

THESIS

BEYOND FAITH-BASED NGOS: DECOLONIZING PEACEBUILDING

An analysis of how colonial and power dynamics in post-colonial conflict regions contribute to the development of decolonization strategies in the work of faith-based NGOs by researching a case study on Iraq.

Written by: Dana van der Ham

Master Religion, Conflict and Globalisation

First Supervisor: Brenda Bartelink

Second Supervisor: Erin Wilson

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates decolonization in the context of peacebuilding, by examining the impact of colonialism on peacebuilding and the relevance of decolonization for peacebuilding. This thesis is based on an examination of how peacebuilding is organized and researches a specific case study of peacebuilding in Iraq. This case study will demonstrate the importance of decolonizing peacebuilding. Furthermore, by incorporating decolonization strategies from other fields, such as indigenous and education. The goal of this thesis is to develop decolonization strategies specifically for peacebuilding and demonstrate their applicability in a case study of peacebuilding in Iraq. This thesis aims to turn an analytical discussion of decolonization into a practical proposal that can be used in peacebuilding programs.

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INTRODUCTION

The debate over decolonization has grown in recent decades. Decolonization, according to the traditionalist definition, is the process by which legally dependent territories gain constitutional independence and become sovereign states.¹ However, a more methodological definition of decolonization is the process of undoing colonialism in all of its political, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic consequences, which frequently relate to unequal power dynamics in society. Decolonization is concerned with seeing these colonial consequences and finding ways to distance oneself from them. In peacebuilding programs, there seems to be a growing need to consider decolonization. Peace is about finding a resolution to conflicts and violence. In conflicts, religion, culture, power, and gender structures are structures to understand the context behind conflicts. Colonialism had a significant impact on the evolution of these structures. Peacebuilding entails not only determining the context in which these structures are intertwined with conflict and violence, but also determining the impact of colonialism. As Atalia Omer points out, decolonization should not only be about the epistemological undoing of colonialism but should also have relevance to the uncertain and invisible lives of many people in the Global South. People in these countries frequently have a greater need for shelter, food, and necessities. As a result, this research should also focus on the possibilities of decolonization and the significance of this process, particularly for local people and organizations with which NGOs work.²

Furthermore, peacebuilding NGOs are embedded in power dynamics. This is significant for decolonization because these power dynamics are frequently rooted in colonialism. To undo colonial influences, these power dynamics must be recognized and reviewed for peacebuilding NGOs to position themselves in more equal power dynamics with the organizations and countries in which they work.

Faith-based NGOs involved in peacebuilding programs and initiatives have become more aware of the potential to incorporate decolonization into peacebuilding efforts. During my internship at Mensen met een Missie (MM), I became aware of the importance of researching

¹ Betts, R. F. (2012). Decolonization: A brief history of the word. In E. BOGAERTS & R. RABEN (Eds.), *Beyond Empire and Nation: The Decolonization of African and Asian societies, 1930s-1970s* (pp. 23–38). Brill.

² Omer, A. (2020). Decolonizing religion and the practice of peace: Two case studies from the postcolonial world. *Critical research on religion*, 8(3), 273-296.

colonial influences on conflict and how more attention was being paid to this topic in peacebuilding programs. Peacebuilding organizations are becoming more aware of colonialism in the sense that it influences conflict development. Taking in colonial dynamics in a conflict context has been seen to give a better understanding of why certain conflicts have occurred. Also, in terms of their position as an organization in terms of power dynamics. There is awareness and attention to this issue of colonialism being intertwined into conflict and peacebuilding. However, not the 'how' to include an explicit decolonization approach on how looking at colonial dynamics could benefit peacebuilding. So, the issue investigated in this is that organizations are becoming aware of the potential and necessity of looking into decolonization, but that peacebuilding has difficulties in how to make a practical approach to decolonization. This knowledge is required to develop decolonization strategies and to change these entanglements of colonialism.

Conflict is the polar opposite of peace, so peacebuilders address conflict. Peacebuilding aims to resolve forms of injustice and conflict by addressing the structural conditions that lead to these injustices and conflicts. Peacebuilding examines the underlying causes of violence and uses this to try to reconcile differences between people and groups, as well as to lay the groundwork for preventing future injustices, conflicts, and violence. Peacebuilding is more than just a crisis response; it is a long-term development strategy focused on social, cultural, religious, and political strategies for enhancing nonviolence and peace.³ The potential and necessity for decolonization stem first from a better understanding of the complexities of conflicts in a colonial context. By taking in the colonial context, a better understanding of the development of conflicts occurs, it stems from the rebalancing of power structures as a result of the colonial impact. There are various actors involved in peacebuilding, which can be classified into four major groups. Donors, global non-governmental organizations, local non-governmental organizations and local communities.⁴ Peacebuilding, as Atalia Omer argues, is primarily intended to benefit and support local communities.⁵ However, the interests of other actors play a role in the organization of peacebuilding. These interests are primarily supported by financial power, as peacebuilding relies on donor funds. Through the historical relations

³ Reychler, L., & Paffenholz, T. (Eds.). (2001). *Peacebuilding: a field guide*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

⁴ Lilja, J., & Höglund, K. (2018). The Role of the External in Local Peacebuilding: Enabling Action—Managing Risk. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 24(3), 411-430.

⁵ Omer, A. (2020). Decolonizing religion and the practice of peace: Two case studies from the postcolonial world. *Critical research on religion*, 8(3), 273-296.

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that have been created, in which colonialism has had a major influence, you see a binary opposition being created in the Global North and South. Global NGOs are mainly situated in the Global North and so also the big donors of peacebuilding who often give requirements on their donations. This keeps the unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South intact that stems from colonial history. Taking in the relationship between different actors in peacebuilding is an important part of decolonization, to analyze how these relationships are contributing to the remaining unequal power relations of colonialism.

Many studies have already been conducted on decolonization and the importance of decolonizing knowledge. This thesis is innovative and relevant because it connects the decolonization discourse to work in peacebuilding. By transforming an analytical study into practical strategies that peacebuilders can incorporate into their programs.

The primary goal of this research is to develop decolonization strategies for faith-based NGOs. First how research can take in the colonial context in peacebuilding, and second how research can look at how the construction of peacebuilding operations contributes to the remaining of unequal power relations. The goal of decolonization strategies is to analyze if faith-based NGOs can make changes in the colonial impact that exists in their field. This will be accomplished by examining the current decolonization discourse and explaining the relationship between decolonization and peacebuilding. In this thesis, a case study on Iraq will be used to examine the analytical discourse of decolonization and describe how decolonization is practically relevant in this one specific case. The importance of decolonization in peacebuilding is emphasized in this study. Specifically, it addresses why it is useful for peacebuilders and, more importantly, why it is useful for the local people and organizations with whom peacebuilders collaborate. So, how does developing decolonization strategies benefit local communities? Looking more in-depth at the necessity of decolonization in peacebuilding, the relevance of this thesis is that it will reveal aspects of the relationship between conflict and colonialism because it will analyze colonial dynamics that are intersected in conflict. The next step in the research is to gain an understanding of what a decolonization strategy might look like and how it might be applied in peacebuilding programs. This section will be researched by looking at other areas of decolonization and examining how they can be applied to peacebuilding. Indigenous and education studies have already conducted more research on decolonization strategies and their implementation; these studies can serve as a foundation for examples of how peacebuilding strategies could be developed. The main research question of this thesis is formulated as:

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How can an understanding of colonial and power dynamics in post-colonial conflict regions contribute to the development of decolonization strategies in the work of faith-based NGOs by researching a case study on Iraq?

To answer the main research questions, this thesis is divided into four subquestions.

Subquestion 1: What is the relevance of decolonization by defining peacebuilding?

Subquestion 2: How does the case study of Iraq show the relevance of decolonization in practice?

Subquestion 3: How can decolonization strategies be formulated and applied in peacebuilding with an understanding of the case study of Iraq?

The first question will define peacebuilding by examining its operation and structures, as well as the various actors involved in peacebuilding and their relationships. Who has the authority in decision-making and how is the agency divided? Furthermore, understanding the role of language in peacebuilding. Given the fluidity and diversity of culture, how does international language influence peacebuilding in local communities? This chapter will critically examine the issue of colonialism in peacebuilding and the relevance of decolonization through this understanding of peacebuilding. With the analytical knowledge gained in the first chapter, the second chapter will examine a case study of Iraq, focusing on the issue of colonialism in peacebuilding and how decolonization is practically relevant in this case. This will be investigated by delving into Iraq's colonial history, current conflicts, and how the NGO *Mensen met een Missie* operates in Iraq by critically examining the relationship between different actors in Iraq's peacebuilding work. Research is here needed on the specific different actors that are involved in peacebuilding in Iraq and how they interact and relate. Furthermore, taking into account the faith-based background of the organization and how a faith-based foundation and religious donors influence the power dynamics of actors in the Iraq program. The third chapter will then investigate what exactly a decolonization approach is by investigating decolonization strategies found in other research fields such as education and indigenous fields. This chapter will provide information on the elements required to construct a decolonization strategy. The final chapter will propose decolonization strategies that could be developed and applied in peacebuilding, arguing how these strategies could be applicable and beneficial in the case study of Iraq.

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These strategies will in one specific context be reviewed and researched. The faith-based NGO *Mensen met een Missie* and its peacebuilding efforts in Iraq will be the case study. The Hague-based NGO *MM* is a Dutch NGO. The organization has a Catholic background and works from the perspective of missionaries. They collaborate with local partners and believe that exclusion is at the root of all conflicts, so they strive for a more equal world regardless of religious beliefs, birth, or gender. They believe in the unifying power of religion and frequently employ religiously-based strategies. This case study is appropriate for this thesis for a variety of reasons. To begin, *MM* is a Catholic organization that works from a missionary standpoint. Catholicism and missionary work have both been linked to the incorporation of colonial structures. This implies that *MM*, as an organization, occupies a specific place in power dynamics and colonial history. Because of the faith-based background, this thesis will also critically look at the relationship between religion and colonialism. By giving an understanding of this historical relationship and how it can have a contemporary influence on the power dynamics with other actors in peacebuilding. The donors of *MM* are for a great part religious institutions. How does their philosophy influence decision-making? As stated in the introduction, the position of an organization is critical to consider in decolonization due to the creation of unequal power balances. As a result, their background is worth investigating in terms of the importance of decolonization and the formulation of decolonization strategies. To be more specific, how can having an understanding of the missionary and catholic background give insights into the power position of *MM* as an NGO in Iraq?

Iraq has not been an official colony for a long period. Iraq was a British mandate in the 1930s. This meant that the British were authorized to act as the representative in Iraq. Following that, the British and Americans attempted to seize control of the country. Because of the potential threat to the country, the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. The Dutch government was also involved in this invasion/war, initially as an ally of the Americans supporting the war, but it was later discovered that the Dutch government actively used violence in the country. This power and control can be viewed as a form of (neo)colonial power.⁶ Mainly because the invasion was found to be not legitimate. America argued that the invasion was necessary because Iraq would have massive-destructive weapons. Later was found that this was not the case and that there also had not been enough evidence to support this. However still during

⁶ Welch, M. (2008). Ordering Iraq: Reflections on power, discourse, & neocolonialism. *Critical Criminology*, 16(4), 257-269.

the invasion, America took control over the whole country without an advised plan on how it could benefit the country. It is also argued that America had its interests to invade Iraq in the sense of world politics and oil. These aspects will be later discussed detailed in the first chapter. Overall, this makes Iraq an interesting research topic because these forms of colonial power were not long ago, and are arguably still occurring today, through control of politics and resources in the country. This must be reviewed by examining the definition of neo-colonialism and determining how this understanding applies to foreign influences in Iraq. This makes the case of Iraq interesting in terms of viewing Iraq-Dutch relations through the lens of (neo)-colonialism and decolonization.

To summarize, there are two major issues concerning decolonization in peacebuilding. The first issue that peacebuilders work on is the colonial influences on conflict and violence. The second point to consider is the role of peacebuilding organizations in colonial and power dynamics. MM's peacebuilding work in Iraq will be used as a case study to investigate these issues. The first step will be to examine the relevance of decolonization; the second step will be to investigate the interplay of colonial influences on the conflicts in Iraq and the position of MM as an organization, and the final step will be to examine how a decolonization strategy could look for a faith-based NGO and how it can be implemented.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical and conceptual framework will primarily concentrate on comprehending the concept of decolonization and the discourse surrounding it. Decolonization is a difficult concept to grasp because it is primarily based on a philosophical debate about how to distance from colonial influences and impacts. This makes it complex to understand decolonization and how to address it practically. So, this chapter will examine the meaning of decolonization through the use of various literature, the distinction in the concept, and how this thesis understands the meaning of decolonization. The concept of decoloniality will also be explored in this chapter because understanding decoloniality is part of understanding decolonization.

