Beyond Media Censorship: Speech and State in the Middle East and North Africa

April 20, 2007
Annenberg School, University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Room 300

Organized by:
Center for Global Communication Studies, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

Co-sponsored by:
Scholars Program in Culture and Communication, Annenberg School for Communication and Middle East Center, University of Pennsylvania

SCHEDULE:

8.45 – 9.30: Coffee and light breakfast served at the Annenberg School

9.30: Introductory Remarks
Featuring Dean Michael Delli Carpini, Annenberg School for Communication

9:40 – 10:10: Exchange of views to help frame the day
Monroe Price, Director, Center for Global Communication Studies
Marwan Kraidy, Scholar-in-Residence at the Annenberg School for Communication
Flagg Miller, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Religious Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

10.10 – 11.20: Naomi Sakr, Walter Armbrust and Mehdi Semati
The Internet, state management and spaces of self-fashioning

Naomi Sakr:
Models of state interaction with diverse flows of meaning: Egypt, The Yacoubian Building, and the Internet

New communication technologies can be used in ways that blur the boundaries between media production and consumption (as in 'user-generated' content and reality shows) and between individual and corporate cultural production (as in MySpace, YouTube etc). The challenges posed to repressive governments are reflected in the vague and all-embracing
prohibitions of the press law that Egypt adopted in 2006, and in the way Egypt's state security forces act against individual communicators to isolate them and deter others. Even so, it can be argued that state interventions in all flows of meaning — whether through old and new media — must still be understood holistically, in relation to each other. This is demonstrated by the case of Alaa al-Aswany's 2002 best-selling novel *The Yacoubian Building* and Marwan Hamed's film of the novel released last year. The Internet had already facilitated exposure of controversial subjects covered in *Yacoubian*, thereby influencing the climate for reception of both novel and film among different social groups. But adjustments in treatment between the novel and film (especially in relation to high level political and financial corruption) reveal the extent to which restraints on exposure persist, despite the scope for transparency that appears to exist via informal modes of expression. Processes of intervention in flows of meaning remain highly complex, involving a range of actors dependent on the state in various ways.

**Mehdi Semati:**

**Persian Blogs and the State: the Politics of Expression in Iran**

The formidable presence of the Persian-language blogs has presented the Iranian state with an unprecedented challenge. Their phenomenal rise is yet another contradiction among many others that characterize the Iranian society. After addressing those contradictions, in this presentation I place the development of Persian blogs and Internet in Iran in the context of post-revolutionary state and its cultural and public policies and their implications. In doing so, I will make the following arguments. First, the state is increasingly unable to contain the challenges posed to it by the Internet. Second, by blurring the boundaries between the public and the private expressions, the political and the personal speech, and the official and unofficial cultures, blogs and the Internet are introducing new cultural and political sensibilities that have long-term and irreversible consequences. Third, it is the state’s own policies that have helped unleash the subversive power of cyberspace. Finally, in the context of unique structural factors (some of which created by the state), it is the cultural dynamism in the Iranian society that holds the key to the direction of its imminent socio-political transformations. If the 1979 revolution was facilitated by the “small media” of yesterday, the path to a more democratic future might be facilitated by the high-tech communication technologies of today.

11.20 – 11.40: Coffee Break

11.40 – 12.20: Ed Webb and Philip Madanat

State religion, public opinion, public media and civil governance

**Ed Webb:**

**State Regulation of Religion in the Middle East**

Focusing primarily on radical Arab nationalist republics such as Tunisia and Syria, as well as Kemalist Turkey, I examine how and with what intent these states regulate religious activity within their borders. Despite being ostensibly ‘secular,’ these republics employ an extensive machinery not only to police religious activity, particularly when it overlaps with the political, but also to produce an official religion which is a form of
nationalized Islam. In this, I argue, they sit within the Jacobin tradition that extends back to the writings of Rousseau on the need for a Civil Religion that is compatible with national and republican belonging. To understand these states either as secular in the sense of separating church and state or as employing a *laïcité de combat*, a radical anti-religious stance, is to misconstrue the role of religion in their ideology and practices. Understanding them rather as propagators and guardians of a national civil religion helps explain why they enter the marketplace of religious publicity not only as regulators but also as would-be monopoly producers.

