

International Symposium

RELIGIOUS PEACE-BUILDING, INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, MIGRATIONS and REFUGEE CRISIS

April 19, 2021

Koper, Online

On one hand, interreligious dialogue in Europe is more developed and dynamic than ever before, and on the other hand, interreligious relations, with the rise of nationalisms and in the shadow of the refugee crisis, and COVID-19 pandemic are under strong pressure and are being the victims of rough politicization. Critical understanding of the dynamics and different contexts of interreligious dialogue and of the obstacles to the kind of dialogue is crucial for identifying the best opportunities for the success of dialogue and facilitating life in religious plurality.

The main focus of the symposium is the search for new paradigms, models and possibilities for the interreligious dialogue, and the search for new **ethical criterion and theological responses to the refuge and pandemic crisis** and the connection of these insights with a new ethics of religious peace-building in the light of mutual interdependence and cohesion, and rethinking the role of moral and intellectual virtues, communication, and the importance of inclusion of women's voices in the framework of the interreligious dialogue.

Symposium organising committee

Chair: Prof Nadja Furlan Štante, Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for Philosophical Studies

Symposium's secretary: Dr Maja Bjelica, Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for Philosophical Studies

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Symposium's Programme

April 19, 2021

9.00

Opening of the Symposium

Nadja Furlan Štante, Science and Research
Centre Koper, Slovenia

Rado Pišot, Director of the Science and
Research Centre Koper, Slovenia

9.15–11.00

Panel I

BUILDING INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Chair: **Nadja Furlan Štante**

Nedžad Grabus: Interreligious Dialogue or
Conflict among Religions?

Bojan Žalec: Positive Relationships and the
Philosophy of Resonance: The Muslim Context

Vojko Strahovnik: Utilizing Religious and
Ethics Education to Fight Polarization and
Radicalization of Youth: The Example of the
EDUC8 Project

11.00–11.15

Break

11.15–13.00

Panel II

MIGRATION & INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS

Chair: **Anja Zalta**

**Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović, Jadranka
Đorđević Crnobrnja**: Challenges and
Possibilities of Interreligious Dialogue at the
Local Level: The Case of Bayram Sofra in
Belgrade

Lana Peternel: Religious Dialogue and Socio-
historical Development of Islamic Community
in Sisak, Croatia

Gašper Mithans: Catholic Ethnic Parishes and
Immigrant Community Associations in the
USA: The Case Study of Slovenian Immigrants
in California

13.00–14.30

Break

14.30–15.45

Panel III

RELIGIOUS PEACE-BUILDING

Chair: **Vojko Strahovnik**

Nadja Furlan Štante: Strengths and
Weaknesses of Women's Religious Peace-
Building (in Slovenia)

Anja Zalta: Peacebuilding and Possibilities for
Peaceful Coexistence? Specifying Dark Strains
of Collective Imagination in Bosnia and
Herzegovina and in Slovenia

15.45

Concluding discussion

Nadja Furlan Štante, Science and Research
Centre Koper, Slovenia

Nedžad Grabus, *Mufti* of Islamic community in Slovenia; Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Interreligious Dialogue or Conflict among Religions?

In the modern world full of changes and challenges every day, we are trying to find an answer to the question of how to preserve social cohesion and stability with respect for religious diversity. This question is especially related to the situation of religious minorities in areas where the other religion is in majority. In respect of legal and regulatory standards, raising awareness of the importance of every being on Earth, is necessary to develop the narrative that will enable us that the other and different are not being perceived the enemy but as a close person to us, because we believe that the diversity of human skin color, language and religion is will of God and His creation. The Almighty God says: “*And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are sings for those of knowledge.*” (Al-Rum, 22)

Developing awareness of responsibility in the interpretation of religion has become imperative. Faith as the search for transcendent truth, the meaning of life, the development of ethical values that enrich our life is essential meaning of all religions. Simplification of religion and reduction to formal manifestation, closure in conservatism, understanding religious truths through historical reconstruction of events, which are marked by conflicts and constant misunderstandings, leads to the roughest political and ideological manipulation of religion. In modern liberal-hedonistic civilization, even religion is trying to be put into function of violence, hatred, extremism and terrorism. Could we continue the dialogue during the period of pandemic (COVID-19) or should we wait the post pandemic developments on the global scene?

