SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

# Rights, Religion and Atrocity Prevention

*An explorative field study of the involvement of religious leaders in Uganda*

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## Abstract

This study examines the nexus of human rights, atrocity prevention and the involvement of religious leaders in Uganda. States hold legal responsibility for preventing atrocity crimes, but influential nonstate actors also have a role in minimizing risks of mass atrocity crimes. Religious leaders can play an important role by influencing the behaviour of their adherents; either negatively by upholding intolerant messages of hostility, discrimination and incitement to violence, or positively by counteracting intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech. The study aimed to explore how religious leaders are involved in atrocity prevention, including searching for facilitators and barriers for such an involvement. For this purpose, the study used an explorative qualitative lifeworld approach with semi-structured interviews. Data collection included twelve individual interviews with religious leaders from four different denominations: 4 Anglican, 4 Pentecostal, 2 Catholic and 2 Muslim. Word by word transcription and thematic analysis was conducted on the material. The results show that religious leaders in Uganda can be naturally involved in atrocity prevention. Through leadership they can mitigate identity-based division by promoting inclusive societies, mediating in conflicts and advocating for peace. The study identified five facilitators and barriers for involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention. Facilitators are: (I) endorsing a theology of human dignity, (II) a self-understanding of mission and mandate, (III) promoting holistic peacebuilding, (IV) education, and (V) networking. Barriers are: (I) poverty levels among leaders as well as adherents, (II) political silencing or affiliation, (III) ignorant and selfish leadership, (IV) lack of resources, and (V) international relations. The study adds perspectives on the possibilities, through facilitators and barriers, to engage religious leaders in early response to risk factors of mass atrocities.

**Key Words**: Human Rights, Atrocity Prevention, Involving Religious Leaders, Freedom of Religion, Uganda

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# Acknowledgements

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ADF | Allied Democratic Forces |
| ARLPI | Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative |
| CoU | Church of Uganda |
| CSO | Civil Society Organizations |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| ECOSOC | United Nations Economic and Social Council |
| LGBTQ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer |
| ICCPR | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights |
| ICISS | International Commission on Intervention and Stat Sovereignty |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Persons |
| IRC | Inter-Religious Council of Uganda |
| LRA | The Lord's Resistance Army |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NRM | National Resistance Movement |
| OHCHR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| Plan of Action | Plan of action for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes |
| PMUC | Pentecostal Ministries of Uganda Churches |
| RCC | Roman Catholic Church |
| R2P | Responsibility to Protect |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| UNCST | Uganda National Council for Science and Technology |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNOGPRP | United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect |
| UJCC | Uganda Joint Christian Council |

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# 1. Introduction

During my field study in Uganda, in April 2019, the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide was commemorated by 100 days of mourning in the neighboring country. The killings of 800 000 people also affected Uganda, and I heard stories of how massacred bodies had been washed down the Kagera River all the way to the shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda. When I read about the horrible events in a New York Times article from May 21, 1994, a glimpse of the underlying hatred and brutality is revealed. The head of the clean-up operation described the sight: "There are so many of them. Children are skewered on sticks. I saw a woman cut open from the tail bone. They have removed breasts and male genital organs. (Lorch, 1994)"

However, this is not a study of darkness. It is about hope and letting light conquer darkness by preventing the occurrence of future atrocities. For me personally, as a Pentecostal Pastor, it is vital to reflect on the role of religious leaders. The importance of taking responsibility for our shared humanity was expressed by a religious leader during one of my interviews in Uganda.

> *You cannot live your own life, I cannot live my own life. I live because you are and*
> *you live because I am. So that relationship, that sharing, that environment that we*
> *are sharing was given to us as a gift for our humanity. We must protect it.*
> *(Interview 1, 2019)*

The task of respecting human dignity is a shared responsibility. We must protect it. By field study in Uganda, with interviews of local religious leaders, this study contributes by exploring possibilities for involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention.

## 1.1. Background

This study examines the nexus of human rights, atrocity prevention and the involvement of religious actors. The connection of these fields is explored from the perspective of religious leaders in Uganda. This section will present a starting point for the study by framing the fields in concern.

The concept of *human rights* sprung out from the experience of "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind" and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaimed the vision of "freedom, justice and peace in the world" including the idea that "human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want" (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Human rights has since then been widely accepted as a common standard for all peoples and all nations, but the importance and challenge of implementing the vision has never decreased and the vision has not yet been realized. As we have seen from the citation above, this study will relate to the very core of human rights, that human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech *and* belief, as well as freedom from fear and want. The indivisibility of rights doesn't neglect the fact that different rights can chafe against each other, and there can be conflict between *freedom of speech* and *freedom of religion and belief*. This tension is coded in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) article 20.2 which states that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law" (United Nations General Assembly, 1966). The UN further emphasises the danger of incitement to violence by linking prevention of incitement to the prevention of atrocity crimes. The underlying motivation for targeting a community may be strengthened by "exclusionary ideology and the construction of identities in terms of 'us' and 'them' to accentuate differences" (United Nations General Assembly, 2013, p5). A well-known example of this is the use of the dehumanising name "cockroaches" before and during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The failure of the international community to prevent atrocity crimes in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s accelerated the debate on how to ensure the prevention of and intervention against gross and systematic violations of human rights. The process led to the concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P), presented by the International Commission on Intervention and Stat Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001 and the subsequent commitment to the principle in the 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome Document (A/RES/60/1). The document paragraphs 138 & 139 are considered to contain

three pillars of R2P (UNOGPRP, 2019a). The first pillar stipulates the responsibility of every state to protect its population from the four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. This entails the *prevention of atrocity crimes* including their incitement. The second pillar prescribes the wider international community to having the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in protecting its population from atrocity crimes, as well as using diplomatic and humanitarian means when necessary. The third pillar stipulates how the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner through the Security Council if a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations and peaceful means are inadequate. Atrocity prevention is however still struggling and voices have been raised for involving other actors. The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (UNOGPRP) points out that States have the legal responsibility for preventing atrocity crimes, but also other actors such as Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and religious leaders also have a role in "minimizing atrocity risks" and that they "play an important grassroots early warning role, particularly as new technologies allow live information to be provided" (UNOGPRP, 2019b).

As we will see in section 3.1 concerning previous research, the academic discussion regarding R2P and atrocity prevention has lately progressed to include private actors. The role of private actors has also been raised in regard to responsibilities in human rights[1]. *Religious actors* are considered to have played an important role in the evolving[2] of the human rights concept as well as being part of its future implementation[3], but an important question to raise is whether there are other ways to better make use of the influence of religious actors and leaders for protecting civilians from large scale human rights abuses by the prevention of mass atrocities?

Recently, initiatives have been taken to also involve religious leaders and actors also in the mission of preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. In 2017, UNOGPRP presented the *Plan of action for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes* (Hereafter "Plan of Action"), in which the UN Secretary-General António Guterrez in the foreword points out that "religious leaders can play a particularly important role in influencing the behaviour of those who share their beliefs" (UNOGPRP, 2017, p1). With the involvement of religious leaders and actors in what has been called "the Fez process", the Plan of Action ended up to present "a programmatic tool" aiming to "contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes [and] enhance the respect, protection and promotion of human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion or belief and peaceful assembly" (UNOGPRP, 2017, p12). Religious leaders can use their influence in either positive or negative ways. Negative influence is described as intolerant messages characterised by hostility, discrimination and incitement to violence. Positive influence is described as "speaking out firmly and promptly against intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech" (UNOGPRP, 2017, p7). The Plan of Action is connecting the fields of human rights, religion and atrocity prevention and has in that way been inspirational for this study.

There are many places where a research regarding involvement of religious leaders in peacebuilding and atrocity prevention would be relevant. A primary condition is the influence attributed to religious leaders. Uganda is highly religious and most of the population are influenced by religious leaders. Other important factors in the case selection is the relevance of atrocity crimes

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[1] See for example *Human Rights and Private Wrongs: Constructing Global Civil Society* by Alison Brysk, (2013).

[2] See for example the 2018 EU publication *Shared space of religion and human rights* which states that "the roots of modern human rights discourse is in theological discourse" and lists shared values between religion and human rights regarding human dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity and justice (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017).

[3] Religious actors play an important role in the promotion of human rights through many different international bodies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for a brief summary: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/religious-and-non-confessional-dialogue/events/en-20181204-eprs-briefing-religion-and-human-rights.pdf

prevention. Comparative genocide studies have identified risk factors of social, political and economic dimensions such as "identity-based division, state-based discrimination, past atrocities, issues of governance including widespread human rights violations, limited rule of law, absence of or weak democracy, and finally, low integration into the world economy, and inequality of wealth and opportunities" (McLoughlin, 2014b, p423). Most of these factors can be attributed to Uganda.[4]

## 1.2. Problem formulation, aim and research questions

Mass atrocities are serious factors for gross human rights violations. R2P in the narrow sense of state sanctioned protection and prevention is not enough to mitigate the risk of atrocity crimes. Religious leaders have a huge influence in many societies and it seems to be possible to involve them to a greater extent in the protection of human rights through atrocity prevention. Religious leadership is not supposed to supersede the state in the responsibility to protect, but to contribute to society by using its mandate and influence over their followers in the direction of preventing incitement, intolerance and identity-based violence. Religious leaders in Uganda are highly influential, but to what extent are the leaders willing and able to exercise this kind of societal leadership? Do the leaders see motivations and relevance to act for atrocity prevention, and what are the facilitators and barriers for this involvement of religious leaders in Uganda? There is a research gap in these areas and further empirical knowledge and understanding on this topic can contribute to the discussion on involving religious leaders, and also to the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 in Agenda 2030 regarding peace, justice and strong institutions.

### Aim
The aim of this study is to explore how religious leaders in Uganda are involved in atrocity prevention.

### Research questions
*1. How are religious leaders in Uganda involved in atrocity prevention?*
*2. What are the facilitators and barriers for involving religious leaders in Uganda in atrocity prevention?*

The first question relates to what religious leaders already experience in terms of atrocity prevention. In what areas are they involved and what are their interest in acting for preventing atrocities? Are they willing to take responsibilities in society that stretch outside their own group? The other question concern what factors there are that can either increase or decrease the potential for involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention?

Exploration was justified by the absence of research on involving religious leaders in preventing atrocity crimes in Uganda (Stebbins, 2001). The study used an explorative qualitative lifeworld approach with semi-structured interviews of religious leaders in order to answer the research questions. Methods and methodology is further presented in Chapter 5.

### Delimitation
For the study to include different views of religious leaders, it involved four different perspectives from the main religions/denominations of the country: Roman Catholic, Church of Uganda (Anglican), Muslim and Pentecostal. Both urban (Kampala) and rural (Lamwo[5] district in northern Uganda) perspectives was sought for as well as perspectives from different levels of religious leadership (national and local). The study will only interview religious leaders and not seek for other perspectives due to limited time of field study.

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[4] See Chapter 2 for a deeper presentation of Uganda and its relevance for this study.
[5] Lamwo district borders to South Sudan. For a detailed map over Uganda districts, see the Electoral Map of Uganda https://www.ec.or.ug/maps/Cons_Map.pdf

**Definitions**
- *Religious leaders* are defined according to the Plan of Action as "those who were or are formally assigned leadership roles by their respective religious institution or communities and/or hold formal religious qualifications" (UNOGPRP, 2017, p9).
- *Atrocity prevention*[6] is defined by Peace Insight as referring to "a broad range of tools and strategies which aim to prevent the occurrence of mass killings and other large scale human rights abuses committed against civilians" (Peace Insight, 2019).

## 1.3. Disposition

This introductory chapter is followed by a presentation of Uganda in Chapter 2 with special emphasis on conflict and religion. After that, the research field in concern is mapped in Chapter 3 focusing on atrocity prevention, involvement of religious actors, and finally, conflict and religion in Uganda. Theoretical perspectives are presented in Chapter 4, and is followed by a presentation of methods used and methodological discussion in Chapter 5. Results of the empirical research are presented in Chapter 6, and is followed by a theoretical discussion in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 contains a brief summary of the study and concluding thoughts.

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[6] For more information regarding atrocity prevention with short history and relevance for local nonstate actors, visit: https://www.peaceinsight.org/themes/atrocity-prevention/

## 2. Conflict and Religion in Uganda

Uganda is characterised by several risk factors for atrocity crimes and is at the same time a highly religious country with influential religious leaders. These factors together with a relatively stable situation at the moment with opportunities to take preventative actions is making Uganda a relevant case for conducting this kind of exploratory research. This chapter will present a background to the field study in Uganda, focusing on conflict and religion. First, we will have a look at some of the present risk factors[7] for atrocity crimes.

