

Religious identity and epistemic resilience in conflict-dominated societies

Abstract

Christians in the Middle East often have to endure social and political hardship. We know this from the horrific images that meet our eye day to day in the media. However, Christians are not just victims - they have been and can continue to be an important conciliatory factor among religious communities in the Middle East. One fundamental achievement of their presence there (more than the presence of Jews and other minorities, such as Baha'is or Yezidis, which is very scarce in the Arab Middle East) is to remind mainstream societies that the Middle East is not a mono-religious bloc. Christians of all traditions thus ensure a broadening of the outlook on the Middle East and keep awake the notion of otherness. Historically they have been a driving force of modernization. They have maintained numerous educational, charitable, social, and medical institutions, which have been open to people of all religions and particularly to the poor and disadvantaged. What are, today, the motivational impulses to keep this mission alive in societies marked by war, oppression, and banishment? This paper specifically focuses on the following key issues: (1) epistemic resilience as a factor in the missionary retention despite war trauma; (2) the relationship of resilience to the concept of transformation; (3) the significance of resilience as a conceptual tool in peacebuilding as well as peace and conflict analysis; (4) the policy implications of the notion of resilience in peacebuilding work; and, finally, (5) resilience as a multi-disciplinary academic concept.

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