Keywords: dialogue, conflict, faith, religion, violence.

Bojan Žalec, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology, Institute of Philosophy and Social Ethics

Positive Relationships and the Philosophy of Resonance: The Muslim Context

The paper is of philosophical nature. The speaker deals with the factors of dialogue and positive relationships. He approaches them with the help of the personalist and existential philosophy of relationship. As analytical tools, he uses concepts such as the I-Thou and I-It relationship (Martin Buber), stages of existence (Søren Kierkegaard) and resonance (Hartmut Rosa). He applies these general concepts in dealing with relationships and dialogue to the context in which Muslims (along with non-Muslims) are involved. In this regard, he highlights the importance of Islamophobia and extreme Islamism as negative factors on the one hand, and elements of Islam and Christianity that have a dialogical and positive relational character and potential on the other.

Keywords: Muslims, factors of positive relationships, Islamophobia, extreme Islamism, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, Hartmut Rosa, resonance, Islam, Christianity

Vojko Strahovnik, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology
Roman Globokar, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology
Mateja Centa, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology

Utilizing Religious and Ethics Education to Fight Polarization and Radicalization of Youth: The Example of the EDUC8 Project

The talk's main aim is to demonstrate the importance of religious education and ethics education as a tool for the prevention of radicalization and polarization. UNESCO's policy brief with the title Preventing violent extremism through education: Effective activities and impact lists the following among the "pull factors" or individual motivations for violent extremism and radicalization: "individual backgrounds (search for identity, adolescent crisis, the attraction of violence) and identification with collective grievances and narratives of victimization." It also includes "marginalization, injustice and discrimination" among the "push factors" or conditions conducive to extremism and radicalization. For the education to address the problems of extremism, radicalization, and polarization in particular concrete educational activities, the educational experiences must be designed to actuate the mentioned factors and establish an openness for transformation. We will present the case of the Educ8 project (Educate to Build Resilience). EDUC8 is an interdisciplinary, multi-track project conceptualized to build resilience in children and young people against radicalization and polarization through religious education in secondary schools and out-of-school settings. The developed educational program consists of seven shallow modules (with a panoptic view of all included religions and ethics) and twenty-four deep modules developed for particular religious education programs and ethics education. In the talk, we will present the project's rationale, the educational program's design, and examples of educational tools.

Keywords: interreligious dialogue, (religious) education, polarization, radicalization violence, youth.

Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović, Institute for Balkan Studies SASA
Jadranka Đorđević Crnobrnja, Institute for Ethnography SASA

Challenges and Possibilities of Interreligious Dialogue at the Local Level: The Case of Bayram Sofra in Belgrade

The Islamic Community of Serbia and the cultural society of Muslims – *Gajret*, have been organizing the Bayram sofras since 2009 as the celebration which symbolizes the end of Ramadan fasting. The celebration is held in the public space in front of the Bajrakli mosque in Belgrade. Since it is organized as part of the celebration of Ramazan Bayrami, its meaning can be observed and analyzed in a religious, but also in a broader social context. In this paper, we observe the Bayram sofras in the context of learning about Islam, as the minority religious community, but also as an event which initiates interreligious dialogue at the local level. Using the theoretical concepts of interreligious dialogue, we are focusing on the role of minority religious community and its engagement with other religions in the public space. In 2015 the Bayram sofras was especially dedicated for refugees coming from the Middle East. The ethnographic research of the Bayram sofras started in 2020 with the main focus on the social and religious elements of Ramazan Bayrami and the role of this religious festival in enhancing the visibility of this religious minority in Serbia.

