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Relational Diversity: Religious Pluralization and Politics of Cohesion

1 Introduction

In 2010 the German Ruhr area came to celebrate itself as "European Capital of Culture," an award which is granted by the European Commission on a yearly basis. One part of the extensive image campaign for the Ruhr Cultural Metropolis ("Kulturmetropole Ruhr") was a huge poster showing a religious procession of Tamil Hindus on a country road near the Westphalian city of Hamm. The visual message of the picture was based on a harsh contrast between the colorful garments of the worshippers (and the goddess) and the monotonous scenery of cornfields and industrial smokestacks. Two banners on the upper right of the poster stated: "Future needs origin. In our region it comes from 170 nations" and "We are the European Capital of Culture 2010." At the bottom there was another lettering which proclaimed: "Where this is possible, everything is possible."

The poster reflects the fundamental ambivalence of dealing with cultural and religious diversity in modern immigration societies. On the one hand, diversity is embraced as a regional resource which enriches the cultural landscape, on the other hand there are severe sceptical and exotistic undertones shining through in the last statement. Hence, it remains unclear whether it is diversity itself which is advertised, or its successful moderation – or domestication – by regional authorities. This tension between the appreciation of religious pluralization and its governance in terms of social cohesion points to a more general ambiguity between modern claims for a universal "We" and a postmodern notion of a "World in Pieces" (Geertz 2000, 218–263) which is coming under scrutiny in this volume.

In my paper, I will address these matters from a sociology of religion point of view which is both programmatic, conceptual and empirical. In programmatic terms (section 1), I will argue for a relational approach to religious diversity which does not restrict itself to a mere topography of religious communities, but focuses on religious pluralization as a matter of encounter and contact zones. In conceptual terms (section 2), I will propose a heuristic model of migration, religious pluralization, encounter and governance and distinguish between three manifestations of diversity (abstract, concrete and relational diversity). In empirical terms (section 3), I will provide evidence for the striking variety of approaches to frame and moderate religious contact in modern immigration societies. Drawing from an ethnographic case study on forms of interreligious encounter in the Ruhr

area, I will present a preliminary typology of interreligious activities and illustrate how they are shaped by the above mentioned tension between universalism and particularism.

2 Beyond Metaphors: A 'Relational' Approach to Religious Pluralization

Scholarly debates about migration and religious pluralization are remarkably relying on what might be called metaphors of isolation. The words may differ, but the images remain the same: E.g. in the German discussion the concept of a "parallel society" ("*Parallelgesellschaft*") has become both widespread and influential. The spatial metaphor is strong: Parallels, so we have learned at school, are straight lines which never touch each other, but rather they go on in an infinite space. Likewise, religious migrant communities are bound to dwell separated and segregated from each other, be it as a result of incommensurable truth claims or of a deeply rooted resentment against the host society. As a matter of course, these implications persist despite all sorts of academic rationalization and reasoning. For instance, social scientists have defined parallel societies by internal cultural or religious homogeneity, social, civic and economic segregation, a duplication of the institutions of the host country and areal self-separation on a voluntary basis. (Meyer 2002) Especially the last point underlines the proximity of scholarly and political debate since voluntary dissociation can easily be judged as an assault to social cohesion. In the Anglophone discussion, related metaphors have been somewhat less abstract and geometric: Terms like "ethnic colony" (Rumbaut 1994, 755) or "religious enclavement" (Turner 2007, 291) dwell on the awkward notion of migrant colonies gradually expanding to the country of arrival and paradoxically turn an existing anti-imperialist discourse against immigrants who may themselves have come from some of the former colonies.

To put it into a nutshell, the academic discussion about migration and pluralization tends to be overmetaphorical and undertheorized at the same time.[1] The reasons for this imbalance are manifold and cannot be discussed in depth here. However, I would like to highlight two factors, namely political discourse and cultural legacy. On the one hand, diversity debates are always overshadowed by *political discourses* which seek for straightforward evidence instead of ambig-

1 This is not to say that metaphors could not be theoretically productive. Much in contrast, they have a strong heuristic potential which provides a good starting point for further reasoning about the conditions, mechanisms and consequences in place.

uous complexity and thus privilege metaphorical reasoning. On the other hand, more subtle and more powerful, the political apparatus itself is grounded in a *cultural legacy* of 'diaspora' as a tale of woe which insinuates a pessimistic view of religious diversity. At the very core of this anti-pluralistic mentality there are Biblical narrations of the people of Israel being captured, dispersed and taken into exile to distant Babylon. These early stories of religion and migration are far from celebrating the new and inspiring environment, but indulge in longing for the distant homeland ("By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion," Ps. 137, 1), deploring the ignorance and malignity of the "host society" ("and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion," Ps. 137, 3) and cultivating fantasies of violence against their suppressors ("O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones," Ps. 137, 8–9).

