

Understanding Asia: Youth and Society

Young, male, displaced: Becoming a Syrian man in Egypt

**Dr. Magdalena
Suerbaum**
Bielefeld University
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Young Syrian men in Cairo have held various roles since their arrival in Egypt in 2012/2013 following the Syrian uprising. They were refugees, sons, brothers, part of the ‘young’ generation, in one way grown-ups with increased responsibilities, but simultaneously not yet uncontested adult men in the traditional Syrian sense. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in 2014/2015 in Cairo, I discuss how young men from Syria made sense of their forced displacement and the various roles they held. They faced challenges in the Egyptian labour market and when trying to get married. Furthermore, young men had to come to terms with the fact that concerns about their safety were among the main reasons why their families decided to leave Syria. In this seminar, I suggest that coming of age in the context of forced displacement is not a linear process from one coherent, holistic life stage to the next. Rather, being a young, displaced man from Syria means walking a blurry, partial and unstable path into adulthood.

Magdalena Suerbaum is a post-doctoral researcher at the Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies at Bielefeld University, Germany. Her research addresses gendered experiences of migration and forced displacement and her regional-ethnographic competence spans the Middle East and Europe. In her monograph “Masculinities and Displacement in the Middle East: Syrian refugees in Egypt” (I.B. Tauris, 2020) she engages, among other themes, with the specific challenges young men face as refugees in Egypt. Recent work includes publications on mothering practices in times of legal precarity (Ethnic and Racial Studies 2022; Citizenship Studies 2022; International Migration 2021). In her current research project, she analyses childrearing practices and intergenerational transmission of knowledge among Syrian parents who live in Turkey and Germany.