

## Cities Compared: Governance, Participation and Diversity

Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi, Zentrum Moderner Orient

### *Concept and objective of the program*

The object of this proposed program is to bring together research on cosmopolitanism in order to compare cities of different regions bordering on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, from various disciplinary perspectives, from history to political sciences or political philosophy. A focus will always be the city. The aim is to confront theories of cosmopolitanism and civil society with concrete historical urban case studies in a comparative way. Thus the attempt will be made to push forward the theoretical discussion of the concepts beyond Eurocentrism and at the same time to connect recent research on Mediterranean cities to ongoing theoretical debates.

The questions of how people of different cultural and religious background live together increasingly exercises people's minds, notably in conjunction with an increasing awareness of global connectivity. Do Arabs or Muslims in Europe live in parallel societies? How do Europeans live in cities of the Muslim world? What is the historical experience of urban denominational communities in the Near East? And how does it compare – or not – to the experience of diverse communities in European towns? How is such cohabitation conceptualized, how is it translated into practice? How are urban societies dealing with the impact of global changes and the change from empires to nation states? How have urban traditions been reinterpreted? Often the concept of cosmopolitanism is invoked to conjure up the image of citizens of the world, easily fitting into different contexts that openly receive them. But when applied to urban realities, describing the diversity of the society, this is then contrasted with the notion of communities closed in upon themselves, hostile to their environment, and potentially subversive to the society's integrity. Can a civil society develop in a non-Western context, and if so, on what basis? The concept of civil society is often named as a precondition for democracy and good governance. Comparative historical analysis has been limited so far. The debate on civil society suggests that the origins of civil society were in towns and in the relationship between town and country, that it developed in the context of European societies, which were more suited to the development of a stable pluralist civil society than others. What are the local traditions of intermediate societal groups on the other side of the Mediterranean? How were they organized in the Ottoman Empire and how did they change with the advent of modern nation states? Were stable civil societies located only in Western Europe? And were civil society 'models' imported from Western Europe to the Near East? If so, how and when did it work, when not? How did the shift from old to new regimes of governance function? What can we learn of European urban history in this field and what from other historical paths? How was something like civil society conceptualized in the Near East? And most of all: what is the relationship between civil society and its possible limits and the existence of cosmopolitan urban society?

### *The concept of cosmopolitanism in political philosophy*

The concept of cosmopolitanism was elaborated in the Hellenistic context and has indeed been used and reinterpreted throughout history. What seems most interesting is to discuss the evolution of its

meaning from the Greek idea of the government of the world as an extended city, through the social situation of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Oriental towns, to the present debate about world governance, urban governance, and life in the cities.

A discussion of the history of the concepts of cosmopolitanism and civil society is necessary in the process of building a common field for discussion. The fact that the history of the concepts relates mostly to European political philosophy must not be considered a Eurocentric vision, but instead as a clarification of the origins and connotations of a concept whose circulation will be at the center of the program.

The first use of the term cosmopolitanism comes from the tradition of the Cynics. The concept was later used by the Stoics and is thus in essence a Mediterranean concept. It matured with the decline of the model of the Greek city and of the model of governance it had promoted in the whole ancient world. At the time of the imperial experience of Alexander, the Cynics introduce the idea of an egalitarian moral system, based on the individual. The Stoics invent the idea of the world as a super-city, with citizens of the world. Cosmopolitanism is, then, from the very beginning a notion situated at the articulation between the government of the world and its differences and the urban government.

From the very beginning, the cosmopolitan idea included a tension between the universal and the individual, between the idea of the possible coexistence of different identities of the individual and a need for an egalitarian-individualist attitude of equality for men (and only very much later women) as citizens of the world or as participating entities in urban social life. The concept of cosmopolitanism is also born at the articulation between ethics and concrete governance of diversity. The urban question is thus at the very heart of cosmopolitanism.

Many misunderstandings have also been created by misuses of the term and by an empirical use of the concepts of cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism. The main problem is the confusion between the coexistence of several different parallel societies and the existence of one single society mixing several components. What is important in this program is to discuss the various uses of the concept in order to promote a cross-examination of different social and political situations, both in history and today. The fact that the philosophical concept of cosmopolitanism was elaborated in a Mediterranean context is not enough to allow inappropriate uses and a mere and undiscussed transposition to local situations. This very transposition must be discussed in a critical way. But the concept remains an important tool to discuss such crucial issues as the idea of world city, world history, world government and governance, urban conviviality, the governance of conflict situations, the emergence of a civil society, and the complex relation between East and West.

During the period of the European Enlightenment, the concept was reinterpreted, mostly in the context of the German philosophical debates and within the more global frame of the evolution of the European literary *Respublica*. That is why an examination of its pertinence today cannot do without a renewed discussion of Kant's ideas on cosmopolitanism, world government, and the role of the individual in the society. Even more important is the role of the concept in the maturation of modern political thought in Europe and the circulation of the concept between Europe and the Middle East in a complex relationship. Nationalism in Europe has also been built as a concept in political philosophy in a complex and constant relation to cosmopolitanism, and the study of the diverse nationalist traditions in the Mediterranean and its adjacent regions has to deal with such complexity. This has to be remembered when studying the stakes of nationalism in the East. From the tension in the French Revolution between nation building and the promotion of universal values to the ambiguity generated by considerations of race and ethnicity in the European nation building processes, discussions of cosmopolitanism have always been matters of great relevance.

They became matters of even greater relevance when this tradition confronted diversity and complexity in a region that had experienced different paths toward the governance of diversity and

in which the impact of the European tradition was accompanied with great ambiguities. But the issue of the regime of difference has also been treated in a philosophical context. In the Middle Ages, authors like al-Farabi (al-madina al-fadila), al-Biruni, al-Isfahani (kitab al-aghani), and Ibn Khaldun have proposed articulated visions of the urban society in which both the Greek philosophical heritage and local traditions have entered into an original creation, which contributed to build the frame of urban governance in the region. This contribution has to be studied in relation to the evolution of the urban government of differences in the region as well. Here the monumental works on cities, the history of cities, civilization, and governance, like those of al Maqrizi (khitat al-maqriziya), Ali Mubarak (khitat al-tawfiqiyah), and Jurji Zaidan (tarikh at-tamaddun al-islami), may offer new insights.

#### *The evolution of the concept of civil society*

Civil society was first theorized as a modern concept in political science in 18th-century Scotland by Adam Ferguson. The concept was also developed in England and in the following decades became a key concept in the construction of the American republic and a major legacy given by New England to the American democracy.

In the past decades, research on civil society has focused on several points, particularly: civil society as a possible condition for the development of democracy and for the development of capitalism and market relations. During the past two decades, these questions have been extensively discussed in relation to the Arab world. But what seems interesting here is to combine research on civil society with research on the cosmopolitan composition of societies, from a comparative urban and historical point of view.

#### *Present debates about cosmopolitan governance and civil society*

The present debates are articulated in the context of cultural and political studies, in disputes on world history, world governance, and post-national and post-colonial issues. There are two main trends. The first one discusses the globalized world and its possible cosmopolitan governance, often in the context of the concept of a "world society" (Weltgesellschaft). The second one is about the neo-liberal project: Is there a neo-liberal cosmopolitanism? In this context, there are also debates on corporate organizations as cosmopolitan forms of governance. In the field of political philosophy, there is also an important debate on Habermas. But what is also interesting is to focus on the urban situation, regarding both cosmopolitanism and civil society from a historical perspective.

Historiography about urban governance is at a turn. It is no longer possible to treat urban administrative modernity as a mere import to the region, and local traditions are presently the object of a renewed heuristic interest resulting in a deep reinterpretation: Before the impact of Europe, urban societies had developed original forms of government and of governance of diversity. The question of modernity in an urban context has been the object of a process of insertion into a more complex frame. But the question remains of the evolution of the governance of diversity, in relation to modernity, to nationalism and nation-state building processes, to administrative rationalization, to the evolution of the role of the individual in society, to the emergence of civil society, and to changes in the role of denominational communities. From the impact of modernity and secularism, to the reinterpretation and forms of survival or cancellation of previous forms of governance, many questions arise in the process of analyzing the relationship between tradition and modernity in an urban Mediterranean context. And cosmopolitanism, as well as civil society, is at the heart of it.

#### *The Cosmopolitan Heritage in the Mediterranean and adjacent regions: the urban context*

Due to its history as well to the history of the concept, this region is a useful starting point for an illustration of these debates and a privileged field from which arguments are drawn. As U. Beck recently warned, the transposition of considerations of cosmopolitanism from philosophy to social

sciences is a source of misunderstandings. But the very object of the present program is to confront these discourses on the basis of a cross-study of historical, political and governance issues.

The first question to discuss is the passage from a conception of cosmopolitanism as an ancient notion in political philosophy to a paradigm designating the social situation of cities with a diverse population in the region. Research in this field cannot remain limited to the gathering of empirical material, but has to confront some theoretical problems. The key might be governance, i.e., the question how a juridical, administrative, and ideological framework was created that allowed the development of cosmopolitanism and how this cosmopolitanism related to modern notions of the term and to different philosophical traditions, both European and Arabic.