Quite obviously, both a critical exegesis of the Biblical sources and a proper investigation of their rich history of reception in music, arts and literature are far beyond the scope of this article. What I want to suggest here is that the unconscious reception of a religious tale of woe still shapes actual debates on migration and religious pluralization and grants plausibility to isolative metaphors of religious communities as parallel societies, enclaves or colonies. In contrast, proponents of a European history of religion have pointed out that from ancient times over the Middle Ages until the early modern period religious diversity has been the rule rather than the exception in Europe. (Auffarth 2007, 126–133; Kippenberg/von Stuckrad 2003) Even though ancient religious communities have been referred to as "mystery cults" (Kloft 1999) the early pluralist setting was not privatized, in the sense of being "restricted to private virtue" (Berger 1967, 134), but eminently public. Rituals, such as the so called "Taurobolium," which involved an ox being slaughtered over a pit and a devotee being covered in its blood, were everything but subtle and attracted considerable public attention. (Duthoy 1969, 89) Likewise, Jörg Rüpke has illustrated how religious diversity became both visible and tangible in ancient cityscapes where representative buildings of various religious communities were established next to each other. (Rüpke 2007)

Given these pluralistic conditions it comes as a surprise that ancient city states also proved to be reluctant and restrictive against new religions and applied discourses of endangerment which are astonishingly similar to modern anti-pluralistic debates. A prominent victim were the early Christian communities who were suspiciously eyed as a Jewish sect refusing to incorporate itself into the majority culture in important matters such as funeral rites and public sacrifice meals. Moreover, social reformist ideas like the egalitarian vision of a community in Christ, nourished doubts about the Christian loyalty to the consti-

tution of the ancient slaveholder society. It is striking that not only the general discourse, but the very same topics (self-segregation, cemeteries, dietary laws and constitutional loyalty) are recurring in actual debates about Islam in Europe, which now, ironically, is referred to as Christian occident. The historical ubiquity of both fruitful religious coexistence (see above) and assimilationist criticism underlines that the tension between particularity and universalism is not at all distinctive of modernity, but represents a continuing pattern in the global history of religious diversity.

In view of these historical insights and the preliminary observations of a metaphorical overbalance in diversity debates it seems all the more appropriate to argue for a 'relational' approach to religious pluralization. In contrast to merely descriptive attempts of mapping the variety of religious communities in a given area, a relational perspective focuses on the structural ties and semantic references of these communities to each other, to their country of origin and institutions of the country of arrival. In contrast to statistical macro-analyses of the impacts of religious pluralization on the religious field (Iannaccone/Stark 1994, Bruce 1999, Voas et al. 2002) a relational approach does not search for causal mechanisms or effects in the abstract space of aggregated survey data, but is to investigate the meso-level of concrete interreligious interaction. In this regard, it does not presuppose the notion of an instrumental or norm-driven actor, but analyzes religious "trans-action" as a social space which enables and configures concepts of agency. (Emirbayer 1997, 287) In the next section, I will translate these general programmatic considerations into a tangible model of migration, pluralization and religious encounter.

3 Varieties of Diversity – A Model

In this section I will present a heuristic model to explore the connection between migration, religious pluralization, encounter and governance in relational terms. The model is to intermediate between my programmatic call for a non-isolationalist approach to religious diversity and the empirical insights which will be presented in the following section. As such, the model can be understood as an invitation to build a middle-range theory of the 'varieties of pluralization' in modern immigration societies even though it does not at all claim to cure the above mentioned imbalance of metaphor and theory.

