

EDITORIAL

Orient Bulletin becomes ZMO Bulletin

Ulrike Freitag

What's in a name? For many years, ZMO has conducted arduous debates about the German version of its name. "Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient" sounds about as antiquated as London's "School of Oriental and African Studies" and many similar institutions. Even if we cannot boast of an age like that of the icon of Asian and African Studies, we have always felt

that, over the years, the abbreviation "ZMO" had become something of a brand. This, together with the difficulty of finding a convincing new name, has so far led us to follow the lead of SOAS or CEDEJ in Cairo: retain the acronym and try to use it, instead of the full name. This needs to be reflected in our publications as well, hence the renaming of our bulletin as "ZMO

Bulletin". We are confident that the content continues to interest our readers and would like to use this occasion to invite our alumni to regularly inform us about their publications and other academic activities. This will enhance the ZMO Bulletin's function of informing and connecting its readership – among one another and with our lively research centre.



When the War Began

Samuli Schielke

*I was asked to contribute to the **ZMO Blog** but it is very difficult to say anything meaningful about massacres. To offer at least a historical record, I decided to share with you these diary notes I wrote when the war began. I was living with Egyptian workers in Dubai at that moment. I have not edited anything, also not passages where I now think I was wrong and others where I contradict myself. I have added some missing words, translated Arabic expressions, clarified unclear passages and corrected typos. I have marked those clarifications with square brackets.*

Dubai

7.10., 23:05 back at the accommodation after a nice afternoon out. Meanwhile in the news, Hamas has been able to organize a major attack against Israel, much bigger than in any of the past wars before, surprising indeed in its extent, crossing the border fence and seizing villages and towns on Israeli side, killing people and taking hostages, and seizing military equipment, and lots of rockets on top. I'm impressed because it's the first attack by them ever that actually has anything resembling an attempt to win rather than just causing pain and provoking a violent counterreaction. But I'm also devastated because it is obvious what will happen next. They don't have the force to hold their gains, and they are not being exactly decent in their warfare either, aiming

as always to kill as many civilians as they can because soldiers are harder to kill. 150 Israelis have been killed so far and we know how badly Israel has avenged the killing of one or two people. This will result in a terrible bloodbath, and I have to exert restraint to not comment to my progressive Egyptian friends on Instagram who are either celebrating and cheering, or *بيفتوا فتاوى* [pass judgement] moralising against unspecified decolonial scholars who (they claim) are silent when real decolonization happens: "Do you support decolonization as abstract academic theory? Or as a tangible event?" Well, it might be a tangible event of decolonization if they had a chance to win or a plan how to win (leaving aside the fact that the progressives would not be very happy about the shape of Pales-

tine ruled by Islamists, but it will take much longer for the world and local political situation to reach the point where it will be possible). I just see more death and darkness. (But then it's not the first time I'm wrong. But this is what I see now.)

[...]

8.10. in Starbucks at 12:15 after having a nice and sweet video call with Asmaa who is struggling with her thesis presentation. My intellectual progressive friends are almost without exception sharing excited and celebratory content about the outbreak of the war, especially about Hamas fighters entering and seizing places in 1948 territory, which is a first since 1948. But I'm just estranged because their joy is so smoothed out of any disturbance. Using nice diagrams of

gliders landing over settlements, no photos of people killed (they only do it when Palestinians are killed), and full of righteousness about Palestinians reclaiming their lands. I fought hard to not get involved in debates, but I could not avoid writing to two people that I don't think that entering a town and killing and seizing whom-ever you can but having no force to keep that town amounts to reclaiming your land. Interestingly, here in my immediate circle, not only T. but also S. is doubtful of this. The latter knows somebody from Gaza who expects the worst now, is very afraid. He also thinks that the attack, spectacular as it is, has no chance to keep its gains, only results in huge retaliation, and

argues that there is an Islamic norm that in war you are only allowed to kill men, not old, women, and children.

I say that I have a 5% hope that this will be the beginning of a more or less permanent if not satisfactory peace (October War to Camp David style) where MbS can rise and shine as the great peacemaker. But it's unlikely with Netanyahu and other radicals in power in Israel, and with Hamas and other radicals as the most credible voice in Palestine, and 95% I expect more death and darkness.

Asmaa today was helpful to put things into perspective for me: you didn't grow up with the قضية [cause] she reminds me. And it's true, those

progressive intellectuals who are so critical of many things in their country, also identify with its causes in a strong way, stronger than a mainstream conservative office worker here may do. And they are willing to see everything the way that makes it suit their قضية [cause]. I have become more sensitized to it in last years, more sceptical of قضايا [causes] if pursuing them requires such a degree of filtering. I think that supporting 2011 [revolution in Egypt] and seeing what came of it has been a transformative experience in this regard.

[...]

For the whole text see <https://www.zmo.de/wissenstransfer/zmo-blog/1>

PROFILES

Transregional Comparison of Local Arrival Contexts

Johannes Becker, Orhan Nassif

In our research project "Migrant Arrival Contexts in Transregional Comparison. Local Figurations and Differing Collective Histories of Arameans and Assyrians in Germany and Jordan", we investigate how local arrival contexts form, develop, and change. Focusing on Aramean and Assyrian Christians in Amman, Jordan and in Gütersloh, Germany, we are interested in the changing relationships between those who have lived in a place for a long time and new arrivals from the same group – with different histories, memories, and national origins. We also analyze the changing relations of migrants with old-established residents, with members of other migrant groups, and with the state.

