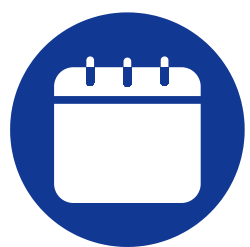


SUFI PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH SURRENDER: DEVELOPING A NEW KNOWLEDGE APPROACH IN AND FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Sufi circles in Belgium, I explore how contemporary Muslims draw inspiration from the Islamic knowledge tradition to address the challenges humanity faces in the contemporary world. I examine how my interlocutors reflect on their daily lives and the wisdom they encounter on their spiritual paths when confronted with current challenges, such as wars, pandemics, the ecological crisis, and the potential threats posed by AI. In the ceremonies I attend and through my conversations with Sufi disciples, an approach to knowledge emerges that I call “knowledge through surrender.” This form of knowledge involves cultivating attentiveness to the world—its wonders and mysteries—being receptive to the presence of God in creation, and developing an awareness of the invisible dimensions of existence. The position of surrender that my interlocutors adopt, and which I encounter during my fieldwork, contrasts sharply with conventional scientific approaches, where ideals of predictability, control, and the belief that scientific knowledge can anticipate and mitigate contemporary threats take center stage. I reflect on how this experiential form of knowledge influences my own methodological approach, revealing parallels between anthropological fieldwork and the spiritual journey as ongoing processes of exploration and self-transformation.



Lili Di Puppo is a research associate in the project “Muslims, the Secular, and Existential Risk” at the University of Chester, UK, and a postdoctoral researcher at KU Leuven, Belgium. Her research interests span the anthropology of religion, anthropology-theology, existential risks, sacred sites, and human-nature relations. She has conducted fieldwork in Belgium, Russia's Volga-Ural region, Moscow, and Georgia. From 2013 to 2022, she served as an assistant professor of sociology at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and as a senior researcher at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, in 2023-2024. Di Puppo has published a special issue on Muslim ontologies, transcendence, and anthropology in HAU – Journal of Ethnographic Theory, as well as two other special issues on Islam in Russia in Ethnicities and Contemporary Islam. She is the convenor of the European Association of Social Anthropology's ‘Muslim Worlds’ network and co-editor of the book *Peripheral Methodologies: Unlearning, Not-Knowing and Ethnographic Limits* (Routledge, 2021).



Date:
Tuesday - 8 July, 2025



Time:
6.15 - 7.45 PM

**Location: Big Seminar room,
Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen**

Link for virtual attendance: <https://fau.zoom-x.de/j/62556506187>



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