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Rivista di scienze sociali della religione

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Sommario

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Inter-religious Dialogue and Religious Freedom:
A Case Study on the Education System
in Post-Conflict Bosnia

Adriana Michilli · Olga Breskaya

Abstract · *This article addresses why domestic laws and international policies on inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance and religious freedom are not fully implemented within the Bosnian educational curriculum. Theoretical perspectives on religious freedom and inter-religious dialogue are presented as two normative discourses of post-conflict society emphasizing the importance of bridging two dimensions of religious freedom: religious pluralism and individual liberty. Concepts of inter-religious dialogue in national law are then defined, before identifying the international community's local role in promoting these competences. We then close with a case-study evidencing the ongoing challenges in implementing religious freedom norms within the Bosnian school system.*

Keywords: Inter-religious dialogue, Religious freedom, Education system, Post-Conflict Bosnia, religious pluralism, individual liberty, Bosnian school system, education, peacebuilding process.

1. Introduction

INTER-RELIGIOUS dialogue occurs when persons from different religious traditions interact and share their own values, commitments and religious beliefs in a casual or formal social setting (Brajovic 2007). Norms of religious tolerance and religious freedom can also be applied to peacebuilding efforts and used to reconstruct relations in post-conflict societies where diverse communities of believers (and non-believers) remain polarized in the aftermath of war.

Post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains a modern state where the development of inter-religious dialogue is stagnated. Despite the country's signature of international peace accords such as The Dayton Agreement and its ratification of international legal charters on the importance of safeguarding human rights to protect religious coexistence; the take-off of religious freedom at the micro-level of society has experienced critical delays. Postwar authorship on this issue has addressed that this problem could be facilitated by its highly fragmented ethno-religious fabric (Russo 2000). Current estimates of the state's religious diversity are as follows: Islam, 51%; Eastern Orthodox Christian, 31%; Roman Catholic, 15% (World Atlas 2017).

This article analyzes why domestic laws and international policies on inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance and religious freedom fail to become practices implemented within the Bosnian educational curriculum. In doing so, the paper provides both a theoretical and localized analysis of the phenomenon at hand. Firstly, we present theoretical perspectives on religious freedom and inter-religious dialogue as two normative discourses of post-conflict society. Religious freedom is articulated as not only as the domestic/international legal standard but as a societal value. We emphasize importance of bridging two dimensions of religious freedom: for religious pluralism and for individual liberty.

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We then move on to explain how inter-religious dialogue, religious freedom and religious tolerance concepts are defined in national law, before identifying the programs implemented by the international community that are promoting these competences at the local level. Finally, we close with a case study and a demographic overview evidencing the challenges in including inter-religious dialogue, religious freedom and religious tolerance within the national education curriculum.

2. Theoretical Frame

Interfaith dialogue and religious freedom present normative discourses, which locate position of a 'good religion' in the post-conflict society. Positive, humanizing, reconciling religion, which contributes to justice and peace, is opposed to dangerous and 'bad religion' which can «slip easily into violence» (Hurd 2015a, p. 23) and has sectarian, divisive power. Religion with its ambiguous face is simultaneously a tool for peacebuilding, reference for conflict-management in various spheres of social life, and matter of religious governance and restrictions. As Appleby (2000) states, processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation are intertwined with the normative concern: «There will be no peace where there is no justice and no justice where human persons do not have these basic human rights» (Appleby 2000, p. x). The salient peacebuilding role of religious actors is predetermined by their engagement with international human rights discourse, missionary work promoting religious freedom, and leadership on interfaith dialogue (Appleby 2000).

As Hurd (2015b) points out, «the right kind of religion, recognized and engaged by state and other public authorities, has emancipatory potential» (2015b, p. 5). However, the positive, constructive power of religion requires good governance considering the deadly conflict of recent Bosnian past. In the context of peacebuilding, religious freedom became simultaneously a highly contested societal value and constitutional and legal norm managing pluralism regime (Giordan, Pace 2014). It became obvious that application of religious freedom is important not only for the establishment of a new legal secularism model in a post-conflict society but for the promotion of new societal value.