Until the end of the Ottoman Empire, most Aramaic-speaking Christians lived in an area that is now divided among Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In the following, we bypass intense naming and identity debates and use the term "Arameans" for members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, who are at the centre of this piece. Especially after the genocide against Aramaic-speaking Christians (the Sayfo genocide) in 1915 and the following de-

acades, many Arameans migrated to surrounding areas. They became part of new states with different national languages and political systems, such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. After World War II, Arameans also began to migrate to Europe. Genocide, state formation, discrimination, violent conflicts, and cross-border connections continue to influence Aramean communities. In our comparison, we ask which "we" images Arameans in Amman and Gütersloh share and which conflicts arise. The project, based in qualitative social research, is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, BE 7494/1-1) from October 2023 until September 2026. We have started to conduct biographical interviews and participant observations in Gütersloh and Amman. Here, we share our initial field impressions, which still await more detailed analysis.

Amman: Established Arameans and Aramean outsiders

Many Arameans who fled to Jerusalem and Bethlehem after 1915 migrated from there to Amman in the

1950s. They founded a Syriac Orthodox community in Amman, which had between 2,000 and 5,000 members. Since the 1980s, thousands of Arameans from Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq have come to Amman, many of them in transit.

We were warmly welcomed in Amman. Members of the church council arranged biographical interviews with members of the congregation; others actively asked to be interviewed. People spoke openly about their lives and the community. But it soon became clear that we were introduced only to Jordanians. There is a strong division between Arameans who are Jordanian citizens and those who are not. Only Jordanians are allowed to be members of the church council, for example. A distinction is made between Jordanian Arameans, Iraqi Arameans who came in the 1990s/2000s, and Iraqi Aramean refugees who only stay in Amman for a few months or years.

The biographies and family stories of the established Jordanian Arameans showed that they experienced enormous social mobility between the 1950s and the 1980s. While

their parents who came to the city were craftsmen or day laborers, in Amman these families advanced in the new state, particularly in the military and secret service. Their upward mobility in Amman was in part due to their newcomer status, as the royal court co-opted several minority groups. The position of these established Arameans is symbolized by a large new church building that replaced the small church from the 1950s. In Amman, Aramaic was only a liturgical language, and memories of expulsion and genocide were faint. At the same time, people were transnationally oriented and their families were scattered across several countries.

Gütersloh: Perceptions of incomplete arrival, ecumenic vision, and secularism

From the 1960s on, Arameans migrated to Germany from Turkey, first as “guest workers” and later as asylum seekers. Since the 1980s and 1990s, a smaller number of people from Syria have also arrived who were often related to those already there. Up to 13% of Gütersloh’s 100,000 inhabitants are Arameans.

It was more difficult for us to establish connections in Gütersloh than in Amman. In conversations, community representatives offered us a general view of the Arameans, their history of suffering, or their perceived origin in the Assyrian Empire. We were initially unable to meet families or to conduct biographical interviews. We were invited

to an Aramean association in a friendly manner, but people remained skeptical towards us. The initial interviews we conducted were very controlled. And Orhan, a Muslim Turkmen from Syria, was especially closely scrutinized. It was only during our third short stay in Gütersloh that conversations became more open.

It is still difficult to understand and explain these differences between Amman and Gütersloh. In Gütersloh – in contrast to Amman – Aramaeans characterized their arrival in Germany as exhausting and incomplete. Those who arrived from Turkey reported on their perceived position as ethnic outsiders and on their attempts to establish themselves, at least economically and materially. Many migrants from Syria, in contrast, associated their arrival with a socio-economic decline.

The dividing lines within the group are also different from those in Amman, mainly in terms of different generations and the secular-religious division. The church communities see a chance to establish themselves in the ecumenical sphere in Germany, for example by successfully introducing Syriac Orthodox school lessons. Younger Arameans, however, saw the conservative Church as restrictive, for example in its separation of the sexes. The Church was greatly concerned that future generations would turn away. Another counter-image for the Church was the small number of secular nationalists who challenged their hegemony in the community.

First conclusions

There are major differences in how Aramean arrival contexts are formed in different places. The trans-regional comparison of “small” migrant groups offers insights into the genesis, dynamics, and differentiation of arrival contexts, boundaries beyond national affiliations, transnational connections, and the role of transnational organizations.

Our first impressions showed, on the one hand, the different genesis of the two contexts: in Amman, the relationship between established Aramean citizens and outsiders from abroad; in Gütersloh, between different ideologies and generations. On the other hand, they revealed very different relations between the Arameans and the state or city where they resided: in Jordan, the state offered an opportunity for minorities to establish themselves; in Gütersloh, the Church attempts to establish itself through ecumenism, while the migrants have a simultaneous perception of “strangeness” and of incomplete and “strenuous” establishment.

So far, we have had contact mainly with people at the “core” of local Aramaic communities. Equally relevant, however, are people on the margins or for whom this affiliation has lost its relevance. We plan to study more family histories and biographies in order to explore (changing) group boundaries and other aspects in the further course of the project.

Digitization and the Protection of Endangered Patrimonies: Ghadames as a Laboratory of Community-Based and Collaborative Strategies

Nora Lafi, Suaad al-Ghafal

Academic historical research sometimes not only has to interpret existing and safely preserved historical sources, but also protect them. This is the case with manuscripts and archives of the Libyan city of Ghadames, which are held in buildings bombed during World War II and which the last two decades exposed to new dangers. This 2-year project (starting April 2024), supported by the Patrimonies Funding Initiative of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung and led by Nora Lafi (ZMO) and



Rubbles of the Ghadames *mahkama* (qâdî's house, the medieval court of justice).



