Islamism versus Post-Islamism?
Mapping topographies of Islamic political and cultural practices and discourses

Abstracts:
(in chronological order)

Friday, 13 December 2013

Keynote I

Katajun Amirpur (Hamburg): A New Generation of Post-Islamist Thinkers. Occidentosis left behind Europe

Susanne Schröter (Frankfurt): Longing for a Simple Life. Salafism in Germany

Salafism is the fastest growing Islamist movement in Germany and is especially attractive for converts to Islam. Susanne Schröter spoke with young Germans, of both immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds, about their motivations for turning to this rather strict, rule-bound, scripturalist form of Islam. The longing for an ordered life with clear guidelines and absolute, divinely sanctioned norms and values presented itself as one of the most important reasons for their choice. Salafis seek a way out of the obscurity of postmodernity (Habermas), and the simple world interpretations offered by charismatic preachers and the tight-knit sense of community Salafi groups provide a refuge from the confusion and complexity of the present. Through their performative self-othering and dramatic public performances they have adopted a habitus that has much in common with the aesthetic practices of secular countercultures. What the former also share with the latter is the vision of a future ideal society that is contrasted with a deficient present, a critical stance towards existing circumstances, and the rudiments of a lived counterculture through which the desired utopia is to be achieved.

Armina Omerika (Frankfurt): The Ethnic Turn? Tradition and ethnicity in the gender discourses of the Salafiya in the Western Balkans

The presence of organized Salafi communities in the Western Balkan is a fairly recent phenomenon that dates back to the beginning of the 1990s. Whereas the first decade of their presence was characterized by intense conflicts between this new interpretation of Islam and what was commonly labeled “traditional believers” or “traditional Islam”, the last ten years have witnessed significant changes in both the structures and the discourses of the Salafi communities. Internal shifts and divisions have led to parts of the Salafis being integrated into local Islamic structures, while new network formations with ties to Salafi milieus in Western Europe have emerged. These changes were accompanied by shifts in the discourse practice, in which concepts like “tradition” and “ethnicity”, originally rejected by the Salafi actors, were subjected to renegotiations and acquired new meanings.

At the same time, normative texts on sexuality, reproduction, family, gender determined behavior and social gender roles continue to constitute a huge part of the Salafi literature distributed and produced in the Western Balkans. Here, too, tradition and ethnicity have gained a prominent role in the construction of gender in the Salafi context. The paper looks at the mechanisms through which these construction processes and production of new meanings take place, and places them within the larger context of the ethnicization of Salafi communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sandžak region.
Kirsten Wesselhoeft (Harvard): “The Day of Beauty and Well-being”: Islamic leisure in urban France and the ‘post-secular’ family

In France, there has been a recent increase in Islamic social events oriented towards women and families. Organized by mosques, Muslim women’s associations, or female entrepreneurs, these events are explicitly oriented towards “relaxation” and “well-being.” This takes the form of beauty services, massages, or exercise classes ranging from zumba to self-defense. At family events, activities from face-painting to pony rides exhibit a programmatic effort to construct both the physical space of the mosque and its social organization as the source of a broader family.

This paper is based in participant observation at several such events in Paris, as well as a comprehensive review of publicity materials and websites. I argue that these events point to the increasing role of women in the management of activities within mosque communities, including to some degree the management of funds. Further, they demonstrate a desire on the part of many French Muslim women to use what disposable income and free time they have to engage in programmed, structured religious activities, rather than socializing primarily in informal ways. Thirdly, they manifest the development of a set of virtues — personal well-being, reflective motherhood, active sisterhood — that connect to certain values and practices of “secular” French society, while explicitly distinguishing themselves from others.

This programmatic model of religious leisure accomplishes several goals that can be considered under the headings of ‘post-Islamism’ and ‘post-secularism,’ while also challenging these terms. On the one hand, they work to center the mosque as the generative heart of social and civic life in a context where Muslims born and educated in France may be more likely to socialize in religiously neutral settings. On the other hand, they incorporate a range of activities into the religious sphere that might otherwise be seen as “secular,” challenging certain models of the secularization of cultural life and ignoring entirely certain politicized attitudes towards European-style leisure. These communities offer a model of socialization and a set of virtues that reform widespread understandings of both piety and ‘Frenchness,’ and that foreground women and youth as the source of a new vision of social ethics modeled on the family.

