Christians and Muslims in Africa. Towards a Framework for the Study of Multi-Religious Settings

Summer School, ZMO, Berlin, 14-20 July 2016

Convened by Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University/ZMO), Abdoulaye Sounaye (ZMO), Marloes Janson (SOAS), Kai Kresse (Columbia University/visiting fellow BGSMCS)

Call for Applications

Across Africa, Christians and Muslims co-exist in shared settings, defining themselves in distinction to each other and at times engaging in heavy, violent conflicts, but also being entangled in complicated ways and showing unexpected similarities. In current scholarly research on religion in Africa, the study of Christianity and the study of Islam are thriving, but alas so far these study fields exist more or less independently from each other. This trend is to some extent further enhanced by the recent deployment of distinct anthropologies devoted to separate religious traditions. Scholars with expertise regarding either Christianity or Islam barely engage in conversations with each other. And yet, the long history of encounters between Muslims and Christians – involving a complicated dynamic of becoming similar and asserting difference, of approach and detachment – calls for an encompassing conceptual framework that is devoted to draw out similarities, differences and entanglements. There is need for a broader conceptual umbrella, which entails a comparative orientation, a concern to synthesize the domains of text and doctrine and everyday religious practice, and a combination of historical and ethnographic research. This calls for a multidisciplinary collaboration among scholars from history, religious studies, anthropology, Islamic Studies and the study of world Christianity. Building upon a number of recent scholarly works, it is the central aim

of this summer school to further the development of a conceptual framework for the study of Christianity and Islam in multi-religious settings in Africa, and beyond. We seek to do so by synthesizing conceptual reflection on comparison and comparability in regard to multi-religious settings with detailed historical and ethnographic studies that focus on concrete encounters and interactions among Christians and Muslims in such settings, which also include other religious traditions (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, and so-called traditional religion).

This summer school is an initiative of the project Habitats and Habitus. Politics and Aesthetics of Religious World-Making hosted at the ZMO, which seeks to further the development of comparative approaches to the study of Christians and Muslims in Africa, especially in urban multi-religious settings, and beyond. We would like to invite 20 junior scholars – advanced PhD students and postdocs – whose research focuses on Muslims and Christians in Africa or who study either Muslims or Christians and feel the need to situate their research against a broader comparative horizon. During the summer school, all invited PhD students and postdocs will be expected to present their work and there will be ample formal and informal opportunities to get feedback and engage in discussions. Every day, there will be lectures by senior scholars and thematic panels. Themes addressed will include the question of comparison and comparability in a setting of religious diversity; a critical review of terms denoting religious mixing (from syncretism to assemblage); the articulation of both religions in the public domain; practices of piety in everyday life; convergences and differences regarding attitudes to health, education, and the state; conflict and violence, interfaith dialogue and peace initiatives. The summer school will last for one week, and be held in the premises of the ZMO. We will able to (partly) fund travel costs and accommodation.

Persons interested to attend are required to send a letter of motivation, a cv, a writing sample (for instance a chapter of their dissertation or an article) and an abstract of the paper they intend to present. The deadline is 15 February 2016. Applicants will be notified by 1 March. Please send your application to Birgit Meyer (b.meyer@zmo.de).

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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. They are part of the graduate program of the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies (BGSMCS). 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

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We are able to fund travel costs and stay for a limited number of participants. Participants in graduate programs are encouraged to investigate possibilities of receiving (partial) funds from their own institutions.
Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University, and the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO).