



Modalities of Co-existence Across Religious Difference. Critical Terms for the Study of Indigenous Religion, Christianity and Islam in Plural Settings in Africa and Beyond

ZMO, Berlin, 22-24 March 2017

Convened by Kai Kresse, Birgit Meyer and Abdoulaye Sounaye¹

This is the final workshop organized in the framework of the research project “Habitats and Habitus. Politics and Aesthetics of Religious World-Making” which aims to further develop comparative and material approaches to the study of Christians and Muslims in Africa, especially in urban multi-religious contexts, and beyond² (2012-2017). Preceded by a number of thematic workshops (e.g. prayer and architecture, sermon in the city) and a recent summer school titled “Christians and Muslims in Africa. Towards a Framework for the Study of Multi-Religious Settings” (ZMO 2016),³ our aim for this final event is two-fold.

First, we would like to address the co-existence of Muslims, Christians and traditionalists in various minority-majority configurations in past and present in the light of the broader question of how to study modalities of co-existence across religious difference. Answering this question implies not only empirical research, but also reflexion on concepts and methods. Doing so is important so as to move beyond the cleavage running through the field of studying religion in Africa, which is characterized by a significant division of expertise with regard to research on Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion.⁴ While encounters and entanglements of indigenous religion with either Christianity or Islam has long been a central research issue, the configuration as a whole has barely been taken into account, even though Christians, Muslims and traditionalists have co-existed – and still co-exist - more or less peacefully in many contexts in Africa. So far the conceptual grasp of complex plural configurations has received too little attention. At stake is not simply the co-existence of people and institutions from different religious traditions as such, but also the politics of organizing and valuing difference on the part of state regulations and religious protagonists. A guiding idea for our research project is that a material approach to religion which takes

¹ The team also includes Marloes Janson, who can alas not attend this final workshop.

² Directed by Birgit Meyer, the project involves two PhD students, Murtala Ibrahim and Hanna Nieber, who study Muslim-Christian encounters in Abuja, Nigeria and Zanzibar, Tanzania. The project (hosted at the ZMO between 2012 and 2017 and taking place in collaboration with Utrecht University) is funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the framework of the Anneliese Maier Research Award. For more information see: https://www.zmo.de/forschung/projekte_2008_2013/Habitats_Habitus_e.html

³ For the outline of the summer school and program see the document attached.

⁴ Recently Marloes Janson and Birgit Meyer addressed this problematic bifurcation in a special section of *Africa 84* (4, 2016). For a link to their open access introduction “Towards a Framework for the Study of Christian-Muslim Encounters in Africa” see: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/africa/article/div-classtitleintroduction-towards-a-framework-for-the-study-of-christian-muslim-encounters-in-africadiv/872F3D90F75107086980C2A197CBD9A4>

material forms, corporeality and the senses as a starting point, is fruitful for grasping the intricacies of politics, aesthetics and ethics of co-existence.⁵

Participants are invited to present their historical and/or ethnographic work on the relations between followers of these religious traditions in shared habitats by making explicit *how* they approach these plural configurations in terms of method and theory. Questions for further discussions and exchange of view-points include: Which politics of difference in terms of state regulations with regard to “religion” – as a political category - underpins these configurations? How do states organize religious diversity and interreligious relations and how does this impinge on how Christians, Muslims and traditionalists relate to each other (regarding intermarriage, friendship, attending each other’s festivals, shared projects and initiatives, etc)? What difference does it make for the shape of a diverse religious field if either Christians or Muslims form a majority? How to grasp processes of mutual crossover, borrowing and copying, and how useful are terms as syncretism, hybridity, or assemblage in this regard? How at all to compare (given valuable critiques of comparison, yet also to acknowledge the importance of comparison in relation to plurality and co-existence)? How do religious groups see, relate to, and approach others (and compare themselves with them)? How do people co-exist on an everyday level? How productive is a focus on aesthetics and ethics to grasp the stakes of co-existence on multiple levels? How useful is a material approach to religion to bring coexistence and diversity into the picture, and what are possible limitations? Posing these and other questions, our aim is to find out which conceptual vocabulary is most productive to analyze modalities of co-existence across religious difference.

