



IEG

Leibniz-Institut für
Europäische Geschichte

Research Programme for 2018–2023

In the **research programme for the years 2018 to 2023**, the overarching theme of **»negotiating differences in Europe«** will to be developed further both substantively and methodologically. The IEG's goal is to implement the trans-epochal perspective equally across all areas of research, to pay closer attention to the interaction between categories of difference and their contingent hierarchies, and to grasp the specific dynamics of the negotiation of difference on the basis of concrete historical processes and problems.

This theme has also facilitated historical-critical scrutiny of contemporary self-descriptions and normative diagnoses of Europe. Thus instead of programmatic observations about tolerance, diversity, and pluralism being characteristic features of Europe, the IEG has focused on the various forms, actors, developments and cycles in the generally conflict-laden negotiation of difference in the realms of religion, society, and politics. Europe is understood as a laboratory for the development of forms of regulating and delimiting – and of producing and preserving – otherness and inequality. The conflictual dynamic of the cultural entity known as »Europe« springs from manifold interactions and entanglements that have led to exchange, assimilation and integration, as well as to differentiation and confrontation, on the continent and beyond.

The research programme 2018–2023 productively carries forward past findings and approaches into the investigation of new central problems; it also applies them to new perspectives within currently running projects:

(1) Recent research at the IEG has highlighted the voluntary and forced marginalisation of individuals and groups as a specific form of negotiating differences. Thus, by investigating the conflict-laden interaction between pluralisation and marginality, the IEG seeks to treat a central question of the European negotiation of difference, asking specifically: What challenges does plurality entail for the pursuit of unity? Under what circumstances is the valorisation of diversity developed or rejected? And what (active) role does a position of marginality play for which, among others, the IEG has developed the notion of »cultural sovereignty« as a heuristic key.

(2) The analysis of key concepts like »humanity«, which should be uncoupled from the differentiating grasp of particular interests, has highlighted the socially impactful dialectic between the sacralisation and the desacralisation of hegemonic ideas. Connected to this, the IEG investigates the way this dialectic works in other fields systematically and diachronically. The question how »sacrality«, as a negotiable resource for the creation and bridging of difference, is invoked or abandoned seems an ideal probe for innovatively studying the entanglement between religion, politics and society, and the transformation between the symbolic, discursive and institutionalised spheres of the sacred and the non-sacred.



(3) Previous IEG research dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of boundaries and their transgression has mapped out the significance of mobility, the drawing of boundaries and their (spatial, social and intellectual) transgression for individual and group processes. The fundamental insight that experiences of difference can be grasped and reflected upon exceptionally well by focusing on mobility is now being analysed in a separate research area. The aim of this research is to show how transnational and trans-cultural boundary-crossing influenced the ascription of religious, ethnic, cultural, social, and gender-specific affiliation.

The research programme for 2018 to 2023 brings the IEG's existing interdisciplinary, trans-epochal and European-oriented strengths to bear on three research areas.

Research Area 1 »Pluralisation and Marginality«

Supporters of European unification often cite plurality in unity as an integral component of a common canon of values. Thus they also view the pluralisation of religion and culture, of life patterns and ways of life, as a defining mark of the continent and its societies in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. At present, however, this stance no longer seems to be the consensus. How did the valorisation of cultural, social and religious diversity change in the past? What concepts of unity were opposed to pluralisation? And what happened to those who were not perceived, or did not perceive themselves, to be part of the majority? In historical perspective, the current approach to plurality in Europe is remarkable above all for the positive value accorded dissimilarity and diversity. For even though plurality can be seen as a constant in European history since what Michael Borgolte has called the »discovery of diversity« in the Middle Ages, for centuries it was the ideal of unity and uniformity that reigned in social and religious contexts. Belonging to social collectives like religious communities, guilds, classes, and nations levelled differences and was placed above egalitarian inclusionary mechanisms, demands for loyalty, and exclusivist claims to religious truth. At the same time, this could lead to exclusion and to social or cultural stigmatisation. Notions of unity were opposed by dynamic processes of pluralisation, which could also include a conscious handling of marginality.

This research area focuses on the charged relationship between pluralisation and notions of unity, as well as on the significance of marginality for processes of pluralisation. Issues to be investigated therefore include: the diverse configurations in which pluralisation, unity and marginality stand in relation to one another; the mechanisms and possibilities of social self-positioning; perceptions of self and other; strategies for regulating co-existence; and various politics of affiliation and shared identity.

From the perspective of the history of religion, the focus is on forms of negotiating the exclusivist religious claims of all three major monotheistic religions and their intersection with cultural, political, and social differences. Four topics present themselves in this context. *First*, the charged and dynamic relationship between a stipulated »orthodoxy«, on the one hand, and religious deviance or a consciously chosen marginalisation, on the other. With a view to the conflict over unity, this also includes questions about religious tolerance and secularization. The containment of religious differences by means of politico-juridical regulations, attempts at theological consensus-building and everyday practices provides a *second* field of research within which the reciprocal relationship between pluralisation and marginalisation comes to the fore. *Third*, analogous processes can be found not only within Christianity but also in Judaism and Islam. Furthermore, modern European history exhibits manifold forms of mutual influence in religion and theology

among the three monotheistic religions. *Fourth* and finally, pluralisation and marginalisation determine the relationships of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities around the world. In contact inside and outside of Europe, this is where perceptions and attributions of centre and periphery, and conceptions of religious communities, are negotiated.

With regard to historical studies, there are several topics as well that will help us gain new perspectives on our research questions. Building, among others, on current research into media, gender and humanitarian aid, a *first* focus can be placed on the genesis of representations and articulations relating to marginalised groups, that is on the political configurations and mechanisms of »advocacy« between a group's own articulation and the intercession of others. *Second*, with regard to social history, the connection between marginality and religious violence in modernising societies since the nineteenth century is to be investigated. This puts a focus on the limits of plurality in everyday practices and lived environment. A *third*, *longue durée* question regards governance structures in politics and the state, specifically the organisation of imperial and democratic power in light of the challenges brought by diversity. *Fourth*, this research area can provide the basis for further historiographical reflection on the relationship between »European« and »global« history writing.

Research Area 2 »Sacralisation and Desacralisation«

In today's »post-secular« configurations, the vigour of religious phenomena, or of phenomena that develop structures and manifestations similar to religion, is vividly present. Its productivity gives historical analyses of »sacralisation« and »desacralisation« particular significance. Investigating such processes makes it possible to analyse the transformation of fundamental moral concepts and their social function. By »sacralisation« is meant symbolic processes through which things, people, and ideas are communicated as intangible and inalterable entities and consequently demand recognition in terms of subjective evidence and affective intensity. Accordingly, »desacralisation« refers to processes through which sacralised entities change or lose their status. By understanding these terms as symbolic, ritual, and discursive action, this heuristic makes it possible to overcome an essentialising distinction between an otherworldly, religiously connoted »holy« and a mundane, secular »profane«, instead grasping this distinction itself as an act of »sacralisation« or »desacralisation«.

From the perspective of the history of religion, »sacralisation« is manifested above all in ritualisation, the creation of a canon of authoritative texts, the veneration of images and objects, and, in more far-reaching terms, the formulation of dogmas and the establishment of religious moral rules of behaviour. Such instances of »sacralisation« can guide the process of community-building in all periods and all religions, to the extent that this process is defined via notions of sacrality and practices of sacralisation. As for »desacralisation«, a first focus of analysis will be on transformations in the orbit of religion, for example in connection with the European »Enlightenment«. That is when, in the name of a rationalist approach, not only did the development of the modern critique of religion begin, but doctrine was subordinated to morals – indeed to the point of sacralisation. After that, the desacralising impacts of developments outside the sphere of religion will be studied. The development of modern natural science leads to the »desacralisation« of the world, whereupon the sciences themselves, which are now ascribed the highest possible authority, are endowed with a sacral aura. Topics pertaining to the history of religion include: *first*, the historical criticism of »Holy Writ«; *second*, the changing relationship between religion and

natural science since the Enlightenment; *third*, the development of new religions and religious movements (e.g., Pentecostal churches, free church congregations, anthroposophy) in Europe; and *fourth* – complementing the historical studies – the religious interpretation of politico-military conflicts in their respective contexts and justificatory structures.