Turkey

Fabio Vicini (Istanbul): Rethinking Solidarity and Justice in Contemporary Turkey. The case of Muslim civil society organizations

The paper explores how today notions of solidarity, mutual help and justice are rethought and promoted within Mazlumder and Deniz Feneri, two Muslim civil society organizations (STK, Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları) in contemporary Turkey. Its starting assumption is that rather than determining the demise of religion, the secularization of Turkish society has meant the redefinition of the role, spaces and limits of Islam in public debate as well as personal experience. In particular, in conjunction with the opening to neoliberal economy in the 1980s and the development of a culture of “civil society” in the 1990s, Islam has progressively returned to the public sphere and become a central issue for defining moral authority and political legitimacy.

Based on postdoctoral ethnographic research and interviews with young volunteers and workers of these two organizations, the paper elucidates how Turkish Muslim STKs deal with Western legal traditions and the related market-driven political system in ambivalent ways. It will show that the accommodation of Muslim long-standing values with Western modern liberal traditions takes place through some controversial compromises, which are revealed by the difficulties these organizations have in dealing with contested issues such as gay rights and abortion. Moreover, through their reference to Islamic ideals they implicitly disapprove of liberal democratic society’s stress on individualism, as well as of what they perceive as capitalism’s inclination toward reproducing social divisiveness, inequality and unhappiness.

While elucidating these aspects the presentation aims to show how by recovering long-standing ideals of justice and solidarity Muslim STKs go beyond binary distinctions of an alleged purely secularist versus an Islamist vision that are still reproduced both in some important scholarships and within Turkish society itself. With their call for a revitalization of monotheistic religions’ dynamism and stress on the common good, these organizations contribute to the remoralization of the public discourse in ways that are not necessarily in contradiction with secular demands, and rather engage with modern liberal traditions by claiming confrontation on the common ground of universal notions of human solidarity and justice.
Islamism versus Post-Islamism? Mapping topographies of Islamic political and cultural practices and discourses

**Pierre Hecker (Marburg):** Hegemony and Resistance. Turkey's post-Islamist turn and the meaning of style

Political Islam in Turkey, for a long time, has found itself in a marginalized position resisting the secularist policies of an authoritarian regime. Today, however, political Islam no longer represents an oppositional counter-public, but—with the victories of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in three consecutive parliamentary elections (2002, 2007, 2011)—has taken the dominant power positions in state and society. The present paper argues that Turkey is currently witnessing a transition from the old secularist hegemony to a new Islamic hegemony.

The AKP was initially hailed by many observers (e.g. Hakan Yavuz, Ihsan Dagi, Mustafa Akyol) as a liberal, democratic, and, moreover, secular alternative to radical Islam. Ideologically, the new political elite replaced Islamism with what it now officially refers to as "democratic conservatism" (muhafazakar demokrasi). This term, however, is a bit tricky, since conservatism in Turkey cannot be thought without religion. Consequently, talking about ‘conservative values’ or a ‘conservative agenda’ practically means talking about religious values or, respectively, about a religious agenda.

It is the contention of this paper that Turkey's post-Islamist government, since coming to power in 2002, has been prompting a gradual Islamization of the public sphere, albeit widely adhering to a cosmopolitan, non-Islamic rhetoric. A set of new rules and regulations—dealing with issues of veiling, nudity, sexuality, abortion, alcohol, blasphemy, creationism, religious education, and so on—underline the government's ambitions of promoting Islamic lifestyles over others. As a consequence, the question of how a person lives—or, more particularly, how a person displays his or her way of life publicly—has turned into an ideological battlefield and stigmatization of the ideological ‘other.’

This paper will address the issue of post-Islamist lifestyle politics by investigating how deviant lifestyles (e.g. rock and metal lifestyles, new Islamic lifestyles) are contesting conservative Islamic hegemony in everyday life. Lifestyle presence, from a perspective of resistance and power, can be an efficient means to lay claim to public space and to challenge the government's political legitimacy.

