

## CHAPTER 8

# Researching Religious Diversity in Western Europe: The Study of Diaspora Communities, Religious Conflict, and Public Domain in Germany and Switzerland

*MARTIN BAUMANN*

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### **1. Introduction**

In June every year, some 15,000 Tamil people from all over Europe travel to Hamm/Westphalia, a less known town in the North of Germany. There, in its industrial outskirts a Hindu temple stages a by now huge festival honouring the goddess Sri Kamadchi Ampal. On the main day of the festival, a replica of the goddess is taken out of the new, purposely-built temple and the goddess circulates around her sacred abode in a public procession. The goddess's departure from the temple enables visitors to have *darshan* – seeing the divine image. At the same time, the power and grace of the goddess blesses the people, the town, and the

country, according to Hindu view. In June 2006 it was the 14<sup>th</sup> time that this annual procession had taken place. During the mid-1990s, a procession like this had given rise to a local conflict, resulting in the closure of the temple and its shift from the residential area to industrial outskirts. This conflict can be taken as a symptomatic reaction of some groups of German people to the public emergence of so-called “foreign” religions and immigrants in Germany. Likewise, in Switzerland, plans by Muslim immigrants to build mosques with a high rising minaret have created heated debates and nation-wide press publicity in recent years. These and other cases illustrate difficulties in coming to terms with the new religious plurality and diversity which have emerged during the last three decades in Western Europe.

The focus of this chapter is on the history of religions in Germany and Switzerland and disputes about religious buildings as publicly displayed symbols of non-Christian immigrants. As a matter of fact, the histories of the religious landscapes in European nation states are very different from those of the classical immigration countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia. Amongst others, in Europe the prominent political idea of a nation state as religiously and culturally homogeneous and, therefore, stable and socially peaceful, has been challenged by the emergence of a diversity of religious faiths and cultural styles. Social conflicts in terms of bitter disputes over the building of mosques and temples, for example, serve as indicators for the challenges, fears and tensions.

In order to analyse conflicts about publicly displaced religious symbols of immigrant and diaspora communities, part one shall provide introductory data on the historic religious homogeneity and emergent plurality in Germany and Switzerland. Part two introduces the terms “diaspora communities” and “religious settlement”, followed by part three which provides examples of conflicts surrounding the building of new homes for non-Christian gods. Part four shall contextualise these conflicts within the broader issue of access to the implicitly prescriptive public domain. The chapter argues that despite a stated equal treatment of non-Christian religions according to constitutional laws, social conflicts bring to the fore the unspoken hierarchy of legitimacy to claim participation in the public domain. The final part provides two examples of coming to terms with religious diversity. It sheds light on the fact that religious and cultural plurality, though continuously discussed in terms of conflict and tension, thrives successfully to an overwhelming degree in everyday life.

## **2. Facets of Religious Homogeneity and Plurality in Western Europe**

### **2.1 Historical Development**

For more than a millennium, territories and kingdoms in Europe were dominated by Christian Churches, faiths, practices and clerics. However, though marginalised and persecuted, Jews and Jewish traditions formed an integral part of the European history of religions. Likewise, Muslims lived for seven centuries on the Iberian Peninsula until the Catholic reconquista drove them out in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Islam remained with a solid footing throughout the Balkan (southwestern Europe). Also, Western esoteric and occult traditions formed an integral, though often forgotten and hidden part of the history of religious thought and practice on European soil.

From the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Martin Luther and Protestant reformation caused a major split in Western European Christianity. Churches independent of and in critical distance to the Pope in Rome developed, bringing about an inner Christian plurality of faiths and churches. Rulers and their territories turned either Protestant or remained in the Roman Catholic faith. After cruel religious wars peace was settled by the rule that the faith of the king or prince prescribed the faith of his subjects. As a consequence, in most Western European territories and small states one faith only dominated: either the Protestant or Roman Catholic. Homogeneity in religious terms, banning diversity as troublesome and threatening to social stability, became the norm.

