English Summaries

Special Focus: Borders, Thresholds, Transfers – Formation of Islamic Fields in Context

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Introduction: Borders, Thresholds, Transfers – the Formation of Islamic Fields in Context

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This introduction outlines the theoretical framework of the articles of this volume, which deal with practices of demarcation, differentiation and relocation of boundaries in fields related to Islam. Starting from a constructivist perspective in the tradition of Fredrik Barth and recent research on ethnicity, it takes social boundaries not as something natural, but rather considers them socially produced. Culture has recently more and more come to be understood as something bound to processes of demarcation centered around the question of identity. The contributions to this volume grapple with this perspective in their analysis of various case studies concerning contemporary Islam.

At the same time, the papers reflect the fact that the practices of scholars of religion also entail interaction with the field of research itself, and they may therefore become involved in the production of symbolic and social boundaries themselves: the boundaries scholars draw by classifying and labeling people and their practices may at times become efficacious within religious fields. While Barth (1969) originally encouraged a focus on boundaries rather than on „cultural stuff“, some contributors to this volume attempt to concentrate on the constructive dimension of cultural practices themselves, without making claims about boundaries necessarily accompanying them or forming the actual preoccupation of the actors. Rather, cultural practices are analyzed as producing relationships, or, in Barth's words, as „internal processes of convergence“ (Barth 1994, 18).

Taking seriously the fact that the ways in which scholars describe difference and boundaries within their field of research may have repercussions for this very field leads us to the more general question of the relationship between the study of religion and its objects. Although analytically distinguishable from each other,

religious and academic discourses are understood in this article as spheres within an interdependent and entangled continuum, in which boundaries are never completely fixed or impermeable. As it is ultimately only through the construction of religion as something distinct that an entire academic field can be justified for its exploration, the academic study of religion has always been involved in demarcating religion, and therefore generating or reproducing specifics of religion. The construction of Islam or Muslim identities is therefore located at the convergence of different discursive fields: as a consequence, boundaries move into sight not only as tools for political strategies, but also as zones of contact, thresholds and sites of transfers and knowledge production.

Therefore, the insistence on a clear separation between the academic field and the religious field has to be treated as a claim rather than a reality: as research on religion is not done in isolation, students of religion are called on to scrutinize their own roles as gatekeepers on the threshold. In this relationship, various mechanisms must be considered. On the one hand, uncritical reproduction of emic religious classification can stabilize and naturalize existent power structures and lead to distorted descriptions. On the other hand, academic discourse can supply religious voices with additional resources. From this perspective, the study of religion is inevitably political, as Bruce Lincoln (1996) has pointed out. As a methodological consequence, academic contributions to the construction of Islam should allow for the plurality of voices in the religious field, by making power relations visible and by destabilizing elite discourses as well as patterns of exclusion and obscuration. Where ambiguities are being concealed and demarcations naturalized or sacralized, students of religion should point out the interested agents. From a critical constructivist perspective, therefore, empirical case studies become subversive interventions into discourses that aim to represent certain relations as established facts. However, identificatory boundaries may serve a variety of uses: not only as tools of dominance, but also as weapons of marginalized groups. A critical assessment of nativist constructions of "Alevi religion" or "Uyghur Islam" therefore needs to make visible the specific backgrounds and options of the actors involved. In all these constellations, students of religion, as actors on the threshold, must reflect upon the possible transfers they are enabling and their own contribution to the construction of social realities they are making through this. Scholarship is challenged to make its own transfers into the religious field transparent in a self-critical way and to illuminate the power structures at work: as boundaries and thresholds function as hubs of knowledge production, research should not stop there.

Religion and Religious Tradition: Discourses of Distinction on the Boundaries of Islam

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Any engagement with groups at the margins of the Islamic discursive tradition requires consideration of the issue of the Islamicity of certain practices, ideas, and entire communities that are or have been contested among Muslims in different times and places. Negotiations of the boundaries of Islam, and disputes about the acceptability of certain interpretations as “Islamic” are, however, not only part of emic discourses, but are also reflected in etic discourses on Islam. At the outset, this paper is concerned with the question of how to meaningfully represent, from a metalanguage position, object language discourses of religious differentiation within the Islamic tradition. This necessarily requires engagement with the intricate dynamics between object language and metalanguage.