**Dana Fennert (Marburg) film (60 min.): Musawah (Equality). The Fight for Gender Equality in Islam.**

The documentary demonstrates the emergence of the transnational feminist network Musawah (equality) which seeks to reform Muslim family laws. The aim of the documentary is to show the dynamic interaction of the network with conservative counter-actors. One of the focus settings is the Malaysian context because the national women’s rights organization Sisters in Islam (SIS) plays a key role within that network and therefore the framework and the strategies of Musawah arose mainly in consideration of the challengers in Malaysia. The reform of the Moroccan Muslim family law is a showcase for the network that Muslim family laws can be changed but even in that Muslim majority country the challengers of feminism are very vocal, as the documentary shows. The protection of the traditional family with complementary roles of husbands and wives is the common goal of various conservative actors around the world as well as in Malaysia and Morocco, the documentary shows that activities and links between those actors increase and that a pro family countermovement of feminism is arising.

**Saturday, 14 December 2013**

**Keynote II**

**Gudrun Krämer (Berlin):** Secularity in an Islamic Context: Egypt as a case study

Irrespective of long-going processes of secularization in all fields of public and private life, secularity and secularism continue to be highly contested in the Arab Middle East. The reasons are both cultural and political. In the age of colonialism followed by authoritarian rule and accelerated globalization, Islamists were able to project themselves as defenders of popular rights against foreign domination and despotic rule, and to mobilize broad sections of the population in the name of religion in general, and Islam in particular. Egypt is an excellent example. At the same time, Islamization, although dispersed, affected virtually all aspects of public and private life: everyday speech and conduct, ethics and aesthetics, charity, business, and commerce (of which veiling is
Islamism versus Post-Islamism? Mapping topographies of Islamic political and cultural practices and discourses

just one example), Islamizing landscapes, soundscapes, and mediascapes. The Egyptian case ties in with observations that globally speaking, (secularist) accounts as secular, with religion being either irrelevant or reactive, are flawed (Casanova, Taylor, Asad et al.). Yet in Egypt it is not merely a question of faith or belief being prevalent in society but of Islam being established as the state religion. Here as in other parts of the Muslim world, it is not so much the relation between “state” and “church” (al-Azhar, Sunni religious scholars, and the Coptic Orthodox Church) that shapes the configuration of secularity, but rather the relation between the ordre public and Sharia, or “Islamic references” more generally. The debate on religious freedom highlights the issues at stake. By putting the Egyptian case into a broader historical framework this presentation also contributes to the debates on multiple modernities and multiple secularities.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Dorothea Schulz (Cologne): Muslim Activism, Mass Media and the Making of Religious Attachment in Southern Mali

The paper probes Asef Bayat’s observation that ‘the advent of post-islamism does not necessarily mean the historical end of Islamism’ and that ‘we may witness for some time the simultaneous processes of both islamization and post-islamization’. The paper focuses on the recent invigoration of Islamic renewal and sharia politics in southern and northern Mali and traces the historical antecedents of these developments. Although the various Muslim organizations and activist networks that are currently competing with each other in regional and national arenas could be interpreted as indications of the coexistence of Islamist and post-Islamist trends in Mali, the paper argues that the Islamism/post-islamism interpretive framework does not capture the complexities of the motivations and aspirations of the diverse Muslim activists. To do so, the paper explores the role of “new” media (particularly audio recording technologies) formats and Muslim networks of mutual support in bolstering the appeal of “Islam” as an idiom of social and political mobilization. In so doing, the paper makes a sustained argument for a consideration of the forms of sociality and economic practices within which believers’ engagements with mass-mediated religious discourse need to be understood and that constitute an important site for the making and remaking of religious attachment, community and authority.

Rüdiger Seesemann (Bayreuth): Post-Islamism, Post-secularism, and the Politics of Islamic Knowledge. Insights from Africa

One of the first Western scholars to declare the end of Islamism was the French political scientist Olivier Roy in 1992. Since then, the body of literature on post-Islamism has been steadily growing (Bayat). Many authors have identified the increased importance of individual piety as a distinctive feature of the post-Islamist era, often with a Foucauldian slant that focused on processes of ethical self-fashioning (Mahmood, Hirschkind). This paper will bring to the fore questions of epistemology that have been largely overlooked in these academic debates. Drawing on empirical research in Sudan, Mauritania, and Kenya, I will argue that Islamist and post-Islamist conceptions of Islamic knowledge are predicated on Western modernity to a much greater extent than both the Muslim activists and the academic observers would admit. As I propose to demonstrate, the “ethical turn” (Soares) in the study of Muslim societies has tended to obscure the epistemological underpinnings of contemporary Islamic thought and practice.