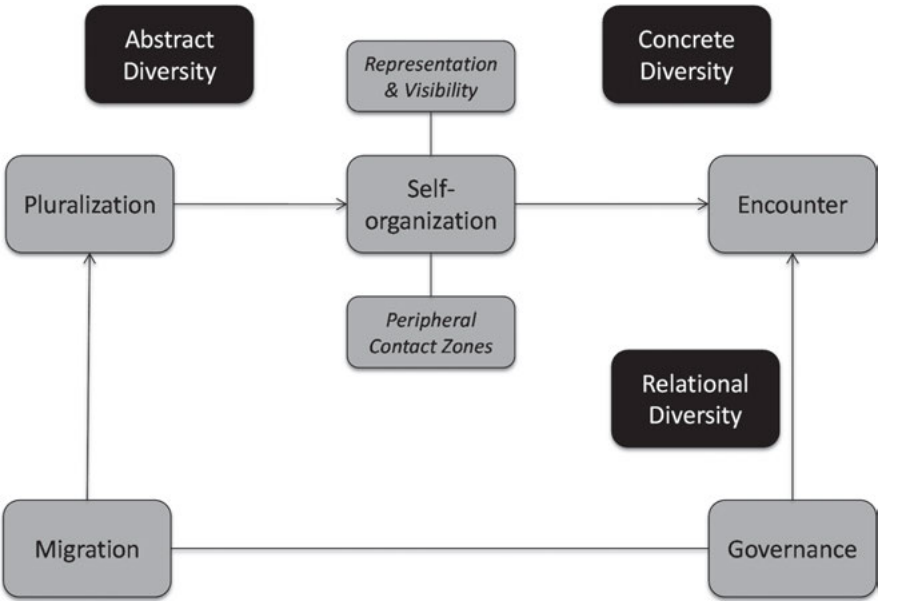

Fig. 1: Model for the varieties of pluralization in modern immigration societies. Designed by the author.

Figure 1 highlights three processes which are empirically strongly intertwined, yet can and should be distinguished in analytical terms: religious pluralization due to immigration and self-organization (i), the translation of abstract diversity into concrete situations of religious encounter (ii), and attempts to govern and moderate interreligious contact with a view to social cohesion (iii).

It may be a truism that processes of migration go hand in hand with cultural and religious pluralization. In Germany and beyond, this development has gained considerable momentum by large-scale labor migration in the 1950s and 1960s when recruiting agreements were signed with predominantly Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco. Later on, refugees, such as Vietnamese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, Kurdish Yezides and Orthodox Christians of several origins further added to the diverse picture. As a matter of fact, however, such pluralization remained 'abstract' as long as religion was restricted to personal practice and a vague sense of affiliation. While Christian migrants found themselves catered for by the established churches, other religious traditions were pushed into a pattern of "believing without belonging." (Davie 1994)

Consequently, the self-organization of religious migrant communities became crucial in translating abstract affiliation into concrete membership, participation and encounter. Previous studies have suggested a distinction of three

phases of religious institutionalization (Baumann 2004, Lehmann 2004): the first phase is characterized by loose gatherings of religious laymen which take place in private premises or community centers. In the second phase, these networks establish simple organizational structures, e.g. by forming registered associations. Through membership fees and donations it is now possible to rent spaces for worship and to invite religious dignitaries from the country of origin or bigger diaspora communities. Likewise, the third phase is marked by a further division of labor and the separation of religious and worldly duties, which may lead to the employment of part- or even full-time cult personnel. Along with the establishment of a community in terms of wealth and status and the development of a sense of being "home away from home" (Ballard 1994), claims arise for representative religious buildings as well as public participation and visibility. At the same time, these very claims raise the public awareness of the particular community (and of religious pluralization as such), thus triggering interreligious and intercultural contact.

Even though the above mentioned phase models can be criticized for their linear and teleological approach to institutionalization, they have so far served well in grasping the institutional dynamics of various religious migrant communities. Yet, representation and visibility are only one mechanism to convert abstract religious diversity into concrete interreligious encounter. Another mode of relational analysis, which may be less intuitive, but certainly not less widespread, is looking at what I call *peripheral contact zones*. The basic idea is that religious minorities may find themselves adjacent to each other due to similar socioeconomic restrictions. A good example are temples hosting both Hindus and Sikhs or multiethnic mosques or churches. (Hutter 2012, 357) In these cases different religious groups agree on a temporary joint venture which is bound to be revoked as soon as one of the groups is established enough to "do its own thing." Such interreligious contact zones can also be the result of transformations on the side of the majority religion in the country of arrival. E.g. in the German city of Dortmund a formerly Catholic church was sold to a Serbian Orthodox community which resold part of the premises to a Thai Buddhist Temple, thus creating a multireligious site. (Nagel 2012, 605) Likewise, Harris and Young report the (literal) conversion of a local Anglican church in England into an interfaith house. (Harris/Young 2009, 11)

