting the importance of cross-fertilization from the discipline of sociology, he discussed the characterization of the contemporary period as a post-secular age where religion is actually on the rise and has a key role in the public sphere. He warned of a schism caused by the disparate discourses of faith and humanitarianism, and of divisions between these humanitarian actors and the communities they seek to serve. Since national staff constitutes 90% of the humanitarian workforce, Prof. Ager argued that we need to establish a dialogue that is true to local realities.

Further acknowledging the trend of increasing religious donorship, Dr Stephen Hopgood (School of Oriental and African Studies) presented his research project at SOAS which examines the secularization of religion and the sanctification of secularism within humanitarianism. Due to the dominant global funding regimes of USAID, EU, Gates Foundation etc, the large humanitarian actors (such as Oxfam and World Vision) increasingly resemble one another across the faith-based/non-faith-based divide in terms of operational structure, language and positioning. Yet the distinction in labelling is maintained, due largely to the historical legacy of proselytism and suspicions surrounding missionary work. This development obscures the reality that all humanitarian action is faith-based. Dr Hopgood argued that humanitarianism and human rights are their own form of secular religion attributable in part to a post 2nd World War retreat from Christianity in Western Europe. However, it remains that faith-based actors have a longevity, reach and motivation that are not present in the secular approach. The ability to relate across cultures through the language of commonly held beliefs and to work through local faith-based actors is a huge advantage. He concluded that in the humanitarian donor market place where the religious giver stays longer and gives more than the secular, religion wins.

In the final presentation, Prof. David Hollenbach (Boston College), Fr. Daniel Villanueva (Entreculturas) and Dr Maryanne Loughry (JRS Australia) argued that the Catholic Church has a unique position through the power of its conviction, global institutional reach and its distinctive mode of response due to religious commitment. Complementarities with other faith traditions and all humanists were also highlighted, noting that Vatican II was a key moment of change in the concept of mission. This ensured a global network of transnational Catholic actors who are well positioned to respond to the increasing complexity of humanitarian issues, which requires responses to be undertaken at multiple levels. The specific features of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) were elaborated, including its ethical framework for justice, peace and reconciliation in which advocacy plays a prominent role; the JRS's interdisciplinary nature furthermore allows it to build complex, multilevel synergies via local presence, publications and academic interrogation. Dr Loughry concluded by presenting the Australian case-study, in which the Catholic Church has been able to undertake political action to protect asylum-seeking children from a detention policy by becoming a service provider with the government and thus influencing policy change through its own capacity.

Participants queried the role of JRS in international advocacy, for example in opposition to the homophobic law in Uganda. The difference between the Catholic Church, the Jesuits, and the JRS within the Jesuits was stressed in response. JRS's mission is to accompany, serve and advocate, and on this occasion is not responding to Ugandan homophobic law since they are focusing on supporting returnees in Kitgum, and the return of Southern Sudanese to Sudan. It was also noted that JRS as an expression of the Catholic Church constantly comes into contact with different approaches within the Church that can contradict the very objectives it seeks to achieve.

Session Two: In the second session, four papers explored the role of faith, religious conviction and spirituality in the experiences, practices and behaviours of forced migrants themselves.

In observing the spiritual dimensions of forced migration in the lives of young UK-based refugees, Bereket Loul (Leeds Metropolitan University) drew stark parallels with Kafka's *The Trial* to highlight the enforced transition, sense of inner turmoil and existential uncertainty experienced. In light of these crises and related psychosocial development issues, school was identified as a space for critical intercultural encounters where values, beliefs, and attitudes were often discordant with the new setting and physical appearances often impugned. While initially disorientating, this prompted a new way of

relating to people and the development of new values resulting in the customization of religion and alterations in the conceptions of 'God'. Mr. Loul's paper found that responses tended to overlook young people's values, beliefs, aspirations, motivations, intentions and visions in framing and responding to life challenges. He argued that a proper understanding of these spiritual dimensions could provide more effective and ethical humanitarian responses.

