

PUBLIC LECTURE

Public space as the arena of assertion vs. repression of Muslim identity

Speaker

Amir Sheikhzadegan

Date and Time

Thursday 14 May,
10:30am-12:00pm

Venue

Bankstown Campus
03.G.55

RSVP

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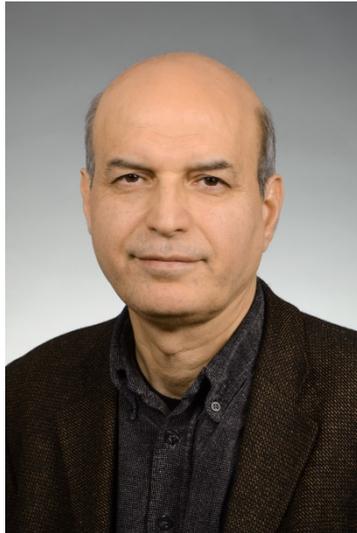
By Monday 11 May

Abstract

A gradual emergence of diasporic communities out of migrant groups with an Islamic background (Schiffauer 2007) also implies a transition of their status from the “invisible migrant-worker” to that of “visible Muslim citizenship” (Göle 2011).

Geared with a strengthening of the populist right in Switzerland, the increasing visibility of Islam has given rise to conflicting claims to the appropriation of urban spaces – a tug of war that culminated in 2009 in a minaret ban, on the one hand, and the emergence of the radical organization *Islamic Central Council Switzerland* (ICCS) on the other.

Drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of “representational space” the study argues that public visibility has become the main contested issue between the populist right and the ICCS. Whereas the former strives for containing “the Islamic threat” by pushing Islam out of the public spaces, the latter uses urban spaces to maximize the public visibility of Islam in Switzerland. Arguing that ICCS’s public presence



stands in a dialectical relationship to its identity politics, the study then highlights the following identity formation practices of this organization:

Firstly, ICCS struggles for a formal recognition of Islam in Switzerland.

Secondly, it seeks for an inversion of the stigma “Islam” (Wieviorka 2001; Cesari 2004) by persuading Muslims to publicly celebrate their muslimness.

Thirdly and finally, it strives for a strong public presence by running book stands in the crowded urban areas, distributing pamphlets and flyers in migrants’ gatherings, upholding public conferences in renowned city halls, and organizing demonstrations in city centers.

The study is part of a larger research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation investigating the narrative identities of Muslims who are actively engaged in voluntary associations. As for methodology, it draws both on *reconstruction of narrative identity* (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2004) and ethnographic investigation.

Biography

Amir Sheikhzadegan is a senior post-doc lecturer and researcher at the Department of Social Sciences (Section of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work) of the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). He is the author of “Der Griff des politischen Islam zur Macht: Iran und Algerien im Vergleich” (2003) as well as the co-editor of “Gesellschaften zwischen Multi- und Transkulturalität” (forthcoming). Sheikhzadegan has been a visiting fellow at the *Zentrum Moderner Orient* (ZMO) in Berlin as well as a lecturer at the universities of Zurich, Lucerne, and Basel. His fields of interest include societal change in Iran, Islam and modernity, civil society, and narrative identity.

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