

Beyond Oil and Radical Islam: From Classifications to Links of Economy and Religion in Central Asia

Tuesday, December 13th, 2011, 5 pm

The Worst of Places, the Best of Places: Bazaar and Risk Economy in the Lives of Kyrgyz Muslims

Lecture by Emil Nasritdinov

Historically, bazaars had a significant role as places for cross-cultural exchange and spread of religious ideas. In Central Asia, Islam significantly spread through Muslim merchants caravanning in paths and trading in the bazaars of the ancient Silk Road. The collapse of the Soviet economy and Communist ideology in 1991 brought the revival of both: Islam and cross-border trade.

Trading in the bazaar often involves risks, especially for wholesale traders. To secure their success merchants employ a variety of religious practices ranging from burning *ysryk* (a special kind of grass) and hanging amulets inside trading stalls to proper five-time prayer and engagement in missionary and charity work as a way of earning God's favor. Among the traders who push the economic risks to the limits are *dawatchis* (Muslim missionaries) who frequently engage in trade with the most expensive and quite risky type of bazaar merchandise – cars. This paper explores the ways Kyrgyz *dawatchis* draw on the statements like: "If you take care of God's business, He will take care of yours" and how the perception of bazaar as a place of vice and virtue fits into their worldviews and economic practices.

Emil Nasritdinov is Assistant Professor at the Department of Anthropology at the American University of Central Asia. He studied Architecture and Urban Planning in Manoa/Hawaii and Chicago and received a PhD in Urban Planning at the University of Melbourne. His extensive anthropological research comprehends topics such as migration, markets, development and spirituality in Kyrgyzstan. His current book project is on nation and migration in Kyrgyzstan.

This lecture series is a cooperation between the Zentrum Moderner Orient (www.zmo.de), the Querschnittsbereich Islam in den Gesellschaften Asiens und Afrikas, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (iaaw.hu-berlin.de/islam) and the Competence Network Crossroads Asia (www.crossroads-asia.de).

During the Soviet era, religion and economy were conceived as distinct, even mutually opposed spheres with their own rationales (such as 'rational actors' on the one hand and 'irrational' 'otherworldly' motivations on the other). A focus on the impact of religious ideas and practices on economic processes - and vice versa - serves to question the common perception of Central Asia as a region determined by either dangerous religious movements or lucrative oil and gas reserves. The lecture series interrogates how 'religion' and 'economy' are shaped and negotiated through everyday strategies and practices. How are separations, links, cross-overs and mutual constitutions of 'religion' and 'economy' conceived and put into practice by Central Asian actors? The lecture series seeks to foreground Central Asian debates on the relationship between religious and economic domains in order to query these social, political and social science categories.

Venue:

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften

Invalidenstraße 118, Room 507
Entrance at Schlegelstraße 26

D-10115 Berlin
<http://iaaw.hu-berlin.de/islam>

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung