



CETREN

Transregional
Research Network

THE POLITICS OF SECULARISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW RELIGIOSITIES

LAUNCH EVENT OF CETREN —
THE CEMIS-CEMEAS TRANSREGIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK



Friday, December 6th, 2013

1.45pm-7pm

Paulinerkirche, Papendiek 14, Göttingen

ABOUT CETREN

TRANSREGIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK

CETREN was launched at the University of Göttingen in 2013. Funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), CETREN fosters collaborations between area studies and disciplines in the humanities and social sciences to contribute to the production of critical “place-based” knowledge. Under the thematic rubric of “The Politics of the New”, CETREN scholars engage with one of the most enduring themes of modernity: the idea of newness and change; the belief that every moment is characterised by unprecedented social flux and churning, and that every generation bears witness to the emergence of a new world. Through two pilot projects on (1) Secularisms and new religiosities, and (2) Entrepreneurial citizenship, CETREN invites creative exchange on how to work with enduring concepts of “regions” and “areas” and how to understand the dynamic relationship between resilient states, transnational movements, and new urban actors.

THE POLITICS OF SECULARISM

The Launch showcases CETREN’s pilot project, “The Politics of Secularism and the Emergence of New Religiosities”.

Secular governance is globally represented as the quintessential harbinger of the new, the means by which societies attain freedom from the alleged intolerance of “tradition”. At the same time, secular projects in fact variously redefine, criminalise and incorporate into new forms of legal-administrative regulation a host of religious practices and institutions. Working under the auspices of CETREN, an international team of scholars is engaged in identifying the most significant of these processes in Asia and Europe, collectively mapping new languages and practices of religion, new relations between structures of authority and citizen-subjects, new forms of religious and secular personhood, as well as the — often violent — means by which secularisation is enforced by state and non-state actors.

PROGRAM

1.45PM OPENING

PHOTO EXHIBITION: SECULAR MODERNITIES AND UIGHUR MUSLIMS IN WESTERN CHINA: IMPRESSIONS FROM RURAL AND URBAN XINJIANG

With Nanjing-based photographer Ma Kang, and Dr. Ablet Semet from the Department of Central Asian Studies at the University of Göttingen.

2.30-3PM WELCOME

Welcome remarks by CETREN Project Leaders

- *Professor Srirupa Roy, Director, Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS), University of Göttingen*
- *Professor Axel Schneider, Director, Centre for Modern East Asian Studies (CeMEAS), University of Göttingen*

3-3.30PM SHARI`A WITHOUT LAW: THE DILEMMA FACING BRITAIN'S SHARIAH COUNCILS

John R. Bowen,

Dunbar-Van Cleve Professor of Arts and Sciences at Washington University, St. Louis.

Britain has the widest network of shariah councils in the West, devoted mainly to dissolving marriages for women. I examine how they deliberate, decide, and justify their decisions. They might seem to be an anomaly: issuing judgments that cannot be enforced, referring to Islamic sources that have no basis in English law. And yet in that respect they resemble strongly the dar al-qazi of India, and, indeed, offer a striking illustration of a broader issue: state law cannot completely capture fiqh, and thus, inevitably, there always remains a surplus of Islamic judgment. I illustrate this final point from current fieldwork in Indonesia. This talk therefore discusses a basic problem of legitimacy and performativity that can be seen in Islamic tribunals in England and in Indonesia (as well as in India and Egypt), and relates to the problematic relationship of political sovereignty and religious commitment.

PROGRAM

3.30-4PM HISTORICISING THE 'CRISIS OF SECULARISM': THE POLITICAL MOMENT OF MID 20TH CENTURY INDIA

William Gould,

Professor of Indian History, University of Leeds.

The most vibrant debates about Indian secularism of the last 30 years grew out of a fascination with the rise of Hindu extremism in India from the 1980s and early 1990s. Relatively little research has explored the contingent moments and political contexts for the putative birth of the Indian secular state between the late 1930s and 1960s. Yet the events of the period from 1930 to the 1950s, very much set a pattern for what was to occur in the 1980s and 1990s. In those decades, not only was the very shape of Indian secularism being decided and challenged, it was determined through three related processes: the struggle to define Congress's position on secularism; the working out of relationships between a virgin developmental state and an Indian population accommodated to an authoritarian colonial model of state power; and the crystallisation of Indian secularism in tandem with the idea of citizenship in India, around independence. The formal definition of the citizen was tied up with regional change and population movement which in turn affected the substantive citizenship rights of Muslims, and thereby the quality of the secular ideal. For our argument, both the dialectic between 'secular' nationalism and Hindu nationalism, and the broader dichotomy of modern nationalism vs. Indian culture are misleading. Whilst Congress secular nationalism had its ideological core at the centre in the person of Nehru, it is questionable how far it extended to the state and district Congress machinery. In places like Uttar Pradesh, secular ideologies were challenged, contested and in a constant interplay of debate and redefinition. If we cannot find a unifying and consolidated explanatory position for Indian 'secular nationalism' in the 1930s-50s, we can do so even less for secular nationalism in general, and perhaps not at all for modern nationalism as a whole.