*Philip Madanat:*
**The role of Mosques vis-à-vis Media Outlets in Shaping Public Opinion in Jordan**
Madanat’s thesis project explores the hypothesis that public opinion in Jordan is mostly affected by religious speech articulated at mosques, and this pre-disposed context is further reinforced by media outlets, particularly TV. A historically predominant State-run media had set the agenda and pre-shaped the salience of issues, and a prevalent Islamic culture had furnished the individual frames which guide them in processing religious input.

12.20 – 1.30: Lunch

1.30 – 2.30: Marwan Kraidy and Joe Khalil
**Spaces of self-fashioning; youth multi-media and reality TV**

*Joe Khalil:*
**Youth-generated Media and Censorship in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon**
This presentation explores how young Arabs react to limits on free speech by producing media that challenge conventional norms and perceptions, both nationally and transnationally. Using the Lebanese ‘cedar revolution’ as a case study, this presentation explores how young Lebanese, unlike their parents, communicated their independence through media instead of violent conflict. As a second case study, Khalil examines the phenomenon of Saudi ‘drifting’ cars as a communication tool for young Saudis. Building on the author’s recent field work, this presentation integrates the workshop’s goals into a broad analytical framework: (1) the relations between alternative media and social movements (2) traditional state censorship versus non-traditional communication (3) youth-generated media as free self-expressive phenomenon.

*Marwan Kraidy:*
**Idioms of Contention: Reality TV and Arab Politics**
The post-911 obsession with Al-Jazeera blinds us to the full complexity and vibrancy of Arab media and public culture. Pan-Arab reality TV shows have been more popular and controversial than anything seen on television in Arab countries, triggering street riots, pushing clerics to issue *fatwas*, spawning transnational media wars, and forcing high-level politicians to resign. Reality TV has provided Arab activists, clerics and regimes with idioms of contention. This presentation tells the compelling story of how the Arab reality TV controversies have stirred and renewed Arab public life from within,
opening a unique vista on the cultural, social and political tensions that are shaping the contemporary Middle East.

2.30 – 3.15: Thomas Keenan and Helga Tawil-Souri
The Internet, violence (global and state) and territoriality

**Helga Tawil-Souri:**
**Internet in the Absence of a State: On-line Realities in the Palestinian Territories**
Against the backdrop of political upheaval and deepening poverty, foreign NGOs and Western hi-tech firms have promised to integrate Palestinians into the global economy, strengthen democratic movements, and bypass Israeli economic dominance through a range of Internet projects, largely without the Palestinian Authority’s involvement, funding or control. By analyzing the forces behind this Internet growth and describing Internet use in the Territories since the mid-1990s, this presentation addresses the contradiction of the powerlessness of the Palestinian ‘state’ in the face of increasing digital communication. Of central concern is whether Internet and (digital) communication freedom can be achieved without equal developments in the political, economic and legal realms.

**Thomas Keenan:**
**Jihadist Media on the Internet, and the Pathways Through Which They Circulate**

3.15 – 3.30: Coffee break

3.30 – 4.15: Jane Goodman, Flagg Miller, Nicole Stremlau and Iginio Gagliardone
Song, circulation, alternative textualities

**Jane E. Goodman:**
**Guerillas of Song: Intertextuality and Ideology in Algerian Berber World Music**
New Kabyle Song, a form of Algerian world music rooted in Berber folk traditions, constituted a significant turning point in the development of Berber cultural identity and political consciousness. Yet at the time this music emerged (1970s), Berber culture had no presence in the Algerian public sphere, and the Berber language and culture were harshly repressed by the Arabo-Islamic Algerian state. In this paper I ask why New Kabyle Song was not able to be contained by the usual censorship mechanisms. Drawing on Jean-Loup Amselle’s notion of *branchement* or “branching interconnections,” I argue that New Song generated so many robust and divergent lines of interconnection that it could not be readily kept in check. I focus in particular on the ideological and intertextual strategies through which the early New Songs were constructed, which made them difficult to construe as censorable in traditional terms. I also consider how the medium and economy of circulation as well as the acoustics of modernity in which the new songs participated helped to lay the foundation for an emergent Berber public culture while also contributing to the difficulty of containment.
**Flagg Miller**

Miller’s presentation will outline some conceptual frameworks that might prove helpful in linking studies of speech and censorship to indigenous Arab and Muslim semiotics of media apperception. While drawing partly upon his work on audiocassettes in Yemen, he will explore the ways in which ethnographic attention to circulation and poetic tropes can inform studies of consensus and dissent.

**Nicole Stremlau and Iginio Gagliardone: The Role of Poetry During the Guerilla Movement in Somaliland**

This presentation will draw on primary research, including oral histories of fighters and journalists, to explore in particular the how poetry broadcasted through traditional media outlets was instrumental in the movement. In an oral society such as Somaliland, poetry was easily remembered and further disseminated through word of mouth. Poetry and the radio mutually enforced one another in a way that could not easily be controlled by the regime because of its informal dimension.

**4.15 - 5.30: Wrap-up/Conclusion – Next Steps**

We would like to thank Joe Khalil for providing a bibliography and background paper.
PARTICIPANT LIST AND BIOGRAPHIES

Participant Bios

Tamara Aqrabawi is a visiting scholar at the Center for Global Communication Studies through June 2007. She is a specialist in community radio in Jordan and is working to further develop the sector. She served as coordinator for the World Association for Community Radio (AMARC) 9 conference, held in Amman, Jordan in November 2006, the first conference on community radio to be held in the Arab world. She is co-author of a study for the World Bank, Community Radio for Development in Jordan; is managing a project for AmmanNet to establish a women’s community radio station in Jordan Valley; and represents MENA women in AMARC.

Walter Armbrust is Hourani Fellow and University Lecturer in Modern Middle Eastern Studies at Oxford University, and Director of the Middle East Centre. He is a cultural anthropologist whose research interests focus on popular culture and mass media in the Middle East. He is the author of Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt, and editor of Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond. Recent publications include “Cinema and Television in the Arabic-speaking World” (in press, 2007), in Robert Hefner (Ed), Muslims and Modernity: Culture and Society Since 1800. New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 6, “Audiovisual Media and History of the Middle East” (2006) in Amy Singer and Israel Gershoni (Eds), History and Historiographies of the Modern Middle East, and “What Would Sayyid Qutb Say? Some Reflections on Video Clips” (2005) Transnational Broadcasting Studies 14 (Spring/Summer) http://www.tbsjournal.com/ and forthcoming in hard copy.

Armbrust is currently working on a cultural history of the Egyptian cinema and a study of Egyptian Ramadan as a consumer-oriented holiday.

Iginio Gagliardone is currently a PhD student at the London School of Economics. His research, supervised by Professor Robin Mansell, focuses on the selective adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in semi-authoritarian regimes. The scope of his work is to understand how ICTs are sometimes reshaped to fit the political purposes of authoritarian governments, inhibiting ICT’s democratizing power while attempting to maintain their role as enhancers of economic performances.

Along with Nicole Stremlau, he has studied the role printed media played in political transitions in East Africa through the voices of their protagonists, and is currently working on a book on Oral Histories of Eastern African Editors. He has worked in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), focusing on the use of new technologies for education and training, and has advised UNDP Ethiopia in the planning of training and capacity building activities for journalists and editors at the University of Addis Ababa’s School of Journalism.

Jane E. Goodman is associate professor of communication and culture at Indiana University. She received her Ph.D. in anthropology from Brandeis University in 1999. Since 1990, she has conducted field and archival research in Algeria and France. Her major research interests include
colonial and postcolonial studies, textuality and discourse, performance studies, and world music. Her book, Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video, was published in 2005 by Indiana University Press. Her work also appears in journals including American Ethnologist, American Anthropologist, the Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, and Ethos.

**Thomas Keenan** teaches literary theory, media studies and human rights at Bard College, where he directs the Human Rights Program. He is the author of “Fables Of Responsibility: Aberrations And Predicaments In Ethics And Politics” (Stanford University Press, 1997). His latest book is an edited volume on media theory, with Wendy Chun, called “New Media, Old Media”, published by Routledge in November 2005. His current manuscript is called “Live Feed: Crisis, Intervention, Media”, about the new media and contemporary conflicts. With Andras Riedlmayer, he started International Justice Watch (JUSTWATCH-L), an Internet discussion list on war crimes and transitional justice. He has served on the boards of WITNESS and the Soros Documentary Fund.

