

*Part II*  
*Historic Case Analyses*

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*Catholic-Pluralized*

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**Interreligious Dialogues in Switzerland**

*A Multiple-Case Study Focusing on Socio-Political Contexts*

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**Abstract**

Due to the federal structure of Switzerland, interreligious activities are also strongly influenced by cantonal contexts. Based on published material as well as on semi-directive interviews with key protagonists, the article analyses three cases of interreligious dialogue – two cantonal cases from the German-, or respectively French-speaking part of the country and the more general case of a women's network. In the cantonal cases, interreligious dialogue is strongly linked to state-religion relation and serves as a tool for inclusion of new religious communities and for social cohesion. In each of the two cases, there are specific forms and organisational structures of dialogue. In contrast to these examples, the third case is more independent of political interests and often adopts a critical stance. Thus two types of interreligious discourse and relationship with the state can be identified which can also be seen as complementary: either a

more critical voice keeping distance from power, or a collaboration with political structures strengthening the religious communities' influence within the system.

## Keywords

interreligious dialogue – Switzerland – integration – recognition – governance

In Switzerland, as in many other European contexts, interreligious dialogue has focused on Islam and Muslims as a key topic of political and social debate in recent years. Global events have triggered local reactions and raised awareness of Switzerland's religious and cultural diversity, which has led to controversial political debates. Interreligious dialogue in the Swiss context mainly refers to Christian-Muslim dialogue. However, other religious minorities, especially the Jewish community, are also involved in several of these activities.

Like the phenomenon itself, the research on interreligious dialogue in Switzerland is fairly new. One project took the form of a 'mapping' with the intention of showing the plurality of shapes and activities of interreligious dialogue.<sup>1</sup> It comprised 53 institutions on a national, cantonal or local level. A standard volume on religions in Switzerland contains a chapter that provides an overview of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.<sup>2</sup> In a few cases, selected dialogue initiatives have been analysed with a specific focus on their ideological background<sup>3</sup> or mechanisms of exclusion and "power imbalance"<sup>4</sup> or have been examined through the lens of network research.<sup>5</sup> Actors of dialogue have sometimes produced statements and position documents which have been analysed.<sup>6</sup> Interreligious dialogue has also been identified as a key issue in different fields of religious activities: It enables a path to social acceptance, which is particularly important for immigrant religious minorities.<sup>7</sup> It has a bridge-building function going beyond one's own community in Muslim

1 Husstein, *Initiativen und Organisationen*; cf. also Könemann/Vischer, *Interreligiöser Dialog in der Schweiz*.

2 Baumann/Stolz, *Vielfalt der Religionen*, pp. 344–378.

3 Haas, *Modes d'Education de Dieu*, pp. 121–138.

4 Baumann/Tunger-Zanetti, *Constructing and Representing*, p. 189.

5 Schmid, *Dialogue als Netz*.

6 Schmid, *Dialogue in Conflict*.

7 Cf. Baumann, *Religionsgemeinschaften im Wandel*, pp. 53; 55; 71–75.

youth work.<sup>8</sup> Finally, it is a key factor for opening chaplaincy to other religions.<sup>9</sup> Interreligious dialogue also redirects the job portfolio of imams towards some kind of social mediation.<sup>10</sup> Last but not least, the political dimensions of interreligious dialogue have been linked with the debate on recognition of the Alevi community.<sup>11</sup>

However, so far no systematic approach to the socio-political or socio-cultural context has been applied. Therefore, the following analyses place this perspective in the foreground. The types of activities and interactions, the commitment of actors etc. are all linked to the context. Yet the context has different dimensions, ranging from global to local, from national to cantonal. On each level, the political dimension of the context is paramount for interreligious dialogue. Like in other migration contexts, it is also strongly linked to political discourses when dialogue is seen as an instrument of social cohesion and governance of religion. Dialogue may comprise dialogue-oriented, but also symbolic and political, interests.<sup>12</sup> Despite the neutrality of the state, there often is some state intervention in the field of interreligious dialogue ranging from participation to support, whereas some state representatives prefer to not get involved.

Besides aiming at understanding, interreligious dialogue also implies strategic action based on specific interests of the respective religious communities. An important element of the Swiss context is that although being implemented in common projects and platforms, interreligious dialogue is in most cases still asymmetrical.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to Muslim groups and organisations, the churches are well-established and recognised institutions who thus also have a stronger capacity of governance that may have an impact on dialogue.

To explore the interaction between dialogue and context, I first look at Switzerland as context in a more general sense (1). Then three case studies are presented, two of which have a cantonal focus, first in German-speaking Switzerland (2) and second in French-speaking Switzerland (3), followed by a third case which is not bound to a cantonal context (4). Finally, some conclusions are drawn from a comparison of the cases (5).

