

## Guest Editor's Note

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This special issue entitled Religion, Peace and Conflict in Contemporary Africa is a collection of selected papers presented at the international conference *Religion, Peace and Conflict in Contemporary Africa* held in Addis Ababa Ethiopia on May 14-15, 2016. This conference is part of a postdoctoral project funded under the Volkswagen Stiftung Founding Initiative: Knowledge for Tomorrow Cooperative Research Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa Postdoctoral Fellowships in the Humanities in Sub-Saharan and North Africa

The selected papers in this special issue clearly demonstrates that the role of religion in conflict should be depicted in binary terms: as a source of conflict and/or as a source of reconciliation. The editors of this special issue argue that starting from the premise that religion is the cause of most conflicts in the contemporary world leads to oversimplification and obscuring the complexity. Establishing a clear-cut model or theory for understanding the relationship between religion, on the one hand, and violence or peace, on the other hand, as it can be inferred from the papers included in this special issue is quite problematic. Religion can play a significant role in preventing and solving conflict. Thus the complex interplay between religion and conflict/peace needs to be addressed and analysed in individual contexts. Furthermore, there is a need to problematise tensions and conflicts often framed as 'religious'. Often wars that are considered 'religious conflicts' have social, economic or political roots as the case study from South Sudan presented in this special issue clearly shows. Likewise the paper focusing on the jihad discourse in Kenya accents how the jihad cause is rationalised in the present ethno-nationalist Somali showing the complex and layered nature of the tension. This duly calls for the need to consider what other explanations, religious or political leaders draw on beyond the religious discourse, symbolism or institutions as a way of justifying violence. Each tenuous and conflictual case has to be unpacked on an individual basis in order to understand the complexity of the phenomenon that is otherwise labelled as a religious conflict, and to get a comprehensive understanding of the multiple factors leading to a particular conflict.

Furthermore, analysis of conflicts over time by adopting a diachronic approach, can help us to understand the underlying issues. These might not necessarily relate to religious differences but rather to politico-economic issues. We also need to consider that tensions and conflicts within a religious community can affect conflict between religious communities. This is a topic that is often ignored in the literature on religious conflict, because social cohesion within the religious communities is taken for granted. The papers focusing on the Tehadiso movement within the EOTC (Ethiopian orthodox Tewahido Church) contribute to filling this gap in the academic discourse. Furthermore the case studies from Ghana and Zimbabwe probed into these and more complex patterns and interwoven causes for religious based discontent in different cultural contexts in Africa. Taking cases of religious based tensions from different parts of the continent and from different religious groups, the contributions examined how religious based tensions and conflicts have evolved in a particular social, economic, and political *milieux*.

Moreover, the papers addressed the local, regional and transnational dimensions of religious based conflicts by paying attention to the factors and the groups involved in the conflicts. Some of the papers further investigated the profile of the actors involved, their internal composition, interests and power positions. This can be best inferred from the paper focusing on the Coptic Church in Egypt which explores the concept of intellectual humility in the context of religious and communal leadership within the Coptic Orthodox Church. The other paper addressing the role of different actors, power positions and mobilisation strategies in religious based conflicts is the contribution focusing on the Ahbash religious groups in Ethiopia. Mobilisation bases of the actors and the appropriation of the new media in the process of mobilisation and information sharing in conflict situations is another theme that the paper on Nigeria elucidates. One of the selected papers addressed the role of religion in peace building drawing on an empirical study of a religious approach for peace making among the Siltie People in Southern Ethiopia. The contribution of the holy water healing in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church presents how religious deliberations offers a solution to the misery and suffering of the afflicted.

Hence, the selected papers included in this special issue address a wide spectrum of themes ranging from aspects of interaction and tension between religious groups, factors accounting for the rise of religious based conflicts, intergenerational tensions within religious institutions, the significance of social media for religious polemics and in religious based conflicts and faith based initiatives of dispute/ conflict settlement. The paper on religious institutions of conflict resolution takes a positive approach addressing the role of religious leaders and ideas in conflict prevention and resolution.

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