

Research Programme 2014–2019

**Muslim Worlds – World of Islam?**

**Conceptions, Practices and Crises of the Global<sup>1</sup>**

**(updated June 2015)**

ZMO was founded to conduct multidisciplinary and transregional research on Africa, Asia and the Middle East, particularly those parts which were influenced by Islam, i.e. what Marshall Hodgson has called the “Islamicate world”. For some time now, academic discussions have expressed a heightened sense of “unease” (Unbehagen, Poya/Reinkowski 2008) about the ways that Islam and Muslims have been studied and presented to the Western public (also Ernst 2004; Ernst, Martin 2010). We acknowledge the contribution of studies on religious belief, piety and spirituality for understanding the contemporary Islamicate world (SCHIELKE 2010; Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Deeb 2006; Green 2011; Hefner 2000; Marsden 2005; Soares, Osella 2009). However, an overemphasis on religion must be seen critically. When social actors are seen as predominantly religious actors this may lead to reductionist accounts of their lives and social contexts. Fashionable generalisations as well as recent academic accounts portraying particular religious traditions (especially Islam) as more prone to fundamentalism than others (Cook 2014) challenge us to develop alternative approaches. They have to comprise multi-disciplinary and transregional perspectives in order to avoid the limitations resulting from an exclusive focus on philology or politics, or from an Arabo-centric scholarship which takes the Middle East as representative of a wider Muslim world. ZMO’s research perspective is based on a well-established focus on translocality (FREITAG, VON OPPEN 2010) and attention to relations between the regions studied, as well as with Europe. It is strongly informed by an actor-centred approach.

In 2014 ZMO entered into the second six-year phase of its BMBF-funded research programme of overall twelve years. Four research groups are investigating the following thematic fields: *Progress: Ideas, Agents, Symbols* (in short: *Progress*), *The Politics of Resources* (in short: *Resources*), *Trajectories of Lives and Knowledge* (in short: *Lives and Knowledge*) and *Cities as Laboratories of Change* (in short: *Cities*).

*Progress* studies projects which aim at a transformation of the individual and society, the ideas that underpin them as well as agents who try to realise them and the symbols that represent them. *Resources* investigates contested and changing ways of appropriating, accessing and using material resources. *Lives and Knowledge* analyses the contingent links between lives and knowledge in diverse

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<sup>1</sup> This programme was developed at ZMO in close cooperation with many international researchers from various disciplines, such as history, anthropology, political science, religious (Islamic) studies, geography and various area studies.

political and historical contexts. *Cities* explores the socio-political dynamics of urban life and its internal transformations, notably the development of new practices and formation of new ideas. The main criteria for the analysis of these themes are spelled out below. The extent to which Islam constitutes a frame of reference both for the actors involved and for academic analysis depends on empirical contexts and thus is considered as an open question to be investigated in situ.

### ***Research field 1: Progress: Ideas, Agents, Symbols***

How do people envisage and attempt to achieve societal advancement? This question, which revolves around the notion of progress as a concept and a social project, has historically been central in both the making and the imagination of society. This has become most evident in the last three centuries when progress became clearly linked to notions such as modernity, development and reform. With regard to the areas under research it can be further asked if people in predominantly Muslim societies imagine progress in distinct ways and to what extent Islam, a common reference in texts dealing with “progress”, influences ideas about and attempts to achieve societal advancement.

In view of ZMO’s long-standing engagement with South-South relations and exchange between Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and building on former research about “Concepts of World and Order”, this research field goes beyond conventional understandings of “progress” as a predominantly European category. European modernist projects, themselves often products of far-ranging intellectual and cultural exchanges with the colonised and non-Western world, became ideological and governance tools in the hands of European colonial administrators and scholars. The thrust of such grand narratives of progress engendered a number of responses and outcomes, as well as attempts to re-elaborate their directions and aims, as exemplified by reformist currents of Islam gaining ground from the late 19th century onwards. Thus, while the positivism and utilitarianism of colonial and imperial times continue to inform political projects, these were modified, re-interpreted and re-assembled in successive post-colonial nation-building projects. In that context, liberals, conservatives, socialists as well as those holding faith-centred worldviews have had to come to terms with ideas of progress and take a position on it.

Notwithstanding the pervasive role of Western notions of progress, however, scholarly critiques of modernity and progress have underlined the need to treat these as internally diverse historical formations (Eisenstadt 2000; Kane 2003; Gaonkar 2001; Abdelkhah 1999; Deeb 2006; Shannon 2006). Going a step forward, this research field does not restrict itself to progress-related projects that were derivative and/or reactive formations vis-à-vis the West. It rather seeks to understand how agents in Muslim settings create their own narratives of progress, and undertake social trajectories that are both context specific and entangled with the wider world. Two assumptions underlie the research field’s approach to the study of progress: first, that the ways in which progress was and is thought about are dialectically related to discourses on decline (Taguieff 2004); second, that progress should not be simplistically understood in terms of a telos of the “inexorable, if always incomplete, advancement of the primitive” (Comaroff, Comaroff 1993: xii). Accordingly, the research field departs from Euro-centric equations of progress with rationalisation, secularisation and disenchantment. Furthermore, since recent analyses of the public sphere do not exclude religion as part of its structural transformation (Habermas 2006; Calhoun 2005), the role of religion in producing ideas, practices and material displays explicitly denoting themselves as progressive has to be critically examined.

This research field understands progress as a horizon of possibilities, a temporal blank screen upon which visions of reality can be projected by given actors and which can, potentially, be brought about through a set of transformative actions. These actions might either serve to alter or maintain the status quo. Progress thus has a Janus-faced temporal dimension: the future solely exists as a continuously

recreated vision in the present. This makes it such a valuable research topic to unravel underlying tendencies in science, policy and desires of a given society or social circle that become explicit and traceable when disassembling such visions (BROMBER ET AL. 2015).

### **Thematic Subfields**

*Progress* will be studied along three interrelated conceptual lines:

- 1) Ideas that aim at improving the individual and society, and the concepts that underpin them
- 2) The social agents who try to implement concrete visions of progress
- 3) The material symbols that represent these visions.

These interrelated subfields – ideas of progress, agents of progress and symbols of progress – are empirically grounded in case studies from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Additionally, they have been designed in such a way as to warrant a multidisciplinary take on progress within the social and human sciences, and in particular: anthropology, sociology, history and Islamic studies. Through the combined analysis of ideas, practices and symbols of progress, the research field is in tune with recent scholarship questioning the linguistic turn in the social sciences. The research thus contributes to important debates about how to link semantics with semiotics through social practice (Reichardt 2000; Ifversen 2011; Locher, Markantonatos 2013).

#### *1) Ideas of progress*

The research field investigates ideas that denote progress in particular settings of predominantly Muslim societies. It follows the emergence of specific ideas that belong to the semantics of progress, and charts the use and transformation of those ideas. In doing so it explicitly aims at contributing to a history of concepts (Müller 2011: 14). It gives due attention to concepts that do not necessarily refer to or translate European projections of progress, but instead emerge in a dynamic interplay between non-European intellectual and popular traditions and the wider world. How different are the discourses of (and on) progress by intellectuals who do not work within an epistemological framework of a religious-secular binary? If conceptualisations of a future, which for various reasons cannot be grounded in experience, produce open categories rather than clear concepts (Koselleck 1989: 88), it is relevant to ask if visions of the future involving reference to the past seem morally more valid or acceptable exactly because they envision the future as a continuation of the past (Trippe 2006; Hashemi 2009; Kane 2013; Eurben 1999; Lawrence 1995; Osella, Osella 2013). The focus of the research field *Lives and Knowledge* on the “itineraries” of intellectual production is particularly relevant in this respect, and close cooperation with this field is therefore envisaged.

Simultaneously however, and all the more since ZMO research focuses on the modern period, the research field explores entangled transformations of concepts. Recent literature has shown that we should recognise the multiplicity of sources as well as of practices of appropriation at work in the making of modernity (Wohlrab-Sahr, Burchardt 2012; Ferguson 2008; Deeb 2006; Cooper 2005; Gaonkar 2001; Eisenstadt 2000). This involves ideas about Islam as a system, as a political and economic, progressive force (Bompani and Frahm-Arp 2010; Osella, Osella 2009; Roy 1937; SOUNAYE 2013) or as a “third way” (Faruqi 1980). Thus, it has to be asked how the allegedly separate spheres of the religious and the secular cross-fertilised each other in producing and contesting ideas of progress, which social forces were and are behind a specific usage of a concept (SOUNAYE 2011), and how the appropriation or emergence of ideas is linked to discourse and language (BROMBER 2006).

Far from solely engaging in intellectual production in a strict sense, however, the subfield ideas of progress investigates how social and cultural settings produce and engage particular understandings of societal advancement. In this respect it is, for instance, interesting to know how the very idea of social

and public interest emerged and morphed under the all-pervasive influence of global capitalism and the nation-state (HAMZAH 2012), eventually becoming entangled with notions of, among others: freedom (and slavery), (in)justice, (in)equality and citizenship.

Notions of human (self-)improvement and perfectibility are part and parcel of ideas of progress (Coward 2008). These include attempts to foster particular subjects, such as educated cadres and self-managing citizens with an entrepreneurial ethos (Ong 2007; Bröckling 2007), or attempts at combining moral improvement with somatic (self-)reform (BROMBER 2013a, b), for instance along the lines of Social Darwinism (ROY 2014) or the “New Man” (Cheng 2009).

In addition to change and improvement, the research field pays attention to conservation and decline. In the first place, permanence and preservation are viewed as projects of framing tradition or as charters for the regeneration of society (GAIBAZZI 2015). Similarly, ideas of progress are often couched in discourses and experiences of decline, crisis and uncertainty, (BROMBER ET AL. 2015; HERZOG 1996, 1999). For instance, in several settings in Africa and beyond, widespread disillusionment with the post-colonial trajectory of the state and failed promises of modernisation have created shifting horizons of expectations (Ferguson 2006; Piot 2010), which in some cases fuel or intersect discourses on what it means to be a good, modern Muslim (SOUNAYE 2015). In this regard, it is particularly interesting to note how Islamic revival, Islamism, Jihadism and Salafism, and similar ideas and ideologies of the Muslim worlds, produce social, political and cultural projects that seek to remedy the ills of contemporary societies. It should be noted that not only piety, but also hope and forbearance may enable disenfranchised subjects to imagine a different, moral temporality of social becoming (GAIBAZZI 2012, 2015: ch. 4). These anthropological studies that employ such complementary categories as hope and despair, expectation and disillusionment, or attempt and failure, might therefore contribute to general conceptual debates on progress and decline.

## *2) Agents of progress*

Agents of progress focuses on the social forces that attempt to realise concrete ideas of progress. The agents the research field is concerned with are by no means restricted to institutionalised parties but also include movements (McAdam et al. 2001), i.e. forces that are “based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (Tarrow 1998: 4). In this respect, the research field currently hosts projects on the interwar and the Cold War periods that investigate the historical, spatial (translocal) and social circumstances in which these movements operated (for South Asia see for example RAZA ET AL. 2014). Relevant actors include transnational political alliances, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (Miskovic et al. 2014) as promoters of progress.

In addition to organised groups, agents of progress encompass the aforementioned (organic) intellectuals and scholars, and their translocal networks, as well as elites, privileged status groups and key figures including experts and cadres. At the same time, attention is also paid to those targeted, excluded or untamed by dominant agents and narratives of progress. In many of the countries under research, formerly extensive public sector employment has been sharply reduced due to structural adjustment policies. In these contexts, individuals seek to strengthen their relationship with the state and thus become engaged in local projects of state-sponsored visions of progress (for example, Mains 2012). Underprivileged and subaltern, or particular interest groups, including expatriates and migrants, will thus be investigated, whether these assimilate, resist, negotiate or radically depart from the dominant ideas and agents of progress.

After the Second World War, the two emerging blocs competed with each other to vindicate their own visions of historical forces and their own versions of the proper avenues of development and the relationship between state and citizenry. An essential dimension of the Cold War was, therefore, a

competition over which system was better geared to deliver progress (Westad 2005). The Cold War not only significantly exacerbated local conflicts through military and economic aid (McMahon 2013), but also saw the institutionalisation of national and supra-national agencies and institutions that deliver “developmental expertise”. In the West, informed by disciplines such as economics and social science, and devised by scholars who equated development with economic growth measurable in charts and indices, progress was rendered a technical problem that only required the delivery of solutions by a swath of different experts (Rist 2014). Often times, and rather than solving problems, this expertise exacerbated them or created a whole set of new issues (Ferguson 1990).

It might seem that the end of the Cold War firmly established a hegemony over notions of progress, development, and the ideal form of economic organisation and the state. Yet, another line of enquiry that this research field pursues is the factual eclectic mix of developmental agendas in large parts of the world, which consist of (neo)liberal and planned economies, democratic and authoritarian state organisation and the rights and responsibilities ascribed to or claimed by citizens. China is a striking example of such a mixed approach, but similar observations can be made about Ethiopia and India, for instance, where five-year plans lasted beyond the Cold War and liberal democracy is suffused by more authoritarian methods of governance. The Cold War, it might seem, was not ultimately won by the West but, rather, it birthed an amalgam of ideas and approaches. The research group traces the emergence of these ideological conglomerates by a careful study of actors at elite and subaltern levels. Looking at various historical periods (from the Second World War to the present day) allows for a comparison and synthesis of observations.