Religious freedom as international human rights norm gives the possibility to manage good and bad religion. Furthermore, in a situation of post-conflict society, religious freedom becomes not only the instrument of peacebuilding and reconciliation but also the international standard of protection religion, traumatized by war, from the state violence (see the case *The Islamic Community in BiH* v. *Banja Luka*). At the same time, good religion is a «mean promoting the common international good through humanitarian relief and development assistance programming, human rights campaigns» (Hurd 2015a, p. 24). In contrast, bad religion is a matter of reform and discipline «through new partnerships for the public good» (Hurd 2015, p. 24).

The 2004 Law on «Freedom of religion», drafted by Interreligious Council of BiH (Alibašić and Begović 2017, p. 23), implies in its General Provisions «traditional values and tolerance», «coexistence», «advancement of mutual understanding» along with the «conformity of Law» with «highest international standards of human rights». Even though the «facilitators of effective interfaith dialogue must find creative ways to deal with everyone's sense of victimization» (Steele 2002, p. 77) and engage in the dialogue religious and non-religious people, it requires particular level of trust to religious actors from all citizens regardless religious affiliation. Interfaith dialogue as a strategy of peacebuilding has to be complemented by non-faith-based dialogue and non-religious dialogue as well as consider role of spirituality in this processes (Muhammed Abu Nimer 2002).

While the events of the war «deepened the existing ethno-religious divisions» (Alibašić and Begović 2017, p. 21), the peacebuilding process could not devoid the consequences of this division and affect the reconciliation process. Educational sector, which is partly covered by Freedom of Religion Law (2004) regulations, is an example of how religion and secondary education in post-conflict settings, are simultaneously «the catalyst for and the obstacle to future conflict» (Lanahan 2017, p. 31).

3. The Post-Conflict State of Education in Bosnia

Kollantai (2013) emphasizes that in transitional societies where ethno-religious divisions are normative as a result of war, schooling institutions should strive to integrate an inclusive curriculum which advocates for inter-religious coexistence amongst pupils. In her chapter dealing with the relationship between peace and education, Kollantai (2013) advises that purely confessional religious instruction, has a corrosive influence on a society's goal of ensuring religious pluralism. She writes on the importance of youth knowledge of world religions, which can foster inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance and promote the development of religious freedom norms.

Russo (2000) explains that the absence of inter-religious dialogue is the byproduct of the country's fragmented legal system. Although the official capital of BiH is Sarajevo, it is important to understand that there is a *de-facto*, political-legal separatism between the two political entities of: The Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska (Russo 2000). The regions are distinctly autonomous, while both of their *de-jure* capitals are Sarajevo, The Bosnian Federation has a hyper-fragmented division of power where laws and policies are established at each of the ten Canton's districts. In Republika Srpska, political power remains more centralized, yet instead of responding to Sarajevo the *de-facto* capital is Banja Luka. In practice, this dysfunctionality nurtures a heavily politicized educational curriculum as regional administrators award preference to the majority religion, leaving both groups of faith unaware of the out-groups religious identity and practices.

4. Inter-religious Dialogue, Religious Freedom and Religious Tolerance in Bosnia

4. 1. *A National Constitution*

On paper, Bosnia has ratified both domestic laws and publicly promoted their stance on international conventions safeguarding religious freedom, inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance and protection of minorities; in practice, the protection of these human rights are often violated. The Constitution of BiH states that: «All persons within the territory of Bosnia shall enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms...one of these freedoms is the freedom of...religion» (art. 2.3). Promotion of minority religion in school is also represented in article 4.1: «Everyone shall have the right to religious education… whether in religious institutions or in public and private pre-school institutions, primary schools and higher education».

