

Thomas Demmelhuber | Roland Sturm [eds.]

Decentralization in the Middle East and North Africa

Informal Politics, Subnational Governance,
and the Periphery



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Preface

This book is the result of a five-year journey. During the course of our research, the phenomenon of decentralization as a policy field that reconfigures the relations between the center and the periphery gained momentum, as did the scholarly debate in this field. At the same time, the political map of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) transformed to become more fluid and increasingly multipolar. New (aspiring) regional powers trying to affect politics at home and abroad emerged during this time. In this book, we attempt to explain the varying forms and functions of decentralization by incorporating the role of neopatrimonial networks on the subnational level in our analyses. We also aim to reflect on the diverse outcomes of decentralization in MENA countries over space and time, and to identify the puzzles and gaps in the literature for future avenues of research on decentralization in the MENA region and beyond.

This research project was funded by a grant from the German Research Foundation (DFG) from 2017 until 2021 (DE 1829/4-1 and STU 122/14-1). We are grateful for the support that made it possible to conduct comprehensive fieldwork in Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan and to present our research at national and international conferences. Unfortunately, due to the tense political situation and deteriorating academic freedom in Egypt, we had to cancel our planned fieldwork in the country.

Special thanks go to our research associates, Miriam Bohn and Erik Vollmann, for their great work and relentless support. Many thanks go to Sylvia I. Bergh for accepting our invitation to be part of this book with a complementary international donors' perspective on decentralization. We are further grateful to Nadine Schnelzer, who was part of the project during the kick-off phase in late 2017. Working in the field can only be successful with colleagues and institutions on the ground. We owe much gratitude to the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Rabat, Tunis, and Amman; the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Rabat, Tunis, and Amman; the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Rabat; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Rabat and Amman; the Laboratoire des Recherches sur la Transition Démocratique Comparée at the University Settat; the USAID office in Amman; and numerous local organizations, activists, academics, and journalists across Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. The main pillar of this study are 162 interviews we conducted in the MENA region. This

study would not have been possible without the cooperation of our interviewees in the region – deepest thanks go to them.

We also thank Ellen Lust, who directs “The Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD)” at the University of Gothenburg, for her support and invitation to the GLD program’s activities and publications. Our home institution, the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, also provided us with abundant support, which enabled us to fully concentrate on our research agenda. The numerous stages of publishing our findings and the final stage of preparing this manuscript in particular have always been a journey with many pitfalls. With the tremendous support of Sabrina Ahmed, Ibrahim Bebars, Katharina Griethe, Jenny Hecht, and Katharina Nicolai (all FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg) it turned out to be an easy trip. We thank all of them for their work and support.

Finally yet importantly, we are very grateful to our publisher Nomos. Many thanks go to our senior editor Beate Bernstein and to the book series’ co-editors Claudia Derichs, Georg Glasze, Mathias Rohe, and Stephan Roll for their excellent cooperation and for accepting us in the Nomos series “Nahoststudien”.

Thomas Demmelhuber and Roland Sturm

Erlangen, May 2021

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