Since practices to bring about progress targeted both the mind and the body, the research field also studies Physical Culture Movements (Sen 2004) and volunteer organisations (for India see ROY 2014), such as Boy Scouts, Girl Guides or the Young Men’s Christian Association (for Ethiopia see BROMBER 2013b).

### *3) Symbols of progress*

Symbols of progress is concerned with the concrete materiality of progress. To make the future “real” or at least tangible through glimpses of it is an important part of projects of progress. Self-consciously developing states are therefore also concerned with the creation of “spaces of hope” – heterotopias – where spectacles are being launched, architectural grand schemes implemented or images and symbols created that can be televised, broadcast and recycled to create a media collage of the future. Infrastructural projects such as high dams (LANGE, BROMBER, FÉAUX DE LA CROIX 2014) as well as attempts to plan and build the “perfect city” are cases in point. In discourses on infrastructure, themes such as growth, prosperity and modernity are typical topoi. State actors organize spectacles and displays, such as contemporary parades of steamrollers or big agricultural machines in Ethiopian cities (Mains 2012: 17), to produce all-round positive images of such projects that become symbols of hope and transformation towards a better future. The performative aspects of progress are part of this line of inquiry as they take place at the point where meaning and materiality meet in embodied practices and cultural artefacts.

It is interesting to note how Gulf and Central Asian cities have been built, rebuilt and expanded over the last two decades to reflect and translate specific ideas, hopes and promises of social, cultural and economic progress, particularly in phases of (post-oil, post-communist) transition (WIPPEL et al. 2014; Alexander et al. 2007). Recently, these urban models and architectural codes started to be exported and adopted in Africa, Asia and the Middle East as new symbols of success (Adham 2014). The research field asks what specific icons or projects (such as the expansion and restructuring of urban infrastructure) stand for. It also asks what (negative) consequences are anticipated and calculated right from the outset – the price that has been or is being paid to implement them. In this respect, the

discourse about progress is commonly accompanied by a twofold dystopia: the dystopia over decline and fears over the future if “proper progress” does not take place, which legitimates a specific project of progress or development. And, secondly, the critique of progress by those who feel they stand to lose something. Present-day critiques of the second kind typically rely on ecological or revisionist arguments that yearn for a more harmonious or golden-age equation between humans or man and nature. It is striking, however, that there is little by way of a fundamental critique of development (exceptions Ferguson 2006; Sen 1999). All too often, the notion has become so hegemonic that critique is typically articulated in reformist suggestions to achieve better, more just, more ecological development (Werner 2013). The questions outlined above constitute an obvious nexus to the research fields on cities and resources.

Representations of progress and decline also include the human body, as mentioned earlier. Visions of the “perfect city” for “perfect” (or normed) inhabitants, consequently, produce mechanisms of discipline, surveillance and exclusion. This takes up ideas from previous ZMO research by Britta FREDE (2014) about the virtuous or perfect city (*madīna kāmila*) which is inhabited by the virtuous man (*insān kāmil*). Another case in point is the modern sports stadium as the perfect venue and natural habitat for the athlete as the epitome of discipline (BROMBER 2015). Since stadiums also fuel discourses about dystopias which analyse the body in relation to social ills or the flip sides of modern lifestyles (Burgees 2002: 301; ROY 2014; BROMBER 2013c, 2014), they are concrete examples to study the dialectics of progress and decline with regard to its materiality.

## ***Research field 2: The Politics of Resources***

This research field investigates the politics of material resources from a comparative historical, anthropological and geographical perspective. Its research agenda responds to the very openness and ambiguity of the category “resource” itself by first narrowing the potential scope of enquiry to a focus on material resources, and secondly, by tracing the processes through which specific matters (land, water, minerals, forest etc.) are “turned into” resources: When and how are they re-valued? How do they acquire economic significance? How do they generate power, wealth, influence and meaning (cf. Peluso 2003: 186)?

In order to explore these questions, the extraction, management and use of material resources must be considered as part of larger social, economic and cultural contexts. Arguing against a perspective which understands specific “resources as substances with essential qualities that are assumed to exist “in nature” and can be “extracted” and made useful as “assets” in particular contexts, anthropologists Weszkalnys and Richardson have called for an analytical perspective which investigates “resource environments” as “the complex arrangements of physical stuff, extractive infrastructures, calculative devices, discourses of the market and development, the nation and the corporation, everyday practices, and so on, that allow those substances to exist as resources” (Richardson, Weszkalnys 2014: 4). While taking inspiration from this and other recent approaches to natural resources which privilege a (neo)materialist perspective (e.g. Bakker; Bridge 2006; Bridge 2009, 2011) this research field considers the physical properties of specific resources and of the technologies involved in their production, together with immaterial (affective, spiritual, symbolic and moral) aspects that are contributing to the social constitution of value. Special attention is given to local social actors’ ways of making sense of, dealing with, accommodating, or resisting, transformations related to resource extraction and commodification.

The struggles over the access, use, and exploitation of material resources are central and existential issues for the actors involved. These struggles engender political and meaning-making processes that cannot be overlooked. Within the larger ZMO research programme, which aims to understand “what it

means to live as a Muslim in a specific historical and cultural situation” (SCHIELKE 2010) – or to live as a member of any other religious community in a societal context strongly influenced by Islamic norms and values – this field more explicitly addresses the role of economic concerns in the structure of everyday lives.

Beyond this everyday perspective, the relationship between normative frameworks labelled as “Islamic” and the politics of resources is complex. The relation between Islam and ecology has become a matter of interest for activists and scholars (e.g. Dien 2000; Foltz 2000; Foltz, Denny, Baharuddin 2003; Al-Damkhi 2008; Al-Jayyousi 2012). With regard to land and water management, particularly modes of tenure and usufruct rights, the creation of a framework for “Islamic natural resource management” through the identification and adoption of “Islamic best practices” has recently been advocated by proponents of global development, not least in order to generate local “legitimacy” and “authenticity” for policy recommendations (Sait 2013; see also UN-Habitat 2010; Sait 2008; Sait, Lim 2006; Faruqui, Biswas, Bino 2001). This development-oriented literature is largely based on the analysis of normative legal or theological discourses, rather than detailed case studies of social or economic practices. Yet more than a decade ago, Roger Owen cautioned against looking at land ownership and property issues in a predominantly Muslim region such as the Middle East primarily “in terms of Islamic legal categories that often bear little relationship to actual practice” (Owen 2000: ix). This echoed wider critiques of the tendency to conflate “the normative and the descriptive” or “the ideal and the real” in analyses of property relations (see Spiertz, Wiber 1996). In contrast to much of the current resource related social-scientific research which is often explicitly or implicitly policy-oriented and framed in normative terms such as “conservation”, “protection”, etc., the approach of this group therefore focuses, first and foremost, on the empirical description and analysis of particular historical and contemporary cases in a comparative perspective. This enables a fresh understanding of the ways in which supposedly “Islamic” and “non-Islamic” notions of environmental and ecological concerns, of property and use rights, of technological progress and of conservation, function in everyday life.

