

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

The Muslim World through the Lens of European Textbooks

Scientific Report

Braunschweig, Germany, 11 - 14 September 2007

Convened by:
Gerdien Jonker

Georg-Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research

Executive summary

The workshop brought together 18 participants, among them the convenor Dr. Gerdien Jonker. As can be gleaned from the *Attached Programme*, all participants contributed to the programme, either in a leading capacity as chairs of panels, as presenters of papers or as commentators. The latter function was improvised at the very last moment, when it appeared that five participants, for reasons beyond their control, had to cancel their participation. Although a heavy blow, the introduction of commentators into the programme enabled us to include two more junior researchers, one from Tunis who at the time happened to stay at the institute and one from Potsdam.

The workshop took place in a historical venue in the centre of Braunschweig, an ancient building from the 12th Century. The beauty and intimacy of the conference room enhanced the concentration, whereas the excellent catering stimulated discussion and personal exchange. The venue helped us to transform a very different bunch of scholars, some still working on their dissertation, others nearing the end of their university career, into a coherent, communicative group.

The workshop offered ample time to present and discuss the individual papers and to make sense of the different pieces of information and the different approaches that were presented within each panel. 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.

The contributions were presented in four different panels:

- Turkey in Europe – The *longue durée* of Turkey in Europe
- Perceptions Across the Mediterranean – Shared histories, different memories
- Images of Centrality – Placing one self on the map of Europe
- Centre and Periphery – Erasing Muslims from the Russian public space

These four 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“
- Identify and compare strategies of Muslims in Europe to place or erase themselves on/from the map of Europe
- Cross-reference the image production in different media (textbooks, history writing, mass media)
- Analyze the strong tie between textbook production and policy making

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, still others the outcome of our research and its consequences for the 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. A proposal is now underway.

Scientific content of the event

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 “European” picture 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 media. The flow of discussion may be summarized in three steps:

(1) 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 the 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.

Juxtaposing Albania and Great Britain within one panel offered another new insight. It allowed the comparison of two geographical extremes that situate themselves centrally on the European map. With an eye on their Muslim subjects, both countries attempt to answer the question of how curriculum presentations can bring about social cohesion. But where the Albanian textbooks consider “the Islamic conversion” during Ottoman rule as something that was initially “forced upon us” but in the long run exercised a positive cultural impact, British textbooks make very little mention of Muslims in Europe and do not answer the pressing question of where British Muslims belong.

To this amalgam an interesting touch was added. At the start of the EWG, a discussion took place in the Council of Europe on the topic of “The Roots of Europe”. In 1953, historians and policy makers discussed ways in which “the new Europe” should be represented in European history textbooks. Considering the Classical age, Christianity and the heritage of Arabs and Ottomans, they asked themselves: “Did the Byzantine Empire belong to Europe?” “Does Turkey belong to Europe?” etc. It was concluded that “Europe was united by a common enemy” and that as a consequence Turkey could not belong. Instead, the stereotypes of the “Muhammadan” enemy were enumerated.

(2) 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 quickly 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 make part of Europe, North African textbooks seek acknowledgment for the civilizing investment.

Differently still, the contribution on the strategies of Alevi Turks in Germany to become accepted as Muslims made clear that many Muslims in Europe, whether belonging to the old indigenous European populations or to the new migrant populations, consider themselves as genuine Europeans and consequently develop strategies to place themselves on the map of Europe. But what does it take to become accepted as European? Is it possible that a Muslim is part of the European heritage? Who possesses the power of definition? When does this discussion reach the level of textbook images?

(3) At the start of the workshop, several definitions of a narrative were put forward. We agreed that a narrative presents a leading idea or opinion that came into existence at some point of the past, became institutionalised underway and presents the „right“ way to look at things. Narratives thus offer ready, *prêt-a-porter* answers to critical questions; they are part of popular knowledge, thus allowing for quick references without the need to re-consider the whole story time and again.

In conclusion, the group noted that, firstly, when considering the semantic reservoir of narratives about the Muslim “other”, scholars are confronted with layered history, a metaphor that includes the image of geological sediments in which the different historic images of Muslims and Islam have been stored away. Narratives build on these, choosing from a repertoire of images, adding this and dropping that in order to “fit” their historical context. With the help of this metaphor it becomes possible to unravel the *longue durée* of narratives, but tracing their meandering through history does not enforce conservatism. Rather, it opens a window on agency, choice and contingency. Sequencing the different layers of the narrative helps us to understand which knowledge was chosen to present the other, with whom rested the power of definition, and which knowledge had to be suppressed to attain that goal.

