

Perspectives from Sociology: Modeling Religious Pluralism from Inward and Outward

By Karsten Lehmann and Anne Koch

1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a significant increase in academic research on Interreligious Dialogue (IRD). Catherine Cornille's 2013 *Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*¹ calls for a consolidation of the discussions on interreligious dialogue in a new way. Along those lines, other scholars have started to interrogate the power dynamics and meaningful systematic relations that underlie dialogical activities emerging as the result of an increased religious pluralism worldwide.²

Against this background, the paper at hand focuses on what can be – in the widest sense – described as ‘sociological approaches’ to the analysis of interreligious dialogue – with a particular emphasis on the concerned discussion in Germany. Since 2010, three works have set a new tone in the German study of IRD by introducing three major themes:

1. The usage of the concept of religion put forward by central actors in the field of interreligious dialogue.
2. The framing of interreligious dialogue activities with regard to concepts of ‘religious pluralism.’
3. The significance of conflict as a major concept in those debates.

The present article aims to follow this particular tradition. It asks the question to what extent an approach that treats IRD as a socio-cultural phenomenon can provide a contribution to the study of IRD in general. On this basis, the paper presents the following two themes:

- In the debates on interreligious dialogue, the category of religion is constructed in a particularly ambiguous way.

This article is an elaborated version of a presentation given at the Panel ‘Dialogue among Three Strands of Dialogue Researchers’ (2014-AAR conference in San Diego). The panel was chaired by Patrice Brodeur (Université de Montréal / KAICIID); with contributions by Leonard Swidler (Temple University) - Perspectives on IRD and Theology; Mohammed Abu-Nimer (American University) - Perspectives on IRD in the Context of Conflict & Peace Studies; Anne Koch (Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, München) / Karsten Lehmann (Universität Wien / KAICIID, as well as a response from Russel T. McCutcheon): Perspectives on Sociology. Karsten Lehmann wants to thank his colleagues Dr. Shahram Nahidi, Prof. Dr. Patrice Brodeur, Dr. Jana Vobecká for their feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

¹ Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2013).

² Paul M. Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theologies of Religions* (London/Norwich: SCM Press, 2010); and Daniel S. Brown, ed., *A Communicative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue: Living within the Abrahamic Faith* (Lanham/Boulder: Lexington Books, 2013).

- The idea of a 'secular world' for the understanding of interreligious dialogue activities is, at least, as important as the notion of 'religious pluralism.'

In order to further elaborate on these themes, the paper is divided into three major sections. It begins with methodological reflections on the sociological discussion of IRD. To do so, it presents short descriptions of three recent sociological analyses on interreligious dialogue in Germany, and the final section presents a specific reading of those analyses in order to provide further suggestions for the analysis of interreligious dialogue as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

2. Sociological Discussions of interreligious dialogue

Evidently, scholars and authors are aware of the fact that the disciplinary attributions are highly complex. During the last fifty years, all academic disciplines have gone through processes of accelerating internal differentiation. Accordingly, it is almost impossible to identify one single sociological approach to religions. For example, in 2013, Grace Davie clearly made a point on how Sociology is subdivided into a wide range of different schools (from classical hermeneutics to rational choice and critical theory), as well as how those schools have developed their own approaches to religion.³ This is even more significant in academic contexts such as the Academic Study of Religions that is characterized by references to many different disciplines while at the same time being dominated by a high degree of boundary work.⁴

Having said that, the following considerations occur from a rather simple observation: Since 2010, an increasing group of German scholars of religions has been explicitly trying to provide new approaches to the analysis of IRD activities. On the one hand, they have based their analyses upon the systematic collection of empirical data (be it via interviews, surveys or data from the media). On the other hand, they have been approaching those sets of data with well-established methods from the social sciences such as content analyses, discourse analyses, or statistical analyses.

The results of those researches provide a two-fold contribution to the Anglo-Saxon debates on IRD: First, they help to assess the strengths and the weaknesses of an approach that is systematically restricting its analyses to socio-cultural phenomena, thus labeled sociological. Second, they refer to researches that come out of linguistic contexts frequently neglected inside the USA – thus hopefully enriching the debates in the context of the AAR. For the purpose of the present paper, the authors focus on three rather recent publications that will help to map the diversity of the analyses in question: a) Gritt Klinkhammer, Hans-Ludwig Frese, Ayla Satilmis, and Tina Seibert: *Interreligious and intercultural Dialogue with*

³ Grace Davie, *Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda* (London: Sage Publications, 2013).