There is a history in Uganda of identity-based division on ethnic or religious grounds and also past atrocities, as we will see in the conflict section below. There are also present challenges in the field of human rights and political governance, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2019 report describes a shrinking space where "violations of rights to freedoms of association, expression, and assembly persisted, as security forces beat and at times, tortured and arbitrarily detained protesters, journalists and opposition members" (2019). The level of democracy is limited; according to the Economist's Democracy Index, Uganda has for the last ten years been rated as a "hybrid regime"[8], currently at 96th place of 167 countries (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019). Economic challenges remain even if there has been an economic growth in recent years and poverty levels have fallen. Income inequality in Uganda has continued to increase during the last 25 years according to an Oxfam report from 2017. "Those at the bottom are on a downward poverty spiral while those at the top are on an upward trend and, if this continues, inequality can only worsen" (Oxfam, 2017, p17).

### 2.1. Conflict

Colonial intervention has nurtured differentiation and opposition between majority and minority groups. There is a violent history in the country including atrocities from the cruel leadership of Idi Amin and the rebel military operations by the religiously labelled The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The Office of the Prime Minister is still running programs[9] and projects to rehabilitate instable regions, but has also been accused of using the liberation narrative in order to legitimise the militarisation of society and civil administration (Reuss and Titeca, 2017b).

Uganda is ethnically pluralistic with more than 50 distinct groups, and ethnic conflicts have been pervasive since independence in 1962 (Rohner et al., 2013). The colonial rule of the British Empire fuelled ethnic tension by restricting inter-ethnic movements and by discriminatory exclusion of administration. After the independence in 1962, ethnicity has dominated politics with leaders promoting positions for their own group. Current president Yoweri Museveni is leading the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and has ruled the country since 1986, having its main support in the South. Rebel opposition was encountered from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), active close to the border to DRC until 2004. Otherwise, opposition and armed rebellion have mainly been present in the northern "Acholiland" region where LRA was active in Uganda until 2006, a conflict having deep historical roots grounded in ethnic hostilities. Although LRA had ethnic bounds to the Acholi by

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[7] For a list of risk factors for atrocity crimes, see Stephen Mcloughlin's contribution in section 1.1.
[8] Definition of hybrid regimes: "Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies—in political culture, functioning of government and political participation. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent." (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019 ,p49)
[9] For example, "Promoting peace dialogue aimed at resolving armed conflict in Northern Uganda" (Office of the Prime Minister, 2019)

drafting many Acholi military deserters, they also attacked villages from their own ethnic background and thus the civil population suffered abuses from both LRA and government troops.[10]

There have also been recent outbreaks of violent clashes between government forces and groups with distinct ethnic identity. Ethnic tension is not limited to Northern Uganda. In the Rwenzori region in Western Uganda, at the border to DRC, there have been clashes including revenge attacks with over 100 people killed in 2014 and additional violence after the 2016 election with more than 50 dead (Reuss and Titeca, 2017a). The present situation in Uganda is also affected by the general regional instability in Central Africa with present conflicts in surrounding countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. In July 2019 there were more than 1.3 million refugees in Uganda, with 838 323 from South Sudan while 365 883 came from DRC (UNHCR, 2019). The Lamwo district in northern Uganda was included in the field studies and is hosting several camps containing South Sudanese refugees.

## 2.2. Religion

Religion is playing a vital role in Ugandan society. According to the 2014 census, a population of 34.6 million contain 39.3 % Catholics, 32.0 % Anglicans (Church of Uganda), 13.7 % Muslims and 11.1 % Pentecostals/Born Again/Evangelical, while only 1 % define themselves as non-religious (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). According to a study by Pew Research Center, Uganda is one of the most religious countries in Africa since 86 % of the population consider religion to be "very important" while 82 % respond that they attend religious services "at least weekly" (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The history of the two main churches, Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Anglican Church of Uganda (CoU) can be traced back to missionaries more than a century ago.[11] Of the four religious perspectives considered in this study, the CoU and RCC are particularly institutionalised. Islam in Uganda can be traced back to the 1840s. Muslims are mainly relating to the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, which is a Sunni Islamic organisation, but there are several different groups in the country based on regional and ethnic background, and also due to international support.[12] The Pentecostal (commonly also labelled as Born Again churches) are comprised of a myriad of independent churches. The 2014 census show that these churches had grown from 4.7 % in 2002 to comprise 11.1 % of the population, and the levels are expected to have risen to even higher levels up to date (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). But it is a loosely connected movement with several umbrella organisations. Some denominations have stronger structures but many churches are independent and organised around the main pastor and his family. The Pentecostal leaders involved in this interview study are primarily relating to the Pentecostal Ministries of Uganda Churches (PMUC).[13]

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[10] For further presentation of Ugandan conflicts and analysis of the relation between conflicts, ethnic identity and trust, please read the *Seeds of distrust: conflicts in Uganda* (Rohner et al., 2013).

[11] The Anglicans (or Protestants as they are nowadays widely called in Uganda) were invited by the Bugunda king in 1877 with the help of the English colonial administration. The Catholic Church had already established a diocese in Sudan when it arrived in northern Uganda a few years later. The missionaries of the two churches started the first schools in the country and thereby shaped the new Ugandan educated elite. By 1962 and the independence, most of the clergy were domestic. For a brief history on early Christianity in Uganda, see Jordhus-Lier and Braathen (2013).

[12] For history and present challenges of Islam in Uganda, see *The Muslim Minority in Uganda: The Historical Quest for Unity and Inclusion* (Soi, 2016).

[13] The PMUC arose from the work together with Swedish missionaries and partners, the current organisation was formed in 1998. PMUC is a Pentecostal denomination with around 250 churches in all regions of Uganda. PMUC has a democratic organisational structure and an executive committee including women as well as leaders originated from neighbouring countries. They are running developmental initiatives such as adult literacy projects in mainly rural areas. With these characteristics, PMUC can be categorised to what Miller labelled as "Progressive Pentecostalism" (Miller, 2007). Personally, I had not been engaged to the PMUC prior to this study, even though there are connections with the Swedish Pentecostal Movement where I serve as Pastor. For a reflection over my role as a researcher, please see section 5.5. Discussion on Source Criticism, Objectivity, Reliability and Validity.

After independence in 1962, religious and regional lines divided politics, and during Idi Amin's military dictatorship in the 1970s, which promoted Islam, both CoU and RCC were brutally persecuted. Since the start of Museveni's reign, the two main churches have avoided political tensions and have strengthened ecumenical cooperation and "emphasised human rights and national reconciliation across political, ethnic, regional and religious cleavages" (Jordhus-Lier and Braathen, 2013, p117).

One example of religious actors taking active part in conflict politics by promoting peace was when an LRA massacre of 400 villagers in Lamwo in 1997 initiated cooperation and a joint prayer in Kitgum town by religious leaders from four denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Islam and Orthodox). This joint action was later formalised as the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), and was vital in forming peace initiatives such as the Amnesty Bill in 1999, a peace conference in Gulu town the same year, as well as a consultative meeting with leaders from northern Uganda and Sudan which brought international attention to the conflict. Ntale argues ARLPI has transformed local religious groups into strong nonstate actors who in cases of significant state weakness can provide important "development support in addition to the spiritual, emotional and psychological support to victims of violent conflicts" (2012, p340).

Religion has a huge impact on politics in Uganda. This is most clearly institutionalised by the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) founded in 1964 containing RCC, CoU and Uganda's small Orthodox Church. UJCC has for the last decade arranged presidential debates, election monitoring and has continued to emphasise peaceful elections. Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRC) is a broader interfaith initiative started in 2001, including the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Seventh Day Adventists as well as two different Pentecostal churches. However, religious interference in state politics have not always been appreciated. Alava & Ssentongo mentions how clergy who protested against the government's treatment of Acholi people in the Northern Uganda war were imprisoned and missionaries were deported (2016). Even recently, critical political statements of clerics have been rebuked by government officials for letting religion interfere with state politics.

# 3. Previous research

The subject field, involvement of religious leaders in atrocity prevention, is in a narrow sense an unexplored area. This section will broaden the scope to consider atrocity prevention within the R2P and the inclusion of nonstate actors. This is a growing field of research with both theoretical discussion and also some empirical studies to consider. This literature review will also consider previous research regarding involving religious leaders and actors in peacebuilding. Religious peacebuilding has emerged to a distinct and growing field of research which stands close to atrocity prevention. The final section of this chapter will summarize relevant research specific for Uganda in the fields of conflict and religion. This chapter points to the relevance of conducting research on the involvement of nonstate actors in general, and specifically to explore the role of religious leaders in atrocity prevention. It will also lead us to the three theoretical perspectives presented in the following chapter and applied to analyse the collected material of this study.

## 3.1. Atrocity Prevention

A number of wars in the 1990s characterised by internal conflict and internal displacements raised the discussion on sovereign responsibility on one hand and the right to humanitarian intervention on the other hand. NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo raised the commitment to improve protection of internally displaced persons (IDP) and to make timely humanitarian intervention. This was the concern of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan when he "challenged international society to develop a way of reconciling the twin principles of sovereignty (and protection of self-determination) and fundamental human rights" (Reike and Bellamy, 2010, p272). R2P originates from the idea that sovereignty demands both rights and responsibilities; the people have rights to determine its government and the state is responsible to offer security. The work by the ICISS resulting in the R2P principle was different from the previous "big-power secret diplomacy" and Thomas G. Weiss argues that "network diplomacy" has been a transformative power for rewriting the norms for ending mass atrocities (2013, p12). The ICISS process mobilized not only state representatives, but also individuals, civil society, private organisations and academia.

A growing interest for the role of nonstate actors in atrocity prevention can also be seen in more recent discussions regarding R2P and its future implementation. In 2015, when the R2P concept turned ten years, various scientific journals presented interesting reflective articles regarding future implementation and the possible involvement of nonstate local actors. Debate regarding R2P has moved from establishing the norm to focusing on the challenge of implementation and to connect R2P to present work "in areas such as conflict prevention, peacebuilding, the protection of civilians, international criminal justice, and the protection and empowerment of woman and girls" (Bellamy, 2015, p180-181). Micro-level efforts (Welsh, 2016) and increased support for "locally-led peacebuilding and prevention actors and capacities" (Moix, 2015) are encouraged. This local perspective include national capacities and actors within the international society, but specifically local civil society.

Debate regarding R2P has often focused on military interventions, but more effort should be focused on non-military preventative actions. The idea of involving nonstate actors and local initiatives has however also been questioned, by reasoning that it would erode and weaken the R2P concept. The former UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect Edward C. Luck is for that reason proposing the development of a concept of individual responsibility to protect (IR2P) as a supplement to R2P, "which looks at prevention, protection, and recovery through the lens of individual and group responsibility" (2015). From a narrow R2P, recent developments has expanded the concept toward the wider idea of atrocity prevention. These ideas has in the academic debate so far been part of conceptual discussions rather than practical experiences. This points to the relevance of exploring the involvement of religious leaders in atrocity prevention.

There are recent examples of nonstate actors involved in atrocity prevention that can serve as encouragement for involvement of religious leaders. Ekkehard Strauss recognises that prevention of mass atrocities usually considers actors on international, regional or state level and "only sparingly refers to civil society and victims' organizations, and even less to individuals" (Harff and Gurr, 2018, p92). Strauss promotes the involvement of civil society and shares his experience from establishing village community committees in Mauritania. The model was used to prevent identity-based conflict and violence. Identity formation in local contexts can consist of complex processes not only grounded in existing group identities of ethnic, religious or tribal lines, but also rumours and conspiracy theories and past histories of violence and socio-political affiliation may raise tensions between groups. Social media and other internet-based mass communication available even in rural areas have also eased the way of disseminating radicalisation ideas and rumours regarding targeted groups. Strauss show how these aspects together need to be responded on the local level by actors with deep knowledge in the local context. Another research looking at the role of local nonstate actors in preventing mass atrocities is the work of Stephen McLoughlin who uses the case of Zambia to raise understanding on the relation of risk and resilience (2014a). McLoughlin proposes a framework which puts greater emphasis on local actors and on local resilience to prevent atrocities. He points out a general overemphasis on the identification of root causes and that there is a lack of research considering "what is already happening in such places to prevent conflict and mass atrocities" (McLoughlin, 2014b, p420). McLoughlin's theoretical perspective is in a useful way broadening the understanding of mass atrocity prevention and will be applied on the collected material of this study, the framework will be further presented in the following chapter (4.1).

Yehuda Bauer highlights the necessity of understanding "sources, development, and importance of ideology in human behaviour" (Harff and Gurr, 2018, p18). Ideology has often been developed or used in order to justify mass murder and religious ideology has been one of the major factors in the development of exclusionary ideologies. The relation between religion and mass atrocities is not uncomplicated, but it should neither be ignored. Bauer argues that "murderous religious fanaticism can often only be met by non- or anti-radicals of the same religious persuasion" and highlights how it is essential in future mass atrocity prevention "to deal with religious ideologies justifying extreme exclusion of non-believers" (Ibid., p20-21). Warning signs, such as hate propaganda has to be countered in an early preventative response (Bellamy et al., 2016). An interesting perspective for understanding features of dangerous speech and the ideologies behind, is the model[14] presented by Leader Maynard and Benesch for understanding how the force of a speech to encourage violence is a product of both context and content (2016).

The presence of dangerous religious ideologies and speeches raises questions regarding the right to freedom of religion and belief and its relation to other rights. The former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, argues that the right is threatened on some of its most basic human rights principles: universalism, freedom, equality, and indivisibility (2013). Bielefeldt claims that there is an urgent need of conceptual clarity in order to defend and strengthen freedom of religion and belief. His contribution will be introduced in the next chapter (4.3) as a theoretical perspective that will guide the analysis of this study by adding a distinct human rights perspective.

As we can see from this section, there is a need to deepen understanding of atrocity prevention, the involvement of local nonstate actors and the countering of dangerous ideology and propaganda. The next section will focus on research involving religion and religious actors in issues of peace and conflict.

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[14] The model systematizes context by referring to the speaker, the audience, the socio-historical environment, and the means of dissemination. The content in dangerous ideology can be understood by six justificatory mechanisms: dehumanization, guilt attribution, threat construction, the destruction of alternatives, virtue talk, and future-bias. For attributing this perspective on religious leaders, it is of value to consider both the platform, mandate and audience they hold, as well as the ideology and message they present. (Leader Maynard and Benesch, 2016)

## 3.2. Involvement of Religious actors

Even if the involvement of nonstate actors such as religious leaders in atrocity prevention is debated and often promoted, there is an insignificant amount of literature analysing how it can be put into practice. The issue of involving religious leaders has been more prevalent in the closely related field of peacebuilding, which therefore also will be considered in this literature review. Religious actors are increasingly involved in peacebuilding initiatives and their role is discussed in the academic debate, within a distinct field concerning *religious peacebuilding*[15]. Steen-Johnsen recognises that "in the past two decades, both governments and organizations has funded and supported such initiatives in the Balkans, Sudan, Pakistan, Great Lakes and Haiti, to mention a few" (2017, p1).

There are experiences from local identity-based conflict prevention where religion have positive impact by "bringing people together based on joint values similar to those reflected in human rights obligations, and offering concrete solutions in conformity with religious traditions" (Harff and Gurr, 2018, p97). From sixteen different case studies of religious leaders and actors in peace initiatives, David Little argues that involving religion in peacebuilding may contribute with several perspectives; by bringing a theology of peace, by giving trustworthiness and mandate for agency, and by helping to switch focus from the violent aspects of religion in conflicts (Little, 2007). Harpviken and Røislien argue that religious actors can be involved in peacebuilding by their normative systems for promoting ethical behaviour, by using their organisational structures as channels for mobilisation and communication, and finally by the use of religious identities for creating common grounds between groups in conflict (2008). A study based on field research in Uganda and relating to the ARLPI initiative, concern the role of faith-based development actors in peacebuilding (Nicholas, 2014). Nicholas points out that faith actors can take the role of peacebuilding through various roles: Facilitation by bringing groups together in meetings, monitoring and observation of human rights abuses, advocating for a peace initiative, socialisation by creating new social norms, inter-faith cohesion by bringing different faith actors together, protection of individuals, and finally as mediators in conflicts.

A recent example of successful involvement of religious actors is the work of a Catholic NGO, the Community of Sant'Egidio, in Central African Republic (CAR). Founded in 1968, Sant'Egidio has since then been active in peace processes around the world and has consultative status with the ECOSOC. They began activities in CAR in early 2000s and was able to reach a peace agreement by negotiating with various armed groups. Bartoli & Garofalo recognises the successful visit of Pope Francis in 2015 as having positive effects on political life and two years later an agreement for peace in CAR was signed in Rome (Harff and Gurr, 2018). The Community of Sant'Égidio's approach in peace processes confirms that stable peace can only come from inside the conflicting communities, and from outside powerful actors. When conflicting parties by cost-benefit calculation find peace preferable to violent alternatives, a peaceful solution can be found.

Even at situations where religion is considered to be a part of the conflict dynamics, such as the case in CAR, it is a simplified solution to ascribe religion the source of violence. To distinguish sources to conflicts is complex and religion is often used by ethno-political leaders in order to generate conflicts and to mobilize support (Gurr, 1996, p74). Harpviken and Røislien claims that religion has to be understood as part of a larger societal context, where it both is affected and shaped by political, cultural and economic processes (2008). Brewer, Higgins and Teeney presents in the article *Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualization* additional perspectives on the relationship between religion and peacemaking (Brewer et al., 2010). They argue that religious actors can potentially have positive impact in peace initiatives, but it is essential to understand their position in relation to civil society and

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[15] Religious peacebuilding can be described as "actions taken by people acting with an expressed religious mandate to constructively and non-violently prevent, reduce or transform inter-group conflict" (Neufeldt, 2011, p346). In practice, the difference between atrocity prevention and peacebuilding might be subtle, but the starting points differ. The research center L'Osservatorio describes the nexus between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention: "While atrocity prevention is rooted in the context of accountability, encompassing international criminal justice and human rights law, peacebuilding stems from conflict resolution and reconciliation frameworks." (L'Osservatorio, 2018).

state politics. Their framework will also be used as a theoretical perspective in this study and contributes to analysing religious actors' involvement, by relating their position to structural factors in society and to important social spaces.

### 3.3. Conflict and Religion in Uganda

Research and academic analyses regarding the more recent conflicts in Uganda was initially focused on "political exclusion and denial of the human rights of the people in the region" (Jordhus-Lier and Braathen, 2013, p114). Later research has analysed underlying factors for violent conflicts and also regarding how violent conflicts affect aspects of identity and trust. A study by Rohner et al. has for example revealed how the intensity of fighting has a significant negative effect on trust toward other people from Uganda (2013). When the respondents own ethnic group is involved, the effect is particularly strong, and people experiencing violent conflicts tend to identify themselves to a greater extent with their own ethnic group rather than to other identity-markers, such as Ugandan nationality.

The lower level of trust toward other groups has also negative impact on economic growth and is a risk factor for continuing conflicts. Studies on conflict in Uganda has been focusing on the effect of conflict on individual expectations (Bozzoli et al., 2011), the economic consequences of being internally displaced (Fiala, 2015), household effects (Deininger, 2003), and the negative impact of conflict on agricultural cooperatives (Hill et al., 2015). There is also recent research focusing on post conflict reestablishment and resilience of youth (Vindevogel et al., 2015) and women (Corbin and Hall, 2019). An interesting aspect for this study from the article by Corbin & Hall is that social support from church and religious activities within communities was considered as an important protective factor for wellbeing.

Reuss & Titeca analysed the recent violence in Western Uganda, a conflict which has been described by the Ugandan government to build on ethno-nationalist mobilisation by the Bakonzo ethnic group (2017a). Their analysis show however that ethnicity often is used as "an outward layer beneath which there is a host of historical, socio-economic and political conflict dynamics" (Ibid. p131). They argue that the conflict is surrounded by other problems and the government's failure to address root causes. These conflict drivers are in fact similarly found in other communities of Uganda: land conflicts, access to public office, natural resource exploitation, youth unemployment, ethnic tensions, perceptions of marginalisation, traditional institutions. Other conflict drivers are key elements of political culture in Uganda, such as the involvement of security agencies, political manipulation and patronage politics. Another article by Reuss & Titeca regarding the current political situation in Uganda highlights the changing demographic, the fact that 78 % of the population are below 30 years of age and therefore born during Museveni's rule (2017b). This creates new challenges for the NRM regime and the "liberation argument" is not impressing a young population who never has experienced nationwide turmoil. Key regime strategies include personalisation, patronage and coercion clothed in the militarisation of civil administration. These strategies could be motivated for older generations from a liberation argument and of national peace and stability. Today, it instead causes a dangerous situation in a country with an increasingly urban young population struggling with unemployment, lack of economic growth and unimpressed by historical liberation narratives.

Jordhus-Lier & Braathen has studied churches and peacebuilding in Eastern DRC and Northern Uganda with reference to the peacebuilding efforts by ARLPI (2013). They claim that the field of peace and democracy with a focus on religious civil society actors are heavily under-researched. They emphasise how this is particularly unfortunate in a conflict-ridden region as the Great Lakes in Africa, where religious actors are considered the strongest civil society institutions. Their study shows that religious networks has primarily been effective in *witnessing* of atrocities and in the initial phase of peace mobilisation: "Church networks gave voice to the people in Northern Uganda, particularly in the Acholi region, and thus helped to establish legitimate civil force for peace from within" (Ibid., p120). Stronger mobilisation across faith communities and across state borders are instrumental for peacebuilding activities. Local level mobilisation for raising awareness and changing attitudes is jeopardised when leaders fail to stay independent from local conflict dynamics. The DRC case shows how a more fragmented church landscape with a failure to establish unity between Catholic and

Pentecostal churches circumscribes the ability to play a constructive role in conflict resolution, since churches are more affiliated and interwoven to local conflicts by religious and ethnic ties.

Academic writing on churches relation to anti-gay law debate in Uganda has been prevalent.[16] Alava is attributing a rising interest of scholarly work on homosexuality in Africa to "the simultaneous increase in activism by lesbian and gay rights groups on the one hand, and the intense Pentecostalisation of African public spheres on the other" (2017, p3). Although Alava problematizes the silence of Northern Uganda churches on the topic of homosexuality, she also mentions how "the Catholic Church has created a pervasive narrative of peace, forgiveness and unity in Northern Uganda – a theological narrative which emphasizes the humanness of all human beings, regardless of ethnicity" (Ibid., p16). There can however also be a negative side effect from the peace narrative of religious leaders. When peace is prioritised over justice, the state's silencing of opposition leaders is somehow accepted due to the fear of violent outbreaks (Alava and Ssentongo, 2016).

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[16] See Alava (2017) for a research summary on anti-gay law debate in Uganda.

# 4. Theoretical perspectives

In this chapter, the theoretical perspectives are presented. These perspectives were derived from the literature review and were chosen for their ability to inform the analysis from three different angles. The first perspective present relevant insight on atrocity prevention, the second perspective will help gain an understanding of involvement of religious leaders, while the third perspective will give vital comprehension of human rights issues at stake. The theoretical perspectives are used for analysing the collected material and are applied mainly in the theoretical discussion of the results (Chapter 7). By discussing the results from the lens of theoretical perspectives, we will gain further comprehension of the involvement of religious leaders in atrocity prevention in Uganda.

## 4.1. Framework for Understanding the Prevention of Mass Atrocities

Stephen McLoughlin is critical of the commonly accepted concept of structural prevention, defined as "the identification and addressing of 'root causes'" (McLoughlin, 2014b, p408). McLoughlin's critique concerns the implicated idea that long-term root causes inevitably lead to outbreaks of violence. In fact there are many examples of countries with a high prevalence of root causes to mass atrocities, where violent outbreaks still haven't occurred. This leads McLoughlin to ask "what coping and support mechanisms exist – at a local and national level – to manage the risk of mass atrocities in societies?" (Ibid., p421). The other critique regarding structural prevention is the tendency of external diagnosis and prognosis. Just like the doctor identifies illness on patients and prescribe treatment, mainly international actors have decided what is counted as root causes and how to handle them. Local contexts and actors have thus been downgraded and structural prevention especially lacks the perspective of local sources of resilience. This paternal character of prevention, neglecting local context and how communities mitigate risk by managing diversity, is prevalent both in policymaking and research.

McLoughlin and his *Framework for Understanding the Prevention of Mass Atrocities* is extending the concept of structural prevention to not only manage risk factors, but to also build resilience in local communities. Resilience is defined as a society's ability to resist and recover from threat. Incorporating resilience into prevention means taking into consideration the capacity of local and national actors to develop strategies for mitigating risk, in states that are exposed for risk factors[17] (or root causes) of mass atrocities. These root causes of social, political and economic dimensions are mitigated "through strategies that foster social cohesion, good governance and relative economic strength" (Ibid., p427). In societies characterised by ethnic and religious diversity, identity-based division may be mitigated by a strong civil society that foster social cohesion. Resilience can be expressed through religious organisations, human rights groups, unions and other groups taking initiatives that promotes inclusive societies, address injustices or provides support to vulnerable people. Civil society may also foster resilience of political dimensions by promoting initiatives for good governance, just institutions and democratic systems with inclusive leadership that counter identity-based divisions. A functioning democracy with active opposition parties is considered as the strongest protective factor. The economic aspect of resilience is fostered by economic growth, trade openness and equal economic opportunities.

McLoughlin's contribution to the understanding of atrocity prevention is very useful in this study where we look at local nonstate actors. It will add reflection on the local initiatives relation to external actors in defining root causes and possibilities for prevention. The perspective of looking at both risk factors and mitigating factors will help in answering the questions of how religious leaders are involved, by giving a broad definition of atrocity prevention that also promotes local preventative initiatives that traditionally has not been connected to atrocity prevention.

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[17] For a list of risk factors for atrocity crimes, see Stephen Mcloughlin's contribution in section 1.1.

## 4.2. Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualisation

Brewer, Higgins and Teeney present a conceptual framework for theorizing the connection of religion and peacemaking in conflicts where religion is involved (Brewer et al., 2010). They point out that although peace is a central theme in all world faiths, the academic discussion has primarily focused on the connection of religion and violence. But religion can neither be seen as irrelevant, only considered as a risk factor for conflict and extremism, nor exclusively seen as a factor for promoting peace. Brewer et al.'s framework tries to add understanding of the ambiguous relationship between religion and peace, and by what mechanisms "religion transforms itself from a site of conflict into one of reconciliation" (Ibid., p1021). They argue that the relationship between religion and peacemaking must be understood "within a nexus of religion, civil society, and state relations" (Ibid., p1022). The impact of civil society, including religious actors, should not be romanticised, but instead analysed for greater comprehension of their ability to be involved in processes for positive peace.

Promoting positive peace is understood not only as limiting the use of violence, but also stimulating a just and equal society and to countering structural discrimination. The ability of religious actors to promote positive peace can also be understood from the ability of bonding or bridging social capital, the former promotes an exclusive solidarity while the latter encourages inclusive solidarity. The ability of bridging social capital is seen as essential for promoting positive peace and thus bringing social healing to societies by linking diverse groups together. The bonding capital of religion is in general very high while the bridging capital is considered to be less prevalent. To comprehend the ability of religious actors in bridging social capital, Brewer et al. proposes the distinction of four strategic social spheres of civil society: intellectual, institutional, market, and political spaces.

Intellectual spaces give room for rethinking conflicts and to envision peace. Alternative visions can be championed and crucial issues to be handled might be articulated. In institutional spaces, these alternative visions of peace are incarnated and the civil society groups can thus be role models of a healed society. Market spaces mobilize "cultural, social and material resources" from local and global networks in order to promote the visions of peace (Ibid., p1025). Political spaces are areas where civil society groups are involved directly or indirectly in peace negotiation or policy formation. It can concern both national arenas as well as international cooperation for promoting peace initiatives.

Religious actors need to occupy these spaces in order to advocate for positive peace. It is also crucial for the peacebuilding capacity of religious actors, to represent "trustworthiness, legitimacy and relationship-building skills with other civil society groups *outside* contested sacred spaces" (Ibid., p1033). This position of trustworthiness is especially problematic to achieve in cases where religion is playing a central part of the conflict, but by entering social spaces in civil society together with other peacemakers, religious actors may bring a faith factor to peacemaking.

This perspective can give insights and inform the analysis of the relations between religious leaders and other significant actors in society such as civil society or the state. The strategic social spaces will also be useful in analysing to what extent religious leaders are involved in atrocity prevention, as well as understanding what facilitators and barriers there are when it comes to occupying these spaces.

## 4.3. Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Conceptualisation

This section build on the article *Misperceptions of Freedom of Religion or Belief* by Heiner Bielefeldt which adds theoretical understanding of religion and basic human rights principles relevant to discuss in relation to the involvement of religious leaders in Uganda (2013). The right to freedom of religion is articulated under article 18 in both UDHR and ICCPR and it guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief. Article 18 (3) in ICCPR include limitations on the freedom to manifest religion when it is necessary in order to "protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others (United Nations General Assembly, 1966). Bielefeldt argues that the right is threatened regarding some fundamental human rights principles.

Religion is a matter of people's ultimate concern in life. The *freedom* of human beings is a consequence of their inherent dignity and a respect for their ability to find their own ways in life. But the reality is that state policies often restrict human beings from free choice, communication and practice. State imposed interreligious harmony can be a barrier to freedom of religion. Often it can be

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motivated by its peacekeeping functions, but restrictions to non-coercive efforts to promote one's faith and to persuade people to adopt that faith, is a violation of the freedom of human beings to change religion or belief. The freedom of religion and belief is meant to protect the freedom of human beings and not to protect religions from criticism.

A threat to the *universal* character of freedom of religion and belief, is restriction of religious diversity by using narrow definitions of accepted religions. Bielefeldt argues that "a human rights approach to freedom of religion or belief must start with respecting the self-understanding of human beings in this field" and states that a broad understanding[18] is necessary to acknowledge the diversity of individuals (Ibid., p37).

The principles of *equality* and *non-discrimination* directly follows from the idea of inherent dignity for all human beings. Equality, together with freedom, is fundamental to the human rights concept. Equality is not in conflict with diversity, instead, a pluralistic society is a prerequisite for a society characterised by freedom and equality. Non-discrimination is equality in practice and requires the additional policies of state neutrality, political secularism and the mechanism of reasonable accommodation. In order to guarantee freedom of religion for all, "the state should not identify itself with one particular religion or belief and, in this specific sense, should remain neutral" (Ibid., p52).

The *indivisibility* of rights is imperative for a holistic human rights agenda and conflicts between different rights must be examined and monitored. Freedom of expression is sometimes considered as conflicting the freedom of religion, by giving room for defamation of religions or by blaspheming laws. But Bielefeldt argues that hate speech should not primarily be restricted, but instead be countered with alternative speech. Freedom of religion and belief can in fact only develop in societies with freedom of expression, and freedom of expression is dependent on the freedom of thought. Gender equality is another possible area of conflict in relation to freedom of religion. But the fact that women may suffer from discrimination in religious communities does not imply an inevitable opposition to religious customs, otherwise multiple forms of discrimination may face women in the intersection of religion and gender. LGBTQ rights may also meet opposition by religious actors. Even if people have the right to express their religiously motivated perspectives on sexual orientation and family life, freedom of religion cannot legitimize the denial of LGBTQ rights or promoting discriminatory legislation. But the internal autonomy of religious institutions should be respected, and "the prohibition of coercing anyone to actively participate in practices that are in opposition to their deep, personal convictions must also be strictly observed in the application of non-discrimination agendas" (Ibid., p66).

Bielefeldt concludes that a holistic understanding of human rights has to be defended even in times when there is serious conflict between different freedom of religion and other human rights claims. It is also imperative that religious communities accept that the benefits of freedom of religion and belief can be equally claimed by other groups of society. The fear of diversity is a real threat for peaceful societies, but the understanding of human dignity is a possible starting point in the quest for a consensus on issues of people's ultimate concern.

This final theoretical perspective will give a distinct human rights perspective to the analysis of religious leaders' involvement in atrocity prevention. Bielefeldt's perspective will be relevant in understanding conflicts between different rights and different groups in society.

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[18] This goes in line with *General Comment No. 22: The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Art. 18)*, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (20 July 1993)

# 5. Method

This chapter will present methodological discussions and methods used in the study. It will begin by presenting the lifeworld approach which informed the choice of method in terms of data collection and analysis. The chapter also contain sections for discussing ethical considerations as well as questions on source criticism, objectivity, reliability and validity.

## 5.1. A Lifeworld Approach

In the quest of exploring how religious leaders are involved in atrocity prevention and the possibilities for increased involvement, this study takes a lifeworld approach. The lifeworld perspective is a central concept within phenomenology and intends to understand the participants' experiences and to interpret the meaning attached to them. This includes the assumption that "the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p30). In order to involve religious leaders in atrocity prevention, we have to gain understanding of the leaders' situation. Jan Bengtsson defines the lifeworld as being "everything that is possible to experience and do for a particular individual /.../ the lifeworld is neither an objective world in itself, nor a subjective world, but something in between" (2013, p6).

The lifeworld approach is an explorative approach where we want to research new worlds, and this demands creativity in the choice of method (Ibid.). Qualitative methods are more suitable in contextualized phenomena as in the case of involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention in Uganda (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Since atrocity prevention can take many different forms and are difficult to observe in a specific situation, observation was not an alternative for this limited study. Instead, the study used semi-structured interviews, which is suitable for clarification of the subject's experience and to provide knowledge of perceptions and attitudes (Ibid.).

The study examined possibilities for involving religious leaders, by searching for facilitators and barriers. With a lifeworld approach, these barriers and facilitators are neither objective nor subjective, but are seen as the meaning and value that leaders experience and express through their lives. Meaning interpretation requires the interpreter to be knowledgeable and having sensitivity toward the interview topic. This pre-understanding is necessary for the lifeworld research, but it can "never [be] the same as already understanding it in advance (Bengtsson, 2013, p8).

A criticism of this method could be that there may be discrepancies between what the religious leaders say and how they actually act, or between their inner attitudes and the values they present in the interviews. People are more likely to describe an ideal of their work and might be unaware of what they actually do (Ibid.). This risk was mitigated by an awareness in the interview situation as well as by searching for specific examples and experiences from the respondent's everyday world. Combining interviews with observations would also give a richer material on this matter, but as I have stated above, it was not possible for this study.

## 5.2. Data Collection

During eight weeks of field study in Uganda during March and April 2019, data was collected by twelve semi-structured lifeworld interviews according to Kvale & Brinkmann (2015). Interviews were conducted with religious leaders from four different denominations (4 Anglican, 4 Pentecostal, 2 Catholic, and 2 Muslim respondents). Participants included representatives at the national level of each denomination but also leaders of local congregations in Kampala as well as in the Lamwo district in northern Uganda. This selection was decided strategically in order to explore the topic from various aspects of religious leadership (Bengtsson, 2013). The four most common faith denominations in Uganda were examined, and the different contexts of urban Kampala in the South and the rural Lamwo in the North also makes sure that different perspectives within the denominations were explored.

Participants that matched the selection were sought by contacting national administration and leadership of each denomination. With this procedure, there was a risk that national administration

would promote participants who shared their view on the matter. I was aware of this risk and tried to mitigate it by seeking various and opposite opinions in the dialogue with other leaders. It should also be noted that the leaders who accepted to be interviewed thereby showed an initial interest for the research subject. There were leaders who declined an interview and cases where there didn't seem to be enough interest for the research matter. In that way, it is probable that those leaders who were interviewed in the study also are more interested in the topic of peace and preventing atrocities than the average religious leader. It is also worth noting that some of the leaders at national level also worked directly with issues of concern in this study through umbrella organisations such as the UJCC and IRC. In one of the interviews there were two respondents, including one representative from the UJCC. Even if these organisations were not of major concern in the study, these perspectives added some extra insight. For an overview of the participants, see table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Participants

| Participant | Denomination/Organisation | Leadership/Setting |
|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | Anglican | National level |
| Respondent 2 | Anglican | National level |
| Respondent 3 | Pentecostal | National level |
| Respondent 4 | Catholic/UJCC | National level |
| Respondent 5 | Anglican | Local/Urban |
| Respondent 6 | Catholic | Local/Urban |
| Respondent 7 | Pentecostal | Local/Urban |
| Respondent 8 | Pentecostal | Local/Rural |
| Respondent 9 | Pentecostal | Local/Rural |
| Respondent 10 | Anglican | Local/Rural |
| Respondent 11 | Muslim | Local/Rural |
| Respondent 12 | Muslim/IRC | National level |

Altogether twelve in-depth interviews were conducted, one with each of the participants, lasting between 28 and 68 minutes. The interviews took place mainly in the leader's office or at their home. Some of them took place in neutral places such as a café or at a guest house. One of the interviews was dependent on an interpreter, the others were conducted directly in English. Language barriers were not perceived to affect the interviews, except for the one dependent on interpretation, even if some of the informants sometimes had to make an effort in order to find the right words since English was not always their first language.

Before the beginning of the interviews, a presentation of the study purpose and method was given together with information regarding confidentiality and audio recording. Each participant received and signed a document for informed consent (Appendix 1). The semi-structured lifeworld interview is less strict and can be regarded as an engaged conversation. An interview guide (Appendix 2) was used consisting of introductory, thematic, probing and summarizing questions. Open-ended questions were used derived from the research questions, literature review and also inspired by the thematic recommendations for involving religious leaders presented in the Plan of Action.

The interviews sought understanding of the meaning of central themes of the respondents' lifeworld by encouraging descriptive and specific expositions. Meaning was sought by openness as a "deliberate naiveté" and by trying to obtain precise and nuanced descriptions of specific situations and events instead of seeking general opinions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). This was done by interpreting and seeking confirmation or disconfirmation in dialogue with the respondent. The explorative character meant that focus was on the parts that turned out to be most relevant for the respondent and therefore not all questions were included in each interview. This way, the interviews focused on certain themes without directing toward specific opinions. This approach means that the concepts used in this study might not be known by the leaders and therefore not explicitly mentioned

in the interviews, but the meanings obtained from the interview material was further analysed and discussed through the theoretical perspectives.

## 5.3. Data Analysis

The method of choice for analysing the material was thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke (2006), following their six phases of analysis (see table 2). Thematic analysis is described as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p87). Thematic analysis was chosen for its ability to generate themes by a theoretically flexible approach, but with clear and distinct guidelines for how to conduct analysis. It suits the data generated in this study with an explorative lifeworld approach where the theoretical perspectives were considered in the final phase of analysis.

**Table 2.** Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p87).

| Phase | | Description of the process |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Familiarising yourself with your data | Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas |
| 2 | Generating initial codes | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code |
| 3 | Searching for themes | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme |
| 4 | Reviewing themes | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis |
| 5 | Defining and naming themes | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme |
| 6 | Producing the report | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis |

The recorded interviews were listened to several times and most of the material was transcribed word for word. That meant that a majority of the content was fully transcribed while parts that was considered as irrelevant for this study were summarised. The analysis of the empirical data can be described as a nonlinear and iterative process. Interesting features of the data were searched, coded and condensed until key themes and sub-themes emerged. Meaning was derived from explicit statements as well as by interpreting the manifest content in order to find a latent meaning in the text. Coding of themes was primarily data-driven and not theory-driven, but the research questions was considered in order to framing and naming the themes in the categories of facilitators and barriers.

The data was analysed from three contexts of interpretation by increasing the level of abstraction from the participant's own descriptions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The first context is self-understanding and this means generating initial codes from the informant's self-understanding. The second context of interpretation is a critical common-sense understanding and extends beyond the self-understanding to interpret the meaning of their statements. The third context, theoretical understanding, includes theoretical perspectives for interpreting the meaning of the participants' statements. The presentation of the data analysis will include one chapter with results (Chapter 6), presenting the themes and sub-themes that emerged following the two first contexts of interpretation. The results chapter will include extracts to clarify and validate the themes but will have limited references to theory. The second part of presenting the data analysis contain a discussion (Chapter 7) of the material derived from the third context of interpretation, which included the three theoretical perspectives in the analysis.

## 5.4. Ethical Considerations

The study involved individuals and there are ethical considerations that need to be addressed. For this purpose, the study considered the principles of *Good research practice* by Vetenskapsrådet, including the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality (2017). Interviews were also conducted according to the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (UNCST, 2014). The participants were prior to the interview informed verbally and in writing about the study, about confidentiality, the right not to answer specific questions and that they could quit the interview at any time. They signed the informed consent form (Appendix 1) according to UNCST National Guidelines for Research involving Humans as Research Participants. All data is kept confidential and stored in a de-identified form. No names are used in the presentation. Still, several people were involved in selection of interviewees and therefor total anonymity cannot be offered. However, there are no obvious risks or negative consequences related to participating in the interviews.

A comfortable interview setting was promoted by the dialogical interview character. For this purpose, it was an advantage that the researcher in this case also was a religious leader himself, and could promote a sense of understanding. Also, the fact that the religious leaders can be considered as elites in their community and that the interviews were conducted at their "home ground", usually their office or home, could also contribute to counteract the power asymmetry of the interview situation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015).

## 5.5. Discussion on Source Criticism, Objectivity, Reliability and Validity

The principles of *source criticism* have been applied for the various kinds of sources applied in this study, including academic writings, official documents and reports, journalistic articles, various internet sources as well as the interview material. The method of source analysis include the four criteria regarding time, dependence, authenticity and bias (Leth and Thurén, 2000). Leth & Thurén also raise awareness of how different worldviews somewhat makes sources biased. This perspective is important for this study since sources from different cultures with different worldviews are reviewed. Critical assessment of a source is with this perspective including an attempt to determine the world-view from which it comes and how it might affect the presented material (Ibid., 2000).

It is also of importance to consider my own role as a researcher in order to strive for a *reflexive objectivity* in relation to the production of knowledge (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Kvale & Brinkmann raises awareness of how ties to groups in subject for the research risk to affect the researcher by closely identifying with the participants. For mitigating this risk it is important to remain at a professional distance and not "going native" by only reporting from the participants perspectives (Ibid., 2015). For me as a religious leader myself, a Pentecostal pastor in Sweden, it was important to reflect regarding my own role in the research. First, I consider my own background and understanding as an asset for the research subject. An understanding of theology, faith and religion is fundamental when relating to and trying to understand religious leaders. My background, including previous experiences of living in central Africa and interviewing of religious leaders in DRC[19] was also an asset for relating to the participants, by promoting a sense of understanding and dialogue in the interview setting. The method with maximal openness in questions and adopting a "deliberate naiveté" helped me to be aware of my own position and preunderstanding. For remaining a critical perspective and not identifying too close to the participants, it is important to have an awareness also in the analysis and presentation of the material. For this purpose, the three contexts of interpretation presented under data analysis were also helpful.

Generalization is not possible in explorative lifeworld studies due to the insufficient number of participants (Bengtsson, 2013). In regard to reliability and validity, this study follows the argumentation of Kvale & Brinkmann by relating the concepts to qualitative interview research (2015). *Reliability* is considered to have both methodological and moral aspects by which the trustworthiness

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[19] In 2011 I conducted the study "Pastor at War", consisting of interviews with Pentecostal pastors in Eastern DRC regarding their experiences of pastoring at times of armed conflicts.

of the research is reflected upon. One way to promote high reliability is by avoiding leading questions in the interviews and to let the respondents clarify and deepen their answers by follow up questions. This is also reflected by the choice of presenting the results of the interviews in a separate chapter, and presenting the theoretical interpretations in the discussion chapter. *Validity* is understood as "quality of craftsmanship" which implement validation as a quality control in all the stages of the research and not only towards the end product. This include having a valid research design and methods responding to the aim of the study, validating during the interviews, validating the logics of interpretation during analysing, and finally in regard to how the final report presents the main findings of the study.

# 6. Results

In this chapter I will present the results from the thematic analysis. Three main themes with respective sub-themes were derived from the material. The first theme gives an understanding of the various kinds of conflicts on different levels that religious leaders are related to. The two other main themes presents facilitators and barriers for involving religious leaders in activities for atrocity prevention. Extracts will be used to clarify and illustrate the themes, the anonymised material will be referred to as interview 1-12. A thematic presentation is applied since the leaders' narratives were surprisingly homogeneous. The results will paint a shared picture of how religious leaders in Uganda experienced the topic, but important differences will also be presented where they have occurred.

The results will be further analysed and discussed in relation to the theoretical perspectives in the next chapter.

## 6.1. Character of conflicts

To answer the first research question regarding how religious leaders in Uganda are involved in atrocity prevention, I will begin by presenting some of the leaders' experiences. During the interviews, it became evident that religious leaders relates to conflicts of different characters and on various levels. The specific leader's personal experience and descriptions could of course differ depending on their own position. National level leadership did to a greater extent relate to and share experiences of large-scale conflicts of national or regional character. They also had experiences of relating to international community and donors for handling conflicts. Leaders of local congregations did to a larger extent relate to micro-level conflicts and expressed a stronger connection with the grass roots of society. Leaders of urban congregations related to issues of cultural division with a rapidly changing and messy context in urban settlements, while leaders in rural Lamwo district related to a culturally more homogenous situation but with conflicts toward external groups such as refugees. There is a tendency that religious leaders of local congregations are less interested or capable than national level leaders to think from a wider societal perspective and to take preventative actions in the wider community. Local leaders tend to focus more on their local congregation and their local challenges. A strength in this local perspective is that they to a larger extent tend to identify with especially vulnerable groups.

### 6.1.1. Socio-Political challenges

Socio-political challenges are here defined as various factors of social and political life that creates challenges and tensions in society. One of the recurring themes in the interviews is the experience of cultural division. Cultural division is related to the ethnic plurality of Uganda, but it also includes groups of other nationalities living in the country. The respondents gave examples which related to group identity, language barriers and specific cultural customs. One example of the latter concerned the cattle rustling of the Karamajong people; they believe that all cows belongs to them, and that other groups therefore holds them illegally.

Examples were given regarding how cultural division made it impossible to have fellowship together at church, it could affect relationship between students at school, and communication between different groups broke down since one group despised the language of another group. It was also described how tribal conflicts in surrounding countries have been transferred to Uganda by refugees. Conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi and DRC affected migrant communities in Uganda and migrants from South Sudan and Rwanda could be met with hostility due to historic experiences of violence toward Ugandans.

One respondent described how strong social ties at the local village level is limiting the number of serious conflicts. But the context is rapidly changing fuelled by migration. Erected refugee camps are transforming the conditions for rural communities in northern Uganda and migration is making urban settlements even more pluralistic. Cultural differences create a growing tension between different

groups. Whether it is formed by refugee crises, urbanisation or globalisation, religious leaders in Uganda are relating to multiple kinds of cultural division between people.

The leaders also described how ethnic and other socio-political causes often are intertwined in forming division between groups. Poverty is considered as a risk factor and especially unemployment among youth tends to turn into despair and violent outbreaks. Other aspects that creates tension and possibly violence is the generational gap and unwillingness of older leadership to step aside and make room for the next generation. This generational division are present both in religious and political leadership. Some leaders also mentioned experiences of how the young generation more often uses social media to create attention for political issues with the risk of the disseminating false or inciting messages. Conflicts and inciting messages are increased in periods of political campaigns. One respondent described how many underlying differences may affect election violence.

> *Such instances are there, probably at times on an ethnic basis. For various reasons, these political circumstances are sparked off by those underlying differences. We find people, communities, having problems with land. And then people look for an opportunity, time to act violently. At times they are silent but waiting for an opportune time to spark off violence. Yes, such instances has been there time to time. Most especially during the election times. (Interview 4, 2019)*

On a question regarding experiences of conflicts and incitement to violence, the respondent explained how ethnicity and land conflicts among other factors may be underlying causes for election violence. Low confidence in political and judicial systems is also mentioned. Another respondent mentioned how political tension is present between different regions in the country. Experience of disadvantage in issues of development and representation at significant political posts are seen as risk factors for violence.

The leaders described that they often are involved in mediation and conflict resolution when it comes to conflicts at both national, regional and local levels. They are also frequently consulted in conflicts of personal[20] character at the local community level. Even if these issues are far from large scale violent conflicts and atrocity crimes, this shows how religious leaders in Uganda are involved and influential at various levels, from grass roots to national issues. Religious leaders expressed how people often have higher trust in their ability to handle the issues than they have toward other institutions of society, such as police or judicial systems.

The leaders express a desire to counter these various socio-political challenges, a willingness to respond to societal challenges of distrust and risk factors for atrocity crimes. Even if they in general don't express it in terms of atrocity prevention, they are involved in local level conflicts that risk evolve into large scale violence. This involvement is seen as a natural part of their role as religious leaders.

### 6.1.2. Religious division

The respondents also shared experiences of religious division. Some of the examples are inter-faith division while others can be categorised as intra-faith division. But the dividing lines between antagonistic groups may also be dependent on several other identity markers interwoven with each other. One example of how political and religious division may work together is related to the rebel movement ADF. Religious hate speech was disseminated by a political rebel movement striving for a Muslim leadership in the country.

One respondent answered a question regarding tension between groups by sharing a recent example of religious division and how the young generation often is involved in these instances.

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[20] Personal conflicts that religious leaders handle concern for example land disputes between families, gender-based violence, mediation between spouses, or issues related to alcohol abuse.

*Yeah, actually this last month I was in northern Uganda and was training a team of people. And the bishop in that area was attacked, his car was stoned by Muslims, who he had... Because he had, I think he had been talking things they did not want to hear. /.../ He says he was driving with his car with his driver and then some motorbike passed by them very fast. And it was a road with a lot of dust, so the guys hide in front of him. And they had threatened him previously on radio somehow and they threw a stone and his windscreen was smashed. So they had to drive on of course, afraid that they... Well I think there is a lot of hate. And that is also a concern for me who works with young people, I think it is nurtured from the young people, because these was not old people throwing stones. (Interview 2, 2019)*

Tension between groups is nurtured among the younger generations. This leader, who works primarily with young people, also shared an experience he heard from Christian pupils whose teacher in a dominantly Muslim school regularly said things that was defamatory against Christians. The religious division in Uganda is nurtured by a culture of confronting each other, especially between Christians and Muslims.

Religious leaders may face religious division in various ways. Some of them are working actively in reducing tension. The respondents in this study also gave examples of how religious leaders may spark the tension by insensitive communication. Even others shared experiences of being targeted themselves. Often, it is the minority group in a certain area that have experiences of being targeted with derogatory or hateful messages. A Pentecostal leader in northern Uganda gave an example of the latter when especially Catholics were warning people for relating to the Pentecostals and naming them as coming from under water. The leader described how the "under water" concept is a description of being occult or demonised and used in order to disparage the Pentecostals. A Muslim leader mentions that they are used to being targeted with negative speeches: "Christians talking about Muslims in a negative way? That is normal. That is normal. I have heard it, to me it is normal." (Interview 12, 2019). Another Muslim leader gave an example of inciting or negative speeches that are addressed to the Muslim community over the radio. Non-Muslims can point out Muslims as being terrorists, connecting them with Al-Shabaab, the Somali Muslim extremists who have carried out actions of terrorism in Ugandan neighbour Kenya. "Someone can say that when he sees a Muslim, he is 'Al-Shabaab'. But we say, anyone can become Al-Shabaab, because not all Muslims are Al-Shabaab." (Interview 11, 2019)

Religious leaders can be a source of hateful and inciting words. As we have seen in previous chapters, preventing incitement to violence is an important aspect of atrocity prevention. Religious leaders have a platform that can be used to disseminate dangerous speech or to counter it. This aspect seems to be highly relevant in Uganda today and the following sections will present facilitators and barriers for the involvement of religious leaders in preventative actions.

