

# Listening to the Other

## Intercultural communication in times of crisis

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### Abstract

In this paper I discuss the role of intercultural communication in times of crisis. First I give an account of current crisis communication research and consider how it relates to the academic field of intercultural communication. I then discuss how the understanding of crisis is constructed through communication in the public sphere and highlight how this implies a challenge to intercultural communication studies. The case of religious climate change contributions is used to illustrate how the language and voice of the Other can interrupt ongoing debates on crises and expand the participants' imagination and interpretive horizons. This leads me to point out the key role of listening in intercultural communication. I end by arguing that both the practice and theory of intercultural crisis communication needs to develop a mode of intercultural listening and learning rather than strategic persuasion and proclamation.

**Keywords:** *Crisis, Religion, Public sphere, Research cultures, Listening*

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### Introduction

Poverty, oppression and various forms of injustice seem to be unavoidable factors of human life on this earth. Despite huge technological advances, unprecedented wealth and wide recognition of all human beings' dignity and rights, human suffering and misery persist. As I write we are facing a migration crisis in Europe, a humanitarian crisis in Africa and the Middle East, and a global crisis of climate change.

Local communities, national politicians and the global, international community need to address these challenges. Immediate crises – dramatic accidents, sudden floods and violent uprisings – require immediate attention and action. The same applies, however, to the slow, silent and deep rooted crises of chronic poverty and climate change. With no action taken, the problems not only persist but become even more demanding for generations to come. Yet, such actions are often contested. These crises are controversial not only in the sense that they involve a conflict of interest, but also in the sense that the understanding of their root causes, present challenges and future directions is disputed. It is in this sense that crises call for intercultural communication: that people come together and communicate across cultural (as well as social, political, ethnic, religious etc.) borders. They are shared challenges across cultural, political and religious borders and require not only joint action, but also some degree of shared interpretation. Accordingly these issues need to be addressed across political, religious and cultural boundaries and among all members of the international community in a broad discussion in the global public sphere.

In other words, addressing contemporary crises requires the practice of intercultural communication. However, this is also a challenge to the academic field of intercultural communication: to consider the conditions, processes and normative dimensions of intercultural communication practice in times of crisis. This article seeks to give a contribution in this regard by arguing that the practice and theory of *intercultural communication* – the kind of communication that “occurs whenever a person from one

culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture” (McDaniel, Samovar and Porter, 2009:7) – need to develop a mode of intercultural listening rather than strategic persuasion and proclamation. By *intercultural listening* I mean the aspect of intercultural communication that occurs whenever a person from one culture receives and actually processes a message from a person from a different culture. In other words, the fact that a message is sent does not necessarily imply that the message is received, welcomed, and processed. It is the latter part that I refer to as intercultural listening and I regard it as a necessary aspect of good or successful intercultural communication. The case of religious contributions in the public sphere addressing climate change will be used to illustrate this point..

## Intercultural crisis communication research

Crisis can be immediate, dramatic and easily recognized as such, but also chronic and an integrated dimension of our societies and way of life. As in the case of climate change, it can be largely acknowledged as a crisis, yet dealing with it as such in terms of action and policy implementations seems to be quite a different matter. These practical dimensions of crisis constitute the focus of *crisis management* which considers the “set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damages inflicted” (Coombs, 2010:20).

This relatively broad understanding of crisis goes beyond the notion of crisis that is too often assumed in the field of *crisis communication* understood as “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (Coombs, 2010:20; see also Coombs and Holladay, 2010 and Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2015). In this context crisis is often understood as organizational crisis. It is characterized by “significant threats, unpredictability and urgency” and traditionally seen “as a very unusual situation that may threaten an organization’s business, reputation, image and relation, or in any way harm its publics” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:181). With this organizational focus, Maria de Fatima Oliveira points out that:

*Crises represent serious threats to the most fundamental goals of an organization and its stakeholders. These events are unexpected and sometimes unpredictable. No matter what the size of an organization, a crisis interrupts normal business and damages corporate reputation; it can imperil future growth, profitability, and even the company’s survival. (Oliveira, 2013:255)*

This preoccupation with threats to organizations and their stakeholders leads crisis communication to focus on damage control and the strategic task of constructing “a positive account of the events and the organizational actions” and to “increase levels of positive opinions about the company or lower levels of negative opinion” (Oliveira, 2013:255). This gives both the theory and the practice of crisis communication a strategic character and persuasive aim.