Given that religion and its place within an increasingly globalizing process of migration and inter-relation has been thrust in to public awareness along with the increasing visibility of religious minorities, it is no surprise that 'concrete diversity' attracts civic and administrative attempts of *governance*. In Germany public authorities have long been reluctant to deal with religious diversity referring to principles of government neutrality. In recent years, however, religious matters

have become an important policy issue on the local, national and supranational level. On the local level, religion is now being included in urban integration plans and the so-called "*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*" represents a national endeavor of diversity governance. Moreover, some German federal states (Länder), such as Bremen and Hamburg, have signed treaties with Muslim associations and paved the way for a further institutionalization and incorporation of Islam in administrative terms. On the supranational level the Council of Europe has published a number of "Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue." (COE 2006) Beyond these recent political developments the governance of religious diversity has primarily been a matter of civil society, which produced a variety of different approaches. (Cf. also Schuppert 2012) In the following section, I will present a typology of interreligious activities and discuss their underlying notions of diversity and cohesion. I will argue that efforts of diversity governance contribute to producing a distinct form of diversity: unlike abstract and concrete diversity, *relational diversity* is not just an attribute of a given population, but a social figuration which reconciles the above mentioned tension between diversity and cohesion, and particularity and universalism on the meso-level.

4 Relational Diversity in Practice: Evidence from Interreligious Activities

Having discussed the programmatic and conceptual implications of a relational perspective to religious diversity I will now provide some empirical evidence of – what I call – relational diversity. The results draw from data collected in a research project on "Interreligious Activities and Religious Encounter in the Ruhr-Area," which is supported by the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Research of North Rhine-Westphalia. In the course of this project we have performed participant observation in 25 interreligious events and conducted 19 in-depth interviews with religious organizers in order to learn more about the rationales of different formats of organized interreligious contact. While earlier studies have focused on Christian-Muslim encounter (Klinkhammer et al. 2011), we decided to go beyond the (more or less) hidden Abrahamic agenda of interreligious dialogue and purposefully included contested (Baha'i), polytheistic (Hinduism) and non-theistic traditions (Buddhism) in my sample. The data was transcribed and analyzed following a grounded theory coding procedure, which led to the emergence of five categories of interreligious activities, namely neighborhood initiatives, dialogue meetings, prayers for peace, school services, and festivals which can be charac-

terized by their particular social structure and composition as well as their distinct notion of diversity and cohesion.

Interreligious neighborhood initiatives are dense local networks of religious representatives and laymen whose primary goal is to promote religious understanding and community cohesion in a local neighborhood. In terms of governance neighborhood initiatives represent a localized grassroots approach to religious diversity "in the quarter." Hence, they do usually not involve state actors, but are carried and administered by the established churches and take place in parish halls or even in private premises. Due to their local scale and relatively long history of collaboration, participants in neighborhood initiatives usually know each other personally. The level of religious and confessional diversity tends to be higher than in other activities since neighborhood initiatives basically address all religious communities in a given area without having to observe a certain quorum of "world religions." In my sample, neighborhood initiatives were the only format which included representatives of smaller minorities, such as Sikhs, and smaller Christian denominations, such as the New Apostolic and the Old Catholic Church. In terms of cohesion neighborhood initiatives rely on an emphatic reference to a common neighborhood as an inclusive social space transcending religious differences – and an exclusive notion of what marks a 'proper' religion. This notion became very explicit in several meetings when participants evoked the image of a pan-religious community besieged by "non-believers" who try to discredit religion and were identified as a "common enemy." Implicitly, the understanding of a proper religion was much narrower and closely tied to an Abrahamic model characterized by monotheism, ethics of solidarity, sacred writings – and the dignity of tradition, which excludes all kinds of new religious movements appearing later in history than the Baha'i.[2]

Dialogue Meetings are discussion groups covering dogmatic or ethical issues in comparative manner and on a regular basis. The social structure of dialogue circles is marked by a hard core of activists, mostly religious specialists (clerics or teachers) and a loose periphery of casual visitors, i.e. people with issue-specific interests. My sample of dialogue meetings involves a thematic range from theological matters, such as "the character of Joseph" or "strong women in the world religions" to more general ethical questions, such as "social human rights" or

2 Pragmatic as it may be, this solution poses a general question, i.e. what is the appropriate age for a legitimate religious tradition? While Baha'i have come to be widely acknowledged as the youngest child within the Abrahamic family, no peace prayer in my sample has ever involved 'new' religious movements, such as Jehovas Witnesses or Mormons. This narrow scope might be a German peculiarity, since Griera and Forteza (2011) provide a number of divergent examples for other European countries.

