

# **Muslim Worlds: World of Islam?**

Conceptions, Practices, and Crises of the Global

## **Research Program of the Zentrum Moderner Orient (Modern Orient Center), Berlin**

### **1. Tasks of the Zentrum Moderner Orient**

In the context of continuing processes of globalization, understanding other regions of the world is extremely important, especially in the face of the accompanying upheavals and conflicts. The Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) is Germany's only institution that focuses on the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia while including historical and comparative research. From an interdisciplinary perspective, interactions between cultural (in particular religious), social, political, and economic processes are studied. The research interest is thereby directed, first, toward the individual regions as such and, second, toward their relationships, both among themselves and to Europe. A special interest here is in the actors of these processes and movements. Due to their special regional and global significance, Muslim societies, groups, and references stand in the foreground of this research program.

The Zentrum makes its combined expertise available in the form of scholarly publications and services. It also has an important function as a bridge between scholarship and the public that it carries out with events and media work. As a contact point for foreign researchers and through its close collaboration with them, it makes an important contribution to research foreign policy. Young researchers are trained and fostered by working in the Zentrum, but also by being instructed by members of the Zentrum.

### **2. The New Research Program**

#### **2.1. Goals, State of Research, Preparatory Work**

The ZMO's future research program, initially planned for six years, examines the unity or heterogeneity of the conceptions of the world in the Islamic-influenced societies of the South and the relationship of these conceptions to concrete spaces and orientations of action and to competing conceptions of the world. The research program assumes that cognitive and normative conceptions stand in tension with concrete action; this is not to be understood as difference but – since the cultural turn in the social sciences at the latest – also as a many-faceted mutual influence. The relationship between religion, in particular Islam, and society in the context of globalization offers an especially striking and significant field of investigation to this end. Here as elsewhere, linear processes cannot be assumed. Rather, globalizing processes must

be considered in their upheavals, crises, and (in part violent) conflicts – which in turn also fuel this globalization.

The *current meaning* of this research perspective reveals itself in all three dimensions: conception, practice, and crisis. Religious and cultural images of the world have been raised to the level of an internationally effective criterion of political difference between members of different “civilizations” and thereby directly influence the interpretation and management of conflicts. Since the world-political upheavals after 1989, this tendency has increased, while replacing the difference in system between the socialist and capitalist “camps” in public images of the world. The attacks of September 11, 2001 brought an increase in international conflicts and tensions, as well as a stereotyping stance toward “Islam” in some areas.

The French Islamic Studies scholar Olivier Roy therefore speaks of religion as a “neo-ethnicity”, a viewpoint that, considering the universal claims of the religions based on revelation, can definitely be regarded as paradoxical (Roy 2006, 332), but that, precisely for this reason, deserves special attention. Religiously molded conceptions of the world are currently booming, including in the societies of the South and their diaspora communities in Europe. They are increasingly perceived and articulated as a criterion of social belonging, but also as a link between heterogeneous groups, societies, and geographical-cultural realms. Islamist ideologies, for example, not only turn against political opponents in the Muslim-influenced countries of the South, but also postulate a (politically/religiously defined) West as the enemy “Other” of a religiously understood “Islamic world” (Schulze, 1990). Such dichotomizing images of the world and identities are relevant not only to practical political questions, like membership in the European Union for Turkey and the role of immigrants in Europe, but also to additional questions of Europe’s self-understanding in a globalized world (Wehler, 2004; Mitterauer, 2003). Only in the context of empirical action and concrete historical experience can they be understood and their supposedly essential virulence reduced. But it must be asked whether current conceptions and practices of “global” interconnections and exchange relationships and the crises and conflicts that accompany them can indeed be exclusively (or primarily) grasped as religious phenomena. Do the current crises and conflicts have historical roots or parallels? Are there comparable developments in neighboring regions, societies, or milieus that are not Islamic-influenced, but Hindu- or Christian-influenced? The historical depth and the attention to “South-South interconnections” that characterize the multidisciplinary basic research at the ZMO are particularly well suited to critically question oversimplified and narrow perceptions: for example, can the empirical diversity of “Muslim worlds” (and their neighbors) in the South be categorized as a single “world of Islam” (Voll, 1994)? And if this is indeed done, how exactly is it to be understood?

The new research program will use case studies to show how the complex reality of Islamic-influenced societies in the South and of transnational Muslim communities is constituted. Muslims are embedded in diverse networks and worlds of life that often (also) take recourse to reference systems and patterns of interpretation completely

different from those that are suggested by a one-sided emphasis on religious affiliation and the resulting cultural construction of differences. Many Muslims and non-Muslims regard the unity of the “world of Islam” as given; by regarding this as an open question, the ZMO’s research program opens up the possibility of viewing it in a *longue durée* global-historical comparative framework and of placing it in the context of concrete “Muslim worlds”. It will thus be investigated how historical and current worlds of life and spaces of action are constituted, on the one hand, by communicatively mediated constructions and representations and, on the other hand, by concrete interactions between individuals and groups. The open term “world” makes it possible to understand the specific interlocking of local worlds of life and experience and changing global frameworks of reference. This transcends the still existing idea of a contrast between global and local and of the (usually one-sidedly understood) directionality of processes effecting globalization (Robertson 1995 & 1992). In terms of the concrete research object, this means that, at the ZMO, Muslims are studied in both majority and minority positions, whereby it is taken for granted that their relations to non-Muslim (majority and minority) groups of the populace are a component of the research program.

With this program, whose basic outlines were already favorably received and endorsed by the Research Council during its evaluation of the ZMO (2006: 18-19), the Zentrum provides crucial impetus for the current discussion. First, it contributes to culturally and historically embedding globalization research and to explicitly relating historical and social developments to political and economic processes. At the same time, this program makes it possible to peruse non-European interpretations of globality and to set them in critical relation to the aforementioned economic and political tendencies to globalization. This permits a new view of a Europe that is itself wrestling with the question of its identity. With this approach, the ZMO makes a central contribution to a new global history that systematically examines interrelations and parallel developments. The ZMO’s multidisciplinary mode of working provides present-oriented research with a systematic and historical depth that is indispensable for understanding current developments.

The program builds on the research conducted at the ZMO over the past twelve years on questions of globalization and translocality (see, for example, Freitag/von Oppen 2005, von Oppen 2004, Reinwald 2004, Fürtig 2001a, Füllberg-Stollberg et al. 1999). An important result of this prior work is a conception of globalization that assumes multiple centers and networks of forces effecting globalization. In accordance with the ZMO’s regional orientation, the researchers working here focus primarily on connections between the various societies of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, while taking interconnections with Europe into account.

Research on the Muslim diaspora in Europe belongs systematically in the research program, but, in contrast to work on temporary migrants, it is not located in the core program presented here. Issues of mutual perception, which in turn often mold self-

understanding and views of oneself, are highly relevant for research, but cannot be realized in the framework of the core program.

The new research program now emphasizes that not all developments that affect globalization start from or are launched from Europe (see also. Mann 2002). It turns against public viewpoints on the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia that still tend to underscore cultural and historical peculiarities and limitations. Even newer approaches of transregional and global history tend to view Muslim societies only marginally in comparison with non-Muslim societies of East and South Asia (cf. Conrad/Sachsenmaier 2007). Other important points of contact with results of earlier programs at the ZMO consist in the emphasis on asymmetries, ruptures, and contradictions in the supposedly linear tendencies of globalization; here, for example, questions of the perception of a global Islam, the construction of locality in globalization, and the role of intermediary and mobile actors have already been raised (for example, Fürtig 2001b, Heidrich and Liebau 1999, Project Group Locality and the State 2002).

## 2.2. Research Fields

The broad overarching theme requires agreement on certain conceptual and empirical approaches that uncover the topic in various ways while simultaneously limiting it. For the first phase, three closely related fields of research have been chosen: “Concepts of the World and Order”, “Microcosms”, and “Actors in Translocal Space”. Each of these fields touches upon the aforementioned interactions between conceptions, practices, and crises of the global, but with different emphases and from different perspectives.

The first two fields complement each other as mirror images: The **first research field** focuses on “**Conceptions of the World and Order**” that make at least a potential claim to global validity, but that can have extremely different natures and scopes. Conceptions of this kind can be regarded as attempts at order and orientation in a world in which the experience of crises casts doubt on existing frameworks of orientation. They can be religiously or secularly constituted, can compete with other conceptions, or can dovetail with them. This is especially true in gender orders, in which the spread of an “Islamic feminism” can be noted alongside references to a (sometimes constructed) “tradition”. On the other hand, they can also quite concretely serve the organization, regulation, norming, and control of relationships under globalizing circumstances, a phenomenon that can already be observed in early regulations of international trade and transcontinental labor relations. They can be ideally (“Islamic umma”) or politically (“pan-Turkism” or “democratic civil society”) constituted. But they can also involve concrete themes like agreement on human rights, regulations for the international labor market and global financial transfers, or attempts to avoid ecological disasters.

Depending on the individual projects' research interest, specific institutions, groups, and persons identified with these conceptions of the world can be studied. This permits a political and social localization of the respective conceptions that explains their origin and effectiveness. Along with seeking concrete comprehension of such new models of order and orientation, the research will also explore how they relate to each other and to competing conceptions, the degree to which they influence each other, and whether they can establish themselves as forces shaping society, religion, the economy, and/or politics.

But certain conceptions of normative world orders are also articulated or questioned in projections of history. These emerge in the cultures and politics of memory, which are an often especially contended field of societal, religious, and historical conflicts and therefore should also be examined, at least in outlines, in this context.

Vice versa, the **second research field, "Microcosms"**, starts from concrete, but primarily locally constituted worlds of experience, for example cities or urban districts, villages, and regions. These are investigated in the context of and in regard to globalizing changes and transformation. For example, one project examines the development of municipal governance, which took form under the pressure of national and international reform agendas and increasing mobility in the 19th and 20th centuries. What networks, institutions, and mechanisms of regulation and negotiation arose to contain and locally manage the tensions resulting from the changes? What models of locality, urbanity, or also globality ("cosmopolitanism", etc.) were developed where, and how did they change in the context of local practice? Successful local models have clearly been exported and had effects outside of the places they originally developed, but under what specific conditions did this occur? Another question is how the presence of foreign entrepreneurs, for example, the Chinese entrepreneurs in North Africa, has changed local worlds of life and experience by creating new connections.

These levels of investigating normative conceptions of the world, on the one hand, and local configurations of the global, on the other hand, will thus be respectively supplemented with the observation of concrete activity in local and translocal worlds of life and experience. With this, the program contributes to a map of the historical change in various levels of globalizing and regionalizing movements. In this sense, various meso-regions can also be sketched that display a significant concentration of contacts in certain phases of their historical development. Examples include the societies of the Indian Ocean and the history of trans-Saharan relations (Marfaing/Wippel 2004, Deutsch/Reinwald 2002).

The diverse changes in structures and connections lead to a great number of partly collective, partly very individual spaces and horizons of action that are to be explored and set into relation with the actors' conceptions of the world. How does economic globalization develop, and is it influenced by religiously or secularly formulated ideological frameworking? What does the rapid spread of Islamic banking practices mean in such a context? To pursue these questions, a **third research field** will focus ex-

plicity on “**actors in translocal space**”, i.e., on merchants and entrepreneurs as well as on “citizens of the web” (so-called “netizens”) and on missionary movements. How do Muslim, internationally active entrepreneurs act in Europe, what strategies to the aforementioned Chinese develop in Algeria? How can we interpret conscious turns to specific practices regarded as Islamic, for example clothing prescriptions and gender orders in everyday life? How do actors themselves explain these cultural, social, but also political turns?

To be able to classify and interpret the current findings, a historical-comparative perspective is indispensable. At the same time, a better understanding of historically grown structures raises a wealth of further questions in connection with the production of knowledge. These questions are related, first, to the thematic complex of the generation and ordering of knowledge in various traditions of knowledge, as well as the concepts generated by these traditions of knowledge. The affirmative assertion of “Islam” as a unity of “religion and state”, as promulgated by some Muslims since the early 20th century, itself presupposes the development of their own concept of the state and of religion. Considering the concept of secularization in the Western science discourse – still of paradigmatic significance despite the “return of the religious” (Riesebrodt, 2000) – it is worth tracing the development of this concept.<sup>1</sup> In the research program, these questions will be addressed for now with events staged jointly by all the projects; additional third-party-financed projects in this area are in preparation.

The three research fields are understood as emphases without rigid boundaries. Several individual plans (projects) are substantively and organizationally associated with each research field; but this association need not be exclusive. The individual projects are tied together in the working process within and between the research fields. At the same time, connections with the overall interest of the program are intensified. Considering such multiple relationships, the regular work meetings of all staff members and the work discussions and workshops that tied the various thematic, regional, and disciplinary perspectives together are a central component of the work at the ZMO. The cooperative and dialogical style of work cultivated at the Zentrum greatly fosters the substantive networking of the research.

### **2.2.1 “Conceptions of the World and Order”**

To the degree that the societies of the South that are studied at the ZMO entered into interaction with their broader surroundings, they developed ideas of the “world” as a comprehensive geographical, social, and normative space that goes beyond everyday activity and communication but that offers the framework for regulating this activity. In the context of increasing mobility, increasingly rapid change, and the increasing volume of communication in the processes of globalization over the last 150 years, the production of the kind of conceptions of the world that lay claim to global scope

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<sup>1</sup> On defining the concept of the secular, cf. Casanova 1996, Taylor 1996.

and universal validity has experienced an enormous boom – in the Islamic context, but not only there. This research field is devoted to the comparative examination of such conceptions of the world, their production, and their normative effectiveness for such changing social contexts.

Conceptions of the world and order are attempts to orient and position oneself and to gain self-confidence in a world that is multiply and variably networked and at the same time asymmetrically ordered. For the regions examined at the ZMO, examples of this in the course of the last 150 years include the constructions of an Islamic world community (*umma*) and “pan-identities” (pan-Islam, pan-Turkism, pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism, and pan-Asianism) (cf. Piscatori 2006, Aydin 2006, Noor 2003, Fürtig 2001b, Landau 1990). But the different variants of anti-colonial or anti-imperial nationalism and internationalism and the recourse to seemingly indigenous traditions in Asia and Africa are also examples of these (cf. for example Goswami 2004, Malkki 1994, Anderson 1991, Freitag 1991, Chatterjee 1986). Such identities always also refer to the “other” within a frame of reference conceived in principle to be global.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the “cultural turn” of recent years, such conceptions of identity and order have been recognized as crucial components of “globality”, also and precisely when they develop ideas of difference and dichotomy within the global (Beck 2005, Robertson 1995). This way of viewing things also emphasizes the processual character of the development of such conceptions.

In this research field, the **first** important thing is to ascertain the diversity of the various conceptions of the world. There are already studies in ethnology, history, Islamic studies, and political science on some of these conceptions, but they have so far been limited to specific areas of investigation and have neglected comparative questions. In societies going through rapid historical transformations, different and often competing normative systems and/or frames of reference are often “cited” and articulated simultaneously. As a result, the sources that feed the world images and ways of acting that claim general validity are very heterogeneous in the regions studied at the ZMO: they include religious texts, legal codices, political programs, and constructed “traditions”. Here a wide variety of borrowings, transfers, and translations can be observed; these in turn can be traced to processes of interconnection, reference, and distance-taking. In this way, unusual interpretations arise: that the strictly Islamic Tablighi Jamaat in Gambia is understood more as a kind of youth subculture, for example, is an initially surprising result (Janson 2006).

**Second**, selected conceptions of the world from the studied societies will be investigated for concrete attempts they include to regulate behavior and relationships in globalizing-effective contexts across the boundaries of everyday, “local” familiarity and obligation. These conceptions seek to produce legitimization, organization, and

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. also the concept of “reference” in Conrad (2006, 159ff) and of “frame of reference” in Loimeier, Neubert, and Weißköppel (2005, 17), which, however, is understood more specifically here, namely in terms of all contexts that are relevant to orientation and stands in a relationship of tension with everyday activity.

security in situations in which these cannot be assumed (any longer). Precisely among Muslims, claims and debates about law and “correct” behavior and the associated relationship to the ordering framework of the *shari’a* form an essential foundation for religiously based globality. But secular discourses of the global were and are based essentially upon references to universal norms – not only in the West (for example, the ecology debates), but also in the postcolonial societies of the South (cf. Beck 2005). Examples of this include debates about “progress” and “development”, ecology, human rights, and citizens’ rights.

As these examples show, the conceptions to be studied in this research field involve both religious and worldly-oriented ideas relevant to cultural, social, or political activity. Conceptions of the world and of order that are developed in the South have to do with what seems to be a wide spectrum of topics, for example the international labor market and global capital transfers, dealings with indivisible public goods and spaces, the relationships between the sexes and generations, or access to the “world of sports” with its own norms of achievement and rules of the games.

**Third**, the normative dimension of conceptions of the world will be systematically investigated in all its historical depth; this results in new starting points for periodizing them. So far, many studies have concentrated on the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Conrad/Sachsenmaier 2007, Conrad 2006, 162). But at the ZMO, research will be further pursued on two concrete historical periods: first, the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when, even before the imperial expansion of the late 19th century, exchange among Muslim societies began to intensify. And second, the period after World War I, whose global effects in Asia and Africa have not been nearly as intensely studied as those of the war itself have been. At the same time, precisely because of the question of the influence of European ideologies in non-European regions, this era is especially relevant for current debates. Work on this field has already been carried out at the ZMO for a long time, as well (Höpp/Wien/Wildangel 2004, see also Schumann 2001). Special interest will thereby focus on the question of the interactions between European and non-European conceptions of the world and how the depictions of the regions and their relationships – between homogeneity/universality and distance-taking/differentiation – changed in these periods.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, study will also address the historical perspective of the actors themselves, i.e., the shaping of memory in its importance for self-localizing and conceptions of the world. Memory is an important starting point for structuring time and space; it helps in constructing, adapting, and perpetuating identity and normativity. Memory thus contributes to orientation and the societal formation of meaning. This plays a substantial role in periods of societal upheaval, as not only the Eastern European, but also the South African example has strikingly shown. This makes culturally and politically influenced memory an important crystallization point for political conflicts (Münkler 1997, Assmann/Harth 1993, Nora 1990). The research of the Zentrum

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<sup>3</sup> One example is provided by the debate about the beginnings of concepts of non-European modernities (for example, Dirlik 2006, Conrad 2007).



Modern Orient already displays a strong tradition in this respect (Höpp/Wildangel/Wien 2004, Höpp 2002).

Reference to history can also serve to establish lines of tradition that interpret the present as a continuation of what has already been. But the past can also be used as a negative foil from which the present and plans for the future distance themselves. Usually both can be observed in how people deal with the past. The concrete mixture of the appropriation of and distance-taking from the past in the shaping of conceptions of the future is an especially revealing research object, particularly when situations of upheaval give rise to hopes for a re-ordering of society, for example in the case of Iraq.

**Fourth**, finally, research will be done on relationships between conceptions and a practice that refers to them, and not only in regard to the explanation of the first, but also in regard to their effect: have universalism or cultural dichotomization, which these conceptions of the world transport, actually led to new orientations, and if so, for whom and on what levels? Do cultural framework creations like these influence economic globalization? What is the effect of a conscious turn to very specific practice regarded as Islamic on the everyday life of the majority of the population, in regard to cultural, social, economic, and political orientations?

In this field of research, it is important to localize and explain the studied approaches in their context, especially because different actors stood and stand behind the various conceptions of the world: from international organizations to influential institutions, social movements, groups, and individuals. Studies of different views of the world and normative concepts must assume the diversity and respectively specific characters of the participating actors, networks, and milieus and also their particular anchoring in local and translocal worlds of life. Such studies must, through comparison, seek to explain which conceptions (or which variants of them) succeed in which social and economic contexts. The correlations between the conceptions and the concrete processes of globalization, situations of activity, and spheres of communication in which they arise must not be viewed deterministically; contradictions and ambivalences must be taken into account: neither networks nor local milieus are static; rather, they are exposed to many processes of change and they change themselves under that challenge.

Prior investigations of this theme have limited themselves almost exclusively to political and intellectual elites as producers of global images of the world. The most widely published conceptions, however, are in no way always those most effective in practice. It must also be assumed that the validity or dominance of norms does not develop solely through codification, but also through legal and everyday practice. In the research field sketched here, the attempt should therefore be made – in close cooperation with research fields two and three – to use everyday utterances and practice to reconstruct the perceptions and conceptions of selected non-hegemonial groups and individuals (cf. de Certeau 1990).

### **2.2.2 “Microcosms” and Practices of the Local**

The research field “Microcosms” is to be understood complementarily to that on “Conceptions of the World”. The focus here is quite literally on micro-cosmoses, worlds in miniature, and the associated practices of the “locals”. Unlike before, here concrete places, villages, city districts, and cities are the starting point for the investigations. Particularly in cities, groups and individuals of varying cultural, religious, and social identity encounter each other in various private and public contexts. This is conditioned primarily by migration and socio-economic change, which are molded not least by changing transportation technology and streams of movement. Cities of the South, in particular, display like a magnifying glass the same problematic as the “world at large”, namely the striving to integrate, regulate, and universalize, on the one hand, and to set boundaries between particular interests, experiences, and identities, on the other. They are thus micro-cosmoses not only in the sense of being exemplary excerpts of the global, but also as intersections where globality, in the sense of a more or less vast interconnection, is “produced”. Cities also throw into high relief the assumption that globality and locality have developed in historical parallel and in interaction with each other. Accelerated urbanization and transnational migrations affect inhabitants of rural areas as much as they affect city people. The resulting changes in social structure and patterns of interpretation, but also material goods, thus enable observation of the interconnection between global and local processes, including in the context of the village (for example, von Oppen 2003). This research field, too, is thus concerned with the tension between interpretation and practice, whereby here the accent is placed more strongly on patterns of action and international transformations.

The objects of the investigations here are, **first**, how various groups in the selected sites interact and distance themselves from each other. Unlike in many earlier studies, the focus of interest here is on conflicts and cooperation between the groups, as well as on the forms and processes of their regulation, and not the identity-formation and way of life of specific individual groups or urban spaces and institutions as such. This research field thus stands in a critical relationship to concepts like cosmopolitanism, urbanity, and sociability (Dakhliya, 1998; Georgeon/Dumont, 1997). It shares their interest in group-overarching relations and in translocal orientations, but it also turns against their normative implications and their tendencies to social selectivity. In the individual case studies, attention will be paid to respectively different mixtures of forms of social grouping or socialization, in accordance with socio-economic or socio-political, ethnic, religious, and/or cultural criteria (Soares, 2005). Norms and status, which are tied to respective group affiliations, have substantial importance for relations between the urban groups and, beyond that, point to the thematic of research field 1.

Urban and village life, however, is not limited to the elites that stand in the foreground of many earlier studies. Rather, particular interest focuses, **second**, on the way participation in communal life is shaped. For this issue, transit sites (ports, for example in

the Mediterranean, on the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, but also places between these and the hinterland) play a special role. For with high fluctuation and heterogeneity, efforts and integration and participation are a special challenge here. Seemingly marginal and temporary groups (for example, small retailers, seasonal workers, domestic employees, pupils and students, migrants passing through, pilgrims, and the homeless) that seem to have no place in established venues of participation are therefore explicitly included in the study.

The various methodological approaches, in particular historiographical and anthropological ones, will be combined in this research field, as well. Comparisons between various regional or local contexts will take on special importance. Transregional comparison, for example between developments in the Ottoman Empire and South Asia, is mostly virgin territory here (see also Fawaz/Bayly 2002; Bentley/Bridenthal/Yang, 2005). Comparisons between various historical periods in the same place show how social relationships change with historical change. Such comparative investigations will also shed light on the processual character of urban relationships. The analyses will thereby be carried out primarily on the micro level of concrete urban spaces, but will also view translocal and global relationships from this perspective. The interactions between social relationships and built space are an important point of study (v. Bruck, 1997).

**Third**, the way various groups live together directly raises questions of social regulation and governance. For example, the development of municipal governance under the pressure of national and international reform agendas and growing mobility in the 19th and 20th centuries will be investigated. The history of the planning and development of new settlements and cities is a promising topic of investigation in this regard, as well. We can expect this to lead to a better understanding of the historical formation and functioning of political-administrative, socio-cultural, and economic urban institutions (Haynes, 1991). The planned examinations of urban microcosmoses in various non-European contexts will lead, both empirically and conceptually, to a more differentiated view of the city as model and interface for globalizing processes; these studies can build on work already carried out at the ZMO (for example, Ahuja/Brosius 2006, Lafi 2006, see also Hanssen 2005 & 2002).

