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**Religions and Development: A Paradigm Shift or Business as usual?**

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There has been a 'turn to religion' by global development actors over the past couple of decades. This article examines the extent to which this is evidence of a paradigm shift or simply business as usual. The first part of the article examines the nature of this 'turn to religion', including how it has been debated and conceptualized within academic research. I examine the usefulness of the concept of 'religious engineering' (the focus of this thematic issue) as a way of helping us broaden approaches to the 'religion-development nexus' beyond a focus on the relationship between formal international FBOs and secular global development institutions. The second part of the article develops the concept of 'religious engineering' with reference to the work of the Pierre Bourdieu. I argue that the concepts of habitus, field and capital help de-centre the focus of attention from global development institutions to other fields of religion-development intersection.

Keywords: religion, development, faith-based organisation, Pierre Bourdieu, post-secular, desecularisation

## Introduction

In the introduction to this thematic issue, Spies and Schrode agree with the observation that over the past decade or so academic output on the topic of religions and development has rocketed (Tomalin 2013; Clarke 2008; Jones and Peterson 2011). They also acknowledge that within development policy and practice there has been an accompanying shift towards taking religions more seriously, with secular global development organizations – from the multilaterals and government agencies to NGOs – being more likely than ever before to seek to engage with and to fund religious actors (Tomalin 2015). This 'turn to religion' corresponds with the first approach to the 'religion-development nexus' outlined by Spies and Schrode (2020: 3), where academics

have reacted by generating research that focuses on how religious values and organizations respond to development, and how religion might be better integrated into development policy and practice. This suggests that the ability of theories about secularization to account for global religious dynamics is limited, since in many settings religions have not withered away and died alongside development and modernization, nor is religion necessarily antithetical to development and progress.

While many have welcomed this 'turn to religion', arguing that to ignore religious dynamics and actors is likely to mean that development is less effective because it will fail to capture what *really matters* to people (e.g. Wilber and Jameson 1980), others, including faith actors and scholars, are critical that secular global development actors have instrumentalized religion to meet neo-liberal development goals (Deneulin and Banu 2009; Jones and Peterson 2011). Elsewhere, I have argued that although global development institutions are taking religion more seriously they mainly do this through partnering with faith-based organizations (FBOs) that look like themselves, and those FBOs in turn have fashioned themselves to be allowed to participate in secular global development debates and practice (Tomalin 2018). This formal FBO sector consists of organizations which operate (at least in their public facing persona) rather like any other international non-governmental organization (INGO) and therefore this 'turn to religion' at the level of global development organizations misses out much faith-based activity at the local level, including in places of worship and the congregations of charismatic religious leaders (Tomalin 2018; Clarke and Jennings 2008). Indeed, some commentators are critical that modern international FBOs working in development comprise little more than neo-liberalism's 'little platoons' (Cloke, May, and Williams 2016: 12).

Much of the ensuing academic research within this first approach to the religion-development nexus focusses, I argue, on only one dimension of the role of these FBOs

(i.e. their engagement with the Northern/Western secular global development system) and adopts 'a practice-oriented or applied approach to satisfy the donors' needs for information about religious organizations and the benefits and challenges of integrating "religion" in a field of practice that has been (imagined as) purely secular' (Spies and Schrode 2020: 3). As Spies and Schrode rightly point out, this approach to the religion-development nexus adopted by secular global development institutions and which has occupied the attention of much of the academic literature in this area, tends to presume a normative distinction between the secular and the religious and adopts a simplistic *sui-generis* understanding of religion that imposes external categories on people's experience rather than beginning with attention to their *praxeology* or purposeful behaviour (Spies and Schrode 2020: 3).

I am in firm agreement with them that there is a need to broaden approaches to the religion-development nexus and that a new conceptual perspective is needed that helps to move beyond prioritizing the agenda of secular global development institutions and instead critically examines their rhetoric and practices. Much religions and development debate fails to take alternative visions of development seriously and with Spies and Schrode I am 'interested not only in how religious organizations integrate in the general framework of development cooperation, but[…]also want to study those actors who put forward their own or alternative projects of transformation and relate them in one way or another to religious resources' (Spies and Schrode in this thematic issue). In my own research I am particularly interested in the role that international FBOs, such as Tearfund, World Vision, Christian Aid or Islamic Relief, play in negotiating and engaging with secular global development institutions to achieve shared goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but are also able to shift in register to connect with and build the capacity of

communities in the Global South, where a shared religious worldview becomes especially significant to interpreting and implementing such global policy frameworks (Tomalin 2018; Tomalin et al. 2018 a and b). These communities are mostly disconnected from the global development industry but also have their own visions of development, within which religious worldviews typically have an impact.

Spies and Schrode develop the concept of 'religious engineering' to meet this need for a new research framework, arguing that it allows for

> an analysis of different projects of transformation, improvement or change without limiting ourselves to a narrow concept of religion, secularity, and development. The notion "religious engineering" refers to active and conscious ways of working on the future shape of a given society, of individuals or the world, where the "engineers" of such transformative projects refer to religious resources such as religious traditions, practices, identities or institutions…With the concept of *religious engineering*, we want to introduce a perspective on projects of change that goes beyond the activities and objectives of development agencies, but one that is still very often connected to their ideas of development (Spies and Schrode 2020: 6, 10).

