

Religious Non-Governmental Organizations: An Exploratory Analysis

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This paper represents the first systematic attempt at an analysis of religious non-governmental organizations (RNGOs). Largely ignored as an organizational field, RNGOs constitute a new breed of religious actors shaping global policy – an organizational hybrid of religious beliefs and social activism at local, national and international levels. This paper proposes a definition of RNGOs, traces the emergence of RNGOs from an historical perspective and situates them in their current religious and socio-political contexts. Drawing on interviews and documentary data from a sample of 263 United Nations-affiliated RNGOs, the author proposes an analytical framework to examine the religious, organizational, strategic and service dimensions of these organizations. RNGOs' unique contributions to the re-definition of a just society as well as the socio-political challenges arising from their religious identity are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become increasingly active in international discourse and decision-making about issues of global scope. The introduction of the term “non-governmental organization” in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter created a political space for self-appointed representatives of public interests to interact and organize for the promotion of common goals. Throughout the last decade, NGO activity has intensified both quantitatively and qualitatively. Organizations such as Amnesty International, Oxfam, Greenpeace, the World Council of Churches, Soka Gakkai International, and the World Jewish Congress, have effectively injected their voices into policy discussions on issues including human rights, sustainable development, the environment, peacebuilding, and governance. Some have provided extensive relief and social services in regions of the world, where due to lack of governmental will or capacity, no alternatives existed. *The Economist* (January 29, 2000) estimates that NGOs today disburse more money than the World Bank.

Among the estimated several million NGOs in existence today, an increasingly visible number of organizations are defining themselves in religious terms – referring to themselves as “religious”, “spiritual”, or “faith-based” NGOs. Both the term “NGO” and “religious” lend themselves to much conceptual ambiguity and, as such, need to be defined at the outset. This paper draws on a recently advanced definition of NGOs (Martens, 2002) in defining “religious NGOs” as formal organizations whose identity and mission are self-consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions and which operates on a nonprofit, independent, voluntary basis to promote and realize collectively articulated ideas about the public good at the national or international level.

Although the modern mentality relegates religion to the realm of private life, religious NGOs (RNGOs) represent a unique hybrid of religious beliefs and socio-political activism at all levels of society. Differing from congregational and denominational structures, which tend to focus on the development of their membership, RNGOs seek to fulfill explicitly public missions.

Pushing for change from both liberal and conservative platforms, RNGOs have executed the successful Jubilee 2000 campaign to relieve Third World debt, played an important role in the establishment of the Rome Statute for an International Criminal Court, lobbied governments on issues ranging from foreign policy to separation of Church and State, and have been a major force in shaping discourse at United Nations conferences. Among the largest such organizations, the Salvation Army, World Vision, and Catholic Relief Services enjoy combined annual revenues of over US\$1.6 billion and claim an outreach of nearly 150 million (Salvation Army, 2001; Catholic Relief Services, 2001; World Vision, 2001).

The presence of religious actors in political and public life is not new. Despite post-Enlightenment efforts to excise religion from public life in general, and government in particular, recent history provides numerous examples of religiously inspired public and political action. Among these, the Liberation Theology movement, the Roman Catholic Church's support of Poland's Solidarity movement, the Jubilee 2000 campaign, and the role of the churches in the abolition of Apartheid in South Africa, are but a few. Despite the religious roots of many of present day conflicts, religious groups and actors have also played pivotal roles in the prevention and resolution of international conflicts such as the Moral Rearmament Movement in the post-World War II Franco-German reconciliation and the Catholic Church in Rhodesia's transition to an independent Zimbabwe (Johnson and Sampson, 1994). The World Conference on Religion and Peace (sometimes referred to as the "UN of religions"), asserts that "Religious communities are, without question, the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class and nationality. They are uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of our time: resolving conflicts, caring for the sick and needy, promoting peaceful co-existence among all peoples" (World Conference on Religion and Peace, 2001).

Within the dynamic matrix of complex organizational networks that is global civil society, the emergence of national and international RNGOs challenges the notion that the emerging global order will be a purely secular one. There is increasing evidence among governments and economists of a rapprochement of religious and secular ideologies in the public sphere, driven largely by a recognition of limits of a purely secular approach to the solution of the world's economic, environmental, and social ills. Recent examples include the 1998 World Faiths and Development Dialogue meetings co-convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the President of the World Bank as well as the United Nations' decision to host the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. In a similar vein, governments at various UN conferences have committed to "spiritual development" (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992), to initiatives that require a "spiritual vision" (United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, 1996), to addressing "spiritual needs" (United Nations World Summit for Social Development, 1995), and to recognizing that "religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men" (United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995).

Despite a marked trend among international actors to consider the views of spiritual and religious actors, RNGOs have been largely ignored. Reasons for this include a lack of agreement about what constitutes an "RNGO" legally, sociologically, and in a non-Western context; reluctance on the part of RNGOs to refer to themselves in religious terms; lack of basic documentary data about RNGOs; and a long-standing trend in the social and political science

literature to overlook the role of religious actors in the public sphere. RNGOs' reluctance to use the term "religion" in describing themselves and their activities is due largely to the potentially negative connotations associated with religious references as well as legal obstacles that arise when applying for public funding. Development organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), for example, recognizing the valuable contributions of Christian NGOs, have expressed not uncommon concerns that religious organizations would use CIDA funds to propagate a particular religious faith, that Christian beneficiaries would receive preferential treatment, and that changes in religious belief introduced by the NGO would undermine local values and traditions (CIDA, 1995).

Understanding of RNGOs' operations and influence has also been limited by the lack of documentary data and available literature about these organizations. Literature about RNGOs has largely confined itself to studies of Christian organizations at the United Nations (Butler, 2000; Malicky, 1968; Richter, 2001), case studies (Baggett, 2001; Metraux, 1994), or a general treatment of the subject from political (Johnson and Sampson, 1994), conflict resolution (Appleby, 2000), or management (Brinckerhoff, 1999; Jeavons, 1994) perspectives. One exception to this is a comprehensive report titled "Religion and Public Policy at the UN," (Religion Counts, 2002) which explores how religions, in general, and religious NGOs, in particular, affect public policy at the UN.

