

Introduction

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1 Living Together in Contexts of Religious Plurality

This volume deals with the basic question of how individuals and communities live together in contexts of religious plurality in super-diverse societies. We approach this question by drawing on the notion of conviviality as a critical concept. We suggest a tentative understanding of conviviality as referring to practices by which people develop a sense of togetherness, belonging, or with-ness while dealing simultaneously with powerful social and religious asymmetries.

While conviviality research has developed into a vast, contested, and vibrant field of research in the last decade, religion has been neglected. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the topic of living together in diversity was prominently discussed in the field of the German-speaking mission theology. Theo Sundermeier developed a concept for ecumenical coexistence under the heading of convivence (*Konvivenz*). Sundermeier speaks of a threefold space of convivence (helping, learning, celebrating). His concept had a strong influence not only on theology but became relevant for the global ecumenical relationships of churches as well (Sundermeier 1986; Sundermeier 1996; Küster 1995; for a critical discussion see Grünschloß 1999, 303–311; Becker/Feldtkeller 2000 and Simon/Wrogemann 2005 offer further insights). This volume expands the theological perspective and ties in with current discourses and most significantly emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach. In this volume, we try to bring together both strands of research concerning conviviality, theological research and research in social science.

In this volume, we consider diverse religious communities and actors that are entangled in convivial practices as relevant to our research efforts. In addition, the effects of political discourses about religious difference that lead e.g. to the racialization of Islam need to be understood not only in their larger political implications but also on the micro level of everyday life practices. By developing conviviality as a praxeological concept, we research how interactive practices are embedded in particular dynamics and shaped by structural forces that influence individual and communal encounters.

This volume begins with the very basic question of what constitutes a sense of belonging, affective togetherness, and even solidarity, while people grapple simultaneously with difference. The authors of this volume recognize that public representations of to-

getherness are at times coerced performances in which some actors feel forced to participate in order to support their own communities. Thus, dynamics of belonging and togetherness are ambivalent and conflicting. We are interested in what role lived religion plays in these dynamics. We research religious understandings of community and conviviality and how precarious moments of with-ness emerge and dissipate again – thus the significance of thin conviviality is also highlighted. We suggest situating the question of conviviality in the framework of practice theory and not in the framework of bound, homogenous identity constructions. Furthermore, this volume offers a broad interdisciplinary approach to questions of conviviality in contexts of religious plurality. Scholars from different fields engage extensively with concepts of religious plurality with regard to dynamics of boundary making and belonging, communication, and spatial configurations.

2 “Conviviality in Motion”: An Interdisciplinary Conversation

In order to deepen our interdisciplinary conversations, we hosted a conference in June 2023 in Switzerland. The aim of the conference was to foster interdisciplinary discourse about conviviality and practices of belonging while also negotiating diversity and to discuss the initial results from our research. We worked together in the style of an authors’ workshop. Each participant contributed a chapter which was discussed on the conference. We highlighted different theoretical and practical perspectives and engaged in sharing our various interdisciplinary approaches.

This volume and the preceding interdisciplinary conference are part of the work of the research project “Conviviality in Motion. Exploring Practices and Theologies in Multiethnic Christian Congregations in Europe” (CiM) at the Department of Theology at the University of Basel. The project explores the practices and theologies that emerge from super-diverse religious communities and asks if and how these communities cultivate an affective and religiously grounded sense of belonging. It investigates the degree to which they develop a distinct religious expression of being church together (<https://theologie.unibas.ch/en/research-project-conviviality-in-motion/>). In this context, Andrea Bieler and her research team developed *doing conviviality* as a critical heuristic framework to approach these questions. The research project is composed of three ethnographic field studies in Europe (Switzerland, Italy, Germany) and two intersectional study perspectives (interreligious perspectives, political theology). Insights from these studies are represented in this volume, too (cf. the chapters by Tabea Rebekka Eugster-Schaetzle, Luca Ghiretti, Lisa Ketges, Claudia Hoffmann, Esther Maria Meyer as an associated member, and Andrea Bieler).

