ISLAMIC AND CHRISTIAN INSPIRED RELIEF NGOs: BETWEEN TACTICAL COLLABORATION AND STRATEGIC DIFFIDENCE?

CARLO BENEDETTI*

Mediterranean and Asia Office, UCODEP, NGO

Abstract: This article focuses on the identification of different types of Islamic and Christian inspired relief NGOs. Four ideal types are outlined following a framework for the analysis of Religious NGOs. The possibilities of collaboration between these NGOs are investigated. The article argues that there is a greater likelihood of collaboration among NGOs closer to the moderate end of the framework. However, collaboration remains difficult on a strategic level and is often limited to a field based, tactical level cooperation. A broader mutual understanding is needed in order to improve global coordination between NGOs coming from different religious traditions. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: NGO; relief; religion; Christianity; Islam; coordination; humanitarianism

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

The article analyses the literature on Muslim and Christian relief agencies and proposes a framework for understanding the relationships between them and for possible collaboration in the future.

The term 'relief agency' is extremely broad. It can encompass anything from a UN specialised agency working in disaster affected areas, to a local Non Governmental

---

*Correspondence to: C. Benedetti, Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit, Department of Politics, University of York, York, UK and UCODEP, Mediterranean and Asia Office, V. Rossini 20R, Firenze, Italy. E-mail: carlobenedetti@libero.it

[1]The preliminary research for this article was conducted at the Post War Reconstruction Unit at the Department of Politics of the University of York during my MA course. This was made possible through the generous support of the 'Cesifin Alberto Predieri' Foundation funded by the 'Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze'. I am grateful for their valuable and continuous help.

Organisation (NGO) working with deprived citizens in any medium sized city in the world. The article concentrates on international NGOs working within the humanitarian sector. Moreover, the common distinction between Muslim and Western agencies is questioned and replaced by the following categories: Christian faith-based NGOs and Islamic faith-based NGOs. Ideal types of Islamic NGOs and Christian NGOs are proposed and the possible structural incompatibilities among them discussed.

The article concludes that from a tactical, day-to-day perspective there are no real limitations to the collaboration of those Christian and Islamic faith-based NGOs that have espoused modern principles of management in relief efforts. Nevertheless, it remains unclear if differences prevent true long-term collaboration.

2   ASSUMPTIONS, TERMINOLOGY AND APPROACH

The assumption underlying this analysis is that, by working together in relief and emergency situations, NGOs can maximise their beneficial impact and minimise overlap and wasting of resources. For example, all too often the creation of separate refugee camps—set up by Christian and Islamic NGOs—has caused the loss of valuable resources that might have been otherwise employed. Moreover, on a broader level, collaboration between Christian and Islamic NGOs could ease some of the tensions that arise in areas where the two religious traditions are mixed. Ideally, the strategic decision to work—or not to work—in some areas could reinforce NGOs' legitimacy if taken jointly by organisations from different religious backgrounds. The 'strategic level' I refer to, in my analysis, should be conceived in these terms.

This article attempts to define ideal types of faith based NGOs in order to compare Christian and Islamic inspired organisations. It derives its faith based typology from the framework elaborated by Berger (2003). However, the operationalisation of some of the variables is problematic. It is impossible to measure with some degree of accuracy the level of religiosity of different organisations. The framework is therefore used throughout this article not as a tool to categorise real-life organisations, but rather as a 'mental map' to rationalise and provide some insight into the faith-based NGOs' universe.

2.1   NGOs: Definitions and Typologies

The term NGO has many different interpretations. Its history starts with the UN charter's Article 71 that allows NGOs to be accredited to the UN for consultative purposes (Martens, 2002). Since then, a vast literature emerged about NGOs' roles, functions and developments. However, the structure and organisation of NGOs remain under-researched. A proposed definition for NGOs reads as follow: '*NGOs are formal (professionalised) independent societal organisations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level*' (Martens, 2002, p. 282). They are formal organisations because they have at least a minimal organisational structure which allows them to provide for continuous work. They are professionalised entities because their staff can be duly paid and have highly specialised labour skills, but at the same time the organisation as a whole remains nonprofit-oriented. NGOs are independent because their funding should come primarily from donations and membership fees. Finally, NGOs are societal organisations

because they originate in the private sphere and usually do not include governmental representatives and institutions. (Martens, 2002, pp. 282–283).

However, this article is not concerned with all the NGOs in the definition above. In order to better understand the types of NGOs to which we are referring, a typology of NGOs would be required. However, the categorisation of NGOs is far from obvious—different criteria are the basis of different typologies. This is not surprising as this difficulty stems from the '[. . .] tremendous diversity found in the Global NGO community' (Martens, 2002, p. 277). In this article, we are concerned only with international NGOs working in the humanitarian sector. Even so, there are several typologies based on different variables: the NGOs' 'school of thought' (Charitable, Legalistic and Interventionist; Ruffini, 2004); their attitude towards the traditional principle of humanitarianism (Stoddard, 2003, p. 28); and their independence or dependence from government intertwined with their impartial/ traditional or partial/solidaristic stance regarding humanitarian principles (Stoddard, 2003, pp. 28–29). The common division between 'Muslim' and 'Western' NGOs, is grossly misleading, implying a unity between all the NGOs coming from a vague geographical unit (the 'West') and all the NGOs coming from a religious tradition ('Islam'). Moreover, it implies a comparison between the two which is unfair given the qualitative difference in the constructed categories. Therefore, further definition is required.

This article focuses on faith-based NGOs working in the humanitarian/relief sector (as opposed to the development sector) and international in character. Faith-based NGOs are different from secular NGOs in that their 'identity and mission are self-consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions [. . .]' (Berger, 2003, p.25). It is important however to keep in mind that the distinction between secular and faith-based NGOs is better understood as a continuum, rather than as a discrete categorisation (Berger, 2003). Secularism is not a clear-cut concept and some parts of it go back to Judeo-Christian origins (Keane, 2002). Difficulties in defining their position regarding religion are encountered by the NGOs themselves (Berger, 2003, pp. 20–22). Nevertheless, in what follows, I operationalise the definition of faith-based NGOs as those that identify themselves as religious.

Finally, using the above definitions, the focus of analysis is NGOs that are formal (professionalised) independent societal organisations whose primary aim is to promote relief efforts in disaster situations at the international level, and whose identity and mission are self-consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions.

3   FAITH-BASED NGOs

Following Berger (2003), I identify a framework for the analysis of faith-based NGOs and apply it to Christian and Islamic NGOs. The main characteristics of both are outlined and grouped into four ideal types.

The existence of faith-based NGOs is not new. Many of them are 'new incarnations' of previous religious organisations (Berger, 2003, p. 20). To analyse them it seems useful to utilise a framework composed of religious, organisational, strategic and service dimensions (Berger, 2003, p. 22–33). The religious dimension can be conceived in terms of orientation and pervasiveness. Orientation is defined as the religious self-identity of the NGOs, be it Christian, Muslim, Jewish etc. Pervasiveness is concerned with the quantitative nature of religious orientation and assesses how much this influences the

organisation's identity, membership, funding, mission and services provided (Berger, 2003, pp. 23–25). As mentioned above, there is no precise way to 'measure' this aspect— nor it is the aim of this article to do that—but there are some milestones that can prove insightful. For example, if only practising believers compose the membership of an organisation, it is safe to postulate that its religious pervasiveness is greater than that of an organisation with mixed—believers and non-believers—membership. The organisational dimension comprises the issue of representation, geographical range, structure and funding. Representation refers to those on whose behalf the NGO claim to speak. The issue of geographical range refers to the presence of the NGO in different locations. The issue of structure assesses the degree of centralisation of authority. The financing issue examines the sources of funding of the NGO (Berger, 2003, pp. 25–29). The strategic dimension can be divided into the issue of motivation, based on religious faith and on its degree, and the issue of mission, general or specific (Berger, 2003, pp. 29–32).[2] Finally, the service dimension concerns the outputs of the NGO. It can be divided into the orientation of the outputs (e.g. education, relief, social service, salvation, mobilisation of opinion), the geographic range of the outputs and the beneficiaries' categories of the outputs (Berger, 2003, pp. 32–33). In short, the different combination of the variables in the framework gives an idea of the complexity and diversity inherent to faith-based NGOs.

4   FAITH-BASED NGOs: CHRISTIAN INSPIRED NGOs

In this section, after describing the main characteristics of Christian NGOs, I identify two ideal types, the *Secular* and the *Militant* Christian NGO. They lie on a continuum built on the framework of analysis outlined above, and differ in terms of their degree of religiosity.

Christian inspired NGOs are usually overlooked when talking about western NGOs, as if they were a remnant of the past or as if the western NGOs were necessarily secular in nature (Ghandour, 2002). Quite on the contrary, a quarter of the $2.5bn US government funding for relief and development in 2000 went to four NGOs of which two were Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and World Vision, both religious in nature (Stoddard, 2003, p. 26). There are two main traditions of Christian NGOs: the Protestant and the Catholic.[3] However, pervasiveness varies considerably across Christian NGOs. Even if the NGO identifies itself with a religious tradition, its membership and staff is mainly composed of non-practising Christians (Benthall, 2003a, p. 38). World Vision, for example, employs non-Christians in states where Christians are a minority (Mlay, 2004). Funding is not really encouraged in religious terms. Overall, appeals for donations refer to 'charity' and compassion which have a very strong Christian resonance, but Christianity lacks the codification of Islam in charitable giving (Benthall, 2003a, 2003b). Charities' fund-raising has become 'gradually a branch of consumer merchandising in which the various motives for charitable giving are skilfully played on' (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, p. 87). The mission can be very different, regarding its religiosity, as well. On one end of a continuum, there are mission statements indistinguishable from those of secular NGOs. On the other end, some NGOs

---

[2]I leave out the issue of 'process', identified by Berger, as I believe it does not add anything new to the framework. The 'process' is related to the way the work of the NGO is pursued. Berger identifies Moral suasion, Dialogue, Information, Modelling, Advocacy, Monitoring and Spiritual guidance as possible ways of working. I believe that the Service dimension, see *infra*, covers these issues as well.

[3]For the former the main actors are: World Vision, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation etc. For the latter: Caritas, CRS, CAFOD, etc.

seek actively to spread the message of Christ (Berger, 2003; Ghandour, 2003). The organisational dimension and the representation issue in particular are varied. Some NGOs claim to represent the totality of believers of a particular faith.[4] Some others express themselves in terms of a multi-denominational spirit and claim to represent a Christian ethos (Berger, 2003). Many of these NGOs are 'multinational'[5] in geographic range and some of them operate in dozens of different countries (Linderberg and Bryant, 2001). Their organisational structure in terms of centralisation of decision-making varies considerably. On one hand, NGOs like CRS have a completely centralised 'unitary corporate organisational structure' (Berger, 2003, p. 27). On the other, Protestant NGOs tend to have a more federal structure with a central office coordinating between various sub-entities. The Lutheran World Federation, for example, illustrates this. Its 56 member churches are proportionally represented in the Assembly, the main decisional body of this NGO (Berger, 2003, pp. 27–28).

As mentioned above, Christian NGOs' funding can derive from government contributions as well as from voluntary donations. However some of them are so dependent on the funding of one particular state that they can be perceived as politicised. Caritas, for example, is funded by the Catholic Church and applies Vatican policies (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 292–294) Nevertheless, Christian NGOs are no more dependent on government or public funding than their secular counterparts (Stoddard, 2003). On the service dimension, relief aid is carried out by all the NGOs considered, but very few of them have it as their only goal (Stoddard, 2003). Finally, the beneficiaries of aid are theoretically not distinguished in terms of religion or any other criteria. This refers to the traditional values of humanitarianism which were originally moulded by religious orders in Europe and then found their secular translation in the Dunanist tradition (Benthall, 2003b). However, some NGOs make promises of help contingent upon conversion and have questionable practices such as forceful baptisms of Muslims while they are being treated in hospitals (Ghandour, 2003).