## 6.2. Facilitators for involving religious leaders

### 6.2.1. Theology of human dignity

A major driver for religious leaders' involvement in issues of atrocity prevention is a theology for human dignity based on a common origin for human beings. The idea of all men being created by God is seen as a basis for unity and equality of all people. Faith is described as a motivation to act out of love to help others. One leader referred to this oneness of peoples of different nationalities on a question regarding how he related to South Sudanese refugees. The local population considered the refugees to be primitive, but the Pastor described how their divine origin is uniting them and should affect relations to the refugees.

*What I as a pastor say is that God created man. God created man out of one person, from Adam. So if we are one, we are the children of God. /.../ We are one, we should not say that these people are bad people. (Interview 8, 2019)*

Leaders from different denominations, both Christian and Muslim, motivated peaceful actions by relating to the common origin in God. A Muslim leader related his actions of promoting peace to be in line with the heart of God, and emphasised that both the Koran and the Bible encourages to not quarrel and fight one another. Even if faith can bring division between religious groups or toward other groups of society, many leaders distinctly said that they seek unity also in relation to people of other faiths than their own. This unity can be driven out of faith, such as relating to common origin as we have seen, or for example to the words of Jesus to love your enemy as yourself. Sexual minorities are not considered to be living according to the will of God, but even if Uganda has been known for hostile attitudes toward LGBTQ people, many of the leaders expressed an attitude where faith can be a driver for respectful behaviour toward these people.

> *We are not judging them, we are not judging them, only we are showing them it is*
> *not biblical. We are not insulting them, we are not judging them. We are not*
> *chasing them from the community, no. Because they are God's creatures.*
> *(Interview 3, 2019)*

A theology of human dignity is a facilitator, a possible driver for religious leaders to promote peace and to prevent atrocities. Involvement of religious leaders in atrocity prevention should include consideration of how to strengthen this theological aspect.

### 6.2.2. Mission and mandate

From the interviews, it also becomes evident that the possibility to involve religious leaders as agents of change toward peaceful communities can be increased by their self-understanding of having a divine mission and mandate. This self-understanding makes it possible for them to be bold in risky situations. When one of the respondents was asked of drivers for getting involved in mediation and reconciliation, he states that Christ has given him a mandate as an ambassador of peace. Even if he sees risks in confronting the wrongdoers, the same respondent described how the prophets of the Bible might serve as role models for speaking the truth also in times of danger.

> *You read it in the Bible, you have heard about the Jeremiahs, the Isaiahs, those*
> *people. The prophets of the olden days. Because of the truth they preached, they*
> *suffered it. So let us also be ready to take the risk. People here have taken the risk.*
> *Janani Luwom took the risk when that government of that time were very brutal on*
> *its citizens, killing them. And Janani stood up and said, now if you kill all of them,*
> *whom will you lead? And he earned his life for those words. So we need to be there,*
> *we need to stand whether the world will want it or not, because we know where we*
> *are going. (Interview 1, 2019)*

Biblical prophets and other religious leaders, such as the former Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwom who was killed by the Idi Amin regime, can serve as motivating examples of being faithful to their divine mandate even to the point of being killed. A Catholic priest described in a similar way how he has been able to criticise the government and promote free democratic elections even though he has experienced pressure from political leaders to not get involved in politics: "It's a risking, but if I'm a priest, I am not going to say no, I am bold enough to go." (Interview 6, 2019).

The divine mandate and mission is however not something that only is present in the self-understanding of religious leaders. As we have seen, religious leaders are highly respected and influential in the Ugandan context. This understanding of religious leaders owning a moral agency in society was also present as an important theme in the interviews. The leaders described how they often, especially in rural areas, are preferred as contacts before the police when there are conflicts or issues of justice.

The leaders communicate directly with their followers through for example preaching. One of the leaders explained how he, through preaching, had been able to unite conflicting migrant groups from Burundi, Rwanda and DRC. The leaders are expected to raise their voices in times of conflict or

resentments, both in local and national conflicts. Respondents also mentioned how they as leaders are given platforms to speak to audiences at community functions, such as funerals, weddings, graduations and other gatherings. In those settings the leaders are able to confront issues that threaten peace in the society, such as hateful speech against a certain group.

The religious leaders in Uganda hold a divine mission and mandate, both in their own view as well as in their followers' views. This societal position is certainly a facilitator for involving the leaders in preventing atrocities and their self-understanding can drive them to also take personal risks for the greater cause. There is an awareness among the respondents that their moral agency also includes a certain responsibility in how they communicate and act. Great mandate also means great responsibility and the leaders pointed out that education and knowledge is crucial in order to act with restraint.

### 6.2.3. Holistic peacebuilding

The leaders expressed how they are involved in various initiatives that can be defined as holistic peacebuilding. This means involvement in conflict resolution but also in initiatives for societal development and in spiritual transformation. Many of these initiatives can be included in Brewer et al.'s definition of promoting positive peace; to not just limit the use of violence, but to also stimulate a just and equal society and to counter structural discrimination. Religious institutions in the country have a long tradition of this. The respondents mentioned various long-term developmental initiatives such as giving vocational training to young people, literacy projects, HIV and AIDS programming, women empowerment and other educational initiatives. The economic development of the country, with increasing inequalities between rich and poor, is a factor that creates division. The leaders gave examples of how religious institutions equip these people for reasonable work as self-starters. They are also running peace initiatives that educates and brings understanding of cultural differences between different groups. Programs are given to build capacities of local communities in how to handle disagreements. Materials are produced and distributed to schools while teachers are educated in how to raise these issues among the students. Many of these holistic initiatives are however dependent on international donors for bringing resources and capacities. As we will see later, this often turns to a barrier for religious leaders from getting involved at higher levels.

The most explicit way that religious leaders are involved in atrocity prevention is through mediation and reconciliation. The leaders mentioned many different experiences of mediating in conflicts. Historical ones like when the current president Museveni was a rebel leader and involved in violent conflict with the sitting government. Other examples raised were the mediation with Kony in Gulu or between the Lango and Karamojong people. Even other examples are more recent, between the government and a local kingdom in Kasese or situations in Kampala. Sometimes the mediating initiatives take form from national networks organising religious leaders, other examples involve mainly local leadership who come together to solve conflicts.

When religious leaders are called to mediate in a conflict, they are also asked to pray for the situation. The leaders come with a spiritual understanding of conflicts. One of the respondents explained his experience of how prayer can play a transformative role when it comes to mediation.

> *Yes, we as pastors are doing the mediation, we mediate when people are quarrelling one another. First I say, ʻlet us start our program with a prayerʼ. When you start a program with a prayer, from that very moment, even if those people were not talking or they are sitting aside from one another, I see the power of prayer /…/ the prayer seem to bring the situation a little bit lower, this is what I witnessed. (Interview 8, 2019)*

Religious leaders can serve as neutral actors when the conflicts concern for example political and ethnic issues. Some examples of mediation concerned conflicts in other countries in the region, Sudan is mentioned but also one example in Burundi. In the case in Burundi, it was pivotal with the support

of an international organisation like Caritas. In many cases, the local peacebuilding initiatives are dependent on international donors, and again this turns out to also be a barrier.

Religious umbrella organisations and networking is another way in how religious leaders are continually involved in peacebuilding. One respondent who is involved in in the IRC, an organisation with the profile of being "religions for peace", expressed how they work holistic with a human rights perspective. He emphasized the need for interreligious bodies in order to bring peace and understanding between different religious groups.

> *We come together for a common good. We do interfaith dialogue, but interfaith dialogue and action. We see those things that can bring us together, like health, poverty eradication, then peace is our main goal, it is peace. We need to see our coexistence, as such as Christians and Muslims can live together. (Interview 12, 2019)*

Religious leaders bring a holistic perspective on peacebuilding. They are active in typical conflict resolution through mediating initiatives, but also in long-term peace and development programs, and they also bring a transformative faith in difficult situations. These activities can be understood as atrocity prevention by building local resilience. There seems to be possibilities and willingness to enlarge this role among religious leaders, but limited resources and dependence on international donors continues to be a barrier for possible initiatives.

### 6.2.4. Education

Education for religious leaders is considered as an important facilitator for involving religious leaders. The educational level varies and a major barrier is access to education. The leaders that had been able to study in higher education highlighted the importance of being educated in order to handle conflicts and identity-based division. One of the respondents explained how his experiences of studying at an interdenominational school of theology, made him more open to cooperate with leaders of other denominations. Building capacities by education and knowledge of other denominations can be a factor for stronger networks. Interfaith dialogue is often met with scepticism from ordinary believers, and increasing understanding of the concept is often required to be able to involve leaders.

A shifting religious context is a challenge related to education. Especially among the Pentecostal or Born Again, there is a problem with independent churches being established by people without theological training. One respondent explained how someone who lacks theological training may present personal interpretations of the Bible and putting his own meaning to verses without knowing the context, and through those messages cause resentments toward other groups.

Religious leaders also need to be educated in order to avoid or to prevent incitement to violence. One leader expressed this aspect by relating to the influence of faith leaders.

> *Faith leaders in this country actually have a big voice. They are always respected. /.../ So as a faith leader I think we all have to be very careful of what we say. And that's why I am saying that we need to be educated and knowledgeable of what we believe and what we actually should be careful to not say. And also we need to be cautious that we have a community following us, so our words are very important. (Interview 2, 2019)*

Theological training is needed but also knowledge of how to prevent incitement to violence, for example through distinguishing and countering dangerous speech and ideology. Even knowledge in other aspects of societal life is important. As we have seen, people often turn to religious leaders for guidance regarding conflict or when they have been exposed to criminal acts. People may have low knowledge of legal procedures and also a lack of trust toward police and judicial instances. The leaders also expressed a need of knowledge on the use of media. They had experienced misuse by people who disseminate hateful and inciting speeches, especially through social media.

Higher educational levels for religious leaders, with theological training and also knowledge of other aspects of societal life, is an important facilitator for religious leaders to be involved in atrocity prevention. This raises questions regarding who should provide the education and who can pay for it. To raise educational levels of religious leaders requires sponsors, there is not lack of interest of higher diplomas by religious leaders or Ugandans in general.

### 6.2.5. Networking

Networking between leaders, denominations or with international partners is seen as a facilitator for involving religious leaders. When it comes to spreading messages to prevent violence, examples were given of how networking organisations such as IRC or UJCC can equip leaders with capacity to coin and disseminate messages of peace through different media channels like radio stations. These organisations are also important for bringing different denominations together and creating spaces for dialogue.

Networking is also important within a certain denomination. When leaders have an opportunity to meet each other, they can avoid division and share experiences of current struggles in the local communities. This kind of networking is also an important opportunity for leaders at the local level to communicate with regional or national leadership. There is however a barrier for networking due to the lack of resources. Many religious leaders are not paid and they are lacking funds to travel. Even national and regional leadership have limited opportunities to travel and meet the local leadership. Isolation can thereby be a ground for breeding violent thoughts regarding other groups.

Mainstream denominations have a stronger developed organisation for networking relations. The Pentecostal leaders described a weaker structure and a more scattered landscape consisting of several different umbrella organisations. Even if the family of Pentecostal churches comprise a significant part of the Ugandan population, Pentecostal leaders are not involved in conflict mediation on high level conflicts to the same extent as the mainstream churches. One of the Pentecostal leaders related this to the need of organising networks.

> *Yes, now it is usual because Pentecostals are organised. It is not as before when we worked independently, but now we have learned to work together with other sister church organisations. (Interview 3, 2019)*

Stronger organisations and networking is considered a facilitator for involving religious leaders in peacebuilding. Examples were also given of networks in the Great Lakes region, binding denominations and religious leaders from different countries together. Many large-scale conflicts affect not only one specific country but also other countries in the region. Stronger ties between religious leaders may be an important mitigating factor in atrocity prevention.

## 6.3. Barriers for involving religious leaders

### 6.3.1. Poverty

The first barrier concern poverty. Poverty and despair risk to become a breeding ground for hatred, which makes individuals willing to take on any assignment for changing his situation. One respondent related poverty to the emergence of rebel or terrorist movements such as Al-Shabab.

> *People want to be rich, and they have been given money to join for example Al-Shabab. If you tell people you will give them money, you're going to look after their family, and many other things... come and join us! Because people are poor, being poor is a threat and it can bring about insecurity. (Interview 12, 2019)*

The leaders drew connections between poverty and conflict and expressed the need to help people to resist from joining violent groups. The youth is especially vulnerable and easily manipulated by anybody who can present themselves as a saviour.

The fact that religious leaders are highly respected and influential actors in society also makes them a target for political actors who tries to infiltrate by using money or gifts. Poverty and hope for a better life can make it difficult for religious leaders to resist corruption. One of the respondents described the risk of politicians buying the platforms of religious leaders, a more common problem among newly founded faith organisations.

> *Some of also the barriers and challenges we have are the politicians. Somehow, sometimes they infiltrate the communities by use of money. And we also have churches that do not have real base, in the sense that they are money-makers. Many small churches are upcoming every day. And then they are also used by politicians, so sometimes it is a bit challenging, very challenging. (Interview 4, 2019)*

Lack of organising structures with controlling and overseeing bodies is especially a challenge for the upcoming independent churches. Sometimes these independent churches are accused of being focused on prosperity, and all the assets of the church are assigned to the founding family. Mainstream denominations have to a larger extent developed protective structures.

