

PD DR. VIOLA THIMM:

# "SUPER-POWER" IN THE GRAVE:

## MEANING-MAKING OF MUSLIM SAINTS' GRAVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND ON THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

This lecture shows, in comparative perspective, how state institutions in Malaysia and on the Arabian Peninsula (United Arab Emirates: UAE, and Oman) classify certain spiritual practices undertaken at graves of former religious leaders or prophets as superstitious (*khurafat*) and, therewith, unacceptable in Islam. Manifold groups of people in both far away and transregionally connected regions believe in a "super-power" (*keramat*) the dead person had and in miracles that surrounded them. However, the way the super-power is dealt with at the graves varies greatly depending on the religious, ethnic and Islamic ideological background of the people. By presenting ethnographic examples resulting from field research in all three regions, this presentation will illustrate which role Islamization and, most recently, Arabization, play in this regard in Malaysia on the one hand. On the other hand it will show how Wahhabi influence in the UAE and the unique strand of Ibadi Islam in Oman form the socio-cultural and religious contexts of handling the graves. Thus, against the backdrop of syncretic and multireligious traditions in all three regions, the ideological orientation of Islam and the perception of what is considered to be superstitious and magical is the decisive factor for a canalizing, disciplining or even repressive form of handling religious and spiritual practices at the *keramat* graves.



Keramat grave of Sultan Al-Arifin, Pulau Besar (Malaysia), 2017.



PD Dr. Viola Thimm is an Associate Professor (Privatdozentin) of Anthropology at Heidelberg University and Senior Lecturer at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU). Most recently, she was fixed-term Professor (W2) of Social & Cultural Anthropology as well as Managing Director and Program Director at FAU's MA-Elite Programme "Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures" (SDAC). Paying attention to queer elsewhere, PD Dr. Thimm currently works on the project "Sexual im/mobilities in Muslim pilgrimage" which compares and links conditions of queer Muslims in Malaysia and in Germany with regard to their practical and spiritual pilgrimage experiences. She was awarded her Habilitation and Venia Legendi in Anthropology (German qualification for full professorship) in 2021. She has published 6 books, three single-authored monographs and three (co-)edited volumes on Islam, gender and im/mobility, including: *Shopping with Allah: Muslim Pilgrimage, Gender, and Consumption in a Globalised World* (UCL Press, 2023), *Narrating Intersectional Perspectives Across Social Scales: Voicing Valerie* (Routledge 2022); *(Re-)Claiming Bodies: Gendered Configurations in Islam* (Palgrave Macmillan 2021), and *Gender and Educational Migration: Life Projects and Images of Femininity of Female Educational Migrants from Malaysia in Singapore* [*Geschlecht und Bildungsmigration: Lebensentwürfe und Weiblichkeitsbilder malaysischer Bildungsmigrantinnen in Singapur*] (Transcript 2014).

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Big Seminar Room, Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen

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