Following the Enlightenment and its praise of reason, and the industrial revolution causing inner-state migrations, the hitherto mono-confessional dominance changed to a bi- or dual-confessional landscape. In towns and prospering cities, Roman-Catholics and Protestants lived together, though mainly in different districts, added by Free Church followers and newly formed Christian traditions and its members. Christian Church towers dominated each village and Cathedrals formed major focal points in the cities. Public space was dominated by Christian symbols. Non-Christian traditions such as Judaism were prevented by law to establish publicly visible buildings and signs of their presence until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the forming of the German nation state in 1871, Protestantism became the state religion, the German Emperor being the supreme bishop of Prussian Protestantism. Defeat in World War I (1914-18) and the imposition of democracy brought an end to state religion and monarchical emperorship. Religious freedom was also introduced. The 1920s saw a growing interest in alternative spiritualities such as Yoga practices and Buddhist ideas in Germany. Following the

rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in 1933, the state enforced church-critical and anti-Christian politics, added by the observation of minor religions. Nazi racist ideology propagated the annihilation of Judaism, persecuting Jews all over Europe and murdering millions of Jewish people. Jewish culture in Europe was almost brought to extinction by the end of World War II in 1945.

In Switzerland, formed as a nation state in 1848 with some twenty cantons, comparable centralized patterns never emerged. In contrast, each canton independently governed its own affairs. Religious freedom was guaranteed by the short-lived Helvetic Republic since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As in neighbouring Germany, Christianity with its various churches, traditions and independent movements dominates the religious landscape almost totally. Up to 1970, 98 percent of the Swiss population were members in either the Protestant or Roman Catholic Churches, or in one of the many minority Christian communities. Apart from a very few converts in Buddhist, Bahá'í or Theosophical circles, the religious scenery and the public domain were undoubtedly dominated by Christian traditions. Religion in Germany and Switzerland was, and to a large extent still is, thought of in Christian terms, religious homogeneity serving as guarantee of the nation states stability.

## **2.2 Changes: Emerging Religious Plurality**

Due to labour shortage, during the 1950s and 1960s workers from Southern Europe and Turkey were recruited to work in industries in Germany for a three-year period. However, the designed rotation system proved to be uneconomic and the so-called "guest workers" were allowed to extend their stay. Due to the prolonged stay, the families of the mainly male workers were permitted to come to Germany. Since the mid-70s, family re-union has caused migrant life to move from the hostels to houses and to pay more attention to religious observance and religious instruction of the children.

Whereas workers from Italy, Greece or Spain have brought with them Christian traditions, workers and their families from Turkey imported Muslim traditions, mainly Sunni tradition. In fact, Muslim soldiers had served in the Prussian army during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and a mosque was built for them already in 1739 in Potsdam, near Berlin. Despite these early encounters and although Islam and mosques had been present in Germany since the 1920s, it was not until the immigration of Turkish people that Islam grew considerably in number during the 1970s and 1980s. Also, due to refugees and asylum seekers, further religions came to Germany during the 1980s. Refugees from Vietnam and

Laos imported Buddhist traditions, providing a considerable numerical addition to the small existent convert Buddhist scenery. Likewise, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka brought with them Hindu traditions and refugees from Afghanistan, former Yugoslavia, Iran and other countries extended the spectrum of Muslim presence in Germany.

The arrival of non-Christian religions in Switzerland began a few years later. Different from Germany, Switzerland had no guest workers scheme. Instead, workers from Italy and later Spain and Portugal (all Roman Catholics) stayed in Switzerland on the basis of a seasonal work permit. After a year, most had to move back but opted to return the next year. Also, restrictions to allow entrance of foreigners are stricter than in Germany, acquiring Swiss citizenship is severely restricted by many hurdles. Nevertheless, global flight migrations from South Asia and Southeast Asia as well as from Africa brought refugees, who applied for asylum amongst others in Switzerland. Also, the break up of the multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia and its war during the 1990s resulted in tens of thousands of refugees. Bosnian and Albanian Muslims, Serbian Orthodox Christians and Croatian Catholics arrived, though, after several years many returned and were respectively sent back to the newly established Balkan states. Workers and refugees from Turkey and Near Eastern states further multiplied the Islamic plurality in Switzerland. As in Germany, several thousand women from Thailand came for marriage, and Thai Buddhist monasteries cater for their religious and cultural needs.

