Discussion of Main Stereotypes on the Concept of Religion 'in Itself'
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1.1. Essentialism

The stereotypes concerning the concept of religion 'in itself' are often based on 'essentialism', here understood as the view according to which religion(s) is thought to possess a specific 'essence' or 'core', and to exist apart from the people entertaining it, and apart from specific historical and cultural contexts. This presumed core is, in the essentialist understanding, the defining characteristic and that which makes religion 'religion' (both with regard to substance and function).

Essentialist positions can be held by religious 'insiders' (religious people in general or people belonging to a specific religion) as well as by e.g. people belonging to another religion or to no religion. In both instances, the essentialist position will often give rise to hostility in the form of racism, sexism, nationalism, or discrimination because it defines an exclusivist 'we' in contrast with an 'other'.

More information on:
- [Essentialism, negative and positive prototypes, stereotypes and prejudices](#)
  - See 2.1.

1.2. The Protestant prototype

Today, the way most people comprehend the term 'religion' can be perceived as a result of the dominance of Christianity, the impact of colonisation, westernisation and the impact of globalisation. On this basis, it is often the Protestant prototypical line of thinking that is used to assess and judge the quality of other religions.

The Protestant prototype creates a general stereotype about religion in itself, often understood as a matter primarily, if not exclusively, of 'faith' and 'inner belief'. All religions that do not comply with this description are subject to discrimination.

It is an important issue that majority religions often seem to set the standard for what counts as a religion in people's minds, in states, in classrooms, in courtrooms, and even in the semantics and discussions of religion in human rights linked terminology and 'law'.

More information on:
- ['Religion' and 'religions': typical, prototypical and stereotypical notions](#)
  - See 2.2.

1.3. Important remarks and recommended approaches in the classroom

It must be clarified both here and in the classroom that there is in fact no such thing as a particular 'essence' of religion(s), and that no religious 'core' has ever been transmitted in an unchanged form through time. Through the study of religion, we learn to perceive and understand religion(s) in its particular contexts, and it becomes evident that all religions have originated, changed, died or transformed to fit the needs of each historical period.

Religions come into existence through societies, historical and cultural contexts, parents and institutions. They are created on the basis of human beings, their interests, their ambitions, their

understanding and practices. Religion, in this perspective, is what the religionists make of it, what they have made of it, and what they may make of it in the future.

It is of great importance that people and pupils comprehend the variety of understandings and definitions regarding religion, and the fact that each of these is a connotation – not a denotation. Religion cannot be understood as something 'in itself', but only as a social product of the way people think, talk and act.

This knowledge is important, not only to the academic study of religion, but also to religion education, - and to societies that wish to handle religious pluralism in a constructive manner. A kind of social-constructivist approach must be thus shared and engaged in both textbooks and classrooms.

Visit the SORAPS-website to read about the project and access the scalable curriculum, training materials, and guidelines. You can also read the full paper on Prejudices and Stereotypes in Religions here.