INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: A RESPONSE TO CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL PRESSURES

W. Y. Alice Chan[1]
McGill University, Canada

Elena Lisovskaya
Western Michigan University, USA

Robert Osburn
Wilberforce Academy, USA

Introduction

One of the challenges and pressures which globalization has engendered for national education systems, schools, and classrooms worldwide is the growth of religious diversity. Thus, in many places, religious diversity has become a new reality of schooling, one to which educators do not necessarily know how to properly respond. Moreover, in the context of often-resurgent religion around the globe, the growth of religious diversity is also associated with an intensified focus on the significance of religious identities. By contrast, in secularized settings, especially those found in the West, there is often resistance and animosity to open manifestations of religious identities. Furthermore, as is true with any social identity, religious and secular identities often become markers that differentiate "us" and "them," and, therefore, may fuel inter-group tensions and conflicts. This special issue includes six articles that address these issues, their educational implications globally, and discuss new approaches for dealing with these challenges.

The first three articles focus on religious education in the context of political strife and inter-group tensions and relationships. They report on specific case studies in China, Germany, and Canada. Based on analysis of official and scholarly documents and interviews with Uyghurs in Canada, Mahmut, the author of the first article, analyzes the Chinese state's secularist rhetoric, policies, and practices, and their past and present implications for the Uyghur Muslims in the autonomous region of Xinjiang. In particular, a concern is raised

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[1] Correspondence: McGill University, 3700 rue McTavish, Montreal, Canada ; E-mail: alice.chan@mail.mcgill.ca

regarding the practices of mass internment of Uyghurs into re-education camps and imprisonment of scholars who study Uyghur religious culture, an issue that begs international attention. Vitale and Clothey review the curricular documents and assignments in *Gymnasium* schools in Hamburg, Germany. They call for an updated Holocaust Education curriculum in Germany, one that would target the newly emerging categories of students who feel increasingly distant from the events and an accurate understanding of the nature of Holocaust. These categories include native-born young Germans and recent immigrants and refugees from the countries historically hostile to Israel and Jewish people. Chan, Akanmori, and Parker focus on the attempts undertaken by the government and educational institutions of the Canadian province of Ontario to recognize historical wrongs towards its Indigenous communities. They examine the promises of spirituality as pedagogy for raising inter-group tolerance while also promoting peace education, and recommend its inclusion into religious literacy courses in the province.

The latter three articles focus on the benefits and limitations of already existing approaches to religious education in the contexts of changing religious diversity in Canada, Russia, and the US. Jafralie and Zaver discuss the importance of teacher training in the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program within the province of Quebec in Canada. They recommend improving teachers' religious literacy and structured support for in-service teachers, including ways to teach about religions neutrally in the religiously diverse province. In the case of Russia, Ozhiganova focuses on the course in the *Fundamentals of religious cultures and secular ethics*, promoted by the government and the Russian Orthodox Church. She examines if and how the course facilitates the development of particular kinds of civic, religious, and gender identities, which she labels as neo-traditionalist. Finally, Gardner documents the outcomes and prospects of a new religious and secular worldview literacy course, which he co-developed with his students in Brigham-Young University, which is affiliated with the Latter-Day Saints Church in its satellite campus in the state of Idaho (USA). Gardner and his students discuss the need to be better prepared for work in religiously diverse settings upon graduation, and how student agency and perspectives can be utilized more effectively in future course developments aimed at fostering "rooted cosmopolitans."

The three book reviews consider different aspects of the relation of religious identity to education, and, in doing so, highlight the vast complexity of this issue. Gerrie reviews *Religious identity and cultural negotiation: Toward a theology of Christian identity in migration* (McGill, 2016) that discusses the lived experiences and identity formation processes of evangelical Christian seminarians. Marcus reviews the collection of papers in *Teaching religion using technology in higher education* (Hilton III, 2018), which fills a gap in the study of the relationship between education, religion, and technology, with special focus on the power of classroom technology to expand the classroom and facilitate student learning outcomes. Graefe reviews *Religion and education: Comparative and international perspectives* (Sivasubramaniam & Hayhoe, 2018), another collection of research and theoretical discussions that, in the author's own words, exemplify the importance of religious education, religious organizations, and institutions for research in comparative and international education and policy discussions.

We believe that this collection of articles and book reviews contributes to and opens new avenues in the ongoing academic debate on the role of religious education in view of the new reality of increasing worldwide religious diversity. We are thankful for the work and contribution of each author, and hope that the reader will find the perspectives developed in this issue interesting and instrumental in continuing the discussion on the link between

religious identities and social, cultural, economic, and political inter-group tensions found inside and outside the school walls.

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About the Authors

W. Y. Alice Chan is a Ph. D. Candidate in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. Her doctoral research is on the potential connection between religious literacy and religious bullying in public school environments, which rose out of her experience observing religious bullying among her students as a middle school teacher. The study explored this connection specifically in the context of Montreal, Quebec, Canada, and Modesto, California, USA due to mandatory religious literacy programs in each context - the *Ethics and Religious Culture* and 9th Grade *World Geography and World Religions*, respectively. Her other research explores religious literacy with respect to radicalization towards violence, violent extremism, and the intersectionality of religious and non-religious identities with other aspects of identity, such as race and social-economic status. She is the executive director and co-founder of the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy, and a co-chair of the Religion and Education Special Interest Group in the Comparative and International Education Society.

Elena Lisovskaya is Professor of Sociology and Education at Western Michigan University. She specializes in comparative sociology of education and religion and teaches courses in comparative sociology of education, religion and gender, text analysis, and various other methods of social research. Her core research interests include institutional and ideological changes in post-communist education in comparative perspective with emphases on Russia and Ukraine. She extensively published on educational change in the context of social revolution, privatization, dogmatism and new ideologies in post-communist textbooks. Since 2000s, Lisovskaya engaged in comparative research on desecularization and religious education in state-run schools, and most recently published "Religion's uneasy return to the Russian school: A case of contested desecularization 'from above'," a chapter in the Religion and Education Symposium Book Series (2018), and "Religious education in Russia: Inter-faith harmony or neo-imperial toleration" in the 2016 special issue of Social Inclusion. Lisovskaya co-authored "Religious intolerance among Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia" (2008); "Orthodoxy, Islam, and the desecularization of Russia's state schools" (2010); "Ethnodoxy: How popular ideologies fuse religious and ethnic identities" (2012) and others. In 2013, she was the co-founder and the first co-chair of the Religion and Education special interest group at Comparative and International Education Society.

Robert Osburn (PhD, University of Minnesota) is the Executive Director of the Wilberforce Academy. He has worked in the field of international education for nearly 34 years, during which time his interests have included the role of religion and its impact on

international students and the development of societies. He has served as an adjunct lecturer at the University of Minnesota, and is the author of a popular text, *Taming the Beast: Can We Bridle the Culture of Corruption?* He has published in the *Journal of Church and State, European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology,* and has contributed to *The Wiley Handbook of Christianity and Education.* In 2013 he co-founded the Religion and Education Special Interest Group in the Comparative and International Education Society. He travels extensively in the developing world where he lectures and advises international mentees. He is currently writing a book on the role of redemptive change agents in social development.