⁴ Oliver Freiburger, "Die deutsche Religionswissenschaft im transnationalen Fachdiskurs," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 21 (2013) 1-28.

Muslims in Germany; b) Martin Rötting: *Religion in Motion*; and c) Simone Sinn: *Religious Pluralism in the Becoming*.⁵

3. Three Major Contributions

All the aforementioned publications have been published rather recently. They are part of a body of literature that has been developed since 2010, and that has shown an explicit interest in working on new analytical approaches for the study of IRD activities.

3.1. Gritt Klinkhammer et al., *Interreligious and intercultural Dialogue with Muslims in Germany*

As far as its general scope is concerned, the work of Gritt Klinkhammer and her team from the University of Bremen can so far be described as the most inclusive research of IRD that has so far been conducted in Germany. Klinkhammer's project starts from two interconnected questions that are actually quite close to a Monitoring & Evaluation rationale: What types of concrete activities are taking place under the label of IRD? And what kind of influence do those activities have on the wider public?

Gritt Klinkhammer and her team try to answer those questions from the point of view of the Academic Study of Religions as well as the Sociology of Religions. With a Master from the University of Marburg and a PhD from the University of Hannover, Klinkhammer is now teaching History and Theory of Religions at the University of Bremen. Her background is primarily related to work on Islam and migration in general as well as the history of Sufism in Germany. The analyses of IRD activities form a rather recent part of her research activities.

In front of this background, the analyses presented in 'Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue with Muslims in Germany' bring together two extensive sets of data: (a) 132 short descriptions of dialogue initiatives in Germany, based upon information collected via a questionnaire that was sent out to 270 organizations, and (b) 20 more detailed qualitative descriptions of case-studies, consisting of data primarily collected via in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions.

⁵ Gritt Klinkhammer et al., *Interreligiöser und interkultureller Dialog mit MuslimInnen in Deutschland, Eine quantitative und qualitative Studie* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Religionswissenschaft und Religionspädagogik) (Bremen: University of Bremen 2011); Martin Rötting, *Religion in Bewegung. Dialog-Typen und Prozess im interreligiösen Lernen* (serie: Interreligiöse Begegnungen. Studien und Projekte 9) (Münster: Lit 2012); and Simone Sinn, [*Religious Pluralism in the Becoming. Religio-Political Controversies and Theological Perspectives of Christians and Muslims in Indonesia*] *Religiöser Pluralismus im Werden. Religionspolitische Kontroversen und theologische Perspektiven von Christen und Muslimen in Indonesien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2014).

The group around Klinkhammer analyzes this material primarily in the tradition of qualitative research methods.⁶ They make the point that dialogue initiatives can be described along the lines of four ideal types (2011: 23-37):

- At the center of almost all IRD activities, the researchers from Bremen see awareness raising (Ger. “Sensibilisierung”) for the situation of immigrants by providing basic knowledge via courses, public lectures, etc.
- As a second type they identify cooperative problem solving (Ger. kooperatives Problemlösungshandeln) that tries to work towards an increasing integration of immigrants, using public networking, campaigning, etc.
- In addition, they use the ideal type of empowerment, focusing on the reinforcement of joint concerns (such as spirituality or feminism) with joint prayers, working groups, etc.
- Finally, the researchers argue that there is a fourth type they describe as theological debates that is dominated by discussions among experts, and that seems to be at the margins of IRD initiatives rather than at their center.

On the basis of those observations, it is possible to highlight two further results of this project that are of particular significance for the following debates – on the one hand the ‘Wirkungsanalyse’ (effect analysis) of concrete IRD activities, and on the other hand the reflections on the empirical usage of the concept of religion in interreligious dialogue:

- (1) In the Bremen-project, the effect analysis has primarily been undertaken on the basis of survey-data, and is based upon the ‘self-description’ of the participants of the survey. On this basis, the authors come to two conclusions. (a) Across all the different types of IRD activities, 74.4% of the participants describe ‘changes in the attitudes of the participants’ as the main aim of their activities (31.8% changes in the participating religious associations; 18.6 % changes in public opinion; 9.3% changes on the level of public administration – 21.7% only marginal changes) (p. 88). (b) The majority of the survey-participants (more or less independent from their respective religious affiliation) identify three main restrictions their activities are facing: absence of resources, influences by media, and existing conflicts. (p. 91)
- (2) The sections on the concept of religion in interreligious dialogue rely primarily on qualitative data: On this basis, Klinkhammer and her colleagues came to the conclusion that the concept of religion used by IRD practitioners differs fundamentally according to the different types of IRD initiatives they can be attributed to. Dialogue activities that are close to theological debates use a totally different concept of religions than those dialogues that are close to the awareness raising type. In both cases, however, the qualitative data suggest that dialogue

⁶ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles/London/New Delhi, 2014); and Stefan Kurth and Karsten Lehmann, *Religionen erforschen: Kulturwissenschaftliche Methoden in der Religionswissenschaft* (Wiesbaden, 2011).

activities are part of the implementation of a particular usage of the word religion in Germany. In the study, this becomes particularly clear with regard to (a) the relation between the researchers and those dialogue activities dominated by Christian participants (that tried to obtain the theological definitions of interreligious dialogue), and (b) the links with the integration discourse (that favored a particularly 'liberal' take on religion).

In both contexts, the concept of religion used by the IRD participants tends to reproduce a mainstream ideal of religion. This significance of the different types of IRD-activities forms the centre of Rötting's analyses, too.

3.2. Martin Rötting: *Religion in Motion*

Martin Rötting's approach to IRD differs from Klinkhammer et al. in two ways. On the one hand, he focuses exclusively on individual constructions of IRD activities, modeling them along the lines of learning processes. On the other hand, Rötting has a double inside-outside profile as a theologian, an academic scholar of religions as well as a pastoral counselor. This educational background and profile makes his work distinct in his interests for application of research results.

These differences notwithstanding, Rötting also has a cultural studies understanding of religion as a pluralistic and competitive field. Since he explicitly follows the aim of interreligious activism and interreligious education, learning theory forms his main frame of reference and his analysis is agent-based instead of institution-based. Rötting sees religious plurality in modern societies as an empirical 'fact' and the pluralizing factor as the central difference in the respective agents' learning behavior and value-orientedness. Dialogue therefore has to start for Rötting on a personal and spiritual, value-oriented base, especially since existential convergence may connect people across a plurality of religions. For Rötting, modern self-reflexive agents use communicational skills to engage in dialogue.

Rötting is the author of several books and uncountable articles on interreligious dialogue. He studied religious education at the Catholic University Eichstätt and received a Master in Theology at Trinity College in Dublin/Ireland. His PhD in the Academic Study of Religions at Munich University is about the Christian-Buddhist-Dialogue in South Korea.⁷ With qualitative methods he conducted interviews with Christians and Buddhists in South Korea to find out about individual learning processes in the context of interreligious encounters. In a critical discussion of David A. Kolb's learning theory⁸ Rötting's research

⁷ Martin Rötting, [Interreligious Learning within Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: An approach from learning theory and an empirical research in South Korea and Germany] *Interreligiöses Lernen im buddhistisch-christlichen Dialog, Lerntheoretischer Zugang und empirische Untersuchung in Deutschland und Südkorea* (St. Ottilien: Eos 2007).

⁸ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984).

begins from the definition of a “starting point” (Ger. Anknüpfungspunkt) that connects two persons in interreligious encounter (2007: 203-38). From this starting point, several learning developments are reconstructed on the ground of empirical data and mapped in a learning circle (2012: 28).

These considerations form the elaborate background of the present book, *Religion in Motion: Dialogue-types and processes of interreligious learning*. In this book, Rötting applies (and tests) results he started to formulate as an active participant in the local Munich interreligious field. Currently he works on a doctoral habilitation at Munich University on “Spiritual identity in an interreligious world: An empirical study in Munich, New York, Vilnius, Seoul, Dublin and Istanbul.” Besides his research on IRD, Rötting also publishes in the field of pastoral counseling on Zen-Buddhism⁹ or *Interreligious Spirituality*.¹⁰ As of today, he works as a theological advisor and counselor at the Catholic university parish in Munich. As a result, one publication is on the religious diversity on the campus.¹¹ He is the founder and CEO of the association *Occurso: Institute of interreligious and intercultural encounter*.¹² This Munich-based charitable association is dedicated to research on interreligious dialogue, interreligious encounters and the education of dialogue moderators for interreligious-secular settings or conflicts.¹³