Defining Decolonialization and Decoloniality

The concept of decolonization is briefly discussed in the introduction. Decolonization, according to its traditional definition, means that colonized countries become independent and sovereign states are recognized by international politics. The traditionalist definition of decolonization is the process by which countries are no longer colonized by another state. The traditionalist definition, however, excludes the longer process of reversing colonial impact, which is where the methodological definition of decolonization emerged. The methodological definition of decolonization is far more complex and philosophical than the traditionalist definition, and it is also the definition of interest in this thesis. The methodological meaning refers to the process of undoing colonialism in all of its political, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic embodiments. Whereas the traditional definition primarily focuses on the physical removal of colonialism, the methodological definition focuses on the removal of colonialism on an epistemological level.⁷ Research has stated that colonialism impacted all forms of societal and cultural dynamics and processes.⁸ To comprehend the undoing of colonial consequences, you must first identify them and then seek ways to distance yourself from colonial influences on dynamics. This is what the decolonization process is about: identifying the colonial impact and counteracting it for the benefit of the colonized. On the one hand, decolonization can be viewed as a political and epistemological movement aimed at

⁷ Betts, R. F. (2012). Decolonization: A brief history of the word. In E. BOGAERTS & R. RABEN (Eds.), *Beyond Empire and Nation: The Decolonization of African and Asian societies, 1930s-1970s* (pp. 23–38). Brill.

⁸ Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 449-514.

the liberation of colonized people. However decolonization, on the other hand, can be viewed as a discourse on comprehending, and acting on the implications of colonialism.⁹

Decoloniality is similar to the methodological meaning of decolonization. However, these concepts have geographic differences. Decoloniality was invented as a concept in Latin-American societies. Decolonization in these societies is frequently critiqued as a discourse as the concept is seen as already European-West dominant, in which the term decoloniality is preferred.¹⁰ Decoloniality emerges from a Latin-American movement concerned with the entanglement of knowledge production from a Euro-American perspective. This movement contends that knowledge is primarily derived from a Eurocentric episteme. In studies decolonization and decoloniality are used simultaneously to describe the same process. This thesis will use the term decolonization as it is the concept that is more frequently used in research and because the concept is more universally used and known.

This thesis needs to notice that the concepts of decolonization and decoloniality are concepts that are being developed in a European-biased understanding of colonialism and post-colonialism. It is critical to be aware of this influence. However, it will remain difficult to completely go around this influence. This thesis includes indigenous, Latin, American, and other scholars with a non-Western background in order to have an inclusive discussion of decolonization and reduce the influence of an European bias. Examples of such authors that are referred to in this thesis are Linda Tuhiwai Smith¹¹ (indigenous) and Anibal Quijano¹² (Latin American).

Knowledge, Power, and Binary Oppositions

To understand how decolonization can be applied, it is first important to understand the contemporary implications of colonialism, and why the history of colonialism can still be a problem today. The main implication is the superiority of Western cultures and knowledge

⁹ Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonizing methodologies: Indigenous peoples and research.

¹⁰ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2019). Discourses of decolonization/decoloniality. *Papers on Language and Literature*, 55(3), 201-226.

¹¹ Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonizing methodologies: Indigenous peoples and research.

¹² Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.

which has led to the creation of a power matrix.¹³ This power matrix includes the privilege of Whiteness, the imposition of the concept of modernity, the use of development to approximate colonies to European modernity, and the formation of financial institutions that benefit the few at the expense of the many. In representation it is seen that people with white/European backgrounds are viewed as having more power. Whether in politics, the media, or even medical books, people with European/white backgrounds are more represented, demonstrating the privilege in the power matrix. Anibal Quijano describes this as power coloniality. He describes with this concept the legacy of colonialism in the form of social discrimination.¹⁴ As he argues that power hierarchies and the value of certain ethnicities are imposed by European colonialism in Latin American societies. Quijano gives a concrete example of how the coloniality of power is visible in Latin-American societies, he argues that colonial institutions in power established a caste system. The Spaniards were thought to be superior in Latin America, while the people they colonized were thought to be inferior. This divergence resulted in categorical and prejudiced rhetoric. This was reflected in social and economic institutions, and it continues to be a feature of Latin American nations today. This is clear in the case of education and labor. In comparison to indigenous Latin Americans, 'European' descent Latin Americans have seen more educational and career opportunities. Having more opportunities in education and labor means having higher social and economic status. The disparity in opportunities results in a disparity in status based on ethnic background.¹⁵ This coloniality of power, as expressed in the political and economic sectors, was inexorably related to the coloniality of knowledge, defined as modernity/rationality, according to Quijano.

What the argument of Quijano shows is that this colonial power matrix created binary oppositions between colonizer and colonized and that these binary oppositions can still be visible today. This is related to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, in which he claims that an ontological and epistemological difference has been created between 'the orient' and the 'occident,' a binary opposition between superior Western cultures and Eastern/Global South

¹³ Sauerbronn, F. F., Ayres, R. M., da Silva, C. M., & Lourenço, R. L. (2021). Decolonial studies in accounting? Emerging contributions from Latin America. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*.

¹⁴ Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.

¹⁵ Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.

cultures. Orientalism, by Edward Said, not only provided a detailed critique of the archaic discipline of Oriental Studies but also raised the issue of knowledge creation from a global perspective. Knowledge creation has also been seen to be Western dominant as a consequence of colonialism. Colonialism, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, not only imposed control over people and resources through military conquest and political dictatorship, but it also imposed control over the colonizer's mental universe.¹⁶ This continued long after colonized countries gained their independence. This means that through a colonial paradigm cultural and societal structures developed in a Eurocentric episteme. Mara Lugones gives an example of this by looking at gender relations in post-colonial societies.¹⁷ She argues that by rearticulating specific European conceptions of gender and sex, shifting them from a binary of male and female to a racialized binary contained within a logic of colonial difference. Following the identification of colonialism's contemporary influence.

Practicality of Decolonialization

As shown above the contemporary implications of colonialism, decolonization is the long-term process of removing colonial influence. This means that decolonization entails removing oneself from the 'Othering' and hierarchy, revaluing inferior cultures and societies, and establishing equal power structures in all aspects of society. Decolonization is about relearning knowledge and reinterpreting power structures and knowledge production structures.

The contemporary consequences of colonialism and how it relates to decolonization is a very analytical and philosophical description. To understand better the reality and practicality of decolonization, it is helpful to look at other research fields on how they have formulated decolonization approaches. Indigenous research has formulated different phases in which indigenous research itself could work towards decolonization as seen in the figure down below.

Step 1: Rediscovery and recovery	In this initial stage of self-discovery, the colonized recover their own identity through the reclamation of their history, culture, and language (Laenui, 2000). Colonialist assertions of superiority can be questioned, and the colonized Other may define their
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¹⁶ Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonizing methodologies: Indigenous peoples and research.

¹⁷ Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742-759.

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	own rules and establish what is real to them (Muller, 2007).
Step 2: Mourning	This phase refers to the expression of feelings of mourning for past assaults that were created through colonization. This phase may result in the questioning of “how it may be otherwise,” which leads directly into the dreaming stage (Muller, 2007, p. 7).
Step 3: Dreaming	In this phase, the colonized Other conceptualizes new possibilities through summoning their Indigenous values, knowledge systems, and histories (Laenui, 2000). This dreaming phase is incremental in creating and imagining a decolonized future (Muller, 2007). Laenui (2000) proposes that researchers can use this phase to imagine new approaches to research and adopt Indigenous methodologies to the communities being studied. This process includes the “lived experiences, oral traditions, language, metaphorical sayings, and proverbs” of the researched communities, to provide a theoretical foundation for the research (Laenui, 2000, p. 16). Through this process, a real voice is given to the Indigenous communities being researched, allowing for maximum benefit to be gained from the research outcomes.
Step 4: Commitment	Progressing from the dreaming phase involves a definitive commitment to a direction or action. Laenui (2000) recognizes that this is the stage where researchers can become “political activists,” establishing a commitment to the inclusivity of the voices of the colonized Other and conducting research that is centered on their values, worldviews, and belief systems (p. 16). This commitment allows research to translate into meaningful changes in the lives of the researched.

Step 5: Action	The combination of dreaming and commitment transforms into actual strategies for action and social change (Laenui, 2000). In this stage, researchers enact their commitment to research methods that are based on “empowerment, inclusivity, and respect for all involved in the research process” (Laenui, 2000, p. 16). Importantly, Muller (2007) indicates that this phase calls for a pro-active response, with positive action that challenges historical injustices rather than punitive action. This proactive response positions the researcher as an activist, allowing the process of decolonization to manifest into a greater social transformation.
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Figure 1

You can see in this figure that it is focused on indigenous research particularly. This can be seen in the phases of emotions and feelings, which will not be universal in the applicability of decolonization for every research field. To make these phases more applicable universally, I translated these phases into more general steps for decolonization, so that peacebuilding can also have some grip on steps for decolonization.

1. IDENTIFICATION
2. RELEARNING AND REINTERPRETATION
3. CREATING INCLUSIVITY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND SELF-DETERMINATION

Figure 2

In figure 1 you see that the first step is about the rediscovery of culture and traditions. Here the important part is to review the colonial impact on your identity. To make this phase applicable to peacebuilding, For this thesis this was translated into the first step of identification. Peacebuilding is not about the rediscovery of someone’s identity and culture. Rather first, on the colonial impact on conflict development and second on the influence on power positions of actors in peacebuilding. Important here is to identify the colonial impact. Next in the phases of figure 1, is about finding new possibilities for your indigenous values

and identity. By relearning the history of indigenous history, making changes, and finding new approaches to in touch with indigenous identity. In this thesis this is described as the second step. Translating figure 2 into a more general step of relearning and reinterpretation. For decolonization, it is important that when the colonial impact has been identified, to find strategies to go beyond the colonial impact by relearning and reinterpreting. In the case of peacebuilding, this would focus on the different structures that are intertwined into conflict (E.G, gender, religion, ethnicity) and on the construction of peacebuilding and the position of actors. The last phase in figure 1 focuses on implementing the strategies found for decolonization to create inclusivity, empowerment, and respect. In this thesis, this is expressed as the last general step toward creating inclusivity, sovereignty, and self-determination. Decolonization strategies in peacebuilding should have a goal to benefit and empower the local actors. To do this the decolonization strategies must contribute to getting a more equal power position for the local actors. These steps represent the steps that are needed to formulate decolonization strategies. First identify the colonial impact, second review how to go beyond the colonial impact, and third create inclusivity and empowerment for the ones affected by the colonial impact.

The question that then arises is how works this practically. What are the themes to focus on in these three steps? By looking at indigenous and education fields, the themes described are found to be overarching themes on how to deconstruct colonial ideologies. These themes will later on in this thesis give points of focus in formulating decolonization strategies for the field of peacebuilding.

Acknowledgment

Recognizing the consequences of colonialism on society and culture is the first critical step in decolonization. Acknowledgment creates a sense of responsibility and allows for change. Recognizing that colonialism had an impact on social and cultural structures as well as institutions allows you to critically examine their development and work toward positive decolonization changes. The practical side of acknowledgment can take various forms. In the field of education, acknowledgment can mean educating students about colonial history and the negative consequences it has had on local communities.¹⁸ In indigenous studies, acknowledgment can take the form of institutional responsibility and accountability.

¹⁸ Battiste, M. (2019). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. UBC press.

Recognizing, for example, government officials who work in former indigenous lands can result in responses that support indigenous peoples.¹⁹ The awareness that colonialism is a contemporary influence on societal structures and areas is not always there. This results in the absence of a critical response to view how decolonization is relevant. Acknowledgment is necessary for the acceptance of contemporary colonial impact and opens the discussion for change. Acknowledgment is not only applied to people who come from post-colonial regions or live negative colonial consequences, it is also for the ones in the dominant position to acknowledge that colonialism still negatively influences others and that they can contribute to making a change in different areas.

Diversity and Cultural Restoration

The reinvention of culture is a particularly important topic in indigenous studies. Indigenous culture has been suppressed by colonial power by making American/European cultures dominant. This had ramifications for traditions, psychology, education, and language.²⁰ Colonialism fundamentally altered indigenous communities' way of life. It is then necessary to reinvent culture and traditions during decolonization.²¹ Indigenous studies have identified several strategies for indigenous communities and individuals to reclaim their cultural traditions and create more accepted diversity in society. The strategy to revitalize indigenous languages is one aspect of this.²² During the period of colonialism, indigenous languages were not permitted to be spoken, and the language of the colonizer frequently became the dominant language. Language is an important aspect of culture, and it has a strong connection to the perception of life. As a result, language is an important aspect of reclaiming culture. Although many people are no longer able to speak indigenous languages, there is a renewed interest in learning these languages and connecting with their cultures, particularly among the younger generation.

¹⁹ Cornthassel, J. (2012). Re-envisioning resurgence: Indigenous pathways to decolonization and sustainable self-determination.

²⁰ Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

²¹ Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

²² Braun, K. L., Browne, C. V., Ka 'opua, L. S., Kim, B. J., & Mokuau, N. (2014). Research on indigenous elders: From positivistic to decolonizing methodologies. *The Gerontologist*, 54(1), 117-126.

Agency

As previously stated, colonialism played a significant role in the formation of power dynamics. One step in decolonization is to create more equal power dynamics. So many decolonization approaches in fields focus on how to give more agency to those in lower positions as a result of the colonial impact. There are various strategies for increasing equal agency. The one in a higher power position has more authority in decision-making, as seen primarily in bureaucratic institutions. Collective decision-making is one of the most promising future directions.²³ There have also been several practical strategies developed to create more equality and decision-making in society. It is critical in education to address and teach issues of power and social justice.²⁴ As stated under acknowledgment, many people become aware of their power position and learn why this awareness is important in the sense of justice, which can help to create an attitude that individuals themselves are attempting to equalize their power position with others. Political representation is also a critical strategy to create more collective decision-making.²⁵ (Submissive) minority groups are frequently underrepresented in politics. This means that the dominant groups in society are those in power. As a result, minority groups' interests are not represented in politics, and minority groups perceive that they are not heard. According to indigenous studies, when political representation is created, it helps to advocate for more agency and rights for indigenous communities. By having more political power and representation, indigenous communities' submissive positions can be more equalized. These communities are also seen to have lower economic status in addition to lower social status because they have more difficulty performing in education and labor due to lower chances in the social sphere.²⁶ Political representation can also advocate for more equal opportunities for indigenous people or any other minority group in society.

²³ Zavala, M. (2013). What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America.

²⁴ Iseke-Barnes, J. M. (2008). Pedagogies for decolonizing. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31(1), 123-148.

²⁵ Zavala, M. (2013). What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America.

²⁶ Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Diverse Knowledge

One of the issues addressed by decolonization is the European/American dominant knowledge systems. This refers to the fact that language, research, morals, and values are all based on dominant knowledge systems. This means that global perceptions are Eurocentric.²⁷ It leaves little room for other cultural traditions to share their perspectives and forces them to conform to the Eurocentric knowledge system. It is extensively studied in indigenous studies how to de-center Eurocentric canons of thought. Diversifying research is one of the strategies. Researchers continue to be predominantly white and from European/American countries. The first lesson to be learned from (social) research is that it is never objective and is always influenced by the researcher's background. Because it is dominated by Western (social) research fields, it is heavily influenced by Eurocentric canons. More diversity in academic research is advocated for. This can be accomplished by investing in non-Western universities, focusing on more non-Western researcher input, and developing more diverse research projects.²⁸ It is also problematic that indigenous research is primarily conducted by Western/white researchers and within a Eurocentric canon. This means that indigenous knowledge is viewed through a Eurocentric lens.²⁹ Different perspectives could be created by having indigenous communities researched by indigenous researchers or having indigenous researchers research European culture, making the overall knowledge system more inclusive. In difficult social-critical studies such as decolonization, it is also important to consider not only the perspective of white-dominant researchers but also the perspective of researchers from post-colonial regions, as they have different perspectives on how colonialism is a contemporary construct. This idea can also be seen in decolonization approaches in health care. In a study of decolonization on health care among an indigenous community in Canada was found that health care knowledge became a privilege only for those who earned degrees from colonial institutions after colonization.³⁰ As a result, Elders stopped sharing their

²⁷ Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.

²⁸ Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

²⁹ Braun, K. L., Browne, C. V., Ka'opua, L. S., Kim, B. J., & Mokuau, N. (2014). Research on indigenous elders: From positivistic to decolonizing methodologies. *The Gerontologist*, 54(1), 117-126.

³⁰ Eni, R., Phillips-Beck, W., Achan, G. K., Lavoie, J. G., Kinew, K. A., & Katz, A. (2021). Decolonizing health in Canada: A Manitoba first nation perspective. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(1), 1-12.

knowledge, and medical men and women almost went extinct. The general public was neither asked nor invited to participate in health development activities. Instead, they learned to consult with experts outside of their own cultures and societies. The entire healthcare system became Eurocentric, with little room for alternative perspectives on how to organize the system. It is suggested that indigenous perspectives in healthcare be reviewed to improve more culturally appropriate healthcare and participation in the healthcare system.

Conclusion

To summarize the concept of decolonization refers to the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of Western thought and approaches to superiority and privilege. Decolonization entails tearing down structures that maintain the status quo, questioning dominant discourses, and confronting unbalanced power dynamics. By looking at other fields this chapter analyzed that the process of decolonization begins with the identification of how colonialism intersects in power and knowledge systems, and how colonialism altered cultural and social constructs. This identification follows in finding steps to relearn and reinterpret power and knowledge systems which are important to achieve the end goal of decolonization which is equalization and sovereignty. To make this more practical, this chapter looked at the themes that other fields' decolonization strategies focus on. All of these strategies have something in common, namely to move beyond the dominant Eurocentric global perspective and learn how to incorporate different worldviews on specific topics. Politics, healthcare, education, and social institutions are all examples. In these strategies, decolonization demonstrates that it is about reviewing and relearning how we view the world and organize our societies. By diversifying and inclusively changing our knowledge systems. Individuals feel more culturally connected and equalized as a result of the realization that their ideas and perspectives are as valuable as those from Eurocentric perspectives. The goal is for each individual to contribute to society on an equal footing. This demonstrates that the practicality of the decolonization strategies discussed in this chapter refers back to the theoretical framework's decolonization analytical steps. Identifying the various issues of colonialism in specific areas, followed by relearning and reviewing the knowledge and power systems that these areas are built on to create inclusive, equal, and diverse societal areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first step in the research is to comprehend how peacebuilding functions. How is peacebuilding structured, and whom are the actors involved? From the perspective of peacebuilding, this review will delve deeper into the colonial dynamics at work in peacebuilding and investigate the issue of colonialism in this specific field. In addition, this chapter will delve into what it means in peacebuilding operations to have a faith-based background. Furthermore, how does an organization's faith-based background intersect with the issue of colonialism and power dynamics, and why is it important to consider an organization's religious background in the context of decolonization?

Defining Peacebuilding

So the first question of this chapter is; what is peacebuilding? According to Johan Galtung, peace research is a study of the conditions for moving closer to peace or staying away from violence. He categorizes peace into negative and positive peace. Negative peace is defined as *the absence of violence and war*, whereas positive peace is defined as *the integration of human society*. Positive peace is the category of peace that peacebuilders work towards as a goal. Positive peace is the presence of social justice and equality, and the absence of structural or indirect violence.³¹ Peacebuilders focus on seeking peacebuilders and so work on conflicts and structural issues in societies. Peacebuilding seeks to end nonviolent forms of injustice and conflict by addressing the structural causes of these injustices and conflicts. Peacebuilding investigates the root causes of violence and employs this knowledge to try to reconcile differences between people and groups, as well as to lay the groundwork for future injustices, conflicts, and violence. Peacebuilding is more than just a crisis response; it is a long-term development strategy centered on social, cultural, religious, and political strategies for promoting nonviolence and peace. Peacebuilding is important because it tries to understand the underlying causes of conflicts and then creates changes that resolve the conflicts.³² The importance of peace in society stems from the fact that violence and exclusion affect

³¹ Galtung, J., & Fischer, D. (2013). Positive and negative peace. In *Johan Galtung* (pp. 173-178). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

³² Barnett, M., Kim, H., O'donnell, M., & Sitea, L. (2007). Peacebuilding: What is in a name. *Global governance*, 13, 35.

everyone. It prevents communities from developing. This has implications for education, healthcare, as well as economic and political stability. Poverty tends to intensify violence and other problems, creating a destructive cycle.³³ As a result, peacebuilders strive to create communities and societies that are stable, and inclusive and provide humanitarian living conditions. Peacebuilders work on long-term processes that promote relationship repair and institutional reform. Furthermore, it helps manage the differences between communities. The key to achieving peace is transformation. This entails identifying the root causes and identifying ways to change the contributing structures. The practical goals of peacebuilding have to do with equality and safety; no threat of violence, equal opportunities, and fair and equal access to basic needs. The activities that peacebuilders use to achieve their goals are defined by Laura Heideman into six different categories:

..., or creating contact across social divides; rights protection, through monitoring abuses and providing legal protection; humanitarian aid through the provision of necessities during times of crisis; norm entrepreneurship, or promoting norms congruent with positive peace, such as respect for individual and group rights, nonviolent conflict resolution skills, and democratic values; dealing with the past through documentation of war crimes, promotion and monitoring of transitional justice mechanisms, and creating peace-oriented memorials, and reconstructing communities through activities directed toward community stabilization and revitalization of community spaces after conflict.³⁴

In peacebuilding, there are different actors involved. As already states these actors can be divided into four different groups:

DONORS	GLOBAL NGO'S	LOCAL PARTNERS	LOCAL COMMUNITIES
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Figure 3

There are numerous actors involved in the categorization of these four groups. To better understand their interrelationship, the function and variety of these groups will be explained in greater detail below.

The main actors that operate peacebuilding are the global and local organizations. Global NGOs are organizations that operate on a global level. The local partners are local NGOs and

³³ Sen, A. (2008). Violence, identity and poverty. *Journal of peace research*, 45(1), 5-15.

³⁴ Heideman, L. J. (2013). Pathologies in peacebuilding: Donors, NGOs, and community peacebuilding in Croatia. In *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

also the religious congregations' unions. There are several important differences between both in the operation of peacebuilding. Local organizations are more present on the ground and have more interaction and connections. As a result, local organizations are more deeply embedded in conflict situations. Another significant distinction between the two is the flow of money. Global organizations are frequently larger, have more connections, are more well-known among the general public, and have more money. This money comes from increased capacity to attract funders and success in obtaining government grants. Money is important in determining an organization's power position.³⁵ Local organizations have more difficulty receiving money from other sources than global organizations because they are less likely to receive grants and funders. This is because local organizations have often less capacity and local donations are more difficult as people are regularly poorer. For example, a Dutch NGO can get more local individual donations because more Dutch people have more money available to spend on peacebuilding. This means that local organizations are frequently reliant on collaboration with global organizations for funding. Important to state here is that the local organization does indeed have an important function in peacebuilding. Local organizations have more local connections and have a deeper understanding of the complexity of the context of conflicts and issues. They are the important link between global peacebuilding organizations and local communities.³⁶

Peacebuilding organizations rely on donor funds to cover their operating costs. Donor funds can come from a variety of sources. Bilateral and multilateral donors are frequently the primary large donors. Bilateral donors are government funds, whereas multilateral donors are international institutions' money.³⁷ Furthermore, individual donors support many non-governmental organizations. Donors wield great authority in the peacebuilding system. Donors hold power in the selection of peacebuilding projects because projects are reliant on funding.³⁸ The donor money as already stated is mostly directed to global NGO organizations.

³⁵ Björkdahl, A., & Höglund, K. (2013). Precarious peacebuilding: Friction in global–local encounters. *Peacebuilding*, 1(3), 289-299.

³⁶ Leonardsson, H., & Rudd, G. (2015). The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: a literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding. *Third world quarterly*, 36(5), 825-839.

³⁷ Biscaye, P. E., Reynolds, T. W., & Anderson, C. L. (2017). Relative effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral aid on development outcomes. *Review of Development Economics*, 21(4), 1425-1447.

³⁸ Richmond, O. P. (2007). Emancipatory forms of human security and liberal peacebuilding. *International Journal*, 62(3), 459-478.

Global NGO organizations choose a focus and create programs, in which they connect with local organizations or religious congregations, to operate together. The last actor and probably the most important actor for peacebuilding are the local communities. Peacebuilding is meant to create positive peace and better living conditions for this actor. The local individuals and communities of the ones affected by violence and conflicts.³⁹

NGO organizations can operate in a variety of ways. These workways are classified as top-down or bottom-up approaches. These approaches are important for peacebuilding because they describe how various peacebuilding actors operate, as well as the division of agency. A bottom-up approach is a learning approach that focuses on local knowledge and input. It aids in the identification of local problems and the development of local initiative methods to address these issues. This approach can be operationalized with a variety of indicators;

(a) awareness building efforts of NGOs; (b) people's participation in projects and (c) NGOs' efforts in creating people's institutions⁴⁰

NGO's that work bottom-up are also referred to as grassroots organizations. A grassroots organization exercises political or economic influence, building on the perspectives and approaches of people in a specific district, region, or community. Grassroots movements and organizations use collective action to effect change at the local, regional, national, and international levels. A bottom-up approach to peacebuilding starts with building relationships with local community actors. In contrast, a top-down approach operates in an institutionalized form. Where a bottom-up approach relies more on local knowledge, a top-down approach tends to focus more on the knowledge and recourses of diplomats, global peacekeepers, and other foreign intervenors. Such, international actors tend to have more influence on decision-making processes than local actors.⁴¹ However, no grassroots NGO can function solely as a bottom-up organization because assistance/direction from local governments is unavoidable at times. Bottom-up strategies are preferred because they are more likely to succeed due to factors such as increased local participation, generating more

³⁹ Barnett, M., Kim, H., O'donnell, M., & Sitea, L. (2007). Peacebuilding: What is in a name. *Global governance*, 13, 35.

⁴⁰ Panda, B. (2007). Top Down or Bottom Up? A Study of Grassroots NGOs' Approach. *Journal of Health Management*, 9(2), 257-273.

⁴¹ Mac Ginty, R., & Firchow, P. (2016). Top-down and bottom-up narratives of peace and conflict. *Politics*, 36(3), 308-323.

insights from local knowledge, and empowering local actors. Local communities in conflict zones understand the situation far better than foreign actors.

The Issue of Colonialism

Now with an understanding of the content of peacebuilding, what is the issue of colonialism in peacebuilding? Peacebuilding organizations work from morality to make positive changes for people. Here it is important to take into account the ethics of humanitarian intervention. The main question is what the relationship is with colonialism. It is no coincidence that most peacebuilding operations take place in post-colonial settings. Colonialism has a significant impact on the development of contemporary conflicts.⁴² Important to understand is that colonialism influenced the development of peacebuilding.⁴³ Colonialism has influenced the power dynamics of the different actors in peacebuilding. Global actors are associated with a higher power position than local actors, these differences in power dynamics are highly influenced by colonial history. In peacebuilding a division can be seen between the Global North and the Global South. The North is more associated with economic development and industrialization, whereas the South represents previously colonized countries in need of assistance in the form of international aid agendas. Local actors and communities are frequently based in the Global South, while global peacebuilder actors and donors are frequently based in the Global North. The Global North has a higher status than the Global South because decision-making authority is concentrated in the Global North's actors. Now the important question is what is the issue of these asymmetrical power dynamics between Global North and South, and the different actors involved in peacebuilding? Furthermore, how is colonialism relevant to this question? The problem with asymmetrical power dynamics is that it maintains a binary opposition between the civilized North and the underdeveloped South.

Decision-making authority is more concentrated in the Global North, the Global North's standards are used more frequently. In peacebuilding structures, knowledge systems, international language, and global ethics are used. The problem is that important cultural and

⁴² Jabri, V. (2016). Post-colonialism: A post-colonial perspective on peacebuilding. In *The Palgrave handbook of disciplinary and regional approaches to peace* (pp. 154-167). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

⁴³ McEwan, C. (2018). *Postcolonialism, decoloniality and development*. Routledge.

social differences may be overlooked in peacebuilding. Sensitivity to local knowledge and diversity is critical for the success of peacebuilding, as evidenced by concrete examples from various studies. The Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) is a case in point.⁴⁴ Grüll and Wilson demonstrate that the language around FoRB is not universal. What is understood as freedom of religion and belief in one cultural context may be understood very differently in another. Furthermore, religion, rights, and FoRB are not fixed concepts. These concepts, as well as the values and practices they imply, are constantly interpreted, reinterpreted, and adapted to specific times and places. This is not to say that the overall goal of acceptance and equality should be overlooked. However, finding ways to incorporate this rich diversity of languages, cultures, histories, and practices relevant to specific contexts in research and policy on FoRB, but also on human rights more broadly, is critical to achieving this goal. The focus and knowledge of local communities are critical in defining the context. Analyzing human rights or other peacebuilding ethics on a global scale, with more authoritative decision-making in the Global North, may result in language and methods that are insensitive to cultural and political differences. The issue of this insensitivity is that it results in less effective peacebuilding strategies due to the lack of local focus and differences.

In peacebuilding, there is argued that the issue of the white savior complex is to be found in peacebuilding constructions. White savior means white communities who believe it is their responsibility to support and uplift communities of color because of the thought that people of color lack the necessary resources, willpower, and intelligence. As a result, whether they realize it or not, white saviors consider themselves superior. In the case of peacebuilding, it results in the superiority of people from the Global North who wants to save the ‘uncivilized’ of the Global South. This idea is that people from the Global South cannot build themselves and need full support from the Global North.⁴⁵ This binary opposition and power position of both that is kept continues the unbalanced relationship between European and American NGOs versus their local partners. People in the Global South are frequently portrayed as helpless and without agency in order to generate sympathy toward donors, which is a concrete example of how the white savior complex is evident in peacebuilding. Rather the focus should

⁴⁴ Grüll, C., & Wilson, E. K. (2018). Universal or Particular... or Both? The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Cross-Cultural Perspective. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 16(4), 88-101.

⁴⁵ Willuweit, F. (2020). De-constructing the ‘white saviour syndrome’: A manifestation of neo-imperialism. *E-International Relations*.

be on peacebuilding on the empowerment of local communities and giving them an equal support system to build themselves.

As already argued, money plays a very important role when it comes to power positions. Peacebuilding organizations are financed by donors. As peacebuilding is dependent on money to finance its aid programs, funders frequently have a pleasing role in peacebuilding organizations. This sometimes leads to that the interest of NGOs is not on the needs of peacebuilding but rather in satisfying the funders of their programs.⁴⁶ As Atalia Omer has argued the importance of these ethics is that the interests of local people and communities are the priority. However, peacebuilding works frequently in a bureaucratic system. This means that not only the interests of local people are significant in peacebuilding, but also the interests of other actors. By having a focus on how to please donors, the needs of local communities vanish. This is a complex issue as peacebuilding is dependent on fundraising. Ways in which the donor sector can be pleased are, for example, the sympathy publicity in fundraising (as just described) or the avoidance of political-sensitive discussions (like abortion, LGTBQ+).

What is critical to understand about the relationship between power dynamics and colonialism in peacebuilding is that colonial history has a large influence on contemporary peacebuilding structures and relationships between peacebuilding actors. This creates a binary opposition between the Global North and the Global South. On the one hand, donors and global NGOs, and on the other, local actors and communities. This demonstrates the existence of a binary opposition among peacebuilding actors. The problem is that grassroots movements, bottom-up approaches, local contextualization, and local empowerment are critical strategies for successful peacebuilding. To implement these strategies, it is necessary to critically examine the binary opposition between actors and concentrate on the establishment of an equal relationship. The focus of peacebuilding should be on local communities, as it is the improvement of this actor that is the goal of peacebuilding.⁴⁷ The focus of local communities and their improvement in inclusivity and empowerment is the focus of decolonization in peacebuilding.

⁴⁶ Duckworth, C. L. (2016). Is peacebuilding donor-driven? Inside the dynamics and impacts of funding peace. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 11(1), 5-9.

⁴⁷ Omer, A. (2020). Decolonizing religion and the practice of peace: Two case studies from the postcolonial world. *Critical research on religion*, 8(3), 273-296.

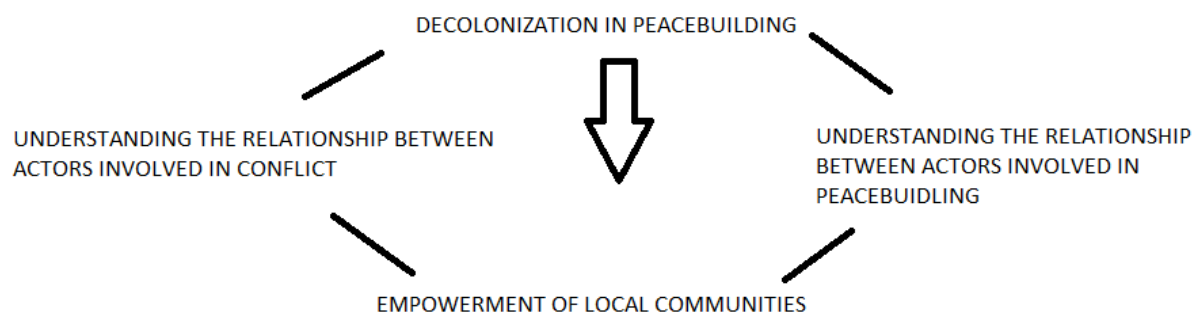


Figure 4

As illustrated in figure 4, decolonization can help to empower local communities in two ways. First, understanding colonization and its consequences in contemporary conflicts is important for peacebuilders. Considering the colonial dynamic in conflict will help you understand why conflicts exist. Second, it is critical to consider the colonial consequences of peacebuilding development. As local communities are an actor in peacebuilding, how are colonial dynamics intertwined in the relationship with other actors? By having the understanding of both, the colonial impact on peacebuilding becomes visible and shows the elements on which decolonization strategies can focus to make changes that will lead to the empowerment of local communities. This will provide insights into how the structure of peacebuilding itself can empower local communities.

The dimension of Faith-based in NGOs

This thesis is particularly focused on religious peacebuilding because the MM case is a faith-based NGO. The role of religion in peacebuilding implies that organizations work from a specific religious perspective that has an impact on the organization's moral-political climate. Faith-based organizations are led by a religious group or are inspired by religious beliefs. Religion or faith is central to their approach. This extra dimension of faith-based organizations is important to analyze within the dynamics of colonization in this research as religion and religious beliefs are intersected in colonial dynamics.⁴⁸

Regarding the importance of context, by taking a religious approach, faith-based organizations place themselves in power relations with local organizations from a religious

⁴⁸ Clarke, M., & Ware, V. A. (2015). Understanding faith-based organizations: How FBOs are contrasted with NGOs in international development literature. *Progress in Development Studies*, 15(1), 37-48.

power perspective.⁴⁹ As in the second chapter, the case study with Mensen met een Missie is presented, the relevance of religious background in power positions will be demonstrated by the example of a missionary/Catholic background, and how this background is interesting for the issue of colonialism. Missionaries can be defined as people or communities who promote their religion or faith or provide a service in a certain area. Missionaries have historically been associated with European colonialism.⁵⁰ By going to European colonized regions, a worldview was promoted that brought a certain moral authority. Missionary activity is therefore unavoidably implicated in either covert or explicit cultural change. The association was made with the Christian belief to be equal to modernity and civility. As a result, missionaries frequently promoted Christian philosophies to indigenous communities while disregarding indigenous cultural and social dynamics. Missionaries were a crucial part of imperial expansion, with Christianization being a crucial part of colonizing and civilizing projects, primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries. The missionary philosophy contains elements of the white savior complex. The crucial issue is the belief that Christianization was required to save and civilize indigenous communities in European-colonized areas. However, this does not imply that missionary work is inherently bad; missionaries have been known to provide good services such as health care, education, and shelter to those in need. In order to find out how this dynamic and historical context affects MM's position, empirical evidence data must be examined in the second chapter. The critical issue is that organizations understand how such a historical context influences power dynamics. To conclude, for faith-based NGOs, identification entails critically examining the role of religion in their peacebuilding approach, and a religious background places them in power dynamics with the local context.

Conclusion

The main question in this review was how peacebuilding works and how the issue of colonialism is relevant and visible in the process. This review has demonstrated the goal of peacebuilding as well as the interdependence of various actors. The issue of colonialism can be summarized as the power dynamics in the colonial period that influenced the development of peacebuilding as well as the conflicts they work on. The goal of peacebuilding is to support

⁴⁹ Wilkinson, O. J., & Kraft, K. (2020). 1 Identifying the encounters between local faith communities and international development actors. *International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters*, 1-14.

⁵⁰ Andrews, E. E. (2009). Christian missions and colonial empires reconsidered: A Black evangelist in West Africa, 1766–1816. *Journal of Church and State*, 51(4), 663-691.

local communities, but the agency for this actor is frequently lacking. As shown in figure 4, decolonization in peacebuilding is about regaining agency and empowering local actors. This can be accomplished by first understanding the role of colonialism in conflicts and then understanding the role of actors in peacebuilding.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explain the research methodology used to conduct this study on decolonization in peacebuilding. The methodology will be divided into two parts. First, a literature study is conducted, followed by interviews. Both are clearly outlined below. The research questions were already briefly explained in the introduction.

Literature Study

The literature review in this thesis will focus on a variety of topics. It will provide an analysis of peacebuilding and decolonization. A literature review will provide information on the historical context of colonialism in Iraq in the first chapter. This chapter examines forms of neo-colonialism and foreign influences in Iraq, as well as the relationship with colonialism, through literature. This historical context chapter will review the relevance of decolonization in peacebuilding in Iraq in this specific case study, based on a literature study. In the third chapter, a literature review is conducted on decolonization in other fields, primarily indigenous studies and education, because these studies have conducted research on how to practically incorporate decolonization. This third chapter's literature review will primarily serve to gain an understanding of how decolonization strategies can be formulated practically, as well as what elements are required to build a decolonization strategy in a field.

Data Collection

In this thesis qualitative research methods are used.⁵¹ This study will use interviews to collect data to answer the research questions. The use of interviews in this thesis is intended to improve the understanding of power dynamics in peacebuilding. The power dynamics between different actors in peacebuilding are an important aspect of decolonization. The interviews' goal is to gain a better understanding of how these actors interact with one another and to gain more insight into the power structures that exist between donors, MM, local Iraqi NGOs, and local communities. Furthermore, an understanding of their operation of bottom/up and top/down approaches will reveal power and agency dynamics. There will be three interviews. One group interview with different people from MM that are involved in the Iraq program. This group interview includes the program director for Iraq and two MM employees

⁵¹ Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). *Qualitative research methods*. Sage.

who are Iraqi natives. The other two interviews will be with people from local NGOs that MM operates within Iraq.

Interview 1: Group Interview MM

In this group interview, three people were involved. The program director of Iraq has a Dutch background and is working on managing the overall program. The second person has an Iraqi background and has been involved in setting up the Iraq program, this person is involved in giving feedback on the Iraqi context. The last person had also an Iraqi background and could give commentary on the Iraqi context. All people work at MM in The Hague.

Interview 2: Interview Local Iraq Actor MM

This local actor is a project manager in Iraq in an organization that works together with MM. These projects are focused on gender issues and problems between religious/ethnic groups. This person gave feedback to MM on how projects were going and how MM could contribute to these projects. This person had an Iraqi background and was still living in Iraq. He also has an academic background as he is a Ph.D. student and a university lecturer next to his job at the local peacebuilding organization.

Interview 3: Interview Local Iraq Actor MM

This local actor was a religious actor, as he is a monk and is located at a monastery in Iraq. This monastery works together with MM on different projects. These projects focus on dialogue, reflection, and harmony building, Examples of these projects are language courses in English, Arabic, and Kurdish, a library, and interreligious dialogue. This actor had a European background but has been working for many years now in Iraq at the monastery. The monastery worked together with different global NGOs such as MM.

The interviews were designed to gather information about how the various actors in peacebuilding operate in this case study. So, what is the relationship with global and local organizations, and how is the agency divided in its cooperation with these actors? Furthermore, how are donors involved in the Iraq program, and what impact do they have on the program? It is critical to gain a better understanding of the various actors' interests. This will be accomplished by asking questions about how programs and projects are organized and what role different actors play in this context. The data of these interviews will mainly be discussed in the second chapter, which goes deeper into the Iraq program of MM and its operation with local organizations and communities.

CHAPTER 1

This first chapter introduces the case study of Iraq by examining its history and the role of colonialism in Iraq. This chapter will describe the major events associated with colonialism in Iraqi history, as well as the issues associated with colonialism in terms of how colonialism has influenced other cultural and societal structures. With an understanding of the issue of colonialism in peacebuilding, this chapter will specifically look at the issue of colonialism in Iraqi history to further analyze how colonialism is still a contemporary issue in Iraq's conflicts and issues.

The Colonial History of Iraq

This literature review seeks to investigate Iraq's historical context through colonial dynamics. This review focuses on the period of European colonialism in Iraq. However, to understand the country historically, a brief historical introduction is required.⁵² Mesopotamia was the ancient name for modern Iraq. Mesopotamia referred to the land between the rivers, as the region had many alluvial plains. Mesopotamia is well known for being the birthplace of the first civilizations due to its fertile land. This also laid the groundwork for being an important part of large imperial empires like the Persian and Roman dynasties. Mesopotamia became a central and integral part of the Islamic world in the 7th century. Baghdad was built during the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). The city quickly grew into a thriving center of culture and knowledge, serving as an important center during the Islamic golden age. The Mongol invasion was known as the Siege of Bagdad in 1258. This invasion was devastating, as many people were killed and mosques, shrines, and the great library were destroyed. This marks the beginning of a new period of hunger, plague, and misery. Timur the Conqueror (1336-1405), made matters worse by being known for his brutality. During his reign, he killed many Christians and nearly destroyed the Assyrian church in the East. Iraq became a battleground between Persian kings and Ottoman Turks after that. The Ottomans gained control of Iraq through the Treaty of Zuham in 1639. However, given the atrocities of the previous centuries, there wasn't much to rule over. Fortunately, trade resumed, and many Arabians migrated to the area, causing Iraq to rebuild under the Ottoman empire.

⁵² Tripp, C. (2002). *A history of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press.

Iraq as British Mandate

Iraq became involved in World War I when the Ottoman Empire chose to side with Germany.

⁵³As the allies won the war, it meant the end of Ottoman rule over the territory of modern Iraq. The British decided to invade the country in 1915, and a year later defeated the Turkish army in the Siege of Kut. In 1917, the British army also conquered Baghdad. The Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul formed the state of Iraq.

Following World War I, the Ottoman Empire was divided, and the League of Nations established the British Mandate in modern Iraq. A mandate gave the British the authority to act as the country's representative in Iraq. Because Iraq was part of the League of Nations mandate, the British had control and power over the territory. The concept behind the League of Nations mandate was as follows;

‘The territories which after the war were no longer ruled by their previous sovereign, but their peoples were not considered "able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world". The article called for such people's tutelage to be "entrusted to advanced nations who because of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility" ⁵⁴

This statement implies that the Ottoman empire's Middle Eastern territories were not modern and needed to be saved by European societies to survive in the modern world. This implies that the British did something good and moral by seizing control of modern Iraq.

By declaring Iraq a monarchy, the British established a new government.⁵⁵ Faisal ibn Husayn was selected to be Iraq's first king. On the one hand, the British needed Faisal to be accepted and supported by the majority to avoid internal agitation and rebellion. Faisal possessed the necessary national and Islamic credentials to be accepted by the vast majority of Iraqi society. Because his family descended from the Prophet Muhammad, his ancestors had political authority over the holy cities. This would most likely meet Arab political legitimacy standards. Furthermore, because of his role in the Arab revolt against the Turks in 1916, nationalists were likely to accept and support Faisal. On the other hand, the British needed the main leader to be vulnerable enough to remain reliant on the British and their support.

⁵³ Dodge, T. (2006). The British Mandate in Iraq, 1920-1932. *The Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914-1974*.

⁵⁴ Müller-Sommerfeld, H. (2016). The league of nations, a-Mandates and minority rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932). In *Modernity, minority, and the public sphere* (pp. 258-283). Brill.

⁵⁵ Marr, P., & Al-Marashi, I. (2018). *The modern history of Iraq*. Routledge.

The mandate eventually lasted less time than anticipated. Iraq was recognized as a sovereign state by the League of Nations in 1932. The British mandate continues to frustrate Iraq's Arab independence movement. Shia and Sunni Muslims both protested, and Kurds in the north demanded their own country. During WWII, Rashid Gaylani was helped by Germany and Italy to seize power in a coup d'etat in 1941. Afterward, the Anglo-Iraqi war broke out. The campaign resulted in the overthrow of Gaylani's government, the British reoccupation of Iraq, and the return to power of Prince Abd al-Ilah, a British ally, as Regent of Iraq.

Iraq is not frequently seen as a classic example of British colonialism, as India or Australia are. However, Iraq is an example of a post-colonial region resulting from British colonialism, although Iraq was described as a Mandate. Colonialism refers to the practice of gaining control of regions, societies, and people. The British had a vested interest in Iraq becoming a sovereign state so quickly. The United Kingdom agreed to keep military bases in Iraq. One of the issues stemming from the British mandate that has contributed to current tensions is the British policy decision to build Iraq out of various pieces of territory. Before the British mandate, no sharp division existed between religious and ethnic groupings. However, Iraq was undoubtedly one nation under British control, and there was a certain ignorance about the Middle East's historical, theological, and ethnic dynamics at the time of its inception. This means that certain groups felt powerless in the country, and there was no sense of national identity. As a result, this might be considered a starting point for the country's community division.

Independent kingdom and Republic of Iraq

The period following the British mandate is complicated by political insecurity. Following independence, Iraq became a kingdom.⁵⁶ Western influence persisted in Iraq during the monarchy's reign. Nationalists continued to rail against Western influence. These events culminated in the 14th of July revolution in 1958. This revolution's goal was to reduce foreign influences. The monarchy was overthrown by the revolution. The socialist nationalist Ba'ath party established the new regime during the Ramadan revolution in 1963, making the country a republic. Iraq began to flourish again under the leadership of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr (1968-1979), as oil sales became quite profitable and raised living standard, Bakr resigned as president of Iraq in 1979, and Saddam Hussein took his place. He had previously held a leading position and was responsible for much of the country's modernization. Hussein, on the

⁵⁶ Marr, P., & Al-Marashi, I. (2018). *The modern history of Iraq*. Routledge.

other hand, acted quickly to have his opponents executed, a process known as the Ba'ath party purge. The Iranian revolution occurred in the same year, 1979. Iraq and Iran were already at odds, but the fact that they were both majority Shia Muslims helped them connect. Hussein felt threatened by the neighboring country's revolution, and he was afraid of revolutionary sentiments that could undermine his position if Iraq saw an example of a revolution in Iran. This resulted in the Iraqi invasion of Iran, known as the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The war ended with nothing but many deaths, making Iraq one of the least popular countries in the world. Particularly after being accused of using chemical weapons on civilians, primarily ethnic minorities such as Kurds. Iraq was deeply in debt as a result of the war with Iran, and it was unable to repay the oil-rich state of Kuwait. Kuwait was hesitant to give in to the Iraqis' request for economic debt relief. Tensions rose when Iraq accused Kuwait of stealing its oil, prompting an invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and a swift takeover of the country. The international community was outraged by Hussein's invasion, and he refused to withdraw from Kuwait. The Americans led a coalition of forces opposing the Gulf War (1990-1991). Iraqi troops were expelled from Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm. Following the defeat of the Gulf War, Iraq was even more dissatisfied when the United Nations announced sanctions against Iraq's oil exports. The United Nations' goal was for Iraq to disarm and close down its weapons facilities. Iraq complained that its national sovereignty was not recognized, which exacerbated tensions. The United Nations established an oil-for-food program in 1995, under which Iraq could sell its oil in exchange for humanitarian aid.⁵⁷ America invaded Iraq in 2003 because the US believed Hussein was secretly stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. As the Americans took over Bagdad, the British took over Bashra. Saddam Hussein was captured in December 2003 and executed by an Iraqi court later that month.

Period of the Islamic State

Later, America was heavily criticized for its invasion of Iraq.⁵⁸ Iraq, it was later discovered, lacked weapons of mass destruction. As anti-American militias grew, the political situation in Iraq became unstable once more. In 2011, Syria devolved into civil war, with the terrorist organization Islamic State (IS) playing a significant role. IS has also invaded Iraqi territory and is responsible for genocidal massacres, primarily against Shia Muslims, Christians, and Yazidis. IS began to decline in Iraq in 2015, thanks to the efforts of the Iraqi military, Kurdish

⁵⁷ Tripp, C. (2002). *A history of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁸ Gerges, F. A. (2014). ISIS and the Third Wave of Jihadism. *Current History*, 113(767), 339-343.

fighters, and US airstrikes. Today, Iraq's political situation is gradually improving, and the country is attempting to rebuild itself after years of war and devastation.

During the 2003 US invasion, the Americans assisted in the empowerment of Shia Muslims in the country at the expense of Sunnis.⁵⁹ One of the issues here is that the US equated the entire Sunni community with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein by viewing them as a homogeneous group.⁶⁰ This played a significant role in deepening the existing tensions between both groups. For example, Shias utilized their police force to unlawfully imprison Sunni protestors who demanded greater representation in government in 2013.

With the American marginalization of Sunni communities, the message of IS became appealing to some Sunni believers.⁶¹ So, IS had an audience for its extremist Sunni message as long as the Shias rule the government. This is a significant aspect of how the group gained support in Iraq's heavily populated areas. On the other hand, when IS (a Sunni movement) attacked Iraq, it heightened Sunni mistrust in the country. This resulted in horrific events for ordinary Sunni Muslims who had nothing to do with IS. However, because Sunni Muslims were perceived as a homogeneous group, many of them were displaced and attacked by members of other communities. This is a potentially dangerous trend. Sunnis faced becoming a dispossessed and resentful underclass in the country they once had the political authority, creating fertile ground for a re-enactment of the cycle of marginalization and radicalization that gave rise to the IS in the first place. Minorities such as the Yazidis, Shabak, and Christians were also disproportionately affected by IS.

Neo-colonialism and the Secret Role of Oil

One of the most serious errors was that the United States and its allies had no backup plan for Iraq's future. The Americans intended to invade the country quickly, depose Saddam Hussein, install a democratic government, and then leave as soon as possible. This failed almost immediately due to the administration's resuscitation. Anyone associated with Hussein or the Baath party was fired immediately, despite critical advice. This caused great chaos in the country by removing an entire population's upper crust, as well as their knowledge. During

⁵⁹ Marr, P., & Al-Marashi, I. (2018). *The modern history of Iraq*. Routledge.

⁶⁰ Mervin, S., Brunner, R., Legrain, J. F., Alagha, J., Visser, R., Pierret, T., ... & De Smet, B. (2013). *The dynamics of Sunni-Shia relationships: doctrine, transnationalism, intellectuals and the media*. Hurst Publishers.

⁶¹ Marr, P., & Al-Marashi, I. (2018). *The modern history of Iraq*. Routledge.

Hussein's reign, it was impossible to make a career without being a member of a political party. This included non-political jobs that had no involvement in Hussein's administration. Without a plan for a new organization in the country, the Americans created a lot of chaos, resulting in more power struggles.⁶² Another failure during the American invasion was the ideological decision to fire all military personnel. These soldiers found themselves without pay. The danger is that they were aware of the hidden weapon's stock and how to obtain it. The discontent of the unemployed soldiers sparked an armed insurgency.

Academics argue that colonial influence continued after the British mandate period, citing Iraq as an example of neo-colonialism. In the case of Iraq, neocolonialism is primarily the result of American power. To comprehend the dynamics of neocolonialism in Iraq, it is necessary to first define neocolonialism. Neocolonialism can be defined as the continuation or reimposition of imperialist rule by one state over another nominally independent state. Economic and political policies are used by a great power to maintain or extend its influence over other areas or people. The main difference between colonialism and neocolonialism is that colonialism involves direct political control and dependence on a region, whereas neocolonialism involves more indirect control and power, which does not jeopardize a country's independence.⁶³

Because no weapons of mass destruction were found, the US-led invasion can be argued to be an example of neo-colonialism. The reasons for the invasion seemed to be not well-grounded enough.⁶⁴ Another argument was that America has benefits in having control in Iraq, one of the reasons why the British had an interest in Iraq. Suggested is that the Americans wanted to get control of Iraqi oil. Before the invasion in 2003, Iraqi oil was completely nationalized and closed to Western oil companies. More than 10 years after the invasion the oil sector in Iraq is almost completely privatized and owned by foreign companies. The Bush administration always denied that oil control played a motive in the Iraq invasion. However, the fact that oil companies were the primary beneficiaries in Iraq

⁶² O'Hanlon, M. E. (2004). Iraq without a Plan. *Policy review*, (128), 33.

⁶³ Welch, M. (2008). Ordering Iraq: Reflections on power, discourse, & neocolonialism. *Critical Criminology*, 16(4), 257-269.

⁶⁴ Welch, M. (2008). Ordering Iraq: Reflections on power, discourse, & neocolonialism. *Critical Criminology*, 16(4), 257-269.

is significant. Even now, America imports a significant amount of oil from Iraq, and most of the oil companies are still in foreign hands.

The role of oil can be seen throughout the history of conflicts and issues in Iraq. It started during the British mandate with the establishment of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), which was under British control. With the country's development and a lack of national identity, there were extensive fights between communities to gain a sense of power and control. The oil fields in Iraq meant money and power, but they also meant a lot of fighting. Iraqis refer to the oil fields as a curse because the fight for oil, power, and control never seems to end. Everyone is circling it and most of the decisions and policies are influenced by the role of oil. Not only in the country but also foreign influences keep playing a role. The British and the Americans want to influence the policies so they can have access to the oil. Also, other European countries like the Netherlands and Germany play a role in policy-making in the country through oil companies.

Dutch Contributions

The focus of this thesis is on a Dutch NGO and its relationship with Iraq. As a result, it is critical to consider the Dutch role in Iraq. When it came to the Iraq war, the Netherlands was one of the few countries that backed the US-led invasion.^{65 66} According to former Dutch prime minister Balkenende, the reasons for supporting this invasion were Saddam Hussein's refusal to obey UN Security Council decisions. Because of the secrecy surrounding the support, this has been a contentious topic in Dutch politics for a long time. This debate was sparked by the discovery that the media received a communication from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Direction for Legal Affairs of April 2003, stating that the invasion was illegal under international law and carried out without formal authority. Because of this announcement, the prime minister had to form a commission to research the international legal mandate of the invasion and the Dutch role in it. This commission concluded that there was no evidence that the Dutch had given military support to the American invasion. Further conclusions were that the prime minister left the decisions on support to the Minister of foreign affairs, the Dutch government aligned itself with the Americans and British position

⁶⁵ Brocades Zaalberg, T., & ten Cate, A. (2012). A gentle occupation: unravelling the Dutch approach in Iraq, 2003–2005. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23(1), 117-143.

⁶⁶ Pijpers, A. (2009). The Truth about the Dutch Involvement in the Iraq War: the Report of the Commission Davids. *The Netherlands Yearbook on international Cooperation*, 49-56.

already before the invasion, and that the support was based on Atlantic solidarity with the Americans and British. Furthermore, one of the most important conclusions of this commission was that the commission supports the statement that the invasion was not legalized by the Security Council resolution. This means that the Dutch were complicit in an illegal invasion. Still supporting this decision implies that the Dutch contributed to the Iraqi war in some ways. This is significant in the analysis of Dutch-Iraqi relations because the Dutch position in Iraqi affairs is likely to influence these relationships. Because the invasion was found to be illegal, the Dutch backed the Americans instead of investigating the reasons for the war. It is therefore likely that the invasion resulted in a dislike or hatred of Americans for the war, and it is also likely that this same attitude developed towards Dutch individuals and institutions as a result of cooperation.

Religious and Ethnic relations in the Contemporary Conflicts

Minority exclusion is one of the biggest problems today in Iraq. Minority ethnic and/or religious groups, including Christian communities, in Iraq, face various challenges. Iraq is a diverse country with numerous ethnic groups. Iraq's population is estimated to be around 33 million people, with several ethnic and religious minorities. Muslims constitute approximately 97 percent of the population.⁶⁷ Shia Muslims account for 55 to 60% of the population. Sunni Muslims account for roughly 40% of the population. Furthermore, there is an ethnic Kurdish minority that is also predominantly Sunni? Finally, Ethnic Shabaks, Turkmens, Faili Kurds, Palestinians, Roma, Christians, Sabian-Mandaeans, Yezidis, and Baha'is make up about 10% of the population, with the majority being Shi'a and Sunni believers. Religious and ethnic identities often overlap or even coincide in Iraq. Assyrian Christians, for example, are both an ethnic and religious identity. So, understanding ethnic identity is critical: while both Sunni Kurds and Sunni Arabs are Sunni Muslims, they have completely different positions and histories, which resulted in different traditions for both communities.⁶⁸ The reason why the tensions between different religious and ethnic groups in Iraq are so big has a lot to do with the colonial history thus described in this chapter. The British colonization caused the formation of Iraq's borders without any input from the cultural and religious groups already living on the land. This also meant that national identity was difficult to create because groups were forced to be a country together without having a lot to say in the country. During the

⁶⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>

⁶⁸ Abdel-Razek, O., & Puttick, M. (2016). Majorities and minorities in post-ISIS Iraq. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 9(4), 565-576.

time of Hussein, Sunni Arabic Muslims had a lot of high positions in society, as it was the group where Hussein belonged to. Therefore minorities had many difficulties during the Hussein regime. When America invaded the country Sunni Muslims were partly blamed for the Hussein regime by the local minorities and America. This meant that the group of Sunni Muslims got a way harder position in society, one of the reasons why IS became so popular.

Today one of the most serious issues confronting minorities in Iraq is the lack of political representation in the country's political system.⁶⁹ In Iraq, the government does not provide political representation for the interests or concerns of minorities. Furthermore, it fails to recognize or defend indigenous or ethnic minorities. Rather, the government treats them as religious minorities. As a result, some communities have been forced to identify as part of larger minority groups. Faili Kurds and Shabaks, for example, are forced to identify with a larger Kurdish majority from which they believe they are distinct. Iraq does not consider Baha'i as a religion and so this group is unable to have religious freedom. Minorities continue to face perilous human rights conditions at all levels: political, civic, and cultural. Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities, as well as other vulnerable people, continue to face violence, religious discrimination, marginalization, and denial of property rights. The consequences for Iraq's social cohesion, national unity, and ability to overcome sectarianism are far-reaching. Even though some communities' overall circumstances have improved, Iraqi nationals' religious, linguistic, and cultural identities are still under threat. By having little political representation, advocating for the situation of minority groups is difficult.

Women are another group that faces great difficulties in Iraqi society. There are a variety of gender issues like gender-based violence, lack of female leadership, femicide, female genital mutilation, and early marriages.⁷⁰ The gender issues are mostly related to patriarchal power dynamics. Fundamentalist religious leaders have added violence or hatred against women in their lectures, causing gender-based violence to rise. Another issue in the Iraqi case is the paucity of women in leadership positions. Women are frequently not taught to advocate for themselves.⁷¹ Women are also prevented from working owing to family shame. This can also

⁶⁹ Marr, P., & Al-Marashi, I. (2018). *The modern history of Iraq*. Routledge.

⁷⁰ Lee-Koo, K. (2011). Gender-Based Violence Against Civilian Women in Postinvasion Iraq: (Re) Politicizing George W. Bush's Silent Legacy. *Violence Against Women*, 17(12), 1619-1634.

⁷¹ Interview 3

be evident in the lack of female religious leaders and leadership. During the war with IS, many crimes against women and girls, especially from ethnic minorities, were committed by this group. MM and local partners try to improve the living conditions and power positions of women, for example by educating men and women on gender rights and the creation of women groups. It has been suggested by scholars that the US-led invasion had an influence on the increase of gender issues and conservatism on women's position.⁷² ⁷³This increase in gender issues has been linked to an increase in religious conservatism, hatred, and poverty.

Conclusion

From a historical standpoint, this chapter looked at colonial dynamics. This is crucial to comprehending how colonialism influenced the current conflicts on the one hand. The historical features of how colonialism may have impacted the power dimensions are critical to consider in the investigation. This chapter focused on European colonization in this historical examination of colonialism. The colonialization of the British and afterward the invasion of the United States are discussed from a (neo)colonial perspective. This analysis examines two critical aspects of this thesis. To begin, it examines how colonialism contributed to current conflicts, such as ethnic/religious group conflicts. Second, it examines how a certain attitude may have developed among Iraqis toward Western/American/European organizations and individuals, which may have an impact on Dutch-Iraqi relations. This historical analysis contributes to the figure's two main aspects of decolonization in peacebuilding. It reveals aspects of the relationship between colonialism and conflict on the one hand, and the relationship between global actors and local actors on the other.

⁷² Ali, Z. (2018). *Women and gender in Iraq: Between nation-building and fragmentation* (Vol. 51). Cambridge University Press.

⁷³ Interview 2

CHAPTER 2

This chapter delves into Mensen met een Missie and their Iraq program in detail. Given the historical context of Iraq, this chapter will focus on contemporary conflicts, colonial dynamics, and how MM works with local actors in the Iraqi context. This will provide an overview of the various actors involved in Iraqi peacebuilding and will explain why colonialism is important to consider as a dynamic within peacebuilding. This chapter is primarily based on interviews, which provided insight into the content of the Iraq program, the interrelationships between global and local actors, and their perspectives on colonial dynamics in peacebuilding.

Iraq Program and Focus

The Iraq program focuses on the issue of minority group exclusion. The program is based on collaboration with five different local partners, who are either local NGOs or, in the case of a monastery, religious organizations. MM attempts to analyze the reasons for these minority inclusions and focuses on increasing trust and cooperation among religious, gender, and ethnic groups in Iraqi society. MM decided to mainly focus on youth in their program because the position of young people is extremely difficult.