Keywords: interreligious dialogue, minority religious communities, Islam, Belgrade, Bayram sofras

Lana Peternel, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia
Filip Škiljan, Institute for Migrations and Ethnic Studies, Zagreb, Croatia
Ankica Marinović, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia

Religious Dialogue and Socio-historical Development of Islamic Community in Sisak, Croatia

To tackle a phenomenon of social and historical development of Islamic communities in different political circumstances, our overarching research objective is to investigate specific patterns of inter-community dialogue that contextualise and shape different patterns of inter-religious communication. By following that aim, we will depict the development of social and religious identities of a small, but very significant, Islamic community in Sisak in Croatia. By using ethnographic approach in the Islamic community, we focus on an inquiry in their historical archives and on interviews with community members. The aim is to show how Islamic community in Sisak developed in different historical, political and social context and how their social relations are established, deployed, developed and strengthened. We presumed that the dynamic of historical communication practices reveals hidden patterns of acculturation outcomes of Islamic community in Sisak emphasising religious peace-building strategies along with obstacles in that endeavours.

Keywords: Islamic community, religious archives, ethnography, Sisak (Croatia)

Gašper Mithans, Institute for Historical Studies,
Science and Research Centre Koper

Catholic Ethnic Parishes and Immigrant Community Associations in the USA: The Case Study of Slovenian Immigrants in California

National or ethnic parishes were in the 19th century a compromise of Catholic leaders' interest in keeping their followers and lay people's desire to preserve their cultural heritage. Ethnic parishes have functioned as cultural hubs of immigrant communities, while at the same time supporting their gradual integration into American society. Over time the organizational strategy of the Church had changed with clear preference over territorial parishes. In the 1980s, the US Catholic Church introduced personal parishes, which are today an organizational alternative: an institutional response to diversification and meeting different ethnic and non-ethnic purposes. However, several personal parishes providing service to communities of European ancestry, including Slovenian, have been forced to close or to merge, usually because of lack of clergy, dwindling Mass attendance (also due to dispersed population and increasing number of elderly parishioners), and financial reasons. This issue is the focus of the paper, presenting parishioners' resistance to the closure of Croatian-Slovenian Church of the Nativity of Our Lord in 1994 and its subsequent reopening two years later as an empowerment moment among the Catholic Slovenian and Croatian Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, re-building of religious community within this "multi-cultural ethnic parish", now shared between Poles, Croats and Slovenians, prove to be challenging. Organizational issues, mostly related to declining number of interested public with no recent larger emigration wave and highly assimilated second and third-generations of immigrants and/or struggles over "representations of the Slovenhood" between newcomers and oldtimers, young and elderly, have several other immigrant associations as well: halls, societies, and newspapers. Which opens the question: are these associations going to adapt (and how) to new circumstances that most likely demand better collaboration within and across the diaspora?

Keywords: Slovenian immigrants, ethnic parish, Catholics in the USA, California

Nadja Furlan Štante, Institute for Philosophical Studies,
Science and Research Centre Koper

Strengths and Weaknesses of Women's Religious Peace-Building (in Slovenia)

The purpose of the paper is to analyse important phenomenon of women's religious peacebuilding within challenges of religious pluralism, growing religious illiteracy and monolithic understanding of religions. Although voice of women and their engagement in inter-religious dialogue and religious peace-building, at least at a visible, formal level, is often omitted or ignored (in Slovenia), it is precisely at informal levels, in terms of concrete actions, that women's efforts to restore peace are very much alive and present (but academically and in theory not analysed nor valued enough).

While women have been marginalized from peacebuilding generally, the emerging field of religious peacebuilding has been particularly challenging for women.

Keywords: women, feminist theology, religious peacebuilding, interreligious dialogue.

Anja Zalta, Faculty of Arts, Sociology Department, University of Ljubljana

Peacebuilding and Possibilities for Peaceful Coexistence? Specifying Dark Strains of Collective Imagination in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Slovenia

The presentation will expose the issue of Islamophobic and Turkophobic (political) discourses in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the construction of the "Other" in the specific socio-cultural and historical context(s). Islamophobia and/as Muslim hatred in the south Slavic area has deep historic roots. However, the hostility to the "Turk" or Muslim is not unknown to the rest of Europe as well. The presentation will deal with the definition of Islamophobia combined with the Eurocentric understanding of racism, which can be and must be recognized in Orientalist discourses. These kinds of discourses are creating and maintaining images of the barbarian, uncivilized and irrational Other, portraying it as a passive subject on the one hand, but aggressive and dangerous on the other. In the second part the presentation will focus on Islamophobia or "Turkophobia" in the particular historical contexts and dynamics in/of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia.

