



NORWEGIAN
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Religion in Development

How is the role and meaning of religion in development interpreted by organization staff and local participants of Norwegian development aid?

Torstein Solhjell

Supervisor

Associate Professor Kjetil Fretheim

This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at MF Norwegian School of Theology and is therefore approved as a part of this education.

MF Norwegian School of Theology, [2012, Autumn]

AVH5035: Master's Thesis (60 ECTS)

Master in Religion, Society and Global Issues

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Working with this thesis has been a demanding and educating process both personally and professionally. The challenge has been twofold: To manage a large amount of literature and applying it in a way which makes sense, and to accommodate the collected data material in an unbiased way. The outcome presented in this thesis has come as a result of my own efforts, in addition to contributions from a number of people. Many people should be thanked, and I will express my gratitude to some of them in particular.

Many thanks need to be directed to my supervisor, associate professor Kjetil Fretheim. He has on several occasions put me back on track, and guided me in a good way. I am fascinated by his academic skills coupled with an ability to give constructive feedback in portions that I can handle. He has throughout this process been interested, available and encouraging.

The production of text has been a most demanding process, very much so because I decided to write in English. Thanks to my friend Ida and my father Kåre, for reading through the text in a most thorough way. I am very thankful for all the time and effort they have spent commenting on both grammar and content.

The field work conducted in Ethiopia in October 2011 set in motion a number of people in Ethiopia as well as in Norway. First, I would like to thank the ones who were important for the outcome of the field work, starting with my informants. Without their cooperation, it would not be possible to write this thesis. A special thanks to Abdirahman in Adadley and the Endalew family in Rayitu, for being sincere hosts and for assisting all my inquiries during field work. I also owe great thanks to my good friends Bjarte and Jacob for adventures, late nights and good times during field work. Their presence gave the stay in Ethiopia an extra dimension. Next sincere thanks to the people who took care of my daughter and wife in Norway during my field work, making it possible for me to stay away for so long. Thanks to family for stepping in for me on several occasions.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my dear Gunnhild. First of all for being my wife and the mother of our beautiful children, Lea and Simon, then for making this research possible in the first place. Her support and encouragement throughout the process has been priceless for the outcome of my studies.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Question

Religion and development are the two main concepts of this thesis. These are basic concepts also in human life, religion because of its ability to create hope and give meaning to people, and development because it is about the changes we crave to get a better life. While development deals with issues related to this world, religion is often concerned with otherworldly matters. And while development is a tangible concept about change in human everyday life, religion often deals with issues which might be more difficult to grasp.

With this short description in mind, one might claim that these two concepts do not fit together. One similarity of the two concepts, however, is pointed at by Gerrie Ter Haar. She argues that religion and development are both visions about how the world may be transformed. The religious perspective refers to an inner transformation, while a development perspective points at an external development – arrangements made for the provision of material resources (Haar, 2011:5). Other theoretical data, as well as empirical data, will in the thesis illustrate how these two concepts might be connected. Therefore, in my research about the relationship between religion and development, the focus will not be *if*, but rather *how* religion is integrated into development.

First, let me clarify the meaning of development and religion as it is used in the thesis. *Development* as a general term refers to changes in a society. This development can be good or bad. Development as it is used in the text refers to development as a result of external forces, i.e. development work. This means work originated by the aim of raising the living standards of marginalized people across the globe. *Religion* refers to a belief in something divine that influences a person's perception of the world. This concept will be partly defined by scholars and partly by the informants in the field. A more extensive definition of these core concepts will follow in the next chapter.

The motivation and interest of doing research based on religion and development has come as a result of two aspects. The first has to do with the meaning of religion in the developed world (the Western world) versus the developing world. In the Western world compartmentalization of different aspects of life has confined religion to a role in the private sphere. In the developing world all aspects of life are more or less tied together, and religion is present in all aspects, public as well as private. This picture will be more nuanced along the way. This unequal status of religion illustrates a challenge in contemporary development

work. How do we deal with religion in development work? And how do Western development organizations adapt to a religious reality in the developing world?

The second source of motivation has to do with the political move in Norway, where the Norwegian Minister of Development in 2011 stated that religion plays a major role in development, and that all development organizations receiving funds from the Norwegian government have to adapt to this “new” religious reality in the developing world (Gjestad, 2011).¹

I therefore decided to take a closer look at two Norwegian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both involved in development work in Ethiopia. One is a religious organization and the other is a secular organization. The focus of the research has been people’s understanding of religion and the role it plays in actual development projects. The main research question is as follows:

How is the role and meaning of religion in development interpreted by organization staff and local participants of Norwegian development aid?

1.2 Material and Methods

One aspect of the research question is to uncover prospective differences between a religious development organization and a secular development organization when it comes to the approach on the ground. Even though both projects for a large part are funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), which requires development work to be separated from religious activities, one might still believe that there is a difference in the way these two organizations run their development projects.

The material of the research is twofold, both based on field work conducted in Ethiopia in October 2011. I interviewed centrally employed organization staff as well as locally employed organization staff; representatives from the funding organization as well as the implementing organization, and local participants either affiliated with the NLM funded project or the DF funded project. The data material presented and discussed in the analysis is based on semi-structured interviews and field notes.

The epistemological position applied in the research is interpretivism, a position which focuses on the understanding of human behavior (Bryman, 2008:15). My role as a researcher

¹ This reference and emerging references in Norwegian are translated by me.

is to try to grasp the meaning of the material, instead of only explaining the hard “facts”. Furthermore, constructivism is applied as the ontological position. This tradition asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2008:19). To put it in another way, related to the research: When one of the informants reply to a question asked in the interview, the statement made is a result of the informant’s interpretation of social reality. After this, the statement will be interpreted by me as the researcher. Methodological issues will be further dealt with in chapter four.

1.3 Related Research

The two fields of interest in this research, religion and development, have separately a long tradition within the field of social sciences. These two concepts melted together in this research, however, is a quite new field, with little material published so far. The introductory books *Religion and Development: conflict or cooperation* by Jeffrey Haynes and *Religion in Development: Rewriting the secular script* by Séverine Deneulin and Masooda Bano are frequently referred to in the theory chapter. Furthermore, *Religion and Development: Ways of transforming the world* edited by Gerrie Ter Haar, *Development* by Anthony Payne and Nicola Phillips and *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations* edited by Jennings and Clarke has been looked into. Another relevant book is *Interkulturell forståelse i bistand* edited by Arne Tolo and Line Alice Ytrehus. This book published in 2011 focuses on the importance of intercultural understanding in the field of development aid.

To my knowledge no research has previously looked into the relationship between religion and development in development projects on the ground in Ethiopia. When it comes to the role of religion in development work on a general level, some research exists. Sindre Olav Edland’s master study about the role of religion in development work is one example. His sample of informants consisted of development workers representing two different Norwegian non-governmental organizations, and the main research question was to find out how religion is understood by these actors involved in practical development work (Edland, 2007).

1.4 Structure

The first part of the thesis consists of chapter two to four being the theory chapter, the background chapter and the methods chapter respectively.

With the research question in mind, there are some issues requesting further introduction to the reader. These will be dealt with in the theory chapter, which consists of five parts. The first part will look into different scholarly definitions of religion, and discuss what might be most applicable for the research in question. Secondly, development will be defined in order to set the premises for this important term in the following reading. In the third part secularization theory will be looked into. This theory will serve as a background for understanding the role religion has played in modern development theory. In part four different theories of development will be presented. In order to understand the situation of today, we need to know what happened yesterday. This section will focus on mainstream development thought and theory since World War II, with an emphasis on how religion has been expressed within these different theories. Part five will look at the development practice in Norway and more specifically how mission organizations have been carrying out development work for the Norwegian government over the last fifty years. Some of the public debate connected to this practice will also be presented in the final part of the theory chapter.

Topics essential for the understanding of the research context and the organizations involved in the research will be introduced in the background chapter, consisting of three parts. Information about Ethiopia as the context of my field work will be given in the first part. An outline of this country's religious and ethnic diversity will be presented, together with a short description of the socio-political situation in present Ethiopia. The culturally/religiously based practice of female genital mutilation will also be given some emphasis in this part. Part two and three will deal with NLM and DF as the development organizations in question. A presentation of these organizations and their guidelines, values, and strategy documents will together with a brief introduction of their implementing partners Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC) and Ogaden Welfare and Development Association (OWDA) mark the end of the background chapter.

Chapter four will describe the process of my research, from the initial planning to the data analysis. Furthermore, methodological appraisals along the way will be mentioned in this chapter, tied together with theory about social research methods.

The main part is found in chapter five, six and seven, dealing with the empirical material of the thesis. This part is based on qualitative data collected through interviews and observations in the field, describing religion at three different levels in development work. By investigating religion at an individual level, a project level and a more general level, many aspects of how religion is in play in development work will be enlightened.

Chapter five looks into the individual aspects of religion. This key concept will first be defined by the informants, thereafter it will be looked into whether religion may be a motivating factor for doing development work. The identity of staff members affiliated with the NLM funded project will also be looked into.

Another aspect related exclusively to organization staff affiliated with the NLM funded project is found in the first part of chapter six, where I will go deeper into the material and look for examples of how religion may be present at the project level. The double meaning of “unreached” and the cause and effect this may have will here be enlightened. After this, the focus will be twofold. First I will investigate whether and how religion may be part of the development projects funded by DF and NLM. Secondly empirical examples will illustrate how religion may support or obstruct a development project.

Chapter seven, which is the final analysis chapter, will present three different ways in which religion is integrated into development. It will be discussed how religion is addressed in the field and what the informants think about the link between religion and development. Furthermore, chapter seven will also discuss the importance of the religious affiliation of organization staff.

The conclusion of the thesis will be found in chapter eight. The summing up will draw the lines between the first and the main part, tied together in some concluding remarks. Theories will be brought up in the light of my research question, and new theories may evolve.

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In order to understand the background for Norwegian development aid today, an introduction of some theoretical perspectives is essential. This chapter will therefore start to define religion and development as the two main concepts of the research. After this, a short presentation of secularization theory will serve as a background for describing the role religion has had within development theory in the preceding six decades. An introduction of some main trends within Western development theory in this period and a closer look at the Norwegian development aid in the same period, both parts with an emphasis on how religion has been expressed, will be undertaken in the two final parts of this chapter.

2.1 Defining Religion

Steve Bruce states in his book *Fundamentalism* that religion has the potential to shake the settled order, simply by asserting that there is some power higher than the monarchs and magistrates of this world (Bruce, 2008:1). But what is really religion, and how do we define this complex, and seemingly powerful concept? Some might define it as a fellowship connected to the religious institutions in society, like churches and mosques, while others might relate religion to something personal and private. Religion as it is used in this text follows the tradition of the sociology of religion, namely the study of religion in its social context. In an introductory book to the sociology of religion, Furseth and Repstad points out that there are two main categories of definitions within the sociology of religion. These are *substantive* and *functional* definitions, describing characteristics of the content of religion and the effect that religion has for people and/or society respectively (Furseth and Repstad, 2006:16).

Scholars have many different definitions of religion. The American scholar Martin Marty says that scholars will never agree on the definition of this concept. He identifies five phenomena which will make it easier to describe what religion is about: Religion 1) focuses our “ultimate concern, it 2) builds community, it 3) appeals to myth and symbol, it 4) is enforced through rites and ceremonies and it 5) demands certain behavior from its adherents” (Marty cited in Haynes, 2007:14). Peter L. Berger defines religion as a man’s relationship to “a sacred cosmos”, and argues that sacred is something that fills people with awe and fascination (Berger in Furseth and Repstad, 2006:19).

While Marty makes five categories to limit what religion is about, Berger defines it in a broader way by using the word sacred. They are both substantive definitions of religion. I would in this thesis like to look at what religion *does*, focusing on a more functional definition of the concept. The concept of worldview as it is defined by James W. Sire might be fruitful in this respect:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being (Sire, 2004:161).

A worldview is described as a starting point for understanding the world. This might also be said about religion. In the first part of Marty's definition, he claims that religion focuses our "ultimate concern". This "ultimate concern" might be juxtaposed with Sire's concept of worldview. A worldview has to do with our basic conception of the world. One important element in the shaping of this conception is religion.

Clifford Geertz, an influential scholar within the field of anthropological studies, focuses on how religion influences people's perception of the world. His thoughts on religion presented in the essay "Religion as a Cultural System" emphasizes the meaning of religion, rather than the social functions of it. The ultimate aim of investigating a religion ought to be to understand how the world and human existence appear meaningful to the believer, according to Geertz (Geertz referred to in Eriksen, 2001:211). James W. Sire uses "a fundamental orientation of the heart" as the starting point for describing a worldview. Clifford Geertz' thoughts on the social and psychological role of religion might be called worldview oriented, with a focus on grasping "men's notions [...] of the "really real", and how these notions "color their sense of the reasonable, the practical, the humane, and the moral" (Geertz, 1973:124).

Hence, because a functional approach to religion – what it means for people on the ground in Ethiopia – is an essential aspect of this thesis, I find Clifford Geertz' definition as the most fruitful.

2.2 Defining Development

Many would say that the starting point of development aid is President Truman's speech on the 12th of March, 1947, where he argued for a substantial American military and economical

aid to Greece and Turkey (Truman, 1980:105). The political concern for the world population was also reflected in the constituting charter of the newly established United Nations, which included “higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development (Deneulin and Bano, 2009:30).

Anthony Payne points out that it is not entirely correct to claim that development theory began in 1945. According to Payne, it would be more accurate to say that we saw the rise of development as a political project in the post-Second World War period, where the “developing countries” were encouraged to pursue a program of change, set by the already “developed countries.” Defining these two groups of countries implies that there must have been development in earlier historical epochs, development which had risen from the first development theories (Payne and Phillips, 2010:6).

For the purpose of this thesis it is sufficient to look at the theories and thoughts that have had an effect on development work from the Second World War until today. A short summary of development theories during this period and how religion has been expressed in these theories will be given later in the chapter. Before that, let us have a look at a theory that has affected development theory and thinking for the last sixty years, namely the secularization theory.

2.3 Secularization Theory

Religion was hardly addressed in practical development work in the first half century of development aid, starting with the 1950s. This may be explained by the way religion was looked upon by the funders of development work in the Western world at that time. In the rise of the social sciences at the end of the nineteenth century, religion was in the Western world viewed as something irrational, incompatible with human reason. Many scholars claimed that religion belonged to the private sphere, and they assumed that the marginalization of religion in the public sphere would ultimately lead to disappearance. This theory, which has been called the secularization theory, claimed that religion would lose its position in peoples’ lives as societies got modernized, human reason and rationality would replace the role of religion (Deneulin and Bano, 2009:15).

The famous scholar in the sociology of religion José Casanova goes more into detail when handling the secularization theory. He divides secularization theory into three different propositions: Secularization as differentiation, as marginalization, and as privatization. He

claims that it is only the first one of these processes which actually happened. The other two processes are questionable, according to him (Casanova, 1994:7).

Casanova describes the rise of modern state, rise of modern capitalism, and rise of modern science as processes which caused the differentiation of the religious and secular sphere, where different aspects of life such as religion, political power, and economy were put in different compartments of a society. The marginalization thesis and privatization thesis are according to Casanova questionable results of this differentiation process. He points at the marginalization of religion as a dominant historical trend in Western Europe only. And when it comes to the privatization thesis, he remarks that most religious traditions have resisted all along the process of secularization. He rather argues for a de-privatization of religion in the modern world (Casanova, 1994).

Peter Berger, an American sociologist, was one of the strongest defenders of the secularization thesis in the 1960s. But at the end of the twentieth century, he claimed the thesis false. Another American sociologist, Scott Thomas, used a humoristic and catching illustration to show that the term secularism only is accountable to the Western world: "...using secularism as an analytical framework for analyzing the reality of non-Western countries is comparable to using the map of the French Alps for analyzing whatever may be called mountains in the world" (Thomas cited in Deneulin and Bano, 2009:54-5).

We need to point out that secularization theory represents thoughts and ideas applicable to Western societies exclusively, although it has served as a framework for understanding religion in non-Western societies as well. As we have seen, the relevance of this theory has been debated even within Western societies. The thoughts of scholars like Casanova, Berger and Thomas indicate a need for contextualization when dealing with the role of religion in a society.

2.4 Religion in Development Theory

I have previously claimed that religion did not play an important role in practical development work in the decades following President Truman's call for helping nations and people in need. This does not mean that religion was not treated at all by the early development theories, or that religion did not matter for key players in development thinking and theory. The following sections contain an overview of development thinking and theory in this period, with an emphasis on how religion has been expressed.

2.4.1 Modernization Theory

Modernization Theory evolved in the aftermath of the Second World War, and it was heavily influenced by The United States' desire to "win over" the new "developing world", meaning countries in the "Third World". The advent of the Cold War – with the United States representing the "Free World" characterized by liberal democracies, and the USSR representing the "Communist World" characterized by state control – stimulated modernization theory. The path of progress from tradition to modernity experienced in the Western World became the recipe also for "Third World" countries. Modernization theory claimed that this recipe would create development. US President Harry Truman's promise to provide US development aid for "Third World" countries resulted in US social scientists and their students travelling to Africa, Asia and Latin America in the decades after World War II, enjoying generous support from both governmental and private agencies as they studied the problems of poverty, driven forward by the mission of modernization theory (Payne and Phillips, 2010:62-63).

The most celebrated and influential theory within modernization theory was associated with the American historian Walt Whitman Rostow. In his *Stages of Economic Growth*, first published in 1960, he argued that it is possible to identify all societies as lying within one of five categories, when speaking about their economic dimensions. He called the first stage *the traditional society*, and the final stage – the aim of all development – *the age of mass-consumption*. According to Rostow it is possible to juxtapose the development going forward in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, with the transitions experienced by the Western world (Rostow, 1990:139). Rostow was not only a scholar, but also a government official working under President John F. Kennedy and later President Lyndon Johnson. In these roles he was concerned that the US should support, aid and protect modernization processes around the world (Payne and Phillips, 2010:67-8).

Given the fact that Rostow uses the Western world as a model for successful transitions in a society, and that these transitions has not come this far in other areas of the world, it may be possible to claim that Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* is nothing more than a description of the history of industrialization in the Western world.

A text that dominated development thought in this period was the *Theory of Economic Growth*, published by Arthur Lewis in 1955. In this theory, religion was mentioned frequently as an important factor in advancing or hindering economic growth. Lewis claimed that

religion plays a major role in economic growth by its ability to shape the attitudes towards different variables such as valuation of material goods, work, wealth creation, thrift, invention, population growth and the treatment of strangers. Given work as an example, religion is according to Lewis conducive to economic growth if work is seen as a way of disciplining the soul and using God's gifts for the service of fellow human beings. He further argued that the rate of economic growth is higher in countries where the dominating religion is representing the view that one's salvation can be secured through hard work, than in countries where the dominant religion does not share such attitudes to work (Deneulin and Bano, 2009:31-32).

The way Arthur Lewis includes religion into his *Theory of Economic Growth* follows the same logic as the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber's pioneering study on the role of religious ideas in economic development. Weber's study was based on the Protestant Reformation, and the economic changes this reformation meant for Western Europe. Wealth creation became a God-blessed activity, unlike in the Catholic medieval times where the ideal was a celibate monastic life. The *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is seen as one of the most important contributors to how religion was to be conceived in development thought: There is good and bad religion in developmental terms. Some religious beliefs are obstacles to development and others are conducive to development (Deneulin and Bano, 2009:33-34).

2.4.2 Dependency Theory

Modernization theory dominated the development debate from 1945 to the mid 1970s, but not completely. One of the theories opposing modernization theory was dependency theory that rose in the context of Latin America in the 1960s. The German economist André Gunder Frank, one of many scholars fronting this theory, argued that the world capitalist system was characterized by a metropolis-satellite structure, where the metropolis exploited the satellites (Frank in Payne and Phillips, 2010:77-78). He continued by stating: "the international, national and local capitalist system generates economic development for the few and underdevelopment for the many" (Frank 1967:8 in Payne and Phillips, 2010:78). His detailed work on the relationship between satellites and metropolis in the economic history of Brazil and Chile uncovered that the former tended to experience their greatest development when ties to the latter were at their weakest (Payne and Phillips, 2010:78).

2.4.3 From Top-Down to Bottom-Up

In the 1970s the world changed in a way which called for new thoughts within the development field. We saw the end of the post-Second World War economic boom, there were shifts in terms of trade which disadvantaged the “Third World”, and problems of population growth and environmental degradation evolved. In sum, we could say that this instability cut against the economic optimism which underpinned modernization theory (Preston, 1996:238).

The renowned development economist Dudley Seers called for a redefinition of the “meaning of development” in one of his writings already in 1969. He mentioned poverty, unemployment and inequality as the three main measures of a country’s development, and he further claimed:

If all three of these have become less severe, then beyond doubt there has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, and especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result “development”, even if per capita income had soared (Seers in Payne and Phillips, 2010:119).

Several new thoughts and ideas of how to approach the development issue entered the arena in this period. Some claimed a new international economic order (NIEO), where one sought to shift the balance of economic power to the “Third World”, to be the solution for the instability in the world. Others, such as a Latin American group concerned with arguing that a little more equality in the world would mean less poverty, and a much easier development task, pointed to the situation at the micro level. The most influential idea of this period – at least for development theorists in the “First World” – the idea of basic needs derives from this Latin American group (Preston, 1996:237).

The “basic needs approach” was introduced as an alternative development paradigm to economic growth. One of the major publications fronting this new approach was the *First Things First: Meeting Basic Human Needs in Developing Countries*, a book published by the World Bank in 1982 (Deneulin and Bano, 2009:37). The publication stated that the local communities should be the key actors in development work. The needs were supposed to be defined by them, not by the Western nations. Religion was clearly expressed through the emphasis on non-material needs. These needs were, according to the publication, valued as important conditions for meeting material needs. There were several reasons for the importance of non-material needs:

They include the needs for self-determination, self-reliance, and security, for the participation of workers and citizens in the decision making that affects them, for national and cultural identity, and for a sense of purpose in life and work (Streeten et al., 1982, pp 33-34 in Deneulin and Bano, 2009:37).

Even though religion is represented by non-material needs in this text, religion did not play a dominant role in development at this time. According to Charles Wilber and Kenneth Jameson, the process of development becomes self-limiting by ignoring religion as the moral base of society. They were highlighting four links between religion and development and suggested that development theory ought to take these into account. First, as already mentioned, the moral base of society (religion in most cases), needs to be synchronized with the development process. Second, religion has a major influence on attitudes towards work, money, technology, health and education on the individual level. Religion as a positive impulse towards development is mentioned as the third important link between religion and development. Finally, transnational actors in global affairs, such as the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church are examples of how religion plays an important role as a transnational political force (Wilber and Jameson in Deneulin and Bano, 2009:38-39).

2.4.4 Neo-Liberalism in the 1980s

The rise of Japan and the newly industrialized countries of East Asia (Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong) were in the 1960s and onwards in sharp contrast with the stagnation in countries in Latin America and Africa. They were all previously grouped together as members of the “Third World”, but had experienced a different development. Development theory now wanted to understand and explain this differentiation (Payne and Phillips, 2010:85).

Neo-liberalism became the major inspiration for development theory in this period. An important feature of neo-liberalism is that the government’s role needs to be reduced in order to achieve desirable development outcomes. Private capitalists and entrepreneurs have to be “freed” from state control to apply their energies to economic growth strategies. Actors as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) went in with financial support to change the structures in countries in the “Third World”. Through these programs called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), the Western world wanted to decrease the role of the government and increase the role of the private entrepreneurs in order to create economic growth (Stiglitz

2006, in Haynes, 2007:8). A critique of the neo-liberal development strategy, also known as the “Washington consensus”, was that it neither gave enough emphasis on the developmental role of governments nor secular and faith-based organizations. They could both play a substantial role in delivering human development goals (Taylor 2005, in Haynes, 2007:9).

2.4.5 Recent Development brings Religion back into the Arena

When we are looking into the development theory of our times, from the end of the 1990s and until today, we discover a diversity of thoughts and approaches. That is not to say that diversity within this field is a new thing. Within development theory from World War II and until today there have always been different strands of thoughts and ideas. The picture is much more complex than this brief summary portrays. Still, it would be fair to say that development theory is more complex in our time than it has ever been before.

Anthony Payne claimed that the end of the 90s represented a juncture for development debates. The debate between neoliberals and neostatists, fronting respectively market control and state control, were now debating the roles of markets, states and institutions in development processes in a new way. This new direction in the debate was caused by the collapse of the Asian economies and others around the world, according to Payne (Payne and Phillips, 2010:146). In this junction, several new thoughts evolved. I will look into some of them.

The neoliberal thinking manifested in the Washington Consensus of 1989, received heavy critique from one of its own. The Chief Economist at the World Bank between 1996 and 1999, Joseph Stiglitz, argued that the neoliberal consensus confused means with ends when privatization and trade liberalization became the main focus. He claimed that these two elements became the ends instead of primary means “to more sustainable, equitable, and democratic growth” (Stiglitz in Payne and Phillips, 2010:147).

Stiglitz asked for redefining thinking about development, and he took the initiative towards a “post-Washington Consensus” (PWC). This consensus emphasized that both microeconomic and macroeconomic interventions were necessary in order to adjust a country’s economy. The PWC wanted a transformation of society through incorporating all aspects of society – meaning the state, the private sector, the family, community and individual – into the development process. The buzzwords capacity-building, governance,

participation, transparency, and civil society rose out of this consensus (Payne and Phillips, 2010:148).

The Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion, Conflict and Cooperation at London Metropolitan University, Jeffrey Haynes, argues that the religious factor cannot be isolated from life's general context in the developing world, simply because religions provide necessary concepts and ideas to meet people's existential questions (Haynes, 2007:14). He refers to the hard facts about our world when he is characterizing the present period of development thought which he calls the post-development model: At the millennial change, more than two billion people did not have access to potable clean water and over a billion people lived on less than one US dollar a day, according to Haynes. He claims that shortcomings such as these resulted in a new initiative from the international community. In September 2000 the United Nations announced their Millennium Development Goals, in short terms often referred to as the MDGs. Extreme poverty and hunger are supposed to be eradicated and primary education is supposed to be universal, to mention only two of the eight goals in this list (Haynes, 2007:9-10).

These comprehensive goals marks a new way of thinking about development, as they focus on specific goals within specific fields. They are universal and the aim is to fulfill them by the year 2015.² The World Bank acknowledged in its Development Report 2000/2001 that new strategies would be necessary at both local and national levels, in order to reach the MDGs, and they spoke up for including ordinary people and their representative organizations in decision-making processes at these different levels (Haynes, 2007:10).

However, it was another initiative from the World Bank that made religion a central part of development thinking. The World Bank was among the first Western institutions to recognize that poor communities can also be described as faith communities. They initiated a research program that served as an eye-opener for the western development industry, concerning how to deal with religion in the developing countries. *Voices of the Poor*, published in 2000, stated that religious leaders and institutions were among the most trusted people and institutions in these countries (Narayan cited in Scott, 2007:69). This publication helped the development agents to find new ways of implementing a project. It helped them understand that the cooperation of religious leaders and institutions would be important in

² For a complete list of the Millennium Development Goals, see appendix 1.

order to “bridge” the development process, simply through their role as trusted members of their communities.

Twenty years after Wilber and Jameson called for including religion into development thinking, religion now enters the development arena by being acknowledged as one of the components of people’s wellbeing. *Voices of the Poor* was one of the main contributors of bringing religion back into the arena. Another important contributor was the Indian economist Amartya Sen, even without mentioning religion.

In his book *Development as Freedom*, published in 1999, he argues that the concept of freedom is central to the process of development. He defines freedom in a broad sense, including “both the processes that allow freedom of actions and decisions, and the actual opportunities that people have” (Sen, 1999:17). There are two reasons why freedom is such an important factor in the concept of development, according to Sen. He calls them *evaluation* and *effectiveness* respectively. The former is related to a person’s overall freedom, and the value of having greater freedom to do the things one has reason to appreciate. The enhancement of personal freedom is important in order to get valuable outcomes, he argues. The latter reason for the importance of freedom in the concept of development has to do with the consequences of freedom. Greater freedom leads to greater possibilities for people to help themselves and to influence the world (Sen, 1999:17-18).

The expansion of freedom is, according to Amartya Sen, both the main object and the primary means of development. In his theory, the values have been brought back to the centre stage. And through this, the values of poor and marginalized people have also been brought to the centre stage. Through democratic and participatory processes the freedoms of these people will be enhanced (Sen referred to in Deneulin and Bano, 2009:45).

I will make use of these theories as a background for discussing the situation on the ground in Ethiopia, in the context of development work. Characteristics from different theoretical perspectives will be enlightened in the analysis, and they will also serve as starting points for prospective new theories of development, highlighted in the final conclusion of this thesis.

2.5 Religion in Norwegian Development Aid

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) has over its fifty years of existence granted financial support to numerous development projects run by Norwegian

(NGOs). As development theory has changed a lot in these years, the conditions for receiving financial support from NORAD have also changed.

This subchapter will look into how NORAD has dealt with religion in their approach, and how the religious mission organizations have adapted to this. Some of the recent years' public debate about what role religion should play in development work will also be enlightened.

In 1962 the forerunner to NORAD, the Norwegian Development Aid, was established. One of its principle guidelines stated that economic support was given on the condition that particular political or religious views were not promoted. A debate followed as to whether this meant that the Norwegian missionaries were excluded as development agents for NORAD funded projects. The guidelines from 1971 specified this issue by pointing out that "support may only be granted for efforts that assist the local population irrespective of their race, belief or perceptions" (Dahl, 2002).

This made it possible for mission organizations to receive funding for their development projects, as long as the development projects were separated from evangelism. The local partner of NLM in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) reacted to this division and notified NORAD about their viewpoints in a letter in 1971. They complained about the division between development and evangelism in NORAD and pointed out that an exclusion of religion from any aspect of life was in the African tradition unthinkable (Dahl, 2002). The complaint from EECMY illustrated what an important role religion played in this setting, in contrast to how it was perceived in a secular government organization as NORAD.

While a local partner in the field complained about the division between development and evangelism in projects run by a Norwegian mission organization, others have complained that mission organizations are granted support from NORAD in the first place. Maybe the most vociferous critics has come from the development studies academic Terje Tvedt. In a newspaper comment in 2004 he claims that the required division between development and evangelism is impossible to uphold in praxis because it conflicts with the nature of mission. Mission organizations are using state money to spread the gospel, according to Tvedt (Tvedt, 2004).

The General Secretary of the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) at that time, Kjetil Aano, responded to Tvedt's detailed criticisms among other things by suggesting that the

debate should be about values rather than religion. In his opinion, value-based development is carried out by all development actors, not only by faith-based organizations (Aano, 2004).

NORAD is still demanding a separation between development work and evangelism for granting support to Norwegian mission organizations. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that development is never “neutral”, in contrast to the neutrality previously demanded of their development partners, stated in the early guidelines. Cultural anthropologist Ingie Hovland therefore claims that “it is possible to argue that the question is not whether development should be based on values, because it always is anyway, but rather *which* values it should be based on...” (Hovland, 2008:179).

Religion has in recent years played a central role in the debate about Norwegian development aid. In 2010 the Norwegian Minister of Development, Erik Solheim, launched a project called “Religion and Development”. This initiative came as a result of an ongoing debate about how to treat religion in practical development work. He pointed out that all Norwegian actors involved in development aid, need to make a greater effort to understand the role of religion in order to understand the societies they are working in. The aim of the project was to learn more about the role of religion in Norway’s cooperation with poor countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010).

In order to understand the volume of development work carried out by Norwegian religious organizations, let us have a look at the proportions. In 2011 the total Norwegian aid budget was more than 27 billion NOK.³ The bilateral aid budget made about 13 percent of the total with its 3.5 billion NOK. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) is one out of nineteen religious/mission organizations receiving NORAD funds for development work. These organizations are unified in Digni, an organization coordinating the activities between its member organizations and NORAD. Digni received about 150 million NOK from NORAD in 2011, which makes about 4 percent of the total bilateral budget and 0.5 percent of the total aid budget (Norad, 2011).

2.6 Chapter Summary

The focus of the thesis, religion and development, has served as a guide to find out what theoretical perspectives are needed in this respect, and how to describe them. First of all,

³ 100 NOK = 16.77 USD (per May 22, 2012)

religion was defined through scholars such as Martin Marty, James Sire and Clifford Geertz. This part concluded that Geertz' definition of religion as a cultural system might be the most appropriate in the research context, as it deals with how religion is constructed from the inside of a society.

After defining the beginning of development theory with President Truman's call to "assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way" on March 1947 in part two of the chapter, the third part presented the idea that religion would ultimately disappear from societies as a result of modernization. This idea, called the secularization theory or secularization thesis, has received a lot of attention from scholars in the Western world. At first, after the rise of the social sciences at the end of the nineteenth century and in several decades to come, this thesis was widely accepted and agreed upon by Western scholars. However, towards the end of the twentieth century many claimed the thesis false. Scholars like José Casanova, Peter Berger and Scott Thomas argued that secularism as a term only was accountable to the Western world and that the effects it had had, were questionable.

Different development theories from the last six decades were presented in the fourth part. The focus on economic development in modernization theory was followed by a focus on local communities as key actors in development in the so-called "basic needs approach". Religion became gradually more acknowledged in development thinking towards the end of the twentieth century. The failure of recent development efforts – people were still poor – and research which indicated that religious leaders might be important carriers of development, were some of the reasons why religion started to play a larger role in our contemporary period of development.

The fifth part served as a brief introduction of religion in the Norwegian development aid debate and practice over the last fifty years. We have seen how NORAD demanded religious and political "neutrality" of their partners in the first guidelines, and we have seen how NORAD now acknowledges that development is never "neutral", meaning that all development agents have some set of values, irrespective of whether they represent a mission organization or a secular organization. Ingie Hovland suggests that the development debate needs to deal with *which* values it should be based on, rather than whether the mission organizations should be NORAD partners or not.

3 BACKGROUND

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part deals with information about Ethiopia as the context of the research. The religious, ethnic and socio-political circumstances of this country on the Horn of Africa will be looked into. The second and third part is about the organizations in question – both the Norwegian organizations NLM and DF and their local implementing partner organizations in Ethiopia.

The background material serves as a starting point for the presentation of the development projects in my qualitative research, and as a part of the framework for the debate and discussion later on in the thesis.

3.1 Ethiopia – The Context

Ethiopia is like many other African societies characterized by a mosaic of nationalities speaking a number of different languages. The more than eighty languages spoken in Ethiopia can be divided into four groups. The largest group is called Cushitic languages, with the Oromo language as the largest spoken language. Furthermore, the Oromo people counts for the largest ethnic group in the country. The Somali and Afar people in the east are also Cushitic speaking people (Zewde, 2001:5).

The Oromo people represent 34.5 percent of the total Ethiopian population of approximately ninety million people. The second largest are the Amhara counting 26.9 percent. Somali and Tigray each count about 6 percent, while there are several smaller ethnic groups representing less than 4 percent of the population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

Orthodox Christianity is the official religion in Ethiopia, following the tradition of Coptic Christianity (Adejumobi, 2007:6). Although Ethiopia is a country with deep Orthodox roots, it continues to host a fairly large Muslim population as well. According to the CIA World Factbook the Muslim population in Ethiopia is close to 34 percent. Almost 44 percent of the population is Orthodox, while the Protestants count just below 19 percent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

The number of ethnic and linguistic groups and the religious landscape illustrate the diversity of the country. This diversity is also seen in my research context. The local people in Adadley are Somali, speaking the Somali language and practicing Islam. In Rayitu the people are Oromos, speaking the Oromo language and practicing Islam. One of the employees in the

NLM funded project in Rayitu is also an Oromo and speaking the Oromo language, however brought up in another part of the country where Islam is almost not present. When this project employee moved to Rayitu, he was a bit surprised by the big differences between him and the local people. He discovered that the Rayitu people, with whom he shared both ethnic and linguistic affiliation, were different from him in a fundamental way. Their way of speaking the language and their manners seemed to be closer linked with the Somali people than the Oromo people, according to this organization employee. In other words, it could seem like the religious connection is stronger than the ethnic connection.