Poverty is a barrier for involving religious leaders since it give room for letting economic opportunities negatively influence or silence the message. These aspects will be further developed below.

### 6.3.2. Politics

Religious leaders and actors face and recognize political barriers. As we have seen in the literature review, faith can sometimes be a barrier from forming peaceful societies by focusing too much on individual change or community change but not enough on political change and democratic development. Some leaders expressed how important it is that they as religious leaders stay out of politics, referring to elections and political power. Their main message in relation to politics, to focus on keeping peace and stability in the country, may result in political silence and restrict the process of democratisation.

But there are also examples given when religious leaders are considered to be too outspoken and are therefore confronted and offered gifts by government representatives in order to be silent. One of the respondents, a Catholic priest, told that a colleague who used to speak out and criticise the government was given money to study in Europe. When he came back he was instead supporting the government. The respondent had himself also been confronted in order to be silenced, but he described how his faith and divine mandate made it possible for him to resist.

> *- They say we are talking too much, what do they do? They give you what you need. You want a car? It's a gift. You don't have much money? It's a gift. So they are slowly but silently silencing the outspoken religious leaders. And everybody is aware of that.*
>
> *- Are they giving gifts to the leaders?*
>
> *- Faith leaders, yes. And therefore, somewhere to the end of the day, you will see that they are no longer speaking out. Because of they are silenced. And you wonder why, but if you study the situation, you know it is because of that kind of life. And I have been one of those outspoken people who has come out strongly to speak against. They have sent twice, people 'shut up, you stop talking, we give you money as much as you want, we shall take you to Europe and we will organise it'. No! As a religious leader I must speak on behalf for the marginalised. (Interview 6, 2019)*

The leader pointed out the divine mission, that Christ has given a mission to care for the poor and marginalised, as the reason to be able to reject the offer. Another of the respondents described how religious leaders are silenced when they criticise the government for corruption, but at the same time often are called whenever there is a conflict rising.

> *When they need us, when they need us to help them, they are the first one to run to us (laughing), when it comes to helping them. For example to bring peace when things go wrong, they are the ones to run to religious leaders. But when you talk about the bad they are doing, they say 'you are not good, you are not good people'. (Interview 12, 2019)*

The government seem to have an ambiguous relation to religious actors. They are dependent on their influence in some issues but they also try to limit their influence in other issues.

As we have seen above, faith and politics can have a fragile relationship. Faith leaders may be criticised or silenced for getting involved in politics, but there might also be a problem with an overemphasizing on peace and stability which in fact can silence democratic processes.

### 6.3.3. Ignorance

The leaders also expressed how ignorance can be a problem among leaders as well as their followers. Uneducated leaders may be less open for taking actions for peacebuilding and preventing atrocities, for example by resisting networking with leaders of other faiths than their own. The lack of education among the population is also a problem when ignorant leaders use religious platforms. If people are not well educated, they are probably not able to question the message. The ignorance gives room for hateful messages and ideas to be founded in the name of religion. One of the respondents highlighted this when he was asked to present barriers for peacebuilding and atrocity prevention.

> *Education is very important, education is the most important. Because if you are not educated, someone can come to you and tell you, for example you might be seated like 40 in a Mosque, someone comes and tells you, 'Islam tells you this and this and this, you have to fight these Christians, whenever you see a Christian you can cut of the head, if you cut of the head you are going to Jannah, you are going to paradise'. Someone comes and tells you such words, and tells you that's what Islam says. If you know, if you are knowledgeable, you say, you tell him, 'Where did you get this information from? Can you give me a verse in the Koran? Can you give me a hadith, and from where?' (Interview 12, 2019)*

The leader explained that ignorance give room for hateful and inciting speeches. Education, both among leaders and the population in general, is very important in order to respond to this challenge.

The interviews raised examples of division between adherents of the same faith family but also between different religions. Examples were given of how Muslim teachers accepts violence against non-Muslims, Christians calling Muslims for "Al-Shabab", Muslims calling Christians "unclean", Catholics accusing Pentecostals for being demonised, or Pentecostals accusing fellow Christians for not preaching the true gospel. Most of these religious divisions do not lead to violent acts and violence is most of the times not promoted by the leadership either. Nevertheless, there are examples of religious leaders playing a significant role in increasing division by hateful speeches. The religious leaders in this study often explained these negative aspects of faith as being examples of ignorant and selfish religion. The problem of selfish religion is also related to an unwillingness to cooperate with other faiths in order to promote peace.

Another barrier for involving religious leaders in promoting peace and preventing atrocities is the disinclination to defend people who advocates a lifestyle which goes against the values of the leaders' faith. This becomes most evident when it comes to sexual minorities. The leaders of this study did not express aversion towards this group in the interviews, but they were not always willing to recognise them as a vulnerable group. Instead the leaders related the presence of sexual minorities to foreign

influence, and the advocacy for the rights of sexual minorities was linked to economic contributions from Western countries.

> *In African countries, there are no homosexuals. Homosexuality comes from the*
> *Western countries. So there is no problem of homosexuality in our churches.*
> *(Interview 7, 2019)*

Ignorance is in different aspects a barrier for involving religious leaders in preventing mass atrocities. Ignorant leaders give room for selfish usage of religion, to hateful speeches and to unwillingness to cooperate with other groups or denominations.

### 6.3.4. Lack of resources

Another major barrier for involving religious leaders in building peace and preventing atrocities is the lack of resources. Resources are necessary for giving leaders basic theological training. Resources are needed for networking and building alliances between leaders of different faiths as well as within denominations. You need resources in order to disseminate messages through media for preventing incitement to violence. Resources are needed for building positive peace by meeting the needs of people, for running long-term peace and development programs.

There is also a struggle for local leaders to reach sites where they hear that division is arising. One of the respondents described how he can receive a phone call from a place five miles away but it is too costly to reach that kind of place, transportation is a barrier not least in rural areas. Another respondent explained how mediation in large scale conflicts demands a great deal of resources in order to start mediating.

> *Sometimes there is a situation where you need to move to a very bad area, a very*
> *tricky area. And then you have no possibilities to move to that area. For example*
> *what happened in Kasese, we had to get money, security, transport and many,*
> *many other facilities. If you fail, then you report to God, that's the only way.*
> *(Interview 12, 2019)*

From the example of a recent conflict in Kasese, the respondent expressed a barrier in finding the necessary resources for reaching the sites of violence and to start mediation between conflicting parties.

The lack of resources is a barrier for religious leaders to be involved in peacebuilding and atrocity prevention. They are dependent on international donors in many initiatives but there are barriers also in the international relationships that will be presented in the following section.

### 6.3.5. International relations

Relations to international actors are vital for religious actors to reach the next level of involvement in atrocity prevention, but the leaders in this study expressed an ambiguous relationship to international donors with negative experiences of disrespect regarding local values.

It is mainly the national level leadership that mention the possibilities and barriers regarding international relations to receive support for resources and capacity building. It is mentioned how the international organisations often come with a specific agenda and that they often do not relate to the needs as the religious leaders see them. The issues could concern what region of the country that is considered to have the greatest needs, but it could also concern what kind of initiatives that is needed. The leaders write proposals but have experienced struggles in receiving funds. One of the respondents told about a negative experience of donors coming with an agenda, without willingness to specify what the challenge concerned.

*I don't want to give an example but we have an experience. It's a bad experience. We have a very worst experience, with a certain donor. When we talked about our values as religious leaders. They say that if you talk about something, you are going to get problems and we are going to take all our resources. We said, it is ok, you can take our resources. But these are our values as religious leaders and as Africans. We said, ok, take the resources. And they took the resources. (Interview 12, 2019)*

The respondent expressed a lack of respect for the local values and the consequence of not being willing to adapt was a loss of resources. One area that may cause challenges concern gender equality. One leader mentioned that even if he was not against the idea of equality, he thought it sometimes was impossible to implement it in the way that international organisations specify the outcomes of a project, due to the local culture and setting. Another aspect that has become a barrier for international relations is when the rights of sexual minorities must be coded in the program planning.

*Sometimes their conditions keep on changing. For us, we are open, but sometimes they put in some little conditions. You must maybe be ready to maybe to deal, if I mention one of the few, transgender sex, whatever... And these are not things that you can carry on in some of our communities. We are just open to whoever comes, we don´t ask whether you are gay or lesbian, we just treat everybody. Because the message is for everybody. But if you code it, you make it difficult for us. You make us think the way you want to think. We are thinking differently, that we can help everybody. But you make it as a condition and we have to sign it, sometimes it becomes a bit difficult for us. /.../ I think it is totally lack of respect because in the beginning we had for instance missionaries, people from Europe, who came here and told us 'this is like this, this is like this'. For instance, if you were a teacher at school, you had to get married, that's what they brought us. Now after so many years, now you are bringing new norms, 'sorry that was a mistake, now this is the new norms that I have brought you'. As if we don't have minds ourselves (laughing). So I think that is a mistake, we need to learn each other, and find how we can balance. (Interview 4, 2019)*

Regarding the issue of how to relate to LGBTQ persons, the leaders expressed how they experience that their culture and values are questioned and not respected. The leader expressed a frustration over how the conditions from Western organisations keep on changing over time and that the international community does not respect the local ideas. There didn´t seem to be an equal relationship, the locals are expected to change their values according to the will of their international supporters. There is a lack of appreciation where the international organisations are not interested to know or to understand how and why the local community is valuing certain things. One leader explained how he was denied help from the American embassy due to this.

*I was caught by the American embassy. 'What about these people who are sexually harassed?' I said, for us, that is a taboo, we handle it quietly, you don't have to blow. If anybody goes, he is helped quietly. But we are not going to put as number one, promoting for the homosexuals, no. /.../ So I didn't get any help there. Because they were talking 'marginalised, marginalised', and I said yes, there are so many marginalised cases, but we pick only handful. As they say, you bite what you can chew, the English saying. (Interview 6, 2019)*

You bite what you can chew. When it comes to finding support from international organisations, the leaders expressed a lack of sensitivity and a pressure to relate to issues in a way that they do not feel comfortable in doing. This way, the dependency on support and ambiguous relationship becomes a barrier for involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention.

# 7. Discussion

In this chapter I will begin to discuss the results in relation to three theoretical perspectives that will deepen our understanding of the possibilities to involve religious leaders in atrocity prevention. After that, I will add some additional reflections on the results.

The first perspective is Stephen McLoughlin's *Framework for Understanding the Prevention of Mass Atrocities* (2014b). His criticism of structural prevention to favour external diagnosis and prognosis seems to be highly relevant also for discussing involvement of religious leaders. The leaders experience a lack of respect and lack of appreciation from international actors when it comes to discussing local needs and values. This study is not evaluating the choices made by international donors or the ability of religious leaders to take preventative actions, but we can point out that the ideas of involving local nonstate actors in atrocity prevention is not as easy in practice as it sounds in theory. Local actors and their understanding of the local context seems to be downgraded and the agenda of international actors is deciding what resource-demanding preventative initiatives that will be supported.

McLoughlin also points out the importance of strengthening local resilience for mitigating risk factors of social, political and economic dimensions. In this aspect we can see that religious leaders primarily stimulate resilience by fostering social cohesion. There are religious leaders who are mitigating identity-based division by promoting inclusive societies, addressing injustices and supporting vulnerable groups. A holistic perspective on peacebuilding can contribute to building local resilience. Factors of faith are important drivers for the leaders, both a theology of human dignity as well as an understanding of a divine mission and mandate. Education and networking are also seen as facilitators for these initiatives of holistic peacebuilding. There are however barriers that can weaken the ability to foster resilience. Poverty threatens to give space for political influence and ignorant leadership that weakens the theological clarity and moral leadership. Leaders may instead use religion for personal prosperity in a way that will deteriorate social cohesion. It can also give space for political forces to use religious platforms for their own interest or to the silencing of outspoken religious leaders. Lack of resources and frosty international relations is a barrier for the ability of religious actors to mediate in conflicts or promoting positive peace.

There are possibilities to also involve religious leaders in the areas of democracy and promoting equal economic opportunities, but these aspects of fostering resilience are less significant in the data collected by this study. Regarding economic development, other studies have shown that religious actors are important agents of change. Dena Freeman is claiming that Pentecostal churches has done more for development and poverty alleviation in Africa than all international aid organisations combined (2012). When it comes to promoting a democratic development and changing state policies, we have seen that the silencing of outspoken religious leaders is a barrier. There is also a risk that an over-emphasis on stability and peaceful elections before a strengthened democracy have negative effect on the leaders' ability to stimulate democratisation processes.

The second perspective to be considered is Brewer et al.'s conceptualisation of religion and peacemaking. Their perspective is helpful for understanding the possibility of involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention, especially for understanding "the nexus of religion, civil society, and state relations" (Brewer et al., 2010, p1022). In this aspect, Brewer et al. denotes the ability of bridging social capital as essential for stimulating positive peace and by that bringing social healing to societies characterised of identity-based division. This study show that there is room for this kind of inclusive solidarity among religious leaders who endorse a theology of human dignity. Inter-faith dialogue is one aspect of that, but there is resistance from what is described as ignorant or selfish religious leaders and adherents. Education and knowledge are important aspects of raising the ability of religious leaders in bridging social capital. Brewer et al. highlights the need of religious actors to represent "trustworthiness, legitimacy and relationship-building skills with other civil society groups *outside* contested sacred spaces" (Ibid., p1033). However, except for religious groups, civil society is

not very strong in Uganda and the religious leaders in this study gave few references to non-religious civil society groups. This affects the discussion of the four strategic social spaces of civil society which Brewer et al. see as crucial for advocating positive peace.

The intellectual spaces where religious leaders envision peace, are primarily in inter-faith dialogue and intra-faith networking. But the greater vision of peace is also fostered in the respective religious communities by progressive leaders who preach messages of unity and common origin. The local religious communities can also serve as institutional spaces where inclusivity is practised by gathering and uniting people of different ethnicity, nationality and other identity markers. There is however a risk that these spaces are bonding rather than bridging social capital. Market spaces are mainly in areas of networking and especially international relations where resources are negotiated in order to promote positive peace. It is worth noting that the tension between what is labelled as Western and African values, might imply that religious leaders who is approaching a Western understanding for gaining resources, might at the same time lose significance and be questioned in national social spaces. Religious leaders are lastly also involved in political spaces by negotiation of peace settlements and mediation in conflicts. But as we have noted, there is a need to enlarge these strategic social spaces to also involve a greater web of civil society actors. The fact that religious actors remain the strongest actors in Ugandan civil society (Jordhus-Lier and Braathen, 2013) makes inter-faith mobilisation instrumental for preventing atrocities.

The final theoretical perspective to be discussed is Heiner Bielefeldt's conceptualisation of freedom of religion and belief (2013). Bielefeldt present threats toward four basic human rights principles; universalism, freedom, principles of equality and non-discrimination, and the indivisibility of rights. This study has not related to limitations of the universality of freedom of religion or belief, but it can be useful to remind that the right of human beings to hold opinions regarding sexual morality remain strong. But it is also relevant to remind that universalism concerns all rights, including the rights of sexual minorities. Freedom of religion is neither supposed to protect religions or religious people from criticism but includes both freedom to promote and to problematize religion. It is however important to keep protecting the freedom of religion, even in variants that can be considered as ignorant religion. Limiting the freedom of human beings may in fact be counterproductive and instead breed hatred.

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are according to Bielefeldt directly related to the idea of inherent dignity for all human beings. When religious leaders hold a theology of human dignity, there should be room for diversity. However, it is doubtful that religious leaders in Uganda would promote political secularism and reasonable accommodation might be seen as applicable on other religions, but it is questionable if sexual minority groups would be considered. At this point, we have to reflect on the indivisibility of rights. Where goes the line between the freedom of proclaiming your religious opinions and to discriminate other groups? Bielefeldt is on this matter arguing that hate speech should not primarily be restricted, but instead be countered with alternative speech. With the help of for example Leader Maynard & Benesch's model for discerning dangerous speech and ideology, it is possible to define when hateful speech actually turns into dangerous speech. The concept of freedom is dependent on both freedom of expression and freedom of belief. LGBTQ rights are facing opposition by religious actors, but how should that be handled? Even if people have the right to express their religiously motivated perspectives on sexual orientation and family life, freedom of religion cannot legitimize the denial of LGBTQ rights or promotion of discriminatory legislation. At the other hand, the internal autonomy of religious institutions should be respected, and "the prohibition of coercing anyone to actively participate in practices that are in opposition to their deep, personal convictions must also be strictly observed in the application of non-discrimination agendas" (Bielefeldt, 2013, p66).

Is it possible to find a middle way here, in the relationship between religious leaders and international organisations and donor countries? If there is a willingness, it should be possible to find a way forward. It might be a possibility if religious leaders could avoid denying LGBTQ rights, and the international partners at the same time avoided setting conditions for their support of involving religious leaders that are against the religious leaders' deep, personal convictions. After all,

cooperation does not have to mean consensus. Religious leaders have already showed that by cooperating with each other in preventing violence, even if they at the same time are propagating for opposing ideas of how to understand and live this life. Different faiths, different ideologies, but a common humanity.

Another issue in donor relationships could relate to the need of theological training, even if this was not mentioned in the material. In Sweden, state sponsoring of confessional education is always debated and often there are huge barriers for seeking funding from secular states for religious education. But what if theological education is seen as a facilitator for preventing atrocity crimes? And if international donors to a higher degree would sponsor local theological education, what would their agenda be when it comes to forming the curriculum?

If we turn back to the first research question, how religious leaders are involved in atrocity prevention, this study has showed that religious leaders are involved in activities of preventative character, even if they in general not acknowledge them as relating to mass atrocities. Many of their actions, such as spreading messages of human dignity, advocating for peace initiatives and mediating in conflicts, or other aspects of holistic peacebuilding, are seen as natural parts of their leadership. Mission and mandate for change is not motivated by theoretical understanding of atrocity prevention but from their faith and theology. In line with the argumentation of Harpviken & Røislien (2008) and David Little (2007), religious actors are involved by the use of religious identities and a theology of peace and human dignity for creating common grounds between different groups. They are also involved in atrocity prevention by using their normative systems and mandate for promoting ethical behaviour, and by using their organisational structures as channels for mobilisation and communication.

# 8. Conclusion

This study has examined the nexus of human rights, atrocity prevention and the involvement of religious actors. Exclusionary ideologies and the accentuation of identity differences continues to threaten the vision of freedom, justice and peace in the world by motivating mass atrocities and gross human rights violations. The legal responsibility for preventing atrocity crimes remains at state level, but the role of local nonstate actors in reducing risks of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing should not be underestimated. Religious leaders can play an important role as local nonstate actors, by influencing the behaviour of their adherents. Uganda is an interesting case due to the presence of several risk factors for mass atrocities, but also for the high influence religious leaders hold in society. The aim of this study was to explore how religious leaders in Uganda are involved in atrocity prevention. The possibilities for involving religious leaders was examined by searching for facilitators and barriers.

In order to answer the research questions, the study applied an explorative qualitative lifeworld approach with semi-structured interviews. Data was collected via twelve individual interviews with religious leaders from four different denominations: Anglican, Catholic, Muslim and Pentecostal. The material was analysed by thematic analysis in order to distinguish themes and sub-themes. Further analysis was done with three theoretical perspectives. The framework of Stephen McLoughlin brought an understanding for atrocity prevention. Brewer et al.'s conceptualisation related to the involvement of religious actors. And finally, Bielefeldt's conceptualisation of freedom of religion and belief gave a distinct human rights perspective on the material.

The results of the study show that religious leaders are involved in atrocity prevention. Many of their actions can be understood as mitigating risk factors of atrocity crimes by fostering local resilience. They mitigate identity-based division by promoting inclusive societies through messages of human dignity. They advocate for peace initiatives, mediate in conflicts, and other examples of holistic peacebuilding. These initiatives toward an inclusive solidarity are seen as natural parts of their leadership, motivated by a theology of human dignity and inspired by a divine mission and mandate to be agents of change.

Religious leaders can also have a negative influence by promoting exclusive solidarity and by disseminating hateful speech and incitement to violence. The possibilities for involving leaders toward positive influence is answered by the identification of five facilitators and five barriers.

The first facilitator is a theology of human dignity, a possible driver for religious leaders to prevent atrocities by giving room for diversity. A second facilitator is the understanding of a divine mission and mandate, both as self-understanding as well as in the view of their followers. This perspective can drive the leaders to take personal risks for a greater cause. The third facilitator is a holistic perspective on peacebuilding with initiatives for conflict mediation, long-term peace and development programs, and also transformative faith. A fourth facilitator is education for religious leaders, with theological training but also other knowledge such as how to distinguish and counter dangerous speech and ideology. A fifth facilitator is networking, between leaders, between denominations and also in relation to international partners.

The first barrier for involving religious leaders is poverty, both among leaders and adherents. Poverty give room for negative influence on theology and to political silencing or affiliation motivated by the gaining of economic opportunities. The second barrier concern politics. A tendency among religious leaders to overemphasize stability and peaceful elections can in fact silence democratisation processes, but there are also examples of political leaders silencing outspoken religious leaders or gaining religious platforms by corruption. A third barrier is ignorance, both among leaders and their followers, which give room for selfish usage of religion, to hateful preaching and unwillingness to cooperate with other groups or denominations. The fourth barrier concerns lack of resources for initiatives such as mediation, education, networking, usage of media for countering dangerous speeches, or long-term peace and developmental programs. This leads us to the fifth and final barrier,

challenging international relations complicates support of capacities and resources to prevent atrocities. The unequal relationship, with a tendency of external diagnosis and prognosis of risk factors and preventative actions, is considered to devalue local priorities and values.

The study has answered the research questions and resulted in new perspectives on the involvement of religious leaders in Uganda in atrocity prevention, but there are also limitations. The study has explored the lifeworld of religious leaders in Uganda, but there are of course also several other perspectives that could inform the results. Civil society groups, political actors, community groups or international actors could also give important insight to the issue. It is also noteworthy that the theoretical perspectives applied in the study primarily brings a Western perception on the results. Other perspectives could probably have informed the analysis in other directions, but the three theoretical perspectives have at the same time been useful for exploring the research subject from different angles.

In regard to future research, it would be interesting to include other groups as mentioned above, but also to use observations or quantitative methods to validate and triangulate the results. The study could also be conducted in other contexts with other religions present for examining possibilities to generalize the results, or for further theorising regarding the facilitators and barriers.

The results of the study should be of interest for different actors motivated to prevent atrocities. Local leadership, either political or religious, could use it for strengthening the role of religious leaders in this matter. International organisations or donor countries may use the study for reflecting over possibilities to engage nonstate actors in early responses to risk factors of mass atrocities. The facilitators and barriers may inform policies for involving religious leaders in atrocity prevention.

The main field of this study is human rights, but its interdisciplinary approach has brought new perspectives of the possibilities to promote inclusive societies. Responsibilities to promote human rights and to prevent atrocities lies on all of humanity, including religious leaders. There are possibilities for taking new steps in engaging local perspectives in prevention, but there are also barriers to overcome and challenges for reaching true partnership between actors with different values. However, the task should not be overwhelming. After all, cooperation does not have to mean consensus, as long as we can agree on principles of human dignity, freedom and equality.

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# Appendix 1. Consent Form for Interviews

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

**Purpose of the research:** To understand the experiences of religious leaders in atrocity prevention.

**What you will do in this research:** If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview. During the interview, you will be asked several questions. With your permission, I will tape record the interviews. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording.

**Time required:** The interview will take approximately 1 hour.

**Risks:** No risks are anticipated.

**Benefits:** This is a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences concerning the subject.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code. The data you give me will be used for a Master Thesis in Human Rights, and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future. I won't use your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

**Participation and withdrawal:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty. You may withdraw by informing the experimenter that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). You may skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

**To Contact the Researcher:** If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Elias Berg, email gusberelas@student.gu.se, phone +46709996101.

**Agreement:**
The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study.  I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____  Date: _____

Name (print): _____

**Presentation of research**
- This study aims to explore the involvement of religious leaders in atrocity prevention. The study is not meant to review or assess your work but to gain understanding from your experiences. I hope you will share stories, experiences and thoughts regarding this topic and how it relates to your role as a religious leader.
- Opportunity for questions from the respondent regarding the research interview.
- Assurance of informed consent (signing of paper) and information regarding confidentiality.

**INTERVIEW**

Introductory questions:
- Can you make a short presentation of yourself regarding background, education and experience of leadership?
- Have you as a leader or your faith community experienced threat or being targeted with hate speech? If so, how?
- What are your experiences of tension/discrimination between groups, based on for example ethnic, religious or sexual identity?
- What are your experiences of messages of hostility, hatred or incitement to commit violence against specific communities (In your faith community or in society in general)? If so, how?

Thematic questions:
- *Leadership:* How is your position as a religious leader affecting your acting in this area?
- *Mediation:* What are your experiences of contributing to mediation, conflict prevention?
- *Interfaith relations:* What are your experiences of contributing to a culture of dialogue, promote inter and intra-religious dialogue, mutual understanding and respect?
- *Minorities:* How do you relate this topic to sexual minorities and gender-based discrimination and violence? How do you relate this topic to youth, where feelings of oppression and hopelessness can be drivers of radicalization?
- *Media:* In what way do you monitor the media, including social media, to identify and counter hate speech?
- *Education:* How is education related to issues of conflict and peacebuilding?
- *Networks:* What are your experiences of establishing networks/coalitions of inter-religious leaders and actors for peaceful societies, or to address other human rights violations?

Examples of probing questions:
- Can you describe the situation further, your thoughts and your acting?
- Can you describe a specific experience?
- Do you have other examples?

Summarizing questions:
- Is there anything you want to add? Any other information of interest for the study?
- Do you have any questions regarding the research?