

### Islam, Urban Life and the Production of (Moral) Norms

**Veranstalter:** André Chappatte, Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin; Saskia Schäfer, Columbia University, New York; Hew Wai Weng, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore / Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin; Abdoulaye Sounaye, Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin

**Datum, Ort:** 26.05.2016–27.05.2016, Berlin

**Bericht von:** Saskia Schäfer, Columbia University, New York

In order to better understand the processes of norm-making in Muslim societies, the workshop „Islam, Urban Life and the Production of (Moral) Norms“ convened at the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin, 26–27 May 2016. The workshop discussed the dissemination and construction of moral aspirations in Muslim societies from North Africa to South East Asia, as well as negotiations and struggles over what is morally right, and who should enforce claims of justice, and in what ways. The organisers sought to revise anthropological claims about local uniqueness and consider global influences in local contexts. The workshop brought together 18 scholars covering eight countries in West Africa and South-east Asia. The papers were organized around six panels each focusing on a specific topic: 1) The Ahmadiyya Question, 2) Space and time, 3) Popular Culture, 4) Mediating Norms and Belonging, 5) Preaching the Norms and 6) Class and Neo-liberalism. The event also included a colloquium.

Ulrike Freitag (Berlin, Germany), the director of the ZMO, opened the workshop, followed by introductory remarks by Abdoulaye Sounaye (Berlin, Germany) and Hew Wai Weng (Singapore/Berlin).

The first panel focussed on the Ahmadiyya, a global Muslim movement accused of deviance in many Muslim countries. KATRIN LANGEWIESCHE (Mainz, Germany) discussed the production of moral norms within the global Ahmadiyya community, which strives for coherence in its value system. Based on fieldwork in Europe and West Africa, she found that the tight organisational structure, proselytization, and edu-

cation were the central channels for building moral norms. Ahmadi missionaries undergo a detailed one-year-training program and while pledging loyalty to the states they live in, they orient themselves via the head office in London.

SASKIA SCHÄFER (New York, USA) argued that the question whether the Ahmadiyya are part of Islam serves as a discursive site to rework the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia. She also raised the question of how scholarship can analyse public discourses of morality without restating or resorting to the liberal norms of the human rights reports that document many of the developments. In the discussion, KAI KRESSE (New York, USA) picked up on the idea of looking into Islamic history to carve out specificities such as the Koranic requisite „Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong“. DIETRICH REETZ (Berlin, Germany) pointed at the delicate ambivalence of provocation games in the competition for claiming the truth.

The second panel centred on Space and Time. LEONIE SCHMIDT (Amsterdam, Netherlands) showed how people celebrating Ramadan have transformed various shopping malls in Yogyakarta into spaces in which piety and consumption are negotiated. Her examples showed how the decorators mingle local Southeast Asian elements with images of the Arab desert. Leonie Schmidt also compared the Ramadan decoration to other festive decorations and thus rekindled the discussion as to how modern and how Islam-specific these phenomena are. Ulrike Freitag pointed out that the end of Ramadan has always been a period of heightened consumption. Sara Abbas asked to what degree not only consumption, but also exploitation was part of the Ramadan-festivities.

ANDRÉ CHAPPATTE (Berlin, Germany) cast his view on the less visible aspects of Muslim life in Odienné, Côte d'Ivoire, to show how this society accepts certain activities only at the margins. In the discussion, Ulrike Freitag pointed at the historical link of consumption and the end of Ramadan and questioned singling out religion as an analytical category. In a similar vein, HUMEIRA IQTIDAR (London, England) criticised the

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assumption that cultures other than Protestantism must be averse to capitalism and reminded of the long history of Islamic trade and markets.

In the third panel, the presentations and discussion evolved around Popular Culture. ELODIE APARD (Ibadan, Nigeria) explained various strategies of adapting to the norms of the hugely influential reformist Izala movement in pop music in Niger. The newer generation of rappers, she found, embrace these norms more openly than the older generation of modern Nigerien musicians, who considers itself the guardian of Nigerien traditional music and as such refuses to bow down to recent religious dictates. The younger Western-influenced generation of rappers engages in defending and spreading Islamic values as disseminated by the Izala movement, and therein also transform the perception of music and its place in society. In this way, music is both a tool for self-assertion as well as for social protest and change.

HEW WAI WENG (Singapore/Berlin) used visual material from his fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur to argue that pious clothes are a way of negotiating one's position between the standards of conservative clerics and urban trends of expressing one's individuality. In addition, many of the small trendy shops he visited encourage the social agency of young urbanites through entrepreneurship. These examples, he concluded, show that pop-Islam does not necessarily aim at disseminating religion but can also be a way of accommodating religion. Viewed in this light, the concepts of post-Islamism and pop-Islamism do not contradict each other, but grasp different aspects of the described phenomena.

ABDOULAYE NIANG (Saint-Louis, Senegal) showed that in Senegal, rap and *mbalax*, „preaching music“ with complex music videos, are an increasingly popular form of negotiating norms and values. The essential condition, he argued, is that music must avoid becoming too much a form of amusement because this could weaken the faith. The religious message must thus be in the foreground for music to be acceptable for many Muslims. Examples were a music video shot in a cemetery to remind viewers of the shortness of the this-worldly life and collaborations

between rappers and Islamic preachers. The changes in the music scene, Abdoulaye Niang concluded, have contributed to a decentralisation of ownership of the sacred word; it has transferred preaching music from to non-religious locations, and has appropriated a new medium.

In her evening lecture, Humeira Iqtidar emphasized the importance of thinking Islamism as a modernist phenomenon rather than a traditional one, and traced back the origins of many of today's arguments to their historical context in colonial South Asia. She explained how the Jamaat-e-Islami was organised as a Leninist cadre that would transform society and how the modernist Maududi understood the *sharia* as a code of law, while it actually constitutes a normative guidance from which laws could be derived. Humeira Iqtidar argued that the common focus on tolerance should be shifted to questions of justice, and on conditions with which states can support rather than impose justice.

The second day opened with a panel on Mediating Norms and Belonging. FERDIANSYAH THAJIB (Berlin, Germany) drew on his fieldwork among Muslim queers in North Aceh, Indonesia, in the liminal spaces of beauty salons and evening gatherings. During hours of hanging out together (*nongkrong*), Ferdiansyah Thajib observed, they reworked their collective experience as marginalised groups in a region in which public spaces for Muslim queers are shrinking.

In his work on a Muslim radio station in Asante in Ghana, BENEDIKT PONTZEN (Bayreuth, Germany) raised issues about language, the proliferation of religious debates, and the friction between religious and economic interests. The discussion afterwards concluded that a diversification of a media landscape does not necessarily result in a pluralisation and proliferation of opinions. Also, participants emphasised that despite all the necessary focus on questions of hegemony and power, scholars must also find a way to take their interlocutors' self-understanding as pious servants of God seriously in their research.

In the following panel on Preaching Norms, DOMINIK M. MÜLLER (Frankfurt, Germany) drew on his fieldwork on *dakwah*

campaigns by the Malaysian Islamist opposition party PAS to show how the party has radically altered their stance towards pop culture in order to gain followers beyond their rural piety-oriented constituency. Humeira Iqtidar pointed out that this pop-Islamism once more exemplifies how Islamists have moved their hopes to change society via the state to the market. Connecting the *dakwah* on part of PAS to the phenomena of trendy hijabs as previously discussed by Hew Wai Weng once more showed how difficult it is to clearly separate *dakwah* from other activities, and reminded us of the central question of singling out religion as an analytical lens.

The final panel focused on Class and Neo-liberalism. DAVID KLOOS (Leiden, Netherlands) refined the workshop's understanding of „middle class“ with his analysis of biographical reconciliations of modesty, religiosity, and narratives of (im)mobility in Aceh, Indonesia. Most literature on Indonesia's urban middle classes focusses on social mobility, but Kloos offered a detailed analysis of a case of religious re-interpretation of non-mobility. ALI NOBIL AHMAD (Berlin, Germany) reminded of keeping the analytical gaze at issues of land and material, drawing on processes of urbanization in Pakistan.

