

# Transculturation Grammars in Secular and Religious Development NGOs

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## 1 Introduction

Having been involved for more than fifty years with “religious” and “secular” development agencies both as a direct actor and as a consultant the question “Does Religion Make a Difference?” is, to me, more than a topic for academic exercise. In fact, it is an invitation to: (1) evaluate and discuss past personal development experiences and religious options, and (2) to highlight two key skills that can be used within humanitarian projects, namely, the capacity to act as a “balancing identity” and the ability to differentiate the *fundamental* from the *fundamentalist* behaviour, whether this be in a religious or secular context. These are the tools I will use to review in the following two development contexts in which I was previously involved: (i) religious components in United Nations (UN) family planning programmes, and (ii) the religious factor in the context of the genocide in Rwanda. Combining these different theoretical and concrete inputs, in my concluding remarks I will present some personal reflections on the “religion” factor in terms of the profiles and preparations undergone by development agents actors in a predominantly transculturation process.

The concept of “transculturation” was introduced into the analysis on colonial policies by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. In that context, the term “transculturation” denounces forced “acculturation” in line with social models imported from the American and European West (Jobs and Mackenthun 2013). Of course, it is not with this denunciatory meaning that I am using the concept here but rather as a process of going beyond the international *status quo* towards a global future as designated by the recent United Nations Declaration on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. By “transculturation” I am referring to that horizon, under which present-day societies are invited to develop in the direction of a renewed international culture.

The article of Christine Schliesser on reconciliation processes in post-genocide Rwanda in this volume provides a concrete example of the complex undertaking of “dealing with the past” and building a new future. Given that, for the last 50 years, I have been actively involved with and con-

cerned by developments in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, these challenges continue to touch me on a personal level (Friedli 2012; Friedli 2013: 225–233; Friedli 2018: 82–84). It offers me the opportunity to actualize that Rwandan past in general and, particularly, my commitment in developmental projects and memory of the genocide events 1994, wherein many of my friends were involved both on the victims and on the perpetrators side.

In fact, by doing so, it is not so much a question of the overall tools taken from the comparative sociology of religions, but rather of my basic understandings of the terms *culture*, *religion*, *violence*, *conflict* or even *reconciliation* (Frazer and Friedli 2015: 10–15, 31). Each of these concepts is defined differently by dozens of theories and hermeneutic approaches (Hock 2002). However, to position myself, I work in the frame of the *Wissenssoziologie* and, more specifically, according to the tradition of constructivism-functionalism (Berger and Luckmann 1966; 2004). And, as far as the methodology for facilitating the processes of integrated development and positive peace is concerned, the keys provided by Johan Galtung have proven most often to still be operational (Galtung 1998: 133–138, 341–363). I will not go back into that here.

In my article, I refer to the following set of conceptual options and theoretical choices:

### *Development*

As mentioned, development processes are to be understood here as social changes qualified as “transculturation dynamics”. This social transition can be described according to the “Economy and Humanism” school inspired by the economist Vincent Lebreton as the passage from less “human” living conditions to conditions that are more “human”. Of course, this approach is not yet highly operational because it does not give a clear indication of what “human” implies and how this is universally applicable. In fact, the human condition is always historically situated

### *Religion*

Neither is it a question here of discussing the multiple theories on the religious factor - for example, the different schools of history, functionalism, constructivism, culturalism, comparative sociology, linguistics, ethics, theology and psychology, besides many other interpretations.

In fact, in our current discussion on the link between development and religion, suffice it for me to describe the religious factor as a “*socially enacted relation to an ultimate concern*”. I would, however, add to this the following comments because “religion” understood as “an ultimate concern” comprises two important elements that need to be taken into consideration in the field: (1) “religion” as, on the one hand, a public socio-political reality and a motivating option on a personal level, and (2) on the other hand, “religion” as a civic, secular, lay reality. In this way, “religion” defines the space held by the sacred as separate from the secular milieu, the area of permission and the taboo contexts. The spaces held by the “in-group” and “out-group”, the included and excluded, are similarly delineated. Needless to say, these kinds of divides have important strategic consequences for all development planning.

### *Spirituality*

However, “religion” also indicates an actor’s personal choice his or her personal motivations for engaging in development work and his or her choice in terms of values. This form of “religion” as a personal lifestyle is frequently designated with the term “spirituality”.

Still in relation to this term “spirituality”, it is, however, not easy to find a common denominator from among the various historical religions. Currently, and in line with the logic of my description of “religion”, I would like to propose the definition of “spirituality” that was elaborated on at the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP III Princeton 1979), namely: “The consciousness of responsibility rooted in an ultimate concern”. This foundational reality, “an ultimate concern”, is not an abstract formulation. It derives from the historical and biographical socialisation particular to the development actor, for example, clan ancestors, the Buddha, Christ, the Quran, the resurrection, human dignity, human rights, the revolt against injustice in the world. In this way, the motivation to become part of a development project can be both “religious” and “secular”.

### *Secularity*

Therefore, in the logic of the sociology of knowledge to which I am referring here, the foundational element of an “ultimate concern” can take both a “religious” and “secular” form. What is essential is that development

agents have a non-negotiable personal foundational reference, which is applied within the concrete space of a project.

In this limited framework, I find two competencies to be useful- Evidently, between others, competencies such as empathic capacities, confidence building, or language skills are useful, however, in this limited framework, I find two competencies to be of primary use in facilitating development projects and international cooperation:

1. Acquiring a "balancing identity"
2. Being able to make the semantic distinction between the "fundamentalist" configuration and the "fundamental" option.

I would like to go into these two skills a little more deeply in the two sections that follow, applying them to the context of the Rwandan Genocide in section 4.

## 2 The “balancing identity” skill

Personal and social identity underpins an individual’s basic personality. It is the element learnt from the prevailing culture. Culture here is understood, in the constructivist line of cultural anthropology, as the complete set of internalised codes, which permit members of a society to survive materially, socially and religiously/ideologically (Berger and Luckmann 2004: 36–39, 49–72). According to this perspective, the social goal is, therefore, to guarantee the survival of a society in economic, political and religious terms. We will come back to the social factor “religion”, but I would like now to emphasise that I am referring here to “religion” as a relative cultural factor and not as an absolute transhistorical reality. Given my personal sensitivity for the religions connotations in political contexts, I would like to examine two of them a little more deeply here: (a) Elements of cultural anthropology and the sociology of religions and (b) Elements of communication skills.

### 2.1 *Elements of cultural anthropology and the sociology of religions*

Ensuring the “identity” of members of the new generation is, the outcome of the process of “primary socialisation” ensured by “significant others” (signifikative Andere), who are responsible for the 'integration' of a person into his or her “basic community” parents, elders, teachers, religious authorities (Berger and Luckmann 2004: 51–98, 118–124). However, what interests us in our discussion on “development NGOs secular or religious” is

the psychological quality of the actors who have decided to work as *go-betweens* in a development process aimed as “transculturation” partial or complete.

We are, therefore, concerned with a specific identity the outcome of a “secondary socialisation”. I am referring here to the role of a “facilitator” or “mediator”, which necessitates in addition to a person’s basic identity the specific competency that the communication specialist Ludwig Krappmann has designated as a “balancing identity” (Krappmann 1971). For this German pedagogue, “balancierende Identität” characterises a type of personality that is solidly structured, but which is, at the same time, sufficiently flexible to be able to enter into the logic of a different personality to be able to understand the underlying origins of that logic and the ways in which it is expressed and justified. In short, a core socialisation that remains, however, open to other options. And it is within these kinds of different ethical and religious systems that solutions based on responsible and viable compromise need to be elaborated. As such, in line with my understanding of development as a process of transculturation, towards responses that are “more human”, acquiring the competencies of a “balancing identity” is an essential precondition. The anthropologist and economist Amartya Sen a well-known expert in projects dealing with literacy, health, agriculture and micro-credit banks in India stresses that identity is multi-faceted (Sen 2006).

## 2.2 *Elements of communication skills*

The profile of an identity is not only multi-faceted in terms of the historical, culture-based context, but also as far as its psychosocial configuration is concerned. It is in this way that Manuel Castels a Spanish specialist in inter-personal communication and social media distinguishes between the “traditional identity” and the “utopian identity” and, in the face of the developmental transition towards modernisation, various forms of “resistance identity” often developed (Castells 1999: 428–435). In order to be able to work in this kind of fluid socio-political context, development workers should, therefore, have a “balancing identity” profile and this in relation to each of the three large cultural areas, namely, economics, politics and religious factors. Therefore, in addition to their own socialised cultural grammar, development workers have to learn the grammars, logics and “languages” used by the partners economically, socially, culturally. They need to learn a new way to express themselves, understand and give value to things under the horizon of a new perspective on a common reality. It is

a process of going beyond (Berger and Luckmann 2004: 142–148). Not wanting to look for this kind of common “transcendence” must be designated as mental colonisation and “epistemic” violence. A purely “technical” transfer of occidental instruments to other inculturated contexts is not possible. As mentioned in my introductory remarks, this type of imposed cultural change is rejected by Fernando Ortiz as colonialist transculturation. But, in our understanding, transculturation is a dynamic process.

To sum up, “balancing identity” is an indispensable prerequisite for all development actors be they secular or religious. It is the capacity to effectively articulate themselves in multiple grammars and cultural logics.

### 3 The differentiation skill: “fundamentalist vs fundamental”

In the prevailing international political context for instance, south-eastern Myanmar or Sri Lanka, the Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa the “religion” factor is clearly a divisive element (Frazer and Friedli 2015: 9–15, 31). This “religion” factor can be either a real or an exploited-instrumentalized element, depending on the context and political leaders. Here again, like with the anthropological and sociological connotations of the concept or tool of “balancing identity”, it is clearly not possible to open the debate on the definition of “religion” in the science of comparative religions (Geertz 1973: 44–95; Hock 2002; Saler 2000).

