The vulnerability of religious minorities
A literature review

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Abstract

In this study, I review some of the most relevant theoretical and analytical frameworks in terms of their value to assess the specific vulnerability of religious minorities. My presentation is organized not by discipline but by theme. First, I present a selection of ways to understand the reasons behind the vulnerability of religious minorities. After that, I consider the contributions of conflict theory toward understanding ethno-religious conflict. I conclude that each of these interpretive models offers valuable pieces to address the vulnerability of religious minorities yet fails to detect important threats.

Keywords   Religious freedom, religious persecution, vulnerability, conflict theory, ethno-religious conflict, religious minorities.

1. Introduction

Although religion has been a neglected topic in the social sciences (Wald and Wilcox 2006; Fink 2009), this does not mean that scholarship has nothing relevant to say about the vulnerability of religious minorities. On the contrary, numerous contributions in a wide range of disciplines have directly or indirectly touched on this topic. These include various philosophical reflections on the notion of vulnerability and the role of religion in society. Some of the analytical concepts concerning minority and ethnic groups developed in the broad field known as conflict theory are also applicable to observing the vulnerability of religious groups (among others, see Toft 2007; Marsden 2012; Vüllers, Pfeiffer and Basedau 2015; Basedau et al. 2017; Henne 2019).

In this study I review some of the most relevant theoretical and analytical frameworks in terms of their value to assess the specific vulnerability of religious minorities. Section 2 surveys classic theories of how people or groups become vulnerable to mistreatment in their society, such as Durkheim on deviance, Weber on chal-

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lenging the state's authority, and Girard on the psychological need for a scapegoat. Section 3 examines conflict theory and its three main types of explanation (grievance, greed, and opportunity). Section 4 evaluates the various theories and notes a tendency to rely too heavily on the power of a single explanatory factor whereas a more comprehensive framework is needed to interpret religious vulnerability.

2. Ways to understand the reasons behind the vulnerability of religious minorities

In this section I discuss various types of theories that provide micro- and macro-level interpretations of the vulnerability of religious minorities. These theories cover the relation between religious identity and vulnerability, vulnerability as a result of deviant social behavior, and the specific vulnerability of commitment to justice. Some of these theories have explanatory pretensions, whereas others have a normative character. Because I am primarily concerned with observing the vulnerability of religious minorities, I will view the theories simply as complementary interpretations that guide our observation.

2.1 The relation between religious identity and vulnerability

The deterministic claim that differences of identity, whether cultural, religious, or racial, unavoidably lead to conflict has been contested by numerous authors due to lack of empirical evidence (Fox 1999; Stewart 2008; Grim and Finke 2011). However, identity, in particular religious identity, does play a role in explaining conflicts. In this section, I present the contributions of several scholars who describe religious identity as an explanatory factor in conflict.

In *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen explains the dangers of what he calls the "assumption of singular affiliation," by which a person's identity is reduced to a single marker. Sen instead emphasizes that "identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others." In his view, the reductionist approach to identity is prone to violence for a number of reasons. One of them is that identity-based thinking is susceptible to manipulation, of which Sen offers ample empirical evidence in his book. For example, he establishes a link between the reductionist characterization of India as a "Hindu nation" and sectarian violence against Muslim and Christian minorities (Sen 2006:46).

The manipulation of identity is also a central theme in the work of Gurr (1993, 2000), Horowitz (2000), and Schlee (2008). In *How Enemies Are Made: Towards a Theory of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts* (2008), Schlee explains that "virtuosi in identity manipulation" implement different strategies to broaden or narrow identities based on rational cost-benefit calculations regarding the inclusion or exclusion of particular groups of people. For example, "within the religious dimension

one can identify with Christianity as a whole or with just one small elect sect."
(Schlee 2008:25). A broad definition of identity may be useful to obtain certain
benefits (such as a larger army), but a narrow definition may be preferred when it
comes to sharing these benefits.

Another reason why identity-based thinking is prone to violence, according to
Sen, is that it removes individual's capacity to identify with others. By downplaying
their other affiliations as well as their belonging to a nation, one can make it easier
to single out a minority, including a religious minority, as different. That which is
different can then be viewed as having less worth or as a threat to the social cohe-
sion of the community, causing the minority group to be viewed as a scapegoat. I
will return to this concept later.

Making a slightly different point, Buijs (2013) warns against "the danger of
unity," referring to the "unitarian" conception of what a well-functioning political
community should be like. According to this conception, all citizens in a society
are expected to share the same language, traditions, dress, lifestyle, and convic-
tions, in opposition to pluralism, which seeks to maximize freedom and diversity
as ingredients of a successful society. Rigid insistence upon unity is often a recipe
for violence.

To summarize, religious identity can evidently be a factor causing vulnerability,
but it should be properly understood. As Sen asserts, differences of identity are not
an automatic cause of conflict; rather, perspectives that reduce individuals to a sin-
gle identity – that is, reductionist and manipulative interpretations of identity – can
increase the vulnerability of religious minorities.

2.2 Vulnerability as a result of deviant social behavior

References to the vulnerability of people who display what is considered deviant
social behavior, including religious minorities, can be found in the work of Émile
Durkheim, Martha Nussbaum, René Girard, and Max Weber. In many if not almost
all societies, these authors note, some form of religion is an essential element that
provides unity and cohesion. Under some scenarios, religious minorities can be
perceived as deviant and therefore as a threat to social cohesion, resulting in vul-
nerability for the minority group.

Durkheim's work on deviance in *De la division du travail social* (1893) is
particularly illustrative in this respect. He argues that shared norms and values,
including religious beliefs, constitute the glue that holds a human society together
by providing a sense of "collective consciousness," which, at least in premodern so-
cieties, was viewed as essential to its preservation. When individuals within a society
question its shared norms and values – for instance, because they adhere to a dif-
ferent religion – they risk becoming viewed as a threat to social cohesion. Schlee's

(2008) analysis of exclusion dynamics as a result of a striving for "ritual purity" in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Africa can also be interpreted in terms of vulnerability as a result of deviant behavior. A modern-day illustration of this dynamic appears in communist and post-communist countries where religious organizations are labeled as "foreign agents" by the government.

The idea of religious minorities being a threat to social cohesion connects with Martha Nussbaum's reflection on how "irrational" and "misguided" fear leads people to imagine alleged faults in a minority group. Examples include the historically common fear of a Jewish world conspiracy – as laid out in the "Rabbi's Speech" (1872) and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1902) (collected in Mendes-Flohr 2011:336-343). More recently, Muslims have been widely perceived as a security threat to Western society. In both examples, a similar pattern is at play:

> Fear typically starts from some real problem. … Fear is easily displaced onto something that may have little to do with the underlying problem but that serves as a handy surrogate for it, often because the new target is already disliked. … Fear is nourished by the idea of a disguised enemy. (Nussbaum 2013:31)

This process can lead to severe consequences for religious minorities. In Nussbaum's example, the unfounded and amplified fear of Muslims in Western society has translated into political reactions against certain forms of religious expression, leading to bans on burqas and minarets in Western countries, among other things. Her explanation of this trend is commonly referred to as securitization theory (see Cesari 2013).

René Girard's influential *The Scapegoat* (1989) resembles Nussbaum's perspective, with one qualitative difference: the vulnerability of religious minorities is explained not by fear but by frustration. Girard posits that humans are driven by "mimetic desire," or wanting what others have. Girard argues that in a human society, mimetic desire is contagious and inevitably leads to conflict at some point because the mimetic desire of all people can never be completely satisfied. At this point, the "scapegoat mechanism" is triggered, by which one person or one group is blamed for the discontent. All of society's frustration is directed to this scapegoat, thereby relieving social tensions.

Girard contends that the victims of social discontent may be totally random, but that stereotypes and prejudices generally play an important role. Some people or groups are particularly easy targets, however absurd the claim that they are responsible for a disaster. Religious minorities in particular are vulnerable to identification as scapegoats:

> The appetite for persecution readily focuses on religious minorities, especially during a time of crisis. … [Public] opinion is overexcited and ready to accept the most absurd rumors. (Girard 1989:6)
>
> Ethnic and religious minorities tend to polarize the majorities against themselves. In this we see one of the criteria by which victims are selected, which, though relative to the individual society, is transcultural in principle. There are very few societies that do not subject their minorities, all the poorly integrated or merely distinct groups, to certain forms of discrimination and even persecution. (Girard 1989:17)

Girard does not conclude that differences necessarily lead to conflict. He does argue, however, that differences increase the likelihood of persecution. Furthermore, he observes the importance in this process of behavioral aspects, particularly where groups (such as religious minorities) share a behavioral code:

> In any area of existence or behavior abnormality may function as the criterion for selecting those to be persecuted. For example, there is such a thing as social abnormality; here the average defines the norm. The further one is from normal social status of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution. (Girard 1989:18)

Religious differences do not always lead to divisions. In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Putnam and Campbell (2010:537) argue that religion can also perform a "bridging" function, as a source of social capital that "connects people of different backgrounds." For example, Putnam and Campbell find that religious Americans are more likely to be "good neighbors" than secular Americans, not because of their faith but because of their sense of community. Scenarios such as Nussbaum's "politics of fear" or Girard's scapegoat mechanism should therefore not be seen as inevitable in religiously diverse societies.