With this volume, the CiM research team had the opportunity to broaden its perspective and intensify its discussions about conviviality in interdisciplinary conversations. As practical and intercultural theologians, we engage with scholars from sociology, religious studies, Islamic studies, political studies, philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, and further theological disciplines (such as systematic theology). The colleagues who are in conversation with us share our interest in questions on religion in the context of migration and related, its interdependencies. We perceive these conversations as very productive

and appreciate their contributions. This volume, as it stands, presents both reflections from interdisciplinary perspectives and first insights from the CiM-research project.

3 Outline of the Volume

This volume has four main sections: Concepts and Contexts of Conviviality, Dynamics of Boundary Making and Belonging, Ritualizations and Multilingualism, and Space and Place Making. This overall structure will help the reader encounter similarities between the single contributions and detect “read threads” that run through the whole book.

Section I: Conviviality: Concepts and Contexts

The first section is dedicated to basic questions regarding the study of conviviality. These reflections encompass empirical as well as normative issues that are methodologically as well as theoretically relevant. Taking an exemplary approach, several contexts of conviviality are highlighted ranging from conceptual debates within the Roman Catholic church to the role of mosques and their convivial ritual practices – both in Switzerland – to Evangelical churches in Italy.

In her introductory essay, *Andrea Bieler* states the basic question of what constitutes *with-ness* in conversation with the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. These ponderings seek to invite anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, and religious studies scholars into the conversation about how to reflect on conviviality in contexts of religious plurality. She suggests situating the question not in imagined identities of those who encounter each other, but to theorize *with-ness* as an open and fragile interstice in praxeological terms. In this vein, questions of how togetherness is practiced and how doing conviviality can be critically described come to the fore. Such reconstructions need to take the asymmetrical relationships between individuals and groups into account and consider how these reflect structures of dominance and injustice. In the second part of her chapter, Bieler proposes a heuristic model that might serve as a sensitizing concept for empirical research on conviviality. The model encompasses six dimensions, namely the repertoire of convivial interactions, the circulation of normativities about conviviality, the dynamics that drive such interactive practices, the spatio-temporal constellations, and affective environments. All of these aspects are embedded in a sixth dimension, structural conditions.

In his chapter, *Matthew Ryan Robinson* considers basic challenges of living with others. To this end, Robinson first identifies intentions in using conviviality to address challenges thematized under the notion of “diversity”, and then, in a second step, enters into conversation with classic engagements with the concept of conviviality. He first sets the stage by considering relevant historically antecedent debates and then turns to Paolo Freire’s theorization of *convivência* and to Ivan Illich’s focus on conviviality. Robinson succeeds in showing that neither Illich nor Freire were interested in diversity per se but turned to the concept of conviviality in their pursuit and practice of human social liberation.

Claudia Jahnel highlights the significance of the body and the senses for developing an appreciation of conviviality in religious communities in super-diverse societies. For a praxeological concept of conviviality it seems unavoidable and necessary to focus on questions of embodiment and affectivity. Jahnel brings together insights from body phenomenology, praxeology, discourse theory, and postcolonial critique and considers the significance of body knowledge as *knowledge in the bones*, tacit, or implicit knowledge for the cohesion of multicultural and multi-religious groups and communities. Body knowledge not only questions the hegemony of rational reasoning and broadens awareness of the polyphony of different epistemologies residing in convivial spaces, it also challenges the presumptions and the methodology guiding research on conviviality.

Eva Baumann-Neuhaus traces the developments of the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland. Since the 1950s, Catholicism in Switzerland has experienced continuous pluralization due to immigration. Baumann shows how the Catholic Church, in its national and local contexts, deals with this fact in a situational-pragmatic as well as a strategic way. She explores how socio-political frameworks and discourses, institutional self-images, organizational rationalizations, and theological-ideological narratives and routines have produced and continue to produce a lived and changing congregational practice located between togetherness and coexistence.

Paolo Naso reconstructs the efforts of some Protestant churches in Italy to adapt in the face of migration processes affecting the Mediterranean region that make intercultural integration policies necessary. Naso reconstructs different models of relationship that have been adopted by the various Italian churches reacting to the high number of Christian migrants arriving in Italy. In particular, Naso reconstructs the birth and evolution of *Being Church Together*: a program through which the Italian Protestant churches (Waldensians, Methodists, and Baptists) promote an intercultural path that has produced significant changes in the congregational life of many communities. At the same time, Naso analyses how, through *Mediterranean Hope – a Migrants and Refugees program* – the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) carries out an organic and strategic intervention to welcome migrants, facilitate proper integration, and promote legal and safe routes that protect the rights of migrants and asylum seekers.

