

Workshop

Property and Citizenship: Histories of Contestation and Entitlement

8-9 July 2019

Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies
(Altensteinstraße 48, 14195 Berlin)

Monday, July 8, 2019

10:30 – 11:00 Introductory Remarks

Seda Altuğ (Boğaziçi University / FU Berlin, BGSMCS / EUME Fellow 2017-19) & Pascale Ghazaleh (AUB / EUME Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation 2017-19)

11:00 – 13:00 Introduction

Martha Mundy (LSE): Food and Land Tenure

Rami Zurayk, Cynthia Gharios, Saker El-Nour and Martha Mundy sought to explore in a case study whether over a considerable period of time (mid-19th century to present) landholding by small farmers or large landholders led to greater production of food. The results of the archival/field study (concerning an area in Kaza/Qada Sayda) raise a number of cross-disciplinary problems and cover a time period stretching from the mid-19th century to the present.

Mundy has also been thinking through the problematic of the relation of tax and title for the Ottoman reforms as effected in what is today South Lebanon, with of course a contrast/comparative understanding of what she earlier studied in South Syria / Northern Jordan.

Dina Khoury (George Washington University)

Dina Khoury's presentation examines a series of reports issued by Ottoman officials and by local intellectuals and elites on the major "problems" that needed to be dealt with in Iraq. She has no overarching argument to make as of yet, as what she presents is part of a larger project on labor migration and documentation regimes in the northern Persian Gulf between the 1880s and 1930s. Rather she would like to make a series of observations about these documents as windows into an emerging "common sense" among officials and local intellectuals about Iraq.

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13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 15:30 Panel 1: Owning and Being

Sara Berry (Johns Hopkins University): ‘Belongings’: Land and Citizenship in Postcolonial Africa

Belonging: The English term ‘belonging’ refers both to property (things owned or held by an individual or group) and to citizenship (membership in a social/political community or group). How have these two forms of belonging interacted since the end of formal colonial rule? How have they been affected by postcolonial economies’ deepening engagement with global markets? How have claims to property and citizenship shaped and been shaped by struggles over the mobilization and exercise of state and social power?

Custom: For reasons of expediency, if not policy, colonial regimes in Africa both cultivated and suppressed “customary” forms of law and authority. Contrary to the expectations of many nationalist leaders, customary forms of law and authority have not only survived since independence, but have arguably been strengthened by the commercialization of land and landed property. How have contemporary readings of “custom” figured in the ways people make claims to property and citizenship? How have they played into the distribution of wealth and power?

“Origin”: Growing competition over land and landed property (minerals, forests, buildings and, increasingly, water) has intensified (rather than weakened) debates over “origin” in Africa, and their significance for contemporary claims on citizenship, property and power. In addition to conflicts over the meaning of ethnicity and ethnic entitlements to property and political participation, the political salience of origin has stimulated the commercialization of history, ranging from antiquities and archives to contemporary music. How has the commercialization of historical knowledge figured in struggles over belonging?

Commercialization: The recent surge of “land grabs” (large-scale acquisitions of land by wealthy, often international investors) in Africa has received a great deal of journalistic and scholarly attention, but Africans have been engaged in acquiring smaller amounts of land—for cash crop farming, urban construction or simply as an asset—for much of the 20th century. How have “local” land acquisitions contributed to, or counteracted, concentrations of wealth and power? How, in particular, have increasing competition over land and the commercialization of land transactions affected economic growth, employment and food security, and the implications of economic change for the meaning of citizenship?

Christian Schmidt (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Center for Human and Social Change): Property and Freedom

Drawing on the contradictory relation of property and freedom, Christian Schmidt will ask how the logic of private property has transformed collective struggles in societies with different property regimes. Is the idea of being liberated from the fetters of

traditional communities and the interference of the state destructive with respect to the struggles against colonial regimes and/or economic powers? Are there ways of demanding to be acknowledged as full citizen without submitting oneself to the dominant property regime? In the discussion of this topic, Schmidt will contribute his knowledge of the discussions in the European workers movement of the 19th century, hoping that this example will allow an in-depth discussion of the pitfalls of the property discourse in the case studies presented by the other participants.