No study has yet attempted to look at RNGOs as a distinct organizational field. This article examines the phenomenon of RNGOs by situating these organizations within the broader socio-political and religious contexts from which they derive. It identifies a sample of active and recognized RNGOs, outlines a multidimensional framework to assess the religious and organizational nature of these organizations and discusses factors, which facilitate and hinder their agenda.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

International non-profit organizations, as we know them today, date back to the mid 19th century. The earliest such organizations include the Typographical Union (1852), the YMCA (1855), the Red Cross (1863) and the International Council of Women (1888). In 1874, Chatfield identifies 32 such international organizations; by 1954 the figure exceeds 1,500 (Chatfield, 1997). He credits the creation of the League of Nations with having stimulated a transnational process, which expanded citizens' concerns and associations beyond the interests and boundaries of the state (Ibid.). The use and definition of the term "non-governmental organization" in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter to denote a consultative relationship between its organs and non-governmental organizations provided the necessary political space for the emergence of a new breed of organization.¹

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of socialism in the late 1980's signalled another major shift in the global socio-political climate forging conditions favourable to organized civic participation in the processes of governance. The end of the state – market

¹ Article 71 calls for arrangements with international NGOs, stipulating that national NGOs are to be considered only under special circumstances.

dichotomy, which dominated the political landscape since the end of World War II, ushered in the emergence of a civil society. This nascent “third sector” was expected to “mediate and balance the power of state and market, to provide a moral check on the market and, likewise to maintain the democratic integrity of the state” (Howell and Pearce, 2000). Since the 1980’s, factors such as the emergence of newly independent states, the declining capacity of national governments, pressures to respond to greater financial competition, intrastate conflicts, new waves of complex emergencies and rapid advancement in communications technology have combined to provide both an urgent need and a political space for third sector development.

Lacking the authority of the state and motivated by value-based rather than profit-based objectives, third sector institutions are characterized by networks of citizens in free association seeking to “change the status quo in the interest of some assumed public good” (Chatfield, 1997). Unlike other non-profit organizations such as universities, employee organizations, soccer clubs, or trade unions - organizations concerned primarily with their own membership - NGOs are driven by an explicitly public mission. They aim to “serve underserved or neglected populations, to expand the freedom of or to empower people, to engage in advocacy for social change, and to provide services” (McCarthy et al., 1992). While the rapid proliferation of NGOs in the last decade and the transient nature of many local level operations makes it impossible to count the total number of NGOs in existence, some estimates have placed the number of NGOs in the United States at two million, 70% of which are less than 30 years old. In Russia, where almost no NGOs existed before the fall of communism, there are now at least 65,000 and in Kenya over 200 new NGOs are created every year (The Economist, January 29, 2000).

RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Academics and practitioners have distinguished between NGOs on the basis of region (e.g. Northern vs. Southern NGOs), representation (e.g. local, regional, international), and mission (e.g. advancement of women, health care, conflict resolution). These categories, however, have failed to grasp an increasingly large contingent of NGOs, which identifies itself in religious terms. Although religious NGOs operate within the same legal and political frameworks of secular civil society, their mission and operations are guided by a concept of the divine and a recognition of the sacred nature of human life.

From the start, NGOs have been a moral entity. They have challenged the “Wrong” in favour of the “Right” and sought to alter inequitable distributions of power and resources in favour of the disenfranchised. Religious NGOs, however, recognize the religious rather than purely “reasoned” origin of the values, which they seek to realize. The Golden Rule to “Love thy neighbour”, underpinning all religious traditions, exhorts believers to be concerned with the condition of others, thereby bringing religious practice into the public sphere (Anhelm, 1999). In contrast with the rights-based approach of many secular NGOs, the starting point for RNGOs is the duty-oriented language of religion characterized by obligations towards the divine and towards others, by a belief in transformative capacities, and a concern for justice and reconciliation (Falk, 2001).

RNGOs today range from local, independently run operations, to transnational, hundred million dollar enterprises. In the same way that NGOs represent specific constituencies, RNGOs represent congregations, denominations, spiritual or political orientations, even the entire membership of a particular religion. Unlike secular NGOs, most of which have been created in the last 30 years, many RNGOs represent new incarnations of previously established religious organizations. Lay religious orders, for example, some dating back many centuries, can “become” RNGOs by entering into a formal relationship with the United Nations or by orienting their mission to serve the general public. Similarly, religious denominations or organizations can establish NGO offices through which to conduct their external affairs.

The need to connect to higher levels of decision-making and share information has led many religious organizations to seek formal recognition as “NGOs”. From the point of view of resources, the transition to “NGO” status is logical. While secular organizations must build their resource and support networks from the ground up, religious organizations have access to extensive social and resource networks by virtue of the long-standing presence of religious establishments and communities around the world. In some cases, religious networks and infrastructures are more stable than local or national governments – providing channels of information and resource distribution in the absence of state-sponsored alternatives.

Throughout the last decade, RNGOs have emerged onto the world scene through a series of international campaigns. One of the first such emergences came in the form of heated debates between representatives of secular and religious NGOs at 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development regarding issues such as family planning and the empowerment of women. Subsequent international efforts, such as the Jubilee 2000 campaign² to cancel Third World debt, spearheaded by churches and religious NGOs, have drawn media attention and popular support and have been rooted in inter-religious cooperation. Religious NGOs were also active in the Nobel Prize winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines and are actively involved in the 1000+ member NGO Coalition working for the advancement of the International Criminal Court.

Internationally recognized for their service, several RNGOs have been the recipients of major awards. In 1947, the Nobel Peace Prize was jointly awarded to two Quaker organizations – the Friends Service Committee in London and the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia – for humanitarian service and dedication to peace and non-violence. The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, founded in 1972 to recognize contributions to progress in religion, was awarded in 1988 to Dr. Inamullah Khan, long-time president of the World Muslim Congress.

SAMPLE SELECTION

The first task in attempting to examine the field of RNGOs is to identify a sample of organizations that are representative of the field as a whole. The United Nations system, with its long history of association with NGOs and criteria governing consultative relationships with NGOs, provided an effective filter mechanism through which to delimit a sample. RNGOs were identified from a larger pool of organizations associated with the Economic and Social Council

² The name “Jubilee” is a Biblical reference to the “Year of the Jubilee” in which social inequalities are rectified, slaves are freed, land is returned to its original owners, and debts are cancelled.

(ECOSOC) and the Department of Public Information (DPI) – United Nations bodies associated with the largest number of NGOs.

A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and December 2001. Eleven interviews were conducted at the United Nations Headquarters in New York; the remaining 12 were completed through a combination of phone conversations and email correspondence. Approximately 80 organizations were contacted in writing or by email to determine their religious or secular orientation.

The identification of religious NGOs among the pool of NGOs associated with ECOSOC and DPI was considerably complicated by the ambiguous nature of organizations' religious identity (i.e. whether the organization considers itself to be a "religious" NGO). Responses to the question "Are you a religious NGO?" given by NGO representatives revealed the difficulties in defining an organization's religious identity. A representative of Jewish Women International (JWI) was unable to respond to the abovementioned question commenting that the answer depends on one's definition of "religious," adding that JWI "is founded on the Jewish principles of *tikkun olam*" (repairing the world) and observes Jewish holidays. The distinction between "religious" and "secular" was equally challenging for the Zionist Organization of America which sees itself as "more secular than religious but...Jewish." Other organizations described themselves as "non-secular" (US Servas), "a-religious" (Petits Freres), "non-denominational supporting Judaeo-Christian principles" (REAL Women of British Columbia), "faith-based working in a secular way" (Susila Dharma International) while others admitted to never having contemplated the question. In cases where NGO representatives could not be reached for comment, the organization's website and/ or literature were consulted to determine whether the organization viewed itself as secular or religious.

The pivotal issue in attempting to discern whether an organization is religious or not was self-identity rather than an independent measure. Of the over 3,000 NGOs associated with ECOSOC and DPI, 263 were identified as religious NGOs and were included in the sample. Table I shows that RNGOs represent 8.5% and 12.6% of NGOs affiliated with ECOSOC and DPI respectively. The Table breaks down ECOSOC-affiliated NGO into three categories according to the type of status granted to the organization. ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 provides for three types of consultative status (Category I, II, and Roster) based on the orientation, merits, and size of membership of the organization. Category I status is granted to organizations concerned with most of the activities of the Council, who have made considerable contributions to the achievement of the objectives of the United Nation, have a large membership, and are closely involved with the economic and social life of the people they represent (Economic and Social Council, 1996). Of organizations enjoying the highest consultative ECOSOC status (i.e. "Category I"), RNGOs represent 14.9%. A list of selected RNGOs is shown in Table II.

Table I. RNGOs as a Proportion of NGOs in Association with ECOSOC and DPI

UN Organ	Total NGOs	Total RNGOs	RNGOs as % of Total RNGOs
ECOSOC	2,060	175	8.5%
Category I ^a	121	18	14.8%
Category II ^b	1029	116	11.0%
Roster ^c	910	41	4.5%
DPI	1,460	184	12.6%

^aCategory I status is granted to organizations that “are concerned with most of the activities of the Council and can demonstrate...sustained contributions to the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations...and are closely involved with the economic and social life of the peoples of the areas they represent and whose membership...should be considerable...”

^bCategory II status is granted to organizations “which have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few the fields of activity covered by the Council, which are known internationally within the fields for which they have or seek consultative status”

^cRoster status is granted to organizations which “the Council...considers can make occasional and useful contributions to the work of the Council or its subsidiary bodies or other United Nations bodies within their competence”.

As the United Nations, according to Article 71 of the UN Charter, associates primarily with international NGOs, the final sample of organizations also consists primarily of international RNGOs - organizations with an official presence in or with a membership from more than 2 countries (although the criteria for the “international” designation vary widely). Despite the potential limitations associated with a predominantly international sample, the spectrum of religions, membership, aims, strategies, and organizational structures represented in the sample allowed for a broad analysis of the “religious factor” in these organizations, one applicable to both regional and national entities.

In its diversity, the sample was conceptually coherent given the organizations’ common adherence to ECOSOC and DPI criteria. Having declared their solidarity with the principles of the UN Charter, the organizations have demonstrated the desire and capacity to contribute to the work of the UN, and have become engaged in the realm of human affairs at an international level in a political milieu. Furthermore, the organizations are united in their formal recognition and adherence to a set of religious and/or spiritual principles, which guide their work.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This article proposes a multi-dimensional framework by means of which to identify and analyze the characteristics of RNGOs. The framework draws on a model, which examines the organisational, governance, strategic, and output dimensions of NGOs at the United Nations from the perspective of political agency (Gordenker and Weiss, 1996a). Table III shows the adapted framework, consisting of religious, organizational, strategic, and service dimensions. The proposed framework integrates both religious and organizational dimensions thereby overcoming reductionistic tendencies to view RNGOs as purely religious or bureaucratic structures. The first two dimensions (religious and organizational) examine variables of religious

Table II: Selected RNGOs in the Sample

Baha'i
Bahai International Community
Buddhist
International Buddhist Foundation
Soka Gakkai International
Christian
Baptist World Alliance
Catholic Relief Services
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World
Council of Churches
Congregations of St. Joseph
Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers)
Habitat for Humanity International
Lutheran World Federation
Order of St. Augustine
World Vision International
Jewish
Americans for Peace Now
B'nai B'rith
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
World Jewish Congress
Muslim
Africa Muslims Agency
Islamic Relief
Muslim World League
World Islamic Call Society
Multi-Religious
International Association for Religious Freedom
World Conference on Religion and Peace
Spiritual
Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
International Fellowship of Reconciliation
MRA - Initiatives for Change

identity and organizational structure. Strategic and service dimensions, shaped by organizational identity and structure, encompass the processes and outputs of RNGOs.

