Resilience to persecution
A practical and methodological investigation

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Abstract

Religious minorities should not only be viewed as passive victims of persecution; they also have agency and can develop mechanisms to cope with the human security threats they face. This study proposes a novel categorization of the broad array of coping mechanisms religious minorities have at their disposal and develops a "Resilience Assessment Tool" as an instrument to observe the resilience of religious minorities. This categorization is then illustrated by discussing three Latin American cases based on original field research. Finally, a number of implications of these empirical findings are formulated for religious minorities and faith-based organizations.

Keywords   Resilience, vulnerability, coping mechanisms, religious freedom, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico.

1. Introduction

To offset the victimization of religious minorities as a result of persecution, in this study I discuss the concept of resilience, based on the premise that religious minorities have agency and can develop mechanisms to cope with the human security threats they face. Persecution cannot always be avoided, but religious minorities can certainly respond proactively to it. First, I discuss the broad array of coping mechanisms religious minorities have at their disposal, proposing a novel theoretical framework in which I distinguish between eight categories of coping mechanisms: avoidance, spiritual endurance, compliance, social wisdom, moral standing, solidarity, collective action and taking up arms. Based on this categorization, I develop a Resilience Assessment Tool as an instrument to describe the resilience of religious minorities. I then illustrate my tool by using empirical elements from three Latin American cases where I conducted original field research. I conclude by formulating a number of implications of my empirical findings for religious minorities and faith-based organizations.

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2. The Resilience Assessment Tool

How can vulnerable religious minorities develop coping mechanisms and become resilient?[2] *Under Caesar's Sword* highlights three typical strategies Christian communities adopt to respond to persecution: "survival, association and confrontation" (Philpott and Shah 2018). These three strategies are not mutually exclusive but can overlap to a great extent. Survival refers to the range of creative strategies of preservation of life that can be applied while staying true to essential elements of church life, often in secret. Association is the active strategy of building networks, such as interdenominational partnerships, interreligious dialogue and international cooperation, to stand stronger against external threats. Confrontation is the often-risky strategy of openly challenging the persecution.

Within a human security framework, Glasius proposes four types of survival strategies people adopt when confronted with violent conflict: (a) avoidance, (b) compliance, (c) collective action and (d) taking up arms (2012:9-16). Avoidance comprises fleeing but can also include refraining from making statements that could be considered as 'politically deviant'. Compliance refers to the obedience to the demands of armed parties – this can be expanded to any actor causing human security threats – including forced labor, the payment of charges or bribes, giving information, betraying others, or even sexual services. Collective action includes not only resistance but also other forms of collective resilience such as information sharing, the preservation of community facilities, informal gatherings or collective negotiation. Taking up arms refers to the direct confrontation of armed power, for example through the creation of self-defense militias.

These four types of survival strategies can take different forms when applied to religious minorities. In *Blessed Are the Organized*, Jeffrey Stout analyzes ways in which religious communities in the United States combat social injustice through organized collective action (2010). An illustration of the avoidance strategy is the 'internal exit movement' that formed under the East German dictatorship before the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was essentially composed of people, including Christians, who mentally withdrew from the regime and gathered in churches, private flats and reading clubs as private acts of protest (Grix 2000:93).

In a way, the avoidance and compliance strategies can be viewed as the opposites of the collective action strategy, although it is possible for people to engage in both strategies at different moments in time. Avoidance (or compliance) can be the result of fear or of a feeling that resistance is useless in given contexts, but it can also be the result of theological options that do not value any form of social engagement or collective action (Freston 2001, 2008; Petri 2012).

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2   In this article, I use the concepts of coping mechanisms and resilience interchangeably.

Indeed, when we consider the role of religion in inspiring social engagement, two theological alternatives are possible: one that inscribes itself in a tradition of isolation and sometimes even rejection from the world, and one that connects with traditions of social engagement and an active role in civil society (Buijs, Dekker and Hooghe 2009; Philpott and Shah 2018). The differences between the two religious traditions are particularly visible in the Protestant world, in which the Anabaptist tradition views the church as a "contrasting community", an alternative to society with an inner focus, whereas the Calvinist tradition calls for an active contribution to social transformation through participation in social initiatives and the denunciation of social injustice (Kennedy 2009; Hunter 2010). The active theological option can in turn be divided between a conservative and a transformative approach to society.

Whereas collective action is essentially nonviolent, taking up arms can be considered an extreme, violent form of collective action. Again, the engagement of religious people in armed resistance is determined to a large extent by their theological preferences, i.e., whether they adhere to pacifist traditions or, on the contrary, follow more militant religious teachings (Wellman 2012). In the Christian tradition, for example, the long tradition of just war theory, which developed with Augustine, coexists with ever-present pacifist traditions. Taking up arms, including counterinsurgency, is not necessarily morally wrong when it serves the purpose of enforcing human security, provided that it follows certain principles regarding the use of force (Salmon and Kaldor 2006; Glasius 2008).

Glasius's categorization of coping mechanisms can be expanded by some additional categories of coping mechanisms that are specific to religion. The first element of religion that comes to mind is the spiritual endurance it provides, as religion is often a source of increased self-awareness, moral strength, and hope in difficult times for its adherents. This is also the central point of Boyd-MacMillan's *Faith That Endures* (2006). Spiritual endurance is essentially an internal feature. It is not limited to religious people, but actively religious people would have this trait almost by default.

In many religious traditions, vulnerability is viewed as something positive or beneficial, as a good attitude to have, and even as a virtue, indeed a source of resilience. A biblical concept close to vulnerability is *praus* (Greek), which can be translated as mildness, gentleness, or meekness, and is viewed as a virtue (a "fruit of the spirit"). In connection with this theme, a theology of suffering has developed, highlighting the benefits of suffering and persecution because of its purifying effect (Lewis (2002 [1940], 2002 [1961]); Boyd-MacMillan 2006; Harries 2016).

Beyond Christianity, vulnerability is valued in other religions. For example, in Judaism, vulnerability is considered as something that "can lead you toward connecting to something greater than yourself, connecting to others and to the divine," leading to resilience or *chosen* in Hebrew, understood as "to be inoculated, impermeable"

(Mandell 2016). In Buddhism, the notion of *karuna*, which is generally translated as compassion, refers to "the wish that all beings are relieved of suffering" which is a direct result of the awareness of the interdependence of everything in nature. It follows that the vulnerable deserve special protection (Hongladarom 2011).

Many works of literature and fiction highlight that vulnerability and suffering, however difficult it may be, leads to character development, new insights, and a deeper understanding of the world and is key to realizing the human good. Examples hereof are the novels *The Power and The Glory* by Graham Greene (2010 [1940]), *Silence* by Shūsaku Endō (1966), and *Till We Have Faces* by C. S. Lewis (1956) as well as the film *The Mission* (1986). It is also a central theme in the work of Greek tragic playwrights, as described in Nussbaum's *Fragility* (1986), and in the novels by Fyodor Dostoevsky (2018 [1866]). In social psychology, vulnerability is often presented as a key quality of a successful, creative, innovative and resilient leader. Brené Brown's TED talk, "The Power of Vulnerability," which had over 35 million views, brought this theme to the core of leadership studies. Brown's book *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (2012) develops the same theme.

The acknowledgment of the 'blessings in disguise' of vulnerability and suffering has an important downside, because it gives the perpetrators of attacks against religious groups the ability to justify their violence by alleging that the victims chose to be vulnerable. Nietzsche follows a similar line of thinking. In *The Anti-Christ* (1999 [1895]), he argues that religion, in particular Christianity which he refers to as "the religion of pity," increases vulnerability: "Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious" (172-73). This is, of course, a fallacy, because acknowledging the purifying effect of suffering does not mean that one voluntarily embraces suffering itself or even that suffering is a choice.