15:30 – 15:45 Coffee break

15:45 – 17:15 Panel 2: Fighting about Property

Pascale Ghazaleh (AUC / EUME Fellow 2017-19): Contested Rights: Conflicts over Ownership of Resources (Egypt, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)

In Egypt today, there are ongoing struggles setting the state and corporate interests, on one hand, against other stakeholders (especially small property owners), on the other. Pascale Ghazaleh proposes to reflect on how the dynamics and outcomes of such struggles over property, whether in land or other resources, are constitutive of citizenship formation in this specific historical case. These struggles are situated within a broader context of (antagonistic) relations among various historical agents: possessors of limited ownership rights (for example, peasants with usufruct entitlement to land); defenders of heritage (frequently self-appointed and seeing themselves as uniquely placed, by virtue of cultural background or education, to preserve the “authenticity” of the built heritage); corporate interests (large landowners or business conglomerates); and various state actors, which have sometimes enabled the privatization of land in order to facilitate its transfer to individuals or private corporations, and at other times pursued nationalization of lucrative resources.

Indeed, the ability to define what constitutes a resource, and to determine how it should be managed on behalf of an entity designated as “the people,” is a foundational element of the modern state apparatus. From a historical perspective, as Christian Lund argues, “investigating the social production of property and citizenship enables concrete understanding of the dynamics of authority or state formation.” In this workshop, Ghazaleh would like to look at several case studies as lenses through which to examine the reciprocal constitution of citizenship rights and state jurisdiction in contemporary Egypt, focusing specifically on the contested ownership of resources. Her particular interest is in understanding how different stakeholders articulate entitlement, and delineate the political and the economic realms.

Yücel Terzibaşoğlu (Boğaziçi University): Landed Estates and Labour in the Agrarian Political Economy of the Balkan Countryside, 18th and 19th centuries

There is by now an established understanding of the Ottoman rural economy and society that is based on the primacy of the small peasantry and on a system of agrarian production relations based on small peasant households. This dominant view is

constructed on certain premises about the nature of the peasant household, the type and forms of agrarian labour, land tenure, and in fact, on certain wider understandings of Ottoman society and economy. These understandings had some long-lasting implications in terms of the various contestations over the making of political and social rights and struggles in the 19th and 20th centuries in different parts of the Ottoman territory (especially in the context of the 1848 revolutions, and of the land reform movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries).

One of the implications of the argument about the dominance of the small peasantry in the Ottoman countryside is that landed estates (*çiftliks*) which had emerged to prominence in the 18th century – if not earlier – were ineffectual in re-organising agrarian relations on land for capitalist development precisely due to the dominance of the small peasantry secured by the Ottoman state and bureaucracy. This paper will question this argument with a close reading of the available historical evidence from some of the Balkan landed estates (in the hinterland of Salonica and in Niş) in the 18th and 19th centuries. It will focus on the organization of agricultural production, land tenure, and variety of labour forms (wage-labour, tenancy, seasonal labour) in the estates, and their dynamic relation to peasant agriculture. The paper will pose the question of what underlying characteristics emerge of the agrarian economy in the Balkans, and what such characteristics can tell us about the political and social struggles of the peasantry in the region.

18:00 Dinner at Luise Dahlem (address: Königin-Luise-Straße 40-42, 14195 Berlin)

Tuesday, July 9, 2019

9:30 – 11:00 Panel 3: Colonial and Postcolonial Property Practices

Alexis Rappas (Koç University): Privatizing Sovereignty: European Imperialism and Property Rights in the Post-Ottoman Levant

