

Eurasian Mobilities and the Transnationalisation of the Religious in the Contemporary Era: Comparative Perspectives on Muslim Populations in France, China, Russia and Turkey

Responsables

Pascale Bugnon
(UNIGE, Genève)

Kristina Kovalskaya
(GSRL / EPHE)

Mardi 11 juillet 2023
8h30-10h30
Salle Athéna 046

Intervenants

Pascale Bugnon
(UNIGE, Genève)

Kristina Kovalskaya
(GSRL / EPHE)

Léo Maillet
(SNF – EHES / UNIGE)

Dmitriy Oparin
(Passages UMR 5319,
Université de Bordeaux)

Résumé de l'atelier

Since the early 1990s, the transnational approach to religious phenomena has allowed a new understanding of religions "on the move". If the phenomena of transnationalisation and translocalisation of religions underwent profound changes during the 20th century, the 21st century has seen an acceleration and an increasing diversity of migratory trajectories, modifying deeply religious and spiritual practices and traditions. Drawing upon the practices of sociability amongst Eurasian Muslim populations, this panel reflects on the paradigm of mobility, exploring the role of religions in maintaining consciousness of a real or imagined homeland connection to people and place, and highlighting the relationships between religious organisations, ethnic identity, and host land incorporation. Indeed, more complex than a simple "transplantation" of beliefs in a third country, migrants transform the cultural landscape of the host country, while the latter also sometimes disrupts the practices and beliefs of migrants. Based on various case studies from Turkey, China, Central Asia and France, we will particularly address the embeddedness of actors simultaneously in at least two places, and what this means in terms of understanding everyday religious circulations of people, goods, capital, and ideas.

Programme

Pascale Bugnon

Barelvi and Tidjaniya brotherhoods in Guangzhou: between preservation of "traditions" and creative adaptations

The mausoleum of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas in Guangzhou (China), is presented as a major testimony to the history of the introduction of Islam in China, which legitimised its heritage inscription in 2013. However, this institutional recognition is not only due to a recent historiographic re-reading, but also to the frequentation of Muslim migrants. Indeed, while the local Muslim population was still very little frequenting the site at the end of the 1990s, the same was not true for the floating Muslim population and foreign Muslims, who have durably compenetrated the local religious life in Guangzhou and have played a crucial role in the religious redefinition of the site. By focusing on two groups in particular, the Pakistani and Senegalese migrants, associated respectively with the Barelvi and Tidjaniya brotherhoods, I will analyse their impact on the revitalisation of Islam in general and Sufi Islam in particular. Indeed, as soon as they arrived in Guangzhou, they participated in (re)establishing the tomb of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas at the centre of their practices, developing more or less important Sufi networks, while adapting their practices to the local context.

Kristina Kovalskaya*Postsoviet Muslims in France: Recycling the National into the Religious*

Among the existing studies on Muslims in Europe, significant research has been conducted on populations with a postcolonial background (e.g. Fadil, 2019; Fadil, Moors & Arnaut, 2021). In the *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, the South Caucasus appears in the chapter "Peripheries", a token of exoticism for religious studies (Davie, Jödicke & Makrides, 2021). Studies emphasise the evolution of their religious practices over generations. However, we have few sociological studies of populations from other origins, from "other Orientals" (Tolz, 2011). Those from the former USSR differ in their itineraries and practices. The generation of Soviet culture has the experience of living in a country with an atheistic ideology; the next generation grew up in a secular Russia whose public space was dominated by the Orthodox Church (Papkova, 2011; Rousselet, 2013). Both share the experience of war and exile (Le Huérou *et al.*, 2014). This paper proposes to study the adaptation strategies of Muslim populations migrating to France from the post-Soviet space (Caucasus, Volga-Ural region, Central Asia). What are the adaptation strategies of these Muslims to a European context where they are confronted with various forms of secularism (Willaime, 2009), in place of the Soviet/post-Soviet management of religion? Our starting hypothesis is the transformation of ethnic/national identities into confessional identities, *via* the mobilisation of local and international networks. An augmented identity, a guarantee of access to the global Muslim market (Gauthier, 2020).

Léo Maillet*Uyghur Bakers in Istanbul: Mobility, Sacrality and Sociability in the workplace*

This paper proposes to study mobility and religion through the prism of food production, circulation, and consumption. It is based on several months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Uyghur bakers living in Istanbul. Focusing on social interactions occurring both inside and around the workplace, it addresses the tensions between mobility and exile, the transnationalisation of religious practices, and the production of socio-religious bounds within a working environment. The data presented includes interviews conducted in Uyghur, photography, video, and ethnographic description. It shows how faith and sacrality are mobilised in narratives and practices related to naan, a kind of flatbread baked in a tandoor oven (tonur). By doing so, it underlines how such narratives are embedded in the socio-political context in which they are being produced, and how they propose an evaluation of it in terms of religious morality and sacrality.

Dmitriy Oparin*Duty and loyalty among Central Asian mullahs in migration*

This paper is devoted to the social landscape and configuration of the Muslim space of a Russian city. The research focuses on the position, religious practices and views of Central Asian mullahs – Muslim immigrants who play an active part in the religious life of the local community, conduct certain rituals, counsel their fellow believers, and who have a certain social capital. Though they do not hold any official positions in the muftiate or the city mosque, they nevertheless play a considerable role in the construction of the religious everyday life of their fellow believers. I am interested in what kinds of relationship the mullahs build with the imam and with the Muslim environment in general. In this presentation, I devote special attention to the religious and migration aspects of the biographies of my informants, their aspirations for self-improvement, and how they conceptualise their duty to God and fellow believers.