In his guided interviews in *Religion in Motion*, Rötting determines types of agents in interreligious dialogue according to learning theory. His sample in Munich comprises around one hundred interviews. As a result, he comes up with six ideal types of dialogue agents:

- According to Rötting, spiritual pilgrims are mainly motivated by their own spiritual development and self-realization and therefore are prone to spiritual and existential transformation. They easily connect with other faiths on this dynamic and existential level.¹⁴
- The social activist is also oriented towards transformation but with a focus on social work. Integration politics is often a cause to engage in interreligious dialogue.

⁹ [Mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers: Encounters with Korean Zen-Buddhism] Berge sind Berge, Flüsse sind Flüsse. Begegnung mit dem koreanischen Zen-Buddhismus. Ein Beitrag zum christlich-buddhistischen Dialog (St. Ottilien: Eos, 2001).

¹⁰ [Interreligious Spirituality: Responsible Exchanges of Religions] Interreligiöse Spiritualität. Verantwortungsvoller Umgang der Religionen (EOS-Verlag, St. Ottilien, 2008).

¹¹ [The whole world on campus!?! Cultural and religious diversity.] Die ganze Welt am Campus!?! Kulturelle und religiöse Diversitäten. Situationen und Perspektiven. (Münster: Lit 2012a).

¹² Homepage: Occurso. Institut für innerreligiöse und interkulturelle Begegnung, URL: www.occurso.de, access 12. March 2015.

¹³ Latest publication of this association: Martin Rötting, Simone Sinn, and Aykan Inan, eds., *Praxisbuch Interreligiöser Dialog. Begegnungen initiieren und begleiten* (St. Ottilien: Eos 2015).

¹⁴ This relates to the findings of an empirical study on alternative spirituality and hybrid forms of religious practices in Franconia, Bavaria by Winfried Gebhard, Martin Engelbrecht and Christoph Bochsinger, „Die Selbstermächtigung des spirituellen Subjekts. Der ‚spirituelle Wanderer‘ als Idealtypus spätmoderner Spiritualität,“ in: Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft 13 (2005) 133-51.

- The religio-cultural democrat is Rötting's third type. It stands for IRD activists that want to realize a fair and peaceful community on the base of democratic values. This type is equally related to the society and his or her religious values.
- The humanitarian agent in interreligious learning is deeply driven by values beyond all religions and worldviews. He relates to an essentialist horizon of his belief system and seeks for experience in his believing.
- The so-called orthodox adapter holds his own tradition and understanding of a unique truth to be central and feels responsible for the continuity of his religious system. He or she is often motivated by the religious essence of his or her religion and the will for reconciliation.
- Finally, Rötting identifies the ideal type of the cultural-harmonizer. The IRD practitioners of this type feel responsible with a high historical awareness for conflict solving within a societal dimension. He or she is motivated by reconciliation as well as by improving the image of his or her religious tradition.

These findings are then related to subcategories of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Christian-Jewish dialogue, Jewish-Muslim and Christian-Buddhist dialogue, the so-called "Abrahamic dialogue" as well as to the dialogue with minor religious traditions and organizations, etc. Rötting exemplifies which type of dialogue a person engages more frequently according to those subcategories, special formats or themes of dialogue.

The vital criteria for this taxonomy is the motivation drawn from biographical interviews and how the respective motivation to engage in interreligious learning relates to what Rötting describes as the four dimensional spaces of society, dynamics, the other, and one's own religion.

In order to do so, Rötting makes a distinction between two basic groups of motivation: contemplative and active motivations. These groups range from the wish to build on one's own identify, way of life, self-affirmation, and self-realization, to the more "active" intention to reconcile, to integrate other worldviews or realize one's own religious tradition, practices and ethics in the public sphere. To give but a few examples: The motivation for identity building relates to the dimension of one's own religion, the motivation to work on one's way of life to the pole of dynamics, or the motivation to realize one's religious ethical convictions to society.

These final remarks establish a link to the third exemplary study that will be presented in this paper.