Religion can also be perceived as a political threat. In his essay *Politics as a Vocation* (1919), Max Weber depicts religion as a competing source of legitimacy that unavoidably enters into conflict with existing power structures. Such conflict is not necessarily violent, but there is always a tension between state authority and religion, which is "an all-encompassing normative system [that] poses an authority alternative to the state" (Scolnicov 2011:1). Other scholars have also viewed religion and the state as competing sources of legitimacy (Habermas 2006; Buijs, Sunier and Versteeg 2013). Similarly, Fox (2013) observes that religion can constitute either a source of legitimacy for the state and political institutions or a factor that undermines their legitimacy. The competition between the state and religion can be readily observed in classic communist countries, where the state wishes to be the only source of legitimacy and is therefore suspicious of religion.

The aforementioned authors all provide complementary interpretations of how so-called deviant behavior – in comparison to the norms of the majority – can translate into vulnerability of religious minorities when they are perceived as a threat to the cohesion of society (Durkheim), inspire an "irrational" fear (Nussbaum), become scapegoats for frustrations (Girard), or are viewed as a threat to the state authority, or by extension to other forms of authority (Weber). This set of theories underscores the importance of considering behavior as a cause of vulnerability alongside identity-based interpretations.

2.3 The specific vulnerability of commitment to justice

In *The New Religious Intolerance*, Martha Nussbaum makes an ontological claim about the intrinsic vulnerability of humanity. Her starting point for this claim is what she calls "the vulnerability premise," or the notion that the faculty of conscience, which is at the essence of human dignity and hence of humanity itself, "can be seriously impeded by bad worldly conditions. It can be stopped from becoming active, and it can even be violated or damaged within" (Nussbaum 2013:65). In other words, as Turner (2006) and Scruton (2017) agree, to be human means to have the faculty of conscience; indeed, for many people, religious convictions are a matter of conscience upon which they base certain life choices. In their experience, the faculty of conscience is closely connected to what can be called the religious faculty. But this faculty is always vulnerable to resistance by "the world," or everything surrounding a person.

The immediate normative implication of this claim is that religious freedom must be protected in the broadest possible way. It also implies that whenever social and political conditions do not sufficiently protect both "equal liberty" and "ample liberty," as Nussbaum contends, human dignity itself is vulnerable to being "coerced, oppressed, and manipulated" (Bock 2014:262). Therefore, it is important to understand the social and political conditions that impede the faculty of conscience – and, by extension, restrict religious freedom – and therefore directly violate human dignity (Turner 2006).

Although the vulnerability premise is universal, Nussbaum argues that the human dignity of people who are strongly committed to justice –many of whom are religiously motivated – is even more at risk of violation. In *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), she argues that because vulnerability is an intrinsic aspect of the human condition, individuals who want to be good will inevitably be confronted with an ethical dilemma: a good human being will always want to be open to the world, but this very openness leaves people exposed to extreme circumstances beyond their control. In other words, to be good is to be fragile, and to be fragile is to risk being shattered (Verbrugge, Buijs, and van Baardewijk 2019).

Judith Butler, although she rejects Nussbaum's ontological claim about vulnerability, makes a similar point in *Vulnerability in Resistance* (2016), where she argues that "resistance" – that is, engaging injustice – increases risk. She gives the example of a street protest, in which all persons present are at risk of detention, arrest, and (in the most extreme cases) physical harm or death. Psychological research suggests that altruistic individuals, particularly those who adhere to strong moral convictions, tend to face general resentment (Monin, Sawyer, and Marquez 2008; Parks and Stone 2010). In the same vein, liberation theologians speak of "martyrdom" as something inevitable for anyone who responds to the Christian duty to promote justice. To promote justice, "oppressive social structures" must be confronted, and this inevitably exposes those pursuing justice to risks, of which martyrdom is the ultimate expression (Gutiérrez 1988; Ellacuría 2002; Sobrino 2005).

3. When vulnerability becomes conflict: understanding ethno-religious conflict by means of conflict theory

Within the field of conflict theory, three schools can be distinguished that offer concurrent interpretations for civil conflicts, including ethno-religious conflicts. The first explains conflicts as a result of grievance and the second as a result of greed; the third favors an approach in terms of opportunity. Notwithstanding the arguments both within and between these schools with regard to what is the best statistical predictor of civil conflicts, I interpret them as complementary interpretations that can shed light on the vulnerability of religious minorities, in agreement with Ballentine and Sherman (2003) and Weinstein (2007). Johan Galtung (1969) makes an alternative distinction between "value conflicts," which involve ideology, and "interest conflicts," which concern resource scarcity.

3.1 Grievance

Relative deprivation theory is probably the best-known motivational framework for interpreting conflict. Developed by Ted Gurr in his seminal work *Why Men Rebel* (2016 [1970]), this theory is one of the most influential political-science frameworks concerning political protest and rebellion. It postulates that relative deprivation, defined as the "perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities," is a strong determinant of the potential for collective violence. Drawing on social psychology, Gurr argues that relative deprivation – which Gurr and other scholars also refer to as "popular discontent," "sense of injustice," or "grievances" – leads to frustration and that frustration in turn leads to aggression, which is the "primary source of the human capacity for violence." Similar notions can be found in the work of other scholars: "rancor" (Galtung 1969), "rage" (Sloterdijk 2007), "rancor" (Schaap 2012), and "anger" and "resentment" (Nussbaum

2016). In Gurr's model, frustration will lead to rebellion if a number of conditions are met: the frustration must be sustained over time by a group that has a sufficient degree of organization, it needs to be supported by ideological justifications, and political action must be viewed as a pertinent solution. The discontented people must also believe that they have the capacity to act (Gurr 2015, 2016).

Frances Stewart (2008) favors an approach that uses "horizontal inequalities," defined as "inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups," to determine the likelihood of conflict as well as their potential for mobilization. Using this concept, Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) argue that grievances based on political and economic exclusion at the group level do cause civil war. They measure group exclusion through a dataset that they consider more suitable than the Minorities at Risk dataset used by Gurr, who had reached a similar conclusion in 1993. Among other things, these authors find that ethnic groups that are excluded from governmental influence or face group-level economic inequality are more likely to experience conflict.

In spite of their differences, the aforementioned scholars all agree on one thing: grievances, whether based on real or perceived injustice, are the primary explanatory factor of conflict between ethnic groups, and under suitable circumstances, such as widespread impunity or sufficient organizational capacity of the antagonistic groups, this can lead to violent mobilization.

Although it takes ideological justifications into account, the grievance-based approach says little about the role of religious convictions and generally focuses on material forms of grievance rather than immaterial ones such as religious disagreements. The only exception is Fox (1999), who developed a theory of ethnoreligious conflict by integrating religion into the Minorities at Risk dataset, but this theory holds explanatory power only in cases of inter-ethnic conflicts in which religion and ethnicity overlap.

3.2 Greed

Rejecting the grievance-based approach, a number of scholars have argued that greed (i.e., economic and political incentives), not grievance, is the primary explanation of conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). The proponents of greed as the leading factor in conflict do not deny the importance of grievances but are skeptical of what they refer to as "self-serving explanations" that are employed to justify rebellion, urging that these narratives should not naively be taken at face value (Kalyvas 2006; Schlee 2008). In Collier's words, rebels should be viewed as "profiteers," rather than as "freedom fighters".

In agreement with this perspective, in *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (2004), Jessica Stern unequivocally concludes that religious

terrorist organizations use religion as a motivation and a justification to recruit soldiers, but that the driving force behind such organizations is "power, money and attention". It is indeed a legitimate question whether insurgencies such as the FARC guerrillas in Colombia or Al-Shabaab in Somalia are really ideologically motivated (by communist ideals and by political Islam, respectively) or simply criminal elements making money off drug trafficking and piracy.

Apart from scenarios of rebels who use religious discourse as a mobilization tool or to conceal their actual intentions, applying the greed-based approach to interpret the vulnerability of religious minorities might seem counterintuitive, as religious conflicts are commonly understood as conflicts over values. However, the greed-based approach introduces the possibility of alternative interpretations to grievance-based accounts. Indeed, most accounts of religious persecution tend to focus on religious motives, misjudging conflicts in which the vulnerability of religious minorities is caused by the rational calculations of a group or organization driven by economic or political incentives (Toft 2011). In other words, even when religious grievances are absent, religious minorities can still be vulnerable.