Even though the Muslims count for one third of the total population, they have historically been a marginalized group in Ethiopia. After the end of the Communist rule in 1991, however, Ethiopia became a pluralized country with Muslims and Christians as equal partners. Traditional Muslims' occupations like trade, finance, and small industry only to mention some, became the pillars of the new market economy. And thousands of mosques were constructed throughout Ethiopia. In Addis Ababa alone, the number of mosques rose from about thirty in year 2000 to more than a hundred in 2004 (Erlikh, 2010:157-158). Historical tensions between Christianity and Islam, and thereof the strong religious identity of the Ethiopian people may have contributed to religious identity as seemingly stronger than ethnic identity.

During the field work I discovered in particular one custom mentioned by development agents at different levels, when speaking about the link between religion and development. That is female genital mutilation (FGM), which is by the World Health Organization seen to have a mix of cultural, religious and social causes. It is characterized by a "partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" (World Health Organization, 2012). *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2005* states that 74 percent of girls and women nationwide have been subjected to FGM. In Somali and Oromo, the regions of my field work, the practice is even more common with respectively 97 and 87 percent of the women above 15 years of age circumcised (Central Statistical Agency Ethiopia, 2005:25).

Although FGM is partly rooted in religion, we will later see how different development organizations have found ways to work with this issue.

People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is today governed by the ethnic based coalition *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF), ruled by Meles Zenawi since 1991, until his death in August 2012. This coalition has today 545 out of 547

seats in the Parliament. Zenawi and his rule has been under strong criticisms from the international community at several occasions, for example when he before the election in 2010 imprisoned opposition candidates and manipulated state resources in order to recruit new members to their party or to make them leave one of the parties in opposition (Olsen, 2010:167-168).

Meles Zenawi was despite the heavy international critique of his rule, experiencing major steps forward in many areas. The Ethiopian economy had almost 7 percent growth in 2009, and is expected to acquire Kenya's position as the biggest economy in Eastern Africa. On my travels in Ethiopia, I was told that Ethiopia is one out of very few countries expected to reach almost all the Millennium Development Goals. Since his government came to power in 1991, Ethiopia has experienced a substantial growth in the life expectancy rate, child mortality is bisected, more people are attending school, and higher income from export and international investments has led to a boom in the building industry in many cities (Olsen, 2010:168-169).

In 2009 Ethiopia introduced a new law for organizations working with civil society in Ethiopia, affecting all NGOs. This law could practically hinder all NGO's to work with political or human rights issues. In my view, just as important as the restrictions in the law is the opportunity it gives the government to monitor and to keep an eye on what each and every NGO is doing. Both funding organizations studied mentioned this law as a challenge for their work.

3.2 Norwegian Lutheran Mission

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) is one of the biggest mission organizations in Europe today with roughly 2500 societies only in Norway. Furthermore, NLM has an extensive part of their activities abroad, in work related to evangelism and development in Africa, Asia and South America. The organization was founded in 1891 and the first missionaries were at that time sent to China (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2012).

NLM started to work in Ethiopia in 1948. The first missionaries came in August, and by the end of the year there were 12 missionaries in the country (Det Norske Lutherske Kinamisjonsforbund, 1949:16). The missionaries in Ethiopia have over the years experienced several Christian revivals. However, there are still many areas in Ethiopia where Jesus' name is not yet known. NLM are in cooperation with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane

Yesus (EECMY) specially focusing their work in these areas (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 1999:30). EECMY is the largest Lutheran church in Africa with about five million members (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, 2011).

The Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC) branch of the Mekane Yesus church is the implementing body of all development work financed by NLM in Ethiopia today. NLM is, through DASSC, funding development projects related to integral rural community development, water and sanitation, and maternal health, in three of the total nine administrative zones of Ethiopia.⁴

In 2003, the Rayitu Community Development Project (RCDP) was established. The project is an integrated community development project where the objective is to improve the livelihood of the community.⁵ RCDP is currently in its third phase, ranging from 2011 to 2013. The project has in cooperation with the target communities assessed the needs for development efforts in many areas. An improvement of the water condition is together with an improvement of hygiene and sanitation placed as the most important need. Other needs are within the fields of education, gender and development, capacity building, and livestock and environment (EECMY/DASSC, 2010).

Three documents have been investigated in order to find the basis for NLM, and furthermore to tell something about the foundations and guidelines to be followed when being an NLM employee in Ethiopia. The first one is the *Value Document*. As a description of the core values inside the organization, and the commitment each and every employee are facing when becoming hired by NLM, it is an important document in the employment process in NLM (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2005:1).⁶ The second document describes the mission strategy of NLM between 2010 and 2020. This is the main strategy of the organization, including all aspects of their mission work. The third document describes one aspect of their overall mission work, namely the development work. The *Strategy of Development Work* is the final principle document of NLM looked into for the purpose of this thesis.

⁴ Field notes.

⁵ Field notes.

⁶ The value document is available at: <http://nlm.no/nlm/ressurser/dokumenter/grunnregler-og-strategidokumenter> (Accessed 2012, May 3)

3.2.1 The Value Document

The slogan of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) is “The World for Christ”. NLMs vision is to spread the message of The Bible to people across the globe. Hence, their aim of working in areas where there are few Christians and not much mission work. According to the *Value Document* development work is only one aspect of the missionaries’ work: “In cooperation with local churches we are involved in projects related to evangelization, education, health and development work” (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2005:1).

The *Value Document* is some sort of a framework for all employees in NLM. The objective of this document is to emphasize the value base which NLM builds its work upon and to describe the commitments of each and every person in the organization. The value document states that the Bible is the highest and final authority in all questions regarding Christian belief and Christian way of life. Through education, preaching The Word and sending missionaries NLM wants to spread the Gospel, the message that Jesus by his death and resurrection has restored our relationship with God. NLM wants to make people followers of Jesus, becoming his disciples. It is the responsibility of each and every employee, according to the value document, to contribute to the realization of the organization’s overall aim through defined tasks, attitudes and way of life (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2005:2).

3.2.2 Main Mission Strategy

The *Main Mission Strategy* set up for the period between year 2010 and year 2020 starts by stating that the aim of all mission activity derives from “The Great Commission” in Matthew 28:16-20 (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2009:3), where Jesus tells his disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (BibleGateway.com, 2011).

Winning souls for Jesus Christ is set to be the most important task of NLM as a mission organization. And according to the *Main Mission Strategy* they want to focus their efforts in areas where there are ethnic groups with no Christian communities or weak Christian communities. The *Main Mission Strategy* focuses on the foundations of NLMs mission, with many references to the Holy Bible. It also describes what kind of people NLM wants to send as missionaries, how the organization wants these missionaries to conduct both in private life

and in their professional work. Furthermore it describes the different phases of mission work in NLM, from startup to phasing out. The latter phase is described as the aim of all NLM projects, after having established independent and sustainable local churches (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2009:7-8). Even though the role of NLM and the missionaries will vary in these different phases, it is according to the *Main Mission Strategy* important to have the aim of the work in mind – a stalwart church which brings the gospel forth.

The strategy document points at development work as one way of working with mission, and states that work in this category is supposed to be directed to all people, irrespective of their faith and ethnic group. NLM craves that their development work is in close cooperation with the governments. A remark about the financial situation describes a dilemma for the organization: “It might be easier to receive funding for development projects than for evangelization projects. Yet, we must not let a healthy balance between evangelization and development work be affected by this” (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2009:10).

3.2.3 NLMs Strategy for Development Cooperation

The third document is focusing on the development work aspect of NLM. *NLMs Strategy for Development Cooperation* starts by underlining that NLM has a holistic approach towards mission. This approach entails a focus on spreading the gospel, diaconia, and development work. The aim is to help people to enhance their own life situation, as well as the life situation of people in their close relations. The methods used for reaching this aim are thoroughly described. Let us have a look at some of these principles (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2006:1).

Local participation is an important part of the development work in NLM. The organization wants to contribute to a development based on equality and cooperation where all people get the chance to be a part of developing their own society. By working through partners on a national or local level and by letting these partners and the local communities get ownership to the development project through playing a central role in processes regarding efforts and decisions, NLM hopes to ingest an assisting role in the projects (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2006:1).

The guiding principles of NLM as it is stated in the *Value Document* and the *Main Mission Strategy* are guiding also in the development work, meaning that the development

work is often carried out in areas with none or few Christians. The focus in these areas, seen from a development perspective, is to help the poor and marginalized groups, and especially women, children, and indigenous groups to get their living conditions improved. Sustainability is mentioned as one of the important principles in NLMs development projects. Through their projects, the aim is to start a process where people can see the possibilities in their local community. NLM states in the *Strategy for Development Cooperation* that creating good relations through long-term involvement is a focal point in order to reach this aim (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, 2006:1-2).

3.3 Development Fund

Development Fund Norway (DF) was founded in 1978 by a small group of people from “The Future in our Hands”, Norway’s largest environmental organization. This organization saw at that time an obvious connection between poverty and the overconsumption of the rich (Jorde, 2008:4). Olav Benestad, the initiative taker of DF, launched in 1976 an idea of how to distribute the world’s resources more equitable. He argued that we needed to give away the salary we did not need ourselves, and suggested that 10 percent would be suitable for people with ordinary jobs. The response was good, and many people contributed in this respect even before DF was officially founded in March 1978. By the end of that year they had 425 contributors which in total had collected more than 400.000 Norwegian kroner (Fjeldstad, 1998:4).

DF works through partners in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Their only field office is situated in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The work in Ethiopia is based on two main pillars. The first is work for food security and management of the natural resources in the highlands of Tigray, and the second is work to improve the living conditions for the mainly nomadic population in Afar and Somali. The Ethiopian government restricts all sorts of rights-based work through a law for NGOs (see 3.1). Despite this constraint, DF claims that they have done a great deal of work related to environmental issues, preservation of wetland areas, and women rights through their partners. Around 150.000 people were positively affected by DF funded projects in Ethiopia in 2010, according to their Annual Report of that year (Utviklingsfondet, 2011b:4-6).

The Ogaden Welfare and Development Association (OWDA) is one of DFs 27 implementing partners in Ethiopia. OWDA was established in 1999 by a group of Ethiopian

Somali people. The vision of this secular non-profit, non-political and non-partisan humanitarian organization is contributing to the eradication of poverty of the most vulnerable and marginalized pastoralists in the Somali region (The Ogaden Welfare and Development Association, 2012).

On behalf of DF, OWDA project staff is implementing an integrated community development project in Adadley.⁷ The project started in 2007 and the first five-year period was about to be completed at the time of my visit in October 2011. It has different components, such as capacity building of local people and local administration, and improvement of basic social services in areas like for example water availability and guidance and teaching in agricultural issues.⁸

In the following some background material about DF will be presented. Their guidelines, values and vision will together with their *Strategy Document* for the period between 2012 and 2016 provide the reader with some knowledge about this organization.

3.3.1 Guidelines, Values and Vision

“In most countries in the “third world” there are enough human and material resources for the development of primal needs for all”, according to DFs principle guidelines. This is the starting point for their work. The same passage states that: “one primal cause of poverty and need is political, economical, and social power structures both at a global, national, and a local level”. DF points out two important responses to this starting point. The first response is related to their approach in development work on the ground. In order to change the existing power structures they want to work through the already existing local actors, to enable them to uncover and change their own society. DFs responsibility of informing and raising people’s consciousness about these issues in Norway is mentioned as the second response (Fjeldstad, 1998:13).

There are four main categories of values in DF. These are *solidarity*, *diversity*, *justice*, and *participation*. *Solidarity* is emphasized both in words and deeds, shown for example through long-term practical action for a more just world, or by making sure that oppressed and marginalized groups are being heard. *Diversity*, both in culture and nature, is highly cherished. DF wants to show this by taking care of the biological diversity, and by respecting

⁷ For the location of Adadley, see Appendix 2.

⁸ Field notes.

social, cultural, and political differences. *Justice* is the third main value of DF, illustrated by their work for a just world based on collective and individual human rights and a democratic form of government. This entails among other things to secure the right of food and clean water for all, and to work for a more just distribution of economic and natural resources in the world. *Participation* is the fourth main value: DF wants mutual openness to result in safety and a fruitful cooperation. They will therefore strengthen local democratic structures and try to realize human resources. Trust, loyalty, and information flow are set as important features of their work, and they want all people to participate in issues related to their own development (Utviklingsfondet, 2012).

The vision, a shorter version of guidelines and values within DF, describes the core subject of the organization. DFs vision is “a sustainable and just world without hunger and poverty” (Utviklingsfondet, 2011a:16-17).

3.3.2 The Strategy Document

In the *Strategy Document* for the period 2012-2016, DF draws a close link between environmental and developmental issues. The fact that the increasing devastations caused by climate change first and foremost affect vulnerable rural groups confirms this view, according to DFs strategy. In this respect, a close link between the north and the south is drawn. The *Strategy Document* claims that climate change and the loss of diversity in nature is some of our biggest environmental challenges, while hunger and poverty are our biggest development problems. DFs most important tasks, according to their strategy, is to improve the life situation of people in the global south through concrete environmental and development projects, to inform people in Norway about our responsibility in these issues, in addition to being an advocate for a change in the political and economical circumstances which create and sustain poverty and severe environmental problems (Utviklingsfondet, 2011a:5,8).

There are three main objectives listed in DFs *Strategy Document*. One of these is related to their development work, and this is divided into four oppositional sub-objectives: An increase of the food security in poor countries through a sustainable and productive agriculture for small scale farmers is the first objective. The second objective is to reduce the vulnerability of climate changes through climate adaption. Third, they want to enhance the living conditions for local communities in rural areas through measures which increase their income and covers for primal welfare needs. The final objective as it is stated in the strategy,

is to include farmers and marginalized groups more in decision making processes, with a special emphasis on youth and women (Utviklingsfondet, 2011a:9-10).

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented background material about Ethiopia as the research context, in addition to a presentation of DF and NLM and their implementing partners on the ground.

We have seen that Ethiopia is a country with an ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. We have also seen how a person's religious identity might be seen as more important than the ethnic identity, illustrated by the Oromo development worker in Rayitu who despite the common ethnic background felt that people in the local community were not "his" people, because of the different religious affiliation.

In the description of the socio-political circumstances in Ethiopia today and the development this country has undergone in the last decades, there is in particular one man who needs to be mentioned. The recently deceased Meles Zenawi ruled in Ethiopia for more than two decades. His rule has been under a lot of criticism from the international community, accused for hindering democracy and free elections. When it comes to development and the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals, Ethiopia is one of the countries with greatest success. The economy is thriving, with an annual growth of almost seven percent in 2009, and prospects of soon becoming the largest economy in Eastern Africa.

DF and NLM are the two Norwegian NGOs in focus in my research. DF is an idealistic organization that draws a close link between the environmental and developmental issues, focusing their development work on increasing food security, reducing the vulnerability of climate changes and helping local communities in rural areas to a better life. NLM is a Christian (Lutheran) mission organization, with the aim of spreading the gospel as a foundation. Their development work is carried out in areas with none or few Christians. Despite the differences between these organizations in values and strategy, the development projects carried out by their implementing partners are similar in many ways.

4 METHODS

This chapter will describe the different processes related to the collection of empirical data material for my thesis. It will in detail describe how the research has evolved, from the planning phase to the final phase of analyzing the data material. It has been organized in this way in order to guide the reader through the different processes of this qualitative research.

In addition to describing the different phases and processes, sections about social research methods are included to describe the methodological traditions and concepts applied in this text.

4.1 Before Departure

The research question (see 1.1) served as a starting point for the collection of empirical data material. I needed to get in contact with Norwegian NGOs doing development work in Ethiopia, and aimed at two organizations that might have different values and different motivations for doing development work, one religious organization and one secular.

As a religious organization engaged with development work in Ethiopia, NLM was a possible candidate for the research. I was a volunteer for NLM in Ethiopia for four months in the spring of 2004; thus I knew the organization a bit from the inside. After this period, I have visited Ethiopia four times and always used the NLM Guest House in Addis Ababa as a starting point for my travels. In that way, and through contacts both in Ethiopia and Norway, I have been following the work of NLM in Ethiopia through these years.

Even though I have been working for NLM and still have some contacts within the organization, I did not feel that these connections would make it difficult for me to appear as a researcher in one of their development projects. The choice of looking into NLM as the religious organization was taken mostly because of pragmatic reasons. The knowledge of people in the organization and some background knowledge about NLMs development work in Ethiopia made it easier to get the access needed for collecting data. I came in contact with a missionary family in the south-eastern part of Ethiopia, and this family welcomed me and my project.

The initial plan was to carry out the field work in October 2011, and I started to plan this in detail. However, it turned out to be difficult to get hold of a secular organization which had the opportunity to accommodate me in October.

First the Norwegian branch of Save the Children in Ethiopia and the Norwegian People's Aid were contacted, without any positive results. After a while DF turned up. Luckily they had the opportunity to assist. The resident representative of DF in Ethiopia recommended me to contact one of their partners, OWDA, suggesting that a visit to a DF/OWDA project in the southeast of Ethiopia could be fruitful for the research. This particular part of Ethiopia has been considered an unstable part of the country, and militant Somali groups have spread fear and uncertainty through occasional operations in this area. However, I was assured by both the DF representative and the OWDA project coordinator that the area was one hundred percent secure at the moment. Given the fact that I had no other alternatives at that time, I was prepared to take the risk.

The aim of the research is to get a grass root perspective on how religion is understood in development work, both in a project funded by a religious organization and in a project funded by a secular organization. I planned to make interviews with the organizations' representatives from the top down to the grass root level.

In preparing for field work two different so-called semi-structured interview guides were set up, one for the organization staff members and one for the local participants.⁹ The interview guide consists of questions in four different sections. First come some introductory questions such as the interviewee's name, age and background. In section two the interviewees are asked to tell about the project in question and their role in it. Section three touches upon religion and possible religious elements of the project. The fourth section focuses on private considerations related to religion and the challenges this might lead to.

The purpose of a semi-structured interview guide is to assist the interviewer in the interview setting. Unlike the fixed questionnaires used in a quantitative study, an interview guide in a qualitative study is a help in getting as much information as possible from the perspective of the interviewee. A semi-structured interview guide can be shaped as concrete questions or only as a list of topics. In the interview setting, the order of the questions or sections is not important. This makes it a flexible way of collecting data. One of the advantages of this method is that the researcher obtains the information without putting the response in pigeon-holes (Bryman, 2008:438).

⁹ For a closer look at the interview guides, see Appendix 3 and 4.

4.2 In Ethiopia, Collecting Data

During the field work ten interviews were conducted, four with people affiliated with the DF funded project and six with people affiliated with the NLM funded project. Four of them were local participants, two men and two women. Three of the local participants were between 28 and 40 years of age, and the fourth was about 70 years old.

The rest of my informants, six in total, are organization staff from one of the Norwegian development organizations in question or their local partners. Their age is ranging from 28 to 60, with the majority up to the age of 38. Out of this group of six, four represent NLM or their implementing partner DASSC. One works as a coordinator for all NLM development projects in Ethiopia, one as a project advisor for the development project in focus – Rayitu Community and Development Project (RCDP) – and the other two are employed by DASSC as respectively project manager and facilitator in RCDP. On the DF side, there is one informant representing DF in Addis and one representing their implementing partner in Adadley.¹⁰

In respect of age one remark needs to be added. The way of describing age like it is done in the Western parts of the world, through using a calendar to state one's exact age, is not common in Ethiopia. Most people in these research areas do not know their exact age. The age of all informants are therefore estimated.

One might claim that the sample of informants is not sufficiently balanced. I believe, however, that the sample is sufficient considering that it represents actors from all levels in the two projects. As already noticed, NLM was easier accessible than DF, what may have influenced the sample of informants. Having said that, I do not believe this situation played any role on the ground. The hospitality of representatives affiliated with both NLM and DF may be characterized by the word goodwill; they all welcomed me and assisted my inquiries, so that I could get the amount of material needed.

The interviews lasted from ten minutes and up to an hour, with an average of about forty minutes. Since people on all levels were interviewed, they represent a variety in education. Some were local people with hardly any education at all, while others were highly educated project supervisors.

¹⁰ For location of the development projects in question, see map of Ethiopia in Appendix 2.

The interviews and observation carried out in the field took place in the interviewees' natural setting and context. It might be in an office or in a small hut in a remote village. In this way the informants or the settings studied was least disturbed. Anyhow, my presence affected the setting and possibly also people's behavior. A community meeting about FGM in the Adadley area might serve as an example. I was told by the organization staff members that such meetings often created loud discussions and disagreements among the local community. At this particular meeting, however, everybody behaved in a polite way. The local community members paid great attention to me as a visitor. My presence may have had a relaxing influence on the meeting.

Through the interviews I met people I had never met before. I had corresponded with some of them in advance via email or telephone. The initial contact was brief and concise, with the purpose of informing about the research, the planned field work, followed by an inquiry for making an interview. After this appointments were made. When meeting the interviewees in the field, they were informed about these issues once more. All of the informants signed an information sheet as consent of taking part in the research. This procedure of "informed consent" is a key principle in social research ethics (Bryman, 2008:694). It serves as a safety for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Through informed consent, the researcher can be assured that the informant knows what he is taking part in, and the interviewee does not need to be anxious about what this is all about (Bryman, 2008:123).

I tried to meet the interviewees with an open mind, unbiased, in order to get their perspective. An interview in a qualitative study like mine cannot be treated or analyzed as facts. They do only reflect the perspectives of the interviewees. Their perspectives are a product of their views, reflections, experiences and interpretations (Bryman, 2008:385).

In order to get as many different perspectives as possible, a broad sample of interviewees was aimed at. A mix of gender and age, as well as background was therefore highly valued. This approach resulted in a sample consisting of both male and female, young people and elders, and people with different religious assurances.

In the effort of collecting as broad perspectives as possible, I met some challenges along the way. For example, the aim of having both male and female informants did not turn out well for members of organization staff. All of the organization staff informants are men, reflecting the gender roles in Ethiopia. Traditionally the girls are called to help their mothers at home, while the boys are more likely to get education.

Among the local participant informants two were women. When interviewing these women, another challenge appeared. In preparation of the interview guide, I had assumed that the interviewee possessed some basic knowledge within the field of development. That was not always the case. So I tried to adapt and rephrase the questions, and sometimes invited the interviewees just to tell their stories. There were still questions and topics these local women could not say much about. Hence these interviews provided less material than the other interviews did. Still these women contributed with interesting material from a woman's perspective.

After having completed all interviews in the field, the material was transcribed. All interviews were tape-recorded and I transcribed all the tape-material myself. Through this process, I gained a better knowledge of the material, and key themes were identified. This process made me aware of interesting aspects in the material, and made it easier to start with the analysis part.

Some of the interviewees seemed to speak in a precise and clear manner. The use of organization staff informants as interpreters might have contributed to this, because of the interpreters' knowledge in the field of development. The subjects and themes raised also seemed to fit well with their proficiency. Some of the meaning may have been lost or rephrased through the interpretation. However, an interpreter was required for pragmatic reasons.

4.3 Epistemology and Ontology

How do we gain knowledge and how do we know what is "true"? Epistemology deals with these issues, concerning what is considered as appropriate knowledge about the social world (Bryman, 2008:4). The epistemological tradition used in collecting and analyzing my material, is called interpretivism, a method that focuses on understanding social behavior. The contrasting view is called positivism, characterized by the explanation of social behavior. While positivism claims that the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as natural sciences, interpretivism claims that a different logic is needed in social sciences than in natural sciences (Bryman, 2008:15).

Several writers and several traditions have contributed to the formation of interpretivism. One of these traditions is called phenomenology. The German writer Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) first initiated the use of phenomenological ideas to social science. He

claims that the fundamental difference between the subject matter of natural science and social science is that the latter has a meaning for human beings, while the former “does not “mean” anything to molecules, atoms and electrons”. People act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their actions and to the actions of others, according to Schutz. He argues that it is the job of the researcher to gain access to people’s “common-sense thinking” and to interpret their actions and their social world from their own point of view (Schutz in Bryman, 2008:16).

Interpretivism, coupled with constructivism, constitutes the methodological tools used in the analysis of the data material. Constructivism is an ontological position, a theory of the nature of social entities, which asserts that social phenomena are under constant construction and reconstruction. As for the concept of “culture”, Becker has suggested that “people create culture continuously”. He acknowledges the role culture has as a point of reference for people’s actions and perspectives, however he also points out that culture is always in the process of being formed (Becker in Bryman, 2008:20).

4.4 Methodological Appraisals in the Analysis

Considering that DF is a secular organization without any kind of religious connection, one might claim it is irrelevant to include this organization in a study of religion and development work. But I choose to do so for two reasons. The study is not a study of official views or of the organizations’ strategy documents. It is a study of practical field work on the ground in Ethiopia. That employees may need to be loyal to the organization’s values, does not mean that these values are the employees’ own personal values. My point here is that personal values may influence the work of employees irrespective of the official value of the NGO. Secondly DF does not implement development projects themselves, they use local partner organizations. Both these partner organizations and their representatives might have different values than those of DF and their representatives.

In the analysis of the collected data material, meaning is the essential factor. I want to find out how meaning is constructed and produced on the ground. Throughout the analysis there is an emphasis on contextual understanding of social behavior. Thick descriptions of social settings, events and individuals will serve as useful tools in this respect (Bryman, 2008:387).

The ten interviews implemented with people involved in development work funded by either NLM or DF constitutes the main part of the material, a material that comes as a result of the actual context and the questions asked, initiated by me. It is important to remark that it is the questions which create an expectation of getting answers. The informants may not have thought at these issues before. The interview setting in a way forces them to respond to these issues. In this interaction, meaning is constructed.

Field notes based on participant observation serve as the second part of my material. Participant observation is a research strategy characterized by observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversations and asking questions (Bryman, 2008:402). This was not initially planned as part of the material, however when at field work, unexpected possibilities turn up. You meet people, live a life and discover interesting aspects worthy of discussion. These aspects are often found outside the interview settings, in informal conversations, in experiences or reflections made in the context of field work.

During field work I discovered an issue often mentioned when presenting “religion and development” as the focus of my research. This was the issue of FGM. Stories about this issue are presented from both the Rayitu area and the Adadley area. In the Adadley area, however, it is not a part of the DF funded project. DFs partner organization OWDA is implementing development work on behalf of several development organizations. One of them is the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), which is funding a FGM project implemented by OWDA. Because this particular NCA project was mentioned both by central and local OWDA staff, and because I got the chance to attend one of the activities conducted by this project, I chose to include it into my analysis. I believe it was a natural thing to do, as a result of the informants’ stories about FGM as a highly relevant issue in the field of religion and development.

Some informants may be referred to at several points throughout the text, as a result of placing the findings into different categories. This approach is called thematic analysis. The themes and subthemes are products of a thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts (Bryman, 2008:554).

The informants are divided into two groups, the ones affiliated with the DF funded project and the ones affiliated with the NLM funded project. In each group there are centrally employed staff members, locally employed staff members and local participants. The two former are often grouped together as simply organization staff member or organization staff informant. Local participants are people with some sort of leading position in the program of

the project. It could be as a spokesman for the youth in a community, a traditional birth assistant trained by the project or simply a respected elder cooperating with the project staff. None of the local participants are paid by the project.

When referring to the development projects on the ground in Ethiopia, the locations of Rayitu and Adadley are used. These projects have activities in many other villages in these areas, some of them visited during my field work. However, an introduction of all these places might both be disturbing for the presentation of the thesis and harm the anonymity of the informants.

4.5 Research Ethics

A qualitative research method may contain many sensitive issues, such as the age of the informants, the themes of the research and the context of the empirical studies. In my research the task of interviewing people about religion, which is a potential sensitive issue, was among the challenges related to research ethics. One of the ethical responsibilities of a researcher is to accommodate and store information in a way that protects the informants. Through the information given to all my interviewees before the interview started, they were assured that participating in this study was on a voluntary basis, that they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and that the collected material would be available for me only and made anonymous at the end of the project period. The interviewees were also informed that the interviews would be recorded, and that these recordings would be deleted when the project was terminated.¹¹

The most challenging ethical issue might have been to keep the promise of anonymity. In order to keep my promise I have tried to group the informants in such a way that the reader is given the essential information, but not more. In issues related to personal religion, the problem of anonymity has been a special challenge. Since the sample consists of both agnostic and religious positions (Christian and Muslim), it has been necessary to delimit the descriptions in order to make sure that statements are not linked directly to any person. The sake of privacy has trumped contextualization!

The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) is an institution that looks after ethical considerations of a research project. If the project contains personal data stored on a computer, sensitive personal data like political or religious perceptions, or if the project stores

¹¹ For a closer look at the information given to the informants, see Appendix 5.

audio or video recordings, then it is subject of notification (NSD, 2012). The application for my research was enrolled at NSD on August 16, 2011, and approval was given on August 29, 2011.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the different processes of my research project from the planning phase to the final analysis of the data material. Methodological choices made along the way are mentioned and argued for. Together with the earlier chapters it has laid the basis for the second part of the thesis, namely the analysis of the material.

In the following chapters the data material will be analyzed in three different thematic areas. Issues where religion is present at the individual level, either for organization staff or local participants, will be analyzed first. The second area of investigation will be religion related to the projects, and the third will discuss religion at a more general level.

5 RELIGION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

As illustrated in chapter two, development work has been promoted by different strategies throughout the years. Modernization theory argued that “underdeveloped” societies should get the chance to develop in the same way as Western societies had done, and presented strategies to that aim (see 2.4.1). The basic human needs approach wanted to change the focus from macro to micro by concentrating on people’s basic needs and upholding these (see 2.4.3). Common for these theories was a fight for “justice”, a fight for a more equal distribution of the goods of the earth. This fight might have been one of the overriding motivations for getting engaged in development work over the years.

The motivations for development work might also include aspects of religion. Some might refer to a wish of helping people in their own religious group, while others might use development work as an instrument for evangelism. Scholars such as Terje Tvedt (Tvedt, 2004) have blamed mission organizations and other religious movements for using development work as a means for their religious activity. The criticism has claimed that religious organizations have taken advantage of people when they are at their weakest, by helping them in development projects and at the same time offering salvation. The debate has often been about what comes first and what has highest priority – development or salvation.

This chapter will look at religion at the individual level, and it consists of three parts. First I will describe how religion is defined by the informants on the ground. This is done in order to establish a framework for the following subchapters, where the understanding of religion plays a central role. Secondly, motivating factors for doing development work will be looked at, with regard to informants affiliated with both NLM and DF. The central issue in this respect is to find out if religion actually serves as a motivation in development work, and how this might be argued for. The third part will investigate the identity of the Christian NLM/DASSC employees in Rayitu. Some of them might like to be called missionaries, while others might claim to be development workers. Where do they themselves have the strongest identity? This issue, which is closely linked with the motivational factors, will be looked at in the last part of the chapter.

5.1 Religion defined on the Ground

When asking people on the ground how they would define religion, I encountered some challenges. One was related to the expectations I would create with a call for a definition. Thus, rather than asking directly, I was hoping that the issue would enter the conversation in a natural way during the interview. In some of the cases it did. I did experience, however, that some of the informants tried to please me by presenting a “correct” answer, assuming there was such a thing. The intention was not to get standardized responses; I wanted to get subjective responses from each and every informant. By asking “what comes to your mind when I say religion”, I hoped that the informants would relax and give their subjective perceptions, without considering what kind of answer I was looking for. Here is one of the responses that indicate an expectation of either a correct or a wrong answer, given by one of the organization staff members affiliated with DF: “When I think religion, it is belief of something, principles and practices of some sort of, you know, like Islamic religion, Christian, Hinduism. There are many religions that I hear in the world. But it should be, you know, belief and practice something.”

In the above quote, religion is related to belief of some sort, and the practice of this belief. The informant does neither go into depth about what it means in this context nor what it means for the informant himself. A more extensive definition is provided by one of the organization staff members affiliated with NLM: “When you are saying religion, what comes into my mind are two things: One, you are asking me about the Christianity. Second, you are asking me about the Muslim. I divide it only into two.” Answering a follow-up question, he confirms the two components of Christianity and Islam:

Yes, it has to be, leaving out the traditional ones. There are two pillars, Christianity and Muslim. Maybe there are some small minor, minor religions which can’t be under the Christianity or the Muslim. There are, if you go to the countryside you know they sometimes don’t even have any religion. And some still believe in stone and trees and some other things.

The focus on Christianity and Islam as the two main pillars reflects the religious reality he is living in. In Ethiopia in general, and in his work in particular, Islam and Christianity are the main pillars (see 3.1). And he does not conceal his personal conviction in the following quote, when he is asked to respond to whether belief in stone or trees may be considered a religion:

No, that is not religion. That is atheist, without religion. But when we are talking about religion I can see only two pillars: Christianity and Muslim. But, as I said, the eternal

life is only one. Even though they [the Muslims] are calling Mohammed. But for me and for the Christians, the way to the eternal life is only one, and that is Jesus Christ.

How you define religion is influenced by the kind of role religion plays in your personal life. In the above case, we can see that religion plays an important role in the informant's life, and his definition of religion encompasses all Ethiopians. We might say that religion is here more or less defined to fit the religious reality in Ethiopia. By accepting the Orthodox Christianity as a part of Christianity, his definition of religion includes all three major religions in Ethiopia. Another organization staff member also affiliated with the NLM funded project defines religion in a broader sense:

I think religion...from my understanding religion can be...it is based on individual understanding in the way everybody can believe religion. Everybody can believe. Some can believe in rivers, some can believe in a stone, some can believe in mountains, some can believe... in every direction.

According to this informant, it can be called religion regardless of what you believe in. Belief is described as something natural, and includes a diversity of beliefs.

In the Oromo language spoken in Rayitu I had some challenges in communicating the word religion. "Amantaa" is the word used when translating religion into Oromo. This means both "trust" and "belief". Below is one of the responses I got from a local participant in the area:

There are two things which come to my mind. One is your own plan which is either you belong to one religious group, Islam or Christian. And the other thing which comes to my mind is about individual or personal trust between people. That you trust someone, that means you are obliged to fulfill the promise, or the way around, you get back what was promised. So it is a plan, Islam or Christianity, and the trust you have in a person.

The plan mentioned in the beginning of the quote, might refer to belief. My interpreter added later that he thinks "Amantaa" is a word used to declare that they belong to a certain religious group. The quote also describes trust to another person as religion. The juxtaposition of "trust" and "belief" as the meaning of "Amantaa" indicates that religion is related to both a belief in something divine and trust to the people around you.

The findings in this subchapter are in line with Sire's concept of worldview and Geertz' definition of religion as a cultural system, in the way they are connected to the meaning of the term, rather than to the social functions of it (see 2.1). Religion might here be related to something that all informants relate to, telling a story about the basic constitution of reality.

We have through the pursuit of a definition of religion covered one individual factor of religion in the field, namely the informants' own perceptions of this concept. Another individual factor of religion might be found in the motivation for doing development work. Let us therefore look at what motivates both local and central employed organization staff affiliated with either NLM or DF to development work. While the first part of this subchapter will present and discuss general motivations, the second part will look at motivations containing religion.

5.2 Motivation for Development Work in NLM versus DF

When asked about motivations for doing development work during interviews, some of the informants affiliated with both NLM and DF refer to the fact that Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, and claim to find some of their motivation derived from that fact. Ethiopia is one out of 48 countries on the United Nations' list over Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The countries on this list represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. This is clearly shown by their population compared to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in that the population of these LDCs counts in total more than 880 million people, which is about 12 percent of the world population. Yet they only count for less than 2 percent of the global GDP (United Nations, 2011).

One of the organization staff affiliated with NLM finds a massive motivation in the fight for equality, and he puts it like this:

You know – as anyone knows – Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries. If you go outside the cities there are many poor people. You will find many marginalized areas, for example like South Omo where people are still living without clothes. Upgrading these people or bringing these people to the life that is needed, to the life that should be equal for all, motivates me.

He further uses his own adolescence in a marginalized rural area as a point of reference for understanding people living in marginalized areas today, and the hardship they are experiencing. "Helping these people could mean a lot", he says. He then takes it to another level by saying:

An improvement for the rural area is an improvement for the nation, an improvement for the country and an improvement for the continent as well. Working in this aspect is really satisfying. This is beyond the salary we are earning an incentive – priceless incentive. You can't count, you can't pay that one (sic.).

Motivation thus seems to derive from much more than a salary. Doing development work on the ground in Ethiopia is portrayed as a meaningful way of contributing to the well-being for the whole continent. Indeed, simply being part of something which helps people in need is mentioned as a motivation by several other informants. An organization staff member affiliated with the NLM funded project puts it in this way:

The main motivation is when you do something, to be a part of it and then it improves the livelihood of the community. That gives you a big satisfaction. Another satisfaction is to see less children die from lack of clean water, and more children going to school. To see the role of men and women sharing jobs, the equality of labor. Generally, to see the improvement of the livelihood of the community inspires us.

It is interesting to note that this centrally employed organization staff member mentions several reasons for his involvement in development when he in fact was asked to pick only one, the most important motivation. This gives us an indicator of a strong dedication to development work, and a genuine interest in improving the living conditions for the people in the area. Gratitude of being part of a development project motivates yet another organization staff member: “The main motivation for me is to be able to contribute to the well-being of my community. We see that people are struggling with all aspects of livelihood challenges, and I’m glad that I’m part of the team to support people in this area.”

So far, the sample has consisted of exclusively organization staff affiliated with the NLM funded project. The findings have not suggested religion as a motivational factor in development work. It is nevertheless important to note, that this does not mean that there are no religious elements in their response. Indeed, one NLM organization staff member finds the question about motivation as a difficult and challenging question, touching upon various motivations in his work:

I have tried to raise this issue at the beginning. I am a Mekane Yesus member. I am a communicant member. As a Mekane Yesus member I have to commit to the organization’s core value. The core value of the Mekane Yesus is to serve the whole person, based on the guiding principles of the church. According to the Bible, we are the followers of the Jesus. Jesus has been serving the people both physically and spiritually. This is our base. We haven’t another agenda. Jesus was serving those who are poor, those people who lack freedom, those who lack liberalization (sic.).

This quote shows some interesting findings. It points at the religious connection as a motivation for doing development work. He says that he is a Mekane Yesus member, and he also says that he is a communicant member, describing some of the values and practices of his religion. Being a member of the church does not necessarily mean much, it is a formal matter. However, the fact that he is also attending the Holy Communion indicates that he is not only a

nominal member. At the end of the quote he uses the word liberalization to describe what Jesus did. It is reason to believe that he meant liberation, as this word is present in the following quote, in which he is describing the aim of the church:

The aim of the church is to liberate people from suffering, from poorness, from injustice practice. This is a core value of the organization. This made us, in order to be here and serve this people. Based on this I am here. Another thing, when we come to the physical part, I am here also to help myself and my family. That is also not an easy thing. In order to serve my family I have to be here. I have to get work – that is also the second issue. But the core value of our commitment is to serve the whole person. This is the base for our work.

There is a motivation connected to the well-being of his family. He says he needs to secure his family by acquiring an income. That is an admirable and honest response. Finding and keeping a job often require staying away from your family and maybe only seeing them a few times a year. For several of the people I met and got in contact with, this is the reality. One example is a woman having placed her 18 months old child at her mother's house in Dodola about 240 kilometers away – with 6-8 weeks between each time they meet. Her husband is studying in the capital Addis Ababa, about 320 kilometers away from Dodola – in the other direction.

The motivation for doing development work is by this informant portrayed as important for both his family and the local community. His main motivation, however, seems to be closely connected to his religious belief. Serving “the whole person” includes both physical and spiritual needs. This holistic approach will be further discussed in the next chapter (see 6.2).

Let us now have a look at the findings from interviews with organization staff connected to the DF project. One informant expresses his motivation like this:

For one reason it is your job [...] getting your job done is one thing which gives you motivation. Say that you will do some activity and if you did that activity you feel that you have done what you have intended to do. That will give you a kind of satisfaction by itself. The other one, we are human beings and we feel also the problems of others. Minimizing other people's problems also gives you some sort of satisfaction. One other thing is religious as well as nationalistic feeling. We are from this people, and you feel that you need to contribute for the development of your people. And one last thing, in principle it is good if you do something good, and by doing good you get satisfaction of that.

It can be argued that the religious element is present here as well, something which gives us an indicator that there might be religiously based motivating factors both in a project affiliated with a secular development organization and in a project affiliated with a religious

development organization. The “religious” starting points for the informants affiliated with DF and NLM are, however, different in a fundamental way: The former group uses the existing local religion as a motivation, while the latter group uses a competing religion as motivation for development work. In the next subchapter we will take a closer look at the identity of the people in this group.

5.3 Missionaries or Development Workers

The organization staff connected to the development project in Rayitu is in professional terms called development workers. Even though they are professional development workers, their mother organization refers to them as missionaries. Which one of these identities that are given priority, might differ from person to person. I asked all three Christian organization staff members affiliated with the project in Rayitu how they would like to be featured, as a development worker or a missionary. The first replied as follows:

I will title myself as both. If I get the chance and room I can preach the gospel, anywhere. And also at the same time, do the development work based on my background. So I’m carrying two bags on my shoulder or on my back: development and evangelism.

This quote displays development and evangelism as two different things, applied at different times. The second informant remarks that development and evangelism are connected through one of the guiding principles of the organization, namely serving the whole person. The emphasis in his response is nevertheless on the missionary aspect: “and I am also witnessing Jesus Christ. If I sit with people I can tell them about Jesus Christ, by wisdom. So, as a Christian I can witness everywhere. My presence is on behalf of the church, so I can serve... I am serving the whole person.”

The third informant sees himself as a missionary, even though it is not his official title: “...it has an impact, actually, if we call ourselves missionaries, especially in this kind of areas. Of course, our employer they call us missionaries and we also prefer to call ourselves missionaries.” He further points out that if it would not have been for the missionary aspect of his job, he could just as well have been working in another area of the country. This final quote clearly illustrates where the motivation for living in this area is rooted. If the identity as a development worker had been stronger than the identity as a missionary, there might have been several other areas more attractive for him. In sum, it seems as if the identity of these informants is more closely linked to being missionaries than to being development workers.

5.4 Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter has been to investigate how religion may be relevant in development work, at an individual level. First, religion was defined by some organization staff members and local participants in the research context. They have shared their thoughts on religion by telling me what comes into their mind when they hear the word religion. Some relate religion first and foremost to their own religion. Others relate it to the different religious views in their own social reality and some refers to religion as a term which encompasses belief in any direction. Whether their answers are textbook oriented or practice oriented, common for all is a picture of religion as a relevant term, and something that concerns their life.

When it came to the motivation for being involved in development work, all of my organization staff informants showed a massive devotion to the field, illustrated by the difficult task of listing only the most important motivating factor. I got several motivations from each of my informants. The salary is one basic motivation mentioned by some. Apart from that, the fight for equality is a strong motivation, as well as the satisfaction of being part of a project which helps the people in their communities. Perhaps more interestingly, informants affiliated with a religious organization as well as informants affiliated with a secular organization mentioned religion as a motivation for doing development work.

For the Christian employees affiliated with the NLM funded project religion is not only a motivation, it is also part of their title and personal and professional identity. Even though their official title when employed in a development project is “development worker”, they are often referred to as missionaries within the organization. These two terms are not compatible for scholars like Terje Tvedt, who argues for a distinct divide between development and evangelism (see 2.5). For the informants in question, however, the two titles seem to be integrated into the work. One is referring to development and evangelism as two bags on his shoulder, applicable at different times and in different settings. Another one points at the holistic approach of the organization when legitimizing the link between development and evangelism. This approach and the implications it might offer for the NLM funded project will be further looked into in the next chapter (see 6.2).

6 RELIGION AT THE PROJECT LEVEL

The theory chapter gave a brief summary and discussion of how religion has been expressed in development theory during the past six decades. Religion has in some way or other been mentioned in most development theories. In modernization theory religion was described as both conducive to development and as an obstacle to development, depending on whether it supported economic growth or not (see 2.4.1). In the basic human needs approach, religion was expressed through an emphasis on non-material needs as well as material needs (see 2.4.3). At the end of the 1990's the issue of religion went through a renaissance in development theory, when recent development efforts seemed to have failed and it became increasingly and commonly agreed that all aspects of a society needed to be integrated in the development process in order to create good development outcomes. In this period the World Bank initiated research "Voices of the Poor" concluded that religious leaders were among the most trusted people in the developing countries, and that they therefore might be valuable carriers of development (see 2.4.5).

In my research in general and in this chapter in particular the central issue is to see how this turn in the development discourse has affected practical development work on the ground. Is development work being controlled by religious leaders and their agenda, or are the religious leaders only functioning as contributors to development?

There is one fundamental difference in the approach of the two development projects in question that needs to be understood. The population of the Rayitu area is almost entirely Muslim, counting for about 98 percent of the population. Thus, the project implementer EECMY/DASSC has another religious connection than the vast majority of the people in this area. In Adadley, the project implementer OWDA is a confession neutral organization, but all of their employees are Muslim. Islam is not only the dominant religion in this area, according to my informants it is the only one. It is interesting to find out in what way the different starting points affects the processes in the projects.

By empirical examples the five subchapters will throw light on different aspects of how religion may be visible in practical development work on the ground in Ethiopia. The first part is about the word "unreached", a common word used in the field of missiology and frequently mentioned among the informants affiliated with the NLM funded project. The second and third part will deal with how religion is a part of the project or not. Organization staff members will evaluate to what extent they think religion is a part of the project, and the

local participants will tell their stories about how they perceive religion is displayed through the projects. Section four and five will present the supportive as well as the obstructive ways in which religion might affect development work.

6.1 NLMs “Unreached” Areas

NLM states in the *Strategy for Development Cooperation* that they aim to work in areas with no or few Christians, in the so-called unreached areas (see 3.2.3). This strategy has to some extent been reflected in my findings. When organization staff members affiliated with NLM are asked to describe the importance of their work compared to other development actors in Ethiopia, some of them mention the aim of reaching the unreached areas:

The central part of the country is more or less saturated these days, as to my knowledge. So that is why we are moving, focusing in South Omo, focusing in Easter Bale, focusing in Somali – focusing in unreached areas. And we try to avoid resource overlapping. If you are doing health work, why we go and intervene in health in that area? We have to go to see unreached area, to help and support unreached area.

This informant further criticizes what he calls the “blanket approach”, formerly used by NLM in the area. He explains the blanket approach and tells me what their present approach is like:

Saying that they starting from here to the end of distance areas, as it was said in John 3:16. Go to all the (sic.) world, so that was the blanket approach. But now we are learning from that with start focusing on what we are good at, who are the marginalized community, what does the government development policy say – can we fit into that one – so we are trying to use a focused approach, depending on our human and financial capacity.

The term unreached is commonly used in Christian mission and missiology. Missiology is an academic discipline, which is concerned with practical theology, and the term is translated as being the doctrine of the mission of the church (Berentsen et al., 2004:16). In this meaning of the word, unreached refers to people who have not heard the gospel. This reading is also found in the *Main Mission Strategy* of NLM for the period from 2010 to 2020 (see 3.2.2). The strategy states that “NLM want to focus their efforts in areas where there are ethnic groups with no Christian communities or weak Christian communities.” But in the above quote unreached is used in another way. It is related to development, and it refers to areas where development and development work has not taken place. This double meaning of the word is also found in the statement of another NLM organization staff:

The main thing is, as it is also in the main strategy of NLM Ethiopia, is to focus on the unreached areas, and this area is very underserved in terms of non-government

organizations and government organizations and the capacity of the local government employees is so limited and the accessibility to the area in terms of infrastructure, telephone and things like that is so limited.

He combines the two meanings by first referring to the religious meaning in the main strategy and then focusing on the lack of NGOs in Rayitu and the surrounding areas.

In this context I believe the two meanings of unreached areas fit well together. Rayitu is underserved in terms of both development and Christian mission. Still, this juggling with definitions offers a challenge. If the mission strategy about intervening in areas where there are no or few Christians is to be followed, then the religious meaning of unreached will take precedence. If so happens, it seems possible to claim that the religious aspects might come to dominate the development aspects. According to my preliminary findings, it seems like the people on the ground who is working for the NLM funded project has their own interpretation of unreached, different from the mission strategy document in NLM. They are aware of the religious aspect of unreached, yet they choose to focus on unreached as areas that are physically difficult to reach and underserved in terms of development.

What might be the cause and the effect of this double meaning of unreached? I believe one possible cause might be connected with the audience: People within NLM might uphold evangelism and spreading the gospel as the most important aspect of development work, while NORAD through its funding channels holds the separation of evangelism and development as a condition for granting support (see 2.5). It might therefore be fruitful to use a “religious” terminology, but at the same time downplay the religious profile. The effect might be an identity in between these two positions, making the organization representatives cautious in their statements about issues related to religion.

6.2 Are there Religious Elements in the NLM funded Project?

This question allows for several interpretations. There are many different ways in which religion might play a role. Through the interviews I sought to find whether the implementing organization has any kind of religious connection, in addition to getting the informant’s personal opinion on how religion was a part of the project or not.

One of the organization staff informants affiliated with the NLM project shows how the linkage between religion and the project in Rayitu has many aspects. When asked whether or not his organization has any kind of religious connection, he answered: “DASSC does not

have any religious connection, but DASSC is an arm of Mekane Yesus with a vision of serving person and community with a holistic approach.”

He continues by saying that while he does not reckon religion to be a part of their project, he believes that he through good deeds can be a good Christian witness in a Muslim area. In the quote he mentions a holistic approach, meaning serving the whole person both physically and spiritually. This may be considered a contradiction in his response. He claims that the implementing partner has no religious connection, yet religion is part of the intention with the work. A fellow staff member elaborates more on this aspect:

Even if we are directly not engaging in religion, the mission of the church is to reach the people through development [...] if you do good work in this area and your witness is good among the community, the community can see what you are doing. And they may come to the church also. Directly I'm not engaging to preach the gospel. But we are witnessing this good work. So, indirectly it is a part of the church.

These two examples illustrate how people on the ground – doing development work funded by NLM – seem to be bringing a religious element into their work simply by being Christian individuals communicating and working together with people in this Muslim area. Furthermore, the informants are referring to the holistic approach of the organization. This aim of serving people both spiritually and physically has already been mentioned several times in the text, and it offers implications in line with the double meaning of “unreached”. This approach is at best a challenge with NLMs motto “The World for Christ” in mind. Even though there seem to be some links between the fields of religion and development, development and Christian mission are still separate fields with separate missions. Development is mainly concerned with the material well-being of the world population, aiming to raise the living standards of people around the globe. Christian mission is mainly concerned with spreading the gospel and converting people to Christianity. When the main aim of NLMs mission activity is focused on winning souls for Christ, one might claim that the mission agenda is more important than the development agenda.

When looking closer into the relationship between the implementing partner DASSC and the mother organization EECMY, we discover a complex situation. A staff member affiliated with NLM believes that DASSC does not have any kind of religious connection, because of its independent status. Others believe that it is the affiliation with EECMY which makes DASSC religiously connected:

Mekane Yesus [EECMY] is one church. Structurally there are departments: Finance department, development department, evangelism department and like that. I couldn't

remember the year, the government was demanding DASSC to separately establish and register as a justice office at the federal level. Built on that, DASSC organized – called Development and Social Services Commission. Even if it is established as a commission, it is linked to the church. The ownership of DASSC is still Mekane Yesus.

DASSC is thus a separate association, in many ways independent of the church, but at the same time owned by the church. The internal DASSC structure makes the picture even more complex. At the Synod level,¹² DASSC is governed by a development committee. The president of Mekane Yesus in the actual Synod is automatically the chairman of this committee. Some people in DASSC would like to keep a distance to Mekane Yesus. This, however, becomes difficult when DASSC and Mekane Yesus are so closely tied together. One of the NLM informants explains why there has become a division between development work and evangelism within the Mekane Yesus church in the first place:

In the past, there was a misunderstanding between development and religion. The employment of the development worker had no selection criteria. If you were a qualified person educated, then you would be employed as a development worker. Be it Muslim, whatsoever. And gradually the separation came between the development and the church workers.

This staff member refers to the 80's, and goes on to tell me that this was a conceptual issue, meaning that it was a debate about what it meant to be a development worker and what was required of such an employee. "If you are working in the church", he says, "You have to accept the church principles." In addition, the resources were another main reason for the divide between development and evangelism at that time, according to the informant:

Development workers were having a car driving long distance, while the evangelists were walking 50 kilometers, 20 kilometers – to go out and to preach the gospel. The resource created a lot of problem [...] having a good car, driving long distance. Having no resource, walking on foot to go and preach the gospel.

The informant continues to say that this has improved a lot over the years – at least the issue concerning employment. The church has today one important criterion for all employees in their development work: "The one who's going to be employed in the development has to be a church member, a Mekane Yesus church member. Unless and otherwise that expertise can't be found."

