

## **Moral Quandaries: Religion and Modern Law in Egypt (Fellowship von Dr. Jeffrey Culang am ZMO Berlin)**

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten  
in Deutschland und den USA

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"Moral Quandaries: Religion and Modern Law in Egypt" explores the entanglement between modern legal reform and morality. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, a new conception of law took root in Egypt. As part of the apparatus of the centralizing state, positivist law contrasted with established moral legal frameworks. Whereas these frameworks had focused on cultivating moral subjects bottom-up through communal structures, positivist law sought to discipline the individual top-down, often through threat of punishment, purposefully eschewing questions of morality. This project traces the making of modern law through genealogies of five concepts essential to the nation-state system: religious freedom, freedom of expression, public interest, nationality, and the minority. Each case shows how translations and codification - by British and Egyptian officials and legislators as well as foreign missionaries amid the ascendance of international law - rearranged or confined moral lexicons and practices toward state-defined public order. This research sheds new light on the place of religion in public life both in Egypt and globally. "Moral Quandaries" also explores a parallel aspect of the rise of modern political ethics in Egypt. In the early twentieth century, religious reformers began to engage with a new legal-political linguistic register that included the five concepts mentioned above. From within their own moral frameworks, they used this new vernacular to articulate and enact intersecting visions of a moral society compatible with modern structures of power and governance yet free from British colonialism. This project argues that these visions, though ephemeral, belie a central premise of secularism that only the division of morality from law and politics - which many see as existing in the "West" and lacking in the "Muslim world" - can sustain open and tolerant societies.

### **Projektbeteiligte**

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