



Research Programme
2008-2013

Muslim Worlds: World of Islam? Conceptions, Practices, and Crises of the Global

I. Concepts of World and Order

Starting with the assumption that 'world' is understood as a geographical, social and ideological space, this research group explores perceptions and projections of the world originating from the South. It focuses on how projections of world and order are translated into normative tools and regulatory measures, such as institutions, group structures and personal agendas, in order to organize and control social relations within global frames of reference. By adopting a historical and cultural perspective, concepts of world and order are located in changing social and political frameworks. Individual projects investigate religious world concepts such as the global umma, as well as more secular perceptions, such as civil society. While concepts like Pan-Islam or Pan-Turkism emphasize ideological and political aspects of global projections, the application of allegedly universal human rights to the local context concentrates on the pragmatic implementations of a global concept. As in the case of Islamic Feminism or the global system of sports, world concepts compete with other perceptions and projections – often hegemonic Western and male-dominated globalization discourses – or become intertwined with them. Contrary to a trend that focuses exclusively on political and intellectual elites, the individual projects place due emphasis on the world projections of ordinary individuals and groups. By focusing on diverse local actors, the research cluster provides insights into the dynamics that characterize perceptions of the global.

II. Microcosms and Practices of the Local



Izmir, ca. 19.Jh.

This group investigates questions of locality, linking up spatial and social relations. What are the ties that bind social actors to a specific place? How, in turn, do actors 'make' a place and how are locations shaped by the interactions and contestations of various social actors over time? How do actors represent a specific location as a meaningful place and a spatially bounded arena for social action?

Among the themes discussed in this group, three perspectives are highlighted. Firstly, drawing on an understanding of localities as 'microcosms', interactions and processes of conflict and cooperation between different social groups in specific locations are explored. Here, the participation of mobile or seasonally absent groups (e.g., traders, pilgrims, migrant and seasonal workers) in communal life is of special interest.

At the same time, local microcosms reflect orders associated with wider contexts, such as state or empire. A second aspect under investigation is, therefore, the issue of territorial control and of governance. Group members study practices of ordering and regulating communal life, the ways in which communities adapt to changing regional orders, and the cultivation and domestication of space through material practices (e.g., building, town planning, construction of dams, railway lines, bridges).

These practices of 'producing locality' are closely linked to a third focus in our discussions, namely, representations of locality. This aspect is studied by analysing the creation (and consumption) of images, maps, travelogues, constructions of local histories and topographic narratives, and their inscription with narratives about social belonging, identity, legitimacy and authority.

III. Actors in Translocal Spaces

The mobility of social actors operating translocally lies at the forefront of the projects that make up the research field Actors in Translocal Spaces. The actors examined here are traders, soldiers, workers, entrepreneurs, Islamic religious scholars (*ulama*) and intellectuals, but also 'citizens of the web' ('netizens'). The geographical starting point for their activities is the global south. The actors operate in overlapping fields of tension, ranging from individual and collective strategies to translocal and global developments. Their operating spaces are affected by struggles for power related to colonial, cultural, political or economic dominance. How they define their goals and strategies in these conflictual translocal relationships, and what sort of practices of the global networks and translocal activities they use, will be explored.

One of our decisive conceptual starting points is the question of mobility as practice. The social actors we consider negotiate geographical, political, linguistic and often cultural and social boundaries, creating new translocal spaces of practice, practical blueprints and strategies in the process. The geographical crossing of boundaries by these actors is habitually accompanied by social and political mobility, and can either hinder social change or become symbolic of their particularly precarious situation. Such asymmetries and fissures in the marginalization of actors are examined in the various projects. Of particular interest are actors in migration, diaspora or exile. Questions about the relationship between mobility and immobility or, as the case may be, inhibited mobility are also asked.