

The Struggle over Identity, Morality, and Public Space in Middle Eastern Cities

Initiative: Transformationsprozesse in der arabischen Welt

Ausschreibung: Staat, Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft im Wandel – Multilateral-kooperative

Forschungsvorhaben im arabischen Raum

Bewilligung: 03.04.2014

Laufzeit: 3 Jahre

Projekt-Website: <http://www.ezire.uni-erlangen.org/research/current-projects.shtml#Struggle>

The Arab uprisings have triggered a multitude of struggles over the identity of society and the 'good' order of state - rather than a linear transition to democracy. This project is based on the assumption that these struggles simultaneously occur on a national and local level. Guided by the question as to the driving forces behind the current changes of the normative order in the Arab world, this project deliberately focuses on the local level. By investigating selected quarters of four Arab cities (Beirut, Amman, Sana'a, and Tunis) as well as Istanbul, the project aims to shed light on two intertwined processes: (1) the spatial politics of constructing and bridging identities and (2) the struggle over the definition and enforcement of moral norms in public spaces - by, for instance, demonstrative religious appearance, milieu pressure, the threat of violence by radical groups, or by coercive governmental policies. Through this investigation, the project aims to answer the question as to whether the Arab uprisings have blurred the (symbolic) boundaries between identities and challenged the normative orders of the states. More specifically, the project looks at three aspects that are considered as key moral conflicts in the Arab world: (1) veiling practices, (2) availability and selling of alcohol, and (3) gender politics. The research is based on a form of method triangulation, which includes the analysis of selected quarters, open narrative interviews with activists as well as guided interviews with experts and inhabitants of the selected quarters, and participant observation.

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