In the closing discussion, participants once more reiterated the importance of overcoming familiar binaries and dichotomies such as the assumed incompatibility between Islam and capitalism or Islam and certain forms of popular music. The discussion also reflected on how the conditions of production and exploitation remain largely hidden from ethnographic research on the production of norms focussed on „cultural“ markers. Finally, the workshop concluded that a comparative perspective across two regions usually perceived at the periphery of the „Muslim world“ allowed for a fresh perspective but needed deeper systematising in order to fully think through the implications of setting the Middle East as the often unspoken point of reference for research in majority Muslim societies.

#### **Conference overview:**

Welcome by ULRIKE FREITAG (Director of ZMO)  
Introductory remarks by Abdoulaye Sounaye

and Hew Wai Weng

#### *Panel 1: The Ahmadiyya Question*

Ahmadiyya Islam and the production of morality in West Africa,  
Katrin Langewiesche (Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Mainz)

Indonesian Ahmadiyya and notion of „True Islam“,  
Saskia Schäfer (Columbia University, New York)

Chair: Nora Lafi (ZMO)

Discussant: Kai Kresse (Columbia University, New York)

#### *Panel 2: Space and time*

Urban Islamic spectacles: transforming the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan in Indonesia,

Leonie Schmidt (University of Amsterdam)

The maquis: a space of entertainment at the margins morality in Odienné, a secondary town of northern Côte d'Ivoire,  
André Chappatte (ZMO, Berlin)

Chair: Florian Riedler (ZMO, Berlin)

Discussant: Ulrike Freitag (ZMO, Berlin)

#### *Panel 3: Popular Culture*

Rapping Islam: cultural strategies to adapt to Izala norms in Niamey, Niger,  
Elodie Apard (IFRA-Nigeria, French Institute for Research in Africa)

Mediating Islam: religious piety, urban lifestyle and moral agency in Kuala Lumpur ,  
Hew Wai Weng (ISEAS/ZMO, Singapore/Berlin)

Popular music, urban youth and Islam in postcolonial Senegal,  
Abdoulaye Niang (Université Gaston Berger, Saint-Louis, Senegal)

Chair: David Kloos (KITLV Leiden)

Discussant: André Chappatte (ZMO, Berlin)

Colloquium: Islamism and Producing a 'Modernist Islam',  
Humeira Iqtidar (King's College London)

#### *Panel 4: Mediating Norms and Belonging*

Becoming liminal community: moral engage-

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ments of Muslim queers in North Aceh, Indonesia,  
Ferdiansyah Thajib (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, FU Berlin)

A Muslim radio station and its impact on ongoing religious debates among Muslims in Asante,  
Benedikt Pontzen (BIGSAS, University of Bayreuth)

Chair: Elodie Apard (IFRA-Nigeria)  
Discussant: Abdoulaye Sounaye (ZMO, Berlin)

*Panel 5: Preaching the Norms*

Producing moral norms and orthodoxy through the Tafsīr: the role of reformist-minded scholars in Northern Cameroon,  
Ahmed Khalid Ayong (BIGSAS, University of Bayreuth)

„XPDC Dakwah“ and the rise of pop-Islamism in urban Malaysia,  
Dominik M. Müller (Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany)

Chair: Hew Wai Weng (ISEAS/ZMO, Singapore/Berlin)

Discussant: Humeira Iqtidar (King's College London)

*Panel 6: Class and Neo-liberalism*

A modest life: religiosity and social (im)mobility in Aceh, Indonesia,  
David Kloos (KITLV Leiden)

The Islamic ethic and the spirit of neo-liberalism: urbanization and middle-class morality in contemporary Pakistan,  
Ali Nobil Ahmad (ZMO, Berlin)

Chair: Leonie Schmidt (University of Amsterdam)  
Discussant: Erdem Evren (ZMO, Berlin)

*Closing Discussion*

Tagungsbericht *Islam, Urban Life and the Production of (Moral) Norms*.  
26.05.2016–27.05.2016, Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult 19.09.2016.