



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND RELIGIOUS MODES OF OTHERING

A Comparative History of Religions Perspective

Two workshops 24 and 30/31 May 2023

Registration: <https://tinyurl.com/mpi-disco>

A joint initiative by:

- Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen
- Diversity Studies Centre Oslo (DISCO), Oslo Metropolitan University
- Indigenous Values Initiative, Syracuse University Henry Luce Project, American Indian Law Alliance

These two workshops examine *othering*, which is the conceptualization of certain categories of fellow humans as irreconcilably different, most often in deprecative and derogatory ways. Othering provides the basis of social attitudes, interactions, linguistic forms, political strategies, and legal rulings throughout history that have served to colonize, disempower, dominate or destroy groups of people categorized on the basis of various principles of differentiation, including skin color, language, and religion. The workshops will engage the voices of Indigenous Peoples to focus on the specifically Christian bases of othering, i.e. those positing Christianity as a superior norm and non-Christian religious traditions and experiences as inferior. Christian othering has two analytical modes to be addressed in the seminars:

Firstly, we address the origins and causes of othering in the history of Christianity from an Indigenous orientation: When, why and in what senses are non-Christian peoples throughout the world perceived as “the other”? Christian othering has been especially evident in the treatment of Indigenous Peoples, whose perspective clarifies the detrimental impacts of “othering” presently. The roots of colonization can be found in the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DoCD), initiated with a series of 15th century Papal Bulls that justified enslavement, land theft and resource extraction initially by explorers of Portugal and Spain who were raiding Africa and the American continent. The DoCD justified the superiority of the European Christian states and thereby reinforced the law in many postcolonial national states for expropriating territory and violat-

ing rights of Indigenous Peoples. Religious codes of domination, based in “Christendom,” have permeated multiple dimensions of society and government. Discovery was motivated by marginalization and destruction of Jews was a defining feature of several Christian polities from the Middle Ages through the early modern period. While antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism can be seen to be secularized in our time these prejudices and practices still bear the imprint of Christian othering.

Secondly, we will examine our own academic traditions in order to investigate othering in scholarship and in university teaching as this is produced by hegemonic Christian and Eurocentric approaches and perspectives. As an alternative, the comparative history of religions (Eliade, Long, Carrasco) engages traditions outside of the western academy as an equally viable point of departure. The proper study of the history of religions in for instance the Americas, the Islamic world and India provides examples of great intellectual traditions beyond Europe and Anglo-American US. Much has been said about the Western biases in the academic study of religion but the starting point for these workshops is the belief that research in comparative history of religions can potentially offer methods and perspectives for knowing and valuing other cultures that need to be heeded in these urgent times.

The two workshops will represent important steps in developing the themes and structure of a larger, culminating event, the Religious Origins-Conference 8-10 Dec. 2023 at Syracuse University. <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/blog/religious-origins-white-supremacy/>



Description of Workshop 1:

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen (24 May)

Before contact with Christian explorers, Indigenous Peoples around the world inhabited a diversity of physical environments from which emanated their cultures, languages and ceremonies. This “superdiversity” (Vertovec) came under assault beginning with the 15th century Vatican theological and legal formulation called the “Doctrine of Christian Discovery” (DoCD)—which continues today. This workshop will connect the “new humanism” of renowned Historian of Religions Davíd Carrasco

with voices of Indigenous Peoples and academics on how the DoCD has been inculcated into the neo-colonialism of our past and present. An examination of “religious othering” can contribute to understanding colonialism over centuries as well as the persistence of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other modes of discrimination.

The workshop will focus on discussion, following brief (5-7 minute) “Impulsvorträge” or kick-off statements by each invited speaker.

