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(eds.)

# Lived Space

Reconsidering Transnationalism  
among Muslim Minorities

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# **Lived Space: Reconsidering Transnationalism among Muslim Minorities**

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With this anthology, we wish to explore the concept and practices of *Lived Space* among Muslim minorities in Europe. Our exploration will be guided by our mutual interest in concepts such as 'space/place', 'home', 'loyalty' and 'togetherness' and the way these sensibilities make individual and collective identities very real, located and concrete, and accordingly, constitute the substantive ground that binds people together. Thus, we consider this common bond to be basically sentimental but, nevertheless, it should be studied as a social fact making Muslim minorities located, grounded and rooted equal to other Westerners.

*Lived Space* is a phrase that we have borrowed from Tim Cresswell's excellent book *Place. A Short Introduction* and his introduction to *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*. Cresswell himself has borrowed the phrase from Edward Soja and in many respects we share the ambition with both Cresswell and Soja to try to question or even overcome habitual dichotomies between place as a subjective emotional relation and place as an objective infrastructure. Thus, the phrase *Lived Space*, however intangible and even slightly contradictory, is the headline of an attempt to combine ontologies and epistemologies of space to form more integrated and thereby realistic accounts of Muslim life in Europe.

Space is usually understood as opposed to place. This makes much sense as space is usually considered a void or an extension while place is associated with names; identities. Thus, the dichotomies involved are classic: Unknown-known, universal-particular, extended-ended, strange-familiar, etc. Following this logic *Lived Space* points to an activity by which the unknown becomes known, the universal particular and the extended becomes ended and vice versa: The filling out of space with human relations, the making sense of space, the transformation of space into places with identities, the doing of the perpetual extensions and changes that occur in human spatial relations.

We have been inspired by recent books on critical cultural and human geography primarily the work of Tim Cresswell and Doreen Massey. We find that a very fruitful inter-disciplinarity can be established between cultural and religious studies of

Muslim minorities, European-Middle Eastern encounters, and human geography. Inevitably, studies of Muslim religious minorities in Europe and studies of European-Middle Eastern encounters entail a significant and even founding spatial extension or change. Almost by definition, studies of European-Middle Eastern encounters evolve along trails of extension or changes of geo-graphy, geo-strategy, and geo-policy. Studies of Muslim religious minorities are no less spatial and are subject to all the inherent meaning of the orders of European-Middle Eastern encounters. When we study and describe the ghettos, the neighbourhoods, the minority spaces and their transgressions of national and cultural borders, we also study the extensions and changes of spatial orders because spaces and places are essentially made up of human relations. Studies of Muslim religious minorities in Europe and European-Middle Eastern encounters are themselves completely intertwined as we experience increased mobility and integration between Europe and the Middle East.

What we have found to be the case in much literature on Muslim minorities in Europe is that the concept of transnationalism is often used to describe the common-sensical fact that individual and collective relations among Muslim minorities very often cross state borders – hence transnational. In this use of transnationalism is implied the *a priori* assumption that border crossing is a particular quality. In principle, it counts for all transgressors but in Europe to Muslims more than to other religious minorities or majorities the last 15-20 years. Often, the qualitative dimension of transnationalism is presented as some sort of vantage point or positive potential as seen in theoretical work by Edward Said, Arjun Appadurai or Peter Mandaville. At other times, in Olivier Roy's and Gilles Kepel's work for instance, it is presented as a potential problem for the social cohesion of the Europeans states, or as something particularly interesting to study because of the *a priori* difference implied when we discuss Muslim minorities. In any case, the general use of the concept of transnationalism in either its empirical or qualitative dimension fails to define transnationalism as a substantially meaningful concept pointing to new understandings that are not already implied in most globalisation literature since the beginning of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the concept of transnationalism should not be rejected but rather re-qualified through a reconsideration of its potentials and limitations or through suggestions for completely new understandings of it.

