Transnationalizing the History of Religious Education in the 19th and 20th Century

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The faculty of Protestant Theology at Goethe University organized an interdisciplinary conference chaired by David Käbisch (Frankfurt/Main) with the heading „Transnationalizing the History of Religious Education in the 19th and 20th Century“ and invited academic researchers from ten different countries – including the United States of America, Israel and Turkey – to Frankfurt. The objective of the conference was to bring together international historians of education as well as of religion and religious education, and to discuss the opportunities and limits of investigating transnational issues in the field of religious education for the 19th and 20th century. An important basis for the conference was the concept of transnational educational spaces that has been elaborated for some time by historical educational research in Germany. Beyond an overly narrow view within local or national frontiers, this new concept allows to focus on cross-border processes of transfer by lending and borrowing ideas and knowledge about education by different media and global networks. Three methodological talks and a wide range of 21 case studies made it possible to discuss the connectivity of such an approach to the issues of a primarily comparative working history of religious education.

In the introductory methodological panel, GERD-RAINER HORN (Paris) outlined his broad-based study on religious-sociopolitical movements and their nearly synchronous patterns in different national contexts during the 20th century. He expressed that both approaches – the traditional comparative and the new transnational – are closely connected to each other and that their distinction becomes particularly clear by the different consideration of dividing and connecting aspects. Following the research results regarding nationality, the historian SILVIA KESPER-BIERMANN (Cologne) showed the specific intersections of educational and national spaces. She demonstrated the recent inspirations gained from historical and educational research for the analysis and interpretation of transfer processes as well as the innovation potential resulting from an enhanced use of space and transfer as elementary conceptual categories. In the third and last methodological talk, BERNHARD DRESSLER (Marburg) pointed out the complex semantic meaning of Bildung within the international academic discourse. For Dressler this term has lost its specific strength of distinction. Because of the independent relation between the genesis and meaning of Bildung, Dressler pointed to its mutual connectivity for the theory and history of education.

After these methodical contours for a better understanding of transnationality and (religious) education, the first focus was set on media as a main supporter for transfer processes in transnational and global contexts. THOMAS SCHLAG (Zurich) suggested seven differentiated dimensions of understanding transnationality by exemplifying the Basel Mission (est. 1815) in China, India, Ghana and Cameroon. Thus, he illustrated the complexity of transnational educational claims and programs. The panel talks by PETER SCHEUCHENPFLUG (Regensburg) and WERNER SIMON (Mainz) dealt with the spiritual Catholic books of Johann Michael Sailer (1751–1832) as well as their translations and reception all over Europe. Moreover, they described the failed efforts of writing and publishing a universal Catholic catechism since the First Vatican Council in 1870 up to the 1930s. In another panel focusing on encyclopedia and journals, RUTH CONRAD (Tübingen) underlined transnational dimensions of Christian pedagogical encyclopedia in the 19th century, whereas SARA HAEN (Tübingen) talked about the perception of other countries, denominations and religions by Catholic and Protestant secondary school teachers regarding journals of religious education.

On the second day, the conference focused on organizational models of religious education that were transferred between several...
countries, religions or denominations. GORDON MIKOSKI (Princeton) presented his critical investigation of the reception of German Lutheran pedagogues and theologians at Princeton Theological Seminary since the beginning of the 19th century. He stressed the very different local reception of liberal, fundamental and modernizing thoughts and concepts that, as he pointed out, had had a significant impact on the development of the seminary. Following the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, AMADINE BARB (Paris) and ROLF SCHIEDER (Berlin) reflected on the possibilities and spaces for teaching about religion in a secular and pluralistic state and society and asked for transnational references. Meanwhile in another panel, MUSTAFA GENCER (Bolu) and VICTORIA GRÄBE (Brunswick) dealt with the transformation of religious educational institutions and programs in the Near East with regard to the transition period from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic on the one hand, and with reference to the Algerian educational system during and after the French colonial government on the other hand. Afterwards, ESTHER MÖLLER (Mainz) analyzed the constitutive impact of educational transfer in the Near East by studying French and German schools in the Lebanon during the mandatory time. Möller raised the question of how multicultural and multidenominational contents at the respective locations could also be understood within a concept of transnationality. Many transfer processes between Europe and the Near East were discussed at the public lecture by DAVID MENASHRI (Tel Aviv). With regard to Iran, the political scientist explained the connection of education and modernization before the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and underlined the subcutaneous significance of Western educational contents up to now.

Within a comparative study about the similarities and differences in the field of religious education in England and Norway, ODDRUN BRÅTEN (Trondheim) regarded the subnational, national and supranational processes and called special attention to the comparability of national educational concepts by following common supranational educational traditions on both sides. SIEBREN MIEDEMA (Amsterdam) and WILNA MEIJER (Groningen) discussed the opportunities and limits for Islamic religious education in Dutch school. They both stressed the tension between national and normative claims on the one hand and religious and cultural traditions as well as liberal and orthodox Islamic educational claims on the other hand. As a transnational reference, Miedema and Meijer referred to the laical public school system in France. As a final talk of this panel, PETER SCHREINER (Münster) pointed out the current, first efforts to standardize religious education in Europe and he raised the question whether Europeanization could be a good term to describe these transnational developments.