Based on a comparison of British Cyprus, the Italian Dodecanese and French-Mandated Syria, this paper argues that European powers sought to assert their imperial dominion in the post-Ottoman Levant by individualizing their subjects' property rights. As they did not claim full sovereignty in these settings, corresponding, from an international legal point of view, to a variety of categories, the British, Italian and French imperial authorities worked through the Ottoman land legislation, which remained in force long after the abolition of the Sultanate in 1922. If the power to adjudicate land conflicts or implement land reform was transferred to colonial courts and institutions it was, the new rulers claimed, out of a concern for economic and administrative rationalization. A comparative study of the transformation of the land legislation in Cyprus, the establishment of a cadastral plan in the Dodecanese and the breakup of musha property in Syria suggests however that by recasting their colonial subjects' real rights - ius in re - over categories of property possessed in less exclusive forms under the

previous Ottoman administration, European powers were in fact constructing a very tangible, if not official, imperial sovereignty. Hence shifts in property regimes became constitutive of new colonial subjectivities where the sovereignty of the colonizer was expressed in terms of personal jurisdiction more than territorial authority. Somewhat qualifying, however, the impression of a radical colonial break and introducing a more layered notion of temporality at the time of imperial transitions, the paper shows that despite official claims to the contrary, European initiatives built on, more than they transformed the nature and purpose of comparable Ottoman land reforms in the 19th century.

Seda Altuğ (Boğaziçi University / FU Berlin, BGS MCS / EUME Fellow 2017-19):
Property, Violence and Politics of Difference in French-Syria (1921-1946)

Law no. 10, commonly known as dissidents' property seizure law, was passed by the Syrian government during the war on April 2, 2018. The law which is much criticized in and outside Syria as a politically-motivated law of appropriation allowed for the creation of redevelopment zones across the country designated for reconstruction. The contested land usually belonged to those groups of people who cannot claim their rights or prove their entitlement. The procedural requirements, such as security clearance coupled with the political context in which it operates, has created a significant potential for abuse of the displaced as well as dissidents from areas previously held by anti-regime groups.

Production of political difference through seizing property for urban planning purposes is not a new governing technique for the Syrian state, or for any nation-state. Nor politics of dispossession is solely peculiar to the urban landscape. The notorious Arab belt policy in north-eastern Syria (1966-1973) is just one example of a state attempt where land policies (in the form of confiscation and redistribution) was adopted as a means for (re)producing political and ethnic difference despite the violent backlashes by the local Kurdish population against dispossession.

Seda Altuğ's talk is going to be on an earlier period, namely the French mandate in Syria (1921-1946). She will argue that management of the land issue – its registration, distribution and settlement of land related conflicts – in French-Syria has been formative in the making of politics of difference as well as state sovereignty and citizenship practices, and vice versa. French documents revealed the many obstacles to the new kind of control over the countryside including the occurrence of theft, armed attacks, disease and peasant dispossession/debt. To a large extent, this was the case in other parts of the colonial world from Egypt to India and British-Palestine as well as in the Ottoman provinces from late 19th century onwards. However, in certain parts of Ottoman periphery with atypical administrative and land tenure systems as well as in French-Syria and Lebanon, the violence of property-making in land intersected with violence of nation-making. In the case of Ottoman eastern provinces, the state's reorganization of the countryside eventually unfolded into mass violence in-between the peasants (both Christian and Muslim) and in particular state-sponsored nomads/tribal leaders which was later in 1915 transformed into a genocidal violence directed at Armenians. In French-Syria, too, violence and property-making went hand in hand with colonial developmentalism and sectarianism, especially in those parts of Syria where the French adopted an ambivalent, yet rather sectarian urban and rural

politics. In these settings, the land issue was intertwined with contested claims of political sovereignty, economic/political power and sectarianism from above and below. In her talk, Altuğ will use French documents and Syrian court records about land conflicts and their settlement in different parts of Syria in late 1920s. She tries to work through these two different genres of documents together and against each other; by this way highlight the locals' agency in its various forms vis-à-vis the French state's contested sovereignty as much as its revealed in the violent contest over land and property.