Arlinda Amiti contributes with her chapter on practices of diversity and conviviality initiated by mosque communities in Switzerland. Muslims form the largest religious minority in the country and are characterized by strong heterogeneity in theological and ethnic as well as linguistic terms. Amiti examines, on the one hand, practices that are crucial for the organization of mosque communities and, on the other hand, initiatives that are of particular importance for strengthening joint actions between the different Islamic communities throughout Switzerland. To this end, the Friday sermon, the month of fasting for Ramadan, and female theologians are considered. The chapter concludes that internally Muslims comprise a diverse set of characteristics like ethnicity, linguistics, and theology based on which they establish mosques. But at the same time a gradual diversification of mosque communities is seen as expectations of younger generations and changes in migration significantly impact the function of a mosque.

Section II: Conviviality: Dynamics of Boundary Making and Belonging

Studying the repertoire of convivial interactions implies an analysis of major dynamics of boundary work. These dynamics often oscillate between various forms of boundary making such as dissolution, diffusion, or solidifying boundaries. The following essays focus on convivial practices, theologies, and theoretical deliberations that take such dynamics into account. Frequently, these are embedded in efforts to create a sense of belonging and togetherness.

In his chapter, *Alexander-Kenneth Nagel* focuses on interreligious activities as vehicles of conviviality and arenas of religious boundary work. The chapter begins with a discussion of the inherently essentializing quality of organized interreligious encounters and their implications for the formation and transgression of religious boundaries. The main section reviews some of the recent social-scientific conceptual literature on boundary work (Lamont/Mólnar, Alba, Wimmer) and offers a comparison of the presented approaches. These insights are related to the specific configuration of interreligious activism. The main emphasis is on a conceptual exploration of the potential contributions of social scientific boundary debates in the analysis of interreligious and intercultural conviviality. Particularly, Nagel offers five “material manifestations” of boundary work in order to foster empirical investigations in the context of conviviality.

Using the example of the Intercultural Church Center in Mannheim, Germany, where six Protestant congregations share a building, *Esther Maria Meyer* asks how these communities practice their distinctness and simultaneously express their desire for unity. On the basis of a detailed description of an ephemeral encounter that occurs between two worship services, processes of communalization and demarcation are presented and their implicit logic of action is analyzed. In a second step, the simultaneity of both processes is reflected sociologically; Meyer asks how the convivial dimension of partnerships at the Intercultural Church Center can be described in its double dynamic of connecting and delimiting. Drawing on the dynamics of boundary making and belonging, relevant phenomena, such as trust, are discussed and introduced into the discourse on migration ecumenism.

Focusing on the research process of the project *Conviviality in Motion*, *Andrea Bieler* offers hermeneutical reflections on how to engage the correlation between qualitative research in Christian communities, that focuses on religious and social matters of conviviality, and the ecclesiological reflection that can be drawn from it. In a second move, she introduces some empirical findings across the sub-projects about how doing conviviality is understood and practiced and what kind of convivial dynamics can be reconstructed. Special attention is given to the dynamics of doing and undoing conviviality as well as to boundary work and belonging. She concludes with some thoughts on a grounded ecclesiology that takes insights from the dynamics of conviviality in super-diverse Christian communities into account.

Against the background of the increasing secularization and pluralization processes of the last decades in Germany, *Anna Körs* deals with the resulting changes and their dynamics and effects in the religious field. Körs explores how religious communities and their congregations respond to religious diversity and enter into interreligious dialogue. To this end, Körs brings together various strands of research exploring interreligious di-

alogue and the governance of religious diversity and presents empirical findings on interreligious dialogue in Germany from a multilevel perspective. Körs sheds light on how different constellations of actors across national, regional, and local levels influence an increasingly religiously pluralized and secularized context and what role interreligious dialogue plays.

Section III: Conviviality: Ritualizations and Multilingualism

Convivial interactions can take the form of ritual practices. Therefore, the connections between rituals, ritualization, and difference are first introduced (Walthert) and then followed by examples of how ritual aspects appear in super-diverse Christian communities, in a religiously plural context, and in schools. Food and eating together (Ghiretti), praying (Hoffmann), and multilingual and translation practices (Dirim/Mecheril, Eugster-Schaetzle) serve as case studies for ritualizations in contexts of plurality.