4. 2. *International Decrees*

It is also important to see how BiH is failing to implement The Council of Europe's (2013): *Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief.* In its report, The Council outlined that the following principles be implemented in alignment with achieving common EU goals on the right of minority religions rights be protected:

States have a primary duty to protect all individuals living in their territory and subject to their jurisdiction, including persons holding non-theistic or atheistic beliefs, persons belonging to minorities, and indigenous peoples and to safeguard their rights. States must treat all individuals equally without discrimination on the basis of their religion or belief.[1]

The Council's 2013 (p. 29) report also emphasizes the criticality of adopting a religiously inclusive curriculum:

Inter-religious dialogue must be a part of our curricula in education, and nobody should feel alienated from the country that he / she is living in. It will help in bringing not only students but also teachers of respective religions in contact with teachers of other religions. This overall representation will help in bringing students of different communities in contact with each other, further giving them an opportunity to forge new relationships and build trust in each other.

5. Attempts to Reform the Bosnian Educational Curriculum

There is a consensus among the international community that the post-conflict Bosnian educational curriculum is incompatible with the aims of liberal education and conflicts with the advocation of cross-faith engagement to spread inter-religious dialogue (OSCE 2007). In 2000, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) researched the degree to which Bosnia was working to ensure regional peace and stability as stipulated by its infantile national constitution. In its' findings, UNDP found the inclusion of religious tolerance in education, to be one of the most lagging and critical structural reforms needed within the multi-ethnic society. The organization's *'Youth Human Development Report'* called for the expulsion of a segregated ethno-religious academic program and recommended the implementation of an interfaith religious learning experiences (2000). In the early 2000s, Bosnia assured the international community on numerous occasions that it was working towards 'national unification' of its educational system (Brajovic 2007; European Center for Minority Issues 2003).

5. 1. *Initiatives*

According to the Advisory Council The OSCE sponsored *Toledo* program was meant to 'offer practical guidance for preparing curricula for teaching about religions and beliefs, preferred procedures for assuring fairness in the development of curricula and standards for how they would be implemented' (Kollantai 2013). *Toledo* assembled interfaith representatives from Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic religions to devise a set of ten guiding principles on how to build a tolerant religious curricula. The course was meant to provide students with the opportunity to appreciate religious diversity, unite people from different faiths and engage in constructive dialogue that transcends many of the belief boundaries within Bosnian society. At the beginning in 2009, conclusive findings indicate that *'Culture of Religions'* was only instituted by two schools in Banja-Luka and Brcko District, leaving the initiatives' outcome with minimal societal impact. OSCE concluded that the ethno-politicization of majority religious populations in power interfered with the take-off of such pilot programs and prevented educators to adopting this curriculum. Other impediments to the inter-religious dialogue course included: unqualified administrative personnel, a lack of institutional transparency and a deep-seeded post-war culture of ethno-religious identity (Kollantai 2013).

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[1] UN Declaration 61 / 295 on the rights of indigenous peoples articles 11, 12, 16.

The Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia has had a presence on the international stage in the post-conflict years. In a statement made in unison with the Reis-ul-Ulema Islamic Community of Bosnia, the two Christian churches and the President of the Jewish Community; The Council calls for the «Right of every child to religious instruction in his or her own faith, guarantees that no one shall be compelled to attend instruction in the institution of another church or religious community» (Brajovic 2007, p. 164). Although the cross-creed community has demonstrated their attendance in the international arena, their ability to work in an collaborative partnership with schools in both the BiH Federation and Republika Srpska to institute educational reform in the area of religious programs has been a failure.

5. 2. *Ethno-religious Relations and the Bosnian Educational Curriculum*

The institutionalization of the «Two Schools Under One Roof» post-war educational policy is a quintessential example of the difficulty of achieving religious freedom within the Bosnian school system. Tolomelli (2015) explains that the program of allowing Bosnian and Croat students to attend classes in the same building, but being physically separated and taught completely diverse curricula (with different educators) was seen as temporary solution to be tolerated by the international community. Despite international pressures to absolve its segregated school program, Bosnian Education Ministers have halted progress on the development of inter-religious classes. In 2007, Education Minister Kuna rationalized this decision by stating that: «The two schools under one roof project will not be suspended because you can't mix apples and pears…apples with apples and pears with pears». (Tolomelli 2015, p, 102). The prejudicial attitude on the reluctance to institute learning about world religions is further exacerbated in the following quotation «Croatian students attend classes in the morning while Bosnians in the afternoon. The Bosnian textbooks state that 'unlike others', Muslims do not destroy sacred objects and the Croat students learn that Muslims are only an ethnic group and not a religion». (Tolomelli 2015, p. 101).

