

An Investigation into the Role of Religion in the Origins, Strategic Development and Internationalisation Processes of International Non-Governmental Organisations

Abstract

Non-state actors such as transnational social movements (TSMs) and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have had an increasingly high profile in global politics in recent years through advocacy and campaigning activities which have caused them to be of growing interest to scholars. However, two aspects of INGOs have not received much scholarly attention.

The first relates to religious INGOs and the lack of research regarding how religion influences this significant sub-set. The second concerns internationalisation processes as there is little research on why clusters of loosely affiliated and often diverse national NGOs choose to combine to form large INGOs and the processes they go through.

Using social movement theory as a methodological framework, this research addressed both points by carefully examining the genesis and developments of two large INGOs: firstly to identify how, and with what effect, religion interacted with other factors in their working practice; and secondly, to track the reasons for internationalisation and to determine the methods they used.

Underpinning the research was a detailed review of how international relations, international development and social movement scholarship conceptualise religion and religious actors. This identified weaknesses in scholarship caused by the legacy of secularisation theory as it obstructs the ability to perceive the presence of religion and to understand what effect it may have.

The research, therefore, concludes with two further contributions: the first are recommendations to improve religious literacy, by presenting a more contemporary way to conceptualise religion and religious actors; and finally, there are proposals for strengthening research methodology to enable the presence and influence of religion to be identified and incorporated into scholarly analysis.