Added to this influx of non-Christian religions due to migration, new religions, esoteric practices and off-springs from mainstream Christian traditions have further diversified the religious landscapes in Germany and Switzerland since the 1970s. International religious organisations, i.e. new religions such as Transcendental Meditation, the Neo-Sannyas Movement of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, and International Society for Krishna Consciousness (“Hare Krishna”), Unification Church, Scientology Church and many more succeeded in winning members and establishing centres. A heated public debate ensued about the assumed danger of these organisations and new religions. Quite different and much more socially accepted, Buddhist schools and traditions from Tibet, Japan (especially Zen) and South Asia came with high ranking teachers and monks. Within a short time, the Asian masters gained a devoted fellowship and hundreds of Buddhist groups and centres were founded. With a few exceptions, up to now Asian immigrant Buddhists and Western convert Buddhists frequent different centres and temples as they place different emphases on the paths they follow.

### 2.3 Current State: Limited Plurality

The net result of these multi-varied processes of conversion and immigration has been the transformation of the former bi-confessional Christian domination to an incipient religious plurality. Due to historical reasons and specific privileges for the main churches, i.e. Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, it certainly is justified to speak of a “limited pluralism” in both Germany and Switzerland (Daiber 1995: 172).

In numerical terms, in 2003 two thirds of the 82.5 million inhabitants of Germany were members of the two main Christian churches. The second largest group, so to say, was constituted by people with no formal religious adherence, comprising some 26 percent. The rate, however, varied considerably between former East and West Germany (70% and 15% respectively (Pollack 1999: 766). Among non-Christian religions, in total almost 6 percent, Muslim traditions with 3.4 million people undoubtedly comprised the largest religious group. Buddhists came up to 200,000 followers. Hindus can be estimated at 110,000 people, Jews about the same number. Other religious communities, new religions and people with an esoteric worldview may be estimated to about 1 million people. In total, in 2003 non-Christian faiths with about 4.8 million people constituted a diversified minority of together 5.7 percent (Remid 2004).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1:

<b>Religious traditions in Germany: numbers and percentage, 2003</b>		
Roman Catholicism	26.2 mill.	31.8%
Protestantism	25.8 mill.	31.3%
Free, other and Orthodox Churches	2.7 mill.	3.3%
Islam	3.4 mill.	4.1%
Judaism	110,000	0.1%
Hindu traditions	110,000	0.1%
Buddhism	200,000	0.2%
New religions, Esoteric (guess)	1.0 mill.	1,2%
Total for non-Christian traditions	4.82 mill.	5.7%
No adherence	21.4 mill.	26.0%
No statement	1.5 mill.	1.9%
Source: Remid 2004		

In Switzerland, the national census 2000 ascertained that almost 80 percent of the 7.3 million inhabitants were members of Christian churches or communities. People with no formal religious adherence came up to 11.1 percent, multiplying considerably from 1.1 percent since 1970. Non-Christian traditions totalled 5.3 percent or less than 400,000 people. The number most likely will be higher coming up to half a million as many foreign people resident in Switzerland refused to state their religious belonging, i.e. gave no statement. Among the non-Christian traditions, Islam again was strongest with 311,000 people, with informed estimates stating figures of up to 400,000 Muslims in Switzerland. Compared to the Muslim fold, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists with 18,000 to 28,000 adherents remained comparatively small in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

Table2:

<b>Religious traditions in Switzerland: numbers and percentage, 2000</b>		
Protestantism	2.4 mill.	33.0%
Roman Catholicism	3.0 mill.	41.8%
Free, other and Orthodox Churches	320,000	4.2%
Islam	311,000	4.3%
Judaism	18,000	0.2%
Hindu traditions	28,000	0.4%
Buddhism	21,000	0.3%
Other and new religions	8,000	0.1%
Total for non-Christian traditions		5.3%
No religious adherence	810,000	11.1%
No statement	316,000	4.3%
Source: Federal Administration of Statistics, 2004		

The range of plurality in both Germany and Switzerland is still small with regard to the percentage rate but very diverse and multiplied with regard to the spectrum of different faiths and practices. Trends point to an accelerated diversification and a continuing growth of religious plurality. Nevertheless, in many political circles and in the minds of many people, the idea of a homogeneous and, therefore solid, well-functioning and peaceful nation remains alive. New developments such as non-Christian faiths and incoming foreigners carry the potential of inducing tension, threat and social instability – a matter of public concern that is raised by certain populist politicians.

### 3. Diaspora Communities and Religious Settlement

In Western Europe, non-Christian religions are mainly made up of migrants and immigrants having arrived during the last 30 years. The title specifies these immigrant groups as “diaspora communities”. Why so? The descriptive term points to underlying relational ties paramount for the immigrants and immigrant communities.<sup>3</sup> Undeniably, both in Germany and Switzerland, immigrants form the largest part of Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and others non-Christian groups and communities. These migrants keep, if possible, firm contacts with the country and culture of origin. The traditions of the former home country play a fundamental role in the lives of these so-called “foreigners”. At the same time, the immigrants have started to adapt to the country of residence. They align themselves with patterns and norms of the new country, i.e. they learn the language of the country, found religious societies and cultural organisations, change ways of living, and introduce religious festivals, teachings and practices. The process of rooting and establishing these “foreign faiths” in Germany and Switzerland is defined by the inter-relatedness of the immigrant group, the country of origin and the host society. The diaspora term points to this important tripolar relationship and to the process of both preserving and transforming the transplanted tradition.<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, becoming rooted in a diasporic setting, conflicts between the dominant, mainstream society and the new, incoming group are more or less unavoidable. Generally, in Western Europe and elsewhere, the presence of refugees, immigrants or guest workers is discussed in terms of economic and social incorporation, i.e. in terms of providing housing, employment, language skills, education and so forth. Additionally, and a point long overlooked by social and political researchers, this aspect of structural incorporation is accompanied by processes of religious incorporation, taking place both on an institutional and representational level. “Religious incorporation” is meant not as an assimilative process, i.e. converting to the mainstream religious traditions of the society. Rather, the notion conveys processes of establishing a religious infrastructure on its own. Organisations and institutions are set up to ensure the maintenance of the transplanted religion. More often than not, religious institutions function on multi-varied levels, providing for the individual not only religious instruction and spiritual-emotional comfort and support, but also arranging for social needs such as legal aid, help to find accommodation and establish contact with people of like kin. Also, on a collective level, such institutions often develop to become the focus of an immigrant community, taking on representational roles (Bouma 1996, Warner 1998, Baumann 1998).

Australian sociologist Gary Bouma has called this development of getting religiously established the process of “religious settlement”, i.e. “the ways in which religions ‘settle’ into a culture and society” (1996: 6) and how “a religion becomes part of a society and culture” (1996: 53). Different to Bouma, who plays down the issue of conflict between new immigrant religions and mainstream Australian society, despite highly controversial measures such as self-declared “mosque-free-zones” in certain Australian cities (1996: 90), I argue that the occurrence of religious conflict is very much a part of becoming settled and, paradoxically, being publicly incorporated in the long run.

## **4. Religious Conflicts in Germany and Switzerland: Three Examples**

The following part refers to religious conflicts on the communal level. Cases are amongst others the building of a mosque or temple as described in examples below. Other disputes arose questioning the building and height of a minaret, the carrying through of a Hindu procession on public streets or the question whether the Muezzin may be permitted to call his fellow Muslims for prayer supported by loudspeakers. More often than not, such incidents have been bitterly disputed in local municipalities and councils. In this context it became apparent that not only practical issues such as parking problems, litter problems, and increase of traffic are at the centre of the quarrel. Rather, as will be argued, at the centre of the conflict is the question whether a new interest group, i.e. the immigrant religious community, gains access to the symbolic wealth of the public domain – or whether this access is limited.