Religion itself can also be a source of resilience, however. In *On Human Nature*, Roger Scruton suggests that religion provides increased self-awareness. He contends that religious people have a practical advantage over non-religious people, in that they have "a ready supply of stories and doctrines that make sense of those truths [pertaining to the human condition]" (2017: 46). The Christian tradition, for example, provides a narrative that explains the origin of evil (in Genesis) and the eschatological foretelling that Jesus' followers would suffer tribulations (John 15:18-16:33).

Another type of coping mechanism related to religion can be the moral standing of religious people in society, such as the respect that religious ministers com-

mand or the superstitious belief that religious people benefit from supernatural protection. Furthermore, because religious groups gather in communities, solidarity among members of a religious community can also be a coping mechanism. An example of solidarity is the sharing of humanitarian supplies to mitigate the impact of human security threats. In a study of the rescue of Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust, Braun (2016) demonstrates that religious minorities (Protestants in dominantly Catholic regions and Catholics in dominantly Protestant regions) are generally more inclined and better able to help other threatened minorities. In a way, this finding connects with Butler's (2016) argument that vulnerability is an important resource for resistance: being a vulnerable religious minority encourages and enables people to reach out to help other minorities. (This does not mean, however, that religious people are by default drawn to engage injustice, or that non-religious people are never drawn to do so.)

I use the word 'solidarity' to refer to support systems that exist within religious communities. I use the concept 'collective action' to refer to the engagement in political advocacy by members of a religious minority. Both solidarity and collective action can transcend the religious minority in question, as Hannah Arendt stresses in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (2006 [1963]), where she discusses how non-Jews could have spoken out on behalf of the Jews during World War II.

A final type of coping mechanism related to religion is Jürgen Habermas's (2006) interpretation of John Rawls's concept of "the use of public reason", which I refer to as social wisdom. Habermas argues, among other things, that both religious and secular citizens need to recognize that they live in a plural context (a post-secular society), and that in the public sphere they need to be willing to listen to and learn from each other's arguments. Earlier, Nicholas Wolterstorff had insisted that every citizen has a right to express his or her own views, using the vocabulary of one's preference, as long as normal decency standards are observed (Audi and Wolterstorff 1997; Buijs, Sunier and Versteeg 2013). Such an attitude, which Rawls has referred to as a "duty of civility," requires of citizens to be capable of "self-reflection" and to make "an effort to learn and adapt" as part of "an ethics of citizenship" that avoids misunderstanding and resentment. Social wisdom thus presupposes such notions as tolerance, respect, fairmindedness and prudence.

Although Habermas (2006) is concerned with the issue of religious expression in the public sphere and not with resilience, social wisdom can be viewed as a coping mechanism. Indeed, religious minorities can decrease their vulnerability by avoiding words and actions that could be perceived as provocative (Casanova 2008; Philpott and Shah 2018). In missiology, concepts such as 'contextualization' and 'cultural sensitivity' stress this exact point (Engle 1983). The theological ap-

propriation of Max Weber's distinction between *Gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction) and *Verantwortungsethik* (ethics of responsibility) by Helmut Thielicke, a Christian ethicist held in high regard among the more conservative and evangelical branches of Christianity, is also applicable here. The former concerns the noble ideals and convictions that one desires to realize; the latter considers what the possible negative consequences of those convictions and ideals could be (Thielicke 1969:512-15). As Buijs puts it, "one is enjoined to act concretely, wisely, in a limited manner; not to change the world, but to take one step, in line with concrete commandments (that includes the commandment not to kill)" (2013:34). (Considering social wisdom as a coping mechanism, an interesting question about the story of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr [Acts 6:8-8:11], is whether he could have avoided his death had he refrained from insulting the Sanhedrin.)

Of course, social wisdom is no guarantee that religious minorities will be safe from threats. Depending on the circumstances, a seemingly inoffensive act can by perceived as a provocation. This was the case of Ahok, former governor of Jakarta, Indonesia, who quoted the Quran in a positive sense but was subsequently accused of blasphemy because he was a Christian (*Al Jazeera* 2017). Moreover, the lack of social wisdom can never be an excuse to cause harm to others. Religious minorities certainly have a responsibility to avoid unnecessary provocations, but a lack of self-reflection can never be used as a justification for human rights abuses committed against them.

Figure 1 synthesizes how I propose to order the coping mechanisms. The distinction between these categories is not watertight, as they can overlap, and religious minorities can engage in different strategies at the same time or at different moments, as alternative or complementary strategies. Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) classic threefold categorization of exit, voice, and loyalty as "responses to decline in firms, organizations and states" or "recuperation mechanisms" could be adapted as an ordering principle of these coping mechanisms. In the framework of this study, I retain the categories of exit and voice, but I substitute loyalty, which Hirschman strongly connects with the private or family spheres, by caution, which is more applicable to human security contexts. Exit covers avoidance strategies, including flight, internal exit (spiritual endurance), and the evasion of any kind of interaction with the powers that be. Compliance is clearly a caution response, involving tacit acceptance of the human security situation and obedience to any requirements made by the powers that be, and so is social wisdom. Moral standing, solidarity, collective action, and taking up arms are all distinct types of voice responses.

Before moving to the empirical section of this study, I would like to observe that my categorization of coping mechanisms should not be taken as a prescriptive list. Rather, I seek to provide a framework enabling the observation of coping mechanisms that religious groups do or could use, without making a normative statement about

Responses to human security threats	Coping mechanisms	Definition
Exit	Avoidance	Not interacting with the actors responsible for the human security threats, leading to flight or internal exit in the most extreme case.
	Spiritual endurance	Withdrawal within oneself, seeking comfort in personal religious beliefs.
Caution	Compliance	Obedience to any requirements presented by the actors responsible for the human security threats.
	Social wisdom	The ability, based on self-reflection, to anticipate how one's words and actions might be received in order to avoid being perceived as provocative.
Voice	Moral standing	Credibility with people outside the religious minority as a result of the respect given to religious roles or religious beliefs (moral authority).
	Solidarity	Mitigation of the humanitarian impact of human security threats within a religious community.
	Collective action	Engagement in advocacy or any form of (organized) nonviolent resistance or protest to the actors responsible for the human security threats.
	Taking up arms	Direct confrontation of armed power through the creation of self-defense militias or counter-insurgency units.

Figure 1. Categorization of coping mechanisms of religious minorities

how or whether they should use them. From a New Testament perspective, taking up arms is obviously problematic (cf. Jesus' rebuke of Peter when he wanted to prevent him from being arrested in Luke 22:49-51), although the Anabaptist/pacifist and Reformed perspectives give very nuanced interpretations of the use of physical force in different contexts. Moreover, in spite of their differences, these perspectives would be in agreement that social wisdom, which I also identified as a coping mechanism, is probably the most important element in decisions on how to use coping mechanisms.

3. Illustrations using Latin American cases

Since 2010, I have conducted field research in three Latin American contexts: (1) actively practicing Christians in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí, Mexico, (2) cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguar-*

dos indígenas (indigenous reserves) of the southwestern highlands of Colombia, and (3) Christians in Cuba. After briefly introducing my cases, which correspond to very different sources of persecution and political-institutional contexts, I summarize and compare the anecdotal evidence of the coping mechanisms of these Christian groups.

Because this study is primarily a practical and methodological exploration, I use my empirical material merely as an illustration of my tool. A detailed description of the fieldwork I conducted can be found in my dissertation (Petri 2020). In this article, I present only some of the results of my interviews pertaining to the resilience of the religious minorities I surveyed, which mainly serve to illustrate the categorization of coping mechanisms I presented above. I do not engage with the literature about religious persecution in these countries, because, to my knowledge, no sources discuss responses to persecution, which is the topic of this article.

My first case concerns actively practicing Christians who have suffered human rights abuses at the hands of organized crime in three states of northwest Mexico. The time frame for this case study covers the second half of President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa's term (2009-2012) and the first half of President Enrique Peña Nieto's term (2012-2015), during the height of the Los Zetas ("the Z's") insurgency. Los Zetas was the dominant drug cartel in northeast Mexico at the time of my research. Because Los Zetas and other criminal groups seek to preserve their interests, their activity is not threatened by people who simply declare their Christian identity. However, people involved in organized crime view Christians who openly oppose their activities as a threat, especially when Christians become involved in youth work, drug rehabilitation programs, or human rights initiatives.

My second case corresponds to an intra-ethnic (minority within a minority) conflict. I studied converts from the majority religion in an indigenous context, to whom I refer as 'cultural dissidents' among the Nasa ethnic group living in the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments). I chose to identify this minority as cultural dissidents, because they include Christians who, often after a conversion experience, decide to reject some tenets of the cultural and religious traditions of their community, but expressly declare that they continue to identify as Nasa and as indigenous. Their dissent focuses almost exclusively on aspects of Nasa culture that they disagree with, but they effectively maintain the same holistic worldview that characterizes their community and do not reject other elements of their indigenous heritage. The timeframe for this case study overlaps with the first six years of the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón (2010-2016), roughly until the signing of the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

My third case considers all Christians in Cuba, with special attention to the most active Christians. Unlike the previous two case studies, I do not focus on a subnational area, mainly because there are no noteworthy geographical differences

within Cuba, although some human security threats, such as the intensity of surveillance and administrative restrictions, are reportedly higher in the eastern half of Cuba. The time frame for this case study begins in 2011, after Fidel Castro resigned as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, and ends in 2018 when Raúl Castro stepped down as President of Cuba.

3.1 Actively practicing Christians in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí, Mexico

Civic participation can be effective and instrumental in increasing the resilience of actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico. In many cases, however, civic participation by actively practicing Christians also increases their vulnerability, especially when it threatens the operations of organized crime. Moreover, reducing human security risks is not really on the agenda of actively practicing Christians; none of the interviewees for this case study spoke about strategies devised by churches or Christian institutions to cope with the threats they face. Indeed, apart from some exceptions such as the positive involvement of Christian leaders in the police department of Guadalupe or the security protocol issued by the Mexican Catholic Church, there is no noteworthy reflection or self-awareness among Christian leaders as to how the threats posed by organized crime could be mitigated. Most interviewees seemed to have accepted the violence as normal and did not seem to be conscious of the specific restrictions it places on their religious freedom.

The lack of reflection on coping mechanisms is a missed opportunity in my view, because actively practicing Christians, if organized and united, can contribute their knowledge and experience to combat impunity and corruption. Often, the focus of most Christian leaders is restricted to church-related issues, leaving aside the potential contribution churches could make to national debates on the major issues affecting society, including the pervasiveness of organized crime.

3.2 Cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia

At first sight, when one observes the social and political activism of the cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in Colombia, it might seem that their coping mechanisms are quite developed: they actively denounce the numerous injustices committed against them. However, as I discuss in my dissertation (Petri 2020), they have at times taken positions that have tended to polarize rather than develop common ground. In this case, activism increases the vulnerability of this religious minority. The spiritual endurance of the cultural dissidents is perhaps their greatest coping mechanism, but it turns into a pitfall when it is combined with an at times unnecessarily confrontational attitude.

The sense of belonging (loyalty) to the Nasa ethnic group of the cultural dissidents, makes Hirschman's (1970) category of voice their primary means of expressing dissent. This does not mean, however, that the ways in which the cultural dissidents express voice are effective. Voice is certainly used with great determination, but not with great creativity or resourcefulness, let alone social wisdom.

3.3 Christians in Cuba

Although there is certainly room for improvement, a great number of the threats to which Christians are subjected in Cuba are mitigated by the various coping mechanisms they routinely use. In particular, their clever avoidance strategies, spiritual endurance and exceptional solidarity, which have developed over the course of several decades, are all inspired by much social wisdom and are important sources of resilience of Cuban Christians.

Of course, there is a clear difference between the more active Christian individuals and groups and those who deliberately steer clear from any form of activism. Moreover, avoidance in the form of leaving the country continues to be very frequent, especially among those people who previously have been very outspoken in their missionary and human rights activism, but who eventually reach a point where they can no longer cope with the ubiquitous discouragement and harassment. The various voice strategies are thus neutralized by the fact that exit is always an option, at least theoretically. Advocacy, as a form of collective action, is gaining some traction but continues to be the effort of a lonely few, which inevitably decreases its effectiveness.

Finally, moral standing, solidarity in the form of humanitarian work or education, and very visible forms of collective action, although they can be thought of as sources of resilience, can work against actively practicing Christians. The exposure that comes with these mechanisms can transform a coping mechanism into a source of additional vulnerability. The same is true for engagement in social work, which can cause conflict with the ideological position of the communist state concerning private initiatives.

3.4 Comparison of the case studies

Most of my interviewees seemed to have little awareness of how they could equip themselves against human security threats. The reasons for this lack of awareness ranged widely, including adherence to pietistic theological options that discourage any involvement in society (in all cases), fear (northeast Mexico and Cuba), the acceptance ('normalization') of violence (in northeast Mexico) and the internalization of a restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the regime (Cuba). Braun's (2016) finding that religious minorities are more inclined to help other vulnerable religious minorities or themselves seems only partly applicable

to my case studies. The cultural dissidents in the Nasa *resguardos*, by contrast, are very militant, but this stance has actually increased the threats they have faced.

Possibly because of the low level of awareness of the need to reflect on the development of resilience, social wisdom is also underdeveloped, with the notable exception of Cuban Christians, who have learned to be cautious so as to survive within the system. The few outliers in Cuba who adopt a more militant path are criticized by their peers for not having any actual impact. In the Nasa *resguardos*, notwithstanding the warnings of a select few, most cultural dissidents are convinced that they act in obedience to their faith and are willing to suffer the consequences. In northeast Mexico, the drug cartels are rarely confronted by actively practicing Christians, who often prefer to take refuge in avoidance and compliance strategies. In such a context, fear, not social wisdom, prevents actively practicing Christians from openly confronting the drug cartels, but it also implies that other coping mechanisms, such as the establishment of early warning networks or the engagement of private security to at least mitigate some of the risks, are rarely considered.

At the same time, coping mechanisms were by no means absent in my case studies. Avoidance and compliance, including formal compliance with government regulations while disrespecting their spirit, are common in Cuba. Cuban Christians and Nasa cultural dissidents both benefit from international support, which also translates into the implementation of solidarity mechanisms to mitigate some threats; this is largely absent for actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico.

The relation between religion and resilience is unquestionably complex and multifaceted. Many people are attracted to a religion because of the expectation that it can provide some sort of relief from the hardships of the world. My case studies confirmed that religious convictions can at times be a source of resilience, because they help people make sense of difficult situations and offer hope and because religious communities can also provide solidarity. In all three cases, there are situations where spiritual endurance and moral authority command some respect that can serve to mitigate threats.

Collective action exists in all cases, but it is understandably difficult to use this coping mechanism in the face of severe human security threats and paralyzing fear. Its impact is also limited when it is not combined with social wisdom. The discreet advocacy work by Cuban Christians and the collaboration between Christian leaders and the police department in Guadalupe, Mexico are positive exceptions.

Collective action can be a double-edged sword. Sometimes, the very initiatives that religious minorities undertake to defend themselves lead to increased vulnerability. For example, the creation of solidarity networks or the establishment of advocacy initiatives, which are initially designed to mitigate threats, can have the opposite effect of drawing attention to a religious minority, thereby increasing its vulnerability.

This evidently happened in the Nasa *resguardos*, where political advocacy was initially conceived as an instrument to combat several forms of injustice but actually increased them. In northeast Mexico, initiatives to mitigate the influence of organized crime on youths encounter hostility as faith-based organizations and drug cartels compete for influence. This problem recalls the philosophical paradox that Nussbaum (1986) identifies as "the fragility of goodness." If one seeks to improve one's conditions, one must confront the world, but the mere fact of doing so also exposes oneself. As Butler (2016) puts it, protesting against precarity increases risk.