It can be argued that there is a polarisation in Christian NGOs. Two ideal types will be helpful in conceptualising this polarisation. One refers to NGOs with low religious pervasiveness in the membership and the mission. Their language is similar to secular NGOs. Their operations are indistinguishable from those mentioned above, however their mission still uses Christianity as reference point and ideology. Therefore, they do not fit into the relativist approach of secular NGOs. On the contrary, they venture "beyond notions of social responsibility to assertions of 'Rights' and 'Wrongs', 'Truths' and 'Untruths' " (Berger, 2003, p. 31). I refer to this as the *Secular*-Christian NGO. The other ideal type refers to NGOs with high religious pervasiveness both in the membership, which might require high religious motivations, and the mission. They actively seek to spread the Gospel and for example distribute bibles in refugee camps (Ghandour, 2003). The humanitarian principle of neutrality and impartiality are not highly regarded by them. I refer to this as the *Militant*-Christian NGO. Obviously, there is not a clear cut divide in reality between these two types of NGOs; they rather form a continuum along which real NGOs are placed.

---

[4]See the Lutheran World Federation who claims to represent 'over 60.5 million Lutherans' (Berger, 2003, p. 26).
[5]The term 'multinational' is used throughout this article in the sense set out in Linderberg and Bryant, (2001). It refers to what they call 'multinational stage three':

NGO [. . .] not only has many offices that produce and provide services in other countries, but also affiliates [. . .] in those countries. [. . .] Local office staffs are largely from those countries, but middle and upper level field managers increasingly are multinational. Its headquarters staff and board members, however, are still largely from the headquarters country (Linderberg and Bryant, 2001, p. 7).

5   FAITH-BASED NGOs: ISLAMIC INSPIRED NGOs

In this section, I sketch a brief outline of the Islamic 'world vision' and rules regarding alms giving which are precisely codified. Two ideal types of Islamic NGOs are suggested and described using the same categories and variables as for the Christians and present a similar picture. On one end, we find the *Militant* Islamic NGOs and on the other the *Moderate* Islamic NGOs.

5.1   Islamic Almsgiving: An Introduction

Islamic inspired NGOs are generally more recent in formation than Christian NGOs (Strand, 1998). Many of them originated in four events that increased the social militancy of the Islamic world—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Iranian Revolution the same year, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the defeat of USSR in Afghanistan in 1989. They also profited from the growth of NGOs in the 1970s and 1980s (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 63–67).

It is useful to give a brief outline of the Islamic 'world vision' regarding charity before analysing Islamic NGOs, as it is less researched and less known than its Christian counterpart. Islam is the monotheist religion that has gone furthest in codifying alms giving. In its metaphysical vision, this is closely linked to Justice and Equity (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 24–25). In a way, giving to the poor is a duty to fully enjoy one's own wealth and to purify it. *Zakat*[6] is the main religious institution through which this is achieved. It is one of the five pillars of Islam[7] and consists of one-fortieth of one's assets per year to be given for charitable reasons (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, pp. 8–9). The possible beneficiaries of *zakat* are divided in eight categories,[8] but their interpretation varies greatly across different Islamic traditions. All the believers in Islam form together the *umma*, or union of the believers which has its geopolitical reification in the *dar al-Islam* or dominion of Islam, that is, all the territories where Islam is the dominating religion. This has its counterpart in the *dar al-harb* or dominion of the war, in other words, all the non-Islamic territories. Of course, this is not an historical reality, but possesses a strong symbolic appeal within the Islamic world and is used by many Islamic NGOs (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 24–29). It is interesting to notice how the NGOs themselves play an important role in (re-)creating this *umma,* being able to address all believers through modern communications technologies (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 121–126).

Finally, it is useful to note the existence of a separated banking and finance system based on Islamic principles and often used by Islamic NGOs, which is usually referred to as 'Islamic finance'. The main difference from the conventional banking system is the

---

[6]*Zakat* derives from the verb *zaka* which means to purify. Therefore, 'by giving up a portion of one's wealth, one purifies that portion which remains' (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, p. 9).