Scrap archives and documents awaiting restoration and cataloguing

Picture credits: The Ghadames Association for Heritage and Conservation

Suaad Al-Ghafal (University of Tripoli/ZMO), is developed in cooperation with the Ghadames Association for Heritage and Conservation (*Jam'iyya Ghadames lil-Turâth wal-Mahfuzât*) and particularly with Nureddine M. H. Althani, Aboulquasim Basheer Qassim Youshaa, and Abduljabbar Abdulqader Assaghir Abuzyd. In Tunis, Emna Bchir (ENAU) is also a partner. The project, which pools the experience of historians, architects, archivists, and civil society, aims to digitize a large number of high-value historical documents. Some of these resources have been saved by the association; some are still under the rubble of the local *mahkama* (*qâdî's*) house, the medieval court of justice. Thanks to the desert climate and the robustness of the traditional terracotta boxes they are stored in, those already excavated are in a good state of conservation.



Manuscripts and old books already collected

Experience shows the need to promote community-based protection processes and to link them with a vision of heritage that includes historical research and interpretation – not just a one-off protection. A reflexive look at the concept and practices of community-based heritage management and conservation is also necessary. The physical conservation of archival artefacts cannot be separated from reflection on the functioning of contemporary societies and on the practice of historical research in dialogue with civil society. This is precisely the spirit of this conservation and research project: to articulate protection necessities expressed by civil society locally and a network of scholars researching the sources that the process aims to protect. The project also conceives protection as including the physical restoration of storage facilities, their

governance in the hands of local civil society, and digitization that allows both stability and accessibility. Interpretation is conceived as combining the knowledge of local civic associations and of scholars active on the international level.



Terracotta box containing and protecting manuscripts and archives

Ghadames is situated in western Libya, near today's Algerian and Tunisian borders. Since ancient times, it has been an important city at the crossroads of the South-North and East-West caravan routes of the Sahara, linking the Mediterranean to the core of the African continent and the Atlantic coast of Morocco to the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, and Asia. Local architecture is renowned for its earthen structure; the city consists mostly of adobe buildings. In colonial times, the city was disputed between French, British, and Italian colonial powers. Ghadames has been under UNESCO protection since 1986.

One of the main aims of the project is to digitize all the materials that were already collected, restore the damaged ones, and order them in an open-access repository, as well to create a digital inventory to be shared locally and internationally, in partnership with the ZMO library. Digging up the rubble of the *qâdî's* house, securing the buried archival materials, restoring them, and digitizing them are also among the objectives. The archives and manuscripts under consideration cover more than 700 years and constitute unique historical sources on the history of the city, its confessional communities, and their relationships with neighboring cities and territories. The collection includes numerous gazelle-hide parchments, as well as several manuscripts and collections of letters.



Chairman Aboulquasim Basheer Qassim Youshaa presenting an archival document at the premises of the Ghadames Association for Heritage and Conservation (*Jam'iyya Ghadames lil-Turâth wal-Mahfuzât*)

This research programme aims to reflect on the nature of digitization processes. Digitization itself will be performed according to rigorous methods defined as part of the project itself, in accordance with professional practices among archivists. The convergence between the community and scholars and the reflection on the notion of the commons don't stop with the technical process of digitization. The status of the digitized archives will adhere to the ethical rules discussed with the partners: the original archives and the photos taken by the Ghadames association will remain in Ghadames, and copies will be stored in the ZMO repository, which will reference them following the philosophy of open access. Workshops reflecting on digitization as heritagization and heritage protection will be organized with other institutes in Libya, Germany, Tunisia, and beyond. This collective research is oriented towards participating in the definition of what heritage is in different contexts and how to preserve it for future generations.

Nora Lafi is a historian and a Senior Research Fellow at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient. She has published extensively on the history of the cities of the Ottoman Empire and on the question of heritage. On Ghadames she published "Ghadamès cité-oasis entre empire ottoman et colonization" in Federico Cresti (ed.), La Libia tra Mediterraneo e mondo islamico, Milan, Giuffrè, 2006, 55–70.

Suaad Al-Ghafal is an Associate Professor at the University of Tripoli and an Associate Researcher with Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient. She specializes in the history of Libya. Among her publications is A Bridgehead to Africa, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021, 242p.

Remoboko Final Conference, 6–8 September 2023, ZMO

Hala Mardini, Frédéric Madore

The final conference of the five-year research programme “Religion, Morality, and Boko in West Africa” (Remoboko) took place from 6 to 8 September 2023. Organized by the project leader Abdoulaye Sounaye and Frédéric Madore, the event was made possible by the generous support of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. Entitled “University Campuses in Africa and Beyond: Training Grounds, Moral Spaces, and Political Arenas”, the conference took place at ZMO.

The event served as a platform for the Remoboko research group to present their findings and engage with scholars from different disciplines working on similar issues in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The conference explored how university campuses function as training grounds for essential skills, as centres of moral activism where ideas of social good and citizenship are debated and transformed, and as political arenas shaped by diverse intellectual, religious, and political engagements. It aimed to illuminate the complex role that campuses play in the social and intellectual development of students and to demonstrate their importance as sites of learning, personal growth, and socio-political interaction.

The conference featured 22 papers in 8 panels, the launch of the book *Religiosity on University Campuses in Africa: Trends and Ex-*



Participants in the conference hall and in front of the entrance (Credits: Marc Beckmann)

periences (Lit, 2023), co-edited by Sounaye and Madore, an exhibition of photographs by the Remoboko team, and the screening of Vincent Favier’s ethnographic film *Karamin San’i Kukum’i Née / Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing*. The event brought together a wide range of scholars from anthropology, history, and sociology, and discussions covered a range of issues including gender, activism, faith, identity, and social status, all in the context of religiosity on university campuses. Hailing from eleven countries on four continents, the contributors provided rich insights that reflected the global and interdisciplinary nature of the conference.

