

Institution: The University of Edinburgh

Unit of Assessment: 33: Theology and Religious Studies

Title of case study: Religion and Ethics in the Making of War and Peace

1. Summary of the impact

Interdisciplinary research on religious framings and ethical approaches to communications, conflict, the laws of war, media, peacebuilding, reconciliation, sectarianism and violence within Edinburgh's School of Divinity has been disseminated and tested through a grant funded research and knowledge exchange project sponsored by the Centre for Theology and Public Issues (CTPI). Involving multiple partners simultaneously in the generation and exchange of new knowledge and understanding, the project demonstrates civil society, ecclesiastical, governmental, other-HEI, media, and third sector impacts on belief, knowledge, practices and values in relation to peacebuilding and reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Scotland. It also demonstrates the value of religious framings of mediation in the rebuilding of intergroup trust in communities which have experienced violent conflict linked to ethnic and religious identities, impacting on international donor behaviour.

2. Underpinning research

The impact builds on a longstanding tradition of work on conflict and peace-building in the School of Divinity by Clegg (SL Divinity 2007-present), Mitchell (SL 2001, Professor, 2011-present), O'Donovan (Professor 2005 – 12), and Wilkes (Research Fellow 2011-present)

Much journalistic and scholarly commentary on the role of religion in conflict and violence identifies religion as the principal causal factor. The research of academics at Edinburgh shows that this neglects the role of secular factors – such as economic competition, post-imperial nationalism and political use of media to scapegoat minorities – in many religiously-linked conflicts. The research identifies religion not only as a source of conflict but as a potent factor in the restraint of violence, and in mediation and peacebuilding in post-conflict settings.

Mitchell's research reveals the role of media and public communication technologies in the instigation of civil conflicts, and their potential in peacebuilding. It sheds light on how individuals and communities remember and reframe violence (3.1). Certain kinds of memorialization and reporting can contribute to ongoing cycles of violence. For example, Second World War news footage was recycled over five decades later to keep 'dangerous memories' of past wrongs in the Balkans alive. Subsequent research demonstrated how sermons, posters, murals, films, radio broadcasts and cartoons have all been used in an attempt to encourage populations to fear, to fight the 'other', or even to kill 'others' for a putative greater good.

Research has also investigated closely the interface of religion and violence. For example, Mitchell (3.2) has investigated religiously-motivated strategies to break such cycles of violence. O'Donovan's research (3.5) on 'Just War' reveals the role of religion in ethical and legal framings of conflict and violence which restrain violence and war. Meanwhile the research undertaken by Clegg (3.3, 3.4) and Wilkes (3.6, 3.7) reveals the role of religion in mediation, peacebuilding and the repair of communities and societies affected by violence and war.

Taken together, this body of research demonstrates that religious framings and religious ethics are central to the task of addressing the roots of violent conflict, of transforming cycles of violence and of healing the consequences of violence and war linked to ethnic and religious identities.

The research findings are mobilized by Wilkes, supported by the Project Team which includes Mitchell as PI, Clegg and O'Donovan as Project Advisors, and local researchers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in an empirical action-research project (funded by an anonymous

UK/Dutch trust £205k, 2010-15). The project adopted a grounded theory approach which enabled research subjects to identify a range of independent variables in the roots of conflict, and in mediation and reconciliation projects and efforts. The research revealed that although development agencies and local academics have adopted the negative characterisation of religion as a source of conflict, civil society groups, members of religious communities, teachers and others believe that religion remains a potential source of moral values and trust and hence represents a crucial resource in mediation, peace-building and community reconstruction. The open-ended project design enabled pathways to impact to be built into each stage of the research, as foreseen and unforeseen impacts were fed back into the development of the research. It stood in sharp contrast to most international donor sponsored research and work in that field, by taking a bottom up rather than a top down approach to the issues.

3. References to the research

3.1 Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2007): **available from HEI.**

3.2 Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Promoting Peace, Inciting Violence: The Role of Religion and Media* (Routledge, 2012) (REF 2)

3.3 Cecelia Clegg, 'Embracing a threatening other: identity and reconciliation in Northern Ireland', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007), 173 – 87: **available from HEI.**

3.4 George Wilkes, 'Religious Attitudes to the Middle East Peace Process', in Philip Broadhead, ed., *Can Faiths Make Peace?* (IB Tauris, 2005, 25 – 35: **available from HEI.**

3.5 George Wilkes, Ana Kubric, Gorazd Andrejc, Zorica Kuburic, Marko-Antonio Brkic, Muhamed Jusic, Zlatiborka Popov-Momcinovic, *Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Survey of Popular Attitudes in Four Cities and Regions: Banja Luka, Bugojno, Mostar and Sarajevo* (2012): **available from HEI.**

4. Details of the impact

Early discussions in project planning involving Edinburgh researchers established that research on the religious framings of conflict resolution of project members was not widely known, and had not been tested in areas affected by religiously-linked violence. It therefore provided an original and significant theoretical underpinning for an action research project in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), a part of the former Yugoslavia which had been affected by Christian-Muslim conflict and which was a place where these claims could be disseminated and tested, whilst at the same time interacting with those reconciliation processes.

Surveys were conducted within local communities in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Mostar, and Bugojnon in BiH on factors involved in conflict and reconciliation. The survey findings were subsequently discussed in a focus group: 'There were 14 persons present at the focus group discussion (13 women, 1 man). They discussed the findings from the Survey. Most of them agreed with the findings of the Survey believing that it is easier to build trust at the local level, among "ordinary" people and that there are no problems there. They think that the political elites are to be blamed for the current situation and that religious communities should be having a more important role in this process' (5.1).

The action research increased knowledge and understanding of the role of religious beliefs, identities and values in exposing and resolving the roots of conflict, and in peacebuilding, among religious leaders, school and university teachers and civil society leaders in communities affected by conflict. Sources 5.4 and 5.5 show that these were understandings that they were able to put into practice in their own work. It also contributed to understanding of the potential value of engaging religious framings, religious leaders and religiously-linked values in peacebuilding and reconstruction among professionals and non-governmental organisations working in economic development, mediation and reconstruction in BiH, and in Croatia, Serbia and Scotland as evidenced in 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4below.

Interviews with specialists and stakeholders were undertaken in mid-2010 and January

2013, focused on 'paths to impact' (identifying key stakeholder relationships; identifying local styles of reconciliation work, and differentiating that work from international patterns and expectations; identifying topics which had received little academic treatment and which appear to divide publics). Public events and stakeholder meetings focused on discussing the findings and their implications and were held in Sarajevo in October 2012 (40 specialists attended two meetings) and in the four cities of the survey in December 2012 (100 stakeholders attended five meetings, in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Mostar, and Bugojno, and a further 25 were interviewed). The evaluation report of these meetings undertaken by an independent research consultant [*text removed for publication*] identified the productive role of the survey in generating new civil society engagements around truth-telling, reconciliation and peace-building (5.6) [*text removed for publication*].

Project impact was particularly strong in terms of generating policy engagements. The project report (3.5) became the major source referenced in the USAID call for a \$3.5m-\$4.5m funding programme entitled New Reconciliation Activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. USAID has confirmed that this report was important in defining the opportunity motivating the Call and in clarifying key public trends and challenges. The grant call identified the 'opportunity' for 'reconciliation activity in Bosnia-Herzegovina' by reference to this Project's key findings, and spelt out some of the Project differentiations across the population: 'Existing negative trends have prompted more people to see the need for a different way of doing things. Enough time has passed, and too much time has passed, for war-related traumas to continue to define people. There is a craving for normalcy, creating a fertile opening for peace-building interventions. The country context is ripe for reconciliation interventions' (5.2).

