



Cities as Laboratories of Change



Informal housing in Pakistan. Photo: Sanaa Alimia, 2012



When darkness arises..., Bougouni. Photo: André Chappatte, 2010



Jeddah, Mecca Gate. Photo: Charles Winckelsen, April 1918

Contesting Modernity in Urban Pakistan: Street Politics, Moral Lives and Transnationalism

Dr. Sanaa Alimia

This project will explore how cities in Pakistan are composed of different local, national, transnational, and multinational actors that are introducing rapid changes to physical landscapes and forms of belonging in the city, in order to question the increasingly naturalised "national order of things". In addition, the project analyses the different ways in which alternative forms of belonging, being, and modernity are negotiated and expressed within the city. In particular, the project explores how informal structures and spaces, such as social solidarity networks in katchi bastis (squatter settlements) or the bazaar (rather than the shopping mall) are indicative of a "modern" culture – albeit in a different way to hegemonic understandings that are articulated by neoliberal structures in Pakistan.

Exploring the City's Margins Through Time: Night Life in Two Small but Fast-Growing Administrative Towns of Muslim West Africa

Dr. André Chappatte

The current instability in northern Mali is increasing a southbound mobility (originally provoked by the desiccation of the Sahel) which is boosting the former trade colonies of Bougouni (Mali) and Odiéne (Côte d'Ivoire). Although never major economic centres, these neighbouring towns of the West African savannah are now growing as hubs of administration, trade, and transport. Their transformation into strategic crossroads between Sahel and coastal areas is originally explored in this project through a comparative ethnography of their night activities.

The core focus investigates the relationship between urban space, social margins and morality during the dark hours of the night, a time, which is seen as conducive to "haram" experiences. Considering Muslims' activities interpreted as being located along a spectrum from "halal" to "haram", this project explores how Muslims conduct their participation in forbidden activities within a local Muslim community by committing them at the margins of society, in terms of time. However, the night is simultaneously explored as being indistinguishable from the open character of daily street life found in urban West Africa which fosters a public Islam based on sight.

A Wall Marking the Border: Urban Jeddah and Its Margins

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Freitag

This project investigates the urban margins of the historic port city of Jeddah in the region of the Hijaz during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century from a number of different vantage points. The most obvious one is a reflection on the urban border marked by the wall built in defence against marauding Bedouin from the landside and foreign invaders from the seaside. However, a number of extra-mural settlements surrounded the old town of Jeddah. These consisted of fishing villages, trade settlements and African-style shantytowns. What were the rules governing access to the city? Which functions did these extra-mural settlements fulfil for the city dwellers? It is already discernible that the seemingly rigid boundary between inside and outside might have been more porous than the distinction suggests. A second research question concerns the articulation of social distinction within the walled city itself. This might have been a matter of status distinctions in the same house (masters and their slaves); it might have also been linked to certain professions or origins. Finally, non-Muslims as well as members of the Ottoman bureaucracy ruling Jeddah until 1916 certainly were regarded as outsiders on grounds of social position, religion and profession.