



## **RELCAPETOWN – Religious Super-Diversity in Cape Town. Dynamics of Leadership and Territorialization Through Religious Spaces in the Migration Process.**

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This project explores the interaction between religions and migration in specific areas of Cape Town, South Africa, from the perspective of the “religious super-diversity” notion. The research deals with social, cultural, and political roles of religious places and communities in a theoretical framework that investigates the relationship between religious agency of migrant groups and social cohesion. It aims to shed light on the implications of religion and the dynamics of religious leadership, hierarchy and organisation upon urban spaces, the public sphere, and relations with institutions.

The areas of Cape Town known as Sub-councils 15, 16 and 20 have been selected for the impressive presence of old and recent “migrants’ religious places”: there are different Christian churches, Synagogues, Mosques, Hindu Temples, Jehovah’s Witnesses Temples, etc.

In 2007 Steven Vertovec introduced into social science theories the category of super-diversity. According to this notion, the nature of immigration brings with it “a transformative diversification of diversity.” As the Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (MPI MMG), in Göttingen, Vertovec applied his theory of super-diversity to religion as social phenomenon. Since 2009, as a testament to usefulness of this concept in understanding the place of religion in social migration and diversity, the MPI MMG has built up a Department of Religious Diversity.

Super-diversity as a starting point provides a challenging scope on the South African cities. Since the legal and political end of apartheid in 1994, Cape Town in particular and South Africa in general have been experiencing new migration patterns, which introduce wide variations in countries of origin, ethnicity, language, religion, and gendered channels of mobility. While a great deal of attention has been placed upon the numbers of migrants arriving in Europe from Africa, very little research has been done on the relationships

between religious places and migrant mobility in African cities which present wide super-diverse societies, with multiple identities and constantly changing religious urbanscapes. This is particularly true for Cape Town.



**Photo:** *Super-Fast, Super-Diverse Cape Town* (Photo: asonzeh ukah)

This project overcomes the standard focus on urban exclusion and segregation and contributes to the advance of the field of study providing:

- (a) the pioneering endeavour to apply and verify the category of religious super-diversity's place building in which diversity and religious pluralism involve a civic dimension in order to examine the role of spatial power in locating religious groups in urban landscapes,
- (b) new data on those urban areas, and
- (c) the extension of the category of religious super-diversity from "world religions" to "traditional religions," including yoga, meditation, neo-shamanism, neo-paganism, etc.

This point is relevant according to statistics which highlight that 5% of South African people declare themselves as "Ancestral or traditional African religions" believers. It is a driving question since most sociologists have used the term "religious diversity" to describe the migration-driven presence of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.

Cape Town is a 'perfect' case study to apply the super-diversity perspective, but a specific focus on the religious element is still lacking. This project will consider the crucial role of religion in the dynamics of leadership, negotiation and hierarchy among religious communities. It is an element of novelty because it will allow researchers to re-consider

previous research on urban exclusion and segregation within the theoretical frame of super-diversity, and at the same time it will provide a spatial and relational perspective to rethink the dynamics of leadership and territorialisation that can be enforced, weakened or mitigated through the private and public use of religion and the display of religious identities.

The core of this project is to analyse the relations among religions and migration in the areas of Sub-council 15, 16 and 20 in Cape Town. In this selected area, the research has the following specific objectives:

- a) To analyse agency and rhetorical strategies of religious groups to legitimize themselves in public sphere. A particular focus will be dedicated to the Dutch Reformed Church.
- b) To explore the (potential) ability of religious places to propose religious super-diversity's place building.
- c) To introduce Cape Town as a case study of religious super-diversity, available for future research and reflection.
- d) To promote a debate towards theoretical assumptions and pre-conceived universal understandings such as "religion," "secularity," "migration," both in universities and in different targets of "civil society" through dissemination and communication networks.

The research approach will be based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis, also considering intersectionality approach, which highlights the fact that no person is reducible to a single identity; so religious identities are experienced as groups in interaction with other characters such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

An important goal of the study is to intersect statistics and ethnographic data. Subsequently, the methodology will involve the analysis of scientific bibliography, archival material, and other publications produced by religious communities, official statistics data, mapping religious places and communities, ethnographic interviews with religious leaders, and administration of questionnaire to worshippers.