In a reflective account of first hand experiences of displacement following the 2007 Kenyan post-election violence, Dr Parsitau Seleina (Egerton University, Kenya), returned to the concept of the violability of sanctuary and highlighted belief as a strategy of belonging and empowerment in the face of crisis. The case of IDPs in Kenya demonstrated the risks of perception of faith-based actors in such ethnically politicized environments coinciding with increased disregard for sanctuary space. At a time when politicians had actively sought the backing of churches for their election campaigns, the targeting of churches in the post-election violence was a striking response. The Assemblance of God church in Eldoret, Rift Valley was deliberately burned down on 1 February 2008 with displaced people sheltering or trapped inside. Mattresses laced with petrol were thrown into the church and people who tried to escape were forced back inside: 17 died inside the church, 11 on the way to hospital and 54 were injured. This was contrasted with the uncelebrated role of personal faith, prayer and spirituality which, Dr Seleina argued, separates the displaced from their harsh realities, improves their lives and overall wellbeing more than political programmes. Examples were presented of IDP women's groups taking on biblical names for inspiration, and of communities using scripture and daily prayer to affirm self-identification and to re-invent themselves primarily as Christians asserting themselves and rejecting their victimhood.

Examining the experience of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Tahir Zaman (University of East London) noted that religious belief is not necessarily or solely an individual experience. Filtered through the contemporary world, it is part of the cultural capital which an individual has at her or his disposal and becomes a cultural resource to be actively mobilized. He argued that Iraqi forced migrants are able to mobilize non-material 'religious resources' to help gain access to material resources by positioning themselves vis-a-vis existing religious institutions and networks. However, certain faith-based actors in Syria have restricted the mobilization of this capital by controlling the provision of assistance to Iraqi refugees. While Caritas International and the Greek Orthodox Church were given official permission to respond and provide aid, Muslim NGOs were prohibited by the State from serving Syrian nationals or Palestinian refugees. This was identified as a means of limiting the expansion of pan-Islamic networks. He highlighted that Islam is a discursive tradition which is historically situated, allowing for a multiplicity of practices which can be interpreted in terms of the context of time and place. Nowadays religion can also be disseminated through new technologies and occupies new spaces.

Utilizing Goffman's dramaturgical front- and back-stage analogy, Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (RSC, University of Oxford) analysed the ways in which Sahrawi refugees strategically represent self-identity and religion in and from their Algerian-based protracted refugee camps under the leadership of the Polisario (who effectively manage a 'state-in-exile' in the camps). She argued that the projection of such representations is a means of securing humanitarian and political capital, with the Polisario carefully balancing the needs of maintaining external and regional political support with the fluctuating attentions and non-economic conditionalities of donor audiences. The official portrayal of the camps as 'secular' and 'ideal' is therefore in line with European and North American concerns surrounding 'good and bad Islam.' Dr Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argued that the support of North American audiences has in part been assured by explicitly contrasting the frequency with which the Moroccan government regularly deports evangelists from its territory, with the Polisario's support of US

missionaries visiting and providing assistance in the Sahrawi camps. These US activists in turn prominently disseminate the Sahrawis' openness to Christianity through political lobbying in the US and UN. The example of Christ the Rock church, active in the Sahrawi refugee camps since 2004, was explored, with Dr Fiddian-Qasmiyeh arguing that although 'public' displays of interfaith activities and programmes serve the 'secular' representation of religious tolerance, the church's presence and activism in the camps is not accepted by all Sahrawi refugees. Dr Fiddian-Qasmiyeh concluded that the stifling of debate and the careful control of representations of the camps necessarily leads to a marginalization of dialogue and dissent, which she coins 'a tyranny of tolerance.'

Sessions Three and Four: In the two afternoon sessions, six case studies explored the current practices and experiences of FBOs in the Global South and North.

Opening the session on the Global South, Dr Alexander Horstmann (Max Planck Institute) presented a case-study of the role of religion and practices of Christian humanitarian organisations in the refugee camps on the Thai/Burmese border. He argued that the role they play in supporting a distinct form of Karen Christianity, developed in political exile and now underpinning a nationalist discourse, is an extension of early missionary activities. He outlined the problems that such humanitarianism faces as it becomes inherently political, exclusionary to other religious practices and a potential obstacle to Karen inclusion in a Burmese Federal Union. Participants suggested that for Baptists to work in a nationalist framework would be counterintuitive to Baptist ideology. As these missionaries work with Chin and others, and these refugee communities do not embody strong nationalist movements amongst themselves, it was suggested that such a form of nationalism was uniquely Karen. Dr Horstmann concluded that there might indeed be a particular Karen application of Baptism that may differ from other ethnic groups.

