Lana Salman

Title:

**Governing through expectation: an ethnography of democratic transition in Tunisia**

Abstract:

Is Tunisia’s current territorial administration reproducing pre-revolution territorial inequalities? Unequal access to basic infrastructure was at the heart revolutionary grievances. To address these inequalities, the Tunisian government embarked on a political decentralization program creating municipalities across the territory, as opposed to thirty percent municipal coverage before the revolution. My dissertation explores whether enabling every Tunisian citizen to make claims on local governments for better services is redistributing resources more equitably. I argue that ‘municipal encounters’ make visible a mode of governing through expectation which reframes territorial inequalities as questions of ‘learning to be democratic’. Despite multiple avenues for participation and contestation, territorial inequalities are thus reconfigured without being structurally addressed. Such paradoxes concurrently shape radical politics and the urban fabric. In addition to observing ‘municipal encounters’, I follow the trajectories of poor female dwellers who have put their faith in ‘landed futures’ investing to build their homes and neighborhoods, and a mode of urbanization from below whereby land is made inhabitable through bottom-up claims for service delivery rather than prior planning. My dissertation makes three contributions. First, the focus on spatialized negotiations enables the construction of an alternative history of the present post-revolutionary juncture that is centered on land rather than labor. Second, experiences of the state at the local level show how, in democratizing contexts, avenues for participation may end up undermining claims to collective consumption instead of boosting them. Finally, this dissertation demonstrates the type of expert knowledge necessary for successful implementation of decentralization policies in the Maghreb.