Tentative program: 24 May 2023

Morning Session I – 9.00-10.30 AM

- **Lecture: DAVÍD CARRASCO** (Harvard) on diversity and religious othering
- **STEVE VERTOVEC** (Max Planck Institute)
- **PHILIP ARNOLD** (Syracuse)
- **LARS KIRKHUSMO PHARO** (Nord)

Break 10.30-11.00AM (coffee and snacks)

Morning Session II – 11.00-12.30

- **BETTY LYONS** (Onandaga Nation/American Indian Law Alliance)
- **SANDY BIGTREE** (Mohawk Nation/Indigenous Values Initiative)
- **MANUEL MAY CASTILLO** (LMU Munich)

Lunch – 12.30-2.00PM

Afternoon Session I – 2.00-3.30PM

- **MATT SHEEDY** (Bonn)
- **SEBASTIAN MODROW** (Syracuse)
- **RIEM SPIELHAUS** (Göttingen)

Break 3.30-4.00PM

Afternoon Session II – 4.00-5.30PM

- **ANDREAS GRUENSCHLOSS** (Göttingen)
- **ADAM DJ BRETT** (Syracuse)
- **EDIN KOZARIC** (OsloMet)

Summation — (5.30-6.00PM)

Dinner at 7.00PM



Description of Workshop 2:

Diversity Studies Centre Oslo (DISCO), Oslo Metropolitan University (30/31 May)

Bringing together academic perspectives in the comparative history of religions with Indigenous Peoples helps to reveal the fundamental challenges necessary in sustaining a multi-racial, ethnic and religious democratic society. In the 18th century, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) "Great Law of Peace" inspired the Founding Fathers of the US and the development of Western Democracy, which has spread around the world, but key ideas related to the environment, women and "superdiversity" had been excluded. Bringing traditional Haudenosaunee voices together with the Sámi, Mesoamerican and Māori traditions can clarify the continuing impact of the DoCD. The Americas, Scandinavia, and New Zealand are all multicultural and multireligious societies with Indigenous, Jewish, and Muslim populations. A comparative history of religions orientation can help explain the persistent presence of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as well as colonialism over the centuries. This workshop can provide approaches and theoretical conceptions of valuing contributions of different cultures, languages, and religions. The workshop will focus on discussion, following brief (5-7 minute) "Impulsvorträge" or kick-off statements by each invited speaker.

Tentative program: 30-31 May 2023 | Pilestredet 46, Clara Holst hus: PA318 ([map](#))

30 May Public directed discussion led by Torkel Brekke – 6 PM

- **BETTY LYONS** (Onondaga Nation; American Indian Law Alliance)
- **LAILA SUSANNE VARS** (Sámi University of Applied Sciences)

31 May Workshop

Morning Session I – 9.00-10.30 AM

- *Lecture:* **DAVID CARRASCO** (Harvard) on diversity and religious othering
- **TORKEL BREKKE** (DISCO)
- **PHILIP ARNOLD** (Syracuse) & **SANDY BIGTREE** (Mohawk Nation; Indigenous Values Initiative)
- **LARS KIRKHUSMO PHARO** (Nord) and **CASPER JACOBSEN** (Copenhagen)

Break 10.30-11.00AM (coffee and snacks)

Morning Session II – 11.00-12.30

- **BETTY LYONS** (Onondaga Nation; American Indian Law Alliance)
- **LAILA SUSANNE VARS** (Sámi University of Applied Sciences)
- **TINA NGATA** (Māori)

Lunch – 12.30-2.00PM

Afternoon Session I – 2.00-3.30PM

- **BRIAN KONKOL** (Syracuse)
- **SEBASTIAN MODROW** (Syracuse)
- **EGLUTĖ TRINKAUSKAITĖ** (Maryland Institute College of Art)

Break 3.30-4.00PM

Afternoon Session II – 4.00-5.30PM

- **MAY LISBETH BREW** (Nord)
- **JAKE EDWARDS** (Onondaga Nation; Indigenous Values Initiative)
- **STEVE NEWCOMB** (Lenape/Delaware; Indian Law Institute)

Summation — (5.30-6.00PM)

Dinner at 7.00PM

