Religious and Ethnic Motivations for Serving Others in the Arab World: Evidence from Lebanon

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Introduction

Research on volunteering has established a link between religiosity and involvement in volunteer work(i). Studies have shown that religious communities find faith, mission and community service to be inextricably linked. (ii) However, the majority of research on this topic has been conducted in the United States, and has focused on the experiences of Christian NGOs to the exclusion of other groups. Relatively little research has been conducted on the role of ethnic identity in giving and much of the existing research has focused on ethnic groups in the United States(iii) and immigrant communities in Europe. (iv) This body of research neglects many communities that are central to the fabric of Arab societies, such as Sunni and Shiite Muslims and minority groups such as Armenians and Palestinian refugees.

This paper seeks to examine the role that religion and ethnicity play in motivating service to others in the Arab world by focusing on the case of Lebanon. The paper specifically examines the role that religion and ethnicity play for staff members of social service NGOs. This is a limited but valuable population to examine due to their strong involvement in the social service sector. Lebanon is an excellent case study due to its great religious diversity and the numerous ethnic minorities living in the country. This work will begin by reviewing important aspects of the literature on religious and ethnic motivations for serving others. Then, I will present research findings based on interviews with 30 NGO staff conducted during field research in Lebanon in 2006. I will discuss the role that faith plays in influencing the attitudes and behavior of staff from religious NGO/social service providers in Lebanon, focusing on Christian, Druze, Sunni, and Shiite NGOs. I will follow by examining the experiences of interview participants from Armenian and Palestinian NGOs who are influenced not only by religion but also by ethnic identity.

Methodology

This paper presents information from a broader study examining faith-based NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, and Sri Lanka. The Lebanon portion of this study involved interviewing 30 individuals who were employees or full-time volunteers at 22 NGOs. At least part of the work of these organizations involved providing health and social services to low-income individuals. Interview participants were selected in an effort to reflect the religious diversity of the population of Lebanon. In addition, several interview participants from secular NGOs were included in order to compare and contrast faith-based and secular NGOs. Table 1 shows the religious identity of the NGOs included in the sample and the number of interview participants from each NGO community. In addition, the percentage of the Lebanese population belonging to each religious group and the percentage of faith-based NGO interview participants from each religious group are included. The sample for the study was slightly over-representative of Christian organizations (42.9% of sample versus 39% of Lebanese population), and slightly under-representative of Muslim organizations (57.1% of sample versus 59.7% of Lebanese population). While the Lebanese government recognizes 17 separate religious sects, these sects can be roughly categorized as four major religious groups: Christians (including Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Catholics, and other Christian denominations), Druze, Shiite Muslims, and Sunni Muslims. Therefore, I made an effort to include faith-based NGOs from these four major religious groupings in my study. Many sources of demographic statistics include Druze as a Muslim religious group, including the United States
Central Intelligence Agency (2006) whose data is used in Table 1.

The Druze religion is an off-shoot of Islam. However, due to its nearly 1,000 year history as a separate sect and its incorporation of a number of non-Islamic beliefs such as reincarnation and forms of East Asian philosophy(v), both Druze and Muslims consider the Druze religion to be distinct from Islam(vi). For this reason, I also approached the Druze as a separate religious grouping.

Table 1. Religious Affiliation of Interview Participants’ NGOs, Populations, and Percentage of Faith-Based NGO Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO CATEGORY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF LEBANESE POPULATION</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF FAITH-BASED NGO PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Based</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39% (vii)</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>59.7% (viii) (including Druze)</td>
<td>57.1% (including Druze)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiite</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As one might expect, all 21 interview participants from faith-based NGOs mentioned that their NGO had a religious founder or mentioned the role that religious identity had played in the founding of the organization. None of the secular NGOs made similar statements when describing their organization’s history.

Religious and Ethnic Motivations to Serve: The Role of Group Membership and Loyalty

When thinking about the influence of religious and ethnic identity on the desire to serve others, both group loyalty and religious ideology play a role. Group loyalty is often a motivator for altruistic behavior(ix), and oftentimes voluntary activity is characterized by an explicit focus on within-group giving and activities that benefit others sharing a similar identity. Indeed, numerous studies of philanthropy indicate that charitable giving and the voluntary work of nonprofit organizations often target specific populations based on factors such as religion(x), race(xi), ethnic or tribal identity(xii), kinship ties(xiii), or national origin(xiv). As early as Weber (1963) and Durkheim (1954), sociologists studying religion have recognized the role religious belief plays in motivating human behavior and promoting communal activity.

Sociology of religion has been incorporated into theorizing on a number of subjects often associated with the nonprofit sector, including altruism(xv), civic engagement(xvi), and civil society(xvii). While
scholars of religion approach the subject from a variety of perspectives, most contend that religious activity cannot be motivated solely by material interests. This perspective holds true even for the burgeoning school of rational choice theorists studying religion.\textsuperscript{(xviii)} Because religion connotes a system of beliefs and practices related to something “sacred” and historically has been shown to be a powerful force, one might argue that the religious orientation of faith-based NGOs will prevail over other factors\textsuperscript{(xx)} that might determine organizational behavior.

According to these theories, many NGOs are created on the basis of group identity, and a great deal of voluntary action and philanthropy is conducted with the hope of helping those that altruists perceive as being part of their community. Simon (1993) emphasizes ethnic and/or religious group loyalty as an important motivator of altruistic behavior, though he cautions that knowing a group’s ethnic or religious identity is not always helpful in predicting attitudes and behavior. Anheier and Salamon (1998) assert that past research has established a close connection between religion and nonprofit activity. A great deal of charitable and volunteer activity is religiously motivated and religious convictions have figured prominently in the creation of many nonprofit institutions in the western world.

Philanthropy in ethnic and religious diaspora communities also provides an interesting illustration of within-group altruism and the ways in which religious and other identities interact. Indeed, for some communities it may be difficult to separate ethnic and religious identity into two distinct categories. As Gurr (2000) notes, shared religion can be one of the boundaries that ethnic groups use to define themselves. Werbner (2002) states that diaspora communities exist through flows of goods and money, gestures of giving, and public service. Philanthropic giving between diaspora communities and their homeland is a means by which diaspora communities establish political clout and cultural authenticity, both in their new immigrant communities and in their countries of origin.\textsuperscript{(xx)} However, diaspora philanthropy need not be limited to members of one’s homeland, as is particularly evident in the case of religious diasporas. As Werbner notes, “When Muslim women in Bosnia or Kosovo or Kashmir are raped or their husbands tortured, it hurts Pakistani women in England.”\textsuperscript{(xxx)} Therefore, in her study of Pakistanis in Manchester, Werbner found women to be engaged not only in philanthropy directed toward their homeland of Pakistan, but toward other members of the Muslim diaspora as well.

In the case of Lebanon, group membership plays a central role in ethnic motivations for service provision by Armenians, Druze, and Palestinians. While staff members from Christian, Druze, Shiite, and Sunni NGOs insist they are willing to serve people from all ethnicities and religions, we find that these NGOs also provide services predominantly to members of their own group (See Table 2.)
The data from the thirty interviews indicate that in Lebanon, NGO social service provision is normally quite clearly structured along sectarian lines. All of the interview participants from Druze, Shiite, and Sunni faith-based NGOs indicated that their NGO primarily serves people from their own sect. Interview participants from Christian NGOs were more likely to report serving a religiously mixed group of individuals, with just less than half stating that they do not predominantly serve their own sect, but a mixed group. However, even in the case of Christian NGOs, the majority of interview participants indicated that their services primarily benefited individuals from their own religious group (See Table 2.)

Abul-Husn (1998) notes, “The political significance of the many sects in Lebanon lies in the role they play as social organizations through which personal and group security can be achieved.” (xxiii)

The results indicate that this security also includes the security offered by faith-based social service NGOs. Indeed, most interview participants attributed the sectarian patterns of their own service provision to the inherently sectarian nature of service provision in Lebanon. As one interview participant noted:

It’s not in our rules or regulations to accept only Muslim children, but we have to be realistic. I mean, this is Lebanon. Lebanon is divided. We don’t reject any child because of their religion, but this is the situation everywhere. I mean, if you go to the Druze (NGOs), you will see that the majority are Druze. If you go to the Shi’a foundations, you see that most are Shi’a. If you go to the Christian (NGOs), you will see that they are Christian. I am sure it is also not in their rules or regulations, but the environment of Lebanon, it is a mosaic country, and with the geographical distribution, and with the sect lists, this is the normal situation. But we do not have any rule about it. On the contrary, we would like to have children with different religions. But on the ground if you come to visit us you will see that most are Muslims, Muslims of all sects. If you go to Christians you will see that most are Christians, and if you go to Druze you will see that most are Druze.

An interview participant from a Druze NGO notes the same phenomenon, but attributes it to the behavior of service recipients.
We don’t make a difference (among religions when providing services). Everybody who asks, we give. But mainly, mainly Druze. Because Muslims have their own organizations, so they go to their own organization. Christians have their own organizations, so they go to their own organization. But we never say no to anybody.

Another interview participant from a Muslim NGO mentioned how geographic segregation in terms of religion and political affiliation influences where his NGO can provide services.

Mostly our services target the areas where mostly Shi’a live. The people who benefit are not always Shi’a; they could be Shi’a, but if the areas they live in are mixed, you might have Christian, you might have Sunni, and you have Shi’a who benefit from the services. Because we are considered Hezbollah and the resistance, it is not easy. Because we are considered Hezbollah, it is not easy for us to provide services in an area that is dominated by another sect, because this might be seen as infringing on the other sect, and they would not be happy [laughs]. Even if we wanted to, we are not trying.

Some interview participants offered more specific reasons for sectarian divisions in service provision, including language barriers and the desire to preserve ethnic identity. However, these specific reasons were only mentioned by interview participants from Armenian and Palestinian NGOs. The specific case of these NGOs will be discussed later in the paper.

**Religious Motivations to Serve: The Role of Faith Ideology**

Research has shown that faith plays an important role in motivating the employees and volunteers of faith-based nonprofit service providers. As Nichols (1988) noted in his examination of nonprofits providing humanitarian relief: “it was religious motivation that inspired relief workers to travel halfway around the world and serve their fellow human beings.” (xxiv) A great deal of research on volunteering has established a link between religiosity and involvement in volunteer work. (xxv) In Ebaugh et al.’s 2003 study of nonprofits serving the homeless in the United States, evidence suggested that volunteers at such organizations are religiously committed people who are motivated to work at a faith-based agency for religious reasons.

Meanwhile, a number of studies in the United Kingdom and the United States have shown that religious bodies themselves find faith, mission and action in the community to be inextricably linked (xxvi) Bartkowski (2001) found that church involvement in social service programs in Mississippi in the United States is encouraged by the church’s values. In their study of the Anglican Church in England, Cairns, Harris & Hutchinson (2005) found that church leaders and volunteers felt that worship and social action are closely connected; that serving the local community was an integral part of practicing their faith.

Most of the research focuses on religion as a motivation for volunteering and service provision by Christian organizations. As such, it is important to reiterate that the teachings of other religious traditions also provide motivation for charity and service. As Anderson (1998) notes, “In almost every culture generosity, however we define it, is an ideal to be striven for, a goal to be achieved.” (xxvii) The tenets of Islam require charity and service to one’s neighbor: *zakat*, an obligatory charitable contribution of approximately 2.5% of one’s income, is an important source of income for many
Much like Christianity, in Islam charity, hospitality, and philanthropy are seen as ways of achieving nearness to God. Philanthropy is central to Judaism as well, with many writers on the subject asserting that Judaism was the first religion to make charity, or tzedakah, a religious obligation. As will be shown below, religious ideology plays an important role in service provision in many Lebanese faith-based NGOs.

Integration of Faith and Service

While employees of faith-based NGOs are interested in serving the material needs of poor clientele, it is easy to imagine that they are also interested in serving clients’ spiritual needs. In her study of congregations providing social services in the United States, Ammerman (2001) found that approximately 25% of congregations are involved in evangelistic and mission work in conjunction with service delivery. Bartkowski (2001) notes that in Mississippi, churches’ religious values often are intertwined in the delivery of food assistance, with staff focusing on both material and spiritual needs. In a survey of welfare-to-work programs in four U.S. cities, Monsma and Mounts (2002) found that about 40% of faith-based programs explicitly integrate religious practices into the services they provide. When studying programs for at-risk youth in the United States, Branch (2002) found that programming included faith-based elements such as the use of prayer in meetings and outreach, as well as the incorporation of religious concepts into program activities.

The degree to which religion is integrated into service provision can vary by agency. Some of this variance can be explained by the faith of the organization itself. In the Faith and Organizations study in the United States, Schneider, Day, & Anderson (2005) found that all of the organizations in the pilot study were immersed in the religious values of their founding faith. However, the role that faith played in programming varied. While African American and Evangelical faith-based NGOs actively used expressive faith in their programming, Jewish, Catholic, mainline Protestant and Peace Churches stressed tolerance for other religions in their programming and staff practices (Schneider et al., 2005). In Lebanon we find that staff from Christian NGOs more often described explicitly integrating faith into their service provision, and even seeing faith itself as a service that was being rendered (see Table 3).

Over one-third of interview participants from faith-based NGOs described religion as a service offered to clients; all of these interview participants were from Christian NGOs (See Table 3). In some cases, this idea of religion as a service was described in terms of actual scheduled activities, such as Bible lessons.

At the moment half of the children we serve are Christians, and half are Muslims, roughly. But all of them enjoy or profit from the same services, including the spiritual programs. They all participate in all the programs that we have.

We are a Christian organization, and we make that clear right from the very beginning. So when we have an interview, when we meet the child’s family, we will say right from the word go that we are a Christian organization, and as part of the services we offer we teach the Bible, and families have to sign an agreement saying that they accept that and agree with that.
So basically, we view our services in two categories—financial, and that’s relief, and developmental, which includes Christian education. That’s where reaching out to the individuals spiritually takes place.

However, other interview participants from Christian NGOs describe the more informal spiritual guidance, religious teachings, and emotional support they offer as an important part of their work, and a means of offering help to service recipients.

Anyone, any elderly or any child or teenager who hears something about God and what the Bible says, they would feel more or less relieved. So that is one way of helping the person, to help them have a different type of hope than what the surroundings will give. This is what makes our work different. The other services we give, the medical and financial services, these are similar to other institutions. Only the message of God is what makes our work different, and the way we give it to children and teenagers and elderly. Sometimes nothing that we can say can make things easy for the other individual, but when we give them the Bible and then try to say something, that makes his day better. That’s how we try to help.

Our aim is not only to educate people so they can make a good life, but to show them that life is worth living. I believe that we as people of faith would like people to see that it is not only by money or by material things that people live their life, but to show them that God has a purpose for their life and finding that purpose makes life meaningful. This is something we can give them.

This description of faith as a service to be provided to service recipients, or the description of sharing faith as an activity that takes place alongside other social service activities of the organization, was unique to interview participants from Christian NGOs. As I mentioned previously, more than four fifths of interview participants from Christian NGOs made some reference that portrayed religion as a service rendered by their organization. No interview participants from other faith-based NGOs or from secular NGOs made similar depictions of the activities of their organization.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO CATEGORY</th>
<th>ORIGINAL SAMPLE</th>
<th>Portray Faith as a Service Rendered</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith- Based</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiite</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that no interview participants, from Christian NGOs or otherwise, explicitly mentioned having a goal of recruiting adherents to their religion, even though this is sometimes discussed as one possible goal of faith-based social service providers. However, seven of nine interview participants from Christian NGOs mentioned that sharing their religious beliefs, religious teachings, or the “word of God” with individuals receiving services was one goal of their organization’s work. No interview participants from secular NGOs or other faith-based NGOs mentioned this as a goal of their organization. One interview participant from a Christian NGO explains,

I do believe, as Christians we believe that we provide here for those children the opportunity to hear the message of the gospel, and that is very important for us. Another main message for us it to provide a good educational program for those children… So the spiritual program and then the educational program, our priorities go like this.

There may be several explanations for this pattern among interview participants from Christian organizations, related both to the Christian faith and to the research process. As Cameron (2005) notes, “Intrinsic to the nature of Christianity is its characteristic as a missionary religion which requires its adherents to evangelise and witness.” One possibility is that the priority placed on witnessing and sharing ones’ faith within many Christian denominations causes Christian NGO workers to believe and behave in ways that are different than faith-based NGO workers from organizations of other faiths. The fact that interview participants from Christian NGOs were more likely than interview participants from other NGOs to report that they do not predominantly serve their own sect, as can be seen in Table 2, may also be an indication of a desire to share Christian teachings with non-Christians.

Another possibility is that the sectarian nature of service provision in Lebanon may cause workers from Christian NGOs to assume they are serving primarily Christian individuals, who would welcome Christian teachings and guidance as part of their services. While interview participants from Christian NGOs were more likely than those from other NGOs to report serving a religiously mixed group of individuals, the majority still indicated that their services primarily benefited other Christians.

**Evangelism as Motivation?**

Supply-side theories of the nonprofit sector also recognize the importance of group identity, particularly in terms of religion. Supply-side theories suggest that the emergence of nonprofit organizations has not so much to do with the demand for nonprofit services, but with the supply of entrepreneurs who are committed to their establishment. These theorists suggest that one of the most likely sources of such supply is religious institutions, particularly in circumstances where religious competition exists. It is argued that religious orders form nonprofit institutions not entirely because of altruism, but for the instrumental purpose of winning new adherents. The formation of NGOs is thus a way that religious groups can win devotees to their cause, and those with desperate needs for education, health care, or other basic supports will come to accept the faith of those who sponsor such services.
Indeed, a number of scholars have cited a desire for new adherents as an important factor fueling NGO growth abroad. As Cameron (2005) notes, “Intrinsic to the nature of Christianity is its characteristic as a missionary religion which requires its adherents to evangelise and witness. Given this context, tensions between proselytising and service provision seem inevitable.”

In Lebanon, no staff members discussed evangelism as an explicit goal of their organization. However, several interview participants from Christian NGOs mentioned that evangelical activities such as sharing their religious beliefs, religious teachings, or the “word of God” with individuals receiving services were goals of their organization’s work.

Faith and Employment in Lebanese NGOs

It is interesting to consider how and why interview participants began working at their NGOs, as it provides some indication of the influence of religious identity and religious beliefs on their attitudes and behavior. When asked, “How did you personally come to work for this organization?”, personal ties within particular religious communities and religious belief or inspiration played an important role in leading many interview participants to work for their organization.

In response to the question “How did you personally come to work for this organization?”, just less than half of all the interview participants mentioned that their personal ties within a particular religious community had led them to work for their NGO (See Table 4). All fourteen who mentioned the role that personal ties within the religious community had played in their employment worked for a faith-based NGO. These personal ties typically involved a member of their religious congregation informing them of the availability of the job and referring them to the individual responsible for hiring, or their own personal ties to the NGO due to previous volunteer work through their religious congregation. Interview participants from Druze and Christian NGOs were most likely to indicate that they had come to work for their organization due to personal ties they had within their religious community. In contrast, only about one-third of participants from Muslim NGOs mentioned that they had come to their job due to personal ties within their religious community (See Table 4).

In addition to mentioning personal ties, a number of interview participants responded to the question “How did you personally come to work for this organization?” with stories about religious belief and religious inspiration. This mirrors much research on faith-based NGOs in the United States, which indicates that faith plays an important role in motivating faith-based NGO employees and volunteers. Interview participants from Christian NGOs were most likely to indicate that religious belief or religious inspiration was one of the factors that drew the individual to work for the organization (See Table 4). Interview participants from Christian NGOs often indicated that they view social service provision as a type of religious ministry. The quotes below offer examples of the role that religious belief plays in motivating interview participants from Christian NGOs.

We hope that this economic crisis would end someday, but again, even if it ends there will be families that will be in need of support, so actually, again as Christians our ministry is to help others. That’s what we learn from our Lord and we try to apply it here as a church, both financially and sometimes in different other social ministries, in counseling, in guiding people.
To us, we are just trying to reflect Christ's love to those needy people. We are just trying to tell them that God cares, that our Lord cares about them, and we are just trying to fulfill the ministry that is assigned to us.

However, Christians were not alone in seeing religious belief as a motivation for working in a social service NGO. More than half of the interview participants from Muslim NGOs stated that religious belief or inspiration was one of the factors that drew the individual to work for the organization (See Table 4). Several interview participants from Muslim NGOs shared examples of Muslim teachings that emphasize the imperative of offering service to others.

We were living in areas that were poor, and the need for services motivated us and gave us incentives. What added to this is the religious and moral side, the hadith (religious teachings). There is a hadith that I still remember that says "all the creatures are sons of God", so it described God as a man and all the creature as his sons, “and the most close to God is the most beneficial”, so God said he is the father of all and the closest one to him is the one that benefits people the most. So this is one example of a really expressive hadith, it explains the role of human beings, and the principal role of the human being is to serve other people. There are lot of hadith that explain that people ought to serve each other.

The prophet said that he who sleeps and doesn’t care about others is not a Muslim. So imagine if I come here and I know that there is a sick man and I don’t help him, then I am not a Muslim or a human.

No interview participants from Druze organizations indicated that religious belief had played a role in leading them to their NGO work (See Table 4). This may be because, while Islam obliges its adherents to make charitable contributions of material goods and labor as a form of zakat or alms giving (xxxix), zakat took on a very different meaning when the Druze religion diverged from Islam. For the Druze faithful, zakat in the material sense is seen as less important than the act of soul cleansing and purification. (xli) As Obeid (2006) states, “to satisfy the requirement of zakat, it is not enough to donate material goods to safeguard the brethren; the effort has to extend to the spiritual realm as well.” (xlii) One interview participant from a Druze NGO explained zakat as a practice that falls entirely outside the Druze religion.

The Muslims have much more income than we do. They are much more in numbers, and they have their zakat. I don’t know if you know about the zakat. It’s an obligatory donation in the Muslim religion. To give zakat, especially in Ramadan, it’s an obligation. They are obliged to give this, two percent of their income to charity. The Muslims have to give it, but the Druze don’t have zakat, so we don’t have to. It’s up to your wish and up to your ability, if you can give or not.

Therefore, while Druze NGOs’ staff members are undoubtedly engaged in charitable work, their attitudes and behavior may be influenced more by humanitarian aims than by religious belief.
Table 4. Reasons for Working in Social Service NGOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO CATEGORY</th>
<th>ORIGINAL SAMPLE</th>
<th>Personal Ties in Faith Community</th>
<th>Religious Belief/Inspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Based</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
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<td>Shiite</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnic Motivations for Service: The Role of Cultural and Linguistic Preservation

The sample for this study also included several faith-based and secular NGOs serving the Armenian and Palestinian communities in Lebanon. These organizations reported the same sectarian pattern in their service provision, and these patterns are likely affected by many of the same factors that affect other NGOs. However, the reported motivations for service provision were much different than those reported by faith-based NGOs. Both minorities have been influenced at least in part by their past experiences of violence or exclusion. However, while religion seems to intersect with ethnic identity as a motivation for Armenian interview participants, Palestinian interview participants carefully distanced themselves from religion, instead embracing their national identity.

Language, Culture, and Faith - Lebanon’s Armenian Community

During the First World War, 1.5 million Armenians were killed in what was then Turkish Armenia\(^{xliii}\). During this period the Turks attempted to extinguish the Armenians in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire through systematic ethnic cleansing\(^{xliv}\). While the genocide has been carefully documented, it remains categorically denied by the Turkish government.\(^{xlv}\) Thousands of Armenians who were fleeing the massacres and deportation found sanctuary in Lebanon, where they were legally integrated into Lebanese society. As of 1998 Armenians in Lebanon numbered around 150,000.\(^{xlvi}\) The Armenian population in Lebanon is predominantly Christian, and faith plays a strong role in the community. As one interview participant notes,

> When you say Armenian you automatically mean Christian. Of course you have Armenians who have been converts to other religions, and you have those who are only nominally Christians, but no one usually says, “I’m not a Christian.” When you say “Armenian”, that’s automatically Christian.

However, in spite of a strong sense of Christian identity, the violence and exclusion of the Armenian genocide and mass deportation seemed to have the strongest influence on the identity of Armenian NGO staff. Without fail, interview participants from Armenian NGOs discussed the genocide and how it influenced their work. The historical experience of the Armenian genocide often intersected...
If you know anything about the genocide you know that about 1.5 million Armenians were massacred, and the remnants of those people ran away and came to Syria and Lebanon... But in that very very bad condition, the first thing they did was to establish schools and churches. I mean, they weren’t people who nagged about their condition. Of course, a lot of help came from different countries and organizations, and we are very thankful for that. But in addition to that help, the Armenian people were convinced that education, that faith, came first. Their condition did not define their future. They defined the future through what they saw as very important, and that makes this work we do today very important. I mean, people had hopes that brought us up to this stage where we are today. So we cannot just forget schools and churches and social institutions just because of financial difficulties, just because we are in a bad position nowadays. This does not justify anything. We should keep on going as we have always done. We have seen far worse days than these days so this drives us to keep going, and this is something I am proud of as Armenian. And I hope that the coming generations will be as proud as our ancestors were in the old days.

Most interview participants from Armenian NGOs indicated that their organization provided services almost exclusively to Armenians. Interview participants attributed this ethnically-based service provision to the geographic segregation of their community and to linguistic barriers presented to Arabic-speaking Lebanese in an Armenian language environment. However, a second reason for ethnically-based service provision that was mentioned by some interview participants was a desire to preserve the Armenian identity, language, and culture. Some perceived that this could only be done by keeping certain aspects of life, such as service provision, separate from mainstream Lebanese society.

But sadly, and I am speaking as an Armenian, we Armenians need to keep our identity. To do that we usually separate ourselves at least in some areas of life, because we have seen genocide, we know the danger of being dissolved or being cancelled from the map, being lost forever. We have tasted that, and now we don’t want a cultural genocide where Armenians will eventually become in Lebanon Lebanese, in Syria Syrians, in America Americans, and forget their language, culture, music, which is very rich.”

Thus in the case of interview participants from Armenian NGOs, we see that ethnic identity, and occasionally religious identity, influence the attitudes and behavior of NGO staff. The result, however, is the same as for other faith-based NGOs; service provision becomes exclusive and structured along ethnic lines.

Preserving Culture and Nation- Lebanon’s Palestinian Refugees

During the First World War, 1.5 million Armenians were killed in what was then Turkish Armenia. After the 1948 defeat of the Arab armies by the Israelis, more than 750,000 Palestinians fled to neighboring Arab countries, with 200,000 settling in United Nations-operated camps near Lebanon’s major cities. Additional Palestinian refugees arrived after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and
Palestinian clashes in Jordan in 1970, bringing with them the PLO infrastructure. While Lebanon had previously welcomed refugees of Kurdish, Assyrian, and Armenian descent, legally and socially integrating them into society, the same was not true for the Palestinians. This was due in part to a broadly held belief among Arab countries that permanent integration would compromise the goal of Palestinians ultimately returning to their homeland. In Lebanon, an additional factor was the fear that integrating the Palestinians as a large group of mainly Muslim citizens would upset the country’s religious-political balance. Many Palestinians continue to live segregated from the rest of Lebanese society in refugee camps, and continue to face a number of legal and social barriers to their participation in Lebanese society.