The author believes that the deconstruction of the racist notion of the "Other" as well as an in-depth understanding of the special socio-cultural, historical, political and religious characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia are preconditions for consistent application of new models and methods for peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Muslims, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Turkophobia, racism, interreligious dialogue

Participants

Dr Jadranka Đorđević Crnobrnja has been employed at Ethnographic Institute of SASA since 1999. She is a senior research associate. She is mostly concerned with problems related to the research of minority communities in Serbia, migration processes in the present, issues regarding childhood and the field of legal ethnology and anthropology. She is the author of three monographs – *The Kinship in The Region of Vranje* (2001) and *Inheritance: In Between Customs and Law* (2011) and *We never cut ties with Gora. Ethnicity, community and transmigrations of Gorani people in Belgrade* (2020) as well as a number of academic articles published in national and international academic publications. She participated in several international conferences and domestic scientific gatherings.

Dr Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Belgrade, Serbia). Her academic research has been primarily focused on the anthropology of religion, religion and migration, and contemporary evangelical movements in Serbia and Romania. She has published academic papers in various languages, edited volumes, and participated in numerous programs, workshops, and international conferences worldwide. In 2017, she was awarded the position of Visiting Fellow at the University College Cork – Study of Religions (Ireland). Her book *Double Minorities in Serbia: Distinctive Aspects of the Religion and Ethnicity of the Romanians in Vojvodina* was published in 2015 by the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA (Belgrade, Serbia). Aleksandra has extensive experience of working and researching in multi-ethnic, multiconfessional, and multilingual Christian communities in the Balkans. Recently, she co-edited the volume *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Aleksandra is particularly interested in the promotion of tolerance, interreligious dialogue, minority rights and student education. From 2019 she is a project coordinator of the Network for Dialogue at the International Dialogue Centre in Vienna. Her current research focuses on religion, contemporary migration crises and refugees in the Balkans.

Prof Nadja Furlan Štante is Principal Research Associate and Professor of Religious Studies at Science and research centre Koper. Her current research interests are women's religious studies, ecofeminism and inter-religious dialogue.

Dr Nedžad Grabus holds the position of Mufti of the Islamic Community in Slovenia. He is a professor of theology at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He also teaches at the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He was the editor of the first interreligious program in Sarajevo that dealt with topics of general importance and covered both Islamic and Christian issues. He participated in and lectured at various religious conferences all over the world, from Vatican, Oslo, Copenhagen and Cairo to Medina, Vienna, Istanbul, and numerous others In Slovenia. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the publication *Unity and Dialogue*. He continues to publish texts of interreligious nature and dialogue in the English, German, Slovenian and Bosnian languages. He personally organized and lectured at the international scientific symposium “Gaining Mutual Respect through Dialogue”. He is the author of five books. He is a vice president of Religions for Peace.

Dr Ankica Marinović is a scientific advisor at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. She graduated in Sociology and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. Ankica Marinović finished a postgraduate study in Sociology of Religion, a master's degree and a doctorate in the field of Sociology of religion at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. From 1988 to 1991 she worked as an intern at the Institute for Social Research, University of Zagreb, where in 1992 she became a research assistant, and in 2001 a research associate. Participated in numerous research projects: *Small Religious Communities in Zagreb* (1988–1991), *Sociocultural Development* (1986–1990), *Religious Changes and Values in Croatian Society* (1996–2002), *Curriculum Evaluation and Curriculum Development for Compulsory Education in Croatia* (2002–2005), *International project ISSP – International Social Survey Program* (2005–present), *International project Kotor Network* (2006–2008). Ankica Marinović is an author of numerous papers: *Is an anti-cult movement emerging in Croatia?*, *What about Our Rights? The State and Minority Religious Communities in Croatia: A Case Study*, *Religious communities in Croatia facing European challenges*; *Religious experience and socio-demographic indicators in the Croatian population*.

Dr Gašper Mithans is a Senior Research Associate at Science and Research Centre Koper. He specialises in the history of religion, and transnational and political history of Slovenia and Yugoslavia in the interwar period. He managed a post-doctoral project about interreligious relations and conversions in interwar Slovenia, project funded by the Europe for citizens programme and obtained a research project about religious change in Yugoslavia (2021–2024). Mithans was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at University of California, Berkeley (2020) and a visiting researcher at the University College Cork (2018).

Participants

Dr Lana Peternel is a research associate at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia; currently working on a project entitled Anthropological Research of Minority Religions in Historical Archives in Croatia funded by the Croatian “Unity through Knowledge Fund-UKF”. This project is conducted in collaboration with Dr James Kapaló, the Principal Investigator of the ERC project Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: ‘Hidden Galleries’ in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe. Lana Peternel received her PhD in anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb in 2009, focusing on ethnic identity and the acculturation process among adolescents with a migrant background in Croatia. Her research is further funded through Ministry of Science and Education’s fund for bilateral research collaboration between Slovenia and Croatia. Since 2019 Lana Peternel serves as the managing editor of the journal *Sociology and Space*. Her main fields of interest include research on the dynamics of religious and ethnic identity formation. Her areas of scientific interest and expertise are qualitative and quantitative research, adolescent subjective health and identity, along with religious identity and sustainability. In addition to her research activity, she teaches the course Digital anthropology at Zagreb University of Applied Sciences.

Prof Vojko Strahovnik is an Associate professor of philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and senior research fellow researcher at the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. In his research, he focuses on the areas of moral theory, practical ethics, and epistemology. The impact of his work ranges from new and important theoretical insights into the nature of normativity (the role of moral principles in the formation of moral judgments, the authority of the normative domain, epistemic virtuousness) to considerations related to practical dimensions of our lives (e.g., the role of guilt and moral shame in reconciliation processes, the importance of intellectual and ethical virtues, ethics education, global justice, animal ethics).

Dr Filip Škiljan, historian and archaeologist (Zagreb, 1980). After graduating from the Classical Gymnasium, he enrolled in a two-subject study of history and archaeology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, where he graduated in 2003. In 2004 he enrolled in the postgraduate study of Croatian history of the 20th century, and in 2006 he received his master’s degree and in 2009 his doctorate. From 2003 to 2006 he worked as the curator of the collection of photographs, videos and digital records in the Memorial Area Jasenovac. From 2006 to 2010, he worked as the head of the Archives of Serbs in the Republic of Croatia at the Serbian National Council. Since 2010, he has been employed at the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies. He was elected a research associate in 2010,

and a senior research associate in 2013, while he was elected a research advisor in 2019. In 2011, he was elected assistant professor at the Croatian Studies at the University of Zagreb for a term of five year. He is focused on the Second World War and national minorities in Croatia, about which he has published several monographs and scientific papers.

Dr Anja Zalta studied Sociology, Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. She is an Associate Professor for Sociology of Religion at the Sociology Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and author of many articles on religious traditions and identities, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, Asian religious paradigmes, and the role of monotheistic religions in the European cultural and religious history. Between 2004 and 2006 she was periodically living in Konya, Turkey, where she was conducting a research on secularism in Turkish society. In 2013, as an executive of the international project at the Istanbul University, she studied the rights of religious minorities, especially in the Tur Abdin province on the Turkish-Syrian border. She is a member of the board of the Slovenian Sociological Society, and a member of editorial boards of *Družboslovne razprave* and *Poligrafi* (both journals are in Scopus base). She is also the co-editor of the monograph *Women Against War System* (Lit Verlag, Zurich 2017).

Prof Bojan Žalec, PhD was born in 1966 in Ljubljana, Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia). He received his PhD in philosophy in 1999 from the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. In 2004, he joined the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana as a researcher, where he is still employed and occupies the position of the Head of the Institute of Philosophy and Social Ethics. He is a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (residency in Salzburg). He continued his studies – one year - at the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Würzburg in Germany. He was a visiting professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb (phenomenological ethics), and a visiting researcher at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. He has published around 150 scientific works.