Differentiation Theory and the Sociology of Religion and Secularity
Workshop Report by Johannes Duschka

On 8 and 9 October 2020, the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" at Leipzig University hosted a hybrid Workshop on "Differentiation Theory and the Sociology of Religion and Secularity", organised by its directors Christoph Kleine and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr together with Daniel Witte from the University of Bonn. The two-day workshop was divided into five paper presentation sessions and concluding discussions at the end of each day. Each session had brief presentations of two previously circulated papers and therefore gave much room for productive discussions. It should be mentioned, how well the hybrid format worked, giving an almost undisturbed real time discussion experience to participants at the venue and online. This was due to the technical equipment provided by the CASHSS as well as the great effort of the session chairs in combining and moderating on- and offline commentaries.

Opening Session

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (CASHSS Multiple Secularities)
Christoph Kleine (CASHSS Multiple Secularities)
Chair: Magnus Echtler (CASHSS Multiple Secularities)

In the opening session, **Monika Wohlrab-Sahr** presented a theoretical outline of the *Multiple Secularities* approach with its focus on the *differentiation* between religion and other societal spheres, further distinguishing between *distinctions* on the symbolic or *conceptual level* and –again – *differentiations* on the *social-structural or institutional level*, heuristically addressing these distinctions and differentiations as *secularities*. In a second step, Wohlrab-Sahr referred to the *multiplicity* of these *secularities*, outlining the goal of a *global scale analysis and comparison(s)* of such configurations *in historical perspective*, looking for *reference problems* and *guiding ideas* of religion-related-differentiations across the globe and through time. The application of the concept to historical and to non-Western contexts would yield conceptual problems and criticism to be discussed during the workshop, especially regarding the applicability of terms and concepts like 'religion' and the 'secular' eventually even 'differentiation', to pre-modern and/or pre-colonial contexts.

Turning to the relation between differentiation theory and the sociology of religion in general, Wohlrab-Sahr outlined the broad variety of approaches, which have contributed to both: from Weber and Durkheim to Bourdieu, Parsons and Luhmann, relating these to problems and questions raised in the submitted papers and to be followed up upon in the subsequent discussions: the specific historical constellations of differentiations; differentiation theory's capacity for causal explanations; its often criticised functionalist heritage; the role of actors and agency; and the relations in and between differentiated realms, especially in terms of power relations.

Closing her introduction, Wohlrab-Sahr again raised the question how to relate differentiation theory to the issue of *secularity*, especially with regard to the formation of a specific *secular sphere* or *realm*. In her view, such an explicit *secular-religious binary* needs to be qualified by a certain meaning attached to it by codes or narratives – beyond the mere structural differentiation of religion from other social spheres. Putting it differently, *culture* and (social) *structure* are to be analysed with regard to religious-secular differentiations in order to get the full picture.

Following Wohlrab-Sahr's presentation, **Christoph Kleine** exemplarily introduced his work on Japan. According to him, the methodological problems to face in the cross-cultural application of the *Multiple Secularities* framework are those of *operationalisation* and *conceptualisation*. The empiric multiplicity of modern secularities would raise questions regarding *path dependencies* and *cultural preconditions* shaping the *appropriation* of the Western model. In order to identify those structures relevant for the crucial distinctions and differentiations, he suggested – to circumvent the problem of a direct transfer of Western concepts – an analysis of the *history of institutions* to discern relevant social structures and a *history of concepts* to identify epistemic structures.

Concretely, Kleine proposed a five-step analysis and briefly applied it to his research on Japan:

1.) Which institutions were considered as 'religions' once this category was introduced? The concept of religion was introduced in Japan in the second half of the 19th century, translated as *shūkyō*. Buddhism and Christianity, already considered as functional equivalents since the 16th century, were subsumed under this category, other traditions like Shintō and Confucianism were not. 2.) Which social practices, concepts, symbols etc. were assigned to the (new) category of religion? According to Kleine, legal classification as religion has changed the character of Buddhism, excluding elements not corresponding with the Christianity-based prototype of religion. Continuities and discontinuities resulted in a *reconfiguration of an already existing societal domain*. 3.) Were these elements assigned to a common abstract category before the introduction of religion? Kleine identifies *shūshi* as category that was used to subsume Christianity and Buddhism from the 16th century onwards, earlier classifications for systems of cognitive and normative orientations were *dō, kyō and hō* – also applied to Confucianism, Daoism, and Brahmanism. The institutional and communal aspect was referred to by terms like *shū*, *ke* or later *monto*. 4.) What degree of equivalence did these indigenous categories have with the concept of religion? For Kleine, the legal and political struggle over the categorisation of Shintō shows that these semantic and functional equivalents were not perfect. Eventually – primarily out of political motives – Shintō was not considered as *shūkyō* once this term was introduced, it subsequently became an example to question the applicability of the distinction between the religious and the secular. 5.) To which extent do institutional and conceptual idiosyncrasies account for specific forms of secularity? Boundaries between the religious and the secular were drawn differently by the Japanese than by Western observers as the example of Shintō shows. For the latter it was unquestionable religious, for the former rather considered a central element of political legitimacy.

Finally, Kleine highlighted another result of his research that has become a major empirical reference point of the *Multiple Secularities* group's work. He identified a structural analogy to the European struggle between the military and the temple in the paradigm of the interdependent nomospheres of the Buddha, represented by monasteries and the clergy, and the Ruler in 12th- to 19th-century Japan. Kleine concluded that *a genealogical approach of a history of institutions and concepts* had advantages over the retrospective projection of macro-sociological formations, but also warned to conflate discursively related pre-modern concepts too easily with our understanding of 'religion'. Nevertheless, he maintained that his research does show how the history of Buddhism in Japan made it possible to subsume it under the category of religion and that the discourse on the nomospheres of the Buddha and the ruler constituted a close similarity to the religious-secular divide – eventually facilitating the later *appropriation of secularity.*

Session 1

Thomas Kern (University of Bamberg)
Raf Vanderstraeten (Universiteit Gent)
Chair: Hubert Seiwert (CASHSS Multiple Secularities)

Thomas Kern presented a paper titled ***Why We Need a Theory of Social Differentiation***. He took off from criticisms against differentiation theory, especially those aiming at its connection to functionalism. Kern pointed at Hans Joas as prominent advocate of this kind of critique, agreeing to his criticism of the normative bias and homogenising tendencies in functionalist differentiation theory, but disagreed with Joas' latest claim to dismiss differentiation theory altogether. Kern proposed an *action based theoretical revision of differentiation theory* instead, because of its repertoire of concepts and taxonomies for *the classification of social phenomena*, its suitability for *comparative research* and the possibility to explain *causal mechanisms* of differentiation by drawing on action theoretical approaches. Referencing the works of Uwe Schimank, Kern emphasised the importance of Max Weber's work on value spheres for an action-based approach, which is looking for causal, agency-based explanations of differentiation processes instead of functionalist deductions. In his understanding, sub-systems are functional only in the sense of providing specific contributions for society.

Kern understands the concepts of differentiation theory as *hypotheses about the properties of empirical phenomena that must be tested empirically*. Leaving normative claims about the direction of social evolution aside, differentiation theory would provide useful tools for the classification of research units: a *typology of differentiated orders* and *concepts of the constituents of the subsystems* as well as of *levels of differentiation*. Beyond classification, differentiation theory for Kern also enables the researcher to hypothesise about the relationships between these units. Again agreeing to Joas' critique of the low explanatory power of functional analyses, Kern states, that recent differentiation theoretical works of – among others – Schimank and himself, have contributed to the analyses of social mechanisms behind specific *differentiation* or *dedifferentiation* processes, *combining differentiation theory and middle range theories*.

