

St. Antony's College, University of Oxford workshop, 2nd November 2016

### Concept note: Citizenship and social change in Lebanon and the Arab world

Disciplinary approaches to studying events in the Arab world have tended to favour political science approaches, with the dominant methodological paradigm being through the lens of 'democratization', or what Cavatorta (2012) characterizes as 'transitology' – where events are interpreted as developing in a linear trajectory from authoritarian rule towards liberal democracy (Kiwani, 2014). Debates about new paradigms for understanding sociopolitical change in the Arab world include for example, conceptualizing new political subjectivities that are both distinct from neo-liberal Western conceptualizations of the individual as well as being distinct from a traditional reliance on communities, parties or tribes, what Hanafi (2012) describes as a 'reflexive individualism'. Others, drawing on Foucault and Said, analyse how knowledge is both produced and used to establish and challenge authority, what has been coined 'post-democratization' scholarship (Teti, 2012). Isin's innovative work on 'acts of citizenship' also offers new ways of thinking about 'citizenship after orientalism' – that is how to understand citizenship outside of Western contexts (Isin, 2008, 2012). Isin challenges traditional constructions of citizenship in purely legal terms, and explores many cases where those who are socially and legally excluded, nevertheless have the capacity to constitute themselves politically.

Also informative is an approach to understanding 'power' in a relational sense, where there is a recognition that power relations unfold in all social relations, rather than being conceived in terms of a finite resource from above. Whilst institutions in the Arab world, for example, legal institutions, political institutions or indeed educational institutions are typically seen as directly under government control, this does not capture the complexity of interpersonal dynamics, the unique characteristic of pedagogical spaces, and hence the transformatory potential in a variety of civic spaces, whether formal and non-formal education, the media, and social media, or less organized civil acts of individuals (Kiwani, 2014).

As the Centre for Lebanese Studies Fellow at St. Antony's College, University of Oxford (2015-16), my research during this year is aiming to explore *how conceptions of citizenship change in contexts of significant political upheaval* – focusing on Lebanon. I am exploring both meta-level and micro-level changes to understandings / conceptions of citizenship through examining the multiple different 'discourses' that are constructed, challenged and interact. I am interested in such discourses across multiple spheres: the political, legal, socio-cultural, religious and educational sites, as well as significantly, the acts of individuals - both those of 'influence' as well as those deemed to be 'marginalized'. Therefore, this project is concerned both with understanding:

- i) *the conditions and processes of change* (given that 'citizenship' is a dynamic, fluid, and changing concept), and
- ii) *the 'actors': who and how such discourses are produced and interact* (sociology of 'knowledge' about citizenship).

The aim of this interdisciplinary workshop is to contribute to our understandings of 'social change' in relation to 'inclusive citizenship' in the Middle East, as well as in broader comparative perspective. Themes of interest could include:

- Social policy making and its relationship with social change and inclusive citizenship
- Civil society

- Gender and sexuality
- Refugees
- Law-making and social change

### **Participant profiles**

1. Dr. Maya Mikdashi, Rutgers University, USA; Legal Anthropology of Lebanon, examining relationships between gender / sex/ sectarianism in Lebanon:

<http://womens-studies.rutgers.edu/faculty/visiting-scholars-and-postdocs/753-maya-mikdashi-f-14-16>

2. Professor Donatella Della Porta, European University Institute, Florence, Italy; Professor of Sociology; comparative studies on democracy and social movements; currently working on major European Research Council project on civil society participation and social movements across Europe, Middle East and Latin America:

<http://www.eui.eu/DepartmentsAndCentres/PoliticalAndSocialSciences/People/Professors/DellaPorta.aspx>

3. Dr Gianluca Parolin, Aga Khan University London; Comparative Law of Middle East and North Africa and author of book, *Citizenship in the Arab World* (2009); formerly at

AUC: <http://www.aku.edu/ismc/about/faculty/Pages/Gianluca-Parolin.aspx?>

4. Dr. Rana Jawad, University of Bath; social policy in Lebanon and the Middle East, and its relationship to the 'Arab protests': <http://www.bath.ac.uk/sps/staff/rana-jawad/>

5. Dr. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, UCL Lecturer in Human Geography, expertise on refugees,

humanitarianism and conflict in the Middle East: <http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/about-the-department/people/academic-staff/elena-fiddian-qasmiyeh>

### **For Registration please contact:**

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