



**'New Man' in Africa, Asia and the Middle East:
Practices, Networks and Mobilization, c. 1910-1960
(International Conference, ZMO 27th – 29th September 2017)**

The 'New Man', here, is understood to encompass a plethora of theoretical constructs as well as social projects closely linked to aspirations of 'progress', modernity and social utopias (or dystopias) that were characteristic of the end of the nineteenth and the earlier part of the twentieth centuries. It was, however, not a 'Western' idea but can be said to have evolved simultaneously in different regions of the world where people were grappling with their own visions of possible futures. The 'New Man' was the idealized type of personality that could be created by way of a deliberate and planned social process. The (historically overloaded) term 'New Man' was not always explicitly used and had certainly fallen out of fashion by the second half of the twentieth century. We have nevertheless opted to use it for this later period as well since the need for large-scale social engineering and the creation of the right type of citizen remained, and occupied a prominent position in late colonial and post-colonial nation-building projects. The methods, goals and relevant categories were transformed but also exhibit continuities that make a comparative exploration worthwhile.

We assume that the 'New Man' as idea and practice of creating a new kind of being fit for the future was a widely popular if not universal undertaking that accompanied projects of modernisation and national movements alike. We further assume that south-south linkages and regional networks were as important as the exchange with Western Europe, Russia or North America. Anti-colonial movements and new Cold War alliances profoundly shaped and changed practices relating to the 'New Man'. As a conceptual container, which despite appearances often included women and especially children, it was related to concrete projects of societal progress that were typically understood to follow a historical telos. It follows that the supposedly most malleable part of the population – youth – often constituted an ideal target for such social experimentation.

This conference is interested in tracing the emergence and shifts in discourse but more particularly in practices surrounding the idea of creating a different kind of human being. We are equally interested in the continuously evolving and changing temporalities and their historical imagination that brought forth, altered and appropriated the idea of a 'New Man' until such time as it receded into the background or was superseded by other concepts.

Being 'new' also meant to be at the forefront of societal progress and, thus, ex-posed to selection. The criteria varied according to the historical context as well as to the concrete understanding about how society functions. Since the 'New Man' should bear particular, if often ill-defined, spiritual/ideological,

mental/attitudinal and bodily characteristics, concrete projects typically targeted this triangle in combination. These projects often became institutionalized, influential and in high demand in times when nothing was sure anymore and everything seemed possible. The 'New Man' was thought of as a vanguard, a force that was already tamed and, thus, itself a potential taming force for all kinds of deviation from the 'right path' to Progress.

The conference puts an explicit emphasis on reception history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and social history. Thus, we are interested in presentations that look at concrete practices of shaping the 'New Man' in Africa, Asia and the Middle East or compare examples from different regions or transfers between them. We seek to explore questions such as: Which kind of south-south or north-south networks disseminated the relevant practical knowledge? Which ruptures and continuities influenced these practices? Was there any reference to earlier ideas (i.e. from the nineteenth century) which be-came common sense or common practice in the twentieth century? How did the dissemination of sports and other distinctly modern bodily performances contribute to such notions? How did cultural productions, such as arts, literature and architecture, visualise and legitimise specific ideas and practices of creating the 'New Man'?

The conference aims to bring together scholars who are specialized in area studies, global history and historical anthropology.