This emphasis is also reflected in one of the relatively few scholarly contributions that link crisis communication and intercultural communication: Swedish scholars Jesper Falkheimer and Mats Heide’s article *Multicultural Crisis Communication. Towards a Social Constructionist Perspective* (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006). Here Falkheimer and Heide argue that “crisis communication is still a field lacking in systematic knowledge and theoretical framework analysis” and that “functionalist and objectivist perspectives have dominated the field” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:180). They also find an exclusive focus on post-crisis and, consequently, that “crisis communication has mainly focused on production of information – designing material in preparation for crisis, to cope with an existing crisis and to restore order after the crisis has settled” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:182). Falkheimer and Heide find that modern research in crisis communication has developed in two directions: “theoretical models from the research on corporate apologia and impression management [...] to produce strategies to improve an organization’s image after a crisis has occurred” on the one hand, and contributions “focusing on the role of issues management and risk communication at ‘crisis incubation’” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:182).

With regard to the field of intercultural communication Falkheimer and Heide find that this “appears to be a rather traditional field with a positivistic epistemology” and the scholars seem not to have taken notice

of the recent “turns in the social sciences” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:183). Against this background, they argue that “there is a need for a cultural and critical turn in the field to get more innovative and contemporary based research results” and suggest that one possibility “is to dig into another intercultural concept, ethnicity, focusing on collective cultural identity as a relational and situational perspective” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:183). They also quote Brendan McSweeney’s criticism of Geert Hofstede:

*Instead of seeking an explanation for assumed national uniformity from the conceptual lacuna that is the essentialist notion of national culture, we need to engage with and use theories of action which can cope with change, power, variety, multiple influences – including the non-national – and the complexity and situational variability of the individual subject. (McSweeney, 2002:113 cited in Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:183).*

This assessment of the academic field of intercultural communication can be disputed, as both the positivistic epistemology has been criticized and alternative approaches have been suggested by a number of scholars in the field (see Blasco and Gustafsson, 2004 and Stier, 2010). However, important for the purposes of the present discussion, is the alternative to the essentialist, nation-approach that Falkheimer and Heide suggest: a constructionist ethnicity-approach. This means that they understand crisis communication as a sense making process “where reality is negotiated and constructed in cultural contexts and situations, rather than distributed from a sender to a recipient” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:180). This perspective assumes that we live in a time “where humans and organizations experience a higher degree of uncertainty than in earlier times” and “that we live in a society that is ethnically diverse and increasingly multicultural” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:180). Accordingly, this proposal draws on the social constructionist approach suggested by, among others, Kenneth Gergen and Vivien Burr as an alternative to positivistic research in the social sciences (Gergen, 2009; Burr, 1995). It “challenges many of the taken-for-granted assumptions”, questions “the idea of objective facts” and “underscores that meanings are produced through people’s interaction” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:186).

Based on this kind of constructionist epistemology Falkheimer and Heide provide four proposals for future research and practice in multicultural crisis communication:

1. A public perspective – audience-orientation
2. A proactive and interactive approach – focusing on dialogue
3. A community-focused approach gaining a long-range pre-crisis perspective
4. An ethnicity-approach towards intercultural communication issues. (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:187)

They argue a change in this direction would “probably lead to a turn of interest: from senders, channels and messages towards the audience as an active public” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006:187).

In this way Falkheimer and Heide prepare the ground for a constructionist understanding of what I in this article refer to as *intercultural crisis communication*: the kind of communication that addresses a crisis situation and that occurs whenever a person from one culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture. Accordingly, intercultural crisis communication is seen as a sub-category of intercultural communication. Further, when I want to highlight the importance of intercultural listening, this is in line with Falkheimer and Heide’s emphasis on audience-orientation and dialogue.

## **Crisis and the public sphere**

Implied in Falkheimer and Heide’s analysis is how this constructionist approach liberates crisis communication from its organizational focus and makes it an issue for public political debate. Within this perspective crises cannot be dealt with by an exclusively post-crisis focus but must be regarded as an integral part of human life and social reality. This gives reason to adopt a more “rhetorical approach to the

definition of crisis, assuming that these events are created and resolved through communication”<sup>4</sup> (Oliveira, 2013:255). Indeed, crises need to be dealt with not only strategically, but in the shared, inclusive and constructive discussions on social and public issues in the public sphere.

