When ‘old things’ meet ‘new things’: the popularity of cassette-zikiris among young Muslims in contemporary Mali - André Chappatte (SOAS)

Religious singers called ‘zikiriklaw’ in Mali initiated the so-called ‘zikiri’ in the late eighties by adapting the traditional remembrance of God to contemporary local music. They started to chant the recollection of God, the Prophet and his descendants accompanied by drums, guitars and other local instruments. Whereas most local Muslim scholars criticised their performances because its musicality allegedly promotes heedlessness rather than devotional concentration, such musical zikiri quickly became popular among Malian youth; tape cassettes of musical zikiri were found in most local markets of southern Mali in 2010. One of the religious singers, Nouhoum Dembélé, even rose to fame and became a sort of pop star among young Muslims in Mali. In this paper I explore the relations between religion, media and marginality through the popularity of cassette-zikiris occurring in contemporary Mali among young Muslims, a category of people often marginalized as bad Muslims by Muslims themselves. I do so by investigating the nature of success and forms of communications of the best known promoter of musical zikiri: Mali’s most popular religious leader Cherif Ousmane Madani Häidara, the founder and spiritual guide of the powerful Ansar Dine Muslim association.

‘Bible Translation and Identity Formation in Bunyoro, Toro and the Ituri Forest of the Congo’ – Emma Wild-Wood (Cambridge University, Henry Martyn Centre)

Bible translation – or lack of it - has always been a political act. In this paper I wish to instigate an examination of the role of Bible translation in the politics of identity formation in the Western kingdoms of Bunyoro, Toro and into the Ituri Forest of Congo in the early 20th century. The articulation of self-determination within a colonial state centred upon Bible translation. European missionaries were drawn into the debate on both sides and Muganda missionary, Apolo Kivebulaya, played a significant role in the translation of the biblical texts into Runyoro-Rutooro, Lukonjo and the language of the Mbuti pygmies from 1900 until his death in 1933. Translation was considered to be part of Kivebulaya’s role as teacher, deacon and priest, at one with his work of preaching, teaching and church building. Its purpose was to create reading and praying publics of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer in their ‘own native tongues’ (Acts2.8) and thus develop communities of literate Christians. Yet the process of literacy formation influenced politics of resistance to British and Baganda rule. In 1901 Apolo Kivebulaya wrote a report to the Church Missionary Society calling from the translation of the Bible into Runyoro-Rutooro, a local impulse that played a role in the Nyangire uprising in 1907. This paper will address the role of translation in the life of one indigenous Anglican priest and the often conflicting influence it had on various communities.

Missionary Science and Christian Literacy in the Making of Luba Ethnicity - David Maxwell (Cambridge University)

In the 1870s the pre-colonial Luba Kingdom was a polity with open and shifting boundaries whose power was more symbolic than military. It represented itself as sophisticated and civilised and these
notions were transmitted through material culture, particularly sculpture, and body mnemonics. Those chieftaincies on the margins of the polity identified themselves with the Luba centre in order to legitimate themselves. They bought Luba art, and copied coiffures and cicatrization, royal emblems and regalia, attached their own dynasties to the founding myth and occasionally sent tribute. In essence the pre-colonial polity was a constellation of chieftaincies with a mythic centre.

By the 1950s Luba had come to mean an exclusive, territorially bounded, self-conscious collectivity of people sharing a common language, history and culture. It was a privileged ethnic category associated with access to education, training and wage labour in the Katanga Copper Belt which those on the margins continued to claim. The paper will examine the role of missionaries and Africans in Luba ethnic formation showing how it unfolded in several stages: first the category was created and expanded through missionary ethnography and collecting, secondly, it was filled with content and meaning through language primers and the Luba New Testament, and thirdly it was disseminated through schooling, preaching and Bible Study. These processes were driven by low-church Protestant missions with a commitment to religious literacy, proselytism and lay empowerment but also extended to Flemish Catholic missionaries who had their own specific commitment to fostering ethno-nationalisms.

Tin-Trunk Bibles: Sacred Texts of the Lumpa Church in Zambia – David Gordon (Bowdoin College)
Karin Barber (2006) coined the phrase “tin-trunk literacy” to refer to the everyday and sometimes obscure forms of writing, reading, and archiving found across Anglophone Africa. Everyday forms of literacy helped to arrange African civil society and even make secular identities. They could also form the basis of sacred authority. In the case of Alice Lenshina’s Lumpa Church in Northern Zambia, tin-trunk literacy not only organized the church bureaucracy, but also constructed sacred authority in the form of hand-written bibles and commandments. This paper considers the dissemination of church commandments and testimonies of Alice Lenshina’s revelations in the form of copied hand-written manuscripts. It comes to focus on one such manuscript used by a church in Chiponya Village, Northern Zambia, with whom the author did fieldwork in 2005. The paper considers the content of the manuscript, its relationship to the broader church community, the conditions of composition, of reading, and of dissemination. The Chiponya manuscript not only reveals the basis of Lenshina’s sacred authority, but also responds to and sometimes resists dominant state and mainstream Christian texts and narratives. This counter-hegemonic sacred text reveals a great deal about the role of textual practices in making and contesting religious and political authority in late colonial and post-colonial Africa.

“Photography as Unveiling”: Muslim Discourses and Practices along the East African Coast – Heike Behrend (University of Cologne)
Since the introduction of photography by commercial studio photographers and the colonial state in Kenya, the global medium has been intensely debated and contested among Muslims on the East African coast. Yet, most Muslim women and men made use of it as a mode of self-representation to enhance their visibility and as a medium of exchange. However, with the upcoming of reformist Islam in the 1980s, Muslim scholars have increasingly invoked the “Islamic interdiction of images” and a gendered concept of purity and seclusion and extended it to include also visual media such as photography and video. In my presentation I will explore in a historical perspective, how photography (of the colonial state) became associated with “unveiling,” with violating the established boundaries of public/private, male/female and of inside/outside that had been created by
the veil. I focus on a negative relation to photographic images and their capacities of mobility and transmission that open the way of what has been largely excluded within the now familiar rhetoric of the global flow of images.

*Mallama Ta Ce: Women’s TV fatwa practices in contemporary Niger – Abdoulaye Sounaye (Northwestern University)*

Recent examinations of the mediascape in Africa have stressed the transformations this domain is undergoing, especially in urban contexts. The proliferation of media outlets is usually mentioned as a major feature of these processes as media literacy and access open up to various social categories. This development has resulted in new social dynamics, which in return are now reshaping not only the mediascape, but also social and religious institutions.

This paper examines the practices of female preachers in Niamey, Niger, as they use TV fatwa (Islamic legal opinions) practices. In the last decade making fatwa has become the main discursive practice that helped female religious figures build their authority and secure a presence in a public arena that was until recently particularly hostile to women’s public religious interventions. How these female figures appropriate various TV studios to promote particular Islamic attitudes, behaviors, practices and norms, and careve a space for themselves is at the center of this paper. I will argue that as they emerge at the intersection of specific Islamic reform discourses and media culture, women’s fatwa practices illustrate a second phase of restructuring of the Islamic sphere in Niger. In centering on socioreligious institutions and spaces, this phase has given way to female preachers increasingly vocal and “makers of contemporary Islam” in Niamey. The paper is based on ethnographic research I have been conducting in Niamey since 2009.

*Enlarging the Kingdom. African Pentecostals in Italy – Annalisa Butticci (Harvard)*

The documentary is the result of a 3 years research project on the West African Pentecostal Diasporas in Italy. The research addresses the social impact of African Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in European cities and societies shaped by Catholicism. This approach is applied to the case study of Nigerian and Ghanaian churches in Italy where the Catholic Church plays key roles in social and aesthetic domination.

For centuries the Catholic Church has been the dominant church with which Europeans (in particular in the Mediterranean region) illustrate their national and cultural identity. In Italy the Catholic Church’s monopoly and symbolic power – even if subjected to continuous tension – still appears to play a decisive role in defining the nation’s religious identity as well as the positions and roles of other religious actors. However, its monopoly and authority, and the symbolic boundaries of its system of belief and practices seem to be challenged by the great differentiation that is now characterizing its social environment. New Christian expressions are becoming increasingly visible in the public sphere, adding color to the symphony of voices attempting to speak publicly in religious term. Among them there are Nigerian and Ghanaian Churches.