8 Endres/Tunger-Zanetti, *Scouts in Rough Terrain*.

9 Schmid/Sheikhzadegan, *A Muslim Chaplaincy for Asylum Seekers?*

10 Schmid, *"I'm just an Imam, not Superman"*.

11 Suter Reich, *Zwischen Differenz, Solidarität und Ausgrenzung*, pp. 310–325.

12 Nagel/Kalender, *The Many Faces of Dialogue*, pp. 96 et seq.

13 Cf. Schmid, *Zwischen Asymmetrie und Augenhöhe*.

## 1 Switzerland as Socio-Cultural Context for Interreligious Dialogue

Switzerland is not a classical nation state, but comprises 26 cantons and four linguistic groups and is thus highly federal and decentralised.<sup>14</sup> There is a territorial repartition of the country based on languages, which has been very stable over the last decades. One could speak of the principle “cuius regio eius lingua”. There have also been strong territorial repartitions according to the two major Christian churches, so that there were Catholic, Protestant or mixed cantons. However, since the 19th century, and even more so for several decades now, the degree of mixing has increased. Moreover, it can be observed that the number of members of the Reformed and Roman Catholic Churches has massively decreased: While in 1970 more than 90% of the population belonged to the two major churches, and in 2000 still more than three quarters did, by 2017 this number had fallen to 60.9%. At the same time, the number of nondenominational persons increased to a quarter of the population. In addition, the increased number of Muslims (5.2%) along with members of other religions (1.7%) and other Christian faith communities (5.8%) express a high degree of social pluralisation.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, differences between the Christian denominations, which had earlier also led to social demarcations, could largely be overcome. Ecumenical dialogue plays an important role in many fields like chaplaincy or social relief so that in most interreligious activities today Catholics and Reformed Christians appear side by side.

There is a shared political culture in the whole of Switzerland, but in a cultural sense, people rather belong to one of the four linguistic groups.<sup>16</sup> Thus being “Swiss” is more of a synthesis.<sup>17</sup> Switzerland is characterised by strong federalism. According to the Swiss constitution, the relationship between the state and religious communities is regulated at the cantonal level (Art. 72,1). Each of the 26 cantons has its own system of regulation of religion ranging from more cooperative to more secularist models of church-state relations. The cantons can thus decide over, e.g. the existence of specific regulations on different issues like chaplaincy in public institutions, religious education in public schools or recognition of religious communities in each canton. Religious organisations are also structured according to the cantons’ structures. Even the local congregations often have more impact than the national level. Muslim

14 Altermatt, *Die Schweiz in Europa*, pp. 131 et seq.

15 Cf. Bundesamt für Statistik, *Religionen*.

16 Altermatt, *Die Schweiz in Europa*, p. 133; Holenstein, *Kulturphilosophische Perspektiven*, p. 15.

17 Holenstein, *Kulturphilosophische Perspektiven*, p. 15.

communities also adapted to the Swiss political structures and thus in many cantons multi-ethnic Muslim umbrella-organisations have been founded which are often engaged in interreligious activities. The poet Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz highlights the dominance of the cantonal identity over the national identity: “Nous ne sommes pas “Suisse”, vous êtes Neuchâtelois, et moi, je suis Vaudois, des ressortissants de véritables petits pays pourvus de nombreuses caractéristiques authentiques.”<sup>18</sup> These strong cantonal identities also influence the debates in Muslim associations. So for example in the Canton of Vaud, Muslims discuss about being “Vaudois et musulman”.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, in the case of Islam and Muslims, the national level also plays a significant role. From 2001 and again in the context of the minaret initiative and other issues linked to the debate about Islam, there was an extensive media coverage of these issues which took place at a national level.<sup>20</sup> Matteo Gianni speaks of the “Muslim question” which is often negotiated in a unilateral and essentialising manner constructing otherness and claiming securitisation as well as assimilation.<sup>21</sup> Thus for interreligious dialogue both the national and the cantonal context may be relevant.

These initial conditions strongly influence the selection of cases for this study. Due to the federal character of Switzerland, a multiple-case design – however, for pragmatic reasons limited to three cases – was chosen that enables some comparison.<sup>22</sup> A purposeful “selective sampling [...] according to a preconceived, initial set of criteria”<sup>23</sup> was conducted before starting the research. As the focus is on the socio-political and socio-cultural context, cases in which cantonal politics play a key role formed the starting point. On a more general level, it was required that the cases to be analysed are accessible, information-rich and bring forth continuous dialogue activities with a social impact. Two cantonal cases with common characteristics were first selected. When focusing on state governance, cantons with a strong interaction between the state and interreligious dialogue are more significant, whereas in the laic cantons (Geneva and Neuchâtel) this is less the case. At the same time, the two cantonal cases should imply some variation due to “contrasting situations”.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the cases of German-speaking St. Gallen and French-speaking Vaud

18 Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz à Denis de Rougemont, quoted from Reszler, *Les Suisses (s'ils existent ...)*, p. 40.

19 Cf. Collet, *Les Musulmans*.

20 Cf. Gonzalez, *Quand la Droite Nationaliste Montre les Minarets*, pp. 73 et seq.

21 Cf. Gianni, *Muslims' Integration*.

22 Cf. Yin, *Case Study Research*, pp. 46–54.

23 Fletcher/Plakoyiannaki, *Sampling*, p. 837.

24 Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 54.

were chosen. These two cantons also have different religious history: Vaud is traditionally Protestant, but has developed into a canton with a co-dominance of Catholics and non-affiliated. St. Gallen as a traditional parity canton has developed into a canton with strong Catholic dominance.<sup>25</sup>

As a further step, the third case was selected as a contrasting, “extreme case”.<sup>26</sup> This case should not be tied to cantonal contexts, but should be cross-cutting and more oriented towards national debates. Here the case of the Interreligious Think-Tank was chosen, which also positions itself – to a large extent – independently of politics and religious communities.<sup>27</sup> Therefore it has the function of a “deviant case study”<sup>28</sup> within the multiple-case design. Finally, it has to be emphasised that the sample aims at illustrating characteristics of interreligious dialogues in Switzerland without claiming to analyse the field exhaustively.