The subsequent presentation by Raymond Wung (Harvard law school) also explored experiences of Christian-based humanitarianism, through the case-study of Cairo, Egypt. In analysing the challenges of outreach to beneficiaries within a diversity of religious orientations, he concluded that agents of different faiths could operate through different modalities in different contexts. Christian organisations on the ground use different strategies such as employing Christian, Muslim, refugee and non-refugee staff, and explicitly diversifying their donor bases. However, they often find it difficult to undertake advocacy within the context of the Egyptian state, and are often accused by some critics of falling short of their Christian witness responsibilities to fight against injustice. When advocacy is undertaken, even in a limited capacity, it was noted that faith differences are mitigated by a need to use secular human rights language. There is also a pervasive fear of proselytism which often underpins State responses to Christian NGOs; one example includes the State's refusal to lease land to an NGO serving Iraqi refugees due to concerns that the NGO's primary intention was to proselytize amongst refugees.

Such apprehensions regarding proselytism have been highly politicised in Sri Lanka, as explored by Rev. Pinnawala Sangasumana (University of Sri Jayewana). The arrival of hundreds of NGOs to the island, particularly since the 2004 Tsunami, has led to widespread accusations of 'unethical' conversions of Buddhists who make up 70% of the population. Subsequent Commissions of Inquiry and the proposed Anti-Conversion Bills meant that all humanitarian actors felt the impact, whether they were faith- or non-faith based organisations. The paper demonstrated the ways in which the ethno-religious cleavages of the wider community can be used to obtain political ends. While the faith-based approach has proven an amenable platform to reach displaced beneficiaries in certain contexts, the paper asked what price those in the humanitarian community pay for these activities. Given that

religious and ethnic nationalism play a significant role in the conflict, nationalist elements in the conflict have been able to mobilize and benefit from the categorisation of these NGOs as providing humanitarian cover for missionary activities.

The repeated focus on proselytism across all papers led some to suggest that the conversion of vulnerable populations such as IDPs and refugees could be considered to amount to religious persecution, whilst stressing that conversion may be a factor prompting individuals/families to apply for asylum.

The final session focused on the ‘receiving’ countries of the Global North, with Dr Nick Gill (Exeter University) starting with a comparative analysis of the strategies of two activist asylum support NGOs in the UK which have developed distinctive approaches to resisting and reforming the State’s asylum system. Dr Gill argued that the first NGO - a left wing, radical, secular group – tended towards an adversarial, distrustful view of and approach to the State; on the other hand, the second NGO – a collective of Christian churches and other religious organisations – engaged in diverse strategies which were grounded in dialogue. The second NGO was reportedly more open to working with State actors, enabling it to build valuable alliances, whilst facing the inherent risks of cooptation. The study highlighted the broader trend of devolving decision-making power to frontline actors in parallel with the imposition of competitive deadlines and a systemic ‘culture of disbelief’ underpinning asylum decisions. In light of this transition, Dr Gill concluded that the strategies of the collective exhibited more potential for change ‘from below’ and ‘from within’.

In the US context, Jessica Eby (Church World Service) explored the significance of FBOs on their home territory, despite such organisations often being better known as donors and international actors. Christian and Jewish faith-based actors have an established history of supporting the resettlement of refugees, having systematically met their material and social needs long before the State legislated to do the same. Mrs. Eby noted that groups (of any faith) are well positioned to support resettled refugees since they have an existing infrastructure, sustained community networks, and are used to working sustainably together. Today, working within a public/private framework, FBOs continue to offer refugees a long-term community presence and a network of activism. She also noted that in 2009 the largest groups of resettled refugees were from Iraq, Burma and Bhutan, and that, since 9/11, forms of integration that promote inter-religious dialogue have taken on new significance. Lastly, she argued that social justice advocacy led by faith leaders is ‘ahead of the curve’ in pushing for the evolution of international norms to recognize those who fall outside of the formal refugee definition (i.e. climate-induced displacees). This was based on the faith-based position that human dignity must always take priority over individual legal status.

Looking to Australia, where the politics of asylum polarize debate, Dr Erin Wilson (RMIT University) presented a critique of the role of faith-based actors in the midst of such an uneasy political context. Whereas government policies have mainly focused on dehumanizing asylum seekers by pursuing narratives of ‘invasion’ and/or ‘terrorism’, Dr Wilson concluded that FBOs aim to re-humanise them and restore their agency. This has been achieved through the main activities of detainee visiting, case management and housing support in the community coupled with advocacy and political lobbying. However, this has sometimes been tempered by the fear of losing their conservative base constituents on a politically divisive topic. A lack of coordination between FBOs has often led to gaps in knowledge of each other’s activities and a lack of strategy of engagement with the State.