[7]These are the fundamentals of the Islamic Religion and apart from *zakat* are: the *shahada* or 'there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet;' the *salat* or observance of the five daily rituals prayers; the *sawn* or fasting in the month of Ramadan; and *hajj* or the performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime by those able to do it (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, p. 164).

[8]Specifically: *al-fuqara* or the poor; *al-masakin* or the needy; *al-'amalina 'alayha* or the people appointed to administer *zakat*; *al-mu'allafati qulubuhum* or those whose hearts are made incline to truth, usually interpreted as those recently or about to convert; the 'captives', interpreted as war prisoners and once as the enslaved; the debtors; those in *jihad* or in the way of God; and *ibn as-sabil* or the 'Sons of the road', i.e. the travellers in need (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, p. 10).

---

prohibition of *riba* or usury in the Qu'ran. This is translated into the prohibition of interest on bank deposit and on any form of investment. Many modern banks in the Islamic world apply this principles and a whole new economy has been created to adjust to this (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, pp. 37–44). This allows the formation of a '100 per cent Islamic solidarity chain': Islamic NGOs can use religious institutions, like *zakat*, to raise funds through Islamic financial institutions in order to perform recommended Islamic actions in favour of Muslims. At no point do non-Islamic factors enter into the chain (Ghandour, 2002, p. 128).

5.2   Islamic Inspired NGOs

The Islamic NGOs' religious dimension is as varied as the Christian NGOs. However, only very few non-Sunni organisations fit the definition of NGO we set out at the beginning.[9] Therefore the religious orientation of Islamic NGOs considered here will be that of mainstream Sunni Islam only. Organisational identity is determined by religion. There are no Islamic inspired NGOs that vaguely refer to an 'Islamic ethos', being open to different traditions or influences. On the contrary some of them actively seek to spread a particular version of Islam. The International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO), for example, is closely linked to Saudi Wahhabism.[10]

Islam is always considered as a formal religion with duties and customs to be respected, not as an ethical reference. Religion is very important even in the membership. The origins of Islamic NGOs are grounded in an identity of political and humanitarian concerns. They represent a form of 'transnational militancy at the contemporary interface where *militant* mobilisation in the name of Islam meets international humanitarian action' (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, p. 70). Therefore at the beginning the members were part of the Islamist movement, disillusioned with western modernity and convinced that Islam was a viable alternative. However, following their own success, these NGOs have been forced to follow a 'popularisation' path: they employ people who are simply looking for a job, not necessarily Islamist (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 102–104). Today, we can conceive of Islamic NGOs' religiosity as ranging from those employing non-practising Muslims to those requiring a total dedication to the cause of Islam.

The mission is also extremely religiously oriented. It derives from Islamic duties of doing good. In a sense, all Islamic inspired NGOs are grounded in the *zakat* tradition. The funding, therefore, is religiously grounded. However, we can draw a distinction between those NGOs who enforce a '100 per cent Islamic solidarity chain', using only Islamic banks, and those, especially western based, who utilise the conventional banking system. The latter have received much criticism for this and are not considered truly Islamic by Islamists and conservative Muslims (Ghandour, 2002, p. 106). Some NGOs receive strong state support and some of them, like IIRO which receives funds from Saudi Arabia, are seen as semi-state organisations. The services provided also possess a certain 'Islamic flavour', for example, in the omnipresence of aid for orphans, given that the Prophet Muhammad was an orphan (Benthall, 2003a, p. 42). The organisational dimension of representation does not vary from one NGO to another. All of them refer to the *umma* and claim to act on its behalf.

---

[9]See for an example the Agha Khan Foundation, officially non-religious, but deriving from the Ismaili Islamic tradition (Salih, 2002; Berger, 2003).
[10]Wahhabism derives from the conservative eighteenth century reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who was opposed to any practice deviating from the absolute belief in the unity of God (Benthall, 2003a).