While the issue of employment has improved in recent years according to this informant, the resource is a factor that may have created and still creates a gap between

¹² A synod is a regional administrative unit of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. EECMY consists of 23 synods. A list of them are available at: <http://www.eecmy.org/?page=synods>

development work and evangelism in the field. In Norway development work has for several decades attracted financial support from NORAD (see 2.5). All NLM initiated development projects in Ethiopia today are ninety percent financed by NORAD. While NLM only need to provide the remaining ten percent for their development projects in Ethiopia, all evangelism work is in this area fully financed by NLM. This enables them to do “more with less” in development than in evangelism.

Let us have a closer look at the quote, in which it is stated that an employee in DASSC needs to be a member of Mekane Yesus. This is not the case in the NLM funded project in Rayitu, where some employees are not Mekane Yesus members. Like all the other informants at this site, I asked a Muslim staff member whether the Rayitu Community and Development Project (RCDP) had any kind of religious connection. He admits that the project has such a connection:

Yes, I think it has connection with religion. What I mean by that is like for example on different occasion in training, the project is facilitating to get different religious denominations, for example the Muslim, Orthodox and Mekane Yesus, to discuss on community issues. In that way we see that involvement of religious groups is vital in order to bring the message to the community.

He does not connect religion directly to his employer DASSC, even though he as an employee is well aware of the religious element in the organization. He still links religion to the project, at the level of carrying out development, and how it might be effective in this aspect.

Even though the NLM funded project in Rayitu is carrying out technical development work, the organization staff members’ statements show that religion plays an important role, both through a holistic approach stated in the strategy of the organization, and also as a tool in the implementation of the project. The wish of training staff representing different religious denominations might indicate that religious diversity among staff members is highly valued by the project management.

In order to acquire a broader understanding of the role of religion in the NLM funded project I spoke to local participants in this area. They were asked whether they considered the project implementer to have a religious profile. This is one of the responses I got: “Their main focus is on development, we never experience them imposing anything and we just see them as a development organization.” Another informant in the same area uses other words to describe the profile of the implementing organization DASSC, but it seems to have more or less the same meaning: “It is primarily for development purpose, and we don’t experience any religious activities from RCDP.”

By speaking about the “main focus” and “primarily for development purpose”, we get the impression that these informants are aware of the mission perspective of the implementing organization. Both informants nevertheless seem to be quite clear about the focus of the project being development rather than religion activity.

6.3 Are there Religious Elements in the DF funded Project?

One of the organization staff members affiliated with the DF funded project says that the project implementer OWDA is a non-religious, non-political humanitarian organization with no religious connections whatsoever. Nor does he consider religion to be a part of the development project in Adadley. Nevertheless, he mentions religion when he responds to whether religion has any relevance for the project:

Of course it will be an important consideration when you are doing development work in the field, to consider many issues like the lifestyle, like the culture, tradition, religion and many other important things. But it [religion] is not incorporated as an element in the project. There's no religious motive (sic.) whatsoever in the project implementation, it's purely humanitarian and it's purely development.

This quote points at religion as one of the factors being considered throughout the implementation of a development project. Another informant supports this notion of “pure development” and gives a personal response in this matter: “I would say in my world religion is not a central part of our development work. We have to respect it, absolutely respect it.” He seems surprised of my repeated questions focused on religion. For him, religion does not belong in a discussion about development, although he is aware of the religious reality in Ethiopia and the religious reality of the implementing organization: “Development Fund is an absolute neutral – confession neutral – organization without a linkage to any religion. But [...] OWDA is very, very strict religious Muslim.”

Throughout the field work I met quite a lot of OWDA representatives in Ethiopia, so I had the chance to find out about this claimed religiosity on my own. I met the management in Addis a couple of times, and during these meetings I became aware of the position religion has for many people in this organization. Since the logistics for the trip to Adadley had to be arranged in Addis, the management put me in contact with one of the project coordinators, whereby we planned and arranged the logistics together. We agreed that I should return for the final arrangements at a specific time the next day. On my way out something came to the coordinator's mind, and the meeting was rescheduled. When I came back the day after, the

OWDA coordinator had just returned to his office. At his desk, on top of a pile of paper, was a black leather version of the Holy Quran with gold ornament. It turned out that he had attended the Friday prayer together with several of his colleagues.

Although religion is not formally a part of the DF funded project in Adadley, the above example illustrates how religious elements are present in the implementing organization. An informant affiliated with DF elaborates on the issue concerning whether religion is a part of the project:

It happened that 100 percent of the staff working and 100 percent of the community are having the same religion, but this was not planned to be like that. It is a development project that the organization is implementing in this specific community, and the staff working here are local staff. Everyone is from the Somali region.

A local participant in Adadley is well aware of the religious affiliation of the people working in OWDA, while denying any religious influence by the organization:

Although we see the people working in OWDA as having a religious affiliation, we don't see any religious affiliation for the organization [...] the people working in OWDA, they are not priests and they are not sheiks, but they are Muslim people, we know.

To sum up, the development work conducted by OWDA in Adadley does not seem to have any significant religious linkage, according to my findings. Religion is neither counted for in the values of the funding or the implementing organization, nor in the implementing of the project. Still, religion seems to play an important role for the people working in this organization. It might perhaps seem strange that the employees of a non-political, non-religious organization like OWDA use their working hours to attend religious activities. In this context, however, I believe that it only shows that religion is important for people at a personal level.

6.4 Religion as a Support

This subchapter will look into how religion may function as a support for development projects on the ground. The focus will first be on the implementing process, and whether religious leaders were included in it, in one way or another. My first question to the informants was therefore framed as follows: "Have you ever been in contact with religious representatives in your work?" Below is one of the responses I got, from an organization staff member affiliated with the NLM funded project in Rayitu:

We have directly or indirectly contact with religious groups through workshops and seminars we organize here. It could be on water or gender or other areas. Yes, we have always included religious figures. They are the most important to transmit the message to the rest of the community.

This quote indicates that the religious leaders are important as a “bridge” between the project and the local community. The informant tells that not only representatives from the dominant religion (Islam) are involved in this process:

Yes, it is the Islamic leaders and the Mekane Yesus has also a representative here with a small congregation. And there is a Full Gospel church (Protestant) with about 30 members and there is a Kale-Hiwot¹³ church (Protestant) with about 30 members and then there’s the Orthodox which is about the same number. We include all these.

Religious leaders representing all religious groups in the area are brought together for conversation and discussion. One of the other informants affiliated with NLM in this area confirms that they do indeed include religious leaders in their development work and goes on to explain what kind of issues are brought up in these meetings: “Yes, we had a meeting with them. Especially in the issue of these harmful traditional [practices] like female genital mutilation, polygamy, rape, and inheritance. These are the commonly known [challenges] in this area.” He further claims that the religious leaders in the area have an important position among the local people: “If you want to convince the people, you have to convince those people”, he says, referring to the religious leaders. He then tells about some constraints in the cooperation with the leaders when dealing with issues they could not agree upon. In order to settle the disagreement, the project once arranged a trip to Robe¹⁴ for the religious people in the area:

I remember once we went to Robe as like a sort of experience sharing by organizing meeting at the zone level. People from both the government and from the different religious denominations [were invited]. We have tried to bring together, in order to [make] them share their experiences.

The reason why they went to Robe was to meet the sheiks living there. The topic of discussion was in this case FGM – female genital mutilation. The Rayitu Community and Development Project (RCDP) wanted to stop the practice of FGM in the local community and they knew that this was an inflamed issue. Thus, they invited people from Rayitu to come along to Robe, to share experiences with the religious leaders in that area. NLM had

¹³ “Kale” and “Hiwot” are Amharic words which mean “word” and “life”. Kale-Hiwot and Full Gospel are more Charismatic churches than the Mekane Yesus church.

¹⁴ Robe is about 140 kilometers west of Rayitu.

previously funded a FGM project in the Robe area, with great success. One of the organization staff members in the NLM funded project told me how this was organized:

You know, as a tool or a strategy we used the Muslims, we used the Orthodox and the Protestant leaders in the area. First we convinced them, why they are doing the mutilation. Is it really written in the Quran, is it written in the Bible, what is the reason? So they discussed and they fought for several days, months, weeks and finally they conclude saying that nothing written in the Bible or in the Quran, about the female circumcision.

DASSC wanted to make use of the resources available in Robe in order to create success in Rayitu as well. One of the locally employed staff members in Rayitu describes some of the challenges along the way:

For example for FGM the sheiks (in Robe) are saying that “Quran does not order you to do female genital mutilation”, they were saying. But these people (religious leaders in Rayitu) are saying it is sunna. Sunna means the thing you can do. If you do it you will get a blessing. If you don’t do it you will not be cursed or you will not be blessed.

He goes on to explain that the process of convincing the local Muslim religious leaders to abandon FGM as rooted in religion has been a great challenge and an ongoing challenge:

Anyhow, even if this issue is in their heart there is a change among the local community. It was tough in the beginning. Even you can’t speak in front of them. Now through the time, through several discussions, we are relaxed and we are openly discussing with them.

The next subchapter will discuss the challenge related to FGM in more detail and from another angle. The main point in this section is to see how religious leaders are used as a supportive element to the development work through dialogue and cooperation, and how religious leaders at different levels might be brought into the development project in the search for a solution, acceptable to all parties.

I did not only come across the issue of FGM in the Rayitu project, it appeared in Adadley as well. When presenting “religion and development” as the fields of interest for my research, the OWDA and DF representatives were eager to tell me about their work against harmful traditional practices such as for instance FGM. The employees in the OWDA headquarter in Addis showed a lot of enthusiasm about a FGM project funded by another Norwegian NGO, namely Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). They told me how they were training local people to facilitate community meetings in their own local community. These centrally employed OWDA representatives stressed that a change in practice needed to come

from within – that the organization’s employees needed to set the example in order to create change. They were therefore proud to tell me that none of their children were circumcised.

During my visit to Adadley, I attended one of these open community meetings, run by one of the local facilitators. The meeting opened with one of the elders reading a verse from the Holy Quran. After that, the facilitator said some words about the reason for this meeting, that they were gathered to discuss the issue of FGM. People were then encouraged to express their opinions on this matter. The kebele chairperson (a local community member appointed by the local authorities) stated that FGM is not rooted in religion, and that this opinion would be confirmed by others later on in the meeting. He mentioned some of the problematic physiological causes of this practice and he also stressed the need of discussing this collective issue together. After this, several elders expressed their opinions. One of them legitimized his opinion about rejecting the practice of FGM by saying: “We all have a sister, mother or daughter who we care about.” Another elder stated that it is a good thing to keep the traditions, but that he only wanted to keep the traditions that are good for people. A third statement appealed to the young people in the community: “I and my wife have been through a lot of problems because of this [FGM]. You who are young need to take a stand. You can avoid these problems.” The religious leaders and the respected elders used their influence to encourage the people in their local community to abandon the practice of FGM.

FGM is sometimes linked with religion and sometimes linked with culture. Clifford Geertz’ theory of “Religion as a Cultural System” (see 2.1) indicates some interconnection between these two concepts. We have seen that religious leaders in Rayitu and Adadley claim that FGM is not rooted in religion, and we have also seen how they use their influence to change the attitudes towards FGM in the local community. Religion has in this way become an agent for change in the local community’s religious perceptions as well as their cultural perceptions. This illustrates how development work on the ground has found ways to make use of religion in work against the partly religiously rooted practice of FGM.

As previously demonstrated, the DF funded project in Adadley does not contain any elements directly linked to religion. However, that does not necessarily mean they do not have any contact with religious figures. I wanted to find out if OWDA had ever been in contact with representatives from religious organizations, to which one of the informants answered the following:

You know most of the people living in this woreda are followers of Islam. There are no specific activities or project intervention which will dictate you to contact religious

leaders, but as part of the interaction that we are having with the community you come across also, religious people are the most influential members of the community. In that way you meet them, discuss issues of how the project activities should be implemented, how to get the support of the communities.

He further points out that the religious leaders are not the only ones approached in the process of implementing a development project. They also approach the clan leaders or the chiefs, the kebele chairpersons appointed by the government, and other highly respected or influential members of the community. Nevertheless, as the “most influential members of the community”, the religious leaders seem to play a large role in bridging the development process. Even though the OWDA project in Adadley is a purely technical project with a focus on improving the livelihood and capacity building in local communities, religious figures are key actors:

If we want for instance to mobilize the community to construct a birka¹⁵, you know the religious figures in that particular area may be helpful in mobilizing because people will listen more to them. When you talk to them, you talk to the individual as an individual community member and you want his influence to get the support of the other community. When he’s preaching the community, he may be using a moral basis for his religion that people should participate in the work and these things. But for us it is like any other influential member in the community we approach and we want to get his support and his support also will contribute the support of the community.

The approach of OWDA seems to be in line with Amartya Sen’s theory about development as freedom. Freedom is in his theory portrayed as both a means and an end in development (see 2.4.5). In a participatory process like the one in Adadley, where religious leaders and other respected people in the local community are approached and consulted in advance of implementation, the freedoms of people are increased.

We have so far looked at how the inclusion of religious leaders into development processes might support development work. We have seen examples from the DF funded project in Adadley and the NLM funded project in Rayitu, in addition to a FGM project implemented by OWDA, funded by NCA. The sample has consisted of staff members only, and they have given examples of how religion might be supportive of development. In addition, I wanted to have the local participants’ opinions on the religious affiliation of the staff, and its importance for the development project in question. The following question was presented to the local participants: “Do you think that it would have made any difference for the project if the staff had been from another religious denomination?” One of the informants

¹⁵ A birka is an underground concrete water tank that stores rainwater.

in Adadley does not see much of a problem if there had been people from another religious denomination implementing the DF funded project, much because of its technical nature. At the same time the same informant claims that the relationship to the people in OWDA is much closer because of its common religious platform:

Take the example of [...]. We know him and even we know his father. For that reason there is much closer relationship with the community than if he would have been someone who came from a different place and who have different religious denomination. And he has also good knowledge and understanding about the local context and culture.

A mutual understanding in religion, as well as a good knowledge and understanding about the context of the work seems to be appreciated. The organization staff in this area has all three qualities. The value of knowing the development workers operating in the area is also highlighted by the other local participant in Adadley: “We know [...] and he is also from our clan. He has many understanding in the area (sic.)” A different religious foundation might have hindered the work of the project according to the same informant: “It would have been very difficult to deal with people with a different religion, because there may have been a clash or fuse and different understandings.”

The mutual religion is by the local participants in Adadley highlighted as an element which makes it easier to cooperate with the implementing organization. In Rayitu, where there are several different religious denominations and the implementing body represents only a marginal religion in the area, the presence of EECMY/DASSC as a representative of a minor religion is seen as a positive thing, at least for some. One member of the locally employed organization staff gives an account of a meeting with an Orthodox Christian health professional in Rayitu:

I am happy for your presence, he said. ”Because I know Rayitu before you came here [...] “after you came here even several social relationships has been improved”, he said. “It was tough to talk with Christian and Muslim at the beginning. That challenge was improved, and nowadays people, the Muslim and Christian are acting like a brother and a sister. And we have relationship. This relationship is improved.”

Even though this is not directly linked to the development project, it shows how a development actor might create an improvement in social relations simply through its presence. After DASSC came to this area the understanding and tolerance between the local people improved, at least seen from this Orthodox Christian’s perspective.

Through numerous examples, I have in this subchapter illustrated how religion seems to be having a positive influence on several aspects of the development project in Adadley and

Rayitu. Nevertheless, considering that something that is positive for someone might be negative for somebody else, I would like to look into possible obstacles caused by religion in the development work implemented by OWDA in Adadley and DASSC in Rayitu.

6.5 Religion as an Obstacle

When interviewing informants in the field about challenges in development work, I started by encouraging them to tell me about challenges on a general level. Because of the sensitive nature of religion I was hoping it could be brought into the conversation without me having to mention it. However, since the interview setting has its own dynamic, the way in which I got to know about the challenges varied from interview to interview. The answers from the local participants were mostly about the lack of resources with nobody mentioning obstacles or challenges caused by religion. Therefore, the data presented in this subchapter will concern the challenges mentioned by members of organization staff only. While I will to some extent deal with general challenges, the main attention will be given the challenges that in some way or another are caused by religion. One of the informants affiliated with the NLM funded project says there are many challenges in their work:

Yes, there are challenges. You know, the need today won't be the need tomorrow. Today you ask for let us say water, tomorrow that is still a need but it won't be your priority need [...] Yesterday I have demanded water, today I want to have a clinic around because many people are sick and malaria infection is high.

He further describes challenges connected to the government policy, meaning that they need to adapt to the 2009 NGO-law of Ethiopia, which forbids them to work with for example issues like gender equality and human rights. He also mentions the inflation as a challenge: "A bag of cement in Ethiopia used to cost 25 birr or maybe 30, ok 100 birr.¹⁶ Today it is more than two hundred something birr." He summarizes the list of challenges in a striking way by stating: "Development is a challenge, by itself."

Regarding the DF project in Adadley, one of the project coordinators mentioned poor infrastructure and communication as the most important challenge. Another challenge was connected with the needs of the population, and what the project could offer. During the recurrent draughts in the area the immediate need is food, which is not provided by the project. Another effect of water shortage is that the semi-nomadic people move in search for

¹⁶ 100 Ethiopian birr = 5,67 USD (per 22.03.12)

water elsewhere, which in turn makes it difficult for the project staff to meet and work together with the local communities.

When it comes to specific challenges related to religion, the interviews with the locally employed organization staff in Rayitu show there have been some religious tensions between the project and the local community. One of the staff members refers to an incident in 2004, where disagreement rose at the beginning of the implementation of a HIV/Aids program: “The intention of the people (sic.) is asking if we are going to divert them from Muslim to Christian.” In response, the project organized a meeting where they invited sheiks, local elders, young people, and government officials to search for a solution: “The community was just highly aggressive, and when we started HIV/Aids awareness raising program then they said that: “How could you teach us about HIV/Aids? We are the Muslims, you are the Christian. We have sheiks. Why you can teach us?”

The local community seems to make it clear that the Christian development workers, who had just recently arrived to do development work, did not have any say in matters of religion. The Muslims did not want outsiders to interfere in HIV/Aids issues. It might seem that the local community was a bit confused because of what they experienced as a mix of development and religion. The informant, who was one of the facilitators at the meeting in question, replied:

What bad things we have done? We are working for you. Our plan is this one. Let me tell you the truth. I am a Christian. But I have my own understanding about my religion and I want to just be a Christian. You also want to be a Muslim. This is a reality. As a Christian, if you will be a Christian I am very happy. But I don't want to force you. You also want me to be a Muslim. This is a reality of human behavior [...] but as a project we are here to serve you, I said.

The religious aspect is being brought up by the informant and described in a personal and straightforward way. Religion is an essential part of this informant's identity, seemingly difficult to hide. Nevertheless, it also seems like he tries to assure the Muslims that the project as such will not involve any efforts to make Muslims become Christian. Through this quote, the need for respecting each other's religion is addressed. The response from the local community revealed the reason for their initial worries: “Ok, that is clear, that is true [...] but we have fear for the future. You will slowly go, go and go and you will divert our people to the Christian.” The project employee in return referred to Mekane Yesus as an organization that has been in the Rayitu area during draughts and periods of hardship, providing relief for a long period of time. At the end of the session, they made great efforts to come to a common

understanding. Indeed, according to the informant, the project has today a very strong relationship with the community. Even so, the challenge is still there: “[...] even if we have a good relationship today, the people have that frustration inside.”

One other story may also illustrate how religion might create an obstacle for the development work in Rayitu. According to some of the organization staff informants, the NLM funded project invited religious leaders to discuss the issue of FGM in September 2010. During the meeting, tension arose among the representatives. The reason for the conflict appeared to be trivial: “The project invited sheiks from other areas which the local sheiks were not happy with.” These sheiks came all the way from Robe. They had been part of the successful FGM project funded by NLM in that area, previously mentioned in this chapter. The staff in Rayitu was hoping that the sheiks’ positive influence on the project in Robe would be valuable in order to achieve the same success in Rayitu. Religious leaders from Robe met with local Christian and Muslim religious leaders and some of their community members, in addition to the project staff. One of the informants in Rayitu explained that the dispute started when one of the local Muslim religious leaders claimed that it was Shariya Law to circumcise girls. However, the claim was immediately discredited by one of the equally trained sheiks from Robe, who explained that there is no foundation for this view in the Holy Quran. The local Muslim leaders claimed that the Robe sheiks were paid by the project, after which the former left the meeting in bafflement. The dispute caused many challenges for the project employees as they were subject of malicious rumors that affected their security. The informant remembers that it was a tough issue to solve:

The issue, because we had to take it serious because it involved security of our staff, so we tried to discuss involving the local administration who is governing the area. They got involved and then the matter brought the attention of the administration which they sorted out by discussing further the intention of the project is not to influence religion, but to use religion figures to address the harmful traditional practices.

Shortly after the first meeting the project staff and the Muslim leaders agreed to meet again at the local government administration offices and managed to settle the dispute. An important factor was that the sheiks from Rayitu apologized for their accusations against the project employees. Even though the dispute was solved in a good way in the end, it demonstrates how religion might be a source of tension in development work.

As has been illustrated in the above paragraphs conflicting religious views have on several occasions created obstacles for the development project funded by NLM in Rayitu.

What then about the development project in Adadley, where the religious affiliation of the implementing staff is the same as for the local community? Is religion considered to be an obstacle in this project?

Contrary to the situation in Rayitu, preliminary findings from Adadley do not show any challenges or obstacles caused by religion whatsoever. One of the informants in this project describes the present situation between the organization staff and the local community:

It's gradual; it's kind of human relations. It builds gradually and you reach a level where you have a very close relationship with everyone, you know everyone, you get a lot from the people and they also know you. Communication is very easy in that regard.

He goes on to explain that it has not always been like this:

At first, we were a bit of outsiders. I had never been to the area, my staff had also never been to the area and everyone was new to the other one. Getting to learn, they also learned from us. If you come back so frequently to the area [...] doing together many activities then you get to know each other. And that's why we are very close to the community now, than was the case when we started.

This quote may suggest that even if the project staff in Adadley and the local community shared the same religion, the process of implementing a development project was not spared of challenges; a process of gaining trust in the local community seems to have been essential for the development outcome. The trust between the implementer and the local community seems to have come farther in Adadley than in Rayitu, considering the tensions between the local religious leaders and the project management in Rayitu. That is despite the fact that the Rayitu project has a longer history. This illustrates how different religious views among the project staff and the local community might create a challenge for the development process.

6.6 Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter has been to investigate different aspects of religion in the development projects in Rayitu and in Adadley. In the process of collecting information about these issues, the Western way of characterizing organizations as either “secular” or “religious” had to be put aside. One example why these labels are useless when dealing with practical development work on the ground in Ethiopia is found in the DF funded project. This project might seem to be disconnected from religion in all ways, because of the non-political and non-religious base of the implementing partner organization. In reality the project appears

to be involved in religion in several ways. All of the centrally and locally employed staff members are Muslims, they attend the Friday prayer during the working hours, and my informant uses the common religious affiliation as a motivation for doing development work among his people. My findings suggest that this reflects the reality in Ethiopia in a good way. People are religious in their daily lives, irrespective of what might be their professional viewpoints.

The different notions of NLMs “unreached” areas are an interesting aspect of how religion is in play at the project level. According to the *Main Mission Strategy* (see 3.2.2), NLM should focus their effort in areas with no Christian communities or weak Christian communities – in so-called “unreached” areas. When the informants are asked to describe the importance of their work compared to other development actors, the term unreached is frequently mentioned, but with another emphasis. Unreached is used in terms of development. This emphasis might have come as a result of the ties between NLM and NORAD, to assure the bureaucrats in NORAD that the financial amount granted NLMs development projects are spent on development, not evangelism. The organization staff in Rayitu is not running any risk by using the term unreached as they do, as the area is unreached with regard to both Christian mission and development. The challenge will first appear when the two notions of unreached do not correlate. That might result in a situation where the aim of development might be overruled by the religious aims.

Neither the organization staff members nor the local participants connected to any of the two projects in question believed that the projects contained any religious elements. In the NLM funded project in Rayitu, however, organization staff members were aware of the strategic reasons for doing development work in this area with about 98 percent Muslims, but they also claimed that the project as such did not directly contain any elements of evangelism. Nevertheless, one informant expressed that “the mission of the church is to reach the people through development”. In a mission organization like NLM, where there is such a strong focus on reaching the unreached, this statement offers a challenge in line with two notions of the term unreached. An emphasis on the religious aspect in NLMs approach will without question rank the mission agenda higher than the development agenda, which in turn might be problematic when the official primary target is development.

This chapter also dealt with how religion might be supportive of development, as well as how it might be obstructive of development. For the purpose of illustration, the issue of FGM was commonly used as an example.

When it comes to religion as an element of support in development work, I discovered several ways in which religion might assist development. Both of the project implementers make use of religious leaders in their implementation. Religious figures are used actively in transmitting the development “message” to the community. Furthermore, empirical examples have illustrated how dialogue and cooperation between project staff and local religious leaders might be supportive of development, even when dealing with tense issues, such as FGM. One example is the community meeting in Adadley, where religious leaders and respected elders – often the same people – took a clear stand against FGM. My OWDA informants stressed that change related to such issues and development in general needs to come from within.

The project in Adadley has more or less the same development approach as the project in Rayitu, with a focus on change from within and participatory processes. The major difference between OWDA and DASSC is the religious affiliation of the project staff. OWDA staff is Muslim in a fully Muslim area, while DASSC staff is mostly Christian in an area with about 98 percent Muslims. When DASSC in addition to this also has a tight connection with a Christian mission organization, religion might become obstructive to the development process. I have presented two examples to illustrate this, made clear by the local religious leaders’ response to issues regarding harmful traditional practices.

The first example is about the ability to communicate a development message. “Who are you to tell us what to do in issues related to religion?” Religious figures pointed out that they had their Sheiks. They did not need or want teaching from Christian people. The second example is about the implementation of the project. Is it “pure” development or is it development and conversion? One religious leader expressed the concern of being diverted by the Christian project implementers.

Even though it looks like DASSC solved these issues together with the local community in a good way, such challenges might be recurrent. These examples suggest it is possible that conflicting religious views, even in “pure development projects”, may create detours in development work. A local participant in Adadley cherishes the project staffs’ common religious and cultural background, and claims that conflicting religious views could easily create difficulties for a development project. This indicates that it is far from irrelevant for the development outcome whether you are an “insider” or an “outsider” when it comes to religion. This issue will be further examined in the next chapter (see 7.3).

7 RELIGION IN DEVELOPMENT WORK

The two previous chapters have discussed different aspects of religion in development work on the ground in Ethiopia. From a focus on religion at the individual level with the possible individual motivations rooted in religion in chapter five, in chapter six we looked at how religion plays a role at the project level. These two chapters have established religion as a factor that should be taken into consideration in practical development work. However, if we have a look at development theory, this has not always been the case.

As explained in chapter two, secularization theory claimed that religion would lose its position in peoples' lives as societies got modernized. The claim was that human reason and rationality would be replacing the role of religion. This has also been the dominant view in modern development theory, at least until the end of the twentieth century when famous scholars like José Casanova and Peter Berger claimed that religion had not been replaced by modern reasoning, and a World Bank initiated research stated that religion was an important element in private as well as public life in the developing world. According to Casanova, the marginalization of religion had only taken place in Western Europe (see 2.3).

Early theories of development did not acknowledge religion as an important factor in development work, even though it was occasionally mentioned and given some emphasis. Until the end of the twentieth century, scholars tended to speak about religion *and* development as two different terms. In the last couple of decades, however, religion has in development work been addressed like never before. In the Norwegian context, politicians have recently focused on the role of religion in development work, and the importance of gaining knowledge about religion in the development work context (see 2.5). This is in line with my preliminary findings: Religion is an integrated element of development work on the ground in Adadley and Rayitu. Hence the title of this chapter: religion *in* development work.

I will in this chapter investigate how religion is integrated into the development projects in Adadley and Rayitu, through a focus on three different aspects: First I will look at how and in what way religion is made relevant in the development context. Is it addressed by the local participants or the organization staff? Second, in order to clarify the relationship between religion and development on the ground, the informants' perceptions on the relationship between these two concepts will be presented. The final subchapter will raise a discussion about the importance of the personal religious affiliation of organization staff in the Rayitu project. Does religious affiliation of staff matter in technical development projects?

Some interesting viewpoints about what might be the optimal religious composition of the organization staff in Rayitu will be presented.

7.1 Who addresses Religion in the Field?

I have previously illustrated how organization staff in Adadley and Rayitu might consider religion to be one of the motivating factors for doing development work. I have also given examples of how religion might assist or obstruct development for the projects in question. Religion seems to represent a powerful force in the two project sites. I would like to investigate whether it is the development organization or the local community that addresses religion. Hence, the informants were asked whether they considered religion to be an important aspect of their private lives. Not all informants were asked this exact question, but the issue was touched upon in most interview settings.

For one of the organization staff,¹⁷ the question about the importance of religion seems to come as a surprise:

Yes, if I haven't a religion [laughing], I am like a dog or animal [laughing again] ...huh? You know, religion is important for everybody. So for me as a follower of Jesus Christ I am very happy and I have also hope to join everlasting life. Because of this I am very happy to be, to have a religion. So, it is very important and it has very good value for humankind.

This man is a Christian working in a Muslim area. The thought of not having a religion makes him break out in laughter. All the other Ethiopian informants (organization staff or local participants) mention religion as an important element of their private life. One of them responds as follows: "A person without any belief or having faith is just living for nothing. So it is an important part of life." Since all of the Ethiopian informants consider religion to be an important aspect of life, the relevant grouping is not whether it is the organization staff or the local participants who addresses it, but rather whether it is the funder (ex-patriots) or the context (Ethiopians). The principle documents of NLM and DF presented in chapter three illustrated how NLM uses religion as a main motivation for development work, while DF does not treat religion at all in their principle documents (see 3.2 and 3.3). However, as I have commented earlier, organizational values may differ from the personal values of an employee. One of the ex-patriots adopts a neutral position when it comes to religion:

¹⁷ The small sample of informants has forced me not to reveal the informants' organizational affiliation, in order to protect their anonymity.

I'm very neutral, and my private life is pragmatic neutral. Not on an atheistic side, not on a religious side, it's on a pragmatic side [...] one of the reasons I find it difficult to believe in a God is the extreme injustice in the world. That we in Norway have everything and here have nothing. And why should a God create it like that. That is the problem for me.

The injustice in the world is here used as one of the reasons for not believing in a God. At the same time as he finds it difficult to believe because of this, he has in several catastrophe areas experienced that the poorer people are – the worse their reality is – the more religious they are. He says this is a continuous surprise for him; however he admits “that religion as such is important mental support in difficult times. But I've been lucky; I've never had difficult times,” he says.

The informant seems to be an agnostic; a view that knowledge about a God is unknown. This view is in sharp contrast to all the Ethiopian project employee informants on the ground in Rayitu and Adadley. For these people, religion is vividly important, and they are openly portraying their personal religious affiliation in the local context.

We have in the previous chapters seen how religious figures are used together with other influential members of the community to address the development “message”, even though the projects are not about religious issues in particular. Religion is in this way addressed by the local community, in the context of development work.

During my stay in Rayitu, I discovered another way in which religion is made relevant in the context. One day I visited a village where the project set up a new school building so that kids in that area did not need to walk long distances to get to school. The project would supply the material needed in addition to a carpenter during the building period, and the local community was supposed to provide labor throughout the project period. Although the project management and the local community had agreed in the planning of the project, nothing had been done for some time. We met some of the elders in this community, and one of them explained the absence of progress with “evil spirits”, meaning that some of the members of the community had died recently. “We are praying to God that these spirits will leave, so that we can get back to normal,” he said. Even though death is a natural thing, it may influence a community in a profound way, making it difficult to keep on as normal. People have different ways of reacting and explaining such incidents. This example illustrates how elements of life (and death) are told using a religious language.

7.2 The Relationship between Religion and Development

The preliminary findings indicate that religion and development are interconnected in the research context. I wanted to find out more about this concrete issue, and thus asked the informants to present their thoughts on the relationship between religion and development. An organization staff member affiliated with NLM refers to development as a tool for religion: “You know, Mekane Yesus or NLM is having a motto which says serving the whole person, or holistic ministry. You can’t preach a person who is starving, starving to death. You have first to solve that problem, and come next to the life.” The way the term “the life” is used in this quote gives us reason to believe that it points at the gospel. In his view, it seems like development is used as an instrument for the actual aim, to spread the gospel. He concludes by saying why it is not possible to separate religion and development: “For your life, religion is important, for your physical need development is very important.”

The link between development and mission is followed up by another NLM/DASSC staff member:

I think, when we talk about religion it is, especially in these densely Muslim populated areas, it is difficult to bring the gospel if you are only doing that. But we go with development, and we’ve see the result is a very good combination. It helps to build a very good relation to what the good deeds you do.

He also points at the larger picture: “If it is not for the development project, Mekane Yesus would not have had a congregation here. About ninety percent of the members of the church are project employees.” The project is in this way instrumental for the spreading of religion in the area, even if it does not engage in religious activities.

These above responses came from informants who belong to the Christian religion. A new aspect of the relationship between religion and development is revealed when we turn to the informants who are followers of Islam. One of the Muslim organization staff connected to the project in Rayitu responds as follows: “In our religion, to help the poor is part of our belief. And when you help the poor and he’s improving in his livelihood, we see that as development. And that’s how they are interconnected.” This aspect of helping the poor is also mentioned by one of the local participants in this area, a woman who is the leader of one of the cooperatives in the project:

In our religion, we also aim to help the poor. For example if somebody gets sick and they need one or two thousand birr, in our religion we are obliged to borrow someone, even if we don’t have to ask back. But in this cooperative, also when we make decisions we relate to that one, being good to the poor and borrowing money and like

that. Those who are able they will bring back. Those who are not able we just treat them through our religion values. And that's how I see the relationship.

The women cooperatives are successful businesses, generating quite a lot of money through buying goats in the cheaper time of the season and selling them to make some profits. The same is also done with grain. The cooperative lead by the informant has had great success. I was told that they currently had 30 000 birr in cash and about 10 goats. This success enables women to become economically independent of their husbands, being able to buy books and clothes for their children. Despite the cooperative being a business, and a successful one, religion and religious values are not put aside. They are making decisions based on religious and moral values.

One of the local participants in the DF funded project claims that religion and development are inseparable with the following argument:

Religion is the first basic for life, and for the people to live they need also that their lives are improved and that is also development. Religion is about the social life and development is about the betterment of the life condition. So, they cannot be separated.

By stating that religion is the first basic for life and at the same time “is about the social life”, this informant illustrates the important role religion has in this context. It is portrayed as an essential factor in private as well as public life. The way this example and several other examples in this text portrays religion, illustrates the shortcomings of secularization theory, claiming that religion has been marginalized and confined to the private sphere. Religion in this context is private, nevertheless part of the public sphere.

The other local participant in the area, a respected and influential elder, elaborates on religion as the first basic for life:

Development starts from the individual. And the first step in this development, even the child when it's in his home, we build him in religion, the knowledge of religion. First he learns the Quran, and then when he learns the Quran the child moves to school.

He continues to state that an individual, who do not have a firm background in religion, will not get much of an acceptance in the local community. The community believes that such a person is weak in moral, he says, and he illustrates his statement with an example:

Take the example of two individuals who are grown up in the same area. One individual is practicing Islam very well, like praying and fasting and doing all these things. He will have a lot of respect within the community. If the other individual is not having the same, although they may have the modern level of knowledge – these

two individuals will not commend the same respect within the community and the influence that these two individuals want in the community will not be the same. The individual who has more respect will also be very important when it comes to passing a message to the community [...]

According to the elder, a modern level of knowledge is something which might be valuable, but not by itself. You need to couple this knowledge with proper religious knowledge if you are going to be successful in sending a development message. A modern level of knowledge alone seems to be of little worth.

