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Public Diversity Management. 'Muslim' claims to religious difference in Switzerland and the diversity dilemma of the political system.

This paper examines the ways in which the Swiss political system copes with religious diversity. It is based on research on conflict management regarding 'Muslim' religious diversity in public institutions and/or spaces. The paper will focus on one of several analysed empirical cases: non-attendance of Muslim children to coeducational swimming lessons in public schools in Basel.

By employing a framework informed by systems theory on empirical data of that case, the paper argues that (political) conflict management on diversity issues, like in the case of Muslims in Switzerland, is limited by the self-descriptions and expectations of the political system itself. It is argued that politics – understood in a broad sense as a communicative system that functions to enable „collectively binding decisions“¹ – encounters more and more difficulties to fulfil this function and is facing a dilemma: On a semantic level, it reproduces expectations and self-descriptions of its societal centrality and ability to govern and manage a well-defined national collective, successfully reducing contingency and uncertainty. Yet, on a socio-structural level, if we follow systems theory, it has been reassigned a place no longer atop a societal pyramid, but amongst many other functional systems which cope with their environment in different, polycontextural ways – a state which has re-entered societal semantics as 'postmodernity'. The semantical negation of this functional differentiation, it is argued, creates three issues the political system encounters when dealing with diversity:

- (a) the definition of the 'collective' to be governed and the production of 'foreignness',
- (b) its self-descriptions regarding societal position and governmental aspirations, and
- (c) its expectational style when dealing with contingency and uncertainty.

In this light, political conflict 'resolutions' like fining Muslim parents for refusing their childrens' participation in coeducational swimming lessons or banning minarets, but also integration policies more general, can be read as 'workarounds' to the diversity dilemma of the political system. The paper sheds light on the schemes of difference used in conflict management as well as on their blind spots. And by drawing on corporate diversity management and diversity politics literature, alternative ways of coping with diversity and their suitability for the political system are examined, contributing to a framework of 'Public Diversity Management'.

¹ Luhmann, Niklas, 2000, Die Politik der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt a.M.: suhrkamp, p. 367.