



The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities

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Table of contents

Table of contents	3
Table of figures	7
Acknowledgements	9
Abbreviations	13
1. Introduction	15
1.1 <i>Initial observations</i>	15
1.1.1 Religious minorities possess a demonstrable vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses.	16
1.1.2 From the perspective of human security, the enforcement of religious freedom poses challenges, especially in subnational areas with weak rule of law and weak state capacity.....	17
1.1.3 Non-state actors, including ethnic groups and organized crime, can create vulnerability for religious minorities.	18
1.1.4 There seems to be a relation between the behavior of religious minorities and their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses.....	19
1.1.5 Religion appears to be a factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities.	20
1.1.6 Religious minorities possess a specific vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses.	22
1.1.7 Religious minorities use or could use mechanisms to cope with human security threats.	23
1.2 <i>Justification</i>	23
1.2.1 Societal relevance	23
1.2.2 Academic relevance.....	24
1.3 <i>Aim of this research</i>	25
1.4 <i>Research questions</i>	26
1.5 <i>Definitions of key concepts</i>	27
1.5.1 Religion	27
1.5.2 Religious minority	28
1.5.3 Vulnerability	30
1.5.4 Specificity	30
1.6 <i>Case study exploration</i>	31
1.7 <i>Reading guide</i>	33
2. Human security and the specific vulnerability of religious minorities	35
2.1 <i>Ways to understand the reasons behind the vulnerability of religious minorities</i>	35
2.1.1 The relation between religious identity and vulnerability.....	35
2.1.2 Vulnerability as a result of deviant social behavior	37
2.1.3 The specific vulnerability of commitment to justice.....	39
2.1.4 State regulation of religion	40
2.2 <i>When vulnerability becomes conflict: understanding ethno-religious conflict in conflict theory</i>	43
2.2.1 Grievance.....	43
2.2.2 Greed	44
2.2.3 Opportunity.....	45
2.3 <i>Coping with vulnerability: resilience</i>	46
2.3.1 Resilience.....	46
2.3.2 Coping mechanisms.....	47
2.4 <i>Synthesis: pieces to the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities</i>	51
3. Strengths and shortcomings of religious freedom assessment tools from a human security perspective	55
3.1 <i>Evaluation of religious freedom assessment tools</i>	55

3.1.1	Origins	55
3.1.2	Methodological review	59
3.1.3	Contributions	60
3.1.4	Shortcomings	61
3.1.5	Synthesis: the limited value of Religious Freedom Assessment Tools.....	64
3.2	<i>Gaining from the human security perspective</i>	64
3.2.1	The relevance of human security for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities .	65
3.2.2	Operationalization of the human security perspective to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities	66
3.3	<i>The multidimensionality of religious freedom</i>	69
3.3.1	Spheres of society	69
3.3.2	Connections between key concepts.....	70
3.3.3	Discarded concepts	71
3.4	<i>Towards a new perspective</i>	73
4.	The Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool.....	75
4.1	<i>Requirements of a new tool</i>	75
4.2	<i>Construction of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool</i>	77
4.2.1	Context of the case study	78
4.2.2	Threat assessment	80
4.2.3	Specificity assessment	82
4.2.4	Resilience assessment	84
4.3	<i>Case study selection</i>	85
4.3.1	Active religious behavior.....	87
4.3.2	Clearly distinguishable group	87
4.3.3	Failing rule of law and undemocratic regime	87
4.3.4	Blind spots on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools	88
4.3.5	Potential for generalization and analytical contribution	88
4.3.6	Specificity	89
4.3.7	Analytical relevance of coping mechanisms.....	89
4.4	<i>Data collection</i>	90
4.5	<i>Security risks and ethical challenges</i>	91
4.6	<i>Concluding remarks: a new tool</i>	92
5.	The vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí, Mexico	93
5.1	<i>The unexplored relation between organized crime and religious freedom</i>	94
5.1.1	Actively practicing Christians, a minority within Mexican Christianity	94
5.1.2	Subnational democratic challenges and cartel violence in northeast Mexico	96
5.1.3	The overlooked role of organized crime on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools	101
5.1.4	The vulnerability of actively practicing Christians to organized crime	103
5.2	<i>Data collection</i>	104
5.3	<i>Security risks and ethical challenges</i>	105
5.4	<i>Assessment phase</i>	106
5.4.1	Threat assessment	107
5.4.2	Specificity assessment	117
5.4.3	Resilience assessment	121
5.5	<i>Evaluation</i>	125
5.5.1	Contributions	126
5.5.2	Limitations.....	127
6.	The vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the <i>resguardos indígenas</i> of the southwestern highlands of Colombia.....	129

6.1	<i>The disregard for religious freedom in the Nasa resguardos indígenas</i>	129
6.1.1	The religious agenda of cultural dissidents within the Nasa ethnic group	130
6.1.2	Legal insecurity and religious tensions in the Nasa resguardos	133
6.1.3	The repression of cultural dissidents.....	138
6.2	<i>Data collection</i>	139
6.3	<i>Security risks and ethical challenges</i>	141
6.4	<i>Assessment phase</i>	142
6.4.1	Threat assessment	142
6.4.2	Specificity assessment	159
6.4.3	Resilience assessment	161
6.5	<i>Evaluation</i>	165
6.5.1	Contributions	165
6.5.2	Limitations.....	167
7.	The vulnerability of Christians in Cuba	169
7.1	<i>The regulation of religion by the Cuban authoritarian regime</i>	169
7.1.1	The differentiated treatment of Christians by the Cuban government.	170
7.1.2	Changes and continuity in Cuba's religious policy.....	173
7.1.3	The ongoing vulnerability of Christians in Cuba.....	177
7.2	<i>Data collection</i>	178
7.3	<i>Security risks and ethical challenges</i>	180
7.4	<i>Assessment phase</i>	181
7.4.1	Threat assessment	181
7.4.2	Specificity assessment	198
7.4.3	Resilience assessment	202
7.5	<i>Evaluation</i>	210
7.5.1	Contributions	210
7.5.2	Limitations.....	211
8.	Reflection on the specific vulnerability of religious minorities	213
8.1	<i>Empirical value of the case studies</i>	213
8.1.1	Summary of findings	213
8.1.2	Comparison.....	218
8.2	<i>Reflection on the research process</i>	221
8.3	<i>Methodological evaluation of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool</i>	223
8.3.1	Methodological innovations.....	223
8.3.2	Scope of empirical observation.....	224
8.3.3	Replicability.....	226
8.3.4	Generalizability and comparability	226
8.3.5	Determination of specificity	227
8.3.6	Synthesis: the RM-VAT as a complement to other tools and frameworks	228
8.4	<i>Contributions to the literature</i>	228
8.4.1	Applications of interpretative models of the vulnerability of religious minorities	229
8.4.2	Improvements to Religious Freedom Assessment Tools	231
8.4.3	Developing human security	232
8.5	<i>Exploration of possible areas for future research</i>	234
8.5.1	Areas for future research that arise from the case studies.....	234
8.5.2	Broader applications of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool	236
8.5.3	Development of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool.....	237
8.6	<i>Implications for religious minorities, faith-based organizations and human rights agencies</i>	239
8.6.1	Comments on intervention strategies to develop the resilience of vulnerable religious minorities	239

8.6.2	The role religious groups could play to mitigate the impact of organized crime	245
8.6.3	Policy recommendations to address minority-within-the-minority conflicts	247
8.6.4	Recommendations for religious minorities in authoritarian regimes	249
9.	Summary	251
10.	Samenvatting	253
	References	257
	Annexes.....	275
A.	Papers and conferences based on this dissertation	275
B.	Scores of Colombia, Cuba and Mexico on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools (most recent publications).....	277
C.	Violent incidents of persecution against Christians in Colombia, Cuba and Mexico (2011-2018).....	280
D.	Comparison of Religious Freedom Assessment Tools.....	282
E.	Spheres of society.....	291
F.	Geographical localization of the Nasa (Páez) ethnic group in Colombia	292
G.	Legal synthesis: indigenous communities in Colombian legislation.....	295
H.	Examples of religious freedom cases in Colombian and Inter-American jurisprudence.....	297
I.	Registered Protestant denominations in Cuba	299
J.	Definitions of key concepts used in this research.....	301

Table of figures

4.1 The interaction between specific vulnerability and resilience	77
4.2 Continuum of religious identity and behavior	79
4.3 Tool for the assessment of human security threats by sphere of society.....	82
4.4 Degree of specificity of the vulnerability of the religious minority to identified threats	83
4.5 Categorization of coping mechanisms of religious minorities.....	84
5.1 Categories of religious identity and behavior by % of total population in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico).....	95
5.2 Map of the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico).....	97
5.3 Threat assessment of actively practicing Christians in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico).....	107
5.4 Specificity assessment of threats against actively practicing Christians in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico)	118
6.1 Map of the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments)	133
6.2 Threat assessment of cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos (Colombia)	143
6.3 Specificity assessment of threats against cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos (Colombia)	159
7.1 Map of Cuba.....	169
7.2 Degrees of pressure depending on type of recognition of Christian denomination or church (Cuba)	170
7.3 Threat assessment of Christians (Cuba)	182
7.4 Specificity assessment of threats against Christians (Cuba)	198
8.1 Synthesis of intervention strategies by religious minorities, faith-based organizations and human rights agencies	245

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Through my work as a development consultant in Latin America to various civil society organizations and international institutions over the last ten years, dealing with topics related to democracy assistance, social dialogue, parliamentary reform, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and conflict resolution, I made a number of empirical observations that gave origin to this research. I mention the names of these organizations when relevant in the body of this research or in the bibliographical references.

This thesis draws extensively on the empirical material I gathered as part of my work as persecution analyst for the World Watch Research Unit of Open Doors International (2011-2016) and as field manager for Mexico and Cuba of the same organization (2016-2017). I thank all my former colleagues, most of whom I can unfortunately not name publicly, for their continuous support.

While working for Open Doors, I was personally involved in the process leading up to the methodological revision of the World Watch List, working in the team of Frans Veerman, a methodological genius, my longstanding ally and personal mentor, together with my good friends Daniel Ottenberg and Ashagrie Abdi. During that period, I contributed to the research of the organization on various Latin American countries which is reflected in the annual World Watch List reports that are published every year in January. The World Watch List meets an important need but, as any tool, has its limitations. The Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool developed in this research should be viewed as a complement to it.

The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, which I founded in 2018 and directed until 2020, further provided me with a stimulating environment to deepen the reflection on the vulnerability of religious minorities I started through this thesis. My appreciation to my team at the Observatory for engaging in stimulating debates with me.

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Finally, I would like to comment on the ongoing discussion in The Netherlands about the desirability and even legality of the dedication of dissertations to God. This research advocates there should be room for religious expression in all spheres of society, including in academia. Religious freedom is a multidimensional principle which cannot be confined to the private sphere. Failing to understand that religious freedom transcends to all spheres of society, is failing to understand the true nature of religion and what makes religious minorities vulnerable. Academic freedom and religious freedom intersect, as do many other freedoms. Since its creation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has been a platform for religious

expression, and has upheld a tradition of both academic and religious freedom. It's an honor to be part of this tradition.

The illustration on the cover of this book was made by Hugo Ortiz De Pinedo (Tiger Cartoon). It represents the unfinished temple de la Preciosa Sangre in Mascota, Jalisco (Mexico). The building of this temple started in the nineteenth century but could not be completed due to religious persecution.

Abbreviations

ARDA	The Association of Religion Data Archives
CDA	Corporación Dios es Amor, Colombia (Foundation God is Love)
CEDECOL	Consejo Evangélico de Colombia (Colombian Evangelical Council)
CIC	Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba (Cuban Council of Churches)
CIRI	Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CRIC	Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, Colombia (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca)
CSW	Christian Solidarity Worldwide
DNP	Departamento Nacional de Planeación, Colombia (National Planning Department of Colombia)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FORB	Freedom of religion or belief
GECHS	The Global Environmental Change and Human Security Project
GFI	Government Favoritism of Religion Index
GIS	Geographic Information System
GRI	Government Restrictions Index
GRP	Government Religious Preference
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
ICEN	Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Nasa, Colombia (Christian Evangelical Nasa Church)
ICG	International Crisis Group
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, Mexico (National Institute for Statistics and Geography)
IRFA	International Religious Freedom Act (United States)
JUSTAPAZ	Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (Christian Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Non-Violent Action)
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NL	Nuevo León, Mexico
NWO	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Dutch Organization for Scientific Research)
OHCHR	United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPIC	Organización Pluricultural de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia (Pluricultural Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia)
RAS	Religion and State
RFAT	Religious Freedom Assessment Tool
RIFREM	Red de Investigadores del Fenómeno Religioso en México (Network of Researchers of the Religious Phenomenon in Mexico)
RM-VAT	Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool
SEZ	Spaanse Evangelische Zending (Spanish Evangelical Mission)
SHI	Social Hostilities Index
SP	San Luis Potosí, Mexico
SRI	Social Regulation of Religion Index
TS	Tamaulipas, Mexico
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNISDR United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, now called UNDRR
USCIRF United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
VAT Vulnerability Assessment Tool
WVS World Values Survey

1. Introduction

In April 2018, I had the opportunity to visit the museum devoted to Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Salvadoran prelate who was murdered on 24 March 1980 while offering Mass. It is widely accepted that he was killed by a right-wing death squad for his public denunciation of social injustice and human rights violations. Romero was declared a martyr by the Vatican in 2015 (and canonized in 2018), but this almost did not happen. My guide told me that the canonization process was stalled for ideological reasons due to his presumed adherence to liberation theology. Moreover, because he was killed for political reasons, Vatican theologians argued for a long time whether he qualified as a martyr. Eventually, they agreed he was indeed a martyr, reaching the compromise that he was killed *in odium fidei* (“in hatred of the faith”).

The debate about martyrdom and canonization is an internal matter of the Vatican, but it reflects a broader misunderstanding of the vulnerability of religious engagement both within and outside academia. No one would disagree that social and political activism of religious people can be risky and even life threatening in authoritarian contexts. However, risks related to religious engagement are rarely understood as violations of religious freedom, nor are they recognized as a consequence of behavior inspired by religious convictions. Often, the religious dimension is readily discarded at the expense of alternative explanations. Studies that focus expressly on religious persecution tend to overlook its behavioral dimension.

Yet, religious minorities are vulnerable in more ways than is commonly accepted, at least that is the core message of this thesis. In this introduction, I first describe the initial observations that constitute the background of my research (1.1). Based on these initial observations, I give a justification for studying the vulnerability of religious minorities (1.2), discuss the aim of this research (1.3) and introduce my research questions (1.4). I then offer some definitions of key concepts (1.5), introduce my case studies (1.6) and present a reading guide for this dissertation (1.7).

1.1 Initial observations

While working as a development consultant in Latin America, I came across many cases in which the human rights of religious groups were violated. Because these cases were so atypical at various levels, I struggled to properly understand and situate them with the social science tools I had at my disposal. The cases were atypical because they were more related to religious behavior than to religious identity, had little to do with legislation but rather with its enforcement, involved non-state actors, and seemed to be more prevalent in contexts with human security challenges.

The analytical frameworks that I knew of seemed insufficient to interpret these cases which presented me with a puzzle: How to understand the vulnerability of religious minorities in very different contexts in Latin America? My reflection about these cases led me to formulate seven initial observations for this dissertation about the vulnerability of religious minorities that I briefly discuss in the following. These initial observations constitute the points of departure that triggered this research:

- Religious minorities possess a demonstrable vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses (1.1.1).

- From the perspective of human security, the enforcement of religious freedom poses challenges, especially in subnational areas with weak rule of law and weak state capacity (1.1.2).
- Non-state actors, including ethnic groups and organized crime, can create vulnerability for religious minorities (1.1.3).
- There seems to be a relation between the behavior of religious minorities and their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses (1.1.4).
- Religion appears to be a factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities (1.1.5).
- Religious minorities possess a specific vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses (1.1.6).
- Religious minorities use or could use mechanisms to cope with human security threats (1.1.7).

1.1.1 *Religious minorities possess a demonstrable vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses.*

The first time I heard about a serious religious conflict in Latin America was in 2010 during a trip to Bogotá, Colombia, when I met Ana Silvia Secué, an indigenous school teacher belonging to the Nasa ethnic group. She shared about the violence she suffered within her indigenous community after she decided to establish a confessional school and started a lobby organization to advocate for the religious rights of Colombia's indigenous Christians. I was shocked by her testimony, but especially by her explanation that the constitutional provisions for indigenous self-government do not allow the state security forces and judiciary to intervene in internal conflicts in indigenous communities, even when there are severe human rights abuses.

An important realization for me was that Ana Silvia's situation was not an isolated case, but part of a broader picture. I later discovered that similar, although less far-reaching, arrangements exist in other Latin American countries, including Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala and Brazil. I started to gather anecdotal evidence of similar situations in other indigenous communities, both in Colombia and in other Latin American countries, which slowly started to reveal a pattern.

Before long, I encountered cases of human rights abuses of religious minorities outside indigenous communities too. (I define the concept of 'religious minority' later in this chapter.) In 2011, I was commissioned by a charity to submit a research paper about the interface between organized crime and churches in Latin America. Some people in that organization had the intuition that this issue deserved to be explored, and they were right. I found that religious ministers are frequently victims of violent assaults at the hands of organized crime. For example, Mexico had repeatedly been proclaimed as the most dangerous country in the world for priests (Petri 2012). I was not able to determine then whether the violence against religious actors was statistically disproportional, but I started to monitor it and the cases in my personal database started to pile up.

The common narrative is that in contexts of pervasive organized crime, everyone suffers and is at risk, so there is nothing specific about religious minorities. Besides, why would criminal organizations care about religion? However, the anecdotal evidence I had gathered through interviews and by monitoring press reports made me realize that the common narrative might

be wrong and that perhaps religious ministers might be targeted specifically by drug cartels who for some reason feel threatened by them.

Field research I conducted for various civil society organizations in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Colombia revealed there was much more to this intuition than I had initially expected. During a trip to Tamaulipas, Mexico, in 2014, I met Daniel Pérez,¹ a young pastor who had taken the initiative of creating a football team for youngsters to keep them away from the drug cartels. One of the youngsters who signed up for his football team resigned his job as *halcón* [hawk], which is how informants and errand boys are called, for the drug cartel *Los Zetas* [The Z's] and was killed. Daniel himself started to receive death threats. This is just one of many examples of similar cases I heard of in which social engagement of religious ministers led to violent assaults by drug cartels.

I came across evidence of human rights abuses of religious minorities in Cuba too, but not in the way I expected. On my first trip to the island in 2015, I expected that religious expression would be outlawed by the prevailing communist regime. I was quite surprised to see so many churches openly welcoming visitors and freely worshipping. I discovered that on the surface there appears to be freedom of worship in Cuba, but underneath serious restrictions of religious freedom can be observed. I learned that religious organizations are tolerated, but face many restrictions, particularly when they grow in numbers. There appears to be no true freedom of expression; religious services are monitored, and ministers carefully stay away from political statements about the regime or the human rights situation.

In Cuba, I established contact with Mario Félix Leonart Barroso, a pastor and blogger, who did not shy away from making public declarations about social injustices and the oppressive policies of the communist regime (Leonart Barroso 2017). Other pastors considered him as “imprudent”, but he believed in his “prophetic mission.” He was imprisoned several times, frequently confined to house arrest and finally forced into exile.

So, I had accumulated anecdotal evidence of vulnerable religious minorities in three very different contexts: indigenous areas like in Colombia, territories controlled by organized crime like in parts of Mexico, and authoritarian Cuba. These experiences made me realize that there are serious problems with respect to religious freedom in Latin American countries, but I struggled to understand why they seem to be so misjudged and even ignored. A review of the main religious freedom monitoring instruments of both faith-based organizations and universities (I refer to these as ‘religious freedom assessment tools’ in chapter 3) did not provide the answers I needed. On these instruments, the specific types of human rights violations I observed in Latin American countries only showed up marginally (see annex B). The observations I share in the next sections sketch out some possible explanations for this situation, but one conclusion seems unavoidable: religious minorities have a demonstrable vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses.

1.1.2 From the perspective of human security, the enforcement of religious freedom poses challenges, especially in subnational areas with weak rule of law and weak state capacity.

I started by interrogating the democratization process of Latin America and the role religion has played in it (Gill 1998; Philpott 2004). The majority of Latin American countries have been

¹ Name changed for security reasons.

electoral democracies for about three decades and have made substantial progress in terms of quality of democracy, notwithstanding remaining challenges (O'Donnell 1993; Dabène 1997, 2006, 2007; Petri 2008, 2019; Carrillo-Flórez & Petri 2009). Since Latin America's democratization in the 1980's, the legal protection of religious freedom is guaranteed by international treaties and national Constitutions. Most Latin American countries are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights, which protect freedom of religion. As far as national Constitutions and state interference in religion are concerned, there are no major concerns related to the legal protection of religious freedom. Data from the Religion and State Project (Bar-Ilan University) confirm that apart from some forms of preferential treatment given to Catholics and some registration requirements and limitations on proselytizing, Latin American states have one of the lowest levels of government involvement in religion, with the notable exceptions of Cuba and Mexico.

But what does this mean in practice? And how can this be reconciled with the evidence of religious freedom violations I had collected? It made sense for Cuba, being an authoritarian regime, but what about Mexico and Colombia? What about cases like the ones of Ana Silvia and Daniel?

Despite the generally very positive legislation, I found that enforcement is a much bigger challenge than many analysts believe, particularly at the local level. As Guillermo O'Donnell explains, in many Latin American democracies, the state does not "effectively establish its legality over its territory", leading to the existence of "brown areas", a color code referring to peripheral areas that combine democratic and authoritarian features (1993). Other scholars speak of the existence of enclaves of "subnational authoritarianism" within democratic nation-states (Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008; Giraudy 2010). The existence of subnational areas that are characterized by weak rule of law and weak state capacity has obvious implications for the enforcement of democratic rights, including religious freedom. The indigenous communities in Colombia and the lawless states in north Mexico fit in this category. This is also true for Cuba as a nation.

It seems reasonable to assume that politically unstable environments, with weak political institutions, failing rule of law and serious human security challenges, are fertile environments for the development of religious conflict and create vulnerability for religious minorities. At the very least, this is an explanatory factor of the vulnerability of religious minorities in Latin American countries that is worth considering.

1.1.3 Non-state actors, including ethnic groups and organized crime, can create vulnerability for religious minorities.

The existence of enforcement challenges in 'subnational undemocratic regimes' only provides a partial explanation for the vulnerability of religious minorities. It still does not explain why organized crime seems to target religious ministers and why religious minorities in indigenous communities are threatened.

A review of the broad field of research commonly referred to as 'conflict theory' did not provide the answers I needed. I come back to this in chapter 2. The human security perspective turned out to be a more useful lens to observe human rights abuses of religious minorities, as I discuss in chapter 3. A distinctive feature of the human security perspective is its open-ended

focus. Its starting point is that the referent for security should not be the state but human rights (Glasius 2008). From this perspective, I was able to recognize that non-state actors, including ethnic groups and organized crime in the cases of Ana Silvia and Daniel, can create vulnerability.

Human security does not specifically look at religion, but the book *Religion and Human Security. A Global Perspective* triggered me to explore the relationship between religion and human security, particularly between religiously motivated actions and human security (Wellman & Lombardi 2012:9). In *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* (2004), Seiple & Hoover also observe that religious freedom should not only be framed as a human rights issue but should also be understood as a security issue.

1.1.4 *There seems to be a relation between the behavior of religious minorities and their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses.*

The human security perspective was helpful, but I still struggled to understand how religious conflicts could exist in a Christian-majority continent like Latin America. Indeed, when looking at religious demography, Latin America is a continent that, at first sight, is characterized by a large degree of religious homogeneity. It is generally considered to be a Christian continent, with Christianity being the majority religion in all countries. Is it realistic to speak of the presence of religious minorities, let alone vulnerable religious minorities in such a context? And how can religious conflict involving Christians exist in Christian majority countries?

In addition, in recent decades, so-called ‘new religious movements’, such as Pentecostalism, Mormonism, Afro-Brazilian religions, the Catholic Renewal Movement and native spirituality, have experienced rapid growth in many Latin American countries. Literature analyzes the success of these new religious movements as a function of the free market of religious ideas, implying that the extent of religious freedom allowed new religious movements to prosper (Steigenga & Cleary 2007). How can this reality, which seems to indicate widespread religious tolerance, coexist with religious conflicts?

A closer look reveals that the apparent homogeneity of Latin America’s religious landscape, conceals considerable diversity within Christianity, both within Catholicism and among non-Catholic minorities, including the fast-growing Protestant groups (De la Torre Castellanos & Martín 2016). In Mexico alone, there are 3,223 Catholic and 4,393 Protestant denominations (INEGI 2010). This diversity, however, does not imply the necessity of conflict.

A frequently cited hypothesis is that legislation and culture in Latin America are discriminatory toward non-Catholics (Freston 2017). When reviewing the empirical evidence for this hypothesis, however, this does not seem to be the main issue when looking at religious freedom, even though this is systematically alleged by many Protestant groups as being a major threat. There certainly are cases of discrimination against non-Catholic groups, but they rarely lead to severe human security threats and human rights abuses (Kovic 2007). Historically, anticlericalism has primarily targeted Catholicism in Mexico and Colombia, and this is also the case in modern-day Cuba. Moreover, this hypothesis is not applicable to any of the cases I described above. To the contrary, religious conflicts in indigenous communities, violence against religious groups by organized crime, and state repression of religion in communist Cuba, have little to do with intra-Christian conflict and affect both Catholics and non-Catholics.

I discovered that the diversity within Christianity is not only denominational; it is also related to religious practice and behavior (De la Torre Castellanos & Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2007; De la Torre Castellanos & Martín 2016). There is a notable difference between nominal Christians and actively practicing Christians. The majority of Latin America's population is nominally Christian but in most countries in the region less than 50% of all Christians regularly attends church. Beyond church attendance, recent surveys, such as *Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region* by the Pew Research Center (2014) and *Religious Beliefs and Practices in Mexico National Survey* by *Red de Investigadores del Fenómeno Religioso en México, RIFREM [Network of Researchers of the Religious Phenomenon in Mexico]* (2016) point to notable differences within Christianity in terms of religious observance, engagement in missionary activity, engagement in charity work for the poor, engagement in advocacy, the following of certain moral principles, etc. Although Christianity is the majority religion on the continent, actively practicing Christians, depending on how they are defined, are a minority (Compagnon 2008; Pelletier 2017).

Considering the important numerical difference between nominal adherents to Christianity and people engaging in various forms of active religious behavior, I realized that looking only at religious identity to understand religious conflicts can be misleading. The cases I referenced above have one thing in common: the vulnerability of the religious groups seems to be related mainly to their behavior and actions, not to their identity. Ana Silvia was threatened by community leaders, not when she converted to Evangelical Christianity, but when she started a school and a lobby initiative for the recognition of the rights of a minority Christian denomination. The converted halcón in Daniel's football team was killed because the drug cartel did not appreciate his change of priorities. In Cuba, Mario Félix got into trouble because he had openly criticized the government. This made me consider that there could be a relation between religious behavior, or rather, behavior inspired by religious convictions, and vulnerability.

As I explain further down, religion has been a blind spot in social sciences for several reasons. In recent years, however, academic interest in religion is growing. Research is being done, for example, about the role that religious actors play in the promotion of justice (Appleby 2000; Mwaura 2008; Grim 2016; Baumgart-Ochse, Glaab, Smith & Smythe 2017), however, there seems to be almost no research that explores the relation between the social engagement of religious actors and their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses. Yet, as Atran observes, "devoted actors, who are unconditionally committed to sacred causes and whose personal identities are fused within a unique collective identity, willingly make costly sacrifices." (2016:192), thereby stressing the pertinence of studying this relation.

1.1.5 *Religion appears to be a factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities.*

The nature of the relation between the behavior of religious groups and their vulnerability can raise questions. For example, it is a legitimate question whether religious behavior really is the explanatory factor of vulnerability in the conflicts I mentioned, or whether alternative explanations are more pertinent. After all, there could also be political, economic or social explanations for the vulnerability of Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix.

In the case of Ana Silvia, perhaps the persecution she suffered should not be explained by religion, but rather by the fact that her actions went against the will of the indigenous authorities? Maybe the murder of one of the young players in Daniel's football team should not be explained by religion but by the fact that his initiative threatened the interests of the drug cartels? Could the case of Mario Félix be explained, not by religion, but by the fact that his public criticism of the human rights situation threatened the Cuban regime?

Over the years, I have come across many different actors, including staff workers of faith-based organizations, but also journalists and government officials, who have asked such questions. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd even dedicated a whole book (*Beyond Religious Freedom. The New Global Politics of Religion*, 2015) to the problems raised by using the qualifier 'religious' as a singular explanation of violence. (This is not the only argument that is made in Hurd's book. For a critical commentary see Toft, 2016.) With Hurd, many are quick to discard cases as 'not religious persecution', pointing to alternative political, economic or social explanations.² In such comments it is implicitly assumed that an incident should only be labelled as religious persecution if the perpetrators had a deliberate religious motive and that religion is the only, or at least the most important, explanatory factor. An additional implicit assumption is that an incident should only be labelled as 'religious persecution' if it has a sufficient degree of intensity, a notion Marshall rejects (2018).

For both conceptual and empirical reasons, these assumptions have always surprised me. Conflicts that are purely religious are rare. This is true even for conflicts that are described in the Bible. One could argue that the incident of the stoning of Stephen, who is traditionally remembered as the first Christian martyr, was more political than religious. A careful analysis of the report of this incident in the New Testament (Acts 6:8-8:1) shows that he was not killed for religious reasons, but because he had insulted the members of the Sanhedrin and because he represented a movement that threatened their influence (Boyd-MacMillan 2006). The crucifixion of Jesus himself could also be interpreted in political terms: he was sentenced to death because he was a threat to the authority of the Romans. Notwithstanding the obvious political dimension of these incidents, no one would dare to downplay the religious convictions of both its perpetrators and its victims. A multifactorial approach to interpret these incidents that recognizes its political and religious dimensions seems therefore more appropriate.

As Fox rightly observes: "there are few, if any, important political events that are purely motivated by religion. Most are motivated and influenced by complex factors (...)" (2001:54). A case in point is the interpretation of the ongoing sectarian violence in northern Nigeria, a cluttered civil conflict in which isolating the religious element is particularly challenging, as Madueke explains (2018). Another Nigerian scholar, who prefers to remain anonymous for security reasons, argues that this conflict is subject to a "persecution eclipse" which he defines as follows:

"[A] situation whereby [religious] persecution and civil conflict overlap to the extent that the former is in a real or imaginative sense overshadowed or rendered almost invisible by the latter. (...) [Persecution] eclipse is a dangerous set of lenses that: minimises, overlooks or denies the suffering of a victim of persecution; encourages a causal analysis that provides vicarious justifications for the perpetrators' actions; shifts the focus of interrogation from religious

² Simon Polinder, "Religie bestempelen als dé oorzaak van conflict maakt erger", *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 20/05/2010; Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Les persécutions antichrétiennes en Afrique, un sujet sensible", *The Conversation*, 22/01/2018.

freedom violations to conflict analysis; and embraces an instrumental view of conflict in which religion assumes an insignificant place in the analysis.” (Anonymous author 2013:1)

In other words, political and economic factors related to ongoing civil unrest often overshadow and obscure the religious dimension of the violence in Nigeria. This example was given to illustrate a more general point: observing – let alone measuring – religion as part of civil conflicts may be complicated by the existence of phenomena like the persecution eclipse. In other cases, religion may overshadow political and economic factors. For example, in a monograph about the Mexican state of Chiapas, Kovic describes how “religion masks political and economic struggles.” (2007:203; see also Toft 2011)

All this suggests that alternative political, economic or social explanations do not invalidate the existence of a relation between religious behavior and vulnerability (Marshall 2018). I believe it is a mistake to want to single out one factor of vulnerability, because conflicts are always multifactorial. In fact, the human security threats I presented as examples do not have a religious motivation that can be singled out, but this does not mean that religion does not play a role. Rather, I believe religion should be viewed as one factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

1.1.6 Religious minorities possess a specific vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses.

The examples I gave suggest that religious minorities possess a demonstrable vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses and that religion seems to be one factor among others of the vulnerability of religious minorities. But is it possible to go further and isolate some degree of specificity that is directly relatable to the behavior of religious minorities for their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses? This is an important question because it provides a justification for delimitating this research to religious minorities, instead of looking at vulnerability as a result of political activism or the position of minority groups in general.

A way to approach this question is to explore what sets the cases of Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix apart from other victims of human rights abuses. For example, what if they would not have been Christians, but secular activists? Would they have suffered the same kind of persecution and threats? It is very likely that they would have. There are countless examples of people who are victims of autocratic indigenous leaders, drug cartels and communist party officials that have nothing to do with religious identity or behavior. But does this mean that the religious convictions of Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix are irrelevant to explain their vulnerability? Can it be ignored that their actions were inspired by their religious convictions?

Because this topic is in many ways uncharted territory and only limited data is available, I knew that it would be difficult to establish that religious people who display behavior that is viewed as threatening by their environment are more vulnerable than non-religious people who display the same kind of behavior. However, I believed that there had to be something specific about religion to explain vulnerability. For example, the religious roles of Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix did give them greater moral influence, and this must have accounted for something to explain their vulnerability.

I became convinced that it is possible to identify some degree of specificity to human security threats that is attributable to religion. With this, I do not imply that religious people are necessarily more vulnerable than non-religious people to suffer human security threats, but religious minorities do possess a specific vulnerability for suffering human rights abuses.

1.1.7 Religious minorities use or could use mechanisms to cope with human security threats.

Another feature I observed in Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix is that they were not just passive victims of human rights abuses, but very proactive in defending themselves against the threats they faced. Ana Silvia actively engaged national media to denounce the treatment of indigenous Christian converts, lobbied Congress to promote legal reforms and established connections with various Colombian NGO's. Daniel tried to organize support from denominational networks and was actively researching methods on how to deal with organized crime. The threats against Mario Félix were never life-threatening because of his strong international connections and his solid knowledge of his legal rights. All three repeatedly told me they found strength in their faith.

These examples show that vulnerable religious minorities can be resilient and can have agency. But I also came across many cases where vulnerable religious minorities were extremely passive and did little to respond to the threats they face. This raised my interest, both from a policy perspective and from an academic perspective: How do (or could) religious minorities respond to human security threats?

1.2 Justification

Elaborating on my initial observations, the justification for this research is provided by the combined societal (1.2.1) and academic relevance (1.2.2) of studying the vulnerability of religious minorities.

1.2.1 Societal relevance

The societal relevance of studying the vulnerability of religious minorities resides in its empirical reality. Although this subject is under-researched as I argued in the initial observations, there is evidence to sustain that the anecdotes of Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix are not isolated cases but part of a broader pattern. The case studies included in this research provide ample qualitative empirical evidence of three emblematic Latin American cases, but there is some quantitative evidence that can be pointed to, such as the data collected by the Violent Incidents Database of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (see annex C), as well as some narrative reports that mention specific aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities (more about this in chapters 2 and 3).

Beyond the quantitative impact of the vulnerability of religious minorities, a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the vulnerability of religious minorities is essential to build greater 'literacy' for government officials so that they can act upon human rights violations related to religion (Joustra 2018). It is also a key to informing the operations of civil society organizations whose focus is to attend to the victims of religious persecution, so that they can incorporate responses to aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that were hitherto

neglected. In the case of human rights organizations in general, this research can also contribute to increase their religious literacy, because they often fail to recognize the religious element in the behavior of for example human rights, environmental or anti-corruption activists (Marshall, Gilbert & Green 2009). Finally, the outcomes of this research can also be relevant to mitigate the vulnerability of religious minorities themselves, helping them in their awareness about their position and their reflection on coping mechanisms.

This dissertation will hopefully provide useful insights for the international promotion of religious freedom as this is gradually becoming an integral part of the foreign policy of democratic nations. This is particularly relevant for Latin America where religious freedom does not seem to be a policy priority. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a body of the Organization of American States, does not have a rapporteur for religious freedom and does not monitor the issue in any way, in spite of religious freedom being enshrined in the American Convention on Human Rights. Religious freedom is also not a policy priority for most Latin American governments, with the timid exception of Brazil (Freston 2018). Special attention to the specific vulnerability of religious minorities is necessary in all efforts related to state reform and democratization. Finally, it is my hope that this dissertation will constitute an encouragement to human rights organization to include religion in their monitoring efforts.

1.2.2 Academic relevance

The academic relevance of studying the vulnerability of religious minorities is stressed first by the marginal interest in religion in social sciences in general (Wald & Wilcox 2006; Fink 2009), which can be explained by the influence of Marx's reductionist approach to religion, the confinement of religion to church-state matters inspired by classical liberalism, the predominance of secularization theory and the declining levels of personal religiosity of academic staff (Fox 2001, 2013; Wald & Wilcox 2006; Philpott 2009; Dieckhoff & Portier 2017). This finding is shared by numerous authors, who highlight a systematic lack of interest in religion in political science, international relations, human security and conflict studies (Johnston & Sampson 1994; Fox 1999, 2001; Philpott 2009; Grim & Finke 2011; Patterson 2011; Wellman & Lombardi 2012; Philpott & Shah 2017; Baumgart-Ochse, Glaab, Smith & Smythe 2017). Wilson (2017) goes even further by arguing that the epistemological dominance of secularism in both academia and policy constitutes an "ontological injustice", because it leads to the subordination and marginalization of non-secular visions of the world, contradicting secularism's own claims to neutrality and universality.

In recent years, social science has regained an interest in religion, in part due to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the trend of "radical Islamic revivalism" which challenged secularization theory (Philpott 2002; Thomas 2005; Berger 2009; Patterson 2011) but the study of religion in social sciences remains problematic for two reasons that further justify the academic relevance of this research. The first concerns the challenge that is posed by the secularization of academic staff which seems to have led to a certain degree of 'religious illiteracy', i.e. a growing misunderstanding of what religion is and what role it plays in society, including the nature of the relation between religion and politics (and more broadly society), and the practical meaning of the concept of religious freedom (Prothero 2007; Patterson 2011; Dinham & Francis 2015; Smith 2017). In chapter 3 I address the challenge of religious literacy by uncovering the vulnerability that results from religious behavior and by proposing a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of religious freedom based on the observation of the freedom for religious expression in distinct spheres of society.

The second reason concerns the epistemological challenges related to the definition and operationalization of religion. Indeed, religion is a variable that is generally considered to be particularly hard to define (Fox 2001; Philpott 2009; Wellman & Lombardi 2012). These conceptualization challenges are even bigger in the case of “scholars with little exposure to religion”, as Wald & Wilcox put it, especially considering the ever increasing number of religious denominations and the plethora of religious practices (2006:526). Because religion is a variable that is so difficult to conceptualize, it is also hard to measure. As a result, it is often not measured at all or only through relatively crude indicators as Fox (2001) and Wald & Wilcox (2006) argue. The lack of attention given to religion only reinforces this problem, because it “provides a poor basis on which to develop variables” (Fox 2001:58). This has implications for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities, which is also insufficiently taken into consideration by existing theoretical frameworks.

Although in recent decades there has been a growing interest in religious freedom through the development of religious freedom assessment tools by both activists and scholars, important blind spots remain. For example, it is not surprising that most analyses of religious persecution focus on religious identity because this has been the most important source of persecution of religious groups throughout history (Jenkins 2008). For example, the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust or the sectarian violence during the conflict in former Yugoslavia were evidently related to religious identity (which partially overlapped with socio-cultural and ethnic/racial identity). This is also true for much of the contemporary religious persecution that is reported by the religious freedom monitoring instruments at a global level. My case studies are substantially different because they refer to behavioral aspects of religion as the primary cause of vulnerability.

Most analyses of religious freedom, including religious freedom assessment tools, focus on documenting religious freedom violations, but give little attention to the responses of religious minorities to these violations. As Daniel Philpott & Timothy Shah, who directed the first systematic study on the resilience of Christians to persecution, *Under Caesar's Sword*, comment, “Far less well understood is how Christians respond when their religious freedom has been severely violated.” (2017:2) In response to this concern, I explicitly focus on coping mechanisms.

More generally, I follow Wellman & Lombardi's invitation to explore the relation between religion and human security who concluded that “the field of religion is ripe for use by scholars who are interested in human security” (2012:11). I discuss extensively the knowledge gap in social sciences regarding the vulnerability of religious minorities in chapters 2 and 3 and propose a new tool to address this in chapter 4. To further mend the limitations of the relative lack of attention for religion in the social sciences, as well the limitations of the conceptual baggage of political science in particular, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach, looking for inspiration in other disciplines such as philosophy and theology to understand the concepts of vulnerability and resilience.

1.3 Aim of this research

The initial observations can be synthesized in the following working hypothesis: religious minorities are vulnerable in unique ways to suffer human rights abuses. Based on this hypothesis, I can now formulate the primary aim of my dissertation which is to explore how

the specific vulnerability of religious minorities can be comprehensively observed. Specifically, my ambition is to go further in the observation of a) what makes religious minorities vulnerable – with an emphasis on the role of religious behavior –, b) how the degree of specificity of that vulnerability can be determined and c) what coping mechanisms religious minorities use or could use to defend themselves against human security threats.

This aim is both theoretical and methodological. At a theoretical level, I propose to interrogate academic and activist literature belonging to three relevant fields: conflict theory, religious freedom assessment tools and human security, with the objective of identifying their contributions and shortcomings for the understanding and observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Although my background is in political science and comparative politics, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from other social sciences, as well as in various degrees from human rights studies, geography, philosophy, sociology of religion, social psychology and theology. I thus contrast the explanatory insights that are offered by various theoretical frameworks with its practical use to make empirical observations.

Based on the insights provided by this exercise, I develop a new tool, the ‘Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool’ (RM-VAT), which corresponds to the methodological dimension of this research. After stressing the pertinence of the human security paradigm to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities, I use this framework to develop a tool to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities that addresses existing limitations in theoretical frameworks and empirical observation tools.

In the empirical part of this research, I follow a case study approach, looking at contemporary cases from Latin America. The case studies thus serve a dual purpose: they are useful to make empirical observations about the vulnerability of religious minorities to suffer human rights abuses; they also allow to test the application and refine the methodological application of the RM-VAT.

1.4 Research questions

Drawing on the above-mentioned elements, the central research question I propose to answer in this thesis is:

- What is the specific vulnerability of religious minorities to suffer human rights abuses?

This central research question invites two sub-questions, one conceptual and one methodological:

- What is the most suitable lens to observe the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?
- How can a tool be developed to comprehensively assess the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?

The empirical objects of this research are expressed through the following sub-questions:

- What is the contemporary specific vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí

(Mexico), cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia and Christians in Cuba?

- How does the empirical reality of Latin America inform the observation of the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?

1.5 Definitions of key concepts

As was stated, this dissertation investigates the vulnerability of religious minorities from a human security perspective. At this stage, it is necessary to define the central concepts of this ambition. These concepts, which I used without defining them in the preceding sections, are religion (1.5.1), religious minority (1.5.2), vulnerability (1.5.3) and specificity (1.5.4).

1.5.1 Religion

There is no consensus about the definition of religion: “Classical associations and meanings of the word ‘religion’ are currently subject to discussion” (NWO 2012). Because religion is a central variable of this research, I chose to adopt a definition of religion that is both meaningful and operational. The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) recommends the adoption of a broad definition of religion which includes “the established forms of religion while at the same time trying to define the new forms of religiosity and spirituality.”

Jonathan Fox’s approach to religion fits with my research. In an article on ethno-religious conflict, he identifies four basic social functions of religion: “(a) religion provides a meaningful framework for understanding the world, (b) religion provides rules and standards of behavior that link individual actions and goals to this meaningful framework, (c) religion links individuals to a greater whole and sometimes provides formal institutions which help to define and organize that whole and (d) religion has the ability to legitimize actions and institutions” (1999:445). In later work, he defines religion as follows:

“Religion seeks to understand the origins and nature of reality using a set of answers that include the supernatural. Religion is also a social phenomenon and institution that influences the behavior of human beings both as individuals and in groups. These influences of behavior manifest themselves through the influences of religious identity, religious institutions, religious legitimacy, religious beliefs, and the codification of these beliefs into authoritative dogma, among other avenues of influence.” (2013:6)

I have simplified Fox’s definition as follows:

“A belief system that includes a more or less coherent set of beliefs in which reference is made to (a) transcendental being(s), which is seen by its adherents as important for who they are and which influences their individual and collective behavior.”

This definition has the advantage of being broad, as it encompasses old and new forms of religious expression, including life philosophies, and explicitly integrates the behavioral dimension of religion. My definition of religion also avoids associating religion with ethnicity

or any other form of ‘sectarian’ identity. Ethnicity and religion may overlap, and religion can be a defining aspect of identity, but I explicitly want to take religiously inspired behavior into account. An additional practical advantage for the conduct of fieldwork of my definition of religion is that it is based on the self-identification of its followers with a religion (and their resulting behavior in society), instead of having to subjectively determine whether someone is a ‘true’ follower of their religion or not.

The definition of religion I adopted is very close to what is commonly understood by ideology. Indeed, both religion and ideology can be thought of as belief systems that inspire the behavior of their adherents. The main difference between the two is that religion integrates transcendental explanations, as is highlighted in the traditional definitions of religion (Wellman & Lombardi 2012).

My definition of religion is deliberately broader than Grim’s definition as “an organized group that seeks to propagate its views” (2005:16) suggests, because new forms of religiosity are not necessarily organized or limited to classic legal-institutional organizations. Patterson agrees that the role of religion should not be viewed in terms of formal religious structures, but rather through the lens of “lived religion” which he defines as “the concrete, everyday behaviors of religious actors and the sensibilities underlying these behaviors, as well as the dynamic expression of that religion (i.e., doctrines, heritages, texts, practices, and formal ethics) translated into daily life and collective action” (2011:6), following Hall (1997). Likewise, the definition of religion cannot be restricted to a set of religious symbols and rites, and its sociological features, as Turner proposes based on previous work by Émile Durkheim and Clifford Geertz: “religion refers to those processes and institutions that render the social world intelligible, and which bind individuals authoritatively into the social order” (2011:284).

The definitions of religion used by Grim and Turner are not necessarily wrong, but in my view, they insufficiently recognize how religion interacts with and inspires religious behavior, and mainly focus on religion in terms of identification. The importance of the behavioral dimension of religion in the context of human security is explicitly stressed by Wellman & Lombardi who highlight “the common pitfall of overvaluing belief and downplaying practice”:

“Security scholars and policymakers therefore need to bear in mind that in studying the impact of religion on human security, the focus should be twofold: (1) the relationship between religion as a belief system and human security and (2) the relationship between religiously motivated actions and human security.” (2012:9-11)

1.5.2 *Religious minority*

‘Minority’ is a highly contested concept of which different acceptations exist across academic disciplines. A purely statistical view would define a minority as a group that is distinguished from others (for example based on its ethnic characteristics) and less numerous than the more numerous majority. In other disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, the notion that a minority is less dominant than or even subordinate to the majority is presupposed, often without regard to its size. The concept of minority can also be a qualifier that is attributed (or self-attributed) to a particular group. I will not go further into this debate here, but will simply assume as a working definition that a minority constitutes:

“A social subdivision of society.”

It would be logical then to define ‘religious minority’ as ‘a religious subdivision of society’, but we can be more precise. In line with the adopted definition of religion, I propose to define ‘religious minority’ as follows:

“A minority group which self-identifies (or is identified) with a particular belief system (religious identity), which influences the individual and collective behavior in society of its members (religious behavior).”

This definition includes two key characteristics: religious identity and religious behavior. The first can simply be defined as “the condition of belonging to a religious group that follows a particular belief system.” In this research I use the criterion of self-identification to determine religious identity for three reasons: to follow how religious affiliation is measured in most population censuses, to avoid using labels that are imposed by others, and to set religious minorities apart from other types of minorities that are defined by non-voluntary characteristics such as ethnicity, language or disability. Although I will not enter into this discussion in this research, I am aware that religious identity is not necessarily the result of self-identification only. Often, people are labeled by others as belonging to a particular religious group or are born into a particular religious group without having made a conscious decision to be part of it. Gurr (1993, 2000) and Horowitz (2000) argue that identity is ordinarily based on a combination of self-identification within a group and the perceptions of non-group members.

The second characteristic of this definition is its behavioral aspect, i.e. the notion that religious convictions lead their adherents to behave in particular ways. This may include participation in religious events and rituals such as baptisms or church attendance, but it also includes any form of behavior that is inspired by religious convictions such as engagement in civil society or politics. In chapter 4 I propose a continuum of religious identity and behavior based on this definition.

The value of this definition is that it allows determining which aspects of religious identity and religious behavior may cause religious minorities to be more or less vulnerable (and more or less resilient) depending on the context they find themselves in. As I explained above, it was not so much their religious identity, but the behavior inspired by their religious convictions that caused Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix to become vulnerable.

Taking the behavioral dimension of religion into consideration in relation to religious discrimination is unusual. Indeed, almost every sociological study about religion, whether about religious conflict or any other aspect related to religion, delimitates religious groups based on the variable of religious affiliation. To be sure, there are studies about religious behavior and religious values (notably the World Values Survey and the Latin American Public Opinion Project), but these studies do not define religious minorities based on behavioral characteristics. The pertinence of defining religious minorities based on behavioral characteristics is provided by my empirical observation in section 1.1.4 that in Latin America there is an essential difference between nominal Christians (the majority) and actively practicing Christians (a numerical minority), and that this difference translates into different degrees of vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses. This point of departure can only be substantiated by focusing the analysis on particular subsets of religious groups defined by behavioral characteristics, like I do in chapter 5 where I study the vulnerability of ‘actively

practicing Christians’ in a selection of northeastern states of Mexico and in chapter 6 where I study the vulnerability of ‘cultural dissidents’ in the Nasa indigenous territories of Colombia.

1.5.3 *Vulnerability*

The central concern of human security is the vulnerability of individuals to security threats, which in legal terms can be referred to as ‘human rights violations’ (when they are perpetrated by the state) or ‘human rights abuses’ (when they are perpetrated by non-state actors). In the framework of this research, the concept of vulnerability can thus very simply be defined in relation to the notion of risk:

“The risk to suffer human rights abuses.”

An application that is close to my study object is the research on the vulnerability of groups to poverty (Chambers 1989; Morduch 1994; Hooogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon 2004; Makoka & Kaplan 2005; Cain 2009) where an explicit analytical difference is made between poverty and vulnerability to poverty. The poor are no doubt vulnerable – poverty enhances vulnerability –, but these analyses focus primarily on the risk of falling into poverty. The concept of vulnerability is thus a forward-looking feature, describing the potential to suffer human rights abuses, whether these abuses occur or not. In other words, vulnerability refers to both latent and manifest human security threats. This is important from a psychological point of view: the threat (fear) of suffering human rights abuses may cause a lot of stress and anxiety, which already is a human rights abuse. It also relates to UNDP’s conceptualization of human security as a combination of “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear.”

In chapter 2 I come back to the philosophical implications of the concept of vulnerability. In chapter 4 I propose that the vulnerability of a religious minority can be assessed by inventorying the threats to which they are vulnerable, distinguishing between threats as a result of religious identity and threats as a result of various forms of behavior inspired by religious conviction.

1.5.4 *Specificity*

Specificity is a comparative notion, referring to:

“A condition that can be more or less particular to an individual or group.”

In relation to a human security threat, specificity refers to the degree to which the vulnerability to this threat is particular to a religious minority. Depending on the threat, different scenarios are possible. It could be that the threat is only applicable to the religious minority, but it could also be that this religious minority shares this vulnerability with other groups.

I consider specificity as a matter of degree, which can be assessed using a sliding scale (in chapter 4 I propose a scale to determine specificity), and not as a binary variable that only allows for two options: specific / not specific. This clarification is important, because it allows to account for the religious component of human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable that would otherwise be discarded by virtue of non-religious explanations, as I discussed in the initial observations.

1.6 Case study exploration

In the description of my initial observations, I referred to the testimonies of three individuals I came across in my professional work and which I could not easily interpret with existing analytical tools, such as the specific tools that are designed to assess religious freedom, as well as broader social science frameworks such as conflict theory, literature on democratization, etc. The realization that these analytical tools present methodological and conceptual inadequacies to make sense of the testimonies I collected and more generally to observe the specific nature of the vulnerability of religious minorities, was the point of departure for this research. To contribute to the understanding of these and similar cases and overcome the limitations of the existing frameworks, I adopt a case study approach. In this section I discuss some general considerations regarding the case studies I investigate. I properly discuss my selection criteria in section 4.3. The case studies are the following:

- (1) the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico,
- (2) the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia and
- (3) the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba.

These case studies follow directly from my initial observations. Indeed, the testimonies of Ana Silvia in Colombia, Daniel in Mexico and Mario Félix in Cuba do not constitute isolated cases but are representative of the vulnerability of religious minorities in three typical Latin American contexts: indigenous communities, areas affected by organized crime and a state under communist authoritarian rule. In each of these contexts, there are indications, or at minimum anecdotal evidence, that religious minorities are vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses, which are insufficiently recognized by existing frameworks.

All three case studies are about areas or countries in Latin America. Policy-makers and academics have generally considered that in this region, with the exception of Cuba, religious freedom is not an issue of concern. The fact that Latin America is not the most obvious region to explore religious freedom violations, makes it a relevant field of study as it provides an ideal laboratory to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities to human security threats that are to a great extent misjudged or overlooked. Through my case studies I show that there are very real problems in terms of religious freedom in the region. Furthermore, the absence of large-scale interreligious conflicts with identity related persecution in the region makes threats to religious minorities that result from (individual) forms of religious behavior more visible and therefore easier to observe.

The case studies have in common that they focus on Christian groups. This is partly a pragmatic choice related to my personal expertise about Christianity in Latin America which I developed through my professional work for different faith-based organizations and thanks to which I was able to collect extensive empirical material. The case studies I included in this research can thus be considered as ‘easy cases’ for the application of my new instrument, the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool.

From an empirical perspective studying cases of Christians is pertinent too. Because Christianity is the majority religion in Latin America, it offers a large reservoir of cases to pick

from. The diversity of Christianity in this region, both in terms of denominational structures and in terms of the behavioral characteristics of its followers, must not be underestimated (De la Torre Castellanos & Martín 2016). This is also true for the groups I study in this research that correspond to very different expressions of Christianity and have little in common in terms of their sociological composition, beliefs, religious practice, behavior and the nature of the threats they face.

Although the three case studies all focus on Christian groups, they constitute very different expressions of Christianity. Urban Christians in the industrial cities of Monterrey and Ciudad Victoria (Mexico), indigenous Christians in rural Colombia, and Christians in communist Cuba probably have little similarities among themselves, beyond their adherence to the same faith. In fact, because these groups express and live out their Christian faith in such different ways, they could almost be viewed as members of different religions. The groups I study also largely differ in terms of their worldviews – holistic for the Nasa and western for northeast Mexico and Cuba – and, to use a Marxian term, their degree of “class consciousness” is nearly completely absent in the case of northeast Mexico but present in the other two case studies.

The diversity of Christian groups I study in this research warrants an application of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool to non-Christian groups. As I further elaborate in chapter 4, this tool is designed to study all kinds of religious minorities, not only Christians. It seems probable that non-Christian groups such as active dissident Muslims in Iran or indigenous polytheistic communities in Africa are subject to similar threats, and that my instrument could therefore also be used to observe their vulnerability.

Beyond their commonalities, my case studies correspond to very different political-institutional contexts. The primary justification for this variety is my aim to shed light on an underexplored phenomenon – the vulnerability that results from active religious behavior –, which led me to select cases that offer broad theoretical diversity in terms of vulnerable groups, the degree and nature of active religious behavior, the type of threats and the nature of coping mechanisms they use.

The reason for selecting my specific cases is that they concern three typical contexts in one of their most extreme expressions, which makes relevant dynamics of vulnerability easier to discern. As Yin observes, “the findings of [unusual cases] may reveal insights about normal processes.” (2014:52). The selected subnational area of northeast Mexico is among the most violent and lawless in the region (with evident human security challenges) which provides a unique opportunity to observe the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians – I have stressed the relevance of delimitating this group this way above – to a non-state actor, namely organized crime. The states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and to a lesser extent San Luis Potosí are among the most violent in Latin America, and the Los Zetas insurgency is certainly among the cruelest (IACHR 2015:64). This case study allows me to wrestle with the question of why criminal organizations would be concerned with religious behavior, i.e. to isolate and gauge the religious factor in the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians. In the case study I also investigate the regulation of religion by organized crime when it takes over essential functions of the state.

Of all Latin American countries, Colombia has the most advanced legal provisions for self-government of indigenous reserves, known as *resguardos indígenas*. In this case study I want to understand to what extent this institutional arrangement creates vulnerability for groups, which I refer to as ‘cultural dissidents’, that on religious grounds oppose the authority of the

political leaders of their reserves and reject the indigenous traditions they consider incompatible with their faith. The Nasa are the second largest ethnic group in Colombia, in which a militant Christian political organization, the OPIC, has confronted, through political advocacy and legal procedures, the political leaders on issues such as freedom of confessional education, freedom of worship and conscientious objection. As in the case study on northeast Mexico, in this case study I focus on the vulnerability, as a result of active behavior inspired by religious convictions, to a non-state actor: the indigenous authority.

Cuba is the only remaining communist regime in the region (although several Latin American countries have tried to emulate elements of the Cuban regime), with a track record of repression of human rights, including freedom of religion. The authoritarian Cuban government is remarkably stable but has also evolved. In this case study, I analyze the subtle ways in which the government regulates religion in modern-day Cuba and describe which types of religious behavior create vulnerability. Although Cuba may seem a more classic example of religious freedom violations by the state, there are nevertheless essential features of the vulnerability of Christians that are overlooked by religious freedom assessment tools.

Because of their extreme characteristics, my three case studies can be taken as representative of three typical political-institutional contexts that can also be found outside Latin America. All three case studies are useful to explore my central hypothesis that religious minorities are vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses in unique ways that existing analytical tools fail to register. They also allow me to explore the relation between religious identity and behavior on the one hand and vulnerability on the other, as well as to isolate the specificity of religion in this vulnerability. In all case studies I also look at the resilience of religious minorities.

1.7 Reading guide

Chapters 2 and 3 contain the theoretical framework of this research in which I explore the sub-question ‘What is the most suitable lens to observe the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?’ In chapter 2, I review and compare various theoretical and analytical approaches (including political philosophy, conflict theory and human security) for their value in observing the vulnerability of religious minorities. In chapter 3, I specifically look at religious freedom assessment tools, discussing their strengths and shortcomings for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. I conclude that whilst these approaches all provide valuable insights, human security offers a fresh perspective that complements the shortcomings of existing frameworks and that can be operationalized to observe features and mechanisms of the vulnerability of religious minorities that other frameworks fail to discern.

Chapter 4 provides the methodological framework for this research. To answer the sub-question ‘How can a tool be developed to comprehensively assess the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?’ I operationalize the human security approach by developing the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). This tool seeks to overcome the main shortcomings of existing frameworks by adapting the methodology of Vulnerability Assessment Tools (VATs) to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities. Among other things, the RM-VAT is designed to explore the relation between religious identity and religious behavior on the one hand and the vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses on the other, as well as to determine specificity and resilience.

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I explore the sub-question ‘What is the contemporary specific vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico), cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the resguardos indígenas of the southwestern highlands of Colombia and Christians in Cuba?’ In these chapters I apply the RM-VAT developed in chapter 4 to three contemporary cases of vulnerable religious minorities. In chapter 5, I study the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico. In chapter 6, I study the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the resguardos indígenas of the southwestern highlands of Colombia. In chapter 7, I study the vulnerability of Christians under the communist regime of Cuba. Methodologically, these case studies serve the purpose of testing the application of the RM-VAT as a means to reveal overlooked forms of vulnerability of religious minorities, in line with the central research question ‘What is the specific vulnerability of religious minorities to suffer human rights abuses?’

In chapter 8, I address the sub-question ‘How does the empirical reality of Latin America inform the observation of the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?’ I describe the main empirical evidence collected in the case studies, validate my initial observations, and synthesize my main findings that improve the understanding of the vulnerability of religious minorities. I also critically evaluate the RM-VAT. Finally, I explore possible generalizations of my framework to other fields.

2. Human security and the specific vulnerability of religious minorities

Although religion has been a neglected topic in the social sciences as I stated in the introduction, this does not mean that scholarship has nothing relevant to say about the vulnerability of religious minorities. On the contrary, numerous contributions in a wide range of disciplines have been made about aspects that directly or indirectly touch upon my research topic. Various philosophical reflections have been made about the notion of vulnerability and about the role of religion in society. Some of the analytical concepts about minority and ethnic groups developed in the broad field known as conflict theory are applicable to observe the vulnerability of religious groups (this is done among others by Toft 2007; Marsden 2012; Vüllers, Pfeiffer & Basedau 2015; Basedau, Fox, Pierskalla, Strüver & Vüllers 2017; Henne 2019). Moreover, the regained interest in religion in recent decades in both civil society and academia has led to a prolific development of religious freedom assessment tools that also provides relevant insights.

In this chapter I review some of the most relevant theoretical and analytical frameworks in terms of their value for the observation of the specific vulnerability of religious minorities. Notwithstanding their important contributions, I argue that they fail to detect important threats that are faced by religious minorities for both conceptual and methodological reasons.

I organize my presentation of approaches not by discipline but by theme. I first present a selection of ways to understand the reasons behind the vulnerability of religious minorities (2.1), before looking at the contributions of conflict theory to understand ethno-religious conflict (2.2). I then discuss literature about the notion of resilience, referring to how religious minorities can cope with vulnerability (2.3). Finally, I conclude that each of these interpretative models offer valuable pieces to the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities, but also have their limitations and can clog an open-ended observation (2.4).

2.1 *Ways to understand the reasons behind the vulnerability of religious minorities*

In this section I discuss different types of theories that provide micro and macro level interpretations of the vulnerability of religious minorities: the relation between religious identity and vulnerability (2.1.1), vulnerability as a result of deviant social behavior (2.1.2), the specific vulnerability of commitment to justice (2.1.3) and state regulation of religion (2.1.4). Some of these theories have explanatory pretensions, while others have a normative character. Because I am primarily concerned with the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities, I simply take them as complementary interpretations that guide the observation.

2.1.1 *The relation between religious identity and vulnerability*

A frequently cited explanation for civil conflict is that societies with minorities that are visible and have a strong identity, which religious affiliation is *par excellence*, are prone to violence, as is the central postulate of Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory (1993). The deterministic claim that differences of identity, whether cultural, religious or racial, unavoidably lead to conflict has been contested by numerous authors for its lack of empirical evidence (Fox 1999; Stewart 2008; Grim & Finke 2011). However, this does not mean that

identity, in particular religious identity, does not play a role in explaining conflicts. In this section, I present the contributions of a selection of scholars who qualify the role of (religious) identity as an explanatory factor of conflict.

In *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen explains the dangers of what he calls the “assumption of singular affiliation”, by which a person’s identity is reduced to a single identity marker, instead of recognizing that “identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others.” In his view, this kind of approach to identity is prone to violence for a number of reasons. One of them is that identity-based thinking is susceptible to manipulation, of which Sen offers ample empirical evidence in his book. To cite just one example, Sen establishes a link between the reductionist characterization of India as a “Hindu nation” and sectarian violence against Muslim (and Christian) minorities (2006:46).

The manipulation of identity is also a central theme in the work of Gurr (1993, 2000), Horowitz (2000) and Schlee (2008). In *How Enemies Are Made: Towards a Theory of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts* (2008), Schlee explains that “virtuosi in identity manipulation” implement different strategies to broaden or narrow identities based on rational cost-benefit calculations of including or excluding particular groups of people. (For example, “within the religious dimension one can identify with Christianity as a whole or with just one small elect sect.”) A broad definition of identity may be useful to obtain certain benefits (such as a larger army), but a narrow definition may be preferred when it comes to sharing these benefits.

Sen does not attach any particular significance to the religious itself. He is primarily interested in the dynamics of identity, which can of course have a basis in religion; he rather views religion as a cloak for identity. Another reason Sen gives for why identity-based thinking is prone to violence is because it removes the capacity of individuals to identify with others. By downplaying their affiliation to other associations as well as their belonging to a nation, it is easy for a minority, including a religious minority, to be singled out as different, and what is different can then be viewed as having less worth or as a threat to the social cohesion of the community. It also makes it particularly easy for a minority group to be singled out as a ‘scapegoat.’ I come back to this concept below.

Making a slightly different point, Buijs warns against “the danger of unity”, referring to the “unitarian” conception of what a well-functioning political community should be like, a society in which all citizens are expected to share the same language, traditions, dress, lifestyle and convictions, in opposition to “pluralism”, which seeks to maximize freedom and diversity as ingredients for a successful society. The rigid insistence upon unity is often a recipe for violence (2013).

To summarize, religious identity can evidently be a factor of vulnerability, but it should be properly understood. As Sen asserts, differences of identity are not an automatic cause of conflict; rather, the view that reduces individuals to a single identity – reductionist and manipulative interpretations of identity – can increase the vulnerability of religious minorities. This being said, as I argue in the following sections, a narrow focus on religious identity ignores the role of religious behavior.

2.1.2 Vulnerability as a result of deviant social behavior

References to the vulnerability of people who display deviant social behavior, which includes religious minorities can be found in the work of Émile Durkheim, Martha Nussbaum, René Girard and Max Weber. In many, if not almost all societies that we know of, some form of religion is seen by these authors as an essential element that provides unity and cohesion to a society. Under different scenarios, religious minorities can be perceived as deviant, and therefore as a threat to the cohesion of society, which creates vulnerability for them.

Durkheim's work on deviance in *De la division du travail social* (1893) is particularly illustrative in this respect. He argues that shared norms and values, including religious beliefs, constitute the glue that holds a human society together, by providing a sense of 'collective consciousness', which, at least in premodern societies, was viewed as essential to its preservation. When individuals within a society question its shared norms and values, for example because they adhere to a different religion, they risk being viewed as a threat to the cohesion of a society. Schlee's analysis of exclusion dynamics as a result of a strife for "ritual purity" in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Africa (2008) can also be interpreted in terms of vulnerability as a result of deviant behavior. A modern-day illustration of this dynamic can be observed in communist and post-communist countries, where religious organizations are labeled as 'foreign agents' by the government.

The idea of religious minorities being a threat to social cohesion connects with Martha Nussbaum's reflection about how "irrational" and "misguided" fear leads people to imagine an alleged fault in a (religious) minority group, such as, historically, the fear of a Jewish world conspiracy – as laid out in the "Rabbi's Speech" (1872) and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1902) (collected in Mendes-Flohr 2011:336-343) – and, nowadays, the fear that Muslims pose a security threat to Western society. In both examples, a similar pattern is at play:

"Fear typically starts from some real problem. (...) Fear is easily displaced onto something that may have little to do with the underlying problem but that serves as a handy surrogate for it, often because the new target is already disliked. (...) Fear is nourished by the idea of a disguised enemy." (Nussbaum 2013:31)

The problem with this process is that it leads to very real consequences for religious minorities. In Nussbaum's example, the unfounded and amplified fear of Muslims in Western society has translated into political reactions against certain forms of religious expression, leading to bans on burqas and minarets in Western countries, among other things. (I come back to the topic of regulation of religion in section 2.1.4.).

René Girard's influential *The Scapegoat* (1989) presents similarities with Nussbaum's perspective, with one qualitative difference: the vulnerability of religious minorities is not explained by fear, but by frustration. Girard posits that humans are driven by "mimetic desire", i.e. the human need to want the same as the other. Girard argues that in a human society, mimetic desire is contagious and inevitably leads to conflict at some point because the mimetic desire of all people can never be completely satisfied. This is when the "scapegoat mechanism" is triggered, by which one person or one group, is attributed the blame for the discontent. All frustration of society is directed to this "scapegoat", thereby relieving the tensions in that society.

Girard contends that the victims of social discontent may be totally random, but stereotypes and prejudices generally play an important role. Some people or groups of people are particularly easy targets, however absurd the claim that they are responsible for a disaster. Religious minorities in particular are vulnerable to be singled out as scapegoats:

“The appetite for persecution readily focuses on religious minorities, especially during a time of crisis. (...) [Public] opinion is overexcited and ready to accept the most absurd rumors” (ibid. 6)

“Ethnic and religious minorities tend to polarize the majorities against themselves. In this we see one of the criteria by which victims are selected, which, though relative to the individual society, is transcultural in principle. There are very few societies that do not subject their minorities, all the poorly integrated or merely distinct groups, to certain forms of discrimination and even persecution.” (ibid. 17).

Now, Girard does not conclude that differences necessarily lead to conflict. He does argue, however, that differences increase the likelihood of persecution, but not without observing the importance of behavioral aspects, particularly in the case of groups who share behavioral codes such as a religious group:

“In any area of existence or behavior abnormality may function as the criterion for selecting those to be persecuted. For example, there is such a thing as social abnormality; here the average defines the norm. The further one is from normal social status of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution.” (ibid. 18).

As a nuance to these theories, it should be observed that religious differences do not always lead to divisions. In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Putnam and Campbell argue that religion can also perform a “bridging” function; it can be a source of social capital that “connects people of different backgrounds.” (2010:537) For example, these authors find that religious Americans are more likely to be “good neighbors” than secular Americans, not because of their faith but because of the communities. Scenarios such as Nussbaum’s “politics of fear” or Girard’s scapegoat mechanism should therefore not be seen as a necessity in religiously diverse societies.

Religion can also be perceived as a political threat. In his essay “Politics as a Vocation” (1919), Max Weber argues that religion is a source of legitimacy which unavoidably enters in conflict with existing power structures. Such conflict is not necessarily violent, but there is always a tension between state authority and religion, which is “an all-encompassing normative system [that] poses an authority alternative to the state”, as Scolnicov explains (2011). In other words, religion and the state can be viewed as competing sources of legitimacy (Habermas 2006; Buijs, Sunier & Versteeg 2013). Similarly, Fox argues that religion can constitute a source of legitimacy for the state and political institutions but can also become a factor that undermines this legitimacy. The competing legitimacy between the state and religion can be observed in classic communist countries, where the state wishes to be only source of legitimacy, and is therefore suspicious of religion (2013).

The aforementioned authors all provide complementary interpretations of how ‘deviant’ behavior – in comparison to the norms of the majority – can translate into vulnerability of religious minorities when they are perceived as a threat to the cohesion of society (Durkheim),

inspire an “irrational” fear (Nussbaum), become scapegoats for frustrations (Girard), or are viewed as a threat to the state authority, or by extension to other forms of authority (Weber). This set of theories underlines the importance of considering behavior as a cause of vulnerability alongside identity-based interpretations.

2.1.3 *The specific vulnerability of commitment to justice*

In *The New Religious Intolerance*, Martha Nussbaum makes an ontological claim about the intrinsic vulnerability of humanity. The starting point for this claim is what she calls “the vulnerability premise”, which is the notion that the faculty of conscience, which is at the essence of human dignity and hence of humanity itself, “can be seriously impeded by bad worldly conditions. It can be stopped from becoming active, and it can even be violated or damaged within.” (2013:65) In other words, as Turner (2006) and Scruton (2017) agree, to be human means to have the faculty of conscience – for many people, religious convictions are a matter of conscience upon which they base certain life choices; in their experience, the faculty of conscience is closely connected to what can be called the ‘religious faculty’ –, but this faculty is always vulnerable to be impeded by what can be referred to as ‘the world’, meaning everything surrounding a person.

The immediate normative implication of this claim is that religious freedom must be protected in the broadest possible way. It also implies that whenever the social and political conditions do not sufficiently protect both “equal liberty” and “ample liberty”, as Nussbaum contends, human dignity itself is vulnerable to be “coerced, oppressed, and manipulated” (Bock 2014). Therefore, it is important to understand the social and political conditions that impede the faculty of conscience – and by extension, restrict religious freedom – and therefore directly violate human dignity (Turner 2006).

Although the vulnerability premise is universal, Nussbaum argues that the human dignity of people who are strongly committed to justice, which includes many religiously motivated people, is even more at risk of being violated. In *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), she argues that because vulnerability is an intrinsic aspect of the human condition, individuals who want to be good will inevitably be confronted with an ethical dilemma: a good human being will always want to have an openness to the world, but it is precisely this openness that leaves him or her fragile to extreme circumstances beyond their control. In other words, to be good is to be fragile, and to be fragile is to risk being shattered (Verbrugge, Buijs & van Baardewijk 2019).

Judith Butler, although she rejects Nussbaum’s ontological claim about vulnerability, makes a similar point in *Vulnerability in Resistance* (2016) where she argues that “resistance” – engaging injustice – increases risk. She gives the example of a street protest: all who are present are at risk of detention, arrest, and in the most extreme case forcible handling and death. Psychological research suggests that altruistic individuals, particularly those who adhere to strong moral convictions, tend to face general resentment (Monin, Sawyer & Marquez 2008; Parks & Stone 2010). In the same vein, liberation theologians speak of ‘martyrdom’ as something inevitable for anyone who responds to the Christian duty to promote justice. In order to promote justice, ‘oppressive social structures’ need to be confronted, and this inevitably exposes anyone who is dedicated to justice to risks, of which martyrdom is the ultimate expression (Gutiérrez 1988; Ellacuría 2002; Sobrino 2005).

Taken together, these authors suggest that a strong commitment to justice increases vulnerability. This is relevant for this research for two reasons. The first is that it provides support for the hypothesis that there is a relation between religious convictions, when they inspire moral behavior or social engagement, and the vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses. The second is that there is indeed something specific about the vulnerability of religious minorities, because this vulnerability can be understood as a consequence of religious convictions that lead them to engage in injustice and therefore put them at risk.

2.1.4 *State regulation of religion*

Depending on the context, the ‘regulation of religion’ can be an important explanatory factor of the vulnerability of religious minorities. This concept can simply be defined as “all government laws, policies, and practices that limit, regulate, or control the majority religion in a state, or all religions in a state” (Fox 2013:41). In chapter 3, I present some religious freedom assessment tools that attempt to measure aspects related to the regulation of religion by the state. Here, I discuss the role of antireligion and religious political ideologies as motives for the regulation of religion, before presenting an alternative explanatory model, rooted in the religious economy approach.

Antireligion political ideologies

The various ideologies that can be grouped under the term ‘secularism’ or ‘political secularism’ deserve a separate mention because of their relevance for my case study on Cuba (chapter 7). From the outset, it is necessary to specify that political secularism is not monolithic; there are important variations within this political ideology (Fox 2013:33-35). At a basic level, secularism can be defined as “an ideology or set of beliefs advocating that religion ought to be separate from all or some aspects of politics and/or public life” (Fox 2015:28), a position many religious and non-religious people share. Political secularism is not a violent ideology in itself. Countries like Mexico (1857), France (1905) and Turkey (1921) have religious policies based on secularism, but this does not necessarily lead to physical violence against religious groups (although it could be argued, that there may be forms of symbolic violence against religious groups in these countries).

Political secularism can, however, lead to significant restrictions on religious minorities and religious groups in general (Gill 2008; Grim & Finke 2011; Fox 2013, 2015; Koesel 2014; Sarkissian 2015). As a political ideology, it is central to various totalitarian ideologies, including communism and fascism, which are characterized by “extreme hostility toward religion” (Koesel 2014:7). These “antireligion political ideologies” or “extreme secular ideologies” seek to implement policies that ban religion from all aspects of public and private life (Fox 2015:31), or to limit and control religion as much as possible (ibid. 55). When societies are governed by such antireligious ideologies, they target religious groups (Sarkissian 2015:3) and “are likely to experience conflict over the role that religion should play in public life and politics if portions of the population do not subscribe to the ruling ideology” (ibid. 19). Contemporary examples of antireligious political systems are North Korea, China, Belarus and Vietnam, to cite some of the most extreme cases.

Although generally not violent, political secularism can also take the form of what has been referred to as ‘secular intolerance’, which can be defined as a radical expression of secularism

seeking to exclude religion not only from the public domain but also from various private spheres, in direct contradiction of the principle of pluralism (Buijs 2013; Buijs, Sunier & Versteeg 2013). It is based on the indifference to, rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations based on the conviction that religion should not have a visible influence on society, particularly on education and politics (Philpott 2002; Petri & Visscher 2015). Nussbaum (2013), while almost exclusively referring to cases of intolerance against Muslims, analyzes the sharp rise of anti-religious sentiments in the Western world, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (this trend is commonly referred to as ‘securitization theory’; see Cesari 2013).

Religious political ideologies

Antireligion ideologies can create vulnerability for religious minorities, but so can religious ideologies, such as Islamism or Hindu nationalism. Indeed, groups that are motivated by religious ideologies can target members of minority religions and societies that are governed by religious ideologies tend to be intolerant toward religious minorities, implementing a wide range of discriminatory policies that restrict particular religious practices (Grim & Finke 2011; Wellman 2012; Cesari 2014; Sarkissian 2015; Fox 2016; Philpott 2019). The most extreme cases include theocratic states such as Iran, Mauritania and Saudi Arabia.

Although religious ideologies can indeed create vulnerability for religious minorities, the claim that monotheisms, and all religions for that matter, are inherently violent or lead to violence, as put forward by Paul Cliteur in *Het monotheïstisch dilemma [The monotheistic dilemma]* (2010) cannot be sustained by any empirical evidence and is “a mistake of judgment”, as Buijs says. Rather, violence should be viewed as “an option that expresses itself in any ‘worldview’: polytheist, monotheist and atheist, but cannot be exclusively attributed to one of these” (2013:34).

Equally wrong is the claim that some religions are more likely to promote violence than others, as Max Weber seemed to believe. As scholars like Fox and Buijs contend, all religions have within them both violent and peaceful tendencies. This being said, “fundamentalists can exploit the violent potential a religion contains even when that religion is rarely perceived as having violent potential” (Fox 1999:433). Within the same religion, justifications can be found for both pacifism and violence, but this does not mean that religions are inherently violent (Cavanaugh 2009; Sacks 2017). As Buijs says, “if one does so, one chases the wrong suspect.” (2013:34) In other words, religion itself should not be viewed as a source of vulnerability for other religious minorities, but interpretations of religion that legitimize violence can be. Fox therefore cautions “to look for factors outside of the religions themselves to explain when and why religion exhibits its revolutionary and violent tendencies.” (1999:435)

The religious economy approach

Notwithstanding the role antireligion and religious political ideologies can play in explaining the state regulation of religion, complementary explanations are offered by what is called the ‘religious economy’ approach. In short, the religious economy approach applies micro-economic theory and rational choice to the sociology of religion. First applied by Peter Berger (1967), it observes the religious environment as a ‘marketplace’ for ‘religious goods’ that can be more or less ‘free’, ‘regulated’, ‘monopolistic’, etc. In this theory, religious participation is

viewed as a function of religious regulation. Some works that have used this theory are Finke & Stark (1988), Gill (1998, 2008), Chesnut (2007) and Grim & Finke (2011).

In *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (2008), Anthony Gill argues that political interests explain the regulation of religion to a considerable extent (Johnson & Koyama make a very similar point in *Persecution and Toleration*, 2019). As an extension of religious economy, Gill claims that politicians will only expand religious freedom if this serves their interests: maintaining power, maximizing government revenue promoting economic growth, minimizing civil unrest and minimizing the cost of ruling. Following this perspective, the degree of religious freedom is thus determined by the feasibility of restricting or not restricting the rights of religious groups. Gill has applied this perspective to explain the relaxing of Mexico's anticlerical policies halfway the twentieth century. Goldenziel (2009) applied it to assert that there were opportunistic political reasons for the Cuban state to partially relax the regulation of religion in the 1990s.

The religious economies approach is also insightful to understand the consequences of the regulation of religion. In *The Price of Freedom Denied*, Grim & Finke (2011) claim, based on a statistical model called 'the religious economies model', that the existence of restrictions placed by the state on religious freedom increases the risk of violence against the religious groups whose religious freedom is restricted. The authors argue that the denial of religious freedoms directly restricts the diversity of religious options on the religious marketplace. They further argue that "to the extent these restrictions increase, and religious freedoms are denied, violent religious persecution will also rise" (ibid. 70). This pattern is observed "regardless of motive", in line with the opportunity-based approach that argues that motivations are indeterminate to explain conflict.

The religious economies model is helpful to observe how the interaction between social and governmental actors can increase the vulnerability of religious minorities. In this model, the actions against religious minorities by both types of actors tend to strengthen each other. It normally seems to start with a specific social group (a mob, typically) representing the majority religion whose actions encourage the government to repress religious minorities, which in turn encourages social groups even more to attack religious minorities. This all leads to a dynamic in which social hostilities involving religion and government restrictions of religion mutually reinforce each other. Empirically, such scenarios can be observed in countries like Egypt where mobs and the state tend to reinforce each other; it does not seem to apply to countries like Cuba where the regulation of religion by the state is not driven by a mob.