North Africa I – Egypt

Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (Copenhagen): Searching for the Post-Islamist `Alim in Egyptian Fiction and Film.

In Egypt, the issue of Post-Islamism is, not least, one of cultural wars. Who is to define Egyptian identity, and who is to define what must be considered correct Islam? Over the last couple of decades, traditional ulama have been vying with self-styled missionaries (du’a) for such a role. “Fatwa wars” have ensued, as Islamic TV-stations sprang up and competed for public attention.
Islamism versus Post-Islamism? Mapping topographies of Islamic political and cultural practices and discourses

Given the public attention to these media stars ulama and du’a, it is perhaps no wonder that, in recent years, Egyptian TV dramas and fiction have taken up the significant social roles, and even personal life, of these figures. This is not only to satisfy public curiosity, but to build up cultural icons and propagate specific interpretations of Islam.

This paper will look at the treatments of the preachers’ personal life. It will compare the first treatments of ulama in TV dramas by the director Hassan Yusuf, with recent treatments of TV preachers in the novel Mawlama, and in the 2013 drama al-da’iya.

It argues that, while in the last years of Mubarak Islamism was slowly making its way into mainstream cultural production, in the aftermath new and more inventive fictional engagements have tried to create cultural icons who could serve as alternatives to Islamist and Salafist monopolization of the devout missionary. This kind of creativity can serve as a basis for a different understanding of what Post-Islamism might entail.

Emin Poljarevic (Edinburgh): Is there a Post-Islamist Turn? Differences between the linear and organic progressions of Islamism in Egypt

The Islamists’ failure to maintain political power in Egypt and Tunisia is to a great extent an indictment of the political culture and despotic nature the institutional frameworks of those states. Arguably, these particular Islamist organisations have adopted and committed to the ideas and application of democratic rules in their respective political arenas. Subsequently, we have witnessed a string of their electoral successes and the following political mêlée, particularly brutal in the Egyptian case that has resulted in near-total defeat of the leading Islamist organisation. They have nevertheless demonstrated to be fully committed to democratic instruments of power distribution. Are these observations and assertions definitive signs of post-Islamism. In the words of Asef Bayat the “post” label denotes Islamists departure from exclusivist politics “toward a more rights-centered and inclusive outlook that favors a civil/secular state operating within a pious society” (2013, 29). Bayat and other proponents of post-Islamist theme are correct in that the two Islamist parties have rolled back on parts of their previous promises. They have left much of the perceptibly exclusivist political discourse, and even reconsidered the meaning of the Shari’ah ruled society. Does this qualify as a departure from the “ideal type” Islamism? In effect, can we talk about post-Islamism in a useful way? And, if so, does the concept help us explain the multitude of ongoing changes within and around Islamist political parties and social movement organisations? My paper attempts to disentangle the various conditions of Islamist political evolution by contextualising the process. I propose that Islamism, as a part of the ideological landscape of Muslim majority societies, has been evolving and changing, affecting and being affected, challenged and being challenged by various socio-political forces and circumstances. In other words, it has never been homogeneous and unchanged, and thus difficult to capture with the labelling of pre- or post-Islamism.

North Africa II – Tunisia

Robert Bianchi (Singapore): The Social Bases of the An-Nahdha Party’s Support in Tunisia

Ennahdha’s electoral support had deep and diverse connections to social classes and geographic regions throughout Tunisia. It’s share of the vote was strongest not in the richest or poorest sectors, but in the intermediate groups of rising and struggling neighborhoods in the provincial cities and in greater Tunis. Ennahdha was the only party that managed to assemble an inclusive nationwide coalition of voters that cut across all classes and provinces. It’s weakest performance was in the wealthier districts of the capital city and in the most destitute rural districts of the western mountains and plains. After forming a coalition government, Ennahdha’s opponents clustered on the far left and far right of the ideological spectrum with no coherent coalition in the center that could rival the broad base of the ruling party. The strains of government and internal factionalism may have weakened Ennahdha’s popular appeal in the last two years, but it remains the strongest and best organized mass movement in the country.
Islamism versus Post-Islamism? Mapping topographies of Islamic political and cultural practices and discourses

Karima El Ouazghari (Frankfurt): Islamism in Action. The Tunisian An-Nahdha party within changing contexts

The paper deals with the Tunisian Islamist Movement An-Nahdha, and in particular the following question: How did An-Nahdha change within changing contexts? After arguing why a contextualist approach is much more promising to explain Islamist behavior, the paper will introduce the analytical tool of Opportunity Structures and Frames, which are both derived from the Social Movement Theory. On an empirical level, the paper shows how An-Nahdha’s “Islamic Frame” has shifted within changing opportunity structures from the 1980s until 2011.

