

Winter Semester 2022/2023

SDAC Guest Lecture Series

Emotions as 'Technique': Personhood and Decision-Making among Indian Muslim Family Businesses in Malaysia

Waseem Naser
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Monday
31.10.22
18-20:00 c.t.
Online

*The lecture will be held via Zoom



Waseem Naser is a doctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. He is based at the Law and Anthropology department and is part of the Emmy Noether Research Group 'The Bureaucratization of Islam and its Socio-Legal Dimensions in Southeast Asia'. He is currently in his final year of dissertation, which focuses upon personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia. Prior to his foray into anthropology, he completed his postgraduate education in economics at the International Islamic University in Malaysia.

Emotions are often conceived as an internal aspect of human experience, rooted either in bodily feelings or cognitive impulses. This talk rather explores the social dimensions of emotions by building on fieldwork conducted among Indian Muslim family businesses in Malaysia. The talk will illustrate how these family businesses depended on particular emotions attached to the family to incite motivation and production in the business. The fieldwork was punctuated with frequent expressions of ambiguity over these emotional practices, often identified as their "culture". To some of Naser's interlocutors, these practices sustain their businesses; while for others, it is rather that these businesses provide an avenue of sustaining their culture in Malaysia. This ambiguity was more pronounced among a generation that was grappling with the choice of continuing within their family businesses, or seeking sustenance outside the family. When emotions in these contexts were ethnographically garnered as embedded in social relations, they do not clearly fall into a form of either feeling or cognition, but operate at a level where they are fuzzily combined. Naser attempts to theorize emotions at this fuzzy juncture, wherein they emerge as a 'technique' of social relations for inculcating particular forms of personhood. Persons in this conception are not simply the seat of emotion, but its transmitters and transformers. The notion of technique within anthropological discourses of personhood is thus argued to be more firmly connected to concomitant notions of relations and the body. Emotions as techniques thus develop into socially shaped idioms and strategies for defining and negotiating personhood.

Please contact Prof. Dr. Viola Thimm
to register:

viola.thimm@fau.de