

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

Tuesday, April 24th, 2012, 5 pm

The Politics of Culture and the Space for Islam: Soviet and Post-Soviet Imaginaries in Uzbekistan

Lecture by Johan Rasanayagam

What is the space for being Muslim in Uzbekistan? Or for being Christian, particularly for converts from the 'traditionally' Muslim indigenous Central Asian population? Within the Soviet Union religious expression was rigorously regulated and monitored, a situation which has continued after Uzbekistan became an independent state in 1991. Both regimes of governance, in their different ways, have sought to regulate social space and to define 'correct' citizen subjects. The New Soviet Person was to be an enlightened, rational subject who had internalised an ethic of socialist modernity which left no space for religious belief. This has given way to the *komil'inson*, the 'perfect person' constructed in Uzbekistan's 'Ideology of National Independence' as the embodiment of a cultural and spiritual Uzbek authenticity. Postindependence state ideology posits a return to an authentic Central Asian cultural and spiritual heritage, suppressed during Soviet rule, within which a specifically Central Asian Islam is encompassed. This paper examines the distinctive social and political imaginaries produced within Soviet and postindependence state ideologies, and how the latter emerges out of, but is in significant ways also radically a departure from, the Soviet experience. It explores how these imaginaries shape the possibilities for being Muslim. The paper also looks at the space for being Muslim, or Christian for that matter, outside state ideology. Rather than seeing such a space in terms of domination and resistance, I am taking up the concept of 'irony' recently employed by Maria Louw in relation to being Muslim in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. Where 'resistance' posits an either/or choice, were the subject either surrenders to or subverts a discursive regime, or perhaps simulates acceptance while concealing an authentic subjectivity behind a mask of compliance, irony allows us to talk about the ambiguities of operating within multiple frames simultaneously, without insisting on a stance of either belief or disbelief.

Johan Rasanayagam is Lecturer of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. He has conducted research in Uzbekistan, Central Asia and his research interests include Islam, morality and the political. He is author of *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; and he is guest editor of a special issue of *Central Asian Survey* entitled *Post-Soviet Islam: An Anthropological Perspective*, 25(3), 2006.

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:

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften

Invalidenstraße 118, Room 507
Entrance at Schlegelstraße 26

D-10115 Berlin
<http://iaaw.hu-berlin.de/islam>

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung