



ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2014/2015

Who Speaks? The Global History of Intellectual Practices: Epistemological, Political, and Ethical Challenges

Thursday, October 16th, 2014, 6 pm

A Vernacular Politics of Political Economy in Bengal

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

Lecture by **Prof Andrew Sartori**

On the one hand, one recent body of literature has sought to historicize political-economic abstractions as discourses of power and technologies of administration. On the other hand, another literature engages in forms of historical analysis that effectively assume the transhistorical transparency of political-economic abstractions. The former leaves the epistemological standing of those abstractions in limbo, the latter sustains their epistemological claims dogmatically. If instead we conceive of political economy as addressed to the opacity that characterizes historically specific forms of social interdependence, we might instead open up a space for inquiries into the conditions under which political economy could emerge as a form of social self-understanding. Such a history need not simply be an "origins" story. Rather, it makes possible an inquiry into the varied conditions under which political economy achieved degrees and kinds of epistemological purchase in different contexts across geographical and social space. My lecture will attempt to sketch one such history for eastern Bengal, where a "Bengali Muslim" agrarian politics that emerged so prominently in the early nineteenth century was (I argue) constitutively premised on political-economic abstractions. I shall argue that this needs to be located in relation to long histories of juridical discourse about property and production, the process of the agrarianization of the eastern delta, and practices and ideologies of colonial law; but that it ultimately turned on the normative potentialities of a deepening commercialization of agrarian production. The result was a regionally specific instantiation of political-economic abstractions that were in themselves far from regional in their significance.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Andrew Sartori is Associate Professor of History at New York University. He obtained his PhD from the University of Chicago and is an intellectual historian of modern South Asia. He is editor of the new interdisciplinary journal *Critical Historical Studies*. His work is focused on the relationship between histories of concept-formation and the history of capitalist society. He has written on the history of the culture-concept, property, political economy, and liberalism. He is the author of *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (2008) and *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (2014). He is also co-editor and co-author of *Global Intellectual History* (2013), which probes into the various conceptual approaches to global intellectual history, and *A Companion to Global Historical Thought* (2014).