One of the organization staff informants affiliated with the DF funded project is well aware of the importance of religion in this context, and argues why it is important:

Religion will have a lot of influence and play an important role in the thinking of the people, their ethics, and there are so many things, their lifestyle even [...] If you do not understand religion and the basic beliefs of this people, you may not have a very good plan which will facilitate the development works [sic.] that you are going to do.

The above mentioned quotes from organization staff and local participants affiliated with the DF funded project indicate that knowledge about religion might be seen as the most important knowledge in development work. Supported by these examples, it looks like knowledge about religion would be required in order to create good development outcomes in local communities like Rayitu and Adadley.

7.3 Religion in Organization and Religion in Community

In this subchapter the issue of religious affiliation of the staff will be discussed. In “pure” development projects, does it matter if the religion of the staff differs from that of the local community? I have touched upon this issue in chapter six, where the local participants in the DF funded project claimed that a common religion with the project staff was a supportive element (see 6.4). The perspective in this subchapter is not whether a homogeneous religious setting is supportive to development work, but rather to study a setting with a complex religious reality, like in the NLM funded project in Rayitu. We will see how the organization staff and local participants in this area emphasize the importance of religious affiliation in order to implement a project successfully.

At the end of the interview with one of the locally employed organization staff informants in Rayitu, the religious affiliation of the staff is brought up. We have seen how religious tensions have caused some problems for the project in this area (see 6.5), and I

would therefore like to get his opinion on the importance of the project employees' religion. The question was framed as follows: "Do you think it would have made any difference for the project if the staff had been from another religious denomination?" He replies: "In the project we have actually, the majority is Christians, Mekane Yesus members, and we have Orthodox member Christians and we have also about 2 or 3 local Muslim staff. What was your question?"

His response is kind of off target, but at the same time informative. It may not have been deliberate from his side, but it somehow served as an eye-opener. My assumption to find exclusively Christian staff connected to the EECMY/DASSC project, based on the religious element of their presence, proved to be wrong. The religious complexity in this area is somehow also reflected in the locally employed project staff. In the follow-up question I wanted to know how a fully Muslim staff would have affected the project: "For example if the staff had been all Mekane Yesus members. We feel it has an impact both positively and negatively. Negatively for example we will be perceived as a religious movement development program." Instead of answering my question, he turns it around and tells me the possible effect of having exclusively Mekane Yesus members as staff. In the following quote, he responds to the issue of having a Muslim staff: "And also if we think we have only Muslim background, I think then we are on the other side of the overall objective of the Mekane Yesus vision. So I think it has an impact, yes." These statements provide reasons why neither a fully Christian staff nor a fully Muslim staff might be entirely positive.

The issue of religious affiliation of the staff was followed up with another Christian organization staff informant. This time I was more direct, asking if it would have been easier to work in this area if all of the project staff had been Muslims:

You asked me a critical question... [laughter]. For the people, for the local people, they prefer like that, whether we believe or not. If all staff will be a Muslim, they will be happy. To speak frankly, they will be happy. But for the organization is missing direction (sic.), missing the value, for my understanding.

He recognizes the important role Islam has in this society through stating that a fully Muslim project staff would have been in the interest of the local people. I am curious about his statement about "missing direction", and I ask him to elaborate:

Meaning that we are here as a Christian to give a good witness. To lay good background here. In order to teach people by our presence, by what we are doing. So if the people will be Muslim they will act as a Muslim. They can maybe just work with development work, but they cannot lay the foundation which the church is demanding. This is a problem.

According to this informant, it is essential to have Christian staff in order to lay religious foundation for Christianity in this unreached area. He mentions that one's religious affiliation affects one's values and behavior, making it impossible for a Muslim to lay the foundation required by the church. Even though the quote above claims that Christian staff is essential in Rayitu, there are today two or three Muslims working in the project, out of about twenty staff members in total. One of these Muslims was among my informants, and I asked him how it was like to be a Muslim working in an organization related to Mekane Yesus: "I don't see any problems, and no one ever asked me about my religious point of view in this project. We respect each other and the aim is... I am working in development. Development is always good for the people regardless of which religion you belong to."

He continues claiming that he has never experienced any problems with being a Muslim in this project, as different religious views are respected. He further refers to the common aim of development, regardless of religion. When he is asked to reflect upon the composition of the staff, and if it would have been easier to do development work in this area if everybody in the staff had been Muslims, he reveals that the religious affiliation of the staff still plays an important role in creating good development outcomes: "I think if you are the other way around to be all Muslim I don't think it would be more effective either. But now at the current situation, the Muslim staff in the project is a minority. It would be good to see, if for example it is fifty-fifty."

The harmful traditional practices connected with the Islamic culture and religion is brought up by this informant as a reason for not having all Muslim staff. In my understanding, the quote above is an acknowledgement of the work conducted by the project both in regards to the issue of harmful traditional practices and at a general level. It is also a call for more Muslim staff members, in order to ease the implementation of the project.

7.4 Chapter Summary

In the Norwegian political debate in recent years we have seen a shift in thinking about development, from speaking about religion *and* development to speaking about religion *in* development. This chapter has looked at three different aspects in which religion might be seen as integrated into development.

In the first part empirical examples illustrated how religion is addressed by the context (Ethiopians), rather than the funders (ex-patriots). One of the ex-patriots takes a neutral stand

towards religion, wondering why people in poor countries have such a strong religious belief. The Ethiopians (organization staff members and local participants) are unanimous claiming that religion is an important aspect of their private lives. We have also seen how the deaths of local community members in a project site near Rayitu are explained in a religious language, claiming that death is synonymous with “evil spirits”.

The second part dealt with the relationship between religion and development. Both organization staff and local participants believe there is a link between these two concepts. There is, however, a difference in the responses of the Christian informants and the informants who are followers of Islam. A Christian organization staff informant affiliated with the NLM funded project speaks of development as an instrument for religion. He points out that the development project has made it possible for the church (EECMY) to establish a presence in Rayitu, and he also believes that doing good deeds through development work is helping to build a good relationship with the local community.

The followers of Islam are in various ways displaying religion as integrated into life and thereby in their development work. A local participant in the DF funded project connects religion and development by describing that a person with a firm background in religion will receive acceptance in a local community. He illustrates his point by telling a story about two individuals grown up in the same area. They are both having the same level of modern knowledge, yet practicing Islam differently. The one who practices “Islam very well, like praying and fasting and doing all these things,” will be most important when it comes to passing a development “message” to the community.

The third part of the chapter focused on the NLM project. The religious composition of the staff was discussed, as the project staff is mostly Christian in a vastly Muslim area. A Christian staff member admits that the local community might have wanted the project staff to be Muslims like them. However, the informant points out that if the majority of the staff had not been Christian, the organization would “miss the value”. A Muslim staff informant states that the Christian staff has been important in order to work against practices such as FGM. At the same time, he believes that it would be a benefit to the project if the Christian and Muslim groups among the project employees had been more equal in size. With the obstacles caused by religious tensions mentioned in chapter six in mind, it is reason to believe that this is a relevant reflection.

8 CONCLUSION

The starting point for this thesis was a curiosity about how religion is dealt with in development work today. I have focused on two Norwegian NGOs, Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) and Development Fund (DF), and development projects carried out by their partner organizations OWDA and DASSC in Ethiopia. I wanted to see how religion and religious elements are understood and expressed by people involved in development work on the ground. A research question therefore was phrased as follows: How is the role and meaning of religion in development interpreted by organization staff and local participants of Norwegian development aid?

Even though NLM and DF have different bases for their work, the former being a religious neutral organization and the latter being a religious mission organization, they are playing by the same rules, as they both receive funding from NORAD for their development projects. NORAD grants money for “pure development” projects only, meaning that all mission activity has to be separated from development work. This demand has historically created tensions both within the mission organizations and in the Norwegian public debate. In recent years, however, Norwegian political figures are encouraging the receivers of NORAD support to make use of religious figures and religious institutions in their development approach (see 2.5). This change in approach serves as a backdrop of this thesis. Before looking at the findings I would like to touch briefly some of the development thinking and theories relevant for my research.

In modern development aid religion has hardly been addressed. According to the secularization theory religion would play only a marginal role in modern societies. This view also affected the early theories of development (see 2.3, 2.4.1 and 2.4.2). In the basic human needs theory of the 1980s, religion was given some emphasis (see 2.4.3). However, it was not until the end of the twentieth century religion was acknowledged as an important factor in the implementation of development work. Influential contributors to this change was the World Bank that initiated research which stated that religious leaders were among the most trusted people in developing countries, and therefore important carriers of development. The book “Development as Freedom” by the famous economist Amartya Sen has the same focus. Through a focus on enhancing personal freedom in order to achieve greater possibilities, the values of poor and marginalized people were brought to the centre stage (see 2.4.5).

Based on my research material from the DF funded project in Adadley and the NLM funded project in Rayitu in Ethiopia in October 2011,¹⁸ I analyze the role of religion on three different levels. The results are presented in three chapters, presenting religion at an individual level, at a project level and at a general level respectively.

Findings illustrate that the distinction between religious and secular organizations as it is portrayed in principle documents (see 3.2 and 3.3), is rubbed out on the ground by the local implementing partners. The employees of OWDA on the DF side and DASSC on the NLM side all have religious beliefs as cornerstones in their lives (see 7.1). Despite the religious neutrality of OWDA organization staff members are still attending Friday prayer during the working hours (see 6.3). The grey zone between religious and non-religious actors is not only found in the employees' personal assurances, it is also found in the organizations. As a large development organization in the southern and eastern parts of Ethiopia, OWDA works with a number of foreign based NGOs. One is Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), a Norwegian Christian development organization. Cooperation between an organization with a Christian basis and an organization that is neutral to religion in a way messes up the field, and challenges the idea that religion and development should be kept apart.

In order to grasp the meaning and role of religion on the ground, I wanted to see how religion might assist or obstruct the development projects funded by NLM and DF. Development theory displays religion as an element that is either supportive or obstructive to development (see 2.4). The situation on the ground is more complex. Organization staff members in both projects cooperate with influential people in the local community, including religious leaders. Because of these leaders' positions in the local community they are effective in addressing a development "message". One example may be found in the project funded by NCA in Adadley where religious leaders take a stand against the practice of FGM. They claim that the practice has no roots in religion, and furthermore that physiological considerations support the rejection of FGM. My informants in Adadley always referred to religion as an element that supported development. This positive attitude towards religion might have come as a result of a homogeneous religious landscape. The DF funded project is carried out by Muslims in a fully Muslim area.

The findings illustrate that it is far from irrelevant for the outcome of a development project whether an organization staff member is an "insider" or an "outsider" when it comes to religion. While the DF funded project is carried out by Muslims in a Muslim area, the NLM

¹⁸ For the location of these project sites, see appendix 2

funded project is carried out by mostly Christians in an area populated by 98 percent Muslims. This project has during its eight years of existence experienced some challenges rooted in religion, in particular in issues related to FGM, where concerns about the agenda of the project have been revealed (see 6.5). Local religious leaders have expressed discontent with being taught by Christians how to deal with issues related to religion. One informant told me that local Muslim leaders had a fear of being diverted by this Christian mission organization. Thus it is possible to argue that the religious foundation of NLM – the aim of spreading the gospel and reaching the “unreached” – is an underlying cause of these tensions (see 6.1).

This example from Rayitu illustrates how the main aim of NLM, stated in the motto “The World for Christ”, might contribute to a bad climate for cooperation between project implementers and local religious leaders in a “pure development” project as the one in Rayitu. Strong motivation rooted in religion might create a challenge in communicating that development is the only aim of development work. It might be argued that development work is an instrument for spreading the gospel.

While religion and development in the first development theories were kept apart, religion has today become more integrated into development thinking and theory. When informants on both project sites were asked to express their opinions about the link between religion and development, they always referred to religion as a basic element (see 7.2). A local participant in Adadley argued that religion is the first basic of life, and that development starts from the individual. According to this informant a firm religious background is important in order to become a respected member of the community, which in turn is important when it comes to passing a development message to the community. A local participant in the NLM funded project, the leader of a women cooperative, pointed out that religious values were essential in the decision making processes related to the women cooperative.

The two Norwegian NGOs meet the focus on religion in at least three ways. As actors in a development industry they meet a focus on religion in contemporary development thinking and theory. As receivers of state money for their development projects, they are encouraged to use religion as a tool to create good development outcomes. Thirdly they meet religious people in communities built on religious understanding in practical development work in Ethiopia. The challenge as I see it is that the two first focus points do not say *how* religion should be integrated into practical development work on the ground.

Based on my findings I would like to welcome a wider debate about religion and development. It is not only a question about religion or no religion, and how religious leaders and traditions are approached in implementing a project. A debate about what religion the implementers of development work belong to could be fruitful. Do they have the same religious affiliation as the local community, or do they represent another religion? And does it matter for the development outcome which religion they represent? Having presented material on how different religious viewpoints might create challenges on the way, my findings indicate that religious affiliation of project staff is important for the development process. I am aware of the need for a Christian organization like NLM to have a Christian staff, otherwise they would “miss the value”, as one of the staff members told me. And one of the Muslim organization staff members claimed that the Christian staff did not affect the project in a negative way. Nevertheless, he believed that it would be good if the Christian and Muslim organization staff had been more equal in size.

My findings have also illustrated that a development process becomes fruitful when the field of religion is in a dynamic relationship with the field of development. We have seen how local religious leaders have been used as partners in forming the development strategy in both projects in question. On the one hand religious leaders have been supportive by communicating the development message to the local community, and have in that way been instrumental for development. On the other hand development might be instrumental for change in religious practice, as we have seen in the NCA funded project where religious leaders encouraged the local community to abandon the culturally and religiously rooted practice of FGM. I believe it is important to focus on both religion and development as instrumental for change. These concepts are interconnected. At the same time we need to keep in mind that they are separate concepts with separate missions.

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APPENDIX 1: The Millennium Development Goals¹⁹

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- Reduce by half the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day
- Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people
- Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

2. Achieve universal primary education

- Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

3. Promote gender equality and empower women

- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

4. Reduce child mortality

- Reduce by two thirds the mortality of children under five

5. Improve maternal health

- Reduce maternal mortality by three quarters
- Achieve universal access to reproductive health

6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

- Halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it
- Halt and reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

7. Ensure environmental sustainability

- Integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse the loss of environmental resources
- Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss
- Halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation
- Improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020

8. Develop a global partnership for development

- Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system
- Address special needs of the least developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing States
- Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies

¹⁹ This list is available at: <http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/pdf/List%20of%20MDGs%20English.pdf> (Accessed 2012, April 30)

APPENDIX 2: Map of Ethiopia²⁰

The project sites Adadley and Rayitu marked in red



²⁰ Google Earth

APPENDIX 3: Questions for Interview in the Field (Local Participant)

Introductory questions

- Name? Age?
- Tell me about your role in this local community.
- How long have you been a part of this project?

About the work

- Could you tell me about this development project?
- What does this project mean for the local community?
- Do you have a role in this project? In case, what role?
- Is this project helping you to get better living conditions? In case how?
- Have you experienced any conflicts or challenges in working with this project?
- Are you involved in decision making processes in this project? In case how?

Religion in the work

- Do you consider OWDA/DASSC to have a religious profile? In what way? Examples?
- Do you think that it would have made a difference for the project if the staff had been from another religious denomination?
- What comes to your mind when I say religion?

Private questions

- Has your religious belief at some point or at some level made it difficult for you to be a part of this project?
- Do you consider religion to be an important aspect of your private life?
- What do you think about the relationship between religion and development?

APPENDIX 4: Questions for Interview in the Field (Organization Staff)

Introductory questions

- Name? Age?
- Could you tell me briefly about your background?
- What kind of work does your development organization engage in?
- How is this work organized? Conducted by local staff or ex-patriots?

About the work

- Tell me about the work you do in this development project.
- For how long has this project been going on?
- Tell me about the challenges in this work. Conflicts?
- You are one of the actors in the field of development work. What is in your opinion the most important motivation for doing development work?
- Are local communities included in decision making processes? In case, in what way?

Religion in the work

- Does OWDA/DASSC have any kind of religious connection?
- Is religion counted for/a part of your project? In what way? Examples?
- Have you ever been in contact with representatives from religious organizations? In case, how is this cooperation?
- Has religion at some point or at some level made it difficult to carry on with this project?
- What comes to your mind when I say religion?
- Do you think it would have made a difference for the project if the staff had been from another religious denomination?

Private questions

- What do you think about the relationship between religion and development?
- Do you consider religion to be an important aspect of your private life?
- There are many development actors in Ethiopia. How would you describe the importance of your work compared to all the other development actors/projects?
- To the organization staff in NLM: How do you title yourself, as a missionary or a development worker?

APPENDIX 5: Enquiry to Participate in a Master Thesis Project

I am a Master Student at the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo, currently writing a master thesis about the relationship between religion and development. The specific field of interest is how religion is understood in development work on the ground in Ethiopia. I want to do semi-structured interviews with in total 8-10 people involved in development work, in addition to some observation in the specific development project. The interviews will last approximately half an hour, and they will be recorded. These recordings will be deleted at the end of the project period.

The sample will consist of adults both from the donor organization and of people from the local communities, as receivers of the development work. There will be a random sample, chosen for pragmatic reasons mostly. The collected data material will be accessible for me only, and it will be made anonymous at the end of the project period. This project will end up in a written thesis in May 2012, and it will be evaluated by the academic institution Norwegian School of Theology.

Since this is a small project conducted without financial support, there will not be given any form of compensation or payment for attending my project. In order to fulfill the requirements for conducting this project, I need to inform you about the project before the interview starts and I also need your consent by signing at the end of this paper. Your consent to take part in this is of course voluntarily, and it may be withdrawn at any time during the project period, without having to mention any reason for your withdrawal.

Best regards, Torstein Solhjell

Email: torsteinsolhjell@gmail.com

Address: Schouterrassen 19

N-0573 Oslo, Norway

I have received information about the study and I hereby consent to be interviewed

Signature