The aim of the project is to encourage the study of particular regional situations in medieval and old-regime urban governance, with a special focus on the governance of diversity: denominational communities, ethnic minorities, guilds, tariqas, and other associations in a number of towns of the area. This related partly to European, partly to Ottoman history. Because it is assumed that modern notions of the nation state and citizenship dramatically changed the overall framework of social organization, the project suggests combining a study of Early Modern solutions to these questions with a discussion of the impact of colonialism, the importance of reforms in an imperial context, and the development in the nation state. The governance of diversity in the Ottoman Empire, with the millet system for example, is in fact a key issue in the understanding of the history of the region, as are the concepts of diaspora, minority, nation, and colony in the old meanings of the terms and their evolution toward modern urban societies. Research has to go beyond a merely empirical description and confront the theoretical aspects of the question. Thus, Ottoman, Arabic, and European political philosophy, as well as the interpretation of urban cosmopolitanism in the Ottoman Empire and the European coastal cities, need to be considered in addition to the study of particular historical case studies to which the concept could be applied.

The development of civil society, or sometimes the reasons for the failure of such a development, are also an important issue, since it is an occasion to follow the evolution of old-regime forms of association (denominational, professional) into a modern situation. The passage from guilds to professional associations or from communities to cultural associations, from notability to political parties, are central issues in the understanding of the evolution of urban societies and of the evolution of the governance of diversity.

The passage to modernity in this field can be analyzed on a large time scale, including the whole 19th and 20th centuries, up to present issues. But moments of radical changes can also be used as a means to understand how the urban system passes from one situation to another: the Izmir fire of 1922, the Saloniki fire of 1917, and the Alexandria riots of the 1950s, for example. These moments can be used as a means to discuss the processes of imperial collapse, nation-state building, the expression of nationalism, and the changes in the definition of identity.

#### *State of research*

The founding publication on the study of governance in a cosmopolitan urban society is surely Ilbert's seminal study of Alexandria. French research since then has developed an empirical rather than a theoretical approach to the question and rarely has confronted the description of the urban reality with the concept of cosmopolitanism. However, it provides much information on urban case studies, from Saloniki to Izmir.

For Europe, research has been particularly productive about Venice and Livorno. The revolution of the interpretation of diversity in the context of the emerging of the notion of the nation state in Italy is indeed an interesting point for comparison.

Research on cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean has also been the object of a recent conference in Nice, with papers by Anne Brogini on Malta, Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire on Freemasonry, Samuel Fettah on Livorno, Marie Carmen Smyrnelis on Smyrna, Malte Fuhrmann on the Ottoman port cities, Randi Deguilhem on Damascus, Katerina Trimi-Kirou on Alexandria, Buket Turkmen on Turkish nationalism, and Yvan Gastaut.

This work often ignores the theoretical aspect of the question and its relevance in the political sciences, but provides an important informative frame. Vice versa, many theoretical considerations ignore the empirical dimension and particularly the urban situation. The object of this program is to set up a productive dialogue between these two fields and to use information about the past governance of diversity in present debates about assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, hybridization, and their expression in urban governance, urban architecture, and organization and in the structure of the whole urban sphere. New research on the concept has been produced recently at the intersection of these trends, and the very core of the present program will consist in exploring such heuristic horizons, where a discussion of the concept of cosmopolitanism can bring new interpretations to the history of the region, its relationship to modernity through urban governance and the state building process, and its present relationship to the issues of governance, democracy, and insertion in a globalized world. The intent is also to bring a diverse angle to the interpretation of present debates about Occidentalism, Islamic radicalism as expression of a hatred of the West, and the complex issue of the governance of diversity in urban situations.

Civil society is thus another key issue. Urban research in this field has recently been subject to a deep renewal, and a useful collaboration can be expected with researchers dealing with different cultural contexts. Topics like the development of professional associations, labor organizations, and cultural or educational associations in relation to local heritages of cosmopolitanism have to be discussed in a wider frame, as does the trend of nostalgia for a former cosmopolitan era; they should then be inserted into a concrete intent to write a social, political, and cultural history of this field, related to present debates.

Authors like Nelly Hanna for Egypt, Emad Hilal, Roel Meijer, and Sami Zubaida have contributed to the renewal of social studies. The object of the present program is to confront such trends with the general question of the governance of diversity in societies both of the past and of the present. The image of the urban social panorama through literature, movies, and photography can also be the object of important contributions.