Call for Papers

Structuring Diversity – Structuring Religion
Religious Diversity and Human Heterogeneity in Society

International Conference, University of Lucerne & online, 30th March to 1st April 2023

Religion and diversity are intimately entangled in manifold ways. Can we systematically unpack this entanglement in a way that enables us to understand it in different eras and regions, on an individual as well as a societal or global scale; and in a way that includes its potential for creating as much as for resolving conflict? In short, how does religion structure diversity, and how does diversity structure religion? This conference addresses these questions by systematically bringing different approaches and perspectives into conversation with each other.

The conference aims to investigate 'diversity' as a term in the study of religions, and thus develop the field's "critical diversity literacy" (Steyn and Dankwa 2021). That is, the study of religions' capacity to analyse religious and social differences, and the relationships involved therein, by considering the asymmetries of power, and differences in scope of action, of various individuals and groups.

In recent years, the concept of diversity has become the subject of prolific discussion and analysis, both in the public arena and across academic disciplines. The category 'religion' is implied in these discussions in myriad ways, but two core strands of analysis can be identified:

Firstly, there is discussion of the **diversity of religions**, in the forms of both intra- and inter-religious diversity. **Intra-religious diversity** references the fact that religions are not monolithic entities, but are characterised by an internal heterogeneity, stemming from divergences in tradition and in individual ideas and practices. This form of diversity fosters religious transformation, but also power-related conflicts, as reflected in the labelling of religious nonconformism. The perspective of **inter-religious diversity**, meanwhile, notes that societies accommodate many different religions – a phenomenon that has supposedly increased in the globalised modern world. This contention has managed to thoroughly dislodge the hegemony of the secularisation thesis, though it has itself seen criticism from numerous – historically inclined and regionally informed – quarters. The diversity of religions, often combined with conditions of "secular-religious pluralism" (Casanova 2019), is seen as a feature of ('modern') diverse societies, in turn transforming 'religion' or religious affiliation into a diversity category. Consequently, as one of a range of diversity categories, religion becomes a focus of various strategies for managing diversity in, for example, politics, administration, economics, and education. Similarly, religious actors encounter and manage religious diversity through interreligious dialogue, for example.

Secondly, there is discussion of what we call **religious diversity strategies**. Diversity is understood here to mean the heterogeneous conditions of the human body and the varied social affiliations of individuals and groups. It includes social inequality, such as access to social positions and social participation being based on gender. Gender, like other diversity categories such as disability, ethnicity, age, class, language, or culture, interacts and intersects with religion (Brintnall 2016). As cultural studies employing a critical approach to the body and social structures (gender, disability, critical studies of race and ethnicity/ethnic studies etc.) have shown, the supposedly objective body and its meanings emerge from interactions between the material and historically specific social actions. Religions form a significant part of these contingent social actions. One may thus examine

how religions generate, influence, and manage the differentiations that together make up human and social diversity. This brings religions into view as both producers and managers of diversity. **Religious diversity strategies** can be directed at both the relationships within a religious community and the community's relationships with other people and social contexts (for example, through social welfare activities). At the same time, religions are themselves shaped by the diversity of humans and social groups. This can be through recognising a given human-bodily and social-practical diversity among their devotees and in society, or in response to explicit demands from these groups and from civil rights activists within and beyond their own communities (diversity policies or social protest). This can lead to intra-religious conflict, which may also strengthen cultural identities and, consequently, reinforce the processes of othering and exclusion. Alternatively, it may lead to a **diversity-sensitive transformation** in religious beliefs, practices, organisational structures, and material culture (for example the creation of special or accessible texts, buildings, and practices). Since religions are inherently diverse, and since the composition of religious diversity varies across different societies, it can be assumed that these processes take a unique form in each individual case.

The above manifestations of the relationship between religion and diversity are often studied separately: Analyses often concentrate *either* on the diversity of religions (intra- or inter-religious diversity) *or* on the interactions between religious contexts and a specific form of physical/social difference (religious diversity strategies).

This conference aims to provide a platform for bridging this divide, bringing these two research agendas into conversation with each other. We seek to further the connection and cross-fertilisation between these research agendas, to conceptionally develop the way the study of religions addresses the relationship between religion and diversity, and to increase its critical diversity literacy.

This bringing together of perspectives is not only justified but necessary, as we believe that the diversity of religions is a crucial factor in how the relationships between different groups in a society (diversity) are structured. Indeed, this interaction is a two-way street, since hegemony in managing both diversity and the transformation of social relations has likewise proven to be a significant field of inter- and intra-religious competition, and has led to confrontations between religious and non-religious epistemic power.

To initiate and substantiate this conversation on the ways diversity structures religion and religion structures diversity, we welcome contributions from various disciplines and regional contexts. Different methodological approaches to case studies and theoretical elaborations on conceptual questions are equally welcome.

**UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN**

Locations, Timeline and Fees

The conference will take place in hybrid format, online and on site at the University of Lucerne (Switzerland) from 30th March to 1st April 2023.

Proposals must be submitted electronically, via www.unilu.ch/diversityreligionconference > "Submission of title and abstracts". The deadline for paper proposals (title and abstract of max. 250 words) is 31st August 2022.

31st August 2022	Deadline for submitting title and abstract (max. 250 words)
30th September 2022	Acceptance
30th March – 1st April 2023	Conference (University of Lucerne/online)

The conference language is English.

The conference fee, travel and accommodation costs for speakers will be covered.[1]
Attendance on site for non-speakers: regular fee CHF 100; reduced fee[2]: CHF 30
Attendance online for non-speakers: CHF 30

For further information, please contact the conference organisers at relsem@unilu.ch or visit www.unilu.ch/diversityreligionconference.

Convenors:

Dr des. Anne Beutter, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

Dr Ramona Jelinek-Menke, Philipps-University Marburg, Germany

Prof. Karina Kosicki Bellotti, Federal University of Paraná, Brazil

Sahra Lobina, MA, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

Brian McGowan, MA, Zurich University for Applied Sciences, Switzerland

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[1] Partial coverage of expenses may occur depending on funding details.
[2] Reduced fee for BA and MA students, as well as participants with no income.