From the perspective of historical studies, the two terms shed new light on the functioning of a »secularly« and »post-secularly« coded society, going beyond the distinction between transcendence and immanence, and comprehend the transfer or transformation of epistemologies. Instances of »sacralisation« are especially linked with the metaphorical transfer of transcendence to non-religious spheres of reference. Thus, changing forms of »sacralisation« can be grasped through a study of the early modern concept of a political divine right and its fractured persistence down to legitimisations of democratic rule. »Desacralisation« includes, for example, the multifarious representational and discursive iconoclasms from early modern to modern times. Assuming that such processes of epistemic transfer between political, social and religious spheres are basically open and variable in their direction, the question of the transfer, interaction, and compatibility of differing systems of sacrality arises. Specific topics are: *first*, »Holy War« in comparative perspective from the early modern period to the »War on Terror«; *second*, human rights as a universal imperative (and their »racist« perversion); *third*, the sacralisation of the human body and its gender identities; and *fourth* – stemming from the early modern valorisation of secular life – the meaning given to labour in industrial society and the attendant reinterpretation of work as an emancipatory practice of self-realisation.

Research Area 3 »Mobility and the Drawing of Boundaries«

Mobility makes otherness especially visible. On the one hand, the movement of people, objects, and concepts lays bare existing political, social, cultural and religious boundaries that must be maintained, transgressed or renegotiated. On the other hand, it leads to the drawing of new boundaries and forms of more or less enduring entanglement. Against the backdrop of increasing mobility and entanglement in modern Europe, this research area will investigate what impact such movements had on the changing ways differences were negotiated between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Special attention will be given to voluntarily and involuntarily mobile actors, the question of affiliation in light of fluctuating boundaries, and the phenomenon of translation, which grew in importance as mobility increased.

From the point of view of the history of religion, the focus is *first* on the transgression of boundaries between the confessions and religions, specifically how it is guided and facilitated by conversion. This form of mobility can be traced not only in connection with the Christian missionary societies on other continents, but also in the Eastern Orthodox Churches and in the Islam of the Ottoman Empire. A comparative study of conversion narratives in a European, inter-religious perspective is a desideratum. Of interest, *secondly*, is the tension between the preservation and transformation of religious traditions, which was a distinguishing characteristic of communities of religious refugees. The networks of communities built by these migrants, such as the Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire and the Puritans in North America, can give insight into the cross-boundary dynamics of religious awakening and renewal movements. *Third*, the religious self-understanding of resolutely trans-confessional or inter-religious milieus will be studied. This self-understanding can be traced from humanist irenic circles to philosophical associations claiming a point of view »above« the monotheistic religions. *Fourth*, translations of religious and theological writings will be analysed. On

the one hand, in the increasing vernacular diffusion of devotional texts throughout all the confessions, and in translations of the Koran, the dissemination of elementary knowledge about other confessions and religions comes to light. On the other hand, translations, by selecting specific texts for translation in specific ways, steer the reception of these texts, thus highlighting the drawing of religious boundaries and religious entanglement.

From the perspective of historical studies, the focus is *first* on individuals and groups that voluntarily crossed geographical borders. Their life stories provide a basis for studying practices of drawing and transgressing boundaries, the creation of cross-boundary networks and the increasingly solidifying entanglements these networks give rise to. Of especial interest are the economic and political actors who played a leading role in building the structures of global entanglements. A *second* focus will be on individuals who were forced to adopt a new home. The life stories of victims of persecution and refugees are especially revealing of the changing potential for action in local, national and international contexts, as well as for studying it with regard to the emergence of exclusive and inclusive concepts (like nation and nationality), political asylum and humanitarian aid. A *third* topic is the question of the political, social, regional and religious »belonging« of individuals and groups – a question that was continually raised by mobility and shifting boundaries. Belonging had to be (re-) defined and (re-)negotiated by those on the move and the societies confronted with them. When considering this question, it is important to distinguish between belonging as perceived by the individuals and groups themselves, and those ascribed to them by others. Account must also be taken of the fact that individuals always possessed multiple, overlapping affiliations. Especially informative is research into the modes of belonging of migrants, which disintegrated and reformed in border areas and in circumstances of transition. A *fourth* avenue of approach is provided by the phenomenon of translation, which is fundamental for exchange when mobility causes contact with the »other«. Here the interest concerns processes of selective knowledge and cultural transfer, as well as the media that facilitated and conveyed these translation processes. It may be asked, for example, how »radical« political, social and cultural ideas spread in the interplay between public censorship and clandestine dissemination.