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### Introduction

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# Introduction

## The Sites, Materialities and Practices of Interreligious Encounters in Europe

*Julia Martínez-Ariño, Laura Haddad, Jan Winkler and Giulia Mezzetti*

### Introduction

Throughout Europe, religious identities have increasingly become significant categories in debates on migration, cohesion, diversity and belonging. In particular, ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ have taken centre stage as categories of difference in articulations of policies supporting integration and social cohesion. An important format in which these identities are mobilized and negotiated is *interreligious dialogue*. A number of studies have traced the emergence and spread of interreligious dialogue as an instrument for governing religious diversity and immigrant integration at different spatial scales and levels of governance (Amir-Moazami 2011; Tezcan 2012; Dornhof 2012; Dick and Nagel 2017; Griera 2012, 2019; Griera and Forteza 2011; Martínez-Ariño 2019; Nagel 2018; Sarli and Mezzetti 2020).

This book ties in with these studies but employs a broader notion of ‘dialogue’. We understand dialogue in the Foucauldian sense of a *dispositive*: a ‘thing to do’, a *desired relation* that subjects are called to engage in and reflect upon in various ways. From this perspective, dialogue surfaced as a problematization of the dystopian imaginaries of potential ‘clashes’ of cultural and religious differences. Recalling broader discourses on recognition and tolerance (Peter 2010), interreligious dialogue manifests itself in multifarious attempts and techniques to mediate those differences.

Consequently, based on this broad understanding the book does not consider only the institutionalized forms of dialogue or ‘dialoguing’, such as routinized meetings with institutional religious representatives or formalized interreligious bodies and discussion forums. Instead, it focuses on the *multiplicity of articulations* of interreligious dialogue that are linked to the multiple forms and modes of interreligious encounter. Our aim is to shed light on the variety of practices, interactions and discourses that bring together people of different religious (and sometimes non-religious) backgrounds and that produce some sort of exchange across religious lines. Such encounters may generate or reinforce existing conflicts and produce new subjectivities. More specifically, the book examines the dynamics of situated practices and encounters in different *local contexts*, where

cultural, religious and political identities are constantly being re-shaped. Indeed, though multi-scalar in nature, the negotiations of identities within a ‘dialogue framework’ take place mainly in diverse local (urban) settings, drawing attention to the ‘local’ when studying current negotiations of religious diversity (Saint-Blancat 2019; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). Therefore, we avoid grand overarching narratives such as ‘the postsecular society’ in favour of rather flexible, heuristic categories that explore questions of the embeddedness and situatedness of interreligious dialogues and encounters, their possibly ambiguous functions and effects on the actors involved, and their practical, material and spatial manifestations.

While the term ‘dialogue’ as mostly used in public discourse focuses rather on verbal and linguistic forms of expression, the notion of encounters relates to embodied practices. Interreligious dialogue is often reduced to language-based exchanges and to the idea of mutual understanding as a solely intellectual process. In order to emphasize the multifaceted practices that go beyond verbal expressions, intentions and explicit reflections, we stress a notion of encounter that understands the latter as neither necessarily productive nor as an empty reference to any kind of meeting (Wilson 2017).

As Wilson notes, encounters are all about difference. Historically the notion of encounter is linked to the meeting of ‘opposing forces’ (Wilson 2017: 452). However, opposition or difference are not fixed concepts, and especially in the moment of encounter, difference is constantly evolving and displays a genuine ambiguity: on the one hand, the discursively fixed understanding of difference can be questioned; on the other hand, the continuity of shaping and manifesting identities is emphasized while the encounter is happening. In this regard, the analysis of encounters is tightly connected to practice theory. Encounters are ‘potential forms of difference and transformation’, a sort of ‘contact zone’ (Pratt 1991, 34) which, in urban contexts, may be productive in terms of cohesion and societal understanding, but which ‘can also produce anxiety, resentment and violence’ (Wilson 2017, 457). Wilson uses a perspective on situated practice to illustrate the relevance of concrete encounters and of physical and emotional dynamics in the negotiation of difference, identity and tolerance in the context of institutionalized measures of dialogue (Wilson 2014a). Using the perspective of situated practices, Wilson reconstructs tolerance—discussed as a dimension of dialogue—as ‘embodied, affective, and emotive’ (Wilson 2014a, 864). In the context of her analyses of dialogue policies, the author thus marks ‘the need for more empirical work that is attentive to its practice’ [the practice of tolerance] (*ibid.*).

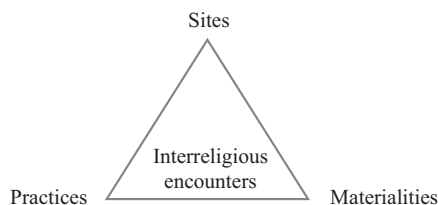
Studying encounters broadens the analytical scope of world perceptions (Popke 2009; Wilson 2017). Encounters can therefore be understood as crucial moments in which people, things and differences are *sensed* ‘through soundscapes (De Witte 2016), taste (Slocum 2008), smell (Wise 2005) and touch (Lorimer 2015; Schuermans 2016)’ (Wilson 2017: 459). Against this background, analysing encounters primarily means studying practice

and process, rather than fixed outcomes and results. However, it is also important to question the assumption that contact necessarily leads to the dissolution of conflicts and produces mutual understanding (cf. Valentine and Waite 2012). Moreover, the judging of encounters as meaningful only if they have certain effects has the potential of overlooking processes and even feeds into a neoliberal logic that only values whatever has a predictable and desirable outcome (Valentine and Sadgrove 2012; Wilson 2017).

This volume studies both encounters with long-lasting and positive effects and ephemeral, unexpected or difficult encounters that may cause conflictual or few measurable results at all. The contributions in this book focus on the ambiguous and multifaceted quality of encounters by emphasizing their embeddedness into and productivity of sites and material, as well as practical relations. Conceptually, the book engages in analyses of the heterogeneous *spatialities*, *materialities* and *practices* of interreligious encounters while keeping an analytical interest in how these encounters interact with a ‘dialogue paradigm’ (Tezcan 2012; Dornhof 2012). On the one hand, we are interested in how the notion of dialogue provides a backdrop to multiform and contentious interreligious encounters, to the different practices that facilitate those encounters and to the corresponding conflicts and negotiations. We ask to what extent the notion of ‘dialogue’ influences how interreligious encounters are framed and arranged. On the other hand, we understand dialogue itself as an *effect* of these encounters and practices. This leads us to the question of how the notion of dialogue is (re)produced, expressed and experienced, but also challenged and transformed, in and through the situated practices and dynamics of encounter.

Drawing on these perspectives, the book does not discuss the theoretical, theological or moral-philosophical grounds of interreligious dialogue. Nor, on a related note, do we conceive of interreligious dialogues as a solely conscious affair or an ‘intellectual project of mind’. Instead, we are interested in the spatial, material, bodily and emotional practices that are not separated from their local contexts. Studying the polyphonic and vibrant topologies of dialogue(s) is directly connected to an understanding of these encounters as spatial and political practices, and thus as both embedded within local social, political and economic fabrics, and as constantly evolving. We then ask how dialogues and encounters tie in with these broader configurations, how their contentious and not always ‘successful’ implementations work, and which differences, identities, feelings and activities of subjects arise from them. Furthermore, the book’s focus on local contexts is important not least because the notion of dialogue is in itself paradigmatically linked to questions of (interpersonal) encounter and coexistence, with dialogue-oriented programmes and practices aiming at producing relations of trust and confidence on the ground.

The perspectives outlined throughout the book will foster a better understanding of how interreligious dialogues, practices and encounters shape religious, cultural and political identities and influence the im-/possibilities



of different actors articulating their positions within local relations of belonging and difference on the one hand, and power and inequality on the other. To examine the local topologies of power that are (re-)produced or transformed through the various manifestations of interreligious dialogues and encounters, the studies in this book shed light on the multiform spatial, material and practical dimensions of dialogue. We therefore treat the sites, materialities and practices of interreligious encounters as analytical entry points into understanding and explaining broader phenomena.

### **The Diversification and Complexification of Interreligious Encounters**

In recent decades, interreligious dialogue, in all its forms and expressions, has expanded widely across the world. We see this in the form of formal conferences, such as the ‘Annual Meeting on Interreligious Dialogue’, organized yearly by the World Council of Churches and the United Nations ‘World Interfaith Harmony Week’ since 2010. As well, more practice-oriented events take place, such as the interreligious mourning ritual organized for the victims of the 2017 terrorist attacks in Barcelona (Griera 2019), or the performative solidarity of Muslim organizations on social media, offering accompany Jewish persons to the synagogue in the face of recent antisemitic threats in several German cities (Liberal Islamischer Bund 2021).

In many European contexts in particular, interreligious dialogue has been considered a suitable tool for dealing with matters of immigrant integration, social cohesion and inter-ethnic relations. Examples of municipalities that have set up local interreligious councils to tackle such issues abound and have been the object of sociological analysis (Griera 2012; Liebmann 2019; Martínez-Ariño 2019). This opens up new speaker positions for religious actors, who can acquire influence as policy ‘players’ when dedicating themselves to the interreligious dialogue agenda. Moreover, interreligious encounters materialize in other modalities, such as interreligious kindergartens, interreligious tours (Sorensen and Martínez-Ariño forthcoming), interreligious rooms in public institutions like prisons, universities and hospitals (Christensen et al. 2019; Clot-Garrell and Griera 2018), and new architectural projects that aim to promote coexistence, as discussed by Burchardt and Haering in this book.