Based on our understanding of the past and current condition of the Palestinians, one can see at least three ways that violence and exclusion might influence the identity salience of Palestinians in Lebanon. The establishment of the state of Israel, which pushed large numbers of Palestinians from their homes and into refugee communities throughout the Arab world, is a major factor that might increase the salience of Palestinian national identity. The continual exclusion of Palestinians from Lebanese society is a second factor that might increase identity salience. A third factor is the violence Palestinians experienced during the civil war. Interview participants from Palestinian NGOs told stories indicating that their experience as refugees, their continual exclusion from Lebanese society, and their experience of violence during the Lebanese civil war influenced their attitudes about the work in which their organizations were engaged. Their Palestinian identity salience was high, and all participants indicated that their Palestinian identity had far greater influence on their work than religious identity.

Perhaps the most commonly mentioned complaint among Palestinian interview participants was the exclusion of Palestinians from participation in Lebanese society. NGO workers saw this exclusion as having a negative impact on the practical nature of their work, and in many ways increasing their workload. Because Palestinians cannot work in approximately 70 professions, because they cannot be treated in Lebanese government hospitals, and because many are living in poor conditions in the camps, NGO workers felt that the social, economic, and health problems of service recipients were exacerbated. One interview participant notes,

"The Palestinians in Lebanon are forbidden from civil and human rights. We are not allowed to be treated in Lebanese government hospitals. About 72 types of jobs, we are not allowed to work in them. We are not allowed to inherit property, like if it’s left to our children...If you visit the camps you can see how they suffer from segregation, from health, the living conditions, from crowdedness of houses and crowdedness inside the houses, and we have a high percentage of chronic diseases.

Much like the Armenians, Palestinians’ experience of being pushed out of their homeland caused interview participants from Palestinians NGOs to also give great importance to efforts to preserve Palestinian culture and identity. One interview participant explains,

"One of our most important projects is saving the Palestinian heritage, the needlework and the embroidery that they do, the Palestinian folk dances... We also have a project where we emphasize on having every child know where he is from in Palestine, what city or village in Palestine, just to keep their memory."
One interesting characteristic of the interviews with the Palestinian NGO workers is their rejection of any affiliation with a religious identity. This usually came out in response to questions confirming that the NGO was not a faith-based organization. Several respondents took great care to explain that their Palestinian identity was most important, regardless of their religious identity.

For the Palestinians, we feel that it doesn’t really matter if we are Christians, if we are Druze, if we are Muslims, if we’re Jews. We don’t care, we are just Palestinians, you know? We are all Palestinians regardless of our religion. This is how I feel and this is how I feel that the Palestinians feel. Like here as I told you we have Christians and Muslims, and we live really peacefully, we are a family.

And we have another camp, I don’t know if you know about the other camp, it’s Palestinian Christians there. You know, it’s amazing, they still have the accent, the Palestinian accent. And for me, I’m a Muslim, but when I go there, I feel like I am going to Palestine. It’s overwhelming for me just to be there. And I don’t care- this is how we feel, the Palestinians. It’s Palestine, it’s Palestinians, it’s not what your religion is.

For interview participants from Palestinian NGOs, similar to those of Armenian NGOs, ethnic identity has a strong influence on the attitudes and behavior of NGO staff. Also similar to the Armenian NGOs, the Palestinian NGOs serve almost exclusively Palestinian recipients. Most interview participants attributed this to the geographic location of their work, which was typically focused inside Palestinian refugee camps. As is the case with the other NGOs examined, service provision is structured along identity-based lines.

**Conclusion**

This is a relatively small study examining the role of faith and ethnicity as motivations for service by NGO staff members in Lebanon. While the population examined here is limited and most certainly does not represent volunteer behavior as a whole, NGO staff and volunteers are a valuable population to examine due to their strong involvement in the social service sector in Lebanon and other Arab countries.

The interview data indicates that staff members from most of the religious traditions included in the study are motivated by their faith to be of service to others, and many believe the faith orientation of their organization adds value to their service provision. However, this perception differs based on religious tradition. Religious social networks also play a strong role in leading NGO staff and volunteers to become involved in a service career. The interview data indicates that staff members from Armenian and Palestinian NGOs have a strong motivation to be of service to their community due to past experiences of violence and exclusion in the region. The motivation to preserve linguistic and cultural aspects of their communities is paramount.

A better understanding of the influence of faith and ethnicity on service to others offers policy makers a potential opportunity to capitalize on this behavior and increase volunteerism, donations, and other forms of service. However, due in large part to Lebanon’s history of sectarian conflict and civil war, past experiences of ethnic and religious conflict motivate most groups to serve primarily members of their own ethnic and religious community rather than the community as a whole. This
pattern of service has the potential to heighten sectarian boundaries and increase conflict. In the case of Lebanon and other contexts plagued by religious or ethnic conflict, policy makers must be mindful of this dynamic. (xviii)


Greenspan, I. (2004). Mediating Bedouin Futures? The roles and influence of NGOs in the conflict between the State of Israel and the Negev Bedouins. Paper read at International Society for Third Sector Research Sixth International Conference, in Toronto, ON.


Vogel, Dita (2008), Highly Active Immigrants: A resource for European civil societies. New York: Peter Lang.


**End Notes**

i. (Greeley, 1997; Hodgkinson, 1990; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, & Kirsch, 1990; Lam, 2002)
ii. (Cairns, Harris, & Hutchison, 2005; Jeavons, 1994)
iii. (Smith et al, 1999)
iv. (Vogel, 2008)
v. (Obeid, 2006)
ix. According to the CIA World Factbook (2006), Lebanon’s population is 39% Christian.
iiii. According to the CIA World Factbook (2006), Lebanon’s population is 59.7% Muslim. This figure includes Druze along with Shiites, Sunni, and other Muslim groups).
ix. (Simon 1993)
x. (Anand 2004; Anheier and Salamon 1998; Ilichman, Katz, and Queen II 1998; James 1989; Smith et al. 1999)
xi. (Joseph 1995; Smith et al. 1999)

xii. (Smith et al. 1999; Greenspan 2004; Osili 2004)
xiii. (Isdudi 2004; Paulos; Smith et al. 1999)
xiv. (Cochrane 2004; Smith et al. 1999)
xv. (Wuthnow, 1993)
xvi. (Skocpol, 2000)
xvii. (Wuthnow, 1999)
xviii. 3 Economists have been interested in religion since the time of Adam Smith (1759). Rational choice studies of religion tend to focus on religious markets, religious human capital, and churches as clubs and firms. Many of these studies emphasize maximization of after-life utility, free riding, or competition among sects as opposed to material benefits of religious participation (Iannaconne, 1998).
xix. Marx (2003) demonstrates the important role that religious exclusion played in national consolidation in Europe; Huntington (1993) argues that religion will be one of the fundamental sources of global political conflict in coming years.
xx. (Werbner, 2002)
xxi. Ibid, (p. 125)
xxii. Because secular NGOs by definition do not belong to any sect, seven secular NGOs were included in this column not because they primarily serve individuals from their own sect, but because they serve a homogenous group of individuals primarily from one single sect.
xxv. (Greeley, 1997; Hodgkinson, 1990; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, & Kirsch, 1990; Lam, 2002)
xxvi. (Cairns, Harris, & Hutchison, 2005; Jeavons, 1994)
xxviii. (Benthall & Bellion-Jourdan, 2003)
xxix. (Arjomand, 1998)
x. (Penslar, 1998)
xxxi. (Anheier & Salamon, 1998; James, 1989; Rose-Ackerman, 1996)
xxxi. Cameron (2005) (p. 1)
xxxii. (James, 1989)
xxxiii. (Rose-Ackerman, 1996)
xxxiv. (Anheier & Salamon, 1998)
xxxv. (Anheier & Salamon, 1998; James, 1989; Rose-Ackerman, 1996)
xxxvi. Cameron (2005) (p. 1)
xxxvii. (Ebaugh et al., 2003; Greeley, 1997; Hodgkinson, 1990; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, & Kirsch, 1990; Lam, 2002)
xxxviii. (Benthall & Bellion-Jourdan, 2003)
xli. (Obeid, 2006)
xlii. Ibid. (p. 233)
xliii. In this table the percentage of interview participants mentioning a particular reason for working in a social service NGO does not add up to 100% because many participants mentioned more than one reason for choosing their line of work.
xliii. (Fisk, 2006)
xl. (Johnson, 2001)
xli. (Fisk, 2006)
xliii. (Abul-Husn, 1998)
xlvii. (Abul-Husn, 1998)
xlviii. (Flanigan, 2010)