This empirical conclusion offers a strong justification for the protection of religious freedom. When this right is insufficiently protected, religious minorities can be expected to be vulnerable. According to Grim & Finke, the protection of religious freedoms reduces conflict because violence against specific religious groups by non-state actors is less tolerated when religious freedoms are protected. Fox adds that the protection of religious freedoms further reduces the risk of conflict because it neutralizes social pressures on the state leading to religious persecution of minority religions and because it reduces the grievances of minority religions (Fox 2013:131). Inversely, it is more likely that a religious minority will be persecuted when there is impunity for crimes committed against it (Grim & Finke 2011) or when a "culture of vigilantism" is encouraged by religious policies such as blasphemy laws in Muslim-majority countries (Saiya 2017).

In sum, the theories presented in this section provide a number of keys to interpret specific aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities. The first is that the regulation of religion by the state can be the consequence of antireligion or religious political ideologies or of political incentives. The second is that restrictions of religious freedom can increase the risk of violence by non-state actors against religious minorities. The third is that the degree of respect for religious freedom is often the result of an interaction between state and non-state actors.

2.2 When vulnerability becomes conflict: understanding ethno-religious conflict in conflict theory

In conflict theory, three schools can be distinguished that offer concurrent interpretations for civil conflicts, which include ethno-religious conflicts: the first explains conflicts as a result of ‘grievance’ (2.2.1); the second explains them as a result of ‘greed’ (2.2.2); the third favors an approach in terms of ‘opportunity’ (2.2.3). Notwithstanding the arguments both within and between these schools with regard to what is the best statistical predictor of civil conflicts, for the purpose of this research, I simply take them as complementary interpretations that can shed light on the vulnerability of religious minorities, in agreement with Ballentine & Sherman (2003) and Weinstein (2007). This is also what Johan Galtung proposes when he analytically distinguishes between “value conflicts” and “interest conflicts”, with the former referring to conflicts over resource scarcity and the latter to conflicts over ideological disagreements (1969).

2.2.1 Grievance

‘Relative deprivation theory’ is probably the best-known motivational framework for interpreting conflict. Developed by Ted Gurr in his seminal work *Why Men Rebel* (2016 [1970]), this theory is one of the most influential political science frameworks of political protest and rebellion. It postulates that relative deprivation, defined as the “perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities” is a strong determinant of the potential for collective violence. Drawing on social psychology, Gurr argues that relative deprivation – also referred to by other scholars and by Gurr himself as “popular discontent”, “sense of injustice” or “grievances” –, leads to frustration, and frustration leads to aggression, which is the “primary source of the human capacity for violence.” Similar notions can be found in the work of other scholars: “rancor” (Galtung 1969), “rage” (Sloterdijk 2007), “rancor” (Schaap 2012), and “anger” and “resentment (Nussbaum 2016). In Gurr’s model, frustration will lead to rebellion if a number of conditions are met: this frustration must be sustained through time by a group that has a sufficient degree of organization, it needs to be supported by ideological justifications, and political action needs to be judged to be pertinent. The discontented people must also judge they have the capacity to act (Gurr 2015, 2016).

Frances Stewart (2008) favors an approach in terms of ‘horizontal inequalities’, defined as “inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups” to determine the likelihood of conflict as well as their potential for mobilization. Using this concept, Cederman, Gleditsch & Buhaug (2013) argue that grievances based on political and economic exclusion at the group level do cause civil war, and measure this through an alternative dataset which they consider to be more suitable than Gurr’s Minorities at Risk dataset, who had actually reached a similar conclusion in 1993. Among other

things, these authors find that ethnic groups that are excluded from governmental influence or face group-level economic inequality are more likely to experience conflict.

In spite of their differences, the aforementioned scholars all agree on one thing: that motivations, specifically, grievances, whether based on real or perceived injustice, are the primary explanatory factor of conflict between ethnic groups, and that under favorable circumstances, such as widespread impunity or sufficient organizational capacity of the antagonistic groups, this can lead to violent mobilization.

Although ideological justifications are considered, the grievance-based approach says little about the role of religious convictions and generally focuses on material acceptations of grievance rather than immaterial ones such as religious disagreements. The only exception is Fox (1999), who developed a theory of ethno-religious conflict by integrating religion into the Minorities at Risk dataset, but this theory only holds explanatory power when it comes to inter-ethnic conflicts in which religion and ethnicity overlap, which is not the issue in my case studies (chapter 6 is about an intra-ethnic conflict and in chapters 5 and 7 ethnicity does not play a role).

2.2.2 Greed

Rejecting the grievance-based approach, a number of scholars have argued that greed – economic and political incentives –, not grievance, is the primary explanation of conflict (Collier & Hoeffler 2004). The proponents of greed do not deny the importance of grievances but are skeptical of the ‘self-serving explanations’ that are employed to justify rebellion, considering that these narratives should not ‘naively’ be taken at face value (Kalyvas 2006; Schlee 2008). In Collier’s words, rebels should be viewed as “profiteers”, rather than as “freedom fighters.” In agreement with this perspective, in *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (2004), Jessica Stern unequivocally concludes that religious terrorist organizations use religion as a motivation and a justification to recruit soldiers, but that the driving force behind such organizations is “power, money and attention”, or greed, in other words. It is indeed a legitimate question whether insurgencies such as the FARC guerrillas in Colombia or Al-Shabaab in Somalia are really ideologically motivated (by communist ideals and by political Islam, respectively), or simply criminals, who make money of drug trafficking and piracy.

Apart from scenarios of rebels who use a religious discourse as a mobilization tool or to conceal their actual intentions, applying the greed-based approach to interpret the vulnerability of religious minorities might seem counterintuitive, as religious conflicts are commonly understood as conflicts over values. However, the main significance of the greed-based approach for my research is that it introduces the possibility for alternative interpretations to grievance-based accounts. Indeed, most accounts of religious persecution tend to focus on religious motives, misjudging conflicts in which the vulnerability of religious minorities is caused by rational calculations of a group or organization that is driven by economic or political incentives (Toft 2011). In other words, even when religious grievances are absent, religious minorities can still be vulnerable, a point I come back to in my case studies.

This being said, the role of immaterial factors of conflict should not be ignored altogether, a distinction that is insufficiently made in both the grievance-based and the greed-based approaches which tend to overemphasize material factors. A helpful typology is offered by

Achterhuis & Koning in *De kunst van het vreedzaam vechten [The art of peaceful fighting]* (2017:111-137), who distinguish between conflicts over interests – which could be (a) competition for the same interest (Girard’s “mimetic desire”) or a (b) struggle over opposite interests – and (c) conflicts over value differences, such as identity, ideology or religion. Achterhuis & Koning stress that, in practice, these three types of conflict can occur simultaneously and interact. To the authors, a holistic approach to conflict is preferable; different elements should be considered, instead of singling out only the material, a point I come back to in the synthesis of this section.

2.2.3 Opportunity

In later work, Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner (2009) put forward the concept of ‘opportunity’ – this concept was already present in the work of Charles Tilly (1978, 1998, 1999) –, nuancing the greed-based approach, suggesting that whenever a rebellion is feasible, in financial and military terms, it will occur. Motivation then, whether it is greed or grievance, is indeterminate to explain conflict, or in any case subordinate to the feasibility of a conflict to happen, such as a power vacuum. In the same vein, scholars have argued that state weakness, expressed by factors like political instability, bureaucratic weakness and rough terrain (Fearon & Laitin 2003) and poor governance, in combination with corruption, failing rule of law and no property rights protection (Chayes 2015) are a particularly relevant predictor of violent conflict. Similarly, Gibson (2005) and Giraudy (2012) show that peripheral areas with poor infrastructure are likely to be “subnational undemocratic regimes.” Feasibility is also implicit in Gurr’s work, because of his emphasis on the necessary conditions for frustration to turn into rebellion.

The value of the opportunity-based approach is that it points to the structural conditions under which violence against religious minorities can develop. It seems indeed sensible that contexts of lawlessness and impunity can increase the risk for religious minorities, both because religious freedom is not enforced, and because any violence committed by illegitimate groups that take advantage of weak political institutions is not punished. For example, in *Faith That Endures* (2006), Ronald Boyd-MacMillan describes how the power vacuum caused by the fragmentation of the ruling Congress Party due to corruption scandals in India and the collapse of left-wing ideology after the fall of the Berlin Wall, was exploited by the extremist and sectarian Hindutva party, which in turn led to persecution of Christian and Muslim minorities.

Although it seems logical that state weakness increases the risk of conflict and, by extension, the vulnerability of religious minorities, the opposite is also possible. In a strong state, political institutions may be used to create “structural violence”, to use Johan Galtung’s concept (1969) which he defines as “avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible.” In other words, structural violence is a form of violence where social structures or institutions, such as elitism, racism, sexism, etc. may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. This type of violence can cause harm for religious minorities, as is the case in authoritarian regimes, which I discussed in section 2.1.4.

A related concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron that also underlines that strong states can restrict religious freedom is “symbolic violence.” (1970) Although this concept was developed initially to understand how social inequalities are reproduced, it also

applies to restrictions on religious freedom. Essentially, symbolic violence is the imposition of habits of thought and perception upon dominated groups within society who then take the social order imposed to be just. The dominated then take their subservient position to be ‘right’ within the social order. In other words, the dominated people collude in their own subordination. Symbolic violence is in some sense more powerful than physical violence in that it is indirect and embedded in different types of thought patterns, perceptions and actions of individuals, which in turn, imposes a sense of legitimacy of the social order.

To summarize, although the different theories about the determinants of ethno-religious conflict were developed in opposition to each other, they provide complementary explanations for the vulnerability of religious minorities. Both grievances and greed can play a role in interpreting the motivations of the actors that create vulnerability for religious minorities. Opportunity-based interpretations, related to state weakness (or on the contrary the use of the power of the state to regulate religion), emphasize the structural conditions that can increase (or decrease) the vulnerability of religious minorities. For these theories to be useful for my research, however, they need to be taken as complementary interpretations instead of seeking to single out one explanatory factor (Owen 2003; Achterhuis & Koning 2017). They must also be broadened beyond ethno-religious conflicts to apply to conflicts involving religious minorities that do not follow ethnic lines.

2.3 Coping with vulnerability: resilience

To offset the discussion about vulnerability in the previous two sections, I now discuss the concept of resilience, based on the premise that religious minorities can develop mechanisms to cope with vulnerability. I first look at the notion of resilience (2.3.1) before discussing a broad array of coping mechanisms religious minorities have at their disposal (2.3.2).

2.3.1 Resilience

Judith Butler (2016) warns against understanding vulnerability only as victimization and passivity, insisting that vulnerability cannot be disconnected from agency. As she argues, the mere act of opposing the conditions of one’s vulnerability, underlines how vulnerability can become a mobilizing force, and thus of resilience. Indeed, vulnerability is not necessarily the opposite of resistance but can play a role in practices of resistance. Vulnerability and ‘precarity’ are generally what lead people to mobilize and to protest against injustice. This protest may itself be risky, as we have seen, but it is often triggered by the original situation of vulnerability.

Following Judith Rodin in *The Resilience Dividend*, the concept of resilience can be defined as follows:

“Resilience is the capacity of any entity – an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system – to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience.”
(2014:116)

Applying this perspective to the vulnerability of religious minorities, this concept means that a resilient religious minority should have the capacity to do three things: (1) to prepare for threats, (2) to recover from them, and (3) to adapt and grow from the experience. Religious minorities

can be more or less resilient to risks, i.e. more or less successful in mitigating their impact. In the resilience assessments included in the case studies that are part of this research, I describe real ways in which the vulnerable religious minority I study can become more resilient – to develop the capacity to cope with human security threats –, in line with the second part of Judith Rodin’s definition which reads:

“As you build resilience, therefore, you become more able to prevent or mitigate stresses and shocks you can identify and better able to respond to those you can’t predict or avoid. You also develop greater capacity to bounce back from a crisis, learn from it, and achieve revitalization.” (ibid. 119)

2.3.2 Coping mechanisms

How can vulnerable religious minorities develop coping mechanisms and become resilient? *Under Caesar’s Sword*, a three-year research project of the University of Notre Dame and the Religious Freedom Project at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University highlights three typical strategies Christian communities adopt to respond to persecution: “Survival”, “Association”, and “Confrontation” (Philpott & Shah 2018). These three strategies are not mutually exclusive but can overlap to a great extent. Survival refers to the range of – creative – strategies of preservation of life while staying true to essential elements of church life, often in secret. Association is the active strategy of building networks, such as interdenominational partnerships, interreligious dialogue and international cooperation, to stand stronger against external threats. Confrontation is the often-risky strategy of openly challenging the persecution.

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

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

In a way, the avoidance and compliance strategies can be viewed as the opposites of the collective action strategy, although it is possible for people to engage in both strategies at different moments in time. This distinction is of particular relevance in understanding why religious minorities engage or not in some coping mechanisms in the context of Latin America.

Avoidance (or compliance) can be the result of fear or of a feeling that resistance is useless in given contexts, but it can also be the result of theological options that do not value any form of social engagement or collective action (Freston 2001, 2008; Petri 2012).

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

As I argued in the introduction of this research, Christianity in Latin America is very heterogeneous in terms of religious practice and behavior, which has implications for the adoption of coping mechanisms. Thus, whilst Wellman & Lombardi stress that religiously motivated actors can play a role in advancing human security (2012), it is important to recognize that this is only true for religious groups and individuals that adhere to a theology that promotes an active participation in society (Mwaura 2008).

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

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

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

Beyond Christianity, vulnerability is valued in other religions. For example, in Judaism, vulnerability is considered as something that “can lead you toward connecting to something greater than yourself, connecting to others and to the divine”, leading to resilience or *chosen* in Hebrew, understood as “to be inoculated, impermeable” (Mandell 2016). In Buddhism, the notion of *karuna*, which is generally translated as compassion, refers to “the wish that all beings are relieved of suffering” which is a direct result of the awareness of the interdependence of everything in nature. It follows that the vulnerable deserve special protection (Hongladarom 2011).

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

The acknowledgement of the ‘blessings in disguise’ of vulnerability and suffering has an important downside, because it gives the perpetrators of attacks against religious groups the possibility to justify their violence by alleging that they do it against themselves because they chose to be vulnerable. Nietzsche follows a similar line of thinking. In *The Anti-Christ* (1999 [1895]), he argues that religion, in particular Christianity which he refers to as “the religion of pity”, increases vulnerability: “Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious.” (ibid. 172-173) This is, of course, a fallacy, because acknowledging the purifying effect of suffering does not mean that one voluntarily embraces suffering itself or even that suffering is a choice.

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

Another type of coping mechanism that is related to religion can be the moral standing in society of religious people, such as the respect that religious ministers command or the superstitious belief that religious people benefit from supernatural protection. Furthermore, because religious groups gather in communities, solidarity among members of a religious community can also be a coping mechanism. An example of solidarity is the sharing of humanitarian supplies to mitigate the impact of human security threats. In a study about the rescue of Jews in The Netherlands during the Holocaust, Braun demonstrates that religious

minorities (Protestants in dominantly Catholic regions and Catholics in dominantly Protestant regions) are generally more inclined and better able to help other threatened minorities (2016). In a way, this finding connects with Butler's argument that vulnerability is an important resource for resistance: being a vulnerable religious minority encourages and enables it to reach out to help other minorities (or its own minority). (This does not mean, however, that religious people are by default drawn to engage injustice, nor that non-religious people are never drawn to do so).

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

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

Although in his article Habermas (2006) is concerned with the issue of religious expression in the public sphere and not with resilience, social wisdom can be viewed as a coping mechanism. Indeed, religious minorities can decrease their vulnerability by avoiding words and actions that could be perceived as provocative (Casanova 2008; Philpott & Shah 2018). In missiology, concepts such as 'contextualization' and 'cultural sensitivity' stress this exact point (Engle 1983). The theological appropriation of Max Weber's distinction between *Gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction) and *Verantwortungsethik* (ethics of responsibility) by Thielicke, a Christian ethicist with general high standing among the more conservative-evangelical branches of Christianity, is also applicable here. The former concerns the noble ideals and convictions that one desires to realize, the latter considers what the possible negative consequences of those convictions and idealistic ideals could be (1969:512-515). As Buijs puts it, "one is enjoined to act concretely, wisely, in a limited manner; not to change the world, but to take one step, in line with concrete commandments (that includes the commandment not to kill)." (2013:34). (Considering social wisdom as a coping mechanism, an interesting question about the story of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 6:8-8:11), is: could he have avoided his death if he had refrained from insulting the Sanhedrin?)

Of course, social wisdom is no guarantee that religious minorities will be safe from threats. Depending on the circumstances, a seemingly inoffensive act can be perceived as a provocation. This was the case of Ahok, Jakarta's former governor, who quoted from the Quran

in a positive sense but was subsequently accused of blasphemy because he was a Christian.³ Moreover, the lack of social wisdom can never be an excuse to cause them harm. Religious minorities certainly have a responsibility to avoid unnecessary provocations, but a lack of self-reflection can never be used as a justification for human rights abuses committed against them.

In sum, the relation between vulnerability and resilience is stressed by numerous authors but possesses interesting nuances in the case of religious minorities. This constitutes not only a justification for researching the resilience of religious minorities, but also confirms that it is possible to determine some degree of specificity in the vulnerability of religious minorities that is directly relatable to religion.

2.4 Synthesis: pieces to the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities

In this chapter I have explored a number of interpretative models, from a wide range of disciplines, which offer complementary interpretations of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Taken together, they can be considered as pieces to the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities; however, they also clog its observation.

Several theories stress the role of behavior inspired by religious convictions as an enhancing factor of the vulnerability of religious minorities. This applies to people with a strong commitment to justice, but also to people who display socially deviant behavior that is perceived to threaten social cohesion or some vested interest. In both sets of interpretations, the vulnerability of religious minorities can be seen as a direct consequence of their behavior. The role of religious identity, however, should not be dismissed, particularly when religious affiliation is manipulated to justify the social exclusion of religious minorities or when a visible religious minority becomes a scapegoat for frustrations. These models also suggest that it is possible to identify some degree of specificity in the vulnerability of religious minorities that is directly relatable to either their religious identity or their religious behavior.

The subtleties of religion's role in society can have important macro-level consequences. They can lead to civil conflicts, in which grievance-based and greed-based motivations, or a combination of them, can create vulnerability for religious minorities. Grievance-based motivations include not only frustrations over material conditions but also political ideologies that can be discriminatory to all religions or to minority religions. Greed-based motivations too are relevant to consider, as the vulnerability of religious minorities is often determined by economic and political incentives. Both can also lead to the placement of restrictions on the religious freedom of religious minorities, by the state or by the powers that be. The risks for religious minorities further increase under unfavorable circumstances, such as widespread impunity or on the contrary a political system that encourages religious violence.

Finally, religion is not only a source of vulnerability. The reviewed frameworks highlight that religious convictions can also be a source of resilience, underlining that vulnerable religious minorities should not be viewed only as victims but as actors with agency (Appleby 2000). This has ramifications at various levels: at the personal level, religious people tend to have an important degree of self-awareness and at the collective level, religion is a source of social capital. Among other things, this enables religious minorities to display solidarity. This, of course, is not to say that only religious people can be resilient nor that all religious minorities

³ "Ahok: Indonesia's religious tolerance on trial?", *Al Jazeera*, 09/05/2017.

have developed satisfactory coping mechanisms; it does mean, however, that the resilience of religious minorities presents a certain uniqueness.

The theories presented in this section have their limitations too in relation to this dissertation. These limitations are primarily related to focus in at least five areas. First, most interpretative models tend to place more emphasis on religious identity, thereby downplaying behavioral aspects of religion. The exclusive focus on religious identity might explain why literature on religious conflict (as well as religious freedom monitoring instruments, which I discuss further down) fail to observe the kind of religious freedom violations like the ones I encountered. Indeed, focusing on the behavioral dimension of religion makes it possible to identify subsets of religious groups based on forms of religious behavior, beyond their religious identification – which would be statistically meaningless in Christian-majority countries – and consequently to observe their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses.

Second, the confounding of ethnicity and religion (implying the neglect of intra-ethnic conflict) is a common feature in conflict theory. The literature that looks at ‘ethno-religious conflict’ is mainly concerned with inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts, not with conflicts within ethnic groups – ‘minority-within-the-minority’ conflicts – like the case of the Nasa ethnic group in Colombia I referenced in the introduction and which I discuss in chapter 6.

Third, the focus on the state by some scholars implies a disregard for the subnational level, which entails the overlooking of local and regional empirical realities, including the position of vulnerable religious minorities in areas where the presence of the state can be much weaker, in line with O’Donnell (1993). It must be observed, however, that in recent years conflict studies have become increasingly sensitive to the limitations of methodological nationalism, a point I will come back to in section 3.2.1. Connected with the former, a fourth point is that most conflict studies have a restrictive understanding of religious freedom by considering only state regulation of religion, failing to appreciate the role of non-state actors with regards to religious freedom. For example, I did not find any references pertaining to the relation between organized crime and religion, which I discuss in chapter 5. This being said, some datasets, such as *Minorities at Risk*, certainly take non-state actors into consideration (specifically considering “Individual acts of harassment, no fatalities” and “Sporadic violent attacks by gangs or other small groups”) but does not establish a link with religion.

Finally, the concern of conflict theory with identifying the single most important explanatory factor of conflict – the single cause fallacy – instead of acknowledging that conflicts are multifactorial can be misleading. As Owen observes:

“It is my opinion that the literature [on the root causes of conflict] has gone astray. That fact that no one condition will necessarily lead to conflict, does not rule out the contributing role of each and says nothing to the implications of several conditions being present in one location. It is the aggregated effect of human insecurities that I feel may be the best possible indicator for potential conflict. Poverty in and of itself may not necessarily lead to conflict, but combined with political repression and a recent environmental disaster, may significantly increase the regional propensity for violence.” (2003:113).

In all, the presented interpretative models are useful to observe some aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities, but they are, generalizing, insufficiently holistic. For these reasons, these models risk clogging the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

Specifically, because of conceptual and methodological reasons, they only observe a limited number of human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable. My primary aim in this research is not to develop better explanations of the vulnerability of religious minorities – although some explanations may be given –, but rather to be able to observe this vulnerability more clearly. In order to properly observe the vulnerability of religious minorities, a more comprehensive framework is necessary. I come back to this important point in the next chapter.

3. Strengths and shortcomings of religious freedom assessment tools from a human security perspective

In the preceding chapter, I presented some of the most relevant theories that provide interesting lenses for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. In this section, I look at a number of religious freedom assessment tools (RFATs), which are the analytical frameworks that come closest to assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities. After a critical evaluation of these tools (3.1), I justify why the human security perspective provides a more comprehensive framework to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities than the former two types of frameworks and how it can complement their shortcomings (3.2), provided it takes the multidimensionality of religious freedom into consideration (3.3). I end with a few concluding remarks (3.4).

3.1 Evaluation of religious freedom assessment tools

In this evaluation, I first present the origins of the RFATs (3.1.1). I then review the methodologies of the main scholarly RFATs (3.1.2). Based on this review, I evaluate these tools in relation to their pertinence for the objectives of this dissertation, discussing their main analytical contributions to the understanding of the vulnerability of religious minorities (3.1.3) and their shortcomings (3.1.4). I end with a synthesis of the value of RFATs for my research (3.1.5).

3.1.1 Origins

Before discussing RFATs, it is necessary to say a few words about the concept of religious freedom because of its relevance for my research. The legal conception of the multidimensionality of religious freedom can be derived directly from article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Matthias Koenig speaks of a “polyphony of religious freedom”, referring to the plurality of uses of this concept in different legal traditions throughout history (2017, see also Fox 2016; Joustra 2018). My understanding of religious freedom is specific to this research and others may use the term differently. I view religious freedom as a broad and multidimensional concept (more in section 3.3). Indeed, my understanding of religious freedom is much broader than what it is commonly accepted (Gill 2008; Gómez Chico Spamer, González Alvarez, Perera Calzada, Porrás Sánchez 2018; Johnson & Koyama 2019). Specifically, I posit that religious freedom should not be restricted to the separation of church and state or to freedom of worship, as it involves many more dimensions. To illustrate this point, the Religion and State dataset elaborated by Jonathan Fox describes government involvement in religion through 132 variables, which can be complemented by 9 detailed variables measuring certain religious policies; for the description of actions taken by societal actors 37 separate variables were developed to complement the Grim & Finke’s Social Regulation of Religion Index. A booklet by the Swedish Mission Council (2010) entitled *What freedom of religion involves and when*

it can be limited enumerates seven specific dimensions of religious freedom: freedom to have, choose, change or leave a religion or belief; freedom to manifest a religion or belief; freedom from coercion; freedom from discrimination; the right of parents to give their children religious and moral education in accordance with their own beliefs; the right to conscientious objection; freedom to practice one's religious belief in the workplace.

The growing interest in documenting and measuring religious freedom led to the development of a variety of RFATs. These tools differ in their objectives and methodological approach but share a number of common features. Most of these tools are quantitative instruments which seek to describe the level of religious persecution – violation of religious freedom – at a particular moment in time, providing a snapshot of the degree of religious persecution in a country and comparing different countries with each other. In most cases, these tools are used to produce rankings of countries or scales of religious freedom violation.

When reviewing the origins of the interest in documenting and measuring religious freedom, four phases can be distinguished. RFATs were first developed by faith-based organizations who had an interest in documenting religious freedom violations to inform their strategic planning. Some civil society organizations later integrated religious freedom into their monitoring instruments. In the 1990's, public and multilateral institutions gained interest in religious freedom and started developing monitoring instruments. In the 2000's, religious freedom increasingly became an object of scholarly attention, leading to the development of several new tools.

Faith-based organizations

The first RFATs emerged within faith-based organizations involved in advocacy and mission. The earliest example is the assessment of the global situation of religious freedom by the International Missionary Council by Bates in 1945 (Sauer 2012). The first edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* by David Barrett (1982) includes a “Religious Liberty or Persecution” score for each individual country. The Christian relief organization Open Doors International started publishing an annual persecution index, known as the World Watch List, in 1993. This index was initially intended as an internal system for planning purposes, but quickly became a tool for the organization to raise awareness to its constituency and the broader public about its work. The second edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* included a *Christian Safety Index* (Barrett Kurian & Johnson 2001), which has been continued in the World Christian Database (Johnson & Zurlo 2018) and in the World Religion Database (Johnson & Grim 2018).

At present, Christian advocacy agencies such as Voice of the Martyrs, Christian Solidarity International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Aid to the Church in Need, the Religious Liberty Partnership of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe have developed basic instruments to describe the religious freedom situation in different countries, and graphically publish them in maps for information and awareness raising purposes (Sauer 2012). In 2012, the methodology of the World Watch List of Open Doors International was comprehensively revised. Sauer summarizes the specificity of the World Watch List as follows:

“In comparison to the above instruments, the World Watch List by Open Doors (OD) has the following combination of features: It appears annually ten weeks after the completion of the period under consideration, it is restricted to

Christians, it is mainly based on grassroots sources from the Christian, missionary and advocacy community, and its interest is pragmatic rather than scholarly, primarily serving the purpose of strategy planning and mobilisation of support for persecuted Christians from a missionary perspective.” (2012:22)

In general, RFATs developed by faith-based organizations do not have an academic vocation but are primarily destined at informing the constituencies of these organizations and for internal planning purposes. Therefore, these tools have limited value for this research. A noteworthy exception is the World Watch List of Open Doors International, which since its methodological revision in 2012, seeks to comply with academic standards including honesty, fairness, objectivity, reliability, skepticism, accountability and openness.

Civil society organizations

Beyond faith-based organizations, religious freedom has received relatively little attention by civil society organizations. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Without Frontiers International and Human Rights Watch do not explicitly monitor religious freedom, although they do include references to specific cases of religious freedom violations in their annual reports. It could be argued that religious freedom assessments are less useful to human rights practitioners than to organizations working in advocacy. Human rights practitioners, particularly those working in the field of asylum and refugee protection, generally focus on documenting specific cases and are therefore less interested in cross-national comparative indexes (Rempell 2013).

There are, however, some noteworthy exceptions. The best known is the Religious Freedom Rating developed by religious freedom advocate Paul Marshall of the Center for Religious Freedom of the Hudson Institute (formerly part of Freedom House) which provides short roundups of the religious freedom situation in over 100 countries. Although it is a very rudimentary RFAT, it has received widespread media attention. Paul Marshall’s books attracted wide attention (Marshall & Gilbert 1997; Marshall & Shea 2011; Marshall, Gilbert & Shea 2013), and were instrumental to the inclusion of religious freedom in particularly US domestic and foreign policy. Civil society organizations like Freedom House, the Bertelsmann Foundation and Fund for Peace also include one or more questions about religious freedom in their instruments.

Public institutions

The inclusion of religious freedom as a policy theme on the agenda of both multilateral and national institutions is relatively recent. In the past decade more and more states have created religious freedom divisions or have in another way integrated the theme into their activities. However, the United States State Department is the only public institution that has developed a comprehensive RFAT in the form of its annual (since 2004) *International Religious Freedom Report*, a qualitative information collection instrument.

At the multilateral level, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights had appointed a “Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance” in 1986 with the mandate “to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.” In 2000, the mandate title was changed to “Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.” The normative

instrumentarium of the Special Rapporteur includes article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, amongst others. As part of his duties the Special Rapporteur performs fact-finding country visits, transmits appeals to States “with regard to cases that represent infringements of or impediments to the exercise of the right to freedom of religion and belief” and submits annual reports to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Although the Special Rapporteur produces reports on specific cases, his office does not use a (publicly available) RFAT to monitor religious conflict.

The Council of the European Union also put the issue of religious freedom on the agenda by adopting the “EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (FORB)” in June 2013 which is integrated into the work of the European Union’s External Action Service.

At the national level, in the United States the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) (1998) created an Office of International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, headed by an Ambassador of Religious Freedom with the mandate to produce an annual “International Religious Freedom Report” on all countries of the world. This report, which includes reports from American embassies in all countries of the world except North Korea and the United States itself, is considered the most extensive documentation instrument on religious freedom (Hertzke 2004, 2008, 2013). Next to the Office of International Religious Freedom, the IRFA also created the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which is an independent, bipartisan, federal government entity mandated with monitoring the status of freedom of religion or belief outside the United States and providing policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

Other national governments which in the 2010s have created specialized divisions within their ministries for foreign affairs focusing on religious freedom include Norway, Canada, Italy, France and The Netherlands. In addition, several western parliaments have deployed initiatives to promote freedom of religion. The impact of these initiatives varies greatly; some government divisions have since been abandoned or receive less attention, while other governments have stepped up their efforts (Toft & Green 2018; Petersen & Marshall 2019). By contrast, religious freedom is not a policy priority for any Latin American country except for Brazil (Freston 2018) nor for multilateral regional bodies such as the Organization of American States.

Scholarly attention

Encouraged by the increasing interest in religious freedom by public institutions, various academic research projects started to develop RFATs in the 2000’s. Two broad types of RFATs can be identified: general datasets that include some variables about religious freedom and ‘pure’ RFATs. In the general datasets, the treatment of religious freedom in these instruments was generally very basic and did not have the level of sophistication and complexity of the scholarly RFATs that emerged later; they were the earliest examples of data collection about specific dimensions of religious freedom. The most noteworthy examples are the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project (1981), the Minorities at Risk Project (1986), the World Values Survey (WVS) (1981)⁴ and in the region, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. Jonathan Fox, who was a student of Ted R. Gurr,

⁴ Based on the data of the WVS, Norris & Inglehart developed a rudimentary Religious Freedom Index in 2004.

used the Minorities at Risk project (Gurr 1993) as a starting point for the development of his composite measures of religion and state, by adapting and broadening its religious discrimination variables beyond the context of ethnoreligious minorities. Jonathan Fox also collected data on specific religion variables for use with the Minorities at Risk dataset.

Most of the scholarly RFATs I identified use a socio-metric methodology.⁵ The best known is Global Restrictions on Religion, which is an adaptation by the Pew Research Center of the methodology developed by Grim & Finke at Pennsylvania State University (2006).⁶ This instrument includes indices for two dimensions of restrictions of religion for adherents of any religion or belief: “government restrictions” and “social hostilities.” The methodology of the indices is based on the coding of 19 publicly available primary sources, the principal source being the International Religious Freedom Reports by the United States State Department (Grim & Finke 2011).

Following a similar socio-metric methodology, the Religion and State Project directed by Jonathan Fox at Bar-Ilan University “measures the extent of government involvement in religion” (2011). His dataset uses a broader range of primary sources and focuses specifically on “the relationship between religion and the state apparatus.” The dataset developed in the framework of this project includes variables for Official Religion, Religious Support, Religious Restrictions, Religious Discrimination, as well as other topics. Additional variables measure policies including religious education, the registration of religious organizations, restrictions on abortion, restrictions on proselytizing, and religious requirements for holding public office or citizenship. A societal module was added to the RAS dataset in 2017. The variables that measure actions taken by societal actors describe societal discrimination and minority societal actions (Fox, Finke & Mataic 2018).

While developed by a faith-based organization, the World Watch List of Open Doors International can also be considered a scholarly instrument, particularly since its methodological revision in 2012 and its academic validation by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, a network of scholars and universities specializing in religious freedom (Sauer 2012). Input for the World Watch List is provided by qualitative questionnaires which are filled by both staff in the field and a network of external experts. The questionnaire design seeks to give an expression to the degree of pressure experienced by Christians in five spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church life). The questionnaire also includes a sixth block on physical violence which cuts across all five spheres of life.

3.1.2 *Methodological review*

In this section I review the methodologies of the main scholarly RFATs and some civil society instruments based on three criteria: (a) definitions of religious freedom and/or persecution; (b) focus of measurement; (c) methodology to aggregate and analyze data. The review of RFATs allows distinguishing between two broad categories: expert-opinion based tools and socio-

⁵ I leave less known RFATs such as the Herfindahl Index of Religious Pluralism (Alesina 2003), the State Regulation of Religion (Chaves & Cann 1992) and the Government Religious Preference dataset (Brown 2016) out of consideration.

⁶ International Religious Freedom Data developed by Grim & Finke (2006) includes three “international religion indexes” to measure Government Regulation, Government Favoritism, and Social Regulation of Religion. These indexes, which are periodically updated by the Association of Religious Data Archives of Pennsylvania State University, are based on the coding of data in the annual International Religious Freedom Report issued by the US State Department.

metric tools. The Religious Freedom Rating and the World Watch List belong to the first category of tools. Both are based on qualitative surveys which are filled out by experts, similar to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index. In the case of the World Watch List, these experts include not only academics and analysts, but also staff of Open Doors International working in the respective countries. The answers to the surveys are given a numerical value which is used to calculate scores for the surveyed countries.

The tools developed by the Association of Religion Data Archives, the Pew Research Center, the Religion and State Project at Bar-Ilan University and the Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion are socio-metric tools, based on the coding of publicly available sources. The coding process does not allow any expert appreciation or judgment on the observed variables. The indices developed by the Pew Research Center are comparable to the ones developed by the Association of Religion Data Archives, which is understandable because they were designed by the same scholars and follow the same methodological outset. The methodology used by the Religion and State Project is also very similar but uses a broader range of sources and more complex coding standards. The Government Religious Preference dataset, a more recent instrument, is inspired by the aforementioned instruments.

As far as their focus is concerned, the indices developed by the Religion and State Project (until 2017, when a societal module was added) and the Government Religious Preference dataset focus exclusively on the relation between religion and the state, which includes both formal codes (laws) and informal practices. Persecution originated from society is monitored by the Pew Research Center through the Social Hostilities Index, the new societal module of the Religion and State Project and by the World Watch Unit through the identification of the societal actors exerting pressure on Christians in each sphere of life. Another distinction that can be made is between tools that focus on all religions and on one religion specifically. With the exception of the World Watch List, which focuses exclusively on Christianity, all reviewed tools cover all religions.

Regarding the definitions used by the RFATs, the socio-metric tools have the most rigid definitions, which can be explained by the needs of coding (quantification). The definitions used in the expert-opinion based tools invite a reflection about aspects such as frequency or intensity, which demand a qualitative appreciation (see annex D for a systematic comparison of RFATs).

3.1.3 Contributions

In 2006, Grim & Finke lamented that “religion receives little attention in international quantitative studies. Including religion in cross-national studies requires data, and high-quality data are in short supply.” At writing, this is not a problem anymore, as increasing amounts of cross-country data on religion have become available (Fox 2011). Of course, each RFAT provides different results depending on its methodology and on what is observed specifically. Still, a major contribution of the presented RFATs is their endeavor to document the situation of religious freedom worldwide.

Documenting religious freedom violations makes data available for cross-national comparisons which give an indication of the scope of religious freedom and religious conflict worldwide. This serves an apologetic purpose: the numerical importance, occurrence and scope of this

phenomenon justifies its analysis (Sauer 2019). By objectively observing the (quantitative) impact of an issue, it can then be considered a “social fact” to use Durkheim’s concept (1893), i.e. an objective social phenomenon which can be an object of research, i.e. “a single reality that is independent of any observer” (Yin 2014:17).

The measurement of the quantitative impact of religious freedom violations at a global scale also allows for an improved understanding of individual cases. It is a means to situate specific cases within a broader context – identifying global trends –, from which comparative results can be distilled. Cross-national comparison allows isolating those variables that tend to have a stronger influence on the development of religious conflict.

The only type of cross-national comparisons in the field of religious freedom that is possible without such data is based on comparative analysis of constitutional and other legal norms. The latter, though valuable, only allows describing the legal-formal dimension of the respect of religious freedom. All reviewed RFATs assume that a comprehensive assessment of the degree of religious freedom cannot be limited to what is contained in constitutional texts but should also consider formal and informal political practices – religious policy –, as well as social-cultural elements.

Each RFAT focuses on different dimensions of religious freedom. The Religion and State Project is limited to the political dimension of religious freedom but integrates both formal (legal) and informal dimensions of the subject (the methodological design covers both legal restrictions on freedom of religion and policies or customs that restrict religious freedom in practice). The Pew Research Center’s Government Restrictions Index also looks at the political-legal restrictions of religious freedom, while the Social Hostilities Index compiles social hostilities that are religiously motivated.

3.1.4 *Shortcomings*

The relevance of RFATs is not up to debate, but in the framework of this research, their use is limited. The reviewed RFATs offer insight into the extent of religious freedom in countries on various indicators, but I argue they are not designed to observe the specific vulnerability of religious minorities. There are at least four areas in which the data provided by RFATs is insufficient in light of the analytical needs of the present research: they are insufficiently holistic, neglect the local scale, have a state bias and use a restrictive definition of religion.

Insufficiently holistic

My first general critique of the presented RFATs is that they are insufficiently holistic, especially in the case of quantitative (socio-metric) tools. Because of coding requirements, most RFATs simplify reality by focusing on a reduced number of variables. Measuring a fixed set of variables can be useful to make cross-national comparisons and to observe evolutions of these variables over time, however, such approaches do not account for the complex interaction between social-political factors which, under specific circumstances, can lead to situations of vulnerability for religious minorities.

In selecting the variables to observe, most RFATs adopt what can be called a ‘laundry list’ approach. The problem with this type of approach, as Fox analyzes, is that laundry lists are

either so specific – “limited to various aspects or instances of the relationship between religion and violence and revolution” – that they are insufficiently comprehensive, or on the contrary so comprehensive that they have “extensive lists of factors contributing to religious violence and revolution” (1999:443). In essence, laundry lists are subject to what Owen (2003) refers to as a “measurement paradox”: they are never representative (exhaustive) enough but the longer they are the more difficult data collection becomes, particularly if the methodology requires cross-national comparisons. Another problem with the laundry list approach is that they lack explanatory power, as Fox points out: “[Laundry lists] identify many pieces to the puzzle but do an incomplete job of putting that puzzle together” (Fox 1999:442). Moreover, important explanatory factors in particular cases may not have been included in the datasets and risk being ignored in the subsequent analysis.

I am aware that this shortcoming applies to quantitative methods in general. Indeed, any socio-metric model inevitably simplifies reality. However, by focusing on a reduced number of variables to describe religious freedom, RFATs run the risk of overlooking specific human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable. As I pointed out in the description of the initial observations for this research in chapter 1, numerous cases of vulnerable religious individuals and groups in Latin American countries are not detected by RFATs.

The negligence of the local scale

Connected with the former critique, the predominant quantitative approach of the RFATs raises an issue related to scale. As they focus on cross-national comparisons, their unit of analysis is the national state. As a result, RFATs give little attention to the local scale. Although the methodologies of most RFATs indicate they take local variations into account when relevant, their primary focus is the national level. In particular the RFATs which are based on the coding of publicly available sources do not realize fieldwork but have a focus that is limited to the global and national scale, i.e. the phenomena that are observable from distance or through written reports. (Localized codings based on the RAS scheme have since been done for Switzerland by Helbling & Traunmüller, 2016.)

RFATs are macro-level indicators, which as Owen asserts, are aggregates that conceal realities that can only be observed locally (Owen 2004). The negligence of the local scale – which Stein Rokkan refers to as the “whole-nation bias” in political science (2009 [1970]) – implies that the analysis contains a relatively high level of generality, i.e. findings are not nuanced or specified depending on local particularities (Snyder 2001; Høyland, Moene & Willumsen 2012; Glasius e.a. 2018). The local – territorialized – expressions of the vulnerability of religious minorities therefore risk going unnoticed, as I have described in my initial observations in chapter 1.

The state bias

Although RFATs acknowledge that the observation of religious freedom violations should not be limited to the observation of the behavior of the state in this respect, the majority of the variables chosen by most RFATs refer precisely to this aspect. Variables describing restrictions on religious freedom (or persecution of religious groups) by non-state actors are comparatively less used, with the exception of the Pew Research Center’s Social Hostilities Index – considering the broad range of non-state actors, the social hostilities category is too broad for

a single index in my opinion –, the new societal module of the Religion and State Project and Open Doors International’s World Watch List since its methodological revision in 2012.

In general, RFATs tend to focus on ‘traditional’ actors of persecution, but do not consider non-state actors such as organized crime or indigenous authorities, the examples I mentioned in the introduction, as players that can restrict the religious freedom of religious minorities, either by taking advantage of the impunity or by effectively taking over control of government. The “over-attention on the state”, as Owen calls it, makes it difficult to observe the role of non-state actors (2003:10).

The predominant focus on the state can be explained by the following three aspects. Firstly, religious freedom was traditionally approached from a human rights perspective which considers the state as the primary addressee of human rights violations.⁷ Secondly, the historical context in which the first RFATs emerged is the (end of the) cold war period and the time of communist regimes in which religious freedom was restricted mostly by the actions of governments. To be fair, a large portion of restrictions on religious freedom indeed still come from the state in many contexts. Finally, observing social dynamics related to religious conflict is more complex than observing whether religious freedom is respected by the state in law and practice; as a result, the state is the easiest actor to code.

Restrictive definition of religion

A critical element is the way religion is considered and defined in RFATs. In my view, the adopted definitions of religion in the RFATs are too restrictive to account for scenarios of vulnerability of religious minorities that are not (exclusively) caused by a religious motive and/or are related to the behavior of religious minorities, i.e. the way religion inspires the behavior in society of its followers. For example, the approach of religion by the Pew Research Center does not integrate most behavioral aspects of religion, defining a religious brand as “an organized group of committed individuals that adhere to and propagate a specific interpretation of explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions through statements about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning.” The Religion and State Project uses Fox’s behavioral definition of religion that I adopted for this research, but nevertheless defines religious minorities only by identity. Currently, it also measures only restrictions on religious practices and institutions by governments and societal restrictions; it does not measure other types of restrictions (economic, political, etc.) by governments on religious minorities.

Moreover, all socio-metric tools only consider organized religious groups, ignoring new forms of religion such as ‘new religious movements.’ Thus, a major limitation of the RFATs for this research is their restrictive definition of religion which does not enable them to observe most cases of vulnerability of religious minorities that result from their behavior rather than from their identity.

In general, the approach followed by RFATs looks at religious identification and its consequences, but not at the role of religion in society, and insufficiently acknowledges the multidimensionality of religious freedom, i.e. the degree to which it is respected in each sphere of society (more in section 3.3). Moreover, the reviewed RFATs place most emphasis on

⁷ Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (adopted in 1993); Part I; para. 5.

variables related to religious identity (religious affiliation) and some forms of religious behavior (such as church attendance or following certain dress codes), but do not take into consideration how specific behavior of members of religious minorities, inspired by their religious convictions, can create vulnerability. As a result, cases of vulnerability of religious minorities like the ones I described in the introduction are overlooked.

3.1.5 Synthesis: the limited value of Religious Freedom Assessment Tools

As the aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of how the vulnerability of religious minorities can be observed, it makes sense to evaluate RFATs, because they are the most popular instruments that come closest to assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities. The RFATs presented in this section are indeed valuable tools to gain insight into the degree to which aspects of religious freedom are respected in law and practice, describing the degree of government restrictions or social hostilities against religion, all of which constitute aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

However, the RFATs fail to recognize a number of threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable. The main reasons for these shortcomings are essentially methodological (insufficiently holistic, negligence of the local state, state bias and restrictive definition of religion). As I argue in the next sections, these shortcomings can be further overcome by an approach that assesses restrictions on religious expression by sphere of society and the adoption of the human security framework.

3.2 Gaining from the human security perspective

In the previous section I presented the main contributions and shortcomings of religious freedom assessment tools for the analysis of the vulnerability of religious minorities. These frameworks have their place, but because of their conceptual and methodological choices, they also constrain the observation of specific threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable, which is the central aim of this research. The theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 2 provide relevant interpretations of some aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities but misjudge others. They are either difficult to operationalize or have a focus that is too narrow. The RFATs I described in section 3.1 are valuable monitoring instruments, but still overlook essential aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Both types of frameworks, however valuable for their intended purposes, thus stand in the way of an open-minded and full observation of mechanisms of vulnerability.

In this section, I argue that the shortcomings of these frameworks can, for a large part, be overcome by adopting the human security perspective which seems more apt to observe vulnerability. I explain that the relevance of the human security perspective for my research resides primarily in its open-ended outlook and in its shift in focus away from the state and towards the individuals or groups that are subject to human security threats. This perspective makes it possible to observe aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are overlooked by the frameworks I reviewed in the preceding sections. First, I elaborate upon the relevance of the human security paradigm in relation to my object of study (3.2.1). Second, I discuss how human security can be operationalized to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities (3.2.2).

3.2.1 *The relevance of human security for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities*

The human security paradigm emerged in the 1990s as an alternative to the traditional security discourse in the period following the end of the Cold War. Although it had been used earlier – it has philosophical roots in early liberal philosophical writings (Owen 2003:7-10) –, the term human security was formally introduced in the 1994 *Human Development Report* (UNDP), which Glasius summarizes as follows:

“This document introduced many of the associations that have become central to our understanding of human security: the opposition to state security, the argument that human security is indivisible (and therefore the global rich have not just a moral but also a practical interest in the security of the poor), and the return to Roosevelt’s classic ‘freedom from fear/freedom from want’ formula to capture the two primary elements of human security.” (Glasius 2008:32)

Conceptually, Owen proposes a definition of human security that has the merit of being concrete and specific, while remaining true to its original conceptualization by UNDP. I adopt this definition for my research:

“Human security is the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive threats. Individuals require protection from environmental, economic, food, health, personal and political threats.” (Owen 2003:38)

Although religion is not usually considered in human security literature, human security introduces a new way to consider security and conflict that is particularly relevant for the analysis of the vulnerability of religious minorities. As Owen claims, “the very point of human security is to shift our attention to threats usually not considered, and most likely not measured.” (2004:21) The initial observations I formulated in the introduction suggest that this is the case for several human security threats that religious minorities in Latin America face.

In the following, I discuss the pertinence of the paradigm shifting properties of this concept for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. Two shifts of the concept of human security, as highlighted by Glasius, are particularly relevant for my research. First, by “shifting security”, the state security paradigm which based state sovereignty on its control of a territory is reversed to a view of state sovereignty that is dependent upon the way it serves and supports its people. It puts the focus on the security of the individual citizen and on every human being. It also recognizes the participation of nongovernmental actors in the security field.

A similar analytical shift can be observed in conflict studies. In recent years, acknowledging the fallacies of methodological nationalism, a number of datasets have emerged that geo-code instances of political violence which allow them to take local circumstances and the role of non-state actors into consideration. For example, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) “records the dates, actors, types of violence, locations, and fatalities of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America.” (Raleigh C., Linke A., Hegre H. & Karlsen J. 2010; ACLED 2020)

This shift has implications for the observation of the threats to religious minorities at the pertinent level of analysis, which often is the subnational level. A traditional security focus would not even consider conflicts involving religious minorities before they become manifest. Furthermore, a traditional security focus which looks mainly at interstate conflicts (or inter-ethnic conflicts, in the case of conflict theory), would not take transnational threats or threats against a minority group into account. It is easy to see why this shift is important for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. It opens the door for the recognition of the responsibility of non-state actors for human rights abuses of religious minorities, such as drug cartels or indigenous authorities (chapters 5 and 6), moving away from vertical approaches of security.

Second, the “shift towards the subjects of security” is equally relevant for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities because it takes into consideration the notion that ‘fear’ or ‘feeling threatened’ is already a form of vulnerability, whether these fears are materialized or not. More generally, this area shifts the focus to the group that suffers religious freedom violations, which connects to the behavioral definition of religion I adopted. In a way, most theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 2 focus on the perpetrators of the harm suffered by religious minorities; the human security perspective focuses on the subjects of security, i.e. the victims.

A practical consequence of the shift towards the subjects of security of the human security paradigm is that it views vulnerable individuals and groups not only as victims that require protection, but also as active agents that can be empowered to engage the threats they face (Glasius 2008:44), in line with Rodin (2014). In this respect, Hoogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon (2004) speak of “risk coping”, the capacity of a group to cope with threats and to respond to pressures.

The most relevant feature of this shift, however, is its open-ended outlook. It constitutes an invitation to inventory the human security risks that threaten a religious minority in the broadest possible way. As I explained in the preceding chapters, the main reason why notable cases of vulnerability of religious minorities in Latin America have been overlooked is precisely because existing theoretical frameworks and RFATs are insufficiently holistic, which means they neglect objective facts that were not initially built into them. Most of the RFATs described in section 3.1 are socio-metric instruments that measure the degree of respect for specific indicators of religious freedom. Because of its open-ended feature, the human security perspective is therefore not constrained by any predetermined laundry list of indicators that can be too limiting.

To summarize, the human security perspective is useful for my research because its open-ended character supplements the main limitations for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities that I identified in both the interpretative models presented in chapter 2 and the RFATs presented in section 3.1. In the next section I discuss how human security can be operationalized for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

3.2.2 Operationalization of the human security perspective to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities

Notwithstanding its paradigm shifting features and the considerable resonance among both policy-makers and academics it received, human security remained contested because of its

perceived conceptual vagueness – there is no consensus about the appropriate definition of human security –, which poses a series of measurement and operationalization challenges. Indeed, how can human security be measured if there is no clarity about what this concept entails? (Owen 2003, 2004; Debiel 2005; Werthes & Bosold 2006; Glasius 2008).

I follow Taylor Owen's approach to human security, which addresses these challenges in a way that is also useful to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities. As mentioned above, Owen defines human security as "the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive threats." (2003:38) This definition is interesting because it respects the open-ended nature of human security but also makes it possible to operationalize it. In the following, I highlight the most relevant elements from Owen's approach for the purpose of my research.

First, Owen recommends observing human security at the most pertinent geographical level (the subsidiarity principle), which will often be the subnational level. Borrowing from geography, this scholar suggests conceiving human security as "an analytical concept with a specific meaning in a specific place. Human security in one location means something very different than human security in another." (2003:1) The relevant human security threats in a particular location must be inventoried (preferably using the input of experts) and data must be collected to describe these threats. Owen recommends that this is done regardless of motive, responsible actor, legal category, or any other variable. Once observed, the threats can be analyzed and interpreted, without predefined analytical categories getting in the way of the observation of human security threats.

Owen thus suggests getting rid of any predetermined sets of factors or indicators (laundry lists) and instead to focus "only on relevant threats, those that surpass the human security threshold" (2003:41), which he defines, following Alkire, as anything that threatens "the vital core of all human lives in ways that advance human freedoms and human fulfillment." (2003:2)

This is relevant for the observation of the vulnerability to human security threats of religious minorities, because it does not restrict the observation to a set of predefined categories such as the indicators of a RFAT or the variables of a theoretical model. It also does not limit the observation to the national level. Specifically, it allows to observe threats that existing frameworks fail to detect but that nevertheless constitute human rights abuses, such as threats that are the result of religious behavior, threats that do not have a religious motive, threats that are perpetrated by non-state actors, threats that can only be observed at the subnational level, etc. Such an approach inevitably sacrifices the possibility for quantitative cross-national comparisons, but it increases the possibility to observe threats that are usually not considered.

Owen further emphasizes that the data collection process must be flexible; any form of available information, whether quantitative or qualitative, can be used, as long as it is relevant to describe the identified human security threats. Glasius e.a. make a similar point considering the limitations of information gathering in authoritarian contexts (2018:64-66) Again, this is useful to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities, because standardized datasets that describe the specific human security threats to which they are vulnerable are not likely to exist. More often, as I demonstrate in the case studies, by putting together public information from various sources, legal analysis and anecdotal evidence such as interviews and news reports, a picture of the specific vulnerability of a determined religious minority can emerge. In this approach, the insights from the theoretical frameworks I presented in chapter 2 and the data collected through the RFATs I discussed in section 3.1 are far from irrelevant; they can all be used as input for the data collection process.

Owen proposes to apply existing methodologies for hazard identification and risk assessment – commonly referred to as ‘vulnerability assessments’ – as tools for the measurement of human security by borrowing again from geography (as will become clear in the following sections). The notion of hazard implies that threats are no longer interpreted in isolation, but in the framework of a specific societal context. The study of risk integrates a dynamic perspective, by its assessment of vulnerability, which is a combination of exposure to risk and lack of resilience (Cutter, Mitchell & Scott 2000:715-716). This is important for the establishment of causal relationships between different types of threats. The nature of these causal relationships does not have to be defined by a theoretical framework that must be applicable in different local contexts; instead, causal relationships between variables can be considered as dependent upon the particular context of a specific location.

A great number of vulnerability assessment tools (VATs) have been developed in recent years in different academic disciplines and policy fields. Originally, the focus of hazard identification research was on tracking environmental disasters (Barrows 1923; Cutter 1996; FAO 2003; Tresman 2004; UNISDR 2004). The application of this field progressively broadened from physical events to hazards caused by human actions, such as technological failure. Later, VATs have been applied to energy supply systems, transportation systems and communication systems (Makoka & Kaplan 2005). VATs are also used in the field of information technology, to assess the vulnerability of computer systems to security risks.

In a monograph about vulnerability in Cambodia, Owen applies this methodological approach to identify thirteen human security threats that affect the population in general, and then uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) to spatially reference these threats. In this thesis, I do not use GIS, but instead categorize human security threats by sphere of society and by degree of specificity. Also, I do not describe human security threats in general but focus on specific religious minorities. However, I maintain the focus on mapping human security threats in specific locations, following the recommendations to observe these threats at the local scale and the use of expert opinions as the primary method for data collection.

Although, VATs have not been applied to religious minorities, its approach is transposable to my research object. A new trend is the application of VATs to specific minorities, instead of the whole population living in a particular location. In fact, VATs have become increasingly popular instruments to provide comprehensive assessments of the vulnerability of groups of people for specific threats or risks:

“Analyzing the plight of vulnerable groups is part of standard poverty analysis, and much can be learned about them. In many instances though, a comprehensive analysis of vulnerable groups is not presented. Lack of data or other concerns are at the root of this. Vulnerability analysis intends to fill this gap by –in addition to dealing with risk exposure [...], focusing on vulnerable groups.” (Hoogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon 2004:6).

Increasingly, vulnerability assessments are following different approaches depending on “who and what is at risk”, adjusting the scale and unit of analysis: “choosing an appropriate approach for conducting a vulnerability assessment is important because each approach can reveal different vulnerability and identify different courses of action” (Alwang, Siegel & Jorgensen 2001). With the trend of broadening the application of VATs to minorities, it is only a small

step to apply VATs to religious minorities. I come back to operationalization matters in chapter 4.

3.3 The multidimensionality of religious freedom

In order to apply the human security perspective to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities, it is necessary to understand how religion expresses itself in society. I propose to use the concept of spheres of society, which I first present (3.3.1). I then make some comments about connections between key concepts of this dissertation (3.3.2) as well as a few comments on some discarded concepts (3.3.1).

3.3.1 Spheres of society⁸

A useful concept to gauge religious freedom is ‘sphere sovereignty’ (*sovereiniteit in eigen kring*), which effectively describes its multidimensionality. This concept was originally developed as a normative theological concept by Abraham Kuyper in 1880 and later expanded by Dooyeweerd (1935-1936). Sphere sovereignty refers to an ideal ordering principle of society, i.e. a structure of social institutions (spheres), each with a distinct nature, purpose and meaning such as the family, the church, the school, the government, etc. (see annex E). Key to the conceptualization of sphere sovereignty is the notion that whilst the societal spheres are interrelated, they are also separated. The concept implies the existence of normative boundaries between each sphere of society which must be observed.

The former implies that the relation between the spheres of society is not hierarchical, but functional. In this vision, the government sphere is a sphere among others, and must respect the autonomy of the other spheres. Each sphere has a specific internal organizational order, and unique relations of authority and obedience. In Kuyper’s thinking, the internal relations within each sphere derive their legitimacy from their own specific meaning and purpose, and therefore spheres have no legitimacy to intervene in other spheres. For example, the government sphere must not intervene in the church sphere, nor must the business sphere seek to exert influence on, say, the government sphere. Kuyper acknowledges that one sphere may intervene in another sphere under exceptional circumstances that justify or require such an intervention. For example, when children in a particular family are being abused, it is justified for the government sphere to intervene in the family sphere to ensure the protection of the children. However, these types of interventions must remain exceptional, and once this situation has been resolved, the authority structure that is specific to the concerned sphere must be restored (Rouvoet 1992).

The theological implications of the notion of sovereignty are not what interest us here but rather the notion of spheres of society. Petri & Visscher propose to use sphere sovereignty as an analytical category to gauge religious freedom, arguing that:

“[Approaching] religious freedom in terms of sphere sovereignty unveils the multidimensionality of religious freedom. Often, the analysis of religious freedom is limited to the legal aspects of it or to the degree of freedom in the church sphere. The proposed framework to assess religious freedom using

⁸ The following paragraphs are an edited excerpt from Petri D.P. & Visscher F. (2015). Revisiting Sphere Sovereignty to Interpret Restrictions on Religious Freedom. *Philosophia Reformata* 80(1): 99-122.

sphere sovereignty as a guiding principle is a way to overcome this reductive perspective of religious freedom. The respect of sphere sovereignty implies not only the autonomy of the church sphere, but also issues such as respect for parental rights in the family sphere, including the right of parents to raise their children according to their own beliefs, or the right to confessional education in the school sphere.” (Petri & Visscher 2015:106)

Beyond the principle of separation between church and state, religious freedom can thus be considered as restricted whenever religious expression is restricted in a sphere of society. As Buijs, Sunier & Versteeg note, the Kuyperian perspective embraces the plural religious order and departs consciously from the theocratic tendencies of the Calvinist tradition (2013). Sphere sovereignty constitutes a practical application of this vision, in which no religious worldviews can be imposed and religious expression, including of disagreement, cannot be muzzled, whether by the state, a particular church, or by any other social institution. Petri & Visscher suggest that restrictions on religious freedom can be reinterpreted as:

“any unjustified restriction on religious expression in any sphere of society.”
(2015:107)

Illegitimate interventions of one sphere in another, aiming at influencing, regulating or restricting religious expression can therefore be interpreted as restrictions on religious freedom. Generally, illegitimate restrictions of religious expression within any sphere can be considered as restrictions on religious expression. For example, Ssenyonjo advocates for “an approach that focuses more on the importance of legitimate justifications for interference” (2009:305) to settle disputes concerning freedom of religion in the education sphere.

Assessing and interpreting the vulnerability of religious minorities is complex, since many religious conflicts involve numerous variables. However, approaching this vulnerability in terms of ‘infringed sphere autonomy’ may bring some clarity into the debate. In many cases, religious freedom is being infringed upon when one sphere illegitimately seeks to intervene in another sphere. For example, in authoritarian regimes, religious freedom is often restricted when the government sphere illegitimately interferes in other spheres of society to regulate forms of religious expression it considers as a threat, or when religious expression is restricted within specific spheres of society.

3.3.2 Connections between key concepts

The different concepts I introduced in chapter 1 and in this chapter come together as the analytical parts of a comprehensive Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool that I develop in the next chapter. The human security paradigm shifts the focus of analysis to individual security, within an open-ended and interdisciplinary approach, which makes it possible to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities to human security threats that would otherwise be overlooked or misjudged as I pointed out in my description of the initial observations for this research. In particular, the lens of human security allows making the religious minority the unit of analysis, instead of the state. It also allows taking pertinent elements into account such as the enforcement challenges of religious freedom provisions, the distinct reality of subnational areas with weak rule of law and weak state capacity and the role that is played by non-state actors.

The behavioral definition of religion makes it possible to define religious minorities in new ways, which in turn allows for a more precise observation of the factors of vulnerability of religious minorities. Specifically, it makes it possible to distinguish between vulnerability that results from religious identity and vulnerability that results from behavior inspired by religious convictions. The former is easily recognized by RFATs but is only a small part of the picture of religious freedom in the Latin American context. The latter is rarely understood in relation to religion (and as a religious freedom violation), because behavioral characteristics are not commonly used to define a religious minority. As a result (and perhaps also as its cause), the relation between the behavior of religious groups and their vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses is underexplored.

In fact, all human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable can be interpreted as restrictions on religious expression, based on a multidimensional understanding of religious freedom (as expressed in different spheres of society). As I argued, essential dimensions of religious freedom are not considered in traditional approaches of religious freedom, including through religious freedom assessment tools, which generally use a narrow definition of religion (ignoring behavioral aspects) and of religious freedom (focusing primarily on the church sphere – freedom of worship). Another practical use of the multidimensional understanding of religious freedom, in combination with the concept of sphere sovereignty, is that threats to religious minorities can be categorized by sphere of society. This makes it possible to distinguish the spheres of society that are affected by different types of human security threats, improving the understanding of the nature of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

The open-ended approach of human security allows to integrate religion as a factor among others of vulnerability, without requiring religion to be isolated as the single or most important explanatory factor for the religious aspects of the vulnerability to be considered. This connects to the determination of the degree of specificity of human security threats. The vulnerability to some threats may be specific to the religious minority; it may also share the vulnerability to other threats with non-religious groups, but that does not mean that the religious component of this vulnerability is irrelevant. On the contrary, it makes it possible to analyze the role that religion plays as a factor of vulnerability.

The vulnerability of a religious minority to human security threats can be mitigated by a set of coping mechanisms that make it more or less resilient. In line with the shift to the subjects of security that was introduced by human security, vulnerable religious minorities are not just victims, but actors with agency that have the capacity to engage the threats they face, i.e. to implement coping mechanisms to protect themselves.

In sum, the concepts of human security and vulnerability can be interpreted in relation to other analytical variables I described: religious identity and behavior, spheres of society, specificity and resilience. The use of this complex of variables provide a toolkit to observe essential dimensions of the position of religious minorities that complements and overcomes the shortcomings of traditional approaches to religious freedom.

3.3.3 Discarded concepts

In popular and academic literature two concepts are commonly used in relation to religion and religious freedom: ‘religious conflict’ and ‘religious persecution.’ Although I occasionally use

them in this research, for example to refer to the work of others who use these terms, they do not form part of my conceptual framework. As my primary aim is to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities, I am less interested in attaching qualifying labels to the human security threats I observe. Besides, both concepts are subject to an inflationary use, with no real consensus about their definitions.

The term ‘religious conflict’ is widely used in conflict literature, often with the prefix ‘ethno.’ As explained in chapter 2, although insights from conflict literature are helpful to interpret the vulnerability of religious minorities, the term ‘ethno-religious conflict’ is too specific for this research, because it only considers conflicts in which ethnicity and religion overlap, thus excluding conflicts where this is not the case, i.e. conflicts involving religion that are intra-ethnic or conflicts involving religion that are not related to identity but to behavior, as happens inside the Nasa indigenous community in Colombia (chapter 6).

Sometimes ‘religious conflict’ is understood exclusively to refer to conflicts between religions (Freston 2006; Garrard-Burnett 2006), which is also too restrictive for the purpose of this research because it excludes situations in which (non-religious) actors threaten religious minorities with no immediately apparent religious motive like, for example, the drug cartels in Mexico or the communist state in Cuba.

The term ‘religious persecution’ is commonly used by faith-based organizations and by some scholars specializing in religion. As can be observed, the definitions of persecution that are used vary widely, with some, like Grim & Finke (2011) practically equating persecution to physical violence and others using vaguer terms such as ‘hostility’ or ‘hardship.’ To be fair, some definitions are quite broad and include many of the aspects I described in my initial observations, but this is not always reflected in the RFATs that are developed based on these definitions. Moreover, no matter how broad the adopted definition of persecution is, it still lacks the holistic feature that characterizes the approach in terms of human security as I show.

A permanent source of confusion regarding the term persecution is the difference between the – deliberately narrow – legal definition of persecution (for example, Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines persecution as a crime against humanity “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack”) and the varying popular uses of the term. In addition, it is often implicitly assumed by the wider public that persecution necessarily involves physical violence, is state-sponsored or has a religious motive that deliberately targets religious groups for their religious identity.

By now, I have established that the vulnerability of religious minorities can involve human security threats that do not constitute physical violence. At any rate, ‘violence’ is a broad concept that includes not only physical violence but also non-material forms of violence including discrimination, social exclusion, psychological harm and deprivation. It also includes the concepts of “structural violence” (Galtung 1969) and “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1970). In my initial observations, I have also established that religious conflicts can involve non-state actors and the actors of religious conflicts do not necessarily have religious motives.

The concept of persecution implies a certain intentionality of the act of persecution, which excludes forms of vulnerability that are caused by non-deliberate acts and circumstances. If intentionality is integral to the definition of persecution, issues such as the fact that the sole

presence in conflict areas can be a source of danger for any member of a religious community, are not considered. For this reason, my approach to the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities is subject-oriented, rather than object-oriented. Moreover, the definitions of persecution by faith-based organizations often have theological connotations related to notions as ‘suffering’ and ‘martyrdom’, which can lead to confusion.

The terms ‘religious conflict’ and ‘religious persecution’ are therefore only useful in the framework of this research if they are defined broadly enough to include all forms of vulnerability of religious minorities and the multidimensionality of religious freedom. It makes more sense to discard these concepts and take the holistic approach of human security instead. In the human rights world, the term ‘religious freedom violations’ is favored. This is a useful concept, provided that the multidimensionality of religious freedom is fully taken into account, but it can also be too restrictive because at best it describes violations of one or more dimensions of religious freedom, but it does not take into account other types of human rights violations that may affect religious minorities.

3.4 Towards a new perspective

In this section I discussed the main innovations of the human security paradigm in relation to the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. I also discussed how the adoption of the human security perspective, thanks to its open-ended feature, can mend some of the shortcomings and blind spots of various theoretical frameworks and RFATs, provided it is complemented by an approach that assesses restrictions on religious freedom in different spheres of society. As indicated, existing frameworks have their value but they also risk clogging the observation, whereas the human security perspective provides a lens that allows for an open-minded observation, i.e. an observation of threats that is not constrained by theories, causal explanations, or laundry lists of indicators.

From a theoretical perspective, the application of the human security framework to the analysis of the vulnerability of religious minorities underlines its broad applicability (Glasius & Kaldor 2006). In order to operationalize human security to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities, I proposed to adopt the VAT methodology. Human security offers the flexibility that is needed to observe all risks that threaten the human dignity of religious minorities. Gaining from human security, in the next chapter I propose a new tool, the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT).

4. The Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool

I discussed the conceptual question ‘What is the most suitable lens to observe the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?’ in the previous two chapters. I interrogated three groups of frameworks that can be used to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities: theoretical explanations, RFATs and human security. I concluded that all approaches offer valuable insights that complement each other, but that the human security perspective is the most comprehensive and pertinent lens for this research. The methodological question ‘How can a tool be developed to comprehensively assess the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?’ is what concerns me now.

Based on the human security perspective, I propose a new tool that is specifically designed to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities: the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). First, I present the requirements for the development of this new tool, inspired by the review of theoretical and analytical frameworks I performed in the preceding chapters (4.1). Second, I proceed to the construction of this new tool (4.2). I then discuss the selection criteria for my case studies (4.3), followed by some comments on data collection procedures (4.4) and security risks and ethical challenges related to the conduct of my fieldwork (4.5). I finish with some concluding remarks (4.6).

4.1 Requirements of a new tool

The starting point for the development of a new tool is that it should enhance the strengths of the RFAT approach, while at the same time overcome most of its shortcomings. As I argued in the previous chapter, this can be done through the use of the VAT methodology, which must be adapted to observe the position of religious minorities, while integrating relevant elements from other theoretical approaches. The following requirements of an ideal tool to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities can be enumerated. In addition to the practical feasibility of its application in my case studies, the RM-VAT must:

- 1) Be sufficiently open-ended, contextual and forward-looking to comprehensively observe the vulnerability of religious minorities (no laundry list and considering all threats, not only executed threats);
- 2) Take the local scale into account, i.e. have the capacity of observing pertinent dynamics at the subnational level;
- 3) Take non-state actors into consideration;
- 4) Focus on the minority suffering the human rights abuses, so that self-identified religious minorities, even within intra-ethnic contexts, can be considered;
- 5) Adopt a broad definition of religion that accounts for its behavioral dimension;
- 6) Acknowledge the multidimensional nature of religious freedom (religious freedom as a concept that is expressed in different spheres of society).

The human security approach, complemented by the VAT methodology used by Owen, suits a great number of the formulated requirements, or at least approximates them to a large extent, as I discussed in section 3.2. Regarding the first requirement, I do not use any pre-determined sets of indicators (laundry lists) like RFATs do but I try to inductively uncover the most pertinent human security threats to which the selected religious minority is vulnerable. In doing this, I follow the data collection approach Owen adopted in his monograph on human security in Cambodia, but I turn away from existing human security measurement methodologies such

as the Global Environmental Change and Human Security Project (GECHS), the Harvard School of Public Health or Hummel (all cited in Owen 2003) that take a particular laundry list as their starting point. I follow the forward-looking component of vulnerability to poverty from Hooegeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon (2004).

The second requirement is directly inspired by Alwang, Siegel & Jorgensen (2001) and Owen (2003) who recommend the observation of vulnerability at the most pertinent geographical level. It follows that the RM-VAT needs to have the flexibility to zoom in to the subnational level that is most relevant for the observation of human security threats. It is also inspired by the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes (O'Donnell 1993; Snyder 2001; Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008; Giraudy 2012).

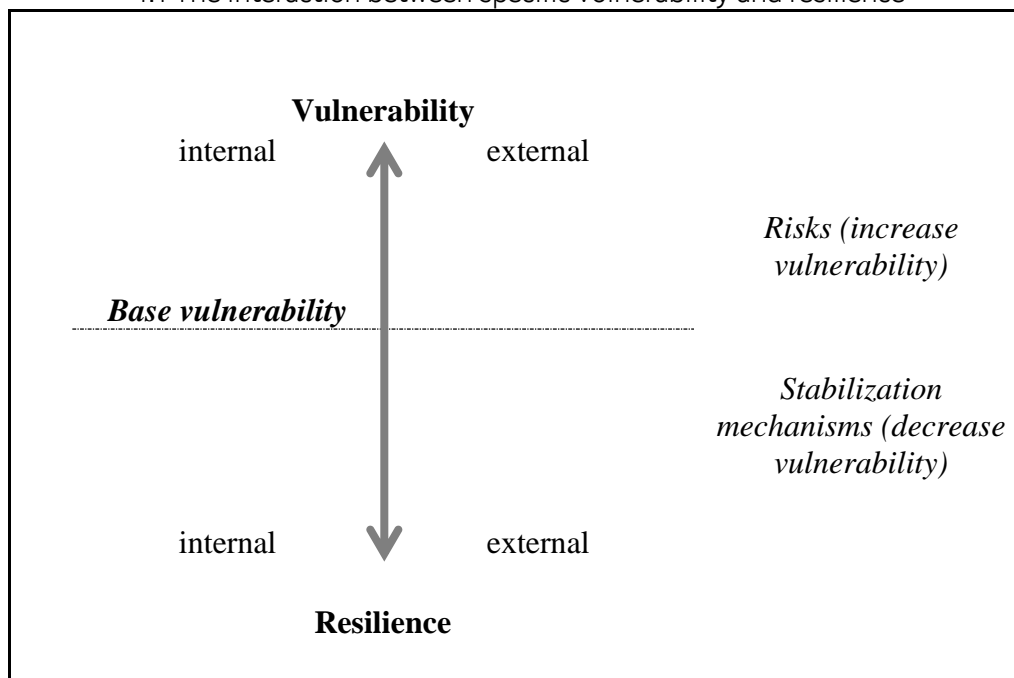
The third and fourth requirements are implicit in human security's "shifting security" feature and the shift towards the subjects of security as described by Glasius (2008). An important difference with Owen and other approaches of human security is that I focus on one specific group rather than on a particular territory. The focus on specific groups is not uncommon among VATs (Hooegeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon 2004), but human security has never been applied to religious minorities.

As to requirements five and six, they are dealt with by using the behavioral definition of religion and the multidimensional acceptance of religious freedom as I enunciated in sections 1.5.1 and 3.3 respectively to guide the application of the RM-VAT. This is, of course, where the main difference lies with existing approaches to human security, which do not explicitly focus on religion. In the following sections, I propose concrete handles to operationalize religion and religious freedom in the observation of human security.

The capacity of performing quantitative cross-national comparisons is a feature of the RFAT approach that is sacrificed in the RM-VAT. Because the RM-VAT acknowledges that human security threats are different for each minority and specific to each (local) context, cross-national whole of country rankings become very difficult. A more suitable approach is the multiple case study approach, which according to Yin is useful "to explain some present circumstance" requiring "an extensive and 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon" (2014:4) which in my case is the vulnerability of religious minorities.

As illustrated by figure 4.1, every religious minority can be assumed to possess a base level of vulnerability which is a function of both internal and external factors. Internal factors include issues such as internal organization, economic base, internal unity, advocacy capacity, leadership or preparedness to external threats. External factors refer to any contextual element outside the religious minority. This 'base vulnerability' can increase through 'risks' and decrease through 'stabilization mechanisms.' The former is equivalent to hazards in human security terminology (and equivalent to escalation factors or crisis triggers in conflict studies), while the latter refers to the resilience of a religious minority, and its capacity to learn to cope with persecution pressures (learning/cultural adaptation).

4.1 The interaction between specific vulnerability and resilience



Source: own elaboration.

This representation of the interaction between vulnerability and resilience has three analytical implications. The first is that religious minorities can be subject (vulnerable) to various human security threats, with different degrees of intensity, which can be documented through empirical observation. The second implication is that these human security threats can be more or less specific to this particular religious minority. Often, religious minorities share forms of vulnerability with the general population or with other groups; in the case studies I try to determine the features that are unique to a particular religious minority. The third implication is that religious minorities can be more or less resilient to these threats, i.e. more or less equipped to cope with these human security threats.

4.2 Construction of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool

In response to the requirements for a new tool sketched out in the previous section, I now proceed with the construction of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). I divide the construction of the RM-VAT into five methodological steps that structure each case study: (1) description of the context of the case study, (2) description of the data collection procedures that were followed, (3) description of the security risks and ethical challenges related to the conduct of the fieldwork, (4) execution of the assessment phase, which is divided in three parts: the threat assessment, the specificity assessment and the resilience assessment and (5) the critical evaluation of the findings of the RM-VAT.

The context description is an essential element of the RM-VAT for a number of reasons. It provides the necessary background for the correct interpretation of the various sub-assessments that are part of the tool, doing justice to its holistic vocation. It is also where I determine the 'zoom level' of the case study, by clearly delimiting its geographical and historical focus as well as the contours of the religious minority that I study.

The second step of the RM-VAT is the data collection process. In each case study I provide a comprehensive description of this process. The third step of the RM-VAT is the description of any noteworthy security risks and ethical challenges that I faced during the realization of the case study. The fourth step, the assessment phase, is composed of three sub-assessments: the threat assessment, the specificity assessment and the resilience assessment. In the threat assessment I categorize the human security threats to which a particular religious minority is vulnerable, based on the data I previously collected. I use the threat assessment as input for the two other assessments. In the specificity assessment I consider the specificity of the threats for the observed religious minority. In the resilience assessment I look at coping mechanisms that are used or could be used to respond to the human security threats by the religious minority.

The final step of the RM-VAT is the evaluation of its findings. In this section, I critically evaluate the application of the RM-VAT, to determine to what extent it succeeded in describing the specific vulnerability of the religious minority and whether it yielded new insights that were not previously known through RFATs or other research. In this evaluation, I describe the contributions and limitations of the RM-VAT as a new tool in relation to the case study.

Here I offer methodological guidelines for the development of the context of the case study (4.2.1), the threat assessment (4.2.2), the specificity assessment (4.2.3) and the resilience assessment (4.2.4). I deal with the data collection procedures and the ethical and security risks later in this chapter. I give a full methodological evaluation of the RM-VAT in section 8.3.

4.2.1 Context of the case study

The first element of this section of the RM-VAT is the characterization of the vulnerable minority, based on the operationalization of the definition of religion I adopted in section 1.5.1:

“A belief system that includes a more or less coherent set of beliefs in which reference is made to (a) transcendental being(s), which is seen by its adherents as important for who they are and which influences their individual and collective behavior.”

This definition distinguishes between individual and collective behavior, as religious freedom has both individual and collective dimensions. In my case studies I mainly focus on visible (outward) expressions of religion, which may have varying gradations: religious identity (passive) and religious behavior (semi-active and active), which can be thought of as characteristics of “lived religion” (Hall 1997). Based on this distinction, I developed a continuum of religious identity and behavior, ranging from religious self-identification and participation to missionary activity and civic participation (figure 4.2):

4.2 Continuum of religious identity and behavior

Religious identity	Religious behavior	
<i>Passive</i>	<i>Semi-active</i>	
Religious self-identification	Religious participation	Religious lifestyle
		<i>Active</i>
		Missionary activity
		Civic participation

Source: own elaboration.

- **Religious self-identification:** This typically refers to how people self-identify in a population census. Self-identification with a particular religion or belief system does not necessarily imply active religious behavior, but merely describes religious identity.
- **Religious participation:** Following (or not following) specific dress codes or participating in institutionalized religious activities. Examples of this type of religious behavior are church attendance and membership of a religious group. Norris & Inglehart use the variable “Religious Participation” as an indicator of religiosity (2004:41), and measure it through questions about the frequency of attendance to religious services in the World Values Survey. Surveys used by the Pew Research Center, the Latin American Public Opinion Project and the Latinobarómetro include similar questions.
- **Religious lifestyle:** Religious convictions may lead its adherents to adopt a particular lifestyle which may be seen as deviant when they imply some form of rejection of social norms or expected behaviors. For example, religious individuals or groups with values such as honesty may not want to pay bribes. Most surveys focus on measuring religious attitudes (such as on drinking alcohol, abortion or sexuality) or religious commitment (the Pew Research Center, for example, developed a “religious commitment index” which combines measures of importance of religion, attendance at religious services and frequency of prayer) instead of on religious lifestyles. There is no appropriate way of measuring this category in traditional surveys.
- **Missionary activity:** Active religious activity with the aim of making converts (proselytism / evangelism) (sometimes combined with charitable work). (This type of religious behavior only applies to religions that actively seek to make converts.)
- **Civic participation:** Engagement in charitable work or open involvement in civil society or politics as a result of religious convictions.

In line with my initial observations, the underlying assumption of my choice for a behavioral definition of religion is that adhering to a belief system does not (necessarily) make its adherents vulnerable in itself, but that this vulnerability is dependent upon the behavior the belief system inspires upon its adherents. As came forward in my review of theoretical frameworks in chapter 2, when the social behavior of a religious minority – whether simply observing religious traditions, living according to a particular worldview, or becoming active in political advocacy – is considered deviant, it may cause it to become vulnerable. There may also be cases in which the vulnerability of a religious minority can also be caused by its religious identity, regardless of its social or political activism.

The concept of ‘religious minority’ is thus applicable to identify religious groups in broad ways. The continuum of religious identity and behavior presented above makes it possible to identify minorities within religious groups based on their engagement in certain types of

religious behavior that distinguishes them from adherents of the same religion that do not engage in such behavior. For example, as I explained in the introduction of this research, there are important differences in Latin America between nominal Christians and Christians who engage in semi-active religious behavior such as regular church attendance or active religious behavior such as involvement in social work. The vulnerability of each of these groups can be expected to be different, depending on the specificities of each local context.

The characterization of the vulnerable religious minority needs to be plausible, meaning it must reflect a group that is clearly identifiable by a shared set of characteristics (Gurr 1993, 2000; Horowitz 2000). At the same time, the delimitation of the vulnerable religious minority may be unusual (such as ‘actively practicing Christians’ or ‘cultural dissidents’, respectively in chapters 5 and 6), particularly if the characterization concentrates on behavioral aspects that are not present in RFATs or other types of studies. This will only make the analysis of this minority thus defined more relevant, as the application of the RM-VAT is likely to reveal mechanisms of vulnerability of the minority that were not previously known.

In the second part of this section I provide a further description of essential contextual elements of the case study, to give a further sense of the plausibility of the assessment of the vulnerability of the selected religious minority and to better situate the human security threats that I later inventory. As I explain in the next section, the context description is not only a means to set the scene, but also serves to provide an initial assessment of threats. In order to complement RFATs who generally focus on the national level, a subnational focus is likely to provide new insights. In the first two of my three case studies I focus on a subnational area. The context description explains in what ways it is different from the national level and why a focus on this particular subnational area is relevant to observe mechanisms of vulnerability.

In order to take advantage of the existing knowledge about the religious freedom situation in the country of focus, in each case study I also consider the contributions of the most common RFATs, taking into consideration not only socio-metric tools but also pertinent narrative reports. As already stated, the application of the RM-VAT should complement the findings of the RFATs, revealing elements that the RFATs do not consider or providing nuances that apply to the selected vulnerable minority.

4.2.2 Threat assessment

The threat assessment is the most substantial part of the RM-VAT. It basically serves as a way of organizing all facts, analyses, anecdotes and expert opinions that were compiled during the data collection process. In the threat assessment, I first list all human security threats I identified through the consultation of experts and interviewees, regardless of their motive and their specificity. In line with the open-ended character of human security and avoiding the laundry list approach, I aimed at mapping the threats in, as much as possible, a comprehensive way, directly following the reports made by my interviewees themselves. This meant that I do not discard threats on the basis of implicit prepossessed notions such as: ‘this threat cannot be labeled as religious persecution’ or ‘this threat is not specific enough.’

Because of the importance of the self-reporting of the interviewees as a data collection instrument, I tried to encourage them to openly share their experiences, without restricting them by any interpretations made out of a preconceived methodology. Following Owen (2003) and Alkire (2003), the only criterion for a threat to be considered is that it must surpass the threshold

of human security i.e. threatening human dignity. The goal of the threat assessment is precisely to inventory all existent human security threats that are faced by the religious minority.

The obvious way to categorize human security threats is to follow the seven components of human security identified by the UNDP (economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security), as Owen does. Religious minorities can indeed be targeted for all seven types of human security threats listed by UNDP. In the framework of this research, however, it makes more sense to categorize human security threats in relation to religious freedom. The seven components of human security refer to general areas in which human security can be threatened but in this research, I am interested in observing human security threats that result from religious identity and behavior. Following the multidimensional understanding of religious freedom presented in section 3.3, the human security threats can be understood as restrictions on religious expression that can be observed in different spheres of society. Based on this model, six spheres can be distinguished: the family sphere, the church sphere, the social sphere (school and health care), the business sphere (marketplace), the cultural sphere (media, arts and entertainment) and the government sphere. I observe human security threats resulting from religious identity or behavior in each of these spheres.

In line with the open-ended feature of human security, this categorization has the advantage that it broadens the traditional perspective of religious freedom beyond the church sphere (freedom of worship) and beyond issues related to the separation between church and state. It also serves as a handy memory aid to identify human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable that are not immediately taken into consideration when talking about religious freedom or religious persecution.

After listing all threats, I categorize them using two variables: the continuum of religious identity and behavior and the spheres of society in which they are manifested. This allows me to interpret the human security threats I observe as ‘restrictions of religious expression within any sphere of society’, in agreement with the multidimensional nature of religious freedom I introduced in section 3.3. Figure 4.3 is the central tool of the threat assessment.

4.3 Tool for the assessment of human security threats by sphere of society

<i>Continuum of religious identity and behavior</i>	<i>Religious identity</i>	<i>Semi-active religious behavior</i>	<i>Active religious behavior</i>
<i>Spheres of society</i>			
Family sphere			
Church sphere			
Social sphere (school and health care)			
Business sphere (marketplace)			
Cultural sphere (media, arts and entertainment)			
Government sphere			

Source: own elaboration.

Once all relevant human security threats have been listed and categorized, I proceed to describe them. As much as possible, I provide a comprehensive overview of the available evidence for each of these threats, contrasting all the data collected through my fieldwork and through secondary sources. If the evidence is very thin or of poor quality, I try to provide an explanation for it. In the description of each threat I include an explanation of the cause of the threats and the actor that is responsible for it. When possible, I say something about the frequency and intensity of the threat.

4.2.3 Specificity assessment

After having established the threats to which the observed religious minority is vulnerable in the threat assessment, my aim in the specificity assessment is to determine to what extent the vulnerability is specific to them as religious minority, as distinguished from non-religious minorities. Following the proposition that it is possible to determine empirically the degree of specificity (uniqueness) of the vulnerability of religious minorities, in the specificity assessment I give each identified threat a rank according to its degree of specificity. To operationalize my definition of specificity as “a condition that can be more or less particular to an individual or group” I use a three-level sliding scale (figure 4.4) to determine the degree of specificity of each individual threat, which I justify in an accompanying narrative.

4.4 Degree of specificity of the vulnerability of the religious minority to identified threats

Degree of specificity	Interpretation
<i>Low (not very specific)</i>	The whole population is vulnerable to this threat, including the observed religious minority.
<i>Medium (quite specific)</i>	The whole population is vulnerable to this threat, but the observed religious minority in particular.
<i>High (very specific)</i>	The observed religious minority is specifically vulnerable to this threat.

Source: own elaboration.

Using a sliding scale allows to practically differentiate between threats that are only applicable to the observed religious minority and threats it shares with other groups. By doing this, I am able to overcome the implicit binary approach to specificity (specific / not specific) that characterizes most conflict analyses. John McWhorter, a linguist, observes:

“almost anything interesting in life is a continuum phenomenon. Our tendency is to put things in pigeonholes and seek binary oppositions: we exalt Linnaeus and physics while treating “fuzzy logic” as a trendy novelty. Yet, in real life, as often as not, the phenomena we observe on our planet are nondiscrete: clines are everywhere.” (2003).

As I explained in the introduction, binary approaches to specificity are misleading in my opinion, because they lead many human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable to be discarded based on the judgment that they are ‘not specifically related to religion.’ This also connects with my initial observation that religion appears to be a factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

In an article entitled “Murder in Mexico: are journalists victims of general violence or targeted political violence?” Bartman (2018) confronts a similar problem that is also related to the determination of specificity. In his article, he “undermines the official narrative that there is nothing distinct about violence against journalists, and that it is a mere corollary of crime” by proving that journalists are, in fact, victims of targeted violence (and are even at a higher risk than the general population of being killed) by both organized crime and subnational government officials because of the nature of their work. Although my approach is different from Bartman’s who follows a statistical probabilities method, the use of a sliding scale approximates it. The sliding scale I use is roughly divided into three because the qualitative data I collected does not allow me to be more precise than that.

In order to come to a more nuanced picture than would otherwise have been possible, I apply the sliding scale to determine the degree of specificity of the observed religious minority to individual threats and not to its vulnerability in general. This enables me to distinguish degrees of specificity of each individual threat and to establish the relation between the specificity of the vulnerability to threats and the continuum of religious identity and behavior.

It is important to bear in mind that specificity is not the same thing as severity or intensity. To say that a threat has a low degree of specificity means that it has a low degree of uniqueness for the observed religious minority. It does not imply, however, that this threat has a low intensity. A threat can have a low degree of specificity but be very severe, or inversely, a threat with a high degree of specificity can have a low intensity.

4.2.4 Resilience assessment

After assessing the specific vulnerability of the religious minority through the first two sub-assessments, the resilience assessment describes the main mechanisms that are used or could be used by the religious minority to cope with the human security threats it faces. The use of coping mechanisms does not necessarily reduce the level of threats the religious minority faces but can make it more resilient and thereby diminish its vulnerability. I explicitly distinguish between coping mechanisms that are used and coping mechanisms that could be used because vulnerable religious minorities do not necessarily implement them.

4.5 Categorization of coping mechanisms of religious minorities

Responses to human security threats	Coping mechanisms	Definition
Exit	Avoidance	Avoidance of any interaction with the actors responsible for the human security threats, leading to flight or internal exit in the most extreme case.
	Spiritual endurance	Withdrawal within oneself, seeking comfort in personal religious beliefs.
Caution	Compliance	Obedience to any requirements made by the actors responsible for the human security threats.
	Social wisdom	The ability, based on self-reflection, to anticipate how one's words and actions might be received in order to avoid being perceived as provocative.
Voice	Moral standing	Credibility with people outside the religious minority as a result of the respect religious roles or religious beliefs commands (moral authority).
	Solidarity	Mitigation of the humanitarian impact of human security threats within a religious community.
	Collective action	Engagement in advocacy or any form of (organized) non-violent resistance or protest to the actors responsible for the human security threats.
	Taking up arms	Direct confrontation of armed power through the creation of self-defense militias or counter-insurgency units.

Source: own elaboration drawing elements from Hirschman (1970), Grix (2000), Habermas (2006) and Glasius (2012).

Coping mechanisms can be categorized in many ways. Based on the theoretical material I presented in section 2.3, eight categories of coping mechanisms of religious minorities can be distinguished: 'avoidance', 'spiritual endurance', 'compliance', 'social wisdom', 'moral standing', 'solidarity', 'collective action' and 'taking up arms.' The distinction between these categories is not watertight, as they can overlap, and religious minorities can engage in different strategies at the same time or at different moments, as alternative or complementary strategies.

Albert O. Hirschman's classic threefold categorization of 'exit', 'voice' and 'loyalty' of "responses to decline in firms, organizations and states" or "recuperation mechanisms" (1970) could be adapted to be used as an ordering principle of these coping mechanisms. In the

framework of this research, I keep the categories of exit and voice, but substitute loyalty, which Hirschman strongly connects with the private or family spheres, by ‘caution’ which is more applicable to human security contexts. Exit covers avoidance strategies, including flight, internal exit (spiritual endurance) and the evasion of any kind of interaction with the powers that be. Compliance is clearly a caution response, referring to behaviors of tacit acceptance of the human security situation and obedience to any requirements made by the powers that be, and so is social wisdom. Moral standing, solidarity, collective action and taking up arms are all distinct types of voice responses. Figure 4.5 synthesizes how I propose to order the coping mechanisms.

4.3 Case study selection

In section 1.6 I gave some general considerations regarding the case studies I included in this research. First, I mentioned that they concern cases of vulnerable religious minorities that are insufficiently recognized by existing frameworks and by policy-makers. Second, they correspond to areas or countries in Latin America, which is an ideal laboratory to observe forms of vulnerability of religious minorities that are to a great extent misjudged or overlooked, particularly when they are related to religious behavior. Third, they focus on Christian groups, which is the majority religion of the region but that presents much diversity in terms of its sociological composition, beliefs, religious practice, behavior and the nature of the threats faced by its adherents. Fourth, the case studies concern three typical contexts in one of their most extreme expressions, which makes relevant dynamics of vulnerability easier to discern. In this section, I give a proper discussion of the selection criteria for the inclusion of these case studies in this research:

- (1) the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico,
- (2) the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia and
- (3) the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba.

According to Yin, a case study consists of a detailed description and analysis of social units or unique entities. The rationale for a multiple-case design must derive from the researcher’s “understanding of literal and theoretical replications” of each case study (2014:27-69). In the context of this research this means that each case study must be expected to present a set of outcomes in line with my central proposition that religious minorities are vulnerable in unique ways to suffer human rights abuses.

Beyond the feasibility criterion – in terms of the practical possibility to do fieldwork and to obtain usable information – I selected these case studies based on the “diverse case method” as described by Gerring (Gerring 2008; Gerring 2017). I adopted this particular method because it “has as its primary objective the achievement of maximum variance along relevant dimensions” (Seawright & Gerring 2008:300), which suits my aim to advance in the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities in a variety of contexts, particularly in areas that are insufficiently noticed in existing RFATs, such as the consequences of religious behavior, the role of non-state actors or the distinctiveness of subnational realities.

With this in mind, my three case studies correspond to three “typical sub-types” of political-institutional configurations which roughly correspond to the main challenges to religious

freedom that affect the continent: the regulation of religion by organized crime; the hostility towards Christian converts in indigenous communities and the restrictions on religious expression in communist and post-communist countries (Petri 2015; Freston 2018).

Within each of these typical sub-types, I selected the most extreme contexts: the states of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas are amongst the most violent in the region; the indigenous communities in Colombia have the most far-reaching degree of indigenous autonomy in Latin America (the Nasa are the second largest indigenous group and there have been frequent political conflicts and legal procedures regarding the degree of respect for religious freedom within the *resguardos*); Cuba is the only authoritarian communist regime in Latin America. The obvious advantage of this choice is that it allows the social phenomenon I focus on to be more easily observed than in less extreme contexts (Yin 2014:52). A downside of this choice is that it reduces the potential for generalization of my findings, a point I will come back to in section 8.3.4. This being said, as Seawright & Gerring argue, “the diverse case method probably has stronger claims to representativeness than any other small-N sample” (2008:301). Because of their diversity, I am confident that my case studies constitute representative illustrations of the vulnerability of religious communities in the continent.

Following the multiple case study approach proposed by Yin, each case study further serves as a means of testing the RM-VAT as a tool, in particular its capacity to identify the main human security threats for which the selected minority is specifically vulnerable, providing a picture of the specific threats and risks the observed religious minority is subjected to. The main contributions of each case study can then be compared, which is, as Tarrow argues, “an intermediate step in theory building” (2010:245), or rather, in the framework of this dissertation, ‘tool building.’

All three cases, however different in terms of their respective political-institutional contexts, correspond to contemporary situations in which a particular religious minority, defined on the basis of its behavioral characteristics, is expected to present a demonstrable and specific vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses. Taking into consideration my intellectual journey I described in chapters 1, 2 and 3, I defined seven minimal selection criteria which I briefly discuss in relation to my case study selection:

- The religious group displays some level of active religious behavior, and there is a reasonable complex of human security threats that results from this behavior (4.3.1).
- The religious group is clearly distinguishable from other groups (adherence to a specific religious belief system is not confusable with other major distinctive characteristics such as ethnicity or cultural identity) (4.3.2).
- There is an advanced degree of failing rule of law and (subnational) undemocratic regime (4.3.3).
- The case is a blind spot on existing RFATs (exclusion of cases where it is obvious that violations of religious freedom take place) (4.3.4).
- The case study has a potential for generalization of findings, or at the very least the application of the RM-VAT contributes something beyond what is already observed by RFATs (4.3.5).
- The specificity of the vulnerability to human security threats is clearly observable (avoidance of cluttered civil conflicts or traditional majority vs minority conflicts, etc.) (4.3.6).
- The analysis of the coping mechanisms by the religious group presents analytical relevance (4.3.7).

4.3.1 *Active religious behavior*

The delimitation of actively practicing Christians as a religious minority in my first case study (chapter 5) is unusual, but analytically relevant because there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to formulate the hypothesis that it is the more active forms of religious behavior that create vulnerability. The same applies to the group I identify as ‘cultural dissidents’ in the Nasa indigenous *resguardos* of Colombia in my second case study (chapter 6). This group has suffered human rights abuses as a result of its social and political activism, which is inspired by its religious convictions. This is not to say that religious identity and lesser active forms of religious behavior cannot cause vulnerability in both cases, however, the primary reason to select these cases is because a relation can be established between behavior inspired by religious convictions and vulnerability.

In the case study on Cuba (chapter 7), I choose to focus on Christians in general, as not many Christians are socially active. The immediate explanation for this is that those who are socially active, are vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses because the Cuban government does not tolerate it. This case is interesting because it gives the possibility to observe vulnerability in relation to the full continuum of religious identity and behavior.

4.3.2 *Clearly distinguishable group*

Although actively practicing Christians are not commonly identified as such, they can be analytically distinguished based on indicators of semi-active and active participation that set them apart from the rest of the Mexican population. Actively practicing Christians do not constitute a distinct ethnic group and cannot be confused with any other sociological category. This means that it is possible to interpret the vulnerability to human security threats that this group faces in terms of their religious behavior. The same applies for Christian Cubans who are not a distinct ethnic group but are easily identifiable due to their adherence to Christianity and membership of a registered or non-registered church.

Cultural dissidents in the Nasa community belong to the same ethnic group as all other inhabitants of the Nasa *resguardos*, with the only difference being their religious affiliation and following social and political stances, which can be determined based on their involvement in specific Christian denominations and advocacy groups. The conflict in the Nasa community is an intra-ethnic or minority-within-the-minority type of conflict.

4.3.3 *Failing rule of law and undemocratic regime*

Although they correspond to very different contexts, the states of Tamaulipas, and to a lesser extent Nuevo León and San Luis Potosí in Mexico, the Nasa indigenous *resguardos* in Colombia and the nation of Cuba have in common that they are undemocratic regimes that are characterized by an advanced degree of failing rule of law and with generic human security challenges. The enforcement of legal provisions for religious freedom is an issue in all three cases, albeit for very different reasons. The first two cases can be identified as “subnational undemocratic regimes”, one because of the pervasive corruption and political infiltration of the drug cartels and the other because the indigenous self-government, by international human rights standards, presents authoritarian features. Cuba is evidently not a democratic country but

is under the political control of an authoritarian regime with a communist ideology. The country presents little subnational variation, although some sources assert that the east of the island seems to be more authoritarian than the west and the Havana area.

4.3.4 Blind spots on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools

For the case studies to be analytically relevant, they must be able to reveal aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are not picked up by RFATs, or at the very least complement them. In all case studies, I take forms of vulnerability into consideration that are not only related to religious self-identification and behavior and I inductively observe human security threats in all spheres of society.

In my first two case studies, the focus on non-state actors as the main responsible party for the vulnerability of religious minorities as well as the focus on the subnational level correspond to blind spots of the RFATs. RFATs do name some marginal restrictions on religious freedom for non-Catholic groups in both Mexico and Colombia and make reference to the specific issues at play in areas affected by organized crime and indigenous communities, but do not assess these dynamics comprehensively.

The problems regarding religious freedom in Cuba seem obvious, as the intolerance of religion of the communist Cuban government is generally recognized by RFATs. However, these tools do not grasp the subtlety of the pressure on Christians, especially when it does not imply physical violence and when it is related to active forms of religious behavior. The added value of the Cuban case is thus that more subtle forms of vulnerability can be discerned in a classic vertical government-citizen context.

4.3.5 Potential for generalization and analytical contribution

The potential for generalization of the findings of the case studies is likely to be highest when similar political-institutional contexts are analyzed, but the RM-VAT could also be applied to very different situations such as threats by armed groups to a religious group or the position of religious minorities within diaspora communities. At the very least, the findings of the case studies can serve to elaborate hypotheses about the vulnerability of religious minorities in comparable contexts, both within and outside Latin America. The case study on actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico could serve to determine research hypotheses based on the vulnerability of active religious groups for similar crime torn contexts. The case study on cultural dissidents in the Nasa territories in Colombia could serve to determine research hypotheses regarding the vulnerability of religious minorities within other indigenous communities with an advanced degree of self-government. The findings of the case study on Cuban Christians are likely to be generalizable to other communist contexts and possibly to other authoritarian / post-totalitarian regimes.

The analytical contribution of each of the case studies to the understanding of the vulnerability of religious minorities in very different contexts has been stressed sufficiently in the preceding sections. The diversity of the case studies included in this research also suggests the possibility for broader applications of the RM-VAT, including to non-Christian religious minorities in a variety of contexts. Especially observing religious minorities based on behavioral characteristics and at the subnational level is likely to yield new insights.

4.3.6 *Specificity*

In the second sub-assessment of the RM-VAT I assess the specificity of each of the identified human security threats to which the selected religious minority is vulnerable, but the existence of a plausible degree of specificity is also a criterion for the case studies to be included in this research. In all three case studies, this specificity is determined primarily by taking behavioral characteristics of religion into account.

For the case study on northeast Mexico this is particularly important. It would have been practically impossible to observe any variation if I had chosen to focus on Christianity based on the self-identification criterion because this group comprises over 90% of the population. As mentioned earlier, actively practicing Christians are not commonly identified as a minority, nor do they necessarily have a group conscience. However, the distinction can be made analytically, on the basis of their semi-active and active religious behavior, which sets them apart from the majority of Mexicans who self-identify as Christians but do not (visibly) practice it, nor display a specific vulnerability. For the case study on cultural dissidents in the Nasa territories of Colombia a similar point can be made. The threats they face are a direct result of the behavior inspired by their alternative religious convictions.

In Cuba, there is sufficient evidence that points to the fact that Christians receive a different treatment than non-Christians. Socially active Christians may receive similar threats as human rights activists, ‘dissidents’ and journalists, but there is nevertheless a specificity of Christians because the church is the only private (non-state) institution that is allowed to exist.

4.3.7 *Analytical relevance of coping mechanisms*

The analytical relevance of coping mechanisms, or the lack thereof, is the final criterion for the selection of case studies. The diversity in coping mechanisms was also a consideration in the case study selection. Indeed, the case studies display a huge diversity in terms of the coping mechanisms they adopt: in some cases, they are generally lacking, in others they are present but counterproductive or on the contrary quite effective. In the case of northeast Mexico, two initial observations drew my attention. The first was the apparent passivity of a great number of Christians when faced with threats by organized crime, an impression I nuance in chapter 5. The second observation, which partially contradicts the first one, was the widely mediatized role of Christian leaders in encouraging the police department of Guadalupe (NL), to actively engage organized crime in the city. In the case of the Nasa indigenous community, the national and international advocacy of people like Ana Silvia Secué initially struck me as an unsuccessful coping mechanism because it seemed to lead to more persecution instead of mitigating it and triggered me to research it more. In Cuba, two parallel dynamics can be observed: on the one hand a forceful generalized ‘internal exit’ but on the other hand the existence of ingenious coping mechanisms through the appeal to international networks, and the practice of ‘staying under the radar’ seemed relevant to observe.

4.4 Data collection

Following Owen's VAT methodology (2003), and considering the circumstances of my fieldwork, I had to approach data collection 'pragmatically', allowing myself to be guided by its availability, instead of following a pre-defined questionnaire or laundry list. I thus compiled any available evidence, in whatever form, that was relevant to describe the human security of the religious minority in its geographical context. Based on extensive fieldwork I collected substantial empirical data that was not previously available.

In all my case studies, this flexible approach to data collection was inevitable. Much data was in fact available, but not in a standardized form. In the case of chapters 5 and 6, I studied religious minorities that are not well known, at least not in the way that I defined them based on their behavioral characteristics. In the case of chapter 7, the delimitation of the religious minority I observed overlaps with most RFATs but there were still lacunas of information, namely, human security threats outside the church sphere, threats that result from religious behavior, and the specific treatment of non-registered denominations and house churches. The first two case studies also focus on remote subnational areas for which much less data is available in general, for both practical and security reasons. In the part of the Mexican territory that is controlled by organized crime, most crimes, including violence against religious minorities, go unreported. In the indigenous communities of Colombia, little is documented too, as they are mostly oral cultures. In communist Cuba, transparent public information is non-existent.

The process for the identification of threats that I followed can be reconstructed as follows. First, I developed an initial threat assessment based on secondary sources. This exercise became the basis of the context description I discussed above. After that, I corroborated and complemented this initial listing of threats by visiting the field, nuancing my initial thoughts and adding qualitative substance to the threats I identified. Finally, I went back to my secondary sources to obtain an extra check on the identified threats. In the case study on Cuba I was able to additionally submit the initial findings of the threat assessment and the resilience assessment to a focus group discussion. Throughout the whole process I thus submitted the identification of threats to various rounds of testing, nuancing and adjusting (triangulation) (Yin 2014:118-129; Glasius e.a. 2018:67-69). The combination and contrasting of information from the RFATs, other secondary sources such as academic and activist literature, newspaper articles, as well as my own fieldwork, provided different pieces of the puzzle. Putting them together allowed a picture to emerge.

For each of the case studies I carried out extensive fieldwork, visiting each country numerous times. Most of my visits to these countries were done as part of my work as a consultant for various faith-based and secular organizations. On average, I held over 40 qualitative interviews with people belonging to a representative range of social actors, stakeholders and analysts (experts active in the field, relief workers, journalists, representatives of religious communities) for each case study. In each of the contexts I already had considerable work experience and established contacts prior to doing the fieldwork. The interviews all took the form of open, informal interviews, aimed at collecting anecdotal evidence and testimonies about the different categories of threats they faced. In addition to the identification of human security threats, the interviews also served as a means to identify mechanisms that are used or could be used to cope with these threats. I sometimes used the contacts of faith-based organizations I had worked with. Occasionally, I had travel partners from these organizations who accompanied me. In each of the case studies I further describe how I conducted my fieldwork.

Although very useful, the information collected through the interviews had two main limitations. The first was that it provided only the subjective perspective of the interviewees, which could have been influenced by what they thought I expected to hear from them for various reasons. The second limitation was that the interviewees at times lacked the analytical categories to situate the violence they were victims of within a broader framework as I aim to do in this research. In the sections about data collection in each case study I explain how I tried to address these issues more in detail.

In general, I always attempted to collect sufficient complementary data from various sources so that they could be contrasted, and patterns can emerge (Yin 2014). I tried as much as possible to reach the ideal of inter-subjectivity, trying to get a minimum of two or three independent opinions on the same topics. As complementary sources to the interviews I used qualitative and quantitative, and public and non-public sources, including scientific articles, expert opinions, incident reports recorded in the media, NGO reports, publicly available statistics, anecdotes, legal documents, data from RFATs and personal testimonies. For example, in chapter 5, I relied more on government reports and local newspapers; in chapter 6, I used court cases and information provided through NGO reports; and in chapter 7, I used scientific articles and RFATs.

4.5 Security risks and ethical challenges

In each of the case studies I provide a detailed description of the particular security risks and ethical challenges I encountered while conducting the fieldwork. Here I make some general comments about this topic. This research strongly benefited from the exposure to the field and the information that my work for civil society organizations allowed me to have. Although the choice of the subject of my dissertation reflects my personal engagement with the issue, I have tried as much as possible to comply with all academic standards by being an unbiased observer. I tried to do this by inventorying human security threats without making any a priori personal or theoretical judgements about the validity of the threats and by not letting my activism get in the way of an honest conduct of my research. In this dissertation, I do not automatically take the side of the religious minorities I studied. For example, in my case study about the Nasa territory in Colombia, I am very critical about Ana Silvia Secué and her advocacy organization, the OPIC. Ultimately, I believe that a fact-based report benefits the situation of religious minorities in indigenous territories more than a passionate and partial manifesto.

Because this research is about human security, the conduct of fieldwork, could be expected to present security risks, both to myself and to the people I interviewed (Glasius e.a. 2018). Concretely, this meant that I had to avoid some locations or cover them through alternative sources such as phone calls or written communication (chapter 5), the review of court cases (chapter 6) or the conduct of some interviews outside the country (chapter 7). It also implied that the names of locations and people needed to be anonymized in all case studies in line with the recommendations formulated by Glasius e.a. (2018:106).

Various ethical questions arose during the conduct of my fieldwork. One of them was that the conduct of interviews may have generated expectations of humanitarian support or of another nature on the part of the interviewees, especially when they represented organizations who depended on funds from external donors or promoted an institutional agenda. In order to receive financial or material support of any kind or for whatever other reason, it was sometimes

possible that my interviewees would exaggerate or on the contrary downplay their situation. Because of any of these reasons, I never used interviews as the only source to assess the nature and intensity of a human security threat. As already mentioned, I systematically cross-checked all information and complemented it with other public sources. Beyond these data validity considerations, I also always made it explicit to my interviewees that I was not in any position to offer them any form of financial support.

I ensured my interviewees gave their informed consent. Except for the fieldwork I conducted in Cuba, I always made it clear to my interviewees that I was working on a research project and that their statements could be quoted. To increase the willingness to give interviews, I systematically announced that their names and places of residence would be anonymized as a security precaution, unless they were well-known figures. Whenever an interviewee requested me not to take notes, not to quote them or to interview them on a particular location, I respected that. Only in Cuba, because of the restrictions of my travel visa and the permanent surveillance, I was forced by the circumstances to present myself as a Dutch tourist and have mostly casual conversations, but even then, I tried to be as open as possible about the purpose of my interviews, which was to understand the religious freedom situation in the country.

It has happened, in Mexico for example, that contacts refused to be interviewed or held back information out of fear. When this happened, I often took it as a confirmation that the representative of the religious minority was indeed under threat, without, however, drawing any further conclusions. At times, the interviewees did not understand the purpose of the research, particularly when they had never thought about their situation from a human security perspective or simply started to perceive their situation as normal. I was always careful not to impose any preconceived position, showing willingness to listen to how the interviewee experiences the human security threats that are faced by him or her (Yin 2014:76-77).

4.6 Concluding remarks: a new tool

In this chapter, I provided the research design for the application of the RM-VAT, a new tool I developed to observe the specific vulnerability of religious minorities in ways that existing frameworks are not suited to do. I outlined the requirements for this tool and defined key concepts, stressing the importance of a behavioral definition of religion to define the boundaries of religious minorities. I also proposed how useful concepts and tools from the human security framework can be adapted to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities. I also laid out the methodological steps for the application of the RM-VAT and provided a rationale for my case study selection.

In the following three chapters I use the RM-VAT to answer the question ‘What is the contemporary specific vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico), cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the resguardos indígenas of the southwestern highlands of Colombia and Christians in Cuba?’ This is not only useful to test the application of this new tool, but also to increase my understanding of the vulnerability of religious minorities, In chapter 8 I critically discuss both aspects to answer the question ‘How does the empirical reality of Latin America inform the observation of the specific vulnerability of religious minorities?’

5. The vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí, Mexico

In this chapter I use the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT) to gauge the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians that is caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León (NL), Tamaulipas (TS) and San Luis Potosí (SP), Mexico. The timeframe for this case study is the period going from the second half of President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa's term (2009-2012) and the first half of President Enrique Peña Nieto's term (2012-2015), during the height of the *Los Zetas [the Z's]* insurgency, the dominant drug cartel in northeast Mexico at the time of my research (more on this group in section 5.1.2).

A motivation for the inclusion of this case study in this dissertation is to counter the commonly accepted narrative that since organized crime affects the whole population and is believed to have no religious motives, it is irrelevant to consider it as a threat to religious groups. Indeed, organized crime is often dismissed as affecting the whole of society, without consideration for the way the freedom of particular religious minorities – or the freedom for specific forms of religious behavior – is being restricted. As I show, the relevance of studying the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians is justified by the high number of reports of actively practicing Christians, Christian leaders and other Christian targets who have suffered human rights abuses at the hands of organized crime in recent years, as well as the demonstrable specificity of these threats to this group.

An important methodological consideration is the fact that the majority of Mexicans self-identify as Christians, and that it is therefore very difficult to observe any variation in terms of vulnerability as a result of religious identity when comparing the vulnerability of Christians and non-Christians. As I argue, Christians, when defined solely by religious identity, are not a religious minority in Mexico. One could specifically look at the vulnerability of minority groups within Christianity such as Protestantism, but even when only this group is considered, it is difficult to identify any human security threats that are specific to this group. The main reason why being a Christian, in itself, does not generate any threats is because neither legislation nor government policy that proscribes it, nor is there any noteworthy societal hostility against Christians in northeast Mexico. (This being said, Mexico is one of the most anticlerical regimes in Latin America and does place significant restrictions on religious institutions in general.)

In the context of NL, TS and SP, the motive of organized crime to restrict religious expression is not as obvious as it may seem. Los Zetas and other criminal groups seek to preserve their interests, but their activity is not threatened by people who simply declare their Christian identity. Schedler (2015) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2015) are quite outspoken about the fact that criminal organizations normally do not have ideological or theological justifications to target specific people or groups. In other words, there is no specific reason for such organizations to single out religious minorities, like religious fundamentalist groups in other parts of the world would. (This being said, Los Zetas may at times have religious motives because of their adherence to the *Santa Muerte [Holy Death]* cult, which I discuss more extensively in section 5.1.2.)

As I show, certain types of religious behavior may become a source of vulnerability when they threaten the interests of organized crime. Expressions of religious identity, such as owning a

Bible, confessing a particular creed, praying privately, displaying religious symbols, or listening to religious music are not in themselves causes of vulnerability of Christians in this context; more active forms of religious behavior are.

This chapter follows the structure of the application of the RM-VAT as outlined in chapter 4. I first discuss the unexplored relation between organized crime and religious freedom to set the scene for this case study (5.1), followed by a discussion of data collection (5.2), security risks and ethical challenges (5.3). I then proceed with the assessment phase of the RM-VAT (5.4). I end with an evaluation (5.5).

5.1 The unexplored relation between organized crime and religious freedom

In order to provide the necessary context for this case study, I consecutively provide a characterization of actively practicing Christians as a minority within Mexican Christianity (5.1.1), discuss the subnational democratic challenges and cartel violence in northeast Mexico (5.1.2), justify the overlooked role of organized crime on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools (5.1.3), and make some concluding remarks about the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians (5.1.4).

5.1.1 Actively practicing Christians, a minority within Mexican Christianity

Christians can hardly be considered a religious minority in any part of Mexico. In fact, according to figures by the World Christian Database of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (2017), 95.9% of the Mexican population self-identifies as Christian. The religious composition in the states that are the object of this case study varies little with respect to the national average: Christians constitute 96.1% of the population of TS, 96.1% of NL and 95.1% of SP.

It is essential to realize that Mexican Christians are far from being a monolithic block. There is a large diversity in terms of denominations, as well as in terms of religious practice and behavior (De la Torre Castellanos & Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2007; RIFREM 2016). Looking at denominations, the majority of Mexico's Christian population is Catholic (108,783,000 – 87.9% of the total population). The various Protestant denominations have a membership of 9.806.500 (7.9% of the total population). There are also small Orthodox (114,000) and Anglican (29,500) communities (INEGI 2010).

In chapter 1, I gave a functional definition of religion as “a belief system (...) which influences their individual and collective behavior [of its adherents].” This definition of religion focuses on its behavioral dimensions, and not exclusively on religious identity. If the focus would be limited to religious identity only, this case study would hardly display any variation, and it would be impossible to identify any mechanisms of vulnerability that are specific to Christians in the country. In numerical terms, the term ‘religious minority’ would not apply. When observing religious behavior, however, notable variation can be observed. In line with the adopted definition, actively practicing Christians adhere to Christianity, but their adherence to this belief system leads to active (religious) behavior. This group can be considered as a religious minority. By looking at the different categories on the continuum of religious identity and behavior proposed in chapter 4, it can be observed that the majority of those who self-identify as Christians do not display active religious behavior, as summarized by figure 5.1.

I used church attendance to measure the variable ‘religious participation’ and self-identification as ‘believer by conviction’ or ‘practicing believer’ to measure the variable ‘religious lifestyle.’ Survey data measuring ‘sharing about one’s faith at least once a week’ and ‘organizing a protest or demonstration for the rights of poor people’ were used as proxies for the variables missionary activity and civic participation, which includes engagement in charitable work.

5.1 Categories of religious identity and behavior by % of total population in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico)

Category	Measurement	% of total population
Religious self-identification	Estimate (WCD)	NL: 96.1 TS: 96.1 SP: 95.1
Religious participation	Church attendance at least once a week (RIFREM)	North, North East and Gulf (includes NL and TS): 53.64 Center West and Center North (includes SP): 57.77
Religious lifestyle	Self-identification as ‘believer by conviction’ or ‘practicing believer’ (RIFREM)	North, North East and Gulf (includes NL and TS): 37.5 Center West and Center North (includes SP): 33.43
Missionary activity	Sharing about one’s faith at least once a week (Pew Research Center)	10
Civic participation	Organizing a protest or demonstration for the rights of poor people (Pew Research Center)	13

Source: Own elaboration based on Pew Research Center (2014); RIFREM (2016); World Christian Database (2017).

Three aspects stand out from the preceding figure. The first is that although the majority of Mexico’s population self-identifies as Christian, not all of them practice their religion actively. The RIFREM survey indicates that more than 50% of Christians in NL, TS and SP frequently attend church but this could be a case of social desirability bias. The real number is probably lower. Other surveys give lower figures of church attendance. According to the Pew Research Center, in Mexico 45% of Christians say they attend religious services at least once a week. This report also cites a notable difference between Catholics and Protestants: only 44% of Catholics say they attend religious services at least once a week, against 76% of Protestants (2014:43). In other words, for the majority of Mexicans, including the inhabitants of the states of NL, TS and SP, Christianity is their religious identity, but this does not automatically translate into semi-active religious behavior.

Secondly, the more to the right of the continuum of religious identity and behavior, the lower the percentages are. Active forms of religious behavior such as missionary activity and civic participation – only national-level measures are available for these variables – are much less frequent than church attendance.

In a country where 95.9% of the population is Christian, the function of missionary activity could be confusing. Missionary activity generally involves efforts from representatives of one

Christian denomination to encourage people to abandon their original denomination and to join theirs, for example, Protestants who try to get Catholics to join their denomination. It can also imply a call to take the faith more seriously, i.e. to actually practice it instead of just being a nominal Christian, or, when the missionary activity is aimed at cartel members, to abandon their life of crime and to lead a different life.

There is slightly more civic participation among Christians than missionary activity, but this depends a lot on denominational background. Both Catholics and Protestants are not very likely to engage in active forms of civic participation such as organizing a demonstration. Among Christians who attend religious services more than never (89%), 13% says they participated in the organization of a demonstration in the past 12 months. On other indicators of civic participation, it can be observed that Catholics are more likely than Protestants to engage in civic participation, whereas Protestants consider evangelism as more important (Pew Research Center 2014:10). This being said, frequent civic participation is low among both Catholics and Protestants on most scales. It must be observed, however, that the figures related to charity work to help the poor are much higher (50% of regular church attendants).

Finally, significant differences between Catholics and Protestants can be identified when analyzing both the RIFREM and the Pew Research Center data, with Protestants having comparatively higher levels of religious participation and of missionary activity. The percentages of Catholics and Protestants engaging in civic participation are much closer.

Based on this description of religious behavior, it can be concluded that Christians displaying active religious behavior are a minority within Christianity. In the subsequent sections of this chapter I provide evidence for my claim that this religious minority has a specific vulnerability to suffer from human rights abuses.

5.1.2 *Subnational democratic challenges and cartel violence in northeast Mexico*

The states of NL, TS and SP are located in the northeast of Mexico (figure 5.2). During the timeframe I chose for this assessment (2009-2015) violence radically increased in Mexico. TS, NL and to a lesser extent SP lived through a particularly fierce upsurge of cartel-related violence during that period (Schedler 2015). NL, TS and SP are not interchangeable, but areas within these states, particularly the mountainous areas bordering the state of TS and some municipalities, have experienced violence by various drug cartels to different degrees and at different periods of time. In order to sketch the context for this case study, in this section I briefly discuss the following elements: the generalized impunity and failing rule of law, the upsurge of cartel-related violence, Los Zetas and other drug cartels and the *Santa Muerte [Holy Death]* cult.

5.2 Map of the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico)



Source: Google Maps.

Generalized impunity and failing rule of law

TS, and to a lesser extent NL and SP can be characterized as “subnational undemocratic regimes”, using the concept developed by Giraudy (2012), referring to “the issue of regime juxtaposition – that is, the existence of subnational undemocratic regimes (SURs) alongside national democratic governments.” Gibson speaks of “subnational authoritarianism in democratic countries” (2005); Schedler speaks of “the societal subversion of democracy” (2014). Giraudy argues that national democratization rarely occurs “in a territorially even fashion.” (2009) Indeed, state or municipal governments with undemocratic practices coexist with a national democracy, perpetuating undemocratic government practices or sometimes implementing full-blown authoritarian regimes, through a variety of tactics that can be identified as “boundary control” (Snyder 2001; Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008).

Giraudy specifically cites TS as a state that “remained undemocratic” after Mexico’s national transition to democracy in 2000. NL, on the other hand, “presents a pattern of progressive democratization.” (2009:70) On the indicators of democracy selected by Giraudy, NL scores better than TS but worse than SP. Harbers & Ingram come to similar conclusions in their assessment of institutional variation in 32 Mexican states (2014). In addition to the uneven democratization of TS and its neighboring states, many consider TS as a ‘failed state’ because both the federal and the state government have lost control over it:

“Overall, the extremely high levels of violence and inability of the government to effectively combat drug trafficking and organized crime in Tamaulipas has raised serious – and quite legitimate – concerns. The cartels have become so

powerful and the forces of the black market for drugs and other illicit goods so overwhelming that the state became extremely violent as the Mexican government continues to lose the battle against the drug cartels. Such high levels of insecurity and the inability of the state enable one to argue that Tamaulipas fits in the failed state – or at least failed zones within state – category as the government has not been able to ensure citizen security and implement rule of law.” (Rosen & Zepeda 2016:91).

The upsurge of cartel-related violence

The emergence of the drug cartels in Mexico has been documented extensively by numerous scholars (Olson, Shirk & Selee 2010; Grayson 2010; Grillo 2012, 2016; Garay Salamanca & Salcedo-Albarán 2012; Schedler 2014, 2015; Rosen & Zepeda 2016; Heinle, Ferreira & Shirk 2017). It falls beyond the scope of this section to expand on this general topic, instead, I briefly describe the upsurge of cartel-related violence in northeast Mexico, which is strongly related to the generalized impunity described in the previous section. Subnational undemocratic regimes in Mexico are particularly prone to processes in which drug traffickers take advantage of structural political vacuums to implement *de facto* authoritarian regimes through the cooptation of local authorities and the infiltration of political institutions (Garay Salamanca & Salcedo-Albarán 2012:316; IACHR 2015; Rosen & Zepeda 2016). Garay Salamanca & Salcedo-Albarán distinguish between two levels: “state capture” and “coopted reconfiguration of states”. The former refers to the promotion of the interests of drug traffickers through corruption and various forms of coercion (Snyder & Durán-Martínez 2009; Giraudy 2012; Schedler 2014). The latter refers to the complete take-over of the state government, in order to influence public policy to ensure long-term legal, political and social protection of their interests.

In my view, the category of “state capture” is applicable to NL and SP, or at least this was the case for a period of time during the timeframe of this study. The “coopted reconfiguration of states” category applies to TS where the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party]* – Mexico’s hegemonic political party for over 70 years, until the democratic transition of 2000 – has been accused of protecting the cartels. Three former governors face formal charges of ties with the cartels.⁹ In addition to the mentioned cases, another former Governor of Tamaulipas was arrested in 2017. He is accused of involvement in organized crime.¹⁰ A police chief in Nuevo Laredo was killed only six hours after his appointment (Grillo 2012; Grayson 2014) and a gubernatorial candidate in TS was assassinated in June 2010 just days before the election (Schedler 2014).

At present, TS is a safe haven for drug traffickers and criminal organizations. “Criminal groups are more effective at collecting ‘taxes’ than Tamaulipas’ own government”, says Alberto Islas, a security analyst.¹¹ In many areas there are curfews imposed by criminals, or these are auto-imposed by the citizens themselves for security reasons (Schedler 2015), something a Protestant pastor I interviewed confirmed.¹² In a way, TS could be described as a state within the state, because in large parts of the territory :ps Zetas have effectively taken over government

⁹ “Mexico investigating 3 former governors”, *The Brownsville Herald*, 13/01/2012.

¹⁰ “Why Mexico’s Governors Became a Prime Target of Criminal Groups”, *InsightCrime*, 31/01/2017; “Detienen en Italia a Tomás Yarrington, exgobernador de Tamaulipas”, *Animal Político*, 10/04/2017.

¹¹ “Tamaulipas: ‘Failed State’ in Mexico’s war on drugs”, *BBC News*, 13/04/2011.

¹² Interview with MX01 (2014).

functions. Los Zetas do not enact laws but their rule has many characteristics of a state: they regulate many aspects of society including religion, ‘taxes’ are raised (protection rackets known as *derecho de piso* [floor right]), there is a compulsory ‘draft’ (youths are forced to join their militias), and they definitely have the monopoly of – illegitimate – violence.¹³ Whether Los Zetas in northeast Mexico can truly be considered as the *de facto* state can be debated, but it is undeniable that criminal organizations are important actors that affect the population, including religious minorities, in the territories where they active.

In spite of the numerous military offensives in the area, security forces have been incapable of restoring law and order in the state. Indeed, they have largely been ineffective and have not led to a reduction of crime indicators. “When the military are present, things normalize but when they leave, [Los Zetas] pick up where they left”, said a pastor in a rural area of TS.¹⁴ A police officer from Monterrey explains: “previous military successes in Monterrey just drove Los Zetas away to Reynosa and Ciudad Victoria.”¹⁵

Los Zetas and other drug cartels

Northeast Mexico has historically been an area marked by intense commercial activity, with large volumes of both legitimate goods and contraband being transported to Dallas, Houston and other US cities daily.¹⁶ Because of the high volume of this traffic, the Nuevo Laredo area attracted various crime syndicates that gradually morphed into what became known as the Gulf Cartel in the 1980s, which is among the oldest organized crime groups in Mexico. The Nuevo Laredo area is the only part of the Mexican-US border that is not controlled by the Sinaloa Cartel. In 1999, the Gulf Cartel began to recruit members of the Mexican Army Special Forces to serve as its military armed-wing. This led to the creation of Los Zetas, a particularly bloodthirsty but extremely well-trained division composed initially of deserted army commandos that “brought in a series of unprecedented tactics: the use of paramilitary hit squads; widespread attacks on police; and mass kidnappings.” (Grillo 2012:94) Eventually, Los Zetas broke away from the Gulf Cartel of which it used to be its armed division and became its greatest rival (Grayson 2007, 2014). Los Zetas is now considered to be the most powerful and the most violent cartel in North and Central America after it overtook the Sinaloa Cartel and the Gulf Cartel in terms of military sophistication and territorial control (ICG 2013; Grayson 2014). All three cartels continue to dispute control of the Nuevo Laredo area.

When President Felipe Calderón took office in 2006 and launched a nationwide “war on drugs”, high intensity crime increased to unseen rates. Not only the ongoing turf wars between the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas, but also the declaration of war on the drug cartels caused widespread violence (ICG 2013; IACHR 2015; Rosen & Zepeda 2016). In 2012, a homicide rate of 46.9 per 100,000 inhabitants was recorded in TS, more than double the national rate of 22.2.¹⁷ In NL, the homicide rate was 38.6. Although the homicide rate in SP was much lower (17.4), it was higher in the area around Ciudad Valles, neighboring TS. Rosen & Zepeda (2016) report a total of 132,135 homicides in the 2006-2012 period, of which 5,943 occurred in NL, 4,756 in TS and 1,892 in SP.

¹³ “¿Por qué el crimen organizado atenta contra la sociedad civil en México?”, *El País*, 12/10/2014.

¹⁴ Interview with MX02 (2014).

¹⁵ Interview with MX03 (2014).

¹⁶ “Entran al día 2 mil armas”, *El Siglo de Torreón*, 17/06/2007; José Luis Pérez Canchola, *El Tráfico de Armas*, 2008.

¹⁷ “En 2010 hubo 24,374 homicidios: INEGI”, *Expansión*, 28/07/2011.

Of a total of 49,415 “narco-executions” by government security forces throughout the Mexican territory during the Calderón administration (2006-2012), 3,924 happened in NL, 2,178 in TS and 526 in SP with respectively 5.1, 3.4 and 2.7 million inhabitants (IAHCR 2015). Rosen & Zepeda present alternative sources that estimate a total 83,191 narco-executions during that same period, of which 4,335 happened in NL and 3,280 in TS (2016). During the same time period, 32 municipal presidents were killed, of which 3 occurred in NL, 2 in SP and 1 in TS. TS and NL continued to rank among the ten most violent states of Mexico during the first years of the Peña Nieto administration in terms of homicides. 1,300 people are reported “missing” in TS and NL.¹⁸ According to Rosen & Zepeda, during the period December 2012-2013, various drug cartels leaders were captured or executed in NL (5 belonging to Los Zetas and 1 belonging to the Gulf Cartel, in SP (5 belonging to Los Zetas) and in TS (4 belonging to Los Zetas and 2 belonging to the Gulf Cartel) (2016). TS has also been the country’s leader in kidnappings for a decade, reaching 16.18 per 100,000 in 2015, according to Ortega (2016).

The Santa Muerte cult

Violence is an integral part of the operations of most cartels. When this is considered necessary to protect their interests, they usually employ ‘murder squads’, which are youths coming from precarious backgrounds, often unskilled, who are trained to be hitmen or hired assassins (*sicarios*). These murder squads rely on a vast network of *halcones* [*hawks*], look-outs who are paid to watch the street and report any military or police presence, making it very difficult for security forces to effectively locate the murder squads and other cartel members (ICG 2013:14-15). However, the violence that is employed by Los Zetas is of a wholly different nature. Los Zetas are known for their extreme cruelty, including beheadings, torture and indiscriminate massacres.

Several sources link Los Zetas to Santa Muerte, a Satanist sect, which could be a possible explanation for their extreme cruelty (De Koster 2014; Grayson 2014; Kail 2015). Many criminal organizations are involved in occult practices, which they use to advance their interests. Examples of this are sending spells and curses to their enemies and invoking spirits to defend their interests. There are also stories of spiritual leaders that cast spells to protect drug transports and the properties of drug traffickers.¹⁹

Santa Muerte is an expression of Mexican folk religion that evolves around the *Niña Blanca* [*White Girl*], a skeletal grim reaper image representing “a popular spirit who cares for the poor and downtrodden” who is believed to have the power to “deflect bullets” (Grillo 2012:191-196). The cult has around two million followers, according to some claims. There is also a very large industry of Santa Muerte souvenirs that are sold to nationals and tourists in large quantities. According to anthropologists, Santa Muerte “reflects the nation’s age-old fascination with the deceased, as shown in its Day of the Dead. The skeleton could even be a resurgence of an old Aztec deity called Mictecacihuatl or the Lady of the Land of the Dead” (Grillo 2012:195).

Beyond being a popular expression of folk religion, Santa Muerte is also venerated by members of drug cartels, in particular by Los Zetas. Grillo and others, including former members of Los Zetas whom I interviewed for this research, assert that the Santa Muerte cult inspires them to

¹⁸ “Más de mil 300 desaparecidos en NL y Tamaulipas”, *El Sol de Mazatlán*, 30/01/2017.

¹⁹ Interviews with MX04 and MX05 (former members of Los Zetas) (2014).

extreme cruelty, such as beheadings using axes, castrations, and other brutal acts.²⁰ For many Christian leaders, there is no doubt that the violence of Los Zetas is inspired by Santa Muerte.²¹ A female pastor near Tampico (TS) declared: “Los Zetas kill as a form of satanic sacrifice.”²²

Grayson asserts that blaming the adherence to the Santa Muerte cult is “a less convincing explanation of Los Zetas’ macabre exploits” and seeks explanations in mental health: “Abusiveness and violence are common in the sadists’ social relationships, because the sadist lacks concern for people and derives pleasure from harming or humiliating others just for pleasure, according to the mental health community, which has labeled such traits as sadistic personality disorder (SPD).” (2014:7). Grayson also speculates that the instruction Los Zetas received by deserters from the *Kaibiles*, an elite jungle squad from Guatemala, has taught them to use decapitations as an intimidation tactic and as a ‘branding’ tool.

Whatever the reasons for the extreme violence of Los Zetas may be – whether it is SPD, as Grayson suggests, or more instrumental explanations such as intimidation, bonding rituals, branding or myths of immunity (Voeten 2018) or any of the “four roots of evil” (instrumental evil, egotism and revenge, idealistic evil or sadistic pleasure) described by Baumeister & Vohs (2004) – the Santa Muerte cult is a central element of the identity of Los Zetas and a justification for their activities, as interviewees for this research also confirmed. As I describe in the subsequent sections, Los Zetas have forced various churches to pay tribute to Santa Muerte and have violently retaliated when the leaders of these churches have refused to harbor its shrines or to take part in the worship of this deity. The cruelty of Los Zetas stands in sharp contrast to the rival Sinaloa Cartel, which is mainly a drug trafficking organization and claims not to target civilians. (The operations of Los Zetas are not limited to drug trafficking alone but also include protection rackets, extortion and kidnappings.)

5.1.3 *The overlooked role of organized crime on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools*

Most analyses of religious freedom in Mexico take a historical perspective. During colonial times, Catholicism was the hegemonic religion in Mexico. Throughout the 19th century, however, anticlericalism gradually became stronger. The Mexican revolution (1910-1920) led to the implementation of a very strict form of secularism (Grayson 2002; De la Torre Castellanos, Hernández & Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2017), which was (and is) atypical for the region. Gill writes: “Mexico represents perhaps the most extreme cases of state control over religion” (2008:115). From the 1917 Constitution onwards, the state exercised more regulatory power over religion than ever. Catholics were factually outlawed, but since all religious organizations were denied the right to exist, Protestants suffered as well. Over the years, religious regulations relaxed somewhat, but were still hanging above the country’s religious groups as a sword of Damocles (Gill 2008:157).

A major turning point was the year 1992, when the most anticlerical articles of the Constitution were amended. The political weakening of the PRI had already started, and the increasing social activism of Catholic organizations, encouraged by two historical visits of Pope John Paul II to Mexico in 1979 and 1990, reached momentum to push for a constitutional revision (Gill 2008:156). Among the changes, religious organizations were finally legally recognized, registered religions were granted equal protection before the law, clergy were given full

²⁰ Interviews with MX06, MX01, MX07 and MX08 (2014).

²¹ “Recent Santa Muerte Spiritual Conflict Trends”, *Small Wars Journal*, 16/01/2014.

²² Interview with MX09 (2014).

citizenship rights, and religious organizations were allowed to own property, have access to public broadcasts, and got permission to hold religious services in public.

The new situation created in 1992 benefitted Protestant churches as much as it benefitted Catholics and was a historical milestone for the country's Protestant community (Isais 2010; Dirección General de Asociaciones Religiosas, Mexico 2012; Lee Galindo 2016). Under the radar, Protestants had increased in numbers since the first Protestant missionaries arrived in the 1910s, in spite of restrictions on visas, evangelism and bible distribution (González & González 2008; Pew Research Center 2014). Cirilo Cruz, President of the *Confraternidad Evangélica de México (CONEMEX)* [*Evangelical Confraternity of Mexico*], commented: "When the 1992 changes were implemented, and all Protestant denominations registered, we found out for the first time how many we were."²³

Although the 1992 reforms considerably expanded religious freedom, some restrictions remain. The separation between state and church continues to be strict, with some forms of religious expression being forbidden in the public sphere. Religious education is allowed only for private schools. At the state and local levels, evangelism and access to media broadcasts are in practice often restricted to Protestants (Beckford 2003; Blancarte 2004). This conclusion is confirmed by 2014 data from the RAS Project which highlights that there are indeed some restrictions on religion in Mexico, essentially in the field of religious regulation. The intensity of these restrictions, however, is very limited in comparison to other countries that receive much higher scores on these composite measures (Fox 2011). The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) developed by the Pew Research Center, comes to the same conclusion, categorizing Mexico as a country with "moderate government restrictions on religion" (2015). By contrast, the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) by the Pew Research Center, which focuses specifically on "violence and intimidation in societies [which] limit religious beliefs and practices", reports "high social hostilities" involving religion in Mexico. The Pew Research Center's findings are based mainly on reports of religious intolerance in rural indigenous communities in the south of Mexico. However, it does not consider religious freedom abuses in the context of organized crime.

A number of narrative reports have, however, stressed the impact of organized crime on Christians (Petri 2012, 2015; Freston 2018; Sotelo Aguilar 2017; Gómez Chico Spamer, González Alvarez, Perera Calzada, Porrás Sánchez 2018). For example, a narrative report by the International Crisis Group on criminal cartels and rule of law in Mexico refers to priests, although the report chooses to focus on journalists and human rights defenders (2013:30). The *International Religious Freedom* report by the US State Department mentions "priests and other religious leaders in some parts of the country continued to be targeted and received extortion attempts, death threats, and intimidation, often from organized criminal groups" (2015).

In hearings at the US Congress, "narco-persecution" in Mexico has also been denounced.²⁴ Awareness about the vulnerability of Christian workers in the face of organized crime is also beginning to rise in the broader society. An article in *El Universal*, one of Mexico's leading

²³ Interview with Cirilo Cruz (2012).

²⁴ Congressional hearing on "The Worldwide Persecution of Christians", Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States Congress, 11 February 2014; Congressional hearing on "Freedom of Expression in the Americas", Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States Congress, 17 September 2015 (I gave a testimony in this hearing).

newspapers, was entitled “Organized crime is intolerant with priests.”²⁵ According to the Mexican Episcopal Conference, Mexico is “the most dangerous country in the world to exercise priesthood”, citing more than 500 threats and 31 killings of priests in the past decade; these cases are mostly related to crime.²⁶ A Protestant news outlet also reported in 2013 that Mexican churches suffer constant criminal attacks.²⁷ In the region this case study is about, two American Protestant missionaries were killed in NL in 2012 by drug traffickers²⁸ and three Catholic priests were killed in TS between 1990 and 2016.²⁹

5.1.4 *The vulnerability of actively practicing Christians to organized crime*

In this section, I have laid out why it is relevant to include a case study about the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians to organized crime in northeast Mexico. I now go over the selection criteria for my case studies, as enumerated in section 4.3. The states of NL, TS and SP provide a unique opportunity to analyze the vulnerability of a religious minority in areas where organized crime has captured the state, taking advantage of the institutional weakness of these subnational undemocratic regimes. The overview presented here confirms the plausibility of the hypothesis that active forms of religious behavior increase the risk of this group to suffer human security threats, in this case by the Los Zetas drug cartel.

I have established that actively practicing Christians can be considered as a religious minority throughout Mexico, including in NL, TS and SP. Although this group does not necessarily have a group conscience as such, its members share similar behavioral characteristics. Because they do not present any ethnic or cultural differences with the rest of the population, their vulnerability can be directly related to the behavior inspired by their religious convictions. By defining this group in this sense, they can be seen as a distinguishable minority whose specific vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses can be clearly observed.

The political-institutional context that characterizes this case study is one in which organized crime takes advantage and deepens the undemocratic nature of the state government of TS and some municipal governments in NL and SP. The area as a whole experiences or has experienced the consequences of failing rule of law, and its subdivisions qualify as subnational undemocratic regimes. In some cases, organized crime has even taken over traditional roles of the state, which includes the regulation of some aspects of religion.

In my review of the contribution of RFATs to this case study, I concluded that these instruments, for the most part, do not consider the role of organized crime in relation to religious freedom. The reasons for this, which are not applicable to all RFATs to the same degree, are fourfold: active religious behavior is not observed separately; organized crime is not detected as an actor of persecution because it is perceived not to have any religious motive; the state bias of most RFATs impedes an analysis of non-state actors like organized crime; the particularities of the subnational level are not considered. In addition, for obvious reasons, many incidents are not reported. Because of the general lack of knowledge of this topic, the

²⁵ “El crimen organizado es intolerante con los sacerdotes”, *El Universal*, 04/01/2015; “Asesinados 44 sacerdotes en los últimos 27 años: Iglesia”, *La Prensa*, 19/01/2017.

²⁶ “Denuncia la CEM amenazas contra sacerdotes; pide afrontar inseguridad”, *Proceso*, 11/04/2013; “Crimen acecha a sacerdotes de la Iglesia Católica”, *Excelsior*, 11/01/2014; “26 sacerdotes asesinados 2012-2018”, *Centro Católico Multimedial*, 16/12/2018.

²⁷ “Iglesias de México denuncian que sufren constantes ataques criminales”, *Noticia Cristiana*, 15/01/2013.

²⁸ “Asesinan en NL a 2 misioneros estadounidenses”, *El Universal*, 01/02/2012.

²⁹ “15 Sacerdotes Caídos”, *Centro Católico Multimedial*, 28/09/2016.

application of the RM-VAT is analytically relevant because it can complement the lacunas of the RFATs and indeed contribute to the observation of aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that they overlook.

The cartel violence in Mexico has been subject to broad scholarly attention. Much attention has also been given to the impact of organized crime on vulnerable groups such as journalists or human rights defenders, but this has not been the case for religious minorities. The specificity of the vulnerability to human security threats of actively practicing Christians is clearly observable because it can be related directly to its religious behavior. This would not be the case if this case study were about Christians in general. When non-Christian groups display similar behavior as Christians, such as civic participation, it is possible to compare their vulnerability and thus isolate specificity.

The analysis of the coping mechanisms by actively practicing Christians presents analytical relevance because of the humanitarian impact of the violence that is caused by organized crime. Observing not only how within this context active religious behavior increases vulnerability, but also exploring how vulnerability to threats could be reduced is therefore interesting, particularly exploring how religious groups can contribute to improve citizen security.

5.2 Data collection

The research design of the RM-VAT described in chapter 4 is based on the collection of all available data about the vulnerable religious minority. Over a period of six years, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data, including newspaper articles, statistics, personal testimonies and other qualitative sources, about the position of actively practicing Christians in the northeastern states of Mexico. I also maintained close contact with staff of NGO's working in the area, receiving their firsthand reports. In the threat assessment I have categorized the most relevant information from this data collection process by type of threat. All sources are duly referenced in the subsequent sections and in the bibliography.

In addition, I carried out three field trips to NL, TS and SP. The first trip took place between 2-9 September 2014, in which I visited the cities of Morelos, Monterrey, Guadalupe, Ciudad Victoria, Ciudad Madero, Ciudad Mante, Antiguo Morelos, Río Verde and San Luis Potosí. The second trip was to Monterrey (NL) and took place between 28-30 August 2015. The third trip was to San Luis Potosí (SP) and took place between 17-31 January 2016. During the first field trip, I was accompanied by a driver/mechanic who is a resident of Monterrey, and a staff worker of a faith-based NGO with many contacts in the area. The interviews conducted during these trips are the primary, though not the only, sources for the case study.

During these field trips, I interviewed over 40 people, belonging to a broad range of backgrounds: church leaders, police officers, social workers, youth workers, journalists, shopkeepers and former cartel members. The interviewees were selected based on their background – most have been victims of hostilities as a result of organized crime or have been firsthand observers of such hostilities – and their characteristics as actively practicing Christians.

My decision to focus mainly on victims of organized crime was motivated by my desire to try to get a picture of the human security threats to which members of this religious minority are vulnerable. This was also a practical need, since there are not many secondary sources

available. In order to put these interviews in the proper context, I complemented them with secondary sources such as interviews with government officials, journalists and academics, as well as with relevant press reports. To get the perspective of the drug cartels, I interviewed a number of former cartel members.

I conducted the interviews in Spanish, but I have translated the quotes included in this research into English. All interviews were open interviews, aimed at identifying the threats to which the interviewee considered he was vulnerable. It is very important to the RM-VAT methodology that the interviewees determined the threats to which they are vulnerable themselves, instead of following survey type questions about possible categories of human security threats. During interviews, I would typically ask the interviewee to share about his or her experience with organized crime, and to explain whether he or she has felt threatened because of his religious convictions or practice. Because of practical, privacy and security considerations (more in the next section), the interviews were not recorded. I kept field notes which I later organized and structured using the analytical categories of the threat assessment. These field notes are kept in a file by me.

The information from the interviews was useful to provide anecdotal evidence and to inventory threats. Never were the interviews used as the only source to assess the nature and intensity of a human security threat. All information was cross-checked and complemented with other public sources such as reports by NGO's, academic articles, survey data and newspaper articles.

Visits to Mexico City in August 2012, January 2015, November 2015, February 2016, March 2016, April 2016, September 2016, November 2016 and February 2017 served to confirm and expand findings from the field trips. During these visits, I had meetings with representatives of the Mexican Ministry of the Interior, the National Human Rights Commission, academics, journalists, leaders of Christian denominations, and Members of Congress. I also took part in a conference about religious intolerance in the Mexican House of Representatives on 17 November 2015 and in another conference about the same topic on 16 March 2016 in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, hosted by the Mexican Council for Religious Tolerance. Part of these trips were done as part of my role as researcher and operations manager of an international charity. Another part of these trips was done as part of consultancy missions in the field of development cooperation and democracy assistance.

5.3 Security risks and ethical challenges

The conduct of the field research involved great security risks, both for me and to some extent also for the interviewees. Traveling through the states of especially TS and parts of NL and SP was a great risk in itself, considering the high rate of kidnappings. On the main highways, there were many military checkpoints. Sometimes it was difficult to determine whether the checkpoint was under the control of the military or of drug cartels that looked like military.

At the time of the September 2014 field trip, a massive military operation had pushed the main drug cartels out of NL, but they were still present in rural and mountainous areas of the south of TS and west of SP, and in and around the city of Reynosa. In Ciudad Victoria, Los Zetas had conducted very violent assaults only shortly before my visit. Although the vehicle that was used for the trip was a basic sedan, deliberately chosen not to attract attention, the number plate from the state of NL did cause some suspicion in the other states, because when Los Zetas

invaded TS, they initially used vehicles with number plates from NL. Even federal military and police seemed afraid when seeing the vehicle I traveled in.

During the trip, my itinerary had to be adjusted a number of times based on advice from my contacts. Also, I would always make sure the interviewees would feel comfortable with being visited and interviewed, and if they would indicate it was not safe, the interview would be canceled. For instance, I canceled a planned visit to the city of Reynosa because the risk of kidnapping on the highway to get there was too great, as well as likely gunfire in the city at night.

A number of people refused to be interviewed or canceled interviews on a very short notice. It is very likely that this happened because of fear to give information that might put them in danger. Some interviewees outright denied they had been victims of hostilities by drug cartels or other criminal organizations, but from the comments of other sources, I was able to determine that they were not speaking the truth, probably out of fear.

It is undeniable that there was a lot of fear, but because of the trust induced by the organization I represented and the personal friendship between my travel partners and the interviewees, the majority of the interviewees openly shared about their experience. Most interviewees gladly accepted the opportunity to be interviewed, giving detailed information and sharing many anecdotes. Some did request some specific precautions, such as not being recorded, photographed or named. One interviewee requested to be interviewed on a parking lot next to a busy road, to give the impression the interview was only a casual encounter. Another interviewee asked to be interviewed at his home, but at a very late hour. As a precaution, the names of the interviewees who are not public figures have been anonymized.

The data collection through desk research did not imply any security risk; however, the data collection process was challenging because of two important reasons. The first reason is that many human security threats related to organized crime, including threats to actively practicing Christians, go unreported. The second reason is that as the subject is relatively unknown, very few reports are available. There is a vast research literature about drug cartels, but very little has been written about the vulnerability of religious minorities in a context of pervasive criminal violence. Moreover, as indicated above, RFATs do not usually consider this kind of contexts in their methodologies, so most of these reports did not prove helpful for my research.

5.4 Assessment phase

As I try to show in this RM-VAT, there is a demonstrable specificity of the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico. The assessment phase follows the three steps described in chapter 4: threat assessment (5.4.1), specificity assessment (5.4.2) and resilience assessment (5.4.3).

5.4.1 Threat assessment

For the threat assessment, I asked all interviewees to list the threats for which they consider actively practicing Christians are vulnerable, and then to comment on them. The most recurring threats are listed in figure 5.3, categorized by sphere of society and religious identity-behavior. The main part of the substantiation for the threats was provided through personal interviews, but I have complemented this by the use of secondary sources.

5.3 Threat assessment of actively practicing Christians in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico)

<i>Spheres of society</i>	<i>Religious identity</i>	<i>Semi-active religious behavior</i>	<i>Active religious behavior</i>
Family sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.</i>	6. Reprisals for conversion and abandoning cartel
Church sphere	1. Theft of church property	2. Illegal charges and extortion 3. Kidnap-for-ransom 4. Restrictions on church services 5. Imposition of Santa Muerte rituals	7. Intimidation of Christian workers who evangelize cartel members 8. Intimidation of leaders speaking out against injustice
Social sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	2. Illegal charges and extortion	9. Pressures on social and human rights initiatives
Business sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	2. Illegal charges and extortion 3. Kidnap-for-ransom	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of active religious behavior.</i>
Cultural sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	5. Imposition of Santa Muerte rituals	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of active religious behavior.</i>
Government sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.</i>	9. Pressures on social and human rights initiatives

Source: own elaboration.

Mexico's strict enforcement of secularism, which aims at removing any expression of religion by private citizens from the public sphere (as documented by the RAS Project), were excluded from this table because they do not correspond to vulnerability within the context of criminal violence. The focus of this threat assessment is on threats to religious expression by organized crime, not on government restrictions of religion.

In this section I first discuss the threats resulting from religious identity, followed by an overview of the empirical evidence available for each of the threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior and active religious behavior. I end with some conclusions.

Threats resulting from religious identity

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, I chose to focus on actively practicing Christians because the consequences of active religious behavior are largely understudied and because the threats that result from it are more severe than threats related to religious identity in the context of this case study. This is not to say, however, that religious identity is never a source of vulnerability. I identified one threat related to religious identity.

Threat 1: Theft of church property

Theft of church property is a very real threat to churches. A pastor reported: “Attacks on churches happen. Los Zetas sometimes walk in to steal and don’t need to use violence because there is no security.”³⁰ A police officer in Guadalupe (NL), also highlighted the robbery of church property as one of the major crimes in his jurisdiction.³¹ Many robberies of church property are, however, deliberately not reported. Catholic leaders indicate that they often prefer not to report the robberies to avoid panic among their members. Moreover, no official records are kept of theft of church property.

In spite of the absence of official records on the theft of church property, the available anecdotal evidence suggests this is relatively frequent. The interviewees did not give specific details on the thefts of church property, but a search of local media of TS and NL revealed this is quite a common occurrence. Indeed, the Catholic diocese of TS announced in 2014 it decided to install surveillance systems after frequent church robberies in Ciudad Madero and Tampico.³² A spokesperson for the Matamoros diocese reported that robberies of churches and parishes “have increased.”³³ A priest from Reynosa reported the robbery of musical instruments and a sound system from his parish.³⁴ Protestant churches in Matamoros (TS) also made similar reports.³⁵ In 2012, a group of journalists had requested the inclusion of theft of church property in police statistics, observing the frequency of this crime.³⁶

It is difficult to determine the motives for the robberies of church property. Most reports speculate the robberies are done by drug addicts, needing valuable objects they can sell or trade for drugs. It is noteworthy that Protestant churches are singled out for robberies because they are often closed for three or more days a week, which makes them an easy target to rob. This being said, because Catholic churches are generally open to visitors they can easily be entered by thieves (Sotelo Aguilar 2017).

³⁰ Interview with MX07 (2014).

³¹ Interview with MX03 (2014).

³² “Iglesias instalan sistema de vigilancia”, *Milenio*, 13/12/2014.

³³ “Al alza robos en iglesias, no hay denuncias para no generar pánico, dice la Diócesis”, *Mundo Tamaulipas*, 21/10/2015.

³⁴ “Roban instrumentos y sonido de la iglesia”, *El Mañana*, 23/01/2015.

³⁵ “Afirman que adictos roban iglesias de Matamoros”, *Horacero*, 09/06/2013.

³⁶ “Robo a iglesias, delito no contemplado en estadísticas de la autoridad”, *La Policiaca*, 12/06/2012.

Threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior

I identified four generic threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior. The intensity and severity of these threats varies, but all are related to visible levels of religious participation or a religious lifestyle that conflicts with the interests of organized crime.

Threat 2: Illegal charges and extortion

Drug cartels have implemented a sophisticated ‘tax’ collection system in the territories under their control, commonly known as *derecho de piso* [floor right] or *venta de protección* [protection racket]. It is a very common practice of such criminal organizations to charge churches or businesses for the right to remain open or to be allowed to organize a public meeting³⁷ – similar to a public license –, to collect a percentage of the proceeds of a business – just like an income tax – or to charge for protection.³⁸

The phenomenon of illegal charges, which is the most common form of extortion in northeast Mexico, is typical of subnational undemocratic regimes in which criminal organizations take over traditional roles of the state, as discussed above. Criminal organizations make all kinds of threats, including the kidnapping of family members if the extorted entity refuses to pay. Victims often cannot report the threats because there is no legal security since the police itself is corrupt (Schedler 2015). (Colombian criminal organizations have a similar practice as *derecho de piso* which is known as *vacuna* [vaccine].) Many churches, but also confessional educational and health institutions, as well as businesses owned by Christians, are required to pay *derecho de piso* in order to be allowed to remain open. This is a recurrent theme in most of the conducted interviews and is by far the most significant threat on church life in the researched states.

It is difficult to assess the extent of these charges because many, if not most, are not reported (according to what some government officials mentioned to me informally, an estimated nine out ten cases of extortion are not formally reported), but most interviewees point in the direction that this is a massive phenomenon affecting virtually all churches, while many others were too afraid to talk about it. Several churches, after hearing about the purpose of my visit were visibly alarmed and refused interviews, or made excuses saying that the pastor was out of town or had moved to another congregation.³⁹ A receptionist at a large church in Monterrey put all cards on the table without knowing it by saying: “There is no need for an interview with the pastor because we don’t pay *derecho de piso* here”, even before she was asked about it.⁴⁰

A female pastor in the coast city of Tampico (TS) said: “Various pastors are paying *derecho de piso*. Some pastors have had to leave the city because they feared for their lives. I personally know the husband of a pastor that had to flee.”⁴¹ A former drug addict and trafficker who now runs a drug rehabilitation program in Monterrey, whom I interviewed for security reasons on a parking lot on a crowded street, asserted that all pastors in the area pay *derecho de piso*,

³⁷ “Impresentable: Pastores de Michoacán deben pagar a narcos para realizar eventos masivos en sus iglesias”, *Noticia Cristiana*, 12/04/2010.

³⁸ “Pago de “derecho de piso” se extiende en todo el país”, *El Universal*, 04/10/2011.

³⁹ Interview with MX10 (2014).

⁴⁰ Interview with MX11 (2014).

⁴¹ Interview with MX09 (2014).

“including the president of the council of pastors of Monterrey, although he would deny it.”⁴² “Many pastors, including pastors of very large churches, pay derecho de piso, although nobody wants to speak about it”, another pastor who is a converted member of Los Zetas told me.⁴³ Newspaper articles⁴⁴ and more interviews,⁴⁵ in all three researched states, also confirmed that a great number of actively practicing Christians are frequently extorted. Some interviewees also hinted at the coercion to cooperate with money laundering as a major threat on churches and Christian businesses but did not provide any details.⁴⁶

Not all churches are confronted with extortions. “We never hear of such pressures by organized crime”, says a pastor of a church located in San Pedro, a wealthy and highly policed suburb of Monterrey.⁴⁷ In the absence of effective security forces, however, extortions on churches are commonplace.

The consequences for not paying the requested derecho de piso are heavy. In the least bad case, churches or businesses have been closed,⁴⁸ but I also heard of one case of a Christian educational institution in the city of Veracruz, located south of Tampico, that was burned after its leaders refused to pay derecho de piso.⁴⁹ In other cases, the refusers are beaten, raped, kidnapped or killed. I also spoke with several members of a pastoral family who decided to leave their hometown Ciudad Victoria in the state of TS and move to the city of Pachuca because they were threatened with death if they did not pay a certain amount of money.⁵⁰

The fact that actively practicing Christians are easily identifiable increases their vulnerability to this threat. The visibility of church services, for example, makes churches easy targets for intimidation. “It is very obvious that organized crime monitors the activities of churches and of Christians. They take advantage of any public activity by Christians with the aim of extorting and generating income”, said one interviewee.⁵¹ Another interviewee reported about a raid by Los Zetas on a church in Monterrey during a service, where they pointed a gun at the head of the pastor and forced the congregation to pay a certain amount in order for his life to be spared.⁵² Indeed, churches are seen as revenue centers by organized crime, as they are thought of as having a lot of financial resources. A police officer comments: “Christian churches collect a lot of money. The bad guys know this. They need money to finance their war: arms, mines, gas.”⁵³ Even though this is only true for the larger churches, it causes churches to be especially vulnerable to extortions and kidnap-for-ransom (Sotelo Aguilar 2017).

⁴² Interview with MX08 (2014) and MX12 (2015).

⁴³ Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁴⁴ “Imparables asesinatos y extorsiones contra Iglesia”, *Centro Católico Multimedial*, 05/10/2016.

⁴⁵ Interviews with MX07, MX03, MX01, MX13, MX06, MX14, MX16, MX25, MX21, MX26 (2014), MX12 (2014) and MX15 (2016).

⁴⁶ “Pastores protestantes y sacerdotes católicos, objetivo de narcos en México”, *Misión de Paz*, 21/08/2010.

⁴⁷ Interview with MX17 (2014).

⁴⁸ Interview with MX01 (2014).

⁴⁹ Interview with MX09 (2014).

⁵⁰ Interview with MX16 (2014).

⁵¹ Interview with MX15 (2016).

⁵² Interview with MX08 (2014).

⁵³ Interview with MX03 (2014).

Threat 3: Kidnap-for-ransom

Next to extortion, kidnap-for-ransom is another common threat in NL, TS and SP. It frequently affects actively practicing Christians, both in the church and the business sphere. As I explained under threat 2, churches are often seen as revenue centers by drug cartels because they are perceived to handle large amounts of money because of the offerings they collect. Although this perception is generally wrong – only in the case of the larger churches do the offerings represent substantial amounts –, it is widespread among drug cartels, as many interviews suggested. Moreover, churches are also an easy prey because they are easily identifiable as churches. Church services can normally be attended by anyone who wishes to visit them, which makes targeting by criminal organizations easier.

Notwithstanding the increasing number of churches that hire private security to protect their facilities, churches can also be viewed as an easy prey for theological reasons. Some interviewees cite the passive attitude of Christians as an explanation for their vulnerability to this threat. One pastor declared: “Christians are particularly vulnerable because they don’t defend themselves. They are an easy target. Los Zetas know that Christians are more passive and that they won’t fight back. And we can’t report anything to the police.”⁵⁴ I was not able to determine whether this passive attitude can be generalized to the majority of Christians in the region, although it is not unlikely that many Christians adopt such an attitude, considering the low percentage of civic participation among Christians. This could also be related to the predominant isolationist (pietistic) theological option among Protestants in Latin America, because it discourages active social engagement (Freston 2001, 2008; Petri 2012).

Regardless of these theological options, it is well-known that many crimes are not reported, which is, to a large extent, related to a lack of confidence in the justice system and fear of reprisals. According to estimates by Ethos, a Mexican research institute, 94% of crimes are not reported (2017). Many pastors and priests I interviewed informed me that they normally do not report assaults against their churches.

The scope of the kidnappings is difficult to assess quantitatively, but there is no doubt that churches are greatly affected by this threat. A pastor of a large church of Ciudad Victoria told me: “Last Sunday I asked all people to raise their hands who had a family member or friend who is currently abducted. 129 people raised their hands.”⁵⁵ Others shared similar testimonies.⁵⁶ Many more reports confirm that kidnap-for-ransom of Christian leaders is a trend.⁵⁷

Kidnapping can happen for commercial reasons but can also be done to intimidate church leaders whom drug cartels see as a threat because of the content of their preaching or their moral influence, at least this is how this is perceived by several church leaders I interviewed. Kidnap-for-ransom can also be used by drug cartels to intimidate as reprisal for not cooperating with a previous requirement. A particularly cruel account was shared by an evangelical pastor in a crime torn city in TS:

⁵⁴ Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁵⁵ Interview with MX13 (2014).

⁵⁶ Interviews with MX22 (2011), MX18, MX09, MX14, MX19, MX01 and MX21 (2014).

⁵⁷ Interviews with MX22, MX24 (2012) and MX23 (2014); “A priest of the diocese of Ciudad Victoria has been missing since November, violence does not calm down”, *Agenzia Fides*, 07/01/2014).

