



Afternoon Talk on Islamic Law

Dominik Krell
University of Oxford

*“A Court of Many Languages:
Islamic Law and Multilingualism in The Gambia”*

Thursday, 16 May 2024 – 4:00 p.m. (CEST)

Hybrid Lecture
in Gerhard Kegel Hall and via Zoom

All employees and guests of the institute as well as
other interested parties are cordially invited to the hybrid lecture.
Please register for the lecture no later than Wednesday, 15 May 2024
using this [LINK](#).

Nadjma Yassari and Shéhérazade Elyazidi



About the Speaker

Dr. Dominik Krell is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies (CSLS), University of Oxford, and a Junior Research Fellow at Wolfson College. His work lies at the intersection of Comparative Law, Legal Anthropology, and Middle Eastern Studies. In his current research project, he studies how Arab countries are influencing the application of Islamic law in Sub-Saharan Africa.

About the Topic

Islamic law has a long tradition in West Africa. In The Gambia, Islamic courts, called 'Cadi Courts', are an important part of the court system and adjudicate cases in family and inheritance law. Apart from the Cadi Courts, the legal system of The Gambia is heavily influenced by British colonialism, with British-inspired common law being applied by the courts.

Another legacy of British colonialism is English, which serves as the country's official language. However, not all Gambians are proficient in English. In everyday life, a multitude of local languages like Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Serer or Jola are being used. While many Gambians are multilingual, others only speak and understand their own mother tongue. Despite this, all courts are supposed to operate in English. At the Cadi Courts, however, no single language dominates, and in many cases, several different languages are spoken simultaneously, while the judges (Cadis) write their judgements in Arabic.

In this talk, Dominik will explore how Cadis, lawyers, and other actors in the court system use the different languages at court. He argues that by allowing for multilingualism, the Cadi Courts present themselves as more approachable than other state courts, whose monolingualism was established by the British colonial power. Furthermore, he will illustrate that the Cadi Courts' multilingualism is not only a pragmatic decision but is also seen by the Cadis as an integral part of Islamic adjudication. By using the Cadi Courts of The Gambia as an example, he will demonstrate the importance of language for the study of Islamic law in the contemporary world.