"How can we care for our elderly?." The degree of religious diversity in dialogue groups is rather moderate and clearly centered around an Abrahamic consensus of Christianity, Islam and Judaism as major world religions. Similar to neighborhood initiatives dialogue meetings do usually not involve state actors and are held in religious premises (often alternating between the participating mosques, synagogues and churches). Due to the controversial nature of some topics and the dialogic format itself these meetings may attract a variety of stakeholders, such as sympathizers of anti-pluralistic political movements. How is the balance between diversity (of religious traditions and political opinions) and cohesion to be achieved in this setting? My results suggest two different mechanisms which are often applied complementary to each other: cultivating difference and discovering common ground. The cultivation of difference implies an acknowledgement and embrace of diversity and is deeply rooted in pluralistic reasoning whereas discovering common ground seeks to intellectually even out religious differences, e.g. by reference to a common origin or systematic similarities.

Interreligious Prayers for Peace are joint worship events which involve lections and liturgical elements from different religious traditions. Similar to neighborhood initiatives they address a wide variety of religious minorities and are characterized by a high degree of diversity. In my sample, peace prayers were the only interreligious activity which explicitly included polytheistic and non-theistic traditions. In comparison to the other activities, interreligious prayers had more participants (between 30 and 100), most of whom were not acquainted with each other. In terms of governance peace prayers offer a number of opportunities for public authorities to become involved. One interreligious prayer in my sample was organized in cooperation between the city council and a renowned local dialogue initiative. It was held in the town hall and opened by the mayor who took the opportunity to advertise the achievements of his government regarding social peace. The balance between diversity and cohesion is achieved by a remarkable ritual design which stages religious boundaries in order to transgress them: Typically, peace prayers rely on consecutive readings or recitations by religious representatives and result in a common prayer for unanimity and understanding. In contrast to the previous formats, peace prayers are less based on cognitive interreligious exchange, but on joint religious experience and ritual performance. Given their formalized structure, the diverse setting of interreligious prayers entails practical protocolary challenges as to the order and speaking time of the traditions involved. A common solution is to 'sort' religions according to their alleged age. This historical approach is an attempt to deal with religious diversity and superiority claims in a neutral and objective way. At the same time, however, it carries strong ethnocentric implications of 'proper' religions being based on some kind of holy founding scripture.

Similar to peace prayers, *interreligious school services* are multi-religious worship sessions held at state run or religious schools in order to celebrate students' successful graduation or their transition to a secondary school. These services are typically offered at schools in districts with a high share of immigrants and address both pupils and their families. In my sample they involved Protestant and Catholic representatives as well as an imam of the Turkish Islamic Union (DITIB), the biggest Muslim association in Germany. Hence, the degree of religious diversity is rather limited and restricted to communities who are well established and acknowledged. It is likely that this restrictive policy is due to the public framework of school services which are held during schooldays and in school venues and involve religious dignitaries as well as teachers. The interreligious setting is marked by a liturgical framework which is strongly inspired by (Protestant) Christian practice. It includes short lections and prayers from each faith tradition as well as songs and sketches which have been prepared in class. The balance between diversity and cohesion is achieved by a guiding notion of the class community or age cohort embracing religious differences.