#### 3.1 *Conceptualizing religion*

In the core group of Culture and Religion in Mediation CARIM (Research group at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH Zurich), we began our guidelines on “Approaching Religion in Conflict Transformation” by making an inventory and analysing more than two dozen schools/theories on “religion” including the “atheist” variant. Initially, we grouped them under five categories religion as community, religion as teaching, religion as spirituality, religion as practice, religion as discourse. But for the *go-betweens* and *facilitators* in the field, both in mediation and development, it still proved to be too complicated to understand and work with the respective grammars and logics on the ground, for example Shamanistic, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Islamic, not to mention their local or even sectarian variants. In the end, we decided to stick to the following working definition: “*Religion*” can be understood *as a socially enacted relation to an ultimate concern*. But the practitioners on the ground still did not find this semantic contraction to be

easy to use. Therefore, we opted for the practical choice of considering “*religion*” to be whatever partners on the ground designate as their fields of “*religion*” (Frazer and Friedli 2015: 9, 13).

In contrast, when it comes to development projects, it seems to be of much more operational value to know how to diagnose the fundamentalist variants and the fundamental options in any religion. Thus, here also, some semantic clarifications and definitional differentiations should be made around the unclear journalistic, and even academic, use of the term “fundamentalism”, to distinguish, for example, between dogmatism, fanaticism, orthodoxy and ultra-orthodoxy, or extremism and radicalisation (Marty and Appleby 1996: 15–47; Mayer 2001).

### 3.2 *Fundamentalist and fundamental*

The interiorisation and socialisation of a given ultimate reference be it religious or secular is attained either in a rigid and repetitive way or in a flexible and situational manner. I qualify the normative and closed method of applying moral precepts as “fundamentalist”. In contrast, I designate as “fundamental” a contextual approach based on values which, although certainly unconditional, can be interpreted according to the concrete needs and emergencies on the ground. In short, it is a question of guaranteeing the “fundamentals”.

These mentalities either fundamentalist or fundamental can be observed within development policies, be these “religious” or “secular”. The “fundamentalist” label, in particular, often remains very vague and controversial. Which is why, in order to render such categorisations operational, it is critical to indicate the different levels on which they can have an impact. For this reason, in this article, I more concretely discuss four “fundamentalist” analytical aspects: doctrinal; moral; psychological; and political; along with their “fundamental” correlations.

It is not always easy to perceive this shift, but this is where the transition towards hard “fundamentalist” aspects in communication happens. In order to be able to analyse and possibly break down these kinds of psycho-social dysfunctions, I find it useful to disentangle, in a very emotional, communicative, often blocked “fundamentalist”, the different levels on which a “fundamentalist” attitude manifests theoretically and practically. Without forgetting that, on the ground, it is, actually, nearly always the other person who is “fundamentalist”, never one’s self. Nevertheless, the results of a

developmental project are conditioned by the clear analysis and perception of these fundamentalistic oppositions to any social and cultural change.

3.3 *Fundamentalism and fundamental options: sociology of comparative religions*

In order to render visible some of the issues underlying the shift between “fundamentalist” and “fundamental” perspectives, I will begin by presenting a taxonomical table that contrasts the “hard” and the “soft” elements of a religious mentality or, as John Lederach said: the two distant shores “fear” and “love” (Lederach 2005: 41–43).

Table 1: Comparison between “hard” and “soft” religions

ASPECTS	FUNDAMENTALIST FORMS OF RELIGION	FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF RELIGION
1. THEOLOGICAL ROOTS	MONOTHEISTIC PRINCIPLE The transcendent god is both the absolute source of life and the implacable judge of good and evil. Totalitarian political organisations gain their legitimacy through him.	OMNIPRESENT DIVINE MILIEU The profession of faith in a universal god relativizes every historical religious institution and every dogmatic formulation. All temporal reality is conditioned.
2. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES	PROSELYTE DYNAMISM This kind of absolute affirmation justifies the conviction of possessing the truth. This sort of religious understanding is not apt for consensus. On the contrary, it is formulated around an aggressive mission.	EMPATHIC AVAILABILITY The dichotomy between “us” and “them” is abolished. “De-enemising” love breaks down the walls of separation and bridges divides through “compassion”.
3. PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOUR	DEMONISING LABELS The transcendent god is opposed by the absolute force of evil in the world. These kinds of satanic forces are identified in the social sphere and have to be eradicated.	RIGHT TO RECOGNITION Hateful denial of the other becomes a ridiculous form of gesticulation. Difference does not incite the need to destroy, but instead becomes an invitation to a convivial way of life.
4. STRATEGIC APPROACHES	MILITARISTIC MENTALITY In alignment with this kind of opposition ideology, humans are classified as “chosen” or “damned”. This latent readiness to crack down can turn into an uncontrollably destructive rage over the smallest thing.	BEAUTY OF COMPROMISE The ideal model is not the crushing of the foreign non-believer or the softening up of any opposition, but the search for promising and productive synergies.



According to the operational description of these two types of behaviour, the “fundamentalist” mentality hardens contexts, whilst, on the contrary, the reference to the “fundamentals” of a basic tradition religious or secular can mitigate a context and facilitate cooperation. The capacity or competency that we are discussing here to discern involves understanding of the deep culture (Tiefenkultur) as a sort of container, which holds values and memories related to being both open to neighbours and closed towards others or strangers.

### 3.4 *The fundamentalist radicality*

The following are some of the characteristics of the “fundamentalist” grammar of a mentality:

#### i. Cognitive level: binary thinking

According to the monotheistic mentality, the transcendent god is understood to be the creator and source of life. He manifests his eternal will, to which obedient submission is required. He inexorably judges between good and evil, between what is allowed and what is taboo. In fact, I am describing here the monotheistic mentality according to the Jewish-Christian-Muslim perspective (Askari 1987: 129–132). However, according to the phenomenology of religions, the “monotheistic” point of view goes beyond historical facts in relation to Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions and designates any mentality that has “inclusion-exclusion”, “choosiness-rejection” or “faithful-infidel” social polarisations (Galtung 1998), be it religious, philosophical or cultural.

However, in the context of development projects this exclusivist interpretation of God as an omnipotent creator often brings with it immediate consequences for developmental project implementation in relation to, for example, responsible family planning policies or other interventions aimed at emancipating girls and women (literacy, professional training, family model, homosexuality). The recourse to this monotheistic principle by delegations from Muslim countries or the Vatican resulted in the failure of the UN summits in relation to demography (Cairo 1994), human rights (Vienna 1995) and women’s rights (Beijing 1996). On the ground, this “fundamentalist” theological reference can block or prevent projects that work to advance or protect women, mothers and their children (Friedli 2013: 233–237; Friedli 2018: 79–82).

## ii. Social level: proselyte dynamism

The claim to be chosen by god (“choosiness” (Galtung 1998)) and, therefore, to possess the only salvific truth, is not apt for negotiating solutions in changing social circumstances. It cannot foster consensus. On the contrary, this “missionary” psychological profile engenders opposition in the community and political persecution.

## iii. Psychological aspects: hardening around morals

The fundamentalist mentality can be characterised by its rigid mentality (“rigidity” (Galtung 1998)) and punitive attitude (“punitivity” (Galtung 1998)). These kinds of reflexes can of course play out reciprocally between actors in a development project, and implementation can get stalled as a result. The threat of withdrawal can be bandied around by one side and another. There are examples of broken trust and actions taken to force people out.

## iv. Strategic procedures: eradicating the stigmatised reality

The fundamentalist perspective divides the world into “chosen” and “damned”. Johan Galtung calls this the “DMA syndrome” “Dogmatism, Manichaeism, Armageddon/Apocalyptic” (Galtung and MacQueen 2008: 92–97). As indicated earlier, this psychological tendency is characterised by “punitivity”, which can result in violent interventions. Depending on the circumstances economic, demographic and massmedial contexts this syndrome can easily turn into collective, even military (not to mention genocidal and terrorist), destructiveness. This is the “fundamentalist” aspect, which is the destroyer of any socio-political interventions.

### 3.5 *The fundamental option*

In order to ensure that a developmental project is not blocked, it is critical to know how to capture, in the same “monotheistic” religious container, the different constructive potentialities of the “religion’s” own narrative, which lie at the heart of its collective memory (Lederach 2005: 41–43, 141–147). In fact, and in contrast to the destructive “fundamentalist” reactions, I am referring here to the “fundamental” constructive dimensions of a given religious tradition. In relation to development projects, it is precisely a

question of being aware of the risks inherent in the destructive “fundamentalist” spiral and trying to redirect the current towards a constructive “foundational” outlet instead. In parallel to the “fundamentalist” mentality, the following are, in the same tradition, some “fundamental” characteristics:

- i. Theological cognitive level: axiological difference between the “divine milieu” and subsequent socio-political manifestations

The “fundamental” faith in a “universal god” relativises all related historical institutionalised expressions of faith. Only “God” is absolute. And the religious traditions are conditioned depending on their cultural history. Therefore, the Christian-catholic saying *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (“Outside the Church there is no salvation”) is a political reduction of this profession of faith, in which the “Church”- rather than “God”- is perceived as the absolute religious reference. And to take another monotheistic context, “Allah” transcends all the historical manifestations of Islam. On this subject, the Pakistani sociologist Hassan Askari continually emphasised that wanting to make external, historical manifestations of Islam absolute, the Ummah, is a blasphemy that has to be denounced as a disastrous fundamentalist schism (Askari 1987: 129–132). In short, the monotheistic affirmation of one transcendent God becomes a sort of “monolatry” a detrimental form of idolatry.

- ii. Social level: empathic availability

The dichotomy between the “in-group” and the “out-group” has long been accepted in sociological research (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 122–138; Friedli 1974: 69–75). However, this dialectic between “in-group” and “out-group” in the biblical tradition is fundamentally relativized. In this context, the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide speaks of “Entfeindungs liebe” (Lapide 1984). This German formulation is difficult to translate other than by using a contrasting affirmation like “de-enemising love”, but its social horizon is clear: take the emotionally aggressive association away from the enemies (“Feinde”), whilst allowing them to continue to be adversaries (“Gegner”). Inside this calmer space, doctrinal, organisational and even moral differences can and should be discussed, evaluated and negotiated. But they are no longer deadly. In the frame of this kind of dynamic, liberation theologians as well as Christians, Buddhists or Muslims speak of “compassion”, “maitri/karuna” and “rahma”.

### iii. Psychological level: the right to difference

In this way, hard fundamentalist aspects become no more than empty gesticulations. Which does not, of course, entirely remove their deadly threats. However, under this “foundational/fundamental” horizon, the invitation to convivence is affirmed, where the right to difference is respected. In this context, the American ethicist Michael Walzer defines tolerance as “the process that civilises difference” (Walzer 1998; Senghaas 2004: 30–52).

