



ZMO-Kolloquium 2012

Thursday, May 31st, 2012, 6 pm

The Kramats of Cape Town: Gravesites as Repositories of Transoceanic Histories and Heritage

Lecture by Sumit Mandal

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

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Kramat is the name given to a Muslim grave that has been a longstanding site of popular veneration. Numerous kramats dot the landscape of Cape Town and commemorate political exiles and slaves from the Malay world brought by the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the forcibly displaced were political leaders and Muslim scholars who came to be venerated for their exceptional powers, knowledge, and contributions to Cape communities. Several led immensely mobile lives before their displacement. In Cape Town, they were cut off from well-travelled Indian Ocean routes and the Malay world. This paper grapples with the question of transoceanic histories in a context in which mobility and connections were disrupted. Besides exile, the forced removals of Apartheid in the mid-twentieth century enforced sharp, racialised boundaries that erased the transoceanic biographies of kramats. Can we sensibly speak of transoceanic histories in a context that has seen irreversible displacement and radical forms of racialisation? What, then, might be the salience of the transoceanic past? Do kramats embody vestigial connections to the Malay world?

Sumit Mandal is a member of the Collaborative Research Centre "Representations of Changing Social Orders" at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He obtained his PhD in History from Columbia University in 1994 and has since published and taught in the fields of social history and cultural studies. He is currently engaged in research on *kramat*, revered Muslim gravesites, in Cape Town, as part of a longterm effort to explore the interconnected histories of the Malay world and Indian Ocean. His recent articles include "Popular Sites of Prayer, Transoceanic Migration, and Cultural Diversity: Exploring the significance of keramat in Southeast Asia" published in *Modern Asian Studies* (2012), and "The Significance of the Rediscovery of Arabs in the Malay World" published in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2011). He is currently working on a book titled "Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World."

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