Unpacking the concept of urban marginality, by André Chappatte, Programmatic Texts No. 10, 2015

Tsypylma Darieva, coordinator *Transformation of Sacred Spaces and Concepts of Hybridity in the Caucasus*, Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena (tsypylma25@gmail.com)

This is a well-written paper based on a long-term empirical research in four different cities in the Middle East/Africa and offers a very interesting approach in understanding the urban marginality concept in the Muslim world. Based on a comparative analysis the paper seeks to identify a historical and cultural variety in the ways marginality is conceptualized, produced and perceived by those who are on the margins and by those who define them as marginalized. Thus, this article deals with a complexity of constructing and practicing marginality as an important mechanism of urban social dynamics and urban lifestyles beyond the western models of urbanization. And this is an innovative aspect. What is new in this study is the attempts to show marginality in its temporality, as a realm of »power« and opportunity on micro-levels in the Muslim world.

There is a number of ethnographies of poverty, slums and marginality in different cities (Hannerz 2004, Burton 2005, Gmelch/Kemper/Zenner 2010). The value of this study lays in the combination of historical and anthropological perspectives. Using archive data and ethnographic observations of specific locations the authors claim to demonstrate how urban margins are named and renamed in a historical perspective and how cultural labeling of urban uncertainty is changing over the time. However, the question I want to raise here is whether urban marginality in the cities of the Muslim world has its durable effect on city infrastructures, urbanites' cultures and urban discourse, for instance urban fear, or not? This is still unclear.

The role of the state in labeling and producing urban marginality is a widely discussed topic in the studies of western model cities. In this regard, some reflections related to the western concept of urban marginality (Loic Wacquant) and its applicability to non-Western post-colonial urban contexts would make sense. In this way, the authors can strengthen their argumentation regarding »the creativity of those at the margins« and the notion of marginality as a »realm of opportunity«, meet a higher standard of publication and produce new research fields. Can we talk about »informality« of urban marginalization processes in the Muslim world?

Another aspect which can be elaborated more precisely is related to the question of spatial and material dimensions of recent marginalization in the Middle Eastern and African cities. If it was the wall in the 19th century, what comes at the beginning of the 21-century to demarcate the line (»the right to the city«) between marginality and non-marginality, and whether it is socially recognizable or not, visible or not.

Finally, why these four cities have been chosen for a comparative study? A brief overview on basic urban settings in footnotes can be useful for readers.
Afterall, I look forward to reading more about this research project.   (August 2016)