“A pastor friend of mine was abducted by a criminal gang that was member of a satanic cult. His family was ordered to pay a ransom. His wife and family succeeded in collecting the money and the criminals came to take it. The pastor’s wife asked them: ‘But where is my husband?’ ‘He is at the beginning of your street,’ they told her. When she went there, her husband was there. Only he was not alive. She found him in a plastic garbage bag, killed and hacked into pieces.”⁵⁸

A pastor from San Luis Potosí (SP) shared he is under threat of being kidnapped for ransom: “My wife and I have been receiving calls in which we were threatened with kidnapping. I told my children that if I’m kidnapped, they should never pay any ransom. We can only trust in God.”⁵⁹ A church leader from Ciudad Valles (SP), who was very reluctant to meet, and finally only accepted to be interviewed by telephone, shared the story of a pastor who was under threat of kidnapping. A young member of his congregation begged Los Zetas not to kidnap this pastor, and he was taken instead. After a number of days, he was released. The church leader who told this story could not confirm whether a ransom had been paid for his release.⁶⁰

Threat 4: Restrictions on church services

Depending on the location and the time, church services are being restricted by the generalized context of insecurity and impunity and by orders of drug cartels who, in practice, regulate religion and religious expression. The right that is violated is freedom of assembly, which is an important dimension of religious freedom. The generalized context of insecurity in the country implies that any type of large gatherings is always at risk of being interrupted and attacked for extortion or kidnappings (threats 2 and 3), but this especially applies to church meetings which are visible, recurrent and generally easy to enter.

In many areas, church leaders have decided not to organize nighttime church services for security reasons, and in some areas no church services are organized at all. A pastor from Monterrey said: “At the peak of the violence caused by Los Zetas in Nuevo León in 2010 and 2011 many churches decided to eliminate services at night because of the risks that this posed. We could only hold church services in daylight.”⁶¹ A pastor from Ciudad Victoria (TS), referring to the same period, stated:

“In 2010 and 2011 we lived through two years of unprecedented violence. We suffered many kidnappings, extortions and other abuses. The police were corrupt, and almost 100% was involved with crime. We had no place to go. We stopped organizing church meetings at night, and church attendance decreased considerably. In 2011, we wanted to organize a large prayer service in a stadium, but many pastors did not want to send their church members to this gathering because they knew that Los Zetas would be throwing grenades at them.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Interview with MX01 (2014).

⁵⁹ Interview with MX21 (2014).

⁶⁰ Interview with MX25 (2014).

⁶¹ Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁶² Interview with MX06 (2014).

Another pastor said that nighttime church services have been suspended in most churches of Tampico for security reasons,⁶³ which can be considered as a form of ‘self-imposed curfew’, significantly reducing religious expression in the church sphere. The decision to suspend nighttime church services in some cases follows a direct order of a drug cartel. A pastor in a medium sized town of TS declared: “In Ciudad Mante, Los Zetas set a curfew and have explicitly ordered all churches not to organize any church services at night. We have no option than to obey this order, because they are the real authority in this city.”⁶⁴

The financial sustainability of some churches is also threatened by the attacks they receive. As the level of threat increases, less people attend church services, which causes the income of the church to go down. A pastor from Ciudad Victoria (TS) recalls: “Most of the big tithers (i.e. people paying up to 10% of their income to the church) left because of the extortions.”⁶⁵ Another minister also says: “The income of many churches went down because we are collecting much less tithes. Many pastors can no longer provide for their families. I had to open a small business, but they started to claim *derecho de piso*. Because I did not want to pay, I was forced to close this business.”⁶⁶

I also found that church services are not allowed in certain areas, and there are reports of churches that have been closed by orders of drug cartels for not paying *derecho de piso*.⁶⁷ Missionary activities are also restricted in some areas. Moreover, there are reports of individuals who are prohibited to attend church services or have the obligation to report to the drug cartels whenever they visit a particular church.

Threat 5: Imposition of Santa Muerte rituals

As already mentioned, the Santa Muerte cult has a widespread following among the members of drug cartels, especially Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel, which both have their headquarters in TS. This cult not only inspires the members of these cartels to extreme violence and cruelty; followers of Santa Muerte have also imposed the celebration of Santa Muerte rituals and the display of its shrines inside churches. Indeed, drug cartels exercise strong pressure on churches to include Santa Muerte statues and symbols, and even to celebrate masses dedicated to Santa Muerte. This threat is a major infringement upon church autonomy, which particularly affects Catholic churches. When church leaders refuse to collaborate, they can face violent reprisals: “It is believed that one of the priests that were assassinated in December [of 2013], was eliminated because he refused to celebrate a mass dedicated to Santa Muerte in his church”, a news service reported.⁶⁸

Threats resulting from active religious behavior

I identified four distinct threats resulting from active religious behavior. As I argued in the previous section, semi-active religious behavior of Christians such as church attendance increases their vulnerability to threats, but this is even more the case with active religious behavior, which refers specifically to outward behavior aiming at promoting social

⁶³ Interview with MX09 (2014).

⁶⁴ Interview with MX01 (2014).

⁶⁵ Interview with MX06 (2014).

⁶⁶ Interview with MX01 (2014).

⁶⁷ Interview with MX08 (2014).

⁶⁸ “México: narco-persecución contra cristianos”, *Noticiero Milamex*, 11/03/2014.

transformation through missionary activity and civic participation. When these activities conflict with the interests of organized crime, Christians are vulnerable to human security threats.

Threat 6: Reprisals for conversion and abandoning cartel

Conversion, by definition, refers to religious identity, but the conversion of a cartel member is more than a mere identity change. It consists of adopting a new lifestyle which leads him to abandon his cartel and betray his former peers. The change in religious identity is not what causes the reprisals by the cartel, but cartel members who convert to Christianity and consequently abandon their cartel risk being killed. Often, converted cartel members also actively seek to convert other cartel members, which also constitutes an important human security threat (see threat 7).

A pastor from NL shared a story about a youth who had left Los Zetas after he had become a Christian and attended his drug rehabilitation center: “Shortly after he left Los Zetas, the last thing we heard was that he was going to visit his family in Reynosa [TS]. He disappeared. We never heard from him again.”⁶⁹ Another pastor shared a story about a former Zeta who converted to Christianity in prison: “Two days before he got out of prison he was killed. Los Zetas did not want it to become known that he had converted to Christianity. I officiated his funeral.”⁷⁰ He also stated: “Criminals who convert to Christianity are murdered. What the cartels are afraid of is that they may lose their leaders if they are exposed to the Gospel.” In the press, even more violent stories can be found about what happens to former cartel members who convert to Christianity. In one of these stories, a former cartel member was given the remains of his daughter and wife on a tray as a punishment for converting and leaving his cartel.⁷¹

Threat 7: Intimidation of Christian workers who evangelize cartel members

Christian workers who actively reach out to cartel members in order to share about the Christian faith greatly put their lives in danger. Christian leaders engaging in this kind of activities can expect to receive death threats. For example, one pastor reported: “One night we wanted to organize an evangelistic campaign in Linares [NL], where many cartel members live. We had to cancel this activity due to the risk of gunfire and extortions.”⁷² A missionary shared:

“In Nuevo León, a friend from the Bible institute where I studied contacted me and told me his uncle had received death threats because he was preaching to youths who had been recruited by the cartels in Padilla, Tamaulipas. When I asked him for more information, he refused to say anything. His uncle is too afraid to speak to me. I was also told about a team of five people who left for an evangelistic mission to the mountains of Matamoros [TS, where Los Zetas hide]. None of them came back. I’m afraid they were kidnapped and killed, because no one asked for ransom to be paid.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Interview with MX08 (2014).

⁷⁰ Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁷¹ “Conversión de “Narcos”: Posible Explicación a los ataques a Centros de Rehabilitación en México”, *Noticia Cristiana*, 25/06/2010.

⁷² Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁷³ Interview with MX23 (2014).

Threat 8: Intimidation of leaders speaking out against injustice

There are numerous reports of Mexican human rights activists and journalists who suffer human rights abuses as a result of their work. This is also true for Christian leaders whose moral authority is perceived as a threat by organized crime. The interpretations of Christianity that seek to promote spiritual and social transformation can easily conflict with the interests of drug cartels. Especially the ‘prophetic voice’ of the church as denouncer of injustice makes Christians vulnerable.

Speaking out against injustice publicly – whether it is violence, drug consumption, drug trafficking, corruption or organized crime – from the pulpit or in another setting, is extremely dangerous and can result in many forms of intimidation by drug cartels, including beatings, attacks on houses of church leaders, or even killings. One pastor shared how his house had been attacked by a drug cartel.⁷⁴ Most interviewees indicated that there is widespread surveillance within churches and that the content of sermons is monitored. “We need to be very careful about preaching against organized crime. There are always halcones in services”, says a youth pastor of a church in Ciudad Madero (TS).⁷⁵ A pastor in Ciudad Victoria (TS), is one of the few pastors who said he publicly denounces injustice in the church services he leads:

“It’s my conviction that the church needs to be out in the streets, be active outside the walls of the church. The church needs to preach about things that are happening in people’s lives. This got me into trouble. Los Zetas arrived at my house, located 8 km outside Ciudad Victoria, one night and wanted to take me with them. [He got out of the situation because Los Zetas were suddenly called away by their leadership.] They see the church as their worst enemy.”⁷⁶

A development worker reported:

“In the north of Mexico organized crime effectively persecutes believers. Narcos threaten pastors to leave certain areas or demand payment of derecho de piso. This is because biblical teachings forbid consumption and distribution of drugs and/or corruption, and this affects their business. It has also happened that massive Christian gatherings have been forbidden by organized crime.”⁷⁷

Reporting on organized crime, in journalism or in academia, is a risky business, as can be expected. Christian news reporters have been killed because they exposed the activities by organized crime. One interviewee cites the case of a Christian news service called Cambios that suffered serious threats after it reported on organized crime.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Interview with MX06 (2014)

⁷⁵ Interview with MX14 (2014).

⁷⁶ Interview with MX06 (2014).

⁷⁷ Interview with MX22 (2011).

⁷⁸ Interview with MX07 (2014).

Threat 9: Pressures on social initiatives

I categorized social initiatives as a form of civic participation, although they often have a missionary goal. Christians who engage in such activities are confronted with major threats, especially initiatives that enter the area of influence of criminal organizations. Drug rehabilitation programs are targeted by criminal organizations because they directly threaten the drug trafficking business, or are a reprisal measure for the conversion to Christianity of former drug traffickers.⁷⁹ The director of such a program in Monterrey shared that he received threats from Los Zetas for accepting former Zetas into his program.⁸⁰ A bloody attack in June 2010 on a drug rehabilitation clinic in Villa Nueva (TS) killed fifteen patients and social workers, and an additional five passersby. Similar attacks occurred in neighboring states in 2009.⁸¹

Initiatives that provide meaningful alternatives for youths at risk who would otherwise be vulnerable to be recruited as halcones are also vulnerable to threats. Daniel Pérez, the pastor from a village in TS who set up a very popular soccer team for boys under the age of twelve, explains:

“You could become member if you had good grades in school. All these boys came from dysfunctional families which made them easy targets for criminal gangs wishing to recruit them. Some of these boys had already been recruited as halcones, watchers for criminal gangs to warn them of police presence. These boys also became part of the team and no longer wanted to work for the criminal gangs. This resulted in one of them, a 10-year-old boy being murdered. The narcos constantly threaten me to stop with the soccer team. I have to deal with threats on my life on a frequent basis. They have called my home, my cellphone, my wife, and the elders of the church. They have left threatening notes on the door of the church.”⁸²

There is an incompatibility of worldviews between actively practicing Christians and organized crime, which to a large extent explains the violence they suffer. Religious lifestyles that run counter to the expectations of organized crime, such as refusals to collaborate with money laundering, are by definition vulnerable. Civic participation, such as drug rehabilitation programs, chaplaincy in prisons or youth work, is also directly threatening the market and influence of drug cartels, and therefore also increases the vulnerability of this religious minority.⁸³

Conclusions

In this threat assessment, I described nine distinct threats to which actively practicing Christians in NL, TS and SP are vulnerable. Most of these threats are directly related to semi-active or active religious behavior. A central finding of the threat assessment is that the level of risk increases with the degree of activity of religious behavior. Religious identity does not

⁷⁹ “Conversión de “Narcos”: Posible Explicación a los ataques a Centros de Rehabilitación en México”, *Noticia Cristiana*, 25/06/2010.

⁸⁰ Interview with MX08 (2014).

⁸¹ “Sangriento ataque a clínica cristiana de rehabilitación de adictos en México”, *Noticia Cristiana*, 21/06/2010.

⁸² Interview with Daniel Pérez (name changed for security reasons) and with two boys who were part of his soccer team (2014).

⁸³ Interview with MX07 (2014).

in itself put people carrying this identity at an increased risk. As discussed, the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians is highest when they display more active forms of religious behavior such as evangelism or social work, which pose a direct threat to the influence of organized crime. As one interviewee put it: “Because of their way of life, Christians are naturally more exposed to suffer from organized crime.”⁸⁴

That risks increase with active religious behavior in a context of organized crime was expected, but semi-active forms of religious behavior, including simple church attendance, also increases risk. The threat assessment found that risks are particularly high in the case of traditional church meetings: attending church meetings already puts worshipers at an increased risk of extortions, kidnappings or other kinds of threats.

The majority of the threats to which actively practicing Christians are vulnerable in northeast Mexico can be traced back directly to ‘greed’, with the general context of impunity creating ‘opportunity.’ Drug cartels extort and commit other offences for money or protection of interests; not for any ‘grievance’ related reasons, nor ideological preferences. This being said, it must be noted that the extreme and unnecessary cruelty – unnecessary to their commercial objectives – of Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel and other groups linked to the Santa Muerte cult could be, in part, connected to a possible religious motive.

5.4.2 *Specificity assessment*

After the identification and data collection for all the threats affecting actively practicing Christians in NL, TS and SP, the next step in the RM-VAT is the assessment of the specificity of these threats to this religious minority, using the three-level sliding scale proposed in chapter 4. Schedler, referring to a broader debate about the question whether violence in civil wars aims at selected targets or is indiscriminate (Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007) concludes that in the case of Mexico victims of violence can fall in both categories (2015). In many cases, the victims of violence are persons who are believed to have ties with adversaries in conflict, but in many other cases, there is indiscriminate violence as well. In addition, many casualties can be categorized as ‘collateral damage.’ By contrast, Bartman finds that journalists in Mexico are indeed victims of targeted violence, countering the official narrative that suggests that there is nothing distinct about the violence against journalists (2018).

As Schedler asserts, threats can be expected against any behavior that “disturbs” the interests of criminal groups (2015), but the fact that this also applies to Christians displaying active religious behavior, such as civic participation, does not yet imply specificity. A certain degree of specificity can nevertheless be observed in relation to the moral authority of Christian leaders, their influence over large numbers of people, and the fact that their civic participation is directly inspired by their Christian convictions.

There is no obvious specificity in the case of indiscriminate violence or collateral damage, but even in cases when actively practicing Christians are not directly targeted, there may be elements that still make them specifically vulnerable, such as the fact that they are seen as easy targets for extortion or kidnap-for-ransom, their generalized unresponsiveness when it comes to defending themselves against threats, and the (often wrong) perception that they handle large amounts of money. Drug cartels also fear that their members would convert to Christianity,

⁸⁴ Interview with MX14 (2014).

strongly dislike the moral standing of some Christian leaders and are uncomfortable with church gatherings at certain hours.

5.4 Specificity assessment of threats against actively practicing Christians in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico)

Degree of specificity	Identified threats
High	Reprisals for conversion and abandoning cartel
	Intimidation of Christian workers who evangelize cartel members
	Imposition of Santa Muerte rituals
Medium	Kidnap-for-ransom
	Restrictions on church services
	Intimidation of leaders speaking out against injustice
Low	Illegal charges and extortion
	Theft of church property
	Pressures on social initiatives

Source: own elaboration.

As can be observed in figure 5.4, the specificity of the threats presents a notable degree of variation; i.e. all identified threats affect actively practicing Christians, but most of them are not exclusive to this religious minority. In this section I describe the different degrees of specificity (high, medium, low), followed by some concluding remarks.

Threats with a high degree of specificity

The number of threats with a high degree of specificity, defined as threats to which the observed religious minority is specifically vulnerable, is relatively limited. Of the nine identified threats, I grouped three in this category: “Reprisals for conversion and abandoning cartel”, “Intimidation of Christian workers who evangelize cartel members” and “Imposition of Santa Muerte rituals.” The first two threats are related to behavior which other (non-religious) minorities are not likely to engage in. Other religious minorities with a missionary agenda could, in theory, also be vulnerable to this kind of threats, but the presence of such minorities in this part of Mexico is not known to me. The last threat is not applicable outside the church sphere which is specific to Christians by definition.

Threats with a medium degree of specificity

Three of the nine identified threats have a medium degree of specificity for actively practicing Christians, meaning they affect the population as a whole, but that there is something notable about the characteristics of the observed religious minority that makes their likelihood to be vulnerable to this threat comparatively higher. Although all threats in this category are directly relatable to semi-active or active religious behavior (and occur in the church sphere), this kind of threats are not exclusive to Christians. Human rights abuses or criminal offenses such as “Kidnap-for-ransom” affect broad segments of society, as described previously. Similarly, not only Christians are affected by the threat of “Restrictions on church services”, because drug cartels place restrictions on any kind of public meetings. In fact, any (large) gathering of people can be expected to attract the attention of criminal organizations.

A supplementary reason for the particular vulnerability of actively practicing Christians to these threats is of a more political nature. Because they attract large numbers of people, churches may be seen as threatening to the activities of organized crime. The moral authority of the church, connected to its influence over the members of its congregation is probably why the threat “Intimidation of leaders speaking out against injustice” particularly affects Christian leaders, although it could apply to other professions such as human rights activists and journalists as well. The moral authority of Christian leaders could be explained against the background of the majority of the population who self-identifies as Christian.

Threats with a low degree of specificity

From the outset, I would like to remind that the assessment of the specificity of the threats affecting actively practicing Christians does not say anything about the intensity or severity of these threats. Saying that a threat has a low degree of specificity for a religious minority does not mean it is not a relevant threat or that it is negligible. On the contrary, all identified threats, regardless of their degree of specificity for this religious minority, constitute severe human rights abuses.

Most threats to actively practicing Christians in the social, cultural and government spheres present a low degree of specificity, which are spheres where religious factors are less determinant, although the behavior of people in these spheres can be defined by religious convictions and lifestyles. Indeed, the engagement of Christians in social initiatives is often a result of their religious worldview and their perceived responsibility to society as an integral part of their religious conviction (Buijs, Dekker & Hooghe 2009). The interviewed social workers and advocates all clearly connected their work to their religious identity.

The threats “Theft of church property” and “Pressures on social initiatives” are not exclusive to actively practicing Christians. In a context of criminal impunity, any type of building may be robbed, whether it is a church or not. Moreover, a brief review of relevant sources reveals that any person engaging in activities in the social, cultural and government spheres, regardless of his religious conviction or motive, is vulnerable to receive threats from organized crime. As the International Crisis Group reports, “Cartel-related violence has been particularly detrimental to those whose work is in dangerous areas or who come into contact with cartels and/or security forces. These include journalists, human rights defenders, health workers, priests and pollsters, among others.” (2013:30) Thus, when considering this type of threats, religious leaders (“priests”) are indeed a vulnerable group to organized crime, but in a similar way as any other person belonging to civil society that engages organized crime. The only difference is that Christians engaging in this kind of behavior do so as a result of their religious convictions.

At first sight, one might conclude that anyone with a regular income is vulnerable to illegal charges and extortion. It is undeniable that these threats apply to many businesses and society as a whole, and not exclusively to Christians. This is largely true, as *derecho de piso* is an important and frequently used income generating activity of drug cartels. However, it is possible to justify the specificity of this threat for actively practicing Christians for a number of reasons. Church services are unique in terms of their visibility, frequency and the great number of people they attract. They are also generally easy to enter because most churches want to be welcoming to visitors. The most important reason why churches are particularly vulnerable to this kind of threats is because they are simply attractive targets for extortion,

often because they are perceived to have large amounts of money because of the offerings they collect.⁸⁵ In other words, churches are often viewed by criminal organizations as revenue centers. In addition, the fact that churches generally do not fight back when attacked only makes them more attractive to organized crime, as already indicated.

Guillermo Trejo, a scholar at Notre Dame University, asserts that civil society as a whole is vulnerable to threats from organized crime. In an article in *El País*, he explains that criminal organizations in TS and other states have in recent years changed their focus from controlling drug trafficking to taking over political power at the municipal level in order to extract local resources. This implies there is no room for any form of social organization, as it is easier for criminals to control a society where levels of social capital are low.⁸⁶ Any civil society initiative is therefore likely to be threatened by organized crime, whether it results from some form of Christian conviction or behavior or not.

Conclusions

The specificity of the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians is observable mainly in the field of religious participation (church attendance) and missionary activity, and much less in the field of civic participation. The high degree of specificity of the vulnerability of this religious minority as a result of church attendance and missionary activity is explained mainly by its (perceived) economic power (through the money collected by offerings) and its moral influence. Civic participation increases vulnerability of actively practicing Christians, but nevertheless has a much lower degree of specificity for this religious minority, even though Christians engaging in civic participation do so as a result of their religious convictions.

It is often argued that because organized crime affects the whole population, it is irrelevant to consider it as particularly threatening for religious groups. What these skeptics are basically saying is that there is no specificity to Christians of threats caused by organized crime. In this assessment I have shown that there is indeed no specificity to Christians when this group is defined by religious identity, but that there arguably is a considerable degree of specificity to the threats for actively practicing Christians. Christians are not intrinsically vulnerable, at least not more than any other citizen living in a context of organized crime, but the more active forms of religious behavior make them more vulnerable. In other words, the identifiable specificity of the vulnerability of Christians in northeast Mexico does not lie in their religious identity, but essentially in their religious behavior.

The same skeptics argue that since organized crime has no religious motive, it is irrelevant to speak of restrictions of religious expression, or even religious persecution, of actively practicing Christians. By adopting the human security perspective, it can be observed that this religious minority does in fact possess an important vulnerability caused by organized crime, regardless of its motive. Moreover, even though the drug cartels most of the time may not have a religious motive, the behavior that makes actively practicing Christians vulnerable is inspired by religious convictions, and as my analysis shows, their resulting behavior does increase their vulnerability to specific threats. In fact, the motives of organized crime to target actively practicing Christians are varied. They are generally not religious, but mostly motivated by

⁸⁵ Interview with MX21 (2014).

⁸⁶ Guillermo Trejo, “¿Por qué el crimen organizado atenta contra la sociedad civil en México?”, *El País*, 12/10/2014.

economic interests (when Christians and churches are viewed as revenue centers) and power-political considerations (when certain forms of religious behavior threaten their influence).

The finding that most of the identified threats to actively practicing Christians can be considered to have a medium or low degree of specificity to this religious minority is important. It implies that organized crime does indeed affect the whole population, but not indistinctly; there is an identifiable specificity in the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians in the case of northeast Mexico.

5.4.3 *Resilience assessment*

In the resilience assessment, I specifically look at the resilience of actively practicing Christians, viewing this group not merely as a passive subject or a victim of human security threats, but as an agent seeking to reduce its vulnerability. In this section, I use the anecdotal evidence that I collected in the field trips to describe coping mechanisms of actively practicing Christians, followed by some conclusions.

Coping mechanisms

During the field trips for this research, I asked my interviewees to reflect on the mechanisms that actively practicing Christians, as a vulnerable group, have adopted to try to cope with the threats they are vulnerable to. Many interviewees had a hard time providing answers to this question, which revealed that the reflection about coping mechanisms and the overall resilience to criminal violence is not very developed. Applying the theoretical framework developed in chapter 4, I distinguish eight categories of coping mechanisms.

Avoidance

Avoidance is by far the most common response to organized crime among actively practicing Christians. Their active practice is limited in most cases to ‘classic’ religious behavior such as church attendance but not much more. Some also chose to move to other parts of the country, rather than to continue enduring the threats. This is true for the religious minority under study as much as for anyone else (Schedler 2015). The avoidance strategy does not always succeed in avoiding harm. As I have shown, religious behavior such as leading a church or attending one already increases the risk of human security threats. Moreover, when a drug cartel takes control of a particular area, all influential people, including church leaders, are subject to the same surveillance and threats.

Often, Christians deliberately avoid any behavior that could expose them, such as publicly denouncing injustice or engaging in any initiatives that could cause them to be threatened by organized crime. The fact that only a minority of Christians engage in civic participation is understandable. Not only is it dangerous, but the dominant theology in the area under study does not encourage social engagement (Petri 2012). In addition, the “normalization of violence” also leads many to become apathetic to some degree (Schedler 2015). Among other interviewees, one pastor confirms this assessment: “There is no strategy in any of the churches to change the situation of organized crime. Many church leaders are too afraid to speak out.

All they can do is pray.”⁸⁷ Another minister agrees: “There is a lot of apathy among Christians. Most Christians simply don’t leave the four walls of the church.”⁸⁸

Spiritual endurance

Strong religious convictions (‘faith’) decrease vulnerability because they lead to increased self-awareness. This is not necessarily a guarantee for protection, of course, but throughout the interviews conducted for this research it became clear that Christians with strong religious convictions had increased moral strength and were often more able of defending themselves against threats. This is illustrated by the story of a girl I interviewed who was kidnapped by Los Zetas:

“I was abducted along with other people by Los Zetas because I happened to witness one of their raids. I had every reason to fear for my life and that of my 10-year-old niece who was abducted as well. But I stood up and took authority. I told them: ‘I am a Christian, you are not going to rape me. You are not allowed. You are going to release me and my niece, and you are going to give us food. I also want you to take off all your Santa Muerte amulets.’ Amazingly enough, they all did what I said. I prayed with these men and all the people abducted. Nothing happened to us, and after three days, my niece and I were released!”⁸⁹

There are indications that citizens of especially TS and NL appear to seek refuge in Christianity. The newspaper *El Universal* writes in an article that religious practice has increased as a result of “the violence”, but also that “faith [is increasingly considered] as an arm against the violence”, citing successful faith-based initiatives against organized crime such as the purge of the police department of Guadalupe (NL) that I describe further down.⁹⁰

Compliance

To many actively practicing Christians, compliance is an important survival strategy. In my interviews, it became very clear that many Christian church leaders and business owners who are extorted choose to pay, and do not report these threats to the police. When church services or missionary programs are ordered to stop by the drug cartels, most generally accept.

Social wisdom

The default option of most Christians in northeast Mexico not to engage injustice for the various reasons discussed above also implies that there is very little reflection on what social wisdom as a coping mechanism should look like. This being said, people are generally very cautious in their dealings with the drug cartels and avoid provoking them as much as possible, resorting to avoidance and compliance mechanisms.

⁸⁷ Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁸⁸ Interview with MX01 (2014).

⁸⁹ Interview with MX27 (2014).

⁹⁰ “La fe como arma contra la violencia”, *El Universal*, 03/01/2017.

There are two areas that stand out from the threat assessment that could benefit from a deeper reflection on social wisdom. The first is the evangelization of cartel members (threat 7). That this is risky is obvious, but research from El Salvador about the desistance from gangs as a result of genuine conversion suggests that there are ways in which this could be done in such a way that the reaction of the drug cartels is minimized. In the case of El Salvador, faith-based societal reinsertion programs for gang members are tolerated by gang leaders if they are perceived to be earnest in their intentions, show a genuine interest in addressing the concerns of the gang members and refrain from reporting them to the police. Just like in various areas of Mexico, criminal organizations in El Salvador extort and assault large churches, but there gangs seem to respect smaller churches that are genuinely concerned with social matters such as extreme poverty (Brenneman 2014; Orozco Flores 2014; Orellana 2017; Arauz Cantón & Petri 2018). The second area concerns the risk of extortion and kidnap-for-ransom when holding church services (threats 2 and 3). There is a tension here that is not easy to resolve, between being secure and being open and welcoming, not just to all, but particularly to people who are dangerous, and/or are themselves associated with the gangs, but may be considering changing their lives.

Moral standing

In some cases, cartel members have expressed that they respect Christians and their leaders, and spare them in particular conflicts.⁹¹ For example, one interviewee shared: “Many cartel members are Christians or used to be Christians. This means they respect Christians. They also feel threatened by Christians because they fear the power of prayer. They also fear to lose their leaders if they convert to Christianity.”⁹² Another source said: “Criminals respect Christians, except when they are under the influence of drugs. Then, they don’t know what they do.”⁹³ In a letter received by a staff worker of a Christian NGO, a pastor from the city of Ciudad Victoria (TS) describes how he and another pastor traveling with him were stopped by criminals on the highway between Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria. When the criminals found out the two men were Christians, they let them go and explicitly said that they decided not to rob them “because they were men of God.”⁹⁴

I obtained similar testimonies from other interviewees. One source shared how a friend who was abducted by Los Zetas was released when they learned he was a Christian.⁹⁵ A girl who had been kidnapped by Los Zetas shared the following: “They were going to shoot me, but something happened with the gun they were using because the bullet did not come out. One of Los Zetas told his partners to release me, saying that no one could touch this girl because God was with her.”⁹⁶ It appears that Los Zetas have some degree of respect for religion, possibly because many of them are extremely superstitious as is illustrated by their attachment to the Santa Muerte cult. Some interviewees also indicated that some gang members were raised in Christian families and continue to hold the religion in esteem, in spite of their involvement in crime. In the majority of cases, however, this does not happen, and it appears that most criminals have no respect whatsoever for religion and religious institutions.

⁹¹ Interview with MX14 (2014).

⁹² Interview with MX07 (2014).

⁹³ Interview with MX06 (2014).

⁹⁴ Interview with MX23 (2014).

⁹⁵ Interview with MX18 (2014).

⁹⁶ Interview with MX23 (2014).

Solidarity

“Organized violence makes it structurally difficult for passive spectators to become solidary actors”, writes Schedler (2015:215). In the case of actively practicing Christians, solidarity is largely lacking. I did not observe this to be a concern in any of the interviews I conducted. Although this finding may be somewhat surprising because one would expect a religious community to experience at least some level of solidarity among its members, this can be explained by the predominant expression of Christianity in this area that is both very spiritualized – less concerned with material needs – and individualistic – focused on individual salvation and much less on material needs of the community and social transformation –, often in combination with the teachings of the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’, popular among Pentecostal groups, which is the belief that God’s will for his followers is to receive material blessings (Steigenga & Cleary 2007; RIFREM 2016).

Collective action

As said above, not many actively practicing Christians engage in collective action, which increases their vulnerability to suffer human security threats. However, some initiatives by actively practicing Christians aiming at transforming society can increase their resilience. An example of a successful initiative to re-establish security is the way police commanders Enrique Alberto San Miguel and Florencio Santos purged the Monterrey police from infiltrated cartel members and eliminated the corruption within the police department (ICG 2013:23-24). When interviewed, Santos explained that this initiative was preceded by the forming of a coalition of Christian pastors in Guadalupe (NL) who started praying for the restoration of law and order in the municipality and worked together with the newly appointed police director to instill values into the reformed police force.⁹⁷ A police officer recalled:

“The positive changes in the police department started with the church leaders coming together to pray, acting in unity to respond to the loss of values in the city. This resulted in the rehabilitation of the police department and created the conditions for the police to address the violence.”⁹⁸

The model was so successful – the violence caused by Los Zetas was effectively reduced – it is being replicated in other cities, including in Ciudad Victoria (TS). A pastor from that city told me he teaches values to a thousand police officers every week at the request of the Secretary for Security of the state government of TS.⁹⁹ The same is true for social initiatives that keep youths away from crime. The example of the football team created by Daniel Pérez is now being replicated in other locations as well.¹⁰⁰

Apart from these isolated initiatives, I did not come across any concerted efforts of actively practicing Christians to advocate for their rights at the federal or international levels. This can be explained by the small demographic size of this group, as well as their internal divisions: there is a total of 7,616 registered Christian denominations (INEGI 2010), with little interdenominational collaboration. Moreover, I have observed that many church leaders do not

⁹⁷ Interview with Florencio Santos (2014); “Cuando la fe es lo único que queda... frente a la inseguridad”, *Posta*, 10/01/2017.

⁹⁸ Interview with MX03 (2014).

⁹⁹ Interview with MX06 (2014).

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Daniel Pérez and MX23 (2014).

naturally think in terms of political solutions for their problems. This makes it difficult for this group to effectively respond to the threats posed by organized crime, and greatly reduces their advocacy capacity.

Taking up arms

I did not come across any evidence that actively practicing Christians are taking up arms or forming self-defense militias, like the citizens of Cherán in the state of Michoacán did.¹⁰¹ I did observe that larger churches do hire private security companies, but there is no ‘military’ strategy on behalf of actively practicing Christians do defend themselves against threats. Only in June 2018 did the Catholic Church issue a security protocol to advise priests and church administrators on how to ensure their personal safety and that of church buildings (CEM 2018).

Conclusions

The examples presented in this section show that civic participation can be effective and instrumental to increasing the resilience of actively practicing Christians. In many cases, however, civic participation of actively practicing Christians also increases their vulnerability, especially when it threatens the operations of organized crime, as was argued in the threat assessment. Moreover, it must be observed that reducing human security risks is not really on the agenda of actively practicing Christians – none of the interviewees for this case study spoke about strategies devised by churches or Christian institutions to cope with the threats that they face. Indeed, apart from some exceptions like the positive involvement of Christian leaders in the police department of Guadalupe (NL) or the security protocol issued by the Mexican Catholic Church, there is no noteworthy reflection or self-awareness among Christian leaders about how the threats posed by organized crime could be mitigated. Fieldwork I conducted for an international charity in Nigeria in June 2014 and for the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America in El Salvador in May 2018, in which I asked religious leaders about their response to religious persecution and violence revealed a similar pattern. A reflection about how these vulnerable communities could cope with the violence is generally lacking. Most interviewees seemed to have accepted the violence as normal and were not conscious about the specific restrictions it places on their religious freedom.

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

5.5 Evaluation

This section evaluates the application of the RM-VAT to actively practicing Christians in NL, TS and SP. After presenting its analytical contributions (5.5.1), I discuss some of its limitations (5.5.2).

¹⁰¹ “Cheran: The town that threw out police, politicians and gangsters”, *BBC*, 13/10/2016.

5.5.1 Contributions

The contributions of the application of the RM-VAT are to a large degree the result of its methodological design, which enables it to observe aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are overlooked by most RFATs and by narrative analyses about religious freedom. These aspects are related to the shifts in focus that were made possible by the adoption of the human security perspective and by the alternative definitions of religion, religious minority and religious freedom. This allowed me to consider active forms of religious behavior instead of religious identity only, threats to religious minorities that do not result from a religious motive, the role of non-state actors such as organized crime and the subnational level.

As a result of these methodological innovations, in this case study I was able to detect trends in three areas. The first concerns the relation between religious identity-behavior and vulnerability. In the threat assessment I found that, as a general rule, the more active the religious behavior of Christians, the greater the risk to suffer human rights abuses. Although this was expected, I also found that semi-active forms of religious behavior, such as church attendance, also imply a risk of extortion and kidnapping. Religious identity, however, is not in any way related to vulnerability, unless it is related to theft of church property. Connected to this, a finding of this case study is that non-religious motives such as ‘greed’ can be an important reason for drug cartels to threaten the observed religious minority. This being said, ‘grievance’ also plays a role in explaining the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians, considering the threats that are related to Santa Muerte.

The second contribution of this case study is related to the specificity of the vulnerability of religious minorities. I was able to demonstrate that the common narrative that religion is not singled out by organized crime is wrong, or at the very least, a representation of reality that is too simplified. Organized crime does have a problem with religion, but it must be qualified. Indeed, organized crime is not concerned with religion in general, but only with expressions of religion that threaten their interests or when religious organizations become a revenue center. Although it may be true that non-religious individuals and groups are also targeted by organized crime when their activities threaten their interests (such as journalists and human rights defenders) or when they are viewed as revenue centers (such as large businesses), it is possible to isolate some degree of specificity of the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians that is related to aspects they do not share with other groups such as their moral influence, their mobilization capacity, their generally passive response to attacks and the welcoming vocation of churches which makes them an easy target, their missionary activity and the offering money they handle. In other words, actively practicing Christians and other groups share a similar vulnerability, but there are elements that are unique to this minority.

Finally, through the application of the RM-VAT I was able to observe that the drug cartels, especially when they take over traditional roles of the state, effectively regulate essential aspects of religion, in ways that are similar to authoritarian governments. Indeed, things like charging churches so they can remain opened (through the protection rackets), the imposed curfews at specific hours, the censorship of the contents of sermons, the elimination of leaders that are too critical, the reporting requirements of religious leaders, the prohibition of charitable work, are characteristic features of political regimes that repress religious expression. Going even further, this suggests that instead of observing the formal government and its failure to enforce religious freedom and protect religious minorities, as RFATs do, the *de facto* government and the religious policies it imposes should be observed.

5.5.2 *Limitations*

Notwithstanding the overlooked and misjudged aspects of the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians to organized crime in NL, TS and SP that the RM-VAT was able to reveal, the tool also has some methodological and empirical limitations. The first set of limitations of the RM-VAT in this particular context are related to its replicability. The replicability of the RM-VAT is first of all limited because of security considerations. The fieldwork conducted for this case study was essential, considering that secondary sources only provided a partial picture, but also dangerous. As explained in the section on security risks, some areas could not be visited because of the risk of kidnapping, and some interviewees were not willing to give interviews because of security concerns. This makes it difficult, although not impossible, for another researcher to apply the RM-VAT to the same area or other areas with similar contexts.

Safety considerations aside, the replicability of the fieldwork in the context of NL, TS and SP by other researchers is limited without the network of confessional organizations that I benefited from. By speaking to different people and asking different questions they could arrive at a different list of threats than I did. Although this is a real possibility, I believe the replicability of the findings of this case study is high because the identified threats possess an intrinsic heuristic value. In other words, another researcher may make slightly different observations, but the essence of the threat assessment should not vary. Moreover, in similar contexts, the threat assessment should yield similar results. Anecdotal evidence, such as data collected by the Violent Incidents Database of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, points to similar threats in other areas of Mexico and in other Latin American countries. Fieldwork I conducted in El Salvador in 2018 also allowed me to identify similar patterns (Arauz Cantón & Petri 2018).

Because the relation between religious freedom and organized crime is such an unexplored topic, statistics and other secondary sources are not easily available. I used whatever secondary sources I could find, but this case study nevertheless relied to a large degree on anecdotal evidence. I tried to mitigate the risk of subjectivity as much as possible by experimental confirmation through similar interviews in order to approximate inter-subjectivity.

6. The vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia

This case study corresponds to an intra-ethnic (minority-within-the-minority) conflict. Specifically, this case study is about the vulnerability of converts from the majority religion in an indigenous context, which I refer to as ‘cultural dissidents’ among the Nasa ethnic group living in the *resguardos indígenas* [*indigenous reserves*] of the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments). The timeframe for this case study overlaps with the first six years of the Administration of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón (2010-2016), roughly until the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC.

Although the FARC guerillas have historically been active in rural areas of Colombia and have been associated with persecution of (actively practicing) Christians, I do not discuss this in this case study. I only ‘laterally’ refer to the FARC when I discuss the accusations that some indigenous leaders would have collaborated with this insurgency.

This case study is unique for several reasons. As explained in chapter 2, most contributions in conflict theory focus on inter-ethnic conflicts, not intra-ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, this case study concerns a conflict that involves a strong behavioral component that is also understudied in conflict literature. Finally, it zooms in on a subnational area with a unique form of indigenous self-government that RFATs fail to observe because of their predominantly national focus. I expect most findings of this case study to be generalizable to other indigenous communities in Latin America and beyond where similar tensions arise, and more generally to cases where collective rights and individual religious rights are not sufficiently balanced. After describing the disregard for religious freedom in the Nasa *resguardos indígenas* as a context description for this case study (6.1), I move to the data collection (6.2) security risks and ethical challenges (6.3), the RM-VAT (6.4), followed by an evaluation (6.5).

6.1 *The disregard for religious freedom in the Nasa resguardos indígenas*

The history of religious freedom in Colombia parallels that of Mexico until the beginning of the 20th century, but where Mexico became a secular and anticlerical state in 1917, the Catholic Church kept many of its privileges in Colombia. This was not uncontested, as throughout the twentieth century there were important struggles between liberals and conservatives, including a civil war known as *La Violencia* [*The Violence*] that lasted from 1948 to 1958 (Gill 2008). The 1991 Constitution was a major turning point for the country in many respects, including for freedom of religion (Díaz Escandón 2009; Moreno Palacios 2009; Arboleda Mora 2011). Before 1991, Catholicism was the official state religion. After the 1991 Constitution, the separation between the Catholic Church and the state was finally implemented, and religious freedom was fully recognized (art. 19 of the Constitution, ratified by the 1994 religious freedom law).

The available data on Colombia collected by the RAS Project points to a univocal conclusion: government involvement in religion is limited, especially in comparison to Mexico. Not only has Colombia no official religion, the levels of religious discrimination and religious regulation are low. Putting some sporadic elements of favoritism of the majority religion aside, it can be concluded from this presentation of the RAS data that the relation between religion and state

is not putting any religious minority in a vulnerable position from a human security perspective. This statement holds true when observing the religious freedom situation at the national level, but completely ignores the atypical situation of the *resguardos indígenas* where religious freedom for minorities is not guaranteed. In this introductory description of the context, I first discuss the religious agenda of the cultural dissidents within the Nasa ethnic group (6.1.1), followed by the legal insecurity and religious tensions in the Nasa *resguardos* (6.1.2). I then offer some conclusions about the repression of cultural dissidents (6.1.3).

6.1.1 *The religious agenda of cultural dissidents within the Nasa ethnic group*

The Colombian statistical office has not recorded religious affiliation for two decades,¹⁰² but according to recent estimates from the World Christian Database (2017), 95.1% of Colombians self-identify as Christians. However, it cannot be assumed that the religious composition at the national level is applicable to indigenous communities, which have a distinct sociological composition and religious history. According to religious history scholars González & González (2008) and Arboleda Mora (2011), the earliest incursion of Christianity among the Nasa were the efforts of Jesuit missionaries, who were strongly resisted. In 1905, Lazarist missionaries began to work among the Nasa, which had more success. This led to a blend of indigenous Nasa and Catholic beliefs and traditions. Protestant groups started to emerge among the Nasa in the 1930s.

Although the presence of Christianity in the Nasa territories has increased over time, it never reached the same proportions as at the national level of Colombia. The Joshua Project, a Christian organization that compiles religious data from various sources, estimates the total Christian population within the Nasa at 65%, with the remaining 35% adhering to “ethnic religions.” (2016) According to the same source, the Christian population among the Nasa includes an Evangelical segment of 38%. In personal interviews, staff from *Visión Agape*, another Christian organization, estimated the number of Evangelical Christians among the Nasa at “around 10-15%”, but is not able to give a justification for this estimate. It is likely that the majority of this group belongs to the *Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Nasa, ICEN [Christian Evangelical Nasa Church]*, which is the largest non-Catholic Christian organization in the Nasa territories. Other non-Catholic groups that have a presence in the Nasa territory are *Asociación Alianza Cristiana Indígena Páez Colombiana [Christian Indigenous Colombian Páez Alliance]*, *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia [United Pentecostal Church of Colombia]* and *Movimiento Misionero Mundial en Colombia [Worldwide Missionary Movement in Colombia]*. Some of these groups eventually merged into ICEN.

Regardless of the exact percentage of Christians among the Nasa, which is objectively difficult to determine, there is an important distinction to be made between the Nasa that take part in the cultural and religious traditions of the community and those who do not. The former may or may not self-identify as Christians but have in common that they follow indigenous religious traditions, generally mixed with Catholic syncretism. The latter expressly reject these traditions, often after they convert to some branch of Evangelical Christianity. This minority group, which I identify in this chapter as cultural dissidents, is the focus of this case study. I argue this group possesses a specific vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses.

¹⁰² Interview with Jaime Alberto Álvarez (2016).

I chose to identify this minority as cultural dissidents, because they involve Christians who, often after a conversion experience, decide to reject some tenets of the cultural and religious traditions of their community, but expressly declare they continue to identify as Nasa and as indigenous. Their dissent focuses almost exclusively on aspects of Nasa culture that they disagree with, but they effectively continue to share the same holistic worldview that characterizes their community and do not reject other elements of their indigenous heritage.

For most cultural dissidents, the behavioral response ‘exit’ is not an option, as is often the case in tribal contexts as Hirschman explains: “exit is ordinarily unthinkable, though not always wholly impossible, from such primordial human groupings as family, tribe, church, and state. The principal way for the individual member to register his dissatisfaction with the way things are going in these organizations is normally to make his voice heard in some fashion.” (1970:76). In other words, because of their feeling of loyalty to their ethnic group, the only recourse for these cultural dissidents is ‘voice.’

The majority of cultural dissidents join ICEN, a movement that follows the basic tenets of Evangelical Christianity. It was initially connected to various North American missions such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Arboleda Mora 2011; Ramírez Escobar 2015) but evolved into an indigenous fellowship with no international connections. Its teachings include an explicit rejection of what is referred to as ‘pagan’ religious practices.¹⁰³ The ICEN is a recognized religious association, as records of the Colombian Ministry of the Interior confirm, but these records do not contain statistics of its membership. ICEN was registered on 8 October 2009, in Páez, Cauca (ICEN 2014).

The North American missions to Nasa communities worked mainly in the 1970’s and 1980’s, which means that most adult Evangelicals at the time I did this research are first generation converts. In my interviews, some of them shared about their conversion experience. According to their reports, tensions within their community as a result of their conversion have always existed but intensified during the past decade when their activism increased, particularly with the rejection of the existing school system which they did not consider to be adequate for their children. The creation of private confessional schools and ultimately the creation of the *Organización Pluricultural de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia, OPIC [Pluricultural Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia]*, an interest group, contributed to increase tensions.

The sometimes aggressive rejection of their original faith by converts is consistent with a trend described in sociology of religion about first generation converts who tend to be very radical in their break with their own past and with pagan elements that are part of their culture (Steigenga & Cleary 2007; Kovic 2007; Jindra 2014), especially when they enter what Gooren calls the “confession phase” of their “conversion career” which comes after the “conversion phase”, in which their religious participation increases and in which they start to adopt a strong “missionary attitude” towards non-members outside their group (Gooren 2007). It is easy to understand how such increased militancy can generate tensions, especially when the type of Christianity they adhere to encourages an uncompromising rejection of the “pagan” elements in their heritage (Casanova 2008), a point that was also made by a representative of a faith-based organization working in the region.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Interviews CO01, CO02 and CO03 (2015).

¹⁰⁴ Interview with CU15 (2016).

Although a large part of the beliefs of ICEN agree with Western expressions of Evangelical Christianity, ICEN members continue to be greatly influenced by the Nasa culture and worldview, in the sense that they do not segregate between the private and the collective, nor between the political and the religious, as is characteristic in indigenous culture (Pancho 2007). In fact, ICEN members are proud of their Nasa identity and continue to consider themselves as members of the Nasa ethnic group. What they complain about is that the majority of the Nasa infer that their conversion to Evangelical Christianity implies a departure from their indigenous identity. “We don’t understand why we can’t be indigenous and Christians at the same time”, said one of their leaders.¹⁰⁵ In the mainstream indigenous worldview, however, it is considered that one ceases to be indigenous when one converts to another religion. This has serious implications, because from the indigenous perspective, it causes the harmony of nature (Mother Earth) to be distorted, leading to a greater risk of natural catastrophes and other negative effects (Pancho 2007; Drexler 2007; Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón 2010; Molina Bedoya 2010).

The view that all members of the indigenous community need to adhere to its worldview and follow its traditions can be qualified, to use Buijs’s categorization, as an expression of a “unitaritarian” political conception (2013). “The danger of unity” in this case is evident through the violent repression of religious minorities. It is also a case of “assumption of singular affiliation” (Sen 2006) and a manipulation of identity that narrows it to the adherence to the same religion and culture (Schlee 2008). In a way, the cultural dissidents advocate for “pluralism”, i.e. the conception that in a society there should be room for different perspectives, although their logic also has unitaritarian features, such as their sometimes aggressive approach to missionary activity as I describe in the threat assessment.

An alternative proxy for the number of cultural dissidents in the Nasa community is membership of the OPIC. According to a public statement of the OPIC issued in 2009, the organization has 24,693 members (OPIC 2009), which would represent around 17.8% of the total Nasa population. This number could not be independently confirmed, but it seems reasonable considering newspaper reports that counted “close to 10,000”¹⁰⁶ and “more than 6,000”¹⁰⁷ members of the OPIC who participated in a protest march in August 2012. Although the OPIC, which I discuss more in-depth in the threat assessment, is primarily an interest group, it mostly federates Christians who reject the authority of the *cabildos indígenas* [indigenous governments]. It is, nevertheless, an imperfect proxy for the number of cultural dissidents because not all people that can be considered as cultural dissidents are members of the OPIC; most members of the OPIC are cultural dissidents, but not all cultural dissidents are affiliated to this organization.

Although reliable data is hard to come by, what is most important is the distinction between ‘traditional’ Nasa and Nasa who are cultural dissidents. On the continuum of religious identity and behavior, cultural dissidents can be found in part of the category ‘religious participation’ but it is mainly through the categories ‘religious lifestyle’, ‘missionary activity’ and ‘civic participation’ that this minority group expresses its dissent.

Finally, as the distinction between a political and a religious organization is not pertinent to the worldview of the Nasa (Pancho 2007:59), it must also be noted that the distinction between the various forms of religious behavior is quite blurry in this context. Specifically, conversion to

¹⁰⁵ Interview with CO04 (2015).

¹⁰⁶ “Indígenas del Cauca, en contravía”, *El Espectador*, 03/08/2012.

¹⁰⁷ “Indígenas de la OPIC marchan en Popayán”, *Semana*, 02/08/2012.

another strand of Christianity or participation in ICEN gatherings can already be viewed as a political statement of rejection of the indigenous authority.

6.1.2 Legal insecurity and religious tensions in the Nasa resguardos

To further elaborate upon the plausibility of the inclusion of this case study in this research, in this section I consecutively describe the following elements of the selected subnational context to characterize its legal insecurity: the Nasa ethnic group, the political autonomy of the resguardos indígenas and evidence of human rights abuses.

The Nasa ethnic group

With around 138,501 members (as of 2007, *Departamento Nacional de Planeación de Colombia, DNP [National Planning Department of Colombia]*), the Nasa ethnic group, also known as Páez, is the second largest indigenous group in terms of size of Colombia. The Nasa live in 72 resguardos and 34 other types of indigenous communities, located in the southwestern highlands of Colombia in an area known as Tierradentro (see annex F). Most resguardos were created during the colonial era. The vast majority of the Nasa, 129,534 people, live in the Department of Cauca. Nasa also live in neighboring departments Caquetá, Huila, Meta, Putumayo, Tolima and Valle del Cauca (figure 6.1).

6.1 Map of the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments)



Source: Google Maps.

The Nasa are considered as an ethnic group with a relatively high degree of preservation of their original culture. The Nasa live in rural communities and work mainly in agriculture and

cattle raising. Weaving is an important activity for the Nasa, which connects to its mythology of the creation of the world. The belief system of the Nasa is built around a syncretic mix of catholic and indigenous traditions and symbols, such as *K'apish* – thunder (Rappaport 2004; DNP 2007). Although the mainstream religious beliefs of the Nasa include elements of Catholicism, the religion of the Nasa can more accurately be described as “a form of pre-Columbian religiosity with Catholic influences.” When a member of the Nasa converts to Evangelical Christianity, this thus constitutes a very radical change.

The Nasa maintain their own language, called *nasa yuwe*, which belongs to the Páez linguistic family. The preservation of this language is highly significant to the identity of the Nasa and is intricately connected to its religion: “Nasayuwe, for the Nasa people, represents a matter of pride in their historical roots, respect for their culture and reverence for their belief system” (Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón 2010). To the Nasa, language is more than a mere “code system” for communication; it is a defining element of their worldview and truly a “fundamental attribute of self-recognition”, to use Manuel Castells’ perspective (1997). Therefore, the imposition of the Spanish language, western education and western religion since colonial times has been considered by the Nasa as a form of symbolic occupation (Molina Bedoya 2010).

The territory is equally essential to the Nasa cultural identity, in which religious and political life are intertwined: “According to ‘traditional’ Amerindian cosmological thought, ‘territory’ is not just a provider of natural resources but is also a space for political and medical-religious practices” (Drexler 2007:138). The importance of the protection of the territory of indigenous communities for the permanence and survival of the indigenous culture has repeatedly been acknowledged in Colombian jurisprudence (more on this below). As Drexler explains, this has important implications for the community’s interpretation of religious conversion as contributing to “cosmic disorder and the accumulation of ‘socio-cosmic filth’.” Through the *Pta'zitupni* ritual – literally: “turning the filth around” – the harmony and equilibrium of the territory is restored. In the *Pta'zitupni* ritual the *Te'wala* (traditional doctor) also gives legal and ethical orientations to the elected governors, who are known as the *cabildos indígenas*.

The political autonomy of the *resguardos indígenas*

During the last decades of the twentieth century, indigenous movements emerged throughout Latin America. The demands of these movements went beyond the social inclusion of indigenous communities in the economic system. They demanded the recognition of group rights and ethnic determination (Yashar 2005:3-5). This unprecedented mobilization of indigenous groups, often referred to as *indigenismo*, had major political consequences. A milestone for the indigenous movement was the adoption in 1989 of the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) “Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries”, which formally recognized the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples, among other things (Yashar 2005:16).

Colombia ratified Convention 169 in 1990 and discussed indigenous rights in the 1990-1991 Constitutional Assembly (Carrillo-Flórez 2006; González 2011). This led to the first official recognition of the ethnic diversity of Colombia, as well as the granting of far-reaching self-administration rights. In a move aimed at preserving vanishing indigenous cultures, articles 246 and 330 of Colombia’s 1991 Constitution grant indigenous groups autonomy in their own territories (Stavenhagen 2001, 2008, 2013; Van Cott 2005, 2008). A review of the legislation

regarding indigenous communities in Colombia confirms the far-reaching political autonomy that indigenous communities enjoy, which is, in the words of legal anthropologist Sánchez Botero, “really revolutionary” (2002).

The Colombian Constitution recognizes “indigenous territories” as a distinct type of territorial entity, alongside municipalities and departments (art. 286). (The majority of resguardos indígenas have acquired the status of indigenous territory in order to benefit from the legal prerogatives this implies. A smaller number of indigenous communities have the status of municipality.) The Colombian Constitution is not very specific about the government system of the indigenous territorial entities. It simply mentions that the indigenous authorities “may exercise jurisdictional functions within their territorial scope, in accordance with their own rules and procedures” (art. 246), that they are “governed by councils formed and regulated according to the uses and customs of their communities” (art. 330) and that they can be beneficiaries of public funds granted by the national government (art. 356). The competencies of the indigenous governments include the adoption and enforcement of legislative acts, economic policy, budget (including the faculty to raise taxes), management of public resources (including for education) and public order (through a *guardia indígena [indigenous guard]*). In addition, they have the faculty to implement their own justice system. This *fuero especial indígena [special indigenous jurisdiction]* includes the possibility to order punishments according to their own *usos y costumbres [customs and habits]*.

Each resguardo is thus given the freedom to adopt its own government system, according to its own traditions. Most Colombian resguardos, including the Nasa resguardos, are governed by a ‘cabildo’, which is a collegiate form of government that is comparable both to a council of elders and a municipal council, and is selected by the members of the resguardo. The cabildo combines executive, legislative and judicial power, but some legislative and judicial prerogatives are exercised by the ‘general assembly’ of all the inhabitants of the resguardo. Sometimes, the cabildo is presided over by a ‘governor’ but more often all members of a cabildo are referred to as governors. The particularities of the government system vary from resguardo to resguardo, and because it is mostly based on oral traditions, it is flexible and can be arbitrary. For example, it is unclear under which circumstances the general assembly should be consulted by the cabildo.

The Nasa cabildos that are located within the Department of Cauca are organized within a regional network called the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, CRIC [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca]*, which also has members who represent other indigenous communities. This association, created in 1971, is essentially a lobby organization for the social and cultural rights of the indigenous communities of the department and serves as an interlocutor to the Colombian government. The CRIC does not have legal authority over the cabildos, but its meetings serve to streamline the policies of the cabildos, particularly for matters related to the protection of their cultural heritage (Ramírez Escobar 2015). Often, the cabildos turn to the CRIC for legal and political support when they need to deal with issues that they consider threatening to the traditions and culture of the Nasa.

During my fieldwork, I did not encounter any noteworthy differences between the views of the cabildos of the different Nasa resguardos and the CRIC. They seem to be on the same line when it comes to matters related to the preservation of the traditions of the Nasa, but I was not exposed to any internal debates within these institutions. The only difference I was able to observe is that some cabildos seem to be more severe than others in the punishment of cultural dissidents, but this could also depend on the behavior of the latter. The general population of

the resguardos, either in day-to-day live or when gathered in general assembly, seems to always approve of the decisions of the cabildos toward cultural dissidents, but this could very well be the consequence of a certain authoritarianism; within the resguardos, there does not seem to be much room for freedom of expression, let alone political opposition.

The indigenous autonomy is far-reaching, but not absolute. The constitutional limitations on indigenous autonomy include the respect for the right to life, the prohibition of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, slavery but also the principles of due process and legality in criminal matters, as well as the prohibition of forced displacement or confiscation of private goods or land – in sum, anything that goes against human rights and the Constitution. As I show further down, these limitations are, in practice, very difficult to enforce when they touch upon the rights of (religious) minorities within the resguardos. Formally, the Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and all laws and practices should be in conformity with it. At the same time, the Constitution institutes a special indigenous jurisdiction and the so-called principle of “non-admissibility due to socio-cultural diversity.” (see annex G)

Human rights abuses in the resguardos indígenas

The far-reaching level of indigenous autonomy in Colombia is generally regarded as something positive (Sánchez Botero 2002; Yashar 2005; Stavenhagen 2008, 2011, 2013; Arlettaz 2011; Molina-Betancur 2012). Notwithstanding the wide support for indigenous self-determination, indigenous justice remains a controversial topic in Colombia.¹⁰⁸ Although the existence of human rights abuses inside indigenous communities has received relatively little attention in legal scholarship, as observed by Scolnicov (2011) and Pinto (2015), some scholars have recognized the challenge to balance the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples and the individual human rights of people living in indigenous territories, particularly minorities (Kymlicka 1996, 2001; McDonald 1998; Jones 1999; Ghanaea & Xanthaki 2005; Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev 2005; Ghanaea, Walden & Stephens 2007; Casanova 2008).

In the Nasa community, there are records of human rights violations that were perpetrated by the indigenous authorities, not only against cultural dissidents (which I discuss in more detail in the threat assessment), but against ordinary citizens in general. For example, a person who had an extramarital affair was reportedly flogged as punishment,¹⁰⁹ a person who had endorsed the wrong presidential candidate was tortured,¹¹⁰ collaborators with the FARC were whipped, including minors,¹¹¹ and a Christian leader was reportedly poisoned.¹¹²

It could be argued that these human rights violations can exist because of the existence of a legal situation that gives the ruling cabildos the authority to administer justice by applying traditional punishments, which under the normal Colombian jurisdiction would not be legal. This matter can also be interpreted in political terms, considering the weak capacity of the Colombian state to enforce the rule of law in remote rural areas. Indeed, beyond the legal authority of the cabildos, the geographical location of the resguardos in practice gives them much power and requires little accountability.

¹⁰⁸ “La justicia indígena que unió a los colombianos”, *Semana*, 12/11/2012.

¹⁰⁹ “Colombian tribe whips cheating lovers”, *Reuters*, 04/06/2000.

¹¹⁰ *Idem*.

¹¹¹ “La justicia indígena que unió a los colombianos”, *Semana*, 12/11/2012.

¹¹² “Indigenous Pastor Poisoned. Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia”, *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011.

The existence of the *resguardos indígenas* alongside the national government level could be interpreted as a particular case of “regime juxtaposition”, to use the concept developed by Gibson (2005). Indeed, the *resguardos* and the national government are not only two levels of government that have jurisdiction over the same territory; they also operate under very distinct legal regimes: the former is based on indigenous customary law, the latter is based on western positive law. According to legal scholar Zegarra-Ballón, this situation of “legal pluralism”, raises questions concerning “the legitimacy of indigenous self-government decisions and, in particular, the adequacy of their systems of administration of justice and the punishment of misconduct inside their communities. This is the case of the severe physical sanctions applied by the authorities of these human groups” (2015:96). In an article about domestic and other forms of gender violence in Nasa *resguardos*, Duarte, another legal scholar, acknowledges the legal tension that is caused by this situation of legal pluralism:

“The Colombian State recognizes domestic violence as a crime and, at the same time, recognizes the jurisdictional autonomy of indigenous peoples. [This] raises the problem of domestic violence for the Nasa people and, in particular, their differences of perception with the State. [There is] a situation of legal pluralism and this pluralism creates confusions, tensions and questions for Nasa women, the Nasa people and the Colombian State.” (2009:229)

“The Colombian national legal system, of which the Nasa people, including Nasa women are part, has the responsibility to guarantee the rights of the people as well as of its members, but responds to this duty in a muddled way.” (ibid. 241).

As Zegarra-Ballón warns, “The right to a special jurisdiction of indigenous peoples must not enter into conflict with the observance of human rights” (2015:96), in line with article 5 of the Vienna Declaration (2013).¹¹³ Conflicts have arisen at a number of occasions, including cases involving religious freedom in which the imperative to protect the cultural identity of the indigenous community conflicted with the individual religious freedom of its members.

Although in this case study I focus on the Nasa, freedom of religion is a generalized issue in indigenous communities in Colombia. A review of relevant jurisprudence of the Colombian Constitutional Court and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights reveals that religious freedom is systematically used as an argument to protect the religious traditions of the dominant religion in indigenous communities (see annex H), linking it to other fundamental rights such as the right to culture and the right to property (Arlettaz 2011). In all cases, the fundamental right to cultural identity has taken precedence over the religious freedom of minority groups inside the indigenous communities (Nieto Martínez 2005; Lopera Mesa 2009).

For example, in sentence SU-510/98, a ruling about a case in which the right to freedom of religion is opposed to the right of the community to preserve its principles, beliefs and culture, the Colombian Constitutional Court let the right to religious freedom of the Arhuaca indigenous community prevail on the basis that its entire system of authority and way of life is closely linked to “a hermetic spiritual conception”, implying that the arrival of another religion within

¹¹³ “All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

the community can be denied and that this community has no obligation to guarantee freedom of religion.¹¹⁴ Thus, in this sentence, the Colombian Constitutional Court declared it is legitimate to restrict religious freedom in indigenous communities in order to preserve their cultural identity. Specifically, minority religions are to be professed privately and religious proselytism (missionary activity) is considered a profanation of the “sanctuary” (this is how the territory of the *resguardo indígena* is viewed) and a threat to the subsistence of the indigenous peoples, and is therefore forbidden (Nieto Martínez 2005).

Later court rulings have confirmed this interpretation. For example, sentence T-659/2013 confirms the legitimacy of the decision of the authorities of a Nasa *resguardo* to expel Christian converts from their homes citing three reasons: the indigenous autonomy, the indigenous conception of “the transcendence of the indigenous territory for the members of these ethnic groups” and the sociological fact that indigenous territories are viewed as collective property.

As mentioned earlier, in all the relevant court cases the Colombian Constitutional Court has stated the caveat that there are constitutional limits to indigenous autonomy such as “the respect for the right to life, the prohibition of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, slavery” and that indigenous jurisdiction must respect due process. The Court has also systematically interpreted indigenous autonomy in the broadest possible sense and has refrained from condemning religious freedom violations inside *resguardos*, asserting it does not entertain jurisdiction over these matters.

Nieto Martínez recognizes that although the rights of indigenous communities to preserve their cultural identity includes the dominant religious beliefs of this community, the conversion of members of an indigenous community to another religion poses challenges related to the protection of the religious freedom of this minority in a minority:

“The greatest difficulty lies with the members of these communities, who for various reasons have changed their religion, and although the Constitutional Court has not hesitated to protect the right of indigenous peoples to the preservation of their cultural identity, the essential expression of these members must, as this entity has expressed, be allowed, under penalty of violation of the right to religious freedom and worship of a minority within another minority specially protected in the Political Constitution.” (2005:283)

This finding is of relevance for the RM-VAT, because it implies that certain aspects of the religious freedom of religious minorities within the *resguardos indígenas* can be restricted in virtue of the imperative of preservation of the rights of indigenous peoples.

6.1.3 *The repression of cultural dissidents*

This context description provides all the necessary elements that justify an in-depth analysis of the vulnerability of the religious minority identified as cultural dissidents among the Nasa indigenous group, which is the second largest indigenous group in Colombia, and where incidents against religious minorities have been most visible in recent years, in part because of their social and political activism. With the selection criteria for my case studies as described in section 4.3 in mind, I have presented evidence that confirms the plausibility of the

¹¹⁴ Interview with Diego Alejandro López Chala (2016).

vulnerability of this group to human security threats. I have done this by describing the religious agenda of the cultural dissidents and highlighting the points of conflict between that agenda and the cabildos' aim to preserve the Nasa culture. I have also discussed the complexity of the enforcement of religious freedom and other basic human rights in virtue of the far-reaching self-government faculties of the resguardos.

The cultural dissidents can easily be identified based on their self-identification as Christians, their expressed rejection of certain cultural traditions of the Nasa, and, for a majority of them, their militancy within the OPIC. They do not constitute a distinct ethnic group but are part of the Nasa indigenous family. The threats that I identify in the RM-VAT can thus be taken as a direct result of their religious identity and behavior.

The Nasa resguardos can be considered as a particular case of subnational undemocratic regime to the extent that the government system is not based on free elections but on customary procedures. In this legal context, the rights of minority groups within indigenous communities receive inadequate protection. Essential tenets of the rule of law, such as basic respect for human rights and due process, are not respected, although this is insufficiently recognized by legal scholarship which overlooks minority-within-the-minority types of conflicts.

As argued, the RFATs are generally silent on the position of cultural dissidents due to their national focus and their neglect of behavioral dimensions of religion. This case study can therefore complement the RFATs by contributing new findings based on original fieldwork in the Nasa resguardos. This case study can also give more substance to the existing claims of religious freedom violations in this community. The case of cultural dissidents among the Nasa provides a unique opportunity to observe the vulnerability of a religious minority within an indigenous community. Indeed, this is an authentic case of intra-ethnic conflict, involving serious threats to human security, including forced displacement and torture, as a result of religious conversion and certain types of behavior, including social and political activism.

The conflict opposing the cultural dissidents and the rest of the Nasa community is relatively uncluttered. The vulnerability of this group is the result of the way the cabildos indígenas respond to their changed religious identity and their resulting behavior, within the boundaries of their self-government faculties. This makes it possible to determine the specificity of the vulnerability of the cultural dissidents without running the risk of confounding it with other factors.

The analysis of cultural dissidents is also relevant from the perspective of the coping mechanisms this group has developed. The social and political activism of some of their representatives had the expressed aim to ensure the protection of their religious freedom and to promote their cultural agenda but seems to have had the opposite outcome. This case study therefore constitutes an opportunity to explore in which ways coping mechanisms can be counterproductive.

6.2 Data collection

During a trip to Bogotá in 2010, I was first exposed to the situation of Christian converts in the Nasa community, and have monitored and gathered information about this group in the following eight years. Applying the research design of the RM-VAT described in chapter 4, I

organized all available qualitative and quantitative data about the vulnerable religious minority that I identified as cultural dissidents under different human security threats.

In total, I carried out four research trips to Colombia: to Bogotá (27 November-5 December 2010), to Bogotá (30 April-4 May 2012), to Bogotá and the departments of Huila and Meta (25-30 January 2015), and again to Bogotá (6-12 August 2017) in which I interviewed over 40 people. During the visits to Bogotá, I met with representatives of the Colombian Ministry of the Interior, the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, academics, journalists, leaders of Christian denominations, NGO's and Members of Parliament. During the trip to Huila and Meta, I visited a settlement of Nasa who were displaced for religious reasons, a safe house for people who had fled various Nasa resguardos, and a boarding school for children from various 'persecution backgrounds', including children who had fled Nasa resguardos.

The interviewees can be categorized in two groups: people that were selected based on their knowledge of the situation of the Nasa resguardos – a sample of government representatives, development workers, church leaders, academics and lawyers – and people belonging to the Nasa ethnic group and who can be identified as cultural dissidents. I asked the interviewees belonging to the first group to list the threats for which they consider Nasa converts were vulnerable, and then to comment on them. I asked the interviewees belonging to the second group to share about the human rights abuses they had suffered from, the reasons for their displacement (when applicable), etc.

I conducted most interviews in Spanish but have translated quotes in the threat assessment into English. As in the previous case study, I did not record the interviews for practical and security reasons. I did take field notes, which I keep in a file for reference. Based on the interviews, I listed the most recurring threats in the threat assessment, categorizing them by sphere of society and the continuum of religious identity and behavior.

The interviews conducted during these trips are the primary sources for the case study. I also relied on internal reports of a number of Colombian charities including Visión Agape (a Colombian partner organization of Open Doors International, that has implemented projects among Nasa Christians since 2001), the Colombian Evangelical Council [*Consejo Evangélico de Colombia, CEDECOL*], *Corporación Dios es Amor, CDA Colombia [Foundation God is Love]* and the Christian Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Non-Violent Action [*Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta, JUSTAPAZ*].

I have also used some interviews and trip reports by Lía Salomé Sánchez, who was a researcher for Visión Agape between 2012 and 2014, with her permission (I have marked them with an asterisk in the footnotes), specifically interviews she conducted in resguardos in the Department of Cauca, including with members of cabildos, which I could not do myself (more in the next section). In addition, I reviewed the records of declarations of Nasa cabildos in court cases about religious freedom, as a substitute for personal interviews, which reflect their public position about the conflict with cultural dissidents.

Although I extensively used the reports of Christian organizations, I could not always consider them as unprejudiced sources because of their institutional agendas. At times, I reached a different conclusion than those reports. For example, I am skeptical about the claim that the cabildos have used FARC guerrillas to intimidate Christians. I also considered the representation of cultural dissidents as victims too partial, because, as I explain, their attitude has sometimes contributed to an exacerbation of the conflict. To avoid any bias, I

systematically contrasted the findings of Christian organizations with my own interviews, reports of non-Christian NGO's, independent media and academic sources. All sources are referenced in the subsequent sections and in the bibliography. In addition, the RM-VAT relies on an extensive analysis of Colombian legislation and jurisprudence regarding religious freedom in indigenous communities because of their relevance to understand the vulnerability of religious minorities in *resguardos indígenas*, as well as other sources such as newspaper articles, academic publications and personal testimonies collected by various Colombian NGO's. All translations of non-English sources are mine.

An important source for the threat assessment was the information provided by the OPIC. I interviewed Ana Silvia Secué and Rogelio Yonda, the two most prominent leaders of the OPIC, at length in 2010 and 2012, and have followed the reports of the OPIC since 2010. It is my personal assessment that the OPIC voices a number of legitimate concerns that can be independently confirmed by other sources (Ramírez Escobar 2015), however, the statements made by the OPIC were taken carefully and always contrasted with other sources, as it is an interest group that defends its political views, including their claims of freedom of worship and education, but also their rejection of the *cabildos* as legitimate political authority.

Part of my trips to Colombia were done as part of my role as consultant for various organizations including the Inter-American Development Bank (2008-2009), the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress (2010-2011) and CDA Colombia (2010), and later as researcher and operations manager of an international charity (2011-2015), which in 2015 included an audit of the humanitarian projects of *Visión Agape* with ICEN and other Nasa Christians who suffered forced displacement.

6.3 Security risks and ethical challenges

The conduct of most of the field research did not involve any noteworthy security risks. It was safe for me to conduct interviews in Bogotá. There were no particular security risks involved for the interviewees either, although some requested the interview or parts of the interview to be held off the record. For this reason, most interviewees quoted in the RM-VAT have been anonymized, unless they are well-known figures (such as high-ranking government officials, members of *cabildos* or the spokespersons of the OPIC) and explicitly agreed to be quoted.

The trip to the departments of Meta and Huila also did not involve particular security risks, although the presence of the FARC *guerillas* in parts of Huila in 2015 continued to be a factor that invited caution and the avoidance of certain areas. As a rule, I always followed the advice of locals. When I visited the safe house for people who fled the Nasa *resguardo*, I was told by the caretaker that indigenous *cabildos* of the area would almost certainly be informed of a visit of a foreigner, but that this would not constitute a security risk for them. The visit to a settlement of displaced Nasa Christians, which very much resembled a refugee camp, did not constitute a security risk because it was located outside the territory of the *resguardos*.

It cannot be completely discarded that some of the interviewees, particularly among the displaced Nasa, could have presented biased information because of possible expectations of financial or other types of support from me. The quantity of the interviews conducted at the settlement mitigated this risk. Moreover, I contrasted the information provided by the interviewees at the settlement with other sources.

At the time of my visit to the settlement, most men were away, working agricultural jobs in the area. Therefore, I interviewed mostly women, young children and elders. Still, sufficient men were interviewed. Some of these interviews at the settlement were challenging due to the limited knowledge of Spanish and education level of some members of the Nasa community, but nevertheless provided relevant information.

Because I spent more time in Huila, in the area around the towns of Neiva and La Plata, most interviews were conducted there. However, I am confident that the findings are generalizable to the whole of the Nasa community, which present important similarities, as is confirmed by other sources such as newspapers articles, reports of various charities, court cases I reviewed and the work of a small number of Colombian and international scholars.

At the advice of Visión Agape staff, I decided not to visit a resguardo indígena myself. There are no noteworthy security concerns when visiting a resguardo, but the cabildo must previously be informed about the purpose of any visit, and the names of the people I would meet with. I was not willing to accept this, because I did not think it would be wise to inform the cabildos about my research, and because visiting the homes of Christian converts inside a resguardo would likely have created some degree of trouble for them. As indicated, Visión Agape researcher Lía Salomé Sánchez did visit resguardos and spoke with both Christian converts and cabildo members, but she could only do this because she was able to establish contact with Christian cabildo members at the time. She later regretted her visit because it led some Christians in the resguardo to be questioned by the guardia indígena.

6.4 Assessment phase

In this section I argue that cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos, as defined above, possess a demonstrable vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses, and that this vulnerability has some degree of specificity related to their religious identity and behavior. I follow the three steps of the RM-VAT: threat assessment (6.4.1), specificity assessment (6.4.2) and resilience assessment (6.4.3).

6.4.1 Threat assessment

The far-reaching political autonomy and legal jurisdiction of the cabildos described previously is particularly relevant for this threat assessment, as it provides the background against which the empirical evidence of human security threats, obtained through personal interviews and complementary sources, can be interpreted. I listed the most recurring threats in figure 6.2, categorized by sphere of society and religious identity-behavior.

6.2 Threat assessment of cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos (Colombia)

<i>Spheres of society</i>	<i>Religious identity</i>	<i>Semi-active religious behavior</i>	<i>Active religious behavior</i>
Family sphere	1. Aggression as a result of conversion 2. Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.</i>	7. Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education
Church sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	4. Violent assaults against church attenders	8. Violent assaults against people engaging in missionary activity
Social sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	5. Reprisals for rejecting traditional indigenous education	7. Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education
Business sphere	3. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands	3. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands	3. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands
Cultural sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	6. Reprisals for refusing to participate in traditional indigenous rituals	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of active religious behavior.</i>
Government sphere	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.</i>	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.</i>	9. Intimidation of members of interest groups 10. Intimidation to prevent political participation

Source: own elaboration.

In total, I identified ten distinct threats to which cultural dissidents are vulnerable. These threats are spread relatively commensurately on the continuum of religious identity and behavior, although it can be observed that the more active the religious behavior, the higher the vulnerability of this minority group. It must be noted that because of the holistic worldview of the Nasa, the distinction between spheres of society is not very meaningful as there is no strict separation between spheres.

Threats resulting from religious identity

Three of the ten identified threats result from religious identity. These threats are directly related to the identification of indigenous Christians with one of the Christian denominations, i.e. the mere belonging to this minority group is a factor of vulnerability. I cover the threat “Exclusion of access to agricultural lands” as a threat resulting from religious identity, although it may also be related to semi-active or active religious behavior.

Threat 1: Aggression as a result of conversion

Conversion to Christianity – understood as the conscious decision to abandon traditional indigenous religious practices, often after joining an Evangelical denomination – is a major cause of human rights abuses in the Nasa resguardos. Indeed, indígenas who convert to Christianity and abandon their ancestral beliefs face aggressive opposition. As Lía Salomé Sánchez, a researcher, explains: “In many indigenous communities, including the Arhuaca, Kogui and Nasa communities, converts to Christianity who subsequently reject their ancestral traditions are isolated, displaced, uprooted, threatened, punished and their fundamental rights are violated.”¹¹⁵

Numerous examples of hostilities against Christians can be given, including cases of denial of health services, forced displacement and physical mistreatment.¹¹⁶ In one case, a group of 139 indigenous Christians were required by indigenous leaders to sign a document renouncing their beliefs. If they refused, they would face violent consequences, including torture and exclusion of access to agricultural lands, a point I return to in threat 3. Overwhelmed by these threats, these indigenous Christians decided to sign the document, but some of them later decided to remove their names from it. In April 2013 they were forced to flee the resguardo and now live in makeshift tents in a village called El Pital made of wood and plastic on a piece of land where the owner of a farm lets them live temporarily. (I visited this refugee camp in January 2015 and spoke with the indigenous Christians living there.)

Such cases are part of a pattern. As a humanitarian worker reported: “In Cauca, almost every day there are cases of indigenous persecution. In recent days, houses of Christians were burned down and Christians were displaced. [I also] received a report that two believers are punished by the indigenous authorities with imprisonment for opposing their ancestral practices.”¹¹⁷ According to reports by the Violent Incidents Database of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, in the course of 2014, about 600 indigenous Christians were displaced from their homes – several of them imprisoned and tortured – with support from local authorities. Two churches were also destroyed in 2014. World Watch Monitor, a news outlet that reports about persecution of Christians worldwide, estimates that between 2015 and 2016, there were 108 incidents of harassment, torture, and violent displacements of Nasa Christians.¹¹⁸

Most of the people I interviewed view the human rights abuses in terms of religious persecution. A Nasa Christian reports:

“We are persecuted. I am persecuted by the cabildos because I am the only one who belongs to the evangelical community. They will come to take me, take my cloths of and punish me in *cepo* and *fuete* [*traditional torture instruments*]. I told the cabildos that what they are doing is against the national Constitution. The land of the Evangelical community of Montecruz, where we used to work

¹¹⁵ Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014).

¹¹⁶ “Julio Cuspian and family displaced by indigenous local authorities”, Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com); “127 displaced indigenous forced to leave the territory where they were”, Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com); Visión Agape internal report, September 2010; Visión Agape internal report, October 2010; Visión Agape internal report, February 2011; “Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia”, Visión Agape, 16/03/2011; “Colombia: Here one feels safe...!”, Visión Agape, 21/11/2011; Trip report by CO10, Visión Agape staff, 8-11 July 2014.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Miguel Pérez (2012).

¹¹⁸ “Church and indigenous Nasa people build Colombia’s future together”, *World Watch Monitor*, 08/09/2017.

to support our community was taken away from us. The indigenous guard arrived on 10 April to banish us. I told the cabildo they could not attack an innocent person without looking at his record. But they said that the political Constitution is for the whites. They said that indigenous law is the only thing that is of worth. I told them: you understand that as Evangelical indígenas we have rights, but they say that churches need to be taken away and that we must be left outside. Now they only create violence.”¹¹⁹

This interpretation is echoed by Ramírez Escobar, a scholar at a university in the Department of Cauca, who explains that the Nasa culture wants to preserve itself and continue to differentiate itself from other cultures. The conversion of some of its members to Evangelical Christianity distances them from this ideal, because it makes them look like the western ‘colonial’ culture that it rejects (2015).

Threat 2: Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations

During the armed conflict between the FARC and the Colombian government, the cabildos were in a complicated and delicate position. Several sources report that FARC guerrillas with some frequency entered indigenous resguardos to provision themselves and to find new recruits, including children. Because of the poverty and high levels of unemployment, many youths were persuaded to join the guerrillas.¹²⁰ The FARC were also reported to have taken advantage of the institutional weakness of the cabildos and the fact that inside the resguardos they were safe from national security forces (police and military) who are not allowed to enter them in virtue of the indigenous autonomy (Ulloa 2010; HRW 2013).

At times, some cabildos may have actively collaborated with the FARC, granting them access to the resguardos or participating in drug trafficking activities, in return for benefits,¹²¹ but the Nasa cabildos have also voiced their opposition to the recruitment of youths (HRW 2013:215). For example, they petitioned both the Colombian Constitutional Court and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to request the assistance of the state to protect their community and their leaders against the threat of the internal armed conflict.¹²² The Nasa have also sentenced the guerrillas in its own justice system.¹²³ Sandoval Forero (2008) describes that one of the main purposes for the creation of the Nasa indigenous guard was precisely to protect the community against the intrusion of guerrillas and other armed groups. Duarte (2009:237) and Pancho (2007:60), an anthropologist and a Nasa herself, cite the armed conflict and specifically the recruitment of youths as a threat to the preservation of the Nasa culture.

In 2012, the cultural dissidents, through the *Organización Pluricultural de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia, OPIC [Pluricultural Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia]* denounced in the press that the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, CRIC [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca]*, the regional network of indigenous cabildos, collaborated with FARC guerrillas and have used the FARC to intimidate Christians.¹²⁴ Some

¹¹⁹ Interview with CO05 (2012).

