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On Properties and Persons



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The project I worked on at the Kolleg concerns the political economy of rural southern Syria at the end of the Ottoman period. The basic material had traveled with me to Berlin and consisted of my handwritten copies of documents and administrative registers from the 1870s-1930s held in government departments of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, along with notes of interviews conducted with older men and women in four villages. Incomplete as were many of the runs of the registers, they nevertheless afforded a window into the villages and a sense of how villagers had negotiated the transformation of a political order.

During the 19th century, in the Ottoman as in other empires from Russia to North India, the individual came to replace the village as the fundamental fiscal unit and relations of rights came to take the form of ownership of land rather than of relative proportions of a village's produce. Such a transformation was not the simple result of international commerce embracing these lands, in other words, of the magic wand of the market. Rather, it corresponded to a reform of government itself as the institutions of village self-management were recast into the lowest rung of the state's formal administrative and judicial structures. The power and legitimacy of the new legal and bureaucratic order came to rest on "knowledge of the population" inscribed in the registers of state (or on registration of "the faculties and fortunes of taxable individuals" as the Edict of Gul-Hane put it in 1839). Thus, from the mid-nineteenth century, local-level administrative documents permit one to look not only at the workings of the state but also into the village.

In earlier years I had come to terms with the broad lines of Ottoman legal reform and the patterns of development in land administration at

the district level, that of the Kaza Ajlun then part of Vilayet Suriye. During this year, although I continued to deepen my understanding of legal texts and worked through the Provincial year-books (*salnames*) to analyse the sociology of the local administration, I was for the first time free to work on the village data. It required longer than I would have liked to gain control of this material after two years' complete interruption: my husband and collaborator on this project, who could join me for only short periods this year, had done the ordering and basic reconstruction from the village data and so I had myself first to work through his compilations of the data (entries in registers of the Ottoman land registry, the Islamic court, the civil court, the civil registry and the Mandate cadastre, and notes on field interviews). In this I sought to understand how particular villages had come to terms with the legal reforms and new administrative structures of the state, and how differences between the interaction of villages with the state reflected the particular character and histories of the four villages over the period. By the end of the year, of my four case-study villages, I have managed to work closely with two and to write up an analysis of them.

Beyond the pleasure of serious documentation of the village systems of share-holding, redistributive agriculture in two regions, the Haurani plain and the hills above the Jordan Valley, the material permits me to address issues of some wider theoretical concern. If property is a bundle of relations, not an object, then the imposition of new legal categories for property entailed a translation and negotiation of the new categories within the sphere of the village relations. The primary instances of these relations were formed by the household, the structure of marital alliance between households (within and without the village), and the simultaneous differentiation and combination of households into blocks of village landholding and political alliance. Thus, the imposition of new legal categories of property induced adjustment within those relations and yet was domesticated by the very process of translation into local categories. It is at this interface that "local knowledge" exists, never in isolation. It is, moreover, only in relation to such instances that we can speak of "gender". Through painstaking micro-analysis can one explore structured differences in the relations of women (as mothers, wives and daughters) in households and, thereby, of women in production and ownership. Striking differences in such relations existed between the villages in the two regions — the plains and the hills — of my study. Documentation of such local variation forms one condition for writing a social history of the Arab East in terms other than simply religious tradition.

Work on this project was both nourished and interrupted by the presentation of papers in meetings during the year: in March a seminar at Harvard University, on land systems and legal reform in the Arab East during the 18th-20th centuries; in April a meeting at Al al-Bait University, Jordan, on 19th century legal reform in the Ottoman Empire, India and Aden; and in May a workshop on norms and law in Granada, Spain, as part of the European Science Foundation Programme on the "Mediterranean Muslim World". Two papers are to be published from these meetings, one in *REMMM* and the other in a volume of contributions to the Harvard Land seminars. In early May I also presented a report to a workshop at the Institut Pasteur, Paris, that formed part of the work of the CNRS-PirVilles research group of which I have been a member the last two years. My contribution concerned Damascus in the context of comparative work on public health in 19th century Paris, Algiers, and Cairo. Other projects I worked on with colleagues abroad were the establishment of a scholarly book review based in Beirut and of a research network of lawyers and academics concerned with the relations of law and society in the Arab countries and Turkey. As part of the latter, in April following our meeting in Jordan, I accompanied Supreme Court Judge Nageeb al-Shamiry of Yemen and Professor Huricihan Islamoglu-Inan of Turkey to give lectures at the German Orient Institute, Beirut — lectures that in the event were punctuated by the rattle and boom of anti-aircraft fire drawn by the Israeli helicopter gun-ships over the city on the fourth day of *Grapes of Wrath*. In the quieter setting of Berlin I had the pleasure, together with Ulrich Haarmann, of inviting Judge Nageeb al-Shamiry to lecture at the Kolleg and of having Professor J.P.S. Uberoi of Delhi also speak in the Villa Jaffé; and besides my Tuesday colloquium in the Kolleg, I spoke on method, source and question in my Haurani research at the *Institut für Islamwissenschaft* of the *Freie Universität* and twice gave interviews to *Radio Multi-Kulti*, once on my own work and once on the recent history of a family in South Lebanon.

Among the fellows of 1995-96 were specialists in global warming and flu viruses. Accordingly, the last winter proved one of the coldest of the century and the fellowship a fertile environment for successive strains of influenza. Yet the warmth and support of the Kolleg and the company of Fellows prevailed even against such inclemency. Dinners at the less orderly *Französischer Tisch* were a particular pleasure as were conversations in a personal vein with the other women Fellows of the year and exchanges with Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa, Issaka Bagayogo, Robert McC. Adams, Ulrich Haarmann, Yehuda Elkana and Joachim Nettelbeck on topics political or professional. Lastly, I owe a particular debt to

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