Second, we would like to discuss the PhD research projects that were conducted in the framework of the Habitats and Habitus project and that near completion. Murtala Ibrahim will present his study of NASFAT and Christ Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria, and Hanna Nieber her study on the apprehension and ingestion of *kombe* (“dissolved Qur’anic verses”) by Muslims and Christians in Zanzibar, Tanzania.

Participants are invited to prepare 30-minute presentations. There will be ample time for discussion. The workshop will start on Wednesday 22 March, 14.15, and end on Friday 24 March, 14.00.

⁵ See eg. Birgit Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence. Towards a Material Approach to Religion*. Inaugural Lecture, Utrecht University, 19 October 2012. <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/257546>

Program

Wednesday, 22 March 2017

Chair: Birgit Meyer

- 14.15-14.30 Welcome/introduction (Birgit Meyer)
- 14.30-15.15 Martha Frederiks: "Religious Belonging and the Quest for Literacy, Commerce and New Connectivities"
- 15.15-16.00 Tomas Sundnes Dronen: "Dialogue from Above? Colonial Rule and Christian-Muslim Relations in Cameroon"
- 16.00-16.15 *Break*
- 16.15-17.00 Kai Kresse: "Thinking with Implicit Comparison and Mutual Perceptions"
- 17.00-17.30 Discussion (kick-off by Paolo Gaibazzi)
- 17.30 *Drinks*
- 19.00 *Dinner Speisewerkstatt*

23 March 2017

Chair: Kai Kresse

- 09.30-10.15 Benedikt Pontzen: "Rethinking 'African Traditional Religion' in Asante, Ghana. A Project Outline"
- 10.15-11.00 Ebenezer Obadare: "The Spirit of Yoruba Liberalism"
- 11.00-11.15 *Break*
- 11.15-12.00 Abdoulaye Sounaye: "I'm Christian...I'm not Charlie"
- 12.00-12.30 Discussion (kick-off by Jacqueline Solway)
- 12.30-13.30 *Lunch*
- 13.30- 16.30 Habitats and Habitus project, chair: Abdoulaye Sounaye
- 13.30-14.15 Murtala Ibrahim: "Mobile Spirituality: Technology-Mediated Religious Practices in Christ Embassy and NASFAT"
- 14.15-15.00 Hanna Nieber: "Kombe as Islamic Medicine: How the Entanglement of Notions of Dini and 'Religion' Matter with Regard to Muslims and Christians in Zanzibar"
- 15.00-15.45 *Break*

- 15.15-16.00 Birgit Meyer: “Studying Modalities of Co-Existence in Plural settings. Looking Back and Ahead”
16.00-16.30 Discussion (kick-off by André Chappatte)
16.30-17.45 Roundtable *Comparison* (chair Kai Kresse) – with Hansjörg Dilger, Daan Beekers, Michael Lambek
17.45 *Drinks*
20.00 *Dinner Good Friends*

24 March 2017

Chair: Abdoulaye Sounaye

- 09.30-10.15 Dorothea Schulz: “Un/making Religious Difference Through Auditory Practices?”
10.15-11.00 Eva Spies: “Winning the Place for Jesus? A Relational Approach to Diversity in a Malagasy town”
11.00-11.15 *Break*
11.15-12.00 Devaka Premawardhana: “Polyontological Mobility: East African Perspectives on Religious Plurality”
12.00-13.30 Roundtable *Studying Religious Diversity* (chair Birgit Meyer) – with Marian Burchardt, Christoph Baumgartner, Pooyan Tamimi Arab, Annalisa Butticci
13.30 *Lunch*
14.30 Departure