Interestingly, the geographic range of Islamic NGOs follows a definite pattern. Almost every NGO works in countries with a very strong Islamic presence, both in the *dar al-Islam* and in territories on the border of it as sub-Saharan Africa, Muslim Kosovo etc. (Ghandour, 2002; Salih, 2002). The structure of Islamic NGOs is very similar to Christian and secular NGOs. Nevertheless, Islamic NGOs tend to be much more centralised than their Christian counterparts. Very few of them, if any, reach transnational status and this can be a reflection of their shorter activity time span (Strand, 1998). The service dimension is extremely relevant, especially concerning the beneficiaries. Most of the NGOs explicitly put higher priorities on aiding Muslims. This derives from the possible beneficiaries of *zakat* which are, following some interpretations, only Muslims. However, other NGOs, for example Islamic Relief, do not distinguish their recipients on the basis of religion. This is because one of the eight categories of 'right recipients' for *zakat* is the 'travellers in need' of whom the religion cannot be ascertained. Therefore *zakat* can be used even for non-Muslims (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, pp. 10–28).

Again, two ideal types can be conceived along a continuum. At one end, Islamic NGOs such as Islamic Relief based in the UK, which use a 'non-100 per cent Islamic solidarity chain' for their funding do not request a total commitment to Islam from their members or employees, but rather look into their academic and professional qualifications. They do not distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim beneficiaries of their aid, but at the same time are strongly grounded in Islamic religious discourse in their publicity and concerned with traditional Islamic categories of the needy, such as orphans. I refer to these as *Moderate* Islamic NGOs. They participate in international humanitarian codes of conduct and share traditional humanitarian principles. At the other end of the spectrum, Islamic NGOs, such as IIRO, strictly utilise Islamic banking. They do distinguish the beneficiaries of their aid, giving preferential treatment to Muslims in need. They refer to their mission as *dawa*, similar in meaning to Christian proselytising. I refer to these as *Militant* Islamic NGOs.

6   CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC NGOs: BETWEEN COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION

Christian and Islamic NGOs close to the *militant* edge of the above proposed continuum have negative perceptions of each other. There is an acknowledged underlying conflict between the two religious traditions, but there are also possibilities of collaboration between those NGOs closer to the moderate end. Their similarities outnumber their differences. At the same time, differences and difficulties remain.

All relief related NGOs have their roots in the concept of 'humanitarianism' in the sense of 'a feeling of concern for and benevolence toward fellow human beings' (Isaac, 1993, p.14). In this very general sense, every NGO follows humanitarian principles. All the monotheist religions have a humanitarian tradition and praise the divine nature of helping others (Isaac, 1993, pp. 14–17). However, humanitarianism has assumed a more specific meaning starting from the nineteenth century through the development of International Humanitarian Law (Cockayne, 2002). Today the humanitarian principles are at the base of a long tradition of aid, which has its terms of reference in the Red Cross and its founder, Henri Dunant (Stoddard, 2003). However, these principles have come under increasing criticism and are being questioned by more interventionist NGOs (Ruffini, 2004). It is not surprising that certain faith-based NGOs, especially those close to the *Militant* Christian

and Islamic NGOs pole, are uncomfortable with them. This results in difficult relations and cross-criticism. Some Islamic NGOs believe in a 'Christian plot against Islam' arguing that all western NGOs, both secular and Christian, are threats to Islam and are working against it (Ghandour, 2003, p. 25). At the same time, some Christian NGOs perceive all Islamic NGOs as having 'humanitarianism only in their name and re-Islamisation as their only goal' (Ghandour, 2002, p. 318). Both these perceptions would fit only few NGOs extremely close to the ideal type of *Militant* Christian and *Militant* Islamic NGOs outlined above. Of course, the reality of things is much more complex. At the very bottom, there is an objective clash between the Islamic *dawa* and Christian *evangelism* as the same person cannot be both Christian and Muslim. Therefore there is an underlying clash of interest between faith-based NGOs (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 320–323).

However, coordination and collaboration are very sensitive issues among all types of NGOs, not only religious, and often fail causing harm to the receivers of aid (Bennet, 1995; Strand, 1998). It is possible to identify a pattern of collaboration among the four ideal types outlined above. It is suggested that the *Militant* NGOs, both Christian and Islamic, will find collaboration very difficult. Nevertheless, collaboration is possible and did happen between the *Secular* Christian NGOs and the *Moderate* Islamic NGOs. Members of these two categories share a common management style grounded in modern techniques and standards and use the same technical jargon (Ghandour, 2002). Islamic Relief, for example, did actively collaborate with Christian Aid in Croatia during the Balkan wars (Ghandour, 2003). A sort of 'field dialogue' opposed to an 'intellectual dialogue' between Islam and Christianity has helped focus on similarities rather than differences (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003, pp. 126–127). A progressive standardisation of marketing and communication techniques has brought Islamic and Christian NGOs closer. Today, Islamic NGOs' and Christian NGOs' publicity is indistinguishable.

However, even in this best-case scenario, difficulties remain. On the field level, one of them is the language and alcohol barrier that restricts both personal and organisational contacts between *Moderate* Islamic and *Secular* Christian NGOs (Strand, 1998, pp. 78–80). But, more importantly, on a global level, there appears to exist a progressive territorialism of humanitarian NGOs working areas (Ghandour, 2002, p. 320). Those areas bordering the *dar al-Islam* are particularly at risk of conflicting behaviours between Christian and Islamic NGOs. Sudan is, for example, an example of this. Ghandour describes this situation as a 'humanitarian cold war' in which collaboration is limited to those areas where both a Christian and an Islamic presence are acceptable and accepted by both sides. In other words, the decision to intervene in some areas is relevant for the type of relationship that will exist between Islamic and Christian NGOs. This is reflected in the 'cultural proximity' thesis following which Islamic NGOs are better suited, and therefore should be given priority, to serve Muslim communities (Strand, 1998; Benthall, 2003b). However, this overlooks the huge differences existing within Islam itself. Experiences in the Balkans show how difficult and counterproductive it is to enforce an Islam different to that of local populations (Blumi, 2002; Benthall, 2003b).

7   CONCLUSION

Having described four ideal types of faith-based NGOs, I now compare their relationship and argue that among the moderate NGOs collaboration is possible on a tactical, field based level. However, broader collaboration remains elusive.

One of the victims of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 is the will of reciprocal understanding among a large part of the Christian and Islamic worlds. Since then, Islamic charities have faced increasingly intense controls for alleged links with extremist groups (Benthall, 2003a). Some of them had their assets frozen as a result of the US 'War on terror'. Nevertheless, this campaign has been slow in progress and confused in content. For example, there is a tendency to disregard the differences between active *dawa* and terrorism or to brand all the 'religiously *militant*' NGOs as extremist (Appleby, 2000, pp. 1–21; Ghandour, 2002, pp. 216–220; Benthall, 2003a, pp. 45–46). Also for these reasons it is important to focus on possible forms of cooperation between Islamic and Christian NGOs. The most suited for cooperation are NGOs closer to the *Secular* Christian and *Moderate* Islamic ideal types. Their operational methods, their projects, their management strategies are very similar. *Moderate* Islamic NGOs have actively sought collaboration with secular and *Secular* Christian NGOs and there are success stories stemming from the field presence (Ghandour, 2003). However, the issue of territoriality of aid makes the work of Christian NGOs difficult or even dangerous in some Muslim states. This should not be denied or overlooked. It is a new feature of the aid environment in the twenty-first century. Overall, collaboration on a tactical level when NGOs are already on the field is possible. It is more difficult to think of a global strategic collaboration for common decisions regarding relief efforts. This asymmetry of access between Islamic and Christian NGOs should not be regarded as totally negative. Accepting the existence of 'non-western approaches to humanitarianism' (Donini, 2004, p. 12) help us to redefine the terms of collaboration. The fact that Islamic NGOs have access to areas where Christian and western NGOs in general do not, should be a reason for satisfaction if the real concern is giving to the needy the help they deserve (Ghandour, 2002, pp. 332–334). Only an open discussion between all the different actors of the humanitarian sector will help to define the necessary new terms of reference for intervention. There are enough points of contact between a large part of the Christian and Islamic NGOs communities to allow a fertile discussion which should bring about changes toward greater mutual understanding. Many NGOs share a common management style, common humanitarian values and similar field activities. A division of labour in the aid system based on security concerns, which exist and are undeniable, might be able to avoid the shortcomings of the 'cultural proximity' thesis. Re-forging it on the basis of safety considerations for the staff of NGOs might be the starting point for a new common ground of discussion, and at the same time, avoid the weaknesses of incorporating the religious beliefs of the targeted populations in the decision to intervene.

REFERENCES

Appleby RS. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham.

Barakat S, Strand A. 1999. When East meets West: clash of civilisations or a new Islamic-Western Aid Culture? *Humanitarian Affairs Review* **Summer**: 30–36.

Bennet J. 1995. *Meeting Needs: NGO Coordination in Practice*. Earthscan Publications Ltd: London.

Benthall J. 1997. The Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and Islamic societies, with special reference to Jordan. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* **24**(2): 157–177.

Benthall J. 2003a. Humanitarianism and Islam after 11 September. In *Humanitarian Action and the 'Global War on Terror': A Review of Trends and Issues*, Joanna M, Adele H (eds). HPG Report; HPG: London; 37–48.

Benthall J. 2003b. *Humanitarianism, Islam and 11 September*. HPG Briefing: London.

Benthall J, Bellion-Jourdan J. 2003. *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World*. I.B. Tauris: London.

Berger J. 2003. Religious nongovernmental organizations: an exploratory analysis. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* **14**(1): 15–39.

Blumi I. 2002. Indoctrinating albanians: dynamics of Islamic aid. *ISIM Newsletter* **11**: 9.

Cockayne J. 2002. Islam and international humanitarian law: from a clash to a conversation between civilizations. *International Review of the Red Cross* **84**(847): 597–626.

Donini A. 2004. Western Aid Agencies don't have a humanitarian monopoly. *Humanitarian Affairs Review* **Autumn**: 12–15.

Ghandour A. 2002. *Jihad Humanitaire: enquête sur les Ong islamiques*. Flammarion: Paris.

Ghandour A. 2003. Humanitarianism, Islam and the West: contest or cooperation?. *Humanitarian Exchange* **25**: 14–17.

Hudock A. 1999. *NGOs and Civil Society: Democracy by Proxy?*. Polity Press: Cambridge.

Isaac E. 1993. Humanitarianism across religions and cultures. In *Humanitarianism Across Borders: Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, Weiss TG, Minear L (eds). Lynne Rienner: Boulder.

Keane J. 2002. The limits of Secularism. In *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, Esposito J, Azzam T (eds). Hurst & Company: London.

Linderberg M, Bryant C. 2001. *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs*. Kumarian Press Inc: Bloomfield.

Martens K. 2002. Mission impossible? Defining nongovernmental organizations. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* **13**(3): 271–285.

Mlay W. 2004. Some myths about faith-based humanitarian aid. *Humanitarian Exchange* **27**: 48–51.

Ruffini G. 2004. *Principles of Humanitarian Action. Lecture given at PRDU*, University of York: on 10/11/2004.

Salih M. 2002. *Islamic NGOs in Africa: The Promise and Peril of Islamic Voluntarism*. University of Copenhagen Centre of African Studies: Copenhagen.

Stoddard A. 2003. Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends. In *Humanitarian Action and the 'Global War on Terror': A Review of Trends and Issues*, Joanna M, Adele H (eds). HPG Report, HPG: London; 25–36.

Strand A. 1998. *Bridging the Gap Between Islamic and Western NGOs Working in Conflict Areas*. Unpublished MA dissertation, PRDU: University of York (York).

Sullivan D. 1996. NGOs in Palestine: Agents of Development and Foundation of Civil Society. *Journal of Palestine Studies* **25**(3): 93–100.

UISP—United States Institute of Peace 2001. Faith-Based NGOs and International Peacebuilding Special Report. Washington, UISP.

UISP—United States Institute of Peace 2003. *Can Faith-Based NGOs Advance Interfaith Reconciliation?* The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina Special Report. Washington, UISP.

Wiktorowicz Q, Farouki S. 2000. Islamic NGOs and Muslim politics: a case from Jordan. *Third World Quarterly* **21**(4): 685–699.