Religious Dimensions

This category includes variables dealing with an organization's religious orientation and religious pervasiveness. Orientation refers to the religious self-identity of the organization (as described by its members) and includes the following categories: Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Multi-Religious, and Spiritual. The distribution of religious orientations of RNGOs in the sample is shown in Table IV. Christian NGOs comprise a majority of organizations in the sample, with Jewish and Muslim organizations combined accounting for less than a quarter of the sample. (It is interesting to note the similar number of Jewish and Muslim RNGOs, given that – in terms of worldwide membership - Muslims outnumber Jews 100

Table III. Framework for the Analysis of Religious NGOs

Dimensions			
Religious	Organizational	Strategic	Service
Orientation	Representation	Motivation	Orientation
Bahai	Religious		Education
Buddhist	Geographic	Mission	Relief
Christian	Organizational	General	Social Service
Hindu	Political	Specialized	Salvation
Jain	Combination		Mobilization of opinion
Jewish		Process	
Multi-Religious	Geographic Range	Moral suasion	Geographic Range
Spiritual	Local	Dialogue	Local
	Regional	Information	Regional
Pervasiveness	National	Modelling	National
Organizational identity	Multi-national	Advocacy	Multi-national
Membership		Monitoring	
Mission/ Services	Structure	Spiritual guidance	Beneficiaries
Decision-Making	Unitary corporate		Members
Processes	Federation		Non-Members
	Confederation		Combination
	Financing		
	Membership dues		
	Donations		
	Foundation grants		
	Government		

to 1.) Approximately 15% of RNGOs identified themselves as spiritual or multi-religious. Spiritually oriented organizations (e.g. Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University) were predominantly of non-Western origin and centred on spiritual principles usually attributed to a spiritual leader. Multi-religious organizations, based on principles of inter-religious cooperation, represented the religious principles of their members. The International Association for Religious Freedom and the World Conference on Religion and Peace are among the largest such RNGOs, drawing their membership from many different religions and working *inter alia* to advance religious freedom.

Table IV. Religious Orientation of RNGOs in Sample

Religious Orientation	Number of Organizations	% of Total Sample
Christian	151	57.4
Muslim	32	12.2
Jewish	29	11.0
Spiritual	24	9.1
Multi-Religious	13	4.9
Buddhist	10	3.8
Bahai	2	0.7
Hindu	1	0.4
Jain	1	0.4

The second religious dimension, termed "pervasiveness", concerns the quantitative nature of religious orientation and assesses the extent to which religious identity defines the organization's structural, strategic, and service dimensions. This category highlights the non-existence of purely secular or religious NGOs and conceives of organizations' religious identity in degrees of "religiosity" rather than in absolute terms. Drawing on organizational theory, Jeavons proposes the following seven aspects of an organization where it is important to ask of its 'religiousness': self-identity, participants, material resources, definition and distribution of power, goals, decision making processes and organizational fields (Jeavons, 1998). Adapting these categories to the context of RNGOs, the analytical framework proposed in this article includes: organizational identity, membership, funding, mission and services, decision-making processes, and strategies. Due to the organizational diversity of RNGOs in the sample and the dearth of analytical or comparative literature on this subject, few generalizations about the religious pervasiveness of the sample can be advanced at this time. However, given the common affiliation with the UN, it can be said that the degree to which the organizations are religious is considered compatible and useful with the aims of advancing the principles outlined in the UN Charter.

Organizational Dimensions

The organizational dimension of RNGOs encompasses organizational variables including representation, geographic range, structure, and financing. Representation refers to the constituents on whose behalf an RNGO claims to speak; geographic range examines the physical spread of RNGOs and affiliates (as measured by an official presence in a given locality); structure assesses the degree of centralization of authority among RNGO offices, locating the organizations along a continuum ranging from centralization to decentralization; and financing examines the source of material resources of a given organization. Considered separately, these factors reveal both the complexity and variety of ways in which RNGOs organize themselves for action.

Representation is a key issue for secular and religious NGOs alike as organizations derive much of their legitimacy and persuasiveness from the degree to which their views are considered to be representative of the membership. Given that religious and spiritual teachings lend themselves to many different interpretations – often leading to major divisions within religious communities – an attempt to represent an entire religious community or even a denomination is a particularly challenging and controversial task. One of the characteristics of present-day denominations is the growing gap separating "liberal" and "conservative" believers. Robert Wuthnow argues that religious differences separating liberals and conservatives of the same faith now tend to be greater than those separating Protestants of different denominations or Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (Wuthnow, 1998). It is essential, then, to determine on what grounds RNGOs claim denominational or religious representation.

RNGOs within the sample define their membership according to a broad spectrum of parameters. The Lutheran World Federation, one of the largest international NGOs, represents "over 60.5 million Lutherans" (Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations, 2001) while the Union of American Hebrew Congregations serves "900 reform synagogues" (Ibid.).

Representing clusters of organizations, the Association of American Buddhists speaks for over 300 Buddhist organizations while the International Council of Jewish Women includes 52 Jewish women’s organizations in 47 countries (Ibid.). Organizations such as the Christian Democrat International and Americans for Peace Now represent not only a religiously but a politically-oriented membership as well, orienting their mission around the defence of democracy and the advancement of political solutions to the conflict in the Middle East, respectively. Spiritually oriented RNGOs tend to have more flexible membership criteria. The Sunray Meditation Society, for example, which focuses peacebuilding and conflict resolution, describes itself only as an “international spiritual society dedicated to planetary peace” (Sunray Meditation Society, 2001) while the World Peace Prayer Society, founded in response to the devastation of the Second World War, asks only that members “take the prayer *May Peace Prevail on Earth* into their heart and make it part of their life” (World Peace Prayer Society, 2001). While it is sometimes difficult to determine the degree to which these organizations are representative of the views of their membership, RNGOs contribute a unique voice to international debate, one rooted in the religious heritage of a significant proportion of the world’s population.

The geographic spread of organizations as shown in Table V is determined by the number of country offices and countries with operations. The majority of RNGOs in the sample are international in orientation, some with operations in as many as 100 countries. World Vision, a Christian relief organization, is one of the largest relief organizations in the world, similar in scope and reach to organizations such as CARE and OXFAM International. In the cases of regional or national RNGOs – particularly those operating in Asia and Africa - access to information is substantially limited by a lack of documentary data and web-based information. A lot more work at the level of basic documentation and description, needs to be done before more accurate comparative analyses of geographical range and organizational reach can be conducted.

Table V. Geographic Spread of Selected RNGOs

RNGO	National Offices	Countries with Operations	Geographic Spread
World Vision International	65	90	International
Soka Gakkai International	28	177	International
International Association for Religious Freedom	9	30	International
Africa Muslims Agency	1	34	Regional (Africa)
Campaign Life Coalition	1	1	National (Canada)

The method of organizing networks within RNGOs varies considerably depending on the type of organization. The sample alone generates over 50 organizational terms including: diocese, congress, federation, league, and (religious) order. In an effort to classify emerging global and national organizational structures, the framework adapts a typology (Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001) based on a continuum of power distribution with the extremes representing absolute centralization and decentralization of decision-making power. Table VI illustrates a typology of three organizational structures (i.e.: unitary corporate, federation, confederation), the locus of decision-making associated with each as well as RNGOs exemplifying the

Table VI. Organizational Structure of RNGOs

Organizational Structure	Locus of Decision Making	NGOs
Unitary Corporate	Central	Catholic Relief Services Habitat for Humanity
Federation	Mostly centre, some individual members	World Vision Lutheran World Federation
Confederation	Mostly members, some centre	Catholic religious orders World Jewish Congress

organizational structure. Catholic Relief Services, founded in 1943 by the Catholic Bishops of the United States is an example of a unitary corporate organizational structure. The organization is centrally governed by a board of 12 Bishops (elected by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) who “play an integral role in the work of CRS, providing oversight on strategic operating directions and support for the mission” (Catholic Relief Services, 2001). Some spiritual, research-oriented, and advocacy RNGOs, such as the Sunray Meditation Society, the Park Ridge Center and Americans for Peace Now respectively, can be included in the corporate unitary category as almost all of their work is organized from a central office, which often constitutes the main if not only, organizational infrastructure.

Further along the continuum towards decentralization is the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), which acts on behalf of its 56 member churches, each of which is proportionally represented by its respective delegates on the Assembly. As LWF’s highest decision-making body, the Assembly passes resolutions, elects its officers (e.g. general secretary, president), and draws on the guidance of national entities to coordinate activities at an international level. Many Jewish RNGOs and those representing Roman Catholic religious orders can also be characterized by a loose central coordinating structure. The World Jewish Congress (WJC) for example describes itself as “an umbrella group [which] represents Jews from the entire political spectrum and from all Jewish religious denominations... and tries to preserve the principle of unity in diversity”. Similarly, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations is governed by a General Assembly composed of delegates who are members of and selected by member congregations in proportion to the size of the congregation.

Roman Catholic religious orders comprise over 20 RNGOs in the sample, such as the Order of Discalced Carmelites, the Order of St. Augustine, and the Knights of Columbus. The orders are arranged in congregations which are connected to the Roman Catholic Church but over which the church doesn’t have direct authority. Sisters of St. Joseph representative to the UN, Dr. Carol Zinn, describes the connection to the church as more a “line of relationship than of authority”. Each order’s mission, derived from the vision of its founder, is distinct but aligned with the overall mission of the Roman Catholic Church.

RNGOs in the sample represent a wide range of organizational structures, determined by both organizational and religious philosophy as well as financial resources. Some sociologists suggest that differences in organizational style may be a reflection of the infrastructure of the

religious community itself. Rudolph, for example, distinguishes between Catholic charitable organizations which she characterizes as “formally constituted components with a hierarchical structure...often created by a central episcopacy” and Islamic philanthropies which, she suggests, are “more spontaneously founded and funded” and are “not part of a hierarchy or monocratic system” (Rudolph, 1997). Aside from religious differences, the choice of organizational structure may be justified in purely practical terms. Centralized structures, which tend to be the most efficient in terms of decision-making and resource-allocation, may be better suited to advocacy and relief-oriented missions while more flexible autonomous structures would be more suitable for RNGOs with a predominantly social service or spiritual guidance dimension.

Financing is a key issue for RNGOs as it plays a major role in determining the character and agenda of a given organization. In order to maintain organizational independence, most RNGOs are privately funded, with the substantial portion of financial resources coming from members in the form of donations, dues, or established tithing mechanisms within the religion itself. Some RNGOs such as the Baha'i International Community accepts funds exclusively from its members, to the exclusion of donations from non-Baha'i supporters. At the other end of the spectrum, Catholic Charities - the largest network of independent social service organizations in the United States - receives as much as two thirds of its funding from the federal government. In most cases, excessive reliance on government funding can affect an organization's posture toward government and have negative repercussions for its reputation as well as functioning. Most advocacy-oriented RNGOs whose mission is to monitor government policy and influence decision-makers in favour of their agenda, are particularly cautious in accepting government funds.

The analysis of religious and organizational dimensions provides an ideological and structural basis for the examination of the remaining two strategic and service dimensions of RNGOs. The strategic dimension deals with what the RNGO sets out to achieve (i.e. mission) and how it goes about achieving it (i.e. process) while service dimensions encompass all of the “outputs” of a given organization.