While I agree that much has been left out of religions and development policy, practice and studies, and that there is a need to capture the religion-development nexus beyond that dominated by global secular development institutions, the term 'religious engineering' may have negative connotations for some due to its associations with 'social engineering' in totalitarian and colonial states, that typically occurs without the knowledge or agency of the subjects of that social change by more powerful actors who use their privileged vantage point to maintain control (Alexander and Schmidt 1996). Indeed, international development itself has been viewed as form of 'social engineering' in this sense (Escobar 1995). Perhaps, the term 'religious engineering' – with its negative overtones – might be one that is more likely to be used in a pejorative sense by those

who are critical that religion is being instrumentalised to serve secular neo-liberal goals. However, Feener, in a discussion about 'social engineering through shari'a', has argued that not all expressions of social engineering have been perceived with 'pejorative connotations' and that 'these negative glosses on social engineering are largely reactions to the tragic historical trajectories of mid twentieth-century Europe' (2013, 300). While there might be better descriptive ways of referring to this conceptual area, for instance as 'projects of transformation' pursued via practices that engage with religion and faith actors rather than via practices of 'religious engineering' (particularly given the strong critique offered by post-development and post-colonial theorists that development itself is little more than social engineering), I will nonetheless bracket this concern for now and will 'discuss and elaborate religious engineering as a category of analysis by testing its usefulness for approaching empirical and theoretical questions related to actors and their projects of transformation' (Spies and Schrode 2020: 13).

The originality of this article lies in its aim is to examine the extent to which the concept of 'religious engineering' is helpful when applied to the critique that modern international FBOs working in development comprise little more than handmaids of neo-liberalism. Or in other words, to what extent is the 'turn to religion' evidence of a paradigm shift or is this simply a case of business as usual? The first part of the article will examine the precise nature of this 'turn to religion', including how it has been debated and conceptualized within academic research. To advance the discussion of 'religious engineering', I will outline four phases of religion and development studies each focusing on different aspects of 'religious engineering', although the term was not yet introduced: 'arguing for the field' – that global development actors need to take account of different projects of 'religious engineering' (1980s early 2000s); 'establishing the field' – a period when 'religious engineers' became participants in

global development policy and practice (early 2000s-2011); 'deconstructing the field' – critiquing and problematizing the focus of religions and development policy, practice and studies, where secular development actors were perceived as having become 'religious engineers' (2010 onwards); and 'constructing the field' – scholarship that facilitates building improved understandings of different projects of 'religious engineering'. In particular, I will examine the usefulness of the concept of 'religious engineering' as a way of helping us broaden approaches to the religion-development nexus beyond a focus on the relationship between formal international FBOs and secular global development institutions. As Spies and Schrode argue, while different actors have '"a will to improve" (Li 2007), they also have different ideas about what that means and how to realize it' (Spies and Schrode 2020). For many groups and individuals this involves the adaption and transformation ('engineering') of religious resources (by religious as well as non-religious actors) to social issues and visions. This, they argue, is what 'we are trying to grasp […] with the concept of religious engineering' (Spies and Schrode 2020).

The second part of the article also makes a significant contribution to the discussion of 'religious engineering', and to religion and development studies more broadly, in developing the concept of 'religious engineering' with reference to the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In an earlier article (Tomalin 2018), I discussed the limitations of traditional categories of social theory to accommodate contemporary global religious forms and related this to calls for a 'new paradigm' in the sociology of religion (Warner 1993; Berger 2014). I argued that theories of secularization and desecularization need to be more nuanced to accommodate multiple co-existing types of religious-secular dynamics at play in the broader religion-development domain (Tomalin 2018). I argue that Bourdieu's work is helpful in this respect. Through his observation of the social

world he developed ‘a unique individual set of conceptual terms to be employed in the course of analysis and discussion of findings […] which he called his ‘thinking tools’’, in particular the concepts of habitus, field and capital (Grenfell 2014, 1; Bourdieu [1972] 1977; Tomalin 2020). Using these ‘thinking tools’ we can view the social world as a series of intersecting fields where individuals perform with varying degrees of ‘success’ – as strategists or ‘engineers’ to achieve desired ends - according to their individual habitus and the deployment of different forms of ‘capital’ (symbolic and economic, social and cultural) (Bourdieu 1986; Grenfell 2014; Long 2001). I argue that the concepts of habitus, field and capital help to de-centre the focus of attention from global development institutions to other fields of religion-development intersection. Taking the example of the involvement of faith actors in setting and implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, I will suggest that Bourdieu offers a way of viewing engagement with global policy frameworks such as the SDGs as differentially shaped by people’s habitus and capital, which can include the translation of aspects of these policy frameworks into culturally relevant language. In particular, it allows us to avoid the erroneous labelling of the religion-development domain as either post-secular or secular, not least because these terms do not adequately describe the reality of how international FBOs interact with the development arena, especially when they shift register between the secular language of global development and a faith lexicon at the local level (Tomalin 2018; Tomalin 2020). The paper also retrieves the concept of ‘capital’ for development studies, where it has become divorced from broader considerations of power and inequality and instead is used as a prop for the neo-liberal project (Bebbington 2007, 158). I argue that it is important to re-unite the concept of social capital in development studies with analyses of power and inequality to consider how ‘religious capital’ is mobilised by

'religious engineers' in socially unequal negotiations to secure projects of social transformation.

