

## The Muslim World Through the Lens of European Textbooks

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This workshop dealt with narratives on Muslims, Islam and the Muslim world as perceived through the lens of European history textbooks. We mapped narratives in the different regions of Europe, looking at the genesis and historic pathways of particular national narratives, cross-referencing textbook narratives on Muslims with ditto narratives in history writing and the mass media. As a result, a kaleidoscopic picture of Europe emerged, in which the South (Spain, Italy) told a story of intimate (aggressive, traumatic) encounters with Arabs, the Centre (Germany) kept alive historic images of the Ottoman conqueror that went back to the Reformation, the West (France, Great Britain) mingled colonial experience with migration reality and the East (Russia) is presently re-entering old images of ferocious Tatars into the textbook medium.

- The contributions were presented in four different panels:
- The *longue durée* of Turkey in Europe
- Perceptions Across the Mediterranean – Shared histories, different memories
- Centres and Peripheries
- Placing Oneself on the Map of Europe

Our first focus rested on narratives about meaningful »others« and their ambivalent relationship to definitions of the self. This touched first of all upon European understandings of Islam and how these relate to European identity(-ies). In its wake, the relationship between identities and interests was explored. We considered the repressive ideology as presented in the peninsula textbook media, the open aggression with which at present Russian textbooks address Muslims in Russia, and the different mechanisms with which textbook narratives on Muslim women in France, Italy and Germany are turned into tools for discussing European gender politics. The contributions on Turkey presented another case in point. In the first half of the 20th Century still admired as an example of modernity, present French and German narratives mainly perceive Turkey through the migration lens. Whereas Germany likens Turkey to the immigrant culture of the Turks, France equals Turks with Muslims, taking French Muslims as an example. Whereas Islam is presented as a belief system with black holes (breeding ground of terror, no civilizing impact), Christianity is pictured as a genetic source of European »civilisation« and the essence of modernity.

Our second focus rested on the objects of the different European perceptions: Turks, Arabs and Tatars. How do Arab textbook narratives reflect on »Europe« and »The West«? Where do Turks, Tatars

and the new Muslim populations in Europe place themselves on the map? At present, the Middle East produces a textbook image of »The West« in which crusaders, colonists and the American aggressor blend. It glorifies the self as an eternal victim without giving an explanation of why the self collapsed. Whereas some 20 years ago, religious texts did not figure, the influence of fundamentalism in education is swiftly gaining ground. Middle-Eastern textbook producers, or so it seems, are presently creating an Arab/Muslim identity that is explicitly distinct from European identities. From the Moroccan textbooks a more ambivalent picture arises. Here, Europe appears to be a place in which Arabs invested in the past, the fruits of which they would like to reap today. Without claiming to constitute part of Europe, North African textbooks seek acknowledgement for the civilizing investment.

These two foci helped us to deal with the workshops' main scholarly objectives:

- Map the different images of Islam and Muslims in textbooks across Europe
- Identify entry points of historical images: How do the institutionalized images of the past function as a semantic reservoir for perceptions of the present?
- Cross-reference European images of the Muslim »Other« with North-African, Turkish and Tatar images of Europe/»The West«

During the final brainstorming, a series of follow-up objectives were identified. Some addressed the future research agenda, others the context (-s) in which research should continue, others still the outcome of our research and its consequences for educational practice. It was agreed that the participants build a network with the aim to strengthen scientific communication on the topic of textbook images on the Muslim/European »Other« across Europe and the Mediterranean, to bring in young scholars, to address multipliers in education and policy makers and to issue recommendations.

Awarded by the European Science Foundation (ESF), the workshop took place in the Jakobkemenate, a historical venue in the centre of Braunschweig, from September 11–14, 2007. The beauty and intimacy of the conference room helped us to transform eighteen very different scholars, some still working on their dissertations, others nearing the end of their university careers, into a coherent, communicative group. During the evenings, people stayed together and enjoyed the Braunschweig international cuisine as well as each other's company. It gave them the opportunity to continue their discussion and to develop new thoughts. The good, unhurried atmosphere very much contributed to the success of the final brainstorming, during which the group created a coherent plan to build a network and apply for the next step in the ESF funding programme.

The proceedings of the workshop will be published in: Contexts. The Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society. Special issue 2009/2: *In or out? Muslims in European textbooks*. Edited by Gerdien Jonker and Shiraz Thobani, published by Bergahn Journals Oxford/New York.