Research into the *longue durée* of European narratives on the Muslim “Other” presents a new approach to textbook analysis and four preliminary studies were presented in this

workshop. It lent the reconstruction of how images come about historical depth and offered an explanation for the durability – if not to say: tenacity – of shared perceptions. However, much more research will be needed to fully understand the ways in which European semantic reservoirs, while preserving and canonizing images of Muslims and Islam, prepare the ground for new images and attach them to the old repertoire.

Secondly, there is a “roots” discussion going on in Europe, which attempts to define who “we” are and, consequently, who “we” are not. It is echoed by like discussions in North Africa, the Middle East and Turkey. Their aim is to retrace the borderline between “in” and “out” and to put stakeholders, prospective candidates and outsiders in their respective places. In this discussion, different (textbook-) narratives compete but the competition cannot be likened to bargaining in the market place. It seems rather that an hegemony of narratives dominates the field. If we want to make sense of how it works, here is another field that needs future research.

Thirdly, different media act as an agency for the production and spread of the narratives under discussion. We focused on textbook media as they present the bottom line of what a society “knows” and deems worthy to pass on to the next generation. It was concluded that education presents both a chance and a risk. The narratives it preserves and adapts to the present can be utilized as a tool for critical reflexivity as well as for creating distinct identities. Only when textbook media are being contextualized within history writing on the one side and policy making on the other, we can begin to understand the place of education in the “roots” discussion. Traditional textbook analysis, focusing as it does on the analysis of words and sequences, largely neglected to undertake this step. We therefore concluded that the contextualisation of the textbook narratives at hand is a field that urgently needs looking into.

Finally it was stressed that we should not fall into the trap of cultural liberality and relativize the dangers of politicised Islam. Many Muslims may presently undertake the attempt to place themselves on the map of Europe, but a minority has set into movement all the violent means it can lay its hands on to undo these attempts. Future research therefore should also address the precarious balance between Muslim attempts to place themselves on the map of Europe as against attempts to erase them.

The proceedings of the workshop will be published in: Gerdien Jonker and Shiraz Thobani (eds.): *Recasting the Image of The Other. Muslims in European Textbooks*. ConTexte, Scientific Journal of the Eckert Institute 2009/1, New York: Berghahn Books.

Assessment of the results

The main outcome of the workshop was the formation of a *European Network for the Study of Meaningful Others through the Lens of Textbooks* (EUROLENS). During the final brainstorming, four main objectives were identified. To put in a nutshell, the network endeavours (1) to promote research, (2) to bring in young scholars, (3) to address multipliers in education, and (4) to issue recommendations for policy makers.

(1) *To promote research.* As may be gleaned from the above conclusions, we identified four topics for future research:

- To unravel the *longue durée* of national textbook narratives
- To try to make sense of the apparent hegemony of narratives in the present, for instance through addressing EU agendas versus national agendas, or national agendas versus minority agendas
- To contextualise textbook narratives between history writing and policy making
- To study the precarious balance between placing oneself on, as against erasing Muslims from the map of Europe

For the moment, three different nodes were created that address different parts of the research: **Barcelona/Rabat** focuses on “One History-Different Memories”; **Braunschweig/Cambridge/Kazan** looks into at “The Production of Myths: Sources and Interfaces”; **Erfurt/Florence/Istanbul** addresses “Hegemonic Policy Agendas” through the study of gender politics.

(2) *To bring in young scholars*

- The undertaking of parallel seminars between Rabat and Barcelona will serve as a pilot project for the development of a format in which sensitive issues may be addressed together. It will serve as an entry for common research and student exchange. The leading thoughts behind are that (1) history is not a utopia but must be clustered around problems a certain group experiences in the present, and (2) any approach to history should include the relevant different perspectives.
- We also wish to create a truly European atmosphere through the free exchange of ideas. What we have in mind is a kind of peripatetic science making with the

help of summer schools in significant European birthplaces. Milete, Istanbul and Odessa were mentioned as possible venues.

(3) *To address multipliers in education* may serve as an important hinge between academia and education. In the network it will therefore occupy a central place. Multipliers will be addressed through

- exchange of ideas for the development of new educational images
- competition between countries
- common publication of educational materials
- in-teacher trainings

(4) *To issue recommendations for policy makers* traditionally belongs to textbook analysis. Our aim however is not the correction of existing words or text sequences but the reform of the historical trade through critical historiography. Students should learn

- to discern and deconstruct local, national, regional and world levels
- to move towards an anthropological and social history
- to teach history as a construction of the present, not as an instrument to trace and “prove” one’s roots

Final Programme

Tuesday 11.09.2007 /19.00 / Official Reception

Wednesday 12.09.2007 /09.00 / Introduction by **Gerdien Jonker**

Panel 1

Turkey in Europe – The *longue durée* of Turkey in Europe

Moderation: Kira Kosnick. Commentator: Matthias Schwerendt

Stefan Ihrig: *Black box, Continuity or significant other? Turkey and the Turks in German history textbooks (1945-2007)*

Hakan Yilmaz: *German and French perceptions on Turkey’s EU vocation (2002-2007)*

Luigi Cajani: *The Rise and Fall of the Ottoman Empire: European Perceptions at the start of the EWG*

Panel 2

Perceptions Across the Mediterranean – Shared histories, different memories

Moderation: Benoit Challand. Commentator: Moez Khalfaoui

Hamed Abdel-Samad: *Images of the Other across Arab textbooks*

Merce Viladrich Grau and Pilar Comín: *History and caricature: an approach to Iberian medieval society through textbook images: methodology and sources (1820 - 2000)*

Mostafa Hassani Idrissi: *Perceptions of Europe in Moroccan Textbooks*

Thursday 13.09.2007

Panel 3

Images of Centrality – Placing one self on the map of Europe

Moderation: Theresa Wobbe. Commentary: Mostafa Hassani Idrissi

Adrian Brisku: *Islam and Muslim Albanians in Albanian Textbooks*

Shiraz Thobani: *Peripheral Vision in the National Narrative: Muslim History in British Textbooks*

Benoit Challand: *A gender-based reading of the visual representations of Islam in French, Italian and German textbooks (1950-2007)*

Kira Kosnick: *On how to be a good Muslim in Germany: Alevi strategies of self-representation in the mass media*

Panel 4

Centre and Periphery – Erasing Muslims from the Russian public sphere

Moderation: Gerdien Jonker. Commentary: Hakan Yilmaz

Irina Morenko: *„Others“ or „Ours“? Muslims in the Public Space of Russia – Media and Policy Practices*

Marad Gibatdinov: *The Image of Muslims and Tatars in Local (Tatar) and Federal (Russian) History Books (1880-2007)*

Mieste Hotopp-Riecke: *Can Tatars be Europeans?*

Friday 14.09.2007 (9.00-12.30)

Synthesis by **Gerdien Jonker**

Final discussion

List of participants

- Hamed Abdel-Samad**, Georg Eckert Institute / Braunschweig (Germany)
Adrian Brisku European University Institute / Florence (Italy)
Luigi Cajani, University of Rome (Italy)
Benoit Challand, European University Institute / Florence (Italy)
Pilar Comin, University of Barcelona (Spain)
Marat Gibatdinow, Tatar Academy of Sciences / Kazan (RU)
Mostafa Hassani-Idrissi, University of Fez (Maroc)
Mieste Hotopp-Riecke, Free University Berlin (Germany)
Stefan Ihrig, Cambridge University (UK)
Gerdien Jonker, Georg Eckert Institute / Braunschweig (Germany)
Moez Khalfaoui, Universite Libre de Tunis (Tunisia) (already in Braunschweig at the time of the workshop)
Kira Kosnick, Goethe University Frankfurt (Germany)
Irina Morenko, Kazan State Medical University / Kazan (RU)
Matthias Schwerendt, Potsdam University (Germany)
Shiraz Thobani, Institute of Ismaeli Studies / London (UK)
Mercè Viladrich, University of Barcelona (Spain)
Theresa Wobbe, Erfurt University (Germany)
Hakan Yilmaz, Bogazici University Istanbul (Turkey)

Statistical information on participants

The meeting gathered together a well-balanced mixture of dissertation students (5), junior researchers (6) and senior researchers/professors (7), seven of whom were women and eleven men. Participants came from eight different countries: Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Morocco, Spain, Tatarstan/RU, Tunisia and Turkey. But during breaks it was possible to hear eleven different languages: Albanian, Arabic, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Tatar, Turkish, Urdu and Russian. Nonetheless, the official conference languages remained English and French.

Gerdien Jonker
Convenor