

Course Title: Religion and Terrorism Workshop

Faculty:

Adjunct Prof., Dr. David Steele; E-mail: david.steele2@gmail.com

Course Description:

This course examines the role that religious identity can play in both the escalation and mitigation of conflict. Students will study the role that ideology, belief, values, and faith-based relationships can play in developing and legitimizing, or in transforming and resolving, deeply rooted conflict dynamics. The focus of this course will be on both integration of religious identity factors into conflict analysis and an introduction to faith-based interventions skills, used by religious actors to foster coexistence. During the course, we will explore how to understand and handle conflicts perpetrated by extremist religious groups. We will also explore the diversity of faith-based reconciliation processes (such as hospitality, healing ritual, apology, etc.) as well as the kinds of roles performed by a wide variety of religious actors (education, advocacy, mediation, dialogue facilitation, etc.). Examples and case studies will be drawn from a wide variety of religious traditions and diverse cultures. In addition to those cases presented in the readings and by the professor, each student will be required to select cases on which to make class presentations and write a paper.

Learning Outcomes:

Students who take this course will be able to:

1. Assess what role religion plays, in comparison to other identity markers, as a driver of conflict within specific, concrete conflict situations in a variety of cultures worldwide,
2. Articulate a framework for understanding, and responding to, conflicts driven by extremist religious groups,
3. Understand and appreciate the potential contribution that all faith-based actors can make toward peaceful coexistence within/among diverse societies
4. Identify specific, and sometimes unique, reconciliation processes which faith-based actors, from a variety of cultures, can use to assist conflicted parties to develop healthy, peaceful and cooperative relationships,
5. Identify specific, and sometimes unique, ways in which faith-based actors can fulfill traditional conflict transformation roles, with special emphasis on intermediary functions such as conciliation, dialogue and mediation
6. Develop personal skill levels in facilitating a variety of reconciliation processes and performing peacebuilding roles.

Requirements:

Class Presentation

Each student will be required to make one class presentation toward the end of the course. Depending on the size of the class, these may be individual or group presentations. The topic, outline and possible resources are listed below under description of the last class session and the bibliography

Paper

One 8-10 page paper will be required of each student and will be due around the mid-point of the course. In the paper you are asked to pick a conflict in which religious identity plays a major role. Resources are also available in the bibliography below. The assignment is to:

1. Describe the primary factors involved in the conflict
2. Identify the specific role that religious identity plays, naming and describing the conflicted religious parties
3. Assessing the role that religious beliefs/ideology, values, and relational dynamics play in exacerbating the conflict
4. Identifying some actors (religious or secular) which have attempted to intervene (if there are any) and evaluating their degree of success/failure
5. Presenting your own recommendations regarding the best way this conflict might be addressed by an intervener (religious or secular)

Class Sessions:

All class sessions will include a combination of activities, including: lecture, exercises, discussion (both whole class and small group), role plays, film, and sharing of experience/questions/perspectives by students.

Session 1:

The Nature of Identity Conflicts

This session will cover:

- The Nature of identity formation: primary and secondary identify markers, ascribed vs. acquired identity; individual vs. collective;
- The role of identity markers in conflict situations: the place and nature of group boundaries; in-group/out-group relations; tensions between group loyalty and treatment of the “other;” the need for balance between bonding dynamics and bridging dynamics.
- Types of violent dynamics common within conflicts in which identify is a major factor
- Relation to other conflict drivers - resources, politics, etc.

Session 2:

The Importance of Values in Identity-Based Conflicts

This session will cover:

- The role that values, spiritually-based or secular, play in providing frameworks/world views that are frequently in conflict.
- An examination of different value systems that exist in different kinds of cultures: collectivist and individualistic; shame-oriented and guilt-oriented
- How values frameworks relate to events that trigger conflict/violence
- Evaluation of the theory that there is an inevitable “Clash of Civilizations” due to value differences

Session 3:

The Role Played by Religious Identity in Conflict Situations

This session will cover:

- The role sometimes played by religious identity in legitimizing and perpetuating conflict: sources of religious identity; links between religious belief/ideology and identity
- The role often played by religion as an underlying world view/value system: identifying positive religious values and their impact on society; identifying the negative role religion can play in values conflicts
- Types of contemporary conflict involving religion
- Evaluation of religious fundamentalism in particular

Session 4:

A Closer look at the Role Played by Extremist Religious Groups

This session will cover:

- Characteristics of extremist religious groups
- Linkages such groups often make with fellow adherents of their wider faith community: ideological, relational and functional
 - The ideological factor: Awareness that some conflicts/tensions are supported by strong frameworks of religious belief; examination of the kinds of religious imperatives that foster conflict/violence (including concepts of fairness, justice, etc.); evaluation of religious justifications for rebellion and violence; characteristics of extremist religious groups that adopt a violent, confrontational posture; relationship between such groups and the wider faith tradition of which they are a part.
 - The relational dynamics: Examination of dynamics that have their roots in a sense of faith-based victimization and grievance; the religious mythologies that have arisen to portray and justify the need for “believer” loyalty; the role religion plays in a resulting identity defined by enmity and a behavior infused with prejudice and stereotyping; the confusion of faith-based justice with a revenge mentality.
 - The meeting of functional needs: Examining how some groups solidify religious loyalties by providing basic services of aid and development exclusively to one’s own faith community; the use of religious calls for charity to deepen in-group/out-group perceptions and exacerbate divisions.
- Examination of case studies

Session 5:

Handling Conflicts Perpetuated by Extremist Religious Groups

This session will cover:

- Approaches to handling all three of the linkages that extremist religious groups make with fellow adherents of their wider faith community: ideological, relational and functional
- Understanding concepts and steps that can be used in a faith-based reconciliation process with those influenced by extremism
- Examination of case studies

Session 6:

Comparison of Religious Traditions as Both Sources and Mitigators of Conflict

This session will compare several of the major religious traditions, examining the impact of their tradition on both conflict escalation and conflict transformation. The faith traditions examined will include: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous traditions.

Session 7:

Faith-Based Reconciliation Processes

This session will include:

- Discovering a deeper understanding of a variety of faith-based reconciliation processes and practices, including: grief and trauma healing, hospitality, confession/apology/acknowledgment of wrongdoing, justice, forgiveness, and the role of ritual.
- Discussion of the degree to which these use of these practices is restricted to individual vs. public forums, and whether they can be performed by leaders (political, tribal, religious, etc) on behalf of their people
- Examination of the complexities, barriers and difficulties involved in each process/practice: both internal (within the individuals/groups with whom the faith-based actor is relating) and external (cultural differences, power inequity between groups, and other systemic factors related to political repression, resource distribution, etc.)
- A film illustrating the work of faith-based reconcilers in Kenya.

Session 8:

Skill Development in Faith-Based Reconciliation Processes

This session will include:

- Introduction to a variety of exercises and short role plays that can be used by faith-based actors to facilitate reconciliation processes and peacebuilding roles, specifically related to grief and trauma, stereotyping, disentangling intent and impact, dealing with difficult behavior, influence and persuasion, dealing with blame, forgiveness, and restorative justice
- Skill practice involving a role play between Muslim and Catholic following the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Session 9:

Roles that Faith-Based Actors Can Play

This session will cover:

- Who are considered to be faith based actors
- The reasons why faith-based actors often can play an important role
- What distinct functions faith-based actors can perform, including (1) observation and witness, (2) education and formation, (3) advocacy and empowerment, and (4) intermediary intervention.
- When in the life cycle of a conflict it is most effective to perform which role or function
- Examination of the complexities, barriers and difficulties involved in each performing each peacebuilding role

Session 10:

Skills Development in Roles Faith-Based Actors Can Play: Especially Advocacy

This session will include:

- Introduction to a variety of exercises and short role plays that can be used by faith-based actors to perform peacebuilding roles, specifically related to negotiation/mediation, problem solving, and facilitated dialogue/conciliation
- Skill practice involving an advocacy role play in which a faith-based organization attempts to meet the needs of a very poor segment of a third world society, but finds itself enmeshed in some evolving conflict.

Session 11:

Skills Development in Roles Faith-Based Actors Can Play: Facilitated Dialogue/ Conciliation and Problem Solving

This session will include:

- Skill practice involving a role play in which religion is a central part of the conflict: between Hindus and Muslims in India
- Skill practice involving two role plays in which religion is not a central part of the conflict: (1) following genocide in Cambodia, and (2) following defection of a North Korean to the South.

Session 12:

Field Trip to Meet with Faith-Based Teachers and Practitioners in Boston

This session will include one meeting, held during normal class time, with a group of Faith-Based actors from a variety of faith traditions. The purpose will be for these people to share their experience and for students to be able to ask questions. It is possible that the date of this session may need to be moved to another day depending on the availability of the guests.

Session 13:

Case presentations on Faith-Based Peacebuilding Roles

This session will include a presentation by either individuals or groups of students. Each presentation is expected to be 10-15 mins. in length. You are asked to:

- Select a conflict situation in a particular country in which there is a clear example of efforts by a faith-based peacebuilder/reconciler
- Describe the conflict context
- Describe this religious actor. What kinds of faith-based interventions have they done in the past? What faith-based practices, reconciliation processes or peacebuilding roles did this person/group employ in the conflict you have selected?
- Describe how their faith influenced what they did and how it impacted the results
- Give your evaluation of the attempted peacebuilding process
- Make any recommendations regarding what you think could have been done differently

After each presentation, the class will provide feedback

Assignment

Preparation of case presentation. Readings you might use to select a case for presentation are listed below

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