¹²⁰ Interview with CO06 (2012).

¹²¹ Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2013).

¹²² T-025/2004, Corte Constitucional de Colombia; T-030/2016, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.

¹²³ “La justicia indígena que unió a los colombianos”, *Semana*, 12/11/2012.

¹²⁴ “Opic denuncia infiltración de las Farc en movimiento indígena del Cauca”, *El País*, 19/07/2012; “La Opic denuncia que indígenas del Cauca tienen vínculos con las Farc”, *W Radio*, 19/07/2012; “The Indigenous Women

of my interviewees also expressed their suspicion that FARC guerrillas have established alliances with cabildos, accusing the cabildos of using FARC guerrillas to intimidate Christians.¹²⁵ One reports states, for example, that on 17 December 2010, “Medardo Caldon, a councilman, was killed in Mera by the FARC-EP by order of the CRIC in the department of Cauca, due to his participation in the creation of the Pluri-ethnic Indigenous Organization of Cauca (OPIC).”¹²⁶ A group of Christians, who were expelled from the Belalcázar resguardo in April 2013 claim the guardia indígena requested the assistance of the sixth front of the FARC to forcefully evict them from their homes.¹²⁷ Ana Silvia Secué, an indigenous school teacher who has set up Christian schools in indigenous communities, shares the following story:

“One time, guerrillas stormed into my classroom and took children to recruit them for their groups. Indigenous leaders had given them permission to do that. I never saw those children again. But I never give up and always continue and set up another school.”¹²⁸

I have not been able to confirm the veracity of the accusations of such alliances between the CRIC and the FARC. This being said, it is not unlikely that Protestant Christians inside the resguardos have suffered persecution at the hands of the FARC, regardless of the question whether the cabildos have been accomplices of these assaults. The intimidation and sometimes violent persecution of especially Protestant Christians by the FARC has been widely documented (Justapaz 2006; Open Doors International 2012; Arboleda Mora 2011:124-129) and is confirmed by interviews I conducted.

Threat 3: Exclusion of access to agricultural lands

According to article 329 of the Colombian Constitution, land in the indigenous territories is collectively owned and subject to decisions of its authorities. Access to agricultural land is granted by the cabildos, who administer community resources. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands is a major human security threat that cultural dissidents face, because it implies they can no longer provide for their livelihood. Because of its severity, I discuss it as a separate threat, although it is normally a consequence of religious identity (conversion), semi-active (church attendance) or active behavior (missionary activity and membership of the OPIC).

A high-profile case is the one of Jaime Tenorio Eudil who was convicted under false charges including an attempted murder – false, according to my interviewees – in April 2010 and sentenced by the indigenous council of Mosoco Páez Belalcázar, a resguardo in the Department of Cauca, to twenty years in prison. After a few months in a traditional prison, he was transferred to a jail in Popayán, leaving a large family behind with virtually no income after his land was also confiscated.¹²⁹ There are, however, many more examples, which I discuss more extensively in my commentaries about threats 1, 4, 8 and 9. Exclusion from access to

of Cauca’s Nasa People”, *Visión Agape*, 17/06/2012; “Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia”, *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011.

¹²⁵ Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2010), Lía Salomé Sánchez (2012) and CO07 (2013); “¿Por qué son perseguidos los indígenas cristianos en Colombia?”, *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 12/11/2014.

¹²⁶ “Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia”, *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011.

¹²⁷ Trip report by Lía Salomé Sánchez, *Visión Agape* staff, 3-7 February 2014.

¹²⁸ Interview with Ana Silvia Secué (2010).

¹²⁹ “The Gospel keeps me free in jail: Jaime Tenorio”, *Visión Agape*, 06/11/2013; “Jaime Tenorio Sends Thanks From Jail”, *Visión Agape*, 04/02/2014; “‘Quisiera irme de aquí’: Marleny de Tenorio”, *Visión Agape*, N/D.

agricultural lands, in combination with forced displacement, constitutes the most common tactic of the cabildos to discourage the conversion of cultural dissidents or punish them for their resulting behavior.

Evidence for this threat can also be found in a lawsuit that was presented by the OPIC, a lobby group created by some cultural dissidents, in 2013, demanding compensation for the forced displacement of some of its members.¹³⁰ Although this lawsuit was lost, some cultural dissidents had privately obtained some land several years before. In most disputes about access to land the cabildos are confirmed in their decisions.

Notwithstanding the severity of this threat, the frontal attacks by cultural dissidents against the cabildos can also be seen as a provocation, for example when the latter are accused by the former of confiscating land of Christians. What typically happens is that after a family converts to Christianity (and often joins the OPIC), the cabildos order them to leave their land. The cultural dissidents then accuse the cabildos of displacing the family from its property, to which the cabildos reply, as they do in every court case: “within the conception of Nasa territory, this is a whole and the improvements that are made are understood as part of it, and therefore are collective property; in accordance with the Constitution, indigenous lands are collective, inalienable, imprescriptible and indefeasible.”¹³¹ In such cases, one could indeed ask the question who the aggressor is. Is it the cabildos, who take away land from converted Christians, or is it the converted Christians who disregard the collective nature of property rights? From a legal perspective, the cabildos are, in fact, in their right when it comes to the administration of collective land, as has been confirmed by the courts. This being said, if the confiscation of land involves acts of violence, this is of course not justifiable.¹³²

Threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior

I categorized three threats as resulting from semi-active religious behavior. Religious identity still plays a role in these threats, but the factor leading to the vulnerability of indigenous Christians is related to various aspects of religious participation and religious lifestyle.

Threat 4: Violent assaults against church attenders

Although conversion away from traditional religion is an important cause of many of the hostilities experienced by cultural dissidents as argued in threat 1, regular church attendance is a specific threat that puts indigenous Christians at risk of violent assaults. I have collected evidence that church services in the Nasa resguardos have been violently disturbed and explicitly targeted. Semi-active religious behavior has also led to severe consequences, including beatings and forced displacement.¹³³

Anecdotal evidence suggests there is a pattern of systematic attacks on properties that are used to hold church services by community leaders, who visibly oppose church services from being held. This pattern has also been confirmed by many interviews I conducted. In an interview

¹³⁰ Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.

¹³¹ Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.

¹³² Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).

¹³³ Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2015); “Indigenous Believers Continue to be Threatened by the Authorities”, *Visión Agape*, 09/10/2014; Trip report by CO10, *Visión Agape* staff, 8-11 July 2014; “Indigenous authorities continue threatening believers in Huila”, *Violent Incidents Database* (www.violentincidents.com).

with María Teresa Mesa, who was evicted from her community and now runs a safe house for persecuted Nasa Christians in a nearby town, said that “the only possibility to reach an agreement with the cabildos is for us to stop holding church services.”¹³⁴

Statements by other interviewees confirm this threat. Leaders of churches are threatened if they continue to organize services: “If Christians continue to meet in houses, we will bring down the roofs and walls of houses where they meet, the house where they put the children also are going to be knocked down”, they reported¹³⁵ A pastor informs that organizing Christian gatherings after sundown has been forbidden to him (he pragmatically organized services during the day).¹³⁶ A female Nasa shared that her church in Taravira, Cauca, was ordered to close, and that the lands of all people who were in that service were confiscated.¹³⁷ In a church in Nátaga, musical instruments and church pews were reportedly confiscated by the CRIC, when the church started to grow to around 120 people.¹³⁸

Threat 5: Reprisals for rejecting traditional indigenous education

One of the main changes in the behavior of Nasa converts to Christianity is their almost systematic rejection of what they refer to as ‘traditional indigenous education’, which they equate to ‘witchcraft’ and consider ‘pagan.’ Most converts express their conviction that traditional indigenous education is contradictory to and incompatible with the Christian faith. It is here that the description ‘cultural dissidents’ is particularly relevant, as the conversion implies an explicit condemnation of one of the core elements of the cultural identity of the Nasa, which is very dear to Nasa leadership as it is one of the instruments they use to preserve the Nasa cultural identity, as explained above. Here, I show that this rejection is often met with widespread hostility, including violent reprisals against the parents who refuse their children from receiving this form of education.

Molina-Betancur argues that indigenous autonomy in the field of education is very advanced, yet still insufficient, particularly with regard to the administration of resources (2012). Cultural dissidents, however, regard the political autonomy of the resguardos as a limitation of the freedom of education. Specifically, Nasa converts complain there is no possibility to opt out of the mandatory indigenous curriculum, in which “pagan” elements are included.¹³⁹

The opposition against traditional indigenous education is led by the OPIC, but is also an integral element of the beliefs of most cultural dissidents: “The OPIC has opposed the content and methodologies used in classrooms, mainly because they are taught to practice witchcraft rituals, getting drunk and denying the existence of the Christian God”, explained one interviewee.¹⁴⁰ I collected evidence of human rights abuses (including physical assaults and forced displacement) suffered by cultural dissidents as a result of their refusal to teach the expected primary education curriculum.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2014).

¹³⁵ Interview with CO10 (2015).

¹³⁶ Interview with CO08 (2014).

¹³⁷ Interview with CO09 (2014).

¹³⁸ Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2014).

¹³⁹ Interviews with CO08 and Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014).

¹⁴¹ Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014); Visión Agape internal report, February 2011; “Writing Campaign for Displaced Women in Colombia”, Visión Agape, 10/05/2015.

Jaime Tenorio Eudil, the community leader mentioned before, started opposing the religious education curriculum and corruption within his Nasa indigenous group after his conversion, which had severe consequences, according to a press report: “Nasa schools teach children magic rituals and deny state benefits to tribal Christians, offering indigenous identity only to those who worship traditional gods. Jaime’s [colleagues in the cabildo]’s response: accusing him of murder and sentencing him to 20 years in prison without possibility of appeal.”¹⁴²

Again, this anecdotal evidence suggests there is a pattern of persecution of converts to Christianity who oppose traditional indigenous education. The hostility of indigenous leaders against cultural dissidents is understandable. By rejecting traditional education, they reject an element that is considered to be essential to the preservation of the Nasa culture, which Nasa leaders are desperately trying to protect. Moreover, the uncompromising and judgmental attitude of cultural dissidents generates friction and can easily be regarded as an insult by the authorities.

However understandable, the fact that indigenous leaders resort to violence, directly threatening the human security of cultural dissidents, is a source of concern. It seems almost impossible to find some middle ground between both parties. Some interviewees do mention they have tried to promote alternative options such as “education based on a Christian indigenous worldview”, but that this was also met with hostility by indigenous leaders, in part because of the perceived provocations by other Christian converts.¹⁴³

Threat 6: Reprisals for refusing to participate in traditional indigenous rituals

Cultural dissidents who reject traditional indigenous education generally also refuse to take part in traditional indigenous rituals (including traditional medicine), which they deem incompatible with their newly adopted Christian faith. Some interviewees agree there is a difference between ‘traditional medicine’, such as healing through plants, and ‘witchcraft.’¹⁴⁴ As is the case with the threats described above, the refusal of indigenous Christians to participate in traditional indigenous rituals, or to financially contribute to them, is met with violent reprisals. In my interviews and in various press reports, Nasa Christian women complained regularly about the public school system in the resguardos in which children are required to learn about “indigenous rituals related to witchcraft” and the following opposition from the indigenous authorities.¹⁴⁵ One woman said: “We [Christian women] teach them [their children] that God exists, but this bothered them [the indigenous leaders] because they are clinging onto their rituals, their customs. But the children welcomed it. We teach the children that the dignity of a person is that he is created in the image and likeness of God, not that he drinks *chicha* [traditional alcoholic drink used in religious ceremonies], and that annoyed them.”¹⁴⁶

Similarly, a female indigenous leader of a small Christian church, explained: “We are being persecuted for being members of the OPIC, because the cabildos force us to take part in rituals and witchcraft; not only do they take away from us what we are entitled to by the state, but

¹⁴² “Indigenous Christians falsely accused for their faith remain hopeful”, *World Watch Monitor*, 02/04/2013.

¹⁴³ Interviews with CO08, Hermes Pete* (2013) and Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014).

¹⁴⁴ Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2013)

¹⁴⁵ “The Indigenous Women of Cauca’s Nasa People”, *Visión Agape*, 17/06/2012

¹⁴⁶ Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2013).

they also want us to go to the traditional doctors and do things that are against the Bible.”¹⁴⁷ This concern is shared also by Christian converts who did not join the OPIC, like Pastor Hermes Pete, who has tried to dialogue with the cabildos. He also denounced the pressure the indigenous leaders put on Christians who no longer wish to participate in the traditional rituals.¹⁴⁸ The violence suffered by Jaime Tenorio and his family, described above, is also a direct consequence of his refusal to participate in traditional indigenous rituals.¹⁴⁹ This report was confirmed to me by Ferney Tenorio, Jaime Tenorio’s son, whom I interviewed in 2015, as well as by Visión Agape staff who visited him in prison.¹⁵⁰ Jaime Tenorio’s punishment for refusing to take part in traditional religious activities might seem very extreme – it could also involve other factors that were not revealed to me – but the opposition to cultural dissidents in this realm is a pattern in other interviews as well.

In the Nasa community, rituals are more than just an optional religious or cultural practice, but an integral element of daily life and therefore of Nasa identity. As stated earlier, the preservation of the Nasa identity is very dear to most indigenous leaders, which is why their opposition to cultural dissidents is to some extent understandable. Yet, the degree of violence they use might conceal a deeper frustration. Indeed, the rejection of traditional rituals and traditional medicine is regarded as subversive by the indigenous leaders. In Lía Salomé Sánchez’s interviews with cabildos it becomes apparent that refusals to take part in important activities of the community of Christian converts is considered as “contempt of authority” (loss of face, in other words).¹⁵¹

Moreover, many cultural dissidents – not only members of the OPIC – frequently complain that the cabildos abuse the funds they receive from the Colombian state for community development projects which instead they use to “chew coca” and to “drink *aguardiente* [alcoholic drink].”¹⁵² I was not able to confirm the veracity of this accusation, but the fact that this accusation is made, combined with the attachment of the indigenous authorities to respect and obedience to their leadership, could be an additional explanatory factor of the violent reprisals of indigenous authorities. Hermes Pete confirms that such accusations “create a conflict with the indigenous authorities.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Interview with CO22 (2013).

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁴⁹ “Colombia’s indigenous believers denounce abuses in Open Doors Forum”, Visión Agape, 12/17/2012.

¹⁵⁰ Interviews with CO10, Ferney Tenorio and CO23 (2015).

¹⁵¹ Interviews with CO11, CO12, CO13* CO14, CO15 and CO16 (2013).

¹⁵² Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013) and CO17 (2013).

¹⁵³ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

Threats resulting from active religious behavior

Four threats to which indigenous Christians are vulnerable result from active religious behavior, which in this case relates to both missionary activity and various forms of civic participation.

Threat 7: Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education

Threat 5, which was classified under ‘semi-active behavior’, discussed the violence as a consequence of the opposition to traditional indigenous education. Here, I look at the human security threats that result from initiatives to establish Christian schools against the will of the indigenous leaders. As a general observation, the initiatives to establish Christian education – confessional schools that are independent from indigenous public schools – are a cause of human security threats for cultural dissidents in a similar way to other forms of religious behavior such as conversion, church attendance or missionary activity (threats 1, 4 and 8, respectively). The establishment of confessional schools is also the main agenda item of the OPIC, which I discuss extensively in threat 9.

In fact, any form of non-traditional education, including Christian education, is opposed by Nasa leaders who require all indigenous children to be educated in pre-Columbian customs and traditions. The evidence I collected points in the direction that setting up alternative confessional schools is not appreciated by the indigenous authorities. Those who engage in such initiatives, whether they belong to the OPIC, ICEN or operate independently, are vulnerable to severe human security threats. There are numerous cases in which the people that create or serve in Christian educational institutions are denied access to water and health services, physically attacked, imprisoned, tortured, displaced and sometimes killed as punishment. School buildings are subject to arson attacks.¹⁵⁴

Again, the main reason for the hostilities of the cabildos against cultural dissidents who try to establish their own schools is that confessional schools are considered a threat to the indigenous culture. Political economy considerations play a role too, in line with rational choice-based interpretations of conflict presented in chapter 2. Indeed, control of education is not only an instrument to transmit cultural traditions to future generations, it is also a means to access financial resources from the central government. At present, the authorities of the resguardos administer these resources, but the OPIC say it is entitled to part of the funds to establish schools according to their principles, as a representative of a Christian NGO explained.¹⁵⁵ Ana Silvia Secué, OPIC’s main spokesperson and advocate for Christian education, declared that the main reason for the persecution Christians suffer is because they started to establish Christian schools:

“That’s when the cabildos began to create trouble. The CRIC signs an agreement every year with the Department of Education for the total number of indigenous children in Cauca, they receive that money, and now it must be over of \$2 million [Colombian pesos]. This year it should be even more, and with

¹⁵⁴ Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2012), CO18, CO09, CO19, CO20 (2013) and with several children who used to go to schools that were destroyed by indigenous authorities (2015); “Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia”, *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011; “Colombia: Indigenous authorities capture Christians in Cauca”, *World Watch Monitor*, 15/04/2013; “The Hope School under Arrest”, *Visión Agape*, 06/09/2016.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2013).

that money they pay the teachers and buy everything the schools need. When we began pulling children out from their schools the whole problem started.”¹⁵⁶

In the Nasa community, confessional education also seems to be a symbolic issue. As was indicated earlier, the separation between the government and church (religious) spheres is not part of the Nasa indigenous worldview. This means that setting up a confessional school goes beyond the school itself. The school becomes a cultural center, is used to organize church services and the land around the school is used as agricultural land. As such a confessional school very easily becomes a symbol of subversion against the authority of the cabildos.¹⁵⁷

From a legal perspective, it is unclear what the precise scope is of the autonomy of the resguardos in terms of education – there is a legal silence about it, as a number of laws that should regulate the constitutional provisions about this topic has not yet been adopted (Molina-Betancur 2012) –, but the human rights abuses like the ones referenced above as punishment for violating a supposed right to educational autonomy do not have any legal basis.

Threat 8: Violent assaults against people engaging in missionary activity

The conducted interviews suggest that missionary activity causes Christians to be threatened and assaulted in most indigenous communities, including in Nasa resguardos.¹⁵⁸ Although there is no reference to the vulnerability of indigenous Christians in the US State Department *International Religious Freedom Report*, it could be deduced from the following that their religious practice is in effect restricted in indigenous territories:

“The government generally permits missionaries to proselytize among the indigenous population, provided the indigenous community welcomes proselytism and visitors do not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands. A Supreme Court ruling stipulates that no group may force religious conversion on members of indigenous communities” (2013).

The Constitutional Court ruling referred to here is sentence SU-510/98, which I already discussed. As explained, this ruling basically indicates that some religious rights may, under specific circumstances, be restricted if this is necessary to preserve and protect the traditions of the indigenous community. This is a reality in most indigenous communities of Colombia, including in Nasa resguardos. Reports by Visión Agape confirm that missionary activity “constitutes a risk” that “frequently occurs in the Arhuaca, Nasa and Kogui communities.”¹⁵⁹

According to statements of the cabildos in court cases, they consider missionary activity as an affront to indigenous traditions, and they therefore see it as legitimate to restrict this activity, and to punish whoever engages in it. The fact that missionary activity – simply presenting the Christian faith – is not the same thing as forcing religious conversion, does not seem to make

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Ana Silvia Secué and Rogelio Yonda (2013). María Teresa Mesa later confirmed this (2015).

¹⁵⁷ Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).

¹⁵⁸ Interviews with CO17, Pedro Santiago Posada* (2013), Lía Salomé Sánchez, María Teresa Mesa and Evangelista Quebrada (2014); “Indigenous Pastor the Victim of Witchcraft in Cauca”, Visión Agape, 10/07/2014; “A missionary translator of the Bible is threatened”, Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com).

¹⁵⁹ Visión Agape internal report, September 2015.

any difference. A pattern thus emerges: missionary activity is not desired by indigenous leaders in Nasa resguardos, and can lead to violent reprisals, including physical violence and forced displacement.

While I assess the testimonies I collected as trustworthy, I must mention that I also interviewed pastors in Nasa communities who say there are no restrictions on missionary activity in the resguardos where they live, and that they have a good relationship with the cabildos. It seems therefore that the restrictions and following violence against indigenous missionaries are not a reality in all Nasa resguardos and depend on the nature of the relationship of the cultural dissidents with the cabildos, as well as on the coping mechanisms they adopt. As I discuss further down, when ‘social wisdom’ is lacking, missionary activity is sometimes viewed as a provocation. Indeed, many of these missionaries do more than just ‘share the gospel’; they also criticize the cabildos, sometimes using quite aggressive language. As one Christian missionary confessed: “They are upset because we [Christian missionaries] remind them [the cabildos] of the money transfers they earn which they spend on witchcraft and other filthy things they do.”¹⁶⁰

There also seems to be a difference between indigenous and non-indigenous missionaries. The restrictions on missionary activity initially applied only to non-indigenous missionaries visiting the resguardos, but were extended to indigenous missionaries in recent years. Restricting the access of foreign missionaries also seemed to be a ‘policy’ of the FARC guerrillas in the territories under their control, which included many Nasa resguardos.¹⁶¹ Under these circumstances, when cultural dissidents refuse to comply, they can expect reprisals.

Threat 9: Intimidation of members of interest groups

In this section, I describe the threats – various forms of intimidation and other violent assaults – resulting from membership of interest groups. In the Nasa resguardos, the main interest group cultural dissidents are part of is the OPIC. This association was formally founded in 2009 by Ana Silvia Secué and Rogelio Yonda, both Evangelical Christians belonging to the Nasa ethnic group, in opposition to the CRIC, which federates the cabildos of the resguardos of the Nasa and other ethnic groups in the Department of Cauca. The members of the OPIC are mostly Evangelical Christians who reject the authority of the cabildos. The OPIC openly denounces and rejects the policies of the CRIC, particularly the restrictions it places on missionary activity, alternative confessional education and participation in traditional religious celebrations.¹⁶² The OPIC describes itself as a “cry of independence [from the CRIC]” representing “thousands of indigenous people who disagree with the CRIC and refuse to submit to its philosophy and parameters.” (OPIC 2009).

As can be expected, the relationship between the CRIC and the OPIC is hostile.¹⁶³ The CRIC has sued the OPIC for violating indigenous autonomy, accusing it of constituting a threat to the indigenous culture. The mere existence of the OPIC is contested by the CRIC. In the legal complaint the CRIC filed against the OPIC, the former argues that the latter is disrespectful “of the fundamental rights of ethnic, cultural and social diversity, of autonomy and self-

¹⁶⁰ Interview with CO17 (2013).

¹⁶¹ Interviews with CO21 and CO20 (2013).

¹⁶² Interview with Leonardo Rondón (2010).

¹⁶³ “Prensa promueve sentimientos de racismo, segregación e intransigencia ciudadana en el Departamento del Cauca”, *Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo*, 19/07/2012.

government, of education that respects and develops the cultural identity, physical and cultural survival that belongs to a proper or special indigenous jurisdiction.” Among other things, the OPIC is accused of planning to create new resguardos outside the existing ones, rejecting “rituals, traditional medicine, spirituality and the worldview practiced by members of the CRIC”, and “adopting or converting to the Christian faith and religion without consulting nor receiving authorization from any indigenous authority.”¹⁶⁴ Membership of the OPIC has led to persecution of its members. This can clearly be seen from the demands placed by the cabildos upon OPIC members that had been previously imprisoned and beaten: they would be released upon the condition that they would withdraw from the OPIC.¹⁶⁵

In the following, I give a few examples of members of the OPIC that have suffered abuses at the hands of the CRIC, including kidnappings, death threats and violent assaults. In one case, OPIC members presented legal charges against the cabildos to denounce that “four families of the indigenous community of the Villa de Itaibe Páez Cauca and Huila were abused for belonging to the OPIC association; their freedom of worship was restricted.”¹⁶⁶ The case went up all the way to the Colombian Constitutional Court, who upheld previous jurisprudence about the precedence of indigenous jurisdiction. The defendant in the case, the Governor of the cabildo, denied the claim that the freedom of worship of Christians had been restricted in any way, but acknowledged that the families were ordered to leave their homes. He explained that this was not because of their religious affiliation, but because they decided to join the OPIC, which, in his view, automatically made them renounce their indigenous identity. According to him, by this act they lost their “sense of belonging to the community and ethnic consciousness and the degree of integration with the community”, an argument the Court accepted.

In addition, the Governor asserted that the decision was both legal and legitimate, because it was made through an agreement of the indigenous assembly, and because it was taken within the framework of the constitutional provisions for indigenous autonomy and the special indigenous jurisdiction. Furthermore, he mentioned that the families were given six months to leave and were offered a financial compensation, observing there was no obligation to do so considering that land titles are collective, and the plaintiffs were no longer entitled to the benefits of this land because of their affiliation to the OPIC.

In fact, in all court cases involving human rights abuses related to freedom of religion, the cabildos consistently refer to their constitutional prerogatives, making the point that anything that happens inside their resguardos occurs within the framework of indigenous autonomy, and that therefore the decisions of the cabildos are legitimate. This is also the case in the above-mentioned Sentence T-659/2013, where the Colombian Constitutional Court confirms the decision of the cabildos to expel families who had joined the OPIC from their land in virtue of the indigenous autonomy, but not without observing the following: “It does not escape the attention of the Court that in some cases, the exclusion of some members of indigenous communities may be unjustified and unconstitutional, as when a member of a resguardo is forced to leave the collective territory for reasons beyond his control, such as physical coercion, displacement or threats. These cases must be considered by the indigenous authorities and duly analyzed by the corresponding [indigenous] judges.” This statement comes almost at the end of the sentence and has no legal consequences but seems to indicate that the Constitutional Court does have concerns about human rights violations in indigenous resguardos but cannot

¹⁶⁴ Demanda de Eduardo Camayo, representante legal del Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC), ante el Tribunal Administrativo del Cauca, Popayán, 30/10/2014.

¹⁶⁵ “Liberados bajo presión indígenas cristianos en el Cauca”, *Visión Agape*, 19/04/2013.

¹⁶⁶ Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.

do anything about it because it does not entertain jurisdiction over these matters in virtue of the indigenous autonomy.

It is clear that the OPIC is not at all appreciated by the cabildos. In an interview conducted by Lía Salomé Sánchez with cabildos they declared that “if the OPIC continues to organize campaigns [massive mobilization of people for evangelistic purposes], we will put all people who participate in jail. But we won’t close or burn churches. If they don’t obey, we will apply [physical] punishments, fuate and cepo.”¹⁶⁷ This is an important quote, because it means that the OPIC is the central problem of the cabildos, and much less the presence of Christian churches. I have collected many more examples of human rights abuses that resulted from membership of the OPIC, including beatings, imprisonment, torture, forced displacement, and death threats.¹⁶⁸

The CRIC’s position has always been that anyone who disagrees with the cabildos, is free to leave the resguardos, in line with Hirschman’s interpretation: “with exit either impossible or unthinkable [for members who are loyal to a group], provision is generally made in these organizations for expelling or excommunicating the individual member in certain circumstances. Expulsion can be interpreted as an instrument – one of many – which “management” uses in these organizations to restrict resort to voice by members.” (1970:76) As an illustration, in one particular case, the General Assembly of an indigenous resguardo adopted the motion presented by one of its members: “If they make that decision [of joining the OPIC] they must also leave the territory, because by belonging to the other organization [the OPIC] they are ignoring our legitimate authority. And I propose that we give them 6 months.”¹⁶⁹ This is one of the central points of disagreement with the OPIC. The members of the OPIC expressly state they do not want to leave the resguardos, but that it is the authority of the cabildos which they reject. By leaving the resguardos they would implicitly give up their indigenous identity, which is what they want to hold on to (OPIC 2009).

The position of the OPIC is that the cabildos need to be reformed, in order to implement a democratic form of government and basic rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of worship and freedom of education. It is evident from the public statements given by the founders of the OPIC at the launch of the organization that they want resources within the resguardos to be distributed fairly, which in their opinion the CRIC does not do, as I already referred to when I discussed the issue of education subsidies (threat 7).

To promote its agenda, the OPIC has organized various marches that gathered thousands of people and that have received broad media coverage.¹⁷⁰ The OPIC has also initiated several court cases¹⁷¹ and taken part in lobby initiatives at the Colombian Congress.¹⁷² So far, the OPIC has not been too successful in promoting reforms of the cabildo government system and creating opportunities for alternative confessional education.

¹⁶⁷ Interviews with CO11, CO12 and CO13* (2013).

¹⁶⁸ Visión Agape internal report, December 2010; “Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia”, Visión Agape, 16/03/2011; “Colombia: 12 Indigenous Christians freed conditionally”, Visión Agape, 30/04/2013; “12 Indigenous Christians freed conditionally”, Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com); ““We want to impact our regions””, Visión Agape, 22/01/2014.

¹⁶⁹ Acta de la tercera Asamblea General del 30/05/2010 del resguardo de Piskwe Tha Fxiw (Cuaderno 2, Folios 84-93).

¹⁷⁰ “Indígenas del Cauca, en contravía”, *El Espectador*, 03/08/2012.

¹⁷¹ “Colombia’s Indigenous Christians Go to Court”, *Visión Agape*, 22/05/2012.

¹⁷² “Colombia’s indigenous believers denounce abuses in Open Doors Forum”, *Visión Agape*, 17/12/2012.

There are rumors that say that former (Conservative) President Álvaro Uribe – who has been critical of the current regime of indigenous autonomy – is behind the creation of the OPIC, but it is not clear whether this is really the case or just an accusation that was made by members of the CRIC to discredit the OPIC.¹⁷³ Colombian scholar Carlos Andrés Ramírez Escobar (2015) rejects this accusation by pointing to the Evangelical origins of the organization which led it to identify ideologically with Uribe and the political right, but that this does not mean the OPIC has been co-opted by it. Ramírez Escobar recognizes, however, that the OPIC and the Uribe presidency were political allies against the “hegemonic” pretensions of the CRIC. Whatever the case, it is evident that the OPIC is a highly controversial organization, and that its membership is considered as “subversive” by the CRIC.¹⁷⁴

Threat 10: Intimidation to prevent political participation

A number of cultural dissidents have participated in politics, standing for local or national offices. Ana Silvia Secué, one of the leaders of the OPIC ran for a senatorial seat in 2014. Pastor Hermes Pete, who is not affiliated to the OPIC, created the *Proyecto Social Cristiano [Christian Social Project]* to participate in a municipal election in the municipality of Belalcázar, in which indigenous and *mestizo (persons of mixed race)* candidates were fielded. These political bids were unsuccessful.

In all cases in which Christians attempt to participate in politics, they are vehemently opposed by the cabildos. Cultural dissidents who have decided to stand for election or to get involved in political parties have been intimidated to desist from these projects. In the best case, the political activity of Hermes Pete “created trouble for us with the cabildo.”¹⁷⁵ Ana Silvia Secué’s senatorial campaign, which revolved around her demands for freedom of education, led her to be threatened with torture on several occasions by the indigenous authorities; in addition to this, her participation in politics has brought persecution to other leaders such as Rogelio Yonda, who reported he received a death threat: “The authorities have had a meeting and they agreed to kill you because you are participating in politics. As you have bodyguards, we will send assassins.”¹⁷⁶

Conclusions

The threats discussed in this threat assessment reveal a clear pattern. When indigenous Christians refuse to obey the orders of the indigenous leaders, and display deviant semi-active and active religious behavior, they suffer human security threats including imprisonment, forced displacement, denial of access to water, healthcare and education, confiscation of homes and farmland, torture, and even death.

As to the reason for such hostilities, the immediate explanation that is given by most interviewees is that Christianity is considered a threat to the preservation of the indigenous culture and of social cohesion.¹⁷⁷ In line with Durkheim’s insights on social deviance, Sébastien

¹⁷³ “Creación de nueva organización indígena en Cauca amenaza con dividir a comunidades étnicas del país”, *El Tiempo*, 25/05/2009; Interviews with CO11, CO12, CO13 and Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with CO18 and CO19 (2013).

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Rogelio Yonda (2015); “Participation in Politics Increases Persecution of Indigenous Believers”, *Visión Agape*, 26/02/2014.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Miguel Pérez (2012).

Fath's general observation about the tensions that are caused by the individualistic nature of especially Evangelical Christianity seems a valid explanatory factor of the vulnerability of Christian converts in the Nasa community: "In societies based on community cohesion, individual conversion preached by Evangelicals sometimes appears as a threat to the social order and can lead to discrimination and even persecution against new converts." (2017:41) Pedro Santiago Posada, the Delegate for Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, confirms this view:

"[Conversion] puts the stability of the [indigenous] communities at risk, because they lose their identity as indígenas and become *campesinos* [peasants]. (...) One of the rights of the indígenas is to retain their worldview. The problem is that the Christian faith is a missionary faith, because Christians believe they own the truth and want to share this truth: The traditional indígenas feel attacked by Christian indígenas. (...) The problem is that indígenas are jealous of their traditions [and do not want to] lose their traditions and disappear as a people. That's why they cling onto them and don't allow others to change them."¹⁷⁸

The image that emerges from the interviews is that, in the eyes of mainstream Nasa, conversion is not only something that leads individual Nasa to abandon or reject specific (religious) traditions of the community; it leads to a decrease of the total number of members of the community because converts are no longer considered as Nasa. The text of a lawsuit of the CRIC reads:

"As a consequence of [conversion], several indígenas counted in the census of the various resguardos and indigenous cabildos, have renounced together with their families to the indigenous census and to the rights that are derived by it, which generates an imminent risk of disappearance of the indigenous communities."¹⁷⁹

As expected, this view is disputed by Christian Nasa who claim they can be Nasa and Christian at the same time, but this is not how community leaders look at it. As one cabildo member declared: "Anyone who leaves the indigenous tradition and embraces Christianity loses their rights."¹⁸⁰

A second explanation for the violence against cultural dissidents that was consistently mentioned in my interviews is the legal situation that grants indigenous communities autonomy as an important cause for the violence against Christian converts. Indigenous leaders do not only resent the conversion of some of their members but have the legal possibility to do something about it, i.e. to punish converts for their 'mistake.' This is indeed an important issue, namely because the protection of cultural rights, in practice, trumps the individual human rights of minorities within the Nasa community, of which I provide evidence in this threat assessment.

Notwithstanding these explanations, the attitude of many cultural dissidents could also be labeled as provocative, both in the aggressive way they seek to make converts and because of the accusations they make about the cabildos. Pastor Hermes Pete suggests that the uncompromising and judgmental attitude of many converts has led to tensions:

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Pedro Santiago Posada* (2013).

¹⁷⁹ Lawsuit by Eduardo Camayo, legal representative of the CRIC, before the Administrative Court of Cauca, Popayán, 30/10/2014.

¹⁸⁰ "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011.

“It’s not correct that Evangelicals try to impose their views on others. For example, they tell you to cut your hair, because the Bible says it’s a sin. And that’s what bothered the cabildos, especially the Movimiento Misionero Mundial [World Missionary Movement], who attacks everyone, saying that wearing earrings or bracelets or makeup is a sin. This annoyed the cabildos, because they said that we were killing the culture. The problem was they were trying to impose a legalistic gospel. Even going out to eat with them was considered a sin.”¹⁸¹

During my field trips, I was able to observe this myself. The type of Christianity that most Nasa Christians follow does indeed seem to be quite intransigent and outright disrespectful of Nasa traditions. This can of course never be a justification for any human rights violation against them, but it does indicate that the attitude of Nasa converts can be a source of tension.

The OPIC also provokes the CRIC by frequently accusing it of misusing the funds that are transferred to the resguardos by the central government. I was not able to determine whether this accusation is founded, but the fact that it is made understandably upsets the CRIC. In addition, the OPIC, which wants a piece of the cake itself, accuses the CRIC to oppose conversions for material reasons, alleging that money transfers from the central government to the cabildos are reduced when the conversion of a member of a resguardo to another religion is followed by its de-registration from the ‘indigenous census.’ I was not able to confirm the veracity of this accusation either, but the fact that these accusations are made and that the conflict is being fought out in the media and in the courts, undoubtedly exacerbates the tensions.¹⁸²

To summarize, in the threat assessment I have made the case that cultural dissidents are indeed vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses, both because of their religious identity (conversion) and because of their behavior (social activism and missionary activity). This being said, it cannot be denied that the attitude of the cultural dissidents is often perceived as a provocation by the cabildos. Provocation is by no means a justification for any human rights abuse, but it should invite a self-reflection by cultural dissidents about their statements and actions.

Claiming the right to religious freedom will not provide the solution as long as it is not recognized that the conflict opposing the cultural dissidents and the cabildos is not only religious or cultural, but also political and material, a distinction that has little relevance anyway in the holistic indigenous worldview in which politics and religion blend together. In other words, the animosity between the cabildos and the cultural dissidents can be considered as both grievance-based and greed-based. Indeed, many forms of religious behavior of indigenous Christians are not limited to following Christian traditions or to presenting the Christian faith. In many cases, it also implies an invitation to leave the CRIC and to join the OPIC and is therefore seen as political subversion. For example, Jaime Tenorio’s imprisonment, allegedly because of made up charges, could be interpreted as a reprisal for preaching the Gospel, but it was also a punishment for his invitation to join the political opposition to the indigenous leaders and to reject traditional indigenous education.¹⁸³ Similarly, a Christian school is not just a teaching facility but also a new Christian society, outside the

¹⁸¹ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁸² Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2012) and María Teresa Mesa (2014); “Colombia’s Indigenous Christians Go to Court”, *Visión Agape*, 05/22/12.

¹⁸³ Interview with Ferney Tenorio (2012).

influence of the cabildos. Refusing to take part in indigenous rituals is more than just believers exercising their right to freedom of religious expression, or freedom of worship. Both are political statements that signal that cultural dissidents no longer submit to the authority of the cabildos.

Speaking about Mexico, but with obvious similarities for Colombia, sociologist José Refugio Arellano Sánchez explains:

“The traditional indigenous form of social organization should be viewed as an intra-structure within the general structure. It incorporates political and religious elements, without separating them. Religious celebrations give meaning to the community. The problem is that Evangelical Christians do not have community celebrations, only private ones. The organization of celebrations is used for both political and religious reasons. It is a requirement to be part of the council of elders. The phonetic translation of the indigenous languages is also problematic because it leads Evangelicals to abandon many indigenous traditions (syncretism). Both Catholics and Evangelicals have political interests. It’s a confrontation of forces in which all parties want to control land depending on their preferred social structure.”¹⁸⁴

6.4.2 Specificity assessment

Figure 6.3 categorizes the ten identified threats to which cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos are vulnerable by their degree of specificity to this religious minority. As can be observed, four threats have a high degree of specificity, three threats have a medium degree of specificity and three threats have a low degree of specificity. In the following I provide a justification for this categorization.

6.3 Specificity assessment of threats against cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos (Colombia)

Degree of specificity	Identified threats
High	Aggression as a result of conversion
	Violent assaults against church attenders
	Violent assaults against people engaging in missionary activity
	Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education
Medium	Reprisals for refusing to participate in traditional indigenous rituals
	Reprisals for rejecting traditional indigenous education
	Exclusion of access to agricultural lands
Low	Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations
	Intimidation of members of interest groups
	Intimidation to prevent political participation

Source: own elaboration.

Threats with a high degree of specificity

¹⁸⁴ Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).

The four threats with a high degree of specificity cover the full continuum of religious identity and behavior: “Conversion”, which is essentially a change of religious identity, the semi-active behavior “Church attendance” and the more active behavior “Missionary activity” and “Initiatives to establish Christian education.” The reason why I gave these threats a high degree of specificity is because they correspond to what could be considered as traditional aspects of the Christian faith in the family, church and education spheres. I did not find any evidence that other religious or non-religious minorities adopt similar patterns of religious identity and behavior. The vulnerability to these threats can therefore be considered as specific to indigenous Christians.

Threats with a medium degree of specificity

Most threats with a medium degree of specificity concern semi-active religious behavior, namely religious lifestyle such as the “Refusal to participate in traditional indigenous rituals” and the “Rejection of traditional indigenous education.” These forms of religious behavior are a direct extension of the religious convictions of indigenous Christians who consider both indigenous rituals and indigenous education as things to steer clear from. These threats, although specific to indigenous Christians, could also apply to other non-Christian indigenous groups or individuals who decide to oppose traditions or display deviant behavior for any other reason, although I did not encounter such cases. The threat “Exclusion of access to agricultural lands” was also given a medium degree of specificity because, although it could happen to any group that confronts the authority of the cabildos, in practice I only found evidence of this happening to cultural dissidents.

Threats with a low degree of specificity

The three threats with a low degree of specificity can be expected to affect all people living in indigenous resguardos, because of the high degree of arbitrariness involved in indigenous justice and the lack of respect for basic human rights, as was discussed. Forms of civic participation such as “Membership of interest groups” and “Participation in politics”, when this defies the power of the indigenous cabildos, are a source of vulnerability, whether this is done by a religious minority as a result of their religious convictions, or by any other group or individual.

The threat “Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations” was categorized as a threat with a low degree of specificity because it is applicable to all indigenous youths in a context in which guerrillas are always in need of new recruits. If there would be convincing evidence that indigenous Christians are specifically targeted by this threat for their religious identity or behavior, as the OPIC claims, its degree of specificity would go up one level.

Conclusions

This specificity assessment reveals that there is an observable specificity to the vulnerability of cultural dissidents, which is related to both their religious identity and various forms of semi-active and active religious behavior. Some threats are shared with other minorities – if they would exist –, and some threats are applicable to the whole of the population.

To assess the degree of specificity for many of the human security threats the multifaceted nature and significance of the various forms of religious behavior must be considered. For example, the opposition to missionary activity by the Nasa cabildos should be seen as a combination of two elements: their desire to protect their culture against foreign influences and religions, but also their discomfort with cultural dissidents making accusations that undermine their authority. Part of this is very specific to Christian converts, and part of this is applicable to any form of behavior that threatens the moral authority of the cabildos.

It is a legitimate question whether Christian converts suffer hostilities because of their religious convictions or just because they are members of the OPIC. In response to this question, I would first of all like to remind that the threats described in previous sections apply to all Christian converts, regardless of their membership of the OPIC, and also apply to church-related aspects of religious behavior such as church attendance. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the OPIC is often seen by the cabildos as the main spokesperson of the indigenous Christian community, which contributes to the increment of the enmity between traditional Nasa and Christian Nasa. It would be fair to say that the OPIC creates trouble for indigenous Christians who are not members of this organization.¹⁸⁵ Whether membership of this interest group could be considered as a form of active religious behavior might also be questioned. In my opinion the answer to this question should be affirmative, as it is an integral part of the religious view of most cultural dissidents to actively promote their development vision for the Nasa resguardos through interest groups such as the OPIC.

The question whether vulnerability as a result of membership of the OPIC, and more broadly the social and political activism of the cultural dissidents, should reasonably be considered as a violation of religious freedom refers to a broader debate I evoked in the introduction to this research when I observed that religion should be considered as a factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities. The agenda of the cultural dissidents is indeed political, but this does not necessarily imply that religion does not play a role in the conflict with the cabildos. As I stated, ‘pure’ religious conflicts are the exception, and therefore a multifactorial approach should be favored. Moreover, although the agenda of the cultural dissidents is political, it is a logical extension of their religious convictions. This all implies that there is indeed a specificity to the vulnerability of this religious minority that is attributable to religious factors.

6.4.3 Resilience assessment

I now proceed with the third step of the RM-VAT, which is the resilience assessment. This section draws on information presented in the two previous assessments, but also relies on additional empirical data. I specifically look at the mechanisms and resources used by cultural dissidents to cope with the human security threats described in the threat assessment. After describing these coping mechanisms, I formulate some conclusions.

¹⁸⁵ Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué, Rogelio Yonda (2012), and Hermes Pete* (2013).

Coping mechanisms

Following the framework that was developed in chapter 4, I categorize coping mechanisms in eight clusters. As I show, these mechanisms are relatively underdeveloped or lacking in many cases.

Avoidance

Although social and political activism of cultural dissidents is quite developed as I argued in the threat assessment, a number of Christian converts prefer to avoid any trouble by not joining the OPIC or similar interest groups, and more generally not opposing the cabildos publicly. This strategy, however, has not always reduced their vulnerability because, as I explained, the OPIC is often confused with Christianity as a whole, implying that even Christians who are not members of the OPIC are also vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses.¹⁸⁶

Spiritual endurance

For many cultural dissidents, their Christian faith gives them the moral strength to cope with the human rights abuses they suffer as a result of their religious identity and behavior. This psychological or emotional resilience is evident in many of the interviews I conducted and other data I collected, with many Christians affirming the strength and courage their faith gives them, by saying things like: “The difference is that I’m not afraid.”¹⁸⁷ In other words, religious convictions do seem to give indigenous Christians an increased self-awareness that helps them to cope with adverse circumstances. Indeed, the radicalism of indigenous Christians is at the same time a source of vulnerability and of resilience. Pedro Santiago Posada explains: “Christians are radical and only radical people are capable of enduring the radicalism of indígenas who aren’t Christians.”¹⁸⁸

Compliance

Many of the cultural dissidents I described in the threat assessment rebel against the cabildos, antagonistically promoting their educational agenda and spreading their accusations of abuse of funds. Whilst this is an attitude of many cultural dissidents, I have also referenced reports of cultural dissidents who, after receiving threats or suffering punishments, agreed to leave their land or decided to submit to the authority of the cabildos. To avoid further threats, cultural dissidents have ceased their opposition to traditional indigenous education and traditional indigenous rituals. A number of them have also withdrawn from social and political activism.

Social wisdom

I found social wisdom as a coping mechanism to be completely lacking for most cultural dissidents, especially the ones who are affiliated to the OPIC who embarked on an

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁸⁷ Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2010) and CO18 (2013); “The Indigenous Women of Cauca’s Nasa People”, *Visión Agape*, 17/06/2012; ““The Gospel keeps me free in jail”: Jaime Tenorio”, *Visión Agape*, 06/11/2013.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Pedro Santiago Posada* (2013).

uncompromising confrontational path against the cabildos, not realizing, or perhaps not willing to realize, that although their demands may be legitimate, their attitude is unnecessarily provocative. The outcome of the strategy of the OPIC has for the most part been counterproductive. Not only were their demands not considered, they contributed to a further deterioration of personal relations in the community. By publicly confronting the cabildos and so fiercely rejecting traditions that are so important to them, some interviewees are of the opinion that cultural dissidents actually fuel the conflict with the cabildos:

“The problem is that the cabildo has begun to act because they [the cultural dissidents] provoked them. They speak badly of the cabildo. They stood behind their pulpits to discriminate the cabildos, saying that only those who were in the OPIC were the ones that were going to receive Salvation, and those who were not in the OPIC were going to hell.”¹⁸⁹

The only exception I found was Pastor Hermes Pete who seemed more conciliatory and open to dialogue with the cabildos to explore a consensual solution.

Moral standing

Moral standing could be a valid coping mechanism, if this recourse is used properly, that is avoiding provocation. Pastor Hermes Pete’s strategy to address issues with the cabildos could be used as an example. His strategy is not only less confrontational but seems to be effective to actually change things:

“It’s true that the cabildos have at times mismanaged public funds, but that doesn’t mean they were stealing money. (...) As Evangelicals, we should not criticize. I believe it’s better to help the person and tell him: ‘this should not be done this way; that should be done that way.’ I have a good relationship with the cabildos which gives me the opportunity to talk to them when they need to correct things.”¹⁹⁰

Moral standing is at the core of the activities of most cultural dissidents. Indeed, many of them loudly voice their disagreement with cultural practices and public policies that they consider contradictory to the Christian faith, as I described in the threat assessment. Whilst it is courageous ‘to stand up for what is right’, I did not find moral standing to be a coping mechanism for most cultural dissidents, but rather a source of vulnerability.

Solidarity

Solidarity from NGO’s and to some extent Colombian church organizations has benefited cultural dissidents. In recent years, organizations such as Visión Agape have provided humanitarian assistance, supplied microloans, financed legal procedures, provided land after forced displacement, and opened a safe house for people who were forced to flee their resguardo. The sense of community among Nasa Christians is also quite developed, with fellow Nasa Christians helping each other, sharing food and other supplies. This solidarity has contributed to mitigate the impact of the human security threats to which cultural dissidents

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

have been exposed. The institutional capacity of Nasa churches is nevertheless limited, and not comparable to the diaconal services of Western church institutions. In my interviews, Ana Silvia Secué further indicated that training in civic rights has been of use for the educational and political initiatives she has led. Thanks to a basic understanding of the law, she says she has been able to fight legal battles and to advocate for the rights of Nasa Christians with the national government.

Collective action

Contrary to actively practicing Christians in the states of NL, TS and SP in Mexico, where collective action is largely lacking, the collective action of cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos is very developed. Through different strategies, including the activities of the OPIC, political participation, lawsuits, lobby efforts in partnership with Colombian church associations, a strong presence in national media and contacts with international organizations, cultural dissidents have tried to promote their agenda and to address issues they disagree with.

Just as is the case with moral standing, collective action has not really been a coping mechanism for cultural dissidents, but rather an additional source of vulnerability. This can be explained mainly by their “adversarial logic”, which Vargas & Petri define as an “opposition logic that does not allow social actors to participate constructively in concertation processes” (2009). This adversarial logic can to a large extent be attributed to the “legacy of Christian missions”, to use the concept of Nigerian scholar Yusufu Turaki, which he uses to describe the attitude of the church in North Nigeria toward social and political action, which is a direct result of the teachings of British missionaries who christened them (2010). José Casanova speaks of the risks of “culturally insensitive proselytizing” (2008). In the case of the Nasa in Colombia, the missionaries that presented the Christian faith to them, quite explicitly encouraged them to reject their ‘pagan’ heritage, and to use such insensitive and judgmental language, which is a direct cause of the current tensions, as Pedro Santiago Posada argues:

“The Christians who are part of the OPIC have wanted to impose their truth on the cabildos, and the cabildos oppose them to preserve their cultural identity through their customs and habits. (...) Analyzing this issue requires reflecting on a dominant factor which is that the indígenas have been warned against beliefs other than their own, because when the first religious congregations arrived they began to take away their territories and told them that all they practiced was of the devil and not of God, an idea that was reinforced by Protestant Christians; and the indígenas are jealous of their traditions and cling onto them so as not to disappear as a people.”¹⁹¹

Taking up arms

The opposition of cultural dissidents to the resguardos and the policies of the cabildos is mainly expressed through their moral standing as well as through various forms of collective action, which includes using legal and political channels (non-violent self-defense mechanisms). I did not come across any evidence of cultural dissidents who have taken up arms, or created self-defense militias. Some leaders of the CRIC have accused the OPIC of having links with paramilitary groups, but I have not found any evidence for this accusation. If this were true,

¹⁹¹ Interview with Pedro Santiago Posada* (2014).

this would mean that some cultural dissidents do use the strategy of taking up arms as a coping mechanism.

Moreover, notwithstanding the legitimacy of some of the objectives of the OPIC, it must be recognized that some members of the OPIC occasionally do engage in violence against indigenous authorities.¹⁹² This being said, it could very well be that the violence committed by members of the OPIC really was in self-defense or that charges against OPIC members are fabricated.¹⁹³

Conclusions

The vulnerability of cultural dissidents is to a large extent structural. The political activity of Christian converts in the Nasa resguardos is certainly a risk increasing factor, but the situation described in the threat assessment revealed that even the less active forms of religious behavior such as church attendance already have an important political meaning that causes vulnerability. Moreover, as discussed, this religious behavior of cultural dissidents often poses a direct threat to the political and economic interests of the cabildos.

At first sight, when observing the social and political activism of the cultural dissidents, it might seem that the coping mechanisms of the cultural dissidents are quite developed. However, because this activism is so confrontational and lacks social wisdom, it actually increases the vulnerability of this religious minority. The spiritual endurance of the cultural dissidents is perhaps their greatest coping mechanism, but it turns into a pitfall when it is combined with a stubborn and judgmental attitude.

As explained above, the sense of belonging (loyalty) to the Nasa ethnic group of the cultural dissidents, makes ‘voice’, to use Hirschman’s category once again, their primary way to express dissent (1970). This does not mean, however, that the way the cultural dissidents express ‘voice’ is effective. Although ‘voice’ is certainly used with greater determination, it is not necessarily used with greater creativity or resourcefulness, let alone with social wisdom.

6.5 Evaluation

In this section, I present an evaluation of the application of the findings of this case study. I consecutively discuss its contributions (6.5.1) and limitations (6.5.2).

6.5.1 Contributions

Three findings stand out as empirical contributions of this case study. The first concerns the centrality of the matter of freedom of education in the conflict between the cultural dissidents and the cabildos. As the threat assessment shows, the claim for freedom of confessional education is the primary point of contention in the Nasa resguardos, leading to severe human rights abuses, even more so than freedom of worship. The latter also leads to human security threats, but the conflict crystallizes around the matter of freedom of education. The conflict reflects the confrontation between two worldviews: the traditional worldview of the cabildos

¹⁹² Idem.

¹⁹³ Interview with CO24 (2013).

organized in the CRIC, who are concerned about the preservation of their indigenous heritage, and the worldview of the cultural dissidents, represented by the OPIC, who refuse to include what they view as “pagan” religious traditions in the educational curriculum of their children.

Presented this way, the conflict seems a typical “value conflict”, but greed-based or “political economy” considerations also play a role. Indeed, freedom of education is also a matter of political power and of access to resources. Education is a symbol of political authority, because it has implications for the ‘indigenous census’, which is the count of inhabitants in a particular resguardo which determines the height of money transfers for education from the central government. The OPIC challenges this system of subsidies, making claims to these funds as well. Both grievance-based and greed-based interpretations of the conflict are thus relevant.

The matter of freedom of education also illustrates the relevance of the open-ended feature of the RM-VAT, because it made it possible to consider the (in part) non-religious motives of the cabildos that are responsible for the vulnerability of cultural dissidents as well as to observe human security threats related to religious expression in all spheres of society, including, in this case, in the social sphere.

The second finding concerns the counterproductive manner in which a subgroup of the cultural dissidents, the ones who are affiliated with the OPIC, have dealt with the matter of religious freedom. As I found, the intensity and frequency of some human security threats has increased by an attitude that is confrontational, verbally aggressive and at times outright provocative. This attitude, which could be the result of missionary work that was not culturally sensitive or a reflection of the excessive zeal of new converts, is not conducive to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This does not excuse the perpetrators of the human rights abuses in any way but it does invite a self-reflection on behalf of the cultural dissidents about their attitude. This point also emerges in the resilience assessment, where I establish that the collective action of the cultural dissidents does not increase their resilience but on the contrary makes them more vulnerable because it is generally devoid from the necessary social wisdom as a coping mechanism.

From an analytical perspective, this point also underlines the importance of making a clear distinction between the observation of human security threats and their interpretation. The finding that the cultural dissidents are, in part, responsible for the deterioration of their human security situation because of the provocative attitude of some members of this group, should not stand in the way of an unbiased observation of human security threats because this could lead to discard the vulnerability of this group because “it’s their own fault”, as a Mexican church leader once told me about a very similar case in an indigenous community in Mexico.¹⁹⁴

A third, methodological, contribution of this case study is the finding that court cases constitute a useful source of information about this much politicized conflict in which impartial sources are difficult to find and conducting fieldwork is complex. Because I did not have the possibility of speaking to cabildos myself, I turned to relevant court cases in order to obtain their representations of the conflict. The court cases also allowed me to gain a broader understanding of the conflicting rights, beyond the particular versions that my interviewees gave me.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Cirilo Cruz (2015).

6.5.2 *Limitations*

I would like to mention four limitations I faced in this case study. The first is related to the conduct of the fieldwork. Because the interviewees are to a considerable extent influenced by their perceptions, it was challenging to distinguish opinion from objective facts. Moreover, the recurrent confusion in the minds of the interviewees between the purpose of an interest group and a religious denomination – the amalgam of politics and religion –, was a very important finding for this research. Similarly, when indigenous Christians speak of setting up a Christian school, or any other religious building, it was difficult to discern their intentions. For example, I found that when they spoke about their religious rights, they also imply the access to self-administrated land and money transfers from the Colombian government. In other words, because of the contradictory and partial statements of many primary sources, interpretation was at times challenging, however, the fact that human rights abuses actually occurred can nevertheless be objectively established.

Second, from a methodological point of view I encountered some issues related to the way spheres of society are understood within the indigenous context. For the sake of comparing between case studies, the approach in terms of spheres of society was maintained, but in the context of indigenous territories, this perspective is not necessarily applicable as the difference between some spheres is blurred (church, social, government) and some spheres are not understood as separate spheres but are always viewed in relation to other spheres (business, cultural).

Third, a major limitation of my fieldwork was the fact that I was not able to speak with cabildos and other, non-Evangelical Nasa. I tried to overcome this problem by integrating other available materials such as jurisprudence, news reports, internal reports of NGO's and interviews conducted by others to mend the gaps in the information I collected through my fieldwork and to confront different opinions about the conflict.

Finally, it can be observed that while the RM-VAT was instrumental to observe human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable, a proper context description is nevertheless necessary in order to understand the factors of this vulnerability, in particular the description of the legal-political prerogatives of the cabildos.

7. The vulnerability of Christians in Cuba

In this case study I apply the RM-VAT to all Christians in Cuba, with special attention to the active. Unlike the previous two case studies, I do not zoom in to a subnational area, mainly because there are no noteworthy geographical differences within Cuba, although some human security threats such as the intensity of surveillance and administrative restrictions are reportedly higher in the eastern half of Cuba (figure 7.1). The timeframe for this case study is contemporary, starting in 2011 after Fidel Castro resigned as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, and ending in 2018 when Raúl Castro stepped down as President of Cuba.

7.1 Map of Cuba



Source: Google Maps.

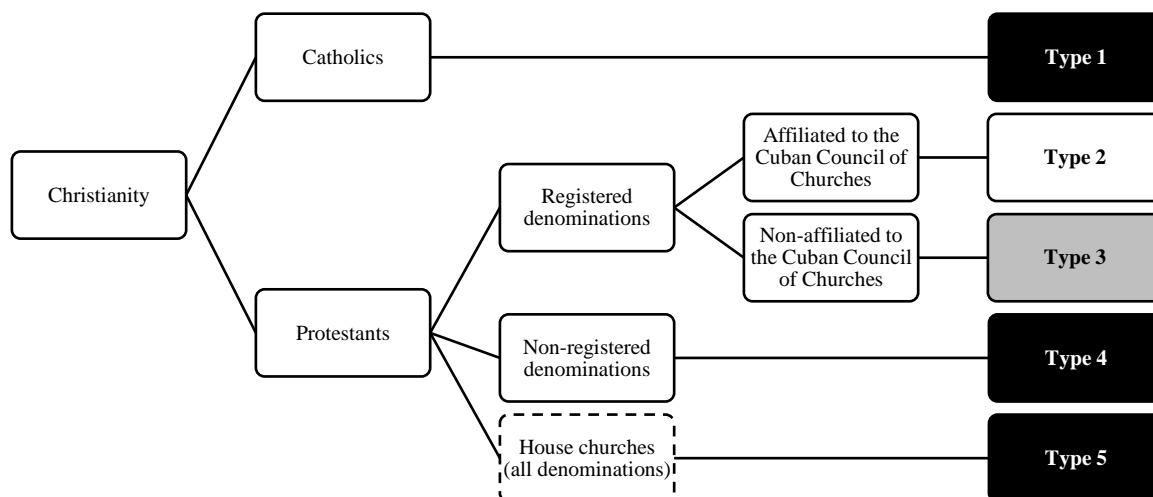
All RFATs highlight restrictions on religious freedom in Cuba, which are to a large extent a consequence of the authoritarian Cuban regime. The relevance of this case study can be found mainly in the additional information and nuances the RM-VAT offers by integrating the behavioral dimension of religion as well as the multidimensional nature of religious freedom, which are features that allow me to describe subtle forms of vulnerability that are not recognized by the RFATs. Following the research design, I consecutively present the context of the case study, in which I present an initial assessment of the regulation of religion by the Cuban authoritarian regime (7.1), data collection (7.2), security risks and ethical challenges (7.3) and the assessment phase (7.4). I end with an evaluation of the RM-VAT (7.5).

7.1 The regulation of religion by the Cuban authoritarian regime

In this context description I first discuss the differentiated treatment of Christians by the Cuban government (7.1.1). I then discuss the changes and continuity in Cuba's religious policy (7.1.2) and finish with some conclusions regarding the ongoing vulnerability of Christians in Cuba (7.1.3).

7.1.1 The differentiated treatment of Christians by the Cuban government.

7.2 Degrees of pressure depending on type of recognition of Christian denomination or church (Cuba)



Source: own elaboration.

The Cuban statistical office does not record religious affiliation. The World Christian Database (2017) estimates the total number of Christians at 7,013,000 (61.6%), which makes it the least Christian nation in the Latin American continent where all other countries, except for Uruguay (63.1%), have Christian populations above 85%. The low percentage of Christians is generally considered to be a direct result of the militant atheist policies in the early days of communism, aimed at eradicating religion (Fox 2013, 2016).

Christianity was established in Cuba in 1512 through Roman Catholic priests of the Dominican order. The earliest Protestant activity dates back to 1741 when Cuba was under British occupation (González & González 2008); the first Protestant church was established in 1883 (Holland 2003). According to WCD estimates, Christianity is composed of Catholics (6,092,000), various Protestant denominations (498,000), independent groups (409,000), unaffiliated (107,000) and Orthodox (52,900). Although a nominal majority, Catholics should be considered as a minority because of the high levels of discrimination this group experiences (Fox 2016:98). Protestant denominations have experienced important growth in recent years, but they still do not make up more than 5% of the total population.¹⁹⁵ Outside Christianity, sizable portions of Cuba's population are Agnostic (1,894,000) and Atheist (477,000) (WCD 2017). (I was not able to determine why there is such a large number of Agnostics.) There are also small communities (thousands) of Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and Baha'is. Afro-Cuban religion, known as *Santería*, is also widely practiced, but is not organized in formal bodies, which makes data impossible to obtain (Goldenziel 2009).

¹⁹⁵ Email correspondence with Bert Hoffmann (2018); "Will success spoil Cuba's Revival?", *Christianity Today*, 26/10/2015; "Cuba undergoes a religious revival", *The Guardian*, 12/06/2015.

Although reliable data on religious practice and demography is impossible to come by due to practical limitations for data collection and “sensitivities related to polling about religion” (Pew Research Center 2014:11), a few observations can be made, which largely echo Margaret E. Crahan’s observations made in 1985. It is safe to assume that the characteristic Latin American distinction between nominal Christianity and active religious practice is also applicable to Cuba and is likely to be even more pronounced. Based on personal observations and interviews, I conclude that regular church attendance in Cuba is low among Catholics, but higher among Protestants. It is also safe to assume that the number of people engaging in the more active forms or religious behavior – the variables ‘missionary activity’ and ‘civic participation’ – is low, because they are to a large extent restricted by law. This does not mean that people do not engage in such behavior, but those people take a risk, which I describe more in-depth in the threat assessment.

Goldenziel takes a different approach to civic participation. She posits that, considering the restrictions on freedom of expression, by joining a minority religion Cubans make an implicit political statement against the regime, because it is one of the few opportunities for them to express anything (2009:195). Seen this way, being a Christian, especially one joining a house church, can already be viewed as a form of civic participation, even when this does not translate into missionary activity or civic participation.

As I argue in the threat assessment, religious identity and the least active forms of religious behavior are not a direct cause of vulnerability for most Christians. Religious affiliation used to be a problem during the early days of the communist regime, but this is no longer the case, especially since the religious policy changes of 1991 (more in the next section). As I substantiate in the threat assessment, in contemporary Cuba, the vulnerability of Christians is to a large extent a function of their behavior. As a general rule, the more active the social behavior of Christians, the greater their vulnerability.

In the particular case of Cuba, the continuum of religious identity and behavior is insufficient for the RM-VAT to yield pertinent results. In addition to the types of religious behavior Christians engage in, vulnerability is also determined by the legal status of Christian denominations as well as their proximity to the government. First of all, there is a noteworthy difference between Catholics and Protestants, to which the Cuban regime has applied differentiated strategies, which present similarities with the religious policies of the Soviet Union and China (Koesel 2014; Sarkissian 2015). The strategy toward Catholics, the largest Christian group, has been one of (a) outright persecution, whereas the strategy toward the much smaller Protestant community has focused on (b) restrictions, (c) cooptation and (d) divide-and-rule (Goldenziel 2009).

The pressure on Catholics, especially Catholic clergy, is generally believed to be higher than on Protestants. The Catholic Church, seen as a foreign institution loyal to another state (the Vatican) has been strongly persecuted since the 1959 revolution, up to the point it looks like there is no viable Catholic church left in the country. As Fox summarizes, “Catholicism is still the largest organized religion in Cuba, but over 50 years of atheist communist rule has managed to create a culture where most young people are not religious and know little about the religion” (2013:204). Baptisms were forbidden for years, training seminaries were closed, and buildings were confiscated. Currently there are not enough priests to serve the community, and for this reason various European and Latin American priests work in Cuba. Seminaries are empty and attendance to mass is extremely limited (Crahan 1985; Lievesley 2004).

At the same time, restrictions were also placed on the registration of new Protestant denominations as well as on the opening of new churches within denominations, mainly to prevent Protestantism from growing. Protestant denominations that registered before 1959 are tolerated, but no new denominations have been allowed to register since. Also, only church buildings that existed before 1959 are allowed to operate (Goldenziel 2009). Except for one Russian Orthodox church in 2008 and a ‘show’ church in the tourist area of Varadero, no new church buildings have been allowed to be built since 1959.¹⁹⁶

This strategy of the regime failed to restrict the growth of Protestantism in Cuba. To circumvent the restrictions on building new churches, registered denominations that experienced growth in membership started to meet in homes of people, the so-called *casas cultos* or “house churches” (Goldenziel 2009). In addition, various independent (non-registered) denominations appeared, which all meet in house churches because they are not allowed to own any property. According to various Cuban church leaders I interviewed, the independent denominations now constitute two thirds of Cuba’s Protestant population.¹⁹⁷ I was not able to confirm this claim, but it does not seem unlikely considering that data from the World Christian Database suggest there are more independent and unaffiliated Christians than mainstream Protestants (2017).

The difference between registered denominations and independent denominations is essential to understand the limitations faced by their members, which each have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Registered denominations can function in relative openness but are nevertheless strongly supervised and face some restrictions. Independent denominations are technically illegal and face more restrictions, particularly related to their growth and their resourcing (Fox 2015:55). They are also monitored but are not required to provide the same type of reports about their activities as the registered denominations. Independent denominations can only meet in house churches. There is no data available about independent denominations (only information about registered denominations is publicly available).

House churches, both within registered and non-registered Protestant denominations, are technically illegal. Although they are tolerated, they are always at risk of being closed or confiscated, particularly if they grow, are used to spread ‘subversive’ messages or get into a conflict with neighbors (López 2005; Fox 2015:147). If they manage to avoid attracting any attention and stay under the radar, which is very difficult because informants are everywhere, this risk can be mitigated.

In combination with the imposition of restrictions, the Cuban regime has also implemented a cooptation strategy towards Protestants, by inviting them to join the *Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba*, *CIC [Cuban Council of Churches]*, a state-controlled body, similar to the Three Self Church in China, which is a church that was created by the Chinese government and is controlled by it (Koesel 2013). Membership of the CIC gives its members some benefits, such as access to foreign donations, the use of seminary facilities, the import of religious literature and opportunities to travel abroad, in exchange for tight internal surveillance and unconditional support to the regime, an arrangement that Goldenziel describes as “corporatism” (2009:187-191).

This strategy has only partially functioned. Of the 35 registered denominations, which are not representative of all Protestants in Cuba as already mentioned, only 22 are full members of the

¹⁹⁶ Interviews with CU01, CU02, CU03 (2015, 2016).

¹⁹⁷ Interviews with CU09 (2012) and CU05 (2016).

CIC (see annex I). The registered denominations that did not join the CIC as full members (eight are associate members) comprise some of the largest denominations, including Assemblies of God, with 110,000 members and the two Baptist Conventions with a combined membership estimated at more than 100,000 members (US State Department 2017). In spite of its lack of representativeness, the Cuban government treats the CIC as the only voice of Protestant Christianity in Cuba. To the eyes of many external and internal observers, the CIC is also viewed as the only expression of Protestant Christianity, leading one Catholic priest I interviewed to lament: “Those Protestants in Cuba, they’re all communists.”¹⁹⁸ He had evidently never been in touch with denominations that are not affiliated to the CIC.

Finally, the divide-and-rule strategy of the Cuban regime has reinforced existing divisions among Protestant denominations, emphasizing the differences between ‘Reformed’, ‘Arminian’ and ‘Pentecostal’ theologies. These divisions tend to take on a sectarian dimension, which foreign missions import into the country (Yaremko 2000) but is also encouraged by the government through the restrictions it places on freedom of assembly and interdenominational collaboration outside the CIC, in combination with the mistrust that is created by the permanent surveillance and informing that is characteristic of communist states.¹⁹⁹

Based on the former, Christianity in Cuba can be categorized according to five types, each one of them receiving a different kind of treatment from the government, as I summarized through figure 7.2. I added house churches as a separate type because of its analytical relevance, although house churches can be found within both registered and non-registered denominations. I color-coded the types based on the relative degree of pressure they are subjected to, with black (types 1, 4 and 5) expressing a higher degree of pressure than grey (type 3) and white (type 2).

7.1.2 Changes and continuity in Cuba's religious policy

In order to interpret Cuba's religious policy, I present two essential contextual elements – the evolutions in Cuba's authoritarian government and the resulting religious policy.

Authoritarian government

After an armed revolt led by Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara against the regime of dictator Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban revolution of 1953-1959 provoked a geopolitical earthquake in the Americas and in the world, inspiring revolutions in the region and becoming an icon of the Cold War. Once in power, Castro rapidly moved toward the implementation of authoritarian policies, but only in 1961 did he announce that the Cuban revolution was in fact socialist, and publicly embraced Marxism and Leninism. In 1960, Cuba distanced itself from the United States and developed a relationship with the USSR, entering its sphere of influence, which reached a climax with the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 (Dabène 2006:115-120).

Cuba is a single-party communist state, with a collegiate government and a legislative body called the *Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular* [National Assembly of People's Power]. Power is concentrated in the hands of one person (Fidel Castro until 2008 and his brother Raúl Castro until 2018), who not only presides over the executive branch but also appoints the

¹⁹⁸ Interview with CU04 (2015).

¹⁹⁹ Interview with CU05 (2016).

members of the parliament, is commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and chairman of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba* [Communist Party of Cuba]. Miguel Díaz-Canel is Cuba's new president as of April 2018. Raúl Castro continues to control the Communist Party of Cuba and the Revolutionary Armed Forces, and is the intellectual author of a new constitution that is in the making.

An important institution within the executive is the Cuban security police, which is comparable to the *Stasi* in former East-Germany. Through these institutions, the Cuban state exercises totalitarian control over many aspects of Cuban society. In addition, local chapters of the communist party, including youth and women sections, and the so-called 'Committees for the Defense of the Revolution', which are instruments of social-political control by militarizing ordinary citizens, monitor the population on a permanent basis (Werlau 2008).

The authoritarian government system that Castro implemented continued even after the fall of the USSR. The Cuban regime did not renounce its support to communism, although its ideological commitment does seem to fade, and the use of communist rhetoric and symbolism is less frequent (Fox 2016:98). Cuba may be, very slowly, moving away from communism, but remains undemocratic, as is observed repeatedly by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. In its 2016 annual report, it states:

“As regards the human rights situation in Cuba, the Commission has constantly pointed out that the restrictions on political rights, the right to association, the right to freedom of expression and dissemination of thought, the lack of independence of the judicial branch, and the restrictions on the freedom of movement and residence have, for decades, constituted a permanent and systematic violation of the human rights of its inhabitants.” (ibid. 545)

Moreover, the island continues to be firmly under the control of the Communist Party and the military, ruled by the same generation of leaders that participated in the Cuban revolution. Fidel Castro's withdrawal from Cuban politics – he resigned as President in 2008 and as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba in 2011 – did not lead to any significant moves toward democracy (HRW 2009), and political dissidents continue to be repressed (CPJ 2008).

The end of the Cold War did nevertheless bring about a noteworthy change in the field of economic policy, inspired by the Chinese model (Hearn & Alfonso 2012; Hearn 2013; Alzugaray 2014; Bye 2017). As a pragmatic response to the growing economic challenges, the Cuban regime implemented some degree of economic liberalization. A 1992 constitutional amendment removed certain limitations on foreign investment and granted foreign corporations a limited right to own property on the island if they established joint ventures with the government (Travieso-Diaz 2001). In September 2010, economic reforms were launched, including more self-employment with some possibilities to develop small businesses, leasing of state land to private farmers and in general reducing the state's economic role (Moreno & Calingaert 2011; Bye 2014). The partial economic liberalization led to the emergence of a private sector, which now represents 10% of the Cuba's workforce.²⁰⁰

This development does not seem to have continued. Several people I consulted report that small businesses that grow too much are shut down by the government, and that there are indications

²⁰⁰ “BTI 2016 Cuba Country Report”, *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, 2016.

that some of the measures are being reversed, particularly the possibility to start small businesses. Moreover, just like in China, the gradual economic liberalization of Cuba has not been accompanied by an expansion of political rights (Hawkins 2001; Hoffmann 2016; Bye 2016).

Religious policy

Religious groups pose an ideological threat to the revolutionary regime, because of their transnational networks, resources and opposition to communism (Goldenziel 2009:184; Fox 2015:125; Koesel 2014:3). As Koesel argues,

“Religious groups, as members of civil society, may be particularly threatening to authoritarian leaders because of their perceived ability to mobilize, especially at the grassroots. This is because religion is not simply a body of beliefs but also a community of believers. In authoritarian regimes, religious communities tend to represent the most diverse and robust forms of associational life outside of the state. They are voluntary organizations that cut across cleavages. They are endowed with resources and dedicated supporters, often led by charismatic leaders, and tied to larger domestic and transnational networks. In other words, religious communities have a distinct set of resources that make them particularly good at mobilization – a toolkit that authoritarian elites and their allies view as extremely threatening.” (ibid. 3)

In 1961, the new Cuban government declared itself officially atheist and implemented a militantly antireligious policy (Kirk 1989). One of its first measures was the nationalization of all property belonging to religious organizations, the expulsion of hundreds of members of the Catholic Church including a bishop and various seminary professors, and the banning of private (confessional) schools (Zulueta Viar 1978; Faria 2002; Jiménez Ortiz 2008). Although churches were allowed to remain open, religious services were obstructed, individual clergy was persecuted, and some priests were sent to re-education camps (Lievesley 2004:147).

After this initial period of confrontation, the relation between the Cuban state and religion relaxed somewhat. Systematic repression was replaced by an effort to control religious activity, but religious groups understood that any form of criticism of the regime was not acceptable (Lievesley 2004). In a meeting outside Cuba with a Cuban pastor, I was shown excerpts of a university thesis that was produced by Yoe Suárez, a student of journalism, who documents the repression of Protestant churches during the first decades after the revolution. The excerpts generally confirm the assessment presented here.²⁰¹ Religious groups were barred from the Communist Party and from certain professions, and religion was negatively presented in official propaganda. Article 54 of the 1975 Constitution made it illegal to oppose one’s faith or religious belief to the revolution (Goldenziel 2009).

Cuba is a classic case of a non-democratic regime in which the state represses religion (Koesel 2014; Sarkissian 2015). The religious policy Cuba adopted shares many similarities with other communist countries such as the Soviet Union or China which it considered as examples. Cuba’s religious policy can thus be categorized within a general typology of communist methods on how to deal with religion, as Sarkissian argues:

²⁰¹ Interview with CU26 (2018).

“[The] Chinese regime’s motivations for repressing religious groups in particular are based on an antireligious ideology. Like other communist regimes in this category (North Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam), the Chinese regime bases itself on ideals that advocate the eventual demise of religion altogether. Yet because the regime recognizes that eliminating religion completely is a long-term goal, it copes with its continuing presence by imposing state control over religious institutions. Groups that attempt to function independently of the state apparatus are subjected to harsh repression and banned from the country. The regime is especially threatened by groups that have organizations based in foreign countries, such as the Roman Catholic Church, and the actions the state has taken against the Vatican’s attempts to govern Catholics in China demonstrate the state’s fear of independent religious activity.” (ibid. 78-79)

Many of these characteristics are applicable to Cuba, whose religious policy “[approximates] the Chinese model” as Sarkissian observes (ibid). Religious institutions are controlled and monitored by the Ministry of the Interior, “with tactics including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons.” Worship is only allowed at government-approved sites. Members of the military are forbidden to engage in religious practices. Religious publications are submitted to strict censorship. Internet access is restricted. Churches are pressured to expel pro-democracy and human rights activists (Fox 2013:204-205).

Amid the global collapse of communism, however, things started to change. In 1985, for the first time, Fidel Castro publicly spoke positively about religion, even though these positive comments were always made outside Cuba and typically to Catholic audiences that supported his political positions (Dominguez 1990). Eventually, symbolic gestures²⁰² such as the televised church service during Reverend Jesse Jackson’s visit to Cuba in 1984 which Fidel Castro attended and the visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba in 1998 followed (Kirk 1989; Lievesley 2004; Goldenziel 2009). Some Catholic buildings that were confiscated at the time of the revolution have been returned although many properties stay in the hands of the state.²⁰³

1991 marked a real “Opening” to religious expression (*La Apertura* in Spanish), with religious people being admitted to the Communist Party. In 1992, the Constitution was amended to eliminate discrimination against religion and Cuba became a secular state rather than an atheist state (Goldenziel 2009). Several discriminatory policies were reversed, such as the import of religious publications that was made easier. In 2008, the process for obtaining approval to execute repairs to church buildings were relaxed and restrictions of religious clergy for traveling abroad were eased. In 2009 religious groups were allowed prison chaplaincy.²⁰⁴ Later, some forms of charitable initiatives were authorized (Fox 2013).

The Cuban government understood it needed to deregulate religion to ensure the support of the main Christian denominations, but was cautious not to go too far in the deregulation to avoid losing control: “The Cuban government recognized the resurgence of religiosity in the population and responded by relaxing restrictions on religious groups in a way that would allow it to maintain control” (Goldenziel 2009:193). Because of the great divisions among religious groups, particularly within Protestantism, the deregulation of religion could be done without

²⁰² “Cuban church speaking out on sensitive issues”, *The Miami Herald*, 31/01/1999; “Castro attends Cuba’s first Catholic beatification”, *Reuters*, 29/11/2008.

²⁰³ Interview with CU04 (2015).

²⁰⁴ “Cuba OKs organized religious services in prisons”, *Associated Press*, 19/05/2009.

great political risk. Many aspects of religious practice continue to be restricted, however, but it seems to happen more through what can be referred to as ‘bureaucratic discouragement’; “the government continued to try to control local congregations through recourse to legal technicalities.” (Lievesley 2004:179).

7.1.3 The ongoing vulnerability of Christians in Cuba

In line with the selection criteria for my case studies I formulated in section 4.3, the focus of this case study on Christians is justified because there is a reasonable degree of plausibility to the claim that this group is vulnerable to human security threats, within the context of the prevailing undemocratic regime. Whereas all forms of religious identification used to be a source of vulnerability in the early days of the communist regime of Cuba, this is no longer the case, especially since the policy changes that were adopted from 1991 onwards, notwithstanding the restriction of certain aspects of religious practice, which are comprehensively documented by RFATs. Unlike the previous two case studies, I look at Christianity in general, although I show that most threats lie on the active end of the spectrum, in addition to the differentiated treatment of the distinct types of Christianity by the Cuban regime.

Christians as a group are easily distinguishable from other groups by their self-identification as such and their religious behavior. They do not constitute a different ethnic group within Cuba; all ethnic groups present in Cuba are also represented among the country’s Christian population.

In this context description, I have tried to steer clear from any ideological judgements, limiting myself to stating facts that provide context as well as a justification for this case study. The objective existence of human rights violations and the undemocratic nature of the Cuban state can hardly be disputed. This context affects all Cuban citizens alike, including religious minorities, who have no legal security and are unprotected from arbitrary political decisions. There may be speculations about a possible political and economic transition of Cuba, but apart from some economic liberalization and deregulation, so far, no significant democratic advances can be observed. Cuba is not subject to human security challenges that are comparable to organized crime in Mexico, but the unpredictability, arbitrariness and unfairness of Cuba’s judicial system in combination with the permanent surveillance culture are characteristic of undemocratic regimes.

