PART 1

Introduction

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Chapter 1

Redressing Religious Inequalities and Challenging Religious Otherization: Global Perspectives and Encounters[*]

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How can we make religious equality a reality for those on the margins of society and politics? This book is about the individual and collective struggles of the religiously marginalised to be recognised, and their inequalities, religious or otherwise, redressed. It is also about the efforts of civil society, governments, multilateral actors, and scholars to promote freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), whatever shape those efforts take. The actors and contexts that feature in this book are as diverse as health workers in Israel, local education authorities in Nigeria, indigenous movements in India, Uganda, or South Africa, and multilateral actors such as the Islamic Development Bank in Sudan and the World Bank in Pakistan.

Some of the case studies engage with development discourses and narratives or are undertaken by development actors, while other cases operate completely outside the international development paradigm. The common denominator is that they are informed by the praxis of seeking to redress religious inequalities, directly or indirectly, with varying levels of success and failure. A common factor across all the case studies is that they examine individual or community experiences and perceptions of religious inequality and how they intertwine with socioeconomic inequality. The approach is informed by grounded theory, premised on emerging theoretical insights from an understanding and analysis of the dynamics of power on the ground.

This introductory chapter is organised as follows. Section 1 briefly describes the rationale and overall approach underpinning this book. Section 2 highlights some of the conundrums associated with naming and framing FoRB and religious inequalities. Section 3 explores approaches that seek to redress religious otherization and exclusion in education, health, and economic inclusion policies. Section 4 highlights the tensions between national development policies and the rights of people on the margins whose violations are both of an economic and religio-cultural nature. Section 5 discusses the disconnects between rhetoric and practice in international multilateral agencies' engagement with religious pluralism in the contexts in which they operate. Section 6 concludes.

1 Rationale and approach

The chapters in this book seek to contribute to addressing a number of gaps in understanding experiences of 'religious otherization' (see discussion of this concept below) for people living in poverty. First, despite the wide array of tools and approaches available for measuring and monitoring FoRB in Western scholarship, there is still a deficit of literature presenting the granular understandings of the conditions and drivers of the unequal power relations experienced on the ground (Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler 2021). The second issue pertaining to the scholarship on FoRB is that the documentation and analysis of experiences of violations predominantly convey the analysis and interpretations of local and international elites. Many of the authors of these chapters were keen to understand and share the experiences of FoRB through the interpretive lens of those on the margins.

Third, the literature on the FoRB–development nexus is still limited, and we hope this book addresses this in several ways. Some chapters highlight the FoRB-blindness of narratives and practices of development in terms of ignoring, overlooking, or circumventing how forms of exclusion informed by religious inequalities undermine processes of positive change. Other chapters point to the exclusionary nature of national development policies and their devastating impact on religiously marginalised people. Other chapters point to the possibilities and tensions of integrating religious equality in national sectors such as education and health. Others point to the pitfalls of external development actors' 'interventions' for inclusive development policies in countries where the targeting of religious minorities has created severe religious equality deficits.

Where do the realities of people experiencing intersecting inequalities on account of their religious or belief affiliations and socioeconomic exclusion fit with the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) mantra of 'leave no one behind'? This book endeavours to deepen the conversation about the congruences and divergences between promoting inclusive development and religious equality. Development as a concept is deeply contentious, fraught with conundrums on its normative underpinnings, and the extent to which its post-colonialist genealogy continues to inform its transformative potential. The book situates religious equality in relation to global narratives around inclusive development as well as in relation to local conceptions of recognition and justice.

The idea of the case studies presented in this book emerged in a meeting of the advisory group of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID)[2] in 2019. CREID is a consortium convened by the author, who is based at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, to make poverty alleviation programming more aware of and responsive to the realities of people experiencing intertwining inequalities on the basis of religious affiliation, class, gender, geographic location, and other characteristics. The advisory group suggested that, in addition to the core countries in which CREID is undertaking Action Research, it would be very beneficial to broaden the scope of our inquiry to include the experiences and perspectives of a wide array of activists, professionals, practitioners, and scholars beyond the remit of the partnerships and projects with which we are cooperating.

After much deliberation and an iterative process of consulting with various stakeholders, an expression of interest (EOI) was published. The EOI that was issued revolved around two core questions which broadly comprise the parameters of this book: 'How has FoRB been integrated in processes of redressing religious inequalities? To what extent was/is the attempt (of integrating FoRB) successful and why?' The call was purposely broad in scope to allow applicants to approach the theme from any reality they are experiencing on the ground that involves an active promotion of FoRB or religious equality. We deliberately sought to broaden the inquiry beyond 'success stories' of promoting FoRB to include experiences of initiatives where the desired objectives were not met, or where the initiative yielded unintended outcomes, or where the initiative claimed to be inclusive but the evidence for the disconnects with reality on the ground suggested otherwise. We prioritised case studies from Africa, Asia, or the Middle East as these were the areas where CREID was operating, and therefore may be particularly useful for other partners in our programme.

The chapters in this book are, with the exception of a couple of entries, the outcome of this call. It may be worthwhile to reflect briefly on the process of issuing an EOI as a method of outreach and evidence generation. I have been reminded that important insights are often generated from what has not worked procedurally as much as what has come to fruition. There are several lessons learned of incongruencies between our expectations when we designated the EOI and the aspired outcome. The first setback was that we had hoped to receive submissions from the broadest set of actors possible that would include not only academics and practitioners but also journalists, local leaders, and activists, to mention but a few. Despite widely advertising the call among our partners in civil society, academia, and human rights, the pool of applicants was still fairly limited.

Upon reflection, we realised a number of uncomfortable truths about our EOI. The first is language. When a call is in English and the expected language of narration is English, this undeniably limits multivocality and engagement with non-Western narratives associated with how stories are told. The second issue had to do with outreach. There is a disconnect between actors on the ground who are in the midst of struggles to make daily realities more inclusive of religious minorities around the globe and the space in which CREID, convened by the Institute of Development Studies, as an academic institution based in the UK is situated. This is one of the realities of Western aid's limited sphere of access and influence globally.

The third issue is one of framing. The terms 'freedom of religion or belief' or even 'religious equality' do not feature in the narratives of people experiencing religious otherization. Even when people on the ground are engaged in struggles with clear implications for religious inclusion, they rarely use the language of FoRB in their claims-making. This does not mean in any way that people do not strive to enjoy religious freedom or would not want to experience equality with peers of majority religions or no religions. Rather, as will be discussed below, people have very many different terms and ways of expressing their aspirations, visions, and yearnings for the fulfilment of this aspect of their lives. However, these struggles take the form of neither projects nor programmes.

Hence, the framing of our call as FoRB in relation to projects or programmes may have unintentionally compounded the exclusion of a myriad of endeavours for redressing religious inequalities. Quite expectedly, we did receive a number of applications by non-governmental organisations proposing they cover their own successful initiatives in terms of dialogues, conflict resolution, and peace-building. Where proposals read as if they were a public relations exercise in promoting the wonderfulness of an organisation, rather than the struggles and unpredictability of power dynamics, we politely turned them down.

Another set of incongruences between aspirations for case studies on FoRB and pathways of change emerged after case studies were commissioned. One of the most widely prevalent challenges was associated with defining what constitutes evidence. We encountered a major conundrum pertaining to initiatives being deemed successful if people of different faiths were brought into dialogue – without any indication of which, if any, power dynamics had shifted as a consequence. Interfaith dialogue has been fashionable in the peace-building and conflict resolution Western scholarship and policy arena (see Thane, this volume). Very rarely has the evidence been presented that links the dialogue with actual change on the ground. We faced such a case study on an initiative in Myanmar in which a dialogue between everyday Burmese Buddhist and Muslim and Christian women in late 2019 (prior to the coup) was described – and submitted as evidence in and of itself of FoRB being promoted.

There was no interrogation of how these encounters shifted the power dynamics in any way on the ground nor any interfaith collective action that may have followed as a consequence. These questions were left unanswered with the assumption that the very occurrence of a dialogue is evidence of FoRB being advanced. Undoubtedly, the politics of evidence in Western scholarship is deeply problematic in its simplistic focus on attribution; that is, narratives that attribute change solely to interventions when in reality there are a wide array of complex factors that can neither be planned nor orchestrated that influence change.[3]

However, there still remains the problematique of equating an interfaith dialogue with advances in FoRB or religious equality. Around the world, many of those experiencing religious inequalities scoff sceptically at the rhetoric of peace-loving religions rehearsed in interfaith dialogues at local, national, and international levels (see Tadros 2013 for an example from Egypt). They point to the failure of such dialogues to trickle down in any way that meaningfully shifts – even only slightly – the unequal power dynamics they experience in their lives. While noting that a dialogue or even a set of dialogues cannot be a panacea for systemic, sometimes decades', perhaps centuries' old histories of religious discrimination and prejudice, nonetheless, any ripple effects need to be accounted for that are sparked as a consequence of the dialogue.

Another major challenge experienced is in data collection and synthesis. We realised that for some cases, it is a tall order to expect non-researchers to generate qualitative and quantitative data without research accompaniment. This generated various conundrums pertaining to the politics of knowledge generation in relation to voice, credibility, and validity of the data. A number of unexpected factors – especially the Covid-19

pandemic unfolding – made data collection very challenging for partners, a predicament that affected anyone undertaking social science research during this period. In retrospect, if we are to truly pluralise the voices, perspectives, and experiences of those seeking to redress religious – and other – inequalities on the ground, we will need to rethink our outreach, our approach, and the limits of our own positionality as a Western-based research institution.

One of the key selection criteria for choosing the case studies in this volume is the positionality of the authors. Positionality is an anthropologic term referring not only to how people represent and position themselves but how they are perceived in the setting in which they undertake research. Ignoring positionality represents one of the greatest oversights in research (and work) more broadly in the area of FoRB. Researchers (as well as social justice advocates, practitioners, and policymakers) tend to assume that if they think of themselves as empathetic towards the 'religious other' and they assume a standpoint favourable to religious equality, that they will be perceived and treated as such by the religiously, socioeconomically marginalised.

In addition to the conventional inhibitions marginalised people experience, such as fear of outsiders and the potential risks of associating with them or that they may be informants, and so forth, there are ones specific to the sphere of FoRB. If the outsider is associated with the religion of the majority or the state who are complicit in religious homogenisation policies and practices, this undermines the credibility of the research process. Even if the outsider is a self-declared atheist or condemns the action of the perpetrator of discrimination that the group experiences, this does not necessarily erase perceptions of threat. In other words, the researcher does not even need to share the same background as the religious majority for their positionality to undermine their access to the community. In some situations, the researcher's country of origin or their name being associated with a particular religious group could be enough to undermine their legitimacy. In other cases, images in circulation of the person in the company of those who are seen as oppressive or, without knowing, visiting a community in the company of someone who is considered a 'traitor' will detract from legitimacy.

The importance of being mindful of positionality, to be considered legitimate in the eyes of the subjects of the research, does not signify that all individuals from the majority religion from the same country or all outsiders will struggle to earn the trust of members of religiously marginalised groups. It does, however, affect the research process. For example, with respect to one case study commissioned for this volume, all the quantitative research was entirely discounted and rejected because it became very clear that participants were engaging with the researchers in a spirit of fear and were therefore giving consistently positive 'exemplary' answers to avoid any potential backlash.

On occasion, a member of a religiously marginalised group may not be confident to speak out about violations or injustices for fear of putting others' lives at risk, and an outsider may be better placed to narrate events and actions which would otherwise have remained hidden. An example of this is the case of Philip Mader, an outsider in relation to land struggles led

by the Adivasis of India, where there would have been insurmountable risks for an insider to publish this work in his/her name (see below). However, with this exception, all the cases in this volume have been undertaken by academics and practitioners who are from the same national background and who have an in-depth understanding of the history, politics, and nuances of representation and positionality.

In view of the fact that the call for proposals was open to academics and practitioners pursuing whatever methodological approach they deemed appropriate, there is great variation in the case studies presented here. Some cases (Nigeria, Pakistan) used a mixed methods approach combining interviews and focus groups with questionnaires. None of the case studies involved the exclusive use of quantitative methods, suggesting that researchers are aware of the limitations of quantitative data that is not accompanied by the interpretive lens of the participants to render meaning to the numbers. This echoes the findings of research undertaken by Birdsall and Beaman (2020) who note that research exclusively reliant on quantitative data rarely allows for a nuanced and credible understanding of the drivers and dynamics of FoRB encroachments at hand.

Other methodological approaches informing case studies are ethnographic (Uganda, India – Shah and Shah, this volume, and Israel – Feldmann Kaye, this volume), representing granular descriptions of power dynamics, relations, and perceptions of those religiously marginalised but also the actors shaping their realities. The case studies from South Africa (Tifloen and Makgoba) and India (Mader) use what would be conventionally considered Action Research (see Burns, Howard and Ospina 2021) – the documentation of the intervention being carried out as it unfolds, rather than afterwards. Action Research involves the use of participatory methods whereby the participants shape the research design, the data collection, validation, dissemination and, most importantly, assume sufficient ownership over the data, such that they can use it themselves for representing their demands and agendas (*ibid.*). For example, in South Africa, researchers applied cultural mapping as a methodological tool to guide participants in mapping sacred sites, green spaces, and water sources (used for rituals) as a starting point for identifying sites that are of religious/cultural significance. The use of participatory mapping created a conversational entry point for the communities to identify hindrances or obstacles to faith practices based on their own experience and local knowledge.

The cases discussed in the previous paragraph involved mitigating against varying degrees of security risks and necessitated authors prioritising duty of care towards partners above other considerations. It was a sobering reminder of how contentious and dangerous it is for people to discuss FoRB in many contexts around the world. In all of the contexts, researchers/ practitioners had to be exceptionally careful in how they approached the subject. In some cases, the redlines for what was viable and possible to engage with in relation to the topic at hand were well defined, no matter how harsh; in other cases, the redlines were blurred and ever-shifting, such that it was up to the activists/researchers to weigh up what was safe.

A most striking example was on research with the Adivasis, which was ridden with intimidation and terror in a context of extreme religious

inequality. Mader writes that during a research visit the team itself 'witnessed an arson attack perpetrated by local elites against an Adivasi group' (p129). The research team was eventually forced to flee, while three families' huts were burnt to the ground, the residents losing their shelter and their belongings. In order to proceed with sharing the work while maintaining a duty of care towards partners on the ground, the identities of the social agents who were supporting the mobilisation of the Adivasis were concealed under the name The Programme and any implicating details concealed. This included both the location and the time frame for its exploration as well as the researchers who supported the inquiry. The risks were so high that in addition to a standard peer review, one of the world's leading experts on indigenous movements in India was commissioned with 'guessing' the location of the inquiry as a litmus test for any giveaways. Only when the author was assured that it was not the correct location and the expert deemed there were no clues to indicate their whereabouts was the chapter deemed publishable.

Beyond these conundrums, incongruencies, and dilemmas that were encountered in the process, the case studies present some important insights, which, while highly relevant for their contexts, also draw out important insights for academics, practitioners, activists, and others who have an interest in redressing religious inequalities for socioeconomically marginalised populations.

2 Reclaiming the idea of FoRB in pursuit of religious equality

While this book is framed in terms of the promotion of religious equality as an ideal, different terms are in circulation among the authors including religious freedom, FoRB, religious discrimination, and religious persecution. There is no consensus on the meaning of the term FoRB and this is reflected in wide variations in operational understanding of religious freedom (Fox 2016; Gatti *et al.* 2019; Marshall 2021). The concept of FoRB has been problematised for its genealogy, its political weaponisation by powerful states, and its incoherent uses (see section 3).

Historically, FoRB and international development have had very different genealogies. The field of FoRB has been the remit of religious lobbies, and some governments. The ideas on FoRB have been advanced through declarations, treaties, conferences and conventions, dialogues, and summits. FoRB, like other ideas, experiences ebbs and flows. There are efforts towards its institutionalisation in foreign policy through toolkits and courses, workshops and platforms, focal points and special envoys, and programmes with large budgets, among a number of governments and non-state actors right now (2020–21) (Barker, Bennett and Farr 2019). But undoubtedly too, the concept – and its practices – have come under scathing attack for its weaponisation in conflicts, the severe 'credibility deficit' of those promoting it, and its assumed tensions with other human rights such as the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people (see Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler 2020 and Petersen and Marshall 2018). FoRB remains siloed in the realm of foreign policy and some human rights circles.

While taking on board its problematic appropriations, nonetheless, as Decosimo (2018: 16) suggests: 'That some concept has a history, even an ethically suspect history, does not by itself tell us that ongoing use of the

concept perpetuates that history.' FoRB should not be relegated to the dustbin of history on account of its political capture, any more than women's empowerment should be abandoned on account of its instrumentalisation to advance highly questionable political agendas (see below).

Many of the conceptions of FoRB in circulation in Western scholarship and grey literature draw on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which encompasses 'freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief' (Article 18.3) (see Thane, this volume). As noted in Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler (2020), there are advantages in using this term; namely, that it encompasses those who follow a religion, and those who do not. The word 'belief' can encompass a wide array of norms and values which people can conceive of as sacred even if they are not codified into a 'religion' *per se*. My reference to the concept of religious equality in relation to freedom of religion is informed by several factors.

First, there is always a fear that with the language of freedom to/freedom from, freedom is considered in relative rather than absolute terms. In other words, when religious minorities who suffer from extreme or systemic persecution of an acute nature suddenly enjoy a modicum of freedoms not previously enjoyed, then they may be expected by some to celebrate their freedom of religion. If, however, equality is the goal, then even when progress is achieved and duly celebrated for incremental change in their status and position, the ultimate aim of enjoying the same set of rights as others is not forgotten. Some may argue that equal citizenship is informed by the same notion, and this is true, yet people who are not bestowed with the status of citizenship such as displaced people and refugees may not be in a position to claim citizens' rights to religious equality.

The second issue is that FoRB focuses on the situation of individuals and groups as disparate categories. In other words, we discuss FoRB violations experienced by group x or the right to enjoy FoRB for group y. What is sometimes lost in the language of FoRB are the relational dimensions of how different groups and components of society relate to each other. Religious equality on the other hand is relational, insofar as equality is about the relationship of status and position. Religious equality allows for an engagement with intra- and intergroup dynamics. Religious equality allows us to look at the spectrum of religious otherization happening in a given context.

Religious otherization here refers to both a process and an outcome. There is a process of religious otherization inherent in who is included/excluded and processes of establishing hierarchies of worth/value. By religious otherization, we mean more than having a different religion; it means where differences become the basis of identifying you as 'the other', as someone who is not 'one of us'. With reference to the use of the term religious otherization in our context, it is reflective of a relationship of power, rather than a numerical status (Tadros 2020).

Trochmann's (2021) discussion of the discursive power of the social construction of 'the other' is particularly useful here. The 'other' is not a static object; rather, s/he/they exists in a dynamic relationship in a majority/minority context in which the majority are not only in a position of power, but their power is entrenched through institutional relationships.

Otherization represents a relationship that is context-specific in the sense that a person may be otherized in one place at one point in time and may experience a very different set of relationships in another context. While the experiences of religious otherization exist along a spectrum of severity and are deeply contextual, one theory is that otherization is driven by a sense of threat by those engaging in otherization. Judith Butler concedes that the act of otherizing people is informed by a perception that they represent a threat, a threat to the power and interests of the majority.

However, not all individuals belonging to groups that are religiously otherized share the same experience. Trochmann (2021) argues that the process of otherization is fluid and dynamic because it is affected by the intersectionality of identities informing human relations. This intersectionality of human relations applies to both the person/group doing the otherization as well as those on the receiving end. The intersection of various identities (class, gender, background, political orientation, etc.) of the person doing the otherization may accentuate or diminish how they otherize someone on the basis of their belief or religious affiliation. Simultaneously, religious otherization experienced by a wealthy and highly esteemed man of a religious minority in one context would be different to the otherization experienced by a poor, female, informal worker belonging to a religious minority.

The third merit of relating to FoRB through the concept of religious equality is very much related to the second; namely, that religious inequality intersects with other inequalities along other axes, such as gender, class, ethnicity, location, political orientation, and so forth.

Another rationale for thinking of FoRB along the lines of religious equality is of a pragmatic nature. For example, for those working in the area of international development, the language of equality brings in the relational dimension of religious equality in relation to other axes of equality/ inequality. There is substantial discomfort among some development policymakers and practitioners with the concept of FoRB on account of its genealogy: being criticised for its Westocentricism and divisive historical applications (Petersen and Marshall 2018; Ferrara 2016.). As noted in the chapters by Thane, and Shah and Shah, FoRB remains a foreign concept to many working within development and peace-building spheres (even when a human rights lens is applied).

It is important to note, however, that neither FoRB nor religious equality feature in the narratives of the religiously marginalised whose lives are described in the chapters of this book. For many individuals and groups who have experienced systemic discrimination for a long duration, the default operation mode is not to talk openly about religious inequalities, discrimination, or targeting (see Feldmann Kaye's chapter on the health sector in Israel, this volume). Years of systemic discrimination have led to individuals and communities internalising a sense of fear of being punished for challenging the status quo. Moreover, as Tifloen and Makgoba share in their chapter in the context of South Africa, people were mobilising for their political and economic rights but were not specifically rallying behind claiming FoRB rights because they were not aware that legally they had the right to FoRB.

One of the key findings from the various studies is that there is a major disconnect between how religion features in people's lives in terms of how they exercise their 'religious' agency and the conventional conceptions informing frameworks of FoRB. The case studies illuminate three powerful insights. Shah and Shah's case study of the exercise of religious agency among poor women in India reveals that syncretism does not only feature in their conceptions of spirituality but also in their everyday survival strategies. Shah and Shah's chapter makes a compelling argument that the language of 'belief', 'affiliation', and 'belonging' is deeply problematic because it assumes that people's religious agency is always restricted to one religion.

The authors give the example of some of the women they interviewed who 'believed' in the power of Saint Anthony to heal their sick children but 'belonged' to the Hindu faith. They note that a Hindu woman may self-identify as a Hindu but regularly pray at St Mary's Catholic Church and also attend the fasting and prayer meetings at the local Pentecostal church. She may be simultaneously committed to praying to Christ and the Virgin Mary, but also continue to go to the Hindu temple once a month. Here the syncretic expression of religion in her life is not only informed by a mix and match of different religious and cultural norms and ideas but also by how they interface with the person's coping mechanisms. Where a person is sick, they will engage with the spiritual signifier that is associated with healing or economic blessing and so forth. It would be erroneous to interpret this as sheer pragmatism; it is also about emotional connections with different aspects of spiritualities that are both deeply subjective as well as shaped by the milieu in which a person has been raised.

The chapters on Uganda, South Africa, and India (Adivasis) that specifically engage with indigenous movements also challenge some of the assumptions of what FoRB entails and what its violations look like. While many understand freedom to worship in terms of the liberty to go to a physical building, these chapters indicate the importance of the understanding of ancestral grounds as being sites of worship. Whereas FoRB can sometimes focus on freedom to read and share scriptures, these case studies show the deep spirituality associated with practices in nature; in particular, for many groups, this involves land and water.

3 Religious inequalities in education, health, and economic wellbeing

This section highlights ways in which FoRB-blind development policies can exacerbate perceptions of religious discrimination (Nigeria) and bring to the fore religious and cultural inequalities (Israel) or compound the effects of existing marginalisation (India).

The first chapter in this volume, written by Miriam Feldmann Kaye, focuses on a case study involving the use of intercultural dialogue to understand how to further diversity in a hospital setting in Israel, and provides insights into differential experiences of health care on the basis of religious and cultural background. The study was undertaken prior to the outbreak of the war between Israel and Gaza in May 2020.

The study objective was to understand how it is that despite the religious and cultural diversity of the health-care workers and patient populations,

and recognition of cultural competencies as crucial for good health-care provision in Israel, research on the quality of health care has ignored the question of religious inequalities among groups and FoRB issues more broadly. Feldmann Kaye observes that,

> even though the hospital management is aware of the need to enhance CC [cultural competency] within their institutions, religion as a component of CC is perceived as relatively unimportant. Indeed, it suggests that religion and religious diversity is poorly integrated into mainstream notions of CC.
> (Feldmann Kaye, this volume, p33)

The author notes that initially cultural competency covers language diversity and some understandings of religious literacy but in a marginal manner.

Religious inequalities in health care need to be understood and redressed. Clearly, when religious inequalities exist, they undermine the principle of equitable access to health care. SDG 3 is about the promotion of wellbeing for all; however, if patients experience religious bias at the hands of health workers and the health system in general, this represents a denial of their right to adequate access to, and experience of, the right to health care and affects the realisation of the notion of promotion of wellbeing for all. By the same token, health workers can also suffer from experiencing religious prejudice by patients and society at large. Target 3c of SDG 3 is to 'substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries' (UN n.d.).

Feldmann Kaye's case study shows the importance of addressing inequalities within the health workforce more broadly. The author presents an intervention involving bringing together health professionals from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds in Israeli hospitals. Health workers from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds engaged in a range of activities collaboratively to reflect on their experiences and those of their patients in relation to how prejudice affects health care. This was a process extending over several sessions, encouraging health professions of largely Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Muslim backgrounds to share their experiences of working in the health sector (one of the limitations highlighted by the author is the absence of other religious groups such as the Christians and Druze). The dialogues enabled a positive impact on FoRB insofar as Palestinians reported that colleagues were now more willing to cover them during *iftar* (breaking fast during Ramadan) and hospital management reconsidered having all night shifts covered by Palestinian Muslims during Ramadan when *sohour* (eating before starting the fast, usually happening at dawn) meant that many Palestinian Muslims would be gathering for *sohour* in preparation for fasting the next day.

The strength of the process of bringing health workers from different faiths for an intercultural, inter-religious engagement is that it represents a form of 'diapraxy' or 'diapraxis'. Diapraxis is a term that does not mean 'the actual application of dialogue but rather dialogue as action' (Rasmussen 1988: 3). Diapraxis, a term coined by Lissi Rasmussen, is intended to be a

form of dialogic action that participants of different backgrounds take part in because of their vested interest in transforming a concrete issue that they are experiencing jointly on the ground (Rasmussen 1988). This is in stark contrast to how high-level interfaith dialogues between faith leaders often materialise. Often senior religious figures (mostly men) from different faiths convene to develop common declarations around peace, fraternity, and commitment to diversity. There are very few studies that document the evidence of how these high-level interfaith dialogues affect the religiously marginalised groups outside the conference halls the meetings are being held (Tadros 2020). On the other hand, with the kind of diapraxy that unfolded in the hospital, new forms of solidarity emerged between Arab nurses and their Jewish counterparts. The latter became aware of Arab nurses' experiences with patients who did not want to be served by Arabs, and consequently, they intervened more proactively with these patients in support of their Arab colleagues.

However, while diapraxy represents an opportunity to create a common response between people of different faiths around a common problem, it still cannot escape the power dynamics that shape religious inequality intertwining with other political inequalities. For example, there prevailed other forms of inequalities such as some of the Palestinian nurses reporting that they do not feel comfortable speaking in Arabic during their shifts, which is clearly a linguistic form of discrimination associated with their ethnic identity, as others who spoke in other languages such as Russian did not report feeling the same way. Raising this in the context of a safe space allowed Palestinian nurses to share experiences that they may have been too scared to disclose in other contexts.

However, as with all measures intended to promote FoRB, Feldmann Kaye acknowledges that these dialogues in and of themselves are not enough to deal with broader power dynamics – the elephant in the room is obviously the Arab–Israeli conflict. A decision was made by participants to avoid engaging with such a contentious and emotive issue, but evidently, this broader context does affect lives in very deep ways. The dilemma is articulated as attempting to conceive of health as 'neutral' ground where all efforts are focused on saving lives. However, sometimes it is impossible to ignore the power dynamics that shape relations in health care, and as one respondent said, not being satisfied with 'pretend friendships' (Feldmann Kaye, this volume, p41). What becomes clear is that ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and language cannot be addressed separately in distinct siloes. This further confirms the importance of an intersectional approach that takes people's experiences – not the defence of religious doctrine – as its entry point.

Aderounmu's study shows how a developmental intervention which has the potential for positive development outcomes can backfire when the deep religious and ethnic fault lines on the ground are not taken into account. The development intervention is the instatement of a scholarship scheme to improve the opportunities of students to acquire a university education. The positive returns of education have long been established in development policymaking, as is evident in SDG 4. The Oyo State Local Government Scholarship Scheme (OYSLGSS) was established by the government to provide students with scholarships to enrol at the First

Technical University, Ibadan in the state of Oyo in southwest Nigeria. The initiative, notes Aderounmu, is the first full scholarship scheme to involve all local governments in the state to 'mandatorily sponsor at least five students to attend the university. Required funds are pooled from the local governments for upfront remittance to the university' (p72).

There is a copious amount of literature in development studies that shows that without due regard for the prevalent power dynamics on the ground, even the best-intentioned and well-designed initiative can have a boomerang effect, causing unintended negative consequences. Aderounmu shows that across Oyo State there has been a history of ethnic and religious tensions, which have entrenched deeply seated religious fault lines, in particular between the Muslim majority and the largest religious minority, the Christians, and vice versa in some local government areas of the state.

These realities were not taken into account when considering that the conditions of selecting candidates in the scholarship scheme are fair, accessible, and consistently applied. Consequently, the scholarship scheme was rendered vulnerable to perceptions of inequity and foul play. Muslim and Christian political leaders were able to share the information about the scheme with their followers, and there was no institutional mechanism at any level of governance to ensure that the minority who follow traditional (non-Muslim or non-Christian) religions also had access to information. This may have been a contributing factor as to why there were no scholarship grantees from those who follow traditional religions.

Development policies that are blind to religious inequalities are analogous in their impact on gender-blind development policies. Gender-blind development policies have been critiqued on the basis of their misguided assumption that if a development programme does not prohibit women's participation, then it is by default non-discriminatory, whereas research has shown how the absence of a level playing field makes gender-blind policies biased in their outlook towards women (by way of example, see Doss 2014; Baruah 2011). Similarly, in this case, lack of due consideration for how majoritarian dynamics influences access to resources has led to disconnects between proclaimed openness for all and the ability of religious minorities, in particular those on the margins, to have access to knowledge about the presence of the scheme in the first place. In contexts of religious majoritarianism, equitable governance of development resources necessitates that access to information about resources takes into account the likelihood that the religiously marginalised will not be accorded a level playing field when they are excluded from access to information.

Just as absence of developmental resources can be a curse, so can the presence of developmental assets if weaponised to foment religious strife and competition. In contexts where there is competition between politicians who weaponise religion for their political ends, any perception of access to resources being tied to religious and political loyalties will breathe fire into sectarian sentiment. Aderounmu's study showed that 'upon interrogation, some opined that information on the scheme may be deliberately gagged to restrict it to either political loyalists or loved ones, which could include religious colleagues of those that had the information' (p67). Avoidance of elite capture in development interventions in contexts of religious

majoritarianism necessitates that measures are in place to ensure that inter- and intragroup inequalities are taken into account in outreach plans.

The key issue that Aderounmu's chapter raises is that when it comes to ensuring FoRB-sensitive development, the devil is in the detail. The qualifying steps for eligibility for applying for a scholarship seemed to be on at least two levels, to be fair and equitable among those applicants who came to know about and apply for the scheme. The study suggested that 'the conduct of the ranking examinations by the university has been of a standard quality devoid of any religious discrimination' (p72) and moreover, the procedure and content of the examinations for eligibility for applying for a scholarship were fair and were perceived as such by the participants in the survey that Aderounmu undertook.

However, the disconnect between the perceived fairness of the application process and the selection process shows the centrality of transparency for mitigating against the exacerbation of religious hostilities. While the exam process was highly commended, on the other hand, the study showed that 'the examination scores were never published and determination of the final list of successful candidates was not sufficiently transparent' (p73). When a candidate from a religious minority (Christian) is congratulated for passing an examination but then finds out that a place was given to another candidate from a majority religion (Islam) in a particular local government, this creates an environment of mistrust and allows rumours of the privileging of one candidate over another on the basis of their religious affiliation to thrive. The outcome is that a programme that is intended to enhance educational inclusion for students becomes tainted with being exclusionary on religious grounds.

Aderounmu warns of the potential dangers of perceptions of injustice in distribution of development resources (in this case, scholarships) on social cohesion. Whether foul play occurred in all or some of the cases of scholarship granting, the lack of transparency in the sharing of the method of selection, and the lack of accountability for any incongruencies in the delivery of merit-based distribution of scholarship both negatively impacted on social cohesion at a local government level. The evidence of the fuelling of pre-existing animosities is clear: petitions are being drawn of foul play and sentiments (and rumours) are being diffused on resources being assigned not on meritocracy but on religious affiliation.

