

The media, politics and dissent in North Africa since the Arab Spring

In addition to marking the official launch of the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies at King's College London, this conference forms part of Dr Fatima El-Issawi's research project 'Media and Transitions to Democracy: Journalistic Practices in Communicating Conflicts—The Arab Spring' which is funded by the British Academy's Sustainable Development Programme. More information about this project can be found at: <https://www.arabmediadem.org>

1000-1030	Arrival and coffee
1030-1100	Introductions: Fatima El-Issawi and Jonathan Hill
1100-1245	Panel #1: The media and authoritarian resilience Chair: Jonathan Hill Speakers:(1) Francesco Cavatorta; (2) Kjetil Selvick; (3) Hendrick Kraetzschmar.
1245-1330	Lunch
1330-1515	Panel #2: The media and political accountability since the Arab Spring Chair: Fatima El-Issawi Speakers: (1) Roxane Farmanfarmanian; (2) Boubaker Jamaei; (3) Fatima El-Issawi.
1515-1530	Coffee
1530-1715	Panel #3: New medias, new dissent? Chair: Charis Boutieri Speakers: (1) Christina Moreno-Almeida; (2) Chaima Bouhel; (3) Omar Radi.
1715-1730	Coffee
1730-1830	Closing address: Omar Belhouchet
1900	Drinks and dinner

Titles, Abstracts and Biographies

Panel #1: The media and authoritarian resilience

Name: Francesco Cavatora

Title: How do we agree on anything in this environment? The Tunisian media landscape and the transition to democracy. A view from Parliament.

Abstract: Building on field work carried out in Tunisia, the paper examines the interactions between elected members of parliament in negotiating a difficult transition to democracy under the spotlight of local and international media.

Bio: Francesco Cavatorta is professor of political science at Laval University in Quebec City, Canada. He is currently working on a British Academy-funded project led by professor Fatima El-Issawi and titled *Media and Transitions to Democracy: Journalistic Practices in Communicating Conflicts: The Arab Spring*.

Name: Kjetil Selvik

Title: Media and regime hybridity in Tunisia

Abstract: Even though students of comparative politics are increasingly aware of the importance of the media for the functioning of hybrid regimes, the understanding of the media's contribution to the dynamics of hybrid politics remains rather one-dimensional and simplistic. In most of the literature, the media are primarily seen as instruments of power that are manipulated and exploited by incumbents to dominate the public discourse at the expense of alternative and oppositional voices. To develop a more nuanced understanding of the role of the media in hybrid regimes, we draw on notions of media hybridity that have been developed in media and communication studies. We discuss how institutional hybridity, hybridity of media technologies and hybridity of journalistic practices affect the media-power nexus, taking Tunisia after 2011 as our case.

Bio: Kjetil Selvik is a Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and at the Peace Research Institute Oslo. He holds a PhD in political science from SciencesPo in Paris and has previously held positions at the Departments of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen, and Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo. Selvik specializes in the comparative politics of the Middle East and has fieldwork experience from Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria and

Tunisia. He leads a three years research project on Journalism in struggles for democracy: media and polarization in the Middle East.

Name: Hendrik Kraetzschmar

Title: Old wine in new bottles? Authoritarian Governance under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (2013-)

Abstract: This contribution problematizes the dynamics of authoritarian governance in Egypt with a focus on the post-2011-12 era. Unpacking key elements of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's rule, it highlights some of the strategies deployed by the al-Sisi regime aimed at entrenching and upgrading authoritarian governance following his coming to power by a military coup d'état in 2013. As part of this investigation issues of continuity and change will be explored as well as the inevitable question of whether the reconfigured authoritarianism established by al-Sisi will in the end be more durable than its predecessor.

Bio: Dr Hendrik Kraetzschmar is Associate Professor in the Comparative Politics of the MENA in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds. His main area of research is the nature of electoral, associational and party politics in the Middle East and North Africa. He has published in a number of leading academic journals and is the editor of *Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World: Contentious Politics in Times of Change* (Routledge 2012) and co-editor of *Democracy and Violence: Global Debates and Local Challenges* (Routledge, 2010). His latest co-edited volume on *Islamists and the Politics of the Arab Uprisings: Governance, Pluralization and Contention* was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2018.

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Panel #2: The media and political accountability since the Arab Spring

Name: Fatima el-Issawi

Title: Is media diversity good for democracy?