Strategic Dimensions

One of the characteristics of RNGO strategies is that of motivation based on religious faith. A central feature of many RNGO mission statements is recognition of the spiritual nature of the individual and of a divine source of guidance, which provides a “blueprint” for the development of the individual and of society as shown in Table VII. The degree to which RNGOs emphasize the religious or spiritual foundation for their actions, however, varies considerably. The mission statements of some RNGOs are indistinguishable from those of like-minded secular organizations, reflecting public relations concerns as well as organizational culture. Mission statements of most RNGOs encompass a range of issues, ranging from highly specialized to broadly generalized as shown in Table VIII. Specialist RNGOs such as the Summer Language Institute (SLI), which focuses on the development and documentation of the world's lesser-known languages, have achieved high levels of expertise within a specific field. More common, however, are generalist RNGOs such as the Lutheran World Federation and the

Table VII. Exerts from RNGO Mission Statements

Religious Orientation	RNGO	Exert from Mission Statement
Buddhist	Soka Gakkai International	“...fundamental aim and mission of contributing to peace, culture and education based on the philosophy and ideals of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin” ^a
Christian	Catholic Relief Services	“The fundamental motivating force in all activities of Services CRS is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it pertains to the alleviation of human suffering, the development of people and the fostering of charity and justice in the world.” ^b
Jewish	Women of Reform Judaism	“...devoted to a broad spectrum of Jewish and humanitarian causes, Women of Reform Judaism furthers the teachings and practices of Judaism.” ^c
Multi-Religious	World Conference on Religion and Peace	“...active in creating multi-religious partnerships that mobilize the moral and social resources of religious people to address their shared problems.” ^d
Spiritual	MRA - Initiatives for Change	“Reconciliation between peoples through healing the wounds of history; Strengthening the moral and spiritual dimensions of democracy; ...Forging networks among people from different cultures and faiths.” ^e

^aSoka Gakkai International Charter, www.sgi.org/english/index.htm.

^bCatholic Relief Services, www.catholicrelief.org/who/index.cfm.

^cWomen of Reform Judaism, www.rj.org/wrj/about.html.

^dWorld Conference on Religion and Peace, www.wcrp.org/RforP/MISSION_MAIN.html.

^eMRA - Initiatives for Change. Connecting Communities for Reconciliation and Justice. Pamphlet, 2001

Aga Khan Foundation, which address a wide variety of issues including relief, human rights, organizational development, and education.

Characterized by missions rooted in religious and spiritual beliefs, RNGOs rely on a variety of processes by means of which to reach their goals. Processes such as network building, advocacy, monitoring, and information provision (propaganda) are common to most NGOs while others including spiritual guidance, prayer, and modeling are a unique feature of RNGO operations. All NGOs encourage the creation of networks – local, regional, national and international bases of support and information by means of which collaborative, targeted action is undertaken. Such networks constitute the organization’s “social capital” - a concept defined by political scientist Robert Putnam as the “connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”, facilitating coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2000, pp. 18-19). According to Putnam, “the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value” (Ibid.). Many RNGOs see the creation of social capital as both a means and an end. The American Jewish Committee, for example, seeks to deepen ties between American and Israeli Jews as helping to ensure Jewish continuity. Similarly, the Association of American Buddhists aims to work for the unity of all Buddhists in the United States, while the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship seeks to “meet the needs of the human family through facilitating beneficial interchange between peoples of the world” (Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations, 2001).

Table VIII. General and Specialized RNGOs: Area(s) of Focus

Type	RNGO	Area(s) of Focus
Specialized	Habitat for Humanity	Affordable Housing
Specialized	Jewish Braille Insitute	Integration of blind, visually impaired Jews into Jewish community
General	Lutheran World Federation	International relief, development, human rights, ecumenism
General	Aga Khan Foundation	Health, education, rural development, NGO enhancement

RNGOs also seek to realize their mission through facilitating dialogue. The Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) are among the most experienced and recognized RNGOs in this field owing, in part, to their long-term involvement in mediation at the United Nations and in conflict resolution and reconciliation initiatives worldwide. For MRA- Initiatives for Change, the effective facilitation of dialogue among mid-level leaders has resulted in some of their most significant contributions, such as their pivotal role in the rapid Franco-German reconciliation after World War II (Johnson and Sampson, 1994). Some NGOs place a great deal of emphasis on the process of dialogue itself. The Baha'i International Community, for example, sees consultation - a Baha'i Faith-based model of group decision-making – as both a means to stated goals and as a social tool to be perfected.

Similar to environmental or human rights NGOs, many RNGOs rely on advocacy and lobbying methods to shape discourse and decision-making. Particularly active in this regard are Christian family planning NGOs as well as Jewish organizations working to support the state of Israel. Concerned Women for America, a conservative Christian NGO and the largest public policy women's organization in the United States, works through a variety of media avenues to educate government representatives and civil society about issues involving abortion, family life, sex education, even US debt to the United Nations (Concerned Women for America, 2001). Jewish organizations, such as the Zionist Organization of America, for example, lobby governments to obtain favourable pro-Israel legislation and work to combat anti-Israel bias in the media and literature.

I

In contrast to advocacy-oriented RNGOs, most RNGOs in the sample operate in a less visible manner. On a diplomatic level, this can be characterized as monitoring, or “following in an expert or at least informed manner the developments related to topics of particular interest to an NGO” (Gordenker and Weiss, 1996b). The strategies of many spiritually oriented NGOs can be characterized in this manner. At all levels the underlying process governing much of RNGO activity is that of spiritual guidance - the implicit and/or explicit propagation of religious and spiritual values, which the RNGO considers essential for the realization of its aims. As such, RNGOs differ considerably from their secular counterparts by venturing beyond notions of social responsibility to assertions of “Right” and “Wrongs”, “Truths” and “Untruths”. Won Buddhism, a Korean-based NGO, aims to “guide individuals to attain enlightenment...to create an enlightened society through spirituality, education and charity” (Won Buddhism, 2001). Similarly the Sunray Meditation Society relies on “spiritual training” as a means of human development (Sunray Meditation Society, 2001) while the Church World Service, outlines a

process of “sharing and receiving the Gospel” as central aspect of their relief, development and advocacy work (Church World Service, 2001).

