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Living Together

Can film help combatting hate speech against religious minorities?

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Increase in hate speech is a tendency worldwide. Group hostility on the basis of religious and ethnic identity is affecting not least human beings who are in a minority situation and hence more vulnerable. Hate speech may lead to hate crimes and even atrocities in attempts to genocide.

“Minorities are the overwhelming targets of hate speech. In social media usually more than 75% of false hate speech targets minorities in countries where we do have reliable disaggregated data.”

Fernand de Varennes, The UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

This brief summarizes main points from an expert panel that discussed the use of film in education as a part of the ICHR project. As a point of departure for the discussion, the panel watched examples of short films produced by the ICHR project in close cooperation with local partners in Iraq, Tunisia, India and Indonesia. The main questions were:

How do these films address good practice of inter-faith understanding? Can such films serve as tools for education that contribute to inter-faith understanding?

What challenges related to inter-faith understanding surface in the making of such films and use of them for educational purposes? How may such challenges be overcome or dealt with?

The Inclusive Citizenship and Human Rights (ICHR) project explores how films may be used in education to help prevent and combat ignorance and hostility based on religious differences and to ensure knowledge and understanding across such divides. Manifestation of religious diversity through religious sites and stories about young people visiting each other's religious sites are among the main topics explored.

“Your films and web stories on inter-faith understanding and inclusive co-existence are part of what we need to try to reach out to as many as possible to create a narrative and to help combat incitement to racial or religious hatred. As we hear in one of the films: Even through diversity we are united as members of the human family.”

Fernand de Varennes, The UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues at the ICHR expert panel at the hybrid conference “Living together” on December 7th 2022

In addition to the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issue, the panel included researchers in the fields of education, social science and human rights law as well as teachers, film producers and directors and experts from civil society organizations using film in their work to promote diversity and co-existence and to combat hate speech against minorities not least in religious grounds. The panel was organized as a hybrid conference at HL-senteret on December 7th 2021 and was moderated by the ICHR project manager, Ingwill Thorson Plesner.

“Arts can play a big role in today’s world especially when we speak about minority rights and other human rights. The use of film is particularly engaging and efficient in teaching for youth because it is not only based on rational thoughts and on perceptions that may differ from place to place. As other forms of art, films appeal to different senses and emotions we all have as human beings.”

Ghassen Ayari, Tunisian film maker and civil society specialist on freedom of religion or belief

“What is special with those wonderful films that we saw today is that we saw both women and men, young and old, and most of the voices weren’t actually religious figure, and few of them were religious figures. This is different from the kind of inter faith dialogue we often see where mainly elderly men and mostly religious figures talking to each other.”

Mark Lattimer, Director of Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights



“It is a strength in education when the tools used appeals to both the cognitive and the emotional dimensions of the learning process. From a perspective of citizenship education the strength of film also can have a backside because as we know film or visual means can also be used for manipulation for propaganda. “

Claudia Lentz, Research Professor at HL-senteret

Claudia Lentz underlined that the concept which we are working with is narrative competence. What we want to develop in teachers and students working with film or visual narratives is the competence to both construct and develop your own narratives. Lentz said that the films shown were also a rich proof here that especially from a minority side this is a very important competence: to raise your voice to produce your own narratives to show and make your own perspectives heard.

The other side of the narrative competence is what Claudia Lentz would call deconstructive competence. That means to meet films and other stories as narratives. The assumed authenticity of documentary films can be a special kind of a trap. A documentary which is produced in a convincing way could sell in biased narratives or even stereotyping perspectives which may be problematic.

In work with students and with teachers it is therefore important to have an interplay of proximity and distance. Lentz explained: “When you see a film and you engage in it, you create empathy. Then afterwards you work with perspective taking; you take a step back and analyze what is the perspective of the film: How has this been narrative constructed? Which elements are included, and what might have been chosen away or eluded?” This is briefly summarized the point of departure for an educational approach that will be further explored in the ICHR project.



Scene from the new short documentary film “Rediscovering Tunisia” produced by the ICHR project at HL-senteret in 2022 in cooperation with the Tunisian human rights expert organization Attalaki who works in particular with the rights of religious minorities. In the film we meet young Tunisians with different religious backgrounds who discuss their experiences from inter-faith excursions in Tunis and Djerba to synagogues, mosques and churches.

This and other films produced by the ICHR project can be viewed at: [https:// www.inclusive-citizenship.no/insights/](https://www.inclusive-citizenship.no/insights/)