This being said, the role of immaterial factors of conflict should not be ignored altogether, and both the grievance-based and the greed-based approaches tend to overemphasize material factors. A helpful typology is offered by Achterhuis and Koning in *De kunst van het vreedzaam vechten [The art of peaceful fighting]* (2017:111-137). They distinguish between conflicts over interests – which could be (a) competition for the same interest (Girard's "mimetic desire") or a (b) struggle over opposite interests – and (c) conflicts over value differences, such as identity, ideology, or religion. Achterhuis and Koning stress that, in practice, these three types of conflict can occur simultaneously and interact. They prefer a holistic approach to that considers different elements rather than singling out only the material ones. I will pick up on this point at the end of this section.

3.3 Opportunity

Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner (2009) have set forth the concept of opportunity as a third explanatory option. This concept, which was already present in the work of Charles Tilly (1978, 1998, 1999), suggests that whenever a rebellion is feasible in financial and military terms, it will occur. It emphasizes that either a grievance-based or greed-based motivation is insufficient to explain conflict, or at least subordinate to the factor of feasibility, which is influenced by external factors such as a power vacuum. In the same vein, scholars have argued that state weakness, expressed by factors like political instability, bureaucratic weakness, and rough terrain (Fearon and Laitin 2003), or poor governance in combination with corruption, the failing rule of law, and a lack of property rights protection (Chayes 2015), is a particularly

relevant predictor of violent conflict. Similarly, Gibson (2005) and Giraudy (2012) show that peripheral areas with poor infrastructure are likely to be "subnational undemocratic regimes". Feasibility is also implicit in Gurr's work, because of his emphasis on the necessary conditions for frustration to turn into rebellion.

The value of the opportunity-based approach is that it points to the structural conditions under which violence against religious minorities can develop. It seems indeed sensible that contexts of lawlessness and impunity can increase the risks for religious minorities, both because religious freedom is not protected and because any violence committed by illegitimate groups that take advantage of weak political institutions is not punished. For example, in *Faith That Endures* (2006), Ronald Boyd-MacMillan describes how the power vacuum caused by the fragmentation of the ruling Congress Party in India due to corruption scandals and the collapse of left-wing ideology after the fall of the Berlin Wall were exploited by the extremist and sectarian Hindutva party, resulting in the persecution of Christian and Muslim minorities.

Although it seems logical that state weakness increases the risk of conflict and, by extension, the vulnerability of religious minorities, the opposite is also possible. In a strong state, political institutions may be used to create "structural violence," which Galtung (1969) defines as "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible." Structural violence occurs when social structures, such as elitism, racism, or sexism, harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.

A related concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1970) that also recognizes how strong states can restrict religious freedom is "symbolic violence". Although this concept was developed initially to understand how social inequalities are reproduced, it also applies to limits on religious freedom. Essentially, symbolic violence is the imposition of habits of thought and perception upon dominated groups within society, who then accept the social order imposed on them as just and interpret their subservient position as "right" within the social order. In other words, the dominated people collude in their own subordination. Symbolic violence is in some sense more powerful than physical violence because it is indirect and embedded in different types of thought patterns, perceptions, and actions of individuals, thereby imbuing an unjust social order with a sense of legitimacy.

To summarize, although the different theories about the determinants of ethnoreligious conflict were developed in opposition to each other, they provide complementary explanations of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Both grievances

and greed can play a role in motivating the actors who create vulnerability for religious minorities. Opportunity-based interpretations related to either state weakness or, conversely, the state's power to regulate religion, emphasize the structural conditions that can increase (or decrease) the vulnerability of religious minorities. These theories should be viewed as complementary interpretations, as we should not expect to find a single factor explaining all cases (Owen 2003; Achterhuis and Koning 2017). They must also be broadened beyond ethno-religious conflicts to apply to conflicts involving religious minorities that do not follow ethnic lines.

4. Pieces in the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities

In this study, I have explored a number of interpretive models, from a wide range of disciplines that offer complementary interpretations of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Taken together, they can be considered as pieces in the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities; however, they can also obscure its proper observation.