Since Ferdinand Tönnies and Émile Durkheim, community is usually seen as a form of the social that is characterized by the equality of its members, be it through shared beliefs, assumptions of common ancestry, or a shared place of living. Rituals are regarded as crucial for the reproduction of such equality: They bring people together in one place, create a common focus of attention, and synchronize movements and emotions. *Rafael Walthert*, in his chapter, expands the narrow focus on community, ritual, and equality by asking what role difference plays. Walthert builds on an understanding of rituals that is based on Catherine Bell's concept of ritualization and Randall Collins' theory of interaction ritual chains. Rituals are seen as an emotional interaction between co-present people, which are structured by the power interests of some of the people involved. Taking empirical examples into account, the implications of these interactions for the creation and upholding of equality, as well as difference, are discussed.

In her chapter, *Claudia Hoffmann* works out processes that encompass and connect religions based on the theme of celebration and prayer as a core intercultural theological question. Hoffmann introduces three case studies: an interreligious peace service, an intercession service at an ecumenical holiday week, and a prayer conducted during a service of an evangelical free church. She shows how, in such practices that connect religions, belonging together and conviviality are constructed. Not only the practices but also the theological concepts behind these practices play a crucial role. Based on these case studies from Germany and Switzerland, Hoffmann illustrates what questions arise and which dimensions and components of such celebrations become visible. The prayers and celebrations discussed in this chapter are not publicly staged prayers, but prayers in more intimate spaces where people also pray for each other. These celebrations represent a form of interreligious celebrating that is not yet well documented or analyzed.

Luca Ghiretti asks how different groups within a super-diverse religious community in Milan find acceptance and positive appreciation across difference and how such mutual recognition finds its limitations. In order to exemplify his findings, Ghiretti identifies different dimensions of sharing food in community life. On the one hand, he inquires how these practices can be interpreted with regard to belonging and togetherness. On the other hand, he explores how these practices create boundaries and differences between individuals and sub-groups within the congregation. He analyzes how certain symbols,

such as the plate, reflect an understanding of unity in diversity that is not based on the notion of hybridization, but on juxtapositions that keep the perception of difference intact. Engaging a praxeologically grounded approach to major dynamics of doing conviviality, even in its ambivalence, he is able to offer important theological insights and interpretations.

Inci Dirim and *Paul Mecheril* consider in their chapter language relations within migration society. Language is not only part of state identity politics and migration management, but the “interaction of the diverse” is also characterized by complex processes of attribution (ascription) of identity and difference. In their contribution, Dirim and Mecheril illuminate three migration-societal aspects from a critical racism and linguicism perspective: multilingualism, language hegemony, and language attributions. With empirical facets and facts from the context of schools, Dirim and Mecheril ask which perspectives might be suitable for an idea of conviviality critically informed by racism.

Tabea Rebekka Eugster-Schaetzle addresses practices of multilingualism and translation in worship services and diaconic settings based on a qualitative-empirical research study in two Swiss churches in which people of different backgrounds gather. These practices have both a functional and a symbolic character: One purpose is that everyone understands what is being said. Another purpose is to show that the gospel transcends ethnic-cultural boundaries and creates a community of reconciled people. At the same time, translation practices do not establish equity. Asymmetries can become even more apparent, for instance, when people are asked about their language skills and mother tongue. Translators hold a special role in multilingual communities. They identify themselves with the people who entrust them with the translation. They also have interpretive power because the community depends on them. In addition, experiences in a multilingual setting require flexibility and tolerance, and therefore there is also increased ambiguity as seen in a greater range of experiences and emotions.

Section IV: Conviviality: Space and Place Making

Space, as outlined here, forms an integral dimension of living together. It becomes visible in its material dimensions and in socio-linguistic dynamics of place making and spatialization. In this section, space is exemplified in its physical, imaginative, contextual, and political formations. As *physical* space, implications for how interaction and other social processes occur might be addressed (Kalender). As *imagined* space, ideas of space and its realization processes become relevant (Ketges). As *contextual* space, the positional formations, that means having a space in the city (Mattes, Kasmani, Dilger; Radosh-Hinder, Bieler), become crucial – at the same time, space becomes *political*. Another political formation of space is highlighted in the link between global movements of people, by migration or by slavery, and their implications in the local space where people live together (Nagy).