Case study research is characterised by the use of “multiple sources of evidence”<sup>29</sup> with their weaknesses and strengths. Therefore, the description and analysis of each case to be presented in the following sections is based on a diversity of sources: websites and documents referring to the different dialogue initiatives, newspaper articles, participant observation of events, continuous exchange with Muslim actors and state collaborators and finally semi-directive interviews, which have been transcribed and analysed according to their content.<sup>30</sup> With the help of these various approaches, a thorough picture of the respective case is intended.

25 Bundesamt für Statistik, *Appartenance Religieuse Prédominante*.

26 Beijenbergh, *Case Selection*, p. 61.

27 Two other dialogue initiatives would also provide interesting insights but were not chosen for different reasons: The Swiss Council of Religions represents an official platform of religious leaders and regularly interacts with the national government (cf. Schmid, *Dialog als Netz*, pp. 271–275). It would therefore not provide the strongest possible contrast. The organisation IRAS COTIS is a kind of network of religious communities and local dialogue initiatives also providing some services like guided tours for school classes. Due to its particular structure, an analysis would go beyond a short case study.

28 Beijenbergh, *Case Selection*, p. 61.

29 Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 97.

30 The following four interviews with five persons were conducted: one with a church delegate conducted in French (Vaud), one with a church responsible and one with an integration officer (St. Gallen), one with the two main responsible persons of the Interreligious Think-Tank – all the three conducted in German. All the quotes have been translated into English by the author.

## 2 Canton of St. Gallen: Interreligious Dialogue as a Tool for Integration

St. Gallen is traditionally one of the parity cantons with Catholic and Reformed regions and populations. For the Canton of St. Gallen the heritage of the Benedictine monastery played an important role. When it was secularised in 1805, the property as well as the buildings were distributed between the canton and the Catholic community (“Konfessionsteil”).<sup>31</sup> Until today, the buildings of the former monastery host both the cantonal administration and the administration of the Roman Catholic Church side by side in direct vicinity, which facilitates personal contacts and encounters.<sup>32</sup> St. Gallen is one of the cantons that still has a relatively high proportion of members of the two big Christian churches (44.7% Catholic and 21.4% Reformed in 2017). It is also among the cantons with the largest proportion of Muslims in the whole of Switzerland (7.5%).<sup>33</sup> Despite a sharp increase in the number of non-religious inhabitants, the Roman Catholic Church continues to comprise a high proportion of the population. In its constitution, the Canton of St. Gallen prominently highlights its Christian and humanistic basis (Art. 1,2). Later on in the constitution, the four recognised religious communities are mentioned: the Roman Catholic, the Protestant and the Christian Catholic Churches together with the Jewish Community. Their relationship with the state is defined as comprising both autonomy and their obligation to the law and principles of transparency and democracy (Art. 109–111).

There has been a round table of religions in the Canton of St. Gallen since 1999.<sup>34</sup> Three key impulses to start activities of dialogue can be identified: One of the starting points was the murder of a teacher in St. Gallen in 1999 who had helped a pupil who was being sexually abused.<sup>35</sup> Following this terrible event, a group was established by the government to reflect on activities and measures for living together in peace. Retrospectively Franz Kreissl narrates from a church perspective: “Triggered by a catastrophe, representatives of politics and religious communities met here for the first time and said: ‘How do we want to deal with each other? And which principles do we actually want to hold, live and implement in dealing with each other?’”<sup>36</sup> A second element was the establishment of the Cantonal Integration Office in 2001,

31 Cf. Kraus, *Schweizerisches Staatskirchenrecht*, pp. 256 et seq.

32 Cf. St. Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, *Unesco-Weltkulturerbe*.

33 Bundesamt für Statistik, *Religionszugehörigkeit nach Kantonen*.

34 Husistein, *Initiativen und Organisationen*, p. 59.

35 Cf. the testimony of the widow of the assassinated: Spirig, *Asche und Blüten*.

36 Interview with Franz Kreissl (17 June 2019).

which identified the religious communities as important protagonists of integration. Committed representatives of religious communities like Dr. Hisham Maizar, president of the Muslim umbrella organisation DIGO (Dachverband Islamischer Gemeinden der Ostschweiz und des Fürstentums Liechtenstein) until 2015, who played an important role in the dialogue between the Muslim communities, the churches and the state constitute a third element. Marlen Rutz Cerna, head of the cantonal integration office, states: “And that is probably what was necessary, for the canton to say, ‘but religious communities are important for the state’. We would like to integrate them and show the people that they are not only bad.”<sup>37</sup>

As a concrete outcome of these different processes, the week for interreligious dialogue and integration (“Interreligiöse Dialog- und Aktionswoche ida”) took place for the first time in 2005. It is not considered as a theological dialogue of experts but as a platform to meet and share different experiences. Kreissl highlights the aspect of encounter and mutual understanding as a response to hostility and negative energy after 9/11: “The only answer is encounter. [...] And the action week is nothing more than an opportunity to create encounters. Through concerts, art, dialogue, conversations, discussions, cooking and dancing together, singing, and all sorts of the like.”<sup>38</sup> The project group is headed by the cantonal integration office and comprises eight regional integration officers and a representative of the Roman Catholic and Reformed church and of the DIGO.<sup>39</sup> It also serves as a vessel for continuous exchange of information.

