

State and Legitimacy within an Arab-Muslim context: Understanding the identity criteria in Jordan and Kuwait

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Abstract

The Arab national identity has a complex, multilayered nature and has been influenced by both internal and external factors. Did the Western sovereignty and the new form of power and legitimacy replace the old authorities? On which grounds the newborn states legitimated themselves? The present thesis aims to answer to these questions and to discuss the existing relation between the pre-modern Muslim state and the modern nation-state. Hence, it starts by retracing the key steps of the State-building process within the MENA region from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to the European colonization and decolonization both historically, politically and especially theoretically, aiming to highlight the legitimacy foundations of the present-day Arab states. In fact, such developments are discussed and analyzed in the first chapter through the voices of the Arab thinkers that lived that peculiar reality, from the *nahḍa* pioneers to the “post 1967 generation”.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Kuwait have been chosen as exemplary cases of “hybrid” systems (in Bacik’s account, 2008). Accordingly, the third chapter focuses on the state and nation-building process of these two apparently far realities stressing on which identity criteria lay their legitimacy. From the analysis of the collected data (80 individual interviews made in the two countries by the author) the national belonging, even though in a peculiar and indeed hybrid form, revealed to be the dominant identity criterion with the other types of affiliation (religious, tribal, linguistic) being its components rather than its challengers.

Notably, the second chapter studies the methodological and ethical challenges that need to be dealt with when discussing the MENA region, especially focusing on the qualitative approach’s crucial aspect of the “positionality” that refers indeed to the different “positions” occupied by the researcher and the participants, often not part of the same cultural and social community and how this may affect the research outcomes.