Regarding the concepts of space/place, home, loyalty and togetherness interesting new perspectives for the study of Muslims in Europe arise from the indeed very diverse theoretical work of among others Tim Cresswell, Doreen Massey, Richard Rorty, Lars-Henrik Schmidt, Mikhail Bakhtin, Wendy Brown, Slavoj Žižek and Chantal Mouffe, some recent and some classical theoretical sources. These authors, despite their significant differences, emphasise the need for integra-

ting social science, psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural studies and narratology in order to understand the complexity of 'the social' which Muslim minorities are part of and not parted from. The central concepts of the social that we wish to emphasise, space/place, home, loyalty, togetherness, are all both subjective and objective, empirical and sentimental, historical and still permanently in the making. The location of these senses can be mapped, they can be presented, imagined and embodied by people, and they are done, made, through the practice of living. Focusing on these concepts, we, following Cresswell, want to tune into the *lived space* of Muslim minorities in Europe.

The contributions to this book have two primary interests that are addressed in different ways. Firstly, they seek to find ways to describe *the spaces* that Muslim Europeans inhabit and *the places* that make (common) sense to them without ascribing any a priori difference, queerness, danger, or vanguard position to them. Secondly, the contributions critically engage with the concept of trans-nationalism which in many respects defines the predominant perspective on Muslim minorities in social and cultural analysis. In this way, the book is located between two concepts that are not readily compatible in as much as *Lived Space* as a perspective is sensitive to ontology while trans-nationalism most often is used analytically to add to or transform our knowledge about Muslims thus making epistemological claims. We find that this tension is very fruitful for our exploration of the common ground that binds Muslim groups together. Hence, we aim at integrating exploration of *being Muslim in Europe* with critical interventions into *explaining Muslims in Europe*.

We hope that the collection will make *lived space* more than a well-coined term and introduce new perspectives on the practice of living among Muslim minorities.

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The anthology consists of chapters that either critically engage in the use of the concept of transnationalism in the study of Muslim minorities in Europe either theoretically or through original empirical research or present original research focusing on the making of place, home, senses of loyalty and togetherness among Muslim minorities in Europe.

The opening chapter of the volume by Jakob Egholm Feldt discusses the origins of the concepts of transnational and transnationalism and argues that the present day use of the concepts in social science analyses of minorities in the West very much supports a shift from sedentary to nomadic metaphysics. Chapter two by Possing and Johansen continues the investigation of these concepts in relation to Muslims in Britain. Here it is argued that the perspective of lived space contributes to the

analysis of identification production in potential asymmetrical power relations between majority and minorities.

Identification as well as negotiation are central to the following four chapters. In chapter three, Sinclair analyses the connection between a transnational political ideology setting the frame for engagement in politico-religious activities and concrete strategies for creating home and making sense of such activities in the everyday life of members of the Islamist organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir. In chapter four, Schmidt analyses examples of identity negotiations through different use of public space. The relationality of space is central to the argument here – what people do and how a given space is used can be expressions of opposition as well as belonging. In chapter five, Hemmingsen looks at a very specific place, namely the court room. Using Danish terror court cases as illustration, she argues that no place is neutral, and that even a court room becomes a stage for negotiations over the right to belong. Even the court room offers oppositional agendas to be lived. The following chapter, Galal's chapter six, analyses satellite TV programmes as lived space. The argument is that through life style programmes and programmes of religious content female audiences gain the opportunity to self-identify and participate in gender debates to further extent than previously seen. Finally, chapter seven by Delaney and Cavatorta, discusses the conditions for Muslims in the Republic of Ireland in terms of political participation. The idea here is to investigate the background for the development of a distinct cosmopolitanism amongst the Muslims minorities present in the country. Again, questions concerning identification, negotiation and belonging are central to the argument.

We have attempted to reach a degree of convergence of concepts and perspectives through discussion of ideas and presentations in two seminars. One at University of Southern Denmark in November 2008 and one in March 2009 at the Danish Institute for Social Research with the purpose of framing our *Erkenntnisinteressen* and aligning our contributions. The seminars have been held under the auspices of FIFO, the Danish Association for Research on Islam and Muslims, and we wish to thank FIFO, its board and in particular chairman Garbi Schmidt for supporting this project all the way. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers from *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* (Journal of Islam Research) and the research group on Cultural History at Roskilde University for helpful comments and suggestions.

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