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Journal of Contemporary Religion

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjcr20

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To cite this article: Tale Steen-Johnsen (2020) The rhetoric of love in religious peacebuilding, Journal of Contemporary Religion, 35:3, 433-448, DOI: 10.1080/13537903.2020.1810972

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2020.1810972

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Published online: 14 Dec 2020.

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JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGION
2020, VOL. 35, NO. 3, 433–448
https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2020.1810972

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ABSTRACT

Religious leaders involved in peacebuilding initiatives often refer to the religious value of love to encourage groups in conflict to live peacefully together. In this article, I suggest that references to love as a religious value might contribute to *bridging social capital*, meaning social bonds between groups who have experienced conflict. However, without simultaneously addressing questions of justice, which is often necessary in violent conflicts, creating social bonds through references to love constitutes a weak contribution to peace. The article uses the study of a religious peacebuilding project in Ethiopia as an example and illustrates how religious leaders failed to make a substantial contribution to peace by evoking love but avoiding questions of justice.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 9 March 2018
Accepted 21 October 2018

KEYWORDS
Religious peacebuilding; the rhetoric of love; social capital; religion and violence; religion and peace

Introduction

In theoretical debates about peacebuilding, *love* is rarely mentioned as a prerequisite for peace. Yet, religious leaders who engage in peacebuilding frequently use the word 'love' and encourage their adherents to love their enemies and neighbours. I suggest that, while references to religious texts that emphasise the value of loving antagonists might contribute to strengthening bridging social bonds between religious groups in violent conflicts, references to the religious value of love without a simultaneous emphasis on justice will not contribute to sustainable peace between groups who have experienced violent conflicts. The aim of this article is to reflect critically on the links between one of the major resources used in religious peacebuilding, that of a rhetoric of love, and the relationships between groups in conflict that are exposed to this message.

Religious peacebuilding is a growing global industry and refers to initiatives where religious leaders or organisations seek to reduce violence by using the authority of their religious position or mandate (Neufeldt 2011, 346). Theoretical debates about such initiatives are rapidly evolving and span a broad spectrum of themes. Here, I focus on debates which emphasise *social capital*—a term denoting resources in the form of social networks and trust that can be used to reconstruct broken social relations after violence

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(Wollebæk and Segaard 2011, 26). John Brewer, Gareth Higgins, and Francis Teeney have explored the specific role of religious leaders in reducing conflicts and developed a theoretical framework to understand the contributions of religious agents to peace. They suggest that such actors might stimulate the construction of *bridging* social capital, namely social bonds that span existing divides (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 2023). In this article, I explore whether religious leaders' use of a rhetoric of love can strengthen such social ties and build bridges between divided communities. To shed light on this question, I incorporate perspectives from peacebuilding literature, including Johan Galtung's conceptualisation of the 'soft' components of religion as a resource in peacebuilding (Galtung 2012, 256).

Love is a complex concept that can denote a wide array of actions and attitudes. It suggests a connection to psychology and a need for belonging and a sense of identity. In this discussion, the *rhetoric of love* and its social consequences are of interest. The theological depth of love in sacred texts is not the focus of this study, although it should be acknowledged that the recipients of messages of love may have broader theological associations with the term than is intended by the religious leaders who engage in peacebuilding.

Religious leaders engaged in religious peacebuilding often call on their adherents to love their enemies, but this is a very demanding message. Zygmunt Bauman observes that 'loving your neighbour' goes against human instincts and can be compared to a "leap of faith" (Bauman 2003, 78).[1] It may be even more difficult to love one's neighbour if one's previous experience of this neighbour is that of an opponent in a violent conflict and an adherent of another religion. It is in such settings that religious leaders use the rhetoric of love, but I question whether it can create social bonds between groups in conflict. My preliminary answer is that the rhetoric of love as part of religious peacebuilding is ineffectual unless the addressed groups feel they have had *justice*, meaning that their grievances and political claims have been voiced, heard, and resolved. To support this argument, I refer to the conceptualisation of justice and truth as a central part of the reconciliation processes proposed by John Paul Lederach (1997, 30). Perspectives on reconciliation can be considered as one part of the broader peacebuilding process, integral to reducing violence in recurrent or ongoing conflicts.

