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The Ecology of Childhood: How our Changing World Threatens Children’s Religious Rights

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The greatest threat to children’s religious rights is Sectarian Conflict

• **Sectarianism** is a form of *bigotry*, *discrimination*, or *hatred* arising from attaching relations of inferiority and superiority to differences between subdivisions within a group.

• Common examples are *denominations* of a *religion*, *ethnic identity*, *class*, or *region* for citizens of a state and *factions* of a *political movement*.

• Fueled by economic crisis, mass migration, poverty, civil unrest, rising inequality and climate change.

• Rooted in fear and hostility to “the other”. 
Logo created in 2000 by Polish artist Piotr Miodozeniec

Children in Italian village of Scanno playing bancarella, a game of flea market.
2010 Flag of the “Coexist Movement” popular on U.S. college campuses.
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter CRC)

• Article 14
  • 1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
  • 2. States parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.
  • 3. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
Parents may not put child to work distributing religious tracts in violation of child labor laws. (Prince v Massachusetts)

Parents may remove child from school at age 13 for religious reasons despite mandatory education laws. (Wisconsin v Yoder)

STATE

CHILD

PARENT

ZONE OF FAMILY PRIVACY

DIAGRAM OF CONFLICT BETWEEN PUBLIC STATE AND PRIVATE FAMILY
(First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States)
1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
   a) Development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
   b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
   c) The development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and civilizations different from his or her own;
   d) Preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
   e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
The CRC Includes Social, Economic and Cultural Rights

• Article 4: States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, in the framework of international cooperation.

• Article 6 (2): States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

• Article 24 (prenatal care, access to healthcare); Article 27 (adequate standard of living); Article 31 (play and recreation).
The Ecology of Childhood:
How Our Changing World Threatens Children's Rights

Forthcoming
New York University Press,
January 2020.
Genesis of Research Project

• Begun during Fernand Braudel Senior Fellowship at European University Institute in Fiesole, Italy  2007-2008.
• Comparative Longitudinal Study of Childhood in US and Italy
• Why Italy?
• Methods: Compare similarities and differences of childhood environments (1) through field work at the village level and (2) through comparative data at the national level.
• Goals:
  • Examine role of CRC in shaping child and family policies.
  • Compare social welfare culture with market capitalist culture.
• What I did not expect . . . .
ECOLOGICAL DIAGRAM OF CHILDHOOD
Microsystems – where children live their daily lives
Mesosystems – where Microsystems overlap and intersect

Children are at the center
The larger social ecology affecting the lives of children and families. It surrounds and permeates their micro and mesosystems.
A TALE OF TWO VILLAGES
Scanno, Abruzzo, Italy
Cedar Key, Florida, US
Observing Children in their Natural Environments
From Left Clockwise: S. Maria della Valle, Madonna del Carmine, Madonna delle Grazie, S. Eustachio, S. Antonio
3 Generations of the Confraternity of the Madonna delle Grazie
Children and Horses Bringing Fire Wood for Festival of San Antonio
First Communion Procession 2014

Massimo and Gaia, siblings from the Ukraine, with their Adoptive Parents
Asilo D’Infanzia Buon Pastore
(Good Shepherd Nursery School)

These children are playing in the Piazza after school is over.

Bright colored track suits minimize competition and social exclusion.
Student’s poster for middle school class project
Student’s poster for 100\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of deadly 1915 earthquake, showing Frattura in ruins and as it looks today.
Clowning Around After the Perfect Earthquake Drill
From left clockwise: Methodist, Church of Christ, Baptist, Episcopal, Catholic
Santa Clam Arriving at Cedar Key Christmas Boat Parade

“Old Florida Celebration of the Arts”
2019 Cedar Key “Homecoming Court” and Shark Athletes
Third Graders Dressed as Super Heroes for Homecoming “Spirit Week”
Two views of Cedar Key School
“The Magic of Mesosystems”
Faith communities engaging with each other and with civic institutions can nurture a culture of concern for all the children.
Coexistence is Learned (or Unlearned) in the Microsystems and Mesosystems of Childhood

• “You've got to be taught before it's too late, Before you are six or seven or eight, To hate all the people your relatives hate, You've got to be carefully taught!”

• Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rogers, South Pacific (1949) written by a Jewish American composer about race relations in the aftermath of the Second World War.
Lautsi v. Italy

• 2009 European Court of Human Rights rules that Mussolini era law requiring display of crucifix in public school classrooms violates rights of atheist family.

• 2011 On rehearing by 17 member Grand Chamber, judgment is reversed and Court find that the European Convention on Human Rights does not require secularism or absolute neutrality but must be judged in light of the history and tradition of each nation.

• Gives significant weight to Italy’s pluralistic policy of welcoming symbols and practices of all religions and concludes that in this context display of the crucifix is not coercive indoctrination.

• But evidence not offered on actual experiences of children.
The World of 2019 is Not the World of 2011

Writing in 2011, I could imagine two different futures
*Religion and Human Rights* (Witte and Green Oxford 2012)

ONE: A world where peaceful coexistence is such an established norm that religious symbols are not perceived as coercive.

TWO: A world so divided by sectarian conflict that display of any religious symbol or discussion of religion is experienced as coercive.

In 2011 I was far more optimistic than I am today.
CRC Article 12 Participation Rights

- Professor Laura Lundy, Queens University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2004, gathers children’s voices in aftermath of “The Troubles.”
- Elementary school children draw giant maps of their neighborhoods to facilitate discussion
- Question: what makes you feel safe and unsafe?
- Curb painting! The custom of residents painting the edge of the sidewalk orange in Protestant zones and Green in Catholic zones.
- Depending on the climate of tolerance or intolerance, even a color made with a child’s crayon can signify war or peace, conflict or peaceful coexistence.
CHILDREN’S MOST IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS RIGHT IS IN OUR COLLECTIVE HANDS