The paper focuses on five key empirical results, which show the link between the Frame and the Context:

1) An-Nahdha’s self-conception as a religious movement can be understood as a reaction to Bourguiba’s repressive secularization policy.
2) The autocratic and repressive context has clearly contributed to An-Nahdha’s increasing politization in the 1980s.
3) The Tunisian Islamist movement reduced religious references in 1988 to reach its goal of political participation, after Ben Ali’s ban of religious political parties.
4) An-Nahdha members increasingly justified the use of violence in the 1990s when state repression made all forms of political participation and expression almost impossible.
5) Since Ben Ali’s downfall in 2011 so called “discoursive opportunities” became more relevant to An-Nahdha. These discoursive opportunities explain why An-Nahdha avoided to talk about the concept of “Shari’a”.

The paper will conclude that An-Nahdha adapted from the beginning remarkably flexible and pragmatic to changing circumstances. It has proven adept at shifting both individual positions as well as the movement’s self-definition in order to achieve full recognition as a legitimate political actor. At the same time, certain political positions can be identified as consistent patterns: commitment to peaceful means, a strong will for participation within democratic and pluralistic processes and traditional views on gender and family. The Islamic religion remains a crucial part of its identity.

Sunday, 15 December 2013

Southeast Asia I

Dominik Müller (Frankfurt): Resisting the Post-Islamist Evolution: Pop-Islamist youth politics in Malaysia

The Islamist opposition in Malaysia, represented by the Islamic Party of Malaysia (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS), has long been portrayed by outsiders as an anti-modern group of rural Malay conservatives that seeks to ban modern entertainment and is categorically hostile to Western culture in all of its facets. During the last decade, however, PAS saw an increasing influx of young, media-savvy and university-educated activists from the new Malay middle class who pushed forward a significant transformation of the party’s profile. These new actors are currently reinventing the party’s ‘Islamic struggle’ (perjuangan Islam) in line with contemporary trends of market-driven popular culture. In the course of this contested process of normative transformation, the Islamic Party’s new generation is now most passionately engaging in pop-cultural and commercial activities, while at the same time creatively using these channels for the expression of decidedly Islamist messages. Accordingly, a hybrid fusion of modern popular culture with constitutive elements of classical Islamist political ideology can be observed.

My presentation will theoretically contextualize and ethnographically illustrate the pop-Islamist reorientation of PAS vis-à-vis the concept of a transnational “post-Islamist turn”. As we shall see, the PAS Youth’s current discursive practices contradict the very definition of post-Islamism. In the PAS Youth community, renewed calls for the establishment of a fully Syariah-based Islamic State, Islamic Criminal Law (hudud/qisas) and other key characteristics of political Islamism are systematically disseminated via social media, commercial activities, celebrity personalities and even rock music - precisely those channels that are widely claimed among scholars of contemporary Islam to be intrinsically linked with the post-Islamist turn.
Kristina Großmann (Passau): Totalizing Visions of the Shari’a in Everyday Life. Enforcement, re/production and transgression of the Islamic dress code for women in Aceh, Indonesia

In the context of social, cultural and political Islamization in Aceh’s post-tsunami/post-conflict situation women are increasingly subject to an Islamic dress code in the public sphere. For many women in Aceh, Islam and their personal religiosity are intrinsic parts of their identity, but - in their view – this does not automatically include the obligation to veil, nor the control and enforcement of the Islamic dress code by state and non-state actors. Women criticize this forced compliance with the Islamic dress code, but nevertheless adhere to it, and thereby reproduce it. Women justify this with their fear of discrimination and violent attacks. In this paper I will elaborate on processes of Islamization on the social and cultural level on the basis of the implementation and enforcement of an Islamic dress code for women in Aceh giving special attention to the production, reproduction and changeability of social practices.

