Religion and SDG16: Conflicts, Challenges and Opportunities[1]

Position paper for round table on 22nd January 2021

Dr. Brenda Bartelink and Dr. Erin K. Wilson [2]

Introduction

Governments and NGOs the world over have largely embraced, at least symbolically, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Five years into the 15 year-program, the 17 SDGs have been embedded into NGO project design and implementation, and governments have integrated them into their policy agendas. Nonetheless, significant work remains to be done if these goals are to be achieved by the desired date of 2030.

Despite growing engagement with religion in development and foreign policy over the past decades, the inclusion of religion in the SDG agenda has not been fully realized. This is problematic since religion is relevant to and intersects with all the SDGs in various ways. Sustainable and inclusive development, and a rights-based approach for all world citizens can only be achieved when all SDGs are realized. With 85% of the world's population identifying as religious (Pew 2015), and religious actors playing leadership and community cohesion roles in social and political spheres around the world, bringing attention for religion into the SDG process is crucial for its success.

The role of religion in relation to **SDG 16** is particularly important yet also highly challenging. This SDG formulates the aspiration to **promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.** SDG 16 is considered by some observers to be one of the most sensitive SDGs, as its focus on security, justice and inclusion potentially infringes the most on state sovereignty (Tomalin and Haustein 2019). Religion's complex relationship with other factors that are often implicated in conflict and social exclusion, in particular unequal power relations between majority and minority communities on the basis of (amongst others) gender, ethnicity, class or nationality, make it crucial to consider as part of a nuanced holistic approach to SDG16.

This paper provides an initial exploration of the question "What is the role of religion in the pursuit of SDG 16?". It argues that consideration of and engagement with religion in its various guises and manifestations - as an identity marker, as an institution of power, as a catalyst for social change - is a vital component of building peaceful and inclusive societies with access to justice for all. As such, we approach religion neither as the main factor in promoting inclusive societies, nor as irrelevant or unimportant, which are often the main ways religion is considered in these discussions (Wilson 2019). Rather, as the paper highlights, religion is inextricably entangled with questions of gender, ethnicity and identity

and thus a more expansive approach is necessary. We propose a **tripartite conceptual framework** that incorporates **contextually embedded, intersectional and cross-cultural understandings of religion** for exploring its role in building inclusive societies. This approach leads to specific methodological choices and requirements, which inform the selection of case studies
and discussion in the paper.

An important observation here is that challenges to peace, justice and inclusion where religion is visible tend to be presented as fundamentally about the clash of religious beliefs with secular liberal values. Such an analysis is, however, highly reductionist. It obscures the complex relationships between religion and other markers of identity, as well as suggesting that a neat clear division between secular and religious institutions and actors is always present and observable. Further, a focus on the religion/secular divide often masks other structures of power that are influential, such as racism and patriarchy, amongst others. It generates and privileges particular assumptions and expectations about the role of religion in social inclusion and exclusion that can contribute to an incomplete picture of realities on the ground. This is not to suggest that we see religion as the main factor or the "silver bullet" for addressing social exclusion and achieving social inclusion. Yet analysis of the factors contributing to social exclusion that does not consider religion in a contextually embedded, intersectional and cross-cultural way, will more often than not produce insights that are incomplete and project responses that do not address the main issues at stake.

Consequently, rather than placing primary emphasis on 'religion', 'secularism', 'patriarchy', or 'racism', a contextually embedded, intersectional and cross-cultural approach requires beginning with an analysis of the everyday lived realities of people and communities across the globe. Unless researchers, policymakers and practitioners begin by 1. Engaging with the voices, perspectives and experiences of people in their own contexts, appreciating how they experience social exclusion and their aspirations for making their own societies more inclusive; and 2. Ensuring that religion is considered in entangled relationship with other factors that contribute to social exclusion, the pursuit of SDG 16, and other SDGs, will always be limited.

'Religion' itself is a complex category that connotes different meanings in different times and places. As such, it is impossible, and analytically restrictive, to define precisely what it means. Rather, we adopt a critical approach to this concept, breaking it down into **two parts:** on the one hand, **the discourses, ideas and practices of religious actors** – institutions, organisations and individuals who identify or are identified as 'religious' and play a role in the work and the politics around building just, inclusive societies; on the other hand, **the assumptions that are made about 'religion' and 'religious actors'** that shape scholarly and policy engagement with religious actors and then further impact and hinder efforts to achieve SDG16. These two parts overlap and are interconnected, difficult at times to disentangle and distinguish from one another. Nonetheless, we suggest that focusing on these two different ways in which religion is significant in relation to just, inclusive societies, is diagnostically useful for understanding the complex dynamics surrounding the phenomenon of religion in the SDG agenda.

This paper offers some reflections to guide a further deepening and widening of the lens on religion in relation to SDG 16, developed in conversation with civil society organisations engaged in human rights advocacy in the Netherlands, Colombia and Indonesia. We first briefly discuss the specifics of SDG16 and its relationship with religion. In the first section of the

paper, we unpack the idea of 'inclusive societies' at the heart of SDG16. In the second part of the paper, we further consider the place of religion in the achievement of SDG16 and argue that a more holistic understanding of religion in relation to the SDGs requires a deeper and broader approach to religion in everyday life and politics. In the third part of the paper, we discuss three cases that demonstrate the complexity and multifaceted meanings of religion in the context of Colombia, Indonesia and The Netherlands. The material for each case study has been gathered through online conversations with representatives from local civil society organizations engaged in promoting human rights and social inclusion, supplemented with secondary literature where available. Drawing on these discussions, we give some narrative examples of how religious actors navigate these complexities in their work towards realizing inclusive societies.

In the conclusion, we offer some principles for how these challenges might be addressed in the future, including the importance of context, the need to centralize the experiences of those who have been and continue to be marginalized and excluded, and drawing on the knowledge, language and practices indigenous to different contexts as part of the process of building inclusive societies. Rather than seeing peaceful and inclusive societies with access to justice for all as a goal to be attained by 2030, we suggest understanding this as a continual never-ending process is more helpful, more consistent with on-the-ground realities and provides more opportunities for the people whose lives are affected on a daily basis to actively participate in building the kind of peaceful, inclusive and just society that they themselves want to be part of.

SDG16 and inclusive societies

A cornerstone of SDG16 is the idea of inclusive societies. As such, in this section of the paper, we unpack this concept and its origins, drawing particular attention to its intersection with questions of religion.

Like all such terms, there is no universally agreed definition of what defines an "inclusive society". At the same time, there are broad points of convergence across the different institutions involved in sustainable development and in academic literature that utilize the term. The concept emerges from human rights and development scholarship and practice. According the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (n.d.), a leading centre for research on human rights and inclusive societies, "An inclusive society aims at empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic, or other status. It is a society that leaves no one behind." The UK Department for International Development (DFID) echoes this definition, adding that practically this approach focuses on ensuring opportunities for all, by removing structural barriers to opportunity and achieving zero poverty (cited in Carter 2015). [3] Similarly, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) defines an inclusive society as one "that overrides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction" (UN DESA 2009: 10). It is best understood as progressive and incremental (Lutiffiya and Bartlett 2020), a process or framework for approach – hence building inclusive societies – rather than an end goal: Our societies can always be more inclusive.

[3] It is important to remember that the definition of "poverty" is also something of a moving target.

Implicit and fundamental to the process of building inclusive societies in the idea of social inclusion itself. According to Brazilian politician Cezar Bussato, in his contribution to the UN Expert Group Meeting 'Creating Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration' (2007), social inclusion has been primarily approached from two main perspectives: economic inclusion and socio-political inclusion. Economic inclusion focuses on the extent to which individuals and communities are integrated into the economic structures and processes of a society and are able to participate in the market through employment and consumerism. Socio-political inclusion is concerned with breaking down barriers to participation such as discrimination of various kinds on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, language, religion, culture or ability.

The most important source for the development of thinking and policy on social inclusion, however, is that of Amartya Sen and his consideration of the sources of social exclusion. Sen coined the concept of social exclusion and developed it as part of his work with Martha Nussbaum on the capabilities approach in development. Sen and Nussbaum took issue with the primary emphasis on economics and income prevalent in international development discourses, approaches and practices. Economic development is only one part of ensuring dignity and well-being. Their capabilities approach argues that poverty is not simply economic deprivation but it is any form of deprivation that prevents people from fully developing their capacity and potential as human beings (Nussbaum and Sen 1993). We can see these conceptual foundations being emphasised in the more recent definitions of inclusive societies, discussed above.

In order to address these barriers to social inclusion, it is important to unpack what they encompass. Economic exclusion refers to the prevention from participation in economic life - in practical terms, unemployment, under-employment, precarious employment and the subsequent lack of access to education, investment or entrepreneurial opportunities that low income affords. Socio-political exclusion refers to the prevention of participation in social and political life - this could manifest in voter suppression, lack of educational opportunities which