As a first step, the article discusses Talal Asad’s conception of Islamic orthodoxy and its underlying concept of discursive tradition. The focus here is on how to develop a metalanguage about Islam as a historical reality, without intervening normatively in the discourse on Islam. While the discursive framing of Islam constituted an important intervention in the academic study of Islam, Asad’s recognition of Quran and Hadith as authoritative reference points for the negotiation of Islamic orthodoxy in Muslim discourses has not remained unchallenged. The article explores this criticism and argues for a dynamic and open concept of religious tradition that does not presuppose specific authoritative reference points for the definition of a particular religion.

Discussing examples from North American Sufi discourses and the modern Turkish discourse on religion, with particular attention to the Alevi case, the text examines, as a second step, dynamics of object language boundary setting and discursive confinements of “Islam” as they are produced at the boundaries of the Islamic tradition. Drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of the religious field and the constitutive role of heresy in the formation of religious orthodoxy, this section addresses the dynamics through which Islam is being reified in two specific religio-political fields. This necessitates engagement with the socio-historical environment in which inner-religious negotiations of the true meaning of religion and the limits of the licit take place. Both the North American and the Turkish examples reveal that emic discourses are often deeply ambiguous about boundaries and much more dynamic than many etic categorizations of religion. A static concept of religion allows for three main ways of positioning marginal groups in relation

to a given religious field: inside, outside, and in-between. Since such a positioning (often articulated with notions such as heterodoxy and syncretism) depends on a reification of the reference point through which this positioning is undertaken, its analytical value is debatable.

Inspired by the work of Daniel Boyarin, the final step of the article introduces a dynamic concept of religious tradition in contradistinction to the static family tree approach. The focus is thereby on entanglements as well as the varying degrees of social and discursive densification of religious traditions. The notion of densification places the focus on the level of consciousness that a tradition has developed with regard to its limits and the extent to which it has solidified its social boundaries. The heuristic goal of this conceptualization is to enable the etic representation of socially and conceptually less densified formations and to distinguish them from traditions with a higher degree of densification (religions). The distinction between religious traditions and religions according to their degree of densification allows for a more dynamic analysis of processes of religionization than comparatively static notions of syncretism, orthodoxy/heterodoxy, and so forth, which ultimately remain connected to the family tree model of religion. The proposed dynamic notion of religious tradition follows scholarship that shifts the perspective from boundaries to contact zones (Pratt) and from influences to conversations (Boyarin). Against the diachronic and synchronic hierarchization inherent in the family tree model, it allows for articulation of the messiness that can constitute the relationship between (religious) traditions, especially those with a low degree of densification.

Interreligious Dialogue as Boundary Work

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The background to this presentation is the Dialogos Study (Klinkhammer et al. 2011), which analyzed a quantitative and qualitative survey of 132 Christian-Muslim dialogue-groups, mainly grassroots groups, in order to identify their aims and principles of operation. The empirical results of the study will be revisited by making use of both a structural anthropological and a socio-psychological approach. Overall, the results indicate that the dialogue groups largely established a distinct culture of interreligious encounter. The groups worked autonomously and individually, without any strict connection to related Christian or Muslim institutions, although to a certain degree critically relating to the discourses taking place within such institutions. In our sample, there were no dialogue groups in which mem-

bers considered themselves official delegates of their institutionalized confession; rather, they prefer to consider the dialogue-group as a way of creating direct, “authentic” encounters of members with each other. Furthermore, these groups have found particular issues through which they feel connected (e.g. “Abrahamic religions”, “Monotheism”, “protection of creation”) and new spaces (e.g. public squares, town halls) in which they create new common rituals. The question is: Do these interreligious dialogues neutralize the existing boundaries between these religious communities, or do they supersede them by creating a new uniformity/unity? Can we even still speak of religious boundaries? Or are they negotiated and established in a new way?

The anthropologist Gerd Baumann identified three “Grammars of identity/alterity”: the “Segmentary Grammar”, the “Grammar of Orientalization”, and the “Grammar of Encompassment”. All three grammars are easily recognized in the negotiations of interreligious dialogues. According to its common aim of searching for shared values, in interreligious dialogues the segmented grammar is most central (e.g. “Abrahamic religion”). This segmented grammar is most crucial in dialogue groups where, beneath the top common metaphorical level/language, a negative orientalizing grammar is at work (e.g. “civilizing Islam”). This is also the case in groups where the grammar of encompassing takes the form of a strategy of co-optation (e.g. “people of the book”, mission) rather than of a process of integration. Furthermore, Baumann emphasizes that the grammars do not only work on a binary level but a ternary one, insofar as there always is an implicitly determined third collective “them”, which is totally excluded. This can be clearly demonstrated for interreligious dialogue, where e.g. fundamentalists or non-religious groups are the declared or determined excluded others.

The determination of identification and alteration certainly does not always proceed without conflicts. Therefore, in the following the author focuses on the conditions for governing these conflicts. According to socio-psychological knowledge, processes of formation and demarcation of groups provide a constitutional fundament for identity formation in general. The members of the in-group use categories of de- and upvaluation in order to demarcate the out-group. However the “mere contact hypothesis” (Pettigrew 2008) claims that every continuous contact between groups reduces the potential for actual conflicts between them. Socio-psychological approaches have identified similar structures of boundary making between groups like Baumann portrays, and they also assume that the solution of intergroup conflicts is only obtainable through a flexible shifting of boundaries (“individualization”, “cross-categorization”, and “superior-categorization”). However, this reconfiguration of boundaries needs the support of public institutions and authorities, otherwise it will generate new aspects of conflict. The latter is illustrated in the article via the example of the Evangelical Church in

Germany (EKD), which aimed to govern Christian-Muslim grassroots dialogue activities through an official statement (2006).

Considering the dynamics of religion in interreligious dialogues, the author evaluates the involvement of researchers of the study of religion critically and emphasizes that interreligious dialogues are a prolific field for research on the changes of recent religious culture.

Ummah – Be Part of it! Community-Building and Social Boundaries within Pop-Islamic Youth Culture in Germany

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The starting point of this paper is the observation of the widespread impact of the concept of the *ummah*, the community of believers, on Pop-Islamic youth culture in Germany: it is present in imprints on streetwear fashion produced by the label „Style-Islam“, is found in pop and hip-hop “*nasheed*” songs and at huge Islamic youth events and meetings, which aim to establish an experience-oriented “*ummah feeling*”. Building upon analysis of this, the paper examines how individual needs for orientation and belonging, especially in the face of migration, together with processes of othering and social attribution by the German society, as well as Islamic identity politics, which rely on community-building, are intertwined with and have an impact on the construction of social borders. The data is based on fieldwork within the Islamic youth organization *Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e. V. (MJD)*, which plays a central role in Pop-Islamic youth culture in Germany. The notion of „Pop-Islam“ refers to a transnational trend in Islamic youth culture that is characterized by a remix of lifestyles, as the combination of practicing Islam consistently in accordance with the concept of *wasatīya*, while struggling for participation and success in Western society, creates a pop culture which conveys particular Islamic identity politics.

Examining the meaning of the *ummah* within this youth culture will complement previous studies, which have especially explored processes of othering widely discussed as a “muslimization of debates”. The construct of the *ummah* can be interpreted as a hybrid and ambivalent collective identity, which negotiates inclusion and exclusion with regards to different social contexts, and which establishes and reinforces social borders within complex social power relations.

The paper analyzes the importance of the confrontation between constructions of belonging and processes of individualization. A sense of belonging is considered to be a matter of one’s own choice, while the *ummah* is imagined as

an idealized and ontologized community of sisters and brothers. As in every youth culture there is fluctuation in its membership, but also an inner circle of members displaying high commitment. This commitment is bound to ideal conceptions of Muslim identity, as well as based on a specific understanding of Islam. Islam is believed to be an all-embracing lifestyle, valid at all times and in every space, therefore an *Islamization of lifestyle* is a means to construct, negotiate and represent belonging to the ummah. The concept of ummah is intended to serve the development and preservation of a true Islamic identity and the lifestyle that represents it. It meets the needs of young Muslims who face discrimination and experience social exclusion. But belonging to this community is also connected to the call to become an "authentic", practicing Muslim according to the reform-oriented Islamic understanding of *wasatīya*, which is transmitted by the Pop-Islamic scene. It establishes social boundaries, yet also creates spaces for negotiating thresholds and transitions. While producing a sense of belonging by orienting one's lifestyle towards Islamic dos and don'ts – especially in terms of gender roles and cultural as well as socio-political activities – young Muslims both distinguish themselves from non-Muslim society and, at the same time, claim participation as Muslims, with reference to Tariq Ramadan. If this social positioning as a collective Islamic identity policy at first glance follows the dichotomous pattern of social debates, more precise analysis reveals the fragility, context-boundness and contradictory hybridity of this identity, as well as the complexity of social demarcation and social formation processes which go along with this. This propagation of a German-Muslim identity can be described as identity politics, which negotiate proximity and distance to German society, on the one hand, to fulfill the duty of *da'wa* (invitation to Islam) and individual needs of recognition and success, and, on the other hand, to maintain an Islamic identity which claims moral superiority. Pop-Islamic identity politics also generate a positioning within the Islamic field itself: whilst trying to integrate other Muslim traditions, there is also a clear demarcation from liberal, traditional, literalist or even jihadist Islamic positions.

This paper demonstrates that it is not only social attributions on the basis of exclusion and devaluation processes which contribute to the construction of a group mentality among young Muslims in Germany, but that discursive processes of community building, through the concept of the ummah, similarly generate intended habitual identifications. Belonging to the ummah offers orientation, affiliation and agency. At the same time, however, it is accompanied by impositions of a sort, because an Islamic lifestyle goes along with struggles that are seen as unavoidable sacrifices, especially regarding finding a job as a hijab-wearing Muslim or finding a spouse whilst considering one's own needs, expectations of parents, and also Islamic dos and don'ts regarding dating.

The construction of a community is in this context linked both to the creation of distinctions and social boundaries, and also to a collective dimension, which is ambivalent and contradictory.¹ Being Islamic is promoted as the central part of one's identity within a hybrid identity construct that keeps social boundaries more or less permeable, and is given negotiating leeway, whilst at the same time not compromising questions of specific Islamic identity politics.²

Shiism, Alevism and Ehlibeyt Islam: Boundaries and Articulation among Contemporary Shii-Alevi Cultures in Germany and Turkey

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This paper analyzes cases of Shii and Alevi Muslim groups in Germany, Turkey, and the transnational space in between, in which seemingly stable “confessional” identities of these groups are subverted, refused and/or overcome. During my research on various Shii communities of practice in Germany, the question of the specifically Shii character of these groups arose: on the one hand, some of my interlocutors refused the label “Shii” for themselves or their practices, considering it political, and instead preferred to call themselves “Muslim”. On the other hand, I also came across forms and articulations of Islam that refer to and engage with semiotic and ritual repertoires from both Shii and Alevi contexts at the same time – similarly urging us to question the analytical value of confessionalized language so widespread in Islamic studies. Examples gained through unstructured interviews and participant observation in ritual practices, such as the 2015 celebrations for Ghadir Khumm among Shii and Alevi communities in Germany, show that boundaries between Shii and Alevi appear to be more important to scientific efforts of systematization than to the actors under consideration themselves. These actors, amongst whom are included charismatic figures important in linking and keeping up networks between Turkey and Europe, draw on common practices and a shared repertoire of symbols to underline the importance of a moral and genealogical belonging to the Prophet's family, the *ehlibeyt*. Such articulations of Islam that emphasize people's belonging to these *ehlibeyt*, have already been studied since Marshall Hodgson's classic “When did the early Shi'a

¹ Jenkins, Richard, *Social Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008).

