

Institution: University of Winchester
Unit of Assessment: D33 Theology and Religious Studies
Title of case study: Religion and Peacebuilding in Nepal
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study describes an iterative cycle of research and impact in relation to work in the area of religion and peacebuilding in Nepal. King's and Owen's research in Buddhism and conflict transformation, Islam and gender violence, and their work on developing a framework for analysing the potential of religion for peacebuilding in a given context, has informed the development of a participatory workshop on the role of religious actors in peacebuilding which has been delivered to a number of communities in the Terai region of Nepal, and the facilitation of a larger networking event in Kathmandu in June 2013 which resulted in the formulation of an action plan to which participating religious groups and faith-based NGOs have committed.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research which underpins the impact of this study has been undertaken by King and Owen since 2004, and brings together a variety of strands which they have worked on separately and in partnership. King is a recognised authority on South Asia Religions, and has published on Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (2004, 2006, 2009, 2010). Since 2004 King's work has examined structural violence within religion, with particular reference to gender and Islam. From 2006 – 2010 Owen worked extensively within Tibetan Buddhist communities in India, Nepal, Tibet, China, and Mongolia, including working with the Tibetan Centre of Conflict Resolution and supporting their capacity development. In addition Dr Owen's work on Buddhism and ethnography has informed the methods of interaction by the research team in Nepal (2008, 2010). His work has strongly influenced the collaborative and reflexive nature of engagement with religious leaders, organisations and faith-based NGOs (seeing them as active and collaborative participants in the research community of practice), and the modes of knowledge exchange used in workshops and seminars.</p> <p>Since the launch of the 'Winchester Centre of Religions for Reconciliation and Peace' (WCRRP) in 2009 Owen and King have been engaged in carrying out a comprehensive review of academic literature in the area of religious peacebuilding and conflict transformation; and in assessing the applicability of a range of Conflict Assessment Frameworks used by peacebuilding organisations and actors. They have also collaborated with academics and peace practitioners throughout the world (including Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Burma, Sierra Leone); engaged with religious organisations and faith-based NGOs; and contributed to policy debates, acting as consultants on religious peacebuilding to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.</p> <p>The findings from this process which underpin the action research project in Nepal include that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the most effective areas of religious peacebuilding requires a thorough understanding and analysis of the conflict context; • The construction of effective religious peacebuilding hierarchies and networks needs to take account of the local history and context; • An effective tool for analysing the potential of religious peacebuilding in a given context or conflict is urgently needed, and considered essential and necessary by donors and aid organisations, and religious groups and organisations involved in peacebuilding. <p>More specifically since 2011 Owen and King have conducted three periods of field work in Nepal assessing the problems and potentials of engaging religion more effectively in the continuing peace process. The research has been carried out in collaboration with the Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies, Tribhuvan University, and the Nepalese NGO Religions for Peace Nepal. The first phase of the project culminated in June 2013 with a series of 'problem solving' workshops attended by religious leaders in areas of Nepal which have a history of inter-religious violence, and a consultation in Kathmandu attended by key national level stakeholders</p>

including religious actors, civil society representatives, academics, policy makers and government officials. Research insights and findings include: the identification of good practice by faith-based NGOs and organisations involved in development and peacebuilding; the need for the development of a non-hierarchical religious peacebuilding network for sharing knowledge and resources; skills and capacity building among grassroots religious leaders; a more co-ordinated effort by government and faith groups to engage with religious militants; more aid assistance for Muslim communities at risk of radicalisation; the establishment of a national level 'Commission for Religious Affairs'; reservation for religious representation on Local Peace Committees.

3. References to the research

*King, Anna. 2004. 'Dalit Theology: a Theology of Outrage', in Bocken, Inigo, Wilhelm Dupré, and Paul van der Velde (eds.): *The Persistent Challenge. Religion, Truth, and Scholarship. Essays in Honor of Klaus Klostermaier*. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing; 53-78.

*King, Anna. 2006 (ed). *Indian Religions: Renaissance and Renewal* . London: Equinox.

**King, Anna. 2009. 'Islam, Women and Violence', *Feminist Theology*, 17.3, 2009, 292—328. (Top for 4th year of all articles downloaded in Sage publications).

King, Anna. 2010. Review of Mohammad Mazher Idriss and Tahir Abbas (eds) *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam*, Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, *Religion and Human Rights* 8 (2013) Martinus Nijhoff. ISBN 978-0-415-56542-4. 248pp. 2013 May, 93–105.

**Owen, Mark. 2008. 'Old Traditions, New Techniques; The Bodily Preservation of Kyabje Ling Rinpoche'. *Religions of South Asia*, 2.2: 215-237.

**Owen, Mark. 2010. 'Tibetan Buddhist Ethnography: Deficiencies, Developments, and Future Directions'. *Buddhist Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No 2: 221–238.