This field builds on a number of discussions that have taken place at ZMO over the past years. Questions of spatiality and scale were a theme discussed by the Microcosms and the Practices of the Local research group (2008–2013) out of which this new research field has developed. This discussion demonstrated that the politics of resources can have eminent local significance even as they simultaneously involve translocal actors and discourses acting at different spatial levels (cf. Wiber, Turner 2009: 4). The “friction” that is generated at the intersection of these scales is, as Tsing (2005) argues, one of the principal issues to be scrutinized when researching large-scale economic and ecological transformations. Investigating these issues in historical comparison across our regions of research opens up new ways of understanding questions of scale and transnational connections. This conceptual angle takes up longer-standing ZMO discussions on “translocality” (FREITAG, VON OPPEN 2010) as well as on economic relations and translocal ties looked at from “below” (“géographie par le bas”, BOESEN, MARFAING 2007).

With much of the current literature on resource geographies addressing the influence of (neo)materialist perspectives and approaches derived from Actor-Network-Theory (classically, Latour 2005), the conceptual issues discussed in this research field also include an explicit focus on actors and “agency” and thus perpetuate a systematic discussion which has been a part of ZMO intergroup work in previous years, notably in 2009/2010.

### **Thematic Subfields**

The work of the group is structured around three distinct, but interlinked, thematic subfields:

- 1) Processes of (re)valuation
- 2) The materiality and location of resources
- 3) Issues of access and control

### *1) Processes of Valuation and Revaluation*

This subfield scrutinizes the situated and contextualised understandings of what constitutes a “material resource” in the specific historical and geographical cases under consideration. This entails a dynamic, processual perspective focusing on transformations and change, rather than static “snapshots” describing specific sets of institutions, rights, or structures at any given time. When, how and why does a specific urban site, a piece of land, a water course, a forest, or any other “matter” acquire or change its commercial value? How do such local changes reflect larger-scale developments at the commercial level (e.g. integration in regional, national or international markets) or legal level (e.g., increasing privatisation, or expropriation/nationalisation)? How do local social actors welcome, accommodate, or resist such changes?

This subfield departs from the inherent tension between the two contrasting meanings of the term “value”/“Wert”, the first having an economic sense and the second a normative, aesthetic or moral one (see Graeber 2001, Miller 2008 on the significance of this double meaning for the anthropology of value). It is suggested that “value” is created from the conjunctures between economic and cultural or moral inflections. However, the economic revaluation of substances, matters, or landscapes as “resources” may run counter to other (social, cultural or religious) norms, values and orders. This subfield therefore also asks which “counter-discourses” (if any) are used to criticise or challenge processes of resource extraction and which forms of collective social action are engendered by such challenges. The temporal dimensions of processes of value generation as well as resistance to resource extraction seem to offer a particularly interesting lens through which to understand such processes (for some examples, see Ferry, Limbert 2008; Weszkalnys 2014; EVREN 2014). The expectation, or hope, for quick gains often contrast with the long-term effects of, as well as the protracted political processes involved in, resource extraction.

### *2) The Materiality of Resources*

The politics of resources must be differentiated according to the respective materialities of the substances involved. Whether a substance or matter is immobile (land) or fluid and transportable (water, oil, etc.), whether it (re)grows quickly or slowly, whether its extraction is considered hazardous (Uranium) or not, makes a difference for its management, use, and commodification, and thus must be taken into consideration for socio-historical analysis (for some examples among many others, see Behrends, Reyna, Schlee 2011, Behrends, Reyna 2008, Limbert 2010, Mitchell 2011 on oil; on forests, Peluso 1994, 2006, Tsing 2005; on water, Baviskar 2007; Strang 2004; on uranium, Hecht 2009, 2010, 2012; on land, Guyer 2011, Lentz 2013, Li 2014). Similarly important are the geographical location of the resource and the technologies engaged in each case. Focusing on moments of technological innovation and changes in infrastructure (and the knowledge or expertise involved) allows for a reframing of older questions by integrating environmental considerations into the analysis of the relationships between technologies and social and political structures (for recent examples, see Goldman, Turner 2011; Pritchard 2011, 2013; Reuss, Sutcliffe 2010). This perspective offers opportunities for building thematic links to the other three research fields.

The approach of the research field seeks to integrate an appreciation of the significance of materiality for “the politics of resources” with the interest in cultural, cosmological and religious questions that also informs ZMO’s overall research perspective. The particular material and symbolic characteristics of specific resources give rise to ethical and normative concerns that may (but do not have to) be



articulated in religious terms. This dynamic is demonstrated by charting understandings of water, a substance that is necessary for supporting human life and has been imbued with highly symbolic connotations. A rich body of Islamic legal tradition has discussed the ritual and spiritual significations of water for notions of purity. At the same time, international “development” prescriptions for the privatisation of natural resources, including water, may be articulated or contested in social contexts which prescribe that “no one is supposed to make a profit [...] from water” (Limbert 2001: 46–47). In contemporary contexts, water scarcity as well as the availability of new technologies may generate new religiously inflected debates, for instance about the religious permissiveness of using recycled wastewater in irrigation.<sup>2</sup> The materiality of the infrastructure involved in controlling large quantities of water may shape affective or visceral ways of engaging with, and influence political movements related to, processes of resource extraction and commodification (Bakker 2004, 2014). The construction of high dams, for instance, demonstrates the ways in which the use and commodification of water and land, as well as the management and control of local populations, is often closely related to promises and technologies of “progress” (EVREN 2014). Similar interplays between understandings of the materiality of a resource and the ethical and normative concerns raised by its extraction and use can be observed in the ways communities’ connections can fruitfully be explored in cooperation with the research field *Progress* (cf. LANGE, BROMBER, FÉAUX DE LA CROIX 2014).

### 3) *Access and Control*

The practical politics of access and constraints of resource use, and their links to the formation and re-formation of political-social hierarchies (see Guyer 2007: 2), are the third focus. This subfield explores questions of communal use rights and individual tenure, of religiously encoded modalities of administration and “ownership” in all its forms, or contested practical cases of transfer and exploitation of resources. By exploring historical and/or contemporary struggles to control inheritance, waqf properties, usufruct rights, and ownership, case studies can open fascinating windows onto the ways in which “Islamic” categories and normative prescriptions are filled with meaning, enacted, developed, transformed and challenged (for example, Owen, Bunton 2000; Mundy, Smith 2007). The study of these issues represents a growing field that, despite increasing interest, is still under-researched. In each case the actual relevance of religious frames of reference, and their relation to other referential frameworks, must be questioned (Dostal, Kraus 2005, Kuran 2001). This touches on issues of legal pluralism. How do co-existing formal or informal legal frameworks interact in shaping the practical politics of resources (e.g. Turner 2009; Pravilova 2011)? Investigations in this subfield centrally touch on the use of physical violence and its effects on modes of resource use and appropriation (cf. Peluso, Watts 2001), thus continuing previous ZMO research on crises and conflicts. This subfield also questions the respective roles and interactions of state and non-state actors in different historical contexts – imperial, colonial, postcolonial – for negotiating resource access and control. Modes of resource access may change through processes of privatisation and enclosure, of technological innovation, and/or of larger-scale economic and political transformations. In such processes, normative frameworks and ideas of social justice may be invoked and contested. The coexistence of religious references with “secular” or other conceptions will be explored from the perspective of social practice (including the analysis of textual sources).

