

## **MOBB: Mobilities, Belonging and Beliefs: Confronting Global Inequalities and Insecurities**

Since 2003 the department's research activities have been subsumed under the research program CONSEC (*Constructing Human Security in a Globalizing World*). The program focused on the interrelated existential (or cultural-symbolic) and physical-material aspects of human security under globalisation: the way contemporary globalization produces new forms of insecurity, fear, and precariousness as well as new discourses of security and securitization; and the multiple and contradictory ways in which people around the world respond to these by seeking physical, existential, and emotional security through social and religious movements, social media, migration, violence, and quests for meaning and equity.

Currently, the program is evolving into a new research program. With this program, we aim to expand more on the consequences of escalating mobility, without fully leaving behind us the interest in human security. One of the key elements in the program therefore will be a strong focus on mobility as a crucial intermediary process between globalization and human security.

In our program, we take up mobility in the broadest sense of the word as a conditioning and disciplining, but also productive and enabling process. Mobility is about migration, exchange and hybridization on a global scale, about transnational lives, and about forced uprootedness, growing inequality and uncertainty, and also about social mobility, life course mobility, and mobilities in terms of shifting societal stratification patterns. Mobility, additionally, lays bare the resilience and inventiveness of people confronted with an ever-changing world. Mobility is a crucial condition in which people shape their life worlds.

When so much is in motion, the question to whom one belongs becomes pertinent. People belong to different social networks, and switch, mediate and move between them, bringing in their life-histories and cultural luggage in each and every one. The groups to which one feels to belong, or tries to connect, can be defined by kinship, ethnicity, religion, nationality, residence, labour contract, club membership, ict-mediated sharing of features of political, professional, or leisure-time nature, and non-institutionalised, but shared interests.

Developing a sense of belonging inevitably rests on principles of inclusion and exclusion. The politics of identity find more formal expression in debates about citizenship and rights. In a less formal way politics of identity can evoke protests and social movements. An important insight in this respect is that one group's security can be another group's insecurity. When a group feels safe behind walls (for instance of gated communities), territorial boundaries (for example of national states), or social boundaries (by various discursive or interactive means of exclusion), the securitization of their own territory inevitably implies the exclusion of an out-group, whose freedom of mobility is reined in. Ethnicity, nationalism, and gender, through processes of (de)connecting by both first and later generation migrants and even among host society citizens, are all manifestations of the twin processes of inclusion and exclusion. In the more extreme cases, these processes include the use of violence.

Another form of seeking security in a rollercoaster-like mobile world is by various forms of religiosity. Religiosity can be liberating in an existential way, but also in a more mundane way religiosity can offer some form of refuge by creating a sense of belonging. Often, controversies on the ways devotion and doctrines should be shaped, adapted or preserved, and even frictions between different currents, are part of processes religious communities go through today. Some religions deploy missionary activity, also globally. But whereas the developments sketched so far are global in their manifestations, they do not necessarily occur in transnational settings, but can also take place at a local or regional scale.

Multi-layered mobility processes bring along that some agents are better equipped to profit from the global movement of people, goods and ideas than others. Often, such opportunities are gendered. Many dangers affect in particular girls and women, especially because of their sexual and physical vulnerability. Nonetheless, they should also be seen as agents. People reflect, analyze, navigate, create, adapt, resist, avoid, organize, flee, plan, assist others, pray, hope, duck, and do much more.

Furthermore, regardless of the outcome of the question whether one tends to profit or to lose from these global movements, most persons will face new insecurities emanating from this mix of inequality, questions of belonging, and the challenge of understanding a world that seems in constant flux. How do people (including youth and children) deal with insecurities about contradicting cultural anchorings? Code-switching and ongoing acculturation processes become important assets in life.

Research in the developing program of MOBB has two foci: (1) new forms of religious and ethnic exclusion, belonging and world-making and (2) development, inequality and conflict, as well as new prospects and forms of agency connected to issues such as access to resources, opportunities, identity framing, strategies of belonging and power relations. New conditions both limit and enable coping strategies, as they impact on resilience, inventiveness and the opportunities and restrictions of available ways forward.

Our Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at VU University is one of the smaller anthropological Departments in the Netherlands with a research staff of about 13 (almost 40 if all internal and external PhD-candidates are included). Presently the department has four ordinary chairs, of which two are fulltime: Cultural Anthropology with a focus on religion, and Social Anthropology and Development (currently vacant). Two part time chairs cover the fields of Popular Religiosity, and of Global History from an Anthropological Perspective.

Additionally, the department has three endowed extraordinary chairs (Processes of Ethnicity and Identity Formation in Africa; Historical Anthropology and Ethnology of Europe; Contemporary History and Anthropology of Africa). Finally, there are five associate professors; three assistant professors; and five postgraduate students with research and/or teaching contracts. The department has no regional focus. The members of the department conduct research in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Europe.

The current staff studies a range of topics, all related to MOBB. They range (the overview not being exhaustive!) from migration, ethnicity, youth and citizenship in South Asia (Bal); migration, new media, marriage, sexuality and Islam in North Africa, Turkey and the Netherlands (Brouwer); decolonization, urban social inequality, violence, environmental awareness and consumptive behavior in Indonesia (Colombijn); development cooperation, land rights & large-scale land acquisitions, anthropology of youth and children, and education in Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles (Evers); migration and mobility from China (including tourism), Chinese nationalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism (Nyíri); popular religiosity (Van de Port); gender, labor, migration and development in the Horn of Africa (De Regt); social movements, citizenship, democratization and ethnicity in Bolivia and the rest of Latin America (Salman); religious authority and community building, Islam in Europe and in Turkey (Sunier); and migration, development, sustainability, conflict and natural resources in the Amazon region, notably in Brazil, French Guiana and Surinam (De Theije).

Most of the staff has intensive collaboration with colleagues, institutions and universities in the countries in which they do their research. Various colleagues have in recent years successfully applied for external funding of larger-scale research projects, in most cases involving various PhD-projects, and bringing together scholars from different departments, faculties and countries (e.g. Bal, Evers, Sunier, De Theije). On occasions, collaboration exists between colleagues from other departments in FSW to organize seminars, prepare and write publications, or present papers on conferences. The department is strong in attracting self-financed PhD students from elsewhere, notably from Brazil and Indonesia.