Responses to the presentations included discussions pertaining to the Left’s more subtle, long-term

campaigns which are often not public, also noting that the second model of NGOs also often uses ‘outside’ demonstrations. The disproportionate power between the State and the individual was highlighted, indicating that the State can act towards forced migrants in ways that that it can’t towards other citizens. This led to a concluding exploration of how different actors might be able to encourage the State to be more responsive towards these moral issues, and whether there are any ‘neutral’ forums for the search for dialogue.

Ways forwards

The workshop provided a strong foundation for future academic, theological and policy collaborations, clearly highlighting the need for continued interdisciplinary discussions to further explore debates surrounding faith-based humanitarianism in contexts of forced displacement. The organisers, presenters and attendees expressed their enthusiasm for this important conversation to evolve, with the following emerging as a few suggestions to guide future steps and partnerships between different interlocutors:

- A more sustained and enduring engagement with the different ways in which both secularism and religious practice/belief explicitly and implicitly shape humanitarian practice and policy. This would require an increased reflection on the assumed secular norms of humanitarianism and the instrumentalisation of secularisms by humanitarian providers and recipients alike.
- Although there is increasing recognition of the existence and contribution of faith, spirituality, and both religious identity and practice, at times this can be little more than a ‘selective acknowledgment.’ It was noted that theological perspectives were underrepresented within the workshop, and that discussions pertaining to the role of divinity and the mystical encounter were absent. The mainstream dominance of social science discourse was acknowledged, with a number of participants asking ‘what is the operational definition of God?’
- A flexible and multidisciplinary framework encapsulating anthropological, legal, political, sociological and theological strands should therefore be promoted (and enacted) to ensure that an epistemological divide does not deter constructive communication on questions surrounding faith-based humanitarianism in contexts of forced displacement. Amongst participants, there were repeated attempts to establish a common understanding of key terms (e.g. “What do we mean by values?” and “What is the difference between faith and religion?”). This suggests the potential for analysts of the humanitarian field to increasingly refer to the anthropology and sociology of religion to contribute to the development of conceptualisations of constructs including “institutions”, “communities”, “culture”, “believing”, “belonging”, “religion”, “values”, “varieties of secularism” and “belief”.
- A final suggestion is for humanitarian discourses and organisations to continue exploring innovative and create ways to recognise and provide spaces for the different voices and priorities of individual communities, IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees themselves to be heard; whether faith-based or secular approaches are more or less conducive to the expression of individual agency, and whether faith-based approaches might facilitate the negotiation of power imbalances in contexts of forced displacement, should therefore be explored further.

Although a number of academic outputs have been planned (including the publication of a number of the workshop presentations in a Special Issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* which is to be guest edited by the RSC’s Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and is scheduled for publication in late-2011), this report is an open invitation to proposals for collaboration in order to continue exploring the scale, nature, impacts and experiences of faith-based humanitarianism in contexts of forced displacement.

Annex - RSC Roundtable discussion: Faith-based humanitarianism in sub-Saharan Africa (23rd September 2010)²

To follow-up on the 22nd September workshop and contextualize the topic within a specific sub-region, the RSC held a short session aimed at providing selected participants working in Sub-Saharan Africa a space for reflection and sharing of experiences.

A series of brief presentations were followed by informal discussion on the roles played by faith-based actors in contexts of forced displacement and how, in practice, institutions of faith act as bases for unity or division. It questioned whether FBOs use models similar to secular organisations, or embody a distinctive mode of (inter)action and how such involvement increases, or reduces, the protection of displaced populations. Participants were asked to consider the potential role of faith-based actors in influencing political change within displaced/conflict-affected communities.

Session One: The first part of the discussion, facilitated by Helen McElhinney (Las Casas Institute) focused on Darfur and Southern Sudan.

Dr Osman Mohamed Osman Ali (University of Khartoum) briefly described the three conflicts in Western Darfur and how each was marked by Arab versus non-Arab divisions. He highlighted the position of various groups (JAE, SPLA/SPLM, DLM/Mafas) in the respective conflicts and then discussed the response of government and religion and religious institutions. It put forward the question: ‘Are FBOs peace messengers or war mongers?’ He claimed there has been negligence on the part of academics and policy makers in examining the religion-dimension in the Darfurian conflicts, despite the significant role that religion plays. However, the presentation was skeptical regarding the impact that religion could have on the promotion of peace. It held that rather than contribute to peace, the practices of both Muslim and Christian groups have been marked by racism and tribalism. Moreover, a peaceful coexistence between the religious groups has been a persistent failure. Sufis have been attacked as heretics, their mosques have been burnt and Imams killed as part of the destruction of ‘infidels’. This has caused many Sufis to be internally displaced. With respect to Christian groups, there is no desire for a permanent Christian presence; thus, such groups have been marginalized and not permitted to build a permanent place of worship.

The presentation by Bakheit Mohammed (University of Khartoum) took a community-level approach to consider the role of faith and faith-practices in conflict in a paper entitled “Beliefs and ritual practices in conflict situations: an anthropological study in Jebel Marra area, West Darfur.” Specifically, the paper investigated the individual use of protection amulets, invocations, and prayer in ethnic conflict in Darfur, arguing that religious beliefs and practices can strengthen social solidarity and cohesion amongst conflict-affected people. Mr. Mohammed found that increasingly, the younger generations were less interested in utilising traditional practices, although it was simultaneously noted that rebel fighters in the Jebel Marra Area appear to mobilize certain ritual practices and belief systems to protect themselves during conflict. A third influence of religious belief was explored with reference to the belief that Allah will punish individuals who deviate from social norms and religious teachings, including divine retribution against those who have attacked and committed other crimes in the conflict situation. The potential for religious belief and practice to offer protection to both victims and

² Notes taken by Ayla Bonfiglio.

perpetrators was therefore highlighted, whilst concurrently raising the question of whether religious belief could play a role in conflict resolution and mediation.

The third presentation by Ms Jessica Gregson (Glasgow University) discussed the return of conflict affected peoples, largely from Uganda, to Yei and Southern Sudan more broadly. It sought to identify the factors that disrupt reintegration and the divisions between those who stayed and returnees. More specifically, it asked whether and how the church acts as a basis for unity or division: Is it a rallying point for Southern Sudanese identity? The presentation observed in the preliminary stages of research that ethnicity served largely as a basis for tension and division. In particular, the Episcopal Church put forth assumptions regarding the existence of a 'common identity' among non-Muslims. Finally, the presentation touched on issues of strategic conversions, the destruction of places of worship, and FBOs advancing rather than allaying conflict.

While in essence remarkably different, the specific context of Darfur and Southern Sudan provided an example of the ways in which faith and ethnicity (the latter of which is more commonly acknowledged) can become highly politicized identities.

Session Two: The second part of the session, facilitated by Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon (Oxford Department of International Development), was on the Great Lakes of Africa with a focus on Burundi and Uganda. The discussion started with the observation that FBOs tend to be seen as a new form of aid organisation, when in fact, missionaries and missionary work date to the colonial era and affect contemporary FBO activities. The growing impact of more recent Pentecostal and Evangelical religious movements was raised and how these funded networks that have shaped political and religious contexts in Burundi and Uganda, particularly in the way that people access medical care and justice.

Yves Habumugisha (Food for the Hungry, Burundi) investigated 'who is in and who is out' in Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Eastern DRC. There has been a significant amount of population exchange between these countries from years of conflict-induced displacement, particularly in the 1970s and 1990s. Many refugees have been displaced for so long that they have become established in host communities and parishes. The presentation asked: should the displaced return or remain? Not only has population exchange created mutual suspicion between countries, but also it has emphasized the role of ethnicity as a defining feature of political boundaries. During the last three decades of conflict, governments have accused churches and FBOs of politicization and advocacy, labeling them as partial actors. The presentation closed by arguing that in fact FBOs are too silent and need to take responsibility for building up positive values through ensuring that the concerns of people are heard and their rights are protected.

Taking displacement in Northern Uganda as his case study, Joey Ager (Ember) argued that the aid industry is not reflexive in its approach to relief and development assistance. For instance, in providing or 'imposing' aid, it is clear that Western aid organisations do not understand the ways in which African communities are religious. Religion is assumed by the West to be something irrational and therefore something that should be separate from the realm of assistance. Economic indicators, for instance, are valued over faith-based values. Consequently, methods of aid delivery are not sensitive to the identity-context in which they are working. The presentation closed by questioning whether identity should be better protected by aid organizations.

The seminar ended on the question: 'Do faith-based and non-FBOs do different things, or do they do the same things differently?' As mentioned in the workshop, it was reiterated that FBOs such as JRS

have professionalized to the point of perhaps having no differences with non-FBOs. There is, however, in parallel an emerging trend of re-discovering faith and calling attention to spiritual inputs in addition to material ones. In interrogating the issue of identity preservation and faith-based humanitarianism, questions were raised regarding the static versus ever-changing nature of identity and how one would go about distinguishing identity.

This workshop is generously supported by the Commonwealth Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the UK Department for International Development.