SDG16 and Religion

Over the past twenty years, much attention has been devoted to the role of religion in relation to sustainable development. Policymakers, practitioners and scholars have argued that, in order to increase effectiveness and promote more equal and sustainable partnerships with local actors, development policy and practice needs to actively include and engage religious actors and ideas. Indeed, many initiatives have been implemented in order to do just that, including the World Bank's Faith Initiative, the German Foreign Ministry-funded Partnership on Religion and Development (PaRD), the European Commission's Global Exchange on Religion in Society, to name only a few. The development community has acknowledged religious actors as important mediators between international politics and local communities. Religious NGOs in particular have been actively engaged in global SDG conversations and were successful in translating global discourse to local religious actors (Tomalin et.al. 2019). Yet, while the relevance of the SDG's is acknowledged by religious organizations in various local contexts, local religious actors indicate they have had little influence on the global conversations around the SDGs (Tomalin et.al. 2019). Furthermore, the religious actors that were engaged in high-level SDG consultations were largely approached because of their status as International NGOs working on development. Indeed, the category of religious stakeholders is conspicuous by its absence amongst the other groups consulted as part of the SDG process. [4] As international organizations, rather than locally

embedded communities, these organizations may have little insight on religion's meaning and significance to people and societies in their everyday lives. Therefore, while appreciating the ways in which religion has been acknowledged and taken seriously in the context of the SDGs, there is still work to be done. As Karam (2019) has argued, enhancing engagement with religion in the SDG process requires a recognition of the fundamental role of religion as part of the cultural fabric of humanity, and as an important variable in shaping development writ large. It brings into perspective the multifaceted and complex meanings of religion to people in particular local contexts embedded in local and global power dynamics.

Religious actors of various kinds are important partners for building inclusive societies. In some contexts they carry more legitimacy and authority than secular/government institutions. Religious actors include religious institutions as well as civil society organizations (who may or may not be affiliated with these established institutionalised religions), promoting human rights and social and economic inclusion through advocacy, public education and activism. The term 'religious actors' encompasses an acknowledgement of local faith-based communities and individuals, in addition to the more frequent focus on institutions and organizations. Religious actors may be essential service providers – e.g. education, health care, sanitation, legal and resettlement services – in areas where the state is either unable or unwilling to provide these services for particular groups/sections of the community or entire populations. In light of this significant role in institutions and service provision, where social inclusion and exclusion are navigated and experienced by individuals and communities, incorporating attention for religion in relation to existing systemic inequalities, as well as how these are navigated by people in their everyday lives is crucial for developing a nuanced, holistic and integrated approach to SDG16.

Many development actors would acknowledge the need to understand better how and when to engage and when not to engage with religious actors, and of knowing where religion might be particularly relevant as a strategy or resource to improve people's lives (Tomalin et.al. 2019). Yet, in engaging with religion in the context of SDG 16, some particular challenges become apparent. Tomalin et al (2019) highlight that engaging religious actors on the SDGs is made difficult by the immense diversity of perspectives on theology, ethics, gender and the societal role of religion, to name a few, that exists within and across different religious and faith traditions. This diversity can influence the willingness of different religious actors to engage with each other, let alone with secular institutions and organisations. A recent article by Omer (2020) argues that religious actors' work on SDG16 in Kenya and the Philippines presents particular paradoxes around inclusion. The religious actors' efforts to realize justice and peace by utilizing indigenous religious resources and methodologies for conflict transformation and peacebuilding demonstrates that SDG 16 programmes are more locally integrated than has previously been the case. However, these same programmes may also strengthen or legitimize certain privileges and unequal power relations, for example by reinforcing scripted gender roles. Religious actors that engage in peace and justice work often have limited opportunities to critically engage with their own notions of religion and how these are shaped in the context of histories of colonialism and oppression, meaning that these organisations can (often unwillingly or unconsciously) reinforce, rather than challenge, socio-political and discursive forms of exclusion.

Exploring religion in relation to SDG 16 therefore requires three crucial conceptual moves. First, it is important to understand how religion is drawn on by various actors to motivate or legitimize their aspirations for and interventions towards the transformation of society. This requires a

4   See the UN Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform List of Stakeholder groups
    https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/ngos

deeper **contextually-embedded understanding** of the meanings of religion to different communities in their local context, including how this may be different and conflicting within that context. Second, religion should be considered in terms of how it intersects with other aspects and dimensions of human life, such as ethnicity, class, gender and broader cultural dynamics, not as a single self-contained factor. This requires **an intersectional understanding** of religion. Third, examining religion and SDG16 requires awareness of the different meanings of the term "religion" and of the different ways in which religious identity, narratives, actors, rituals and practices manifest across diverse contexts. This requires **a cross-cultural understanding** (Gruell and Wilson 2018) of religion, recognising the interplay between local and global assumptions about what religion is and does, and the ways in which these assumptions are embedded in local, national and global power relations. As a result of its embeddedness in these power relations, religion is implicated in economic, socio-political and discursive exclusion.

These conceptual moves have important methodological implications. A contextually-embedded approach requires engaging specific local contexts and actors for understanding local dynamics affecting the achievement of SDG16 with reference to religion. An intersectional approach necessitates engagement with traditionally marginalized perspectives (e.g. women, non-western, spiritual/ indigenous approaches) within a religious context, alongside those of the "usual suspects". A cross-cultural approach requires consideration of the gendered, economic, political, social, cultural and historical power
structures - patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, democracy, authoritarianism, (neo-) colonialism, to name a few - with which various religious traditions are embedded
and entangled(Bartelink and Wilson 2020).

Overarching these three approaches to religion and the SDGs is the requirement for critical reflection on the power relationship between the categories of "religion" and "secular". This binary framework contributes to the privileging of particular religions or religious voices that are more easily aligned with the Christian/ Secular discourses of modernity that have shaped international development and humanitarianism (Ager and Ager 2011; Tomalin et.al 2019; Wilson 2017). In a broader sense, this includes a methodological suggestion for scholars, policymakers and practitioners alike to critically reflect on their own policies, organisations and approaches in relation to religion and the SDGs, as well as that of their counterparts, the contexts and societies in which they work, all in the context of their own complicated histories of inclusion and exclusion, within and across national boundaries.

In the rest of this paper, we apply this three-fold structure to three cases related to the consideration of religion in building inclusive societies. Each case demonstrates religion's complex entanglement with other factors that contribute to economic, socio-political and discursive exclusion, such as gender, ethnicity and class. This highlights that religion cannot be considered in isolation, but neither should the roles of gender, ethnicity and class in social exclusion be examined without reference to religion. Exploring these three cases in conversation with each other further highlights the importance of cross-cultural approaches, since it demonstrates the differences in understandings and consequently priorities when it comes to building inclusive societies and the role of religion. Further, by examining cases from diverse regions of the globe, and where different religious or philosophical perspectives are dominant, the cases are able to speak to religion's embeddedness in broader power structures, including colonialism and secularism.

Colombia

Colombia is marked by the armed conflict that affected the country for more than fifty years, and since the ceasefire in 2015 and the peace agreements a year later, violence by armed groups still occurs. The experience of insecurity and violence, has a much longer history for African Colombian communities, as they have been affected by various forms of colonial violence and oppression for centuries. For African Colombian communities armed conflict and violence is not necessarily different from the forms of racism and exclusion they experience. Afro-Colombian women in Palmira, for example, have limited opportunities and access to decent employment. In addition to trauma as a result of the recent conflicts, women experience sexism within their communities and sexism and racism in broader Colombian society. The individual challenges that women experience in accessing the labor market, are thus closely entangled with their discursive exclusion.

As observed in relation to minority communities in other colonized societies across the globe (e.g. Omer 2020, Haustein 2017), in Colombia the social exclusion experienced by Afro-Colombian communities has historically included pressures to reshape their religious and spiritual lives to fit within a Christian universalizing cosmology, as this was seen as the pathway to development. Here we see the consequences of the overarching religion/secular binary. The social fabric of Afro-Colombian communities has been deeply affected by the suppression of cultural identity, their ancestral values and their own traditions and customs by westernized culture. The experience of discursive exclusion of African Colombian women in particular has disconnected them from cultural forms of empowerment. Efforts to improve women's economic positions and challenge their exclusion from the labour market therefore necessarily involve addressing the forms of socio-political and discursive exclusion they experience.

Afro-Colombian women themselves have developed forms of leadership, demonstrating awareness of the various forms of exclusion mentioned above. A recent example from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic serves to demonstrate how Afro-Colombian women themselves understand the most significant social exclusion challenges and develop responses to those challenges. 87-year-old, Marciana Lerma de Sanchez is an expert in herbs and local knowledge of the Caucan Pacific. Observing the consequences of mandatory measures and social distancing to stop the spreading of COVID-19, consequences that exacerbated the challenges already present in the community as a result of social marginalization and exclusion - for example, mental illness, stress, anxiety and depression - among the Afro-Colombian community in Palmira, motivated Marciana to act. With her knowledge of plants and traditional Pacific medicine, Marciana has become a great support for many communities in Palmira and in her native territory. Despite her being far away from her territory, she continues sharing tips and natural remedies through on-line workshops. In these workshops, she also shows local Afro-Colombian leaders the importance of spiritual guidance in these difficult times. Her herbs and traditional medicines have become a cure for sadness, pain, headaches and respiratory complications. In this way, some of the consequences of the quarantine are treated with the knowledge of the ancestral Afro-Colombian culture. Supporting and empowering Afro-Colombian people to reconnect to indigenous practices of healing that have become marginalized, Marciana Lerma de Sanchez challenges discursive forms of exclusion. At the same time she models a form of inclusive leadership that indicates that inclusion and empowerment can be intersectional, including economic, religious or gendered positions. This brief example

highlights how drawing on the knowledge and resources indigenous to local communities can be a source of empowerment that combats forms of socio-political and discursive exclusion. In doing so, people's (mental) health and wellbeing are improved, which in turn supports them to seek out and claim their own place in the economic and socio-political institutions of their communities.

Indonesia

Cirebon is a super diverse society composed of various ethnic and religious groups, including different Islamic traditions (Sunni, Shia, Ahmadiyya), Christian traditions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and indigenous and tribal religions. There are various tensions within the communities from which future conflicts may emerge. The existence of violent extremist groups contributes to a sense of insecurity and threat. The influence of conservative religious voices and their influence in local and national politics increases a broader dynamic of polarization between more conservative and liberal religious groups. Islam in Indonesia has a long independent, indigenous history with a strong knowledge tradition. However, influenced by access to the media, conservative groups are now more strongly orienting themselves towards conservative and more extremist interpretations of Islam from the Middle East. Muslim religious actors that advocate for justice and equality with reference to Islamic knowledge and tradition are blamed for buying into western imperialist (e.g. human rights) agendas. Local politicians, in their attempt to avoid such accusations and secure conservative religious support, have increasingly tailored themselves towards these conservative religious actors' voices. This polarization typically plays out around the issue of women's rights, a topic that invites heated debates on social media. Women's rights are understood as imposed on Muslim societies by western, imperial powers. The latter position however needs to be understood in terms of how various colonial histories have become entangled and fuel broader resistance to the forceful imposition of secular liberal agendas via human rights and gender activism (Mahmood 2012). Here we see the entanglement of religious actors and discourses in broader power relationships of patriarchy and colonialism, highlighting the necessity of a contextually embedded, intersectional and cross-cultural approach to religion in building inclusive societies.

A local organization, Fahmina, is very strategic when it engages with religion directly and when they avoid doing so. In local communities, Fahmina chooses to depolarize and de-escalate tensions by only implicitly engaging with religion. In the programme Setaman, or 'School for Love and Peace' Fahmina promotes diversity and tolerance. Tolerance is understood as a category of active behavior, often included into considerations about the Indonesian state and the idea that national welfare is dependent on 'togetherness' and 'strength in unity'. They draw on a local practice of direct encounter, referred to as Silaturahmi, gatherings to establish and maintain good relations with and knowledge about friends, family, and neighbors are organized (Grüll and Wilson 2018). Fahmina experienced a number of instances showing that Silaturahmi can be an effective means to overcome social, religious, and political divides. It involves duties for both guests and hosts and is an essential part of Indonesian everyday life. The choice of Fahmina to focus on perceived "Indonesian" values such as tolerance, is informed by their choice to focus on common values rather than religious differences.

On the issue of women's rights in Indonesia, however, Fahmina chooses a more direct religio-political strategy. The organisation is critical of how existing forms of indigenous Islamic scholarship on women's rights within Indonesian Islam and Indonesian society, tends to be overruled or sidelined by strong conservative voices. Their advocacy programmes target

politicians and policymakers to familiarize them with Indonesian Islamic scholarship on gender and women's rights. In addition to this stronger positioning within Islamic and political circles, Fahmina also seeks dialogue. It combines Islamic scholarship on women's rights with a careful strategy of engaging various religious actors around the issue of domestic and gender based violence. Conservative and more liberal religious actors share a concern with the stability of families and the wellbeing of children, which gives an opening for conversations about promoting family wellbeing from an Islamic perspective while addressing gendered forms of violence. Fahmina's approach demonstrates the ways in which local faith actors are constantly navigating complex intersecting dynamics stemming from religion's entanglement with broader power relations such as colonialism and patriarchy. It further demonstrates that viewing conflicts around women's rights and gender equality through the secular/religion binary is unhelpful, since Fahmina draw on local indigenous values and wisdom to challenge the social exclusion of women, perspectives that are often broadly classified as "backward" or "pre-modern" within the secular modernist framework (Blaser 2009). It further demonstrates the need for a contextually-embedded approach that responds to the specific dynamics of the local context. Finally, Fahmina embodies a cross-cultural approach in the ways in which they draw on both local indigenous knowledge and wisdom alongside broader human rights frameworks and values in shaping their work.

Netherlands

The recent (over)emphasis on violent extremism in various areas of global politics and the consequences for minority and marginalized groups, is another challenge in the achievement of SDG16. Minorities and marginalized groups have been labelled as 'terrorists' or 'extremists' by some governments e.g. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia (Nelson 2020). Existing societal tensions may be simplified or manipulated by governments, the media and some religious and civil society actors for the achievement of political goals and agendas. Witness, for example, the marriage of the terms 'refugee', 'Muslim' and 'terrorist' in the public imaginary, reinforced by political elites and the media, and utilized as an argument for stricter control of Muslim minorities (Wilson and Mavelli 2016). The following case demonstrates how this form of discursive exclusion leads to socio-political exclusion of Muslims, and women in particular.

The initiative Meld Islamofobie (Report Islamophobia!) was started in 2015 to better document and raise awareness to the violence perpetrated on Muslims following the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. Meldpunt Islamofobie! was initially set-up as a facebook group in which Muslims could share experiences of racism and discrimination. In 2016, the Facebook group transitioned to the establishment of a formal foundation that monitors, registers and reports on Islamophobia in the Netherlands. [5] Since then, Meld Islamofobie is an active public platform and community, that has -amongst others- published three reports: one on the gender dimension of Islamophobia, a second on the Everyday Experience of Islamophobia in the Netherlands and a third on the consequences of the Burqa-ban in the Netherlands.
Forms of physical and verbal violence, exclusion and discrimination against Muslims because of their Muslim identity are considered Islamophobic incidents (e.g. Abaâziz 2016). This includes discrimination on the labour market, at work, in education and verbal and physical violence on the street and on the internet. These incidents are not always recognized as Islamofobic or racist incidents. One example is a student in an applied university who was repeatedly addressed as 'Fatima' by a teacher, an arabic, Muslim name, while her first name is a Dutch name. The same teacher asked her several times whether she was unable to hear him because of her headscarf. When she reported to her supervisor, the response was that the teacher was

just having an off-day and that such comments are not always racist (Abaâziz 2019).
In the reports that Meld Islamofobie produced, a clear gender dimension in Islamophobic incidents becomes visible. While men report more often that they are arrested by the police, women report significantly more violent incidents on the street. Women that wear some form of religious veiling such as the niqab, in particular, report more incidents of being verbally harassed or being spat on. Following the legal ban on clothing that partially covers the face that became active in August 2019, violent incidents against women wearing face covering as well as women wearing a veil only covering their hair, increased (Abaâziz 2020). These incidents demonstrate a reverse logic: While the ban on face covering clothes was justified on the basis of "security", it has served to increase the sense of insecurity for women wearing these forms of clothing, even in spaces where it is legally allowed. Banning the headscarf is also part of a broader mindset of "liberating" Muslim women from gender inequality and oppression (Abu-Lughod 2002; Scott 2007; Fadil 2011), yet the lived experience of Muslim women in the Netherlands is that bans on veiling have in fact contributed to an increase in forms of violence against women (Abaâziz 2020).

In the Netherlands polarization is visible between religious and secular actors that stand in the way of fostering inclusive societies. The position of religious, especially Muslim, minorities presents a specific challenge towards the realization of SDG16 in Western European countries, since these countries often emphasize a secular identity as a key component of social inclusion and belonging (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010). This is not to say that the position of religious minorities is unproblematic in other contexts, merely that the types of challenges to social inclusion in the Western European context are specific owing to the overt presence and influence of secularism. While Islam is the most obvious example of a religion that is considered as a problem, there are also examples of other religious minority groups such as African Christians that become the locus of moral panics and contestation (Knibbe 2018). However, this should be seen against a background of developments in the religious landscape among majority groups in Europe that are not problematized, even when they espouse religious values that are strongly problematized amongst migrant groups (e.g. Catholics and evangelicals with strongly unequal gender ideologies) (Knibbe and Bartelink 2019). The relationships of power in which Muslims in Europe are embedded are not only shaped by religion, but also by their positions of class, gender and race, as well as education, professional and economic precarity/stability. Colonial and orientalist power structures also shape Muslim minority experiences of social exclusion. Criticism of Islam within the Netherlands is therefore different from internal criticism of Islam in Indonesia. Where in Indonesia it constitutes criticism of the dominant overarching majority culture, in the Netherlands critique of Islam reinforces the disempowered, marginalized and excluded position of Muslim communities, a position that arises because of the complex entanglement of religion with other identity markers and broader economic, socio-political and discursive forms of exclusion.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to initiate a conversation about the importance of attention for religion in the pursuit of SDG16 - building peaceful and inclusive societies with access to justice for all - and provide an initial framework for how such attention could be productively structured and applied in scholarly analysis and policy and project development and implementation. Religion - as an identity marker, as an institution of power, as a catalyst for social change - is present in complex and unique ways across all societies, and often is entangled with diverse forms of economic, socio-political and discursive exclusion. Consequently, any efforts to build peaceful and inclusive societies that do not attend to religion in all its multifarious guises will be impoverished.

We have presented a tripartite framework for analysing religion and SDG 16 that incorporates contextually-embedded, intersectional and cross-cultural understandings of religion, and positions religion as interrelated with broader power structures, including patriarchy, racism, neoliberal capitalism, (neo-)colonialism and of course secularism. The case studies from Colombia, Indonesia and the Netherlands demonstrate the importance of such a nuanced expansive approach for understanding not only the multiple factors that contribute to social exclusion in different contexts but also the ways local actors contest this exclusion and claim inclusion.

What then is the way forward? Below we provide a dot point outline of principles drawn from this analysis that may be taken up and applied by policymakers and civil society practitioners when endeavouring to navigate the complex political terrain of social inclusion, and religion:

- Scholarly, policy and civil society analysis of social exclusion and how to build inclusive societies must begin from the perspective of people's lived experiences. This includes attention for the role religious actors, narratives, institutions, rituals and practices play in both social marginalization and in forms of empowerment to claim social inclusion.
- From this starting point, analysis needs to develop contextually-embedded, intersectional and cross-cultural understandings of religion.
  - Contextually embedded - what does "religion" mean for and how is it practiced and experienced by people in a particular context, without assuming that it is the same for all members of that community?
  - Intersectional - how is "religion" entangled with gender-, ethnicity- and class-based forms of social exclusion?
  - Cross-cultural - how do understandings of and assumptions about "religion" in one context shape and feed into its role and understanding in others (for example, secular European assumptions of religion as "pre-modern" in former colonial contexts where secular perspectives are viewed as "colonial")?
- Methodologically, this requires scholars, policymakers and civil society practitioners to first engage with and understand marginalized communities experiences of social exclusion and learn from the efforts and approaches of them and their allies regarding their vision of an inclusive society. Further, it requires critical reflection on our own presuppositions and biases regarding the forms and sources of social exclusion, and how we ourselves are bound up in and contribute to social exclusion.

References

Abaâzi, Ibtissam. 2016. Jaarrapport 2015. Meld Islamofobie, https://www.meldislamofobie.org/jaarrapport-2015/ Last visited on December 11, 2020.

Abaâzi, Ibtissam. 2019. Alledaagse islamofobie in Nederland. Een verkennend onderzoek. Meld Islamofobie, https://www.meldislamofobie.org/rapport-alledaagse-islamofobie-in-nederland/ Last visited on December 11, 2020.

Abaâzi, Ibtissam. 2020. Zwartboek "Boerkaverbod": Een pleidooi voor de afschaffing van het 'boerkaverbod'. Meld Islamofobie, https://www.meldislamofobie.org/zwartboek-boerkaverbod/ Last visited on December 11, 2020.

Abu-lughod, Lila. 2013. Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Ager, Alastair and Joey Ager. 2011. "Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism" Journal of Refugee Studies 24(3): 456-472

Bartelink, Brenda. Forthcoming. "Religion, Gender and International development: searching for game changers in the midst of polarisation". In Religions, Gender and Society, eds. Caroline Starkey & Emma Tomalin. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bartelink, Brenda and Elisabet Le Roux. 2020. What is in a name? Identifying the harm in 'harmful traditional practices'. In International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters, eds. Olivia Wilkinson and Kathryn Kraft. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bartelink, Brenda and Erin K. Wilson. 2020. "The spiritual is political: reflecting on gender, religion and secularism in international development" in Kraft, Katherine and Olivia J. Wilkinson (eds). International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters. London: Routledge, pp45-58

Blaser, Mario. 2009. The threat of the Yrmo: The political ontology of a sustainable hunting program. American Anthropologist, 111(1), 10–20

Bouma, Gary. 2016. "Religious diversity and the challenge of social inclusion." Social Inclusion 4(2): 1-2.

Busatto, Cezar. 2007. Solidary Governance for Creating Inclusive Societies. A contribution to the Expert Group Meeting 'Creating Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration'. September 10 to 13 2007, Paris. United Nations, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/sib/egm'07/documents/CezarBusatto_finalpaper.pdf Last visited on December 11, 2020.

Carter, Becky. 2015. "Benefits to Society of an Inclusive Societies Approach" Research Report. GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services. Available at https://gsdrc.org/publications/benefits-to-society-of-an-inclusive-societies-approach/ Accessed 12 January 2020

Fadil, Nadia. 2011. "Not-/Unveiling as an ethical practice" Feminist Review No. 98, 2011, pp83-109

Grüll, Christoph and Erin K. Wilson. 2018. "Universal or Particular… or Both? The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Cross-Cultural Perspective." The Review of Faith & International Affairs 16(4): 88-101.

Gupta, Joyeeta and Courtney Vegelin. 2016. "Sustainable development goals and inclusive development." International environmental agreements: Politics, law and economics 16(3): 433-448.

Jörg Haustein. 2017.Strategic tangles: Slavery, colonial policy, and religion in German East Africa, 1885–1918, Atlantic Studies, 14:4, 497-518
Karam, Azza.2019. Religion and Sustainable Development. From Overlooking to Commodifying Faiths. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: Inaugural Lecture. Accessed 12 January 2021 https://www.godgeleerdheid.vu.nl/en/Images/Inaugural_Lecture_Azza_Karam_tcm239-918580.pdf

Klassen, Pamela. 2019. "Contraception and the Coming of Secularism: Reconsidering Reproductive Freedom as Religious Freedom." In Secular Bodies, Affects and Emotions, eds. Monique Scheer, Nadia Fadil, and Birgitte Schepelern Johansen, 17–30. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Knibbe, Kim. 2018. "Secularist understandings of Pentecostal healing practices in Amsterdam: Developing an intersectional and post-secularist sociology of religion." Social Compass 65(5): 650-666.

Knibbe, Kim and Brenda Bartelink. 2019. "Gender: Religion, Secularism, and Women's Empowerment." In Religion and European society: A primer, eds. Benjamin Schewel and Erin K. Wilson, 125-141. Oxford, UK: John Wiley and Sons Ltd

Lutfiyya, Zana Marie and Nadine A. Bartlett. 2020. "Inclusive Societies" in Noblit, George W. (ed). Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2006. "Retooling Democracy and Feminism in the Service of the New Empire." Qui Parle 16(1), 117–143.

Mahmood, Saba. 2012. "Religious freedom, the minority question, and geopolitics in the Middle East." Comparative Studies in Society and History, 54(2): 418–446.

McNevin, Anne. 2011. Contesting Citizenship: Irregular Migrants and New Frontiers of the Political. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nelson, Matthew J. 2020. "Pandemic Politics in South Asia: Muslims and Democracy"
Report for the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy. Available at https://religionanddiplomacy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/TPNRD-Nelson-Pandemic-Politics-in-South-Asia.pdf accessed 13 January 2020

Nussbaum, Martha and Amartya Sen, eds. 1993. The Quality of Life. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olcott, Jocelyn. 2013. "Transnational Feminism: Event, Temporality, and Performance at the 1975 International Women's year Conference". In Cultures in Motion, eds. Daniel T. Rodgers, Bhavani

Raman, and Helmut Reimitz, 241-266. Princeton: Princeton University Press, doi: https://doi-org. proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1515/9781400849895-011

Omer, Atalia. 2020. "Decolonizing Religion and the Practice of Peace: Two Case Studies from the Postcolonial World." Critical Research on Religion 8 (3): 273–96.

Petersen, Marie Juul and Katherine Marshall. 2019. The International Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief. Sketching the Contours of a Common Framework, Danish Institute for Human Rights and Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, https://www. humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/research/2019/rapport_ internationalpromotion_12.pdf Last accessed 11 December 2020.

Raoul Wallenberg Institute. n.d. Inclusive Societies. Raoul Wallenberg Institute, https://rwi.lu.se/ what-we-do/focus-areas/inclusive-societies/ Last visited on December 11, 2020.

Schubert, Lara. 2009. "Harmonizing Particularity of Religions and Universality of Human Rights: Critique of Traditional 'Top Down' Approach and Proposed Alternative." Religion & Human Rights 4(1): 25-40.

Scott, Joan Wallach. 2007. The Politics of the Veil. Princeton: Princeton University Press
Siebers, Hans and Marjolein HJ Dennissen. 2015. "Is it cultural racism? Discursive exclusion and oppression of migrants in the Netherlands" Current Sociology 63(3): 470-489

Silver, Hilary. 2007. "The process of social exclusion: the dynamics of an evolving concept" Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper 95. Available at http://www.albacharia.ma/xmlui/ bitstream/handle/123456789/31520/1319The%20process%20of%20social%20exclusion%20the%20 dynamics%20of%20an%20evolving%20concept2007.pdf?sequence=1 accessed 13 January 2020

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1996. "'Woman' as theatre – United Nations Conference on Women, Beijing 1995-Commentary." Radical Philosophy 75: 2-4.

Tomalin, Emma, Jörg Haustein, and Shabaana Kidy. 2019. "Religion and the Sustainable Development Goals." Review of Faith & International Affairs 17 (2): 102–18.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2008. Report of the Expert Group Meeting, "Promoting Social Integration", 8-10 July 2008. United Nations, https://www.un.org/ esa/socdev/social/meetings/egm6_social_integration/documents/egm6.report.pdf Last visited on December 11, 2020

Wilson, Erin K. 2012. After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics. Basingstoke: Palgrave

Wilson, Erin K. 2017. "The socio-political dynamics of secularism and epistemological injustice in global justice theory and practice" European Societies 19(5): 529-550

Wilson, Erin K. and Luca Mavelli. 2016. "The refugee crisis and religion: beyond physical and conceptual boundaries" in Mavelli, Luca and Erin K. Wilson (eds). The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question. London: Rowman and Littlefield International, pp1-22