Monika Arnez (Hamburg): Islamism or Post-Islamism in Indonesia? A critical analysis

Several scholars (i.e. Azra/Hudson 2008; Barton 2001) have been referring to Indonesia as a showcase of tolerant, moderate and plural Islam. Among the reasons given are the moderating influence of the Muslim mass organizations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the fact that Indonesia, in contrast to other Muslim nations, is a democratic state, and the history of Islam in maritime Southeast Asia, which has been shaped by a variety of influences. However, other studies have pointed to how Islamism manifested itself in Indonesia in various forms: through numerous cases of religious conflicts in different regions of the archipelago, for instance in Aceh, the Moluccas, Kalimantan and Poso, violence against minority groups, the implementation of religious bylaws (perda shariah), the Islamization of local practices etc.

Based on fieldwork carried out in the region since 2008 and referring to recent studies on Islamism and post-Islamism (Bayat 2013, 2005, Bruinessen 2013, Tibi 2012, Feillard/Madinier 2011) I will evaluate to what extent we can apply the terms Islamism and post-Islamism to the Indonesian context.

Southeast Asia II

Norshahril Saat (Canberra): Ideological and Utopian Islamism. The official ‘Ulama’ in post-authoritarian Indonesia and Malaysia

Are we living in a post-Islamist era? As Asef Bayat (2005) points out, the term ‘post-Islamism’ has been deployed in various ways which departed from its original intent: to describe the conditions in post-Khomeini Iran. Far from how others have understood the term - that Islamists have departed from Salafi thought, or there is an increasing ‘privatisation’ of Islamization- Bayat’s application of post-Islamism is never intended to depict state-level discourses, but portraying only societal trends. Broadening the Islamism/post-Islamism debate to the state level, this paper examines to what extent the concept post-Islamism explains the religious and political behaviour of the official ulama in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia. By focusing on the official ulama (Islamic religious scholars in state bureaucracies), mainly those from the Ulama Council of Indonesia (MUI) and the state muftis from Malaysia, I argue that the ulama’s distance from state power, the nature of institutions they occupy, and the political opportunities presented to them condition the form of Islamism adopted, as well as strategies deployed, when engaging their respective states.

Applying Karl Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, this paper demonstrates that what we are witnessing in post-authoritarian Indonesia and Malaysia today is not a shift from Islamism to post-Islamism; but Islamism manifesting itself in ideological and utopian fashion. In short, ideology reflects ideas of groups in power seeking to preserve the existing order, while utopian thinking reflects those seeking to destruct the existing order. MUI, being a quasi-formal institute lacking legal authority apart from delivering non-binding fatwas (legal opinions) adopts a more utopian Islamism. Its legitimacy and authority are contingent upon societal demands for Islamic commodities such as halal economy, Islamic banking, and Islamic tourism, which it champions. Conversely, the Malaysian muftis reflect ideological Islamism, where preserving the ideological thrusts of the ruling elites-made up of the ruling party UMNO, Malay Royalty, and Malay capitalists- is on top of their agenda. Utilising primary fieldwork data and secondary sources, this paper further argues that the official ulama have not departed from the original goals of Islamism, the formation of Islamic state. Largely coloured by strands of conservatism, it is the expression of Islamic state that varies.
Frederike Trottier (Frankfurt): Sports and Islam: Muslim sportswomen in the Islamic Solidarity Games

The Islamic Solidarity Games (ISG) in Palembang 2003 serve as an example of the attempt to combine a global phenomenon, namely modern competitive sports, with religious concepts and Islamic piety. A publicized goal of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF, affiliated institution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference) as the organizer of the games and the Indonesian government was to strengthen the Muslim community in Indonesia and worldwide. The ISG thus embody a trend towards post-Islamism through the combination of Olympic ideas such as solidarity and peace with a strong emphasize on Islam. However, several issues indicate a discrepancy between ideal of the motto “Unity in Harmony” and the reality of the games in Indonesia. In particular the discussion about the “appropriate” clothing of female athletes was among the sticking points during the ISG. Therefore, this paper elaborates on the question of to what extent the (female) body is contested in the Indonesian public with focus on the games. Indonesia provides a telling example of a Muslim majority country with very diverse trends towards post-Islamism as well as neo-Islamism and a myriad facets in-between. Hence, the Islamist anti-women propaganda on the one hand and the enthusiasm of local Muslim spectators on the other hand demonstrate the ambiguity of this sporting event and its reception in Indonesia.

This paper draws from the results of fieldwork conducted in Palembang during the Islamic Solidarity Games where I undertook participant observation research, conducted interviews and analysed newspaper publications on the games.