**Joe F. Khalil** is a Ph.D. student at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. He has more than twelve years of professional television experience as director, executive producer and consultant with CNBC Arabiya, MBC, MTV and Orbit. As media professional, he has traveled on assignments in Italy, USA, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. For seven years, he was an instructor at the Lebanese American University where his teaching and research focused on transnational broadcasting, programming and production. His writings were presented at several conferences, and he consulted for various academic and professional organizations on issues pertaining to media in the Middle East. His articles have appeared in *Transnational Broadcasting Studies, Middle East Broadcasters Journal*, and in *Global Media Journal*. His dissertation is about youth-generated media in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia; and this presentation is based on his work in Arab Media.

**Sakher Al Khasawneh** is a visiting scholar with the Center for Global Communication Studies through May 2007. He is Assistant Professor of Law at Al-Isra University, Jordan, where he is currently developing a course on media law for Fall 2007. He previously designed and developed training courses at Abu-Ghazaleh Organization, and served as Chief of the Police Science department for the police academy. In this capacity, Al Khasawneh worked with government and human rights during agencies on multiple initiatives which resulted in an improvement of human rights police procedures in Jordan. Before that he was the police criminal prosecutor, where he gathered extensive prosecution experience. In addition, Al Khasawne was a local police advisor both nationally and internationally.

**Marwan M. Kraidy** is Scholar-in-Residence at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, which he will be joining as Associate Professor in summer 2007. His publications include more than 40 published articles and essays and two books Global Media Studies: Ethnographic Perspectives (Routledge, 2003) and Hybridity, or, The Cultural Logic of Globalization (Temple University Press, 2005). Previously a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, and founding Director of the Arab Media and Public Life (AMPLE) project, Kraidy is currently writing two books: Screens of Contention: Reality Television and Arab Politics, and Arab Television Industries, a reference work for British Film Institute. He frequently provides expert analysis on Arab media and public opinion
to outlets such as PBS, NPR, BBC, the New York Times and the Washington Post. Kraidy is fluent in Arabic and French, and conversant in Spanish.

**Philip Madanat** is a Doctoral candidate in Social Communication at the Open University of Catalonia in Barcelona. He currently serves as Editor-in-chief of Al-Maghtas Magazine, a magazine for Christians in Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, and as program manager with the International Research and Exchanges Program (IREX)’s Jordan Media Strengthening Program. He previously served as executive director for development at Radio AmmanNet in Jordan. His thesis project, “The role of mosques vis-à-vis media outlets in shaping public opinion in Jordan,” is based on the hypothesis that public opinion in Jordan is mostly affected by religious speech articulated at mosques, and this pre-disposed context is further reinforced by media outlets, particularly TV. A historically predominant state-run media had set the agenda and pre-shaped the salience of issues, and a prevalent Islamic culture had furnished the individual frames which guide them in processing religious input.

**Flagg Miller** is a linguistic and cultural anthropologist who specializes in political discourse and media on the Arabian Peninsula. Much of his research examines the politics and aesthetics of knowledge in the Arab-Islamic world. His first book, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen* (Harvard University’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2007), focuses on transformations in political poetry that accompany the expansion of writing and audio-visual recording technologies in Yemen. His work on Arabic language reform has been published in the *American Ethnologist, Anthropology Today, the International Journal of Middle East Studies, the Journal of Language and Communication*, and the *Journal of Women’s History*. His current book projects focus on Muslim reformers as well as militants, from Osama Bin Laden to the Guantánamo detainees. Dr. Miller has lived and studied in the Middle East and North Africa for over four years, including Tunisia, Syria, and Yemen.

**Monroe Price** is Director of The Center for Global Communication Studies at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, and Director of the Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research in London. Price, who was Dean of Cardozo from 1982 to 1991, graduated magna cum laude from Yale, where he was executive editor of the *Yale Law Journal*. He clerked for Associate Justice Potter Stewart of the U.S. Supreme Court and was an assistant to Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz.