Presenting a case study from an ongoing religious peace project elucidates the dilemmas associated with references to love as a sacred value in religious peace initiatives. The empirical example from Ethiopia describes a religious peacebuilding initiative where leaders from majority religious communities joined hands publicly to denounce the sporadic violence that occurs between religious groups. In their messages advocating peace, these leaders have emphasised tolerance and coexistence; they have also used the word 'love', referring to the sacred duty to love their neighbours, even if they are

considered enemies (Abba Paulos et al. 2010, 1). This empirical example shows how religious leaders, while referring to the language of religious virtues, fail to address questions of justice that emerge from political grievances. Therefore, I suggest that they make a weaker contribution to stimulating bridging social capital than they would make if they spoke more openly about political problems—or what could be called the questions of justice that arise in scenarios of violent conflict.

Religious peacebuilding

David Little and Scott Appleby emphasise that the main avenue through which religious leaders contribute to peace is through building social relations. This engagement for peace is, according to them, characterised by values of non-violence (Little and Appleby 2004, 5). In current world politics, there is a wide array of such activities; religious leaders, both with and without the support of international agencies, use the resources available to them to transform deadly conflicts, specifically in their capacity as *religious* leaders. Such endeavours are particularly common in scenarios where religion is part of the conflict dynamics. One such example is the inter-religious council in Israel and Palestine, another the 'Imam and the Pastor' initiative which involves two religious leaders from different religious traditions working together for peace in Nigeria. However, in conflict scenarios which have no religious dimensions, religious peacebuilding initiatives are also deployed.

When discussing religious peacebuilding, it is valuable first to unpack the concept of *religion* to understand what resources religion might contribute to peacebuilding. When religious leaders engage in peacebuilding, they refer to their holy scriptures as sources of authority on how peace can be re-established. This calls for an understanding of religion, particularly the dimensions of religious discourse. Bruce Lincoln defines religion as a "discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal and contingent and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status" (Lincoln 2003, 5). In addition, a discussion of religious peacebuilding requires a perspective which shows how religious discourse might mobilise *social groups* to enact more peaceful practices. Without social groups to engage in the peaceful practices endorsed by religious discourse, any attempt to mobilise religious communities for peace would be in vain. Lincoln states that religion involves "a community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices" (ibid). He adds that religion is "an institution that regulates religious discourse, practices and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value" (ibid). This view envisions religious leaders as having the power due to their position in religious institutions to influence the practices of religious communities by referring to sacred texts and historical practices of

peaceful coexistence. All these elements—discourse, identity, community, and institution—are thus essential resources for religious leaders who are engaged in peacebuilding and capture the methods used and the logical reasoning embedded in religious peacebuilding initiatives.

The rhetoric of love is often evoked when religious leaders engage in peacebuilding (Abba Paulos et al. 2010; World Council of Churches 2008). The rhetoric of love is part of the global religious vocabulary and a popular 'go to' resource for religious agents who seek to underline the virtue of love instead of hate and peaceful coexistence instead of violence. Yet, what is the significance of the reference to love? Does it enable religious leaders to achieve their goal of mitigating violence? In the following, I will discuss whether such references to love might strengthen social bonds between groups who have experienced violent conflicts and thus whether they might contribute to reducing violence between them.

Bridging social capital as a contribution to peace

To understand whether a rhetoric of love contributes to peace, we need to examine first what a contribution to peace looks like. Scholars continue to grapple with the question of what a contribution to peace really is. It can perhaps be explained by neo-liberal trends affecting the donors who support religious peace initiatives, pushing them to measure the impact of the initiatives they support. The donors have, to an increasing extent, asked religious leaders to document the results of their efforts. The academic community, for its part, tries to provide answers to the question of what a contribution to peace is. Whereas earlier scholars predominantly focused on opportunities for religious actors in peacebuilding, they have now moved the discussion towards a more critical assessment of the potential of religious leaders to build peace (Steen-Johnsen 2016, 23). The more recent critical discussions have posed this question: *what are the conditions for religious peacebuilders being able to contribute to alleviating violence?* There has thus been an increasing interest in understanding the contextual conditions that facilitate such efforts (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1022). Next, while relying on prominent scholars in the theoretical discussion on religious peacebuilding, I will present the concept of bridging social capital to answer the question how religious leaders might contribute to peace.

Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney discuss how religious actors contribute to peace and the contextual conditions affecting their peace efforts. They claim that the most significant difference religious actors and organisations might make in promoting peace is to stimulate bridging social capital. By 'bridging social capital' they mean social bonds which span group divisions in situations of conflict. (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1024) The term 'social capital' is not new and has gained significance as an explanatory concept for a range of

social phenomena. It became widely known when it was used by Robert Putnam, together with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti, to explain why democratic institutions seem to be stronger in areas with social networks—areas which could be described as high in social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). Pierre Bourdieu used the term to describe how individuals from certain classes possess resources called social bonds (a form of social capital) which can facilitate access to other forms of capital and constitute a resource for positioning these individuals in what he refers to as social space (Bourdieu 1989, 17). The term later gained wide popularity and is used by both policy makers and scholars to describe how social bonds might be a resource for both individuals and society.

Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney employ the term 'social capital' to explain how religious leaders can contribute to peace in violent conflicts. They see broken social relations as the main challenge in the aftermath of violence and suggest that, in order to build sustainable or what they refer to as *positive peace*, such broken relations must be restored (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1023).[2] One key prerequisite for this to take place is that the restored social bonds must be *bridging*, meaning that they span diverse groups which may have less interaction with one another because of violent conflict. On the other hand, social capital might also be *bonding*, meaning that the social fabric of already existing groups is strengthened. Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney underline that religious groups have generally been strong in bonding social capital and weak in bridging social capital. The construction of bonding social capital might be necessary to achieve bridging social capital in the later stage of a peace process. Nevertheless, according to scholars like Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney (2010, 1023), the bridging quality of social capital is essential to establishing sustainable peace.

Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney further indicate that there are several preconditions for establishing social ties. First and foremost, they suggest, religious actors' ability to contribute to bridging social capital is mediated by their relationship with the state. This is a key point which underscores that religious leaders are not free agents; rather, their actions are conditioned by their relations within the political context in which they are situated. Whether religious leaders are capable of re-establishing broken social bonds depends on two factors: whether the religious community has a majority or minority position in society and whether the peacebuilding project has an official or unofficial status (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1023). These dimensions of what Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney call state–civil relationships can open or close opportunities for religious leaders to contribute to peace. For example, in some instances, the leader of a majority religious community will have fewer possibilities to engage in religious peacebuilding when this involves criticising the state, as majority communities are often closely aligned with

governmental powers. On the other hand, while a religious community in a minority position might have fewer influential resources, its members might be freer to voice public criticism of the government as part of a peacebuilding endeavour (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1030).

To pinpoint the precise nature of the contribution religious leaders make to peace, Brewer, Higgins and Teeney invoke the concept of *spiritual capital* to suggest how religious actors might contribute to creating such bonds.[3] The authors claim that by caring for the adherents' spiritual needs and by sharing practices of faith, religious communities have common features which help to forge social bonds between them. The term 'spiritual capital' is closely related to the earlier definition of religious peacebuilding, describing how religious actors employ resources which are particular to their religious beliefs and practices when engaging in religious peacebuilding.

While the concept of social capital seems very apt for describing the specific contributions of religious leaders to peace, the term has been widely criticised for being used to explain "too much with too little" (Woolcock 1998, 155). Critics have claimed that it is impossible to measure social bonds; therefore, the term 'social capital' is not a very useful analytical category. Despite its shortcomings, in discussions of religious peacebuilding, the term seems to capture one of the main contributions that religious leaders might make. It is important to note that assuming that bridging social ties automatically equates to more peace is riddled with difficulties. Many scholars would agree that social bonds, in the form of networks and trust, are assets which might contribute to less violence in a post-conflict society. Some authors (e.g. McGrellis 2010, 775; Szreter 2002, 588–589) have shown that building networks within a social group can facilitate later attempts to create bridges between more heterogeneous groups. In a study of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, Maria Power emphasises that it was pivotal to the success of the evangelical association "Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland" (ECONI) that its members worked on strengthening bonds *within* the Protestant or Catholic communities before their respective members were encouraged to work with the other community (Power 2011, 70). Power's study highlights the complex nature of social bonds between identity groups who have experienced inter-group conflict.

Insisting on the establishment of inter-group social relations without addressing deeper grievances in conflict scenarios may well have its own set of specific challenges. One, which I highlight here, concerns situations in which the rhetoric of love is used without a willingness to address injustice openly. Encouraging such relationships to be forged without also addressing judicial transgressions that occurred during the conflict as well as deeper political grievances might be problematic. However, first, I will add some comments about the way references to love might prove an asset for religious peacebuilding that aims to increase bridging social relations and bonds between different groups.

The rhetoric of love and bridging social capital

In order to understand how references to the religious value of love are connected to bridging social capital, I will present some theoretical perspectives on the role of love and emotions in the establishment of relationships. The question I explore here is whether references to love might indeed contribute to establishing social bonds between groups who have been divided by conflict. Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney underscore that spiritual capital as an asset in creating bridging social capital might indicate that this is the case. They highlight how shared faith, practices, and values facilitate versatile interactions and connections between different religious groups (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2011, 22). In this perspective, it is possible to envision that proffering love can cultivate shared values between religious groups and that this emphasis can contribute to establishing social connections between them.

Love could also be conceived of as a religious value or norm which can be stressed as particularly important by religious leaders engaging in religious peacebuilding initiatives. Appleby claims, for example, that, if religious leaders underline that certain religious norms and acts are valuable, they *sacralise* them (Appleby 2000, 26). Sacralisation could imply that certain acts are justified and rendered valuable by reference to sacred texts and traditions. In this understanding, references to the shared religious value of love might be helpful to enable more peaceful interactions with other religious groups and might contribute to the establishment of trust and social networks between them.

Galtung argues in favour of viewing love as a facilitating element in the establishment of bridging social capital between religious groups in conflict zones. Like many other scholars discussing religion, violence, and peace, he emphasises that religious traditions have resources which allow them to kindle both violence and peace. In his deliberations on the 'hard' and 'soft' qualities of religion, he highlights that all religious traditions have *hard* qualities accentuating division and distance from the other. However, he finds that religious traditions also embody *soft* qualities, encouraging respect for others and for nature—and emphasising love. Galtung encourages all proponents of the soft qualities of religion to unite for peace and sees great potential for shared platforms of action based on these values (Galtung 2012, 256).

Because leading religious figures can underscore the shared value of love and encourage interaction based on it, it has the potential to be a vital resource in the formation of bridging social bonds and trust. This opens an understanding of love as part of a specific spiritual capital that draws upon shared values between different faiths. The reference to loving one's enemies as part of a religious discourse for peace might, therefore, open up common

ground for action and for the establishment of social bonds, which, as mentioned, contributes to peace in violent conflicts (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1023). In this perspective, love might stimulate peace in the form of cultivating social bonds. However, as I will point out in the following, love is only *one* of the elements that must be present in order for groups to interact peacefully. Other values such as justice and truth must be equally considered when the aim is to establish bonds between groups who have interacted violently in the past.

The rhetoric of love and peace?

I have argued that a rhetoric of love might contribute to the strengthening of bridging social capital between groups in conflict. Here, I take the argument further, asking whether references to love are enough. Could references to love, in extreme cases, render religious peacebuilding processes even less viable?

These questions spring from theoretical debates about the requirements for peacebuilding and reconciliation. As I have suggested, strengthening social bonds between groups who have been engaged in conflict is a useful contribution to peace (Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney 2010, 1023). However, as I have argued elsewhere, the establishment of bridging social capital may not be enough to establish peace in situations where underlying social and political injustice is causing violence (Steen-Johnsen 2014, 287). Joram Tarusarira and Gladys Ganiel suggest that violent conflicts are characterised by "dysfunctional relationships" between groups (Tarusarira and Ganiel 2012, 101). They claim that such dysfunctional relationships might be aggravated by deeper social and economic imbalances between groups as well as by structural political imbalances (Tarusarira and Ganiel 2012, 102). Their understanding of conflict challenges the notion of how religious peacebuilders can contribute to peace. Understanding conflicts as possibly rooted in deeper social injustices between groups demands that a viable contribution to peace grapple with the deeper layers of the conflict dynamics. The question remains whether an emphasis on love and coexistence, which is endorsed by religious leaders, is enough to address these deeper layers of conflict or whether it avoids taking seriously enough the difficult and often political grievances involved in violent interactions between groups.

