

Battling through the press: Progressive activism in the Middle East

Panel coordinators

Patrizia Manduchi (University of Cagliari), Daniela Melfa (University of Catania)

Summary

Decolonisation is seen as a time of struggles and utopian impetus. Since the First World War demands for independence started emerging in the Middle East and political movements organised around competing creeds. Among the ‘weapons’ used by activists on all side, the press played an essential role – despite wide illiteracy – in challenging authorities, circulating opinions and attracting adepts. Editorial offices, often clandestine, were also a breeding ground of ideas. This political engagement persisted in the aftermath of independence when the intellectual and political elites strove for development, national unity and state-building. In this effervescent atmosphere the press continued to work as a catalyst for activism and counterhegemonic ideologies.

Focusing on the decades that straddle independence, the panel aims to examine the political struggle through the lens of the progressive press. Newspapers’ editorial line or even specific articles disclose information about political perspectives and projects. It is on this creative and imaginative phase – which covers both the colonial and postcolonial period – that panellists are invited to focus. Debates around constitutions, state economy, education, foreign policy, etc. shed light on the constitutive moment that goes hand in hand with the liberation struggle.

We welcome papers that deal with the agenda of newspapers or reviews, the activity of the editorial staff or even prominent intellectual figures. Through content analysis new horizons of expectations and sense may be highlighted. Attention can be paid also on the profile of readers and the impact of the press on public opinion and the ruling class. Barriers on journalistic activities or censorship may be seen as the litmus test of their effectiveness. Analysis may address both independent and partisan newspapers. The transnational network of these ‘activists of the pen’ and their international ‘ideoscape’ may be also taken into account to better situate their posture. Finally, the set of case studies will enable us to better outline what makes ‘progressive’ a political force, to distinguish different stances of progressivism (‘moderate’, ‘radical’, etc.) and to debate related categories such as the ‘Left’.

Submission guidelines

Proposals must include a title, an abstract and five keywords. Abstracts should be between 300 and 400 words. Accepted languages are English and French (WOCMES working languages).

Proposals must be sent in both Word and PDF formats to (Patrizia Manduchi, manduchi@unica.it; and Daniela Melfa, melfa@unict.it).

The deadline for proposals submission is September 30, 2017. Authors will be notified of acceptance on or before October 20, 2017.

Further information about WOCMES-5 is available at <http://www.tresculturas.org/wocmes18/>.