Finally, I find Bourdieu's analysis a fruitful avenue for approaching the 'religion-development nexus because of the strong connection he makes 'between theory and practice, and how these should feature in social science research practice' (Grenfell 2014, 1; Bourdieu [1972] 1977). There is an inbuilt attention in Bourdieu's work to power relations and socio-political transformation, essential for achieving a paradigm shift in global development policy and practice. This also builds on a long tradition within development studies, which aims to better link scholarship and practice to help bring about progressive social transformation (Long 2001; Lewis and Mosse 2006).

## Phases of Religions and Development Studies

### *Phase 1 Arguing for the Field (1980s early 2000s)*

When I first became interested in researching the topic of religions and development in the early 2000s there were next to no academic publications on this topic. Development studies emerged as an academic discipline to reflect on and contribute to global development processes and since religion was not seen to be part of these, neither did it form part of the subject matter of development studies. However, development studies also has a strong critical strand that aims to challenge the extent to which the dominant neo-liberal model of development can deliver what it promises and whether it is structured to benefit certain individuals in certain countries rather than increasing wellbeing and prosperity for all. Some of these critical voices began to make a case for the importance of considerations of religion for development – one could say, they emphasised that global development actors need to take account of different projects of 'religious engineering'. So by the 1980s a critique of the marginalization of religion in

global development institutions, from both faith groups and academics was beginning to appear, although at that stage had not resulted in a significant literature (e.g. see Wilber and Jameson 1980 for one of the few exceptions).

Even at the level of the secular global institutions things were apparently changing. The 1980s also saw the rise of 'human development', with the first human development report launched by the UN in 1990 (UNDP 1990). This was influenced by the Capabilities Approach of Amartya Sen, which measures development in terms of 'human capabilities' – the things that people can and cannot do in life – where an earlier emphasis on economic development was more strongly accompanied by other measures of wellbeing and development (Sen 1990; Nussbaum 2011; Deneulin and Shahani 2009; Tomalin 2013). Another landmark project that gave rise to a broader and multidimensional perspective on poverty and under-development was the World Bank's Voices of the Poor study, which ran from the early 1990s to 2000. At the same time, this research highlighted the important work that faith groups were doing and that 'in ratings of effectiveness in both urban and rural settings, religious organizations feature more prominently than any single type of state institution' (Narayan et al. 2000, 222; Tomalin 2013, 46–47).

The publication in 1980 of a special issue of the journal World Development is probably the earliest example of religion and development coming together in development studies and the beginning of the argument that global development actors need to take more account of different projects of 'religious engineering' (although the term was not used and it was not until a couple of decades later that this view began to take shape). In the introductory article, Wilber and Jameson argue that unless approaches to development are consistent with 'the inherited moral base of society' (1980, 468), which is shaped by religion, they are likely to be ineffective. Also, in the field of

development anthropology from the 1980s we can see a shift towards taking culture into account as well as discussions on participation and local knowledge, which although not a focus on religion *per se*, was moving towards new forms of discourse and practice that could incorporate considerations of religion (Chambers 1983; Hoben 1982; Horowitz and Painter 1987). In addition to this discussion about the importance of religious values and practices to shaping people's understandings of what counts as development and how to achieve poverty reduction, other critics argued that the global development industry was missing a trick in not engaging significantly with faith actors who held trust, resources and networks.

Not only was religion largely absent in the programmes of donors and NGOs but also in development studies, and academia more broadly. Ver Beek carried out a content analysis of the three leading development studies journals between 1982 and 1998, finding only 'scant reference to the topics of spirituality or religion' (2000, 60). For the journal World Development, he only identified 5 instances of 'religion/religious', but if we search for the word 'religion' between 1998-2020 in World Development, the figure shoots up to 689. This confirms that something has changed, and that religion is now a serious topic for development studies, suggesting in turn that it has become more relevant for development policy and practice at the level of global institutions (Tomalin 2018). But how had it become relevant? Was a paradigm shift underway that would be able to capture and accommodate diverse views about what counted as a good life or instead was it 'business as usual'? Moreover, how did the academic community respond?

***Phase 2 Establishing the Field (early 2000s-2010)***

In the world of 'development' it is not always easy to separate from the academic discipline of development studies from the fields of policy and practice. There is a significant overlap in the literatures produced by academics with that from practitioners

and policy makers. This is relevant when we consider that the first major global initiative in this area – bringing together development actors, faith groups and academics – was called World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) established in 2000 by former World Bank president James Wolfensohn and former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey of Clifton and which currently operates in Washington, DC, based at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University. In the early years WFDD worked closely with a World Bank unit, the (now defunct) Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics (DDVE), which led both policy analysis and research from within the World Bank (Marshall and Marsh 2003; Marshall and Keough 2004; Marshall and van Saanen 2007; Osorio and Wodon 2014).