He was founding director of the Program in Comparative Media Law and Policy at Wolfson College, Oxford, and a Member of the School of Social Sciences at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Prof. Price was a senior fellow of the Media Studies Center in spring 1998. He was deputy director of California Indian Legal Services, one of the founders of the Native American Rights Fund, and author of Law and the American Indian. Among his many books are a treatise on cable television, *Media and Sovereignty and Television*, and *The Public Sphere and National Identity*.

**Naomi Sakr** is Reader in Communication in the School of Media, Arts and Design at the University of Westminster and Director of the Arab Media Centre, which is part of the University's Communication and Media Research Institute. Previously a journalist, editor and country analyst, Sakr specializes in the political economy of Arab media, with a particular focus

Email: Naomi@mediaprobe.co.uk or sakrn@wmin.ac.uk


**Helga Tawil Souri** is of Palestinian origin and grew up in various parts of the Middle East, Western Europe and North America. Tawil Souri is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University in the U.S., where her research focuses on various aspects of Palestinian and Arab media practices and spaces, including analyses of local broadcasting industries and cinema, the relationship between the Internet and national/economic development, and issues around social and political spaces. She is also a photographer and documentary filmmaker.

**Nicole Stremlau** is Director of Stanhope’s Africa Media Programme. Her PhD dissertation is on The Press and the Consolidation of Power in Ethiopia and Uganda. She is part of the Development Studies Institute at the London School of Economics in the UK. Stremlau is currently co-authoring a book of Oral Histories of Eastern African editors - extensive research was conducted in Ethiopia, Somaliland, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda. The project is part of the Stanhope East African Fellowship Programme. She is also initiating a project for the Stanhope Centre in response to a request by the government of Somaliland to assist with capacity building and transforming the Ministry of Information. She received her MA degree from SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, UK) in politics and economics and her BA degree with honors from Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT) in the College of Social Studies.

**Robert Vitalis** is Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. From 1999 to 2006, he was director of the Middle East Center. He is the recipient of fellowships from the American Research Center in Egypt, the Social Science Research Council, the Woodrow Wilson Center, the American Council of Learned Societies, the International Center for Advanced Studies, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Shelby Cullum Davis Center. In 1996, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations awarded him a Bernath Prize for his work on Egyptian political economy. In 2006, Stanford University Press published *America’s Kingdom: Mythmaking on the*
Saudi Oil Frontier, which debunks the many myths that now surround the United States’ “special relationship” with Saudi Arabia.

Ed Webb is an advanced PhD Candidate in the Political Science Department at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is completing a dissertation on state-led projects of secularization in revolutionary republics, including Turkey, France, Tunisia, and Syria. He also works as a Research Assistant at Penn’s Middle East Center and teaches political science at Haverford College. From September 2007 he will be an assistant professor at Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

Webb earned his B.A. in Oriental Studies from Cambridge University, UK, and then joined the British Diplomatic Service, where he worked on European Union affairs before a posting to Cairo, where he ran the Press and Public Affairs section of the British Embassy as well as being the Embassy's lead analyst on Egyptian internal political affairs. Before coming to Penn, he was head of Central Asia and South Caucasus Section at the Foreign Office in London. He earned his MA in Political Science from Penn in 2003. His research interests include religion and politics, nationalism and identity politics, and international political economy. He has also carried out research in collaboration with Professor Bob Vitalis on Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and early 1960s, particularly on Abdullah Tariki, co-founder of OPEC.

Barbie Zelizer is Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and holds the Raymond Williams Chair of Communication. A former journalist, Zelizer’s work focuses on the cultural dimensions of journalism, with a specific interest in journalistic authority, collective memory, and journalistic images in times of crisis and war. Coeditor and founder of the journal Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism (Sage), Zelizer also has served on the editorial boards of numerous book series and journals, including Journal of Communication, Communication Theory, Critical Studies in Media Communication, Rhetoric and Public Affairs, Popular Communication, and Critical and Cultural Studies in Communication. Zelizer has lectured widely both internationally and nationally, and her essays on the media have appeared in The Nation, Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Newsday, and other publications. Author and editor of seven books and some 40 articles and book chapters, Zelizer’s work has been translated into French, Hebrew, German, Portuguese and Japanese. Zelizer has been both a Guggenheim Fellow, a Research Fellow at the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, and a Fellow at Harvard University's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy. Her previous academic appointment was at Temple University.