

Vorstellung der Projekte am Forum anlässlich der Auftaktveranstaltung am 10 Okt 2011

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear Senator Zöllner, members of the Forum and, above all, new fellows,

As a cultural anthropologist working on Africa, I have long been struck by the inadequacy of the distinction between area studies geared to parts of the world located outside of the West – Africa, Middle East, Asia, Latin America – and big systematic disciplines that, though spatially unmarked and presented as universal, de facto tend to focus on problems and issues arising in Western societies. How to organize knowledge production and teaching in our globalized – ever more entangled and interdependent – world of the 21st century is a big challenge for scholars in all disciplines.

Internationalization is one of the big catchwords in managing academia, but unfortunately it is often an empty term that entails little more than a call to write and publish in English, and an overall orientation to Anglophone scholarship. This is not enough. A more fundamental move is required that takes seriously actual global entanglements as a starting point for a new vision for knowledge production.

Following up the advice of the Berlin Science Commission to stimulate and develop transregional research and thanks to the financial support of the Berlin Senate, the Forum Transregional Studies started its work in 2009. *Trans* is a key term here: *Trans-regional* stresses the importance of moving beyond the limits of, yet building upon, the strengths of area studies, so as to explore neglected current and historical links between regions – including not only North-South relations, but also relations between, for instance, Africa and Asia. The forum initiative brings researchers from different regions in conversation with each other. The fellows we welcome here today come from all over the world – including Britain, Columbia, Egypt, Holland, Italy, India, Iran, Japan, Morocco, Turkey, US – spending the next academic year in Berlin to engage with each other and Berlin-based researchers.

The forum is also *trans-disciplinary*. Recognizing the importance of synergizing expertise from different disciplines that are kept separate in the normal order of academic institutions, the forum involves young and senior scholars from different backgrounds – as anthropology, architecture, history,

Islamic studies, law, linguistics, literature, religious studies, theology, urban sociology and the arts - in an ongoing conversation and joint research.

And, of course, the forum is *trans-institutional*, cutting across Berlin's universities and research institutions so as to create a new productive and truly international research environment.

As the chairperson of the Academic Advisory Board, I am happy to introduce the projects and activities of the Forum. A lot is going on – I can only offer a brief sketch, so as to convey a sense of the spirit of this new and in my understanding path-breaking and exemplary initiative. For more information, and an introduction of this year's fellows, I would like to refer you to our brochure.

ZUKUNFTSPHILOGIE. Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship is directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and coordinated by Islam Dayeh at Freie Universität Berlin.

The term **ZUKUNFTSPHILOGIE** refers to the polemical debate between classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Nietzsche on "the method and meaning of classical studies." Resuming this debate about the future of philology in today's global context, this project explores historical and contemporary textual practices within Europe, as well as in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Combining critical reflection about the genealogy of philological practice with detailed textual research that moves beyond the established classical canon and explores hitherto marginalized scholarly traditions, this project is about the reconfiguration of philology itself as a self-conscious trans-regional endeavour. The core activities are a *lecture-cum-seminar* series, workshops and international summer/winter schools, such as a winter school in Cairo last year, and its international postdoctoral program. This year, the project hosts five fellows who work on issues such as the mutual exchanges, translations and religious conversions between different linguistic and religious traditions in the 14th and 15th century Mediterranean world; Muslim perceptions of the religious 'Other' in the early modern Ottoman empire; Arabic receptions of German Linguistic Orientalism; and conceptions and practices of fiction and poetry in Persia, China and Japan.

RECHTSKULTUREN – Cultures of Law - Confrontations beyond Comparison is directed by Susanne Baer, now at the Constitutional Court, and Christoph Möllers at Humboldt-Universität, and coordinated by Alexandra Kemmerer at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Linked to the Berlin research network Law in Context, Cultures of Law takes as a starting point globalization's challenge to rethink Law by placing it in its culturally and socially specific contexts. As the subtitle highlights, the aim is *not* a mere comparison of sets of distinct cultures of law. The point rather is a systematic confrontation of the Western culture of law, as

it is taught and practiced here, with legal understandings, perceptions and practices in other global regions and culturally diverse settings. In the light of increasing cultural diversity and legal pluralism that comes to the fore with global migration the importance of this project is obvious. Transcending inherited dichotomies such as public vs. private, and center vs. periphery, it aims at nothing less than the transregionalization of the study of law.

Striving to incorporate Berlin-based scholars so as to “multiply” the approach, the project organizes workshops and lectures.

This year, it has selected nine fellows who work on issues such as: the negotiation of new social orders and law in culturally diverse urban neighbourhoods in Istanbul and Berlin; everyday practices of Islamic law in sharia’*h* courts in London; law and the memory of violence in post-conflict societies; caste, law and identity politics in India in past and present; the cross-cultural translation of legal and political thought in the British colonial empire; or the constitutionalization of international law from the perspective of the global periphery.

GLOBAL PRAYERS – Redemption and Liberation in the City is co-directed by Werner Schiffauer and Stephan Lanz, both Europa-Universität Viadrina at Frankfurt/Oder, and Katrin Klingan, Haus der Kulturen der Welt. While from a perspective of modernization and development, urbanization is often associated with secularization and the decline of religion as a public force, it is all the same clear that the reality is different. Focusing on the marked presence of religion in urban space, this project explores the propagation of and transregional relations between new urban religious communities in metropolises as Beirut, Berlin, Istanbul, Jakarta, Kinshasa, Lagos, Mumbai and Rio de Janeiro. Through detailed empirical research, the project investigates the complex interplay between religious developments and urban cultures. Six academic fellows and eight artists investigate phenomena as Hindi, Islamic or Pentecostal religious revival groups in claiming and – literally – *taking* place in cities; religio-aesthetic projects in the fields of architecture, dress styles and sound; the staging of rituals and religious spectacles; as well as religious street politics. A distinctive characteristic of Global Prayers is the collaboration between scholars and artists. This does not only acknowledge the so far often neglected importance of the political-aesthetic dimension of religious presence in urban space, but also yields creative artistic forms that will eventually be presented to a broader audience in an exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt next February.

Last but not least, let me **INTRODUCE EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE EAST – THE MIDDLE EAST IN EUROPE**, in short EUME. Founded in 2006, EUME has been initiated by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Wissenschaftskolleg, and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.

The EUME format, approach and inquiry has inspired the shape and thrust of the Forum, and since this year, EUME has been incorporated. Conducting research on historical, political, religious, social and cultural entanglements of Europe and Middle East, EUME works on five research fields: perspectives on the Qur'an, travelling literary traditions, urban change in the Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and European perspectives on Islam, and a critique of modernity from a Middle Eastern Perspective. EUME is directed by a collegium of eminent scholars in the study of Islam – you find all the names in the brochure –, the scientific coordinator is Georges Khalil who also coordinates the activities and projects of the Forum in this initial stage with his team at the Wissenschaftskolleg.

Focusing on the entanglement of Europe and the Middle East, EUME's key concern is to critically reflect on the historical conditions of knowledge production about the Middle East, and to re-center scholarly inquiry via a transdisciplinary and transregional perspective.

As in preceding years, EUME hosts ten fellow researchers, and an additional affiliated fellow. Working within the five mentioned research fields, the fellows research issues such as textual practices and translation; identity politics and cosmopolitanism in the late Ottoman Empire; Islamic legal theory; visual arts and politics post 9/11; or aesthetics of displacement in Palestinian and Israeli cultural memories and heritage formation.

I hope that my brief presentation has been able to invoke the specific characteristics of the four projects, and conveyed a sense of the richness and creative energy of the individual fellow projects. The Forum looks forward to, and will do its best to help initiate exciting discussions over the next year and beyond. Intended as an exemplary initiative for the future, the Forum hopes to draw in many Berlin-based researchers, so as to contribute to the development of a fresh vision for academia in the contemporary world which we all share and which presses us to transcend mono-disciplinarity and ethnocentrism.

I would now like to give the floor to Andreas Eckert, who will introduce this evening's main speaker. Thank you for your attention.

Birgit Meyer, 10 October 2011