The added value of the RM-VAT in comparison to the RFATs is that it allows to observe subtleties in this vulnerability which fills some gaps, providing nuances and new insights for the understanding of the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba. The RFATs are well-suited to describe a large part of the restrictions on religious freedom that result from this context. Contrary to the previous two case studies, Cuba is much more a ‘classic case’ of violation of religious rights and the existing RFATs are well designed to observe it. However, looking beyond the impact of religious legislation and policies, the application of the RM-VAT identifies subtleties of the vulnerability of Christians and specific human security threats that are not noticed by the RFATs because of their broader focus that does not distinguish between identity-based and behavioral expressions of Christianity, nor the differences between and inside Christian denominations. In this sense, the case study of Cuba can be considered as a ‘hard case’ for the added value of the RM-VAT.

The potential for generalization of the findings of this case study resides primarily in its similarity with other communist regimes (in transition), and more generally authoritarian regimes, as well as with governments that display authoritarian tendencies that follow elements from what can be referred to as the “communist handbook” to regulate religion, such as the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua, for example. I conducted fieldwork in Venezuela in 2013 for an international charity and desk research about Bolivia in 2018 for the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America. I recognized several aspects of Cuba’s religious policy in these countries.

The specificity of the vulnerability to human security threats of Cuban Christians is clearly observable to the extent that it can be related directly to the continuum of religious identity and behavior. The specificity assessment allows me to describe in which ways the vulnerability of Christians is different from other groups such as other religious minorities or political dissidents.

The analysis of the coping mechanisms of Cuban Christians presents analytical relevance precisely because Christianity has persisted, and some Christian denominations have grown in spite of the decades long repression of religion on the island. This underlines the resilience and resourcefulness of Cuban Christians who found ways to deal with the restrictions.

7.2 Data collection

“There is a huge literature upon Cuba and none of it is neutral”, writes Lievesley, referring to the ideological polarization of scholarship about Cuba (2004:3). This is also true for reports about the human rights situation in Cuba, including religious freedom, where many sources contradict each other. On the one hand, the loudmouthed accounts of US-based activists, often from Cuban origin, are likely to be exaggerated. On the other hand, the ‘left wing’ of Latin American Christianity – groups that are close to liberation theology, such as the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* [*Latin American Theological Fraternity*] – tend to downplay the human rights record of the Cuban government. Inside Cuba, the same polarization can be observed between Christian denominations that are affiliated to the CIC who rarely express any inconformity, and denominations that are not affiliated to the CIC who are in a more difficult position. This reality makes it very complex to do research in Cuba, as I constantly needed to discern what the background was of the sources I consulted and the people I interviewed.

As described in chapter 4, the data collection for the RM-VAT is based on the compilation of all relevant sources that were available to me. Since 2011, I actively monitored Cuba, collecting public sources from both faith-based organizations and secular media on the religious freedom situation in Cuba, as part of my work as researcher and operations manager of an international charity. During that time, I interviewed many people who were working in Cuba, collecting their firsthand reports. I also studied pertinent legal documents and RFAT reports. In 2015, I was commissioned by an international charity to research whether restarting operations in Cuba was opportune (this organization had worked in Cuba in the past). This research implied the elaboration of a report describing the religious freedom situation in the country. I was later given the assignment to set up operations, which I managed until the end of 2017. The goal of this assignment had no direct relation with this research, but it allowed me to be exposed to the reality of the field and to collect additional data for this case study. There was no friction

between this professional assignment and my research because I never announced my professional role during my first contacts with people so this did not influence their comments.

Much of the input for the RM-VAT was obtained through two field trips I conducted to Cuba, the first took place from 4-11 March 2015 and the second took place from 10-16 February 2016. During these trips, traveling with a colleague at both occasions, I conducted around 40 interviews with Cuban church leaders and members in all major cities in the western half of Cuba. (I interviewed people from east Cuba outside the country.) The interviews were selected to obtain a representative spread of different denominations – Catholic and Protestant, registered and non-registered, affiliated to the CIC and not affiliated to the CIC. For the identification of the interviewees, I received help from various organizations, which I cannot name publicly for security reasons. I also made some of my contacts by randomly walking into churches or through referrals.

During the interviews, I systematically introduced myself as a tourist from Holland, interested in meeting Cuban Christians, a cover I tried to maintain throughout the research, to protect both myself and my interviewees. When applicable, I would mention I was a friend of the person who gave me their contact information. I was always open about my primary motive for talking to the contacts, which was to understand the religious freedom situation. I only revealed my professional role to some of my contacts after a few conversations if I judged they could be implementing partners of the organization I represented.

Through casual conversations, I tried to learn more about the main human security threats my interviewees were facing, but I could not take any notes for security reasons (see below) and because I did not want the conversations to look like formal interviews. During my second trip I interviewed the contacts that I found most interesting for a second time, which was useful to build trust, and allowed me to clarify aspects that I encountered during my first trip. After returning from both trips, I wrote summaries of my main findings.

I had the opportunity to meet with a number of Cuban church leaders outside Cuba during training conferences I organized on behalf of an international charity in Trinidad and Tobago from 22-27 August 2016 and in Costa Rica from 4-9 December 2017, which were attended by 10 and 6 Christian leaders, respectively. Because of security reasons, these trainings had to be conducted outside Cuba. The first training was to present strategies used by churches in China and Russia, two former communist countries, to cope with government repression of religion. The second training was intended to build capacity for advocacy and documentation of human rights violations. During these training weeks, I was able to have lengthier conversations with the participants and could also conduct longer interviews of which I made notes, which are kept by me on file. I conducted the interviews in Spanish, but all quotes included in this chapter have been translated to English. At the occasion of the second training, I presented a draft version of the threat assessment and submitted it to a focus group discussion, which allowed me to refine and improve it.

Since 2011, I kept close contact with various faith-based organizations working in Cuba, and with Cuban Christians through various means, including personal meetings in Costa Rica, Canada, Colombia, Mexico, The Netherlands and the United States. From 9-12 January 2017 I attended a consultation of representatives of some 20 faith-based organizations working in Cuba in Chicago, which not only broadened my understanding of the human security threats that religious minorities face, but also gave me insight into how Cuban churches deal with foreign donors. The latter was useful mainly to understand to what extent support from abroad

constitutes a coping mechanism for Cuban Christians, while at the same time increasing its economic dependency and generally reinforcing denominational divisions.

7.3 Security risks and ethical challenges

Cuban society is characterized by an advanced degree of suspicion and secrecy, which is the result of decades of communism, where anyone can be an informant of the regime. In order to obtain useful information, I needed to win the trust of my interviewees, but I could never be completely sure they were telling the truth or withholding information. One interviewee confided: “Nobody in Cuba tells you everything. I don’t know everything that’s going on inside my denomination. I don’t tell you everything.”²⁰⁵

Finally, I was aware that my presence could in some cases have generated expectations with some interviewees for donations or other forms of support, although I always made it clear that I was not in a position to provide any financial support. During one interview with a pastor, he shared that his daughter had dreamed that her house would receive a visit of two foreigners (in this particular trip I was accompanied by a white South-African colleague), which I found amusing but also suspicious.²⁰⁶ Since there are so many foreign faith-based organizations that visit Cuba – it is truly a popular destination for ‘religious tourism’ –, who generously donate money and supplies, it is always a risk that interviewees say what they think the donor wants to hear.

For all these reasons I could only treat the interviews as anecdotal evidence. Never were they my only source for the threat assessment. My strategy was to speak to as many people as I could, both in and outside Cuba in order to discern patterns and cross-check my findings. The consultation of faith-based organizations working in Cuba that I attended in Chicago in January 2017 was particularly useful to confirm and nuance my initial findings.

The conduct of the fieldwork did involve security risks, both for myself and for the people I interviewed. The worst that could happen to me was to be expelled from the country, but contacts I visited risked being interrogated or harassed. I became aware this happened to at least two persons I spoke with. One interviewee was particularly down-to-earth when I asked him about the security risks for him meeting me: “There is nothing that can happen that can make me more vulnerable than I already am. I am more concerned about your safety.”²⁰⁷

Because the organization I represented, is blacklisted in Cuba, my ‘cover’ was to travel to Cuba as a tourist, which allowed me to travel freely around the country in a rented car, but it also meant I had to behave like a tourist, i.e. I could not speak in church services or seminaries had I wanted to, or even conduct formal interviews. My meetings were mostly short, unannounced, and I did not take any notes to protect my interviewees. To further protect my interviewees, I have anonymized their names, denominational affiliations and places of residence, unless they have since left the country.

I visited Cuba in 2015 and in 2016 but following the advice of a colleague working for a faith-based organization and my most trusted contacts in Cuba, I decided not to travel to the island in 2017. By then, I had given some interviews to various news services and the testimony I

²⁰⁵ Interview with CU05 (2017).

²⁰⁶ Interview with CU06 (2015).

²⁰⁷ Interview with Mario Félix Leonart Barroso (2016).

gave at a congressional hearing in the United States in September 2015, where I mentioned the religious freedom situation in Cuba, had started to get spread. Hurricane Irma, that hit Cuba in September 2017 also made it impossible to visit Cuba for a short period of time and led to increased surveillance of Cuban security services. Instead, I stayed in touch with my Cuban contacts through email (always using covert language), through telephone (whenever they were outside Cuba) and through colleagues who traveled to Cuba. I also had the opportunity to meet various Cuban leaders, belonging to a wide range of denominations, outside of the country on a number of occasions, which was quite beneficial because they could speak more freely.

7.4 Assessment phase

In the threat assessment, I inventory, substantiate and categorize the main threats to which Cuban Christians are vulnerable. By moving beyond the nominal (identity-based) definition of religion, I was able to discern mechanisms of vulnerability that are not applicable to Christianity as a whole, and to differentiate between socially active groups within Christianity (7.4.1). In the specificity assessment, I determine the degree of uniqueness of these human security threats to Christians. As I argue, some threats are comparable to any other individual or group engaging in similar behavior, but other threats are specifically related to their religious affiliation (7.4.2). Finally, in the resilience assessment, I discuss mechanisms Christians use or could use to be more resilient to human security threats (7.4.3).

7.4.1 Threat assessment

The restrictions on religious expression imposed by the Cuban state are well documented by various scholars and recognized in the RFATs, as described above. These restrictions are arguably an important source of vulnerability for religious groups, but they can be misleading because they do not differentiate between minorities defined by their behavioral characteristics, which constitutes an important shortcoming because it leads to the neglect of important human security threats. In this threat assessment, I focus on aspects of these threats that are not covered by the RFATs, such as the subtleties of the various forms of pressure or the precise types of religious behavior that cause vulnerability.

Figure 7.3 provides an overview of the ten human security threats I identified that are applicable to Christians, following the usual categorization of threats resulting from religious identity, threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior and threats resulting from active religious behavior. I give empirical evidence for each of these threats, followed by some conclusions.

7.3 Threat assessment of Christians (Cuba)

<i>Spheres of society</i>	<i>Religious identity</i>	<i>Semi-active religious behavior</i>	<i>Active religious behavior</i>
Family sphere	1. 'Conversion' from the Communist Party	4. Restriction of educational activities	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of active religious behavior.</i>
Church sphere	2. State surveillance	4. Restriction of educational activities 5. Restrictions on various aspects pertaining to freedom of worship 6. Restrictions on church growth	8. Restrictions on missionary activity
Social sphere	2. State surveillance	4. Restriction of educational activities	9. Hindrance of charitable work
Business sphere	2. State surveillance	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.</i>	9. Hindrance of charitable work
Cultural sphere	2. State surveillance	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.</i>	<i>No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of active religious behavior.</i>
Government sphere	2. State surveillance 3. Discrimination when dealing with the authorities	7. Prosecution of conscientious objectors	10. Intimidation of people engaging in human rights activism

Source: own elaboration.

As can be observed, the majority of the threats listed in this table are described with the generic word 'restrictions.' This is because they refer both to laws or government practices that restrict specific groups of activities and to the different possible consequences for people engaging in such activities. These consequences generally involve questioning and intimidation. In the most extreme cases they can lead to more severe human rights violations, including (arbitrary) fines, short term or long-term imprisonment, property destruction or confiscation and even expulsion from the country. The severity of these threats depends on different factors I describe in this threat assessment.

Threats resulting from religious identity

Of the ten human security threats I identified, three can be categorized as threats resulting from religious identity, i.e. any person that self-identifies or that is visibly identifiable as Christian is vulnerable to them.

Threat 1: 'Conversion' from the Communist Party

Whenever an active member of the Communist Party decides to join a church, this can have consequences for this person and his/her family. It generally puts them at risk of losing their jobs. In the past, this used to be a very serious issue, but conversion is no longer forbidden and converts can now openly join a church. Religious identity is not recorded on official documents and ID's, but it can be safely assumed that security services do keep track of such changes. Since 1991, party members are allowed to have a religious affiliation, so from a legal perspective there is no incompatibility between being a Christian and a party member. Conversion continues to be discouraged, however, and could lead to various discriminatory measures, for example when dealing with the authorities (threat 3).

Many different types of people can be considered as converts to Christianity. In a highly secularized society, any person who at a given moment decides either to become a Christian (if this person was an atheist or an agnostic) or to practice their faith more actively (in the case of nominal Catholics, or believers who decide to switch to another Christian denomination) can be considered a convert, i.e. as someone who changes their religious beliefs. Reprisals for conversion, as already stated, used to have far-reaching consequences for everyone, but this is no longer the case today, at least not to the same degree. It continues to be difficult for communist officials, however, to convert to Christianity.

In various interviews, I was told that a growing number of Communist officials join churches, but that it is difficult to determine how genuine their conversion is. Former Communist Party members are often met with suspicion when they want to join a church, because Christians are used to people portraying themselves as earnest believers who renounced the Marxist and atheist ideology, but who are in fact acting as informants of the regime.

In a Protestant magazine for Hispanic residents in the United States an interview that was published with Jorge Luis Pantoja, a Cuban secret agent who was trained to infiltrate a Baptist church and become a youth leader and pastor. In the interview he shares that after years of working as a spy, he experienced a genuine conversion, which placed him in a difficult situation: "I could not tell anyone about [my conversion] because I took a military oath, and this would be considered as treason of the fatherland. My only option was to speak with God daily asking for direction. As a young person I was afraid of what could happen to me because I started to learn how low and dirty this regime really was." Jorge Luis Pantoja saw no other alternative than to remain silent about his newfound faith for a number of years, and finally, in 1995, requested political asylum in the United States, voluntarily exiling himself from Cuba.²⁰⁸

Although this example took place in 1995, it can be taken as representative of what other converts from the Communist Party face, especially the fear of reprisals, even after the Opening of 1991. I was not able to determine the scale of such conversions. For security reasons, it is understandable that stories about conversion to Christianity of party officials who are expected to be atheists are not made public. My interviewees were not too eager to speak about cases they know of either, presumably to protect themselves and their church members. Moreover, although no longer illegal, baptisms of converts are often postponed or done secretly to avoid any problems.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ "De Agente Secreto a Siervo de Dios", *Cristianismo Hispano Hoy*, January 2015.

²⁰⁹ Interview with CU05 (2016).

Threat 2: State surveillance

State surveillance, both physical but also digital (the state is the only internet provider in Cuba) is a threat that is present in all spheres of life, revealing the totalitarian traits of the authoritarian Cuban regime. Monitoring of church services and sermons is systematic, but beyond the church sphere there is widespread monitoring as well. RFATs widely acknowledge its existence, but do not qualify how intimidating and even paralyzing this form of psychological pressure can be. Although it is not physically violent, state surveillance is an important human security threat that directly threatens human dignity.

By international human rights standards, surveillance is labeled as a human rights violation. Surveillance not only has a chilling effect on the exercise of civil liberties; it also constitutes a disparity in the power relation between the watcher and the watched which “creates the risk of a variety of harms, such as discrimination, coercion, and the threat of selective enforcement, where critics of the government can be prosecuted or blackmailed for wrongdoing unrelated to the purpose of the surveillance” as Richards asserts in his article “The Dangers of Surveillance” (2013). It is generally accepted that the right to privacy can be infringed under specific circumstances such as a security threat,²¹⁰ but even this is highly controversial (Richards 2013).

State surveillance is very common in the Cuban context, directly infringing religious freedom. There is a broad consensus among the Cuban ministers I interviewed that it is both permanent and systematic. One pastor said: “We know that there are always informants listening to our sermons. That is why we are always very careful and refrain from making any comments that could disturb the communists.”²¹¹ Another pastor said: “As long as we stick to religious themes, we have nothing to fear, but when we discuss social issues, there are always informants.”²¹²

Surveillance is not limited to the contents of sermons and church services, but encompasses almost all spheres of life, including all written and electronic communications especially of church leaders and other influential persons, as well as any published materials. “Neighborhood committees report everything that may seem subversive to the authorities”, declared one pastor.²¹³ Another told me: “They [the state security] already know you’re here, meeting with me.”²¹⁴ A representative of a foreign organization working in Cuba also told me: “Virtually anyone can be tempted to become an informant for the authorities. When a poor family is offered a weekend in a tourist hotel, they easily reveal sensitive information about their ministers.”²¹⁵ Among the Cuban ministers I interviewed, I observed a certain acceptance of the surveillance, presumably because they are simply so accustomed to it that they do not question it. This being said, when I had the opportunity to meet with some of them outside Cuba, they expressed relief that they could talk freely.²¹⁶ While sharing a meal safely in Costa Rica, one pastor told me: “Even now, I look around for people overhearing our conversations. I know there is no threat here, but I’m just so used to it.”²¹⁷

The only people who seem to be really bothered by the permanent surveillance, are foreign ministers working in Cuba and Cubans who live outside Cuba. “I am sure that there are

²¹⁰ “Mass surveillance is fundamental threat to human rights, says European report”, *The Guardian*, 26/01/2015.

²¹¹ Interview with CU07 (2016).

²¹² Interview with CU08 (2016).

²¹³ Interview with CU05 (2016).

²¹⁴ Interview with Mario Félix Leonart Barroso (2015).

²¹⁵ Interview with CU09 (2013).

²¹⁶ Interview with CU10 (2017).

²¹⁷ Interview with CU05 (2016).

infiltrated agents at all levels. Sadly, this is how it is. Not only in Evangelical [Protestant] churches but also in Catholic churches, centers of Spiritism and [masonic] lodges. The fear to lose power brings them [the Cuban government] to do this, but let's remember that God has got time and it will come",²¹⁸ says Jorge Luis Pantoja. "There are always informants in church. It can be people of whom you least expect it",²¹⁹ an Italian Catholic priest working in a coast town in Cuba told me and he requested me to never email him because he was concerned that he might be expelled from the country.

Just like the practical restrictions on aspects of freedom of worship, the permanent surveillance has a paralyzing effect on the work of Christian ministers, effectively reducing their freedom to speak freely and undertake any initiative the authorities might not appreciate. When a religious minister 'crosses the line', this can lead to interrogations at the police station or at the party bureau, occasional physical harassment or he can be accused of any fabricated charge like I describe in threat 5.

Threat 3: Discrimination when dealing with the authorities

"You'd be stupid to put your religion on a job application. (...) It would go straight in the bin", said a schoolteacher,²²⁰ a statement that represents quite well that religious people continue to face some degree of discrimination in any dealings with the authorities. The existence of this discrimination is such a normal thing for most Christians that they rarely complain about it. When specifically asked about it, however, Christian leaders acknowledge it happens, but seem to have accepted it as something that is simply part of their lives.

Christians occasionally experience discrimination in the form of exclusion from access to basic social services and food rations.²²¹ Christians are also often discriminated when they apply for various permits. This does not happen homogeneously throughout the country, as it is more frequent in the east.²²² I was not able to determine why there are differences in the application of the restrictions between neighborhoods and regions, but I did perceive some churches to have better relationships with the authorities than others, suggesting it is possible to mitigate some of the threats through personal advocacy. At any rate, the unpredictable and arbitrary implementation of such restrictions causes Christians to experience a lot of stress.

Although this is not as strong as in the past, being a Christian continues to be viewed as an obstacle to professional growth.²²³ Generalized restrictions on (university) education for Christians are largely a thing of the past, but children of outspoken Christians do continue to face them. For example, one pastor told me his daughter was not accepted in university: "I suspect this happened to punish me because my church has been very successful in converting people to the Gospel."²²⁴ The same applies to discrimination against Christians and other religious people in public employment (private employment does not technically exist in Cuba); it used to be stronger in the past, but individual Christians may still encounter discrimination in public employment, both in getting into jobs and in promotion. A young

²¹⁸ "De Agente Secreto a Siervo de Dios", *Cristianismo Hispano Hoy*, January 2015.

²¹⁹ Interview with CU04 (2016).

²²⁰ "Religion in Cuba. Chango unchained", *The Economist*, 18/04/2015.

²²¹ Interview with CU06 (2016) and CU05 (2016).

²²² Interview with CU10 (2016)

²²³ Interview with CU07 (2016)

²²⁴ Interview with CU06 (2016).

engineer told me he would have faced challenges in his job for a public company for being the son of a pastor if he had not developed a good relationship with his boss.²²⁵

Threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior

Under the category of semi-active religious behavior, which covers religious participation and religious lifestyle, I identified four threats.

Threat 4: Restriction of educational activities

Under the antireligious interpretation of the communist ideology, education is an exclusive prerogative of the state (Sarkissian 2015). Any non-state institutions, whether families, private schools or religious institutions, are, strictly taken, not entitled to engage in any form of educational activities. In the categorization I adopted, these institutions correspond to the family, church and social spheres. In the social sphere, a strict prohibition of religious education can be observed, including religious education outside of public schools (Fox 2015; US State Department 2017; Open Doors International 2017). Non-compliance with the education policy occasionally leads to human rights violations. A recent widely mediatized case involved a pastoral couple, Ramón and Adya Rigal, who refused to send their children to a public school, “arguing that the state system emphasises a Marxist-Leninist atheist ideology that goes against their beliefs. They also [said] their children were bullied at school.”²²⁶ The couple was arrested, and after a quick trial, the pastor was condemned to a one year prison sentence and his wife to house arrest. In addition, the pastor was required to cease his work as a church leader. After international advocacy efforts, the sentences were reduced, and the pastor was allowed to resume his religious work.

The case of Ramón Rigal is controversial because the pastor was effectively withdrawing from the legal obligation for education, which would be an offence in many democratic countries that do not have legal provisions for homeschooling. It does, nevertheless, highlight that the Cuban state provides no room for conscientious objection in the case of education, and that refusal to comply can lead to the prohibition of ministerial work and even to prison sentences. According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a faith-based charity, several cases of a similar nature occurred in the course of 2017.²²⁷ Open Doors International reports that “especially marginal Protestant groups such as the Apostolic Movement or Jehovah’s Witnesses denounce they suffer reprisals for not complying with the legal requirement to send their children to state schools” (2017).

The restrictions on religious education are not absolute, however. In the church sphere there is slightly more room for educational activities. “The state is particularly jealous about the influence of churches on young people”, explains a pastor. “As churches, we can develop educational programs, but they must be low scale so we do not attract attention.”²²⁸ Extracurricular catechism is not impossible, but must be done cautiously by avoiding large gatherings of youths and the teaching of any topic that could be labeled as ‘subversive.’²²⁹

²²⁵ Interview with CU11 (2015).

²²⁶ “Cuba: pastor returns to work after arrest for home-schooling”, *World Watch Monitor*, 18/08/2017.

²²⁷ “Pastor Barred From Working As Church Leader”, *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, 04/08/2017.

²²⁸ Interview with CU08 (2017)

²²⁹ Interview with CU05 (2016)

Similarly, various Christian denominations from time to time organize summer camps for youths, which are tolerated, provided this is done “cautiously.”²³⁰

This being said, various Protestant pastors regret that their denominations have failed to educate their congregations in essential fields: “Our church members are dealing with many challenges: family disruption, loss of values, drug abuse and adolescents without direction. We neglected our role to educate them.”²³¹ This situation is a direct result of the prevailing communist policy: “We always assumed that we as church leaders needed to stay out of education because this is the role of the state, but we are starting to realize now that this was a mistake.”²³²

In higher education, perhaps paradoxically, religious education is possible, but only in government approved seminaries of registered denominations, which are always under intense scrutiny. Curricula and literature must formally be approved by the CIC (and informally by the Communist Party). Topics related to any form of social or political engagement of Christians are to be avoided at all times.²³³ This is also the primary reason why the training events I organized had to be held out of country.

Finally, in the family sphere, education is also limited by the communist understanding that this is a state prerogative. This directly contradicts one of the tenets of religious freedom as a multidimensional concept which is the respect for the right of parents “to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions”, as stated in article 18, paragraph 4, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a legally binding instrument that Cuba signed in 2008 but has not yet ratified. (It is not likely that Cuba will ratify this legal instrument. The Cuban government has publicly stated it does not consider it to be necessary, arguing that the 1959 revolution had brought about civil and political rights in the country.) In practice, Christian parents try to educate their children in the Christian faith, as various interviewees affirmed, but the educational role of parents is not fully respected.²³⁴ As one pastor declared: “Schoolteachers pit children against their parents by saying things like: ‘don’t believe what your parents tell you, they’re wrong.’”²³⁵

Threat 5: Restrictions on various aspects pertaining to freedom of worship

As described above, after the Opening of 1991 a number of restrictions on religion were relaxed, but laws and government practices nevertheless continue to restrict various aspects pertaining to freedom of worship (Hearn 2008). The RAS Project also mentions these restrictions but does not provide any detail about the human security threats that Christians face when they fail to respect these restrictions. The fieldwork I conducted reveals that this is dependent upon many factors, including the type of Christian denomination and the extent to which a particular individual or group is viewed as a threat to the regime. House church buildings, which by default do not have permission to host religious activities, are always at risk of being closed or confiscated.

²³⁰ Interview with CU12 (2016)

²³¹ Interview with CU07 (2016).

²³² Interview with CU13 (2016).

²³³ Interviews with CU09 (2014), CU14, CU07, CU10 (2016) and CU08 (2017).

²³⁴ Interviews with CU13, CU09 and CU10 (2016).

²³⁵ Interview with CU05 (2016).

In one very extreme case, for example, a house church building was destroyed by government bulldozers and its members detained by the police.²³⁶ The particularity of this case was that the pastor of this church had repeatedly made statements criticizing the regime (threat 10), his church had experienced rapid growth (threat 6) and was part of an unregistered denomination, thus technically illegal.

Such violence occurs and is concerning but is relatively rare. The Violent Incidents Database of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, that keeps track of incidents of closed, confiscated or destroyed churches based on media research, only records eight similar cases since 2011. A number of faith-based organizations claim to have recorded much higher numbers, but these claims could not be independently verified.²³⁷ Many of my contacts in Cuba also seriously question the reliability of these claims.²³⁸

Much more common are the practices of intimidation, bureaucratic discouragement and discrimination. For example, Cuban ministers who travel abroad to attend international conferences are systematically questioned before and after their trips.²³⁹ The import of Christian materials needs to be channeled through the CIC, and is subject to censorship: literature that is considered subversive by the regime, such as theological works on social mobilization, human rights and social transformation is systematically confiscated.²⁴⁰ I was able to confirm this myself when I visited the printing presses and libraries of various Cuban denominations. In 2015 and 2016 I visited the seminaries of the *Seminario Evangélico de Teología*, a shared facility of three CIC affiliated denominations, the seminary of the *Iglesia Cristiana Reformada* (Christian Reformed Church), the seminary of the *Convención Evangélica de Cuba Los Pinos Nuevos* (Worldteam) and I spoke with seminary leaders of the *Convención Bautista de Cuba Oriental* (American Baptist Churches). I also spoke to the people operating printing presses at the *Iglesia de la Biblia Abierta* (Open Bible Churches), the *Liga Evangélica de Cuba* (Independent) and the *Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal de Cuba* (Assemblies of God).

Sometimes the state intervenes in the designation of denominational leaders, and ensures the President of the CIC is always favorable to the regime.²⁴¹ Internet access is limited (slow and costly) and largely monitored.²⁴² Christian materials can be accessed, as long as they are not viewed as subversive by the regime.²⁴³ Owning printing presses used to be restricted but is now possible, but there is no way to obtain paper, ink and other supplies legally²⁴⁴, and even on the black market – the real market – this is difficult.²⁴⁵ Mail can be received but only up to a certain weight.²⁴⁶ Registered denominations can have a bank account, but there is a maximum amount of monthly transactions they are allowed to handle.²⁴⁷ Christians do not lose their inheritance rights, but retired pastors do not receive a pension.²⁴⁸

²³⁶ “Church destroyed and 200 hundred members detained in Cuba”, *Christian Today*, 09/02/2016.

²³⁷ “Church demolitions gather pace”, *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, 16/08/2016.

²³⁸ Interviews with CU08 and others (2016).

²³⁹ Interviews with CU05, CU07 and CU12 (2016).

²⁴⁰ Interviews with CU09 (2014), CU08 and CU14 (2016).

²⁴¹ Interview with CU05 (2016).

²⁴² “Cuba sigue a la cola del mundo en libertad de Internet”, *Martí Noticias*, 14/11/2017.

²⁴³ Interview with CU11 (2016).

²⁴⁴ Interview with CU08 (2016).

²⁴⁵ Interview with CU12 (2015).

²⁴⁶ Interview with CU09 (2012).

²⁴⁷ Interviews with CU05 and CU09 (2017).

²⁴⁸ Interview with CU05 (2016).

The pattern that emerges is that many aspects of freedom of worship are tolerated, but always subject to limitations.²⁴⁹ Formally, many things are possible, but in practice, much is intentionally slowed down or stalled through bureaucratic processes, leading to frustration and a permanent feeling of obstruction. “The permanent obstruction is a strategy of the government. Only the most determined people actually manage to get things done”, as one interviewee put it.²⁵⁰

Another pattern that emerges from the interviews is that Christians are rarely directly accused of violating religious policy, which explains why such threats are not recognized by RFATs. Rather, when the authorities want to hinder a particular individual or church, a frequently used strategy is to fabricate charges that have nothing to do with religion. For example, one strategy is to accuse someone of buying on the black market, which is illegal, but this is also a very convenient tool, because virtually everyone in Cuba buys on the black market because as many supplies are simply not available in the formal economy.²⁵¹ “Whenever there are reports that religious ministers are caught buying something on the black market, it is likely there is something else behind it”, says a representative of a faith-based organization working in Cuba.²⁵² A similar strategy is to accuse a church of violating zoning regulations, which is very common in the case of house churches, whose formal destination is residential and not religious.²⁵³

Beyond fabricated charges related to black market purchases or zoning regulations, the private life of church leaders, who are subject to permanent surveillance, can be used against them. For example, in *Sodoma, enquête au cœur du Vatican*, a worldwide research about homosexuality in the Catholic Church, French sociologist Frédéric Martel describes how secretly homosexual priests and bishops are blackmailed by the Cuban regime to force them to tone down their opposition to the regime (2019).

Christians have learned to find ways to work within these restrictions by being very cautious and ‘staying under the radar’ as much as possible. Developing personal relationships with the authorities has been a good strategy to mitigate risks, but when authorities change, there is no way to tell how unpredictable things are. “If we are smart, we can enjoy some degree of freedom, but you need to know how the system works”, says one pastor.²⁵⁴ The unpredictable and arbitrary use of such strategies are nevertheless like a sword of Damocles hanging over churches in Cuba, for whom there is no true legal security, leaving them vulnerable even when they stay within the limits of the law.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Interview with CU09 (2012).

²⁵⁰ Interview with CU12 (2016).

²⁵¹ Interview with CU27 (2015).

²⁵² Interview with CU09 (2012).

²⁵³ Interview with CU09 (2012).

²⁵⁴ Interview with CU12 (2016).

²⁵⁵ Interview with CU15 (2017).

Threat 6: Restrictions on church growth

I chose to mention the restrictions on church growth as a separate threat because it is such an important factor of vulnerability of Christians. In threat 5, I described the existence of restrictions on various aspects of freedom of worship, but I also explained that within these limitations and hindrances it is nevertheless possible for churches to function. However, whenever churches start to grow in membership, integrating many new converts, they frequently experience more opposition. It is not even necessary for ‘subversive activities’ to take place within a church; their sheer growth is viewed as a threat by the state.

The RFATs show a picture that churches face restrictions but are tolerated. Through my fieldwork, I found that these restrictions intensify when churches start to grow. If a church really grows fast and visibly, it can lead to its complete destruction, although this rarely happens. More often, other pretexts are found to intimidate the pastor or priest, sow divisions causing churches to split or even fabricate scandals to discredit the religious minister leading the church.²⁵⁶ “The authorities try to do anything to keep us small”, said one pastor.²⁵⁷ Another said: “Churches are largely left alone when they’re small, but when we start to grow in numbers, the oppression starts.”²⁵⁸ Making a similar point as Scolnicov (2011) and Koesel (2014) about the permanent tension between authoritarian (communist) regimes and religion as competing sources of legitimacy, an older pastor explained: “The communists don’t like large gatherings of people. They simply cannot stand it that we [religious ministers] have such an influence in the community while the Communist Party is losing members.”²⁵⁹

Beyond the generalized restrictions on freedom of assembly, the reasons for the Cuban regime’s suspicion of church growth can be both ideological and political, as this quote summarizes: “It’s simple. The ideological bases of the Cuban revolution have always been the Marxist-atheist philosophy. Its main concern is a great revival in the churches because this could lead to a weakening of the regime, as each person who converts to the Gospel is one person less who believes in this system.”²⁶⁰ Another interviewee argues: “Vital religion and the communist ideology are incompatible. The sight of successful and growing churches is a sign to the world that communism failed.”²⁶¹

Threat 7: Prosecution of conscientious objectors

Conscientious objection is classically associated with both freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. In legal scholarship, defining the boundaries of the right to conscientious objection is controversial,²⁶² because determining when and under which conditions religious demands should justify exemptions from civil laws is extremely complex (Nussbaum 2007; Bouchard & Taylor 2008; Tollefsen 2009; Wolfe 2012). Without going into this debate, what interests me in the framework of this case study is the extent to which conscientious objectors – as an expression of religious lifestyle – in Cuba are vulnerable to suffer human security threats.

²⁵⁶ Interview with CU09 (2016).

²⁵⁷ Interview with CU07 (2016).

²⁵⁸ Interview with CU08 (2016).

²⁵⁹ Interview with CU05 (2016).

²⁶⁰ “De Agente Secreto a Siervo de Dios”, *Cristianismo Hispano Hoy*, January 2015.

²⁶¹ Interview with Mario Félix Leonart Barroso (2017).

²⁶² UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 22 (1993) states that religious freedom “cannot be derogated from, even in time of public emergency.”

The RAS Project indicates the existence of “slight restrictions” on conscientious objection in the case of military service, explaining that “conscientious objectors to military service are not given other options for national service and are prosecuted” (the most recent data is from 2014), in accordance with article 65 of the Cuban Constitution which states that refusal of military service is a punishable offence. A 1991 report by Amnesty International stated there were “Unconfirmed reports of Jehovah’s Witnesses being imprisoned for refusing military service (...).”²⁶³ Participation in some communist celebrations is compulsory, but none of the people I interviewed seemed to find this problematic, or perhaps they decided it was not worth challenging it, which suggests that nobody takes communist dogmas seriously enough to bother challenging them.

I did not come across any contemporary cases of conscientious objectors getting in trouble. Conscientious objection to military service is not an issue in most Christian denominations, as it is mainly a concern for Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Apostolical Movement and Quakers which are relatively small in Cuba. Moreover, it seems that alternatives to military service are now available: “For religious groups that actively oppose military participation, there are no legal provisions exempting their members as conscientious objectors; in practice, the authorities allow conscientious objectors to perform alternative service” (US State Department 2017),²⁶⁴ which the Cuban government, through its Permanent Mission to the UN office in Geneva, confirmed in a letter to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). I conclude that prosecution of conscientious objectors to military service is a low intensity threat for Christians.

Conscientious objection is an issue in the field of education, which I already discussed in threat 4. Beyond education and military service, the only other areas where the right to conscientious objection of Christians is restricted is in the field of family policy. A number of Christian ministers I interviewed complained that they were pressurized by the authorities to publicly express their support of gay rights, which the Cuban government decided to embrace in 1986, after decades of persecution of sexual minorities.²⁶⁵ For religious ministers holding conservative views, not supporting this policy is a matter of conscience. Refusal to express their support to it did not get them into trouble, but they did receive warnings this will be the case in the future.²⁶⁶

Threats resulting from active religious behavior

Of the ten identified threats, I categorized three as resulting from active religious behavior, referring to missionary activity and civic participation. Although only a minority of Christians engages in such activities, it is likely this is precisely because these activities face so many restrictions. The intensity of these threats is also higher than for the threats described above.

²⁶³ “Conscientious Objection to Military Service”, *Amnesty International*, 1999.

²⁶⁴ Interviews with CU16 and CU09 (2016) confirmed this.

²⁶⁵ “From Persecution To Acceptance? The History Of LGBT Rights In Cuba”, *The Cutting Edge*, 24/10/2012.

²⁶⁶ Interviews with CU05 and CU08 (2016).

Threat 8: Restrictions on missionary activity

Restrictions on missionary activity is the first major threat resulting from active religious behavior that can be identified. Because the state is the main actor responsible for the vulnerability of religious groups in Cuba, it is pertinent to look at what RFATs, particularly the RAS Project, inform about this, before contrasting it with my empirical observations. The RFATs all point to the existence of legal restrictions on missionary activity, which are placed both on Cuban nationals and foreign clergy or missionaries who can be denied visas or given visas under the condition that they refrain from proselytizing (Fox 2015:193-194).

Cuba's policy regarding missionary activity is not unequivocal. An assessment of this policy in 2008 by Fox indicated that some aspects were relaxed (2015), but later reports by other sources both confirmed²⁶⁷ and contradicted this.²⁶⁸ It seems that the Cuban government is struggling to determine its policy, leading to a great amount of legal uncertainty for Christians in Cuba. Just as with other threats, it seems that restrictions on missionary activity are tighter in the east of Cuba, and generally target fast growing denominations that are not registered or registered but not affiliated to the CIC.

What RFATs inform about the restrictions on missionary activity needs to be nuanced by empirical observations. During my visits to Cuba, I was able to observe groups engaging in street evangelism, but I would not jump to the conclusion that missionary activity is now accepted. For example, I observed a very marginal group of social outcasts with little education, who gathered for religious services next to a garbage dump, who were not restricted in doing street evangelism. My personal guess is that the authorities did not bother to intervene because it seemed unlikely that this marginal group would be successful in gaining any adepts. On the other hand, I also received reports of better organized groups belonging to larger denominations, who requested permission for street evangelism which were denied.²⁶⁹

I can only speculate what the reasons are for allowing only some groups to engage in missionary activity, but I would expect the authorities are cautious not to give the impression that religion is oppressed in Cuba, and therefore only restrict the missionary work of groups that they view as a threat, in a similar way that freedom of worship is not restricted but church growth is. By comparison, the Afro-Cuban religion is now very visible on the streets of Havana and faces less restrictions than Christianity.²⁷⁰ A review of literature suggests that the Cuban government has become less hostile to this religion in recent years, mainly because it is increasingly viewed as part of the Cuban national culture – in opposition to Christianity which is viewed as imposed by Spanish colonialism in the case of Catholicism and American imperialism in the case of Protestantism – and because it has increasingly become an export product (Miller 2000; Hearn 2008). (Ironically, when taking a historical perspective, the presence of both Christianity and Judaism in Cuba precede Afro-Cuban religion.)

²⁶⁷ Interviews with CU12 and CU05 (2016).

²⁶⁸ Interviews with CU11 (2016) and CU05 (2017).

²⁶⁹ Interviews with CU08 (2016) and CU05 (2017).

²⁷⁰ Interview with CU05 (2017).

Threat 9: Hindrance of charitable work

With the Opening of 1991, religious groups were authorized to engage in some forms of charitable work. Many religious groups, who in the past could not conduct any form of charitable work, gratefully took advantage of this opportunity.²⁷¹ The largest charitable initiative in this field is the Cuban chapter of Caritas, which legally operates in Cuba since 1991 under the umbrella of the Catholic Church (Goldenziel 2009:199). The Christian charity World Vision International also started to do work in Cuba in 2011.²⁷²

The broadening of the possibilities for religious groups to conduct humanitarian work is not as positive as it may seem. It is strictly limited to areas that have been previously authorized by the government, such as initiatives providing meals for elderly people and (disabled) children or emergency relief programs, which are Cuba's most important social challenges and for which the government's capacity is limited (Hearn 2008). Charitable work needs to stay within the boundaries defined by the government. Religious groups cannot, for example, engage in any activities related to education (threat 4), work with youths or business development. Also, humanitarian work is only possible for registered denominations (denominations that are affiliated to the CIC have more options) and is always subject to strict monitoring. The state must always be given the credit and any initiative must be cautious not to attract too much attention. At all times, missionary activity through these activities must be avoided.²⁷³ In *Cuba: Religion, Social Capital, and Development* (2008), Hearn makes very similar observations in his study on the Afro-Cuban religious community, speaking of "state stewardship" of the social initiatives of this group.

The RAS Project identifies the existence of formal and practical restrictions on any form of civil society organizations with a confessional base, implying that any form of charitable work needs to be conducted directly by churches. Religious clergy is also restricted in chaplaincy in hospitals, prisons or military. Finally, the RAS Project observes the occurrence of "arrest/detention/harassment of religious figures/officials/members of religious parties for activities other than proselytizing."

A recent example of the restrictions on charitable work are the hindrances placed on the churches that tried to provide humanitarian aid to the victims of hurricanes Matthew and Nicole in September and October 2016 and hurricane Irma in September 2017.²⁷⁴ In both events, in a display of interchurch solidarity, a coalition of churches loaded some trucks with food and supplies, but these trucks were stopped by the authorities for not having the proper permits. One interviewee, who was involved in the humanitarian operation after hurricane Irma, said: "The authorities told us there was no need for us to take humanitarian aid to the victims and that this is the responsibility of the state. They confiscated all the supplies to distribute it themselves."²⁷⁵ In order to bring the humanitarian aid to the victims, the group had to come up with alternative strategies, such as traveling by night and in smaller, less conspicuous vehicles.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Interviews with CU17, CU18 (2015) and CU19, CU20 and CU21 (2016).

²⁷² "Trabajando por la niñez en Cuba", *World Vision International*, 03/09/2015.

²⁷³ Interviews with CU17, CU18 (2015) and CU21 (2016).

²⁷⁴ Interviews with CU22, CU09, CU10, CU11 and CU05 (2016).

²⁷⁵ Interview with CU11 (2016).

²⁷⁶ "Cuban government is blocking religious charities from aiding Hurricane Irma victims, pastor warns", *The Christian Times*, 01/11/2017.

Another example where restrictions apply is in the field of business development initiatives, which some churches engage in with a vision of generating income sources for poor church members, to finance the operations of the church, raise income for missionary work or even finance the operations of their printing presses. Various churches have encouraged and supported its members to take advantage of the legal possibility to create small businesses such as copy shops, coffee shops, souvenir stores, micro-farming, etc. It is not completely impossible for religious groups to engage in such activities, but it is key they do not attract too much attention because businesses that grow too visibly risk being closed as one interviewee recalled: “My cousin started a small business, a restaurant, just around the corner. After three months it was shut down by the government. Why? Because it was too successful.”²⁷⁷

More problems occur when churches actively engage in business development initiatives,²⁷⁸ for example through the provision of microloans, for which foreign ministries often provide capital: “Our microcredit program is under threat. The government says that churches should not give loans for businesses. They say that if someone needs credit, they can reach out to the public banks. But this is not true, they never give loans to small businesses.”²⁷⁹

In summary, as long as charitable work by religious groups stays within the confines of established boundaries, it can be done, but it is always subject to government monitoring. However, when charitable programs cover other fields, especially education or business development, they are met with restrictions. If these restrictions are not observed, more severe human security threats can follow.

Threat 10: Intimidation of people engaging in human rights activism

The final threat that is applicable to Christians is the intimidation of people engaging in human rights activism or any form of public criticism of the Cuban regime. This is by far the most intense threat Christians face, although only a small minority of them engages in this type of activity because of the obvious risks this implies.

As I discuss in the specificity assessment, Christians engaging in human rights activism and secular (non-religious) human rights activists share a similar vulnerability to this threat, in a country that is not democratic by any standard. Yet, there are features of this vulnerability that are unique to Christians. To start, the RFATs highlight “restrictions on clergy and/or religious organizations engaging in public political speech (other than sermons) or propaganda or on political activity in or by religious institutions”, “restrictions on religious political parties” and “restrictions on clergy holding political office” (RAS Project).

In Cuba, there is a tacit understanding among most Christians that they should simply stay away from any political activity, which for some is based on a theological option that discourages an active role in civil society²⁸⁰ and for others is the result of a *modus vivendi* under the Cuban communist regime.²⁸¹ As Koesel explains, under the USSR, “it was understood that religious groups were to stay out of politics and education, and in return the state would not interfere in their internal affairs” (2014:33), and this is also applicable to Cuba. The Cuban

²⁷⁷ Interview with CU23 (2015).

²⁷⁸ Interview with CU11 (2017).

²⁷⁹ Interview with CU05 (2017).

²⁸⁰ Interview with CU07 (2016).

²⁸¹ Interviews with CU05 (2016); interviews with Catholic priests by Frédéric Martel (2019).

state has a similar – tacit – agreement with religious groups, although it is not always respected. With some frequency, the state does intervene in the church sphere (threats 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8), and a minority of socially active Christians venture into the field of politics, not by standing for election, which is impossible without being a member of the Communist Party, but by making public political statements or joining protests.

A distinction must be made between intervening in politics as a church or religious group or as an individual believer. In both cases, from a normative standpoint, there should not be any restrictions placed on the freedom of (political) expression for religious actors, as this does not constitute a violation of the principle of separation between church and state (Habermas 2006; Petri & Visscher 2015). In Cuba, political expression is restricted for all types of religious actors: the state engages in various form of repression of the political expression of religion as described by Sarkissian (2015:37-40).

In the case of church bodies, denominational leaders deliberately chose to avoid making political statements, mainly to avoid trouble. “We just don’t do this [making political statements]. It would make things worse for us”, one denominational leader said.²⁸² Another commented: “In Cuba, if we really want to promote social change, we should not do it through open criticism of the government. We need to be cautious, patient and strategic.”²⁸³

Some individual Christians, including church leaders, actively engage in political speech, and face severe human rights violations as a result. A noticeable example is Pastor Mario Félix Leonart Barroso, who is a strong believer in the theological option which is known as ‘integral mission’, a current that shares common features with liberation theology and which highlights that Christianity has a mission in the social, political, educational and political fields, and should not be reduced to religious worship.²⁸⁴ His views led him to actively engage in social action by collaborating with human rights activists, becoming a blogger publicly denouncing the regime, writing for various underground newspapers, organizing conferences and concerts, and participating in radio and television programs outside Cuba (including a Miami-based radio broadcast that can be received in Cuba). He suffered from severe human security threats, including intense surveillance, confiscation of personal belongings, numerous threats, beatings, imprisonments,²⁸⁵ and finally had to exile himself from Cuba.²⁸⁶

Like Mario Félix Leonart Barroso, there are various other Christian human rights activists that suffer human security threats for their political positions. A recent case involves a university student who was active in a group that advocates for religious freedom in Cuba. After performing advocacy work in the United States, he was harassed and later expelled from his university, following the fabricated justification that he had accumulated too many absences.²⁸⁷

Conclusions

A characteristic of the regulation of religion by the state in present-day Cuba is that it rarely involves physical violence. The regulation of religion is mainly expressed through legal

²⁸² Interview with CU28 (2016).

²⁸³ Interview with CU08 (2016).

²⁸⁴ Interviews with CU09 (2012), CU08 (2015) and CU14 (2017).

²⁸⁵ “Cuban Pastor Was Arrested Hours Before Obama Visit”, *CBN News*, 31/03/2016.

²⁸⁶ Interviews with Mario Félix Leonart Barroso (2015, 2016) and CU15 (2017).

²⁸⁷ “Cuban activist expelled from university”, *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, 10/05/2017.

restrictions on religious practice, in combination with intentional bureaucratic discouragement and intimidation tactics. Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic violence" describes this form of violence well (Bourdieu & Passeron 1970). Interviewees share that during the early days of communism, religious actors faced beatings, imprisonment and sometimes forced labor and even murder, but that this is no longer the case. The pressure on religious actors is generally subtler now, taking the form of harassment, strict surveillance, discrimination and occasional imprisonment of leaders. This is not to say that physical violence against religious groups is nonexistent. Various sources indicate that some violent incidents are still taking place, including arrests, demolitions of religious property and various forms of harassment (CSW 2017; US Department of State 2017; USCIRF 2017; Open Doors International 2017).

Most threats included in this threat assessment are recognized by RFATs, but my fieldwork discerns interesting empirical nuances. A central finding is that the vulnerability of religious minorities in Cuba is primarily, although not exclusively, the consequence of social activism that is inspired by religious convictions. A high degree of social activism can also lead to restrictions of other, less active forms of religious behavior, as a kind of repercussion measure.

Five decades after the Cuban revolution, the vulnerability of religious minorities evolved. During the first years of communism, the regime's strategy was to try to violently eradicate any form of Christian expression. This strategy largely failed, and churches continued to grow. Now the government's strategy is to allow religious practice but to control public expressions of Christianity that could threaten the regime. On the surface, there seems to be freedom of worship, but in reality, Christians, particularly those that are socially active, are a vulnerable group. Based on the threat assessment, I conclude that religious people are no longer discriminated in terms of access to university education, public sector jobs and membership of the Communist Party, or to a much lesser degree than used to be the case in the early days of the communist regime. Attendance of church services, even in house churches or non-registered denominations, also is no longer a problem as it used to be.

A great percentage of Christians do not practice their religion, and those who do face relatively little obstacles if they stay within the boundaries the government sets for religious practice. However, although both religious identification and semi-active religious behavior are tolerated, the unpredictability of the state and the permanent surveillance are nevertheless very intimidating. Indeed, religious ministers, especially those who are not affiliated to the CIC, live in a constant state of fear and discouragement, as they are subject to permanent surveillance, the threat of fabricated charges whenever something they do displeases the authorities, ongoing discrimination, total absence of legal security, and frustrating restrictions in the conduct of their work.

The restriction of many dimensions of religious freedom is not viewed as a problem by most Cuban religious leaders I interviewed. My interpretation is there are two reasons for this. The first is that they are simply content with their newfound freedoms, which allows them to do much more than what they used to be allowed to do in the past. Occasional imprisonments and threats serve as a reminder that there are lines that should not be crossed.²⁸⁸ The second reason is that many religious groups have, perhaps unconsciously, internalized this narrow interpretation of religious freedom – an authentic expression of "symbolic violence" –, sometimes to the point that they believe they have freedom of religion and would not even

²⁸⁸ "Cuba report reveals ongoing religious restrictions", *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, 06/02/2017.

consider doing anything outside these parameters (which is a form of “symbolic violence”, to use Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970).

There is also the matter of the standard for religious freedom in international human rights law, which recognizes the multidimensionality of religious freedom I described in section 3.3. This standard is not necessarily the standard of the Cubans I engaged with, who often resorted to compare the present situation with the much harsher conditions during the early days of the communist regime. Especially the older generation of leaders seemed very content with their newfound freedoms since the Opening of 1991. I found younger interviewees to be more aware of the fact that it is still not the ideal situation. When asked about the restrictions they face to operate their churches, many would answer there are none, but whenever I asked specifically about aspects related to church repairs or extensions, active missionary activity or criticism of the government, all would immediately declare that these things are not possible or subject to restrictions. This discrepancy could be explained by the optimistic nature of the Cuban people or their reluctance to express criticisms to strangers, but it is also possible that this is because they got so used to the pressure that they consider it as normal.

The internalization of the narrow definition of religious freedom is also present among international faith-based organizations that are active in Cuba. Some seem quite naïve, but they all accept the rules imposed by the Cuban government; they know that in order to be allowed to work in Cuba, they must avoid any form of intervention related to human rights, or they must somehow do it undercover.²⁸⁹

More active forms of religious behavior continue to be a serious source of vulnerability. Churches cannot grow too much, registration of new churches is nearly impossible, social work beyond the defined boundaries is forbidden and any form of human rights activism or public statements against the regime are immediately repressed. The repression mostly takes the form of harassment but can also go further, such as fabricated charges, bureaucratic discouragement, discrimination, and bulldozing of church buildings or house churches and imprisonment of church leaders in the most extreme cases.

The main criterion for the repression of religious behavior seems to be that it is threatening to the regime. Any religious group that grows too much is viewed as a threat, and this is even more so when religious groups engage in any form of human rights activism, or simply develop projects that lead them to develop a certain degree of moral authority within a community, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the state.

The common denominator of the threats to Christians is that any form of religious behavior that is viewed by the regime as subversive creates vulnerability. This can be semi-active behavior such as church growth but also more active behavior such as human rights activism. As a general observation, the more active religious behavior gets, the more the intensity of the threats increase.

Although the restrictions and surveillance seem to be indiscriminate, threats are generally higher for denominations that are not affiliated to the CIC, including the Catholic Church and the various independent Protestant denominations and house churches, particularly in the case of passive and semi-active religious behavior. In the case of some forms of semi-active and all forms of active religious behavior, the difference between CIC affiliated groups and non-

²⁸⁹ Interviews with CU24, CU14 and CU09 (2017).

affiliated groups fades, as engagement in such behavior by any type of religious organization is not appreciated by the regime. (This being said, CIC members rarely engage in active religious behavior beyond the authorized boundaries anyway.)

I conclude that the Opening did not provide full religious freedom but only created the illusion of religious freedom. The Cuban state defines the parameters of what religious freedom includes, effectively restricting it to purely ‘ministerial’ activities – freedom of worship, i.e. activities taking place within the church sphere –, excluding its social dimensions. For example, Fox specifies that only “apolitical worship” is allowed, meaning that the inclusion of any political content in church services, theological training or religious literature is impossible because of permanent government surveillance and harassment, as is characteristic in autocratic regimes (2015:55-111). Goldenziel even argues that surveillance of church services actually increased since 1991: “Although Cuba’s constitutional change to become a secular state appears to increase religious freedom, the Cuban government has greatly increased its efforts to regulate and monitor religion” (2009:208).

7.4.2 Specificity assessment

In this section I evaluate the specificity of the human security threats Christians face in Cuba. When relevant, I compare the vulnerability of Christians to the vulnerability of two obvious groups: (a) other religious groups such as Afro-Cuban religion, Judaism or Islam and (b) other socially active groups, mainly secular human rights activists, which are frequently referred to as ‘dissidents.’ This allows me to determine threats with a high, medium and low degree of specificity, as summarized in figure 7.4.

7.4 Specificity assessment of threats against Christians (Cuba)

Degree of specificity	Identified threats
High	Restrictions on various aspects pertaining to freedom of worship
	Restrictions on church growth
	Restrictions on missionary activity
Medium	‘Conversion’ from the Communist Party
	Discrimination when dealing with the authorities
	Restriction of educational activities
	Prosecution of conscientious objectors
	State surveillance
Low	Hindrance of charitable work
	Intimidation of people engaging in human rights activism

Source: own elaboration.

Threats with a high degree of specificity

Of the identified human security threats, three can be categorized as having a high degree of specificity. Because these threats are related to typical religious activities belonging to the church sphere, establishing their specificity is relatively straightforward, because non-religious groups simply do not engage in such activities. (This being said, non-religious groups do face important restrictions of freedom of assembly and freedom of association, which makes their

position in this respect somewhat comparable to house churches and unregistered Christian denominations.)

Of the three threats in this category, two correspond to semi-active religious behavior – “Restrictions on various aspects pertaining to freedom of worship” and “Restrictions on church growth.” The threat “Restrictions on missionary activity” corresponds to active religious behavior. Regardless of their high degree of specificity, the intensity of these threats is generally not very high.

Part of these threats are applicable to all religious groups, but there are nevertheless noteworthy differences both within Christianity and with other religious groups. Indeed, as argued in the threat assessment, restrictions in this category are more strictly enforced in the case of Catholic churches, non-registered Christian denominations and house churches (types 1, 4 and 5 in figure 7.2) and to a lesser degree for registered denominations that are not affiliated to the CIC (type 3). This is even more so in the case of Christians who also engage in other forms of active religious behavior. CIC affiliated denominations are largely left alone (type 2).

In comparison to other religious groups, there are some noteworthy differences which underline the specific vulnerability of Christians. For example, in the field of missionary activity, the restrictions placed on Christians do not seem to apply to Iranian Shi’ite missionaries, who in 2014 were allowed to establish a cultural center and a mosque in Havana, and who actively work to recruit and convert Cubans.²⁹⁰ The same applies to the restrictions on the opening of new places of worship. Save the two exceptions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Christians have not been authorized to open new churches since 1959. (Many house churches have opened, however, but these have an uncertain legal status.) Yet, mosques are being opened in Cuba: apart from the Shi’ite mosque, on a personal visit to Cuba in 2015 I observed a large building site for another mosque in Havana, which is a component of a cooperation agreement Cuba signed with Turkey.²⁹¹ Finally, many of the restrictions on freedom of worship experienced by Christians I discussed in the threat assessment do not apply to Afro-Cuban religion.²⁹²

The existence of these differences between religions could be explained from the perspective that the Cuban regime only restricts forms of religious expression it considers as a threat. Following this assumption, the Cuban government has no incentive to restrict the missionary activity by the Shi’ite missionaries, because this community only grew to 70 people in three years and is therefore not mobilizing large groups of people.²⁹³ The same is true for the missionary activities of marginal Christian groups, which do not face any restriction either, whereas more organized, larger, Christian groups do. The Cuban government also seems to have an incentive to authorize the opening of mosques, because it is interested in developing good relationships with Muslim countries such as Iran, Turkey and Qatar.²⁹⁴ The current tolerance of Afro-Cuban religion can be interpreted as a political decision of the Cuban government to support this ‘autochthonous’ expression of Cuban culture as explained earlier.

²⁹⁰ “Cuba, Iran's island in the sun”, *The Hill*, 24/10/2016.

²⁹¹ “Turkey's Erdogan proposes building mosque in Cuba”, *Reuters*, 12/02/2015.

²⁹² “Religion in Cuba. Chango unchained”, *The Economist*, 18/04/2015.

²⁹³ “Why Cuba’s Muslim Population Is Growing”, *Newsweek*, 27/12/2016.

²⁹⁴ “Latin America’s leftist regimes get cozy with Iran”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 15/02/2016; “Turkey's Erdogan proposes building mosque in Cuba”, *Reuters*, 12/02/2015; “Turkey and Qatar’s Burgeoning Strategic Alliance”, *Middle East Institute*, 08/06/2016.

Most of the restrictions regarding freedom of worship apply to all Cubans, not only Christians. Hearn mentions these specifically in the case of Afro-Cuban communities (2008). This being said, these restrictions constitute important limitations on the freedom of worship of Christians, mainly because Cuban Christianity widely uses printed materials, much more than Afro-Cuban religion, or most ordinary citizens for that matter. Moreover, the possibility of applying these restrictions makes it possible for the Cuban authorities to enforce them to Christian groups it wishes to muzzle.

There are also specific restrictions on Christians in the realm of freedom of worship. Obstruction of church services is a permanent threat for house churches.²⁹⁵ Renovating or building extensions to church buildings is very difficult. Requests for church repairs are stalled in the bureaucracy, and therefore always slow.²⁹⁶ An illustration of the way Christians are restricted is the initial prohibition for the rebuilding of churches that were destroyed by hurricanes Matthew and Nicole in September and October of 2016. As explained, in Cuba the building of new churches is restricted, but churches that existed before the 1959 revolution are tolerated and should therefore be allowed to be rebuilt. A pastor explained that the authorities simply decided to ignore that these churches had ever existed and refused to allow them to be rebuilt.²⁹⁷ Only after providing proof that the churches existed, combined with intense advocacy efforts, was it possible to rebuild the churches.²⁹⁸

Threats with a medium degree of specificity

As threats with a medium degree of specificity, I have categorized “‘Conversion’ from the Communist Party”, “Discrimination when dealing with the authorities”, “Restriction of educational activities”, “Prosecution of conscientious objectors” and “State surveillance”, three of which correspond to religious identity and two of which correspond to semi-active religious behavior. These threats are applicable to both nominal Christians and socially active Christians.

Discrimination when dealing with the authorities is a reality for many minority groups in Cuba, although its intensity varies depending on the particularities of each case and the specific group a person belongs to. At a basic level, all Cubans who are not members of the Communist Party can be subject to some degree of discrimination, although this is much less a reality today than in the past. More frequent are discriminatory practices against specific minority groups, such as sexual minorities, the Afro-Cuban population and, of course, religious groups, although the nature and intensity of this discrimination has considerably diminished in recent years (Miller 2000). The main reason why I gave these threats a medium degree of specificity is because there continues to exist a certain level of historical suspicion toward religious groups, including especially the largest religious group in Cuba, Christianity (Goldenziel 2009:184; Koesel 2014:3; Fox 2015:125).

In the field of educational activities, non-state education is restricted for any private actor, but Christians are the only sizable group that actively seeks to play a role in the education sphere, whether through catechism or formal seminary education, and therefore encounters the most important restrictions. Prosecution of conscientious objectors is a threat that is generally applicable to all Cubans, but in practice, only outspoken Christians face this issue. State

²⁹⁵ Interviews with CU15, CU12 and CU05 (2016).

²⁹⁶ Interview with CU12 (2016).

²⁹⁷ Interview with CU10 (2016).

²⁹⁸ Interview with CU05 (2016).

surveillance is generalized as well, but it is possible to establish a certain degree of specificity for religious groups, because they are specifically targeted because of their capacity to mobilize and influence large groups of people.

Threats with a low degree of specificity

The following two threats were given a low degree of specificity: “Hindrance of charitable work” and “Intimidation of people engaging in human rights activism.” Both threats correspond to active religious behavior. The main reason why I assigned a low degree of specificity to these threats is because they are applicable in similar ways to non-Christian groups, i.e. any other socially active group that engages in human rights activism. When Christians become socially active in this way, they automatically become ‘dissidents’, and are treated as such by the regime.

The threats I categorized as having a low degree of specificity, may nevertheless be very intense. Reports from both human rights watchdogs and faith-based organizations confirm that any person engaging in active behavior that denounces the undemocratic nature of the regime, whether journalists, human rights activists or religious ministers, are subject to intense threats.

The fact that the specificity for this group of threats is low does not mean there is no specificity at all. Indeed, there are some accents that characterize the vulnerability of Christians to these threats. A key aspect is that the behavior of Christians is inspired by their religious convictions. Also, it must be remembered that the regime is particularly weary of Christians because of features such as their claim to moral authority, their organizational capacity, their influence over large numbers of people (church members), their mobilization capacity and their international ties. In the case of the Catholic Church, especially, their ties with the Vatican, a foreign state, raise the suspicion of mixed allegiances. A church can also become a symbol of subversion, such as the human rights group known as the *Damas de Blanco [Ladies in White]* because of the white gladiolas they carry, whose main act of protest is to attend Sunday Mass. These features clearly differentiate Christian dissidents from non-Christian dissidents who generally do not have access to this ‘religious capital.’

Conclusions

Whereas the intensity of the threats faced by Christians increases as their religious behavior gets more active, this is not true for their specificity. This specificity resides mainly in the fact that some of the more risky forms of behavior are exclusive to Christian religious practice (such as Christian worship, conscientious objection or missionary activity) or because in the Cuban context it is only Christians who engage in such activities (such as educational or humanitarian work).

Specificity decreases in the case of social activism, precisely because any person or group that chooses to engage in such activities can expect a similar response from the state. This being said, even in such cases it is possible to isolate certain elements that are specific to Christians in the Cuban context which set them apart from other religious and non-religious groups, such as their moral authority, mobilization capacity or international connections. For example, state surveillance is widespread in all spheres of society, but churches generally receive special attention because of the influence they have over large groups of people.

Fox comprehensively establishes the existence of hostilities toward religion in Cuba – the existence of demonstrable threats to religious minorities, to use the vocabulary of this research –, but at the same time considers there is no specificity to these threats: “While the state is hostile to religion, this hostility is at about the same level as state hostility to other types of non-state organizations. Religion is not singled out.” In light of the empirical evidence I presented in this specificity assessment, I argue this conclusion is contestable. Methodologically, I do not treat specificity as a binary variable, but rather as a sliding scale, roughly divided into three. Even in cases when threats are applicable to both religious and non-religious groups, there are still essential elements that are directly attributable to religion. Moreover, Fox’s conclusion only concerns the variables he collected in the RAS Project, which do not look at differences between Christian denominations, the subtle nature of some human security threats which I observed empirically through the threat assessment, and some forms of religious behavior it does not consider.

Koesel’s discussion of the characteristic elements of religion that make religious groups vulnerable under authoritarian regimes (2014) seems more applicable to the case of Cuba. These elements are related to the fact that religion directly competes with the legitimacy of the state (Ghanea & Xanthaki 2005; Habermas 2006; Ghanea, Walden & Stephens 2007; Scolnicov 2011; Fox 2013) and because of its mobilization capacity (Koesel 2014). As already explained, this mobilization capacity sets religious groups apart from other human rights activists, which may have a constituency, influence and international connections, but do not have entire congregations behind them. This is particularly true in Cuba, where religious groups are tolerated amid the restrictions, but freedom of association and assembly is restricted for non-religious groups.

I do agree with Fox that the specificity for most threats Christians face is likely to be low, because the Cuban state places similar restrictions on all non-state actors. Indeed, because of the authoritarian nature of the Cuban state, any person or group who engages in socially active behavior can be expected to be vulnerable, whether they are religious or not, as is documented by public and private human rights watchdogs.

In the course of this research I also identified a number of threats that are applicable to Christians but did not pass the threshold of specificity. These threats are “restrictions on freedom of assembly for non-religious meetings” and “restrictions on freedom of expression of religious leaders.” Although they constitute severe limitations on the religious freedom of Christians, they are by no means unique to this minority. Under the current Cuban political system, no civil society group other than the Communist Party, whether religious or not, is allowed to gather for whatever purpose. (Perhaps paradoxically, freedom of assembly is only allowed for registered religious groups and sometimes tolerated for house churches, as long as they stick to purely religious themes.) Freedom of expression also is restricted for all. Although Afro-Cuban religion seems to have more leeway than Christianity, this does not mean that its followers can freely express views that are critical of the government.

7.4.3 Resilience assessment

The third step of the RM-VAT is the resilience assessment. In this assessment, I use information provided in the previous two assessments, but I also add new empirical material to describe how Christians in Cuba cope or could cope with the threats they face. After describing these coping mechanisms, I formulate some conclusions.

Coping mechanisms

In this section I describe the main coping mechanisms that are used by Christians in Cuba, following the categorization of coping mechanisms introduced in chapter 4. The focus group session in which a group of Cuban church leaders discussed my initial conclusions allowed to nuance and complement my findings. It also revealed that Cuban Christians, although they have developed a substantial number of techniques and resources to cope with pressures, are generally unaware of their importance as they have grown so used to using them. This being said, the application of the focus group was instrumental to stimulate the self-reflection of the participants about coping mechanisms.

Avoidance

Avoidance is a common coping mechanism for all Christians, although documenting it is challenging, because people who adopt this coping mechanism by definition avoid making their views known. Moreover, the majority of my interviewees were actively practicing Christians who are generally more outspoken about their faith and are less drawn to adopting this coping mechanism. This being said, many of them do apply avoidance in different parts of their work and personal lives. A phrase that is frequently mentioned in this regard by the Cubans I interviewed is ‘staying under the radar’, which refers to the attitude they adopt of trying not to be noticed by the authorities and always being cautious. I observed avoidance in many different areas, such as in the organization of evangelistic activities, the creation of small businesses, the conduct of social work, the operation of a printing press, etc. These activities are generally conducted in such a way that they attract as little attention as possible, with frequent tactical postponements.

Individual Christians too practice avoidance. For example, a young engineer working for a state company who remained silent about his Christian convictions to avoid any trouble in his professional career.²⁹⁹ A church leader told me that he picks some battles that are important to him, but avoids others to diminish pressure from the government.³⁰⁰ Jorge Luis Pantoja, the former secret service agent mentioned in my description of threat 1, decided to remain silent for a time about his conversion to Christianity until he finally decided to leave the island without ever telling anyone but his spouse about his conversion instead of directly confronting the authorities.

Christians also adopt ways of speaking covertly through bible stories, parables, biographies of saints or well-known Christians and seemingly apolitical religious acts. For example, in one church service I attended, the pastor made references to John Bunyan, the 17th century English writer and preacher, who had been imprisoned for his missionary work, leaving his audience to establish a parallel with the persecution in modern-day Cuba. The Ladies in White, the group mentioned above, silently protest against imprisoned dissidents by attending Sunday Mass.³⁰¹ Outside Christianity, in Afro-Cuban religion, the annual procession in honor of San Lázaro has evolved in the 1990’s into a forum for the expression of political protest (Hagedorn 2002). In

²⁹⁹ Interview with CU11 (2016).

³⁰⁰ Interview with CU08 (2017).

³⁰¹ “Castro vs. the Ladies in White”, *Wall Street Journal*, 29/08/2011.

all examples, seemingly religious acts constitute covert expressions of protest, which really is the only way for religious organizations to express disagreement with the regime.

There is an inherent contradiction between engaging in any form of public or social activity, which by definition generates exposure, and the imperative of not attracting attention. Cuban Christians have found ways to continue to engage in such activities while at the same time minimizing their exposure. For example, missionary activity is done preferably through personal, casual looking conversations instead of through large open air gatherings. Businesses are careful not to grow beyond one employee. Churches avoid integrating new converts, but instead direct them toward house churches within the same denomination. Humanitarian work is done but in small groups and from different locations.³⁰²

The use of covert language in communications is standard practice for Christian leaders and activists. Copying different people in emails or explicitly mentioning dates and places where meetings take place is avoided, to not alert security services who may be spying on private telephone or electronic conversations. Yet, Cuban leaders warn about “too much secrecy”, because that can also create suspicion. “I’ve got nothing to hide. It’s all open,”³⁰³ says one Cuban pastor. Another pastor says: “If we’re just talking about theological matters, which interest us as church leaders, we’ve got nothing to fear.”³⁰⁴ However, mentioning political subjects, such as criticism of the human rights situation in Cuba, is avoided at all times.

At times, staying under the radar is impossible, and the only alternative that is left for many Cubans is to either abandon their social activity or to leave the country. Since the Cuban revolution this has happened in large numbers, mainly to the United States. According to data from 2013, there are 1,135,000 foreign born Cubans living in the United States (Pew Research Center). I was not able to establish the percentage of Cuban Christians who migrated to the United States as a result of an avoidance strategy. However, many interviewees pointed to the fact that there are numerous church leaders who end up migrating to the United States, either because they grew tired of all the oppression or because they were requested by the authorities to leave, leaving Cuban churches without leadership,³⁰⁵ in line with a pattern described by Hirschman: “Latin American powerholders have long encouraged their political enemies and potential critics to remove themselves from the scene through voluntary exile.” (1970:60). I interviewed at least five people in such a position.³⁰⁶

Spiritual endurance

In almost all the interviews I conducted with Cuban Christians, they expressed how their Christian faith is “a source of comfort, relief and hope” that helps them to undergo the challenges that are inherent to living in a communist system. Especially “the Biblical teaching that believers are not of this world but are promised a future, better world” was cited as a source of consolation.³⁰⁷ In addition, Cuban Christians expressed they find comfort in the realization

³⁰² Various interviews and focus group discussion in December 2017.

³⁰³ Interview with CU05 (2017).

³⁰⁴ Interview with CU08 (2015).

³⁰⁵ Interviews with CU25, CU09 (2014) and CU05 (2016).

³⁰⁶ Interviews with CU25 (2014), CU10 (2015), Mario Félix Leonart Barroso, CU07, CU14 and CU05 (2016).

³⁰⁷ Interview with CU27 (2017).

that Christians have suffered tribulations throughout history and presently continue to suffer in different parts of the world.³⁰⁸

A number of them also expressed they felt a calling to remain and serve the church in Cuba, instead of leaving to the United States (one interviewee who has said this ended up leaving anyway).³⁰⁹ Cuban Christians also remind themselves that living in the United States, although it continues to be an aspiration for many, is not necessarily ideal, particularly when “considering the temptations and challenges of materialism” they would face there. Some even view living under communism as “a blessing because it helps them to stay true to the faith.”³¹⁰

Finally, the ‘house church model’ can be an important source of spiritual endurance. As Koesel suggests, house churches are particularly appropriate for the development of deep personal relationships and have allowed Chinese churches to grow in ways it may not have without the restrictions imposed by the communist regime (2014). This also seems to be the case for Cuban churches, as various interviewees recognized.

Compliance

For Cuban Christians, compliance can take two general forms. It can take the form of real compliance, i.e. acceptance and obedience to regulations, or it can take the form of formal compliance with regulations, even though their spirit is disrespected. For example, building an extension to a church building is not really possible, but if this is done very gradually, without attracting attention, and formal requirements such as the maintenance of the historical façade of the building are respected, restrictions can be circumvented. I could observe this when I visited the church of a pastor in west Cuba, which in 1959 was a small building that could hold 50 people at most, as I estimated from a black and white photograph I was shown. The façade was maintained, but three stories were built on top of it, without ever disrespecting any regulations. Now the building can hold 500 people.³¹¹

One pastor I interviewed routinely applies this kind of strategies: “You need to navigate the inner workings of the system. You won’t get permission to build a church. What you do is you request permission to build a storage shack, and then you request permission for remodeling it. If you’re clever, you can work around the restrictions.”³¹² Another pastor operates an illegal printing press in east Cuba, with the complicity of the authorities. He says: “The only reason why my printing press is not shut down is because I maintain such good relations with the authorities. We have an unspoken agreement that I will never print anything that could jeopardize the authorities. I also printed some materials for them when their own printing press was broken.”³¹³ A youth pastor from Havana encouraged one of his church members to write a thesis about the persecution of Protestants during the first decades after the Cuban revolution. Producing such a thesis as a theology student would have been impossible because of the restrictions on seminaries, but he cleverly took advantage of a legal loophole and was able to write the thesis as student of a journalism program. The thesis was later published in the United

³⁰⁸ Interview with CU10 (2017).

³⁰⁹ Interviews with CU08 CU07, CU10 (2016) and CU05 (2017).

³¹⁰ Interview with CU07 (2016).

³¹¹ Interview with CU12 (2015, 2016).

³¹² Interview with CU12 (2015).

³¹³ Interview with CU10 (2016).

States, but distributed through flash drives in Cuba, circumventing the restrictions on printing.³¹⁴

Not all Cuban Christians are as resourceful as the examples I mentioned, who seem to be the exception. More often, Christians prefer to obey when they are ordered to shut down a particular project or operation. “Sometimes it’s best to just comply. You need to pick your battles.” says one pastor.³¹⁵ To many, compliance is thought of as a protection mechanism: “If we are ever questioned, we can always say we have always obeyed previous orders.”³¹⁶

Social wisdom

Most of the Cuban Christian leaders I interviewed seemed to have developed an acute sense of social wisdom. As can be deduced from the description of the previous coping mechanisms, Christian leaders think through very carefully when to avoid or to comply with the authorities, and when to engage in behavior that might be risky such as social work, evangelism or (international) advocacy. Many realize that if they antagonize the authorities too much, it might make things worse for them in the long run. Therefore, they approach their interaction with the authorities ‘strategically’, weighing the consequences of any action they take. They comply with the authorities most of the time, so they are not viewed as ‘trouble makers’ and disobey only when they consider the matter is sufficiently important.³¹⁷ This point is also made by Martel, who asserts that Catholic leaders in Cuba often have no choice than to collaborate with the government if they want to have even the slightest form of influence (2019).

The importance of social wisdom can also be observed when it is lacking. In the case of a minority of Christian leaders who have become victims of human security threats it could be argued they have been ‘unwise’, in the sense that their behavior is often viewed as unnecessarily provocative by their peers, an observation I also made about some of the cultural dissidents in the Nasa indigenous communities of Colombia.

Moral standing

Moral standing can be both a coping mechanism and a source of vulnerability. In contrast to the case study on actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico, the moral standing of religious leaders, i.e. the credibility as a result of their religious roles, rarely works in their favor in the case of Cuba. Indeed, a high moral standing in society increases vulnerability because it is precisely the moral authority of religious leaders the communist authorities are weary of. It can happen that Christian leaders earn the respect of communist officials, for example if they develop personal friendships or because their spouses attend their church and this could then sometimes constitute a coping mechanism. However, if the humanitarian work of a church generates a certain level of goodwill within a community, the church is put in a position where it competes with the state (similar to what can be observed with the issue of traditional vs Christian education in the Nasa community in Colombia), and this is never appreciated by the communist leaders.

³¹⁴ Interview with CU26 (2018).

³¹⁵ Interview with CU28 (2017).

³¹⁶ Interview with CU05 (2017).

³¹⁷ Interview with CU08 (2017).

Solidarity

Some examples of inter-Christian solidarity can be observed in Cuba, in spite of the limited material resources that churches generally have. Hurricanes Matthew and Nicole (September-October 2016) and Irma (September 2017) provide good illustrations of this solidarity. The hurricane damage caused important humanitarian challenges such as reduced access to drinking water, food and other supplies. The hurricanes also caused the destruction of a number of churches and pastoral houses. To attend to the humanitarian situation, Cuban churches from the west of Cuba, which was less hit by the hurricanes, collected donations and supplies to help the churches in the affected areas of the country. As operations manager of an international charity in Mexico and Cuba, I led various humanitarian initiatives after the hurricanes, allowing me to personally observe this inter-Christian solidarity.

In spite of this impressive display of solidarity, it is the exception rather than the rule. There is a lot of mistrust among Cuban churches, and even within Christian denominations, much of which is the direct result of the divide-and-rule strategy of the Cuban regime.³¹⁸ Collaboration beyond the limits of Christian denominations remains uncommon. Christian leaders are aware that this reduces their overall resilience because they do not act as a bloc but find it difficult to trust one another.³¹⁹

Within denominations, however, solidarity networks are important. They are often funded by international (Western) partners of Cuban churches, who generously supply funds for materials, church repairs, salaries, pensions and small business development initiatives.³²⁰ In addition to the remittances that are sent to Cuba by emigrants to their family members, this constitutes the main source of income that pays for the expenses of Cuban churches (Goldenziel 2009). This finding is confirmed by interviews I conducted during the consultation of faith-based organizations working in Cuba that I attended in January 2017 in Chicago. This is true also for other religious groups, such as the much smaller Jewish community and to a lesser extent the Afro-Cuban religious communities (Hearn 2008; Goldenziel 2009; Weinreb 2017). Weinreb speaks of a “gift economy” that emerged between Jewish Cubans and their visitors. This concept is largely applicable to the relation between Cuban Christians and foreign missions. In addition, the international ties of Cuban churches, although not appreciated by the Cuban regime, provide these churches with advocacy partners who frequently speak for them in international advocacy forums and in the media.

As with other coping mechanisms, international advocacy can also be a source of vulnerability, because it can be counterproductive. Frequently, Cuban leaders complain about the undirected advocacy efforts of international faith-based organizations in which very often Cuban emigrants to the United States are involved that “do more harm than good.”³²¹ “They only yell at the Cuban authorities, but their reports are often not accurate, and they create problems for us [Cuban Christians]”, says one Cuban pastor.³²²

³¹⁸ Interviews with CU05 (2017) and CU09 (2016).

³¹⁹ Various interviews and focus group discussion in December 2017.

³²⁰ “Cristianos cubanos reciben ayuda para iniciar micro-empresas”, *Evangélico Digital*, 05/11/2018.

³²¹ Interviews with CU07 (2016) and CU15 (2017).

³²² Interview with CU07 (2016).

Collective action

Whereas solidarity refers to the mitigation of the humanitarian impact of human security threats within a religious community, collective action corresponds to the engagement in advocacy or any form of (organized) non-violent resistance or protest against the actors responsible for the human security threats. Collective action as a coping mechanism is relatively underdeveloped among most Christians in Cuba. The principal aim of the divide-and-rule strategy used by the Communist Party was precisely to prevent any form of coordinated effort among Christians that could destabilize the regime. In addition, Christians prefer not to engage in any form of political advocacy because they are very concerned that this could disturb the precarious status quo that allows them to operate their churches with relative freedom provided they do not criticize the authorities.

In recent times, however, some things appear to be changing. Socially active Christians have started to learn about nonviolent resistance through their relations with other (non-religious) dissidents. Spread through flash drives, copies from works like *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (1993) by Gene Sharp have become available and some Christian activists timidly start to adopt some of its techniques.³²³ There are YouTube videos that present the application of Gene Sharp's methods by dissidents in Cuba.³²⁴

A follower of Gene Sharp's teachings, Mario Félix Leonart Barroso, a pastor and human rights activist, told me in an interview that he had received notice that he would be arrested because a particular blog post he published annoyed the authorities. He immediately asked the members of his congregation to come to his church for a service. Overcoming their fear, many people gathered in front of the rectory where he lived in display of solidarity. When the police arrived, the crowd made it practically impossible to arrest him.³²⁵

Other church leaders have applied the same tactic:

“[...] Rudisbel Rivera Robert, the owner of the property on which a large unregistered church meets in Santiago, was detained and interrogated for supposed ‘public disorder’, but when he was cited a second time and the police saw that he was accompanied by a group of supporters from his church, they congratulated him for the orderliness of their meetings and released him.”³²⁶

Among church leaders there appears to be a growing awareness that concerted efforts, provided they are executed ‘wisely’ – this is the word my interviewees use –, can sometimes be beneficial. For example, after initial refusals to obtain permission for the rebuilding of churches that were destroyed by a hurricane, lobby efforts of church leaders proved successful.³²⁷ This being said, only a tiny minority of Cuban Christians engages in this kind of efforts and can thus truly be considered as socially active. For the majority of Cuban Christians, advocacy remains something to be avoided. Many interviewees do not believe that international pressure can have a positive effect on religious freedom.

