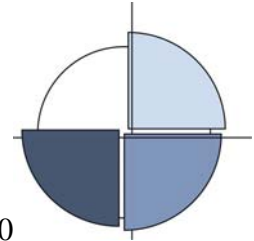




Sonderforschungsbereich 640



Call for Papers

Workshop

New Voices, New Media, New Agendas?

Pluralism and Particularism in the Middle East and North Africa

9-11 February 2011, Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin

Since the 1970s, an increasing number of non-Arab and non-Islamic voices in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been questioning the alleged homogeneity of the Arab world. Agents of marginalized ethnic, religious and denominational groups are struggling for the recognition of their languages and cultural particularities, and they are challenging established representations of identity politics as pursued by the state. At the same time, the agents of new social movements such as feminist groups, youth groups and human rights organizations are standing up for political pluralism, equality and democracy. The scope of the claims and demands of all these voices is widely diverse, ranging from tuition in oppressed languages, to a women's quota in the parliament, to participation in governmental decision-making or to the radical reorganization of political power.

Agents for social change use traditional mass media (newspapers, radio and TV) and new media (websites, blogs, chat rooms) in order to canvass their ideas. The media function both as a key tool and as a platform of identity politics. During recent decades the media in the MENA region have been the focus of a wide range of academic approaches. Whether analysing the traditional mass media or the new media, researchers are concerned with political decision-making, social change, war and conflict, religion, collective identity, nationalism and regionalism and globalization.ⁱ Other studies raise questions about issues such as media ethics and the sociology of media production and consumption.ⁱⁱ

This workshop aims to bring together researchers dealing with pluralism, identity politics and the power of the media in the Middle East and North Africa. We seek to compare representations such as concepts, images, narratives or symbols as applied to the media in order to assert, confirm or question meaning and belonging. We wish to privilege voices offering alternatives to the dominating narratives of the hitherto ruling elites and take a closer look at the agendas of these voice and the interests behind when it comes to propagating

pluralism and particular interests. In doing so we will ask how new these claims and ideas actually are. Pluralism is often a keyword among agents belonging to hitherto marginalized groups. However, does this term in some cases serve merely as a pretext to enforce particularistic interests at the expense of others? It can also be asked to what extent demands for religious freedom are connected to attempts to maintain structures of gender-based injustice. Another question to be discussed in the workshop is whether the new media are by definition a positive development, as so often claimed. How far do they constitute a means to foster ideas of political pluralism?

For discussing these and related questions in a cross-regional and comparative way the workshop seeks to bring together researchers from the fields of regional studies, media studies, political science, social anthropology, cultural studies, Islamic studies and history. The workshop aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of identity politics and social change in the MENA region. We invite researchers to submit abstracts (250 words) and a brief biography (100 words) by 1 April 2010. Papers to be presented at the workshop shall be submitted by 15 December 2010.

The Workshop is organized by the Zentrum Moderner Orient in cooperation with SFB 640 at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.

Venue: Zentrum Moderner Orient

Date: 9-11 February 2011

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ⁱ On traditional mass media, see William A. Rugh (1979): *News media and Political Process in the Arab World*, New York: Syracuse University Press; Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskander (2002): *Al-Jazeera. How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*, Cambridge: Westview Press; Khalil Rannawi (2006): *Instant Nationalism. McArabism, al-Jazeera and Transnational Media in the Arab World*. Lanham, et al: University Press of America. On new media see Jon B. Alterman (1998): *New Media, New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World*, Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Edmund Ghareeb (2000): 'New Media and the Information Revolution in the Arab World: An Assessment.' In: *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 54, N° 3, pp. 395-418; Loubna H. Skalli (2006): 'Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA.' In: *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 2, N°2, pp. 35-59; Philip Seib ed. (2007): *New Media and the New Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

ⁱⁱ See for example Kai Hafez, ed. (2003): *Media Ethics in the Dialogue of Cultures. Journalistic Self-Regulation in Europe, the Arab World, and Muslim Asia*. Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut; Mamoun Fandy (2007): *(Un)civil War of Words. Media and Politics in the Arab World*. Westport: Praeger Security International.