

WORKSHOP IN JORDAN

An impression on urban minorities in Amman, Jordan.

Reflecting the workshop „urban minorities” in Jordan. (This report is summing up the experiences and impressions that I got during the urban minorities workshop in Jordan. It does not deal with the topics in a scientific way).

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The workshop took place between the 8th of March until the 17th of March. Before we took a closer look on the urban minorities in Jordan, we listened to the presentations of the professors concerning the different perspectives on cities, nations and minorities. First I would like to state what I kept from those presentations, and then continuing to explain more on what I learned about urban minorities in Jordan.

Perspective on sociology: I would like to begin with the perspective on sociology. One of the basic messages was that repetition structures the social life and that society comes from repetition (Theory from Weber). For the urban minorities in Amman this would mean that once the people structured their daily and social life, and keep on repeating that, they would form a part of society, because society comes from repetition. But this theory from Weber seems too simple, when we want to apply it on urban minorities. Even though most of the minorities in Jordan seem to have structured their daily life, this does not seem to be the key into the core society. So repetition might be one of the parts for participating in a society, but not the solution for a full acceptance in one core-society. Furthermore Prof. Eckardt talked in his perspective on sociology input about a theory from Georg Simmel. Simmel sees the city as a state of mind. In a city individuals chose their relationships towards others and in the city people are not friends with everybody; this is simply not possible and also not wanted by the individuals.

Dr. Yasser Rajjal introduced to us the **concepts of a Nation State**. This concept of a Nation State is a fairly new one. When we look at the Nation-State of Jordan, one can see, that to unite all the different minorities peacefully, is the main goal. There needs to be a common past for the people in order to identify themselves with the country. A past, which everybody can refer to, is needed, and therefore this past needs to be as far as possible apolitical. One of those suitable pasts for Jordan is Petra. Petra is an ancient city in Jordan. Because the identity of people is always linked to space, Petra is considered one of the cities in Jordan that is suitable for a Nation-State like Jordan. And this is because of its ancient heritage, which is more suitable than for instance the urban heritage, because Petra is something that has neither a political meaning nor impact on Jordan, and therefore it does not affect the peaceful living together.

A closer look on Amman. Amman is not a typical Islamic-Arabic city unlike Cairo or Alexandria. Amman is a city that grew with the car. But because of the suitable past for a Nation State, and the importance of the ancient heritage, the urban heritage became marginalized, that includes the city of Amman. Nowadays the city is facing many threats that are emerging, such as the neoliberalism in the new downtown Abdali, which is a place that was empowered through enforced regulations. It can be seen as an enforced development of the city. Furthermore there are more threats

emerging, just like the “kitsch-syndrome” and the “Arab-city-syndrome”. Besides this Amman is also facing the problem that the city center is becoming the area of the wealthy citizens, while the poor are getting pushed to the outside. This really becomes a problem, when we consider that public transportation is not very well developed, and cars are not affordable for everybody.

During the urban minorities workshop in Jordan I got a deeper look into the **Circassian community in Jordan**. The Circassians are people coming from south of Russia and have been banned from their homeland during the Ottoman Empire. Originally the Caucasus is their homeland. After the Russians banned them, they spread in the whole world. Since then many of the Circassians are considering themselves to live in diaspora. The Circassians are longing for their home. Kamal Jalouqa was a Jordanian with a Circassian background and he and his story about desiring his homeland was really impressing to me.

One of my impressions about the Circassian community was that they are having difficulties in preserving their culture. Mr. Kamal Jalouqa showed us a video about the Circassian community in Amman. In this video they showed one of the big problems they are facing, which is preserving their language Adhyge and teaching it to their children. The community is of the opinion that once the children forget the language they will forget their homeland and their roots.

Since the Circassians form an ethnic group but do not have a Nation, that protects and preserves their cultural heritage, I got the impression that one day there will be no trace of this culture. With this I mean, that the people will remain, but their language and tradition, which forms their culture will be forgotten.

The people have to assimilate into the core society where they live in order to take part and enjoy all the freedoms of this society, which in this case is the Jordanian one. But unlike the Armenian community in Amman, which is more successful in teaching and preserving the language and culture of Armenia, the Circassians do not have a country to go back to. This is one of the similarities that the Circassians in my point of view have with the gypsy community. The gypsies are an ethnic minority and also spread around the world, but they do not have a country that protects their cultural heritage. The difference on the other hand is, that in my point of view gypsies do not assimilate into the core society they live in, and that is, why they are discriminated and marginalized in the society.

Conclusion: In this workshop I really enjoyed the intercultural exchange we had with all the students, especially the Jordanian ones. To me this was one of the most enriching parts about this workshop. Besides the positive aspects I would like to criticize the lack of official discussions. Here two emerging discussions got cut off by the professor, because of the tight schedule, even though the students still had unanswered questions. So I would have really wished a deeper discussion with the experts.

But over all I am very happy to had the opportunity to take part in this workshop and get a glimpse into the Jordanian society and culture.