Service Dimensions

The fourth dimension, service, looks at the sum total of services, or “outputs”, provided by RNGOs both to their membership and to external persons and organizations. The framework divides this dimension into five categories including: ‘Education’, ‘Relief’, ‘Social Service’, ‘Salvation’, and ‘Mobilization of Opinion’. The other dimensions include ‘Geographic Range’, which refers to the geographic scope of service provision, and ‘Beneficiaries’, which differentiates between member-based and external target groups.

Almost all RNGOs have an educational component as they strive to spread information in order to build awareness of and support for their cause. (This can be seen as not only a service component but also as an essential element to the survival of any NGO.) In the framework, the ‘Education/ Information’ category encompasses services directly related to institutions of formal and informal education, the provision of advice, information and educational materials about issues with which the RNGO is concerned, and any research associated with those activities; ‘Relief’ refers to food distribution, shelter, water, sanitation, and medical care; ‘Social Service’ refers to activities related to peacebuilding and community development (both internal and external); ‘Salvation’ includes activities related to spreading a religious message for purposes of proselytization and/ or conversion. Finally, the ‘Mobilization of Opinion’ encompasses efforts to influence the opinion of government and civil society in order to achieve change and reform at the policy level. Table IX shows examples of organizations whose services, or aspects thereof, are strongly oriented towards one of the five above-mentioned categories. As mentioned previously, very few RNGOs confine their activities to one service dimension.

Each of the five broad service categories exists within a larger moral framework, a sense of “Right” and “Wrong” informed by the RNGOs membership and its subscription to a particular system of belief. Looking at services alone however, one is likely to miss the distinctly religious nature of this dimension. What renders these services religious (or spiritual) is the nature of the

Table IX. Service Orientation of Selected RNGOs

Service Orientation	RNGO	Description
Education	AMIT	Religious Zionist Education
Relief	Catholic Relief Services	Food, health care, complex humanitarian emergencies
Social Service	Muslim World Congress	Muslim unity, interfaith cooperation, mediation
Salvation	Christian Embassy of Campus Crusade for Christ	Minister to diplomats at the United Nations
Mobilization of Opinion	Bread for the World	Contact government representatives about legislation negatively affecting the hungry in the United States and worldwide

world-view on which they are based and the motivation from which they spring. While some organizations focus on the education and propagation of a particular religious or spiritual tradition, most are concerned with the practical expression of their religious beliefs and consider themselves duty-bound to be a source of positive change in society. It is this sense of duty, or mission, which is rooted in and often defined by a particular religious or spiritual orientation. Although phrased somewhat differently, all religions command to “Love thy neighbour as thyself” - an exhortation which calls believers to look outside of themselves, to recognize the needs of others and, most importantly, to act.

Drawing on the politically-oriented framework proposed by Gordenker and Weiss (1996a) the current framework has introduced dimensions and categories which encompass the religious aspect of organizations as well as the practical expression of religious beliefs in the organizational structure, strategy and services of the organizations. The analysis has revealed a tremendous diversity in all four dimensions, highlighting the not only the religious diversity of the organizations but also the diverse missions and approaches stemming from shared belief systems.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to “map” the uncharted terrain of religious NGOs through the identification of a sample of 263 RNGOs and the examination of their religious, organizational, strategic and service dimensions based on the proposed analytical framework. The identification of religious NGOs from among the larger pool of UN-affiliated NGOs was based on the organizations’ self-identification as “religious” rather than independent measures. Owing to the exploratory nature of the study and, in many cases, the lack of documentary data, many questions have been raised and many more remain to be answered.

Despite such difficulties, however, the conceptual map of RNGOs laid out by this study serves several important functions. It takes the important first step to identifying a sample of formally recognized and active RNGOs, thereby delimiting a heretofore unexplored organizational field. Second, it raises the level of awareness about the nature of religious identity and functions of RNGOs beyond commonly held missionary and proselytizing associations. Finally, it provides a holistic framework by means of which to analyze RNGOs’ religious, organizational, structural and service dimensions, and to better understand this new form of religiously inspired social and political engagement.

The first set of questions raised deals with the sample itself. Why do Christian NGOs account for over 57% of the sample? Is the religious distribution in the sample representative of the larger body of RNGOs worldwide? If so, what aspects of Christianity and its followers facilitate the formation of Christian NGOs? What factors hinder other faiths and believers from establishing RNGOs? The answers are a likely a combination of ideological, political, and economic factors. It is possible that involvement with the UN and NGO creation is compatible with Christian culture and ideology, given the involvement of churches in the formative process of the UN (e.g. World Council of Churches), their desire to influence the secular polity and their access to material resources. While a detailed discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of

this paper, it is worthwhile to note the argument that certain religions, in their emphasis on charity, individual initiative, institution building and autonomy are more likely to encourage nonprofit formation than those in which these dimensions are not emphasized (Salamon and Anheier, 1998, p. 13).

The proposed framework reveals salient characteristics, which highlight “cultural” differences between variously affiliated RNGOs. Christian NGOs, for example, tend to focus their mission on charity and emphasize concepts of “God” and “faith”. It is not an accident that most of the international humanitarian and relief NGOs, such as World Vision and Catholic Relief Services are Christian. Jewish organizations, on the other hand, make few references to God or religion, focusing instead on the social justice teachings of the Torah as the basis for their advocacy-oriented missions. Furthermore, Christian NGOs, such as Catholic Charities and Habitat for Humanity, tend to be connected to denominational structures and religious leadership whereas Jewish NGOs are generally governed by an elected Board of Directors and operate on the basis of an independently drafted Constitution. Spiritual NGOs, almost all of them of non-Western origin, are among the most loosely structured, focusing on the inner life of the individual through the application of principles advanced by spiritual leaders.

Noteworthy is the similar number of Muslim and Jewish NGOs in the sample, despite the fact that Muslims outnumber Jews worldwide by a factor of 100 to 1. The large Jewish presence in the United States, the material resources of the Jewish community, as well as its emphasis on advocacy and social justice may account for the relatively large number of Jewish NGOs in the sample. Affiliation with the UN may also reflect Jews’ political interests in the maintenance and security of the State of Israel – in which the UN plays a major role.

The organizational dimension of RNGOs reveals one of the most salient characteristics of this organizational field, namely the enduring extensive networks of congregations, affiliates, organizations and individuals, which comprise the larger RNGO community. These horizontally and vertically organized networks constitute highly effective channels of communication as well as human and financial resources, attesting to the wealth of RNGOs’ social capital. Unlike secular NGOs, which must build their networks from the ground up, RNGOs often attach to existing infrastructures from which to recruit human and financial resources, appealing to people on the level of moral duty rather than pure rationality.

Despite this wealth of networks, the unique contribution of RNGOs is essentially qualitative. In general, RNGOs’ activities, while at times similar in appearance to those of non-religious NGOs, concern themselves with the spiritual well being of the individual and of society. To be sure, the work of secular NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International seeks to raise the quality of life of the individual by targeting injustice and abuses of power but they are not specifically concerned with the non-physical nature of the individual nor do they claim guidance and motivation from religious and spiritual sources. Claiming religious affiliation, RNGOs no longer represent isolated value-based entities (as do many secular NGOs), but rather position themselves on the foundation of a global network of religious and spiritual institutions from which their values derive. This may render RNGOs “other-worldly” and irrational to some but it also enables these organizations to make use of “cultural power” – cultural resources such as symbols, ideologies, and moral authority - to affect

political outcomes (Williams and Demerath III, 1998). While secular NGOs also rely to a degree on appeals to morality as a means of mobilizing public opinion, religious NGOs are more directly able to raise moral issues and tap into religious discourse, thereby fuelling a sense of moral duty, indignation or outrage, which makes change possible.

By choosing to classify themselves as NGOs, religious organizations - consciously or unconsciously – take on a political identity and inject their uniquely religious voices into a predominantly secular discourse about the nature of the new world order. Theirs is a distinctly moral tone, charged with notions of “Right” and the “Wrong” - culturally resonant with large portions of the world’s population. With this approach, RNGOs have been very successful in mobilizing support for a variety of initiatives including civil rights lobbies, international reconciliation, and humanitarian aid.

Despite their demonstrated accomplishments in the arena of social justice, many governments are hostile to the “religious” and “NGO” dimensions of RNGOs. Given close association between religion and political leadership in many non-Western nations, and the association of “NGOs” with Western values, some governments perceive the values “imported” by RNGOs as both a threat and an imposition. In September 2000, Pakistan’s religious and political parties and the clergy who head them led an organized religious campaign against NGOs, accusing them of being Western and Christian (Khan, 2000). In a similar revolt the Eritrean government shut down health clinics operated by the Presbyterian Church and stipulated that “religious organizations may fund but not initiate development projects” (US Department of State, 1999). Because of their association with a specific system of spiritual or theistic values along with a view to personal transformation, RNGOs raise difficult questions for governments and development organizations alike.

The level and extent of RNGO involvement on an international scale, particularly in the political realm – as shown in the analysis - also raises questions regarding RNGO representation, the effectiveness and evaluation of RNGO efforts, as well as an appropriate role for RNGOs in development and governance. The issue of representation, namely the capacity of RNGOs to speak on behalf of their constituents, is key as it impacts on the organization’s legitimacy and ability to be persuasive in their arguments. Whom do RNGOs represent and how can we be sure? How do multi-million member organizations such as the World Muslim Congress or the Baptist World Alliance represent the major differences in religious practice and opinion held by their members? How can we know that RNGO leaders are representing their constituents rather than pushing their own agenda? Given that many religions today are internally contested by increasingly polarized interpretations (e.g. Vatican Catholicism vs. liberationism, Orthodox vs. Reform Judaism, fundamentalist vs. “modern” Islam), it is difficult yet essential to know whose views are represented by a given RNGO, particularly those claiming a global membership. An organization with clearly defined (“transparent”) views based on a just representation of its membership (although it is unclear how this would be ascertained) appears much more legitimate and minimizes the confusion surrounding its aims making it a more attractive partner to other religious or secular organizations.

Outside of clarifying issues of representation, RNGOs face the challenge of determining the effectiveness of their strategies, a task complicated by the less-readily quantifiable aims and

strategies of religious organizations. Despite the history and scope of demonstrated service, the millions of dollars disbursed annually to RNGOs, and the importance of evaluation in securing financial resources, the absence of evaluations or published analyses of RNGO effectiveness is puzzling. Given the fundamental differences between religious and secular frameworks, it is not surprising that some RNGOs may have resisted independent evaluations for fear of being “exposed” and discredited by an evaluation method rooted in efficiency principles that did not recognize their aims as valid. How do you measure spiritual guidance, peacebuilding, community building, or personal transformation? Is an RNGO effective if it has provided services but has not remained true to its religious beliefs in the process? The challenge is to develop evaluation mechanisms sensitive to RNGOs’ unique aims and strategies and ultimately able to determine the validity of such aims and strategies in relation to those of secular NGOs.

Despite the internal and external challenges facing RNGOs, the time has come to meaningfully and substantively engage with religious actors in forging solutions to problems facing modern society. Through their connections to extensive networks of believers – representing a wealth of social, financial, cultural and spiritual capital - RNGOs embody the means through which to reach and mobilize significant portions of the world’s population. RNGOs represent a unique concern with the spiritual and moral capacities of those they seek to serve – capacities at the root of man’s ability to transform his condition and that of those around him.

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