(* = included in University of Winchester UoA 61 submission in RAE 2008. ** = included in REF 2 in the present submission.)

4. Details of the impact

Owen's and King's work on developing a conflict specific framework for analysing the potential of religious peacebuilding within a given context has led to increased engagement between themselves and policy makers both in Nepal and in the UK. In 2012/13 the WCRRP was invited on three different occasions to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to talk to staff and senior officers about religious peacebuilding, both in Nepal and several other contexts including Syria. Their work in this area has also been presented to Lord Alderdice at the House of Lords in May 2013 and as a result he has offered to convene a meeting of Lords interested in this area, with a view to establishing a working committee with representation from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development, as well as academic institutions working in this area. Whilst difficult to quantify precisely, their research and the growing reputation of WCRRP has increased the awareness and willingness of civil servants and policy makers to more seriously consider the necessity and importance of engaging religious leaders, groups and organisations in situations of conflict.

The impact of their research within the Nepalese context is much clearer and more tangible. During the first two periods of fieldwork Owen and King initiated dialogue with a wide range of religious and non-religious actors involved in the peacebuilding process to survey the current state of religious peacebuilding in Nepal and collect baseline data for the project. This interactive assessment initiated a process of knowledge exchange, and drawing on insight from previous research; in-depth knowledge of the relevant religious traditions; and an enhanced understanding of the Nepal context, Owen and King were able to facilitate change for a variety of stakeholders.

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For example, religious stakeholders consistently reported a clearer understanding of the potential of religious actors within the peace and development processes, and the type and nature of engagements necessary to their being seen as legitimate actors by other stakeholders. 'Secular' organisations (such as Saferworld, UNODA) reported a greater understanding of the potential roles of religious groups and communities, and increased confidence in how to approach them.

The research data collected during the first two periods of field work was subsequently used to devise a participative and facilitative workshop which was delivered in June 2013 to several inter-faith organisations based in the Terai region, where inter-religious conflict has traditionally been a problem. Workshops particularly in Neplagunj and Biratnagr were very well-received, with religious actors reporting a range of benefits including:

- Increased understanding of the roles of religious actors in peacebuilding;
- A greater appreciation of the problems and potentials of religion in the Nepalese context;
- Increased advocacy skills particularly in relation to engaging national and state actors;
- Better insight into the barriers to participation in peacebuilding for religious actors at national and international level.

In addition to the workshops, a national level symposium and consultation was held in Kathmandu on 17th and 18th June 2013 in association with Religions for Peace Nepal and the Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies, Tribhuvan University. The consultation was the direct result of the relationship building process carried out by King and Owen, and brought together religious actors, faith-based organisations, 'secular' peace practitioners, INGOs/NGOs, as well as policy makers and government representatives including the Minister for Peace and Reconstruction. King's and Owen's research informed the structure and content of the symposium, and they facilitated much of the dialogue process.

As a result of the two day discussion a wide range of stakeholders agreed and signed up to the 'Kathmandu Declaration' an action plan identifying specific areas of religious peacebuilding on which religious and non-religious organisations and actors would collaborate (<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology/Research/Documents/Kathmandu%20Declaration%20final.pdf>). Additional impacts include:

- The initiation of network of stakeholders working in peacebuilding;
- The opportunity for grassroots peacebuilders (from Biratnagar, Neplagunj, and Muslim communities) to address for the first time a high level national audience and inform them of their problems;
- A shift in recognition of the importance and potential of religious actors at government level;
- A report summarising the last three years research has been compiled and on invitation submitted to the Minister of Peace and Reconstruction and we are awaiting his response; particularly in relation to assisting in the establishment of a national level 'Commission on Religious Affairs' which would act as an advisory body to the government to act as an early warning system for identifying potential problems within and between religious groups (<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology/Research/Documents/Religion%20and%20Peacebuilding%20in%20Nepal%20Report.pdf>).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Owen, Mark & King, Anna. August 2013. 'Religion and Peacebuilding in Nepal'. WCRRP Report (Submitted by invitation to the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, Government of Nepal). (<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology/Research/Documents/Religion%20and%20Peacebuilding%20in%20Nepal%20Report.pdf>)

'Kathmandu Declaration'. Kathmandu 2013. (<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology/Research/Documents/Kathmandu%20Declaration%20final.pdf>)

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Image Channel, Nepal National Television. Interview with Dr Mark Owen 18th June, 2013.

Consultation contribution, Former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations -
<http://www.kulgautam.org/2013/06/role-of-religion-in-peace-building-and-development-in-nepal/>

Corroborating Statements and Contacts:

Minister of Peace and Reconstruction, Nepal.

Former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations.

United States Institute for Peace, Nepalese Advisor, (including statements from the All Religion coordination Committee (ARCC), Biratnagar, and the Inter Religious Coordination Committee, Birgunj).