### ***2.2.3 Actors in Translocal Space***

The third research field in the new program casts a glance at mobile political and economic actors from Islamic-molded societies in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, thereby investigating practices of global networking and translocal activity whose starting point lies in the South. Neither the first research field, which focuses on perceptions or conceptions of the world, nor the second, which examines primarily local structures and their development, is imaginable without acting individuals or groups. It is thus only logical to focus attention in the third field more on translocally operating actors in and between Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and on their mobile practices that, in a certain way, are the basis for the sum of the relation-

ships that mean concrete globality. This research field, too, takes up impulses from studies already carried out at the ZMO (Heidrich / Liebau 2001).

Future investigations of the movements of persons and organizations, however, will not be restricted to the interconnections resulting from mobility and the possible rise of new political, economic, and social spaces. Rather, the focus of research interest here is the actors themselves, their horizons of and strategy for activity before, while, and after they cross (geographical, political, or socially constructed) boundaries (Bourdieu). This research field takes seriously the individual actors' possibilities to do more than orient themselves toward existing norms in relation to processes of globalization. They can also respond creatively to and affect the framework conditions (cf. Joas 1996). This is the only way to defend the supposition that globalization is fueled from multiple centers and is not merely accepted or tolerated by the actors in the South.

This research field thus concentrates on persons or groups of persons who move across borders. Possible objects, as concrete actors, include transnationally operating merchants and companies, traveling missionaries, preachers, and transnational missionary movements like the Asian Tablighi Jama'at or the Muslim Bible Scholars in East Africa (van der Heyden/Liebau, 2005; Masud, 2000; Eickelman/Piscatori 2004).

The question thereby pursued thus has three parts. **First**, to what degree does mobility alter the travelers themselves? Studies of travelers have shown that religiously motivated trips, like pilgrimages, missionary movements, and/or commercial travel, change social relationships. At the same time, they shape horizons of activity, which can have political consequences (Petry 1985, Werbner, 2003) and which contributes to the formation of images of the world. Here, in turn, are also points of connection with the research of the first field of the new program. Political or religious groups are strengthened or fragmented by mobility; companies expand or must close down. The actors' mobility seems to be fundamentally constitutive of the success of some companies (Bang 2003, Markovits 2000, Masud 2000, Stagl 1995, Eickelman/Piscatori 1990, Freitag 2003a).

**Second**, in close connection with the work done in the research field "Microcosmoses", changes in the starting points and destinations will be examined, for example when foreign students return home (Reetz 2006). This puts the issue of the rise of nodes of globalization in the center of research interest.

The systematic investigation of mobility as a practice of activity fills a gap in research, since there is relatively little empirical research on the modern mobility of merchants and entrepreneurs or political actors like diplomats, military personnel, or oppositional movements in the South. The consequences of this mobility in Muslim-molded societies, too, have been meagerly studied (see also Freitag 2003b, Peleikis 2001, Hanna 1998, contributions in Freitag/Clarence-Smith 1997 and in Marfaing and Wippel 2004). There are a few studies of discourses in these societies on traveling and on

travels (for example, Clifford 1997, Said 1983), but here, too, the field of tension between everyday practice and norm formation, between strategic action and the “moral economy” are still to be desired in research. Here, research field 3 touches on the question of world images in research 1, from the opposite perspective (2.2.1).

But, **third**, activity in translocal spaces should be placed in the context of processes of economic, political, and cultural globalization. It and they shape each other mutually (Dennerlein/Reetz 2007, Freitag/von Oppen 2005). Investigating it also sharpens our view of the contradictions and crises of the global. The actors overcome geographical, political, linguistic, and often also cultural and social borders. The shaping of new, translocal spaces of activity, however, can be tied to violent conflicts among competing actors. In addition, translocal conceptions of and strategies for activity stand in a field of tension with attempts by a wide variety of socially or religiously defined groups, state institutions, and non-state organizations to regulate these border-crossings, to erect new borders, or even to prevent mobility: here international trade agreements come to mind, as well as religious or nationalistic ideologies or the construction of border facilities like those around the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla. The actors’ geographical border crossing is and was often accompanied by social mobility, but it can also prevent social change or become the distinguishing mark of groups in a particularly precarious situation. Finally, the relationship between mobile and immobile actors or those prevented from being mobile is of special interest.

The investigation of the practical side of mobility, its consequences, and its contexts also further develops the ZMO’s research line on translocality in history and the present.

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