Mehmet T. Kalender approaches space in the context of interreligious encounters. He begins with theoretical reflections on “situations of religious plurality”, based on Erving Goffman’s interaction theory. The concept of situation refers to face-to-face activities that are organized by means of the direct bodily interaction of the involved participants

and under specific structural conditions. Starting from this notion of situation in the horizon of interaction theory, Kalender elaborates on the spatial qualities of situations and conceptualizes religious plurality as a situational condition. He develops a systematization of “physical, symbolic-material, and discursive arrangements” that he suggests should be used as an analytical framework to explore spatial references in situations of religious plurality. In his conclusion, Kalender links this conceptualization of space situations to conviviality and discusses the benefits of understanding space as an integral condition of conviviality.

Dominik Mattes, Omar Kasmani, and Hansjörg Dilger present a photo-essay which draws from an ongoing film project that follows four religious groups as they build and negotiate their place and presence in the city of Berlin. These include the Sufi-Center Rab-baniyya, the Hindu community of the Sri Mayurapathy Murugan Temple, the Buddhist community of the Pho-Da-Pagoda, and members of the neopagan network Pagan Ways and Communities. The photo-essay explores how minoritized religious groups situate themselves in the multi-religious landscape of Berlin. It asks what struggles such groups experience in their attempts to establish and maintain affective presence in this highly diverse metropolis. It portrays the affectivity of ritual practice in urban space; visuals are accompanied by believers’ reflections on their relation to the city, other religious communities, political actors, and the wider secular society. What becomes visible are the dual affective dynamics of their inclusion/exclusion, engagement/withdrawal, and visibility/invisibility in public domains and initiatives, civic institutions and fora, or simply in the urban at large.

Silke Radosh-Hinder and Andrea Bieler present an empirically based approach to the communicative constructions of space. They begin with reflections on joint construction projects of multi-religious initiatives, exemplified by insights on one project, a three-religion day care center in Berlin. Such projects require long negotiation processes. The founding team of the three-religion day care center developed a concept of “egalitarian difference at the organizational level” that is considered crucial to the overall project. The implementation of this concept proves to be complex. On the one hand, sustainable systems must be developed between members of different religious associations and institutions, which are characterized by large structural differences and are neither institutionally nor contractually linked to each other. On the other hand, such projects require extensive negotiation processes with other stakeholders who are outside such initiatives: with the members of their own religious group or institution, political authorities, funding agencies, local actors, the media, and public opinions critical of religion. Finally, Radosh-Hinder and Bieler discuss the communicative construction of space and the role of communicative interactions. As a notion of conviviality, the constructed space becomes visible in multi-religious buildings in the city.

Lisa Ketges investigates spaces of conviviality. She approaches the notion of space with particular attention to power dynamics. Space proves to be a conflictual topic in intercultural communities that are investigated in her research project. The notion of power dynamics in their spatial qualities is developed in two steps. First, Ketges presents two theoretical perspectives: (a) a theoretical framework that conceptualizes power in a double sense as agency and power of interpretation and (b) space as a process of spatialization. Second, based on insights from her empirical research project, she links processes

of power dynamics and spatialization to five phenomena. These phenomena reveal physical, imaginative, social, religious, and relational dimensions of space. Finally, Ketges presents the ambivalence of spaces of conviviality with regard to understandings of *withness*, theological reflections, and practical considerations on shared spaces.

In her chapter, *Dorottya Nagy* approaches situations of conviviality shaped by migration and the history of slavery from an unusual perspective. Nagy investigates xenophobic discourses and practices in present day Europe in relation to historical examinations of Europe's history of colonization and slavery as a topic of church history. She frames this relationship through theories of the Anthropocene and argues that there is a link between how the term "economic migrants" is present in public discourses in various European countries and the ecologically destructive practices of colonization. To illustrate her approach, Nagy presents her involvement with a workgroup that developed a mobile exhibition on the relationship of churches and slavery in the Netherlands. She argues that theorizing with the notion of the Anthropocene can function as a destabilizing proposition for all fields of knowledge, including theology and ecclesiology, that investigate the complexity of living together.

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