Some reflections on the uses of differentiation theory for the sociology of religion and secularity were presented by **Raef Vanderstraeten**[1], drawing closely on the work of Max Weber and Niklas Luhmann. Vanderstraeten proposed four perspectives to address questions of institutional differentiation between religion and politics to reflect on historical processes inside and outside the West: 1.) Drawing on Max Weber's historical comparison of India and China, Vanderstraeten hinted at *the structural consequences of contingent historical circumstances*, in this case for the development of institutional unity or duality with regard to religion and politics. 2.) Asking about *coextension or dissociation*, three different constellations are possible according to Vanderstraeten: co-extension of religion and politics as in the ancient polis; a plurality of religions under one political rule like in the Roman Empire; religions reaching over different political units, like the medieval Roman Church or the modern world religions. Especially the latter two would correspond to *a conceptual non-identity of religion and politics*. 3.) Again referencing Weber, Vanderstraeten introduced a typology of religion, referring to the distinction between *religious communities* ('Gemeinschaftskult') or *civil religion* on the one hand, and *religions of salvation* ('Erlösungsreligion', 'Gemeindereligiosität') on the other. The latter being prone to differentiate itself from society. 4.) In terms of conceptual differentiation – as he put it –, Vanderstraeten emphasized the *self-differentiation* of the religious from the world or 'secular' – originating in early Christianity and having semantic consequences until today, foreshadowing the

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[1] The paper was written together with Hartmann Tyrell, who had to cancel his participation on short notice.

system/environment distinction prominent in systems theory. The formation of the secular is – in this understanding – a product of the self-differentiation of the religious.

In the second part of the paper, Vanderstraeten suggested to distinguish between the *differentiation of specialized roles* and that of *communication systems*. Functional differentiation according to Luhmann could not directly be linked to initial role differentiation, it occurs only when at least two roles – *professional roles* and (public) *boundary roles* – organise themselves around a certain function. Differentiation of function systems would accordingly depend on the differentiation of inclusion rules for those boundary roles, stressing the heterogeneity of modern society. According to Vanderstraeten, for the early Luhmann functional differentiation of religion occurred rather late, as a reaction to the problem of how to incorporate large populations in lay roles, in this perspective *secularisation becomes a problem of inclusion*. In his later works, when the paradigm of religious decline was already in question, Luhmann's interest turned to *the variety of arrangements of inclusion and exclusion*, observing that religion was somehow independent from the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of other systems – appearing as an adaption advantage. Vanderstraeten concluded that the focus on such arrangements would raise fruitful research questions on the *interrelation between mechanisms of in- and exclusion in function systems*, especially between religion and other, 'secular', systems. This kind of analyses could be carried out in a comparative framework, *examining different religious traditions and areas of the world with regard to their mechanisms of in- and exclusion*.

Session 2

Sudipta Kaviraj (Columbia University)
Adrian Hermann (Bonn University)
Chair: Yasemin Ural (CASHSS Multiple Secularities)

Sudipta Kaviraj opened the second paper session with his presentation on ***Disenchantment and secularization***. Phrasing it ironically by asking whether European history of religion did also happen in India, he pointed to the necessity of historicising the allegedly universal findings of sociological theories in the light of the vast expansion of historical knowledge on religion since the times of their origin. He identified Weber (on secularisation) and Durkheim, later Luhmann (on differentiation) as the most important theoretical traditions to engage.

Regarding Weber, Kaviraj pointed out both, the centrality and the vagueness of the concept of *(dis-)enchantment*, covering belief in goblins as well as in a philosophical transcendent god. Disenchantment would also incorporate evolutionist expectations of the eventual disappearance of all enchanted belief. Kaviraj criticised this conception by drawing on examples from Indian history, showing that for example Vaisnava theologists dissented from earlier conceptions of a transcendent God, advancing the idea of an aesthetic *(re-)enchantment*, a tradition of thought that extended to modern thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore. Relating these findings to Weber, Kaviraj again emphasised the internal asymmetry of the latter's theory – empirically rich on European, sparse on other religious traditions – questioning its general applicability to the regions and religions of the world.