The German scholar Jürgen Habermas gives a comprehensive account and discussion of the origins and key features of this *public sphere* in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1992). He argues the modern public sphere emerged in the Enlightenment and in the context of bourgeois middle class as its members would read the newspapers discuss current affairs around their coffee tables and in their salons. In this way a new arena for discussion of social and political affairs was created. People would discuss social and political issues, but not in the capacity of being politicians, bureaucrats or governmental employees, but as concerned citizens trying to establish an understanding and a shared opinion about such issues. In this process, characterised by a shared interests and rational arguments, what they might have of private and pre-political opinions, are transformed and indeed transcended.

Similarly, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues that this form of interaction among the bourgeois classes represented a new and common space of discussion. He writes:

*Books, pamphlets, and newspapers circulated among the educated public, conveying theses, analyses, arguments, and counterarguments, referring to and refuting each other. These were widely read and often discussed in face-to-face gatherings, in drawing rooms, coffeehouses, salons, and in more (authoritatively) public places, like Parliament. (Taylor, 2004:84)*

Taylor describes these local, face-to-face arenas as “topical common space” but points out that the novel factor in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was how these local spaces were tied together and thus transcended in what he calls “metatopical” (Taylor, 2004:86) common space. In this way, the modern public sphere became a “space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society” (Castells, 2008:78) and “cultural/informational repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate” (Castells, 2008:79).

Habermas’ understanding of the public sphere is anchored in ideal theory, and others have criticized and supplemented his approach by considering more closely the features of the public debate in current societies and real life situations. Several have pointed out the difficulties people face in accessing and participating in the public debate, facing racism, gender stereotypes, religious prejudice etc. Others have argued that Habermas’ focus on the public sphere does not take sufficiently into account the many different public spheres linked to various groups in society – ethnic communities, religious groups and others. They develop their own discourses and public debates, but also tend to remain in contact with wider society. In this way they have a public orientation (see Calhoun, 1992).

## **Research cultures of war and peace**

Considering not only ideal notions of the public sphere, but also the constraints in real life public debate, a crisis situation represents a profound challenge to the public sphere as an open arena for participation and debate. As the war on terror has shown, crisis can legitimize further restrictions on public debate. This does not, however, change the need for broad discussions and an open debate about the social and political issues and challenges crises represent. Local, national or global crises require broad communication and indeed the scholarly field of intercultural communication needs to address how this kind of communication, debate and dialogue can be undertaken in times of crisis.

One of the challenges of the public sphere in times of crisis, is how crisis tends to exacerbate *stereotyping*, “the belief that classifies a person as a member of a specific group, and nothing but such a group member”; *prejudice*, the “negative attitude based on stereotypical thinking”; and *discrimination*, “negative behavior that is an outcome of stereotyping and prejudice” (Svartevik, 2013:5). Both stereotypes and prejudice can be relatively harmless and even considered a necessary starting point for any inter-human exchange. As indicated, however, they can also become a rigid starting point that

obstructs joint understanding and indeed leads to discrimination. In some cases, and in particular in<sup>5</sup>times of crisis, stereotypes can become images of enemies based on “a perception of the unfamiliar, or strange, which is evaluated only negatively” (Spillmann and Spillmann, 1997:50). Spillmann and Spillman identify six key features of such images: negative anticipation (that enemy acts are linked to destructive intentions towards one’s own group), putting blame on the enemy, identification with evil (opposite value system), zero-sum thinking (what is good for them is bad for us), stereotyping and deindividualization, and refusal to show empathy (Spillmann and Spillmann, 1997:50-51).

Often these images and attitudes are considered the primary task of intercultural communication. Indeed, it is an important part of the self-understanding of the field of intercultural communication that it serves as a tool for solving problems of precisely this kind. Rarely are these problems seen as inherent to the field itself. However, there are exceptions. For example, Min-Sun Kim has argued that there is a need for a paradigm shift in the field: a shift from a research culture of war to a research culture of peace (Kim, 2012).

First Kim identifies five trends within a research culture of war classified as cultural dimensions, cultural adaption, cultural bias and theories, comparison of groups and acculturative communication competence. Regarding the *cultural dimension*, collectivism is seen as the absence of individualism and a binary opposition is established between the developed and modern (Anglo-Germanic) countries and “traditional and backward” countries (the rest). *Cultural adaption* is understood in terms of the assimilation of the other. Strangers are seen as exclusive bearers of the burden of making adjustment. Further, the hegemony by one culture or system of thought over others prevents understanding other people’s life experiences (*cultural bias in theories*). The *comparison of groups* is made in a binary style, and the Other becomes the devalued half of a binary opposition, that pits individual and group needs in opposition to each other. This inevitably leads to making good/bad comparisons. Finally, in terms of *acculturative communication competence* there is an emphasis on host communication competence. This amounts to a linear, accommodation model: maximum convergence of strangers’ internal conditions with those of the host communication styles and minimum maintenance of the original cultural habits. Together these five trends amount to a research culture of war characterised by rejection or annihilation of the Other.

By contrast, these five trends of research emerge in different ways within a research culture of peace which welcomes the Other. Regarding the *cultural dimension*, this kind of research culture encompasses models that acknowledge differences without placing them in hierarchy or opposition. For instance, individualism and collectivism are likely to be separate dimensions rather than the polar opposites of a single dimension. In terms of *cultural adaption*, this approach moves beyond assimilation: both the host and the stranger share the burden of adjustment. This acknowledges a need to recognize the additive element of biculturality or multiculturalism. In terms of *cultural bias in theories*, the need to foster the diversity of non-western patterns of cultural representation going beyond individualistic ideologies becomes important. *Comparison of groups* focuses on bicultural identities and recognizes the dynamic nature of individuals’ cultural identity. Hybrid identities are shaped by migration, discrimination and minority ethnic, racial and religious statues. Finally, regarding *acculturative communication competence*, this becomes bicultural communication competence: an alternation model in which individuals are able to gain competence within two or more cultures. This competence includes dynamic code switching and a wider repertoire of communication strategies and styles (Kim, 2012).

## Religious contributions in the public sphere

The importance of this kind of shift from a research culture of war towards a research culture of peace can be seen with the example of religious contributions to the public sphere. Such contributions can come in the form of statements from religious institutions (Church synods, Muslim clergy, religious association) or individuals (clergy, mandated representatives or ordinary members of faith communities) expressing themselves in a religious language or with reference to religious texts, authorities or experiences. Religion is, however, a Janus-faced phenomenon. At times it appears to offer meaning and consolation, a sense of community and belonging, moral norms and political motivation. At other times it comes across as a contributing factor to social disruption, violent conflict, irrational behaviour, authoritarian power or political passivity. Similarly, in the public sphere and in human communication, religion has been viewed

as a negative factor that undermines the rational debate a modern, liberal and secular society relies on, and as such a conversation-stopper (Rorty, 1999:168-174). Others have argued religious contributions should not be excluded from the public sphere, as they are an integral aspect of how people experience the world they live in, inform their viewpoints and motivates their engagement in social and political life (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997; Rawls, 2005; Butler, Mendieta and Van Antwerpen, 2011).

An important contribution to this debate comes from the American philosopher John Rawls. His understanding of the public sphere is much in line with that of Habermas, and he argues that open discussion is a crucial part of any liberal democracy (Rawls, 2005). However, Rawls finds that religion – or contributions that rely on what he calls a *comprehensive doctrine* – should be limited in the public sphere. In particular in the context of political debates, he argues religious contributions have no role to play. By contrast, Habermas famously reconsiders his understanding of religion in the public sphere in his book *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Habermas, 2008a; see also Habermas, 2008b). Here Habermas recognizes the constructive role of religion in not only peoples' lives but also in the public exchange on social and political issues. Instead of warning against religious opinions and viewpoints being articulated in the public sphere, he argues that these threaten neither the inclusiveness of public exchange nor the secular and rational discussion in the political and judicial spheres. Indeed, Habermas argues religion contributes to a more inclusive, richer and more complex public sphere.

Habermas' new understanding and approach is linked to his renewed assessment of the role of religion in society. Whereas he earlier relied on the widely shared assumption that religion in modern societies would gradually lose their importance, in particular in the public sphere – the so-called secularization thesis – he now recognizes the continued role of religion in society and talks of the post-secular society. This is not a move back to the Christendom of Medieval times but an acknowledgment of the continued role of religion in people's lives. Habermas writes:

*...the expression "postsecular" does not merely grant religious communities public recognition for their functional contribution to the reproduction of desirable motives and attitudes. The public consciousness of a postsecular society reflects, rather, a normative insight that has implications for political interactions between religious and nonreligious citizens. In the postsecular society, the conviction is gaining ground that the "modernization of public consciousness" affects and reflexively transforms religious and secular mentalities, though not simultaneously. Both sides can then take each other's contributions to controversial public debates seriously for cognitive reasons as well, assuming that they share an understanding of the secularization of society as a complementary learning process. (Habermas, 2008a:111, original emphasis)*

This notion of the post-secular as an opportunity a complementary learning process points to the constructive role religion can play in contemporary society and intercultural communication. Habermas finds that religious traditions represent resources that inform religious contributions in the public sphere, but equally that they are resources for mutual learning for all participants in the public debate. Accordingly, it becomes a task and a challenge for religious citizens to articulate and, if necessary, explain their religiously informed contributions in the debate. Similarly, it becomes the task and indeed the privilege of secular citizens to learn from their fellow religious citizens and counterparts.

Stereotypes, prejudice, a research culture of war and religious illiteracy are obstacles to this kind of learning process, but Habermas insists that religious contributions should be welcomed and acknowledged as a positive, at least potentially positive, contribution to the public sphere. But how can that happen? Understanding such contributions as messages sent from one culture to be processed by a person from a different culture, this question can be rephrased in the language of intercultural communication studies: How can such contributions be received, welcomed and processed in the practice intercultural communication? Religious contributions addressing environmental issues and climate change indicate an answer in the context of intercultural crisis communication.

## Environmental issues and climate change

Environmental issues and climate change have been on the agenda of the international community since the 1960s. National governments and the United Nations have launched several initiatives to address the issues, though broad consensus and effective policy solutions have been lacking. Religions and religious actors too have recognized the need to speak out about climate change and several statements and declarations have been issued from a number of faith communities and interreligious fora. Examples of this include statements from the Council for the World Parliaments of Religions (CPWR), the Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change (IDCC) as well as the World and the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change in New York in 2014.<sup>[1]</sup> Similarly, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has had a comprehensive programme for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

Such statements indicate how religious groups contribute to the global public debate on environmental issues and climate change. And as argued, to the extent these religious groups are perceived as not only religious but also cultural Others communicating from a different culture by either the majority or various minority groups participating in the more local or national public debates, their contributions can be seen as attempts at practicing intercultural communication. Further, given that climate change represents a profound global, economic, political and moral crisis, they also practice intercultural crisis communication. Importantly, however, they do so by using religious language. This might include that they recite authoritative texts, prophets or apostles, but also more broadly that they use religious terminology. Thus, by using a distinct language and contributing in their unique way, these groups articulate their own alternative ways of interpreting climate change as well as ways and reasons to respond to crises of this kind.

In societies with low levels of religious literacy (a growing concern in Europe, North-America and other regions), this kind of language and contributions in the public sphere might be a minority voice and strange to many. In multicultural or multi-religious post-secular societies, however, their contributions need not, and should not, be regarded as irrelevant or illegitimate contributions, as is sometimes the case (see Bruce, 2002 and Butler, Mendieta and Van Antwerpen, 2011). In other words, the ideally inclusive character of the public sphere and intercultural crisis communication should not be taken for granted. However, as contributions that give voice to groups in society and articulate their concerns, interpretations and viewpoints, also religious voices, arguments and viewpoints should be welcomed in this shared context. Although religious language is not self-explanatory, the meaning and concerns that are articulated can still be accessible to others. Further, following Habermas, religious voices and terminology can also bring alternative perspectives, challenge assumptions and possibly prompt new perspectives, concepts and terminology. In this way they can challenge, indeed interrupt, the public debate. For those who listen, however, there is an opportunity to learn. And taken as a learning opportunity, this kind of interruption offers an opportunity to expand the imagination and to see the crisis at hand from a new perspective. Indeed, both the practice and theory of both intercultural communication and intercultural crisis communication need to encourage this kind of interruptive and imaginative exchange that puts religious resources into circulation, encourages unconventional thinking and challenges our creativity.

## Intercultural listening

Against this background it becomes evident that intercultural communication is an integral part of a dialogical, public and constructionist approach to crisis. Importantly, it also becomes imperative that the aim of intercultural communication is considered broader than simply speaking and getting the message through strategically and persuasively. A key part of this kind of communication is to understand what the Other is saying and try to establish some sort of shared understanding or overlapping consensus. To achieve this, the participants of intercultural communication need to listen. As stated in the introduction, this kind of intercultural listening takes place whenever a person from one culture receives and processes a message from a person from a different culture. Although intercultural communication “occurs whenever a person from one culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture” (McDaniel, Samovar and Porter, 2009:7), this kind of communication cannot be considered successful if

this message is not in fact welcomed, acknowledged and processed by the receiver. This points both to the importance of listening in intercultural communication and to the specific and crucial role of listening in intercultural crisis communication.

Unfortunately, the issue of listening is rarely discussed at any considerable length in crisis or intercultural communication textbooks, though the issues of non-verbal communication, hermeneutics and conversation-stopping are often addressed. Still, some scholars have pointed out the importance of listening. Joseph Zompetti, for example, argues: "Listening plays a necessary and vital role in both understanding messages sent by senders and providing feedback to such messages. We also know that the context surrounding a communicative exchange is important for listening" (Zompetti, 2006:86). Indeed, any information process "by its very nature, requires attentive, albeit active, listening" (Zompetti, 2006:86).

Further, the importance of listening invites the question of how one should listen and how to learn appropriate and good forms of listening. Addressing these issues, Guo-Ming Chen and William Starosta have identified three problems related to listening in intercultural communication: listening across emotions, fusing horizons, and selective listening. They write:

Listening across emotions describes how interactants become frustrated, and emotional responses for frustrating conditions trigger listening failure. Fusing horizons characterizes our inability to overcome cultural predispositions and our unsuccessful attempts at recognizing other cultural perspectives. Selective listening, like all listening exchanges, explains that we choose what we listen, thereby creating situations where important intercultural information is missed. (Zompetti, 2006:88, referring to Chen and Starosta, 1998)

These problems, and many more could be added, indicate how the relationship between speaking and listening is complex and multifaceted. Clearly there is a need to find constructive strategies to deal with these challenges and to be aware of the various dynamics in intercultural communication speaking and listening in terms of the positions as insider/outsider, oppressor/victim, silenced/silencer (Kamaara, Vasko and Viau, 2012:60; see also Chen and Starosta, 1998). Indeed, although some work has been done, there is a need for further research on this aspect of intercultural communication in both quite ordinary times as well as in times of crisis.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, crises constitute challenges for suffering people, concerned citizens, responsible politicians and others who practice intercultural communication. It is also a profound challenge to academics and scholars in the field of intercultural communication. I have argued crisis communication too often has limited its focus to strategic and persuasive communication in the event of organizational crisis with the aim of limiting the negative effects for the organization and its stakeholders. An expanded understanding of crisis that includes chronic and hidden crises highlights, however, the need for constructionist approaches in the fields of both intercultural communication and intercultural crisis communication, as well as a broad, inclusive public debate on issues of this kind. The key role of the public sphere for such debate suggests the potential benefits of a research culture of peace, not war, and the importance of a willingness to listen and learn in times of crisis. As argued, even alternative, religious minority voices – to some rather peculiar, strange voices from a different culture – that at times are from the public sphere can contribute to the (re)construction of a shared understanding of environmental issues and a new approach to the climate crisis. Accordingly, I have in this article argued for the need to develop a mode of open, curious and imaginative intercultural listening, a topic too often neglected in the scholarly field of intercultural communication. This kind of listening is crucial not only for good and successful intercultural communication to take place, but also for those involved in public and intercultural debates seeking to find ways of critically and constructively responding to crisis.

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[1] A number of climate change statements from world religions can be found on the website for the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale: <http://fore.research.yale.edu/climate-change/statements-from-world-religions/> (accessed 18.12.2014).

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