3.3. Simone Sinn: *Religious Pluralism in the Making*

To put it into a nutshell, the work of Simone Sinn provides new insights to these discussions in question in three ways: First, by her analysis of theological publications and guided expert interviews that highlight categories and narratives with a formative influence on the understanding of religious pluralism understood in a much more general

way as a socio-political framework. Second, by the focus of her analyses on the situation in Indonesia. Third, by Sinn's explicit link between empirical analyses and theological debates. Sinn is a protestant theologian and pastor. For several years now she has worked in Geneva at the Lutheran World Federation as theological advisor for interreligious relations and frequently publishes in this function.¹⁵ She has great experience in interreligious dialogue settings and consultancies on a global level with the Christian churches, denominations, and other religions, especially Muslim organizations. Along those lines, the following considerations focus on her PhD in theology that has been accomplished in the Program of Excellence "Religion and Politics" at the University of Muenster.

Sinn's book on religious pluralism is based on a careful and thorough survey of sociological and political science literature on civil religion and politics in Indonesia. Against this background, Sinn reconstructs the history of the present relationship between the post-Suharto regime and the religious institutions as well as its role in Indonesian society and academia. Sinn approaches her field of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Indonesia with discourse theory in the tradition of Michel Foucault and the sociology of knowledge (Alfred Schütz). Accordingly, "religious pluralism" is considered as a (negatively denoted) concept in an emic discourse as well as the normative negotiation of influence within the field of plural and diverse religions (2014: 80).

Against this background, the interview-analyses aim to reconstruct mental schemes and action patterns of Christian and Muslim theologians' understandings of religious pluralism. Sinn therefore does not ask for explicit conceptual definitions of religious pluralism but for self-perception of the situation as well as the perception of other religions under conditions of pluralism and the post-Suharto religion legislation. In this respect, religious organizations in Indonesia are located in a public discursive field of civil society between political ethics (religious legislation) and theology of religions. Sinn has been focusing on the scope of action towards pluralism and the resources for action in this field.

With regard to the present discussions, chapter 4 of Sinn's PhD dissertation is of particular interest. Whereas chapter 4.3 represents values and motivations of theologians who are engaged in interreligious dialogue (comparable to the procedure of Rötting), chapter 4.4 comes up with four subcategories of discourses on religious pluralism at Indonesian universities. On this basis, religious pluralism is characterized by multiple overlapping discursive topics like conflict, citizenship, diversity (or anti-discrimination), proportionality and then their critical interrelation:

- The religious conflict discourse claims for clear boundary work between religious groups and a strong state position to organize pluralism. It sees religious

¹⁵ For example: Simone Sinn, ed., *Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2008); or Simone Sinn, Mouhanad Khorchide, and Dina El Omari, *Religious Plurality and the Public Space: Joint Christian - Muslim Theological Reflections*. Evangelische Verlagsanstalt (November 2014).

institutions as self-interested striving for domination. Pluralism is favored less as interreligious relations and more as multi-religiosity that guarantees each religion its secure space.

- The diversity discourse on religion sees – according to Sinn – peaceful cooperation as the natural state and inner responsibility and task of religious institutions in education and culture activity. Diversity in this discourse is regarded as an integral feature of identity and essential in Indonesian history. Otherness in the framework of this discourse is not imagined and felt as extraordinary, fascinating or threatening but as normal neighborhood.
- The discourse on citizenship is concerned about civil rights and legal protection of the (religious) minority. Starting points are often cases of discrimination towards minorities in the educational system or concerning construction projects. The *pancasila*-discourse only legitimates some religions so that this framework is not sufficient for every situation in the religious plural field of Indonesia.
- The proportionality discourse takes into account the difference between the religions in numbers of adherents. Large religions are said to have more responsibility to influence the society than smaller ones. Representational institutions in the regional administrations have been implemented in recent years that mirror in their composition the numerical size of religions and contributed to the proportionality-mental model.

Along those lines, the qualitative and hermeneutical work of Sinn clearly demonstrates how religious pluralism is the outcome of societal and theological negotiation processes in a specific national environment. Especially elite agents/experts influence the modeling of pluralism. The religious freedom discourse states the right of the member strongest religion to be more dominant and uphold the duty to take over responsibilities for public welfare.

In this context, Sinn underlines that religious elites think of dialogue as a means of strengthening connective and stabilizing societal forces. Sinn's work concludes therefore with theological-anthropological considerations on optional vulnerability in interreligious dialogue in Indonesia and two basic ways of dealing with vulnerability: segregation or solidarity.

This leads back to the initial question to what extent sociological studies of IRD might add an interesting new dimension to IRD research in general.

4. Conclusion

As has already been alluded to at the end of the introduction, the present article seeks to argue that the analyses of Gritt Klinkhammer et al., Martin Rötting, and Simone Sinn provide two interconnected lines of clarification for recent discussions of IRD activities in Germany and beyond. In order to make this point, it is at first helpful to

systematize some of the central findings that have been carved out by the three studies in question:

First of all, all the presented analyses were highlighting the diversity that dominates the field of IRD-activities. Coming from very different angles, the three authors finally arrived at very differentiated typologies that underline the different aims (Klinkhammer et al.), individual motives (Rötting) as well as the embeddedness of IRD activities in wider socio-cultural discourses (Sinn). Taken together, this type of empirical research illustrates that IRD activities are very heterogeneous; they can be based upon very different rationales.

The three analyses do not, however, stop at this point. Especially the analyses of Klinkhammer et al. and Rötting, they have made it very clear that these different types of IRD activities have a significant influence on (a) the content of the respective activities as well as (b) their social significance. ‘Cultural harmonizers’ and ‘humanitarian agents’ (Rötting), for example, follow very different approaches to religious traditions; and the ideal type of ‘empowerment’ stands for an approach to the wider society that is distinct from e.g. ‘theological debates’ (Klinkhammer et al.).

On this basis, Sinn’s analyses add yet another layer of complexity that is of high significance for the following considerations. Every analysis of IRD activities has to take the socio-cultural context of those activities into consideration. Of course, they are – from the point of view of sociological analysis – not independent from political or economic developments. In addition, it is, however, also important to take the general discourses on religious plurality and religious pluralism (Sinn) as well as the general role of religion in society (Klinkhammer et al.) into consideration in order to properly assess the role of IRD in a given society.

Having said all this, it is finally possible to come back to the two themes formulated in the introduction.

- (1) In the debates on interreligious dialogue, the category of religion is constructed in a particularly ambiguous way. The analyses underline the intrinsic plurality of interreligious dialogue activities. IRD must not be reduced to the classical triangle of Christian-Muslim-Jewish dialogue. It is based upon a plural field of highly diverse worldviews and manifold levels of normative influences on important issue—as, for example, the integration of modern societies and their reactions to religious plurality. Under these conditions, the presented analyses highlight the social constructedness of the notion of ‘religion’ through scholars and IRD-agents. In addition, they suggest that these constructions of ‘religion’ correspond with different types of agents and their view on the negotiability of religious topics.
- (2) The idea of a ‘secular world’ for the understanding of interreligious dialogue activities is, at least, as important as the notion of ‘religious pluralism.’ As far as this theme is concerned, the above analyses actually distinguish two dimensions: On the

one hand, they show to what an extent IRD has developed as a response to secularization processes. On the other hand, they underline that IRD has – even among ‘secular minded’ agents – developed into an important factor for integration politics and societal justice. It would be naïve to think that this socio-cultural framing would be without impact on IRD activities.

These two themes have an immediate impact on the more general debates on IRD in as far as they highlight the plurality of these activities beyond mere theological reflections. The present article wants to introduce this point of view into the debates and encourage further analyses along those lines.

Karsten Lehmann is a sociologist as well as scholar of religions. He received his PhD (Sociology) from the University of Tübingen and his Habilitation on Religious NGOs in the context of the UN (Academic Study of Religions) from the University of Bayreuth (to be published with Routledge in 2015). Lehmann is an expert in qualitative research methods, the role of international religious NGOs as well as the ways to deal with present-day religious pluralism in Europe. At the moment, he works as Head of Social Sciences and Statistics at the KAICIID Research Department in Vienna/Austria. In this position, he is coordinating the overall Peace Mapping Programme with a specific focus on the qualitative analyses linked to Case Studies as well as what the project calls “Voices from the Field.” In addition, Lehmann has been conceptualizing and coordinating a number of further projects inside KAICIID, such as the Talking Dialogue/TD project or the international Dialogue beyond Dialogue/DbeD conference – the results of these projects are about to be published later this year.

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