PhD Project

Knowledge of Reconciliation.

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Abstract:

The dissertation will explore in the categories of Transitional Justice studies (TJ) the contribution of religious practices to peace processes in post-conflict societies in Africa. Using Mozambique as a case study, I propose to examine the contribution of plural religious practices for reconciliation in three religions respectively and comparatively: African Traditional Religions, Christianity, and Islam. The time frame of analysis will be the end of the civil war until the rise of political tensions in the country (1992–2013). With reference to the “local turn” within the field of TJ, and taking the perspective of local actors, the dissertation will seek to analyse plural religious practices and their contribution for reconciliation processes in societies that until now have not been sufficiently considered. More specifically, I propose to analyse the diversity of local practices and the complex local power relations with particular attention to religious reconciliation rituals. The aim of the analysis is the reconstruction of knowledge of reconciliation as knowledge about the reconstruction of a society. The leading research questions concern the diachronic and synchronic importance of religious actors in relation to reconciliation, the practices of reconciliation used and their relation to each other.

These research questions are linked by four research areas: Firstly, the dissertation is based on findings from the field of Transitional Justice (TJ). Studies have pointed out the potential of local practices for peace in post-conflict societies. However, the “local” has been understood as “traditional”, resulting in an insufficient exploration of the plurality of local practices. Secondly, the dissertation draws on findings from reconciliation studies, according to which reconciliation is seen as a prerequisite for peace. Within the field of reconciliation studies, some scholars have pointed out the potential of religious rituals for reconciliation. These works base their findings on a certain concept of reconciliation. However, plural concepts of reconciliation – e.g. Christian, Muslim and Traditional – have not yet been studied sufficiently. Thirdly, the dissertation draws on findings from works looking at religion in the context of
African civil wars. Studies have pointed out the meaning of rituals in post-war periods. The variety of rituals and their contribution for reconciliation have, however, not been given enough attention. Fourthly, the dissertation refers to findings from the field of the history of knowledge, the operative assumption being that societies are based on a certain “knowledge”, understood as a category through which societal processes can be reconstructed. In analysing actors and practices, different knowledge systems can be reconstructed alongside each other from which conclusions about societal processes can be drawn. Accordingly, the analysis of actors and practices from the standpoint of the history of knowledge seems very promising.

From a methodological viewpoint, the dissertation will primarily utilize qualitative vis-a-vis interviews and analyses of the reconciliatory rituals described using a praxeological and discourse analytical approach.

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