



Charlemont grant report

Recipient name:	Dr Sahar Ahmed
Discipline and subject area:	Humanities and Social Science
Amount and year awarded:	€2,325 in 2023
Title of project:	Developing the theory of Plurality in Understanding the Right to Freedom of Religion.

Summary of findings:

This research grant allowed me to travel to the Desmond Tutu Centre to explore the development of a theory of religious pluralism that can be used under the Law as an alternative to the theory of equality for purposes of non-discrimination. I was able to work and research with Dr. Lee Scharnick-Udemans, who is an expert in religious studies and more specifically religious pluralism, with a focus on religion in the media.

One of the key findings of this research was for me to be able to understand what religious diversity means in a theological and philosophical sense. What was more interesting – and not something that I had fully anticipated – was how unique this is in the context of South Africa, and how well-developed the theory of plurality is in a South African religious and legal context. While the South African Constitution has been studied and compared to other post-colonial nations' constitutions (e.g. Ireland's) extensively, it has not been studied as providing a potential roadmap to understanding plurality in the context of religious minorities and/or religiously diverse communities (something evident from the tours of Robben Island's Muslim Kramat (shrine) and Irish cemetery, and the neighbourhood of Bo-Kaap, formerly known as the Malay Quarter). Another interesting finding was being able to learn from religious studies scholars at the Desmond Tutu Centre: I was able to learn that while there is so much that can be adopted from one discipline to the other (i.e. from religious studies to law), terminology could be confusing. Any theory developed would have to account for a translation of sorts, to make the theory's applicability both more universal but also more effective. A case in point was a discussion on what 'equity' means from a legal perspective vs a religious diversity standpoint. Any interdisciplinary theory stemming from this research will have to have a clearly-established common academic language.

Having gained a better and fuller understanding of all of these issues from Dr. Scharnick-Udemans and her colleagues, I have started to work on what the above could mean in a legal framework, particularly under my interest of International Human Rights Law, and how this will be applicable to the law; to discussions on freedom of religion and how that freedom works; and how our conception of equality could change or broaden in the context of the right to freedom of religion.



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Plans for continuing collaboration:

The plan for continuing this collaboration is to work with Dr. Scharnick-Udemans to develop and write two articles reflecting the findings from the research trip. The idea behind two articles is so that one can be published in a legal journal, and one in a religious studies journal, so that both audiences get both established and new perspectives. It also allows for more interdisciplinary learning and for the work to be peer-reviewed by both sets of peers.

We also intend to present those findings in the form of conference papers in 2024. It is hoped that Dr. Scharnick-Udemans will be able to come to Europe so that we can extend the collaboration from South Africa to Europe in order to present it to conferences.

Publications associated with this project that you have been involved in:

Dr. Scharnick-Udemans and I have been actively involved in the early stages of developing our first academic article that will discuss the potential learnings that the study of Law can get from Religious Studies when it comes to religious plurality as an effective philosophical framework for questions around equality. Work on this article, along with a subsequent article which will follow this one, will resume next year as I am currently on maternity leave.

Dr. Scharnick-Udemans and I plan to submit the first of these articles to a Legal journal (e.g. the Journal of Law and Religion) with which I have an existing relationship as I've published in it before. It is also the ideal avenue for interdisciplinary research like this.



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Dissemination and plans for future dissemination:

Dissemination of this research was planned in two phases: the first phase was for while I was in Cape Town, South Africa, on the research trip, which was in the form of a research seminar held at the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of the Western Cape, which is the research institute that hosted me and where Dr. Sharnick-Udemas is the Senior Researcher. I was invited to present my preliminary findings from the trip along with Dr. Scharnick-Udemans while entertaining questions and discussion with other researchers, faculty and students at the Centre. I was also invited as a Guest Respondent following my own talk, to observe and provide feedback on presentations presented by post-graduate researchers at the centre from a legal perspective, something they wouldn't otherwise have readily available at the Centre.

This research seminar also afforded me the opportunity to meet with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Professor Monwabisi Ralarala, who presented me with his latest publication on language and the Law.

The second phase of the dissemination will involve Dr. Scharnick-Udemans being able to come to Europe so that we may present our findings in the form of our journal articles at conferences. We are hoping to (and aiming to) be able to present at next year's Socio-Legal Studies Association Annual Conference, which will be held at the University of Portsmouth, UK, in March 2024. We will be applying once the call for abstracts opens.

It is also our hope to apply to the European Association for the Study of Religion's Annual Conference, due to be held at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, in August 2024.

Outreach and engagement activities:

A research seminar held at the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of the Western Cape, which is the research institute that hosted me and where Dr. Scharnick-Udemans is the Senior Researcher. I was invited to present my preliminary findings from the trip along with Dr. Scharnick-Udemans while entertaining questions and discussion with other researchers, faculty and students at the Centre. I was also invited as a Guest Respondent, following my own talk, to observe and provide feedback on presentations presented by post graduate researchers at the Centre, from a legal perspective, something they wouldn't otherwise have readily available at the Centre.