MUBIT Inter-University Doctoral Cooperation in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Basel/Zurich
&
Middle Eastern Studies
The Graduate School of Social Sciences
(*G3S*) University of Basel

Call for Applications

7th Annual MUBIT Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies in Basel

Values and Status Negotiation:

Media in the Middle East and North Africa

A Workshop with

Dr. Roxane Farmanfarmaian

(University of Cambridge)

October 18-19, 2019

Organized and hosted by

Dr. Ali Sonay

Values and Status Negotiation: Media in the Middle East and North Africa

In this workshop, students will engage with understandings of the media in the Middle East from the perspective of the role media plays in society, and the position it commands in relation to power. This reconceives the study of media as a political project on grounds that the media reflects the society that produces it and operates as a socially symbolic resource. In contrast to universalist benchmarks for media legitimacy based on 'good' journalism as institutionalized in Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights, the media's legitimacy, and position, is understood as contingent on how effectively it represents the values of society itself. However, as the culturally specific canopy of social norms, beliefs, traditions and practices is always unstable, and in the Middle East, frequently employed as political capital for ideological purpose, the media must continuously negotiate in a process that depends on those in power to adjudge its status. Values and Status Negotiation is therefore a framework for understanding the media from the inside, and in terms of their own environments. In today's increasingly polarized political atmosphere, scholarly interrogation of the media's rights and appropriate roles in social context is increasingly relevant, and we seek applicants whose work sets out to discover how these are understood, rationalized, exercised, negotiated and found appropriate and useful within different social milieux. Those interested in the practices and power of media across platforms, within both the private and public spheres, who seek fresh approaches to the media's engagement with audience norms and historical experiences from perspectives that arise from within the Middle East, are particularly encouraged to apply.

Guest Lecturer: Dr. Roxane Farmanfarmaian (University of Cambridge)

Roxane Farmanfarmaian is the Principal Investigator and Director of the University of Cambridge-Al-Jazeera Media Project, which has researched 'Media in Political Transition' in the Southern Mediterranean, and published a series of special sections on Media in Tunisia, Morocco and Turkey between 2014 and 2017 in the Journal of North African Studies and Middle East Critique. Dr. Farmanfarmaian teaches in the POLIS Masters programmes at Cambridge, focusing on the international relations of the modern Middle East and North Africa, media and energy security.

Organization

The 7th Annual MUBIT Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies in Basel, "Values and Status Negotiation: Media in the Middle East and North Africa" is a two-day intensive seminar (from October 18, 12:30 pm to October 19, 12:30 pm, 2019) organized by Dr. Ali Sonay at the Program for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Basel.

Application

PhD and MA students who wish to attend the workshop are asked to write an email to Dr. Ali Sonay (ali.sonay@unibas.ch), with a biographical abstract explaining their research interests and projects as well as their academic background (max. 400 words, in 3rd person singular, in English) in addition to a Curriculum Vitae. *The deadline for the application is August 2, 2019.* Applicants will receive an answer regarding their participation by August 12.

Requirements for Successful Participation

Participants are entitled to 3 ECTS points for successful participation. Participants will receive a list of readings, to be completed prior to the workshop, by August 12, 2019. Successful participation at the workshop is subject to the mandatory completion of the required readings in advance and active participation in the workshop discussions.

Contact

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Inter-University Doctoral Cooperation in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies
Basel | Zürich

Related questions that this workshop will explore include:

1. Defining Free Expression and the Meaning of a Free Media

Freedom of expression is a malleable and contested concept. Even in societies that consider themselves totally free, constraints include restrictions on hate speech, child pornography or incitements to terrorism. As Isaiah Berlin observed, 'freedom to' and 'freedom from' are dependent on each other, reflect social norms and tolerances, and involve negotiation between human imperatives of self-expression and the social implications of self-expression by others. This panel explores the constraints, normative sensitivities and issues of identity that impact the concept of freedom of expression and how that defines media freedom within societies in the Middle East, as well as how these interpretations differ from the international norms codified in Chapter 19.

1. How can we define free-expression, and media freedom, and how are these concepts understood in confessional societies and communication hierarchies?

2. What symbolic resources are engaged by the media in negotiating national identity, social norms, and political interests?

3. How do these differ in the Middle East from the international norms expressed in Chapter 19, and in media practices in the West?

2. Conceptualizing the Profession of Media and its Instrumental Role in Society

The purpose of media has been defined in the West as holding governmental authority to account. However, in the Middle East, the purpose is often couched in more pastoral terms, as an instrument for collective good, and for disseminating opinion and guidance.

1. How is media positioned as a socio-political instrument of power and how does this affect its status in society?

2. Is media a pastoral instrument for audience development, or fact-based tool for information dissemination? How does this relate to historical practice? Does this have implications in regards to its values negotiation?

3. What is the trade-off between investigative reporting and news-as-commentary, and how does that affect meanings associated with journalism, information dissemination, patriotism, belief projection, official ideological rhetoric, and self-censorship?

3. The Relationship between Local, Regional and International Media

The ability to access media across borders and political systems has had significant impact on the environment of public opinion and political perspective. The competition for attention and influence has grown radically in the past decade, as American and European broadcasts and internet news sites have been joined by Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and other networks, contributing to a complex media space that includes fake news and norm export.

1. What role do outside media play in regional/national media's positioning, credibility and competition for audience time?

2. How does international media consumption affect local media's symbolic power, and norm negotiation?

3. Has the concentration of conventional media in corporate and government-business conglomerates, including through international partnerships, contributed to a strengthening of local media in facing the challenge of outside norm conveyance, or weakened it - and how is this understood by local societies?

4. How has the Role of Media changed since the Arab Uprisings?

The Arab Uprisings had a profound effect on how social media was employed for popular and youth empowerment. Subsequent political shifts since the Uprisings, however, have contributed to government resilience in the media space, recalibrating the relationships between citizens, and both social and conventional media.

1. How has media's role changed since the Arab Uprisings in regards to content, control and reception, and the norms it negotiates?

2. What is the role and position of Islamic media in today's Middle East – including Islamic programming within mainstream cross-national media? What values are they negotiating, and how is this impacting their status?

3. How have women been integrated into the negotiation of values in mediating information, and consuming media?

4. How have shifts in the use and abuse of digital and social media affected the landscape of values and status negotiation?