The documentary explores Nigerian and Ghanaian Churches’ system of beliefs, models of church-organization, types of leadership, social engagement, gender politics, and claims of recognition in the Italian land. Special attention is paid to the diverse dynamics of encounters, interactions, and conflicts between the Catholic Church and Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.
The documentary is a visual narrative of concepts such as religious monopoly, religious media and mediation, gender, patriarchy, religious authority, state religion, African diaspora, and inter-ethnic and interreligious relations.

Framing ‘Terror’ in Muslim Newsletters: Alternative Faith-Based Media and Dissemination of National News in Kenya - Halkano Abdi Wario (Moi University)

Since the liberalization of air waves and opening up of democratic space in the early 1990s, there has been unprecedented growth of private print, broadcast and new media in Africa. In Kenya a sector that saw such upsurge in public visibility is faith-based media of all religious persuasions. Among the Muslims, a significant minority within the Kenya, Friday Bulletin and the New Dawn freely distributed regular publications of Nairobi’s Jamia mosque and the Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance; has over the years emerged as the voices of the religious constituency on national issues. This diverse religious community has had strenuous relations since the colonial times with the nation-state over unequal distribution of the resources in its home regions mainly found in semi-arid north and the Coast, under-representation in leadership position and insensitivity to its pertinent issues such as Muslim personal law, issuance of national identity cards and war against terror. Global war against terrorism and subsequent moves by the State in last few years to enact anti-terrorism has amplified acute sense of marginality and unfair target by the state agencies interested in eradicating it. While discourses about anti-terrorism feature prominently in the mainstream secular media, little is known on how alternative faith-based media such as Muslim newsletter report, frame, and analyze news items that directly touch on its religious constituency. This paper aims at textual and contextual analysis of the framing of news items pertaining to anti-terror bill in the two newsletters between 2010-2012 and examines how producers engage with, select, re-shape and appropriate specific news items in new and creative ways. It aims to open up new frontier in understanding the fundamental role these forms of mediation play in sensitization of religious communities; creation and appropriation of knowledge and provision of alternative understanding of everyday news of concern to them.

Oscillating Figures: Muslims in the Mainstream and Muslim Media in South Africa - Gabeba Baderoon (Penn State)

In this paper I explore the oscillation in images of Islam between the margins and the centre, part of a century-long pattern through which Islam has become visible in South Africa. I examine the role of the media and the interstitial forms such as cartoons and cookbooks in constituting a public discourse around Islam in South Africa, as well as the counter-publics constituted by practices through which Muslims made claims on the colonial and eventually the South African national space. The paper draws on news archives of a century of media images of Islam in the Muslim and mainstream South African media, interviews with journalists, and an analysis of contemporary art and literature that reflects on the role of the media in constituting a public space for Islam in South Africa. Critical and reflective artworks such as the play At Her Feet by Nadia Davids have interrupted the oscillation between margin and centre in and helped to deepen the debate about the public space for Islam in South Africa.
“Publishing Nawazil on Slavery: New debates about Islam and slavery in the Sahel” - Bruce S. Hall (Duke)

Over the last decade, many of the most important collections of legal opinions produced in the West African Sahel (largely Mauritania and northern Mali) between the 17th and early 20th centuries have been published and made available to Arabic reading publics in the sub-region. These texts include much material devoted to questions of slavery. My paper explores some of the ways in which the publication of local jurisprudential writings is helping to reshape contemporary Sahelian discourse around slavery. I pay special attention to efforts by scholars descended from slaves to evaluate the legitimacy of slavery as it was practiced in the Sahel. I argue that the wider availability of local jurisprudence on the issue of slavery has helped to open up intellectual space for a wider evaluation of the slave past so important in this part of Africa, and it has made possible explicitly Islamic arguments against slavery and for abolition of residual forms of social discrimination associated with slave pasts. The paper treats the transfer of manuscript materials into published form as an important development with important implications for post-emancipation citizenship in the Sahel.