The final panel on the last day of the conference laid a focus on transnational networks and its non-state actors. By analyzing the ecumenical discourse on education before the World Church Conference in Oxford in 1936/37, HENRIK SIMOJOKI (Bamberg) showed how ecumenical efforts could serve as the engine for transnational entanglements, although in his case study national patterns of perception were still dominant. In his opinion, purely comparative approaches would blockade the view on the spaces of discourse and communication. On the basis of Catholic catechetical papers, MARKUS MÜLLER (Mainz) reconstructed a network of Catholic pedagogues between Germany, France, Belgium and the United States in the post-war period that could be proved by the exchange of pictures from textbooks. HENNING SCHLUSS (Vienna) set a focus on religious education under Communist oppression and stressed the importance of informal networks in the former GDR in the late 1980s. In the second panel, networks of religious education before 1933 were observed by ROBERT SCHELANDER (Vienna), ANTJE ROGGENKAMP (Münster) focusing on the relationship between Protestant religious education and nationality in the Habsburg Empire and transnational networks of peace education in the 1920s. Finally, MICHAEL WERMKE (Jena) described the transfer processes of pedagogical knowledge and multi-religious educational programs in his comprehensive case study on Jewish and Mus-
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In regard to the controversial discourse on the relationship between national-comparative and transnational-transfer-oriented approaches, Schweitzer suggested that only the combination of both approaches could lead to significant results. In his opinion, doing research on religious education was not only characterized by national frontiers, but also by a complex set of many religious, denominational, ethnic and other limitations. There is the challenging task to perceive all these limitations as well as the different efforts to cross them. Finally, Schweitzer asked the participants of the conference to think of the term multilateralism that should remind them “of the many limitations and of many blind spots the history of religious education is still suffering from”. 

Conference overview:

David Käbisch (Frankfurt am Main): Be- grüßung und Einführung / Introduction

1. Methodologie / Methodology

Gerd-Rainer Horn (Paris): Transnationalizing the History of Religion. The methodology and practice of transnational history

Silvia Kesper-Biermann (Köln): Transnation- alizing the History of Education. Educational Spaces and Transfer in Educational Research

Bernhard Dressler (Marburg): Bildungs- geschichte und Bildungstheorie. Das system- atische Verhältnis von Genese und Geltung in der Religionspädagogik

2. Medien / Media


a. Bücher und Katechismen / Books and Cat- echism

Peter Scheuchenpflug (Regensburg): Geistliche Bücher als transnationales Bildungsmedium. Das Beispiel Johann Michael Sailers

Werner Simon (Mainz): Ein Katechismus für alle? Das transnationale Projekt eines Wel-teinheitsKatechismus
b. Lexika und Zeitschriften / Encyclopedia and Journals
Ruth Conrad (Tübingen): Transnationale Aspekte christlich-pädagogischer Enzyklopädie im 19. Jahrhundert
Sara Haen (Tübingen): Andere Länder, Konfessionen und Religionen in religionspädagogischen Zeitschriften. Die Wahrnehmungsmuster von katholischen und evangelischen Gymnasiallehrkräften

3. Organisationsmodelle / Organizational Models
a. Naher Osten / Near East
Mustafa Gencer (Bolu): Die Modernisierung von Institutionen religiöser Bildung in der Übergangsphase vom Osmanischen Reich zur türkischen Republik. Transnationale Perspektiven
Victoria Gräbe (Braunschweig): Religionssunterricht im algerischen Bildungswesen unter und nach der französischen Kolonialherrschaft
Esther Möller (Mainz): Orte der Mission? Französische und deutsche Schulen im Nahen Osten
b. USA
Gordon Mikoski (Princeton): The Germanization of American Theological Education. A case study about the Princeton Theological Seminary
Amadine Barb (Paris) / Rolf Schieder (Berlin): Education „Global Citizens“ in an Age of Pluralism: Teaching about Religion in American Public Schools

3a. Europa / Europe
Oddrun M. H. Bråten (Trondheim): Religious education in England and Norway: The transnational Dimension
Siebren Miedema (Amsterdam): Organizational Methods of Islamic religious education at schools in Europe
Wilna A. J. Meijer (Groningen): Islamic Education in the Netherlands. Transnational Dimensions of a School Struggle
Peter Schreiner (Münster): Eine Europäisierung religiöser Bildung? Religionspädagogik und internationale Standardisierungsprozesse

4. Öffentlicher Abendvortrag / Public Lecture
David Menashri (Tel Aviv): Education and Modernization in the Middle East – Transnational Perspectives: The Case of Iran

5. Netzwerke / Networks
a. 1918–1933
Robert Schelander (Wien): Protestantischer Religionsunterricht und Nationalitätenfrage im Habsburgerreich
Antje Roggenkamp (Münster): Transnationale Netzwerke der Friedenserziehung in den 1920er Jahren
Michael Wermke (Jena): Der Transfer pädagogischen Wissens. Jüdische und muslimische Absolventen der Frankfurter Pädagogischen Akademie 1927–1933
b. 1933–1989
Henrik Simojoki (Bamberg): Kirche, Staat und Erziehung im ökumenischen Diskurs. Transnationale Netzwerkbildung und Wissenschaftskommunikation am Beispiel der Weltkirchenkonferenz in Oxford 1937
Markus Müller (Mainz): Internationalisierung katholischer Bildungsorganisation in der Nachkriegszeit. Die Beziehungen katholischer Religionspädagogen nach Frankreich, Belgien und den USA

6. Tagungsabschluss / Final Lecture
Friedrich Schweitzer (Tübingen): Rethinking the History and Challenges of Religious Education. The Meaning of Transnational Perspectives


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