Hence, interreligious dialogue no longer takes place only in the form of a conversation between faith leaders in a conference room. This results from a diversification and complexification of interreligious encounters. The multiplicity of modalities, aims, actors involved and outcomes of such encounters call for novel approaches that take into account the multidimensionality of the phenomenon. This does not mean that previous theoretical proposals and perspectives are no longer suitable for understanding current developments. On the contrary, they are still helpful in allowing a better grasp of what is a rapidly changing phenomenon. Our approach, however, aims to offer conceptual tools with which to examine interreligious encounters without necessarily categorizing them a priori as either, and exclusively, a public policy instrument (Martínez-Ariño 2020), a social movement (Fahy and Bock 2020), a geopolitical configuration or effect (Giordan and Lynch 2019), a post-secular expression, an effect of globalization and the pluralization of societies (Körs et al. 2020) or a way of recognizing diversity symbolically. While such conceptualizations are useful in many ways, they may also prove limiting in others, as we argue in the next section.

### Scholarly Perspectives on Interreligious Dialogue

The social scientific study of interreligious dialogue has expanded significantly in recent years, as interreligious dialogue has become more widely practised. In the European context in particular, a number of edited volumes have been published recently that examine interreligious dialogue from different perspectives. While they focus on different aspects or dimensions of interreligious dialogue, all of them aim to propose conceptual frameworks allowing the complexity of the phenomenon to be grasped more effectively. In what follows, we engage with a small selection of such volumes which, according to our reading, offer insightful conceptual frameworks through which to examine interreligious dialogue.

In their recently published volume *The Interfaith Movement* (Fahy and Bock, Routledge 2020), John Fahy and Jan-Jonathan Bock propose to analyse interreligious dialogue from a social movement perspective. However, their argument is based mostly on US and UK examples and ignores the fact that in Europe interreligious encounters often happen under the umbrella of state power. From a different perspective, Mar Griera (2012) proposes to study interreligious dialogue as a policy paradigm to deal with matters of migration and diversity. Inspired by this perspective, which examines interreligious dialogue using the conceptual tools of governance studies, the edited volume *Governing Religious Diversity in Cities* (Martínez-Ariño 2020, Routledge; originally published as a special issue of *Religion, State and Society*, 2019) conceives of interreligious dialogue as a municipal public-policy instrument.

The attempts to define interreligious dialogue as a social movement, a form of activism, a policy paradigm or a public-policy instrument may be

all appealing, but it can be difficult to determine whether interreligious encounters always fit within these conceptualizations. To avoid struggling to fit interreligious encounters into such categories, we do not ask whether or not they are social movements or policy paradigms but rather examine the different articulations of such encounters. We therefore argue that a certain interreligious encounter may fit within the social movement framework, while others may be better explained by a different category, like a policy paradigm, or by using multiple categories. We also argue that such classification may also change over time depending on how such encounters are framed, deployed and used in different periods.

A different but also productive effort to move the research field forward conceptually is Marianne Moyaert's edited volume *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries* (Springer 2019). In an attempt to overcome the limitations of a belief-centred approach to interreligious relations, Moyaert explores the practical and material conditions of interreligious rituals and the processes of negotiating and transgressing these rituals, thus providing inspiration for our own empirical and theoretical framework. Moreover, the editor highlights the importance of considering the material and spatial dimensions of interreligious dialogues. As well, inspired by feminist and intersectional scholars, she stresses the need to examine the sociopolitical contexts in which dialogue takes place. While some of the analytical categories of our approach echo this book, the main concept Moyaert's volume presents—interrituality—draws on a rather theological approach, which makes the volume largely different from ours.

Finally, Julia Ipgrave's edited volume *Interreligious Engagement in Urban Contexts* (Springer 2019) discusses the social, spatial and ideological (e.g. theological) aspects of different forms of interreligious activism. With its theoretical focus on the different modes of social capital that exist within interreligious engagement—e.g., bonding, bridging and linking capital—the volume offers a rich explanation of how interreligious activities can facilitate new forms and experiences of belonging and community. However, the question of the extent to which interreligious encounters and practices are also operating as technologies of power (i.e. of inclusion and exclusion) remains to be addressed more explicitly.

As we have shown, scholars are continuing to make efforts to find an appropriate theoretical and conceptual vocabulary with which to make sense of interreligious dialogue. The social movement or policy paradigm approaches, to name just two, try to fit interreligious encounters into those categories. However, what we see is that in some cases a concrete example of an interreligious encounter may be considered a social movement, while in other cases it may be better understood as a policy paradigm or a theological discussion. For example, the work of an artist, like the one analysed by Otterbeck in this volume, cannot be understood as a socio-political movement, yet could be appropriated by political actors, for instance, to make a geopolitical claim. Similarly, nor can the project of the *House of One*, a

planned multi-religious building in Berlin, as discussed by Burchardt and Haering in this volume, be considered a social movement as such although it may be mobilized in the form of or as part of a social movement to fight racism in a certain neighbourhood at a particular moment in time, for instance.

Interreligious encounters are on the move, as encounters are in general, and we cannot rigidly fix them under any one interpretative label. Rather, we should pay attention to the different articulations and the multiplication and diversification of forms, goals and actors in interreligious dialogues. For this, we need more open analytical categories with which the diverse forms of interreligious encounters and dialogues can be investigated. In this volume, accordingly, we analyse interreligious encounters through three analytical dimensions: their sites/spatialities, materialities and practices. By doing so, our book continues earlier conceptual efforts to make sense of and understand interreligious dialogue, practices and encounters. The heterogeneity of the chapters collected in this volume allows us to challenge categorical classifications and supports our argument that it is not possible to classify interreligious encounters and dialogues using any definite framework.

### A Three-fold Approach to Studying Interreligious Encounters

Our volume draws insights from some of the works discussed above, but it approaches the topic differently. The novelty of our approach lies in the emphasis on the spatial, material and practical dimensions of interreligious encounters. The book is divided into three sections, which correspond with these three conceptual and analytical lenses. Under the perspective of *sites*, we group the contributions that either focus on processes of interreligious place-making or employ a specific spatial argument, e.g., by exploring the transnational dimension of local conflicts and negotiations, or by arguing for attention to be paid to spatial configurations that have been little studied so far. In this section, three chapters are presented. Through the prism of *materialities*, we bring together three contributions that explore the bodily and affective dimensions of dialogue(s) or highlight the materializations of local interreligious relations and identity-making processes. The heuristics of *practices* brings together contributions which, by looking at the (micro-)contexts of situated activities, trace the dynamics, fault lines and contradictions that emerge in the implementation of interreligious dialogues. The three contributions in this section examine the embedding of interreligious dialogues in local constellations of actors and institutions. As well, they explore the diversity of possible expressions of dialogue, asking how dialogue is practised in the form of, e.g., art/photography, guided exercises of self-reflection or local social action. Despite this distribution of chapters on the basis of their main analytical emphasis, most of them tackle



more than one of the three dimensions. This is not surprising, given that all three dimensions find themselves interrelated in the life of encounters, the distinction between them being mostly analytical.

### *Spatialities*

The first dimension of our conceptual approach points to the spaces and sites of encounter in and through which interreligious dialogues take shape and operate. We conceive of dialogue(s) as political practices that draw on broader discourses, but that are always *situated*. We analyse the conditions and mechanisms through which dialogues are spatialized and inscribed in different local contexts, where specific power relations and dynamics of formal and informal encounters generate specific effects. However, we do not treat the spatial dimension of interreligious encounters as a given. Rather, broadly following an understanding of space as socially constructed (Lefebvre 1991; Knott 2008), we argue that certain places and sites are precisely produced by those encounters. In other words, interreligious encounters may create new places, be they more permanent, as Nagel shows in this book in his analysis of the ‘Gates of World Religions’ in the German city of Hamm, or be more ephemeral, like the atmospheres that interreligious meditation and encounter create in the case of Copenhagen examined by Paulsen Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen (in this volume). Or, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina presented by Djolai (in this volume), mechanisms of communitarian spatial segregation and inequalities inherited from post-war arrangements, coupled with the ever-contemptuous sharing of power between different ethnic groups, may account for the violent interactions that erupt around religious symbols and buildings. Such a spatial regime as this almost prevents collaborative interreligious encounters from taking place both metaphorically and literally, meaning that the basic form of communication between different faith groups is silence, to be interpreted as a signal of tolerance rather than indifference.

Moreover, we emphasize the local dimension without excluding other scales and dynamics (Massey 2005). Specifically, we take into consideration the interconnection and interdependence of different spatial scales. As some of the chapters show, interreligious encounters that happen locally are traversed by dynamics and controversies or contestations that take place at other scales. This is the case in the studies by Burchardt and Haering as well as by Emmerich in this volume, where the authors show how national and international dynamics—linked, for example, to the influence of the Turkish government in German politics—spill over into local interreligious projects and discussions. Situated though encounters may be, the space where they occur is also a ‘network of relations at scales from global to local’ and ‘space/time’ (Knott 2009, 157). While emphasizing the *locales* and *localities* of encounters, we keep in mind the role of the global flow of interconnections, and of other scales too, in shaping if and how ‘the interreligious’