PROGRAM

4PM-4.20PM COFFEE BREAK

4.20-4.50PM THE VALUE OF COMPARISON

Peter van der Veer,

Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen.

Comparison should not be conceived primarily in terms of comparing societies or events, or institutional arrangements across societies, but as a reflection on our conceptual framework as well as on a history of interactions that have constituted our object of study. One can, for instance, say that one wants to study church-state relations in India and China, but one has to bring to that study a critical reflection on why one should suppose the centrality of church-like organizations as well as the centrality of Western secular state formation in our analysis of developments in India and China. That critical reflection often leads to the argument that societies outside the West should be understood in their own terms, and cannot be understood in Western terms. However, 'native' terms have to be interpreted and translated in relation to Western scholarship. Moreover, such translation and interpretation is part of a long history of interactions with the West. For example, in the Indian case it is good to realize that, despite its foreign origins, English is now also an Indian vernacular. In the case of China it is good to realize that, despite the prevailing notion that everything has an ancient Chinese origin, communism did in fact not originate in the Song dynasty, but is a Western invention. Any attempt to make a sharp (often nationalist) demarcation of inside and outside is spurious in contemporary society. Comparison is thus not a relatively simple juxtaposition and comparison of two or more different societies, but a complex reflection on the network of concepts that underlie our study of society as well as the formation of those societies themselves. It is always a double act of reflection.

PROGRAM

4.50-6PM PANEL DISCUSSION

Discussants:

- *Birgit Meyer,*
Professor of Religious Studies, Utrecht University.
- *Rupa Viswanath,*
Professor of Indian Religions, University of Göttingen.
- *Patrick Eisenlohr,*
Professor for Society and Culture of Modern India, University of Göttingen.
- *Matthias Koenig,*
Professor of Sociology, University of Göttingen.

6-7PM RECEPTION



SPEAKERS

JOHN R. BOWEN

John R. Bowen is the Dunbar-Van Cleave Professor of Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis, and recurrent Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics. He has been studying Islam and society in Indonesia since the late 1970s, and since 2001 has worked in France, England, and North America on problems of pluralism, law, and religion, and in particular on contemporary efforts to rethink Islamic norms and civil law. His most recent book on Asia is "Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia: An Anthropology of Public Reasoning" (Cambridge, 2003). His „Why the French Don't Like Headscarves" (Princeton, 2007) concerned current debates in France on Islam and laïcité. „Can Islam be French?" (Princeton, 2009) treated Muslim debates and institutions in France and appeared in French in 2011. "A New Anthropology of Islam" from Cambridge and "Blaming Islam" from MIT Press appeared in 2012, and "European States and their Muslim Citizens" will appear from Cambridge in late 2013.

Bowen is currently writing "Shaping British Islam", to appear from Princeton. He also writes regularly for The Boston Review. His current work concerns ways to analytically span regions in studying law, religion (Islam), and the state.

SPEAKERS

WILLIAM GOULD

William Gould is Professor of Indian History at the University of Leeds. Educated at the University of Cambridge, he began his academic career as Smuts Research Fellow at the Centre of South Asian Studies, where he developed his first monograph, "Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India" (Cambridge, 2004). In 2003 he moved to the University of Leeds, and developed two further major monographs. The first grew out of a large scale research collaboration with Royal Holloway London, entitled "From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India, 1930 - 1960s". From this research he developed "Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930-1960s" (London, 2011), which explores the political discourses surrounding corruption in India and the nature of the everyday state in the emergence of civic movements of anti-corruption. In 2012, he also published a broad comparative history, "Religion and Conflict in South Asia"

(Cambridge). Gould is currently finishing a project exploring the process of "denotification" and concepts of citizenship for western India's so-called "Criminal Tribes", Vimukta Jatis, or "Denotified Tribes" between the late 1930s and early 1950s, which will result in a documentary film directed by a film maker and theatre activist in Ahmedabad. He also collaborates with a citizens' movement based in the region of Lucknow which has recently established public information centres that promote anti-corruption via Right to Information applications.