### **4.1 A New Home for the Hindu Goddess**

The introduction described the public procession in honour of the goddess Sri Kamadchi Ampal, carried through in Hamm, Northern Germany. This festival and its public staging have caused heated disputes and nationwide media coverage during the mid-1990s. From 1989 to 1997, the temple was situated in a residential area, surrounded by apartment blocks and private gardens. As the attendance at the annual festival procession increased rapidly, anger and hostility amongst a few neighbours arose as well. They complained about blocked garage entrances and lamented litter lying in the front gardens. In the preparatory stages leading up to the procession in 1996, residents voiced their misgivings in letters to the local

newspaper. They foresaw “intolerable state of affairs in their streets” and demanded a ban of the procession. On the basis of numerous conditions imposed by the local authorities, the procession could take place, although for the last time in that area. However, the temple in no way complied with German regulations of fire prevention and security standards. Thus, the local municipality had to close the temple. In a very cooperative way the municipal authorities of Hamm helped the Tamil Hindus to find a new site for their temple, however.

Within a short time, a suitable property was found, situated in an industrial area, far outside of Hamm. At a local meeting, the authorities summoned the people of the district and presented the plans to have the temple there. Quite differently than expected by the administration of the town, self-declared spokespersons of the community dismissed the plan. In an aggressive atmosphere these loudspeakers rejected the project in an openly racist way. Hindus and Tamils were dismissed as “foreign” and the temple as non-fitting to the village and the neighbouring industries. The speakers vehemently demanded that the temple should be shifted somewhere else.

In reaction to this, two days later in a public statement, the mayor of Hamm expressed his strong criticism of the intolerance and hostility to foreigners which had dominated the meeting. Previous to the meeting, the press office of the municipality already had declared that the temple had gained importance for the cultural life of the town. Supporting the temple would be an “expression of openness and ability to integrate foreign customs and practices”.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to the refusal voiced at the gathering, the authorities ordered that the temple would find its new home in this area. Fairly quickly a pragmatically arranged house was built, adjacent to an existent house where the priest and his family found their new home. In autumn 1997, the Hindus brought their goddess Sri Kamadchi and her entourage from the old temple and re-installed her at the new place. Plans quickly developed to erect a spacious temple hall with numerous shrines for the gods. Five years later, the main priest Sri Paskarakurukkal and several thousand Hindus inaugurated a marvellously built temple with two high rising towers (Tamil: *gopuram*) – signalling from far away the new abode of the Hindu gods.<sup>6</sup>

## 4.2 Building Mosques and Minarets

Other cases of communal conflicts were modelled along similar patterns and shall be given in brief. For example, a long and fierce dispute accompanied the building of the now biggest and most splendid mosque in Germany in the early 1990s in Mannheim (about 100 km South of Frankfurt). In communal meetings, it was

aggressively debated whether the mosque should have a respected place right in the city centre and whether the minaret should be allowed to have the double size of the mosque building. In the end, local councils decided that the Yavuz Sultan Selim mosque could be built in the city centre, but that the height of the minaret should have only half the size of the neighbouring Catholic Church tower. Similar to the Hindu temple in Hamm, local authorities and people in the area now praise the mosque in Mannheim as a symbol of tolerance, achievements of immigrant people, and new tourist attraction of the city (Schmidt 1995, Spuler-Stegemann 1998: 19).