² Tariq Ramadan, *Die Muslime im Westen. Aufbauen und Mitgestalten* (Berlin: Green Palace, 2003), 26–50.

become sectarian". Hogdson also hints at the widespread nature of "Alid Piety" and the veneration of the prophet's immediate offspring not only among Shiis, but also among other Muslims, including Sunnis. While these insights have been taken up by students of southern and southeastern Muslim practices, as well as by historians of Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire, such forms of Ehlibeyt-Islam, as I call it here, have as yet remained outside the scholarly focus for contemporary and European contexts.

Making use of Frederick Barth's constructivist insights into ethnicity and Stuart Hall's theory of articulation, the paper first describes and analyses the practices of boundary making and identification. It argues that a mere focus on boundary work does not help to come to terms with these forms of Islam and their specific use of different semiotic and ritual repertoires. Rather, the relation of boundary work on the one hand, and the practice of identification on the other, has to be taken into consideration: an understanding of the above-mentioned Ehlibeyt-centered forms of Islam as "articulations" captures their character as bringing elements from different discursive traditions together. Such a focus on a combination of these repertoires also accommodates Stuart Hall's idea of 'articulation', which gains its analytical value through the two-fold semantics of the term: 'articulation' brings with it the notion of utterance, and likewise refers to a combination of two elements. Thus, the term enables us to analyze the combination of different such 'elements' (such as, e.g., semiotic repertoire, symbols, terminology, practices), and to answer the question of how identity is constructed through such acts of articulation – complementary to acts of drawing boundaries. As such, by discussing examples of Ehlibeyt-centered articulations of Islam, the paper also addresses theoretical problems that arise, considering both the relationship between boundary making, on the one hand, and acts of identification, on the other, as well as the relation of emic discourse and labeling practices to scientific, emic categories and terminology.

The term *Ahl al-Bayt* Islam, understood as a specific 'articulation', therefore enables us to grasp practices and forms of Islam among different Ali-oriented islamicate currents, such as Alevis and Twelver Shiis, which rather focus on identification as Ehlibeyt instead of emphasizing 'confessional' boundaries regarding history, dogma or practice. These articulations, found in Germany, Turkey and the transnational space, appear incommensurable with either 'sectarian' boundaries or analytical categories of the same vein. They therefore require an analytical and linguistic register that operates beyond essentialized notions of confessional categories within islamicate traditions.

Additional Articles

Place Names as Source Material in the Study of Religions

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Taking its starting point from current Anglophone landscape theory (esp. W. J. T. Mitchell), the paper highlights a class of source material that has been notably neglected in the discourse of Comparative Religion to date: place names. Especially in the context of the so-called ‘spatial turn’ and in the area of the ‘aesthetics of religion’ (*Religionsästhetik*), studying toponymic material can make fundamental contributions to current debates. The paper gives an overview of some central aspects of this class of source material that can be of direct relevance to research in Comparative Religion, with the hope that this will contribute to giving this material a more prominent position in the research discourse. In particular, the paper, in order to provide an overview over central aspects of place names that could be particularly pertinent to the study of religions, proposes the following hypotheses:

A. In diachronic perspective, place names can serve as sources for historical spatialities of religions.

B. In synchronic perspective, place names reflect central aspects of the presence of religions in geographical space.

(1) Place names can serve as mnemonic pegs (*Speicherungsmedium des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* in the parlance of German memory studies, after Jan and Aleida Assmann). As mnemonic pegs, they contribute to filling geographical space with associations. In doing so, place names can give a very concrete presence to aspects of religions and thus contribute to shaping the world of everyday life. They can make aspects of religion pervasive in the spaces of this everyday life and can make important contributions towards creating a feeling of being at home, especially in the sense highlighted by the humanist geography of Yi-Fu Tuan.

(2) By giving them a presence in geographical space, toponyms can be conducive to naturalizing aspects of religious world orders, and can contribute to providing orientation and to coping with contingency.

(3) At the same time, place names are not only media for conveying religious meaning, but also serve as reference points for geographical orientation. As such, they are used by many members of any given community in a very pragmatic fashion. This pragmatic use has the consequence that place names as such can

be much more stable than the religious semantics or worldviews associated with them. Thus, place names can outlive their religions – and by doing so, become catalysts of invention for new ‘traditions’.

