

Order, Religion, Politics: The Fatwa in Contemporary Islam

Workshop held at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies

Date:

Wednesday, July 11; 9am – 4pm

Organiser:

Dr. Alexandre Caeiro, Visiting Fellow at BGS MCS

Participants:

doctoral students of the BGS MCS

doctoral students and fellows from associated institutions

Readings:

- Agrama, Hussein (2010) "Ethics, tradition, authority: Toward an anthropology of the fatwa", *American Ethnologist* 37 (1): 2-18.
- Ashqar, Usāma 'Umar al- (2009) *Fawḍā al-iftā'*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafa'is.
- Caeiro, Alexandre "Ordering Religion, Organizing Politics: The Regulation of the Fatwa in Contemporary Islam", forthcoming.
- Tayob, Abdulkader (2009) *Religion in Modern Islamic Discourse*. London: Hurst & Company.

Credit Points:

1 CP

Application:

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

Contact:

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(for workshop outline s. below)

Workshop Outline:

There has been a proliferation of voices in the 21st century calling for the regulation of the fatwa in the Muslim world. Several high-profile international conferences have been held in quick succession. Many muftis have engaged in a reflection on the dilemmas of issuing fatwas on satellite TV and the Internet. Religious scholars and public intellectuals have published books about the spread of strange fatwas (*fatāwā shādhah*). Newspapers across the Muslim world frequently carry articles on the need to organize iftā'. A specific diagnosis of the situation seems today to be widely shared, cutting across the usual lines of religious and political orientation: for state and non-state actors, be they traditional ulama, Islamists or secularists, the production of fatwas is now deregulated beyond control. The proliferation of contradictory fatwas has led to a "chaos", causing perplexity amongst Muslims, and ranks as one of the major quandaries of the contemporary Muslim ummah.

This one-day seminar will explore some of the assumptions that underlie the current debate about the regulation of the fatwa in order to ask more general questions about religion and politics in the contemporary Muslim world. Although the idea of chaos (*fawḍā*) is constantly reproduced in print, on air, and in cyberspace, what is precisely implied by this notion is not entirely clear. As it is used by its proponents, the discourse of chaos often appears to conflate a range of different social phenomena: the circulation of discourse within publics; shifting conceptions of knowledge and authority; the penetration of market logics into the realm of iftā'; the impact of new media technologies upon structures of religious authority; the relationship between the fatwa and politics; the fight against terrorism... In this workshop we will seek to disentangle these various phenomena in order to provide a clearer picture of what precisely is at stake in contemporary attempts to regulate fatwas, organize religion, and re-order politics.

Amongst the questions we will ask are the following: What conceptions of the performativity of Muslim ethical speech are at stake in the debate about the regulation of the fatwa? How have social actors constructed "reality" in their discourses, and for what purposes? What understandings of media are privileged here? To what extent do proponents of the chaos of fatwa thesis articulate a "politics of depoliticization" (Connolly 1993) that masks the impossibility of reaching a rational consensus? How do local and national specificities shape global calls for regulating religious authority? What transformations in the functions of the fatwa seem to underlie the whole debate?