



Three Ways of Discussing New Identity Politics in Middle East International Relations

Identity politics is far from new in the Middle East. On the contrary, strong attention to competing identities of various forms has almost figured as the defining feature in the study of Middle East politics. One may therefore ask how much more there is to say about Middle East identity politics, and to what extent it makes sense to speak about 'new' identity politics in the wake of the Arab uprisings. In my lecture, I will argue that there is indeed more to say. This is partly because various classic issues have gained new importance, though with a new 'twist'; and partly because a range of novel issues have emerged concerning (the study of) Middle East identity politics, not only 'out there', but also 'in here'. Following an outline of four prominent features of the pre-2011 debate on identity politics in Middle East international relations, the lecture examines the 'new identity politics' debate at three levels of abstraction: One level concerns the debate about dimensions of continuity and change of various identities 'out there', e.g. the relative importance of territorial, sub- and supra-state identities. Another level concerns the debate on how scholars can analytically best grasp current identity politics and where to look for analytically useful tools, e.g. what is on offer from IR, Middle East studies, religious studies and other disciplines. The last level redirects attention from identities 'out there' (in the Middle East) to identities 'in here' (within academia) as reflected in the emerging debate on how our own identities, shaped by disciplinary training and cultural-institutional context, impact how we study identity politics in the Middle East.

Readings list

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