Lederach's deliberations on the prerequisites for reconciliation in divided societies follow a similar kind of reasoning. Like Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney, Lederach is preoccupied with the *relational* aspects of peacebuilding: he discusses the processes which must take place between groups so that they can peacefully coexist (Lederach 1997, 30). The author notes that four elements must be included in reconciliation processes to restore broken relations between groups who have interacted violently in the past. These elements are *truth*,

justice, mercy, and *peace*. References to love might be related to the concepts of mercy and peace which entail acceptance, forgiveness, compassion, and respect. However, it is harder to establish how references to love can contribute to truth and justice. Truth entails acknowledgement, transparency, and clarity, whereas justice refers to equality, making things right, and restitution, according to Lederach. He stresses that reconciliation processes have an emotional and psychological dimension. At the same time, he underscores the need to recognize and deal with past grievances in order to restore relations (Lederach 1997, 30).

The connection between justice and peace is complex, which should be recognized. In some instances, processes of justice may lead to even more violence and conflict. Kai Ambos, Judith Large, and Marieke Wierda (2009, v) write that

> Opposing voices point out that prosecutions can make it impossible to achieve a negotiated settlement to conflict, may divide and even threaten the affected population, if they open old wounds or prompt re-mobilization for war or criminal intent.

The stance of the United Nations is that justice and peace should be pursued in tandem (ibid, vi). A noteworthy observation about the connection between justice and peace is made by Eric Patterson (2012, 70–71): he underlines that processes of justice move beyond situations of impunity, demanding an accounting for transgressions, and therefore often stop the cyclical nature of conflicts. These arguments contribute to the discussion about the rhetoric of love in religious peacebuilding by the significance of a contribution to peace that does not acknowledge the justice dimension that scholars like Lederach (1997) and Patterson (2012) and organisations such as the UN (Ambos, Large, and Wierda 2009) suggest must be part of a peace process.

As underlined in the previous discussion, a rhetoric of love can play a role in stimulating bridging social capital between antagonists. However, a rhetoric of love does not seem to be enough to create sustainable peace if questions of justice and truth are not addressed simultaneously. The discussion here has underscored that dealing with grievances, injustice, and transgressions is a pivotal component in the restoration of broken social bonds. All these elements have a place in peace processes. Lederach's arguments align with those advanced by Galtung, describing that positive peace, that is solid viable patterns of coexistence, presupposes equality and justice (Galtung 1991, 31). References to love without concurrent engagement with questions of truth and justice may therefore simply not be enough to establish bridging social capital between antagonists.

Yet, what opportunities do religious leaders have to initiate discourses of justice? Is the reference to love their only option in difficult circumstances? Stein Erik Horjen notes that, during the peace process in South Sudan, the

churches wanted to raise questions of justice and reconciliation but were not given the opportunity to do so in the political peace process. This led to an inherent weakness in the process, which thus did not yield the results the churches had hoped for. (Horjen 2014, 162) In an example from Ethiopia, which will be presented below, religious leaders did not dare to raise questions of justice because of the formation of an authoritarian state. Religious involvement in the post-apartheid reconciliation process in South Africa may be a successful example of the participation of religious leaders in processes of justice. Therefore, it may not be a question of insight or will on the part of religious leaders so much as contextual conditions that open or hinder their engagement in questions of justice.

As mentioned, I will describe a religious peacebuilding process in Ethiopia to examine whether a rhetoric of love without addressing injustice can be sufficient to build peace. In this initiative, religious leaders strongly emphasised love and coexistence as important religious values. They did so without touching upon the deeper injustices involved in conflict scenarios. This example accentuates that love is not sufficient to contribute to peace if it is not coupled with other concepts, such as justice. I argue that proffering love without justice and truth may, at times, even hinder deeper necessary processes of truth from becoming salient in peace processes.

The rhetoric of love in religious peacebuilding in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, religious leaders from major religious traditions have gathered for many years to try to reduce tensions between religious groups in their country who have engaged in violent clashes. I have researched these peace initiatives and conducted 53 in-depth interviews with religious leaders, government officials, and people in conflict areas, describing the role and opportunities of the leaders to contribute to peace. The study was a part of a larger PhD project aiming to identify the connections between political context and religious peace initiatives (Steen-Johnsen 2014). The religious leaders I interviewed for the study were already organised in different forms of interreligious networks, with an informal élite network of top leaders and a formalised council consisting of second-order religious leaders being among the two most prominent which were included in my study to explore these processes.

Religious groups in Ethiopia do at times clash violently. This has especially taken place in the southern regions of the country. In these conflicts, people have been killed and churches and mosques have been burnt. Although these conflicts appear religious as they take place between demarcated religious identity groups, they rarely revolve around doctrinal disputes. Rather, the conflicts seem to be caused by deeper political grievances and can be seen as protests against the political and economic marginalisation of ethnic groups

(Steen-Johnsen 2016, 102–104). Still, the religious leaders participating in the study emphasised that the conflicts were religious and proffered religious rhetoric to remedy them. I suggest that they did so in order to keep in line with state policies regarding these conflicts.

The conflicts should be understood in the light of historic polarisations in Ethiopia. The country has traditionally had a Christian Orthodox majority, which has historically been closely affiliated with political powers. During the reign of Haile Selassie (1930–1974), the Orthodox Church and the emperor were almost inseparable (Larebo 1994, 149). The Orthodox Church as well as political élites have been dominated by the highland Ethiopians, consisting mainly of the ethnic groups of the Amhara and Tigray. This reality has further consolidated both political and religious power in the hands of certain groups. Scholars who have analysed Ethiopian religious life note that the central powers have exercised extensive control over more peripheral religious groups, which are often located in southern Ethiopia (Zegeye and Pausewang 1994, 27). Religious groups who have historically been marginalised include Protestants, Muslims of predominantly Sufi persuasion, and animists.[4] These groups historically resided in the south, the only area open to the activities of Western missionaries of the Christian faith. During the reign of various emperors, southern Ethiopia was colonised through a feudal system whereby the ruling élites exploited the land in the south. In the conflicts which have occurred between religious identity groups, there are references to historical grievances and complaints that land was taken by Orthodox settlers from the Amhara group at the expense of Protestants and Muslims located in the south.

The current Ethiopian polity can best be described as authoritarian.[5] The ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has taken full control of the government at all levels and applies a governance model which promotes upward accountability to the ruling party, rather than a downward accountability to the people (Aalen 2011, 47). The EPRDF regime has a tighter control over Ethiopian society than any other political group ever had before in Ethiopian history (Abbink 2011, 604). Democratic space for free expression is severely limited and international organisations have expressed concern about the restricted opportunities for people to voice opinions contrary to those of the ruling party (Human Rights Watch 2010, 4–7). The government has also been known to use violence towards those who oppose it, in conjunction with suppressing elections, and to restrain protests from the religious communities (Amnesty International 2013). Similar to previous elections, Ethiopia's elections in 2015 were, according to news reports, marred by the EPRDF regime's tight control of any attempt to voice opposition against the incumbent regime (Samuelsen 2015).

Religion has become a contentious topic in Ethiopia, a country surrounded by volatile countries where religion has become part of political protests. Ethiopia has taken military action against the al-Shabaab Islamist movement

in neighbouring Somalia and has cautiously observed the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Egypt. In 2011, the government clamped down on Muslim groups protesting against what they saw as interference in their internal religious affairs. Studies on religious peacebuilding in Ethiopia have shown that the regime aims to control religion for security reasons (Steen-Johnsen 2014, 221–223, 2016). An example of this is the way the political authorities have initiated and taken subtle control of the content of such initiatives. The religious leaders engaged in peacebuilding described how political authorities interfered in the planning and effectuation of religious peacebuilding initiatives. The result was often that these leaders did not dare to speak openly about the underlying grievances causing the unrest and violence between religious groups. The conflicts that religious leaders addressed had apparent religious dimensions, as they took place between demarcated religious groups and often in conjunction with religious ceremonies. A closer look at the conflict dynamics revealed, however, that deep political and economic issues were involved in causing the conflict (Steen-Johnsen 2016, 102). These issues can be perceived as 'structural imbalances' which Tarusarira and Ganiel's definition of conflict suggests (Tarusarira and Ganiel 2012). Fearing the government, the religious leaders did not address these deeper imbalances, because they contained dimensions of political protest and unresolved historical injustices.