³²³ Interview with CU11 (2017).

³²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ManMqEOYR8>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I96KQYkYCR0>.

³²⁵ Interview with Mario Félix Leonart Barroso (2016).

³²⁶ Internal brief from CU15 (2017).

³²⁷ Interview with CU10 (2017).

Collective action is not limited to advocacy. As Koesel argues, house churches can be viewed as an “organizational weapon.” In an article, this scholar compares the underground Protestant house church in China and the rise of early communist parties. In both cases, similar organizational forms were adopted “to protect it in a hostile political environment.” In Chinese house churches, just like in the equivalent Cuban *casas cultos*, “The different levels are insulated from each other, with limited knowledge of the members above and below. In this way, if anyone is raided by the authorities, the others can continue to function with little interruption” (2013:572).

Taking up arms

I did not come across any example of Cuban Christians taking up arms to defend themselves against threats. Historically, this has never happened and does not seem to be on the agenda of any of the people I interviewed. I also doubt whether such a coping mechanism would be in any way effective, considering the symbiotic relationship between the Communist Party and the military – both institutions are under the control of Raúl Castro.

Conclusions

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

Of course, there is a clear difference between the more active Christian individuals and groups, and the ones who deliberately steer clear from any form of activism. As already stated, socially active Christians constitute only a very small group in Cuba. The examples of coping mechanisms presented in this resilience assessment can thus hardly be generalized to the whole Christian population.

Moreover, avoidance in the form of leaving the country continues to be very frequent, especially in the case of people who previously have been very outspoken in their missionary and human rights activism, but eventually reach a point where they can no longer cope with the ubiquitous discouragement and harassment. The various ‘voice’ strategies are thus neutralized by the fact that ‘exit’ is always an option. This being said, advocacy, as a form of collective action, is gaining some traction, but continues to be the effort of a lonely few, which inevitably decreases its effectiveness.

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

7.5 Evaluation

In this section I evaluate the application of the RM-VAT to the case of Christians in Cuba. I consecutively highlight its contributions (7.5.1) and limitations (7.5.2).

7.5.1 Contributions

In comparison to the previous two case studies, the value of the RFATs to this case study is much greater. Indeed, the restrictions on religious freedom that are imposed by the state – a direct consequence of the authoritarian nature of the regime and its atheist and antireligion ideology – is an essential aspect of the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba and are comprehensively documented by most RFATs. However, there are noteworthy elements to this vulnerability that this RM-VAT allowed to reveal that the RFATs misjudge, in part because these tools were not designed to observe them.

The first contribution this case study makes concerns the observation of the subtle nature of the vulnerability of Christians. Although the application of the RM-VAT to Christians reaches similar conclusions as most RFATs, it also goes beyond them. The additional knowledge that emerges from this case study resides primarily in the qualification it gives of the subtlety of this vulnerability, especially after the changes that occurred since the 1990's.

The subtlety of the vulnerability of Cuban Christians goes beyond legal and policy aspects of religious freedom. It includes things like the frustration that is caused by the government tactic of bureaucratic discouragement, the general legal insecurity due to the inconsistent, and therefore unpredictable application of regulations throughout the territory and in time, the intimidation and the cultivated mistrust between people that are caused by permanent surveillance, and the continuous minor forms of harassment. These elements are hard to quantify which explains why they are overlooked by most RFATs. When looked at individually, these threats may be negligible but taken together they create a culture of fear that is paralyzing and effectively restricts religious expression in different spheres of society.

Similarly, violent incidents against Christians that can be measured as such are rare. Arrests of Christian leaders are sporadic but when they happen, they have a chilling effect. More often, however, Christian ministers that are viewed as a threat by the regime are attacked on fabricated charges that appear to have nothing to do with religion, and that are therefore not considered by RFATs. Christian ministers that have to leave the country in appearance do so voluntarily, but often after a climate was created in which they no longer felt safe; such threats are not counted as forced expulsions in the RFATs either.

The second contribution of this case study is the finding that many Cuban Christians, as well as international Christian organizations working in Cuba, have internalized the restrictive definition of religious freedom as freedom of worship (and only apolitical worship), that is imposed by the communist regime. In the threat assessment, I was able to identify human security threats that express themselves outside the church sphere and that are the result of the more active forms of religious behavior. I was able to observe this thanks to the methodological innovations of the RM-VAT – the categorization of threats by spheres of society and the continuum of identity-behavior. The conduct of fieldwork itself gave me more sensitivity to the context than I would have had if I had gathered evidence for the lists of variables that compose most RFATs. Especially the distinction between types of Christianity based on their

level of proximity to the regime, as well as the distinction between religious identity and different forms of behavior inspired by religious convictions were useful because they allowed me to make more than general observations of religious freedom by moving beyond the standard identity labels such as ‘Catholic’, ‘Protestant’ or ‘Jewish.’ For example, I was able to understand the specific position of house churches, which face more restrictions than government-controlled denominations.

A third contribution regards specificity. The analytical distinctions of the RM-VAT allowed me to discern different degrees of specificity which made it possible to nuance two generally held assumptions about religious freedom in Cuba: that religion, and Christianity in particular, is not singled out as a target by the state but that all forms of civil society are repressed, and that religious ministers who engage in social action are subject to the same treatment by the state as any other political dissident. I was able to show that these statements are only true at a global level, but that there nevertheless is a degree of specificity of the vulnerability of Christians, depending on their behavioral characteristics, denominational affiliation, and other factors. Specificity decreases when religious behavior gets more active, but only to a degree. Characteristic elements of Christian groups such as their mobilization capacity, their moral influence and their competing claims to legitimacy must be accounted for.

The observation of the resilience of Cuban Christians is a fourth contribution of this case study. In contrast to the previous two case studies, the coping mechanisms of this religious minority are noteworthy because the repression of religion by the communist regime has been a reality for such a long time. In spite of all its tactics, the Cuban regime has not been able to eradicate religion, and some Christian denominations have even grown. Spiritual endurance and international solidarity may have played a role, but it is possibly the social wisdom of Christian leaders that has made the greatest difference. The ‘forced invention’ of the house church model could also have contributed to it. The only downside to this otherwise positive assessment of the resilience of this minority is its acceptance of the narrow definition of religious freedom as well as the mistrust between religious groups that the regime provokes as part of its divide-and-rule strategy.

7.5.2 Limitations

The main limitations of this case study were not conceptual, but rather practical, related to difficulties in the conduct of the fieldwork and access to sources, within a context of permanent surveillance and mistrust on the one hand (which implied that Cuban Christians rarely document incidents of violations of religious freedom), and unspoken expectations from foreign visitors on the other. Both factors implied that I could never be completely sure my interviewees were telling the truth. For my visits to Cuba, using a cover was unavoidable in order to obtain information. A third visit to the island had to be cancelled for security reasons. The lengthier interviews could only be done outside of the country. This all points to the limits of anecdotal evidence: replicability of my research in the Cuban context is difficult for practical reasons.

In addition, because scholarly interest in active Christians in Cuba is relatively limited, I did face some challenges to contrast some of my empirical findings with academic literature. Statistics on religious demography and practice also were not readily available. The tendency to frame the Cuban situation in ideological terms by critics (namely the anti-Castro lobby in Florida, including exiled Cuban Christians) and supporters (such as leftwing denominational

organizations in Latin America) of the Cuban regime was not helpful either to strive for objectivity because they are prone to either exaggeration or downplaying of threats. I am still confident in the validity of my findings but there are sections where I could not go beyond anecdotal evidence.

The finding that many Cuban Christians seem to have internalized a narrow conception of religion and religious freedom as imposed by the Cuban state was also a limitation for the conduct of my fieldwork. It implied that most of my interviewees experienced a large number of restrictions on religious freedom as something normal and did not have full awareness about the threats they face, particularly the ones that are not related to the church sphere. I was able to overcome this to some extent by adapting my questions, or by asking the same questions on a second or third encounter after investing in building trust with contacts. The focus group session I had the opportunity to organize was helpful in this respect, but it also revealed that self-reflection about restrictions on religious freedom and possible responses is relatively limited. Curiously, Cuban Christians seem to apply coping mechanisms unconsciously.

Methodologically, although the application of the RM-VAT again proved to be a useful tool for data collection, it was nevertheless necessary to add a description of the different types of official recognition of Christianity in the introductory section of this chapter, without which the threat assessment would have been less meaningful. To properly observe the vulnerability of Cuban Christians the continuum of religious-identity was insufficient; distinguishing between types of Christianity was essential for the threat assessment to add value.

8. Reflection on the specific vulnerability of religious minorities

My personal and professional involvement in advocacy for religious freedom raised my interest in the topic of the vulnerability of religious minorities. The realization that my empirical observations about vulnerable religious individuals and groups in Latin American countries, such as the examples of Ana Silvia, Daniel and Mario Félix I mentioned in the introduction, are insufficiently detected by existing approaches to religious freedom and by conflict theory in general, led me to formulate my research questions. I used the concept of vulnerability in relation to the broader field of human security to approach religious freedom and religious conflict, following Wellman and Lombardi's invitation to explore the "understudied relationship" between religion and human security (2012). Through the development of a Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT), which I applied to three qualitative case studies, I offered evidence for the proposition that religious minorities are vulnerable in unique ways to suffer human rights abuses. In addition, I demonstrated that observing the vulnerability of religious minorities is a necessary complement to existing approaches that analyze religious freedom and religious conflict.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the specific vulnerability of religious minorities by looking at four levels which each build onto each other: the main empirical findings of my case studies (8.1), a reflection on the research process (8.2), a methodological evaluation of the RM-VAT in light of the case studies (8.3) and the contributions of this research to the literature (8.4). I then combine these four levels to explore possible areas of future research, benefitting from the methodological innovations of the RM-VAT but also building upon the generalizable empirical findings of the case studies (8.5). I end this chapter by discussing the implications of this research for practitioners and for religious minorities themselves (8.6).

8.1 Empirical value of the case studies

In this section, I summarize the main findings of each of the case studies (8.1.1), before comparing them (8.1.2).

8.1.1 Summary of findings

I applied the RM-VAT to three case studies: the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico (chapter 5), the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia (chapter 6) and the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba (chapter 7). In these case studies I highlighted dimensions of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are overlooked by existing tools. I provided evidence for restrictions on religious expression outside the church sphere: in the family, social, business, cultural and government spheres, which are often related to religious behavior and much less to religious identity, providing new empirical information.

My professional work allowed me to gather a lot of information and experience that constituted sources for this research. My personal involvement in the topic, however, did not influence my research in the sense that I did not try to prove any personal conviction, if only, I aimed to raise more awareness about the vulnerability of religious minorities and shed some light on some

understudied dimensions of this vulnerability. Rather, I set out to observe human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable, without preconceived notions about what these threats should be.

In my case studies I provided evidence for the possibility that religious behavior can be the cause of human rights abuses. In northeast Mexico, being a nominal Christian is normally not what creates problems with organized crime – Christianity is the majority religion –, but being an actively practicing Christian, especially one involved in social work or human rights activism increases the risk of suffering human rights abuses. In the Nasa indigenous territories, nominal Christianity can sometimes be an issue depending on the Christian denomination one chooses to belong to, but it is mainly the more active forms of religious behavior related for example to political activism that increase risk. In Cuba too, being a Christian is not a major concern – at least not as much as it used to be in the past –, but active religious behavior such as engagement in human rights activism is.

I further observed how non-state actors can cause religious freedom violations, such as organized crime in northeast Mexico or ethnic groups in Colombia. In addition, the focus on the national level leads RFATs to ignore important dynamics that take place at the subnational level such as areas controlled by organized crime or with some form of indigenous self-government. When looking at countries such as Mexico or Colombia at the national level, a picture emerges of countries that have a relative degree of respect for human rights including religious freedom, but such a macro-level picture conceals issues that can only be observed locally. In political science, the analysis of “subnational authoritarianism” has become an object of study (Snyder 2001; Gibson 2005; Giraudy 2010); it is also pertinent for the analysis of religious freedom.

The regulation of religion by organized crime

My first case study, on the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí (Mexico), underlines the pertinence of focusing on active religious practice as a source of vulnerability. Indeed, by focusing on active religious practice – instead of on Christianity in general, which would not have allowed me to observe any variation –, I was able to identify specific human security threats that actively practicing Christians face in a context of organized crime, thereby validating my initial observation that organized crime creates vulnerability for religious minorities, and that political instability is a predictor of conflict (Fearon & Laitin 2003; Chayes 2015) and is conducive to the development of subnational undemocratic regimes (Snyder 2001; Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008; Giraudy 2012). This finding contradicts the conventional wisdom that organized crime is not particularly concerned with religion (Schedler 2015; IACHR 2015). The threat assessment revealed clearly that this is not the case.

The former is relevant first from a conceptual perspective. It implies that non-religious motives, such as greed, which is evidently the main driver for organized crime, can lead it to harm religious groups that stand in their way. This particular conclusion is not surprising considering that organized crime can be expected to be driven by rational calculations; however, this had not explicitly been established in relation to religious groups, in part because the distinction between religious identity and religious behavior is not usually made, and in part because RFATs and other tools generally tend to look for religious motives for the ‘persecution’ of

religious groups. As a consequence, non-religious motives for threats to a religious minority that is defined by its behavioral characteristics are overlooked.

This being said, in the case of Los Zetas, religious motives are not completely absent, when comparing this group to other drug cartels. The perpetration of extremely cruel acts of violence that serve more than an instrumental purpose (such as extortion, the elimination of threats or intimidation) can be interpreted in relation to their adherence to the Santa Muerte cult. The human rights abuses that are connected to the imposition of Santa Muerte rituals in church buildings are evidence hereof.

The behavioral delimitation of actively practicing Christians as a religious minority was also relevant for the determination of the specificity of their vulnerability. I established that actively practicing Christians do possess a specific vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses at the hands of organized crime that is a direct consequence of their behavior and therefore not indiscriminate, referring to things like the moral influence of Christian leaders and their unique mobilization capacity. Within the broader debate about whether violence in civil conflicts is indiscriminate or not (Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007; Schedler 2015; Bartman 2018), this case study provides an additional argument to not automatically assume that violence against a particular group is indiscriminate.

Connected to the former, a major finding of this case study that deserves to be researched more in-depth is that organized crime, particularly when it takes over essential functions of the state, actually regulates religion in a similar fashion to communist states and Islamic theocracies (Gill 2008; Grim & Finke 2011; Fox 2013, 2015; Koesel 2014; Cesari 2014; Sarkissian 2015; Philpott 2019).

In a 1985 book chapter, Charles Tilly makes an interesting analogy of war making and state making with organized crime, arguing that the development of states bears much resemblance with the protection rackets that characterize criminal operations. Based on my case study on northeast Mexico I make a similar argument but come at it from the opposite direction: in its regulation of religion (and society in general), organized crime acts very much like a state. Indeed, considering the infiltration and co-optation of the state by organized crime, the threats listed in the threat assessment can be re-interpreted as forms of ‘religious policy’ that are quite similar to what I observed in my case study about Cuba: the intervention in the designation of religious leaders and the elimination of leaders that are critical to the regime, the censorship of the contents of sermons, the imposed curfew, the reporting requirements, the ‘taxation’ through the protection rackets, the restrictions on charitable work, etc. At a minimum, it can be observed that characteristic elements of the regulation of religion by authoritarian governments can also be observed in this case study with the difference that these are not imposed by the state but by organized crime, the *de facto* authority.

Restrictions on religious freedom as a result of unbalanced rights in indigenous resguardos

In my second case study, about the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the resguardos indígenas of the southwestern highlands of Colombia, the relevance of the focus on active religious practice, both to observe human security threats that would otherwise be overlooked and to determine specificity, is once more evident. The behavior of the cultural dissidents, which revolves mainly around their confrontation with the cabildos, is the direct cause of their vulnerability. The religious convictions that lead them to take their

social and political stances, for many of them through the OPIC, is what determines their specificity.

This case study can be interpreted as an intra-ethnic conflict in which collective rights clash with individual rights. In my case study I found that human rights are effectively violated inside the Nasa resguardos, including the rights of religious minorities. This finding is fundamental because, contrary to the various external threats to indigenous groups in Latin American countries, minority-within-the-minority issues are understudied and not addressed in public policy and in legal scholarship (Scolnicov 2011; Pinto 2015). By providing empirical evidence of human rights violations inside the Nasa resguardos, this case study provides a justification for further investigation of the issue of minority rights in indigenous communities.

In a way, the granting of self-determination rights to indigenous communities can be considered as a ‘historical correction’ of the injustice that has been done to these communities since colonial times; however, it has also created a new form of injustice, because it does not have a built-in mechanism in which the religious diversity in indigenous resguardos is guaranteed, as reflected in this case study. Achterhuis & Koning speak of conflicts in which “the means to reduce the fight have become the source of new forms of fighting.” (2017:134) As Matthias Koenig argues, human rights, in particular religious freedom, are readily presented as a solution to the challenge of religious diversity. In reality, he argues, religious freedom remains a contested concept that has been used self-servingly by different groups throughout modern history (2017). This is also the case in the Nasa community where the opposing parties interpret religious freedom differently. The cabildos argue that they cannot allow religious diversity in their resguardos, because it threatens their religious freedom, a view that has been upheld by Colombian judges (Arlettaz 2011). The cultural dissidents also argue for freedom of religion, but they have a more Western, individualistic take on this concept, advocating not only for the freedom to conduct missionary activity but also things like freedom of education and a certain disregard for the collective nature of property rights, which are foreign to indigenous cultures.³²⁸ Paradoxically, the claim to religious freedom seems to be a cause of the conflict, more than it being a solution.

The resilience assessment revealed that it is not only the complex legal situation and the hostility of the cabildos that are at fault, but that the cultural dissidents also share a part of the responsibility. Without justifying the human rights violations the cultural dissidents have been subjected to, their evident lack of social wisdom led them to behave in ways that antagonizes the cabildos and exacerbates the conflict. Indeed, their “adversarial logic”, as I called it (Vargas & Petri 2009), is a direct consequence of their uncompromising religious views and stands in the way of a solution to the conflict. The escalation of the conflict can further be understood from a historical perspective, as both the uncompromising views of the cultural dissidents and the reactions of the cabildos are rooted in past events. Similar dynamics could be observed in African conflicts between indigenous religious communities and Evangelical Christians (Coertzen, Green & Hansen 2015; Sauer, Visscher & Petri 2015; Mayrargue 2017).

The specificity of the vulnerability of cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos is based on a similar logic. It is the religious convictions of the cultural dissidents that lead them to display forms of semi-active and active religious behavior in and beyond the church sphere that are perceived as a threat by the cabildos indígenas at two levels. The first is the preoccupation with the protection of the cultural heritage of the Nasa which in their view is put under pressure by

³²⁸ Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).

individual conversion, growth of churches, missionary activity, refusal to participate in traditional rituals and the rejection of traditional education. This could be interpreted as the violent response that is triggered by a “unitarian” political conception, as Buijs calls it (2013). The second is the fact that the cultural dissidents challenge the authority of the cabildos through their accusations of corruption and their advocacy for democratic reforms, freedom of worship and freedom of education, which has a symbolic meaning as well as financial consequences. This could be interpreted in terms of greed because it refers to a complex of economic and political incentives. At both levels, the specificity of the vulnerability resides in the fact that the threats that the cultural dissidents suffer from are the consequence of the behavior that is inspired by their religious convictions.

The internalization of a restrictive definition of religious freedom by Cuban Christians

My third case study, in which I analyzed the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba, concerns a ‘classic’ case of restrictions of religious freedom by an authoritarian state that most RFATs are well-suited to observe. Although the empirical contribution of this case study is therefore less novel than in the case of the other two, it does nevertheless uncover substantial new information, complementing or nuancing the RFATs in several areas. The first concerns the importance not only to distinguish between religious identity and religious behavior but also to consider the differentiated treatment that the Cuban regime gives to different types of Christianity. As I observed, the threats Christianity faces depend to a large degree on their proximity to the regime and their legal status. Unlike the other two case studies, religious identity therefore constitutes an immediate source of vulnerability in the case of Cuba, but this does not apply equally to all forms of religious identity.

Another area in which this case study makes an empirical contribution concerns the observation of the subtle nature of human security threats that are not picked up by other instruments, either because they are objectively difficult to discern without doing extensive fieldwork in the country, or because they are, in appearance, not directly related to religion. By this I refer to expressions of what Bourdieu would call “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1970): the frustration, intimidation and mistrust that are induced by the communist system, as well as the fabricated charges against religious leaders that are viewed as adversaries of the regime, which create an environment that is very hostile to free religious expression. A connected area is the importance of fear that Cuban Christians experience, which is insufficiently recognized by RFATs.

The finding that Cuban Christians seem to have internalized the restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the communist regime, which equates it to freedom of worship that is strictly apolitical, also stems from the case study. It shows how successful the Cuban regime has been, not at eliminating Christianity or at slowing down its growth, but in unconsciously defining the options for Cuban Christians and the nature of the freedom they aspire to, which is a form of “symbolic violence” to use Bourdieu again. As a result, most Cuban Christians do not engage in education or charitable work, let alone political activism, not only because it is restricted, but more so because they have internalized the perspective that they should not engage in such activities.

Regarding the determination of specificity, in this case study I argued that although Christians who engage in active forms of religious behavior may face similar threats as secular political dissidents and therefore have a low specificity, it is nevertheless possible to determine their

specificity in virtue of the competing legitimacy between religion and the state (Scolnicov 2011) and its unique mobilization capacity and international connections (Koesel 2014).

In terms of resilience, the spiritual endurance of Cuban Christians has no comparison with the other two case studies. Indeed, Cuban Christians have endured persecution, of varying intensity through time and depending on the type of Christianity, for much longer than actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico and cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos. This has probably given Cuban Christians the opportunity to better develop coping mechanisms, which was more difficult for Christians in northeast Mexico, where the human security concerns are much more recent but also more violent. Other noteworthy features of the resilience of Cuban Christians is their apparent compliance with government instructions while at the same time taking advantage of legal loopholes, the ‘forced invention’ of the house church model and their acute sense of social wisdom.

In Cuba, the specificity of the vulnerability of Christians can be understood as a function of three elements: Cuba’s religious policy (which has evolved over time), the proximity of the religious denomination to the regime and its legal status, and the type of religious behavior of the religious minority. Some of these elements are related to the ideological hostility of the Cuban regime toward religion in general and some are related to the repression of political dissidents, but in all cases there are particular characteristics of Christianity that must be considered such as their mobilization capacity, their moral influence, their competing claim to legitimacy and its international contacts (in the case of the Catholic Church, the status of the Vatican as a foreign state). For these reasons, it can be maintained, for example, that there is some degree of specificity to the vulnerability of Christian human rights activists in comparison to non-Christian (secular) human rights activists.

8.1.2 Comparison

I focus my comparison of the findings of my case studies around three points. The first point is that vulnerability increases when the religious minority constitutes an ideological alternative to the powers that be. A common denominator in all three cases is that vulnerability increases when the behavior of the religious minority is perceived as threatening by, respectively, the drug cartels, the cabildos indígenas or the Communist Party. Confessing one’s adherence to Christianity in northeast Mexico, converting to Christianity without ceasing to participate in indigenous rituals in the Nasa resguardos, and apolitical worship in Cuba, normally do not increase vulnerability. The greater threats appear with the more active forms of religious behavior, such as criticism of the (*de facto*) authorities or engaging in activities that directly threaten their interests. In the first case study this involves forms of religious behavior such as work with youths, drug rehabilitation or human rights activism that are perceived as a threat to organized crime and are therefore met with reprisals.

In the Nasa resguardos and in Cuba, semi-active religious behavior takes on a symbolic meaning that triggers violent responses. For example, as Goldenziel explains, the mere fact of joining a minority religion can constitute an implicit political statement against the regime (2009) and so does conversion in cultures like the Nasa that are characterized by the “assumption of singular affiliation” (Sen 2006) in which all members are expected to share the same religion. In the Nasa resguardos this involves physical attacks on church services and in Cuba and northeast Mexico censorship of the content of church sermons.

A pattern that emerges from the different threat assessments is that human security threats seem to increase with the more active forms of religious behavior. In northeast Mexico, religion is an alternative, especially for young men, for a life in the drug cartels. In southwest Colombia, the cultural dissidents promote an alternative vision for education and more generally an alternative conception of indigenism. In Cuba, Christians, through their behavior but also by their mere presence, represent an alternative to the state and the communist ideology.

The second point of comparison between the case studies is that vulnerability can sometimes constitute an opportunity, as vulnerable groups are easily taken advantage of. This is most visible in the case of actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico where semi-active forms of religious behavior, such as church attendance, create vulnerability for religious minorities for the simple reason that engaging in this type of behavior increases the risk of kidnap-for-ransom or extortion. As I described, churches and businesses of Christians are not only viewed as revenue centers but are also considered as easy preys that do not offer resistance because churches wish to be welcoming to visitors and because moral convictions of Christians often lead them to reject violence even in the case of self-protection. In Cuba too, this dynamic can be observed. Churches were hoping to become less dependent on the state and foreign donors by supporting the elaboration of small businesses, but when these grow too much this attracts the attention of the government.

The third point concerns the great variation in coping mechanisms among the case studies. When comparing all three case studies, the first remark that can be made is that coping mechanisms are generally underdeveloped. Most of my interviewees seemed to have little awareness about how they could 'arm' themselves against human security threats for a wide range of different reasons, including the adherence to pietistic theological options that discourages any involvement in society (in all cases), fear (northeast Mexico and Cuba), the acceptance ('normalization') of violence (in northeast Mexico) and the internalization of a restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the regime (Cuba). Braun's finding that religious minorities are more inclined to help other vulnerable religious minorities or themselves (2016) seems only partly applicable to my case studies. The cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos, by contrast, are very militant, but this actually increased the threats they faced.

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

Through the interviews I conducted, I found that asking members of religious groups about coping mechanisms helps them to critically reflect on what they are presently doing to defend themselves against human security threats. This contributes to greater self-awareness, which I

could observe through the conduct of focus group session with a selection of Cuban leaders. I come back to this point in section 8.5.3.

This being said, coping mechanisms are not at all absent in my case studies. Avoidance and compliance, including formal compliance with government regulations while disrespecting their spirit in the case of Cuba, are frequently used. Cuban Christians and cultural dissidents both benefit from strong international support, which also translates into the implementation of solidarity mechanisms to mitigate some threats; this is largely absent for actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico.

The relation between religion and resilience is no doubt complex and multifaceted. It seems correct to assume that an important reason why people are attracted to one or the other religion, is because of the expectation that this religion can provide some sort of relief from the hardships of the world. Throughout the case studies I was able to confirm that religious convictions can at times be a source of resilience, because it helps making sense of difficult situations, offers hope and religious communities can also provide solidarity. In all three cases, there are examples of cases in which spiritual endurance and moral authority commands some respect that sometimes serves to mitigate threats.

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

I found that collective action can be a double-edged sword. This is because there are times when the very initiatives that religious minorities undertake to defend themselves lead to an increased vulnerability. For example, the creation of solidarity networks or the establishment of advocacy initiatives, which are initially designed to mitigate threats, can have the opposite effect of drawing attention to a religious minority, which could increase its vulnerability. This evidently happened in the Nasa resguardos, where the creation of the OPIC was initially conceived as an instrument to combat several forms of injustice, but actually increased them. In northeast Mexico, initiatives to mitigate the influence of organized crime on youths are met with hostility when faith-based organizations and drug cartels compete for influence. The former connects with the philosophical paradox that Nussbaum identifies as “the fragility of goodness” (1986) which I discussed in chapter 2. If one seeks to improve one’s conditions, one must confront the world, but the mere fact of doing so also exposes oneself. As Butler puts it, protesting against precarity increases risk (2016).

Beyond internal-theological explanations, it is also important to consider differences in actors and context to explain the differences in coping mechanisms among vulnerable religious minorities. The coping mechanisms of Cuban Christians are more developed than in the subnational areas of Mexico and Colombia I studied, but this could be because its context is characterized by a prolonged vertical (state) oppression of religion whereas the other two contexts correspond to more sudden forms of repression by non-state actors. It could therefore be relevant to research the impact on the development of coping mechanisms in different contexts: prolonged and sudden repression (vertical and horizontal repression).

8.2 Reflection on the research process

The main benefits of the data collection process of the RM-VAT are its flexibility and context-sensitivity, because it allows the incorporation of all available sources without discriminating between their nature and source, the only criterion being that they must be relevant to describe human security threats, following Owen's recommendation (2003). This meant that I could use any available sources: anecdotal evidence gathered through fieldwork, survey data, newspaper articles, jurisprudence, internal reports of local NGO's, jurisprudence and even pertinent data from RFATs. By contrasting these sources, a picture emerged that is more complete than for example the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) by the Pew Research Center that are restricted to a self-imposed selection of sources. Together with the broad conceptual scope of the RM-VAT, this approach to data collection, which characterizes qualitative research in general, was therefore instrumental to produce more empirical information than other tools.

This pragmatic approach to data collection was also a necessity considering the limitations of data collection at the local level (Owen 2003), in human security contexts in general (Glasius e.a. 2018) and in oral cultures like the Nasa. In all my case studies, for example, survey data on active forms of religious behavior was absent, but I could compensate this by interviewing religious people that displayed active religious behavior. In the case study on the Nasa resguardos, I could not directly interview the cabildos, but I was able to obtain their testimonies through the internal reports of a local NGO and through their public statements in court cases. Because most human rights abuses are not reported in contexts like northeast Mexico and Cuba, I could not consult police records, but I was able to identify this through press reports (some of which have been included in the Violent Incidents Database of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America) and through personal interviews.

In spite of its advantages, this approach to data collection also has its limitations at several levels. The first is that the RM-VAT relies heavily on anecdotal evidence gathered through interviews, which implies methodological weaknesses in terms of "bias due to poorly articulated questions; response bias; inaccuracies due to poor recall; reflexivity – interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear" (Yin 2014:106,110-113). To mitigate the bias due to poorly articulated questions in my case studies I consistently tried to guide my interviewees to share about the human security threats they suffered using the table that crosses the spheres of society and the continuum of religious identity and behavior as a mental *aide-mémoire* (figure 4.3).

I tried to deal with response bias and reflexivity through data triangulation which in my case studies consisted in experimental confirmation through similar conversations to approximate inter-subjectivity, comparison through similar contexts and by, as much as possible, contrasting the findings of the interviews with various secondary sources.

In the case study on northeast Mexico I referred to literature about organized crime in Latin America. In the case study on the Nasa resguardos I discussed legal scholarship about other minority-within-the-minority conflicts. In the case study on Cuba, I contrasted literature on religious regulation in other communist and authoritarian regimes. When relevant, I also cited empirical data about similar political-institutional contexts that I collected myself through my work for various NGO's including the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, or through reports of other researchers and civil society organizations.

In the realm of response bias, emotions also played an important role in the interviews I conducted. In northeast Mexico, fear implied that many people I approached either held back information or refused to be interviewed altogether. In the Nasa resguardos, the anger of the cultural dissidents similarly influenced their response, as well as their political agenda in the case of members of the OPIC. In the case of Cuba, I had to be attentive to the ideological proximity of my interviewees to the communist regime, which also influenced the views they expressed. Again, data triangulation and the aim of inter-subjectivity was how I tried to mitigate the impact of these issues.

Notwithstanding the former, it is important to remember that subjective data is not the same as unreliable, corrupt and unusable data. Owen notes that “a degree of subjectivity is healthy to the assessment” and is “[how] meaningful information can be attained.” (2003:61-62) Subjectivity must therefore be accepted while at the same time “mitigated by local knowledge and disciplinary experts” (op. cit. 35).

Response bias is also related to the self-awareness about both threats and coping mechanisms, which turned out to be a major issue in all three case studies, although for very different reasons. In northeast Mexico, because of the normalization of violence and the theological reasons I already mentioned, many actively practicing Christians I interviewed had come to accept the human security threats they faced as a normal part of life, which implied that they often did not interpret human security threats in relation to religious freedom and also did not develop a reflection about coping mechanisms. In the case of the Nasa resguardos, the indigenous holistic worldview of my interviewees implied that they did not intuitively establish a distinction between different spheres of society. The internalization of the restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the communist regime in Cuba made it difficult for my interviewees to discern restrictions on religious freedom beyond the church sphere. This all meant that I had to keep my questions as simple as possible, with the aim of finding out what human security threats they face and what coping mechanisms they use, but not burdening my interviewees with the categorization of the human security threats on the continuum of religious identity and behavior and by spheres of society.

The matter of reflexivity played out at different levels in the contexts of my case studies. At a general level, a risk was that some interviewees would indeed say what they thought I wanted to hear, although I could mitigate this by applying the data triangulation method to confirm facts, and by systematically distinguishing between perceptions and verifiable facts (perceptions can have informational value too). As I mentioned in my descriptions of ethical challenges, I was sometimes faced with interviewees who had expectations that I would be able to broker some form of humanitarian support for them, particularly in the cases of Cuba and the Nasa resguardos, which could have influenced the answers to the questions I asked. What I did to avoid this risk was to clarify the purpose of my interview, multiply the number of interviews with similar sources to reduce this risk (inter-subjectivity) and have multiple interviews with the same sources over time allowing me to build a relationship of trust.

To avoid inaccuracies due to poor recall, I kept a record of all my documentation including my field notes (I could not record any of my interviews for security reasons) and I made my chain of evidence explicit in the description of each of the human security threats, following Yin (2014:118-129).

8.3 Methodological evaluation of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool

In this section, I critically look at the RM-VAT itself by discussing its main methodological strengths and weaknesses, which mirror each other to some extent: methodological innovations (8.3.1), the scope of the empirical observation (8.3.2), replicability (8.3.3), generalizability and comparability (8.3.4) and determination of specificity (8.3.5). In 8.3.6 I round up this section with a synthesis.

8.3.1 Methodological innovations

Based on my adaptation-operationalization of the human security paradigm in chapter 4, I developed a “Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool” (RM-VAT) which allowed me to observe certain types of vulnerability of religious minorities that are not noticed by the existing approaches. The tool introduced four major conceptual-methodological innovations.

First, the use of the notion of vulnerability to analyze religious freedom violations constitutes the main conceptual innovation of my research (see annex J for the definitions of the key concepts used in this research). Borrowing from geography, the concept of vulnerability allows operationalizing the human security framework through the vulnerability assessment methodology. Because vulnerability “addresses the nature of the impact itself” (Owen 2003:11), this methodology makes it possible to fully observe both latent and manifest human security threats against religious minorities, moving beyond narrowly defined approaches that are common in conflict theory and human rights monitoring.

Second, the RM-VAT, following the open-ended approach – the lens – it borrows from the human security perspective, is designed to observe essential elements that are not observed by existing frameworks. These elements cover different analytical parameters such as vulnerability based on religious identity and vulnerability based on semi-active and active religious behavior, threats caused by both state and non-state actors, individual and collective forms of vulnerability, different dimensions of religious freedom (restrictions on religious expression in different spheres of life), and the possibility of focusing on the subnational level. All this makes it possible to observe aspects of religious freedom violations that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Third, the RM-VAT attempts to describe degrees of specificity of human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable, providing analytical clarity in what are frequently cluttered conflict situations. Often, human security threats to religious groups risk being dismissed as ‘collateral damage’ in which the role of religious convictions and behavior as a source of vulnerability is not recognized. Being able to determine that a particular religious individual or group suffered a particular threat because of factors that are relatable to religion makes this recognition possible. Often, the degree of specificity of a particular threat to a religious individual or group is not absolute; in any conflict situation, religion should rather be viewed as one element among others.

Fourth, the RM-VAT interrogates the resilience of religious minorities by looking at the coping mechanisms they adopt or could adopt to reduce their vulnerability to human security threats. In line with one of the central tenets of the human security paradigm, vulnerable groups are not considered as passive subjects or victims of persecution, but as active players who can develop

responses to the human security threats they face. This provides interesting analytical categories because it allows contrasting the intensity of human security threats that are faced by a particular religious minority with its capacity to cope with these threats. It also allows for the development of recommendations for the improvement of the resilience of vulnerable religious minorities.

8.3.2 *Scope of empirical observation*

The methodological question that arises when considering my empirical findings is whether I could have obtained the same results if I had not used the RM-VAT but had followed a traditional qualitative approach around a selection of research questions. New empirical knowledge could indeed have been obtained without the RM-VAT, considering my personal knowledge and experience living and working in the countries I studied, but the added value of this tool resides in four aspects.

The first is that it serves as an *aide-mémoire* to consider threats that occur in all spheres of society considering the full continuum of religious identity and behavior, as already mentioned. In connection with this, the second aspect is that the RM-VAT constitutes a helpful instrument to organize all available knowledge, collected through fieldwork and secondary sources, into three comprehensive sub-assessments: the threat assessment, the specificity assessment and the resilience assessment, a point that Owen also makes in the discussion of his VAT (2003).

The third aspect is its focus on observation before interpretation. The major difference between the RM-VAT and the RFATs on the one hand, and the theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 2 on the other, regards the issue of observation. Indeed, whereas the RM-VAT and the RFATs seek to observe violations of religious freedom, most theoretical frameworks are primarily concerned with explaining the causes of conflict, including religious conflicts. This is most evident in the case of the literature about the determinants of conflict (the schools that offer explanations of conflict in terms of grievance, greed or opportunity). This is also true for the analyses that are more directly related to religion: Girard interprets conflicts in terms of “mimetic desire” (1989); Sen views “the assumption of single affiliation” as prone to violence (2006); Gill explains the regulation of religion as a function of political interests (2008); Grim & Finke interpret religious persecution as the consequence of religious regulation (2011); Nussbaum explains religious discrimination as a result of irrational fear (2013); Hurd affirms that the qualifier ‘religious’ risks exacerbating conflicts (2015).

As I already stated, a concern for the purpose of my research is that these theories clog the observation because they imply a focus on one or a selection of variables and ignore others that could very well be decisive factors. For this reason, I argued that the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities should take place before seeking to empirically validate theoretical models that may not reflect the reality of a particular context. In my case studies, I do give interpretations of the human security threats I identify, but I withhold my judgment until after the observation, in agreement with the open-ended nature of the human security perspective I adopted.

The fourth aspect is that the RM-VAT observes more by casting the net wider. As discussed in my review of RFATs in section 3.1, I identified four points in which I believe the RFATs fall short for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities in the Latin American contexts of my case studies and possibly other contexts: they are insufficiently holistic, neglect

the local scale, have a state bias and use a restrictive definition of religion. In the design of the RM-VAT I address the first point by getting rid of laundry lists of indicators of religious freedom. As I explained, these lists of indicators, no matter how comprehensive, will never cover all the possible restrictions on religious expression, nor can they be taken as proxies for them in Latin American contexts, as my initial empirical observations suggest. The RM-VAT observes threats without being restricted by a predetermined set of indicators. In addition, the self-reporting of the people I interviewed for my case studies about the human security threats they face contributed to maintain an open-ended outlook.

To address the three other shortcomings of the RFATs for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities in the political-institutional contexts I set out to study, I introduced a number of conceptual shifts, which are inspired by the two paradigm shifting features of the human security paradigm (Glasius 2008) that are most relevant to my research as I described in section 3.2: shifting security and a shift towards the subjects of security. These conceptual shifts are the behavioral definition of religion and of religious minority (operationalized through the continuum of religious identity and behavior), the multidimensional understanding of religious freedom (operationalized through the concept of spheres of society), the focus on the subject of human security (the religious minority itself) instead of on the structural conditions that lead to human insecurity, and the conscious choice to consider non-state actors, non-religious motives and, when pertinent, the subnational level.

The RM-VAT's methodological aim is precisely to cast the net wider than existing frameworks and tools. Particularly the inclusion of behavioral aspects of religion and the approach in terms of spheres of society set the RM-VAT apart from other tools. As explained, most RFATs restrict the observation to religious identity and only some forms of religious behavior, as well as to the observation of violations of religious freedom in the church sphere (freedom of worship) and a limited selection of aspects of other spheres of society. Operationalizing the behavioral definition of religion and the multidimensional understanding of religious freedom, the RM-VAT views religion not as a social sphere – the church or its equivalents in other religions (mosque, synagogue, temple, etc.) are spheres – but as a phenomenon that expresses itself in all spheres of society (Petri & Visscher 2015).

In the RM-VAT, I also discarded the use of the concept of 'religious persecution' that is central to most RFATs. Beyond the competing acceptations of this term and its inflationary use, it places too much emphasis on the perpetrators of this persecution and their intentions, thereby implying the neglect of non-religious motives and forms of vulnerability that are the result of unfavorable circumstances rather than of deliberate acts by individuals or groups. All three case studies included in this research provide examples of religious groups that suffer human rights abuses for non-religious reasons such as the 'commercial' motives (greed) of organized crime in northeast Mexico to extort Christian leaders (chapter 5), the political economy reasons of indigenous Nasa leaders in Colombia to reject religious conversions because they lose access to education subsidies (chapter 6) and the political considerations of the Cuban communist regime who refuse to share influence with churches (chapter 7). As I argued in section 3.3.3, even when the concept of religious persecution is defined broadly to cover all the aspects I discussed in this research, it is essentially an object-oriented notion, whereas the RM-VAT expressly adopts a subject orientation.

8.3.3 *Replicability*

A limitation that follows from my reliance of anecdotal evidence concerns the replicability of the data collection which is reduced because of practical and security reasons. Indeed, the conduct of the fieldwork is very labor intensive (I give some suggestions in section 8.5.3 to try to make the application of the RM-VAT to multiple cases more ‘doable’), requires a solid personal network like the one I benefitted from thanks to my institutional affiliations and can involve substantial security risks for the researcher. Beyond these considerations, replicability is also reduced by the role of the interpretation of the researcher, especially when developing the threat assessment. A legitimate question is whether another researcher would have arrived at the same lists of threats as I did, because the content of the threat assessments is not immediately self-evident. It is fair to say that interpretation indeed plays an important role in this process and that another researcher could therefore arrive at different conclusions by interviewing other people or by noticing aspects I paid less attention to.

Yet, because of the intrinsic heuristic value of my case studies, another researcher may certainly identify slightly different threats or vary in the qualifications of these threats, but the essence of the threat assessments should not vary substantially if sufficient sources are consulted, because roughly the same threats should show up. Moreover, because the matrix that crosses spheres of society with the continuum of religious identity and behavior guides the observation, similar outcomes should be expected. Finally, the consistency of the data triangulation with secondary sources further ensures the replicability of the findings.

The observations made in the case studies should certainly be transparent and verifiable, but it could be asked whether replicability should be a methodological goal of the RM-VAT. The stated aim of this research, and the purpose for which the RM-VAT was developed, is to advance in the observation of the specific vulnerability of religious minorities, which the RM-VAT does because it yields new empirical information. The replicability of the findings is an additional benefit, but it is not its primary goal. Furthermore, one can go too far in trying to ensure replicability and more generally maximizing accuracy and reliability of the data, because it can stand in the way of an inductive observation of threats. As Owen asserts, “It is precisely this mentality that leads to a discarding of all data but the vague national level indicators produced by International Organizations. The fact is that much of the data are collected with integrity and reasonable accuracy.” (2003:61). So, although replicability in itself is an important requirement, it should not be made into a *condicio sine qua non* for the viability of the RM-VAT, as this could imply that important, but difficult to acquire, knowledge is not acquired at all.

8.3.4 *Generalizability and comparability*

Considering the research design I adopted (the diverse case method), the generalizability of my findings presents inevitable limitations (Herron & Quinn 2016). As Seawright & Gerring claim, “Diverse cases are likely to be representative in the minimal sense of representing the full variation of the population. (Of course, they may not mirror the distribution of that variation in the population.)” (2008:297). Due to the methodological issue of sampling, this means that the findings of my case studies are theoretically only generalizable to other cases that correspond to the same typical sub-types of my case studies.

I believe that the general picture of the threat assessments can be generalized because the identified threats possess an intrinsic heuristic value, which can be inferred from similar observations in similar contexts. In this research I referred to fieldwork I conducted myself in other crime torn areas within Mexico and in other Latin American countries, particularly Colombia and El Salvador, in which I identified similar threats to the ones I identified in my case study on northeast Mexico. The same is true for my case study on the Nasa resguardos which present similar patterns of threats in other indigenous communities I studied in Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala. In Venezuela and Bolivia I observed threats to religious expression that are comparable to Cuba. The generalization of my findings to other contexts outside Latin America is likely to be more difficult, but at the very least the findings of my case studies can serve to elaborate hypotheses for research in similar political-institutional contexts, as I suggest in section 8.5.1. Moreover, notwithstanding the limitations to the generalizability of the findings of my case studies, as a tool, the RM-VAT could be applied to a broader set of cases, as I discuss in section 8.5.2.

As I already mentioned, the benefit of the inductive perspective of the RM-VAT is that it casts the net wider and has the versatility to yield meaningful results in very different political-institutional contexts. At the same time, its downside is that every case study is substantially different which somewhat hinders comparability. As a result, quantitative cross-national comparisons as the RFATs do are literally impossible. In theory, it should be possible to adapt the RM-VAT into a quantitative instrument, but it would imply sacrificing its holistic nature to a large extent, and returning to a laundry list approach, which is precisely what the RM-VAT intends to avoid. This being said, using a qualitative approach, comparisons can be made in which characteristics of the political-institutional context are treated as independent variables and the vulnerability of a particular religious minority as the dependent variable.

8.3.5 Determination of specificity

A final methodological point I would like to discuss relates to the determination of specificity. Above, I already discussed the methodological innovation of the specificity assessment – a sliding scale to determine degrees of specificity instead of a binary variable – and how this allows me to overcome the problematic reflex that “if there is no maximum degree specificity, there is no specificity at all” that characterizes most studies on religious persecution which consequently only observe threats that have a maximum degree of specificity and discard relevant threats that have lower degrees of specificity. My approach to specificity thus allows me to observe more, and be more nuanced in my observation.

There are three methodological concerns, however, with the determination of specificity as I did in the specificity assessment that deserve to be mentioned here. The first concerns precision. When executing the second step of the RM-VAT, I found that it is certainly possible to approximate some degree of specificity, even when human security threats are not exclusively applicable to religious minorities, but moving beyond a three degree scale of specificity does not seem feasible. Distinguishing between low, medium and high degrees of specificity is probably the highest level of precision that can be obtained. This being said, determining specificity with more precision than a three degree scale is probably not necessary.

Establishing specificity is further complicated in cases where there are no other religious or non-religious group to establish a comparison with. In the case of northeast Mexico, I could establish specificity by comparing the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians to the

vulnerability of secular activists and journalists, and in the case of Cuba, I could establish specificity by comparing the vulnerability of Christians to the vulnerability of other religious groups and human rights activists. In the case of the Nasa resguardos, however, the cultural dissidents are the only group I identified that stands up against the resguardos. By extension, its vulnerability presents a large degree of specificity because it is the only group that possesses this vulnerability. I could only speculate to what extent similar threats could also have applied to other groups.

The third concerns the relation between specificity and intensity. Specificity and intensity are not the same. Establishing that a particular threat has a higher degree of specificity for a particular religious minority, is not the same as saying that this religious minority suffers more than other groups. Based on the data I collected in the case studies and the impossibility to determine how widespread or representative the identified threats are this is impossible. For my case studies, I am only capable of justifying for which threats the vulnerability of religious minorities have a higher degree of specificity, not whether these minorities actually suffer more than other groups. This is in itself already an important methodological contribution of this research, but to go further and establish the comparative intensity of the vulnerability of religious minorities is not possible since the data that link active forms of religious behavior with vulnerability to human security threats are not available.

8.3.6 Synthesis: the RM-VAT as a complement to other tools and frameworks

The RM-VAT was developed as a result of my dissatisfaction with existing frameworks and tools to adequately observe the vulnerability of religious minorities in selected Latin American contexts. In this dissertation, I have argued its pertinence as a tool that yields additional empirical information and mends the gaps of other frameworks. It has its limitations too, particularly in the field of quantification and the determination of specificity, as I explained above. For this reason, the RM-VAT should be viewed as a complement, rather than a substitute to existing tools.

Although the RM-VAT indeed observes aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are not detected by existing tools and frameworks fail to reveal, it is not better on all points. For example, the RM-VAT is not suited for cross-national whole of country rankings and comparisons which the RFATs are. The RM-VAT also does not claim any causality or generalizable explanatory power, which other frameworks do. Therefore, the RM-VAT should be viewed as a complement to existing frameworks and tools which continue to have their place. The RM-VAT merely highlights dimensions that are less intuitive but at the same time very real in terms of the human security concerns they raise.

8.4 Contributions to the literature

In this section I discuss some contributions to the literature that can be made based on the empirical observations and the conceptual developments made in this research. I mirror my discussion on chapters 2 and 3, consecutively presenting my contributions to interpretative models of the vulnerability of religious minorities (8.4.1), to RFATs (8.4.2) and to human security (8.4.3).

8.4.1 *Applications of interpretative models of the vulnerability of religious minorities*

Although it was not my aim to empirically validate the interpretative models described in chapter 2 – my aim was to better observe the vulnerability of religious minorities, not to explain them –, I did find elements of these models to be applicable to explain some of the human security threats I identified in my case studies. I also identified aspects of these theories that could be adjusted. I present four building blocks that could be integrated into a comprehensive explanatory theory of the vulnerability of religious minorities.

The first building block is the importance of adopting a multifactorial approach to analyze religious conflicts and conflicts in general. This is very clear when observing the debate about the determinants of conflict. In my case studies, I have shown that each of the popular determinants – grievance (Cederman, Gleditsch & Buhaug 2013; Gurr 2016 [1970]); greed (Collier & Hoeffler 2004) and opportunity (Fearon & Laitin 2003; Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner 2009) – are factors that contribute to the vulnerability of religious minorities, without any one of them being the single most decisive factor. Although it is true that in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, the actor that is responsible for the vast majority of the human security threats to actively practicing Christians, Los Zetas, operates out of greed, grievance-based factors should also be considered in view of the inspiration this groups finds in the Santa Muerte cult. Yet, the violence of this drug cartel only became possible because of a context of extreme corruption, lawlessness and impunity, providing the opportunity for violence.

A similar analysis can be made about the indigenous territories in the southwestern highlands of Colombia. At one level of analysis, the religious agenda of the cultural dissidents enters into conflict with the cabildos who have various reasons to resent this group. One of them is their concern with the preservation of the cultural homogeneity of the Nasa as an ethnic group which they believe is threatened by cultural dissidents who display deviant social behavior to use Durkheim's concept (1893). Another reason is rooted in political economy: their fear of losing political influence and economic subsidies leads them to implement identity manipulation strategies, paraphrasing Schlee (2008). Above all, it is the advanced self-government faculties of the resguardos, in combination with their geographical remoteness that gives them the opportunity to violently repress the cultural dissidents. In this conflict, the different determinants of conflict that conflict literature presents are all present: grievance, greed and opportunity; not in opposition to each other, but as complementary interpretations (Ballentine & Sherman 2003; Weinstein 2007; Owen 2003; Achterhuis & Koning 2017).

The determinants of conflicts approach is less useful to explain the situation of Cuba, which is a classic form of authoritarian government that uses “structural violence” (Galtung 1969). Yet, some form of grievance could be observed through the antireligion political ideology that is an integral part of the communist government system (Sarkissian 2015). Greed, too, is not totally absent in the Cuban case. On the island, social work of religious group is restricted but for a different reason than in northeast Mexico, namely because it competes with the legitimacy of the state, following Weber (1919) and more recently Scolnicov (2011).

As these paragraphs show, the different theoretical frameworks offer complementary explanations for the same themes or are applicable at different moments in time. There is, however, not a single theory that provides a comprehensive explanatory framework for all forms of vulnerability of religious minorities. This suggests that these theories should be used concurrently, as pieces to the puzzle, but avoiding deterministic and mono-causal approaches.

A second building block is the recognition of the fluidity between state and non-state actors. Connecting with the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes, two of my case studies focus on the subnational level and on non-state actors. I show that frameworks that have been developed to explain the actions of the state, can also be used to analyze non-state actors. This is very obvious in northeast Mexico, where drug cartels have taken over traditional positions of the state, and effectively regulate religion. This is also the case when considering the indigenous authorities of the Nasa community, who run an authoritarian government system without recognition of individual rights.

Another example of the application to non-state actors of theories that were developed to analyze the state is the concept of “political origins of religious liberty” developed by Gill (2008), which can be used not only to interpret the evolutions in Cuba’s religious policy as Goldenziel does (2009), but also to interpret the vulnerability of religious minorities in the indigenous territories of Colombia. Indeed, the advanced degree of self-government in indigenous territories does not constitute a political incentive to guarantee religious freedom in these territories. Stretching the scope of the theory, it could even be applied to the areas controlled by the drug cartels in northeast Mexico who, acting as the *de facto* political authority, have little interest in guaranteeing religious freedom.

The third building block, which I have insisted upon a lot throughout this research, is the relevance of considering the consequences of behavior alongside identity as a source of vulnerability. This must be done systematically in conflict theory, in particular to consider types of conflicts that do not run along ethnic (identity) lines, such as the minority-within-the-minority conflict in the Nasa indigenous territories. I discuss some theoretical applications of this here, and come back to the practical implications of measuring behavioral aspects of religion in the next section.

Regarding the relation between religious identity and vulnerability, I found Sen’s perspective on the dangers of the “assumption of singular identification” (2006) to be applicable to the Nasa community of Colombia where converts to Christianity are no longer considered as indigenous, which in turn constitutes a justification for their social exclusion. To some extent, this is also the case in Cuba where Christians in practice are considered as second class citizens. I did not, however, find this perspective to be applicable to my case study on northeast Mexico, in which identity plays a much smaller role.

Yet, even when identity explains the vulnerability of a religious minority, I found that it rarely is the only factor. In the case of the Nasa community, although identity is part of the problem, other factors come into play too, including political economy considerations, for which Schlee’s interpretation of identity manipulation based on cost-benefit calculations is helpful (2008). As I found, one of the reasons why conversion to Christianity is resisted by the indigenous authorities in the Nasa resguardos, is because it implies a reduction in money transfers from the central government. A similar dynamic can be observed in northeast Mexico, where the Los Zetas cartel opposes any action by actively practicing Christians that directly threaten their interests, such as the conversion of their members, work with youths or drug rehabilitations initiatives.

Other explanations are also possible. The resistance to converts in the Nasa resguardos of Colombia can be interpreted using Durkheim’s work about socially deviant behavior (1893), as well as “the politics of fear” by Nussbaum (2013) and “the scapegoat mechanism” by Girard (1989). As explained, many contend that conversion to Christianity is a threat to the

preservation of indigenous culture. Some indigenous leaders go even further by claiming that conversion distorts the harmony of the universe and leads to environmental disasters. A similar accusation, still common in Cuba, that religious people are ‘foreign agents’ that seek to destabilize the country, provides yet another illustration of Durkheim’s theory.

In northeast Mexico, the vulnerability of commitment to justice (Nussbaum 1986) can be most clearly observed, with the drug cartels attacking any person who, motivated by their religious convictions, engages in social work which it considers a threat to their influence. Similar dynamics can be observed in Cuba, but this time it is the government who wants to preserve its ideological influence over society. Although Nussbaum focuses primarily on the level of the individual, my case studies provide a macro level application of her theory. This does not apply to religiously inspired people only but could also apply to social workers, human rights activists or journalists who do not have a religious motivation.

Finally, the fourth building block concerns the analytical value of the notion of spheres of society that has a potential for broader applications. Although I used this concept to gauge violations of religious freedom (Petri & Visscher 2015), it could also be used as an analytical tool to observe social phenomena such as democratic backsliding (Glasius 2018) or the degree of respect for particular fundamental rights such as freedom of expression in distinct spheres of society. Observing a social phenomenon by different spheres of society allows for a more fine-grained manner than through the classic categories of ‘state’ and ‘civil society.’ It also permits overcoming approaches that only consider individual freedoms. The separation of spheres can be considered as a normative addendum to the separation of powers, because the respect for the autonomy of each sphere constitutes a safeguard against “authoritarian and illiberal practices” to cite Glasius (2018), which can be understood as illegitimate interventions of the government in the various private spheres restricting their freedom.

8.4.2 Improvements to Religious Freedom Assessment Tools

This dissertation could inspire changes to the methodologies of the RFATs that can easily be implemented so that these can expand their scope. After all, qualitative research has always produced insights that have informed the development of quantitative tools. By doing this, the RFATs would still be subject to the limitations that characterize quantitative analysis in general, but they could cast their net a little wider by measuring other variables that can be compared in a large n-format.

In this section I discuss some possible improvements to RFATs. (I deal with broader applications of the RM-VAT in section 8.5.2.) First of all, the RFATs could be improved by developing variables that describe overlooked aspects that the RM-VAT revealed such as the multidimensionality of religious freedom, notably religious freedom violations that occur in spheres of society other than the church sphere. This can be done by creating more variables that constitute proxies for each of the spheres. To some degree, the World Watch List of Open Doors International already does this, because it has elaborated a list of questions for five “spheres of life” (private, family, community, national and church spheres), but it does not specifically consider the social sphere nor the business sphere. The RAS Project covers elements of some spheres, but could also be expanded. Particular attention should be given to variables describing subjective elements such as fear, frustration or discouragement. RFATs could also be a bit more flexible in their data collection process by broadening the number of sources they use, which, particularly in the case of the Pew Research Center, is reduced.

RFATs could take the role of non-state actors in restricting religious freedom more into account. The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) by the Pew Research Center and the societal module of the Religion and State Project already do so but these indicators could be ‘unpacked’ to a larger extent. To account for subnational variation, RFATs could be applied below the national state, in line with the broader trend of discovery of the subnational dimension (for example, the V-Dem project takes the subnational level as unit of analysis to compare quality of democracy). Most RFATs state in their methodologies that they take relevant subnational factors into consideration, but only in few instances do they take the subnational level as their unit of analysis. Apart from some pilots by the WWL and the RAS Project, this has not been done systematically.

Another major blind spot in most RFATs that I discussed in this research is that they insufficiently account for behavioral characteristics of religion. In order to address this issue, RFATs could develop more variables that describe forms of semi-active and active religious behavior. Alternatively, it would be helpful if more survey data about such variables is produced. In two 2018 reports, the Pew Research Center stresses the sociological relevance of making the distinction between religious identification and religious behavior in a Western context (2018). In Mexico, the RIFREM survey is a useful source of information about semi-active forms of religious behavior, but lacks questions about more active forms. A practical problem with existing surveys that needs to be addressed is that it cannot be determined to what extent active forms of religious behavior, of which only few measurements exist and often only at the national level (an exception is the Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt University that collects data at the state and municipal levels), are a consequence of religious convictions or not.

8.4.3 Developing human security

Human security has lost some of its appeal in recent years, in part due to its perceived conceptual vagueness, as explained in section 3.2. Human security remains, however, a very useful lens to observe social phenomena, as is illustrated by this dissertation. Indeed, legal or traditional political science analyses that focus on the state fall short in understanding religious freedom violations in Latin America, which are better understood through the human security perspective, in particular its shift toward a non-traditional approach of security and its subjects (Glasius 2008). In the following I highlight three aspects that could serve to develop this important theoretical concept.

The first aspect concerns the operationalization of human security. As I argued in section 3.2, human security is in itself only a paradigm-shifting concept. However valuable, it needs to be operationalized through the notion of vulnerability so that it can be measured or observed (Owen 2003). In this dissertation I specifically looked at the vulnerability of religious minorities, but the applications of vulnerability assessment tools are much broader, for example political, ethnic, gender or sexual minorities.

As a tool, the RM-VAT is centered on religion through its focus on threats to religious expression in different spheres of life and the coping mechanisms that are specifically related to religion, which makes it difficult to apply it to non-religious groups. Moreover, the behavioral component of the RM-VAT is absent from ethnicity, gender and sexual preference, which are identity categories. The threats that specific professions face, such as journalists or

human rights activists, for example those that promote identity rights and the ones that are ideologically driven, most of the time express themselves in just one sphere of society. This being said, the principles that undergird the RM-VAT, such as the open-minded observation of human security threats and the subject-oriented approach, are applicable to all types of minorities. To properly observe the vulnerability of non-religious minorities it would make more sense, however, to return to the original VAT methodology of which I gave some examples in chapter 3 (Alwang, Siegel & Jorgensen 2001; Owen 2003; Hoogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon 2004; Makoka & Kaplan 2005; OHCHR 2010).

A second aspect that could inspire VATs is the methodological innovation of the specificity assessment which consists in adopting a sliding scale instead of the implicit binary approach to specificity that many seem to follow. Thanks to this sliding scale, I was able to determine degrees of specificity rather than discarding threats that for an arbitrary reason are not deemed specific enough to be considered. It is important to stress the importance of carrying out the specificity assessment after the threat assessment and not before. I systematically carried out both the interpretation and the determination of the specificity of the human security threats a posteriori, i.e. after their observation. If I would have done this a priori, I would have risked discarding human security threats based on a precipitated understanding that they were either “not specific enough” or “not religious persecution”, hereby falling into the same trap as RFATs and other analyses of civil conflicts. The a posteriori determination of specificity also allows the RM-VAT to cast its net wider than other tools, because more threats are considered.

A final aspect that could inspire VATs regards the resilience assessment, which builds on the notions that vulnerable people have agency and that vulnerability can be a form of resilience (Brown 2012; Butler 2016). In most VATs, resilience is not considered (for example in Owen 2003). Analyzing resilience together with vulnerability is relevant to inform strategies to deal with human security threats. Considering vulnerability and resilience together is also necessary to properly gauge vulnerability. A mistake that is often made is to conclude that a particular group is not vulnerable because it is resilient, which would be an error of judgement: the fact that a group is resilient means it is coping well with threats, but it does not mean there are no threats.

Resilience has received increased scholarly attention (Hoogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis & Dercon 2004; Glasius 2012; Rodin 2014), but, just like the concept of human security, it requires an operationalization so that it can be gauged. In order to do this, following a multidisciplinary approach inspired by various authors (Thielicke 1969; Grix 2000; Arendt 2006 [1963]; Habermas 2006; Glasius 2012; Wellman 2012; Philpott & Shah 2018), I elaborated a categorization of eight coping mechanisms to observe the resilience of the vulnerable religious minorities: ‘avoidance’, ‘spiritual endurance’, ‘compliance’, ‘social wisdom’, ‘moral standing’, ‘solidarity’, ‘collective action’ and ‘taking up arms.’ With the exception of ‘spiritual endurance’ and perhaps ‘moral standing’ which would require to be substituted, these coping mechanisms can be used to identify the coping mechanisms of non-religious minorities.

Another contribution in the field of resilience is the improved understanding of the relation between social engagement – whether inspired by religious convictions or not –, vulnerability and resilience. On the one hand, in my case studies I could observe the central point Nussbaum makes in *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986) that people who wish to be good are indeed at a higher risk of being shattered by the world; the threats that result from active religious behavior confirm this. I also observed that vulnerability increases unnecessarily when people wish to be ‘too good’ and avoid any form of self-defense, because that makes them an easy prey for

assaults, which became apparent in the examples of churches and businesses in northeast Mexico who sometimes refrain from engaging private security to protect themselves. On the other hand, trying to be good and engaging social injustice seems to be a moral imperative as well as a practical necessity in dangerous contexts. As I also observed, it is often the lack of social engagement – underdeveloped coping mechanisms ‘solidarity’ and ‘collective action’ – that increases vulnerability. Yet, too much social engagement, undertaken to mitigate vulnerability, at times seems to increase it, because it attracts unwanted attention from the government in the case of Cuba and from the drug cartels in the case of northeast Mexico.

8.5 Exploration of possible areas for future research

In this exploration of possible areas for future research, I consecutively discuss areas for future research that arise from the case studies (8.5.1), broader applications of the RM-VAT (8.5.2) and areas for development of the RM-VAT (8.5.3). I focus primarily on the insights I gained from the threat, specificity and resilience assessments of my three cases. I deal with the practical recommendations that come forth from the resilience assessments in the next section.

8.5.1 Areas for future research that arise from the case studies

A general and perhaps expected area of future research that arises from the case studies is the relation between religion and human security. In this dissertation, I have only explored a small portion of this vast area by studying the human security (specific vulnerability and resilience) of religious minorities, without getting close to exhausting this topic. More research is needed in two related areas: the role of some religious actors to promote conflict and the role religious actors can play in conflict resolution and in promoting human security (Johnston & Sampson 1994; Appleby 2000; Mwaura 2008; Wellman & Lombardi 2012; Grim 2016; Baumgart-Ochse, Glaab, Smith & Smythe 2017). Because it remains largely understudied, a specific emphasis deserves to be placed on the subnational dimension of human security (Owen 2003; Dabène 2008; Glasius e.a. 2018), in particular in studying how subnational undemocratic regimes interplay with religion and religious freedom, which empirical relevance is stressed by my first two case studies. In line with the “shifting security” feature of human security and the findings of my case studies, I also recommend taking a different approach to the state and its enforcement of religious policy, particularly considering the increasingly blurred lines between authoritarianism and democracy as analytical categories (Dabène, Geisser & Massardier 2008; Glasius 2018).

A more specific area of future research concerns the relation between organized crime and religion. In my case study on northeast Mexico I found that the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians is to a large degree the result of the fact that their behavior disturbs the interest of the drug cartels. This finding defies the conventional understanding that organized crime is not concerned with religion; my first case study suggests that it can be and most of the time for non-religious motives which could be labelled as ‘greed.’ It would be interesting to explore to what extent this conclusion applies to similar contexts such as other crime torn regions of Mexico, the gang violence in Central American countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras, the guerrilla wars in rural Colombia, the violence in Brazilian favelas and drug-related conflicts in the Caribbean region. Beyond Latin America, one could think of the organized crime in sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan or even in the inner cities of the United States.

Going even further, as I already hinted to above, organized crime, when it takes over traditional functions of the state through infiltration or co-optation at the subnational level like I observed in my first case study, effectively regulates religion in similar ways to states in non-democracies, including Islamist regimes and communist regimes (Koesel 2014; Cesari 2014; Sarkissian 2015; Fox 2016; Philpott 2019). Understanding these dynamics more in-depth would constitute an excellent avenue for future research.

In my case study on the Nasa resguardos in Colombia, a central finding was that the far-reaching indigenous self-government rights, although positive on paper, lead to the risk of human rights abuses, including violations of religious freedom. Research by Ghanea & Xanthaki (2005), Kymlicka (1996), Scolnicov (2011) and Pinto (2015) suggests that the issues posed by the imbalance between individual and collective rights in indigenous communities are widespread, affecting not only religious minorities but also other types of minorities such as gender, sexual and political minorities. Yet, minority-within-the-minority or intra-ethnic conflicts receive relatively little attention in legal scholarship and in conflict studies. Further research into how to solve the puzzle of imbalanced rights that is respectful of collective cultural rights and minority rights is therefore highly relevant. Cases that come to mind are other Latin American countries (other indigenous territories in Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil) (Nieto Martinez 2005; Kovic 2007; Lopera Mesa 2009; Duarte 2009; Scolnicov 2011; Zegarra-Ballón 2015; Freston 2018) and worldwide (Canada, United States, Israel, Australia, South Asian countries, New Zealand). Examples of discussions of minority-within-the-minority cases are Kymlicka (1996) (Canada and United States), McDonald (1998) (Australia and Canada), Pfaff-Czarnecka (2010) (South Asia), Jobani & Perez (2014) (Israel) and Pinto (2015) (Israel and Canada). Findings could further be generalized to religious conflicts within diaspora communities.

A related point concerns the exploration of models for the accommodation of differences in politics with deep societal cleavages (Gurr 1993; Kymlicka 1996; Lijphart 2004; Vargas & Petri 2009; Achterhuis & Koning 2017), as is evidently the case in the Nasa community, and the legal precedent of “reasonable accommodation” which “acknowledges that there are plural thoughts on [...] issues and should be accommodated when reasonable” (Du Plessis 2014:105). A possible solution to the religious conflict I described in my case study could be that cultural dissidents accept the political authority of the indigenous leaders, but that they are given the possibility to opt out of those social activities they cannot take part in because of their religion, like the mandatory religion classes in indigenous schools.

A solution in the field of education could be to implement a system in which traditional indigenous education and confessional education are both funded by the Colombian state, inspired by the Dutch educational system since 1917 which came into being as a solution to the *schoolstrijd* [*school struggle*] in The Netherlands (1848-1917). Initially, the conflict revolved around freedom of education, with confessional groups demanding the legal possibility to create private confessional schools, a right that was included in the 1848 Constitution. Considering the high costs for establishing and maintaining confessional schools, anti-revolutionary politicians Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (2008 [1847]) and Abraham Kuyper (1880, 1898) then advocated for the public financing of confessional education, which was granted after a long struggle, through a series of political reforms referred to as ‘the Pacification’ that were adopted in 1917. This led to a unique system in which the state funds all schools equally, both secular and confessional, with some degree of autonomy to establish

policies regarding curriculum and teacher appointments (Hooker 2009), while the state maintains general educational standards applicable to all (Du Plessis 2014).

The Dutch model in which religious schools are publicly funded remains controversial and continues to be opposed on ideological grounds by various (secular) political parties. Interestingly, most RFATs (GRI and RAS) view the Dutch educational system as a form of state favoritism of religion, which is ironic, because most religious groups view it as a major advance in terms of religious freedom. Buijs specifically cites the Dutch educational system as an expression of pluralism (2013), with the caveat that it should not lead to “religious segregation” but “provide a platform for encountering other religions and cultures” (Buijs, Sunier & Versteeg 2013:12-13). At any rate, this model allowed to peacefully accommodate major political differences of religious and non-religious groups. It could be interesting to explore a similar solution for the cultural dissidents in the Nasa community.

The religious policies of communist and post-totalitarian regimes, although they have received substantial attention (Koesel 2014; Sarkissian 2015; Fox 2015; Philpott 2019), deserve ongoing study. Flowing from my case study on Cuba, I noted that the evolution over time of the religious policy in this country is insufficiently understood, particularly the way in which informal and often unreported government practices restrict religious freedom. As Koesel notes: “There are few comparative studies of religion and politics in countries undergoing transitions from communism – or for that matter from other forms of authoritarian rule.” (2014:175). This is not only relevant for Cuba but also to interpret religious policy in other countries in the region that apply elements from “the authoritarian toolkit” to repress religion, as Koesel calls it. In Latin America, Venezuela appears to be implementing similar measures in terms of restricting religious freedom, inspired by the communist model. Other communist countries such as North Korea or communist countries in transition, such as China and Vietnam, could also be considered. Beyond the communist world, the case study could be generalizable to other authoritarian / post-totalitarian regimes, like for example in Central Asia or the Middle-East, as well as to governments who formally or informally propagate a state religion. In addition, studies about post-totalitarian regimes should give more attention to coping strategies of religious minorities as the ones I observed in Cuba or the ones observed by Grix in East-Germany (2000) and Koesel in China (2014).

8.5.2 Broader applications of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool

The RM-VAT is essentially a tool to organize data on human security threats and coping mechanisms which could theoretically be applied to any political-institutional context. The varied nature of the political-institutional contexts of the three case studies included in this dissertation points to the broad possibilities for the application of the RM-VAT. Indeed, in terms of units of analysis (subnational / national), human security setting (organized crime, indigenous conflict and communist authoritarianism), geography (urban / rural), type of persecution (horizontal / vertical), social cleavage (ethnic / non-ethnic) the possibilities seem endless. The possibility that the tool can be applied to other contexts, however, does not mean it will necessarily yield substantial new empirical knowledge. A more pertinent approach, therefore, is to determine under which parameters the RM-VAT could improve the observation of vulnerability of religious minorities.

Although the three case studies included in this study concern Latin American countries and Christian groups, the RM-VAT can be used to study religious minorities belonging to other

regions and other religions. As I already pointed out when I discussed the potential for generalization of each of the case studies, the RM-VAT can be applied to observe the position of religious minorities in similar contexts in other regions. Since I applied the RM-VAT to such different groups in my case studies, it can be assumed that it can be applied to vulnerable non-Christian religious minorities as well.

In addition, I would like to observe that a reflection about vulnerability and coping mechanisms also exists in other religions – I gave examples of Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam in chapter 2 – and some of the assumptions of the RM-VAT are based on the work of scholars who are rooted in different religious confessions: Baha’i, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and even atheists. Most analytical concepts that are part of the RM-VAT, such as the continuum of religious identity and behavior, apply to all religions. Although it is rooted in Reformed political philosophy, in this dissertation I used the concept of ‘sphere sovereignty’ (spheres of society) as an analytical category to describe the multidimensionality of religious freedom – which is nothing more than an extension of the principle of separation between religion and state to other spheres – and not as a normative concept. The only required adaptation would be to change the name of the church sphere to the corresponding religious institution (Petri & Visscher 2015).

The added value of the application of the RM-VAT is likely to be higher when it concerns cases in which religious minorities display active forms of religious behavior, at the subnational level, in contexts affected by high human insecurity, with threats outside the church sphere (or its equivalent for other religions: the mosque sphere, the synagogue sphere, the temple sphere, etc.), and when the analysis of coping mechanisms is analytically relevant. Within these parameters, the RM-VAT can be applied beyond Latin America and to non-Christian religious minorities such as Sufis or Baha’i in Iran, Salafists in Egypt, Rohingya in Myanmar, Muslims in India or Jews in the Middle East or in Europe. (In the case of non-missionary religions such as Judaism, the category ‘missionary activity’ is not applicable.) It can also be applied to observe the vulnerability of religious groups to organized crime in countries like Nigeria, the issues posed by conversion in indigenous communities in Australia and the repression of minority religions in Indonesia.

Atheists constitute an exceptional group because they do not technically qualify as a religion, but they can share a number of characteristics with religious people insofar their worldview inspires certain forms of individual or collective behavior – ‘class consciousness’ is not necessary; this was also absent in the case of actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico –, like humanist groups, although it may be a challenge to identify them if they do not organize in groups. In Iran and other Islamic countries, atheists are persecuted in similar ways as religious minorities, about which there is little awareness.³²⁹

8.5.3 *Development of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool*

In light of the case studies, there are a number of avenues that could be explored to improve the RM-VAT. A limitation of the tool that I already mentioned is the determination of the scope of the human security threats it observes. As I explained, threats can be observed with a certain degree of certainty, but it is not possible, because of limited data availability in the cases I studied, to determine how widespread or representative they are. Taking on the challenge

³²⁹ “Atheists around world suffer persecution, discrimination: report”, *Reuters*, 09/12/2012.

formulated by Douglas W. Hubbard in *How to Measure Anything. Finding the Value of "Intangibles" in Business* (2014), it should in fact be possible to come up with an 'extrapolation method' to predict the scope of the identified human security threats, an intangible, even with limited data. According to Hubbard, the starting point of any measurement problem is to gather what is already known about the subject: one generally has more data and needs less data than one thinks; in my case, the RM-VATs include a wealth of information, including estimates and input from experts. Based on an assessment of all available data it can be determined which variables require additional measurement. A sufficient amount of new data – to reduce uncertainty and yield information value – is often more accessible than one thinks, as Hubbard asserts.

A related point is the determination of what can be referred to as 'comparative intensity', i.e. the comparison of the intensity of human security threats between religious minorities and other groups. As I discussed above, the determination of the specificity of these threats is possible up to a degree, but in order to be able to compare the intensity and be able to determine whether, for example, Christians in Cuba suffer more or less from certain threats than political dissidents, data describing the scope of the human security threats is necessary. In order to overcome this limitation, the adoption of a statistical probabilities method, as used by Bartman to reach the conclusion that "[in Mexico] journalists are at a much higher risk of being murdered than the general population" (2018:1093), could be explored.

Not only the intensity of human security threats could be compared between different groups, this could also be done for coping mechanisms. For example, in the same study, Bartman found that solidarity among critical journalists in Mexico is very important, which contrasts with my finding that solidarity among actively practicing Christians in NL, TS and SP is largely lacking.

Beyond quantitative extrapolations of the RM-VAT to determine scope and comparative intensity, improvements can also be made to simplify the conduct of the fieldwork and the data collection process in general. Provided the right survey data becomes available, particularly more measurements of behavioral aspects of religion – "lived religion", to use Hall's concept (1997) – that can be crossed with human security threats and perceptions about these threats, the identification of human security threats could be more expedited because the need for extensive fieldwork would be reduced. The risk of such an approach is that one loses the inductive and context-sensitive features of the RM-VAT, but because the threat assessment is less labor intensive, more cases could be analyzed.

Simplifications can also be made to the threat assessment itself at the level of the observed spheres of society, merging certain spheres or by focusing exclusively on one sphere or sub-sphere. Merging spheres would reduce the number of categories of interpretation but would make it easier to apply the threat assessment to holistic contexts like the Nasa where the borders between spheres are not watertight. Focusing on specific spheres could be relevant if one wants to deepen the understanding of the intricacies of a particular topic such as freedom of education, conscientious objection or surveillance in relation to religious freedom, although one risks losing the inductive qualities of the RM-VAT to assess religious freedom violations throughout all spheres of society.

For the case study on the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba I had the opportunity to conduct a focus group session with a number of Christian leaders, which allowed me to obtain their feedback on the threats I had identified and to facilitate a reflection about coping mechanisms. Beyond its use to improve the quality of the threat and resilience assessments, the focus group

session was also instrumental to increase the awareness of the participants about the threats they face and triggered a self-reflection about coping mechanisms they experienced as helpful. Because of practical limitations, I was not able to conduct similar focus group sessions in the two other case studies, but ideally making one or more focus group sessions integral to the application of the RM-VAT would be beneficial for data collection.

In the same line of thinking, the resilience assessment could benefit from the world of “scenario planning”, also called scenario thinking or scenario analysis, a strategic method that some organizations use to get to grips with the broader contextual uncertainties when making strategic or major investment decisions based on a better understanding of the complexity of the future business environment. This method was pioneered for application in business by Royal Dutch Shell in the 1970s. The scenario narratives that result from such exercises may be referred to as “memories of the future”, providing a meaningful framework for discussing the key trends in the contextual environment and their implications for business decisions (Krijnen 2017). This method could also be applied to gain a better understanding of the vulnerability of religious minorities and gain insights into the coping mechanisms they could adopt in response to the future environment, especially if representatives of the observed vulnerable religious minority are involved in the process.

8.6 Implications for religious minorities, faith-based organizations and human rights agencies

A number of implications for three groups can be formulated based on this research: religious minorities, faith-based organizations implementing relief projects to victims of religious persecution and human rights agencies (whether public institutions or civil society organizations). Based on the findings of my case studies, I first offer some general comments on intervention strategies to support vulnerable religious minorities and develop their resilience (8.6.1). I then discuss three fields that can be generalized from the information I collected in my case studies: the role religious groups could play to mitigate the impact of organized crime (8.6.2), policy recommendations to address minority-within-the-minority conflicts (8.6.3) and recommendations for religious minorities in authoritarian regimes (8.6.4).

8.6.1 Comments on intervention strategies to develop the resilience of vulnerable religious minorities

When reflecting about coping mechanisms against human security threats that religious minorities can adopt, the controversial point, made by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (2006 [1963]) that Jewish leaders may not have done enough to prevent the Holocaust is worth mentioning: “The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and fearless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people” (1963:125). Although Arendt was severely criticized for this statement by many who alleged that she was ‘blaming the victims’ of the Holocaust, this was not at all what she meant. The Nazis (and the silent collaborating majority) were evidently guilty of the Holocaust, and Arendt recognizes that it would have been insensitive to expect the Jewish leaders to have resisted the Final Solution because of fear, ignorance of the Nazi projects and the, in retrospect, naïve expectation that cooperation with the Nazis could have mitigated the harm to the Jews (Elon 2006). This being said, in her book Arendt cites the

courageous examples of the Danish population and Dutch Jewish leaders who on moral grounds resisted the implementation of the Final Solution, which had some impact on the attitude of Nazi officials.

Raise awareness about human security threats that are faced by religious minorities

Two recommendations for vulnerable religious minorities and for organizations wishing to help them can be inferred from Arendt's reflection about the Holocaust. The first is the need to raise awareness about the human security threats that are faced by religious minorities, like the desperate attempts of SS officer Kurt Gerstein, the protagonist of Rolf Hochhuth's play *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel* [*The Deputy, a Christian tragedy*] (1975 [1963]), portrayed in the 2002 film *Amen*, to get the Vatican to take notice of the Final Solution. The lack of awareness about the Holocaust did not only concern the international community but also the Jewish community itself who was largely ignorant about what was unfolding. In my case studies, I could observe a similar lack of awareness among religious groups. Issues such as the normalization of violence in northeast Mexico and the internalization of the restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the communist regime in Cuba limit the understanding of the broader picture of the human security situation they find themselves in.