SPEAKERS

PETER VAN DER VEER

Peter van der Veer is Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen. He has taught Anthropology at the Free University in Amsterdam, at Utrecht University and at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1992 he was appointed as Professor of Comparative Religion and Founding Director of the Research Center in Religion and Society in the Social Science Faculty of the University of Amsterdam. He served as Dean of the Social Science Faculty and as Dean of the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research at Amsterdam, and as Director of the International Institute for the Study of Islam and Chairman of the Board of the International Institute for Asian Studies, both in Leiden. In 1994 he was appointed as University Professor at Large at Utrecht University, a position he continues to hold. He received the Hendrik Muller Award for his social scientific study of religion. He is an elected Fellow of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Van der Veer

works on religion and nationalism in Asia and Europe. He has just published “The Modern Spirit of Asia” (Princeton University Press 2013) on the comparative study of religion and nationalism in India and China. Among his major publications are “Gods on Earth” (LSE Monographs, 1988), “Religious Nationalism” (University of California Press, 1994), and “Imperial Encounters” (Princeton University Press, 2001). He was editor or co-editor of “Orientalism and Post-Colonial Predicament” (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), “Nation and Migration” (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), “Conversion to Modernities” (Routledge, 1997), “Nation and Religion” (Princeton University Press, 1999), “Media, War, and Terrorism” (Routledge-Curzon, 2003), and “Patterns of Middle-Class Consumption in India and China” (Sage 2007).

EXHIBITION

SECULAR MODERNITIES AND UIGHUR MUSLIMS IN WESTERN CHINA: IMPRESSIONS FROM RURAL AND URBAN XINJIANG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MA KANG AND ABLET SEMET

This exhibition invites a visual conversation between two photographers, Ma Kang and Ablet Semet, whose lives and work are intimately connected with the question of Uighur identities in a transregional Asia. Ma Kang is a Hui-Chinese photographer and visual essayist based in Nanjing. Born in the city in 1962, his work has engaged with the spatial and historical dialogues of urban architecture and people's inner lives in contemporary, post-reform China. With early training in oil painting, Ma Kang became interested in photography in 1993 as a more satisfying medium for his creative expressions and aspirations, using photographs to critically reflect on, and play with, the "ways of seeing" at a point in time when faith and certainty seem particularly elusive for the majority of Chinese people. His work cycle "Uncertain Times" was shown in galleries in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hong Kong and in many cities around the world. Juxtaposed with the "crisis of faith", Xinjiang has captured Ma Kang's attention since 2003. "Although faith does not come easily there", he notes, "it still exists", providing a place for experiencing both dislocation and self-sufficiency. The works shown in this exhibition have been selected from Ma Kang's most recent explorations on urban change and religiosity in Urumqi, Kashgar and other cities in Xinjiang. Ma Kang's distinctly urban perspective is in dialogue with Ablet Semet's focus on rural spaces. In contrast to Ma Kang's identity as an artist, Dr. Semet is a scholar and ethnographer in Central Asian Studies at the University of Göttingen. Born in Artush, near Kashgar, in 1969, he began his studies in Urumqi before reading Turkology at Minzu University in Beijing (formerly Central University for Nationalities) where he also lectured. After spending time in Ankara, he came to Germany and gained a doctorate in Turkology in Göttingen in 2003. His photographs document his research on the complex cultural encounters of language, literature and religious heritage, and speak to the difficult explorations into contemporary Uighur identity formation.

EXHIBITION



In this exhibition, both portrait work and landscape photographs visually capture a moment of rapid and uncertain transformation in the lives of Uighur Muslims in Western China. As both religious group and ethnic minority, they highlight the conflicts within the secular Chinese state and its politics of nationalism and territorial integrity. However, as the photographs show, Uighur Muslims are also coming to terms with a more local aspect of secularism. Entangled in China's reform process and official development strategies for the Western regions since 1999, their cities are undergoing radical, secular-driven modernisation processes, which signal the disappearance of inherited urban quarters, multi-religious architecture and vernacular ways of life. While drawing attention to Xinjiang's multiple narratives of modernity and its contested sites of belonging, Ma Kang and Ablet Semet bring their own biographical entanglements into the spaces and stories of this transformation in order to highlight a personal visuality of affect and intimacy beyond the larger frame of state power.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN

CONTACT

CETREN

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

Heinrich-Düker-Weg 14

37073 Goettingen

Phone: +49 (0)551 39 21286

Email: cetren@uni-goettingen.de

Website: <http://www.cetren.de>