(4) Place names, by being able to give a place in geographical space to several different worldviews at the same time, also document conditions of coexistence of different religious systems. In this way, they can be testimonies to situations of religious pluralism.

(5) When the coexistence of different religions or worldviews fails, however, place names can also become focal points of conflicts. The toponymic material can be highly pertinent for analyzing situations where such conflicts are articulated by drawing on the vocabulary of a religious discourse.

The paper illustrates these hypotheses by drawing on a range of examples mainly selected from the northwestern European cultures of Iceland and Gaelic-speaking Ireland. While the state of research does not yet allow to propose a comprehensive ‘theory of religious place names’, I still hope that the paper is able to highlight the potential of a so far strongly under-studied class of material, and to offer some directions that could be explored by future research.

Religion and Urbanity: A New Perspective on Urbanized Religion

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In the light of present-day urbanization, the paper takes a fresh look at religion in the cities of the ancient Mediterranean. The widespread model of “polis” or “civic religion” is checked against its origins in Numa Fustel de Coulanges’s *La cité antique* of 1864. The re-reading of this work lays open the deficit in the widespread model of coextension of political dominion and identity with religious practices and identity. Fustel offers a much more complex model of multiple layers and divergent directions of religious communication and loyalty. The logic of Fustel’s argument cannot be shortened to keeping the strength and obligatory force of “public” religion, i.e. religion on the level of the city, without acknowledging the even more fundamental character of the social levels underneath. How a city could function beyond a power structure kept up by sheer force is the basic question Fustel tried to answer, and the rich evidence for religious practices was not the answer to the question, but the curious fact to be explained. Here, however, Fustel started to give answers that he himself did not follow through as his own solution to the problem turned the city into a transitional phase. This quickly shifted his own interest from the question of stability to one of decline, from the

question of the ongoing relevance of the basal units to the universalistic transcending of the city.

The main points to be taken home from the reading of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges are the religious creativity of individuals, the centrality of religious practices and beliefs as socially inclusive and exclusivist strategies, the continuation of practices and (implied) conceptions across levels of social aggregations, the co-presence of institutions and actions of these different levels within the city, and finally the heterogeneity of the imaginaries entertained by co-present inhabitants.

Recent urban studies have focused on the very complexity of cities, not only in terms of functions and services offered or the diversity of their populations. From different angles, this has been described as the overlapping of different networks, the different groups' differences in making urban space, diverse agents' different appropriations of spaces as "*espace vécu*". From a similar starting point, those approaches to the history of cities that are focusing on economic factors stress the diversity, the division of labour and the hindrances of exchange that need to be overcome. In such a type of narrative, dominant in recent studies on today's cities, religion is a tool for the urban aspirations of inhabitants or migrants to the city, often in contrast with established religion. In contrast, narratives focusing on the political dimension in "early cities" presume hierarchy instead of heterarchy as the default situation. Urban space is created top-down, helped by religion. Religion is a resource administered by elites and rulers enlarging their power by monopolizing the alliance with even more powerful agents. Here, strangely enough, it is taken for granted that the acceptance of this partial alliance was fully interiorized by the powerless, so that they feel compelled into obedience, thus simply denying the problem that Fustel tried to solve.

Against this backdrop, a new concept of "urbanized religion" is proposed. In difference to "urban religion", "urbanized religion" is introduced as a dynamic concept focusing on change. It is inclusive, permitting analysis of the development of specific religious agency and practices (e.g. neighborhood shrines, theatrical processions; authors and entrepreneurs), specific forms of religious knowledge and imaginaries (imaginative locales; imagined communities, heavenly cities), and societal phenomena such as civic ritual or religious communities in the appropriation, modification and formation of urban space. The leading question is how and how far religion is shaped over time by factors that are characteristic, even if not exclusive, of city-space. Religious change is constituted by the ongoing interaction between space and different agents: temporary inhabitants and voluntary or involuntary immigrants, residents and administrators, people living off religion or employing religion for realizing their urban hopes.