It is in this context that religious leaders have engaged in peacebuilding talk about the 'love of enemies'. They do this when visiting conflict areas in the aftermath of conflicts, where they call for joint prayer meetings among the groups who have been engaged in conflict and remind them of the religious virtue of love. In addition, they underscore that Ethiopia has been a country where religious groups have lived peacefully together for centuries. Some would say that the latter message is a gross understatement of the systematic suppression of some religious groups by others. Emphasising the value of love in the aftermath of conflict can be explained by the precarious political situation in Ethiopia. It might, in fact, be the only politically acceptable strategy when religious leaders engage in peacebuilding in a context like Ethiopia (Steen-Johnsen 2014, 260). The EPRDF regime supports this kind of discourse as it seems to serve its quest for political stability. I suggest that this kind of rhetoric might reduce violence and can be considered a very limited contribution to peace. But, as Galtung's research underscores, contributions to peace that fail to take into account the underlying dimensions of violent conflict will not be sufficient to build positive peace (Galtung 1991, 31). Thus, I have argued that this kind of contribution to peace should be deemed marginal and stimulating bridging social capital through references to love will not contribute to positive peaceful coexistence unless the more contentious political dimensions of the conflicts are addressed. Love without truth and justice is simply not enough to build

peace (Lederach 1997, 30). Religious leaders *can* address these dimensions if they want, but in the authoritarian political context of Ethiopia they choose not to and opt rather for an approach whereby they support the *status quo* through their messages of peace and love.

Support for the *status quo* and the ruling élites is not an uncommon strategy for African religious leaders in general, according to Jeffrey Haynes (Haynes 1996, 80). He states that, especially when state powers are backed by security forces, as is the case in Ethiopia, religious leaders may have very limited opportunities to oppose these powers (ibid, 82). According to Haynes, this is because religious leaders fear punishment and therefore turn a blind eye to transgressions by the state authorities (ibid, 102). While an array of reasons, including fear, might impel religious leaders to focus on messages of love instead of talking about the real political issues at stake, this form of peacebuilding—where religious virtues are emphasised at the expense of addressing real political grievances—will yield very limited contributions to peace.

In this situation, the rhetoric of love may, at worst, contribute to diminishing otherwise legitimate political protests disguised as religious unrest. Hence the message of love and peaceful coexistence becomes a contentious and potentially ambivalent tool for peace.

Conclusion

The Zambian scholar Isaac Phiri asserts that proclaiming peace and love might be a key role for churches in African political life. He suggests that, especially in authoritarian states, churches could be the only institutions with enough leadership and credibility to challenge the ruling political élites (Phiri 2000, 781). The example from Ethiopia shows that, in this context, religious authorities do not challenge the oligarchies of the state but remain locked in a discourse of peace and love and remain myopic to questions of justice and truth. When the concept of love is framed in this way, it becomes a vehicle which can contribute to silence and continued oppression rather than a being tool to create bridges between people.

I have shown that a rhetoric of love might, at best, contribute to bridging social capital and to establishing bonds that transcend divisions arising in the aftermath of violent conflicts. However, the case from Ethiopia, combined with Lederach's theories of reconciliation, suggests that relations are only restored in the aftermath of conflict if several dynamics of the relationship are addressed, such as questions of truth, justice, mercy, and compassion (Lederach 1997, 31). This suggests that, if references to love one's enemies as a religious duty is to contribute to bridging social capital, this discourse must be more than mere lip service and must actively address thorny and possibly painful questions of justice and truth.

Notes

1. Here he refers to Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (Freud 1961).
2. The term 'positive peace' was coined by Galtung and suggests a situation where justice and equality prevail and are structurally embedded (Galtung 1991, 31).
3. The term 'spiritual capital' is taken from the web site of the Metanexus Institute and is elaborated by Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney (2011, 22).
4. Jon Abbink (2008, 117) explains Sufism in the following way: "Sufism (taصawwuf) is a mystical movement affiliated (mostly) with Sunni Islam, aimed at the adherents gaining a closer connection to and higher knowledge of Allàh. It is geared to personal spiritual growth and union with Allàh, performed collectively, in fraternities or brotherhoods."
5. There are signs that the Ethiopian polity is reforming and opening up under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, but it is too early to say whether the authoritarian state will change profoundly.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all those who participated in the study of religious peacebuilding in Ethiopia. In addition, I am grateful to the University of Agder for giving me the opportunity to conduct research on this topic.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work has been supported by the University of Agder in providing the author with research time.

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