As a result of meeting team members, the mayors of Mostar and Bugojno declared that they would now host a further public meeting focused on reconciliation in their locality, using the survey material on their locality. Since their offices are the most effective local actors capable of recruiting a cross-section of participants to a neutral space, this is a significant pathway to impact. The meeting at Bugojno was held on 28 November 2012, and brought together 31 participants including local religious leaders, politicians, city officials and others [*text removed for publication*]. Journalists including TV were also there. The meeting at Mostar, 18 December 2012, comprised a small group, including mayor, a leading journalist, religious leader, university academic [*text removed for publication*].

A subsequent Konrad Adenauer Stiftung report used the Project findings and impacts to suggest: 'A glimmer of hope therefore remains that society in Bosnia and Herzegovina will grow to become whole again. But there is still a long way to go where coming to terms with the past is concerned' (5.3).

In interviews with the Project's external impact evaluator, a series of interlocutors affirmed the value of the study for their work, indicating the intention to use it. 'One interesting thing that can be specified, for example, is the research that we did last year in BiH on this issue in cooperation with the University in Edinburgh. We are continuing it now with a larger sample, and it showed that citizens have expressed a degree of confidence in the contribution of religious leaders to the process of reconciliation.' Professor from University of Eastern Sarajevo (5.4).

Others gave their views but were unwilling to be quoted on the constructive impacts of the project in engaging religious actors in peace and reconciliation: these include individuals from the youth initiative KULT; from two prominent research centres (Analitika and the Center for Advanced Studies); from leading NGOs in the reconciliation field (Centre for Non-Violent Action, Network for Building Peace/Catholic Relief Services, the Research and Documentation Centre Sarajevo, and Soul for Europe) and from the leadership of four political parties (SDA, PDP, HDZ 1990 and Naša stranka).

The project also provided significant impetus towards the shaping of two further initiatives:

Pluralism in Crisis, an IAS-funded interdisciplinary network linking Scottish and international specialists, coordinated by the Edinburgh project team, developed models for pluralism inspired by early discussions of the project in 2010.

The Edinburgh Peace Initiative was launched in 2012, bringing specialists and civil society organisations together in a process focused on local and international networking. Project findings were integrated into the inaugural international conference on peacebuilding and civil society.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[The following weblinks are to original webpages but should these be unavailable a pdf of the page can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/oboupzw>]

5.1 Nahla stakeholder meeting report, December 2012

<http://english.nahla.ba/tekstovi10.aspx?tid=230>

5.2 USAID, New Reconciliation Activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina grant call closed 13 July 2013. [text removed for publication]. Live link to the grant call at http://www.hedprogram.org/media/news_releases/USAIDRFAs_NonHED_2013.cfm

5.3 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung International Report 4/2013, 'International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Coming to Terms with the Past in the Affected Countries', pp. 48-49. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_34089-544-2-30.pdf?130422170550

5.4 Interview with Z. Popov-Momčinović at <http://www.balkaneu.com/interview-professor-university-eastern-sarajevo-zlatiborka-popov-momcinovic/>

5.5 The research project, and related links and activities, are described at <http://relwar.wordpress.com/activities/research/rebuilding-after-conflict-in-bosnia-herzegovina/>

5.6 [text removed for publication]

5.7 Corroborating Contacts

5.7a Edinburgh Peace Initiative coordinator. Corroborating impact of project on creation of Edinburgh Peace Initiative

5.7b Professor at Cornell University, partner in Pluralism in Crisis network. Corroborating impact of project on design and development of Pluralism in Crisis programme

5.7c Member of Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo, Bosnian Academy of Arts and Sciences. Corroborating the impact of the project in shifting the grounds on which the role of religion in reconciliation is perceived amongst experts, opinion leaders and the wider public. Corroborating the long-term impact of the project results in Bosnia-Herzegovina of the inclusion of local specialists in the planning process.