

Transforming Concepts of Knowledge: Muslim Female Learning Circles in Contemporary Urban Africa

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Female learning circles are not a new phenomenon in Muslim Africa. Nevertheless, since the 1980s women are increasingly involved into mass education. Mass alphabetization campaigns have successfully led to open access for a wider female public to Islamic knowledge. This project looks at contemporary phenomena of Islamic knowledge transmission among women. How does the practice of contemporary Islamic knowledge transmission look like? Where do women learn, how and from whom? What are the life paths of women involved in the transmission process and can we identify changing patterns concerning the organization and social embedment of knowledge transmission? Starting with Nouakchott (Mauritania) where traditionalist institutions of Islamic education are still well established, the project examines diverse female learning circles in which the participants follow different doctrinal paths of Sunni Islam. A comparison to other African Urban settings is envisioned, where Islamic learning draws on different traditions and mass alphabetization among women is established since a longer period like for example in Cape Town (South Africa).

African Partner Project

Printing Knowledge, Informing the Umma: Historical and Contextual Analysis of the Kenya's Friday Bulletin

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Knowledge transmission has been a central tradition ever since the founding of Islam. The spread of printing technologies to the Muslim world in the 18th and 19th century and later European colonialism and post-colonial developments facilitated the spread of book usage and rise in literacy levels in the interior of Africa. Since the liberalization of the air waves and opening up of democratic space in the early 1990s, there has been unprecedented growth of private print (especially faith-based media), broad cast and news media in Africa. Among the Kenyan Muslims, the Friday Bulletin, a freely distributed English language weekly publication of Nairobi's Jamia mosque has emerged as the voice of the religious constituency in the last 10 years. Despite its prominent role in knowledge mediation, this crucial newsletter has attracted little academic attention. Aside from religious proselytism, the Bulletin serves as a forum for dissemination of national and international news with direct bearing on the faith community, an avenue for marketing of business products and a space for advertisement of educational institutions and job opportunities. This project aims at a textual and contextual analysis of the knowledge production, transmission and consumption of the Friday Bulletin between the years 2003 - 2013. It examines how its producers engage with, select, re-shape and appropriate knowledge in new and creative ways. The project aims at opening up new frontiers in understanding the fundamental role these forms of mediation play in sensitizing religious communities and creating and appropriating knowledge within the growing literate Muslim communities in Kenya who constitute 11-12% of the total population.