11:00 – 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 – 12:45 Panel 4: Discipline and Destruction

Muriam Haleh Davis (University of California, Santa Cruz)

Muriam Haleh Davis reflects on the ways in which concepts coming out of discussions on racial capitalism – specifically regarding land – can be applied to colonial and post-colonial Algeria. Drawing on the insights of works by Brenna Bhandar, Lisa Lowe, and Cedric Robinson, her work deals with questions of property, citizenship, and race in three historical registers: 1) colonization in the second half of the nineteenth century when, she argues, racial hierarchies based on Islam were fundamental to the organization of land tenure 2) the late colonial developmentalist period, when land reform attempted to transform "homo Islamicus" into "homo Economics" and tied questions of land to economic aptitudes and capacities and 3) the post-colonial period, when Ben Bella's notions of self-management and redistribution of land reflected a moral order and national identity that was in direct response to colonial understandings of the economy.

Ammar Azzouz (University of Bath): Domicide: Destruction of Homes in Syria

Amidst the killing of over 470,000 Syrians since 2011, another tragedy has been taking place: domicile, the planned, systematic and deliberate destruction of 'domus', home; expelling civilians from their homes and collectively punishing and displacing communities within or outside their country. In this presentation, Ammar Azzouz builds on the work of Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith on the 'murder of home', domicile, which they developed in their book published in 1998. This urbicidal destruction of home is not happening in contested geographies at the time of conflict and war as in Syria, but also in 'peace' time situations where homes are intentionally demolished under the name of development, regeneration or because these homes are seen as 'informal', 'illegal' or 'unmodern' – for instance destructions of homes in Egypt and China. Now in Syria, with over eight years of destructions and violence, there are fears that new waves of destructions will emerge in the name of reconstruction. There are already emerging plans and decrees to raze entire neighbourhood and replace them with new high-rise buildings, leading to loss to community identity, heritage and the source of livelihood in these neighbourhoods. This presentation not only brings these destructive constructions to the debates of citizenship and property, but also

brings the voices of Syrians who have their homes demolished or destroyed to humanise and individualise their struggle.

12:45 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 15:30 Panel 5: Corporate Practices

Bodhisattva Kar (University of Cape Town)

Bodhisattva Kar will reflect on the culture of contracts involving several communities, joint-stock companies and the administration of the North-Eastern frontier region of the British Indian Empire. Through a connected history of the contractual and the customary in the region, he proposes to revisit the critical and inconstant conjunctions between the styles of political control, the logics of capital accumulation and the discursive infrastructure of identity and difference.

Deen Sharp (Terreform, Center for Advanced Urban Research / MIT)

Deen Sharp is interested in how the histories and geographies of corporations (in its various forms) have constituted the Middle East, particularly in relation to ownership rights (or more specifically urban development/urbanization) and forms of sovereignty. His central questions are: how does the corporation fit into the practices of ownership rights and citizenship practices that have often been framed mainly in relation to the state? How is the corporation, and its process of capitalization, more than mere business operations but also sovereign practices? And to what extent do corporations organize contemporary material life in the region?

In his research on the corporation he has been looking at the contemporary work on the East India Company. The work of Philip Stern on how the East India Company took on sovereign powers has been particularly influential ([The Company-State](#)) to his work that has considered the central role of the corporation in the formation of Beirut as a pivotal trading hub in the 19th century and the contemporary reconstruction process that followed the Civil War in Lebanon. He is also thinking about the real estate activities of contemporary Arab states that often involve corporations and have resulted in a recent expansion in the processes of capitalization.

In relation to capitalization, the scholarship of Nitzan and Bichler has been important – specifically their book “Capital as Power”. Also the work of Timothy Mitchell that introduced Sharp to this work; you can see an interview with Mitchell here on his own thoughts on capitalization (attached). He is interested in the relationship between capitalization and urbanization, and trying to think carefully about the way in which the built environment creates the literal structures to organize contemporary capitalism and social life in the region.

Finally, in relation to the specific expansion of the urbanization process in the Middle East, he is currently engaging the work of Adam Hanieh (“Money, Markets and Monarchies: The GCC and the contemporary political economy of the Middle East”) and Gunel’s “Spaceship in the Desert: energy, climate change, and urban design in Abu Dhabi”.

14:45 – 15:00 Coffee break

15:45 – 16:45 Wrap-up Discussion