



Urban Studies Seminar 2011 - 2012

Chaired by Prof. Ulrike Freitag and Dr. Nora Lafi

Annual theme: Urban Sociability and Urban Movements (Middle East, North Africa, Iran, Turkey)

Monday, January 9th, 2012, 5 pm

ZMO-EUME-Colloquium

Twice a month,
Mondays 17:00-19:00

Venue:

Conference Hall
Zentrum Moderner Orient
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14129 Berlin-Nikolassee

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The Debate on the Exemption of Istanbul from Military Draft as Urban Movement in the Virtual Meeting Place of the Press

Lecture by Elke Hartmann

For a long time the dwellers of the metropolitan area of Istanbul were exempt from military service. During the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, however, the privileged status of the capital was repeatedly debated and finally abolished in 1909. The reactions to this change in the Istanbulite press offers a panorama of self-perceptions of the new educated urban elite. The key question was that of whether or not the military could have a place in urban life and society. Taking this example as a starting point, this paper reflects more generally on defining the specificity of urban society and the status of the capital within this framework. In this context it also discusses the impact of modernizing reform with its basic idea of homogenization which stands in contrast with any concept of formalized differentiation, legal or social specificity or institutionalized plurality.

I interpret the press as a very specific urban, virtual assembly place where the newly emerging class of urban, secular intellectuals meets, debates and mobilises public opinion. The virtual sociability of the urban / metropolitan press creates the room for an intellectual and political movement to (re)define and / or reassure oneself of what urban culture, urban space, urban society can be, also in contrast to its possible opposite, the rural on one hand and the provincial periphery on the other hand. Here the issue of being exempted from military draft, of being privileged, becomes essential. It expresses the contrast of the urban education and skill to the rural coarse physical work of agriculture and military.

Elke Hartmann has studied History and Islamic Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. 2003-2008 she was employed at the same university's Institute for Islamic Studies, from 2008 on at the DFG Research Group "Self-Narratives in Transcultural Perspective" at the History Department of the FU Berlin. In 2010 she co-founded Houshamadyan, a project to reconstruct Ottoman-Armenian town and village life. Her research interests focus on Ottoman history of the 19th and early 20th century, especially on aspects of modernization, ways and conditions of cultural and technical adaptations, minorities, state- and nation-formation processes, public order and mass violence. Her PhD thesis examines military conscription in the late Ottoman Empire in the context of modern state formation. During the last years she has turned on autobiographical texts as sources, having published a series of articles on the memoirs of Armenian revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire.