Title of Paper/Presentation: Trauma, religion and culture: The diverse roles of religion in coping with organized violence in Colombia

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Please paste the abstract below and utilize the following headings:

(a) Background: The purpose of this study is to explore the roles of religion in coping with a potentially traumatic situation of organized violence, in a particular cultural, socio-economic and political context, such as the Colombian one. In Colombia, religion as a cultural aspect has a significant place in Colombian society. It also deals with an armed conflict which lasts for several decades now and has resulted in the phenomenon of massive internal displacement of populations.

(b) Method: This research has a cultural psychology approach and uses a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews. Participants include 51 adults, internally displaced people (IDP), and two key informants. Four topics are explored: a) their displacement, b) religion in every-day life, c) changes in their religion following displacement, and d) the roles of religion during their displacement experience.

(c) Results and (d) Conclusions: Results show that religion is important for Colombian IDP’s. Mostly Catholics, their religion is centered on a direct and personalized relationship with God, in spite of the collective rituals they practice. In this sample, IDP’s experience religion as a culturally anchored pattern, resistant to adversity: after displacement their religion remained either unchanged or reinforced. Concerning the displacement, the most salient aspects are the intensity of violence they went through, the imminence of departures, and the precariousness they have to deal with at arrival.

In spite of these conditions and all the suffering they undergo, IDP’s show a remarkable capacity to cope with the available resources in an active, flexible and diversified way. Several roles of religion have been identified. They have been gathered according to their functionality into five categories: a) meaning provider, b) stability conservator, c) transformations catalyst, d) social support source, and e) potentially harmful aspects. The importance of studying religion in a functional and culturally contextualized way is discussed.