### iv. Strategic level: beauty of compromise

The model of behaviour is, therefore, for neither to crush the other be it the stranger or the non-believer nor to deny differences, but to search for a lucid and constructive compromise. This kind of intellectual and practical method is not an invitation to a harmonizing conversation, but rather a call to a practical approach that I will qualify as “diapraxis” -dialogue beyond dialogue - a dialogue on the practical consequences of a doctrinal system and not a theoretical exchange on absolutely affirmed truths (Poltorbis 2011; Lindbeck 2009: 18-27, 59-74).

## 3.6 Findings on the “fundamentalist vs fundamental” shift

In the frame of my actual presentation on “fundamentalist vs fundamental” transitions, there is no need to enter into further detail. What is important is to shine a light on the four theoretical levels underlying social change processes: doctrinal, moral, psychological and political. This is with regard to both fundamentalist radicalisation and fundamental deradicalisation. In fact, what is important here is to highlight the case that the personal observation skills and the practical clear-sightedness required by development workers are the same, independent of whether they belong to a religiously affiliated or to a secular NGO.

The following is, therefore, our conclusion: there is no difference in the approach to be adopted by a development project, be it religious or secular. This is because both religious and secular NGOs must remain alert in order to detect any slides of the “fundamental” theological option towards “fundamentalist” social radicality. However the risk of a “fundamental-fundamentalist” shift should be the concern of all partners in a development project religious as well secular.

#### 4 Development NGOs during the Rwandan genocidal processes

The sociological typology of levels that I am presenting here, according to which the fundamentalist mentality or the fundamental option can be defined, is the result of multiple past engagements. The most significant being in the context of the evolution of post-genocide Rwanda. My remarks should be considered as a further illustration of the reflections made by Christine Schliesser in this volume on recent socio-political developments in new Rwanda. In fact, Christine Schliesser describes in her article, in a very concrete way, the reconciliation and development initiatives currently offered by the churches in Rwanda. In contrast, I will provide a more generalised and strategic perspective. To do this, I started by interpreting the fundamentalist-fundamental issues in the line with the sociological concept typology. This kind of approach is more abstract and, therefore, less existential. However, it highlights and systemises certain socio-political historical factors, framing them within a holistic analytical perspective.

This article leaves aside the controversies that surround in the Rwandan context each historical reference and the, often contradictory, interpretations that have been made in their regard (Braeckman 1994; Scherrer 1997), I refer to the material and testimonies gathered as a member of a rogatory commission appointed by the Swiss Government as soon as the murderous events that occurred in Rwanda from April to July 1994 were brought to the public's attention by the international mass media. Swiss public opinion was all the more troubled by the news because hundreds of Swiss development workers, missionaries and NGO staff had worked for decades in Rwanda.

As a member of this commission of inquiry, made up of a professor of international law, an economist, a member of the Swiss Parliament's National Council and myself as a sociologist of religions, I participated from 1994 to 1996 in the hearings of more than a hundred political actors of the time and witnesses of the genocide. Because they lasted around four hours per person, the hearings took place in Switzerland, Belgium, France and Rwanda. Minutes were taken during each of these comprehensive interviews by the two secretaries assigned to the commission. These documents have been filed at the Federal Archives of Switzerland in Bern (Voyame 1996). I am using them now as a database to illustrate the typology of processes that are qualified as either "fundamentalist" or "fundamental".

Table 2: Rwandan genocide and reconstruction

DIMENSIONS	FUNDAMENTALIST: EXCLUSIVE RADICALITY	FUNDAMENTAL: INCLUSIVE OPTION	TYPOLGY
DOCTRINAL ROOTS	1949: Rwanda conse- crated to Christ the King, to 1990: Ten Command- ments of the Muhutu	Imaana overall Rwandan presence; Ubuntu philosophy: Desmond Tutu	DOGMATISM vs GLOBALISED ULTIMATE CON- CERN
SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES	Radio/TV Mille Collines: animalisation: Batutsi = <i>inyenzi</i> = cock- roach	Banyarwanda detrib- alisation: Paul Kagame's policy	FANATICISM vs TOGETHERNESS BHN
PSYCHOLOGY	<i>Uubuhake</i> feudal system Tutsi-Hutu apartheid	<i>Twese hamwe</i> = widows solidarity; Muslims in Nyami- rambo	FUNDAMENTALISM vs UNCONDITIONAL SOLIDARITY
POLICY STRATEGY	Radio/TV: <i>gukora</i> = weed = geno- cide April–July 1994; Death lists (8 April 1994)	<i>Gacaca</i> = popular tri- bunal <i>Umuganda</i> = solidarity work Reconciliation: Pres- byterian Church	RADICAL EXTREMISM vs DEALING WITH THE PAST NEW BEGINNINGS

4.1 Fundamentalist Rwandan radicality

In order to avoid being a passive observer of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, it is necessary to identify its origins. In fact, it is not sufficient to understand this tragedy in the way I have often heard it referred to by people around me as a kind of unforeseeable epidemic that suddenly overran Rwanda. Instead, we ought to try to understand the related historical triggers.

This is not the place to go into an in-depth analysis of the factors that led to this tragedy in Central Africa. Even less so is it the time to debate the various explanatory theories that have been presented (Friedli 2013), for example, the Belgian colonial past, the Catholic mission, the demographic explosion, the influx of refugees in the region, urbanisation, the fall in the price of coffee or the international context of the Cold War.

Table 2 reflects my attempt at a typological systemisation by presenting an overview of the four levels of fundamentalist radicalisation and fundamental deradicalization applied to the context of the genocide in Rwanda. In this way, I illustrate how complex it is for development NGO staff -whether religious or secular - to identify the socio-political realities that are at high risk of becoming deadly let alone to intervene in a practical way to break the spiral of violence.

### i. A binary doctrinal argument

The ideological radicalisation of the two socio-ethnic groups in Rwanda, Batutsi and Bahutu, can be illustrated by two significant political-religious events: (1) the solemn consecration of Rwanda to Christ the King by the Catholic mission in 1949, and (2) the almost “biblical” affirmation of Hutu purity vis-à-vis the Tutsi tradition (Zürcher 2014: 65–94).

The solemn consecration of Rwanda to Christ the King by the Catholic mission in 1949 does not in itself pose a political problem (Rutayisire 1984). It concretises, within the Catholic Church in Rwanda, the spiritual affirmation proclaimed in 1925 by Pope Pius XI that the Kingdom of Christ is a religious weapon against the forces of destruction in the world. In fact, this dogma highlights the Christian vision according to which all nations should obey Christ’s evangelical counsels. However, in the specific colonial and political context of Rwanda, where governance of the country was entrusted to the power of the king and the Batutsi chiefs, this proclamation sacralised feudal Tutsi power. At the time of the Social Revolution led by former Bahutu serfs from 1959–1961, during the great wave of decolonization, this political-religious consecration put the Catholic Church on the side of the Batutsi social enemies (Friedli 1997).

Nevertheless, the public space in Rwanda continued to be impregnated by Catholic catechism and sermons. This was evident on many occasions. One example being the *Ten Commandments of the Mubutu* published in December 1990 in the Kangura journal of the governing Hutu party (Chrétien 1995: 38–42, 373).

In the solemn style of the Old Testament in the Bible, this “Decalogue” of political correctness reminds the Bahutu citizens of their obligations and the behaviour that is expected of them vis-à-vis the Batutsi. The following are some of the commandments (Chrétien 1995: 39–40):

- *Commandment One: Every Mubutu must know that all Umututsikazi (Tutsi women), wherever they may be, are working for the Tutsi ethnic cause. Consequently, any Hutu is a traitor if he:*
  - *marries a Mututsikazi*
  - *has a Mututsikazi concubine*
  - *has a Mututsikazi secretary or protégée.*
- *Commandment Five: Strategic positions be they at the political, administrative, economic, military or security-level must be given to the Babutu.*

- *Commandment Seven: The Rwandan Armed Forces must be exclusively Hutu. This has been taught to us by the war of October 1990. No soldier is permitted to marry a Mututsikazi.*
- *Commandment Eight: The Babutu must stop taking pity on the Batutsi.*

## ii. Socio-political consequences

The radio station Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (Chrétien 1995: 63–82), played a major role in the process of social division that occurred in Rwanda prior to the April-July 1994 genocide, by diffusing strong messages of segregation and hatred towards the Batutsi. In these radio broadcasts, the Batutsi were designated as they had been since the beginnings of the wave of decolonisation and democratisation by the nickname *inyenzi*, which means “cockroach” (Chrétien 1995: 127–138). This animalisation of men and women is a decisive ideological step that makes the murder of human beings acceptable since it is no longer considered a homicide but rather a cleansing of the public sphere and a clean-up of the environment like in Nazi Germany when the public space was purged of traces of members of the Jewish community, who were disqualified as weeds or vermin (Zimbardo 2007: 287–310).

Moreover, dehumanisation and commodification of the enemy are procedures used in military camps to take away from soldiers and torturers the innate human inhibition that prevents the killing of other human beings. Removing the human quality from men, women and children makes it easier for military personnel to execute the order to massacre them. It was in line with this dehumanising logic that the messages broadcast by Radio Mille Collines prepared the mentalities and psychologies in Rwanda for the acts of cruelty and genocidal murder that were to follow. Consequently, in the space of one hundred days, from April to July 1994, more than one million women, children and men were executed without the slightest remorse or inhibition (Hatzfeld 2015).

## iii. Psychology hardening around morals

Much earlier than 1994, the socio-economic consequences of this racist vision had partitioned and stratified daily life and the economic system in Rwanda. I am referring here to the *ubuhake* system, a feudal structure that allowed the Tutsi lords to exploit the Hutu serf farmers and herdsmen who were in their service (Scherre 1997; Friedli 1998). As we have just seen, this



type of relationship was made sacred by the Church's reference to Christ the King. In addition, and very secretly, rites of initiation and *kubamba* shamanistic ceremonies consolidated this public authority structure by integrating the forces of *imâana* "chance". The Christian missionaries, from the Catholic, Protestant and Anglican confession, tried to combat this multi-formed and ambiguous *imâana* "witchcraft" by identifying the Christian God as the sole transcendent *Imâana* (Kagame 1976: 129–150; Coupez 1975; Friedli 1974: 172–173, 188–192; Rapold 1999: 299–419). Consequently, the symbolic and religious environment became extremely confused and ambiguous right at the time when Rwanda was consecrated by the Catholic missionaries to Christ the King. In this artificial and complex context, all references to fundamental, humanitarian, and developmental ethics imploded.

#### iv. Police and military consequences

In the frame of this multifaceted religious confusion, the international context of decolonisation and democratisation was further strengthened. Political changes were announced and inexorably put in place. The Ten Commandments of the Muhutu mentioned earlier is an example of this. How could development aid workers and technical staff from Belgian, Canadian, Swiss and French humanitarian agencies orient themselves in this context? Not least because throughout the day the local radio was asking people to go out to "*gukora*" on the hills and in the valleys! Now, this verb *gukora* at first sight means to work or weed. However, the verb is polysemous. And the request to go out to "clean" can be understood as a call to "massacre" the detested Batutsi *inyenzi*. Thanks to this ambiguity, the spiral of genocidal massacres was set in motion. However, staff of the mentioned Swiss, Belgian, French and Canadian development aid NGOs understood these messages as a call to engage in rural development and reforestation (Voyame 148–150, 186–189).

#### 4.2 Fundamental options in the Rwandan context

It was the fundamentalist descent to hell. How could the way back to Rwandan fundamental values and humane reflexes be envisaged? What were the ethical parameters needed in order for that to happen? How could the socio-economic conditions necessary for reconstruction be identified? How could people distance themselves in their daily lives from the mur-

derous fundamentalist reflexes and behaviours? Is it only a question of obeying the new political authority in Rwanda, as some theories suggest? According to this interpretation from cultural sociology, politics ordered the killings in the first place and now it was ordering the return to a way of life founded on good neighbourly relations. This interpretation seems to present an understanding of the genocide that is overly superficial. Indeed, in order for a new public order to be able to calm, heal and reconcile the Rwandan population, I would say it was necessary to evoke and internalise some renewed dimensions of the values that lie at the heart of the Rwandan fundamental deep culture (Sibomana 1997: 201–229; Friedli 2018: 83–84, 86).

In principle and, again, by way of a brief outline, it is a question of renegotiating and reorientating the four societal levels highlighted earlier with regards fundamentalist processes (cf. above Table 1): (1) from rigid dogmatism with its exclusivist, binary logic towards the reference to non-negotiable, inclusive human values; (2) from exclusivist, moral demonization and dehumanization towards the unconditional will to be together; (3) from dualistic, ethnic extremism towards unconditional human solidarity; (4) from exclusivist, racist fanaticism towards the new horizon of supportive and inclusive beginnings of convivence. Although these four levels on which cultural change is based may sound like a good Sunday sermon, in actuality they represent the essential points of a consistent developmental roadmap in transitional justice, community healing and human security policy (Lederach 2005: 131–149). The following are some of the main related points:

#### i. The encompassing “divine milieu”

As we have seen, in Rwandan tradition, transcendent reality is designated as *imâana*. This can be interpreted as something that is beyond *Batutsi* and *Bahutu* ethnic divisions. However, was this interpretation still possible given the Catholic and Protestant churches had interpreted *imâana* as being a valid designation for the biblical monotheistic God? Moreover, a linguistic analysis of Rwandan proverbs reminds us that the *imâana* energy field refers to the ambivalent role that fortune plays in the lives of *abantu* humans (Coupez 1975: 90–94; Rapold 1999: 299–419; Friedli 1974: 188–192). In his Bantu-Rwandan philosophy, the Rwandan philosopher Alexis Kagame (1976: 129–150) further reminds us of this characteristic of the Rwandan deep culture. It is for this reason that, in the context of the anthropology of *bantu* cul-

tures, South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu preferred the trans-ethnic dimension of the concept of *ubuntu* “humanity”, which designates the human value of solidarity.

However, I doubt that in the 21st century this kind of return to precolonial Rwanda through the reference to *imâana* could have a mobilising effect, particularly among post-genocide young people. It might be more feasible, in the theological context of the Catholic Church, to consider a prudent reinterpretation both spiritual and apolitical of the theological affirmation of “Christ King of the Universe”?

## ii. Fundamental empathy

These kinds of religious dimensions could be an invitation to go beyond the *Hutu-Tutsi* ethnic divide without ignoring the *banyarwanda* anthropological, foundational dimension. Moreover, Paul Kagame, the current president of Rwanda, has stressed this *banyarwanda* foundational reference in his politics for the new Rwanda. In doing so, his intention has been to detribalise both public opinion and political practice. In order to achieve that, of course, Rwandan history needs to be rewritten and, thereafter, taught to the new generation.

However, numerous local and international observers have pointed out that, notwithstanding the egalitarian official political discourse, striking human rights violations and new forms of clientelism, subtle clan systems are reappearing (Henkel 2011). In addition, there is a worrying, growing divide between the urban milieu and the living conditions in rural areas. Yet, how is it possible to verify these evaluations?

## iii. Solidarity in difference

The following two initiatives demonstrate that even in the midst of the 1994 genocidal explosion and all the hateful and murderous fury it was still possible to behave in ways that were based on human solidarity:

- In the solidarity umbrella organisation “*Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe* nous les femmes ensemble”, since late 1994 mothers and widows from different ethnic and social backgrounds have helped each other in order to (re)construct houses for their children and orphans. This women’s support association enabled displaced and disorientated children to receive emotional counselling, food and shelter irrespective of their ethnic affiliation.

- The *Basnabili Muslim* community in Nyamirambo/Kigali saved many of their neighbours in the days of the genocidal hunt by hiding them in their homes during the daytime under the roofs of their houses and huts or even in their toilets and septic tanks.

These are two examples of significant actions that were based on the values of hospitality, which are more fundamental than tribal divisions. Values that are not broken by ethnic ideologies or religious cleavages.

#### iv. Political level

Some initiatives that referred to the fundamentals of the Rwandan culture proposed the implementation of post-genocidal, post-trauma psycho-social actions. These constituted an important step in the urgently-needed process of engendering mutual support and, as it was said by Naason Munyandamutsa a Rwandan psychiatrist (1958–2016), helped in “reconstructing souls”. Nevertheless, these therapies remained at the personal level, meanwhile it was the entirety of the Rwandan society that had to be open to living together again in a new way, in terms of its social structures, developmental energies and political conditions. In order to achieve this, Rwanda has some traditional negotiation and reconciliation processes called “*gacaca*”. This system of talks “under the tree” and “on the lawn” (= loose translation of *gacaca*) was used in the past for neighbourhood conflict resolution in the context of rural, self-sufficient societies and near-home relations.

This kind of negotiation mechanism could not function without some adaptation in the context of the one hundred days of genocide where there was a need to bring to light the atrocities that had been committed throughout the country, evaluate who was responsible, decide on appropriate punishments, avoid reprisals and guarantee new societal beginnings (Rutayisire 2012). In order to do this, new juridical tools were required, which would be complementary to the popular *gacaca* tribunals. The reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa and, appropriately, the leadership and vision of Desmond Tutu were instrumental in highlighting transitional justice procedures that could constitute the new juridical tools that were needed (Clark 2010).

Indeed, with the help of 150,000 judges, who were trained in the space of a few weeks, popular tribunals held in the villages judged those responsible for the atrocities and abuses committed during the three months of genocide in 1994. Between 1996 and 2011 this work was done according to

the following four axes (Rutayisire 2012; Friedli 2013): right to truth, right to justice, adjudication of punishments and guarantee of non-repetition.

In addition to this judicial procedure by the newly adapted *gacaca* community-tribunals, another important contribution to the restoration of fundamental Rwandan values was monthly community service in the form of days of public *umuganda* reforestation, road maintenance, the repair of homes, communitarian fieldwork. This diapraxis being a way of building solidarity.

## 5 Outcomes and new beginnings on development and religion issues

This article on two development contexts and projects one international (UN) and the other national (Rwanda) demonstrates, in my opinion, that differentiating between “religious” and “secular” approaches is not helpful. Both “religion” and “secularity” can produce constructive or destructive consequences i.e. both styles of acting can produce hardening or mitigating social repercussions. The divide is not between “religion” and “secularity”, but rather between “orthodoxy” and “openness” between the evangelical-secular radicalization complex on the one hand, and the human-spiritual capacity to “transcend” on the other hand. Rigidity or flexibility, repetition or creativity. The skills of a “balancing identity” and the “capacity to differentiate” are two decisive development competencies. They permit a person to understand and enter into the cultural grammar of the other, be it within a religious or a secular context.

In so doing, cooperation can start under a common horizon indicated by the Basic Human Needs approach: survival, wellbeing, identity and hope. In this contribution, I have presented two cognitive skills that are, in my opinion, indispensable preconditions to realise sustainable development projects, conceptualised as a desired process of “transculturation”: flexibility as a *balancing identity* and discernment of *the fundamentalist vs. fundamental* shift. The *Rwandan context* we analysed -pre-genocide, genocide 1994, and post-genocide - dramatically illustrates how both competences are necessary for developmental agents working in complex human contexts, wherein in some way or another the factor of “religion” was involved (Marshall 2011: 10–13).

In all these areas, the knowledge of the “religious” factor plays a pivotal role on at least two levels:

- (1) RELIGION AS A TOOL: The “religion”, even in its “secularised” form, is a key cultural component to know about and respect in order to enable a development project to advance.
- (2) REGION AS SPIRITUALITY: The experiences I have shared with go-betweenes engaged in serious and long-term development projects and on the field of political conflicts have taught me that they are driven by what they themselves call “*spirituality*” (Frazer and Friedli 2015: 12–13, 21, 29–31).

However, for us, it is impossible to define this term “spirituality” in a trans-cultural manner. But we do think, that its meaning is to be sought in an “awareness of responsibility *rooted in an ultimate concern*” with socio-political consequences. The reference to this “ultimate concern” ought to be ascertained *in situ* as valuable religious grammar Buddha, the Resurrection, Allah, the Kingdom of God, Human Dignity, etc. The personal spiritual roots of agents in Developmental NGOs religious or secular should be understood as an individual basic choice, but not a public proclamation.

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