This line of investigation is closely related to on-going debates about “property” (Strang, Busse 2011; Benda-Beckmann, Benda-Beckmann, Wiber 2006; Hann 2006, 1998; Siegrist, Sugarman 1999; Verdery/Humphrey 2004). The classical anthropological observation that notions of property are, in essence, an articulation of social relations between persons through things (rather than a relation

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/reuse-treated-waste-water-permissible-irrigation-crops-or-park-areas>; accessed June 3, 2015

between a “person” and a “thing”; Verdery, Humphrey 2004: 2; Hann 2006: 111) can be extended to resources in general. The “bundle of rights” that determine social relations through resources can be pushed, pulled, contested and temporally differentiated. This insight has been extended by Ribot and Peluso (2003) who argue that the “ability” or the “power” to benefit from a resource is in many cases more central than the “right” to benefit from material goods. Access and use rights may be allocated by customary or formalised legal frameworks. They may also be acquired, most centrally through labour (e.g. Peluso 2003: 198). The nexus between a material resource and labour as a mode of appropriation has great potential to become an important perspective for this research field. Another line of thought that speaks to concerns of this research field is the growing literature on the “commons” which proposes to decisively shift the debate from the nature of property regimes to those political relations that emerge at the intersections of the social and the material. Initially understood as collectively owned and/or managed resources such as water, land or forests, in its more recent usage the notion of the commons enquires into different forms of living, imagining, organising and mobilising that constitute and sustain communities (Hardt, Negri 2009; Harvey 2012). Here is an obvious link to debates about the right to the city which play a role for colleagues working in the group *Cities as Laboratories of Change*.

### ***Research field 3: Trajectories of Lives and Knowledge***

This research field concentrates on intersections of lives and knowledge, in respect to the diverse ways by which people are located in, subjected to, creatively inhabit, and otherwise move through historical contexts and institutional frameworks. Emphasis is placed on “trajectories” to consider existential pathways and retrospective accounts of moving in and moving through particular social, political, and intellectual settings. This manifold sense of trajectories relates to knowledge as both, constraining and enabling, implicating and at the same time challenging normative conventions of association and categories of representation.

By following the lives and works of, for example, intellectuals, politicians, journalists, writers or soldiers, individual projects within this research field track their world-views, their visions of different futures, and their self-positioning within multi-layered historical contexts. Consideration is given to the various ways in which people produce themselves and are affected as subjects within wider formative processes of knowledge production. Thus, deploying an understanding of subjectivity, knowledge, and agency as situated and relational (Haraway 1988) involves two central tasks: First, a move beyond reified notions of subjects by challenging teleological modes of representing individuals’ lives and life-stories (Bourdieu 1986). Second, a move beyond instrumentalist conceptualisations of knowledge by emphasising how people appropriate material and imaginary resources to respond to their context of life. (Hörning, Reuter 2004). Accordingly, knowledge and subjects are approached as processes and as elements within materially situated entangled histories (Randeria, Conrad 2002) rather than as given, insular units.

This processual approach to the nexus between lives and knowledge reflects current research interests in communities and individuals as active subjects, rather than beings predetermined by natural processes and cultural discourses. *Trajectories of Lives and Knowledge* contributes to current debates over the concept of knowledge as an analytical category employed to gauge the coordinates and the functioning of social processes (Burke 2000; Sarasin 2011; Mulsow 2012; Renn 2012). It follows recent pleas for enlarging the scope of debates on the history of knowledge beyond the exclusive Eurocentric limitation to Western archives and historical contexts (Fischer-Tiné 2013; FREITAG, VON OPPEN 2010; LIEBAU 2014b). By looking at entanglements and translations, the projects challenge views of the history of knowledge that classify it according to established binaries such as Western

and non-Western. Accordingly, they inquire into forms of knowledge in colonial and imperial contexts by considering the multiple linkages between metropolises and (former) colonies. Moreover, by paying close attention to the production and circulation of knowledge, as well as the existence of different modes and medialities of knowledge, the research field develops a framework for analysis that is able to grasp the complexities and contingencies of, for instance, Islamic, secular, expert and peripheral knowledge.

Second, the research field engages in rethinking concepts of subjectivity in tension with a “Western” and Eurocentric frame (Chakrabarty 2008). By exploring the various elements that produce lives and knowledge, it contributes to a rethinking of the more general question of how lives that cross Muslim and non-Muslim, multiple imperial and national, Western and non-Western contexts can be adequately grasped, both narratively and conceptually (Rolf 2014; Lässig 2008). On the one hand, it aims at achieving this goal by disentangling notions of life and representation – for instance, by virtue of writing, oral accounts or photography (Azoulay 2008) – and by unpacking assumptions underlying practices of biographical representations – such as autobiography, biography, memoir (NIKRO 2012; HEGASY 2014). On the other hand, the research field is designed to critically engage with history, memory, and temporality as dimensions of historically situated forms of subjectivity (RIECKEN 2012, 2014).

This approach to *Trajectories of Lives and Knowledge* ties in with the overall perspective of the ZMO research program, especially with its critique of the reification of categories such as “Muslim” and “Islam”. By studying actors in, and from, predominantly Muslim settings defined by translocal linkages connecting Asia, Africa and Europe, this research field investigates various ways of producing, mediating, translating, authenticating and challenging diverse forms of knowledge in which elements from multiple historical contexts intersect. Attention to such entwinements brings into view how different invocations of knowledge are linked with one another and their effects on trajectories of lives. When does knowledge become a resource for a person to make a better living or to secure one’s family’s livelihood? (This question could link enquiries in this field to *Resources*). When is knowledge linked to the pursuit of moral, religious and political ideals? (Here are overlapping interests with the *Progress* field). And how do they come together in individual’s and groups’ trajectories? Another consideration is the question when and how knowledge is decontextualised, objectified and reconfigured as “expertise”. (This question is also relevant to the three other research fields, see also A5).

More often than not, different forms of knowledge have neither the general validity nor the coherence they claim; instead, people make use of them in an ambiguous fashion, uniting ideas and pursuits that in theory may appear incompatible but in practice coexist and overlap (SCHIELKE 2015). Religious and expert knowledge and intellectual biographies need to be understood in relation to the social processes, moral concerns, power relations, intellectual traditions and everyday urgencies that make them possible and relevant. Therefore, the research group analyses the role of and the relationship between these modalities, and the extent to which religious (Islamic and other) traditions of knowing intertwine with other modalities. Furthermore, the group is interested in the question how far practical knowledge is shaped through and also shapes socio-political contexts like capitalism, globalisation, and new media.

Major questions raised within the research field *Trajectories of Lives and Knowledge* directly derive from earlier debates at ZMO. The new field takes up ideas from the research field *Akteure des Wandels: Lebensläufe und Gruppenbilder in orientalischen und okzidentalischen Kulturen* (1996–2000), (HEIDRICH, LIEBAU 2000). It is also directly based on recent discussions on the role of subjectivity and agency in translocal contexts as well as on processes of producing, distributing and popularising

knowledge-deliberations held within the ZMO research group *Actors in Translocal Spaces* (2008–2013) The discussion on agency has been deepened in the colloquium “‘Agency’ Reloaded: Between Life Worlds and World Order” (2010/11), whereas the colloquium “Who Speaks? The Global History of Intellectual Practices: Epistemological, Political, and Ethical Challenges” (2014/15) tackled the problem of knowledge and knowledge production by asking about the possibilities and limits of intellectual history in a global frame. The topic “biographies as knowledge” (see below) has become a major line of discussion within the conference *Ruptures and Linkages: Biography and History in the South*, jointly organised by the German Historical Institute, London and the ZMO research group *Actors in Translocal Spaces* in 2012.

### **Thematic Subfields**

The research field *Trajectories of Lives and Knowledge* is framed by the following three subfields:

- 1) Biographies as knowledge
- 2) Living with knowledge
- 3) Shared knowledge – shared lives: entangled life trajectories through knowledge

They mark thematic and methodological paths of inquiry based on current discussions at ZMO. They are not only closely linked to one another but at the same time offer connections to the other three research fields.

#### *1) Biographies as Knowledge*

One approach in dealing with the inter-relatedness between life, biography and knowledge is to engage with biographical writings as historical sources and as genres. Considering how biographies gather, structure, store and mediate knowledge, an initial question can ask about what was and is regarded as “biographical knowledge”. While the relationship between “life knowledge” (Lebenswissen) and biography is currently extensively discussed in literary and cultural studies (Asholt, Ette 2010), ZMO-research projects address these questions not only in the context of the regions we study but also from diverse disciplinary approaches, such as history, anthropology or Islamic studies. The research group Lives and Knowledge deals with processes of translation between different linguistic, cultural and disciplinary traditions by engaging recent approaches to the problem of translation (Bhabha 1994; Liu 1995; Juneja, PERNAU 2009; LIEBAU 2012; Bachmann-Medick 2014). For instance, by taking up an analytic stance that examines the ways in which subjects “write” and shape their lives on the one hand, and practices of knowledge production that involve attempts to “write” and shape the lives of these subjects on the other, we develop a perspective on biographies and knowledge that allows us to translate between particular contexts, while not levelling their individual differences (RIECKEN 2014; LIEBAU 2014a).

Embedded in regional, historical, social or religious traditions, biographical writings aim at various goals, address different readerships and, in the end, also codify specific types of knowledge (Arnold, Blackburn 2004; Fay 2002; Reichmuth 2009). They can be written out of a certain moral obligation to safeguard knowledge for future generations, to convince people to participate in political or religious life, or to open a broader social, religious or political picture behind the described personal one (Reynolds 2001; Elger, Köse 2010; Venkatachalapathy 2006). The knowledge with which people narrate their (or others’) life histories at a certain point in life, the events and developments they describe (or decide to omit), reflect not only the intentions of the person but also throw light on the social and political circumstances, as well as on the demands and expectations of the envisaged readership. Generally, this approach also has a strong epistemological dimension. Individual projects investigate whether, how and why people do or do not reflect on the role of learning and knowing

(education and knowledge) in life descriptions and whether and how they connect knowledge trajectories (i.e. their own way of education as well as major developments in sciences) with their biographies.

## *2) Living with knowledge*

The second approach connects Michael Jackson's (1996: 2) point that "the knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life" with the philosophical insight that individuals are at the same time subject and object of knowledge (Foucault 1986, 1990) and, following from that, with the assumption that a trajectory of life and knowledge can be understood and studied as social capital (Bourdieu 1986). The research group's approach brings together projects which aim at linking intellectual history with the social history of their carriers – the researcher, the expert or the creative inventor. Thus, one cannot talk about "endogenous" or local knowledge (Hountondji 1997) of a certain region without talking about the people producing and practising it (for the example of Africa, see Bang 2003; KRESSE 2010). Any kind of "genealogy of cultural capital" is not imaginable without linking it to the problem of positionality and situated observers (Haraway 1988). Life-paths and biographies intersect with certain historical moments, and intellectual schools can be identified through biographies (building on Collins 1998). As every individual life path is positioned in a world determined by political, economic and religious power structures, various kinds of knowledge can become a contested resource for living and a means of power (OESTERHELD, Kumar 2007; Pathak 2009) as well as an object of media discourses and popularisation by various actors with very different intentions (GRÄF 2010). Projects thus investigate what kind of knowledge is important in a certain context for whom, who produces and mediates it (and for what purpose), who has access to it, and what the implications are for people's lives. What knowledge and aspirations mean for young Muslim activists in Egypt today (SCHIELKE 2010) may differ from what contemporary Pakistani Muslim activists (REETZ 2010) regard as necessary. In any case, experiences of educational institutions provide a useful lens to study the connection between knowledge and life trajectories. Whether education is first of all seen as an investment in one's individual future, or regarded as an important instrument in times of social transformation, the command of knowledge becomes an indicator for processes of social inclusion or exclusion with consequences not only for the individuals concerned but with long-term implications for societies as well.

In a next step, the future oriented, aspirational character of education connects the theme of knowledge with the theme of hope. The pursuit to gain knowledge, to know, grasp and master things, is linked with hope both in the specific sense of the desire to realise certain things, as well as in the general sense of the expectation that "there is more to life than what exists for us in the here and now" (Jackson 2011: xii). Just as different, at times incompatible traditions and modalities of knowledge intertwine in real lives and histories, so do different kinds of hope. Last but not least, hope is seldom realised as expected; the theme of hope is always accompanied by the themes of frustration and ambivalence (SCHIELKE 2015).

## *3) Shared knowledge – shared lives: entangled life trajectories through knowledge*

The third perspective of inquiry takes up the notion of community and focuses on the question of the social gathering of life trajectories by exchanging and sharing common frames and points of reference. Such gatherings are connected or entangled through knowledge. By taking into account the localities and temporalities of knowledge production and its circulation between actors as well as throughout time and space in a global frame, this path of inquiry breaks the binaries between individual and society and concentrates on flows and intersectional entanglements. Trajectories of life can be –

directly or indirectly – connected through shared experiences with knowledge and the structures of reference and structures of effect they imply. Access to a particular system of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge in a certain religious or political context, the attendance of a particular educational institution, or the intellectual traditions of a family can have similar and lasting effects on life trajectories. The same holds true for the belonging to a community who follows the intellectual legacy of a particular historical subject.

By placing the individual trajectory of knowing into a larger context, this approach can open a window to understand the broader society. It can help to investigate the relations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, dominant and dominated or marginalised forms of knowledge during a certain period, or distributed through or within a certain institution (Brown 2011; PERNAU 2006). Taking knowledge as a lens can help to study trajectories of cohorts or collectives, entangled through the commonality of knowledge. As practical knowledge is always related to time and space through the people living and acting with it, individual and group life paths can mirror the knowledge which is available and which dominates in certain historical, cultural, political or religious contexts. The acquisition of knowledge as well as the implementation of knowledge for a certain goal can bring people together for particular periods of their lives. Whether one acquired knowledge within a colonial educational system, during the times of cold war, in a village school or in an elite college, in a secular or in a religious institution may not only shape his or her biography but also open ways for possible “shared life paths” with other individuals or groups (REETZ 2013).

This perspective at the same time can challenge the popular equation of “biography” with “life” – as something being limited in a frame between a starting point (birth) and an end (death). The intellectual legacy of a person, be it a scholar, religious thinker or politician, can become the nucleus for groups of followers or believers, the centre for scholarly traditions and schools. Clashing, but mutually related biographical representations of one and the same historical person, shared within a community can, in a way, transcend death. Thus, knowledge can be regarded as being related in yet another sense to a particular life and biography (FREDE 2014; Seesemann 2011; Raulff 2009; Assmann 1998).

#### ***Research field 4: Cities as Laboratories of Change***

This research field explores the heuristic scope of cities in Muslim societies in a socio-historical perspective, considering them as a particularly dynamic formation. This is evidenced in the dramatic urban expansion notably since the late 19th century which is still accelerating. Thus, cities form “laboratories” which allow historians and social scientists to observe the development of new practices (e.g. of governance, trade, forms of living) with which various actors on the urban scene experiment as well as the formation of new ideas (Haar 2011: 29–47; Gieryn 2006). Cities undergo frequent changes, physically, economically, politically, as well as in terms of the management of what has come to be called architectural heritage. For their inhabitants, cities might offer unexpected opportunities and risks (Guyer 2011: 487–491). Thus, they can be considered as laboratories in which different actors experiment with new ways of living, organising or governing. For researchers, they have the added advantage of being often better documented than rural sites.

One of the central questions for the research field is the role of state and non-state actors (see e.g. metroZones 2011). In this context, the activities of religiously motivated actors, which have been increasing over the past decades due to a range of socio-political and cultural changes, and now comprise many groups seeking to self-consciously style cities in a way which allows for a decidedly Islamic lifestyle, draw particular attention (see below). Another major issue is that of the increasingly fluid transitions between rural “hinterlands” and the “city” proper (Hidle et al. 2009: 419). This is a function of demographic changes and migration, of rapid and both planned and spontaneous

urbanisation and economic development, as well as of new networks of communication. Thus, the question of what can be considered “urban” under the circumstances of the 20th and 21st centuries is important and will be addressed (Rieker, Ali 2009; Saunders 2011: 19–27).

Urban Studies notably about the MENA region have been dominated for decades by a series of paradigms, mostly emerging from area studies. Researchers have long been looking for the supposed ontological specificities of such cities, with attempts to build a theoretical link between culture, religion, the urban form and governance. Thus, the notion of a specifically “Oriental” or “Islamic city” emerged, building on ideas developed by Max Weber and later elaborated upon by others in a variety of different forms (Bruhns, WIPPEL 2001; Haneda, Miura 1994). It was said to be characterised by specific architectural features, by being subjected to a central administration which resulted in the lack of local representation and in the anaemia of civic instances, and by economic inertia due to the investments of resources in unproductive pious foundations (*awqaf*) as well as by erratic taxation. The “Islamic city” debate has contributed to an early theorisation of cities outside of the traditional North American and European horizons of urban history and urban sociology. In spite of this undoubtable merit, the notion of “Islamic City” has since been much critiqued and fundamentally revised. This is partly the result of the increasing integration of urban historians and geographers working on the region into international and transregional scholarly networks (LAFI 2005; Matin-Asgari 2004; Wirth 2001, 1991; Abu-Lughod 1987; Raymond 1994; Ilbert 1982).

Currently, new research themes and methods are emerging with which this research field engages (Celik 1999). Beyond questions relating to older cities, they include considerations of the different phases of industrial and commercial globalisation, the evolution of urban governance, and the branding of the new “global cities”, to name but a few. As for South Asia, most research has been done on India and there, a special focus on megacities has been noticeable (AHUJA, Brosius 2006; Rieker, Ali 2009: xi–xii).

Besides the strong “métropolisation” of capitals and economic centres, however, continents such as Africa are simultaneously marked by the proliferation of smaller towns (Denis 2009). In contrast to the numerous studies which explore megacities via the logics of global flows (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Sassen 2002; Scheld 2003), Mathieu Hilgers in his ethnography of the middle-sized town of Koudougou in Burkina Faso reminds us that urbanites still live in “places” (2009), i.e. specific locales. In this regard, this research field also explores to what extent the fact that living within “the intermediate context of the secondary city” (De Boeck, Cassiman, Van Volputte 2010) means being involved in and shaped by local ramifications (Hilgers 2012) and regional politics while simultaneously being connected to global flows, such as illustrated with the increasing consumption of Chinese products observed in southern urban Mali (CHAPPATTE 2014). Secondary cities are considered as “important nodes in the networks between places of different scales” (Bell, Jayne 2006: 7) which substantially mediate between the local, the national and the international. In a sense, they depict localised “cartographies of globalisation” (Chen, Kanna 2012).

By integrating these new approaches within the framework of *Muslim Worlds – World of Islam?*, this research field takes a fresh look at the question of the specificities of particular regional, religious or typological constellations. Thus, a more defined differentiation between spaces, social structures and policies clearly (or implicitly or even allegedly) linked to Islamic norms and practices (Schatzki 2001), ranging from the institution of *hisba* to the investigation of shrines, and between those emanating from other sets of needs or norms, e.g. economic developments or heritage management, will help to develop a more nuanced understanding of cities in Muslim contexts, past and present. It will increase our understanding of the pertinence of religious norms and practices (or the lack thereof) to urban development. This can only be done in a comparative perspective on different urban traditions within

the Muslim world, i.e. by the inclusion of sub-Saharan Africa or the Indian subcontinent in the discussion, for which the ZMO setting and research experience, is renowned. Furthermore, non-Muslim cases need to be considered routinely for purposes of comparison. Thus, comparison and multidisciplinary are at the heart of this research field.