In addition to a special panel on Indonesia with five colleagues from the UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, the conference offered several case studies, including Pentecostalism in Ghana by Bruno Reinhardt

(Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil), the religiosity of African students in Japanese universities by Rebecca Babirye (Tokyo Christian University, Japan), the making of sacred spaces for different religions on the campus of the University of Minnesota by John Schmalzbauer (Missouri State University, USA), and social diversity and conflicting injunctions on campuses in Abu Dhabi by Laure Assaf (NYU Abu Dhabi, UAE).

Participants expressed their appreciation for the in-depth discussions of the interrelated themes. Olutayo C. Adesina of the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) summed up the conference as “important for the understanding of humanity”.

The Remoboko team would like to thank Rakiya El Matine, Patrycja Komor, Hala Mardini, and Tim Fedke for their invaluable logistical support, which was crucial to the success of this event.

Relicts of the Ancien Régime – Socialist & Imperial Legacies and the City, 13–15 September 2023, ZMO

David Leupold

The workshop, hosted by ZMO in September 2023, was organized as part of the DFG project “Future images of the past? – Life and Afterlife of the socialist ‘city of the future’ in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus” (led by Dr David Leupold). It investigated how remnants of past political entities, ranging from the

Habsburg and Ottoman Empires to the defunct regimes of state socialism, continue to influence contemporary urban experiences.

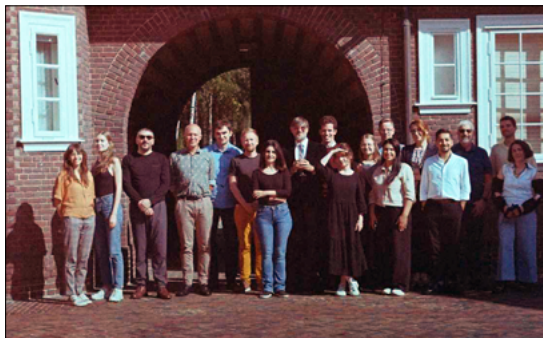
Viewing these remnants as artifacts of an ancien régime, the workshop explored the entirety of surviving elements, both physical and immaterial, that outlasted the politi-

cal structures from which they originated. Rather than being seen solely as objects of “post-Soviet nostalgia,” the workshop highlighted how the physical remnants of a discarded social utopia might possess the inherent ability to haunt the present with the unfulfilled futures of the past. This haunting aspect of abandoned utopias

was a prominent recurring theme throughout the event.

Aligning with this theme, in his keynote speech, Ronald G. Suny illustrated how focusing on the socialist city post-Stalin provides a unique perspective on the Soviet experiment. It offers a “distinct optic” that emphasizes how the past continues to shape the present as a “living legacy of socialism”, manifested not only in infrastructure and residential architecture, but also in immate-

rial aspects such as place attachment, everyday practices, institutionalized hierarchies, and lingering expectations. Suny provocatively suggested that the combined impact of the Soviet Union’s collapse and Russia’s war in Ukraine, fueled by late tsarist nationalism and Putinist neo-imperialism, has resulted in a form of “retrospective amnesia” about the Soviet experience.



Workshop participants in the courtyard

Memory as a Resource in Conflict Transformation: The Role of Media and Journalists in Peacebuilding”, TraCe Stakeholder Workshop, 20–21 September 2023, Bogotá, Colombia

The international workshop took place in Bogotá, Colombia, at the Universidad de los Andes. The two-day event brought together international scholars and media practitioners to discuss the role of various types of media and journalists in peace consolidation processes following violent conflicts and crimes against humanity.

The aim of the stakeholder workshop was to provide a platform to exchange contemporary knowledge and critical reflections on the role of the media. Together, the participants reflected on journalistic practices and developed solutions to

address the legacies of political violence.

The conference was co-funded by TraCe and the Leibniz Research Alliance “Value of the Past”. It was organized by Sonja Hegasy (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, ZMO), Rousbeh Legatis (SOAS, University of London), Dr Sabine Mannitz, Prof. Dr Jonas Wolff (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt PRIF), and Prof. Dr Stefan Peters (German-Colombian Peace Institute CAPAZ).

This text was copied from the TraCe website; for more, see, [https://www.trace-](https://www.trace-center.de/en/news-1/details/trace-stakeholder-workshop-memory-as-a-resource-in-conflict-transformation)

[center.de/en/news-1/details/trace-stakeholder-workshop-memory-as-a-resource-in-conflict-transformation](https://www.trace-center.de/en/news-1/details/trace-stakeholder-workshop-memory-as-a-resource-in-conflict-transformation).

A conference report was published in 2024: Rousbeh Legatis, Claudia Maya. *Memoria como recurso en la transformación de conflictos: El papel de medios y periodistas en la construcción de paz // Memory as a resource in conflict transformation: the role of media and journalists in peacebuilding*, 69p. <https://www.instituto-capaz.org/informe-del-congreso-memoria-como-recurso-en-la-transformacion-de-conflictos-el-papel-de-medios-y-periodistas-en-la-construccion-de-paz/>

South Asian Futures, workshop, 6–7 October 2023, ZMO

Sagnik Kar, Mona Conrad



The workshop was organized as a part of the ERC Consolidator Grant project “Timely Histories: A Social History of Time in South Asia”. The 12 papers placed the concept of the “future” at the heart of the discussion and brought into focus a considerable period from the early modern era to the years following decolonization in South Asia.

Three papers at the workshop dealt with the early modern period. By examining debt contracts to show how the notion of debt entailed a future-orientation, one paper stressed the need to consider “temporality” as

a category that needs to be studied in parallel with social and economic ones. The connection of the temporal with the socio-economic surfaced as well in another presentation that underlined the centrality of commercial practices in engendering novel ways of thinking about time. As an example, the case of money lending was provided to demonstrate how its repercussions, such as profits or debts, were possibilities that unfold in the “future”. A third paper elaborated on how the early modern was not a period that lacked a sense of time measurement, since time units like *kāla*

and *kṣaṇa* were widely prevalent, pointing also to the need to place the “modern time” of the 19th century in a dialogue with temporal cultures of the early modern period.

