

## **Workshop Review: „Values and Status Negotiation: Media in the Middle East and North Africa“, University of Basel, October 18-19, 2019.**

On 18-19 October 2019, the Middle Eastern Studies Department of the University of Basel held its 7th Annual Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies. The theme of this year's workshop was 'Values and Status Negotiation: Media in the Middle East and North Africa'. The workshop, which was organized by Dr. Ali Sonay, explored the following four topics that were intensively discussed by the participants of the seminar: (1) Free Expression and Free Media, (2) The Media's Role in Society and its Profession, (3) The Relationship between Local, Regional and International Media, (4) The changing Role of Media.

The workshop was directed by Dr. Roxane Farmanfarmaian from the University of Cambridge. She works there as the Principal Investigator and Director of the University of Cambridge-Al-Jazeera Media Project that has researched „Media in Political Transition“ in the Southern Mediterranean and published a series of special sections on Media in Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey between 2014 and 2017 in the *Journal of North African Studies* and *Middle East Critique*. Dr. Farmanfarmaian teaches at the University of Cambridge, focusing on the international relations of the modern Middle East and North Africa, media and energy security.

The workshop was frequented by PhD and MA students from Germany, Hungary and Switzerland. The participants were able to improve their knowledge by discussing about new emerging dynamics, topics from a historical, media and political scientist perspective. Under the supervision of Dr. Farmanfarmaian and Dr. Sonay, the participants tried to analyze the situation and role of the Media in the Middle East and North Africa by comparing the dynamics and influence of different media platforms in the MENA region with the ones from the western world. One of the discussed topics was the censorship and influence of the Turkish Media in Turkey.

During one of the workshop discussions, Dr. Farmanfarmaian presented the case of the Tunisian state-owned television station. She mentioned how the same news presenter changed the description of the protestors during the Jasmine revolution. This change showcases how the Arab Spring uncovered the dynamics, influence and narrative of its authoritarian elite in the Media.

Another important aspect discussed was about the relationship between local, regional and international media and how especially the younger generation shifts away from consulting newspapers as a source of information but rather uses online news channels and social media platforms. This topic led to a fruitful discussion about how states use media outlets to influence and manipulate society and how this has changed throughout history – in the end agreeing, that manipulation through media has always been there and the change is more about the means.

The workshop gave space for constructive and diverse conversations with the participants enriching the experience with their different academic backgrounds and research focuses. Before concluding the workshop, Sara Rizkallah – a PhD Student of the Central European University – presented her research

thesis about the role of women in graphic novels after the Arab Spring in Egypt. Whilst we have learned that media comes in various forms and is being used for different purposes, it is of great importance to keep researching this field, because the power of media shaping and influencing the values of societies, and vice versa, will go on and is crucial to understand the dynamics of the times we live in.

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