Several theories stress the role of behavior inspired by religious convictions as a factor enhancing the vulnerability of religious minorities. This feature applies to people with a strong commitment to justice, but also to people who display socially deviant behavior that is perceived as threatening social cohesion or some vested interest. In both of these settings, the vulnerability of religious minorities can be seen as a direct consequence of their behavior. The role of religious identity, however, should not be dismissed, particularly when religious affiliation is manipulated to justify the social exclusion of religious minorities or when a visible religious minority becomes a scapegoat for frustrations. These models also suggest that it is possible to identify some degree of specificity in the vulnerability of religious minorities that is directly relatable to either their religious identity or their religious behavior.

The subtleties of religion's role in society can have important macro-level consequences. They can lead to civil conflicts, in which grievance-based and greed-based motivations, or a combination of them, can create vulnerability for religious minorities. Grievance-based motivations include not only frustrations over material conditions but also political ideologies that discriminate against all religions or minority religions. Greed-based motivations are relevant as well, as the vulnerability of religious minorities is often determined by economic and political incentives. Both can also lead to the placement of restrictions on the religious freedom of religious minorities, by the state or by other powerful interests. The risks for religious minorities further increase under unfavorable circumstances, such as either widespread impunity and lawlessness or a political system that encourages religious violence.

The theories presented in this paper have their limitations too. First, most interpretive models tend to place more emphasis on religious identity, thereby down-

playing behavioral aspects of religion. The exclusive focus on religious identity might explain why literature on religious conflict fails to observe religious freedom violations related to religious behavior. Indeed, focusing on the behavioral dimension of religion makes it possible to identify subsets of religious groups based on forms of religious behavior, beyond their religious identification – which would be statistically meaningless in Christian-majority countries – and consequently to observe their vulnerability to human rights abuses.

Second, the confounding of ethnicity and religion (which implies a neglect of intra-ethnic conflict) is a common feature in conflict theory. The literature on "ethno-religious conflict" is mainly concerned with inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts, not with conflicts within ethnic groups (including "minority-within-the-minority" conflicts).

Third, the focus on the state by some scholars implies a disregard for the subnational level and thus tends to overlook local and regional empirical realities, including the position of vulnerable religious minorities in areas where the presence of the state can be much weaker, as observed by O'Donnell (1993). However, in recent years conflict studies have become increasingly sensitive to the limitations of methodological nationalism. For example, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) "records the dates, actors, types of violence, locations, and fatalities of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America." (Raleigh C., Linke A., Hegre H. & Karlsen J. 2010)

Finally, the concern of conflict theory with identifying the single most important explanatory factor of conflict – the single cause fallacy – instead of acknowledging that conflicts are multifactorial can be misleading. As Owen (2003:113) observes:

> It is my opinion that the literature [on the root causes of conflict] has gone astray. [The] fact that no one condition will necessarily lead to conflict does not rule out the contributing role of each and says nothing to the implications of several conditions being present in one location. It is the aggregated effect of human insecurities that I feel may be the best possible indicator for potential conflict. Poverty in and of itself may not necessarily lead to conflict, but combined with political repression and a recent environmental disaster, may significantly increase the regional propensity for violence.

In all, the interpretive models discussed in the paper are useful in elucidating some aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities, but in general they are insufficiently holistic. For these reasons, these models risk obscuring rather than facilitating the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Specifically, for

conceptual and methodological reasons, they observe only a limited number of human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable. To properly identify and interpret the vulnerability of religious minorities, a more comprehensive framework is necessary.
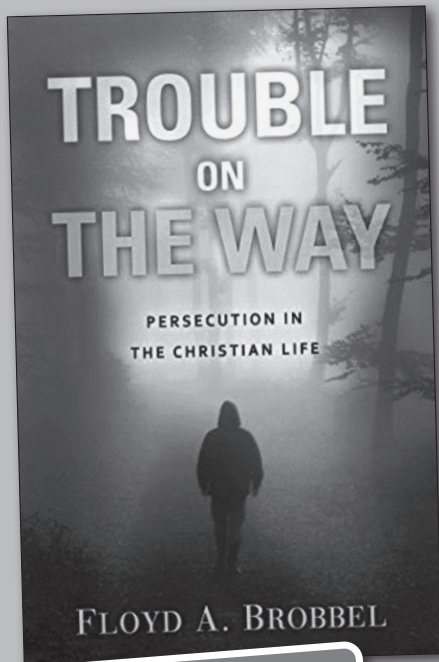
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