

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

Tuesday, January 31st, 2012, 5 pm

Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong? Islamic Elites, Business and the State in Tajikistan

Lecture by Dr. Tim Epkenhans

'Commanding right and forbidding wrong' is one of the central moral tenets within the Islamic tradition. In contemporary Tajikistan, Hanafi Sunni religious authorities frequently refer in their sermons and writings to the broader tradition of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' as an ethical(-religious) but also societal obligation for Tajikistan's Muslims. The societal dimension of this tradition especially responds to the urgent social grievances in the Tajik society: social and economic exclusion, labor migration, poverty, corruption, rapidly declining health and education services etc. Whilst Muslim authorities project concepts of social justice and 'legitimate' social order for their lay religious audience, they cultivate complex social and economic relations with representatives of the dominating elites and the state in Tajikistan. Politicians and business men frequently present themselves as *murids* (committed followers) of a religious authority, thus capitalizing on the latter's religious charisma and eventually generating legitimacy and authority among localized social groups and networks.

My presentation will discuss three prominent representatives of the religious field, their interaction with the economic and political field as well as their own vested economic interests (and activities) and how they represent these activities to their lay religious followers.

Tim Epkenhans is Juniorprofessor for Islamic and Iranian Studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-University in Freiburg since 2009. He studied in Münster, Bamberg, Cairo and Tehran. Between 2002 and 2009 he worked in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan for the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Among his recent publications are "Defining normative Islam: Some remarks on contemporary Islamic Thought in Tajikistan – Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda's *Sharia and Society*", published in *Central Asian Survey* 2011, and "Islam in the Security Discourse of the Post-Soviet republics of Central Asia" in the *OSCE Yearbook 2010*. He is currently working on autobiographical narratives of the Tajik Civil War.

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:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin-Nikolassee
www.zmo.de

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung