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Operating Within the Global *Umma*: Gambian *Tablighi* Religious Beliefs and Practices

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Meeting of Muslim Women in the Gambia

Whereas a previous project focused on the Gambian branch of the *Tabligh Jama'at*, a transnational Islamic missionary movement, this current research explores the translocal religious networks in which the Gambian branch is embedded. The conception of the *Tablighi* congregation as a global *umma*, which at the same time covers a multiplicity of local and regional expressions, is taken as a starting point for this project and branches off in two directions.

Previous ethnographic field research indicated that *Tablighis* from other West African countries regularly assemble in The Gambia to attend *Tablighi* conferences, and that Gambian *Tablighis* frequently set out on missionary travels to neighbouring West African countries. The current research project compares the *Gambian Jama'at* with its branches in other West African countries, particularly in Senegal and Nigeria, and explores the links between them.

Secondly, the *Gambian Jama'at* will be linked with other Islamic reformist movements, such as the Senegalese *Jama'at 'Ibad ar-Rahman* and the Nigerian *Yan Izala*. In addition to their ideas on their position within the global *umma* and their attitude towards Islamic education and politics, the basis for comparison of these movements will be how they perform Muslim rituals, interpret intergenerational and gender relations, and deal with Sufis and Sufi-related practices.

The intention behind studying the Gambian *Jama'at* as part of the global *umma* is to illustrate that Islamic reformism is not a teleological, monolithic movement but, instead, a diffuse process that occurs at different levels where the local and translocal intersect. This approach, both timely and appropriate, unlocks stereotypical images of Sufi Islam as accommodating and syncretic and 'fundamentalist' Islam as a militant male force with an overtly political agenda.

Violence, Memory and Dealing with the Past in Iraq: an Example of the Survivors of the Anfal Operations in Kurdistan

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Ibadu seller

After the fall of the Ba'ath-regime, Iraqi society faced a legacy of decades of violence, with victims of past crimes claiming certainty, justice and compensation. At the same time, Iraq has been shattered by the escalation of fresh violence from occupation forces, militias and terrorist groups. With ongoing violence from multiple actors, the former dividing line between followers and opponents of the Ba'ath-regime has begun to shift towards a deep fragmentation of Iraqi society along ethnic-national, regional and religious lines. The victimhood of past and current violence plays a key role in legitimating the claims of diverse factions to power in the new Iraq, none of whom are prepared to delegate ownership of the process of dealing with the past – and thus the power of interpretation – to the national level. A national process of negotiating the past does not appear to be in evidence. Victims of past crimes feel increasingly marginalized with regard to their need for assistance and of social and political acknowledgement of their specific experience of extreme violence.

The research focuses on the experience and situation of the victims and survivors of the so-called Anfal operations (a vast military campaign carried out by the Iraqi regime against the rural areas of Kurdistan in 1988). The project looks at the construction and transformation of the individual and collective memory of this event and its representation in regional and national discourses, as well victims' expectations of justice and compensation and an institutionalized process of dealing with the past. Based on the example of the Anfal survivors, the research will examine the preconditions, constraints and opportunities for a national process of dealing with the past in Iraq under conditions of occupation, conflict and ongoing violence. It will contribute to a broader debate on the correlation between extreme violence, construction of memory and political transformation. The project refers to psychological trauma and memory research as well as to sociological and historical memory research, and takes into account the experience of transformation and reconciliation processes in other post-conflict situations such as in South Africa, Rwanda and Bosnia.



Anfal surviving woman. Photo: R. Maro 1991