Aderounmu's study shows concern over its impact on democracy at large. Disputes over fairness of resources are a microcosm of disputes in Nigeria over the nature of democracy. Ultimately, it exposes the relationship between FoRB violations, religious inequalities, and exclusionary democracy. When democracy is understood to be a legitimisation of religious majoritarianism, then ultimately it can only be exclusionary and discriminatory towards those that hold alternative religious beliefs or none. An inclusive educational policy would ultimately require not only the instatement of a merit-based system of assigning scholarships but also addressing inequalities on a level playing field so that those on the margins are able to benefit.

Shah and Shah's chapter sheds light on another dimension of the relationship between development and FoRB and inequalities, namely the right to express religious agency freely and how it affects economic

wellbeing. Shah and Shah undertook their empirical research on the economic wellbeing of poor Dalit women during the Covid-19 pandemic, a period in which they documented the increased vulnerability of the socioeconomically marginalised to hardship, exploitation, and further impoverishment. Drawing on case studies, they show in detail how, focusing on both geographical location and background, Dalit women who exercised their religious repertoires experientially were also more likely to seek plurality in their economic repertoires for survival.

Beyond the specific case of Dalit women worshipping the goddess Yellamma, Shah and Shah suggest a probabilistic relationship between those who enjoy personally and experientially a relationship with the transcendent, and their confidence to venture in exploring what their options are for interest rates offered by different money lenders. Shah and Shah note that since an individual's adaptive capability is formed and strengthened during periods where there are no emergencies, during these times individuals can diversify their risk profiles, build resilience, and reduce vulnerability to extreme events by identifying lenders who are able and willing to provide loans at a competitive rate. In the context where systemic discrimination on account of caste, class, geographic location, and religion are acute, these findings have major significance for those that are committed to promoting wellbeing.

The key finding here is that the protection of poor people's freedom to engage in whatever religious practice they wish to, without hindrance or fear, is key to enabling them to cope with life's unpredictability and volatility. Such freedom is under assault in parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh where the worship of the goddess Yellamma is under threat. Shah and Shah explain that while these Dalit women may 'identify' as Hindu, their practice of worshipping Yellamma includes forms of devotion that are despised by the Hindutva nationalists:

> Devotion to the goddess, whose rituals include regular animal sacrifices and, in some cases, worship in the nude, does not sit well with Hindu religious leaders, including those who have been influenced by *Hindutva* teachings. These leaders have now engaged in efforts to revise the structure, beliefs, and practices of this ancient multifaceted faith, and infuse them with a political and nationalistic emphasis. In short, these reformers wish to create a 'sanitised' version of Hinduism that scrubs out of existence and recognition the worship of deities such as Yellamma, which is regarded as superstitious and ignorant.
> (Shah and Shah, this volume, p97)

This straitjacketing of poor people's religious agency has major implications for inclusive development. First, any understanding of wellbeing needs to take into account poor people's recourse to religious repertoires as an intrinsic resource that plays a central role in their lives. Second, interventions that seek to understand and challenge class- and caste-based forms of assault on Dalits need to take into account how attempts at religious homogenisation by the Hindutva elites represent a form of epistemic violence against the Dalits' religious agency. In other

words, despising poor people's expressions of faith is part and parcel of the elites' assault on poor people's repertoires of power and sustenance. Third, encroaching on people's religious agency may lead to ghettoisation. Shah and Shah express concern that in response to being targeted, marginalised people may resort to a kind of religious sorting, akin to racial sorting among African Americans in the United States. Such a sorting would mean that people would associate only with those who hold the same beliefs, thereby blocking access to important networks, knowledge, and interactions with the broader community.

4 Tensions between national models of development, religious equality, and respect for FoRB

There is a rich and nuanced scholarship on how extractive and reductionist understandings and practices of development can strip people of their humanity and their political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The three case studies discussed below are examples of how national development policies can simultaneously deny people of their FoRB and their right to religious equality.

In India, the government proclaims a firm commitment to implementing the SDGs and a 'leave no Indian behind' agenda. However, in the name of economic development, it has also time and again evicted the Adivasis, an indigenous people traditionally living on forest land. Concurrently, Narendra Modi's government is promoting an exclusionary version of Hindutva ideology that is intolerant to all those who deviate from the narrow conception of what constitutes authentic Hinduism. Adivasis find themselves both held in bondage by landowning caste groups because of their historic loss of land while also being subjected to pressure to tow the Hindu nationalist line.

Mader's chapter suggests that Adivasis' struggle for the preservation of tribal land through agroecology is also a struggle for the protection of the cultural and spiritual repertoires of their community. The Adivasis' struggle is not framed in terms of FoRB (a term they do not use, see Mader) and they do not deny the transcendental in their defence of their right to the land. Mader notes that the distinctness of their identity makes them keen to differentiate their struggle from that of other groups, even from those who experience similar injustices. The intersection of economic and religious injustices is similar to other groups, for example, those of the Scheduled Castes who belong to religious minorities, or has resonance with the struggle of Muslim pastoralists. Nevertheless, the Adivasis engage in a distinct struggle which is situated in their history as an indigenous movement.

There is also a political imperative as to why framing their struggle on their own terms is crucial, rather than as part of other groups' quest for justice: while solidarity with other groups may bring the power of numbers, it means sharing in the political costs of being targeted by the state. Mader notes that,

Visible displays of Adivasi culture and spirituality furthermore usefully help to distinguish The Programme's activities from those of the staunchly secular Naxalite Maoist insurgency, which the

Indian government violently suppresses. Hence, as members of The Programme put it, they reduce the risk of persecution and increase their agency when, instead of chanting political slogans and invoking armed resistance, they put 'god and drums in the front'.
(Mader, this volume, p116)

In South Africa, the government has pursued an extractive developmental model, allowing coal-mining enterprises who have purchased the land owned by the residents in Steenbokpan to change the mode of production from an agricultural hub into coal mining. The majority of the people of Steenbokpan identify with Christianity that is blended with African traditional belief systems. As their access to their ancestral land comes under coal-mining administration, the latter failed to understand that what the people lost was not just material resources, but immaterial, in terms of an assault on their spirituality. When actors are driven by maximising profit, the result can be not only the impoverishment of populations but also the violation of people's right to freedom of worship and association:

Participants also mapped places of worship including gravesites that represent sacred places and discussed access to these sites. Some of the graves are located within the Medupi Power Station campus and access is gained through requests and appointments that are granted sometimes, and the presence of armed security personnel creates a hostile environment.
(Tifloen and Makgoba, this volume, p159)

Tifloen and Makgoba note that,

The removal of ancestral graves during the development of Medupi Power Station in Lephalale in the province of Limpopo drew outrage from faith communities and civil society who regarded the process as a violation of people's human rights, and shines a light on the contested nature of the development of South Africa's coal industry.
(Tifloen and Makgoba, this volume, p145)

By restricting residents' access to ancestral lands where the burial sites represented an intergenerational spiritual connection between the living and the dead, they were being denied access to what they considered as sacred.