materializes in local contexts, if only because encounters and contexts are strongly shaped by broader discursive fields (not coincidentally a spatial metaphor). For instance, the sites considered by Djolai bear the wounds left by the heritage of war and by nationalist and interethnic clashes, while the case studies analysed by Nagel, Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen, and Emmerich are set in continental Europe, where interreligious ‘talk’ in post-secular configurations has been considered instrumental in domesticating and pacifying Islam. As Kim Knott (2008) argues from a religious studies perspective, space is dynamic, socially constructed and historically layered, and it points to the materializations of, e.g., religious ideas, practices and knowledges. Simultaneously, the formation of spaces may go hand in hand with the formation of (new) social groups and interactions. In his contribution to this volume, based on empirical work in a small town in Germany, Emmerich shows how the provincial character of this space, as opposed to big urban centres, can create specific conditions for the development of relations of trust and intimate bonds that can support (but also sometimes compromise) interreligious governance networks. In other words, different spatial scales create different conditions for interreligious cooperation and interaction. Another aspect can be emphasized by looking at the changing spatiality of religion in cities and urban environments. The Western bias in social theory posits ‘the city’ as the locality of ‘the secular’ *par excellence* (Casanova 2013; Burchardt and Becci 2013). This thesis is not overturned just by the simple observation of new religious ‘presences’ embodied by practicing migrants in Western immigration countries, but also by the consideration that even historical and established Western religions did not disappear from the city. The privatization and individualization of religion have made religious institutions less and less influential in regulating a community’s social life, especially in polycentric, highly diversified and globally connected conglomerates such as urban contexts; yet this does not mean that religion has been dissolved from these places altogether, if only—and precisely—because of its material and spatial dimension. As Knott et al. (2016, 129) argue, ‘the tangible remains of this process, as well as the materiality of processes of demolition and repurposing, gained too little attention’. The loss in religious authority, with declining membership and public practice, does not necessarily translate into a loss in spatial and social significance, nor does it mean that established, declining religions do not participate in the power struggles over (shrinking) political significance; at the same time, the ‘secular’ and the non-religious also take part in these struggles.

Hence space is enmeshed with power relations, and ideas of encounter are also represented through space. Moreover, the notion of encounter itself, we would argue, points to the spatial imaginaries of co-presence and diversity (Massey 2005; Wilson 2017). In our case, this raises questions such as: *how is space constructed through interreligious encounter? How do different spatial conditions (e.g. rural vs. urban spaces) influence the shape of interreligious encounters? How does space created through such encounters*

*produce and reproduce existing inequalities? How do interreligious encounters reinterpret spaces?* This latter question is addressed by Nagel's case study of interreligious art in the metropolitan Ruhr area of Germany. This art reinterprets, or as the author puts it 'recultivates', a post-industrial context. Overall, the chapters in this section, as well as some presented in the other sections, shed light on the centrality of the spatial dimension for a deeper understanding of interreligious encounters, their conditions and consequences.

### *Materialities*

Linked to questions of spatiality, the book also focuses on the *materiality* of interreligious encounters, tracing the significance and effects of bodies, bodily practices, things, assemblages and affects (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Anderson and Harrison 2010; Houtman and Meyer 2012). In many variations, scholars in social and cultural studies have employed non-representational and (Deleuzian) new materialist theories that foreground affective relations and bodily encounters as a means of analysing how identities, subjectivities and differences are forged and constantly re-made in and through shifting configurations of diverse material elements that display diverse agencies and potentialities (Thrift 2004; Ahmed 2004; Lim 2010; Anderson et al. 2012). From the perspective of this kind of thinking about assemblages, differences and identities are manifested in contingent but powerful (historical) tendencies in distributing and organizing specifically positioned (human and non-human) bodies, tendencies that become operative within affective material assemblages. Assemblages, however, always contain a multiplicity of potential ways to be generative and productive, so that every tendency or force—or, with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), every line of articulation—will be in a relationship of tension with alternative (materially mediated) tendencies and forces (See also Dewsbury 2011). Within material assemblages, and in the processes of their becomings, elements of all kinds, things and spaces may 'become sites of intensive difference' (Swanton 2010, 2340), as they are affectively loaded and positioned within political and societal practices. From an assemblage perspective, racializing or culturalizing operations, which produce and make tangible certain identities, are mediated in more or less rationalized interplays of heterogeneous material elements. Racializing and culturalizing differentiations are conceptualized 'as something that bodies do in interaction [with bodies referring to all kinds of human and non-human entities; the authors]' (*ibid.*, 2399), while interactive encounters between bodies and material elements are (partially) grounded in the 'formatting of perceptions by past experience' (*ibid.*, 2340).

So far most non-representational and new materialist works have not explored interreligious politics, practices or encounters. However, they offer impulses for making visible how interreligious encounters, practices

and spaces are linked to, and grounded in, processes of the production and circulation of identity and difference. There is one exception in this regard, where Anna Hickey-Moody and Marissa Willcox use feminist and new materialist perspectives to shed light on the material dimensions of the ‘entanglements of difference’ (Hickey-Moody and Willcox 2019, 1) that are relevant in making articulations of ‘religion and gender at a community level’ (ibid., 1). The authors analyse cross-cultural and interreligious ‘feelings of “community” and “belonging”’ (ibid., 1) as something that is tied to ‘more-than-human assemblages; [...] homelands, countries, wars, places of worship, orientations, attractions, aesthetics, art and objects of attachment’ (ibid., 1). In a different publication, drawing on data from a project on interfaith childhoods, Hickey-Moody and Willcox (2020, 65) ask ‘how the materiality of religion can shape the ways young people and their parents build relationships with those from different religions’.