However, other initiatives also reflected a 'turn to religion', driven by actors we could call 'religious engineers'.Within the US Government, following the passing of Welfare Reform Act in 1996,[1] and the election of the Evangelical Christian Republican George W. Bush in 2001, the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) – now called the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives – was established at USAID, on December 12, 2002, 'to create a level playing field for faith and community based organizations to compete for USAID programs' (USAID 2018). International organizations were also drawing attention to the importance of understanding religion and engaging with religious actors around development goals. The UNFPA, for instance, has been the main space within the UN where faith engagement has been encouraged and now has decades of experience working with faith-based organizations, with several

[1] The 'Charitable Choice' provision in the 1996 Welfare Reform Act allowed 'religious organizations' to compete for government contracts to provide welfare services, creating an environment that made it easier for faith-based organizations to receive federal funding where before they had experienced barriers (Chaves 2003; Jacobson et al. 2005)'

publications that explore the role of religion and culture in its work (2005, 2007, 2008). It has been at the forefront of efforts to mainstream considerations of faith throughout UN agencies. It was part of a new initiative beginning in 2007 and formalized by 2009, the UN Inter Agency Task Force (UNIATF) on Religion and Development (UNFPA 2014, 3), and in 2009 produced 'Guidelines for Engaging Faith-Based Organizations as Cultural Agents of Change' (UNFPA 2009). Other work in this area includes producing reports on the UNIATF's engagement with faith actors (Karam 2014, 2016). More recently this body, now known as the UN Interagency Task Force on Engaging Religion for Sustainable Development, has played a role in events and publications concerned with bringing faith actors into the new SDG process (Karam 2014, 2016). The World Bank has also played a role in allied initiatives, following the revitalization of its engagement with faith-based actors via its Faith Initiative in 2014 (World Bank no date). This includes the 2015 launch of the so-called "Moral and Spiritual Imperative to End Extreme Poverty', or 'Moral Imperative' for short (Temple of Understanding 2018)

Around this time two more initiatives emerged that should also be mentioned. First, the German government development agency – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) – has in recent years placed a strong emphasis on understanding and engaging with faith actors (GIZ no date). It has also played central role in the setting up of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PARD), established in February 2016 at the Berlin conference 'Partners for Change Religions and the 2030 Agenda' and is the current PARD secretariat. It brings together development 'partners from all over the world in order to harness the positive impact of religion and values in sustainable development', and therefore might be understood as an example of 'religious engineering' (PARD no date). Second, in 2012 the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) was set up with the aim of bringing together

academics, development practitioners and faith groups around the goal of working to 'increase the quality and quantity of robust, practical evidence on the pervasive, but poorly understood and uncharted, role of local faith communities (LFCs)' in development (JLI 2014)

This briefly outlines the emergence of and the current state of religion and development engagement at the level of global development institutions. In response to such shifts, a research agenda has emerged, which is concerned with the interactions between 'religions and development'. This topic has attracted funding from major bodies (e.g. DFID in the UK and the Henry R. Luce Foundation in the USA). In the UK, between 2005 and 2010, DFID funded a large £3.5 million research programme based at the University of Birmingham (Stambach 2005; Clarke 2007). By around 2010 we can say there is a scholarly religions and development field. This corresponds to the first approach to the religion-development nexus outlined by Spies and Schrode (2020). No longer were development studies journals routinely turning away material on religion but were more open to publishing in this area. A good number of books had also emerged by this stage (e.g. Rees 2011; Carbonnier 2013; Ter Harr 2011; Haynes 2008; Clarke and Jennings 2008; Tomalin 2013). The focus of this work was diverse, but there was still an emphasis on making a case for the relevance of religion for development, exploring the ways that religions were both good and bad for development and providing studies to evidence this. There also emerged a sizable literature on the role that faith-based organizations play in development which has continued to this day, at the expense I argue of examining the contribution of local religious actors – e.g. religions leaders and congregations – to defining and progressing development in their settings (Tomalin 2018).

***Phase 3 Deconstructive: Critiquing and Problematizing the Focus of Religions and Development Policy, Practice and Studies (2010 onwards)***

This brings us to the second approach to the religion-development nexus outlined by Spies and Schrode (2020). By around 2010, we begin to find the emergence of a literature critiquing and problematizing religions and development policy and practice, as well as how the topic had been dealt with in development studies, and other disciplines. While many welcomed this 'turn to religion' by development studies, policy and practice, arguing that to ignore religious dynamics and actors is likely to mean that development is less effective (e.g. Wilber and Jameson 1980), others are critical that global development actors have instrumentalized religion to meet neo-liberal development goals. In fact, to refer to the main theme of this thematic issue, one might say that secular development actors were now perceived as having become 'religious engineers' themselves (see the example of PARD above).

Three main critiques are noticeable here. First, that secular global development intuitions are guilty of picking and choosing which types of religion to engage with. For instance, they seek engagement with organizations that share their liberal values and express their faith 'passively' rather than those that obviously combine their development work with activities that aim to gain converts (Deneulin and Banu 2009; Clarke 2008). Second, as Balchin warns, 'this rush to 'find the religious' is rarely backed by sophisticated knowledge of the diversities among religious groups' and we often find the uncritical adoption of dominant (usually male) perspectives and voices within religious traditions as though they are representative of the tradition as a whole (Balchin 2011, 17). This runs the risk of marginalizing other voices and positions that may not have such a prominent public presence, specifically feminist or gender sensitive interpretations within religious traditions. Considering the highly patriarchal nature of most religions, women's participation in religious institutions (e.g. churches, mosques) and faith-based organizations is likely to be marginal. Even when women do have opportunities for

leadership in FBOs this does not necessarily challenge traditional gender regimes. Moreover, access to services or assistance may also be conditional 'on conforming to the FBO's interpretation of religiously appropriate gender roles and behaviour' (Tadros 2010, iii). Thus, while religion can provide women with coping strategies and concrete support services, this may also involve gender costs.

Third, despite a critique of development studies, policy and practice for ignoring religion having been voiced since the 1980s, since the rise of 'human development' discourses, the turn to religion in development studies in the early 2000s tended to focus rather exclusively on the role that formal faith-based organizations play in development, at the expense of examining the contribution of local faith actors – e.g. religions leaders and congregations – to defining and progressing development in their settings. Critics of the 'turn to religion' for instrumentalizing faith actors to achieve neo-liberal goals would likely feel comfortable with the term 'religious engineering' here as it resembles the pegorative use of social engineering to describe the contemporary development project.

***Phase 4 Constructive: Scholarship that Facilitates Building BetterUnderstandings of Local Faith Actors and Development Processes***

Moving beyond arguing for and establishing the field, and then a 'deconstructive phase' of critique and reflection, which argues that religion and development scholarship had been derailed by the neo-liberal development model, religions and development research now needs to take a constructive step which facilitates building improved understandings of different projects of 'religious engineering'. I am particularly interested in the role that international FBOs play as 'religious engineers' in their engagement with local faith communities to sensitise them to global development frameworks such as the SDGs, and how these local faith communities might be better integrated into both global and local

civil societies in order to achieve humanitarian and development goals. This corresponds to Spies and Schrode's third approach, where scholarship reflects a more inclusive approach to the religion-development nexus that moves beyond focussing on how religious values and organizations can be integrated into the work of global development actors and instead also builds a better understanding of local faith actors and development processes as 'religious engineers' (2020). This includes both ethnographic and historical research, where studies of the religion-development nexus globally reveals that religion is often deeply engrained in people's visions of what counts as progress and that this has shaped understandings of 'development' long before the emergence of secular global development discourses from the late 1940s. Atia's work on 'pious neoliberalism' within Islamic settings, for example, is a strong reminder that the western secular model of development is only one among many (Atia 2012; see also Rudnyckyj 2015).

To enhance the analysis and build improved understandings of different projects of 'religious engineering', as a contribution to this 'constructive' phase of religions-development engagement, I propose to deploy the notions of development interfaces (Long 2001) and development brokers (Lewis and Mosse 2006). Both concepts will enrich the empirical study of cases of 'religious engineering' and fit well with the theoretical framework Bourdieu proposes, which I develop later in this paper. I argue that the focus of attention in religions and development studies, policy and practice has tended to be upon the interface between global development actors and international FBOs. We know much less about the 'interface' between international FBOs and local faith actors. This is an area where we need to direct ethnographic research to generate empirical data in order to better understand how global policy frameworks are interpreted and implemented at the local level, including their translation into culturally relevant language. Following Long I argue that 'interface situations often provide the means by

which individuals or groups come to define their own cultural or ideological positions vis-à-vis those espousing or typifying opposing views' (2001, 70) as well as being the social and conceptual locations where translation occurs and initiatives like the SDGs can become localised and locally determined development needs and values made visible to global actors.[2] Extending the work of Lewis and Mosse, I argue that international FBOs act as 'brokers operating at the "interfaces" of different world-views and knowledge systems, and [that this] reveals their importance in negotiating roles, relationships, and representations' (Lewis and Mosse 2006, 10; Long 2001). Crucially, though, the brokering relationship is not just one directional and in order for a paradigm shift to occur whereby development becomes more equitable and is not Global North led, a two-way learning processes is needed and international FBOs also have a role to play in feeding back to secular global development actors. As Lewis and Mosse suggest such 'ethnographic research can provide policymakers and aid managers with valuable reflective insights into the operations and effectiveness of international development as a complex set of local, national, and cross-cultural social interactions' (2006, 1), involving I argue projects of 'religious engineering', as well as other kinds of locally determined cultural and political programmes.

A research project that I co-led between 2016-2019, on faith actors' engagement with the SDG process in Ethiopia and India, revealed that international FBOs such as Christian Aid, World Vision, Tearfund or Islamic Relief engage in an interface with global

[2] Elsewhere, I have defended Long's interface analysis against the critique that the compartmentalization of 'aid givers' and 'aid recipients', 'as if they were social groups governed by different, or even incompatible logics' is reductionist and polarizing (Rossi 2006: 27; Tomalin, 2020).

development institutions such as the UN and government donors, because they have learnt how to operate as international NGOs and have secularized their discourses.[3] By contrast, as far as we could determine, there was next to no engagement of LFAs in setting the goals, and their knowledge of the SDGs to date remains scant. Nonetheless,although international FBOs were present at the negotiations at the UN in New York, to set the SDG framework, the Christian NGO World Vision in particular, 'the negotiation processes … involved faith actors as civil society actors, so that their religious identity did not make an obvious difference' (Tomalin et al. 2018b, 109). However, these international FBOs not only interface with the world of secular development, but also with local faith communities and identities, participating in different projects of 'religious engineering' as they switch in register. Thus,

> faith actors, in the same way as other civil society actors, interact in a range of forums where they use a different language and ways of engaging according to the character of other participants. While many faith actors deliberately maintain a "secular" persona in their public engagement with the SDGs, they are at the same time able to also engage with local faith communities in terms of religious language and concepts where appropriate (Tomalin et al. 2018b, 110).

They are 'brokers of development' in the sense of 'intermediaries who take advantage of the position at the interface between two social and cultural configurations' (Bierschenk et al. 2002, 9). While development anthropologists, have drawn attention to the role of brokers and translators both in their analysis and their advocacy for more accountable 'bottom up' development they have not typically focused on religious dynamics (Long 2001; Lewis and Mosse 2006). Religion is not absent but tends to be subsumed often within broader discussions about culture. Given the epistemological gap between secular global development actors and faith actors at the grass roots and the difficulty of translating concepts and strategies across this divide, international FBOs play an

[3] 'Keeping Faith in 2030: Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals' was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Tomalin et al. 2018a, Tomalin et al. 2018b).

important role as 'development brokers and translators' (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Bierschenk et al. 2002). Indeed, a key question that many of these organizations are now asking is how can local faith actors who are not that well linked into global development discourses and processes be better integrated into both global and local civil societies in order to achieve humanitarian and development goals and what is the role of the international faith-based organizations in achieving this?

**Theorising Religions and Development using Bourdieu**

Elsewhere I have argued that the 'turn to religion' by global development actors since the early 2000s is not evidence of the 'desecularization of development' or the emergence of 'post-secular development praxis' since they mainly do this through partnering with international FBOs that look like themselves, and those FBOs in turn have fashioned themselves to be allowed to participate in secular global development debates and practice (Tomalin 2018). Neither does it make sense to view the 'turn to religion' in terms of secularity, not least because international FBOs in the religion-development domain shift register between the secular language of global development and a faith lexicon at the local level. Moreover, the tendency to focus on the interface between global development actors and international FBOs means that faith-based activity at the local level, including in places of worship and the congregations of charismatic religious leaders, is largely overlooked (Clarke and Jennings 2008; Deneulin and Banu 2009). There is a multitude of projects that engage with religon and faith actors or – to use the language offered by Spies and Schrode – of 'religious engineering', that risk remaining invisible to the world of secular global development unless there are brokers and translators who are able to operate at across different development interfaces (Bierschenk et al. 2002, 9; Lewis and Mosse 2006; Long 2001). While international FBOs are negotiating and engaging with secular global development institutions to achieve shared

goals such as the MDGs or the new SDGs, they also connect with and build the capacity of local faith actors in the Global South who are often disconnected from the global development industry and are play an important role as brokers and intermediaries (Kraft and Smith 2019).

I argue that a fruitful avenue for refining the concept of 'religious engineering' and for developing a theoretical approach to understanding these different intersecting fields of 'religious engineering' as neither exclusively secular or post-secular is the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and specifically his 'thinking tools' of habitus, field and capital ([1972] 1977; Grenfell 2014; Tomalin 2020). Bourdieu's thinking tools offer a distinct advantage for understanding contemporary religious dynamics, in enabling us to view society as a whole, as neither religious nor secular, but as a social world of intersecting fields - or to use Long's terminology, interfaces (1991). I propose that we view the religion-development nexus as a series of intersecting fields or interfaces, within which a religious or secular habitus may or may not dominate. As Thomson writes

> According to Bourdieu, the game that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive, with various agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of capitals: they are both the process in, and product of a field. Bourdieu nominated four forms of capital: economic (money and assets); cultural (e.g. forms of knowledge; taste, aesthetic and cultural preferences; language, narrative and voice); social (e.g. affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage) and symbolic (things which stand for all of the other forms of capital and can be "exchanged" in other fields, e.g. credentials). However, unlike a carefully manicured football field, there is no level playing ground in a social field; players who begin with particular forms of capital

> are advantaged at the outset because the field depends on, as well as produces more of that capital (Thomson 2014, 67).

Underpinning Bourdieu's social theory is a commitment to understand power structures and relations, as well as to practically tackle inequality, and this makes it particularly fitting for application for approaches in development studies which aim to contribute towards social transformation. His work has influenced development studies in a number of ways, for instance in the work on the anthropology of development by Norman Long on 'development arenas' as 'social locations or situations in which contests over issues, resources, values, and representations take place' (2001, 59). Long proposes an 'actor-oriented interface analysis for understanding cultural diversity, social difference and conflict inherent in processes of development intervention' (1999, 1). This is highly relevant to my project and also resembles Spies and Schrode's *praxeological* approach in their development of the concept of 'religious engineering' (Spies and Schrode 2020; Tomalin 2020), which, as I will argue, ought also to include attention to Bourdieu (2018, 4). A *praxeological* or actor-oriented approach begins with a focus on individual actors and how they negotiate to fulfil their needs alongside other actors, rather than labelling their individual or collective projects as about 'religion' or 'development'. Whether something is religious or related to development emerges from the meaning that individuals assign to their activities rather than the scholar or policy maker categorising them as such from the outset, as Spies and Schrode also explain in the introduction.