Beyond internal theological explanations, differences between actors and contexts also help to explain the differences in coping mechanisms among vulnerable religious minorities. The coping mechanisms of Cuban Christians are more developed than those in the sub-national areas of Mexico and Colombia that I studied, but this could be because Cuba is characterized by a prolonged vertical (state) oppression of religion, whereas the other two contexts suffer more sudden forms of repression by non-state actors. More research on the impact of the type of repression (i.e., prolonged or sudden) could help us understand the development of coping mechanisms in different contexts.

4. Implications for religious minorities, faith-based organizations implementing relief projects for victims of religious persecution, and human rights agencies

As we reflect on how religious minorities can apply coping mechanisms in the face of human security threats, the controversial point made by Hannah Arendt (2006 [1963]), that Jewish leaders may not have done enough to prevent the Holocaust, is worth mentioning: "The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and fearless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people" (1963:125). Although Arendt received severe criticism for 'blaming the victims' of the Holocaust, this was not her intent. The Nazis (and the silent collaborating majority) were evidently guilty of the Holocaust, and Arendt recognizes that it would have been insensitive to expect the Jewish leaders to have resisted the Final Solution because of fear, ignorance of the Nazi projects, and the (in retrospect) naïve expectation that cooperating with the Nazis could have mitigated the harm (Elon 2006). However, Arendt features the courageous examples of the Danish population and Dutch Jewish leaders who resisted the implementation of the Final Solution on moral grounds. Their resistance had some impact on the attitude of Nazi officials.

Two recommendations for vulnerable religious minorities and for organizations wishing to help them can be inferred from Arendt's reflections on the Holocaust. The first is the need to raise awareness about the human security threats faced by

religious minorities, like the desperate attempts by SS officer Kurt Gerstein, the protagonist of Rolf Hochhuth's play *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel* (The Deputy, a Christian Tragedy) (1975 [1963]), portrayed in the 2002 film *Amen*, to get the Vatican to take notice of the Final Solution. Lack of awareness of the Holocaust typified not only the international community but also the Jewish community itself, which was largely ignorant of the unfolding genocide. In my case studies, I observed a similar lack of awareness among religious groups. Issues such as the normalization of violence in northeast Mexico and the internalization of the restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the communist regime in Cuba limit believers' full understanding of the human security situation in which they find themselves.

Second, regarding the documentation of human rights abuses, the overwhelming number of organizations in Latin American civil society, including faith-based organizations, neglect their responsibility to collect data. Most organizations are generally very good at talking about issues, creating attention-grabbing campaigns on social media, performing social diagnostics, and even making recommendations for public policy, but they rarely undertake the tedious, time-intensive, and sometimes dangerous task of documenting incidents. This is also true for the documentation of violations of religious freedom.

Having a clear picture of the threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable is strategically relevant because it can inform tactics that can contribute to making a religious minority more self-reliant and mitigate the risks it faces. This leads me to my second recommendation: develop and facilitate reflections about coping mechanisms. Avoidance and compliance seemed to be the default response of most members of the vulnerable religious minorities I studied. This is understandable considering the fear that results from the very real human security threats they face, but an adequate understanding of these threats as well as careful reflection on how they could possibly be mitigated could nevertheless be very beneficial.

Clearly, it is extremely difficult for many Christians in Latin America to even start considering coping mechanisms. Beyond fear of repression, there is a broadly shared sense that resisting the oppressors, whether they are the drug cartels or the Cuban government, is useless. In my interviews, I observed a sense that publicly addressing issues will not lead to a radical change in society. As a Colombian pastor from Cali stated, "When evil is so present, it kills all hope for change" (Harold Segura, personal interview, 2011).

Coping mechanisms are further underdeveloped because of a complex set of theological reasons. An insight from psychology about bullying illustrates how moral convictions, which may be rooted in religion, about compassion and the rejection of aggression – even when it is necessary for self-protection – can indeed make people vulnerable (Peterson 2018:23-24).

The predominance of certain theological options that rule out any form of social engagement, particularly in Pentecostal denominations that teach a strict segregation between 'spiritual' and 'earthly' matters, also explains an overall limited involvement in the pursuit of social justice and the underdevelopment of coping mechanisms.

In view of the multiple factors that discourage social engagement, it may not be surprising that the communities I surveyed have not developed a reflection about the concept of resilience. A logical response by faith-based organizations would therefore be to stimulate an active theological reflection on the value of resilience, while at the same time offering practical real-life examples of resilient religious communities, expanding the direction taken by the *Under Caesar's Sword* project (Philpott and Shah 2018). As Stout (2010) argues, grassroots religious groups, if they adopt effective strategies, can exercise real influence over policy and promote social justice. Compiling a manual of best practices of the application of coping mechanisms, similar to Gene Sharp's (1993) catalogue of 198 "methods of nonviolent action," could also serve a didactic purpose.

Along with the need to raise awareness and to stimulate reflection on coping mechanisms, the central importance of social wisdom is highlighted in all three case studies. The value of this skill resides in the fact that it informs how best to apply all other coping mechanisms, notably solidarity, collective action, taking up arms, and formal compliance with regulations even though their spirit is disrespected, as described in the case study on Cuban Christians.

To be effective, coping mechanisms must be used strategically. If not, they could have the counterproductive effect of increasing vulnerability instead of reducing it. This is not only a philosophical question but also a practical one. International advocacy in support of the human rights of Cuban Christians provides one example. When its tone is too confrontational and sensitive information is not handled carefully, Cuban Christians complain that they are hindered more than helped because the advocacy triggers more hostility from the government.

In the most extreme cases, it may be a form of social wisdom to remain silent about one's faith, as did the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries to Japan who are portrayed in *Silence* by Shūsaku Endō (1966). Similarly, in the Bible, Queen Esther stayed silent about her Jewish background for strategic purposes, positioning her to be instrumental later in achieving her people's salvation.

The importance of social wisdom is also illustrated by the case of the cultural dissidents in the Nasa *resguardos*. Contrary to the general trend I described, there is no lack of collective action among cultural dissidents, but this collective action may be too confrontational and uncompromising, contributing to a worsening of the conflict instead of solving it. The *Under Caesar's Sword* project reminds us that "Domestic advocacy is most effective when done quietly and respectfully by Christian leaders

who have nurtured relationships with local and national officials" (University of Notre Dame 2017:48). If the cultural dissidents would move away from their adversarial logic and instead adopt a "collaboration logic" (Vargas and Petri 2009), they might have better chances to succeed without increasing their vulnerability.

This is of course easier said than done, and it is especially difficult when religious minorities have antagonized the powers that be. It is nevertheless a direction worth exploring, in line with Habermas's recommendation to religious traditions to undertake the "arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection" (2006:14). Generalizing, Christian converts should critically analyze the impact and meaning of their religious behavior in their community, as is the essence of Thielicke's *Verantwortungsethik* (1969). The religious rights of individual Christian converts should be respected, but it would be beneficial if they realized that, in their context, a church building is more than just a place of worship; it can also be seen as a symbol of political subversion, as Mexican sociologist José Refugio Arellano argues (personal interview, 2016). Buijs similarly encourages religious groups to "define orthodoxy in such a way that the reflective distance, the wisdom and serenity that are required to live in a non-perfect world is cultivated. Orthodoxy should be defined and transmitted to next generations as the opposite of radicalism" (2013:34).

It is also critical for both foreign and indigenous missionaries to understand the need for cultural sensitivity. As José Casanova observes, "Global denominationalism [international Christian missions] would also defend the principle of individual religious freedom, which includes the right to conversion and the attendant right to evangelize, but would recognize that there are both appropriate and inappropriate ways to evangelize" (2008:15).

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(Bonn – Cape Town – Colombo)

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