

On Reading and Writing about “Muslim Cultures” of South Asia
Workshop held at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies

Date:

Friday, July 13, 2012 ; 9am – 6pm

Organisers:

Razak Khan

Olly Akkerman

Omar Kasmani

(PhD candidates Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies)

Participants:

doctoral students of the BGSMCS

doctoral students and fellows from associated institutions

Credit Points:

1 CP for attendance

2 CP for attendance + paper presentation

Application:

The deadline for application is May 31 via e-mail to khan@bgsmcs.fu-berlin.de

Contact:

For any queries or questions, please contact

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(for workshop outline see below)

Workshop Outline:

“Too Little and Too Much” has been the paradox of writings on the history of Muslims in South Asia.¹ Ironically, these visible histories of Islam lead to disappearing of diversities of Muslim lives and histories. The issue of Muslim identity and politics in South Asia has been a subject of rich debate. The existing scholarship has contributed much towards building our understanding of the ‘larger trend’ in South Asian Islam. The legacy of the colonial past continues to shape such efforts. The scholarly emphasis has been on how the diverse identities and histories were submerged in the formation of a Muslim religious community and the project of Muslim nation state. Thus, categories like ‘Islamic Revivalism’ and ‘Muslim Separatism’ have become well accepted landmarks to map Muslim experiences of politics and religion in colonial South Asia. While these categories have provided an important entry point, they have also brought undesired closures to the other possible ways of understanding how Muslims negotiate issues between *deen* (spiritual) and *duniya* (material) both under European colonialism as well as under subsequent military and predominantly democratic regimes in post colonial South Asia.

Much focus has remained on textual and normative aspects of Islam often neglecting lived local experiences. The persistence of Islam as a measuring yard to understand the diverse and complex lives of Muslims is analytically inadequate, if not completely mistaken. The emphasis has been to define a global category of Muslim identity across time and space with shared similarities at the cost of overlooking local imaginations.² We find Islam and Muslim as one category neither in the archive nor in the field. What we find instead is Islam as a constantly debated discursive tradition in and across various local and translocal contexts. These everyday negotiations of Islam in the realm of thinking and acting are deeply contextual and therefore better described as Muslim cultures.

The workshop, ‘On Reading and Writing about Muslim Cultures of South Asia’ is an effort to raise some of these dilemmas. It aims to reflect on continuity and disjuncture of colonial history and post colonial trajectories of South Asian Muslims across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The workshop attempts to find new ways of reading and writing about Muslims in the region. What is often understood as Muslim culture has evolved in a context shared by multiple religious, literary and social cultures of the region. We therefore hope to find themes of commonality and difference that present the creativeness and dynamism of South Asian Muslims in shaping their history. Possible themes of discussion include but are not limited to experiences of colonialism and post colonialism, circulation of ideas and practices, the production of space and memory, lives of actors and texts that render the Muslim cultures of South Asia distinctly local and yet shared. It is towards the limits and possibilities of the categories, Muslim and Culture that we hope to situate new ways of reading and writing on South Asia.

¹ Barbara Metcalf. Presidential Address. Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 54, No. 4, Nov 1995, pp.951-967.

² Dale. F. Eickelman. The Study of Islam in Local Contexts. *Contributions to Asian Studies*. 17, 1981. pp. 1-16.