

**WS 16**

**The end of negotiations in the Middle East?  
Debating the power of everyday life and scopes for action after post-Islamism  
RG Naher und Mittlerer Osten und Nordafrika**

*01.10.2019, Teil 1: 16:00-17:30 Uhr / Teil 2: 18:00-19:30 Uhr, Raum D434*

Organisiert von / organized by:

**Maren Jordan** (Universität Hamburg)

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The so-called Arab Spring sparked hopes of social justice and political reforms throughout the wider Middle East. More recently, however, residents' everyday lives tend to be dominated by political polarization, violent conflict, tightened censorship and authoritarianism. Scopes for action that opened up all throughout the region after 2011, especially in urban spaces and for marginalized social groups, now appear forcibly closed. Islamic movements once regarded as popular movements against political oppression in authoritarian 'secular' regimes have now come to stand for militant violence and/or growing intolerance in public life.

This workshop of the regional group Near and Middle East and North Africa seeks to discuss the role of negotiation and recent transformations of everyday scopes for action in the region. Drawing on empirical research, we wish to question the 'end of negotiations' in the Middle East, as commonly evoked by international media. Rather, we propose that the current attempts of ideological closure and restrictive authoritarian politics constitute a fertile ground for social negotiation processes on a deeper level. Thus, Asef Bayat (*Life as Politics*, 2010) writes about the 'non-movement' of Middle Eastern women, youth and the urban dispossessed that challenges the authoritarian logic of power by individual, yet contentious common practices of everyday life. By engaging in fashion or sports, having 'fun' or pursuing an education that leads them to an alternative reading of Islam, marginalized social groups encroach spaces of power and privilege hitherto claimed by male urban elites.

One key question that has been controversially debated within the Anthropology of Islam in recent years is the relation between mundane practices of everyday life and the normative formation of (pious) subjectivities, as well as their political implication. Following up on this, we are looking forward to contributions that draw on empirical research in the region to reflect on the state of everyday scopes for action and the negotiation of the socio-political order through the ambiguities and paradoxes of everyday life.

Vortragende Teil 1/ Speakers part 1:

**Aymon Kreil** (Ghent University) und

**Samuli Schielke** (FU Berlin)

**Normalization and the search for a predictable life in Egypt**

In 2011, change was the word of the day in Egypt. And yet even during this period, many tried to preserve a sense of ordinariness and normality in their lives. Some others hoped that change could lead them to what they considered a normal life as decent people. In parallel, a powerful counter-revolutionary discourse called for a quick return to normality. This trend won, and stability became the new political keyword. Neither attempts at negotiation nor confrontation but rather, various ways of normalization appear to many as the best tactics for the moment. First, looking at the events of 2011-2013 in Egypt, we discuss how normalization and paradoxical utopias of stability

informed both the ways in which many Egyptians tried to maintain a sense of predictable life amidst unpredictable events, as well as state strategies of reinstalling control. Second, we follow up how young people who had put hopes into the revolution after 2014 became involved in projects of career and marriage, and other attempts to conform to conventional expectations by people around them, showing how those attempts may both reinforce as well as unsettle taken-for-granted paths of living.

***Mina Ibrahim*** (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

**Striving for invisible good lives: negotiating the misfits of the Coptic Christian tradition**

For the Coptic minority in Egypt, pursuing a 'good life' is constantly connected to how Copts negotiate the 'visibility' of the Christian tradition in a predominantly Islamized state and society. In the proposed paper, I investigate overlooked and contradictory 'good' Coptic lives, specifically following the 2013 coup. After the 2011 uprising in Egypt, there was a surge of interest in Egyptian Copts. Scholarship on Coptic activism tended to focus on ways Copts were making their faith 'visible' in the streets and in the media. With the crackdowns on public spaces and the retreat of Copts and all groups out of the streets, however, I attempt to broaden the meaning of Coptic activism. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that sometimes Copts prefer not to negotiate their faith during their everyday interactions at their universities, workplaces, or leisurely sites. Because such negotiations do not always fit into some of the Coptic political and socio-economic imaginations, I particularly focus on how the striving for 'good' lives among members of marginalized religious groups might exist beyond and without struggles for 'visibility' within the Egyptian society.

***Katarzyna Puzon*** (HU Berlin)

**Manoeuvring through the City of Beirut**

In August 2013, a massive explosion took place in the Shi'a neighbourhood of South Beirut, depicted by some as a 'Hizbullah stronghold'. It was followed by a bomb blast shortly after in another part of the city. Such 'moments of danger' (Benjamin 1968) instantly enliven troubled narratives about the Lebanese capital, both inside and outside the country. These concern its wartime past, a protracted civil war, as well as more recent sudden acts of violence. In lieu of focusing primarily on those 'extraordinary' events, this paper explores mundane mobility practices in the city of Beirut and the ways in which they contribute to daily productions and negotiations of space in a volatile urban setting. Discussing a number of Beirut's images and imaginings, I examine how mobility practices manifest in the everyday. Also, I look at the readings of the past and the present those practices offer, and how they impact the ways in which the future is envisioned in an ambiguous geography of the metropolis.

***Sana Chavoshian*** (Universität Leipzig)

**Profanations: dreams and dissent in the post-revolutionary Iran**

This paper ethnographically engages with the theological therapeutics emerged in the context of Iranian Reformist discourse in the past decade. I focus on various and viral dream-practices and ask, how they correspond to the prioritization of individual religious experience over the orthodoxy of jurisprudence. In these practices, we encounter an "image reservoir", namely the "dream-images" that act as porous medium for experiencing the invisible and making regimes of profanation. What seemed in the beginning to be an intellectual debate among Politico-Religious Reformists for challenging the authority of the Islamist regime, galvanized crucial public disputes and led

to juridical accusations and prosecutions in empirical application. I take a critical stance toward the flattened and homogenized illustration of Muslims' Dreamscapes in "Anthropology of Islam". Whereas in their rubric of literature the only tension lays between Islamic Traditions of Interpretation and various fields of psychoanalysis, I show the modalities of imagery and supersensory operations that take dreampractices to political non-conformist acts.

Vortragende Teil 2/ *Speakers part 2:*

***Claudia Liebelt*** (Universität Bayreuth)

**Gendered scopes for action amidst the recent authoritarian turn in Turkey**

Within the religio-conservative gender climate established during the rule of the conservative, pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party in Turkey (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), pious forms of femininity have come to challenge hitherto dominant ideals of femininity, namely of the Republican female citizen as urban, middle class, "Western" and most importantly, secular. Drawing on ethnographic research on beauty and aesthetic body modification in conservative parts of Istanbul, my paper analyses pious forms of self-fashioning. Pious middle-class women of different generations, my research shows, are creative in reconciling their aesthetic desires and imaginings of themselves against the background of changing notions of appropriate feminine appearance and behaviour within the Turkish public. Their self-fashioning as feminine relies on a social redefinition not just of what is considered feminine, but of what is permissible and respectable from an overall Muslim perspective, as well as within particular social settings. This paper wonders about the gendered scopes for action amidst the conservative gender backlash and recent authoritarian turn in Turkey.

***Katja Föllmer*** (Universität Göttingen) und

***Liza Franke*** (Universität Göttingen):

**Negotiating the wearing of the hejab in Iran and in Egypt**

The hejab has always been subject to political, social and religious discourses in Muslim societies. After 1979, since the hejab was mandatory for every woman in Iran, the black tchador in particular became a symbol of Iranian society. With the years, the kind and manner of wearing the hejab diversified dependent on age, occasion and social class. Recently, a general debate about the abolition of the mandatory veil has begun, with individual women taking off their veil in public and sharing their images on social media. In Egypt the hejab is not mandatory, yet Islamic fashion has increased enormously especially since the late 20th century. Moreover, religious discourses have spread throughout Egypt encouraging certain styles of fashion. We analyze how in contemporary Alexandria, different historical memories, each containing a multiplicity of collective and individual religious experiences are stratified with regard to the hejab. The paper discusses when the hejab is defined religious by highlighting differences and similarities between Egypt and Iran. It investigates if single actions or non- movements induce or influence the shift of meaning with or against authoritarian norms and if a general shift to a more religious, social or political connotation of the veil is observable.

***Maren Jordan*** (Universität Hamburg)

**Politics of motherhood and the limits of negotiation in Oman**

In Oman, marriage and motherhood for the vast majority of women are 'non-negotiable'. Recently, the Sultanate's uncertain economic and political stability in light of decreasing oil resources, the unrests in 2011 and an aging Sultan have re-strengthened Islamic discourses and piety on local levels. Women's roles as devout wives and mothers of the future generation seem all the more loaded with meaning and expectations. Yet, the shaping of these gender roles, such as the when and how to marry and have kids, remain negotiable. Drawing on fieldwork in Oman's interior region, this paper explores how women of different age-groups negotiate these life-altering decisions in their daily lives with relatives and friends, with their husbands, themselves and/or with God. I discuss how their decisions and acts at times subversively challenge the politics of motherhood and existing power relations - be it the patriarchal family, stately institutions or religious norms, while at other times reinforcing them. Building on Johnson-Hanks (2010) approach of 'conjunctural action' I analyse women's scopes for action and decisions situationally and from a life-course perspective within a social context in which the pious and the mundane are closely entangled.

**Annika Ramsaier** (LMU München)

**Dating across boundaries: interethnic couples in Israel**

The political situation in Israel seems to be stuck, without any negotiations between the Israeli and the Palestinian government in the nearby future in sight. Also, even if Jewish and Palestinian residents of Israel have the same citizenship, they live almost segregated from each other with rare interaction on an everyday basis. Many towns in Israel are either completely Jewish or Palestinian; schools are likewise separated and the army service, claiming to unite citizens by serving the nation, is compulsory for Jewish citizens exclusively. Based on an empirical study, my paper focuses on Jewish and Muslim- or Christian-Palestinian interethnic couples living in Israel. How do intimate relationships between Jewish and Palestinian Israelis come into being despite of the national tension? What are their daily experiences with their surrounding society and the state? Which ideas of the "national", tensions and boundaries are reflected in their romantic relationships? By documenting the interaction of interethnic couples, this study contributes to an understanding of the complexity of relations between Jewish and Palestinian Israelis and their social reality.