While noting the economic and environmental destruction brought about by the activities of the mining companies, this had another significant impact on their FoRB: the environmental degradation also meant a drying up of water, thereby denying them their ability to worship – water is used for 'baptisms by Christian congregants, cleansing, and healing by African traditional healers' (Tifloen and Makgoba, this volume, p158).

Here the principal violator of FoRB is a private sector actor, the mining industry:

In South Africa, over the past few years, there has been an increase in resistance to mining development from workers, trade unions,

small-scale farmers, civil society, and environmental activists due to health concerns, low wages or limited job prospects for locals, poor living conditions, inadequate community consultation, and a lack of accountability within the sector.
(Tifloen and Makgoba, this volume, p147)

There is a gap in research in relation to the role of private sector actors in promoting or undermining FoRB. Tifloen and Makgoba argue that the South African government is accountable for enabling the mining companies to create this hostile environment, as recognised by the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) report which 'found that the government was responsible for the harm done to mining-affected communities because of its "failure to monitor compliance, poor enforcement, and a severe lack of coordination"' (p147).

As with the Adivasis, the struggle has been framed in terms of the defence of people's cultural rights, as opposed to FoRB *per se*. In mobilising to preserve people's cultural and religious sites (and their associated way of life) under threat, activists sought to hold to account the state and mining companies by holding them in violation of the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999 (NHRA). While the Act leaves much to be desired in terms of explicit and broad recognition of religious norms and beliefs as part and parcel of people's heritage resources, nonetheless, it was the entry point that at least provided a platform for galvanising the community. In reflecting on why the campaign was pursued in the name of heritage preservation, as opposed to defence of FoRB, the authors note that participants were aware of the Heritage Act but were not aware of the legal provisions pertaining to FoRB.

Interestingly, key references on FoRB in South Africa, such as the Office of International Religious Freedom at the US Department of State (2020), never mention mining companies as an actor responsible for the violation of FoRB, nor do they refer to indigenous people's struggles for access to their ancestral lands that they hold sacred. It seems that when advocates do not frame their struggles as for FoRB or against religious discrimination or any of its corollaries, Western analysts are less likely to consider it as such. Such oversight can have two implications: first, the myriad ways in which religious discrimination occurs are not recognised, and second, violators are not held accountable and go under the radar internationally.

In Uganda too, Muhumuza, Vanwing and Kaahwa present another example where development can be anathema to the protection of indigenous people's right to sacred land and practices. Ironically, the encroachment on indigenous people is occurring because of a policy that is intended to promote sustainable development. When the Rwenzori Mountains were gazetted as a natural park, to be managed by the government, powerholders did not consult the local people who were present in the area. Government authorities enforced several regulations that forbade the indigenous people living in the mountain access to particular territories containing religious shrines, and they also forbade resource harvesting as well as other activities associated with religious norms and beliefs. Muhumuza *et al.* argue that prejudiced attitudes towards the indigenous people had fed into the belief that they were responsible for destroying the flora and fauna.

It is not surprising that local people in the villages that neighbour the Rwenzori Mountains National Park reported that they felt that the Uganda Wildlife Authority staff considered them to be less important than the monkeys and apes that lived in the park. It is a classic case of what Timothy Mitchell (2002) would consider to be 'the rule of the experts', those assumed to have privileged knowledge and a lofty plan who are assumed to be best positioned to engineer change that is assumed to be in the interests of all. The chapter demonstrates powerfully how, when forced to listen to the people living in the Rwenzori Mountains, the 'experts' discovered that not only were the assumed tensions between the religious and heritage practices of the indigenous people and the protection of the environment premised on myth and not reality, but also that some of the religious and customary knowledge, rules, beliefs, and practices are conducive to the protection of the biodiversity and integrity of the habitat.

The role of the religious norms/beliefs in protecting the biodiversity of the Rwenzori Mountains can be seen, for example, in the worship of certain trees, in the belief that 'if such trees were cut, they would bleed or cry or speak with an expression of pain' (Muhumuza *et al.*, this volume, p190). As a consequence, areas where the Bamba and Bakonjo people were able to practise their religious beliefs were sites that enjoyed a greater diversity of plants and animals than some of the neighbouring areas where they did not reside. This is because the practices associated with the protection of nature allowed for the preservation of the flora and fauna because they were considered sacred. In other words, these norms were life-sustaining not only in the spiritual sense but in the environmental sense as well: the two were strongly intertwined.

Muhumuza *et al.* note that an attempt to address infringements on the cultural and religious rights of the local Bamba and Bakonjo people who were being violated by the authorities overseeing the Rwenzori Mountains National Park was made through the Culture, Values and Conservation Project (CVCP). This initiative jointly implemented by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and Fauna & Flora International (FFI) sought to address the conflict between the rangers concerned for preservation of flora and fauna and local people's persistence in accessing the area for religio-cultural practices. Once again, as with the Adivasis in India and the struggle over ancestral lands in South Africa, these struggles were made in the name of heritage preservation rather than the defence of FoRB. The convergence of what constitutes 'religious' and what is 'cultural heritage' is opaque, but it seems that the language of 'cultural conservation' had more political currency than FoRB protection.

5 External actors' promotion of FoRB: ideology and political will

There are two chapters in this book which explore attempts at making poverty reduction programmes funded by multilateral aid agencies more inclusive of religious minorities, one in Sudan and one in Pakistan.

The case of the World Bank's Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) is highly compelling because of its size (US$256m over five years, 2009–16) and outreach: it claimed to have benefited over 10 million Pakistanis, including marginalised women and people with disabilities. The authors of the chapter, Asif Aqeel and Mary Gill, were keen to assess

how inclusive the World Bank's outreach is with respect to its proclaimed commitment to also being inclusive towards religious minorities. The World Bank recognises religious minorities as comprising individuals and communities whose ranks in turn comprise some of the ultra-poor. In the case of Pakistan, the Hindus from Scheduled Castes and the Dalit Christians experience numerous intersecting sources of inequality on the basis of religious marginality, class, and caste.

The authors did not have access to the database of beneficiaries of the entire programme which would have enabled them to take a random sample and explore the scope of outreach among the religiously marginalised poor and the quality of their participation. Accordingly, Aqeel and Gill chose to take a more purposive approach to the inquiry, focusing on capturing the perceptions of marginalised groups of the World Bank programme. The focus groups and interviews undertaken in several districts were highly illuminating in understanding the World Bank's PPAF through the eyes of religiously marginalised poor people.