Patterns from an International Freedom of Religion Report (2012) affirm that course offerings oppose the implementation of inter-religious curricula because instruction is typically given in the majority religion (and language); such as Bosnian cantons offering Islamic instruction and Croat cantons offering Catholic religious instruction. Trends of minority religious groups having little alternatives to learn about their faith and the faith of others in the company of their peers is not well corroborated in the literature or international reports by quantitative and statistical evidence, underlining that additional research is merited in this realm. Additional data from the report (2012) confirms that courses entitled *Society, Culture and Religion* as well as *Culture of Religion* involving lectures on inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance and religious freedom have been implemented in schools in Sarajevo and Tuzla districts however, longitudinal data evaluating their level of societal impact remains unavailable.

6. Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper we set out to identify where the gap between national laws, international policies and practice occurs in the implementation of inter-religious dialogue in Bosnia's educational curriculum.

The intertwined aspects of peacebuilding as a societal value and interreligious dialogue involving churches and religious communities contributed to the scope of a 2004 Law on

Freedom of religion and its meaning in post-conflict BiH. However, if Law on Freedom of religion is emphasizing role of religious communities and less religious autonomy of the individual, this could produce discrepancies in interfaith dialogue as well as peace-building process in educational sector, when religious freedom is mostly seen as a legal instrument for the regulation of relationship between religious communities which were involved in the conflict. In long-term perspective, the consequences of this process could be increasing secularization and growth of mistrust to religious institutions in spite of the strong rhetoric and policies of interfaith dialogue.

At the national level, we have defined the vast decentralization based upon ethno-religious identities (which re-surged in the post-war era) to be a major force stagnating the development of an inter-religious education curriculum. Internationally speaking, Bosnian heads of state are keen to formulate constitutional articles and accept UN and OSCE facilitated programs on the building: religious freedom, religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue yet their implementation of these norms within national educational curricula does not come to fruition.

In the end, national law doctrine and international policy is not complemented by social change; rather it is halted by it. The resurgence of ethno-religious identities in post-war Bosnia have stratified both government and civic society creating conditions which are unfavorable to the rise of a pluralist religious curricula. Our case study on the *Two Schools Under One Roof initiative* is a grim example of the State's *de-facto* decentralization practices superseding the Federation of BiH's national constitution creating a school structure which empowers majority religious groups while marginalizing minorities. Our indicators define both the institutionalization of government practices on inter-religious dialogue and a *de-facto* decentralized legal apparatus to be the primary barricades obstructing the development of inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance and religious freedom within the Bosnian educational system. We recommend that future research in this domain utilize our variables to target governmental and legal realms of Bosnian society by building awareness on the benefits of instilling these core competences into the state's national education curriculum.

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27 June 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

Hereby I, Olga Breskaya certify that the article:

"Inter-Religious Dialogue and Religious Freedom: A Case Study on the Education System in Post-Conflict Bosnia." *Religioni e Società* XXXIII(91): 84–90. 2018. DOI: 10.19272/201831302010. ISSN 0394-9397.

was co-authored with Adriana Michilli.

The article was jointly conceived in dialogue between the two authors. Olga Breskaya took the lead in writing the sections "1. Introduction", "2. Theoretical Frame", "3. The Post-Conflict State of Education in Bosnia", and "4. Inter-religious Dialogue, Religious Freedom and Religious Tolerance in Bosnia", while Adriana Michilli took the lead in writing "5. Attempts to Reform the Bosnian Educational Curriculum" and "6. Conclusions."

Respectfully,

Dr. Olga Breskaya