

**Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Practice**  
**Lecture cum Seminar**

**Thursday, June 16, 2011, 16.00 – 19.00**

Freie Universität Berlin, Raum JK 24/122d, Habelschwerdter Allee 45

**Sumit Mandal**

(Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)

**Global Conjunctions in the Indian Ocean?**  
**A Creole Arab writer in the Malay World in the Early 1800s**

**Chair: Manan Ahmed** (Freie Universität Berlin)

Abdullah al-Misri is regarded as one of a number of authors who in the 1800s introduced a certain realism to writing in Malay, during the time that European rule became increasingly consolidated. The Dutch and the British drew a line through the Malay world in 1824 that demarcated their respective colonial spheres (from which the independent nation-states Indonesia and Malaysia emerged in the twentieth century). Al-Misri and Abdullah Munsyi are often identified as the literary innovators of the respective colonies, though the former is nevertheless a neglected author in comparison to the latter. Abdullah Munsyi's fame grew not only because of the innovativeness of his work but its propagation by his British patrons. Indeed, it was the high estimation in which his work was held in colonial circles that led to its near canonical status in the early decades of independent Malaysia. When later a critique emerged, literary authorities questioned the author's authenticity as an ethnic Malay by drawing attention to his Arab-Indian ancestry, and his critical views of local rulers in contrast to his apparent awe of the British. Al-Misri was possibly no less intimate with the Dutch, but his writings were not promoted by the latter and remained largely unknown until Monique Zaini-Lajoubert published an edited compilation in 1987. His rediscovery thus took place largely without colonial acknowledgement and decades after independence. However, the lines drawn by the colonial powers and reproduced in contemporary nation-states have continued to inhibit a broader and more complex appreciation of his writing.

The question that arises for this lecture centres on how nation-bound perspectives attenuate the terms of our understanding of identity and belonging by erasing the mobility and interconnected histories of authors and texts. Rather than a creole whose writing reflected the everyday translation of the multi-lingual world that he inhabited, he is seen today as an Arab whose work is largely the concern of Indonesian literature. In contrast, this lecture examines one of Al-Misri's texts as a conjunction of historical trajectories not only of the Malay world but also the Indian Ocean. How might we view the author and his text on these transnational scales? How might we then read his work?

**Sumit Mandal** is a member of the Collaborative Research Centre "Representations of Changing Social Orders" at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and on leave from the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. He obtained his PhD in history from Columbia University in New York in 1994 and has since published and taught in the fields of social history and cultural studies. His research centres on cultural diversity with a focus on Southeast Asia, in particular the outcome of the transnational connections of Muslim societies in the Indian Ocean world. His article "The Significance of the Rediscovery of Arabs in the Malay World" will be published in the journal *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* in 2011. He is currently working on a book titled "Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World."

### **Lecture-cum-Seminar**

The Lecture-cum-Seminar series is a central element of the scholarly program of the Zukunftsphilologie project. It is conceived as a working seminar of 3 to 5 hours. The lecture (ca. 45-60 minutes) is meant to introduce the audience to the research problem and provide the general analytical and theoretical framework for the topic. This is followed by a practical seminar, wherein the speaker demonstrates his or her case by reference to texts in the original language and in English translation. It is hoped that this Lecture-cum-Seminar series, a combination of theory and a direct engagement with texts, will enable scholars to examine the comparative aspect of the problematic without neglect of the local and singular nature of the texts examined.

### **Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship**

The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important „philological wars“, the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these „philological wars“ emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

**Contact:** [zukunftsphilologie@trafo-berlin.de](mailto:zukunftsphilologie@trafo-berlin.de)

For more information please see: [www.forum-transregionale-studien.de](http://www.forum-transregionale-studien.de)

<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/friedrichschlegel/promotionsprogramm/kooperationen/Zukunftsphilologie/index.html>