A widely cited proverb is that 'where there is a will, there is a way'. The evaluation of the World Bank's outreach on the PPAF showed that where those presiding over the programme willed for the inclusion of those who have historically suffered systemic inequality, there was relative success in reaching them. The authors concluded that within the remit of their inquiry, the World Bank's proactive efforts to include poor women and people with disabilities paid off. While the inquiry was not on the quality of participation or impact, it showed that the World Bank was able to at least ensure that those on the margins, on account of gender and ability bias, were included.

Not so for religious minorities. The authors identified a number of 'disconnects' at the design level which compromised the potential for outreach to the religiously marginalised ultra-poor. The first obstacle to outreach to the religiously marginalised ultra-poor is whether the geographic locations in which they live are included in the list of sites of high-priority outreach in the programme. If there is extreme disparity in socioeconomic conditions in an area where the religious majority are faring better than the religious minority, the latter can easily fall off the radar of the high-priority outreach districts. The authors note that some of the poorest Christians who live in ghettos in Punjab, as well as Scheduled Caste Hindus who are mostly bonded field labourers in rural areas of Sindh, were overlooked. In both instances, since the Muslims in these districts fared better, and they were a majority, those on the margins were overlooked. A more proactive approach that actively sought the pockets of the ultra-poor within districts would have enabled an outreach to these religious minorities.

The second factor from the authors' assessment of the inadequate inclusion of the religiously marginalised poor in the programme is associated with the privileging of areas where the World Bank previously worked. The authors note that, with the exception of one district, Sanghar, by and large there was a perpetuation of pre-existing bias in the selection of areas where PPAF was previously in operation and where religious minorities had already been excluded. The authors point to the fact that from focus group discussions, it became clear that most of the union councils (UCs)

selected for the implementation were the same where the PPAF conducted earlier projects.

The inference that the authors draw is that religious minorities were neglected in earlier projects and so were they in this project, despite the fact that the proposal design had made their inclusion as beneficiaries mandatory. They note that had the programme actively sought the inclusion of religious minorities, many of the adjacent or nearby UCs could have participated. This is akin to the incumbency factor in politics, whereby a politician who has been in office has significant advantage when seeking re-election over a candidate who is freshly competing. Here we see a similar phenomenon: the World Bank is drawing on pre-existing relations with UCs that have already been supported to expand and consolidate, thereby making it difficult for religious minorities to be represented where they were previously absent.

What accounts for these disconnects? Without an engaged conversation with those active on the programme, we are left with pure conjecture. There is of course the potential for what Wilkinson has explored at length in terms of internalised bias that shapes the lens through which contentious issues of religion are addressed (Wilkinson 2020). For Aqeel and Gill, the disconnect between the proclaimed intention of being inclusive of religious minorities living in extreme poverty and the reality on the ground becomes clear when compared with efforts to include extremely marginalised women and people with disabilities. They found that at the design, implementation, and monitoring phases, there were no deliberate efforts to redress the inequalities that have led to the exclusion of religious minorities from poverty programmes, whereas for women and people with disabilities, they fared a little better, featuring not only as participants but as representatives on local councils – because measures were proactively taken every step of the way to remove obstacles to their inclusion.

The chapter by Ahmed (Elehemier) describes the Islamic Development Bank's (IsDB) approach to promoting FoRB in its policies and practices during its development interventions in Sudan between 2016 and 2019. It focuses on,

> the IsDB's attempts to integrate FoRB into its poverty reduction and development interventions in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the poorest states in the country, through the company's Islamic Microfinance (IM) initiative. Most of the population of the two states are either Christian, atheist or have their own indigenous religions and beliefs, groups who have faced grave repression, violence, and religious discrimination due to their beliefs by the Islamic government of Sudan. (Ahmed (Elehemier), this volume, pxiv)

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought obstacles to undertaking a robust evaluation of the multi-tiered programme which included interfaith dialogues and peace-building activities, so the focus of the study was describing the rationale and the opportunities and challenges of implementing its microfinance programme. It is not intended to serve as an evaluation of the programme but rather to provide insights into programmatic approaches as they unfold on the ground. Ahmed (Elehemier)

notes that while there is a generic commitment to non-discrimination in its overall statement, there was no evidence of specific statements to redress religious inequalities or promote FoRB in its programme statement.

The author notes a number of important observations regarding the programme design. Funded by Saudi Arabia, the IsDB has a commitment to promote globally Shariah-compliant finance practices, one of which is Islamic Microfinance. Yet in a post-civil war context, in which people remember that in the name of an Islamic regime they suffered the worst atrocities, the appropriateness of yet again using 'Islamic' for an economic programme was questioned. Moreover, the question of the legitimacy of the actor providing the support is brought into question where mistrust prevails. In a context where the people believe that the Saudi Arabian government propped up and supported the Islamic project of the Sudanese government that oppressed them, can a Saudi-based initiative, in this case a Bank project, be trusted?

Ahmed (Elehemier) warns that in contexts of extreme poverty and deprivation, people were so desperate for sources of finance, they trusted their religious leaders who encouraged them to take part in the programme. The role of religious leaders in facilitating and enabling the implementation of the programme was central: they were the main sources of information about the scheme, they served as guarantors, and they actively promoted people's uptake of the loans.

However, Ahmed (Elehemier) warns astutely that it is important not to conflate participation with buy-in. Members of religious minorities and animists may have participated in the microfinance scheme out of desperation; however, underneath the surface, there are simmering sources of deep mistrust towards the initiative and the intentions of those presiding over it. With a history of having suffered multiple attempts at Islamicisation of their culture and people, the advancement of economic services under yet another Islamic banner can only be a reminder of a religiously divisive era. It is reflective of the failure of programme designers to understand how collective memory of oppression influences people's ability to ignore the role of ideology. This presents international multilateral agencies with a real conundrum: what to do when your positionality – how people perceive you, independently of how you position or represent yourself – becomes a real obstacle for engaging in FoRB promotion?

6 Conclusion

Through the highly eclectic case studies presented in this book, readers will find recurring patterns of the power of ideologies of religious otherization, the intertwining of struggles for political, social, and economic justice with the quest for religious equality, and the many ways in which people experience FoRB violations – even when they do not name them as such. These case studies provide exciting insights into how **not** to engage in FoRB promotion, but they also point to social justice struggles where the quest for religious equality lies at heart. It is hoped the case studies will inspire others to undertake further research towards understanding the power configurations that shape people's realities of religious otherization and exclusion, in all of their complexity and dynamism.

Notes

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3 See an excellent piece: University of Pennsylvania's Center for High Impact Philanthropy (2013).

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