



Reshaping state / local communities relations in Tunisia: The socio-cultural and institutional challenges of the decentralization project

International development agencies believe that by adopting institutional reforms based on the best practices that have proved effective elsewhere, so-called « developing countries » could take their places in the globalised economy. Based on a case study carried out on the implementation challenges of a decentralization project in Tunisia, I will argue by using an interpretive approach that this thesis is not sustained. This article shows that institutions cannot be reduced to their technical functions but that they are based on particular collective imaginaries that ground what is legitimate or not and structure the relationship of individuals to power and the meaning given to their actions. It encourages the consideration of cultural framework of meaning; these local cultural references structure the governance modalities of a society, understood in terms of the modalities of exercise of power in a given group (state, company, local authority, etc.). It advocates the necessity to move from a technic- prone approach in the implementation of institutional changes towards a socio-cultural approach that integrates the local expectations of what "good governance" should be and on which depends the legitimacy of institutions and their appropriation by local populations.

Readings:

Yousfi, Hèla, "Civil Society" in Tunisia: the Ambivalence of a New Seat of Power <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/civil-society-in-tunisia-the-ambivalence-of-a-new-seat-of-power,1677>

Yousfi, Hèla, Trade Unions and Arab Revolutions: The Tunisian Case of UGTT (New York: Routledge, 2017). <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/36238>

Yousfi, Hèla, Social Struggles in Tunisia: A Curse or a Revolutionary Opportunity? <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28312>

Yousfi, Hèla; Hmed, Cchoucri, ARAB SPRING REVISITED: WHAT DID TUNISIA'S NOBEL PRIZE ACTUALLY REWARD? <https://www.occupy.com/article/arab-spring-revisited-what-did-tunisia-nobel-prize-actually-reward#sthash.iqnpquGo.dpbs>

Yousfi, Hèla, Utopique souveraineté pour les pays arabes ? <https://blog.mondediplo.net/utopique-souverainete-pour-les-pays-arabes>

+ A detailed version of her research work (in french, for those who speak french and short one in english see GoogleDrive folder).