This research field has a particular concern with space, building on Lefebvre's classical study (Lefebvre 1991). Thus, questions like the complex relationship between the physical space of the city and the identities of its inhabitants, the dynamic definition of notions of territories (as opposed to static visions), the role of secular and sacred spaces, issues of representation and symbolic presence will be examined. These phenomena need to be mapped and related to different types of scales, with the clear intent of trying to both empirically and theoretically link the micro-scale of the street to other scales at the municipal, regional, national or international levels. Recently, this has been tested successfully by members of the research group with regard to urban violence (FREITAG ET AL. 2015).

### **Thematic Subfields**

The research field comprises three thematic subfields. They concern the social, material and morphological development of cities in a globalising world, the roots, patterns and possible limits of civic engagement in urban contexts of the regions under study and the formation of different ideologies and visions of urbanity.

- 1) Social, material and morphological development of cities
- 2) Civic engagement in various urban contexts
- 3) Ideologies and visions of urbanity

#### *1) Social, material and morphological development of cities*

The first subfield concerns the changing morphological and social realities of cities in the regions. Special attention is given to the interactions between urban growth, changes in the cultural patterns of cities and the political economy of their governance (Kleniewski, Thomas 2010), with particular interest in the phenomenon of subaltern urbanism (Roy 2011; Bayat 2000, 2007) which might well need to be historicised by considering extra-muros settlements. These urban developments need to be situated within complex processes of regional and global integration and dissociation, resulting often in changing patterns of cooperation and competition between cities of the regions (Saunier, Ewen 2008). They impact on the character of cities as well as on the worlds of merchants, artisans, workers and their organisations. Attention also needs to be paid not only to the currently fashionable "global" and "mega" but also to secondary, yet also considerably "globalised" cities (Sassen 2001; Demissie 2011; Friedmann 2002 [1986]; Taylor 2004; Scholz 2004: 221ff.; Hall 2008). It is further necessary to avoid falling into the popular trap of equating evolution with "progress" or even Westernisation: formerly significant cities may lose their importance, or witness a marked decay in their infrastructure, etc. On the basis of such research, the whole notion of what actually characterises cities and urbanity needs to be reconsidered (see second subfield).

Cities are here considered not as the theatre of evolutions which fall upon them (industrialisation, urban growth, colonial domination, different forms of globalisation) but rather as fields of experimentation or laboratories, as mentioned earlier. Here is an obvious connection with the research field *Progress*. Additionally, developments within cities can well be "markers" or symptoms of change, a change which often involves the use or creation of material and immaterial resources (in parallel to the research field *Resources*). Obviously, change can take very different forms, and urban conflict, often taking the shape of riots and violence, is a part of this enquiry (FREITAG ET AL. 2015).



## 2) *Civic engagement in various urban contexts*

The second subfield concerns a crucial element in the present enterprise of critical re-examination of existing and inherited culturalist paradigms about cities in the Muslim world. That is a discussion of the roots, functioning patterns and possible limits of civic engagement and the emergence of a public sphere and civil society in an urban context (Ehrenberg 1999). Furthermore, questions pertaining to notions of urbanity and civility, often couched in Islamic terms, may need to be considered on the basis of actor-centred investigations. These terms are often seen as the crucial qualifying elements of cities and urban life, but at the same time are heavily value-ridden and often culturally predetermined (Vogelpohl 2011; Dirksmeier 2009; PERNAU 2008, 2011).

This subfield explores urban dynamics past and present with the aim of better understanding the relations between urban societies and rulers. It examines questions of governance, urban leadership and popular mobilisation, as well as on urban culture, conflicts and mediation. This can be achieved by investigating anew the contribution of urban institutions of various sorts, such as professional, confessional and residential units to the functioning of the city. These institutions as well as voluntary associations can draw our attention to the establishment of different types of public spaces within the city. To take into account the differentiation of the public sphere, but also to examine instances when it integrates into a whole, is especially important regarding the multicultural nature of many cities in the regions in which the research field is interested. In a historical perspective, the central question is whether there are specific institutions and sociabilities which privilege cities as spaces of “modern meaning-making projects” and the shaping of “a new political” (Rieker, Ali 2009: xv), or whether the processes of suburbanism have actually resulted in fundamentally new individualistic approaches to urban life (Bayat 2009: 97; Isin, Rygiel 2007) which require a far more differentiated perspective. Evidently, access to and distribution of resources and the more general question of a right to the city (Lefebvre; Harvey) play a major role in this subfield, where cooperation with the research field *Resources* will hence be of major importance. At the moment, some researchers interested in this field are involved in discussions about a collaborative DFG–ANR project with the research groups IAC (Institut interdisciplinaire d’anthropologie) and LAU (Laboratoire d’anthropologie urbaine) at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. While we hope to collaborate with them, our programme distinguishes itself by its particular concern for the commonalities and particularities of Muslim cities.

## 3) *Ideologies and visions of urbanity*

The third subfield investigates “the” future or ideal city (Nieuwenhuijze 1966) as conceived by philosophers, planners, architects and rulers (here in close cooperation with research field *Progress*). Besides a historical perspective on past attempts at urban planning and governance, current processes of branding and marketing cities are being investigated. Arguably, and in contrast to the stated aim of establishing uniqueness, they lead to international processes of convergence. This is partly linked to global ideologies and economic systems as well as notions of governance, which increasingly resemble each other (Löv 2008). Projects linked to this thematic subfield deal with urban planning and conservation as well as with urban anthropology and politics, thus blending perspectives of social and physical urban transformation

Cities are in no way the direct projection of a governance or ideological idea onto the ground, but rather the complex result, in a two-way relationship, of multiple conscious decision-making processes and spontaneous developments (the imperial city: Driver, Gilbert 2003; the colonial city: Glover 2008; the socialist city: French, Hamilton 1979; the capitalist city: Smith, Feagin 1987; Graff 2008; the oil and post-oil city: Scharfenort 2009). Inside this research area, the insertion of a reading of the treatment of urban heritage as one of the elements of both urban ideologies and the relationship with

the urban past is planned. This is one aspect of the question of what is considered to be an “authentic” past. This perspective is situated in a complex interplay of local notions with national planning and international understanding and norms, notably in the context of “World Heritage”. It often leads to the imagining and recreation of “tradition” in a particular way which might be more aimed at attracting tourists than at strengthening local communities (Jimura 2011; Dearborn, Stallmeyer 2009). Nevertheless, how these cities are imagined and branded is in itself a highly contested process (Jacobs 2010; Hudson 2008).

Out of the work in and between the research groups, common questions and concerns have emerged which inform the work programme of ZMO for the next years (see A5).

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