

Prayer, Architecture, History

Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), Berlin, 4 November 2013

Conveners: Charles Hirschkind (UC Berkeley) & Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University, ZMO)

The topic of prayer has generally been discussed in the humanities and social sciences in terms of the ritual requirements of different traditions of worship and the distinct forms of spiritual experience and religious life they contribute to. Departing from this conventional framework, the recent research initiative "New Directions for the Study of Prayer" organized under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC, New York) seeks to generate innovative research on practices of prayer across religious traditions, geographical areas and disciplines (for more information see <http://forums.ssrc.org/ndsp/about/>).

This workshop is inspired by the SSRC initiative's emphasis on new directions in the study of prayer." Bringing together a number of researchers in Berlin institutions (a.o. ZMO,¹ the Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies - BGMCS,² the *Global Prayers Project*³), the workshop will evolve around the triad: prayer, architecture, history. In particular, we would like to discuss two interrelated sets of issues:

1) *Prayer sites in urban environments*

We suggest to focus on the actual building of churches, mosques, temples and shrines, involving architecture and design, and their use and inhabitation on an everyday level. Our aim is to explore the interface of religious spatial-sensorial practices and the specific shape and use of prayer sites. How is prayer enacted in these sites? How are these sites situated in the wider urban environment? In how far does the specific context of the city trigger the emergence and shape of new prayer sites? Which responses and contestations do they invoke on the part of urban inhabitants?

2) *Contested sites and historical conflicts*

Historical conflict and trauma can leave a profound imprint on the meanings assigned to religious worship, an imprint that is often registered in the spatial and architectural forms that mediate prayer's enactment. Our aim is to focus on sites where historical conflict and

¹ See http://www.zmo.de/forschung/index_e.html

² See Patrick A. Desplat & Dorothea E. Schulz (eds), *Prayer in the City. The Making of Muslim Sacred Places and Urban Life*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012. This edited volume is based on a workshop organized at BGMCS in 2009.

³ The research initiative *Global Prayers. Liberation and Redemption* in the Global City takes place in the framework of the Forum for Transregional Studies Berlin and is jointly organized by *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, Berlin and Europa Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt. See <http://globalprayers.info>.

violence have been organized around boundaries of religious difference. How do architectural forms come to mediate, intensify, and embody contemporary responses to those historical legacies? How has the enactment of prayer become entwined with such histories of violence and conflict? How have local actors confronted and sought to resolve these issues?

By embedding the study of prayer within specific urban environments and national, regional, and municipal histories, and by focusing on sites where prayer has become entwined with historically embedded religious conflict, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of the role of prayer as a distinct practice of historical reflexivity and engagement.

For more information please contact Birgit Meyer (b.meyer@uu.nl). In case you would like to attend, please send an email to Lotte Knotte lotteknote@gmail.com.

Program

09.30-10.00

Jonathan van Antwerpen/Courtney Bender
The SSRC New Directions in the Study of Prayer Project

Charles Hirschkind
Introducing the workshop theme

10.00-11.30: **Houses of Prayer**
(chair Birgit Meyer)

Courtney Bender (Columbia University)
The Prayers of Tomorrow: Building the Temple of Religion at the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair

Wai Weng Hew (ZMO)
Sights/Sites of Inclusive Islam: Chinese-style Mosques in Malaysia and Indonesia

Werner Schiffauer
Spatiality and Religiousness. A Storefront-Mosque.

11.30-11.45: Break

11.45-13.00: Urban space
(Chair Charles Hirschkind)

Stephan Lantz (Europa Universität Viadrina)
Urban Fundamentalism or the Fight for the (Religious) Right to the City? Ambivalent Interactions between Religion and Politics in Contested Urban Spaces

Reza Masoudi Nejad (ZMO)
Ritual, Public Space, and Urban Development: the Bohras' Muharram in Mumbai

13.00-14.00: Lunch

14.00-15.15: Sound and Silence
(Chair Charles Hirschkind)

Peter Lambertz (Universität Leipzig/Utrecht University)
Uncomfortable Silence: A Japanese New Religious Movement's Silent Sound Sites in Kinshasa.

Nasima Selim (Freie Universität Berlin)
"Healing the city": Sufi Prayer at Berlin's Fernsehturm

15.15-15.30: Break

15.30-16.45: Prayer and the Imagination
(Chair Birgit Meyer)

Patrick Desplat (Universität Köln)
Tropes of Longing and Loss. Muslim Nostalgia and the Politics of Place-Making in Urban Ethiopia

Benedikt Pontzen, (Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies)
Are Amulets the Work of God or Shirk? On Islamic Imaginaries, Practices, and Discourse in Asante, Ghana.

16.45-17.30: General Discussion