



Religion: Bridging Gaps and Breaking Paths

Contemporary approaches towards discourses of religion and knowledge production in transdisciplinary perspective

International Conference of the Doctoral Program *Religion – Knowledge – Discourse* at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2nd – 4th of February 2017

CALL FOR PAPERS

As a signifier, “religion” figures as one of most vibrant — but no less polyvalent and in many regards polarizing — buzzwords in contemporary academic discourses. Hardly any term attracts more attention and consideration from scholars across the academic spectrum. At the same time, “religion” proves to be, on many levels, a seemingly inexhaustible point of contention. Taking into account both its unquestionable timeliness as well as its sheer complexity and controversiality, “religion” calls for a collective academic effort: the challenge of approaching “religion” demands TRANS-disciplinarity!

As such, this conference is designed as an experimental space, a research laboratory for contemporary approaches towards “religion”, discourses of religion and knowledge production. In the spirit of our intentionally ambiguous slogan, “bridging gaps and breaking paths”, we seek to bring together voices from various academic backgrounds for a constructive, mutually challenging and inspiring dialogue. We cordially invite senior and junior researchers with advanced research projects approaching “religion” in innovative ways, who are also open to think and interact beyond their academic disciplines, to join us in our endeavor.

This conference is a collaboration of the transdisciplinary research scheme *Religion – Knowledge – Discourse* (RKD) and will be held at Humboldt University of Berlin. The objective of the RKD research cluster is to encourage young scholars to critically investigate and reflect on discursive categorizations and notions of religion and knowledge by means of diverse empirical and theoretical inquiries. Since the establishment of the RKD in 2014, junior and senior researchers have brought together insights from various disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from Sociology, Economics, and Anthropology to the study of Religions, Philosophy and Theology. The RKD research group, by means of this conference, seeks to gather and share these insights with a broader audience, inviting others to join the critical exchange on the conjunction of *Religion, Knowledge* and *Discourse*.

Contributions to the conference addressing the following topics are especially welcome:

I. Religion, Gender and Theologies: Stagnation or change in the authority over ‘religious’ knowledge production?

Feminist and Queer Theologies offer distinct voices within religion/religious traditions. These voices are often radically different from those heard by the producers and enforcers of (androcentric) orthodoxy. They also provide distinct voices within the “global” feminist and queer discourses which tend to ignore/disregard religion and religious practices as a form of agency and human flourishing.

Scholars of the field frequently build on and are inspired by the struggles of other marginalized groups and are aware of how different categories such as: race, class, gender and religion, are interdependent systems of discrimination.

How are notions of agency and subject-formation articulated in terms of religious/theological discourse? What role do theologies play in practices of social exclusion/inclusion?

II. *Religion and Economics: Interactions of two discursive spheres.*

Global discourses on religion and development: How do development benchmarks, goals and new governmental technologies and discourses affect religion? Are secular development agendas compatible with perspective(s) of faith-based organizations? How do discourses of religion and development interact? In what ways do economic developmentalist approaches transform when it comes to the appropriation of religion?

Neoliberal technologies and management of uncertainties: How do neoliberal technologies function in terms of managing uncertainties? What is the role of imagination in dealing with uncertainties? What kinds of interventions emerge and are counted as appropriate in dealing with uncertainty in contemporary knowledge-based economies? How and in which forms does 'the religious' intervene in contemporary problem-solving processes?

III. *The Praxis of Religion, Theologies and Knowledge Production: Overcoming the dichotomy between inside and outside perspective*

Unlike the analytical and/or critical "outside perspective" of sociology, anthropology, and religious and cultural studies etc. on and towards formations of religious subjectivity, religious communities inevitably have to be able to productively relate to, regulate and (re-)form themselves and their praxis from an "inside perspective". In fact, theologies or theological discourses, with their particular function of theological knowledge production, may be understood as more or less institutionalized, inner-religious possibilities of self-regulation. With this in mind: Are there new and unexplored strategies for theological and (other) discourses of academic knowledge production to overcome this dichotomy of perspectives? Can theologies and (other) academic disciplines work together dialogically on a common understanding of particular formations of religious subjectivity; or even find ways of mediation between different religious traditions, their self-understanding and practices?

IV. *Religion Revisited: Positioning, Politics, Power*

Religion positions groups and individuals in the world. It generates notions of belonging and meaning. These processes of positioning do not occur in a vacuum, but are closely linked to socio- political and economic formations. Examining this embeddedness in a network of power, shaped by time and place, poses certain analytical challenges which need to be addressed. One of them being the often made distinction between "politics" and "religion".

But to what extent is such a distinction analytically sound? How can we re-think politics in the field of religion / religion in the field of politics? What insights does a postcolonial approach to studying religion generate with regard to notions of politics? Is classification along religious lines a political act? And does it subvert, or reproduce other modes of positioning?

V. *Religion, Body, Material Culture and Aesthetics*

In its search for truth and enlightened wisdom, the human body and its mundane desires and affects have largely been neglected in Western thought. Privileging the aesthetics of the mind and the spiritual realm of human existence, the body has even been pushed aside. As an inheritor of these legacies, the research of religion did not widely differ from this tradition. However, concepts like body, affect, material culture and aesthetics have since experienced significant growth. Despite this veritable explosion of interest, it is still vital to examine more closely the challenges and questions that we face as researchers who are marked by traditions which have neglected the body. How can we make sense of the physicalities and materialities within the study of contemporary religious communities and theologies? How can we open up our research perspectives towards a closer incorporation of the body and its adaptation into contemporary theory of religion (and the secular) and thereby overcome traditionally held dichotomies between body and mind?

Please submit a 250 word abstract via e-mail, indicating the theme and methodological approach of the paper you wish to present by 31st of October 2016.

For any queries do not hesitate to contact us:

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For further information about the conference and the organisers, please visit

<https://www.rwd.hu-berlin.de/de>