At the ida-week in 2005, the “St. Gallen Declaration for the Coexistence of Religions and interreligious Dialogue” was signed by the Roman Catholic Bishop, the President of the Church Council of the Reformed Church, the President of the Muslim umbrella organisation (DIGO) together with the State Councillor of Home Affairs of the Canton and the City Councillor of the city of St. Gallen.<sup>40</sup> The declaration is a statement against prejudices and radicalism and in favour of peace, human rights and tolerance and has a strong symbolic character. The declaration focuses on differences several times: It formulates the target “not to obscure the differences, but to make them understandable” (2.b). It advocates “a culture of diversity” (2.d) in which differences are “relative”. It is the state which enables coexistence in a diverse society: “We are committed to a diverse, but best possible integrated society, based on fundamental

37 Interview with Marlen Rutz Cerna (17 June 2019).

38 Interview with Franz Kreissl (17 June 2019).

39 Kanton St. Gallen, *Über die ida*.

40 *St. Galler Declaration for the Coexistence of Religions and Interreligious Dialogue*.



humanitarian values and a democratic constitutional state.” (2.d). People without any religious affiliation are also mentioned at the beginning of the declaration and can be seen as part of the diversity presented later on in the text: “A considerable number of people do not feel the need for any kind of religious preference.” (1.) The declaration has been translated into 14 languages and can be considered as an outstanding example of interreligious dialogue.<sup>41</sup>

In 2007 a book was published comprising a documentation of the signing ceremony, a demographic analysis of multi-religious society, reflections about the declaration from the perspective of different religious communities, reflections on the political context and relevance as well as reports from implementation into practice. Katrin Hilber, responsible State Councillor at that time, clarifies in her preface, that it is not the state’s role to participate in interreligious dialogue but to provide favourable conditions for dialogue and cohabitation.<sup>42</sup> However, there is strong logistic and financial support from the state.

The ida-week has been linked with the “Buss- und Betttag”, a common ecumenical holiday with a strong link to social cohesion and political authorities, which, since 2009, has integrated an interreligious ceremony. In several cantons there are attempts to open this tradition for other religious communities.<sup>43</sup> The ida-week’s focus on symbolic meetings including different religious representatives in the courtyard of St. Gallen monastery produces strong images of living together in plurality.<sup>44</sup> A recent document from 2018 illustrates that the discussion on the declaration continues: Achievements like the introduction of Muslim chaplaincy in the Cantonal Hospital in St. Gallen and the burial ground for Muslims in St. Gallen cemetery are mentioned and are seen as an encouragement for an expansion of such measures for which the ida-week provides a basis.<sup>45</sup>

A further characteristic of the ida-week is that it aims at proximity. Besides central events in the capital, it encompasses a large canton-wide programme. When reconfirming the St. Gallen Declaration at its 10th anniversary, after the official ceremony, all citizens were invited to sign the declaration and can still do so via the official website. The basic idea of the declaration has also spread to other towns in the canton. For example, similar declarations were adopted

41 Cf. Ritter, *Religiöse und kulturelle Vielfalt*, pp. 213 et seq.

42 Departement des Innern des Kanton St. Gallen, *Von den Verpflichtungen des interreligiösen Dialogs*, p. 9.

43 Cf. Faber, *Ein verbindender Feiertag*, p. 242; Wenk, “*Ich höre dein Gebet*”.

44 Cf. Amt für Gesellschaftsfragen St. Gallen, *Eindrücke vom interreligiösen Betttag 2013*.

45 Kanton St. Gallen, Amt für Soziales, Kompetenzzentrum Integration und Gleichstellung, *Ida Forum 2018 vom 20. September 2018*.

in Wil and Altstädten. A radio project “ida on air” aims at reaching younger target groups. Moreover, pedagogic material has been made available.<sup>46</sup>

The churches in this dialogue process intend to support smaller religious communities: “In this respect the big churches have always tried to take the smaller communities with them, but this often leads to the feeling that ‘we are not seen properly.’”<sup>47</sup> This shows the ambivalence of such symbolic inclusion events. The ida-week offers religious communities the opportunity to attest to their belongingness to the canton and society. Eventually, in 2019 the Serbian Orthodox Church signed the declaration. While the Muslim community is not recognised, it can be an equal partner in the ida organisation and programme.<sup>48</sup> After a political debate and some support by religious communities themselves, the government decided in 2018 not to proceed further with the possibility for a recognition of religious communities according to private law.<sup>49</sup> Since 2017 the ida-week has been complemented by the “St. Gallen conference on issues of religion and state” which focuses on the political level.

The canton gave the decisive impulse for the dialogue process and shows a strong commitment in terms of logistics. Reinhold Bernhardt in his typology of interreligious dialogue takes the ida-week and the St. Gallen Declaration as examples of a politically initiated dialogue as part of a political agenda.<sup>50</sup> It cannot be denied that the canton – beyond logistics and moderation – has a kind of ‘broker’ or ‘usher’ function attributing a place to the religious communities and interreligious dialogue in society. This aims at harmony and stability, but also tends to disempower the religious communities. Even if the canton has initiated a fruitful process, there is the risk of an overemphasis on religion as a tool for social cohesion. However, the project also takes up overarching national debates and transforms them into locally tangible and positive images. Against the background of the ambivalence of the state’s role, Marlen Rutz Cerna reflects on a stronger responsibility of the religious communities in the future, “so maybe we can take ourselves out at some point”.<sup>51</sup> Regardless, the ida-week has radiated and become a model for the civically organised Swiss-wide annual week of religions taking place since 2007 which provides an umbrella platform for a large number of interreligious manifestations in the whole of Switzerland.<sup>52</sup>

46 Kanton St. Gallen, *Ideen für Projekte*.

47 Interview with Franz Kreissl (17 June 2019).

48 Kanton St. Gallen, *Über die ida*.

49 Cf. *St. Gallen anerkennt weiterhin nur vier öffentlich-rechtliche Religionsgemeinschaften*.

50 Reinhold, *Inter-Religio*, pp. 94–101.

51 Interview with Marlen Rutz Cerna (17 June 2019).

52 Inforel, *Woche der Religionen*; Scherrer, “Woche der Religionen”.

### 3 Canton of Vaud: Interreligious Dialogue as a Condition for Recognition

The Canton of Vaud is a canton with a strong reformed tradition of a national church which was included into the organisation of the canton until 2003. Financial equality for the Roman Catholic Church was only reached in 1970.<sup>53</sup> The demographic situation changed dramatically during recent years: There was a strong decline in the number of individuals identifying as Protestants (from 62% in 1970 to 40% in 2000 and 24% in 2016) and a strong rise of the number of persons without religious affiliation (from less than 1% in 1970 to 13% in 2000 and 31% in 2016), whereas the number of individuals identifying as Roman Catholics remained fairly stable (33% in 1970, 30.1% in 2016).<sup>54</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that almost two thirds of Catholics have a migration background.<sup>55</sup>

The two churches keep a close link with the state as institutions of public law, whereas the Jewish community has the status of an institution of public interest. When the new Constitution of the Canton of Vaud from 2003 refers to the churches and religious communities, it first states two basic principles (Art. 169): the consideration of the spiritual dimension of the human person (“la dimension spirituelle de la personne humaine”) and the contribution of the churches and religious communities to social cohesion and the transmission of values (“la contribution des Églises et communautés religieuses au lien social et à la transmission de valeurs fondamentales”).<sup>56</sup> The Constitution particularly emphasises their mission for everyone (“leur mission au service de tous dans le Canton”) (Art. 170,2). This is the basis for the canton to finance the mission of the churches in the service of all in their spiritual, social, charitable, educational and cultural role through direct subsidies (and not through tax collection).<sup>57</sup> The law on the relationship of the state with the recognized religious communities mentions several fields in which this mission becomes visible, like health and solidarity, and states clearly: “The churches participate in interreligious dialogue.”<sup>58</sup>

53 Cf. Kraus, *Schweizerisches Staatskirchenrecht*, pp. 286 et seq.

54 Statistique Vaud, *Annuaire statistique Vaud 2019*, p. 55.

55 SPI St. Gallen, *Religionszugehörigkeit und Migrationshintergrund*.

56 Le Conseil fédéral, *Constitution du Canton Vaud*. Cf. Gardaz, *Le statut des Eglises*; Engi, *staatliche Finanzierung*, p. 277.

57 Cf. Gardaz, *Le statut des Eglises*, p. 168; Winzeler, *Einführung in das Religionsverfassungsrecht der Schweiz*, pp. 101–104; cf. also Reber, *Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften*, pp. 84–91.

58 État de Vaud, *Loi Sur les Relations entre l'Etat et les Eglises*, Art. 7,3.

Structures of interreligious dialogue were mainly implemented after 9/11. Christophe Monnot underlines that the implementation of interreligious dialogue in this context aimed at demonstrating that an open-minded, dialogue-oriented and solidary religion can be constitutive for society.<sup>59</sup> Like chaplaincy in different fields and institutions, since 2010 ecumenical and interreligious dialogue are part of the common missions (“missions communes”) that the two churches accomplish together in the name of the state and that are directed by a special commission. Due to the religious pluralisation, there has been a discussion about the recognition of further religious communities during recent years and the recognition procedure has started for the Muslim community, the Anglican Church and the Protestant Free Church FEV (Fédération évangélique vaudoise). Participation in interreligious dialogue is considered as one of the conditions for religious communities that want to be recognised. The implementation rules stress that the community has to participate in interreligious dialogue through interreligious bodies, conferences or celebrations (Art. 8).<sup>60</sup> As the article uses the terms ‘interreligious’ and ‘intra-religious’ respectively, the relationship with the recognised churches seems to be paramount. The Muslim umbrella organisation UVAM (Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes), that has demanded recognition of public interest, emphasises the importance of interreligious dialogue on their website. The UVAM considers civic values as the common basis of interreligious dialogue, whereas existing differences are seen as not very important for living together.<sup>61</sup> Thus, interreligious dialogue performs a function of inclusion for new communities. While interreligious dialogue provides a common platform of communication with the state for religious communities, it also offers the possibility for the state to channel activities of the religious communities and to value their social utility. Dialogue also provides a legitimisation for state support of religious communities towards people without any religious affiliation.