Overall, these materialist perspectives open up questions about the situated production of relations of identity and difference and lead to a reframing of subjectivities: How do identities and differences emerge within and through interreligious encounters, and how do the latter affect different bodies (Swanton 2010)? In addition, more structural issues concerning the materiality of interreligious practice are foregrounded. How are the practices and politics of interreligious dialogue and encounter connected to material changes in local contexts such as new (temporary) (inter-)religious places, urban-planning interventions or infrastructural change? How, for example, may more or less organized interreligious encounters and dialogues be related to the infrastructuring of cultural and religious identities (Burchardt and Höhne 2015)?

Finally, acknowledging the centrality of religiously or interreligiously framed material images, things and artefacts—in their experiential quality, their affectivity and in terms of their entanglement with knowledge production—is crucial to grasping the processing of interreligious activities (Houtman and Meyer 2012; Meyer 2015). As we explain further below, Motak and Krotofil’s study of a digital poster designed for the celebration of the Day of Islam organized by the Polish Catholic Church attests to this. The material turn in the study of religion redirected the attention of scholars from an exclusive focus on beliefs and the symbolic aspects of religion to the study of its objects, artefacts, bodies, buildings, digital media, etc. According to Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman, two scholars advancing the study of material religion, ‘championing materiality signals the need to pay urgent attention to a real, material world of objects and a texture of lived, embodied experience’ (Meyer and Houtman 2012, 4).

In this volume, we enquire into the ‘material life’ of interreligious encounters and their ‘pipes and cables’ (Thrift 2004, 58). *How do objects and materials mediate and produce interreligious encounters? What new materialities are generated in interreligious encounters, and how do these reflect unequal power positions?* Our understanding of the materialities of

interreligious encounters is well illustrated by the chapters in this section. Motak and Krotofil's paper on the Day of Islam, organized by the Catholic Church in Kraków, focuses precisely on one element in its materiality, namely, a digital poster advertising the event. The image showed a digitally changed city skyline of the old city of Kraków, which incorporates symbols of Islamic belief. The authors investigate the discursive negotiation of the poster by applying a thick description of the mostly virtual comments on the poster's artwork. The strong reactions to this picture stress how materiality connects with imagination and perception, since the poster did not represent a real material change, but rather visualized a certain societal condition—the discourse on the recognition of Islam in Poland.

Similarly, Jan Winkler's chapter using Deleuzio-Guattarian assemblage-thinking and theories of affect examines the materiality of an exhibition about Islam and Muslims in the German city of Erlangen and shows how, through the exhibition, its photos and the stories it tells, interreligious encounters are framed and negotiated. More specifically, the chapter draws our attention to the power that a physical setting like an exhibition can have in defining an 'appropriate' Islamic subjectivity that is able to engage in dialogue and encounters with people of other religions and the wider society. In doing so, Winkler also points to the internal negotiations within a particular religious group, in this case Islam, about what it means to be a proper Muslim. Through a fine ethnographic account of the exhibition and a tour around it, the author describes small moments and gestures that show the tensions and potentials of interreligious encounters as they emerge in and through dynamic material assemblages.

From a different perspective, the chapter by Burchardt and Haering shows how materiality, which in their case is reflected in the projection of a future architectural intervention in the city of Berlin, does not necessarily produce the envisaged effects in terms of promoting conviviality. Their analysis of the discussions around the project of the still-to-be-built interreligious building *House of One* reveals two main aspects: on the one hand, the prominence of the cultural hierarchies in which diverse urban actors are positioned, and on the other hand, the extent to which materiality may reflect criticism and social struggle rather than the much-aspired peaceful interreligious coexistence. Interestingly, their contribution also proves how materiality, even when it is not yet there, i.e. when it still needs to be laid down, has the power to affect public discussions around religious diversity and interreligiosity.

### *Practices*

In this volume, we also focus on the configurations of encounters and (bodily) practices that make dialogues intelligible and tangible in the first place. For some time now, a perspective on practices has established itself in the cultural and social sciences which consistently describes the social from the point

of view of situated and corporeal activities. In addition to the well-known perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), who explored the internalization of social structures in the form of embodied actions, the ontological approaches of, among others, Theodore Schatzki (Knorr-Cetina et al. 2001; also, Hui et al. 2017) have gained attention in recent years (cf. Simonsen 2010; Reckwitz 2017). These approaches conceive of practices as bodily and material nexuses of linguistic and non-linguistic activities and, at the same time, as the smallest units of the social. Social dynamics are then analysed as effects of different interwoven practices. Examining practices also means avoiding reducing social reality to discourses, symbols or explicit knowledge production. It means instead analysing how social (or discursive) relations are created, that is, how they are always in the making in the course of practical action. Though to some extent the concept of practice connotes more or less structured social activities, discussions in practice theory have explored the relationship between stability and instability/change, as well as the ways in which this tension may manifest itself within or between practices and their performative enfoldings. Thus, discussions in practice theory also try to capture the changing meaning of practices through variations to original practices (Butler 1991, 213; Schäfer 2016).

Moreover, looking at practices is often tied to an interest in encounters. The reconstruction of practical activities sheds light on the (micro-)contexts and local constellations in and through which specific encounters take place. Beyond a narrow idea of practices as organized and structured activities, many authors (see the discussions below) use the notion of practice more broadly to look at the situatedness, embeddedness and complexity of (local) everyday activities, that is, of activities that are always marked by both stability/routine and change/rupture, and that therefore display both the structuring effects of socio-political rationalities and discourses and the open dynamics of contingent encounters (Schäfer 2016; Wilson 2017).

While the authors cited below do not necessarily refer explicitly to the theories outlined above, they all adopt a view of situated practices that helps them understand the conditions and effects of cross-difference dialogues and encounters. A perspective on practices is then reflected, for example, in those works that examine how religious and cultural identities, as well as interreligious and intercultural relationships, are made or become meaningful and are lived and negotiated in everyday activities in urban contexts (Amin 2002; Wilson 2011, 2014b; Kuppinger 2014; Mayblin et al. 2016; Dwyer 2016; Ipgrave 2019). Recent research generally shows a great interest in the importance of situated and practised encounters for the dynamics of living together in circumstances of difference and diversity (Valentine 2008; Wilson 2017). In some cases, institutionalized measures and policies aimed at intercultural or interreligious dialogue are also examined and their effects on the negotiation of identity and difference, as well as on living together in diversity, are questioned (Wilson 2014a; Mayblin et al. 2016). With regard to the concrete practice of an interreligious project, Mayblin

et al. (2016) show that, even in the context of institutionalized attempts to strengthen cross-difference relationships, supposedly banal practices (e.g. joint sports activities) can play a major role in overcoming differences (cf. also Amin 2002). De Wilde (2015), on the other hand, combines a governmentality perspective with an ethnographic investigation of practices and thus reconstructs the concrete techniques of managing multicultural relationships in an urban quarter. She can show, among other things, how the production of a (positive) emotional atmosphere becomes an element in the governance of differences that relies on affective citizenship in a multicultural context. Konyali et al. (2019) also use an ethnographic reconstruction of practices and interactions to shed light on processes of the (re)production as well as the transformation of dominant identity positions in locally institutionalized interreligious dialogues.

A perspective on practices helps us understand how interreligious encounters and dialogues are processed within concrete and situated contexts. *How is dialogue practiced? Which practices can express which notions of dialogue in relation to which encounters? Which practices facilitate or hinder which kinds of encounter?* A perspective on practices also leads us to an analysis of the ways in which dialogues are embedded in, and connected to, other arrangements of practices. *How, for example, may interreligious activities be embedded within urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes, local social cohesion/integration policies, or city marketing and tourism?* (For connections between multifaith and interreligious activities and urban social cohesion policies, see, for example, the chapter by Prideaux and Mortimer, this volume). Simultaneously, a focus on practices enables consideration of the myriad ways in which dialogue is practised, from institutionalized interreligious ‘round tables’ to fleeting encounters and local demonstrations, from interreligious bus tours and kindergartens to ‘chill-out zones’ or ‘rooms of silence’. A practice approach, however, also allows us to examine specific personal experiences and inter-related practices of perceiving. The example of a photographer who converted to Islam and who seeks to make visible the universal humanity of being a Muslim in particular can be analysed as a specific practice of interreligious encounter, as Otterbeck’s study in this section does. Meanwhile, although situated in the section focused on *sites*, Emmerich’s chapter shows how specific figures can play the role of a broker both among religious communities and between religious communities and (local) state actors. Therefore, the practice of interreligious encounter and dialogue can be a matter of local interpersonal relations, trust and close bonds.

The practices of interreligious encounter can take many shapes. Sometimes they result from intentional interfaith initiatives. In other cases, however, these encounters result from practices that did not start out from settings where different religious communities would meet to discuss or work around issues of faith. Put differently, interreligious encounters may result from intentional interreligious practices, whereas others may be the

side effects of other types of actions and practices. In their study of the relationship between public policy and multifaith social action in the UK, Melanie Prideaux and Tim Mortimer (this volume) show that interreligious encounters may be the starting point for social action projects conducted by various religious communities in deprived neighbourhoods and localities, or they may be the end result of social action initiatives implemented by actors in different religious communities. In their empirical study, the authors identify two types of the practise of interreligious encounters, one starting out from interreligious interactions, the other resulting in them. Moreover, their study also shows how public policies aimed at funding local social-action initiatives may impact on the connections and interactions between different actors in the field, who strategically mobilize or hide their religious identities for the sake of accessing public funds.

While situated in the section on materiality, Burchardt and Haering's paper also reveals an interesting distinction concerning practices of interreligious dialogue and encounter. On the one hand, the official project of the *House of One*—a planned multi-religious building in Berlin that stands at the centre of the authors' study—is appreciated for its symbolic power and its capacity to promote particular discourses on diversity. On the other hand, religious representatives, especially those in marginalized communities, highlight the importance and efficacy of everyday grassroots interreligious practices, which receive much less attention and public support than a prestigious major project. In other words, practices of interreligious encounter can take many shapes, from very formal and/or spectacular to rather informal and/or mundane encounters, which may lead to very different outcomes precisely because of their different natures.

The study of interreligious encounters through the perspective of practices enables an examination of how power relations are put into practice and how unequal relations are reproduced through practices. Simultaneously, by using a practice lens, we are better equipped to look into everyday practices and interactions and their messiness on the micro-level (Reckwitz 2003, 298). Although situated in the spatialities section, Emmerich's chapter very clearly shows how 'interreligiosity' *is done* on a daily basis through apparently routine and seemingly banal practices. As interreligious encounters take place through practices that vary according to the context, what at some point may be considered exceptional can turn into a regular form of encounter. This is also reflected in the chapters in this book. In his study of the distinguished Muslim photographer Peter Sanders, Otterbeck shows how the artist repeats a certain cultural practice (portraying Muslims in photographs) and creates—variation by variation—a recognizable aesthetic that conveys an interreligious message. Motak and Krotofil, in their chapter on the dissemination of a poster concerning the Day of Islam in Kraków, analyse how the practices of receiving and perceiving a digitally changed image of this city, and of re-posting it via social media, provoked a controversial debate in local society. This debate reflected a kind of interreligious



dialogue that is more dispersed, informal, unstructured and spontaneous, though a spontaneity into which problematic and exclusionary voices could also inscribe themselves. Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen illustrate the genealogy of atmospheres by analysing the ephemeral, embodied and intersubjective practices of an interfaith initiative in Copenhagen. The authors ask how atmospheres tune encounters, and which embodied attunements emerge in relation to which practices among the participants.

## Concluding Remarks

By focusing on *spatialities, materialities and practices*, this book mobilizes analytical categories that enable examination of the multifaceted local power effects of different interreligious encounters, thereby grasping contentious modes of implementation, as well as current transformations of interreligious dialogue(s). This investigation is all the more relevant as the ‘dialogue paradigm’ is currently undergoing several changes. First, due to the growing importance of interreligious initiatives as a means of governing religious diversity, new actors and programmes are emerging. Dialogues gained political importance primarily with regard to the problematizations of ‘Islam’, yet many other groups besides Muslims are increasingly navigating the dialogue paradigm (cf. Ippgrave 2019). As a consequence, the emancipation of heterogeneous (post-)migrant groups is challenging existing approaches to dialogue and their identity-political settlements. Second, the political mobilization of interreligious initiatives has prompted re-negotiations of the local relationships between religion and the state that require further scholarly examination. Third, the strengthening of right-wing populist and extreme right-wing positions in many European countries might transform, or contest altogether, existing dialogue agendas. Several questions for future research arise: *how are interreligious encounters and practices, and the attempts to arrange them as dialogues, reconfiguring the position of religion in secular political publics? How do they promote ‘appropriate’ ways of living together in diverse contexts and articulate new modes of (local or national, formal or informal) citizenship and belonging (Ayata 2019)?*

Overall, our volume seeks to sharpen the focus on the production, reproduction and contestation of identities, subjectivities and power. Thus, we approach the question of how identities and differences are re-configured and negotiated in and through the local practice of more or less organized interreligious encounters and dialogues. We ask how interreligious relations are articulated and made tangible and understandable through certain practices and encounters, and to what extent these practices and encounters are embedded in power relations and linked to processes of identity formation and subjectivation. Finally, this also means questioning constellations of interreligious encounter as interventions, that is, as practices that seek to establish certain forms of desired relations of identity, difference and belonging. Interreligious practices and encounters shape the fields of possibility for specific subjects and groups inside and outside these practices

and encounters; they make it possible or impossible, easier or harder, to problematize specific socio-political issues, to express oneself or to speak to others in certain ways.

Ultimately, by turning to the spatialities, materialities and practices of interreligious dialogues and encounters, the book and its rich and diverse contributions shed light on the heterogeneous domains where the visibility and inclusion of religious and cultural differences are currently negotiated and contested. In doing so, it contributes a better understanding of how cultural, religious and political identities are reconfigured across Europe.

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