Abstract: The Tunisian political transition has succeeded in building a consensual governance beyond ideological and political divides. Debating politics in media platforms became open and dynamic after having been for decades restricted to the coverage of the regime's activities. However, this debate is taking antagonistic forms contributing in some cases to exacerbating divisions and polarization. The media

politics relationship has acquired complex features with each side perceiving the other as shaping public opinion. This paper reflects on the notion of agonist diversity based on data collected in a focus group conducted in Tunis in May 2019 bringing together representatives of media, civil society and politics.

Bio: Dr Fatima el Issawi is a Reader in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Essex and a Senior Visiting Fellow at the LSE Centre for Africa. Her research focuses on the in the intersections of news media, conflicts and democratisation in the Global South. She is the Principal Investigator for the project “Media and Transitions to Democracy: Journalistic Practices in Communicating Conflicts—the Arab Spring” funded by a grant from the British Academy Sustainable Development Programme. The project addresses the transformations in journalistic roles and identities in time of uncertain transition –or attempted transition- to democracy in North Africa.

Name: Aboubakr Jamaï

Title: Press freedom in Morocco: Repression 2.0

Abstract: This article examines the evolution of repressive tools used by the Moroccan state against the independent media. It argues that the Arab spring has not altered the repressive course taken by the Moroccan authorities starting with the enthronement of Mohammed VI. While freedom of the press started to Improve by the mid 90’s, it took a dire turn by the year 2000 as shown by Reporters Without Borders’ freedom of the press index and the World Bank governance indicators. Under Mohamed VI, The State started to resort to Lawfaring, more specifically the weaponization of penal law; Economic asphyxiation through advertisers boycott; and the proliferation of zombie publications to silence the independent press. Whereas these remained the major tools of repression through the last 20 years, they were gradually adapted to take into account the specificities of digital media. The article will focus on the state’s treatment of the media which held a critical line during specific events: The Galvan Affair and the Rif uprising.

Bio: Aboubakr Jamaï is the Dean of The School of Business and International Relations at the Institute for American Universities (IAU College). He teaches Media & Conflict, Contemporary Politics of The Middle East and International Business.

He is an International consultant on Media development in the MENA region.

His work in favor of democracy in the Middle East was recognized by the Washington based "Project On Middle East Democracy" which awarded him his "Leaders for Democracy" prize in 2016.

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Panel #3: New medias, new dissent?

Name: Cristina Moreno-Almeida

Title: Trolling the Sacred: Memes, Satire and Symbols of Oppression

Abstract: Moroccan rulers have historically held a special status of sainthood enhanced by symbolic rituals of power and the Moroccan Constitution. Despite the King's legal and symbolic sacred status, user-generated memes and satirical social media pages mocking the monarchy have flourish since 2016. My paper examines memes of the King posted on Facebook and Instagram non-political pages in order to identify the role of satirical memes in creating instances of activism and political participation within entertainment online groups. Through digital discourse analysis of posts, comments and reactions, this paper exposes the changing depictions of the King in the digital age and symbols of power. It argues that although a culture of fear is still in place, trolling the monarchy bestows ordinary people with moments of political engagement where the ruler is no longer a sacred figure, his legitimacy is questioned, and his supreme power disputed.

Bio: Cristina Moreno Almeida, PhD, is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College London. Her research is about culture, power, and resistance at the intersection of society, politics and digital media. Her current work analyses memes in Morocco looking at the social, cultural and political ramifications of disseminating cultural production online. She previously worked at the LSE Middle East Centre and the LSE Department of Media and Communications on the project 'Personalised Media and Participatory Culture' with the American University Sharjah researching young people's participatory culture, the internet and creative production (2015-2017). She has published on youth, digital media, music, and resistance. Her latest book is entitled *Rap Beyond Resistance: Staging Power in Contemporary Morocco* (Palgrave, 2017).

Name: Omar Radi

Title: Online Activism and Online Repression

Abstract: In 2011, social networks and online media helped organize and amplify dissidents' voices. Ten years later, the return of authoritarianism and the crackdown on human rights have made the Internet and social networks a refuge rather than a stepping stone to the street. It became the scene for daily anonymous leaks, denunciation of abuse and corruption, and citizen journalism etc. But ten years were also enough for the authorities to catch up in controlling and supervising the Internet, and adapt their oppression methods to the virtual space, which has become the main political battlefield in Morocco.

Bio: Currently a Bertha Foundation Fellow, researching land grabbing issues in Morocco, Omar Radi is a journalist specialized in political and economic investigation. In 2011, he co-founded the French version of the news website Lakome, and worked with several media outlets (Le Journal Weekly, Telquel, Media 24, The Desk). He is a Thomson Reuters Foundation 2014 alumni.

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Keynote Address

Name: Omar Belhouchet

Title: Les politiques répressives des médias libres: le cas de l'algerie