Reference to “modern time” provided a convenient way to approach the 19th and 20th centuries, with which most papers in the workshop engaged. As an activity that involved planning for the future, insurance, was addressed, on the one hand, in terms of whether colonial India offered conditions ripe for its success, and on the other, in showing how it found a place and became a subject

in the domain of the Bengali print in the 20th century. With a focus on the vernacular in the 20th century, specifically an ascetic-turned-political activist's writings in Hindi, another paper discussed how "anti-imperialist" futures were envisaged.

Two papers raised the issue of how time was counted. One discussed the calendar as a part of 19th-century debates on the "standardization" of time, while the other used Bengali children's journals to unpack how children, as the future generation, were taught the value of "time discipline" through such vernacular materials. Another set of papers used technologies, such as money minting and technological innovations in the field of agriculture, as an

entry point to understand how state-driven initiatives impacted future-making.

In the course of discussions, post-colonial South Asian history figured primarily in two presentations. One looked at the use of high-yield variety seeds in post-colonial India by placing it within the context of partition, in which the region of Punjab experienced a loss of agricultural infrastructure equated to a "loss of time". High-yield variety seeds, with their promise of ensuring food supply in the near "future", were thereby seen as a solution. The other was more directly concerned with political questions, primarily because it looked at student movements in late colonial India and early post-colonial Pakistan. It broadly addressed not only



Another suitable place for a picture is ZMO's entrance hall

how nationalists interpreted the role of students, but also how students envisaged their role as citizens "in-the-waiting" in the nation's future.

These rich and profound presentations foregrounded engagement with the "future" as a temporal category and from various perspectives. In doing so, they catered to one of the central objectives of the project: to discuss time, but going beyond a purely device-centric understanding of it.

Rethinking Global Engagement, Symposium, 29–30 November 2023, Oxford

Kai Kresse

This second symposium of the Oxford-Berlin Research Partnership focused on ways of re-thinking the kinds and qualities of global connections and collaborations held and cultivated by institutions like the University of Oxford and the Berlin University Alliance (BUA), as leading European universities that are themselves entangled in global power-knowledge relationships and the histories and after-effects of colonialism. Conscious of the need to cultivate different kinds of partnerships with institutions particularly in the Global South, speakers from Oxford and Berlin addressed questions and challenges of overcoming Eurocentrism in academia and ideas about transforming infrastructures accordingly.

In coordination with the Berlin Center of Global Engagement (BCGE, based at the Freie Universität Berlin), the Oxford-Berlin collaboration hosted a symposium entitled "Rethinking Global Engagement" at St. Antony's College in Oxford. ZMO Vice Director Kai Kresse participated in the second panel, which dwelt on "Changing Patterns and Underlying Values". He shared some of the experiences gained over the past two years when organizing activities and facilitating exchange with diverse academic partners based in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, as part of the collaborative BUA-funded network "co²libri" (conceptual collaboration: living borderless research interaction). Hereby, regular global online meetings coordinated between ZMO, the FU, and the HU Berlin and a multiplici-



Panel on "Changing Patterns and Underlying Values (Kai Kresse, first from left)

ty of long-term southern partners have been dedicated to an engagement with theorizing from the South and the rethinking of research collaboration and its formats. Other speakers also discussed the development of universities and research in global comparison (with a critical look at inequalities and their perpetuation), the pressures on global academia through the dominance of English and anglophone traditions, and the problematic of university rankings (their criteria and logic). In different ways, panelists argued for a pluralism of values in the wider university and research landscape.

Remoboko Photo Exhibition

Vincent Favier



Impressions from the exhibition in ZMO's entrance hall

The Remoboko team organized a photo exhibition as part of its final conference, held at ZMO from 6 to 8 September, 2023 (see p. 5). Concluding five years of a research programme dedicated to religion, morality, and boko in West African public universities, the conference gathered scholars from different regions and academic contexts. The participants examined university campuses as training grounds, moral spaces and political arenas, besides their educational mission. Covering several West African universities in Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Senegal, this photo exhibition aims to give some insights into the team members' respective research and field sites, in which religious manifestations are obvious to different degrees. Each member of the Remoboko research group displays five photos in the lobby of ZMO.

Abdoulaye Sounaye, the head of the project, picked photos that illustrate religious symbols and places on campus, such as a notorious Cheikh painted on a tree at the Université Cheikh anta Diop of Dakar, Senegal. Another photo displays a cross and

a crescent that stand at the centre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Materialising religious presence on campus, it also raises some issues regarding religious cohabitation between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria that were solved by constructing a "Berlin Wall", a simple paravent that prevents Muslims from seeing the cross from the mosque when they pray.

Bello Adamou Mahamadou did his research at the Université Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, Niger, where he has been a doctoral candidate. His photos show collective religious manifestations on campus, such as a massive prayer where Muslims, mostly students, celebrate *Eid el-Fitr*. A photo of Christian students praying in a seminar room demonstrates, on a different scale, the worshipping conditions of the Christian minority on campus.

Frédéric Madore's photo series shows mainly spaces of worship on the university campuses of Lomé, Togo and Abomey-Calavi, Benin. The photos highlight the implantation, presence, and visibility of religious buildings on campus and, at the

same time, the associations behind their construction. Mainly spaces of prayer such as mosques and churches, these buildings – sometimes so ambitious that they are not completed yet – show how religious associations seek to establish themselves lastingly in these academic spaces and to redefine their initial secular nature.

Vincent Favier exhibits a series of portraits of five students from the Université Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, Niger. The selection illustrates a certain diversity in terms of students' religiosity and aspiration. Besides their studies, students engage in various activities that provide them with a range of social, religious, or political skills. Both female students aspire to complete their degree, a rather rare occurrence for women in the Nigerian context. Other students include a Christian leader, a student union member, and an "Oustaz" who teaches Islamic subjects.

Further photos are exhibited online (<https://photos.app.goo.gl/oC7f3DheU4aoxvFL8>) and are accessible through a QR code displayed at ZMO.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

GESELLSCHAFT ZUR FÖRDERUNG DES ZMO E.V.

Udo Steinbach

The Gesellschaft zur Förderung des ZMO e.V., an association of friends and supporters of ZMO, elected a new board in November 2023. Udo Steinbach (Maecenata Stiftung/MENA

Study Centre) and our former colleague Claudia Ghrawi are the new chairpersons. The main purpose of the Gesellschaft is to actively support ZMO's non-material and material

concerns. It cooperates with representatives of research organizations as well as political and cultural institutions and supports ZMO research projects and cultural events. Among

other things, the Society awards the biannual Fritz-Steppat-Preis to recognize outstanding dissertations by young scholars. The call for applications was closed by 31st March, the winners will be announced in July.

With a view to intensify interaction between the board and the members of the association, a *Stammtisch* (convivial get-together) is to be held occasionally. The first one is scheduled for 19 April 2024, at 6 p.m. and will take place at the restaurant Casalot, at Claire-Waldorff-Straße 5, 10117 Berlin. Members are kindly invited to participate.

The annual lecture (organized in cooperation with the Katholische Akademie, the Maecenta-Stiftung, and the Orient-Institut, Beirut) was held on 27 November 2023, at the Katholische Akademie, Berlin. The subject “Werte im Widerstreit – der



Meeting of the Gesellschaft zur Förderung des ZMO e.V. in November 2023 at ZMO

globale Süden und der Westen” was addressed by three speakers dealing with the European concept of human rights and diverging perspectives from China and African countries (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZxa219zjSY>). Together with Katrin Visse of the Katholische Akademie Berlin, Udo Steinbach organizes a series of events on “Poesie und Politik im

Nahen Osten”. Performances in the Persian (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAXqQaSCxCl>) and Arabic languages (video in preparation) took place on 4 December 2023, and 29 February 2024, respectively. For further information and membership please see <https://archiv.zmo.de/zmofreunde2015/zmofreunde2015.htm>

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Launch *Islam West Africa Collection*, 9 November 2023, MiCT, Berlin/Online

Frédéric Madore

On 9 November 2023, the *Islam West Africa Collection* (IWAC) was officially launched at the offices of Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT) in Berlin. Directed by Frédéric Madore (ZMO), the IWAC is a collaborative, open-access digital database that currently contains over 5,000 archival documents, newspaper articles, Islamic publications of various kinds, audio and video recordings, and photographs on Islam and Muslims in Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger, Nigeria, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. The site also indexes over 800 relevant bibliographic references. This project was funded by the Berlin Senate Department for Science, Health, and Care. As an NGO developing media on the African continent, MiCT, co-founded by Klaas Glenewinkel, was a very suitable host. Ulrike Freitag (ZMO), Mauro Nobili (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA), Issouf Binaté (Université Alassane Ouattara, Côte d'Ivoire), Vincent Favier (ZMO), and Kai Kresse (ZMO) commented on the project. Nobili, an expert on Arabic manuscripts from West Africa, argued that the IWAC allows us to appreciate the diversity and richness of West African Muslim intellectual culture, which transcends the boundaries of format and the dichotomy between traditional and modern materials. Binaté emphasized the importance of the project in protecting endangered documents and ensuring their accessibility for future research.

Beyond the event itself, the launch helped to generate significant interest in the database. In less than a



From left to right: Ulrike Freitag, Abdoulaye Sounaye, Sonja Hegasy, Frédéric Madore, Vincent Favier, Klaas Glenewinkel (MiCT), Mauro Nobili (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign), Kai Kresse (Credits: Marc Beckmann)

month, the site had more than 700 different visitors from 71 countries and several thousand pages viewed. Far from being the end of a project, this is just the beginning, as the IWAC will continue to grow with the inclusion of thousands of other documents that Madore has already digitized and will lay the groundwork for future collaborations with other scholars and institutes.

Photos and recordings of the interventions can be found here: <https://islam.zmo.de/s/westafrica/item/244>



Hilal Alkan. 2023. *Welfare as Gift. Local Charity, Politics of Redistribution, and Religion in Turkey*, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, ZMO Studien 46, de Gruyter, 176p, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111156552/html>

ZMO Programmatic Texts

Johannes Becker, Katrin Bromber, Sana Chavoshian, Ahmad Moradi, Antoinette Ferrand, Aksana Ismailbekova, Jasmin Mahazi, Tabea Scharrer, Samuli Schielke. 2023. *Silence, secrecy, ignorance, and the making of class and status across generations*, ZMO Programmatic Text no. 15, 15p, <https://doi.org/10.58144/20231214-000>

Abdel Qader Amer, Abdul Hameed El Kayyali, Nora Lafi (eds.), *تأملات حول المشاركة السياسية في المنطقة العربية مطلع القرن العشرين* [Reflections on Political Participation in the Arab World at the Beginning of the 20th Century], Amman, Alaam Publishers, 2024, 224p.