Finally, *interreligious festivals* refer to public events based on a programmatic notion of religious encounter. These festivals may range from interreligious feasts to tournaments, such as the annual interreligious soccer competition "Kick-off for Dialogue" (*Anstoß zum Dialog*) in Dortmund, which involves two teams of Christian and Muslim clerics, supervised by a Jewish referee. Interreligious festivals may combine different elements of the previous formats, e.g. the interreligious soccer tournament involved an interreligious quiz for children as well as Muslim and Jewish youth groups performing traditional dances. In contrast to other activities, interreligious festivals are characterized by a large number of participants and high fluctuation; they do not usually include liturgical action, such as prayer or worship and lack a clear-cut distinction between religious and cultural boundaries. Similar to peace prayers interreligious festivals may become a stage for public authorities. For instance, the above mentioned tournament included addresses by the mayor and the chief of police who highlighted the analogy of sportive and intercultural fairness. Such political moderation is one of several modes to balance diversity and cohesion during interreligious festivals: The soccer game resembles peace prayers as it takes a "ludic" approach of literally playing with religious differences. The particularity of religious traditions is being evoked, for instance by the composition of teams, and potential interreligious conflict is reframed as productive competition. In contrast, interreligious feasts, such as common *Iftar*-celebrations, dwell on a strong sense of unity through commensality admitting diversity in the form of short explanations on particular religious festive dishes and dietary rules.

As a matter of fact, this preliminary typology can neither claim to be exhaustive nor disjunctive. In the sample there remain activities which are being notoriously difficult to categorize. An example are interreligious get-togethers, such as the initiative "*ZusammenSetzen*" in Wuppertal, which meet in private living rooms and are largely based on personal encounter and biographical narrating. Other border cases are temporary interreligious roundtables or open days which are established during the planning process for representative mosques and tend to be issue-specific and apologetic. Finally, the typology does not account for the variety of artistic responses to religious pluralization, e.g. interreligious rooms of silence in hospitals or airports. Nevertheless, the distinction between interreligious neighborhood initiatives, dialogue meetings, peace prayers, school services and festivals provides a snapshot of a highly dynamic field and elucidates the variety of civic approaches to religious diversity. It should be clear, that, regardless from their institutional attachment or constitution, the above mentioned activities are not just disparate single events, but represent social figurations of their own kind. As such, they have incorporated the tension between particularity and universalism and provide different institutional solutions to balance claims for diversity and for cohesion. In my concluding remarks, I will provide a comparative discussion of these approaches and argue for a relational understanding of religious diversity apt to bridge the gap between global integration and cultural diversity.

5 Conclusion: Interreligious Encounter and Entangled History

In this paper, my aim was to outline a sociology of religion perspective to religious pluralization and the governance of interreligious encounter. In order to prevent airy theorizing on the one hand and empirical muddle on the other, I have presented my argument on a programmatic, conceptual and empirical level. On the programmatic level, I have argued for a relational approach to religious diversity which mediates between merely topographic endeavors and statistical macro-analysis and focuses on the meso-level of concrete interreligious interaction. On the conceptual level, I have fleshed out the relational research program and offered a heuristic model to conceive of the connection between processes of migration, religious pluralization, encounter and governance. Moreover, I have proposed a terminological distinction between abstract, concrete and relational diversity. While abstract diversity refers to individual religious affiliation and personal practice, concrete diversity reflects visibility and encounter which go

hand in hand with religious self-organization. Abstract and concrete diversity denote attributes of a population, whereas relational diversity refers to the social figurations which come into play when interreligious contact is becoming subject to attempts of governance. Hence, the empirical level of my investigation was to examine interreligious activities as governance arrangements in response to religious pluralization.

The empirical evidence suggests that there has evolved a variety of different approaches which can be distinguished regarding their underlying notions of religious diversity and their strategies to balance particularity and cohesion. Interreligious *neighborhood initiatives* allow for a high degree of diversity between and within religious traditions. They achieve cohesion by administering a bright boundary between believers and non-believers and by reference to the local neighborhood as an inclusive social space. In comparison, interreligious *dialogue meetings* admit a lesser degree of diversity as they have to observe a certain quorum of 'world religions.' They apply two basic modes of diversity management, i.e. the cultivation of religious differences and the intellectual discovery of theological common ground. This ambiguity between exposing and deconstructing religious diversity is also characteristic of interreligious *peace prayers* which include a broad variety of theistic, polytheistic and nontheistic religious traditions. In contrast to dialogue meetings, peace prayers rely on a performative rather than cognitive approach to reconcile diversity and cohesion. In short, peace prayers evoke religious boundaries – in order to transgress them in a final shared prayer for unanimity. Similar to peace prayers, interreligious *school services* are based on joint worship and ritual practice. At the same time they have proved much more restrictive with regard to religious diversity admitting only representatives of well-established communities, such as mainline Protestants and Catholics as well as the Turkish Islamic Union for Religious Affairs. In terms of cohesion, school services dwell on a strong notion of the class community or age cohort outshining religious differences. Finally, interreligious *festivals* combine several of the above mentioned characteristics in a distinctive way: They resemble neighborhood initiatives in their focus on the local community and dialogue meetings in their sense of cultivating religious boundaries. They are similar to peace prayers and school services in emphasizing interreligious practice and experience. In order to achieve the balance between diversity and cohesion interreligious festivals offer two additional strategies, a ludic approach which reframes religious conflict as sportive competition, and a commensal approach relying on a holistic understanding of hospitality.

In a comparative perspective the notions of religious diversity throughout different forms of interreligious activities have proved to be closely tied to concepts of a proper or legitimate religion. My evidence suggests two basic models of 'inter-

religious religion,' which I call the Abrahamic and the World Religion model. The Abrahamic model is based on the common Biblical origin of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as on theological consensus regarding monotheism, ethics of solidarity and the significance of a Holy Scripture. It was most prominent in dialogue meetings and interreligious school services and pervasive in all other forms of encounter as well. The World Religion model was rooted in the dignity of tradition, a general appreciation of human rights and the attachment to some sort of sacred writings. It was prominent in peace prayers and the commensal kind of interreligious festivals. The dignity of tradition is often valued by its alleged seniority, i.e. the age of its founding scriptures, which prevents all sorts of new religious movements from being included in the scope of accepted diversity. In this respect, there seemed to be a tacit agreement that the Baha'i are the last permissible religion on the timescale which makes them literally the Seal of Prophets. The inclusive or exclusive sense of religious diversity was closely connected to the more or less official nature of encounter. Hence, interreligious school services and dialogue meetings appeared to be selective in terms of establishment and reputation whereas peace prayers proved to be more inclusive. Moreover, there is a significant difference between inter- and intrareligious diversity: Most of the activities under investigation (with the exception of neighborhood initiatives) implied a representative mode of communication with one person speaking in the name of one religious tradition which abetted essentialism and inhibited all kinds of intrareligious heterodoxy.

Along with different understandings of diversity there went various approaches of cohesion politics which can be modeled on (at least) four different scales: First, the *access* to diversity can be cognitive, involving comparative theological reasoning and intellectual enlightenment, or experience-based, e.g. resting on joint worship practice. Second, religious *boundary work* may either focus on the cultivation of religious differences in order to construct and maintain bright boundaries between religious traditions or aim at leveling differences and blurring boundaries. (Alba 2005; Lamont and Molnár 2002) The first mode is pluralist in embracing (or tolerating) the religious other whereas the second mode creates a sense of unity by the deconstruction of difference. Likewise (and third) the *collective framing* of cohesion politics can range between the poles of community and society. (Tönnies 1957) Communitarian settings are marked by some initial collective identity, for instance as an age cohort (school services) or local neighborhood (neighborhood initiatives) while societal settings are based on a notion of difference combined with a convergence of interest (dialogue meetings). Consequently (and fourth), the reference point of cohesion may lie within or outside the religious field. Hence, peace prayers achieve internal cohesion by literally forming a super-religious community whereas interreligious festivals

and neighborhood initiatives externalize the locus of solidarity to another social entity.

Taking a step back, what lesson can be learned from these results for the role of the humanities at the threshold of modernization and globalization? As tentative as it may be, my analysis has shown that religious diversity in modern immigration societies is far from being planished so as to fit the universal norms of efficiency and bureaucracy. Neither does it just 'survive,' an awkward atavism of doubtful folkloristic value, but it is highly productive and innovative in creating new sociocultural forms. These new domains of diversity, however, can just occur to those who look for them, which puts not only an empirical, but also – and all the more – a heuristic challenge. In this paper, I have argued for a relational approach to religious diversity which conceives of diversity in terms of concrete encounter rather than abstract attributes. This change of perspective also implied reconsidering the methodology and unit of analysis: Instead of mapping single religious communities or analyzing aggregated individual data, I chose to examine interreligious activities as structured events of symbolic interaction which require interactive methods, such as participant observation. Beyond the subject-matter of religion a meso-level approach to relational diversity embodied in symbolic interaction has a lot to offer for the interdisciplinary debate within the humanities, including the social sciences, as it grounds airy meta-debates about global and entangled history in a tangible analysis of cultural practice.

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