Interreligious dialogue in the Canton of Vaud is highly institutionalised in a threefold way: In 1998 the association l'Arzillier was founded when a house of the same name was donated to the Reformed Church. The Arzillier as a house of dialogue provides its symbolic home and can be called “Maison-mère, mais sans contrôle”<sup>62</sup> which has a consultative function for grassroots dialogue. Besides the dialogue between the churches, religions and spiritual worldviews, the statutes of Arzillier also mention the dialogue between believers and

59 Monnot, *L'Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes*, p. 139.

60 Le conseil d'état du canton de Vaud, *Règlement d'Application de la Loi*, Art. 8.

61 Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes, *Dialogue Interreligieux*.

62 Interview with Dominique Voinçon (26 June 2019).

non-believers (Art. 2).<sup>63</sup> However, this dimension has not yet been particularly visible in the dialogue activities. The Chart of Arzillier focuses on “bridges of conviviality” as the main target of dialogue.<sup>64</sup> The committee of Arzillier consists of one member from both the Catholic and Reformed communities (both the dialogue commissioners of their churches), as well as one member from the Jewish and Bahai community and two from the Muslim community. All of them guarantee the link with their respective communities.<sup>65</sup> A Hindu representative is soon to be included. The Arzillier organises interreligious events (encounters, round tables, conferences) as in the annual Swiss-wide interreligious week in which political representatives regularly participate. In the case of terror attacks they also take a position in the name of their religious communities. As the two Christian members of the committee have a full employment by their churches, they can assume a key function in organisational matters. In contrast, the Muslim members do not have equal resources.

The second pillar is the MCDA (“Musulmans et chrétiens pour le dialogue et l’amitié”) with a specific focus on Muslims and Christians and is thus narrower than the Arzillier. The initial idea for dialogue and establishing MCDA arose shortly after 9/11 and was linked with the intention to demonstrate independence from events abroad and to emphasise the necessity of dialogue in the Swiss context.<sup>66</sup> There are a handful of local MCDA groups in some of the towns in the Canton of Vaud (Lausanne, Vevey, Payerne, Yverdon, Moudon). They enable a grassroots dimension of dialogue and its presence on the street depending on the local situation and the specific interests of the group members. The third pillar is the Interreligious Council in which the heads of the respective religions are represented and which can delegate certain tasks and projects to the Arzillier committee.

Interreligious dialogue in the Canton of Vaud is part of the relations between state and religions. Dominique Voinçon, responsible for interreligious dialogue in the Roman Church, describes the function of interreligious dialogue in response to state expectations in the Canton of Vaud as follows: “They expect us to do this kind of thing, they expect us to be relays for the government’s desire for religious peace in the canton of Vaud and for a welcome of the new communities.”<sup>67</sup> Voinçon alludes to all kinds of interreligious events. This shows that the state claims a high degree of power of definition in the

63 <https://www.arzillier.ch/>

64 <https://www.arzillier.ch/>

65 <https://www.arzillier.ch/>

66 BenMrad/Burkhard, *Musulmans et Chrétiens*, p. 11.

67 Interview with Dominique Voinçon (26 June 2019).

religious field. Consequently, interreligious dialogue in this institutional sense guarantees a space for religions in the public sphere by defining the “religiously correct”.<sup>68</sup> One can speak of a mutual support between state and interreligious dialogue. Voinçon further speaks of the financial support by both the state and the churches: “Thanks to government subsidies, we exist, we have a real place. And the state considers us to be the operational partner of interreligious dialogue in the canton and we have a real place.”<sup>69</sup> The emphasis is on the structurally anchored place that the dialogue has. It is therefore not a free-floating activity but an integral part of the social fabric of the Canton of Vaud.

The inclusion of new communities through interreligious dialogue may have an asymmetrical structure as it gives a high degree of power of definition to the already recognised communities. Interreligious dialogue acts as a kind of gateway to joint missions. New communities are also measured by interfaith dialogue as to whether they can gain access to common missions. For the churches, it is also about protecting the status of recognition by enabling this status also for Muslim communities but with strict conditions:

There would be an interest in opening this recognition to others so that they have the same common missions as Catholics, Reformed and Jews: prison and hospital chaplaincy as well as interreligious dialogue. And all this with a strict framework, which prohibits proselytism.<sup>70</sup>

There has also been some criticism concerning the issue of who is represented in dialogue and who is not – like smaller communities or Muslim minorities.<sup>71</sup> Thus, there is a danger that dialogue, conceived as an instrument of inclusion, will also reinforce certain forms of exclusion.

