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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 17

Does public employment protect? Wages in question in the Maghreb and the Middle East

We discuss in a multidisciplinary way the transformations of public employment in the Maghreb and the Middle East. In a context where the question of inequalities, protections and social rights are built in collective causes, we aim to understand what is at stake around and at the heart of work. We will first discuss the uses of the notion of wage-earning on our grounds, to show that it invisibly and subalternally affects the vast majority of the most ordinary forms of employment in the region. By choosing to focus our attention on the public sector, reputed to be at the heart of social contracts because it produces the most protective and socialized wage-earners, we wish to uncover the unsaid, the disappointing promises and the economic and social violence that make up this stronghold of work, which is surprisingly little studied. Rather than turning it into an endangered species, we will try to understand what protection mechanisms are activated, negotiated or weakened in the context of emblematic or, on the contrary, atypical jobs of the functionalized wage-earner. What are the rights, statutes and regulatory mechanisms in practice? What are the conflicts that have been and are being expressed there today? What are the temporalities, the actors, the norms, the practices? The contributions offer a cross-examination, from different fields and different periods, to question what the societies of the Maghreb and the Near East have to say about the orders and disorders of capitalism.

Person in charge : Catusse Myriam (AMU, CNRS, IREMAM)

Discussant : Longuesse Élisabeth (CNRS, Printemps)

Program

Catusse Myriam (AMU, CNRS, IREMAM)

« Fatherland employees »: when army retirees lose protection in Lebanon and Morocco

This contribution starts from two recent social protestations: army veterans in Lebanon mobilized during the summer of 2019 against the announcement of the reduction of their pensions within the framework of the government austerity program, and pensioners and widows of Moroccan National Security pensioners protested against their expropriation by their mutual insurance company. Their emblematic professions of public employment are considered to be at least as important for their social and economic functions; associated with wages, as for their security roles. However, these mobilizations highlight the nature and fragility of direct or more indirect protection linked to employment specifically dedicated to national security and elaborated on tensions between warfare and the welfare state. The paper examines what being a «fatherland employee» produces as expectations, as moral devices and as a domestic and political economy. I discuss the erosion of protection, as an observation post of a new social question that goes beyond the borders of the Maghreb and the Middle East.

Ghiglia Marianna (AMU, IREMAM)

Civil servants... not like the others. Challenges and limits of the process bringing journalists in Egypt under the civil service (1960-today)

This paper examines the sociohistorical process by which journalists in Egypt got transformed into “civil servants”. This unique process was triggered by the “nationalization” of the main press institutions of the country in May 1960. By transferring the ownership of the latter to the National Union (the single party), law n. 156 of 1960 marked an important turning point in the history and future of their staff members, without immediately converting them into state employees. The use of quotation marks is all but insignificant, as the above-mentioned law was neither a nationalization law in the strict sense of the term, nor a civil servitization law. Its enactment was the starting point of a transformation process that would come to an end two decades later when a new press law would transfer the ownership of newspapers to the state once and for all. The purpose of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, it aims to describe this long process, while showing its challenges and limits. On the other hand, it seeks to reflect upon the distinctive status of state-employed journalists, to better understand its characteristics as well as social protection and advantages attached to it. By using a comparative approach, this paper will compare their work conditions with those of journalists employed by party and private newspapers.

Pluta Audrey (AMU, IEP d'Aix-en-Provence)

Between a rock and a hard place : politicization and corporatization of policemen trade unionists in post-2011 Tunisia

Ben Ali's departure and the change of political regime enabled policemen to organize protests and to create unions. A series of police demands emerged, carried by different unions: pay rise, increases in rank, compensation for the families of deceased police officers, etc. The unions have obtained, following negotiations with the various governments since 2011, series of material advantages, while fiercely defending their status. For colleagues prosecuted, police unionists have also developed a varied repertoire of actions: lobbying judges and / or the administration, legal and legal support in disciplinary committees, etc. Questions of control and sanctions, problems of illegitimate police activities are all therefore at the core of the redefinition of police standards. The post-2011 period saw the emergence of new struggles in the definition of legitimate methods of maintaining order, a debate in which the security forces were able to weigh their interests.

Scala Michele (IEP de Lyon, associé IFPO) – co-person in charge of the panel

Below the Contract: Casual Labour, Clientelistic Arrangements and Personalization of Protections at Électricité du Liban

Once an emblem of national unity and the building of a «modern» state, Électricité du Liban is today a prominent symbol of the multiple crises the country is going through. In the aftermath of the civil war (1975-1990), the attention of observers mainly turned to the analysis of the sector structural issues; of local policies of management (and allocation) of electrical resources; and to the reform projects repeatedly announced and systematically postponed. The transformations of work and employment within this rare example of an “Employer-State” in Lebanon remain little questioned. Though, they constitute one of the most profound processes that have accompanied successive crises in the sector. In this intervention, I will look at the case of «ğabb al-ṭalab (on demand)» workers: a precarious labor force excluded from the Labor Code by its article 7, which has gradually become predominant in the company during the post-war period. By analyzing the modes of labor regulation actually in place within the workplace, I will question the coexistence of job insecurity and continuity of work in the light of the absence of “formal” protections and the function of clientelistic ties. I will show how clientelism provides, beyond the contract, forms of social protection from which the precarious labor force is excluded. By resituating this case study in the reality of labor relations in Lebanon, I will then endeavor to deconstruct the ideas of norms and derogations when they are applied to work and employment in the Lebanese context and well beyond.