



Call for proposals

The 'state' of Lebanon: Concepts of political order in crisis?

International workshop

Orient-Institut Beirut, 15-16 October 2015

Though this be madness, yet, there is a method in't.

Shakespeare, Hamlet II, 2.

The Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB) of the Max Weber Foundation invites paper proposals for an international workshop on “*The 'state' of Lebanon: Concepts of political order in crisis?*” to be held in Beirut from 15-16 October 2015. The workshop aims at examining the explanatory value of various classical and new approaches towards political order in understanding the fragility/stability of state and society in Lebanon.

Rationale

The functioning of state and society in modern Lebanon is challenging classical concepts of political order and governance on many levels: A state monopoly of legitimate violence in the 'Weberian' sense does not exist, but public security and legality have not yet broken down. Key government institutions have been vacant for months and years, but public services continue to be provided. The country seems to be in almost perpetual political crisis, but real estate investment continues its decades-long boom. Interference of external actors in Lebanese domestic politics is frequently blamed as a root cause of the country's problems, but internal actors and even government institutions are actively encouraging it. Corruption is unanimously condemned, but at the same time frequently used as an almost necessary instrument to circumvent administrative obstacles and getting things done. Impunity seems to undermine the credibility of state institutions, but postponing or circumventing formal justice is sometimes considered as an act of wisdom to prevent violent conflict and preserve peace. In spite of the much-mentioned 'weakness', 'inefficiency' and 'heterogeneity' of the Lebanese state, the country has, until now, managed to adapt to enormous challenges and ruptures – most notably the influx of Syrian refugees – in a much better way than some of its more centralized neighbours.

In view of all these paradoxes, the 'deficits' of statehood in Lebanon – as perceived through the lenses of 'Weberian' or 'Westphalian' state models – do

not indicate an absence of political order, but rather ask for the development of more complex, comprehensive and flexible concepts of political order and governance.

During the last ten years, a number of new concepts have emerged in the social sciences that attempt to capture the complexity of similar situations in various countries. Apart from shifting the focus of attention from the state to problems of governance and governmentality, they include concepts such as 'hybrid political order', 'limited statehood', 'mediated state', 'institutional multiplicity', 'parallel government', 'ungoverned space', 'creative chaos', etc.

In our workshop, we want to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these and other descriptive and normative conceptual tools in advancing a better understanding of the complexity and the management of political and social order in Lebanon. We invite Lebanon-related case studies and discussion papers that provide insights into, for instance:

- How important are formal institutions for political stability?
- Have measures and attempts to extend governance increased since the recent 'break-down' of constitutional political institutions?
- Who needs 'the state'?
- The explanatory range of old and new conceptual approaches towards political order and their consequences for field research in Lebanon
- The interplay of formal and informal mechanisms, public and private, external and internal actors in order to obtain or provide public services (such as security, justice, social welfare, education, and environmental issues) on the local, national, and international level
- The gap between the rhetoric and the empirical functioning of political order in different contexts
- The difference between scholarly approaches and popular everyday ideas about political order
- The viability of time-honoured conceptual ideas of political and societal order in modern Lebanon, such as 'consociational democracy', 'house of many mansions', or Lebanon as a 'model' and 'message' for multicultural societies.

Deadline for submission of proposals: 30 June 2015

Proposals should include a title, a short abstract of ca. 100-200 words, and a CV, and should be submitted by email to workshop@orient-institut.org

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