#### 4 Interreligious Think-Tank: Interreligious Dialogue as Social Criticism<sup>72</sup>

The Interreligious Think-Tank is a private initiative that was founded in 2008 as a result of many years of cooperation between women in interreligious

68 Cf. Lamine, *Mise en Scène de la “Bonne Entente”*, p. 9.

69 Interview with Dominique Voinçon (26 June 2019).

70 Collet, *“Il ne Faut pas se Moquer de Ceux qui ont Peur”* quoting Dominique Voinçon.

71 Cf. Keshavjee, *20 ans de l'Arzillier*, p. 7. A critique in this sense is also brought forward by Baumann/Tunger-Zanetti, *Constructing and Representing*, pp. 201–203.

72 This following chapter is partly based on Schmid, *Dialog als Netz*, and takes up some formulations of that text.

theology courses. It is an association that currently comprises six women who all live in German-speaking Switzerland and communicate in German language. Several members have a background in gender studies and interreligious dialogue, which gives a clear common thematic focus. The creation of the Interreligious Think-Tank was a reaction to the foundation of the Swiss Council of Religions as an official platform between the highest representatives of the churches and Jewish and Muslim communities in Switzerland: “The external impetus was the founding of the Council of Religions, which simply made us angry as women.”<sup>73</sup> This strengthened the desire to make the voices of women more audible in dialogue. However, it was never their intention to restrict themselves to gender issues but to raise their voices in current debates about different topics. The women transformed the experience of exclusion into dialogue activities with an intensity which had rarely existed before. The chosen term ‘Think-Tank’ indicates that it is a matter of first thinking together as a group and then communicating the results through common statements, declarations or booklets. The Think-Tank was also active in the minaret debate, which contributed to its fame. In its statement the Think-Tank raises 16 arguments against a minaret ban – an issue they considered as a defamation of Islam and a violation of religious freedom.<sup>74</sup>

The Think-Tank is an independent organisation which does not profit from financial support from the state or the churches. It is also completely independent of religious communities: “We have strictly imposed on ourselves to be institutionally distant and independent. And that also means that none of us may be employed in a Muslim, Jewish or Christian religious community. This simply leads to conflicts of interest.”<sup>75</sup> As independent individual thinkers, the members of the Think-Tank can take positions which stand against the official positions of the religious communities. Thus, they can be open for learning processes in interreligious dialogue providing space for criticism of one’s own religion.

The most important publication of the Think-Tank is its guidebook for interreligious dialogue, that has also been translated into English. It is a shared text with a common authorship and can be seen as an example of self-reflection of dialogue actors. The Think-Tank takes a critical position against any instrumentalisation of interreligious dialogue and aims to restrict it to its core function:

73 Interview with Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji (7 February 2019). Cf. Strahm/Kalsky, *Damit es anders wird zwischen uns*.

74 Interreligiöser Think-Tank, *16 Gründe für ein Nein*.

75 Interview with Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji (7 February 2019).

We feel it is important to stress that dialogue on its own cannot address and resolve all the questions that arise when different religions live and work together within a society. [...] Dialogue can, however, support the development of a broad, supportive foundation upon which equal rights and opportunities can be built.<sup>76</sup>

This comprises issues of basic rights like prayer rooms, burial grounds etc. The document also contrasts dialogue of women, who are often in a more independent position and who are freer in dialogue than men, who, due to their official authority positions, often have more impact on the religious communities.<sup>77</sup>

Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji stresses the particularity of the work of the Think-Tank in contrast to many other dialogue initiatives:

I've participated in many other interreligious circles or communities from time to time and you spend so much time explaining misunderstandings or saying why you find it impossible to do it like that and so on and so forth. You never get to this relationship of trust because there are fluctuations and everything. And we don't have all that, we can really concentrate on the content.<sup>78</sup>

The Think-Tank thus represents a kind of counter-image to official dialogues: "It is really something that develops interreligiously and the product really gets the predicate interreligious. Not just one next to the other, but it is really kneaded and interwoven with each other."<sup>79</sup> It is not about a public staging of dialogue, but results of an expert dialogue are presented: "We think in that sense first among ourselves and then carry it to the public. It is always our goal that it goes to the outside and has an impact."<sup>80</sup>

When looking at the positions of the Think-Tank, it is clear that they are closely related to the political context. Unlike other official statements, in the debate about the minaret ban, the Think-Tank clearly pleads for religious freedom. Here are two more examples of a critical analysis of social and political debates in Switzerland by the Think-Tank: In 2010, one year after the anti-minaret vote, it again published a statement which observed a harshened debate about Islam and aimed at strengthening Muslims who see society as

76 Interreligious Think-Tank, *Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Cf. also Berlis, *Addressing Structural Asymmetries*.

77 Cf. Interreligious Think-Tank, *Guidelines*, 1.2.

78 Interview with Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji (7 February 2019).

79 Interview with Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji (7 February 2019).

80 Interview with Doris Strahm (7 February 2019).



hostile to them. Interreligious dialogue should therefore gain more public visibility. Moreover, they criticise an instrumentalisation of women's rights for a politics hostile to Islam: "Men from those parties which propagate a backward-oriented image of women and who have been combatting for years postulates in favour of emancipation, advocate the liberation of 'poor, oppressed' Muslim women."<sup>81</sup> In 2015, the Think-Tank refers again to human rights as a basis and looks critically at a demagogic picture of a threat by refugees. It evokes religious values of solidarity, mercy, generosity and helpfulness as motivations for welcoming refugees looking for shelter.<sup>82</sup> The Think-Tank thus advocates critical alternatives to dominant positions on society, migration and pluralism.

Summing up, the Interreligious Think-Tank can be seen as an expression of protest, counter-image and counter-programme in several aspects: It presents an alternative to an often mainly, or exclusively, male dialogue;<sup>83</sup> it keeps its freedom from any kind of political instrumentalisation and state governance. Nevertheless, it is closely related to the political context on a mainly national level and tries to have political impact through contact with individual politicians and to interfere in public debates. In this sense, interreligious dialogue functions as a critical companion of social and political debates. Using the terminology of James M. Gustafson, it can be characterised as a "prophetic discourse" in a wider sense combining indictment, utopia and social criticism.<sup>84</sup> The Think-Tank is also a counter-image to a dialogue focused merely on encounter for its own sake and a celebration of communalities. Beyond that, the members of the Think-Tank always intend to reach intellectual depth and a content-oriented interreligious dialogue. It is again the relative context-independence that gives the members of the Think-Tank the freedom to do so.

## 5 Comparison and Conclusions

The three cases can be compared in different ways: first through a comparison between the two cantonal cases and second through a comparison between these two and the third case with a different framework. Both times, the comparison will be focused on the relationship with the state, forms and interactions and finally effects and impact.

81 Interreligiöser Think-Tank, *Ein Jahr nach der Anti-Minarett-Abstimmung*, p. 2.

82 Interreligiöser Think-Tank, *Schutzsuchende und Fremde*.

83 Cf. Bechmann, *Sarah and Hagar*, also referring to the Interreligious Think-Tank as one example.

84 Cf. Gustafson, *Varieties of Moral Discourse*, pp. 7–13.

The two cantonal cases share many structural elements, but are also marked by some specific differences:

1. *Relationship with the state:* With St. Gallen and Vaud, one sees two forms of state-religion relations, both of which can be regarded as cooperation regimes but with different designs. Both are highly determined by state conditions and frameworks. Whereas in St. Gallen there is more participation of the state in framing interreligious dialogue, the activities and relationships are less formalised than in Vaud where, in a regime of stricter separation, the state encourages and supports but does not act in cooperation with the religious communities.
2. *Forms and interactions:* The higher degree of centralisation combined with major events in St. Gallen contributes to a broader anchoring and perception of the dialogue events themselves than is the case in the canton of Vaud. Whereas in Vaud the dialogue is mainly realized through panel events and committees, in St. Gallen – besides similar forms – the ritual dimension plays a greater role, which can be interpreted as a Catholic heritage.
3. *Effects and impact:* Among the manifold effects of these dialogues that can be identified, there is symbolic inclusion, but also an interreligious expansion of hospital chaplaincy and the establishment of a Muslim burial ground (St. Gallen) as well as the gradual inclusion of new religious communities into the regulated relationship with the state (Vaud). Whereas in St. Gallen religion as such is attributed a place, in Vaud there is a stronger tendency of secularisation so that religion is seen in terms of peace and spirituality.

As for these two cantonal cases, they are deeply rooted into the legal and social situation of the respective canton and it would hardly be possible to transfer them to another context. Further comparison of all three cases reveals a strong contrast between the dialogue activities in the two cantons and the Interreligious Think-Tank as an example of a more independent project:

1. *Relationship with the state:* The major difference consists in the fact that the latter represents an independent network that is not involved in political structures or procedures in contrast to the cantonal cases. It thus has the freedom to develop and propagate an alternative vision of society challenging mainstream positions, whereas interreligious dialogue in the cantonal cases has to adapt to the political framework.
2. *Forms and interactions:* Whereas the cantonal activities are more structural and symbolic, in the case of the Think-Tank, dialogue is more content-related. Thus, also the outreach varies significantly. While the cantons try to involve a general public, the Think-Tank at least in its writings addresses more specialised target groups and stakeholders.

3. *Effects and impact:* For cantonal politics, dialogue serves as an instrument of integration and social cohesion which is often still linked to issues of migration. In contrast to this, the Think-Tank rather questions prevailing categories, resists to be instrumentalised by anyone and develops a post-migration perspective.

Looking at the Think-Tank on the one hand and at the cantonal cases on the other hand, two types of interreligious discourse and relationship with the state can be identified which can be seen as complementary: either a more critical (“prophetic”) voice keeping distance from power, or a collaboration with political power gaining influence within the system. The latter corresponds to the Swiss political culture which is more compromise-oriented. Both paths have their strengths and their shortcomings.

The three short case studies also show that there is a high degree of plurality and dynamic variance within Switzerland with regard to interreligious dialogue which can take on different forms in different contexts. Whereas one example goes beyond, two are closely linked to a territorial framework with a specific socio-cultural context. It becomes evident that local and regional dimension are central for interreligious dialogue. Thus, a country-centred macro-approach needs to consider activities and their impacts on different levels. Analyses of dialogue activities in other contexts may profit from looking at the Swiss cases and from determining their profile between independence and institutional inclusion, between critical distance to politics and collaborative participation.

### Biography

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