Awareness raising thus is an essential intervention priority for faith-based organizations, a responsibility it shares with human rights agencies. In line with the demonstrable specificity of the vulnerability of religious minorities, I conclude that religious freedom constitutes a distinct analytical category and therefore should receive separate attention in human rights monitoring. This must be done in such a way that it takes both the multidimensionality of religious freedom and the behavioral dimension of religion into account, following the human security approach. If the concept of religious freedom is not properly understood, its violations cannot be recognized. Misunderstanding the multidimensionality of religious freedom is worrying from the perspective of the rule of law. In my work for civil society organizations, I have witnessed government officials who have used the argument that a particular human rights violation cannot be qualified as 'religious', which then becomes a justification not to act on it.

As I argued in chapter 3, human rights organizations rarely give attention to religious freedom, or include it under the broad category 'sectarian conflict.' A case in point is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a body of the Organization of American States, which, as already mentioned, does not have a rapporteur for religious freedom, but has rapporteurs for a wide range of other vulnerable groups, such as indigenous people, women, migrants, journalists (freedom of expression), children, human rights defenders, afro-descendants, LGBTI, etc.

Regarding the documentation of human rights abuses, the overwhelming number of organizations in Latin American civil society, including faith-based organizations, which neglect their responsibility to collect data is noteworthy. Most organizations are generally very good at talking about issues, creating attention-grabbing campaigns on social media, performing social diagnostics, and even making recommendations for public policy, but what they rarely do is the tedious, time-intensive, and sometimes dangerous task of documenting incidents. This is also true for the documentation of incidents of violation of religious freedom. If incidents were properly documented, in human rights monitoring and in RFATs, this research would not have been necessary.

The documentation of incidents is the main justification for requesting attention to a specific social problem or social fact. If religious freedom violations are not documented, it is as if they did not exist. This is fundamental for any attempt at political advocacy:

“Documenting human rights abuses is the heart of human rights work. The effectiveness of human rights as a tool depends on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the evidence gathered. It can contribute to educating and organizing as well as advocating at a political or legal level. Government leaders have been brought down through documentation of human rights violations; the power of the process, both for the victim and the perpetrator, should not be underestimated. Documentation is about collecting stories, establishing truths and “sounding alarms.” Success can depend on one’s ability to access those stories and give meaning to them, for example through showing patterns of abuse.” (Kaplan 2009:25).

Documentation is particularly important in situations in which victims of violence that are too afraid to report crimes to the police – as observed in my three case studies –, or when states fail to comply with the requirement to register human rights violations. To cite just one example, in its report *The Human Rights Situation in Mexico* (2015), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that “the internal forced displacement has not been documented and analyzed comprehensively by the [Mexican] State, which is the main obstacle facing the comprehensive response that Mexico should give this phenomenon.” The report also observed that the situation “is evidenced by the invisibility of the problem”, which does not allow to “adopt the measures necessary to provide an effective response to this phenomenon.” (p. 134). Therefore, one of the most important purposes of documenting incidents, particularly when they concern human rights violations, is to ensure that a record of specific violations is kept, to hold the responsible party accountable, and demand that its victims are compensated. As a human rights manual states, “Well-handled human rights information is basic to any struggle for justice and peace.” (Burma Issues 1994).

The need to develop and facilitate reflections about coping mechanisms

Furthermore, having a clear picture of the threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable is strategically relevant because it can inform tactics that can contribute to making a religious minority more self-reliant and mitigate the risks it faces, which leads me to the second recommendation: the need to develop and facilitate reflections about coping mechanisms. Reformulating Arendt’s nuanced argument using the concepts of this research, it could be said that the use of coping mechanisms could have mitigated the threat of mass extermination of European Jews at least to a small degree. It falls beyond the scope of this research to discuss Arendt’s argument more extensively, but it provides an opportunity to interrogate the findings of the resilience assessments in my case studies.

In my case studies, I found that coping mechanisms are generally underdeveloped, and, save some noteworthy exceptions, passivity – expressed through avoidance and compliance – seems to be the default response of the majority of the members of the vulnerable religious minorities I studied. This is understandable considering the fear that results from the very real human security threats they face, but an adequate understanding of these threats as well as a careful reflection about how they could be mitigated could nevertheless be very beneficial and overcome the default passive response.

Before discussing which coping mechanisms can be recommended based on the findings of my case studies, it is first of all important to acknowledge how difficult it can be for a great number of Christians in Latin America to even start considering coping mechanisms. Beyond fear of repression, there is a broadly shared sense that resisting the oppressors, whether the drug cartels or the Cuban government, is useless. In my interviews I observed a feeling that publicly addressing issues will not lead to a radical change in society. As a Colombian pastor from Cali puts it, “when evil is so present, it kills all hope for change.”³³⁰

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

“But just as often, people are bullied because they *won't* fight back. This happens not infrequently to people who are by temperament compassionate and self-sacrificing (...) It also happens to people who have decided, for one reason or another, that all forms of aggression, including even feelings of anger, are morally wrong.” (Peterson 2018:23-24).

In chapter 3 I referred to the predominance of certain theological options that rule out any form of social engagement, particularly in Pentecostal denominations that teach a strict segregation between ‘spiritual’ and ‘earthly’ matters, which also explains an overall limited involvement in the pursuit of social justice and the underdevelopment of coping mechanisms. The following statement by a Guatemalan pastor illustrates this:

“I have worked for years in an area where gangs and organized crime have produced enormous pain and harm to the population. What I have seen is that the Church has not taken a clear and unanimous position on what to do. For this reason, the interventions to mitigate the negative consequences of organized crime are scarce and isolated. Besides fear, the main reason for this is the doctrine of the majority of the churches that separates the spiritual from the material, concluding that the church should not do anything about the issue because it is ‘material.’ I personally do not share this point of view but it is the view of the majority.”³³¹

The generalized passivity of most Christians I interviewed for my case studies can further be explained by a lack of understanding of the concept of resilience itself, which is not surprising considering the combination of reasons that discourage any reflection on social engagement. A logical response to this passivity by faith-based organizations would therefore be to stimulate an active theological reflection about the value of resilience, while at the same time offering practical real-life examples of resilient religious communities, expanding the direction taken by the *Under Caesar's Sword* project (Philpott & Shah 2018). As Jeffrey Stout argues in *Blessed Are the Organized* (2010), grassroots religious groups, if they adopt effective strategies, can exercise real influence over policy and promote social justice. Compiling a manual of best practices of the application of coping mechanisms, similar to Gene Sharp's catalogue of 198 “methods of nonviolent action” (1993), could also serve a didactic purpose.

³³⁰ Interview with Harold Segura (2011).

³³¹ Interview with Mario Larios (2011).

The central importance of social wisdom

Along with the need to raise awareness and to stimulate a reflection about coping mechanisms, the central importance of social wisdom is highlighted in all three case studies. The value of this mechanism resides in the fact that it informs how to best apply all other coping mechanisms, notably solidarity, collective action and taking up arms, and even the formal compliance with regulations even though their spirit is disrespected, as I described in the case study on Cuban Christians. Engaging religious minorities to be solidary with other vulnerable religious minorities in their own country or region can strengthen this.

To be effective, coping mechanisms need to be used strategically. If not, they could have the counterproductive effect of increasing vulnerability instead of reducing it. This is not only a philosophical question but also a practical one. An example that can be mentioned is the international advocacy to support the human rights of Cuban Christians. When its tone is too confrontational and sensitive information is not handled carefully, Cuban Christians complain that it hinders them more than it helps because it triggers more hostility from the government.

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

The importance of social wisdom is also illustrated by its absence in the case of the cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos. Contrary to the general trend I described, there is no lack of collective action among cultural dissidents, but this collective action may be too confrontational and uncompromising, contributing to a worsening of the conflict instead of solving it. The *Under Caesar's Sword* project reminds that "Domestic advocacy is most effective when done quietly and respectfully by Christian leaders who have nurtured relationships with local and national officials" (University of Notre-Dame 2017:48). If the cultural dissidents would move away from their "adversarial logic", and instead adopt a "collaboration logic" (Vargas & Petri 2009) they might have better chances to succeed, without increasing their vulnerability.

This is of course easier said than done and is especially difficult now because of the ongoing antagonism between the cabildos and the cultural dissidents. It is nevertheless a direction that is worth exploring, in line with Habermas' recommendation for religious traditions to undertake the "arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection" (2006:14). Generalizing, Christian converts should critically analyze the impact and meaning of their religious behavior in their community, as is the essence of Thielicke's *Verantwortungsethik* (1969). The religious rights of individual Christian converts deserve to be respected, but it would be beneficial if they realized that, in their context, a church building is more than just a place of worship, but can also be seen as a symbol of political subversion, as Mexican sociologist José Refugio Arellano argues.³³² Buijs similarly encourages religious groups to "define orthodoxy in such a way that the reflective distance, the wisdom and serenity that is required to live in a non-perfect

³³² Interview with José Refugio Arellano (2016).

world is cultivated. Orthodoxy should be defined and transmitted to next generations as the opposite of radicalism.” (2013:34).

It is also critical for both foreign and indigenous missionaries to understand the need for cultural sensitivity. As José Casanova observes, “Global denominationalism [international Christian missions] would also defend the principle of individual religious freedom, which includes the right to conversion and the attendant right to evangelize, but would recognize that there are both appropriate and inappropriate ways to evangelize” (2008:15). In a similar way, the *Under Caesar’s Sword* project recommends:

“Persecuted churches should avoid giving unnecessary offense and bringing on “avoidable” persecution by adopting (where possible) culturally sensitive measures to avoid community tensions. For example, churches can monitor sound levels during worship, avoid staging events on other religions’ festival days, rely as much as possible on indigenous leadership, and avoid disrespectful public comments about other religions.” (University of Notre-Dame 2017:48).

Synthesis of intervention strategies

The points I made in this section are summarized in the figure 8.1, identifying the shared responsibility of faith-based organizations, human rights agencies and religious minorities themselves to actively and strategically respond to human security threats.

8.1 Synthesis of intervention strategies by religious minorities, faith-based organizations and human rights agencies

	<i>Religious minorities</i>	<i>Faith-based organizations</i>	<i>Human rights agencies</i>
Raise awareness about human security threats that are faced by religious minorities	X	X	X
Include the multidimensionality of religious freedom in human rights monitoring.			X
Conscientiously document violations of religious freedom.	X	X	X
Develop and facilitate a reflection about coping mechanisms		X	X
Stimulate a theological reflection about the value of resilience.		X	
Compile best practices of the application of coping mechanisms.	X	X	X
Acknowledge the central importance of social wisdom	X	X	
Engage religious minorities to be solidary with vulnerable religious minorities in their own country or region.	X	X	
Facilitate a hermeneutic self-reflection about how to use coping mechanisms strategically.	X	X	
Be culturally sensitive.	X	X	

Source: own elaboration.

Considering the limited resources of faith-based organizations and human rights agencies, it makes sense for them to prioritize on vulnerable communities that have low developed coping mechanisms, rather than on vulnerable communities that already know how to deal with the threats they face, and to focus on developing those coping mechanisms that have been proven to work in other contexts. When groups have a low degree of resilience, interventions are required to develop their resilience. When groups are in a situation of low vulnerability, it still makes sense to deploy interventions aiming at a preparation for possible future threats. No intervention is required when the vulnerable religious group already has a high degree of resilience, but such groups could be encouraged to share their experience with other, less resilient groups.

8.6.2 *The role religious groups could play to mitigate the impact of organized crime*

Generalizing from the findings of the resilience assessment of the case study on actively practicing Christians in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, in this section I share a few comments about the role religious groups could play to mitigate the impact of organized crime. This can have a positive impact at three levels: to reduce their own vulnerability, to help other vulnerable groups in line with Braun's hypothesis that religious minorities are generally more inclined and better able to help other threatened minorities (2016), and to make a positive

contribution to society in general. The importance of the latter should not be underestimated. It can be considered a moral imperative, but it also increases resilience by creating goodwill in a community, which will be more likely to protect the religious minority when it is threatened.

Commenting on religious freedom in indigenous communities in Mexico, the US State Department denounces the existence of “poor enforcement mechanisms” and impunity for acts of religious intolerance (2013). This finding is also applicable to the areas under control of organized crime like NL, TS and SP, as well as other crime torn areas in Mexico and beyond (the ‘northern triangle’ of Central America, rural Colombia, Brazilian cities, parts of sub-Saharan Africa, etc.). The general context of lawlessness, impunity and corruption creates the opportunity, to use Collier, Hoefler & Rohner’s terminology (2009), for criminals to attack vulnerable groups, including religious minorities who display active religious behavior. The inability of the state to guarantee the rule of law is a direct factor of their vulnerability, because the state fails to uphold its duty to protect. In such contexts, it is just too easy to kidnap someone or to raid a church.

In response to this finding, the obvious recommendation to civil society in general is to hold the Mexican state accountable for its duty to protect, and to promote programs that strengthen the state’s capacity at all levels to enforce the law and protect its vulnerable citizens, including religious minorities. Religious minorities should themselves play an active role in this respect, conscientiously documenting incidents and filing police reports – and be trained to do so –, even though this may be risky, and advocate for a better protection of their community. The actively practicing Christians I studied have a lot to gain in this field as the coping mechanisms ‘solidarity’ and ‘collective action’ are underdeveloped.

The Mexican government recognized the role the church and religious institutions can play in promoting social capital in society in a context of organized crime. As a Mexican government official declared: “Churches and religious associations can make an important contribution to rebuilding the social fabric by disseminating a culture of legality and reinforcing principles and values.”³³³ My observation in my case study on northeast Mexico reveals that churches have generally not responded to this call. The notable exception I found is Guadalupe (NL), where church leaders made a significant contribution to instill values in the police department. When religious minorities engage in civic participation, however, this needs to be done in such a way that it does not increase their vulnerability but instead contributes to an effective transformation of social structures. Military offensives are often very destructive and short-lived, whereas religious action could contribute to changes in society which in turn could reduce the appeal and influence of drug cartels.

Small measures can have a large impact. Because visible gatherings of religious groups in churches or other equivalent institutions are directly putting them at risk, safer ways could be explored so that religious services attract less attention of criminal organizations, such as the organization of meetings in smaller groups, preferably in private homes in order to stay under the radar. The house church model, as applied by Cuban Christians is a possible template (I come back to this in section 8.6.4). Increased security checks at the entrance of churches could also be useful, as I observed in Jos, Nigeria in 2014. Following the advice of Israeli security experts, young men stand guard around churches during services to deter any attempt of terrorist attacks, purses and bags are systematically checked at the entrance, and visitors need

³³³ Speech of Paulo Tort Ortega, the Director of the Religious Associations division of the Ministry of the Interior of Mexico at the Seventh World Congress of the International Religious Liberty Association in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic from 24-26 April 2012.

to park 200 meters away from the church building to avoid the threat of car bombs. Because extortion is often related to the perception that religious institutions handle large amounts of money, these would do well to think of ways to be less conspicuous in their fundraising and avoid cash offerings. Such measures will not solve the problems but could reduce the vulnerability of this religious minority to some of the threats.

8.6.3 Policy recommendations to address minority-within-the-minority conflicts

Based on my case study on the cultural dissidents in the southwestern highlands of Colombia, in this section I give a few policy recommendations that can be used to address similar minority-within-the-minority conflicts. A priori, there is no necessary conflict between external protections of indigenous communities and individual rights of group members as Kymlicka (1996; 2001) and McDonald (1998) assert, but such conflicts are to some degree inevitable “in the real world”, as the Nasa resguardos illustrate. In *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (1996), Kymlicka advocates for the broadest possible endorsement of “group-differentiated rights” for ethnic minorities but cites two limitations to this endorsement: (a) restrictions of the basic civic and political rights of its members and (b) rights that enable one group to oppress or exploit other groups. In other words, Kymlicka is favorable to maximize tolerance of all facets of minority culture as long as it does not contradict the non-negotiable principle of internal autonomy.

Kymlicka’s normative stance seems reasonable, but its application is challenging. Imposing it by coercion is obviously problematic. Recognizing this challenge, he explores some possible solutions. The first is to seek a negotiated agreement on fundamental principles. The government, or in its default, civil society organizations, should facilitate serious mediation efforts between indigenous leaders and cultural dissidents, although this is evidently easier said than done. In the Nasa resguardos there is evidently a lot of incomprehension between the different parties that could perhaps be amended through conflict resolution. In order for this to happen, however, there needs to be political will on both sides to dialogue, and a broadly shared recognition that the principle of self-determination also has an internal dimension, which cannot be used to commit any human rights abuses (Jones 1999).

The rejection of religious freedom, or of any other human right for that matter, by appealing to traditional culture is nonsensical, as Martha Nussbaum stresses. In *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (2000), she confronts the frequently heard charge that the language of justice and human rights is a form of Western and colonial imposition that is incompatible with the norms of traditional cultures. Referring to the matter of discrimination of women, her reflection can also be useful to address minority-within-the-minority conflicts in general. Among other things, Nussbaum argues that using the notion of tradition to resist human rights is not only self-serving but also too simplistic, because it foregoes the fact that cultures are dynamic and are “scenes of debate and contestation”, which include dominant voices but also voices of women (and, by extension, any vulnerable group) “which have not always been heard.” In other words, if one wishes to appeal to tradition, one must also be willing to listen to the non-dominant voices that are also part of tradition (2000:225). In a similar vein, Toft argues that because “the human rights regime has undergone a systematic diffusion across the world” it is not only incorrect to present it as a Western imposition but also is a “denial of agency” of vulnerable communities (2016).

Any negotiated agreement or legal solution to the complex issue of minority rights faces the challenge of its enforcement, above all in contexts where there is no political will or state capacity to apply the rule of law, such as in remote rural areas of Colombia. An international tribunal, for example, can order the rights of religious minorities to be respected, but this will be meaningless if the orders are not enforced, as frequently occurs with such rulings in rural Mexico (Dabène 2008; Petri 2019). I have personally witnessed this in religious conflicts in indigenous communities in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Jalisco (Mexico). Negotiated agreements were not enforced, in part due to the remoteness of these communities.

The second solution Kymlicka proposes is for the state to offer incentives for liberal reforms inside indigenous communities. There are antecedents of successful progressive lobbies in other indigenous communities that could be a source of inspiration. Cleary's research on changes in women's political rights in indigenous communities in the state of Oaxaca in Mexico revealed that the formalization of indigenous autonomy, which was previously used to restrict the right of women to vote and to stand for election, created space for liberal activists to expand female political participation (2017). This example is interesting not only because it shows it is possible to advance human rights in indigenous communities without renouncing indigenous self-determination, but also because it hints at a path that cultural dissidents could follow, namely to lobby for the formalization (turning into positive law) of the indigenous self-government institutions which are now largely based on customary and oral legislation. This would reduce the large degree of arbitrariness in which core legal principles such as due process risk being disregarded, a point that is repeatedly stressed by the human rights commissions at the state level in Mexico.³³⁴

For this solution to be effective, however, members of indigenous communities who disagree with their authorities must not feel encouraged to leave, because otherwise the incentive for internal democratization weakens. As Hirschman observes, based on Walzer, "the greater the opportunities for exit, the easier it appears to be for organizations to resist, evade, and postpone the introduction of internal democracy even though they function in a democratic environment." (1970:84).

The third solution is to strengthen international mechanisms for protecting human rights. Kymlicka argues that indigenous groups are generally more willing to submit to the judicial review of international tribunals than to constitutional courts which enforce the constitution of their conquerors. The paradoxical situation in the case of Colombia is that the Constitutional Court has categorically defended the autonomy of the *resguardos indígenas*, at the expense of the individual (religious) rights of its members. The obvious international mechanism cultural dissidents would turn to is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), but it would remain to be seen how this institution would address the conflict between individual and collective rights, or whether it would confirm the jurisprudence of the Colombian Constitutional Court. Based on a review of jurisprudence, I found that the IACHR has never directly addressed the issue of minority rights (including rights of religious minorities) in indigenous communities. So far, it has only received cases that were related to the external dimension of self-determination (2015). Also, it is noteworthy that it has a rapporteur on indigenous rights but not one on religious freedom as I already mentioned.

Whether through the IACHR or some other institutional arrangement, the present imbalance of the Colombian legal system needs to be addressed. As stated earlier, the right to self-

³³⁴ Interview with Eduardo Sosa Márquez (2016).

determination of indigenous groups needs to be balanced with the protection of the human rights of minorities, including religious minorities, living in the *resguardos indígenas*. To paraphrase Kymlicka, the respect of the cultural rights of indigenous groups are only acceptable if they protect the freedom of individuals within the group (2001:20-23). This calls for active lobbying at both national and multicultural institutions in order to ensure the full enforcement of art. 8-2 of ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989), namely the principle that the preservation of indigenous customs and institutions cannot contradict fundamental rights, and that conflict resolution procedures must be established to solve any unbalance between them:

“These peoples shall have the right to retain their own customs and institutions, where these are not incompatible with fundamental rights defined by the national legal system and with internationally recognised human rights. Procedures shall be established, whenever necessary, to resolve conflicts which may arise in the application of this principle.”

Kymlicka accepts that “intervention is justified in the case of gross and systematic violation of human rights, such as slavery or genocide or mass torture and expulsions” (2001:170). Based on the evidence presented in chapter 6, one could argue some form of intervention could already be justified, but the Colombian Constitutional Court has systematically ruled otherwise or declared not to entertain jurisdiction over cases involving indigenous peoples.

McDonald (1998) warns against searching for a general theory to solve conflicts between rights. In his view, such conflicts are way too complex for a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, he recommends a contextualized approach that takes the identification of the interests that underpin the conflicting collective and individual rights as its starting point. Such an approach could for example take into consideration elements that are important to the *cabildos* such as the money transfers of the Colombian government to the *resguardos* and the (legitimate) concerns for the preservation of their culture as well as elements that are important to the cultural dissidents such as the possibility to hold church services and to opt-out of the aspects of the indigenous traditional education they consider as witchcraft. A contextualized approach may provide an alternative solution to accommodate conflicting interests than the current jurisprudence regarding indigenous *resguardos* that only offers two options for cultural dissidents: either they accept the political authority and the rulings of the *cabildos*, or they leave the *resguardo*.

8.6.4 Recommendations for religious minorities in authoritarian regimes

The resourcefulness and overall resilience of Cuban Christians, and of all Cubans for that matter, can only be qualified as remarkable. The capacity of the Cuban churches to not only survive, but also to grow amid surrounding hostility is unique. This being said, the degree to which Cuban Christians have internalized and even embraced the restrictive concept of religious freedom imposed by the communist regime, as previously described, is in my view a limiting factor of their resilience. Indeed, by accepting restrictions on religious freedom as normal, Cuban Christians implicitly renounce any aspiration to change this situation. Assuming this is a general trend in most authoritarian regimes, it is therefore essential that faith-based NGO's focus much more on building awareness about what the concept of religious freedom actually entails through capacity building workshops for vulnerable religious groups. This must also inform the way human rights advocacy at multilateral bodies is done. As already stressed,

it could be worthwhile to facilitate more collective self-reflection about coping mechanisms through focus group discussions as I did with a group of Cuban Christian leaders, because it can have a direct effect on the resilience of this vulnerable group.

Although increased self-awareness can be very beneficial to the resilience of religious minorities, it must not come at the expense of their social wisdom. As can be inferred from the case study on the cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos, their often aggressive militancy for religious rights exacerbated the conflict, leading to more repression. Therefore any form of increased self-awareness about human rights should be accompanied by a warning to maintain social wisdom.

In addition, I believe it would be beneficial for Cuban Christians to work toward decreasing its dependency on foreign aid, by actively taking advantage of the growing opportunities to start small businesses, while always taking care of staying under the radar. Although restrictions persist, the possibilities for conducting humanitarian work in Cuba have been broadened. Taking advantage of this opportunity would not only provide income to finance the operations of their churches but would also decrease the risk of financial sanctions from the Cuban authorities (such as the fact that religious ministers are not entitled to a state pension) while at the same time reducing the influence of international faith-based organizations in internal church affairs.

More generally, religious groups would do well to recognize the benefits of humanitarian work as a source of resilience. Engaging in humanitarian work, provided it is done carefully, could be a valid strategy to generate goodwill with the authorities and with local communities, which in turn could provide some protection for Christians based on the recognition of their altruistic work. I observed this mechanism at work in Caracas, Venezuela, in 2013. When the government wanted to clamp down on private Catholic schools for ideological reasons, in a particular neighborhood, the community stood up for it and managed to reverse the government's decision because the Catholic Church was doing so much good in terms of social work.³³⁵ It would also help to “counter false stereotypes of being ‘fifth columns’ or agents of the West”, as the *Under Caesar's Sword* project stresses (University of Notre-Dame 2017:48).

Vulnerable religious groups all over the world should embrace the value of the “house church model”, as is used perforce by Cuban Christians, Chinese Christians, etc. Many seem to consider house churches as something that was imposed by the fact that the communist regime would not allow new churches to be built. Although this is how they originated, house churches also provide benefits in terms of organizational capacity, as Koesel explains, which should not be underestimated (2014). The house church model could for example be a source of inspiration for cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos, because it would allow them to avoid drawing unwanted attention, while continuing to meet to celebrate church services.

Finally, strengthening inter-religious unity can be an important avenue to enhance resilience. Speaking with one voice when dealing with the authorities, sharing resources and advocating for the same causes could potentially strengthen the position of religious minorities and give them more scope to protect their interests.

³³⁵ Interviews with Samuel Olson and José Rodríguez (2013).

9. Summary

The starting point for this dissertation was the empirical observation that a number of characteristic aspects of religious persecution in Latin America are insufficiently recognized by existing theoretical frameworks and data collection tools. Indeed, the literature on freedom of religion and religious persecution tends to make four general assumptions. First, it tends to consider that religious persecution emanates from the state, or from the religious majority, and always has a religious motive. Second, it implicitly considers that religious persecution is experienced by groups, based on ascriptive identities and regardless of behavior. Third, it assumes that religious persecution is experienced equally everywhere within a state. Finally, religious persecution is often believed to be equivalent to, and typically correlates with, ethnic or linguistic discrimination or persecution.

As I point out in chapter 1, these assumptions leave many forms of what I call ‘vulnerability of religious minorities’ unobserved, a term I prefer over the concept of ‘persecution’ because the latter is subject to an inflationary use and carries numerous implicit assumptions. Adopting a human security perspective, in this dissertation I show that threats to religious freedom a) can also emanate from non-state actors, and can also be targeted at people belonging to the religious majority; b) may differ based on individual behavior (actively practicing believers whose behavior threatens the powers that be, are likely to be more at risk in human security contexts); c) can vary within a state or sometimes occur only at the local level; and d) have a specificity that cannot be reduced to other identity markers.

In chapter 2, following an interdisciplinary perspective, I discuss the contributions of literature, including conflict theory, for the understanding of the vulnerability and resilience of religious minorities. I conclude these interpretative models offer valuable pieces to the puzzle of the vulnerability of religious minorities, but also have their limitations and can clog an open-ended observation. Specifically, I argue that there is a knowledge gap concerning the consequences of religious behavior (behavior inspired by religious convictions). I also examine how religion can provide a resilience that helps religious minorities deal with human security threats directed at them.

In chapter 3, I critically look at the main ‘religious freedom assessment tools’, which are the most common frameworks to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities. I find that these tools, however valuable, insufficiently detect essential forms of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are related to religious behavior, non-state actors and the subnational level. Moreover, they tend to consider only a small part of the multiple dimensions of religious freedom. I then justify why the human security perspective provides a more comprehensive framework (or lens) to observe the vulnerability of religious minorities thanks to its shift away from the state as the referent of security, its focus on the subjects of security (the victims) and its open-ended outlook. To operationalize the human security paradigm for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities, I propose to adapt the methodology of vulnerability assessments. In line with an understanding of religious freedom as a multidimensional phenomenon, I also chose to interpret human security threats as any restriction on religious expression in any sphere of society (family, church, social, business, cultural and government spheres).

Chapter 4 entails the core result of my reflection on the vulnerability of religious minorities. Here I develop a methodology that allows to observe how different forms of religious behavior can lead actors such as states, indigenous leaders and organized crime to restrict the religious

freedom of a religious minority, which I call the ‘religious minority vulnerability assessment tool’ (RM-VAT). Concretely, this tool allows me to do three things: (1) observe human security threats that are faced by religious minorities in different spheres of society and in relation to their type of religious behavior, (2) determine the degree of specificity of these threats, and (3) describe the resilience (or lack thereof) of the religious minorities. The aim of the threat assessment is to allow for an open-ended observation of human security threats, instead of following a pre-defined questionnaire; the aim of the specificity assessment is to determine how specific these forms of discrimination are to religious groups and behaviors; the aim of the resilience assessment is to do justice to the agency of religious minorities and to observe the coping mechanisms religious minorities use or could use to defend themselves against human security threats.

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I illustrate my argument with three Latin American case studies, based on original fieldwork: (1) the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico, (2) the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* [indigenous reserves] of the southwestern highlands of Colombia and (3) the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba. Although my three case studies focus on Latin American cases and on Christians, their diversity in terms of institutional contexts and types of religious behavior suggests the potential for broader applications of the RM-VAT. As I conclude in chapter 8, the methodology I developed is instrumental to ‘cast the net wider’ than existing frameworks and tools, thanks to the inclusion of behavioral aspects of religion and the approach in terms of spheres of society, and to consider all pertinent threats, including threats that have a lower degree of specificity.

The case studies served not only to test and validate the RM-VAT and its underlying conceptual assumptions; they also yielded interesting new empirical findings that can be generalized to other cases. These findings include the regulation of religion by organized crime when it takes over essential prerogatives of the state, the restrictions on religious freedom as a result of unbalanced rights in indigenous communities, the consequences of the internalization of a restrictive definition of religious freedom by religious minorities themselves in authoritarian contexts, and the crosscutting finding that vulnerability increases when the religious minority constitutes an ideological alternative to the powers that be. In chapter 8 I further develop a reflection on the implications of the main findings of my research for religious minorities, faith-based organizations and human rights agencies. Among other things, I stress the importance of raising awareness about human security threats that are faced by religious minorities, the need to develop and facilitate reflections about coping mechanisms and the central importance of social wisdom.

The RM-VAT constitutes a valuable instrument to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities in ways and on levels not observed before. These new insights form a useful basis to reflect on and develop methods to build resilience within these groups and raise awareness of their situation worldwide.

10. Samenvatting

Het uitgangspunt voor dit proefschrift (*De specifieke kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden*) was de empirische observatie dat een aantal karakteristieke aspecten van religieuze vervolging in Latijns-Amerika onvoldoende worden onderkend door bestaande theoretische kaders en instrumenten voor gegevensverzameling. In de literatuur over godsdienstvrijheid en religieuze vervolging pleegt men uit te gaan van vier algemene aannames. Ten eerste is men geneigd te denken dat religieuze vervolging afkomstig is van de staat, of van de religieuze meerderheid, en dat er altijd een religieus motief is. Ten tweede wordt er impliciet van uitgegaan dat religieuze vervolging wordt ondergaan door groepen gebaseerd op toegeschreven identiteiten zonder te kijken naar hun gedrag. Ten derde wordt aangenomen dat religieuze vervolging overal in een staat gelijkelijk wordt ervaren. Tenslotte wordt vaak gemeend dat religieuze vervolging equivalent is aan, en doorgaans correleert met, etnische of taalkundige discriminatie of vervolging.

Zoals ik in hoofdstuk 1 uiteenzet, zorgen deze aannames ervoor dat vele vormen van wat ik 'kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden' noem, onopgemerkt blijven. Ik verkies deze term boven de term 'vervolging' die m.i. onderhevig is aan inflatoir gebruik en talrijke impliciete veronderstellingen met zich meedraagt. Vanuit het perspectief van *human security* (menselijke veiligheid) laat ik in dit proefschrift zien dat bedreigingen van godsdienstvrijheid a) ook kunnen komen van niet-statelijke actoren en ook gericht kunnen zijn op mensen die tot de religieuze meerderheid behoren; b) kunnen verschillen als gevolg van individueel gedrag (mensen die actief hun geloof beoefenen en wier gedrag een bedreiging vormt voor bestaande machthebbers lopen meer risico in onveilige contexten); c) kunnen variëren binnen een staat of soms alleen op lokaal niveau kunnen voorkomen; en d) een specificiteit hebben die niet kan worden herleid tot andere identiteitskenmerken.

In hoofdstuk 2 bespreek ik vanuit een interdisciplinair perspectief inzichten uit de literatuur, waaronder conflicttheorie, om de kwetsbaarheid en weerbaarheid van religieuze minderheden te duiden. Ik concludeer dat deze interpretatieve modellen waardevolle stukjes bieden voor de puzzel van de kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden, maar ook hun beperkingen hebben en een onbevooroordeelde waarneming kunnen belemmeren. Meer in het bijzonder beargumenteer ik dat er een kenniskloof is ten aanzien van de gevolgen van religieus gedrag (gedrag dat geïnspireerd wordt door religieuze overtuigingen). Ik onderzoek ook hoe religie een bron van weerbaarheid kan zijn die religieuze minderheden helpt om te gaan met bedreigingen die op hen zijn gericht.

In hoofdstuk 3 kijk ik kritisch naar de meest voorkomende kaders om de kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden te beoordelen. Ik kom tot de conclusie dat deze instrumenten, hoe waardevol ook, onvoldoende in staat zijn om essentiële vormen van kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden waar te nemen die verband houden met religieus gedrag, niet-statelijke actoren en het subnationale niveau. Bovendien hebben ze de neiging slechts een beperkt aantal dimensies van godsdienstvrijheid in ogenschouw te nemen. Vervolgens motiveer ik waarom het perspectief van *human security* een veelomvattender kader (of lens) biedt om de kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden te observeren dankzij het verlaten van de staat als referent voor veiligheid, haar focus op de slachtoffers van bedreigingen in plaats van op degenen die daar verantwoordelijk voor zijn, en haar brede en open blik. Om het *human security*-paradigma voor de observatie van de kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden te operationaliseren stel ik voor om de methodologie van *vulnerability assessments* (kwetsbaarheidsbeoordelingen) aan te passen. Uitgaande van godsdienstvrijheid als een

multidimensionaal fenomeen, heb ik er ook voor gekozen om *human security*-bedreigingen te interpreteren als beperkingen van religieuze expressie binnen maatschappelijke kringen (gezin, kerk, sociaal, zakelijk, cultureel en overheid).

Hoofdstuk 4 bevat het kernresultaat van mijn reflectie over de kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden. Hier ontwikkel ik de *religious minorities vulnerability assessment tool* (RM-VAT), een methodologie om te observeren hoe verschillende vormen van religieus gedrag actoren zoals staten, inheemse leiders en georganiseerde misdaad ertoe kunnen brengen de godsdienstvrijheid van een religieuze minderheid in te perken. Concreet stelt dit instrument me in staat om drie dingen te doen: (1) het observeren van bedreigingen waarmee religieuze minderheden in verschillende maatschappelijke kringen worden geconfronteerd in relatie tot hun religieus gedrag, (2) het bepalen van de mate van specificiteit van deze bedreigingen, en (3) het beschrijven van de weerbaarheid (of het gebrek daaraan) van religieuze minderheden. Het doel van de *vulnerability assessment* (kwetsbaarheidsinschatting) is om een open waarneming van bedreigingen mogelijk te maken, in plaats van het volgen van een vooraf gedefinieerde vragenlijst; het doel van de *specificity assessment* (specificiteitsinschatting) is om te bepalen hoe specifiek deze vormen van discriminatie zijn voor religieuze groepen en gedragingen; het doel van de *resilience assessment* (weerbaarheidsinschatting) is om recht te doen aan de zelfredzaamheid (*agency*) van religieuze minderheden en om de *coping*-mechanismen te observeren die religieuze minderheden gebruiken of zouden kunnen gebruiken om zichzelf te verdedigen tegen bedreigingen.

In de hoofdstukken 5, 6 en 7 illustreer ik mijn betoog aan de hand van drie Latijns-Amerikaanse casestudy's, gebaseerd op eigen veldwerk: (1) de kwetsbaarheid van actief praktiserende christenen veroorzaakt door crimineel geweld in de staten Nuevo León, Tamaulipas en San Luis Potosí, Mexico, (2) de kwetsbaarheid van culturele dissidenten onder de etnische Nasa-groep in de *resguardos indígenas [inheemse reservaten]* van de zuidwestelijke hooglanden van Colombia en (3) de kwetsbaarheid van christenen in Cuba. Ofschoon mijn drie casestudy's zich richten op Latijns-Amerikaanse gevallen en op christenen, geeft de diversiteit van hun institutionele contexten en soorten religieus gedrag het potentieel aan voor bredere toepassingen van de RM-VAT. Zoals ik in hoofdstuk 8 concludeer, werpt de methodologie die ik heb ontwikkeld het net breder uit dan bestaande kaders en instrumenten doen, doordat aandacht geschonken wordt aan de gedragsaspecten van religie en aan dreigingen binnen verschillende maatschappelijke kringen, en door alle relevante bedreigingsaspecten in de beschouwing te betrekken, inclusief bedreigingen met een lagere mate van specificiteit.

De casestudy's zijn niet alleen bruikbaar voor het testen en valideren van de RM-VAT en haar onderliggende conceptuele veronderstellingen; ze leveren ook interessante nieuwe empirische bevindingen op die kunnen worden gegeneraliseerd naar andere gevallen. Deze bevindingen betreffen de regulering van religie door de georganiseerde misdaad wanneer deze essentiële taken van de staat overneemt, de beperkingen van godsdienstvrijheid als gevolg van ongelijke rechten in inheemse gemeenschappen, de gevolgen van de internalisering van een nauwe interpretatie van godsdienstvrijheid door religieuze minderheden zelf in autoritaire contexten, en de constatering dat kwetsbaarheid toeneemt wanneer een religieuze minderheid een ideologisch alternatief vormt voor de bestaande machten. In hoofdstuk 8 lever ik een reflectie over de implicaties van de belangrijkste bevindingen van mijn onderzoek voor religieuze minderheden, confessionele organisaties en mensenrechtenorganisaties. Ik benadruk onder meer het belang van het vergroten van het bewustzijn over de bedreigingen waarmee religieuze minderheden worden geconfronteerd, de noodzaak om over *coping*-mechanismen na te denken en deze te bevorderen en het centrale belang van 'maatschappelijke wijsheid'.

De RM-VAT is een waardevol instrument om de kwetsbaarheid van religieuze minderheden te duiden op manieren en op niveaus die nog niet eerder zijn waargenomen. Deze nieuwe inzichten vormen een bruikbare basis om na te denken over en methoden te ontwikkelen om de weerbaarheid van deze groepen te bevorderen en hun positie inzichtelijk te maken.

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Annexes

A. Papers and conferences based on this dissertation

- Presentation and discussion of my research proposal at a seminar on religious persecution at the Human Geography and Global Studies Department, University of Tübingen, 15 October 2013.
- Presentation and discussion of my research proposal at a meeting of the Research on International Security and Risk Seminar, University of Amsterdam, 23 October 2013.
- Presentation of paper “Revisiting sphere sovereignty to interpret restrictions on religious freedom” at the Second Amsterdam Kuyper Seminar on “Christianity and World Affairs: Building Blocks for an International Order Where Justice and Peace Embrace”, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 23-24 January 2014 (published in *Philosophia Reformata*, co-author Frans Visscher).
- Presentation of paper “Understanding dimensions of religious freedom and persecution dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa” at the Second Annual African Law and Religion Conference, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, 26-28 May 2014 (published in Coertzen, Green and Hansen (2015). *Law and Religion in Africa—The Quest for the Common Good in Pluralistic Societies*, Cleveland: SUN Press, 347-368, co-authors Christof Sauer and Frans Visscher)
- Invited scholar at the Political Studies Department, Bar-Ilan University, working with Prof. Dr. Jonathan Fox, April-May 2015.
- Testimony about religious freedom in Latin America, congressional hearing on “Freedom of Expression in the Americas”, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States Congress, 17 September 2015.
- Testimony about religious freedom in Mexico, Congressional hearing on “Tolerance and Religion”, House of Representatives, Mexico, 17 November 2015.
- Publication of blog post Central African Republic: Religious Persecution and Political Conflict for *Cornerstone*, a website of the Religious Freedom Project, Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs in 2015.
- Presentation of paper “Civil conflict, religious persecution and the church in some African countries” at the Church History Society of South Africa meeting “Church, war and peace”, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 14-16 August 2014 (publication forthcoming in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, South Africa, co-authors Christof Sauer and Frans Veerman).
- Yearbook entry “Religionsfreiheit und Verfolgung im südlichen Afrika unterhalb der Sahara. Dimensionen und Dynamiken verstehen.” In: M. Klingberg, T. Schirmacher, H. Bielefeldt & C. Schirmacher (eds.). *Jahrbuch Religionsfreiheit 2015* (pp. 121–147). Bonn: International Institute for Religious Freedom.
- Conference on “Balancing rights: religious freedom in indigenous communities”, First Meeting of the Mexican Council for Religious Tolerance, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, 16 March 2016.
- Guest lecture “The secular state vs. the confessional state: conceptual elements for a better informed debate” at Facultad de Relaciones Internacionales, Universidad Autónoma de Centro América, 22 May 2016.
- Lecture “Religious Freedom in Latin America”, Postgraduate Course “Constitutional State and Religious Liberty”, Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford, 20-24 March 2017.

- Conference on “Constitutional State and Religious Freedom”, House of Lords, United Kingdom, 24 March 2017, allocution about religious freedom in Latin America.
- Lecture “Religious Freedom Assessment Tools”, Postgraduate Course “Constitutional State and Religious Liberty”, Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford, 26-30 June 2017.
- Presentation and discussion of paper “Using human security to observe the specific vulnerability of religious minorities” at a study group meeting of Christian Philosophy, Dutch Research School of Philosophy (OZSW), 28 September 2018.
- Guest lecture “Introduction to the human security paradigm”, Philosophy and the Ethics of Violence: Peace, War, and Terrorism, Minor Peace and Conflict Studies, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1 October 2018.
- Presentation and discussion of paper “Monitoring instruments of religious freedom” at a meeting of the Seminario sobre Religiosidades Contemporáneas, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) Unidad Occidente, Guadalajara, Jalisco (Mexico), 15 January 2019.
- Presentation and discussion of paper “La regulación de la religión por el crimen organizado: caso de Nuevo León y Tamaulipas” at the XXII Meeting of the Red de Investigadores del Fenómeno Religioso en México, 5-8 June 2019 in Creel, Chihuahua, Mexico.
- Presentation on “Religious Freedom in Latin America”, The Bishop of Truro’s Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians, 12 April 2019.
- Input provided for the independent review of the foreign policy of the United Kingdom regarding persecution of Christians (written and oral testimonies submitted April-June 2019)
- Lecture on “The human right of religious freedom in Mexico today”, Congress of the State of Hidalgo, Mexico, 7 August 2019.
- Keynote conference “The Declining Religious Freedom in Latin America – The increasing persecution of Christians” and workshop “The Persecution of Christians in Latin America – a practical and methodological investigation / What really helps?” at Schönblick Kongress, 10-13 November 2019 in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany.
- Presentation and discussion of paper “The regulation of religion by organized crime: conceptualization of an underexplored phenomenon based on empirical evidence from northeast Mexico” at the International Studies Association Midwest Conference, in Saint-Louis, Missouri, 22-23 November 2019.
- Publication of the book *Conceptual Tools to Assess Religious Freedom in Latin America [working title]*, with J.B. Arauz Cantón (2020, forthcoming) at the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America.
- Publication of book chapter “Revisiting Sphere Sovereignty to Interpret Restrictions on Religious Freedom”, in S. Polinder & G. Buijs (eds.). *Christian Faith, Philosophy & International Relations: The Lamb and the Wolf* (pp. 240-262), Brill with Frans Veerman, 2020.
- Presentation and discussion of paper “La participación política de actores religiosos en América Latina: retos para la neutralidad del Estado” at the Latin American Studies Association, annual conference, in Guadalajara, Mexico, 13-16 May 2020.
- Guest editor (with Govert Buijs) of a special issue of the *International Journal of Religious Freedom* on “The Impact of Religious Freedom Research” (2020, forthcoming).

B. Scores of Colombia, Cuba and Mexico on Religious Freedom Assessment Tools (most recent publications)

Religious Freedom Assessment Tool	Colombia	Cuba	Mexico	Scale
Religious Freedom Rating, Hudson Institute (2007)				
Religious Freedom Rating			4	7
World Watch List, Open Doors International (2019)				
Private sphere	7.9	8.8	8.3	16.67
Family sphere	7.6	4.4	7.5	16.67
Community sphere	11.8	9.1	12.2	16.67
National sphere	9.4	10.5	10.2	16.67
Church sphere	8.5	11.8	9.7	16.67
Violence	12.6	3.9	13.5	16.67
Total score	57.8	48.5	61.4	100
International Religious Freedom Data, The Association of Religion Date Archives, Pennsylvania State University (2008)				
Government Regulation of Religion Index			3.056	10
Government Favoritism of Religion Index			0	10
Modified Social Regulation of Religion Index			6.333	10
Global Restrictions on Religion, Pew Research Center (2016)				
Government Restrictions Index	3.1	5.0	4.4	10
Social Hostilities Index	2.3	0.0	5.9	10
The Main Religion and State Dataset, Religion and State Project, Bar-Ilan University (2014)				
Official Religion	No	No	No	-
Official Support	Multi-Tiered Preferences 1: one religion is clearly preferred by state, receiving the most benefits, there exists one or more tiers of religions which receive less benefits than the preferred religion but more than	Nonspecific Hostility: While the state is hostile to religion, this hostility is at about the same level as state hostility to other types of non-state organizations. Religion is not singled out.	Separationist: Official separation of Church and state and the state is slightly hostile toward religion. This includes efforts to remove expression of religion by private citizens from the public sphere.	-

Religious Freedom Assessment Tool	Colombia	Cuba	Mexico	Scale
	some other religions.			
Religious Discrimination Against Minority Religions	2	38	11	108
Regulation of and Restrictions on the Majority Religion or All Religions	2	27	20	87
Specific Types of Religious Support	6	3	4	52
Societal Module, Religion and State Project, Bar-Ilan University (2014)				
Discrimination, harassment, acts of prejudice and violence against minority religions: General	5	2	14	81
Minority actions of Discrimination, harassment, acts of prejudice and violence - Against the majority religion	0	0	0	15
Minority actions of Discrimination, harassment, acts of prejudice and violence - Against the other minority religions	1	0	0	15
Societal regulation of religion	1	0	3	11
Religion and State-Minorities Dataset, Religion and State Project, Bar-Ilan University (2014)				
Governmental Discrimination	Animists: 1 Jews: 1 Muslims: 1 Protestants: 1	Protestants: 19	Animists: 2 Jehovah's Witnesses: 3 Muslims: 0 Protestants: 11	70
Government religious preference, Religious Characteristics of States Data Project, Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion (2015)				
Government Religious Preference	2.7	1.4	1.4	4

Religious Freedom Assessment Tool	Colombia	Cuba	Mexico	Scale
composite score – preferred religion				
Government Religious Preference composite score – non-preferred religion	1.3	1.2	1.4	4
CIRI Human Rights Data Project (2011)				
Freedom of religion	2	0	1	2

Source: own elaboration based on cited datasets.

C. Violent incidents of persecution against Christians in Colombia, Cuba and Mexico (2011-2018)

Colombia	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Killings	0	1	11	7	0	2	2	7
(Attempts) to destroy Churches or Christian buildings	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	15
Closed Churches or Christian buildings	0	2	151	11	0	0	0	3
Arrests	0	0	12	1	3	0	0	5
Sentences	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	5
Abductions	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Sexual Assaults	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Forced Marriages	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse)	1	39	545	206	12	3	9	163
Attacked Christian houses	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Attacked Christian shops or businesses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Forced to leave Home	0	0	34	173	119	1	18	91
Forced to leave Country	0	38	6	0	0	0	0	2

Cuba	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Killings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(Attempts) to destroy Churches or Christian buildings	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	0
Closed Churches or Christian buildings	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Arrests	1	0	0	0	0	245	55	245
Sentences	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Abductions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual Assaults	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Forced Marriages	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse)	1	1	11	0	0	0	67	1
Attacked Christian houses	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
Attacked Christian shops or businesses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Forced to leave Home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Forced to leave Country	0	20	4	0	0	0	0	0

Mexico	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Killings	1	5	10	3	3	20	15	16
(Attempts) to destroy Churches or Christian buildings	0	2	3	2	2	2	9	34
Closed Churches or Christian buildings	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	3
Arrests	0	56	38	9	0	1	6	10
Sentences	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Abductions	1	1	7	0	1	5	83	2
Sexual Assaults	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Forced Marriages	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse)	81	240	650	131	0	8	205	28
Attacked Christian houses	3	20	23	13	0	2	2	9
Attacked Christian shops or businesses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Forced to leave Home	0	71	206	23	0	21	116	27
Forced to leave Country	0	92	230	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Violent Incidents Database, Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America. (www.violentincidents.com).

D. Comparison of Religious Freedom Assessment Tools

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
<p>Religious Freedom Rating, Center for Religious Freedom (Hudson Institute)</p>	<p><i>Religious freedom:</i> “Religious freedom has two dimensions. It belongs to individuals and also to religious groups. It includes a person’s right to walk down the street wearing a cross, a yarmulke or a headscarf, or not to do so, and to express and live out one’s beliefs in society. It also includes the rights of groups to worship God as they wish in community, to run schools, hospitals and other institutions, to publish and possess sacred literature, and order their internal affairs.”</p> <p><i>Religious persecution:</i> “any hardship endured because of one’s religion”</p>	<p>The degree of religious freedom expressed on a scale of 1 to 7.</p>	<p>“[Religious Freedom in the World] gives narratives on 101 countries representing 95% of the world’s population based on a standardized questionnaire of 122 questions in ten groups. This is translated by expert consensus into a comparative single <i>Religious Freedom Rating</i> on a scale of 1 to 7 applicable to all religious groups in complete countries or parts thereof.”</p>
<p>World Watch List, World Watch Unit (Open Doors International)</p>	<p><i>Christian:</i> “A Christian is ‘anyone who self-identifies as a Christian and/or someone belonging to a Christian community as defined by the church’s historic creeds’.”</p> <p><i>Persecution:</i> “Persecution is ‘any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and</p>	<p>The degree of pressure experienced by Christians in a country because of their faith measured throughout five spheres of life.</p>	<p>“One of the tools of Open Doors to track and measure the extent of persecution of Christians in the world is the World Watch List (WWL). The WWL is based on the research and comparison of expert opinions (Open Doors’ field researchers, external experts, academics) and publicly available research</p>

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
	actions towards Christians’.”		documents. It is a qualitative instrument based on these expert opinions and through the examination of different opinions seeks objectivity.”
International Religious Freedom Data , The Association of Religion Date Archives (Pennsylvania State University)	<i>Religion:</i> “explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions that include statements about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning.” <i>Government regulation:</i> “the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by the official laws, policies, or administrative actions of the state.” <i>Religious favoritism:</i> “subsidies, privileges, support, or favorable sanctions provided by the state to a select religion or a small group of religions.” <i>Social regulation:</i> “the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by other religious groups, associations, or the culture at large.”	Government Regulation of Religion Index: “a comparative measure of the actions of the state that deny religious freedoms including any actions that impinge on the practice, profession, or selection of religion. A higher GRI score indicates greater religious regulation. Range: 0 – 10.” Government Favoritism of Religion Index: “a comparative measure of the actions of the state that provide one religion or a small group of religions special privileges, support, or favorable sanctions. A higher GFI score indicates greater religious favoritism. Range: 0 – 10.” Social Regulation of Religion Index: “a comparative measure of the restrictions placed on practice, profession, or	Socio-metric methodology based on the coding of the International Religious Freedom Report

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
		<p>selection of religion by other religious groups or associations or the culture at large. A higher SRI score indicates greater social regulation.”</p> <p>Religious Persecution Index: “Average number of people physically abused or displaced due to their religion according to US Department of State's 2005 and 2008 International Religious Freedom Reports (as coded by ARDA researchers). 0 = None; 1 = 1-10; 2 = 11-20; 3 = 21-100; 4 = 101-500; 5 = 501-1000; 6 = 1001-5000; 7 = 5001-10000; 8 = 10001-50000; 9 = 50001-100000; 10 = greater than 100000.”</p>	
<p>Global Restrictions on Religion, Pew Research Center</p>	<p><i>Religious brand</i>: “an organized group of committed individuals that adhere to and propagate a specific interpretation of explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions through statements about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning”</p> <p><i>Religious persecution</i>: “physical abuse or displacement of</p>	<p>Government Restrictions Index: “based on 20 indicators of ways that national and local governments restrict religion, including through coercion and force.” (Grim & Finke 2011:84)</p> <p>Social Hostilities Index: “based on 13 indicators of ways in which private individuals and social groups infringe on religious beliefs and</p>	<p>Socio-metric methodology based on the coding of the International Religious Freedom Report and 18 other primary sources.</p>

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
	people because of religion.”	practices, including religiously biased crimes, mob violence and efforts to stop particular religious groups from growing or operating.”	
Religion and State dataset, Religion and State Project (Bar-Ilan University)	<p><i>Regulation:</i> “limitations on the majority religion or on all religions; discrimination limits only minority religions.”</p> <p><i>Religious discrimination:</i> “limitations that are placed on the religious practices or religious institutions of minority religions but not those of the majority religion.”</p> <p><i>Religious restrictions:</i> “restrictions that are placed on all religions or the majority religion.”</p> <p><i>Religious legislation:</i> “the extent to which the government supports religion.”</p> <p><i>Societal discrimination:</i> “actions taken by societal actors and attitudes toward minority religions.”</p>	<p>Official Religion: “A 15 value variable which measures the official relationship between religion and the state. This includes five categories of official religions and nine categories of state-religion relationships which range from unofficial support for a single religion to overt hostility to all religion.”</p> <p>Religious Support: “This includes 51 separate variables which measure different ways a government can support religion including financial support, policies which enforce religious laws, and other forms of entanglement between government and religion.”</p> <p>Religious Restrictions: “This includes 29 separate variables which measure different ways governments regulate, restrict, or control all religions in the state including</p>	Socio-metric methodology based on the coding on a number of primary sources including news articles and legal texts, academic resources, government and inter-governmental organization reports and reports by advocacy groups and academic organizations.

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
		<p>the majority religion. This includes restrictions on religion’s political role, restrictions on religious institutions, restrictions on religious practices, and other forms of regulation, control, and restrictions.”</p>	
		<p>Religious Discrimination: “This includes 30 types of restrictions that are placed on the religious institutions and practices of religious minorities that are not placed on the majority group. This includes restrictions on religious practices, restrictions on religious institutions and clergy, restrictions on conversion and proselytizing, and other restrictions.”</p>	
		<p>Societal Discrimination: “This includes 27 types of actions taken against religious minorities by actors in society who do not represent the government. This includes economic discrimination, speech acts, property crimes, nonviolent harassment, and violence.”</p>	
		<p>Minority Societal Actions: “This</p>	

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
		<p>includes five types of acts taken by minorities against the majority group or other minorities (coded separately) including violence, terrorism, harassment, and vandalism.”</p> <p>General societal relations: “This variable measures the general relationship between the members of the majority religion and members of minority religions.”</p>	
<p>Government Religious Preference, Religious Characteristics of States Data Project (Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion)</p>	<p>“The Government Religious Preference dataset (GRP) measures government-level favoritism toward, and disfavor against, 30 religious denominations.”</p>	<p>“A series of ordered categorical variables index the state’s institutional favoritism in 28 different ways. Those 28 variables are combined to form five composite indices for five broad components of state-religion: official status, religious education, financial support, regulatory burdens, and freedom of practice. The five components’ composites in turn are further combined into a single composite score, the GRP score. All of this is done for each of the 30 religious denominations covered in the dataset.”</p>	<p>Socio-metric methodology based on the coding of a selection of primary and secondary sources, combining “collection” and “sampling” procedures.</p>

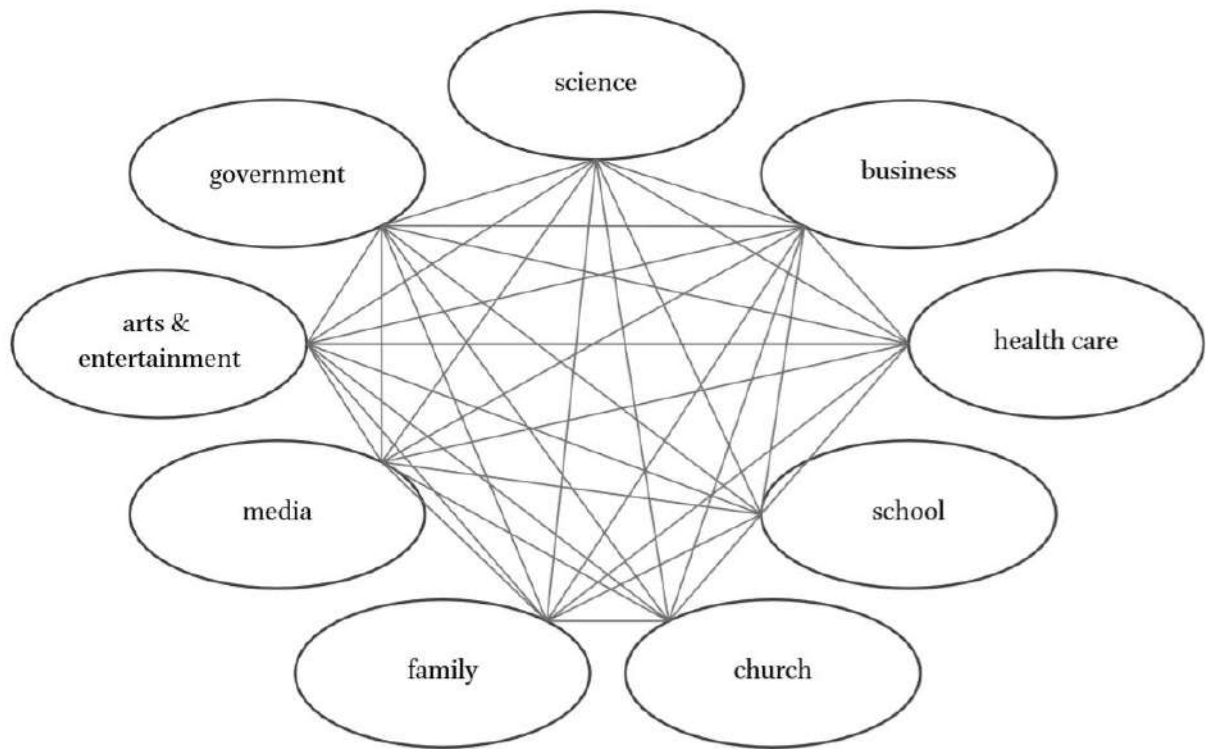
RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project	The dataset includes a measure of constraints on religious freedom which indicates the extent to which the freedom of citizens to exercise and practice their religious beliefs is subject to actual government restrictions. Citizens should be able to freely practice their religion and proselytize (attempt to convert) other citizens to their religion as long as such attempts are done in a non-coercive, peaceful manner.	A score of 0 indicates that government restrictions on religious practices are severe and widespread. A score of 1 indicates such practices are moderate, and a 2 indicates such practices are practically absent.”	Socio-metric methodology based on the coding of standards-based quantitative information on government respect for 15 internationally recognized human rights for 195 countries, annually from 1981-2011.
Minorities at Risk Project, University of Maryland	The dataset defines “a minority at risk as an ethno-political group that collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis other groups in society; and/or collectively mobilizes in defense of promotion of its self-defined interests.” The focus of this dataset is on ethnic minorities, however, some of the variables used to describe these minorities could also be used to describe religious minorities.	Monitors and analyzes the status and conflicts of politically-active communal groups in all countries with a current population of at least 500,000.	Socio-metric methodology based on the coding of political, economic and cultural dimensions for 283 politically active ethnic groups.
World Values Survey (WVS)	The survey contains numerous questions, including a number of questions on	Worldwide investigation of socio-cultural and political change. It is	Public opinion survey.

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
	<p>“Religion and Morale.” Most of these questions refer to the degree of adherence to religious values, but some could be used to assess opinions on religious freedom.</p>	<p>conducted by a network of social scientists at leading universities around the world. Interviews have been carried out with nationally representative samples of the publics of more than 80 societies.</p>	
<p>Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), Vanderbilt University</p>	<p>The survey includes a number of questions on religious identification and behavior, which can be cross tabulated with variables describing a broad range of human rights violations in order to assess the nature of the relation between religious identification or behavior and the frequency of human rights violations.</p>	<p>Biannual surveys of public opinion in the Americas</p>	<p>Public opinion survey.</p>
<p>Freedom in the World, Freedom House</p>	<p>The civil liberties rating includes a question on religious freedom: “Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?”</p>	<p>The <i>Freedom in the World</i> survey “measures freedom according to two broad categories: political rights and civil liberties.”</p>	<p>Expert opinion survey.</p>
<p>Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace</p>	<p>‘Religious persecution’ is a sub-indicator of the indicator ‘Human Rights and Rule of Law’.</p>	<p>The index is composed of “twelve primary social, economic and political indicators (each split into an average of 14 sub-indicators).” The methodological</p>	<p>Expert opinion survey.</p>

RFAT	Definitions	Focus of measurement	Methodology to aggregate and analyze data
		information provided on the website of the Fragile States Index does not provide an explanation of how sub-indicators are calculated or measured.	
Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Bertelsmann Foundation	The first variable – state of political transformation (Democracy Status) – “is measured in terms of five criteria, which in turn are derived from assessments made in response to 18 individual questions.” One of the questions belonging to the criterion ‘Stateness’ is “to what extent are legal and political institutions defined without interference by religious dogmas?” Questions are answered by a narrative based on the input from consulted experts.	The Bertelsmann Transformation Index “analyzes and evaluates the quality of democracy, a market economy and political management in 128 developing and transition countries.”	Expert opinion survey.

Source: own elaboration based on cited datasets.

E. Spheres of society



Source: Petri & Visscher (2015)

F. Geographical localization of the Nasa (Páez) ethnic group in Colombia

DEPARTMENT / MUNICIPALITY	RESGUARDO / COMMUNITY	POPULATION	AREA (hectares)
Caquetá			
Belén de los Andaquíes	La Esperanza	33	1278
Puerto Rico	Nasa Kiwe	118	1479
Puerto Rico	Siberia	75	416
Puerto Rico	Zit – Sek del Quecal	107	820
San José del Fragua	El Portal	118	186
San Vicente del Caguan	Altamira	305	10556
San Vicente del Caguan	La Palestina	50	0
San Vicente del Caguan	Veracruz - Otros	334	0
Solano	El Guayabal	41	52
Solano	ND	23	0
Cauca			
Buenos Aires	La Paila - Naya	745	501
Buenos Aires	Las Delicias	1193	1145
Caldono	La Aguada - San Antonio	1115	4428
Caldono	Laguna Siberia	2124	1956
Caldono	Pioyá	2173	4911
Caldono	Pueblo Nuevo	3619	7276
Caldono	San Lorenzo de Caldono	6265	8257
Caloto	Corinto	319	1731
Caloto	Huellas	4142	6168
Corinto	Corinto	1275	0
Corinto	Guabito López Adentro - Otros	1858	0
El Tambo	Alto del Rey	833	1223
Inzá	Calderas	155	1095
Inzá	Calderas	764	1212
Inzá	La Gaitana	1386	116
Inzá	San Andrés de Pisimbalá	1610	3365
Inzá	Santa Rosa de Capisco	1260	1587
Inzá	Topa	123	2000
Inzá	Tumbichucue	436	4395
Inzá	Turmina – Otros	1354	3157
Inzá	Yaquivá	2175	16161
Jambaló	Jambaló	12304	21874
Miranda	La Cilia – La Calera	1423	800
Morales	Agua Negra	878	2000
Morales	Chimborazo	1160	2112
Morales	Honduras	4449	21200
Páez (Belalcázar)	Araujo	91	200
Páez (Belalcázar)	Avirama	4488	2621
Páez (Belalcázar)	Belarcázar	1538	44751
Páez (Belalcázar)	Chinas	424	1800
Páez (Belalcázar)	Cohetando	4018	0

DEPARTMENT / MUNICIPALITY	RESGUARDO / COMMUNITY	POPULATION	AREA (hectares)
Páez (Belalcázar)	Cohetando	3500	10330
Páez (Belalcázar)	Huila	3468	42000
Páez (Belalcázar)	Lame	653	2270
Páez (Belalcázar)	Mosoco	1938	12114
Páez (Belalcázar)	Ricaurte	1872	0
Páez (Belalcázar)	Ricaurte – Otros	4002	0
Páez (Belalcázar)	San José	492	11037
Páez (Belalcázar)	Suin	172	1162
Páez (Belalcázar)	Tálaga	3570	6382
Páez (Belalcázar)	Tóez	471	7687
Páez (Belalcázar)	Togoima	1744	2691
Páez (Belalcázar)	Vitoncó	3978	7057
Popayán	El Canelo	310	0
Popayán	Páez de Quintana	1580	655
Popayán	Poblazón*	728	2899
Puracé	ND	803	0
Santander de Quilichao	Canoas	2335	431
Santander de Quilichao	Guadualito	288	199
Santander de Quilichao	La Concepción	475	609
Santander de Quilichao	Tigres y Munchique	2205	8822
Silvia	Pitayó	3813	15406
Silvia	Quichaya*	2141	3798
Silvia	Quizgó*	3879	3565
Silvia	Tumburao	329	725
Toribío	San Francisco	3205	12580
Toribío	Tacueyó	7828	27885
Toribío	Toribío	4123	9018
Totoró	Jebalá	830	188
Totoró	ND	189	0
Totoró	Novirao	880	1054
Totoró	Paniquitá	774	8222
Totoró	Polindara	1262	1480
Huila			
Gigante	ND	112	0
La Plata	La Gaitana	620	158
La Plata	La Reforma	85	155
Neiva	Tama – Páez – La Gabriela	125	558
Palermo	Bache	34	118
Meta			
La Uribe	Los Planes	63	1725
Mesetas	Ondas del Cafre	140	4075
Mesetas	Páez de Villa Lucía	121	2633
Putumayo			
Mocoa	Páez de la Aguadita	137	99
Puerto Asis	El Libano	120	0

DEPARTMENT / MUNICIPALITY	RESGUARDO / COMMUNITY	POPULATION	AREA (hectares)
Puerto Asis	Las Minas	110	0
Puerto Asis	Santa Rosa Alto Lorenzo	173	0
Puerto Asis	Villa Hermosa	120	0
Puerto Guzman	El Descanso	142	75
Villagarzón	Juanambu – Otros	200	0
Tolima			
Planadas	Gaitania	1276	4900
Rioblanco	Las Mercedes	77	397
Valle del Cauca			
El Cairo	Doxura	215	109
Florida	Altamira	137	0
Florida	El Salado	263	0
Florida	El Triunfo – Cristal Páez	466	2137
Florida	Granates	200	0
Florida	La Cumbre	11	0
Florida	La Rivera – Otro	126	0
Florida	Lomagorda	227	0
Florida	Los Caledos	274	0
Florida	Nasa Kwe's Kiwe	267	89
Florida	Nasa Tha	137	189
Florida	Parraga	120	0
Florida	San Juanito	135	0
Jamundí	Kwe's Kiwe Nasa (La Cristalina)	989	36
Pradera	El Nogal	108	0
Pradera	Kwet Wala (Piedra Grande)	433	517

Source: Departamento Nacional de Planeación, Colombia (2007).

G. Legal synthesis: indigenous communities in Colombian legislation

Legal rules and regulations	Summary
Political Constitution (1991)	<p>Recognition of Colombian citizenship of indigenous people (art. 96).</p> <p>Reservation of 2 seats in the Senate to represent indigenous communities (art. 171 and 176).</p> <p>Creation of a special indigenous jurisdiction, with the authority to judge within their territorial ambit based on their <i>usos y costumbres</i> (customs and habits) (art. 246).</p> <p>Recognition of indigenous lands as “territorial entities”, allowing for the autonomy in terms of territory, budget, government and security in their jurisdiction (art. 285, 286, 287, 296, 321 and 329).</p> <p>Recognition of the principle of “autonomy and free self-determination” as the right of indigenous peoples to determine their own institutions and government authority, exercise jurisdictional, cultural, political and administrative functions within their territories (art. 330, regulated by decree 1953 in 2014).</p> <p>Allocation of royalties based on the number of inhabitants in its territory (art. 356).</p> <p>The <i>resguardos indígenas</i> are allotted the faculty to apply legal rules and regulations, implement development policies, collect and distribute resources, maintain security and manage natural resources (art. 329).</p>
Law 21 (1991)	Adoption of ILO convention 169.
Law 52 (1992), materialized by decree 0436 (1992)	Creation of a National Council for Indigenous Policy to act as an advisory body for indigenous affairs.
Law 60 (1993) – Distribution of Powers and Resources (“Ley de Transferencias”), modified by law 715 (2002)	The resources [funds for community development projects in education, health and infrastructure] for the <i>resguardos indígenas</i> will be distributed in proportion to the participation of the population of the <i>resguardo</i> , based on the census by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (art. 25 of law 60; art. 83 of law 715).
Law 99 (1993) – Environmental Statute	Creation of the National Environmental Council, in which indigenous communities are represented.
Law 115 (1994) – Education Code	Implementation of “ethno-education” in indigenous territories. Schools are obliged to teach indigenous languages and culture in their curriculum, and subjects that could threaten the culture of the <i>resguardo</i> are forbidden.
Law 160 (1994) – National Agricultural Code	Creation of the Colombian Institute for Agricultural Reform (renamed Colombian Institute for Rural Development in 2007) with the faculty to recognize indigenous settlements and give them lands that are necessary for the needs of their communities.
Decree 2663 (1994), derogated and updated by decree 1465 (2013)	Regulation of the awarding of land to <i>resguardos indígenas</i> .

Legal rules and regulations	Summary
Decree 1397 (1996)	Creation of the National Commission for Indigenous Territories to advise the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development about the needs of indigenous communities.
Law 600 (2000) – Penal Code	Members of the indigenous communities enjoy a certain degree of non-admissibility (<i>fuero especial indígena</i> , or immunity from prosecution) because of their cultural diversity in case the offense committed is not a crime according to their culture (art. 378).
	Reintegration into their socio-cultural environment as a security measure for members of indigenous communities (art. 479).
Law 685 (2001) – Mine Code	Obligation for natural resource operators not to damage the cultural, social and economic values of the communities that occupy the space in which the concession for the extraction of minerals is allowed. Also, indigenous authorities have priority in granting concessions for the exploitation of mines in indigenous territories.
Law 734 (2002) – Single Disciplinary Code	Any indigenous person who administers state resources will be disciplined in accordance with the punishments for public servants.
Law 906 (2004) – Code of Penal Procedure	Establishes an exception to judge those crimes that are to be judged by the indigenous jurisdiction (art. 30). In case the conduct committed is considered a crime in both jurisdictions, it may be tried, since the principle of non-admissibility due to socio-cultural diversity does not apply. Punishment and security measures must be established in coordination with the highest indigenous authority in the respective community.
Law 1096 (2006) – Child and Adolescence Code	Imposes obligations on the family and states that in indigenous communities, the obligations of the family will be established according to their traditions and cultures. Contains regulations for the adoption of an indigenous child or adolescent, stating that in case the adopters belong to the same community, it will be carried out according to their customs and habits. With regard to work permits for minors, the authorization of the superior command of the community is required. In case of punishable conduct by an indigenous adolescent, they will be judged according to the norms of their own communities. In the event minor offenders commit a delinquency outside their community, they will be subject to the system of criminal responsibility for adolescents of ordinary jurisdiction, if they do not wish to return to their communities of origin.

Source: own elaboration based on cited legal rules and regulations.

H. Examples of religious freedom cases in Colombian and Inter-American jurisprudence

Case	Summary and implications
Sentencia T-342/1994, Corte Constitucional de Colombia	The right to cultural identity as well as the right to religious freedom and worship of the Nukak Maku indigenous people were protected from the “threat” posed by the work of the New Tribes Evangelical Association, who through their work had generated a relationship of dependence, which could potentially violate the mentioned rights and enable coercion or imposition of their religious doctrine.
Sentencia SU-510/1998, Corte Constitucional de Colombia	The Court pointed out several fundamental aspects of the special worldview of the indigenous community of the Ika O Arhuaco resguardo in order to make the right to “cultural identity” prevail over the right to religious freedom: (1) the preservation of the indigenous territory is closely related to the worship of their gods, making the territory equivalent to their temple (a sacred place); (2) the decision explains the relationship between the religion of the ethnic group and the care and respect for nature; (3) the analysis that religious beliefs are a fundamental element of the indigenous culture, on which all structures are based. Based on this analysis, the Court determined that restrictions on the right to religious freedom within these communities were constitutional.
Comunidad Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni contra Nicaragua, sentencia de fondo (31/08/2001), Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos	The particular situation of indigenous groups, in which their spirituality plays a central role, has led the Court to declare that, in applying the rights of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, states must take into account the characteristics of the communities to which they apply. This implies recognizing that states should not only protect the right to property in its classic sense of individual ownership, but also forms of collective ownership and possession.
Sentencia T-1022/2001, Corte Constitucional de Colombia	The Court did not protect the right to religious freedom and worship, of indigenous people belonging to the Yanacona resguardo, because they followed evangelical Christianity, in contrast to the majority that assimilated Catholicism, given that the profession and practice of such beliefs runs counter to their customs. Therefore, the practice of these beliefs should be limited to the private sphere. For its public exercise it is necessary to have the respective authorization of the indigenous authorities, which are autonomous for the taking of this decision.
Comunidad Indígena Yakye Axa contra Paraguay, sentencia de fondo (17/06/2005), Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos	The Court has come to the conclusion that traditional lands and the resources linked to culture must be safeguarded under Article 21 of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights.

Case	Summary and implications
Comunidad indígena Sawhoyamaxa contra Paraguay, sentencia de fondo (29/04/2006), Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos	Due to the Court's conception of indigenous peoples as "true legal subjects with their own singularity", the collective nature of the law is stronger than individual freedoms.
Sentencia T-349/2008, Corte Constitucional de Colombia	The Court considers that, in relation to the factual situation that was presented within the resguardo, it must reiterate in full the precedent set forth in Sentence SU-510 of 1998.
Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia	Evangelical Christians claim that the Pickwe Tha Fxiw resguardo in the town of Itaibe in the municipality of Páez violated their fundamental rights and those of their families as a result of their conversion to another faith, by stripping them of the property and the land they owned in the territory of said resguardo, without receiving compensation for the improvements they made on them. The Court reiterates jurisprudence of the Court related to the constitutional protection in the 1991 Constitution of the fundamental right to the ethnic diversity and cultural identity of indigenous communities, the recognition and guarantee of their autonomy and jurisdiction, and the constitutional importance of the territory for members of these ethnic groups. The Court confirms rulings of lower courts that the dispossession of the plots of the plaintiffs is legitimate, since they voluntarily left the community by withdrawing from the CRIC and joining the OPIC.

Source: own elaboration based on cited jurisprudence.

I. Registered Protestant denominations in Cuba

	Own seminary	Member of the Cuban Council of Churches (CIC)
Conservative churches		
Iglesia Bautista de Gracia (Independent)	No	No
Iglesia Bautista Bereana (Independent)	No	No
Iglesia Presbiteriana Ortodoxa (Independent)	No	No
Iglesia Cristiana Reformada (Christian Reformed Church)	Yes: Jagüey	Yes
Broader churches with a conservative wing		
Convención Evangélica de Cuba Los Pinos Nuevos (Worldteam)	Yes: Placetás	Associate
Convención Bautista de Cuba Oriental (American Baptist Churches)	Yes: Santiago	No
Convención Bautista de Cuba Occidental (Southern Baptists)	Yes: Havana	No
Intermediate churches		
Mision Mundial en Cuba (United World Mission)	Yes: Cabañas	Yes
Liga Evangélica de Cuba (Independent)	No	Associate
Iglesia de Cristo (Churches of Christ)	No	Associate
Convención Bautista Libre (Free Will Baptists)	Yes: Pinar	Yes
Iglesia Hermanos en Cristo (Brethren in Christ)	No	Yes
Iglesia Metodista (United Methodist Church)	Yes: Havana	Yes
Iglesia de la Biblia Abierta (Open Bible Churches)	No	Associate
Iglesia de Dios Ortodoxa (Independent)	No	Yes
Iglesia Evangelica Bethel (Elim Assemblies missionaries)	No	Yes
Liberal / ecumenical churches		
Iglesia Episcopal (Episcopal Church, member of the Anglican Communion)	Combined	Yes
Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada (Presbyterian Church)	Combined	Yes
Iglesia de Nazareno (Church of the Nazarene)	Yes: La Lisa	Yes
Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas	Combined	Yes
Pentecostal churches		
Iglesia Santa Pentecostés (Pentacostal Holiness Church)	No	Yes
Iglesia Congregacional Pentecostal (Congregational Holiness)	No	Yes
Iglesia Evangelica Pentecostal de Cuba (Assemblies of God)	Yes	Associate

	Own seminary	Member of the Cuban Council of Churches (CIC)
Iglesia Pentecostal Buenas Nuevas (Independent Pentecostal)	No	Associate
Primera Iglesia Pentecostal (Independent Pentecostal)	No	Yes
Iglesia de Dios Evangelio Completo (Church of God, Cleveland)	No	No
Iglesia Evangelica Pentecostal Luz del Mundo (Independent Pentecostal)	No	Yes
Iglesia de Dios en Cuba (Church of God, Anderson)	No	Yes
Iglesia Misionera de Dios (God's Missionary Church)	No	Yes
Iglesia Apostólica de Jesucristo (Unitarian Pentecostal)	No	Yes
Bando Evangélico de Gedeón (Gideon's Band)	No	Associate
Iglesia de la Fe Apostolica (Churches of the Apostolic Faith)	No	Yes
Los Amigos (Quakers)	No	Yes
Other churches		
Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día (Seventh-day Adventists Church)	Yes: Havana	Associate
Ejército de Salvación (Salvation Army)	No	Yes

Source: Spaanse Evangelische Zending (SEZ) (2012).

J. Definitions of key concepts used in this research

Avoidance	Avoidance of any interaction with the actors responsible for the human security threats, leading to flight or internal exit in the most extreme case.
Collective action	Engagement in advocacy or any form of (organized) non-violent resistance or protest to the actors responsible for the human security threats.
Compliance	Obedience to any requirements made by the actors responsible for the human security threats.
Cultural dissidents	Members of the Nasa ethnic group in Colombia who, on religious grounds, oppose the authority of the political leaders of their reserves and reject the indigenous traditions they consider incompatible with their faith.
Human security threats in relation to religious freedom	Any restriction on religious expression in any sphere of society.
Human security	“Human security is the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive threats. Individuals require protection from environmental, economic, food, health, personal and political threats.” (Owen 2003:38)
Minority	A social subdivision of society.
Moral standing	Credibility with people outside the religious minority as a result of the respect religious roles or religious beliefs commands (moral authority).
Religion	A belief system that includes a more or less coherent set of beliefs in which reference is made to (a) transcendental being(s), which is seen by its adherents as important for who they are and which influences their individual and collective behavior.
Religious minority	A minority group which self-identifies (or is identified) with a particular belief system (religious identity), which influences the individual and collective behavior in society of its members (religious behavior).
Resilience	“Resilience is the capacity of any entity – an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system – to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience. As you build resilience, therefore, you become more able to prevent or mitigate stresses and shocks you can identify and better able to respond to those you can’t predict or avoid. You also develop greater capacity to bounce

back from a crisis, learn from it, and achieve revitalization.”
(Rodin 2014:116)

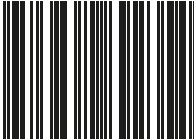
Religious freedom	- Legal definition: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” (Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) - Political definition: freedom of religious expression in each sphere society
Restrictions on religious freedom	“any unjustified restriction on religious expression in any sphere of society.” (Petri & Visscher 2015:107)
Social wisdom	The ability, based on self-reflection, to anticipate how one’s words and actions might be received in order to avoid being perceived as provocative.
Solidarity	Mitigation of the humanitarian impact of human security threats within a religious community.
Specificity	A condition that can be more or less particular to an individual or group.
Spiritual endurance	Withdrawal within oneself, seeking comfort in personal religious beliefs.
Taking up arms	Direct confrontation of armed power through the creation of self-defense militias or counter-insurgency units.
Vulnerability	The risk to suffer human rights abuses.



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