In Switzerland, a comparable case gained nationwide media attendance in Winter 2005/6. In Wangen, a village with 4,700 inhabitants in north-western Switzerland, the local society of Turkish Moslems submitted an application to build a minaret for their mosque. The minaret should have no loudspeakers (to call for prayer), but primarily should be a symbol of Muslim life and presence in that village, as a representative of the society explained. Within days only, however, several hundred people had signed a petition demanding a ban of the minaret and a rescue of the “religious peace in the village”. A right wing party took up the case and added fuel to the fire. In populist tone it demanded a general ban of all “disturbing religious buildings” by law. “Mosques do not belong to our landscape”, the party speaker declared. In view of the emotionally heated atmosphere, in early 2006, the administration of the village turned down the application on the basis of shortcomings regarding building regulations. The Turkish society plans to institute proceedings against the dismissal and most likely will obtain the right to build the minaret by the judicial decision of the canton.<sup>7</sup>

Not all endeavours to erect high towering religious buildings have been accompanied by disputes and conflicts, however. Not far away from this Swiss village of Wangen, ten years ago, Thai Buddhists had built a huge monastery. The *wat* (monastery) is visible from far away and marks a definite contrast to the common appearance of Swiss landscape. In similar line, Tibetan Buddhists had inaugurated a purpose-built monastery in North-Eastern Switzerland in 1968 already, whereas in Hanover, northern Germany, Vietnamese Buddhists had built a big monastery with a high towering pagoda in 1991. Other examples can be given. The general pattern is, both in Germany and Switzerland, that in line with the negative image which Muslim people and Islamic symbols face in the media and the public, building initiatives and a public appearance are treated with refusal and rejection. In contrast, most other religions and Buddhism in particular enjoy a much more positive image and have fewer difficulties in engaging in the public domain.

## 5. The Public Domain and Restricted Access

### 5.1 Foreign Faiths Perceived as Threat

The local conflicts point to difficulties surrounding contemporary institutionalisations of non-Christian traditions in Western Europe. It is the infuriation and rejecting rage which raise queries. The apparent hostility undoubtedly moves beyond understandable complaints about parking problems, nuisance of noise or litter problems. Although some local residents may have expressed traditional hostility towards the “different” and “other”, it is simplistic to dismiss their views as being unacceptable. Sociological analysis requires a proper understanding of their unease with the appearance of a place of worship that seems alien and, therefore, threatening to them.

As the controversies illustrate, getting along with non-Christian faiths is rather a new and very uncommon experience for many German and Swiss citizens. This certainly applies to the realm of public visibility and public recognition of non-Christian religion as well. Changes and shifts in the representation of religion, i.e. which faiths and religious traditions have access to participation in the public domain, produce uncertainties, worries and fears. Coupled with a nervous attitude towards the unknown and new, such changes are quickly constructed as a threat. The fierce reactions to the building of a far visible minaret or the carrying through of a public Hindu procession to a certain extent reflect such anxieties and perceptions of being threatened (Nye 1998, Baumann 1999).

A parallel development complicates the situation: since the early 1990s, a boom of mosque building has been taking place in Germany, likewise in Switzerland since about 2000. After 30 years of more or less unnoticed and unrecognized existence, Turkish and ex-Yugoslavian people and their organisations increasingly step into the public. In particular, the immigrants strove for societal recognition of their own religion, conceived as one of the most important characteristics of identification. The former unseen places of prayer, most often hidden as “backyard mosques” (Behloul 2004) in industrial areas, have changed to become respectable and visible symbols of Islamic presence in Germany and Switzerland. The new self-consciousness and the intention to make the residential society their home should also find expression in buildings which display an obviously Islamic appearance, as many Muslims argue.

### 5.2 Public Domain: Battlefield of Religious Settlement

In these and other cases, the structural incorporation of the immigrants served as a prerequisite for the provision of financial resources and administrative skills to

enable a publicly visible religious institutionalisation. In the same way as processes of social and economic incorporation were not unaccompanied by conflicts, so did developments of religious settlement. The battlefield of religious settlement and incorporation is the public domain, the socially defined visual landscape. Apparently, new players in the field such as immigrant groups with a different, in this case non-Christian tradition, have to fight for the right to be visibly present, to represent themselves in the architecture and activities of a locality. Such communal conflicts make obvious that this public domain, far from being neutral and accessible to every player, is a normative space, bitterly defended by its dominant groups. Strategies of closure by way of legal measures such as building ordinances, noise and traffic regulating decrees prescriptively aim to control the access. This discriminatory treatment underscores the existence of an unspoken hierarchy of legitimacy and validity to claim space in the public domain (Asad 1990: 468, Rex 1991: 13-14). These disputes and tensions as outlined are hardly surprising against the history of most Western European nation-states, their public domain dominated by Christian Churches and the idea of religious homogeneity.