Formal Care: Religion and Written Genres in the Gold Coast/Ghana – Sean Hanretta (Stanford)

This paper considers innovative written genres as a new media form and traces their implications for changing religious practice and thought. It looks at the role of templates in routinizing the provision of religious services and the reconfiguration of spiritual authority in the Gold Coast (Ghana) during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Blank forms, single-page prayer texts, handbooks and even epistolary manuals were either created or repurposed in the context of reform movements that newly focused on the proper practice of rituals by non-elites. Reforms responded to the increased presence of Nigeria-trained Hausa scholars in all parts of Ghana immediately before and after British (and German) conquest. These brought with them new ideas about Arabic literacy, the proper role of the ‘ulama’, and the importance of popular piety. Increased local labor migration produced heterogeneous communities of Muslims with highly varied traditions of practice. Reformists strove to standardize practices to eliminate disputes and facilitate the emergence of a coherent Muslim community. The new textual forms contributed to a growing sense that religion and status could be determined by reference to testable, measurable indices dovetailed with British administrators’ efforts to define the boundaries of religious communities and to adjudicate “customary” practice in accordance with transnational textual sources. But they also provided new ways to imagine—and to assert—what it meant to be Muslim.

The Rise and Downfall of a Marial Cult: Media and Religious Competition in Postcolonial Kinshasa - Katrien Pype (Leuven)

During the mid-1990s, many Kinois (inhabitants of Kinshasa) turned to Brother Raphael, a man in his late twenties, who had been receiving messages from the Virgin Mary since the late 1980s announcing the violence in the eastern part of the country and also offering strategies to counter it. Topicalizing warfare and urban moral decay, crucial issues in the experience of postcolonial Congolese, Brother Raphael quickly gained much authority in religious and political circles. The compound in which he grew up and where the Virgin visited him soon turned into a sacred space where large groups of followers, academics and leading and aspiring politicians included, prayed, venerated the Virgin, and asked Brother Raphael for spiritual guidance. Yet, conflicts with the Congolese Catholic authorities, and a media ban, announced by the Congolese Catholic Church
board in the early 2000s, eclipsed Brother Raphael totally from the public scene, and, in addition, the increasing appeal of Pentecostal churches marginalized this cult, leaving the sacred compound nowadays almost empty. Despite the prohibition to appear on radio and television, Brother Raphael has not ceased to mobilize various other media, in particular photography, print media, statuettes and natural objects (in particular trees and water), to spread the message of the Virgin Mary, to evidence his privileged relation with the Otherworldly, and to attract new followers.

This paper takes this marial cult as a privileged entry point to understand religious competition within Kinshasa’s Christianity and will focus on three different technologies of mediation employed or contested by various players in this conflict (the Congolese Catholic Board, non-believers, Brother Raphael and his followers): first, Mary, Jesus and saints as privileged channels of divine messages; second, public broadcasting; and third, charms and mystical objects (natural objects, statuettes, photographs and print media).

Islamic Preaching in the Diaspora: The Dakar Sermons of Lebanese Shaykh al-Zayn - Mara Leichtman (Michigan State University)

While there has been much emphasis on new types of media for the dissemination of Islamic ideas, this paper focuses on the traditional Friday khutba (Islamic sermon), which remains influential. Lebanese Shaykh ‘Abdul Mun‘am al-Zayn was trained in Najaf, Iraq, studied under Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Ayatollah al-Khu‘i, and serves as a wakil (Shi‘i representative) to Ayatollah al-Sistani. Sent by Musa al-Sadr, he first arrived in Dakar in 1969, where he worked to build the Islamic Social Institute, which opened in 1978. As the first Shi‘i institution in Senegal – and all of West Africa – and the only mosque where sermons are preached entirely in Arabic, Shaykh al-Zayn quickly gained a following – enhanced by his charisma – of both Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims, Arabs as well as Africans. This paper focuses on the shaykh’s discursive strategies for addressing his unique diasporic following. At times he stresses the particularities of Shi‘i Islamic practice, but more often he highlights a more universal Islam. In analyzing khutba given in 2003 during the beginning of the U.S.-led war in Iraq, this paper pays particular attention to his engagement with global politics and how his messages are translated for a community in West Africa detached from the Middle East. Many second, third, and now fourth generation Lebanese in Senegal (whose families first arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) have never visited Lebanon.


The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been referred to as the era of the imperial petition, an instrument employed by colonial subjects across Britain’s Empire in their efforts to gain the attention and favor of the state. While at times employed to serve various economic or political purposes, imperial subjects were just as likely to formally petition the British imperial state to assist in pushing forward their own moral agendas.

Muslim reformists in the British Settlement of Aden are a case in point. Beginning in 1923, Islamic reformists in Aden began to agitate against various local spiritual practices they deemed “un-Islamic” and, more importantly, a danger to the moral hygiene of the local Community of Believers. Among their first targets were two local spirit possession cults Zar and Tamburra. Reformists held that the ceremonies and dances of both cults encouraged lewd conduct and immorality among the Settlement’s Muslims. Like Muslim reformers across the Islamic world in this period, the
“respectable citizens” of Aden used a variety of methods to influence the boundaries of the local moral community and end the practice of spirit possession. Mosque sermons, short tracts and lectures in local literary associations were all used to influence the local community’s perceptions of what was and was not morally acceptable. However reformists also sought to actively involve British authority in defining the moral parameters of their community by filing formal petitions with the colonial state, signed in some cases by hundreds of residents, to ban practices, such as spirit possession, that were viewed as beyond the moral pale.

Reformists, however, were not the only ones to exploit the imperial medium of the petition. Both practitioners of Zar and Tamburra resisted the efforts to put them out of business by taking their case to the state. Both utilized formal petitions in an effort to convince the Resident to overturn their respective bans. Although the spiritual practices of the cults were similar and both sought remedies via the same channels, the two groups experienced very different results. The followers of Tamburra succeeded in avoiding an outright ban although certain restrictions were placed on their activities. Those who practiced Zar, however, were entirely unsuccessful in their efforts and were ultimately forced from the Settlement. Using the lens of spirit possession and public spirituality, this paper explores the emerging articulation of the Muslim moral economy in colonial Aden and the ways in which individuals sought to shape the moral community of believers in the age of High Colonialism.

“Princes Shall Come Out of Egypt and Ethiopia Shall Stretch Forth Her Hands Unto God”: Marcus Garvey, the Negro World and 1920s South African Prophetic Politics – Robert Trent Vinson (The College of William and Mary)

With over 300,000 dues-paying members, nearly 1,200 UNIA divisions in 43 countries and millions of supporters globally during its early 1920s peak, the Jamaican Marcus Garvey’s American-based Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was the largest black-led movement in world history. Primarily because of South Africa’s harsh racial conditions, the transmission of Garveyism to South African ports by black sailors and the wide dissemination of the Negro World, the UNIA’s weekly newspaper that had a peak circulation of 200,000 copies worldwide by 1921, there were more UNIA chapters in South Africa than in any other African country. The Negro World served as Garvey’s principal instrument for spreading the gospel of African independence, black political and socioeconomic uplift, racial pride, and unity.

This paper analyzes the Negro World to argue for the centrality of religion in the UNIA-heretofore often seen as primarily a political movement-and to illustrate how the paper became the primary vehicle to create a far-flung, but remarkably congruent UNIA religious community, featuring a prophetic politics that spoke of divinely ordained deliverance from white rule. Through the Negro World, Africans and diasporic blacks affirmed that metaphorically, Garvey was a modern-day Moses who would come to lead Africans out of a tyrannical Egypt and virtual slavery to the Promised Land of personal and political equality, education, and upward mobility. The Garvey-centered prophetic politics expressed in the Negro World, blurring distinctions between politics and religion, spread to African-based print media, including the South African newspapers Abantu Batho, the African World, and the Black Man. This black transnational prophetic politics energized African protest during the 1920s and provides a case study that simultaneously places African and American history in transnational contexts, while re-centering Africa and Africans within African Diaspora studies.

Beyond African Nationalism: Isaiah Shembe and the hymns in Ibandla lamaNazaretha - Nkosinathi Sithole (University of Zululand)
The hymns of Isaiah Shembe, said to be “religious poetry of great beauty” by Sundkler (1961: 186) and “literary texts of great power and vision” by Duncan Brown (1999: 197), provided a medium for Shembe to articulate his views and sense of self. Gerard has remarked that, “[i]t is in his hymnal poetry that Shembe makes his unique contribution to Zulu literary history” (1971: 188). This genre of hymns provided Isaiah Shembe with a space where he could ‘talk back’ to colonialism and white domination, among other inequities. In this paper I look at the hymns of Isaiah Shembe, showing how he articulates his experiences as an individual, as a Zulu and as a human being. I am interested in how Shembe in his hymns evinces a strong African nationalism while at the same time exceeding or going beyond such an African nationalism.

Feedback, Reception, and Ethnographic Film-making - Richard Werbner (University of Manchester)

When Writing Culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986) became the manifesto for reflexivity in post-modern ethnography, it evoked no accompanying movement in ethnographic film-making. Apart from intense comment on shooting or production in the field and to a lesser extent on editing, there remains a black hole, obscured from reflexivity. Ethnographic film-making usually proceeds through much feed-back, often from academic audiences, or more rarely following Jean Rouch’s example, in responses from the subjects’ themselves and their home audiences. Having made “The Quest for Well-Being in Botswana”, a series of four films on consultations with diviners and faith-healers, I turned, in a Rouch-like approach, to “Forum Follies”, a second series about the first. This present paper discusses the media problems involved and it sheds light on a black hole by visualising reception and feed-back with clips from my films.

“The Angel of the Sabbath is the greatest angel of all”: media, rhetoric and marginality in a South African church – Liz Gunner (University of Johannesburg)

The paper follows the recent struggle for leadership in the Nazareth church, founded by Isaiah Shembe, as represented in the South African print media both regional and national. It also examines the role of radio – the Zulu language station, UkhoziFM, as it provides a regular weekly slot for the AmaNazaretha sabbath service and sermon. The paper asks why have the affairs of the church been allotted so much media space? And what tensions of discourse and religious practice and belief exist? The church has been called by its followers, ‘the church of the poor’. Is this still an apt description, or should we seek to refine, even discard it at a time of shifting church/state power relations? Is it in part now ‘the church of the powerful’?

Liz Gunner, U Johannesburg.

Fostering ‘moral community’ from the margins: Muslim activism, mass media and the making of religious attachment in southern Mali - Dorothea E. Schulz (University of Cologne)

The paper probes current scholarly debate on the relationship between religious identity politics, public participation, and new media technologies in postcolonial Africa. It takes the recent invigoration of Islamic renewal and sharia politics in southern and northern Mali as a starting point to trace the historical antecedents of these developments. It pays particular attention to 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 a second step, the paper draws on the example of the charismatic media preacher Sharif Haidara and
his followers to examine the political conditions and social and economic resources that have allowed this media savvy religious leader to move from a position of relative religious and political marginality to the center stage of national Muslim and political debate. 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.

**Paperwork and the Millennium - Derek Peterson (University of Michigan)**

This paper is about the documentary procedures by which, in 1971, the millennium of Christ came to western Uganda. The region was then gripped in a long-lasting civil war, fought between the Ugandan state and separatists of the Rwenzururu kingdom. Rwenzururu’s advocates argued that they were legatees of a people who had once been sovereign. In their historical research they created documentary, dateable evidence of the wrongs that had once been done to their people. They set out to build an independent state, using the techniques of modern governance to make their independent polity visible, credible, and worthy of support. But in 1971 Rwenzururu’s historically-determined project was interrupted. The prophet Timosewo Bawalana announced that a new epoch had arrived in western Uganda. Old antagonisms had come to an end, he announced, and a new era of peace had at last arrived.

This paper is about the documentary practices by which Bawalana broke time and brought in a millennium. In his use of language, in the bureaucratic formatting of his correspondence, and in his evocation of Biblical precedents Bawalana placed western Uganda’s people in a different time and a different history. His experimentations undid the fixities of culture and heritage. In Bawalana’s correspondence we can see a time when the immanent frame bursts asunder, when new forms of agency become thinkable, and when the lessons of the past do not determine human destiny.