Editorial: The Role of Religion in Violence and Peacebuilding

Johan Strijdom
strijjm@unisa.ac.za

Joram Tarusarira
j.tarusarira@rug.nl

Violence may be conceptualised in a narrow sense as physical harm done to persons or property, or in a broader sense as the systemic violation of people's rights and dignity or any interference that limits one's potential. Thus, violence can be direct or indirect. It can be structural, cultural or direct. The essays in this volume engage with different theories and concepts of violence, applied mostly to sub-Saharan case studies, to offer diverse perspectives on how religion is instrumentalised for violence or peacebuilding.

The volume opens with an African case study, which problematises the dominant and naïve view that African indigenous religions are non-violent and peaceful, seeking healing and integration, whereas it is primarily missionary religions such as Islam and Christianity that promote violence. Ezra Chitando and Joram Tarusarira challenge this idealised view of African indigenous religions, by arguing that African indigenous religions, like other religions, are not inherently violent or non-violent, but can be instrumentalised in either way by individuals or groups. In their article, they analyse the content of the song *Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa Ramadzibaba* (Zimbabwe was/is born of the blood of the fathers/ancestors), and show how it has been politically manipulated and performed in a selection of contexts to justify 'sacred violence' to defend Zimbabwe against perceived enemies.

Thinking further about the relationship between religion and violence, Kizito Kiyimba considers the possible links between Catholicism and religion in Uganda. Observing that recent violence in Uganda has been mostly within

the Catholic religious space, he wonders about the epistemic links between Catholicism and violence within the Ugandan context. To propose an answer, he takes into account the views of both perpetrators and victims of the violence, by analysing four cases: the Uganda Martyrs; Ms Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement; Mr Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army; and Ms Ceredonia Mwerinde and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. His conclusion is that the epistemic links should be seen as justificatory rather than causal.

Kingsley Amaechi, in his article, uses Social Movement Theory to understand the northern Nigerian-born Boko Haram's choice for a violent strategy, notably suicide bombing. Based on previous research and semi-structured interviews with pertinent participants in Nigeria, he argues that the choice of this Salafi-Islamist group for a violent strategy should not be seen in isolation, but needs to be analysed as a choice that has evolved over a period of time as the group has developed violent ways to achieve its goals within a specific social-political context and with material support and other resources from similar-oriented organisations from outside the country.

Victor Counted proposes another theory, which attempts to explain religious violence psychologically. Deploying attachment theory, the article discusses the ways in which attachment disruptions might increase the risk of adult religious psychopathology. If the relationship between a religious believer and a religious figure can be understood as an attachment experience crucial to identity formation and providing a sense of safety, the disruption of such a bond by slandering or acting against the religious figure may predispose the believer to respond violently as a way to protect the attachment bond. Counted argues his point by applying the theory to three cases, namely Charlie Hebdo vs al-Qaeda, Boko Haram vs the Nigerian government, and Pastor Terry Jones vs Islamic radicalization.

Turning our attention to women, Molly Manyonganise focuses on the often excluded voices and experiences of women, not only in contexts of political conflict and violence, but also peace and reconciliation. Using the case study of a platform called Churches in Manicaland (CiM), in Zimbabwe, she observes that women suffer significantly due to political conflict and violence, but the role they are afforded in building peace and transforming the conflict is minimal. Her study of the CiM platform, building on extant literature and interviews, revealed that CiM did not make a deliberate effort to involve

women to address issues affecting women. CiM's activities have, in other words, been gender-blind.

In their article, Mariam B. Khan and Fatima Seedat study ways in which pious Muslim wives on the east coast of South Africa, in order to ensure peaceful homes and out of a sense of religious duty, negotiate domestic conflicts of married life, in part by being sexually available and pleasing to their husbands regardless of personal desire. As such it intends to be a qualitative case study of the intersections of gender, religion and sexual and reproductive health and rights of Muslim wives. They argue that although these women's negotiations in the home expand ideas of peace-making, their sexual choices raise ethical concerns on mutual consent, as well as questions around cultural violence. The article thus investigates the interplay of choice and obligation in the negotiation of the pietistic aspiration of peace and tranquillity in the home. This article brings to the foreground security in the home as an example of micro conflicts, which is often overshadowed by macro conflict such as security on the battle front.

Lastly, Francis Benyah focuses on how religious ideologies and foundations can contribute to violence against albinos in Ghana. It engages with the following questions: how do religious beliefs and cultural values contribute to the plights of albinos in Ghana? What is the place of albinos within Ghanaian socio-religious space? And, how can the inculturation of human rights help mitigate the violence against albinos in Ghana? Benyah argues that the condition of albinism is religiously explained and once something is religiously explained it becomes forceful because religion plays an essential role in various aspects of the Ghanaian society and culture. Against the preceding, Benyah discusses how the inculturation of human rights, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* and all other major international and regional human rights instruments which variously state that no one shall be discriminated against on the basis of colour, birth, health, or other status, can help mitigate the violence that is perpetrated against persons with albinism.

These different perspectives on the role of religion in violence and peacebuilding, produced by theoretically informed analyses of mostly sub-Saharan case studies, demonstrate that academic work is not only useful in analysing critical problems in society, but is also an ethical imperative.

As guest editors we would like to thank the 15 authors who submitted articles for this volume, and the more than 30 reviewers who peer-reviewed

these submissions. Although only 7 articles were eventually recommended for publication, we hope that authors found the feedback from our peer-reviewers helpful to revise their articles.

Johan Strijdom
Religious Studies and Arabic
University of South Africa
strijjm@unisa.ac.za

Joram Tarusarira
Religious Studies
University of Groningen
j.tarusarira@rug.nl