

Call for Papers

Workshop

Religion in higher educational institutions in Africa and beyond: (Re)Conversion, Power, and Authority from a comparative perspective.

November 16-17, 2021

Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient

Religious diversity is a feature of contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa and the outcome of many dynamic socio-historical processes. Over the past centuries, Christianity and Islam in particular, claimed a significant influence on social, political and even economic interactions across the continent. While trade, missions, migrations, and demographic growth imposed new forms of religious cohabitation, being religious and displaying it has become prevalent in many parts of the continent. This has affected the status of religiosity in private and public domains, has shaped modes of belonging, power relations, and ultimately how people interact, especially in multi-religious settings.

Organised by the Remoboko research group, this workshop focuses on conversion and power/authority in religious interactions, and aims to offer insights into (re)conversion (as a social and spiritual process) and power/authority (emanating from individuals, religious leaders or institutions) on university campuses. Prioritising a comparative approach, it seeks to bring together various analytical and methodological approaches and disciplinary perspectives to examine the dynamic of conversion and construction of authority in higher educational institutions.

Students' social background, gender, religious belonging, academic status (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctor, professor...) are conceptual lenses that could be used to frame contributions. We acknowledge that power is relational and multidimensional; hence we include alternative concepts such as authority, agency, domination, and influence, which may help understand conversion in relation to authority in social interactions and religious experiences. What drives conversion at the individual or the group level? To what extent does conversion occur through personal choice, external persuasion or coercion? How authoritative are the power structures—scriptures, theologies and interpretations—that religion produces in the processes of (re)conversion? What narratives are mobilised to establish authority, and build outreach strategies? How are identities and belonging reconfigured? What boundaries emerge and are challenged in this process? What power relations ensue? How does (re)conversion shape religious interactions and experience on campus? These are some of the issues we would like to engage. Therefore, we welcome contributions that rely on detailed empirical case studies in higher education contexts.

The workshop will be held at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin. The languages will be English and French. Costs for travel and accommodation will be covered for a limited number of participants. In case participants cannot travel due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the workshop will be held in a hybrid format, online and on-site.

Interested graduate students/young scholars should submit their contributions and direct inquiries to: conversionpower@zmo.de. Participants will be expected to write a blog post based on the presentation during the workshop. The blog posts will be published on our blog: <https://remoboko.hypotheses.org/>.

Timeline

- July 15, 2021: Deadline for abstract (max. 300 words), a short biography of the applicant along with their full name, email, and affiliated institution and department
- August 1, 2021: Notification of acceptance
- October 30, 2021: Deadline for papers
- November 16-17, 2021: Workshop