Interpreting the nature of deliberative practices and processes of political participation in the Arab world is a major issue in contemporary academic debates involving both the critical discussion of colonial visions and clichés and understanding present-day challenges. In this collective volume, various authors tackle such issues from the standpoint of historical research, also attending to the notion of historicity and the importance of deciphering the various layers of ideologically connoted interpretations that have accumulated. Viewed from Tunisia (Habib Kazdaghli and Ahlem Hajaji) to Iraq (Muhammad Muthaffar Al-Adhami), Syria (Mohammed Arna'ut), Jordan (Abdul Majeed Al-Shunnaq and



Khaled Bashir), and Palestine (Falestin Naili), the focus is on development in the first half of the 20th century, in contexts often determined by colonial occupation, of instances of deliberation whose definition was renewed but whose sociology was strongly connected to earlier practices. The book explores such connections, but also illustrates how political participation existed during the Ottoman era and was rooted in a variety of deliberative institutions, from confessional communities (Jewish, Christian) to assemblies and councils, and how colonization both erased this legacy and tended to instrumentalize deliberative practices in a constrained framework.

This volume builds on a workshop held at Institut français du Proche-Orient (Amman) in June 2022 in the framework of the HISDEMAB research programme, funded by the Leibniz-Gemeinschaft and based at ZMO under the supervision of PD Dr habil. Nora Lafi.

Stefan B. Kirmse (ed.) "Soviet Central Asia: Beyond 'Modernisation' and 'Decolonisation'", special issue of *Saeculum: Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte* 73 (2), 2023.

In this special issue of *Saeculum*, edited by Stefan B. Kirmse, the authors (including Nikolaos Olma, David Leupold, and Stefan Kirmse) seek to capture the diversity of the Soviet experience in Central Asia. The volume stresses ambiguity and ambivalence throughout, not only to capture lived experience under socialism, but also to discuss memories and the politics of memory. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Soviet experience has moved centre stage in public debate, both in Central Asia and beyond. However, this debate suffers from "retrospective amnesia", which is less about forgetting in a general sense than about forgetting ambiguity and multiperspectivity. The Soviet Union was hardly a simple foreboding of, or even a condition for, the curious mixture of the late tsarist nationalism and neo-imperialism that now inform Russia's war. Thus, perhaps more than ever, we need to explore the Soviet experience through the eyes of its contemporaries, with all its brutalities, contradictions, and aspects of inspiration.

For further publications see <https://www.zmo.de/publikationen/index.html>.

WELCOME In November



2023 Dr **Martin Christof-Füchle** joined ZMO as Project Coordinator and researcher in the MIDA project and works on the history of German participation in the European colonial endeavor, with a focus on India. He studied In-

dology und Comparative Religion at Tübingen University and received his PhD in 1997 for his dissertation on "Rajputentum und puranische Geschichtsschreibung". His main areas of interest are Hindi language and literature and the entangled histories of India and Germany from the 18th to the 20th century. He will

complete his project by the end of October 2026.

Orhan Nassif started as a project partner of Johannes Becker in the project "Migrant Arrival Contexts in Transregional Comparison" (see p. 2–3) in December 2023. He holds a B.A. and an M.A. in Social Work from the Catholic University of Applied

Sciences and University of Education (both Freiburg/Breisgau). His research interests include the fields of masculinity, migration, and participation.

Dr [Birgitte Stampe Holst](#) joined ZMO in January 2024 with a Carlsberg Foundation Internationalization Fellowship for two years. She is an anthropologist working primarily on processes of political and social change as these are lived by the people caught up in them. She holds a PhD from the University of Copenhagen. Her ZMO project examines how Syrian refugees in Germany and Denmark activate memories of Syria to navigate in relation to host state authorities and how this shapes their political subjectivities.

In February 2024, Dr [Arpan Roy](#), an anthropologist researching in the Middle East, joined ZMO as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow. He currently investigates the experience of Evangelical missionary work in the Arab world. Prior to joining ZMO, he held a postdoctoral research fellowship at the American Center of Research in Jordan.



Dr [Maria Ketzmerick](#) started in March 2024 as a postdoctoral researcher in the project “Crafting Entanglements”. Her project looks at racialized discourses in the making of the Cold War and uses Berlin as a locale for South-South Entanglements. She studied Political Science, International Law, and Global Studies and worked at the collaborative research centre Dynamics of Security at the University of Marburg and at the Chair for Sociology of Africa at the University of Bayreuth. Her research focuses on topics within post- and decolonial security research in Central Africa in a regional, transnational, and global context, as well as on approaches of (sociological) peace and conflict research.



Dr [Leila Almazova](#) started at ZMO in March 2024 with a two-year project on “The Search of a ‘New Orthodoxy’. Islamic Education in Post-Soviet Tatarstan”. She studied at Kazan State University, Department of History. In 2002, she finished her PhD on “The Problem of Human Existence in the

Tatar-Muslim Philosophy (at the beginning of the 20th century)”. Her expertise is in Muslim thought, Islamic education, and Islam in the Russian Federation. From 2012 to 2016, she worked as Executive Director at the Resource Center for the Development of Islamic Education and Islamic Studies at Kazan Federal University, Tatarstan.



Between March and August 2024, Dr [Laure Guirguis](#) is staying at ZMO. She is a historian who works on the political and cultural history of the Arab world, with a focus on Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. She has been working on sectarianism in and on the New Left in the Arab world. Currently, she is an Alexander von Humboldt fellow at the Lateinamerika-Institut, the FU Berlin, and ZMO, where she is launching a new project on the politics of art between the Arab world and South America.

ZMO welcomes two Visiting Research Fellows in the first half of the year. Dr [Murat Arpacı](#) (Erzincan B.Y. University, Turkey) joins the Representation of the Past unit in March and April 2024. His research topic is “Colonial Past in the Present: Orientalism, Patriarchal Discourse and Gender in Turkish Delight Sculpture”. Dr [Marion Breteau](#) (American University of Kuwait) participates in the Age and Generation unit in May and June 2024 and works on “Connectivity and Domestic Work in the Gulf States”.