Another important impact of Bourdieu on development studies can be seen in the influence of his work on 'social capital' which became particularly popular in the World Bank (Bebbington 2004). However, as Bebbington has argued this use of the concept of social capital has tended to divorce it from 'Bourdieu's more socio-political notion' (2004, 344) since 'the concept of social capital has played an ideological role in the

neoliberal project, accommodating it more than questioning it' (2007, 158). An aim here is to re-link the concept of social capital in development studies to considerations of how 'religious capital' is mobilised in socially unequal negotiations by 'religious engineers' as they seek to secure projects of social change and development. Given the baggage associated with the term 'religious engineer', through its affinity to social engineering, and the critiques of the 'turn to religion' (itself a manifestation of religious engineering) as instrumentalizing, it is crucial that there is an emphasis on power differentials and inequalities. Although not formally recognized as a category by Bourdieu, his theory of different capitals lends itself to a discussion of 'religious capital' (Verter 2003; Starke and Finke 2000; Iannaccone 1990). I argue that this is another aspect of Bourdieu's thinking that should be part of a theory of 'religious engineering'.

In the remainder of this section, I will outline the ways in which Bourdieu is particularly well suited to theorising the religion-development nexus and the specific contribution his 'thinking tools' can make to refining a theoretical approach to the concept of 'religious engineering'. First, the role of international FBOs as mediators or brokers between secular and religious perspectives on development is of particular interest to me. While the 'turn to religion' by global development actors may well not be evidence of a serious consideration of religious dynamics in the way that they matter to communities in the global south, instead this line of engagement has become secularized, it has created a new domain of formal international FBOs (Tomalin 2018; 2020). Applying Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', 'these newly empowered and enabled faith-based development actors, who are increasingly funded and promoted by the secular institutions that they engage with' (Tomalin 2018, 10), move between the 'fields' of secular global development policy and practice and that of LFAs – where they use religious modes of communication, that marginalizes those local faith actors from direct participation in global development

discourses and practices. Thus, for LFAs, their habitus and capital combination make it difficult for them to participate in global development discourses, even though global development actors are accused of being interested in leveraging the 'religious capital' of local faith actors for neo-liberal ends. However, the habitus and capital combination of international FBOs enables them to successfully engage in the field of secular global development and to play a role as brokers and translators (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Tomalin 2020). The social and conceptual space where different groups intersect – or the 'interface' – has been recognized by anthropologists and sociologists of development as sites of 'common interest' as well as having the 'propensity to generate conflict due to contradictory interests and objectives or unequal power relations' (Long 2001, 69). Here I am interested in the interface where international FBOs meet local faith actors and their projects of 'religious engineering' and ask: how are global secular development frameworks such as the SDGs rendered meaningful in these interfaces and how are the products/outcomes/dynamics of these negotiations and interactions made visible to global development actors and with what effect? For instance, there can be suspicion of and a lack of interest in global frameworks at the local level for a number of reasons and this can make them less likely to achieve their aims. Local communities do not necessarily have 'mastery of the development language' (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 183) which renders the mainstream formulation of frameworks such as the SDGs remote and hard to interpret as relevant. It is also the case that global frameworks like the SDGs are target-driven and the processes to achieving the social change they envision are not mapped out. For both of these limitations to be overcome, in settings in the Global South that are highly religious, the role of international FBOs as development brokers or mediators is crucial. First, in locations where a faith perspective provides a rationale to work towards social transformation as well as often being an impediment to social change, international

FBOs have the capacity to translate global frameworks into local religio-cultural languages and form alliances with local communities to challenge harmful social norms. Second, the sharing of a faith perspective, even if it is a different faith tradition, can create trust where local communities might otherwise be suspicious of the relevance of global frameworks (Tomalin 2020). However, as brokers, international FBOs are not only in a position to translate global frameworks to the local but also to feed back to global development actors about how local communities are interpreting and implementing their policy frameworks; they are well placed to facilitate a two-way learning process. In turn this needs to impact upon future policy debates and design. Ethnographic research to address can provide secular global development actors with 'reflective insights' into how their policy interventions are interpreted and incorporated by communities in the Global South (Lewis and Mosse 2006). This will help them see beyond an approach to the 'turn to religion' that instrumentalizes religion ('business as usual') to serve the interests of the Global North and instead to move the direction of a 'pardigm shift' through better understanding the ways that religious capital and habitus is used to shape and secure locally determined needs and using this two way learning process to inform future development planning.

This brings me to the second reason why Bourdieu is particularly well suited to theorising the religion-development nexus, as well as the specific contribution his 'thinking tools' can make to refine the theoretical concept of 'religious engineering'. Bourdieu's theoretical insights suggest practical ways of dealing with inequality and he is on the side of those who are looking for a paradigm change in global development discourses and practices in that the key struggle for him was against the 'scourge of neoliberalism' (Bourdieu 2001, vii). I argue that since the 'turn to religion' is not a level playing field, and instead has been characterized as the engineering of religious capital

by secular global development actors to meet neo-liberal development goals, following Bourdieu et al., in order to redress the balance I suggest that 'we must relinquish the single, central, dominant, in a word, quasi-divine, point of view. We must work instead with the multiple perspectives that correspond to the multiplicity of coexisting, and sometimes directly competing points of view' (Bourdieu et al., 2002, 3). Knowledge of these multiple perspectives needs to be acquired via an 'actor-oriented approach' involving ethnographic research which 'emphasizes the ways in which development meanings are produced and negotiated in practice and how development processes and interactions have different significance for the various actors involved' (Lewis and Mosse 2006, 9). As also proposed by Spies and Schrode, such an 'actor-oriented' or praxeological approach avoids labelling projects of social change as religious or about development and instead allows the meaning to emerge from the narratives and behaviours of individual actors. At this interface, international FBOs are positioned to translate between local faith actors and global development actors and to broker better development outcomes (2020).

However, it is beyond the capacity of international FBOs to theorize these interactions, this instead being the role of the academic. Grenfell argues that Bourdieu 'advocates the fusion of theoretical construction and practical research operations – a *theory of practice*, which is at one and the same time a *practice of theory*' (2014, 214). I take this to imply not only that theory should emerge from empirical research and that we should be able to verify our theories in the discourses and behaviours of our research participants, but that theories need to be useful to the people they hypothesise about and need to be shared and developed with them. This interaction can contribute towards the 'theory of change' approach to designing and implementing development initiatives and has become popular with global development actors since the 1990s (Weiss 1995; Vogel

2012). Such a 'collaborative model' is where a theory of change is 'co-created through collaboration between academic expertise (inputting evidence from existing research) and practice expertise (where stakeholders outline their view of how things work). The researcher takes the position of a critical friend with a support and challenge role with stakeholders' (Laing and Todd 2015, 4).

## Conclusion

My aim in this article has been to examine the extent to which the concept of 'religious engineering' is helpful when applied to the critique that modern international FBOs working in development comprise little more than neo-liberalism's 'little platoons' (Cloke, May, and Williams 2016: 13). Or in other words, to what extent is the 'turn to religion' evidence of a paradigm shift or is this simply a case of business as usual? First, I trace four phases of religion and development studies each focusing on different aspects of 'religious engineering': 'arguing for the field' – that global development actors need to take account of different projects of 'religious engineering' (1980s early 2000s); 'establishing the field' – a period when 'religious engineers' became participants in global development policy and practice (early 2000s-2011); 'deconstructing the field' – critiquing and problematizing the focus of religions and development policy, practice and studies, where secular development actors were perceived as having become 'religious engineers' (2010 onwards); and 'constructing the field' – scholarship that facilitates building improved understandings of different projects of 'religious engineering'. I have demonstrated that, while bracketing concerns over negative connotations of the term 'religious engineering', it is helpful in pointing towards a social and conceptual field beyond the 'turn to religion' by global development institutions, by focusing on projects of transformation that also include a 'turn to religion' but that could be pursued by any local actor.

There is a multitude of projects that engage with religion and faith actors, or – to use the language offered by Spies and Schrode – 'religious engineering', that require translation in order that they are meaningful to a secular development audience, while at the same time secular development frameworks such as the SDGs need to be translated into culturally appropriate concepts in order that they are meaningful to communities in the Global South, where religiously influenced worldviews are still strong (Tomalin 2020). I have argued that international FBOs are positioned to translate between local faith actors and global development actors and to broker better development outcomes (Bierschenk et al. 2002). There is a need for more ethnographic research of this 'interface' between international FBOs and local faith actors (Long 2001) and, following Lewis and Mosse (2006, 1), a need for this research to contribute to a process where 'reflective insights' are shared with policymakers and aid managers to improve the operations and success of global development policies and practices. Not addressed in this paper, is also a need for future research to better understand the impact of engaging with religion and faith actors – or of 'religious engineering'- upon the projects of secular development actors.

Second, I argued that religious dynamics in the religion-development nexus are too complex and shifting to be captured via simple theories of secularization, desecularization or of the post-secular and instead developed a theoretical approach to further refine the concept of 'religious engineering' with reference to the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theory of fields and habitus offers a way of understanding contemporary religious dynamics, in viewing society as neither religious nor secular, but as a social world of intersecting fields within which a religious or secular habitus may or may not dominate. Within these different fields, actors utilise 'religious capital' to secure their needs. Bourdieu's attention to the importance of interrogating

power relations in order to contribute towards socio-political transformation – and indeed towards a paradigm shift in global development policy and practice – is useful in highlighting how global development actors act as 'religious engineers' when they instrumentalize religious capital to serve neo-liberal development goals.

To finish, I will share a blog post from the US based Acton Institute, a conservative and libertarian 'think-tank whose mission is to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles', [4] which succinctly captures something of the concerns about the 'turn to religion' by global development actors and the extent to which it is 'business as usual' rather than a 'paradigm shift'. Jakubowski, critically reflecting on the 2015 World Bank conference on religion and development in Washington DC, tells us that

> World Bank President Dr. Jim Kim told the faith communities at the conference, "we need prophetic voices to inspire us and evidence to lead the way." However, trotting out a few token "prophetic voices" in front of a deeply problematic system of foreign aid will not lead to the kind of sustainable results that transform communities. Superficially importing religious ideas and figures into existing aid models will not work. The successful integration of faith with development would require a shift in the paradigm, committing to the idea that people are created in the image of God, endowed with dignity and creative capacity. As Acton research fellow Michael Matheson Miller has said before, a "social engineering top-down approach" often devolves into "neocolonialist models imposed on developing countries," and ultimately, such strategies fail to see the poor as the "subjects and protagonists of their own story of development. (Jakubowski 2015)

[4] https://acton.org/about

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