

Islam and Citizenship: Perspectives from South Asia and the Middle East

Conference held at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen

11 November 2016, CeMIS Boardroom

Organizers: Radhika Gupta, Patrick Eisenlohr, and Nandagopal R. Menon

The notion of cultural citizenship points to the fact that there is no known polity in which legal citizenship is factually decoupled from the performance of ethnic, ethno-linguistic, and religious signs of belonging, or a combination of all above, further reworked through social stratification, even in nation-states that present themselves as highly inclusive. This conference focuses on the nexus of religion and citizenship, taking the issue of Islam and citizenship as an example. Drawing on a range of studies from South Asia and the Middle East, we address the entanglements between Islam and political belonging.

One of the consequences of the nexus between religion and citizenship is that contemporary religious activism is concerned with questions of political inclusion and exclusion. For example, religious activists engage in discourses, public performances and media campaigns that fuse notions of pious selfhood, service to the public, and claims for inclusion in the nation and other political communities. It has therefore become more and more difficult to separate contemporary political transformations from religious activism that touches on such questions and claims for inclusion and exclusion. Transnational religious networks can be especially illustrative in this respect. Often the same globally active religious organizations and reformist movements have tailored their strategies to the different national contexts in which they operate.

The problem of cultural citizenship as the necessary supplementation of legal citizenship is also closely tied to the public sphere. This is because cultural citizenship revolves around the performance of particular social and cultural markers or indices. It is a matter of public performance subject to ratification or withholding of recognition. It therefore comes as no surprise that public performance and contemporary media practices feature prominently in contests about citizenship. At the conference we will also discuss the multiple intersections between Islam and other forms of social differentiation such as stratification, ethnic and ethno-linguistic markers. Taking a transregional perspective, we aim to discuss interconnections and divergences within and between South Asia and the Middle East with respect to Islam and citizenship.

09:15 - Welcome

09:45-12:00 - Citizenship and Beyond

Simon Fuchs (University of Cambridge): Striving for a Sunni State: Anti-Shi'i Sectarianism and Belonging in Pakistan

Radhika Gupta (CeMIS, University of Göttingen): Beyond Citizenship: Predicaments of Belonging Among the Shi'a Muslims of Kargil

David Strohl (MPI, Göttingen): Serving the Imam, Serving the Nation: Religious Philanthropy, Associationalism, and Citizenship in an Indian Muslim Community

Discussant: Raphael Susewind (MPI, Göttingen)

12:15-13:15: Lunch

13:15-15:00 – The Politics of Religious Difference

Sinem Adar (Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Göttingen): Religion, Electoral Politics and National Membership in Turkey, 1923-1980

Seçil Dağtaş (University of Waterloo): “We Are One”: Political and Aesthetic Representation of Ethno-Religious Difference at Turkey’s Border with Syria

Discussant: Jeremy Walton (MPI, Göttingen)

15:00-15:30 – Coffee break

15:30-17:15 – Genres of Belonging

Ali Khan (Ashoka University, New Delhi): Rhetorics of Belonging Amongst North Indian Muslims, 1850-1950

Nandagopal R. Menon (CeMIS, University of Göttingen): Apocalypse Now: Polemics, Critique and Modes of Muslim Belonging in South India

Discussant: Patrick Eisenlohr (CeMIS, University of Göttingen)

17:15-18:00 – Reflections and Discussion

Lamia Karim (University of Oregon)

18.30 Dinner for conference participants at L'Osteria, Kurze-Geismar-Straße 9.