FAREWELL In February 2024, Dr [Ritam Sengupta](#) started as Assistant Professor at the Jindal School of Art and Architecture at the O.P. Jindal Global University at Sonapat, India. Dr [Samuel Wright](#) will join Plaksha University in India in May 2024 as Associate Professor in Humanities and Social Sciences.

[Hanna Janatka](#) left ZMO at the end of 2023 as a PhD candidate in Islamic Studies at BGSMCS. As a Gerda Henkel Foundation Doctoral Fellow, she is working on the Arab exile press and Arab nationalism in interwar Europe.

Dr [Canay Şahin](#) was ZMO research fellow between September 2021 and January 2024. She is re-

turning to her job in the Department of Economics at Yıldız Technical University in Turkey and will continue her recent research on the transformation of landed property in the 19th-century Ottoman Black Sea.

From March 2024 onwards, Dr [Juliane Schumacher](#), a former member of the research unit Environment and Justice, works as Senior Consultant for a communications agency in Berlin, specialized in science and sustainability communication.

ALUMNI NEWS On 31 October 2023, [Bello Adamou Mahamadou](#), a former PhD fellow in the research project “Religion, Morality and Boko in West Africa: Students Training for a Good Life” (Remoboko, Leibniz Junior Research Group, ZMO 2018–2023), defended his doctoral thesis “Religious dynamics at the Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey (UAM): Analysis of interactions between Salafi and Pentecostal students” at the Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey.

[Ali Dogan](#), a PhD fellow of the former research group Learning Intelligence, successfully defended his PhD thesis “The raison d’être of intelligence agencies. West Germany’s (BND) and Iraq’s (JMA) foreign intelligence agencies during the Cold War (1969–1990)” on 12 February 2024.

Congratulations!

AWARDS [Nikolaos Olma](#) was awarded the 2024 Heinrich Winkelmann Fellowship by the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum (DBM). The fellowship funds a three-month research stay at DBM, during which Nikolaos will explore the epistemic injustices that characterized state-sanctioned industrial uranium mining around the globe in the early post-World War II era.

On 1st January, [Kai Kresse](#) received an award for his research on Swahili culture and society from the Muslim University of Morogoro, Tanzania. The distinction was part of the university’s annual international conference celebrating Swahili language and culture. Other awardees were Abdilatiff Abdalla and Ibrahim Noor Shariff.

In March 2023, [Denys Brylov](#) and his colleague Tatyana Kalen-

ichenko were awarded a Badge of Honor and Letter of Thankfulness from the United States Institute of Peace for their work with religious organizations to resolve the intra-Orthodox conflict in Ukraine and generally to increase the peacemaking capacity of religious organizations in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The award was presented by Peter Mandaville, Senior Advisor for the USIP's religion and inclusive societies team.

NEW FORMATS ZMO'S knowledge transfer started into 2024 with the launch of "ZMO kitchen talks" (<https://www.zmo.de/kitchen-talks>), a monthly podcast produced by ZMO fellows in the institute's kitchen – the heart of ZMO. Over a coffee or tea, the hosts meet with their guests to talk about academic fieldwork, methodology, and the most recent research at our institute. Hilal Alkan, the guest of the first episode, spoke with Lena Herzog-Sounaye about her ethnographic fieldwork on Turkish migrants' relationships to their plants and how planting influences their homemaking practices. In the second episode, Stefan Kirmse shared his archival work experiences in countries of the former Soviet Union with the moderator Noura Chalati and the listeners. Anandita Bajpai invited ZMO visiting fellow Olutayo Adesina from Nigeria for a



kitchen talk, exploring with him the present-day meanings of anthropology and history. The podcast was initiated by Lena Herzog-Sounaye, Noura Chalati, and Lena Wassermeier and continues monthly with new guests and insights. It can be listened to on our website or through Spotify.



Another new format is the recently launched ZMO Blog. (<https://www.zmo.de/wissenstransfer/zmo-blog>). It opens a space to publish texts from the first-person perspective that arise in and around the research process. This includes the experiences of guests and students at ZMO, comments on current topics, and other personal text forms. The first contributions revolve around the situation in Israel and Palestine after 7 October 2023. Samuli Schielke shared his field diary from 7 October, when he was on a research trip in Dubai. Former ZMO associate Elad Giladi wrote about the situation in Israel, while ZMO affiliate Randa Abubakr reflected on her Cairo University students' perspectives on the war in Gaza. *Elisa Nobel-Dilaty*

ZMO DIGITAL With support from the Berlin Senate, the Digital Research Infrastructure Development at ZMO project made significant strides in 2023! A new *Open Science Policy* ensures that research data is handled in accordance with

FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) principles and provides researchers with best practices. A transformative agreement as a member of the Leibniz consortium signed with Taylor&Francis further underscores the commitment to Open Access, ensuring that researchers can publish in high-impact journals without financial barriers for the coming 3 years. Over 17,000 items from the ZMO Special Collection are now searchable in the ZMO Repository and platforms such as the German Digital Library. A new scanning station speeds up digitization. While complete documentation and storage present ongoing challenges, the project is laying the groundwork for the use of the comprehensive special collection at ZMO.

The *Islam in West Africa* website (see p. 9) is combining diverse data for researchers and the public, with continuous development ensuring its relevance. Tech upgrades like improved security and additional staff training empower ZMO to manage its digital infrastructure effectively, but long-term sustainability requires addressing personnel needs. Overall, the project laid a strong foundation for a modern digital research environment at ZMO. *Alisher Karabaev*

CALENDAR

See <https://www.zmo.de/en/events>

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