For a fruitful contemporary conceptualisation of religious history, Kaviraj made a number of proposals that generally seem to be in line with the proposed operationalisation of the *Multiple Secularities* approach presented by Christoph Kleine. Similar to Vanderstraeten, Kaviraj stated that 'religion' emerged from Christian self-differentiation. Even though Kaviraj did not propose to ban this term's use in other contexts, he asked to spend attention to similar developments and the according terminology in other faiths. Although

Weber and Durkheim would not use Christian conceptual language directly, it should be reflected that they were drawing upon it when developing their own. Kaviraj emphasised that Indic religious traditions for example have their own vocabulary to describe and evaluate differences. An empirically rich and in that sense symmetrical *comparison* instead of a shallow *contrast* would ask for an exploration of the analytical resources of such conceptual repertoires.

In ***Global History of Religion and Differentiation Theory,*** **Adrian Hermann** proposed to extend Burkhard Gladigow's *European History of Religion* to a global perspective. Adding thoughts from postcolonial theories, he asserted a necessity to *provincialise* European history of Religion, but without falling into cultural relativism by simply replacing European with local categories. Herrmann called for a historicisation of the European experience that is aware of the latter's continuing relevance as universal prototype, describing its hegemony while revealing its historical contingency. Such considerations should lead to a theory of modernity abstaining from teleological narratives. Drawing on David Scott, Hermann stressed the importance of a remembrance of Europe's colonial and imperialist domination during the emergence of today's global categories and the reflection on contemporary asymmetries of power within the proposed historicisation. Borrowing from Talal Asad Hermann introduced the notion of the *single shared world,* attempting to mark the domination of modern global categories without claiming social or cultural homogeneity on a global scale. Additionally referring to Luhmann, Hermann suggested that *world society theory*, conceiving the modern social world as a single whole instead of a plurality of societies, could provide a theoretical perspective to grasp this single shared world. The global reach of communicatively reachable acts as well as the transformation towards a primacy of functional differentiation are identified as decisive developments for this idea. With regard to the latter, Hermann – similarly to Vanderstraeten – emphasised that functional differentiation should not be understood as the split of a whole into parts, but rather as *creation of a difference between system and environment* – eventually leading to a multiplicity of relations between different subsystems; neither should its primacy imply its teleological self-realisation, but it should rather be understood as a *historically contingent conditioning structure or framework*. Hermann introduced an understanding of social structures as being radically temporal and contested. In the light of these considerations, the emergence of religion as a function system could then be described as historical *and* modern phenomenon.

Bringing the semantic level back into his considerations, Hermann stressed the genuine, dynamic interconnection between semantics and structures, rejecting the idea of differentiations as pre-existing structures beyond discourse. In this view, religion as a modern function system is the contingent result of multiple developments that *cannot be reduced to pre-existing or necessary societal functions*. Concluding his presentation, Hermann posed a challenge to the *Multiple Secularities* approach by stating that *religion in its present form as function system could then only be described and reconstructed with regard to contemporary global society and not in continuity from pre-modern situations*.

Session 3

Gesa Lindemann (University of Oldenburg)
Detlef Pollack (University of Münster)
Chair: Florian Zemmin (CASHSS Multiple Secularities)

Gesa Lindemann opened the second day of the workshop with a paper on *Religion and social differentiation*, analysing the connection between differentiation theory and religion based on a *theory of procedural ordering systems of violence*. She historically identified three such systems: *the order of reciprocity*, *the order of judiciary*, and *the order of politically controlled state power bound by the rule of law*. Each order would permit different forms of social differentiation.

According to Lindemann, the order of reciprocity is characteristic of Europe in the early Middle Ages as well as of societies described by ethnological studies. This order was characterised by family groups in relationships of mutual exchange, inappropriate exchange easily leading to direct violence, which was eventually contained by reciprocal giving obligations. Groups are the dominant social units, individuals do not play a role, and differentiation beyond family groups is not likely to occur. In the transition to the high Middle Ages (11th–13th centuries) the church played an important role by legitimising the rule of new emerging central powers and weakening the power of the families by giving individuals legal status through baptism, preventing or at least impeding infanticides, thereby *changing the rules of inclusion and exclusion* into or from society. In that process, members of society became responsible individuals before God, opening the possibility of dissent with the family. Church had created an early form of *individualisation* against the family based on the force of territorial rulers. Against this background, social differentiations of the economy and of law developed. Religion acted as a facilitator *and* a constraint of social differentiation by criticising and thereby limiting the new forms of economic interactions.

Lindemann further argued that in 18th and 19th centuries a new procedural order of violence was established by modern nation states. This order removed the act of violence – public demonstrations of torture for example – from the public arena. This removal lead to a trust in non-violence, establishing the *paradox of violence*: Society appeared to be largely based on peaceful coexistence but still relied on violence monopolised by the state. Succeeding the Christian baptism registers, the state replaced them by its records of birth, marriage and death – a violence-supported organisational performance that follows from that which had generated the *soul individual* in the first place. In this sense, the church was replaced by medicine, a process called *medicalisation*, guaranteeing equal legal status to the newborn, a development that fostered further individualisation, which was complemented by the institutionalisation of fundamental rights as a *stop rule* to state power. This constellation enabled individuals to establish different contexts of action and different group contexts, in other words *horizontal differentiation*. Contrary to the political, these other contexts have not developed stop rules, tending to fully absorb individual actors and to destroy the established differentiation. To regulate this tendency, political regulation and societal critique are necessary. Lindemann closed her presentation stating that from her perspective *secularisation does not refer to the decline of the belief in God, but to the fact that the individualising process once initiated by the church is later carried by the state*.

Detlef Pollack's presentation focused on *The presumed origins of functional differentiation in Western Europe.* Similar to Kern's account, Pollack asserted the lack of differentiation theory's explanatory power, making it necessary to provide it with a foundation in action theory to identify the carriers of differentiation processes and the specific actor constellations impeding or promoting processes of functional differentiation. He forwarded the thesis that the emergence of processes of functional differentiation in the West was driven

by the Roman church, giving this type specific traits different from types of differentiation in other cultures – such as a peculiar *consistency*, *rigor* and *enhancement*. Consequently, high degrees of competition and conflict would be characteristic for *Western type differentiation*. As a counterbalance to these traits – but still struggling with them till today –, the West eventually developed a competence to limit its inherent tendencies of enhancement and maximisation, as Pollack illustrated with regard to limiting dynamics regarding science, economy and political power in modern society, similar to the stop rules introduced by Lindemann before.

Historically, Pollack argued analogously to Vanderstraeten's brief account, the European type of differentiation developed from the insistence of the Roman patriarchate in the high Middle Ages to rationalise its actions on a purely theological basis, forcing other spheres to construct their own systems of logic. In the 11th century, the Roman church strove for detachment from society, institutional establishment, and supremacy over all other spheres through purification from worldly interferences, self-referential recruitment, establishment of a church judiciary, and the pope's claim of superior authority. Especially the latter provoked counter-reactions by (worldly) emperors supported by scholars, deriving secular power from non-church sources. *Functional differentiation therefore emerged from the conflict between universal claims of the church and its counter currents* – Pollack suggests that the mentioned tendencies towards consistency, rigor and enhancement are related to this conflictory origin.

Referring to Thomas Bauer, Pollack briefly outlined a comparison with a different, the *Near Eastern type of differentiation*. In contrast to other positions, Bauer would argue that the dichotomy of *din* and *dunya*, or what we call religious and secular, was only one distinction among many others in the ancient Near East. Because various discourses stood side by side, Islam did not overarch all societal spheres. Still drawing on Bauer, Pollack offered the specific constellation of religion not being represented by an hierarchical institution, therefore not acting as an independent agent in the ancient Near East, as a possible explanation for the multiplicity of discourses and perspectives shaping this type of differentiation.

Session 4

Sita Steckel (University of Münster)
Phil Gorski (Yale University)
Chair: Marian Burchardt (Leipzig University)

Sita Steckel opened her paper presentation on ***Differentiation theory and historical secularities: A perspective from the European past*** with some general considerations concerning the concept of differentiation. According to her, the division of labour has always been present in societies throughout history, followed by the emergence of specialised roles and conceptual distinctions, eventually differentiating spheres of activity such as religion. From Steckel's perspective, *institutionalisation* is the crucial process of differentiation, stabilising and homogenising societal spheres. She identified *alphabetisation*, *bureaucratisation* and *the emergence of mass media* as some of the main factors fostering institutionalisation. Her historical examination of differentiation processes disproved to some extent images of the stable, unified Christian Middle Ages since *intra-religious and intra-confessional plurality* were much more present than today due to the lack of institutionalisation. This observation lead her to question the conceptual link of functional differentiation to *inter*-religious plurality, which is dating its advent in Europe around 1500. She directed the attention to earlier phases of significant and complex internal diversity and plurality within Christianity caused by *local variations*, eventually fostering differentiations between religion and other spheres, – a perspective that leads to the acknowledgement of *different trajectories of*

differentiation for different fields and subfields but also for locally different secularities. With regard to the *Multiple Secularities* approach, Steckel raised the question whether the history of secularities should and could only be written as *segmental histories* instead of aiming at society as a whole – a suggestion that seems very much in line with some of the works resulting from the first funding period of the Leipzig project, especially those dealing with the complex relationship between religion and healing/medicine.

In addition to inner plurality, Steckel identified *cultural entanglements* having a major impact on institutional patterns of differentiation and being a primary driver of transformations. Early situations of cultural encounter, such as the European observation of religious toleration by Muslim rulers, would open perspectives on alternative arrangements of differentiation to relate to. To complicate the picture even more, she also asked to look for the *shifting structural alliances* of actors from different fields to explain institutional change, such as certain religious elites sanctioning practices of political elites, political actors pushing back religious influence, or protecting religious plurality and endowing religious peace.

Secularization of the World OR Fragmentation of the Sacred? was the question **Philip Gorski** raised in the last presentation of the workshop. Starting from the observation that, although religion and politics have become autonomous from each other, religious institutions have also lost their monopoly over the now fragmented sacred, he asserted that differentiation theory is necessary but insufficient to study religion today. Similar to Kaviraj, Gorski focused on the Weberian heritage of differentiation theory, criticising it for its *ontological parsimony* (ignoring organisations, communities, practices and artefacts); for its *vast historical sweep* (attaching modern differentiation too strictly to developments rooted in the axial age); and for its notion of *sphere parity* (alleging functional equivalence of all value spheres). Gorski mentioned Luhmann and Bourdieu as alternative frameworks, preferring Bourdieu's field theory for rectifying some of the shortcomings attributed to Weber by incorporating bodily ritual through habitus and by considering the primacy of the economic sphere. For Gorski, further advantages lie in Bourdieu's conceptualisation of fields as being constituted by struggles between rival elites and his historical argument that modern cultural spheres did only crystallise from the late 19th century onwards. Gorski also identified shortcomings of Bourdeusian field theory, namely its *structural isomorphism*, the lacking attention for *materiality* and its insufficient account of the properties and mechanisms of *social boundaries*. Also similar to Kaviraj, but with a slightly different accent, Gorski attributed these shortcomings to the historical moments of their emergence. These theories are therefore insufficient to analyse contemporary society, because Western nation-states have been pluralised by immigration, have experienced massive unchurching, and exist in a less stable, fluid, culturally hybrid, accelerated multipolar world.

Hence, Gorski suggested the image of a *shattered vase* to capture contemporary developments, which the conceptions of differentiation or secularity cannot sufficiently cover. According to him, *religion has lost the monopoly over the legitimate forms of the sacred*, leading to a multiplicity of modern sacralities. Gorski referred to Charles Taylor's *nova effect* but asked to radicalise this metaphor in the sense of a total fragmentation. The challenge would then be to construct a conceptual framework to examine these fragments and to understand the underlying *dynamics of (de-)monopolisation* instead of trying to incorporate them in the master narrative(s) of secularisation.

Discussions and Reflections

The lively discussions addressed many aspects, empirical details and theoretical clarifications, as well as systematic problems and further research perspectives – on a subjective selection of the latter two I will briefly focus in the following critical reflections.

The presented papers offered a stimulating input with regard to the context-dependent processes and constellations to look for in order to uncover, analyse or explain (historical) processes of (de-)differentiation, such as the emergence of conceptual distinctions, processes of homogenisation and heterogenisation, (de-)monopolisation, (de-)pluralisation, inclusion and exclusion, (de-)institutionalisation, (dis-)appearance of structural alliances or the fragmentation of the social – sometimes directly pointing to processes of (de-)differentiation, sometimes standing in rather intersectional relations to them.

With regard to the broader theoretical implications of differentiation theory, it seemed that almost all speakers and participants openly rejected the evolutionist or teleological heritage of differentiation theories in favour of a *sensitivity for historical contingency*, some on the empirical grounds of their research, some as principled stance, many for both reasons. Most of the presentations during this workshop were good examples that it might well be possible to rid differentiation theory of this heritage. The closely related and openly addressed, often criticised, *functionalist bias of differentiation theories* however proved to be a more difficult problem to tackle. In one or the other way a majority of the speakers referred to modernity as being characterised by a primacy of *functional* differentiation, but the repeatedly raised question what the concrete function(s) of religion in (modern) society might be, was not sufficiently answered. Confronted with the elaborate theories of differentiation presented, suggestions based on the Durkheimian idea of providing social cohesion were as little persuasive as simple references to the division of labour. Especially with regard to the approaches referring to Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation, the impression was that 'functional' might be a misleading conceptual residue – some participants already seemed to prefer the use of terms like *horizontal or institutional instead of functional differentiation*. Function systems were foremost characterised as autonomous, self-enhancing, self-referential, 'eigenlogical' systems, following and enhancing ends rather disconnected from social or societal necessities that *might* have fostered their emergence in the remote past. A thorough and consequent reflection on this quality of institutional autonomy of social spheres (in modernity) leads to the question whether and to what extent they can (still) *primarily* be described as functional, or whether differentiation theory should abstain from its (terminological) primacy, because it contradicts its own assumptions or even tends to bring in unacknowledged normative or metaphysical statements about society. At the same time, such a reflection could open up differentiation theory for the inclusion of obviously related critical concepts from other theoretical traditions like *reification of* and *alienation from social reality*.

With regard to historically oriented cross-cultural comparisons, an endeavour obviously essential to the *Multiple Secularities* framework, Adrian Hermann's stimulating presentation posed a fundamental challenge. While at first his concept of a *Global History of Religion* seemed to critically complement conceptualisations of cross-cultural comparison as put forward by Kleine and with a different accent by Kaviraj, he suggested a radically different interpretation in the conclusion of his paper and the subsequent discussions. His final declaration that modern 'religion' cannot be described in any continuity from pre-modern situations, together with the repeated assessment that modern global categories were *equidistant* from European/Western categories and from those of other regions and traditions, poses serious questions whether and how historical research could at all cross the asserted qualitative rupture between modernity and pre-modern arrangements, but also whether the ascertained hegemony of Western categories in the emergence of modernity could be made visible within such a *framework of equidistant categories*. In terms

of Steckel's presentation, one could ask whether such a perspective would ignore the pre-modern history of cultural entanglements and again creates a picture of stable and homogenous pre-modern societies. Nevertheless, the workshop showed the great potential, but also the conceptual difficulties of this kind of comparisons, demanding a particular awareness for the conceptual subtexts of terminologies like encounter, entanglement, imposition or appropriation; global, European or western; exceptional or provincial; culture and society.