So, in our program, we decided to focus on youth because the position of young people is really difficult. There's an economic crisis, the situation is not good, and they always run the risk of being co-opted by militant groups. There are many militant groups, and they're trying to recruit, of course, young people. Also of course, because Iraq has known so many conflicts over so many years, it has become part of society.⁷⁴

They decided to target young people because they are also more open to new learning and experiences. MM believes they must learn about the various ethnic and religious communities that exist in Iraq, as well as nonviolent conflict resolution methods. The projects' emphasis on minority exclusion can vary. These focuses can be on religious-ethnic tensions, interreligious dialogue, or mediation through religious leaders. There are also numerous projects that focus on gender issues. As explained in the first chapter, gender issues are an enormous problem in Iraq. So, the gender projects focus on getting a better position for women in Iraqi society.

For example, we tried to make lobby groups for women to join seminars and workshops and lobby to fight for women's rights in society. (...) We realize that it's quite easy to be political since you are male, but it's not the

⁷⁴ Interview 1

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same when you are a woman because there are a lot of barriers. For example, you have to cover and there are certain rules on how to behave.⁷⁵

As mentioned, many contemporary conflicts and issues have been related to oil in the country. The interviewees also emphasized the role that oil has in Iraq and that this is still a big contributor to the development of conflicts in Iraq.

From the Iraqi perspective and my perspective personally, I think that is the epicenter of all the decisions [oil, DvdH]. I think it's the center of everything. Whatever happens around the country is because of that. The Iraqi people describe it as a curse because most of the time they pray to get rid of this problem, get rid of this oil because they are never rested and everyone circles it. Everyone wants a portion of it. All the decisions are made based on oil, all the policies are developed based on this fire.⁷⁶

The role of oil is linked to Iraq's (neo)colonial history. Both the United Kingdom and, later, the United States were interested in oil, and there are still foreign influences on oil companies in Iraq. This means that oil and colonialism can be connected. Oil is probably one of the main reasons why foreign countries, still today, are so interested in Iraq. Those conflicts are still heavily influenced by issues around oil, which means that colonialism, and its connection to oil, is an important dynamic to analyze in the Iraqi conflict context.

Another link to the conflicts associated with colonial history is the country's lack of national identity. Because Europeans divided the former Ottoman empire into different countries, borders were established without regard to the various communities that lived there. Different groups were forced to form a country without any say in the formation of what is now modern Iraq.

From the creation of the country, the conflict started because it was not created based on the division that we have in the country. It's just decided by virtue that in 1920, this is your mark, this is your country, and this is how we follow the rules. So, from that time, we were given to one nation, and the rest was just ignored. Nobody in the country was involved in this.⁷⁷

This created a lot of ethnic and cultural tensions between different groups and after the mandate heated discussion on how to organize the country. Today, these tensions are still there and are probably developed from the formation of modern Iraq. In order to overcome

⁷⁵ Interview 2

⁷⁶ Interview 1

⁷⁷ Interview 1

this problem, solutions have to be found in how this great diversity of religious and ethnic groups can live more harmoniously together.

The Peacebuilding Actors and Their Relationship

Mensen met een Missie is a global organization that works together with local partners on these projects. Although MM itself only works from the Hague, it can be described as a global organization because they collaborate on projects all over the world. MM collaborates with a variety of local partners in various regions in Iraq, with a primary focus on Kurdistan.

However, projects have also been carried out in other parts of Iraq. Projects are frequently proposed to MM, and MM as an actor decides whether or not the project fits into their overall Iraq program and focus. Local actors have a lot of leeway in how they organize and manage their overall project, and MM assists them.

So, discussing with them and speaking with them, what should we do next? What do we really need more to add to our program? Then I go back with my suggestions and my plan, as trying to be a part of the decision making (...) I can personally feel that I was part of the decisions and it was good for me because they made me more involved and trying to keep more suggestions sending of ideas on how to improve our projects.⁷⁸

This shows that MM as the global actor with more donor money has more agency in the sense as they decide if a project is suitable and fits their budget. However, in the design of the projects, the local actors have a lot of agency. As the local actors propose their main ideas for projects to MM, and then work together to see if the project can happen. As seen in the literature review, funding is an important topic in decolonization when it comes to the agency. The funding of the Iraq program comes only from donations from religious organizations. All basis programs of MM, such as Iraq, are financed by religious organizations or individual donors. There are special programs that are financed only by the Dutch government, but these are managed through the Dutch government.

Peacebuilding is reliant on knowledge of conflicts, in the context of society and culture. How this knowledge is obtained is also linked to agency.

So, we mostly rely on the knowledge of the organizations we work with and of course, (...) but we need to rely on local knowledge.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Interview 2

⁷⁹ Interview 1

Peacebuilding is reliant on conflict context and the most valuable knowledge on how conflicts developed come from people who have experienced the conflicts. These people understand the context behind conflicts best. Furthermore, the cultural and societal structures are intertwined into conflict. That is why local actors are also very important actors in peacebuilding, as these actors can give local knowledge to more international actors of peacebuilding who are more distanced from the conflict context. Local actors are therefore significant in the understanding of conflicts.

Frequently the collaboration between MM and their local partners is for a set period; to renew the cooperation as a local partner, MM must review its collaboration with a local partner. Whether MM can continue with a program depends mostly on budget and capacity. However short-term contracts with local partners are negative for the quality of peacebuilding.

So, our program in Iraq is only for two years. I think if you want to give space for local organizations to develop their own ideas, then you have to be committed for at least ten years, I think. So, they can build up something and do something that will have a longer-lasting effect.⁸⁰

Both MM and local partners have agreed that peacebuilding could be more successful with longer contracts. Short-term contracts have also been criticized by literature because peacebuilding often necessitates long-term processes to truly affect change in society.⁸¹ The main issue with long-term contracts is that they require long-term money flow from donors, which is difficult to achieve because donors review their donations and how much money is available to give to peacebuilding mostly every year, and as previously stated, the budget of peacebuilding is reliant on donor money. Especially in the case of the Iraq program, because one big religious donor is behind the funding of this program. If the funding of this donor stops, the Iraq program will likely also stop.

Donors, as an actor, plays thus a significant role in decision-making, though not always directly. Money is required for peacebuilding projects. Because donors provide the funds, they can direct where and how the funds are spent.

Because they live on donors' money and the money that comes from them. It decides on their future and their program. MM cannot promise their local partners to work with them for ten years. There is no long-term

⁸⁰ Interview 1

⁸¹ Goodhand, J., & Sedra, M. (2010). Who owns the peace? Aid, reconstruction, and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. *Disasters*, 34, S78-S102.

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commitment from any partners, which is a big issue, even a major issue. When it comes to local organizations, I think, they sometimes have great ideas, but sometimes local knowledge and capacities are not good enough.⁸²

This is a difficult issue because most peacebuilding actors would like longer contracts and more decision-making toward local actors. The difficulty is that you cannot force donors to give money for a long period, most likely they want to renew their donation every year or two years. The way peacebuilding is organized now, leaves a lot of indirect decision-making towards donors. The question is if longer contracts are possible with yearly donations. Money is emphasized to be an indirect key in agency.

I mean for providing everything you need, the budget is essential, because it's quite difficult in Iraq. The government cannot support you to provide you with a budget. (...) So how much we can do is based on what we get from the donor. So, if we get more. We can do more, I don't want to say everything is related to money now, but if you are limited with the budget means that you can't do too much.⁸³

That this agency of money is sometimes also used negatively is shown in the next quote. MM leaves overall a lot of space for local partners to suggest their projects and input. Other organizations can seem to have other requirements in cooperation with local partners.

One of the organizations that were interested to fund said that only Kurdish and Arabic courses could be funded and not English courses could be funded, because then Iraqi people would want to go to Europe.⁸⁴

This is significant because it implies the power position that donor interests can have, as well as the white superiority that is implied in the organization's statement to this local actor. These requirements are contributing very much to keeping an unequal power relation.

In Iraq, there can also be found a sense of white superiority based on European doctrine. As a result of this influence, people of European or American descent have more authority.

I think any knowledge that comes from the West is the right one, that is what many Iraqi people think. Eurocentric doctrine is still there. So, I think any idea from blond-haired blue eyes is the right one. (...) They (Europeans/Americans) are superior. They have better knowledge. We can't compete with European students because the education is crap in Iraq and it's destroyed systematically by American virtue.⁸⁵

So people with blond hair and blue eyes are perceived as superior because of their appearance. Furthermore, knowledge from Europeans and Americans is regarded as more

⁸² Interview 1

⁸³ Interview 2

⁸⁴ Interview 3

⁸⁵ Interview 1

valuable. European students are more valued than Iraqi students. This sense of superiority that exists in Iraq is most likely a result of colonial influences from the British and Americans. On the other hand, there is some prejudice against white people because they resemble Americans in appearance. This is primarily due to the American invasion. This can make it dangerous for white people to be alone outside in some areas.

So they (white people) reflect the hating people who came to our country. For example, if you are coming to Iraq, no one knows you are Dutch because they don't know you. They just look at you like you are an American.⁸⁶

On the one hand, white people are valued more in Iraqi society due to their appearance and the belief that knowledge from white people is more valuable than knowledge from Iraqis. White people, on the other hand, are associated with the American invasion, and there is some hatred for white people because of their American appearance.

The Catholic/missionary background also has an impact on program funding. The funding for the Iraq program was for two years and these donations came from religious institutions. As funders, these religious institutions have no direct influence on Iraq program decision-making. It is stated, however, that there is an indirect influence in decision-making. The desire to sometimes please donors has an indirect influence. Because the program is funded by religious institutions, MM works from the standpoint that program quality comes first. However, there has been an internal debate within the organization about how far MM should support issues like abortion and the LGBT+ community for example in light of how funders would react to potential support. This means that the perspectives of religious institutions and donors play an indirect role in the decision-making.

When asked if the faith-based background was visible in their relationship, the local partners discovered that the Catholic/missionary background was not really present in their cooperation.

(...) they never speak about religion or something like that. Yes, we have had some activity in a monastery, but religion or faith is not discussed between the organizations.⁸⁷

As a result, Catholic or Missionary ideas are rarely discussed with local partners. The faith-based background is visible in their partners, as they frequently work with monasteries,

⁸⁶ Interview 2

⁸⁷ Interview 2

Catholic actors, and other religious leaders/communities in their projects. Their faith-based background makes it easier for them to connect with actors from similar religious backgrounds.

What the influence is of the missionary background on their methods and ideas is however rather vague. Yes, the organization identifies with a catholic/missionary background, but what it means exactly to be such an organization is not clearly discussed and is also a discussion topic inside the organization.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to look at the MM as an organization and its local partners to answer the question of how decolonization is relevant in this specific case of peacebuilding in Iraq. The first section of this chapter examined the current conflict in Iraq and its relationship to colonialism. The second section examined the relationship between various peacebuilding actors and how it relates to colonialism. Finally, it was investigated how MM's faith-based background as a global peacebuilding actor affected his relationship with other actors and peacebuilding. Decolonization is relevant in Iraq because colonialism and contemporary foreign influences have a huge impact on the country's current conflicts and issues.

Considering colonialism as a dynamic would be beneficial for context analysis in Iraq. On the other hand, it is clear from this case study that colonialism had an impact on the structure of peacebuilding. In terms of agency, colonialism has an impact on the relationship between actors. This does not imply that actors intentionally work from a higher or lower power position, but rather that these positions are imposed on how peacebuilding is developed in general.

CHAPTER 3

This final chapter will bring all previous research together, and with an understanding from other fields on what decolonization strategies are, will conclude on practical decolonization strategies that come from the results of the specific Iraq program in the Mensen met een Missie organization. These results will be focused especially on the knowledge of peacebuilding in Iraq but also give inspiration and opportunities to apply these strategies further into peacebuilding.

As argued colonial impact is relevant to peacebuilding in conflict context and to the development of peacebuilding operations. This means that the decolonization strategies should focus on the following two questions;

1. How can NGOs use colonialism as a dynamic in context analysis of conflicts?

2. How can NGOs contribute to making a change in the power positions of peacebuilding actors?

Looking at the theory of other fields of decolonization, it was discovered that one of the most important aspects of decolonization is to avoid a Eurocentric perspective. There has been discussion about how other fields achieve this through themes such as awareness/acknowledgment, equal agency, and diversity. Taking these examples from other fields, as well as the focus questions and empirical data from the second chapter, has resulted in the following recommendations for decolonization strategies for peacebuilding.

Awareness of (de)colonization and Input Local Actors

Mensen met een Missie already addressed issues such as colonialism. They have a special workgroup that works on this subject, so they understand the significance of (de)colonization. For peacebuilding organizations, raising awareness is the first step toward decolonization. As public awareness grows, so does the importance of discussing colonialism in the context of peacebuilding, particularly because peacebuilding organizations frequently work in post-colonial settings. Acknowledgment leads to awareness, which opens the door to change. There will be no action if the topic of colonialism is ignored in peacebuilding. However, colonialism is being discussed more frequently in global peacebuilding organizations. It is important for global organizations to constantly involve local actors in the discussion on colonialism and decolonization. This is critical because it is even more important that these local actors review the debate and provide their perspectives on (de)colonization because they

are the ones most affected and live in post-colonial regions. Otherwise, primarily global actors will provide their perspectives on how decolonization should be implemented, reinforcing the power dynamic within the decolonization discourse. As a result, local actors' perspectives and voices must be included. In the Iraq case study can be seen that local actors provided very valuable knowledge on the colonialism history of Iraq and a perspective on the relationship between global and local actors. As these actors in Iraq live the colonial reality in Iraq, these perspectives are important to take into research and decolonization approaches. An example of how MM could involve local actors more in the discussion of colonialism is to expand their workgroup. This workgroup on colonialism is now only with the staff of MM. However, they could see if they can involve some of their local partners from different contexts in this workgroup to get a more diverse input on how organizations can act on colonialism.

Reflect on your own Identity

Identity reflection is necessary for analyzing the power dynamics in relationships. This is important not only for individuals but also for organizations as a whole. This thesis has looked specifically at faith-based organizations, as MM explicitly identifies with a Catholic/missionary background. This identity has helped to connect more easily with religious/Catholic actors in local regions. However, as previously stated, missionaries have been linked to colonialism. Missionaries came mostly from colonial countries and promoted a certain worldview, in which a certain authority was created by the implication that this worldview was sometimes 'better' than the cultural perspectives of the communities they worked in. This does not mean that MM should disconnect from this identity, as it also gives positive fundamentals to work with this perspective. However, it is difficult to analyze their faith-based background because MM themselves are not precise on how the Catholic/missionary background is visible in their organization. Nevertheless was found that in decolonization it is important to reflect on historical colonial dynamics and how their identity influences the power dynamic with other actors. Making it more clear how their identity is intertwined in the organization can help determine what it does to their position with other actors. In the Iraq case study was seen that their background was not much of an influence as faith was not discussed often between MM and their partners. However that does not imply that the background is not of influence in other contexts, therefore it could be important to be aware to reflect in different contexts on the background and the implications it had on power dynamics.

Influence of Colonial Dynamics in Conflicts

Understanding (neo)colonialism is important in better understanding the development of contemporary conflicts, as demonstrated by Iraq. MM demonstrated that while more attention is being paid to the role of colonialism in conflict development, the colonial dynamics that are intertwined in conflict are not always critically examined. The current issues in Iraq, such as gender issues, exclusion, IS, corruption, and an unstable political situation, have been heavily influenced by America's invasion in 2003. Local actors believe that this event, more than the British mandate, has had a significant impact on the development of Iraqi society. These conflicts are extremely complex, and colonial dynamics can aid in better understanding, leading to new insights on peacebuilding strategies to effect social change. To understand the colonial context in post-colonial peacebuilding regions, it is necessary to examine various cultural and social structures and how they have been influenced by colonialism. For example religion or ethnicity, as these are structures that play a significant role in contemporary conflicts. As explained in the first and second chapters, the lack of national identity, which was partly caused by the formation of modern Iraq by the British mandate, causes the division in religious./ethnic groups to expand. Furthermore, understanding the colonial context can lead to a better understanding of IS as a religious extremist group with a large following. This can be explained by the fact that, following the invasion, Sunni Muslims were persecuted due to their association with Hussein. According to one of the interviewees, this created an attitude in Iraqi society that violence seemed to be the only option for effecting change. The underlying issue is that this community's lack of agency and support is the specific issue of IS, which was indirectly caused by America's invasion and power. Understanding this can lead to a peacebuilding approach that looks at nonviolent ways to gain more agency in society, such as more diverse political representation or inter-religious dialogue to improve the relationships between religious and ethnic communities. Again also in understanding the colonial context, it is important to get local input. Local actors understand the colonial context best, as they live in the region. MM already gets this input from their own staff that comes from Iraq but it could be beneficial to make some input group on how local partners review how the colonial context is relevant. For example in projects that work on gender issues, as these issues have seemed to be increased after the American invasion, how do local partners understand this change from a (neo)colonial understanding and how could it improve the projects on gender issues?

Language

There is a global language surrounding peacebuilding. This thesis has used the example of Freedom of Religions and Belief (FoRB). This FoRB concept is based on a Eurocentric understanding of what freedom, religion, and belief are. However, the meaning of these concepts can vary depending on the culture. As a result, a Eurocentric cultural concept is applied to a context with a different meaning. In the context of Iraq, for example, different religious and spiritual traditions that in the Eurocentric understanding would be classified as religion or belief are not classified in the Iraqi context, for example, Baha'i. As a result, it is critical to adjust these forms of language in terms of cultural understanding and consider how global language as FoRB could be changed to local understandings. What MM excels at is taking many pieces of advice from the local context. This is also important when it comes to changing the global peacebuilding language. Again, here getting input from local actors is important as they know the local context best and help give suggestions in translating the global language to local understandings of it.

Collective decision-making

Collective decision-making is heavily influenced by agency. Various actors collaborate in peacebuilding. Because of the importance of local actor involvement, global actors must incorporate the views and perspectives of local actors. MM in Iraq works on this by meeting with their local project manager every week to discuss options and development within the local context and communities. Local actors also design and propose projects in the decision-making process, which aids in collective decision-making. The equal agency of peacebuilding approaches and perspectives is central to collective decision-making. This means that space is created for global and local actors to provide reasoned critiques of peacebuilding approaches. Important is to try and make decisions together as a team of global and local NGOs in the best interest of local communities. Examples of how to stimulate this are to have regular meetings, leave room for local partners to sometimes lead a meeting, and have open discussions on a course of action.

Fundraising

Donors wield considerable power in peacebuilding because it is financially dependent. Money equates to power. This means that the interests of donors can sometimes play a significant role in peacebuilding, with or without the concern of local communities. As seen from the interviews every actor emphasized that almost everything in peacebuilding is dependent on

money. Changes in fundraising could help give local communities more agency and set priorities based on their interests. One suggestion for change is to collect larger sums of money over a longer period. Peacebuilding projects now typically have one or two-year contracts. Peacebuilding projects that are organized over a longer period can be more successful as advocated in the interviews. In the case of Iraq, for example, this could aid in looking into the complexities of this issue and developing a long-term strategy for improving women's positions. One or two-year projects make working on a long-term process difficult because issues such as gender rights cannot be significantly changed in such a short period. However long-term approaches are difficult because donors frequently make annual contributions, in which they review how much and where they spend their money on peacebuilding each year. Global actors, who receive the majority of donor funds, could reconsider their donation organization. 'These actors could promote longer-term donations, but this may be difficult. What could be more successful is the promotion of non-directed donations, in which global actors collect money and use it to fund long-term programs and processes. Another option is to try to work on more long-term programs through governments. MM as an example gets money for certain programs that are assisted by government grants. These governments are often from the global North and attention could be raised among these governments on more long-term granting for the importance of decolonization.

Fundraising Campaigns

Fundraising campaigns for peacebuilding programs are common among major global actors. As previously stated, these campaigns can have a white savior complex by portraying local communities as helpless and reliant on Euro-American societies to save them. This places post-colonial peacebuilding regions in a submissive position, implying that they lack the agency to help themselves. This is not to say that fundraising campaigns should not be used. Rethink how a fundraising campaign portrays local communities. This can be accomplished by telling stories of local people who have directly committed to making changes in their society and how MM has assisted them. Another option would be to focus more on the peacebuilding strategies that are used, for example, in the case of Iraqi and the local partner of MM, explaining the language courses and the goal of the strategies. In the case of gender-based violence, you could instead of portraying women as helpless and submissive, focus more on campaigns where local women's groups are committed to changing women's positions. Or focus on inter-religious women's groups that attempt to make women have more

political representation in Iraq. With this more assisting approach to campaigning, you give local communities more agency and the impression that they are completely capable of making changes for themselves.

Diversity of staff

To avoid a Eurocentric viewpoint, it may be beneficial to have staff from various backgrounds, this means that different perspectives of individuals are incorporated within an organization. This allows for a more varied discussion of peacebuilding issues within an organization. MM does a good job of emphasizing staff diversity, as native Iraqis work in the Hague on MM's Iraq program. These people, of course, have more knowledge about the situation, but it also means that there can be a more inclusive discussion about how to operate in this situation. A diverse workforce includes people from various cultural contexts, as well as people of different genders and ages.

Conclusion

One of the most important findings for decolonization strategies in peacebuilding is not to decide for them but decide together. Global and local NGOs are not the same and both work on different levels. However, in creating decolonization in peacebuilding it is very important to expand the input of local actors. These actors work outside a Eurocentric perspective and allow to diversify the ideas on colonialism and peacebuilding. This will lead to more working together on a horizontal level rather than on a vertical level.

CONCLUSION

So, to conclude this thesis has researched the main research question;

How can an understanding of colonial and power dynamics in post-colonial conflict regions contribute to the development of decolonization strategies in the work of faith-based NGOs by researching a case study on Iraq?

This research question has been divided into three different subquestions. The first subquestion investigated the relevance of decolonization by defining peacebuilding. By examining a theoretical/conceptual framework on what decolonization entails, as well as a literature review on how peacebuilding is implemented. Decolonization is the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of Western thought and approaches to superiority and privilege. Decolonization entails demolishing structures that keep the status quo in place, challenging dominant discourses, and confronting unbalanced power dynamics. Peacebuilding actors are classified as global organizations, local organizations, local communities, and donors. These actors participate in power dynamics. It has been argued that colonialism influenced the evolution of peacebuilding. The Global North has been seen to have more agency and decision-making power than the Global South, where the majority of peacebuilding occurs. According to Atalia Omer, the primary goal of peacebuilding and decolonization is to benefit local communities. However, because of these unequal power dynamics, which are partly the result of colonialism, local communities do not always benefit fully from peacebuilding. Decolonization in peacebuilding entails examining the colonial context in conflict situations where peacebuilders work on, as well as power dynamics. Taking into account the colonial impact on conflict context has been argued to provide a better presentation and understanding of conflict development and occurrence.

The second subquestion looked at the Iraq case study and how it demonstrates the relevance of decolonization in practice. The first chapter investigates Iraq's colonial history and how it has contributed to current conflicts and power dynamics. This chapter concluded that colonialism influenced religious/ethnic tensions by defining Iraq's borders during the British mandate without regard for the various groups living in the region. The 2003 US-led invasion caused widespread chaos in the country. Following the invasion, the Americans had no plan for reforming the country, resulting in instability and an increase in already existing tensions among various groups. The second chapter examined a case study on peacebuilding in Iraq,

focusing on the NGO Mensen met een Missie and some of their local partners in Iraq. This case study demonstrated the power dynamics between actors, which are influenced by the money flow in peacebuilding. Donors wield considerable power because peacebuilding relies on donor funds. Decolonization is relevant in the case of Iraq because it demonstrates an understanding of contemporary conflicts within the context of colonialism in the sense of oil and national identity. The Iraq case demonstrated that global and local organizations want to promote more equal decision-making, but that donor funding makes this difficult.

The last chapter looked at how to formulate and apply decolonization strategies in peacebuilding by using the case study of Iraq and MM as an example. These strategies were focused on conflict understanding and the power positions of peacebuilder actors. Formulating the strategies, theories of other fields were used as examples to translate them for peacebuilding. These themes of focus were linked to agency, diversity, and awareness. One of the most crucial conclusions for decolonization strategies in peacebuilding is to include local actors in the discussions and decision-making. Local and international NGOs operate at various levels and are not the same. However, it is crucial to increase the contribution of local actors in order to support decolonization in peacebuilding. These local actors operate outside of a Eurocentric framework and enable a diversity of perspectives on colonialism and peacebuilding.

This thesis has demonstrated that decolonization extends beyond faith-based NGOs. Colonialism is intertwined with peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Making decolonization a reality entails changing the entire peacebuilding system, which will be a long-term change. An organization like MM is reliant on this model of peacebuilding. It is impossible for them to make big changes in, for example, the flow of money in peacebuilding. However, this does not preclude MM from contributing to decolonization through their methods and relationships with local partners. This thesis has argued for practical decolonization strategies that provide areas of focus for global NGO organizations. Further research can look into how decolonization can be applied on a larger scale with the international peacebuilding community involved. What is most important to understand is that the interests of local communities should be prioritized at all stages of decolonization and that any strategy developed should benefit them the most.

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