In Germany and Switzerland, irreversible shifts from a Christian dominated to a pluralistic society, in both religious and cultural terms, are under way and are increasingly becoming apparent. In particular, the transformation manifests in disputes which the "social player" and interest group can gain access to participation and representation in the public domain. It is important to notice, however, that such social conflicts for participation and recognition are not solely disintegrative. On the contrary, as Georg Simmel, Lewis Coser (1956) and others have argued, conflicts take on integrative functions as well. Often, such a dispute makes visible the hitherto unnoticed group and its religious specifics for the first time. The way in which the conflict is handled and which measures of negotiation are employed marks and recognizes the marginal group. The conflict establishes the group as a valid partner to be taken into account, if not respected. Furthermore, with regards to the minority group itself such conflicts can serve to close ranks, to express a common interest and to establish a joint political voice.

The outspoken insistence of the nation-states on democratic principles, freedom, and liberty of the market may require a self-critical examination of the patronizing and hegemonic attitude towards immigrants in the allocation of resources for their self-representation and recognition in the public domain (Taylor 1992). Obviously, the indispensable re-negotiation of the normative and, thus, political culture of the public domain has started in Germany and Switzerland. Disputes and heated debates are most likely to increase and continue as immigrants organise to claim their civil rights. As the outlined case studies demonstrate, however, such re-negotiations can succeed in finding compromises if both parties,

i.e. the immigrant community and the local authorities, share a mutual respect and a willingness to cooperate (Rex 1991: 18, Vertovec 1996: 66).

## **6. Conclusion: Coming to Terms with Religious and Cultural Diversity**

Compromise and mutual respect imply a non-negotiable acceptance of the political and legal fundamentals of the mainstream society as well as recognition of the particularities of both, the majority and minority parties. This may provide avenues for the incorporation of immigrant and minority groups of non-Christian faiths. Instead of prolonging the discussion of difficulties and tensions accompanying the shift from a hitherto primarily homogeneous to a pluralist society (in cultural and religious terms), two concluding observations are made that highlight endeavours to come to terms and face the new diversity.

### **6.1 Incorporating Religious Minorities**

In an engaging article, Steven Vertovec (1996) outlined the means and strategies the British city of Leicester employed to socially, culturally and religiously incorporate its minorities. In the early 1990s, a third of the 270,000 inhabitants of Leicester were classified as ethnic, i.e. of immigrant origin and offspring. In particular, Hindus and Muslims form strong parts of the city (20%), living in segregated areas. However, the municipality of Leicester encouraged the founding of self-representational organisations, the establishment of inter- and intra-cultural networks and the recognition of specific rights. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs celebrate their major festivals as big and public events; they have built important and visible religious sites and obtained high level positions in the administration, police, politics and general public. Access to and participation in the public domain did not remain rhetoric, but led to a share in the scarce societal resources of status, representation, and power. Social recognition and political participation bind the spokespersons and minorities and provide an idea of being a part of society, of its demands and challenges (Andrews 1995, Vertovec 1996: 62-67).

In Germany and Switzerland, the percentage rate of non-Christian religions and national-cultural minorities is much lower than in Britain. Up to now, non-Christian religions constitute only 5 to 6 percent, as outlined in part one. Nevertheless, heated disputes and social conflicts have and continue to occur and these call for mediation and solutions. How does the academic discipline for the

Study of Religions react in view of the shifts and challenges? Did it react at all, as its comparative focus on religions would make it a perfect mediator?

## 6.2 Documenting Religious Diversity

Teachers and students took notice of the disputes, but rarely directly engaged in conflict settling. Rather, they strove to provide fact-oriented background knowledge of the religious plurality in the town and city, and gave lectures about so-called “foreign faiths”. Indeed, though many “common” people perceive non-Christian religions as probably troublesome and a latent threat, there is a simultaneous longing for competent information and direct encounters. During the last years, scholars in the Study of Religions and other disciplines researched the religious diversity in their locality and published the results. Often a hitherto unknown religious diversity came to the fore, at times numbering more than hundred different religious groups, centres and traditions. Studies exist, amongst others for Berlin, Bonn, Bremen, Frankfurt/Main, Hamburg, Hanover, Leipzig and Marburg, (all in Germany) and for Switzerland with regard to Basel, Fribourg, Lucerne and Zurich.<sup>8</sup>

Most studies aimed to raise awareness of the plurality present in the very locality with the side effect of fostering eventual acceptance and acknowledgement of “foreign faiths”. Some departments arranged an exhibition to publicly display the diversity; others sought the cooperation with the local offices of integration while a few staged public symposia and lectures. Among other results, the discipline for the Study of Religions which had been rather unknown in Germany and Switzerland, has become better known in the wider public as a competent point of reference and as a useful partner for administrations and certain interest groups. Also, at times a non-intended effect was that such departments themselves became a non-aligned, though active part, within the continuously changing scene of religious plurality in the locality.

Overall, academic research on current religious diversity quickly moves beyond the university and acquires importance in the wider public. The discipline and its studies may provide data, tools, and analytical insights to engage in the re-negotiation of the public domain in the unavoidable effort to come to terms with religious diversity.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For the religious landscape in Germany and recent developments, see amongst others Daiber 1995, Karakasaglu & Nonneman, 1996, Pollack 1999, Klöcker & Tworuschka 2000ff., and the listing of the many different religions and sub-traditions in the survey provided by Remid 2004 ([www.remid.de](http://www.remid.de)).

<sup>2</sup> For the religious landscape in Switzerland and recent developments, see Federal Administration of Statistics/Bundesamt für Statistik, 2004, Haug 2005 and Baumann & Stolz 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The term “community” is a contested and at times misleading one as many immigrant groups do not form “communities” in the way Christian parishes function. Also, the term implies a homogeneity and consensus which is often lacking among the groups described. For the difficulties of the term, see Vertovec 1992 and Knott 2004.

<sup>4</sup> For the term “diaspora” and the manifold relationships see, amongst others Tölölyan 1996, Cohen 1997, McKeown 1999, Baumann 2000 “Diaspora”, Baumann 2003. For the overuse of the term see critically Cohen 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Declaration of the municipality of Hamm, 21 February 1997, translated by the author; see Baumann 2000 *Migration*, 151.

<sup>6</sup> The dispute has been described and analysed in detail in Baumann 2000 *Migration*: 149-152 and Baumann, Luchesi and Wilke 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from the article in the nation wide news paper *SonntagsZeitung*, 12 February 2006, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> A list of all studies documenting the religious diversity is online available at [www.remid.de](http://www.remid.de). The department at the University of Lucerne, where I teach, carried out such documentation in 2002-05. The results were presented in a handy, free of charge catalogue providing an overview of Christianity’s plurality and brief portrays of the 32 non-Christian groups and locations in the canton. A website was set up ([www.religionenlu.ch](http://www.religionenlu.ch)) and Islam specialist Samuel-Martin Behloul wrote a research report of the Muslim landscape in central Switzerland (Behloul 2004). Furthermore, film-maker Kerstin-Katja Sindemann produced nine films of rituals and festivals celebrated by Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in the canton (Sindemann and Dept., 2005). Finally, an exhibition in Spring 2005, presented the yet unfamiliar religious plurality to the wider public (<http://www.religionenlu.ch/projekt-science.html>). Parallel to the exhibition, the office of integration of Lucerne municipality launched a poster exhibition in the town with posters graphically interpreting religious plurality (Baumann 2005).

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