

Program

Sermon in the City

October 30-31, 2014, Berlin
Zentrum Moderner Orient



Convenors: Abdoulaye Sounaye and Birgit Meyer
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Recent contributions to the academic study of religious phenomena have drawn attention to sermon practices, particularly in Islam and Christianity. Intended to communicate a particular content and persuade listeners about its importance, sermon certainly mediates religious discourse, values and norms. However, as a performance space, it also calls attention to the body, the voice and oratory skills, the experience of listening, the active participation of the audience, the emotional state of the participants and listeners, indicating that the sensuous experience of the sermon is as important as the message it seeks to convey. In fact, as sermon practices across Africa show, the voice is constitutive for the performance of the sermon and a powerful charismatic resource for the preacher.

The city in contemporary Africa has been described as a place of multifaceted experiences, an arena of competition, an environment of opportunities, and the setting of rapidly changing and transformative dynamics. Perhaps, no dimension of social life other than the religious one has better illustrated this reality. Across cities, occasions of preaching have multiplied as sermons spread to street corners, markets, stadiums and cultural centres, fueling conflict, promoting sectarianism, and enabling new modes of sociality; preaching rallies have become some of the most efficient ways of building communities and attracting followers; preachers have become public figures whose role in both private and communal lives has significantly increased; critical and argumentative, sermon in the city has become one of the most mediated discourses, and sometimes with a significant impact on social cohesion and political stability. Adding to these developments, particular mediation techniques are continuously reshaping urban soundscapes and how people live and manifest religiosity. In short, across Africa, preaching has become a significant dimension of urban life.

How do sermons lend themselves to these dynamics and reverberate with everyday religious experience, discursive practices, politics and interactions in urban Africa? This workshop tackles this broad question by engaging three sets of issues. First, focusing on oratory practices, we would like to examine how voice, speaking and listening become essential parts of the sermon. How do they account for the

aesthetics of preaching? How do we theorize these practices?

Second, as media technologies play a significant role in urban sermon practices, enhance the popularity of preachers, shape message content and contribute to the formation of new socialities, we propose to address the mediation of sermons. This concerns, in particular, its reproduction and amplification, two modes that have become pervasive across religious traditions and cities. What is the impact of these practices on constituencies and interactions? What do they tell us about sermon in the city? Examining these dimensions is even more important when we consider how sermons serve numerous claims of authenticity, attacks and counterattacks, in particular via various media practices that have grown even more sophisticated in recent years (CDs, DVDs, Radio, TV, Youtube and other online sites).

Finally, how sermons are involved in the construction of authority, relate to charisma, set the stage for competition and become the site of conflict, seems to be one of the critical questions an examination of preaching in contemporary Africa cannot afford to overlook. Are these developments indicating a shift in the way religious authority is constructed and assumed? Are there any political implications coming out of these trends? We propose to take up this set of issues by focusing on the art of persuasion that comes out of sermon practices, and the ways in which these practices shape authority within particular groups and communities.

By calling attention to aurality and orality, reproduction and amplification, authority and social formations, this workshop proposes first, to examine both the individual and the communal experiences of sermon; second, to focus on the ways in which sermon brings to the fore sensorial subjectivities and religious aesthetics; and third, to analyze the impact of sermon practices on the structures and modes of construction of authority in urban spaces.

The workshop will gather scholars working primarily on Islam or/and Christianity and will consist of a number of panels with presentations and discussion. Case studies and comparative projects based on ethnographic material are highly desired.

Program

Thursday, October 30

09:30 - 10:00	Welcome (Ulrike Freitag / ZMO) & Introduction of the Conference Theme Birgit Meyer, Abdoulaye Sounaye
10:00 - 11:20	Panel 1: Sermon: a Site of Performance Chair: Kai Kresse (Columbia) Discussant: Birgit Meyer - Abdulkader Tayob: <i>Performing Tafsir (Exegesis) during South Africa's Transition from Apartheid to Democracy</i> - Abdoulaye Sounaye: <i>Performing Wazu (Sermon) among the Sunnane in Niamey, Niger</i>
11:20 - 11:40	Break
11:40 - 13:00	Panel 2: Iconicity of Sound Chair: Birgit Meyer (Utrecht) Discussant: Reza Masoudi Nejad - Marleen de Witte: <i>"Buy the Future @ the Christ Temple: Construction, Amplification, Circulation... 'Permanent Error'?"</i> - Peter Lambertz: <i>Vocal Subjectivity, Aesthetic Difference, and Trans-cultural Reassurance among 'Spiritualists' in Kinshasa.</i>
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 15:20	Panel 3: Voice and Aurality Chair: Katharina Lange (ZMO) Discussant: Martha Frederiks - Wilfried Hinsch & Dorothea Schulz: <i>Authentication as Mediation ? A View from Social Philosophy and Anthropology</i>

- Max Stille: *Islamic non-Friday Sermons in Bengal: the Rhetorical Role of a Melodic Voice and Jokes*

15:20 - 15:40

Break

15:40 - 17:00

Panel 4: Powerful Oratory and the Making of Community

Chair: Martha Frederiks (Utrecht)

Discussant: Adrian Hermann

- Kai Kresse: *Maulidi Sermons in Lamu: Community and Experience in Discursive Space*

- Annemeik Schlatman: *Muharram Rituals in Dutch; a Lay Preacher touching the Hearts of young Shi'i Muslims in the Netherlands*

17:15 - 17:30

Introduction to Exhibition The Spiritual Highway (Stephan Lanz, Marloes Janson)

NB: 18:00 ZMO colloquium: *Emotional Translation. Conceptual History beyond Language*, lecture by Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin)

Friday, October 31

09:30 - 10:50

Panel 5: Contesting Religious Authority

Chair: Dorothea Schulz (Cologne)

Discussant: Roman Loimeier

- Hassan Ndzovu: *The Broadcasting of Sermons (mawaidha) of Female "Preachers" by Muslim Radio Stations in Mombasa, Kenya*

- Benedikt Pontzen: *"Speaking for Islam" and Religious Authority in Zongos in Asante, Ghana*

10:50 - 11:00

Break

11:00 - 13:00

Panel 6: The Work of Persuasion

Chair: Katrin Bromber (ZMO)

Discussant: Saadi Norman Nikro

- Bruno Reinhardt: *Preaching and "Flow" in a Pentecostal Bible School from Ghana*

- Daan Beekers: *A Moment of Persuasion: Travelling Preachers and Islamic Pedagogy in the Netherlands, Utrecht University*

- Jan Scholz: *The Question of Persuasion in Contemporary Islamic Oratory Performance in Egypt*

13:00 - 14:00

Lunch

14:00 - 15:20

Panel 7: Urban Outreach

Chair: Abdoulaye Sounaye (ZMO)

Discussant: Marloes Janson

- Hew Wai Weng: *Sensational Forms of Cultural Dakwah: Chinese Muslims' Preaching in Urban Malaysia and Indonesia*

- Maria J. de Abreu: *The Gospel According to the City: Gesture, Citation, Temporality*

15:20 - 15:40

Break

15:40 - 17:00

Panel 8: Sermon in Comparative Perspective

Chair: Britta Frede (Bayreuth)

Discussant: Stephan Lanz

- André Chappatte: *Public Sermons at Night*

- Murtala Ibrahim: *Preaching in God's City: Nasfat and Christ Embassy in Comparative Perspective*

17:00 - 17:30

Closing remarks

(Roman Loimeier, Martha Frederiks & Abdulkader Tayob)