

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The Institute for Middle East Studies

IMES Inaugural Research Workshop:

Shifting Conceptions of Citizenship in the Middle East

Monday, November 12, 2007

Lindner Family Commons, Room 602, 1957 E St. NW

10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

R.S.V.P. to imes@gwu.edu

10:00-10:30: Breakfast and Welcome

10:30-12:00:

Egypt: Challenges of Islam, Citizenship, and Democracy

- Mona El-Ghobashy, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Barnard College
- Ellis Goldberg, Professor of Political Science, University of Washington
- Marc Lynch, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, GWU

12:00-1:00: Lunch and remarks from IMES Director, Nathan Brown

1:00-2:30:

Transnational Linkages of Middle Eastern Diasporas to Their Countries of Origin

- Liesl Riddle, Assistant Professor of International Business and International Affairs, GWU
- Yossi Shain, Professor of Political Science, Tel Aviv University
- Jennifer Brinkerhoff, Associate Professor of Public Administration and Intl. Affairs, GWU
- Natasha Iskander, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, NYU

2:30-3:00: Coffee Break

3:00-4:30:

Borders of Inclusion: Law, War, and the Making of Citizens

- Ilana Feldman, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Relations, GWU
- Dina Houry, Associate Professor of History and International Affairs, GWU
- Rania Maktabi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Business, Social Sciences, and Foreign Languages, Østfold University College
- Shira Robinson, Assistant Professor of History and International Affairs, GWU

*****Notes prepared by Sarah Auten. Please do not quote or cite without IMES permission.*****

Egypt: Challenges of Islam, Citizenship and Democracy

Mona El-Ghobashy explored the role of opposition parties under authoritarian regimes, and why the Egyptian opposition parties have failed to gain momentum over time. Dr. Ghobashy argued that the opposition parties view elections as a strategic opportunity to promote reputation building structures, both domestically and internationally. However, this strategy has caused a rift between generations, where more traditional leadership feels the high profile weakens their message. The Egyptian government encourages this internal factionalism as a strategy to erode opposition groups' base. Thus, their participation in elections becomes opposition parties' Achilles heel, as shown by thirty years of uneven election results.

Ellis Goldberg examined how the Muslim Brotherhood defines citizenship in its own political context, given the current application of democratic principles in national elections. Dr. Goldberg also discussed how Egyptian principles of democracy are seen to derive their power from religious authority, rather than as a fundamental right of human societies as is typical in Western-style democracies. This is a significant concept in understanding how the Muslim Brotherhood looks at democracy and the role of religion in politics; in some instances, the presence of religious authority in government, such as the proposed council of ulema, threatens the system of checks and balances designed to prevent abuses of power by the government.

Marc Lynch discussed the fallout of the Muslim Brotherhood's decision to draft a political party platform, which resulted in a well publicized heated internal debate between the older generation of cautious Brotherhood leaders and a small percentage of reformist-minded bloggers representing a younger generation, which tends to be much more media savvy and have a higher profile in Egyptian politics. Dr. Lynch identified a growing movement in Egyptian politics to analyze the Muslim Brotherhood in generational terms and offered several examples from recent events where this division has influenced the direction of the party.

Question & Answer Session

Question 1: I want to argue that the Islamic religious push is not exclusive to Egypt. Those who have difficulty with change look to religion as a tradition of comfort and for a sense of rootedness. For example, we see Putin in Russia creating a sense of Russian identity through Russian orthodoxy; in the United States, we have Rudy Giuliani pushing for a Christian identity for the nation. They are riding the same wave in Egypt, but in a more focused manner.

Question 2: You mentioned the 15% of Egyptian youth who are the more sophisticated urban voices engaged in the rising blogging culture. What about the other 85% who do not support this movement? Are there Salafi bloggers forming an ideological counter to them?

Marc Lynch: Although the bloggers like to identify themselves as urban sophisticates versus the Salafi bumpkins, this image is not necessarily true. Among the Salafis there are many university students active online, but they tend to use more forums or communicate their views as blog commentors. They have intense hostility towards the other 15%, labeling them as not Islamic, pro-Western and too liberal. They feel that the bloggers are pulling them in a direction they don't want to go, and this is mobilizing them against the bloggers.

Question 3: How does one look at social political movements in relation to one another and in relation to the State? You say we have a case of kiffaya envy, but we are dealing with an authoritarian system. In the current environment, can bloggers capture that grassroots base?

Ellis Goldberg: As the older generation formed in traditional political science systems, we had no more use for tradition. We need to have political systems that embrace new technology. This needs to be a yardstick for an engaged political leadership.

There has been an attack on Orientalism and consequently, political science departments have become too careful on how they approach and engage religion in an Islamic environment. Noah Feldman's *After Jihad* does an excellent job with this; Al Bishri is emerging as a careful thinker, even if they don't agree with his politics – he is still in dialogue with contemporary political thought.

Mona El-Ghobashy: The way in which these movements affect themselves is a key reason why the parties adopt their strategies. For example, the Islamists versus the secularists – how does the competition between them link up to their strategies?

Question 4: What is to be gained by coalitions in a system where seats can't be gained?

Ellis Goldberg: Even though they're not increasing in seats, they're gaining reputation. For these coalitions, reputation is seen as an investment in the present that is to be paid as income in the future. Reputations are difficult to cash in on, they can't be easily deployed for other purposes, and once you have one, you can't shake it.

Marc Lynch: Islamists in particular don't have a distinction between Muslim Brotherhood and non-Muslim Brotherhood members. People who are renegades can still be Muslim Brothers; it is part of their reputation.

Question 5: Egypt is still a very well-run police state. The bloggers may be gaining a lot of attention right now, but has no one expressed pessimism about how long the state will allow them to operate? Are you really suggesting that 150 bloggers are going to start a whole new society? I don't buy it.

Marc Lynch: When Abdelmona Mahmoud was arrested and tortured, there was a big secular political movement to support and ensure his release. He used his blog to publish the name of his torturer – this was an unprecedented move that shows the bloggers' power.

Question 6: You combine bloggers and a dialectic of reputation building. Other studies show the cultivation of reputation to be pointless; they say there is no political economic investment, its not fungible or exchangeable. How do you transfer this to the patron-client relationship, and how do you make it fungible? Also, if you compare the change between generations, can you argue that there is a shift in leveraging new media to create or participate in reputational politics?

Mona El-Ghobashy: This is precisely the debate that has been focused around the Muslim Brotherhood: the faceless middle managers are bewildered by these bloggers, who they feel are wasting their political capital by dialoguing with the West. They feel that the Muslim Brotherhood is too powerful to invest in such things.

Ellis Goldberg: I'm not sure I believe that social capital is fungible.

Question 7: The question surrounding blogging is one of identity versus reputation: the bloggers are using it as a medium to express their political and religious identities. As youth, are they more likely to ask: How do I practice my religion?

Marc Lynch: There is something to your point about identity expression, as blogs are a form of self-expression, especially for women. It is a forum for the conversion narrative or a platform from which to announce your Muslim Brotherhood identity to others.

Question 8: What is the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in relation to the international community? Are 4th generation bloggers teaming up with 2nd and 3rd generation bloggers to form generational coalitions?

Marc Lynch: A big division between the generations is whether the Muslim Brotherhood should participate in elections at all. The older generations see themselves primarily as a protheletizing group and feel that politics dirty their image. The new generation sees politics as part of the daawa, as outreach through a visible community presence.

Mona El-Ghobashy: I would like to add that the role of the state as Secularist versus Islamist is a very divisive issue. Each umbrella camp has a different position on the role of religion in politics, and there are deep cleavages in their ideologies.

Ellis Goldberg: One issue is the deep divides in strategic interests between groups; Egyptian politics is not always neatly divided into formal groups. If you look at the interests of Egyptian businessmen, their interests don't always align, for example, their free economics interest. Another issue is the Muslim Brotherhood identity crisis – as groups like the Muslim Brotherhood become defenders of free elections and free politics, what makes them an Islamist party?

Question 9: There are political issues of contestation dividing the Muslim Brotherhood and the secularists, such as the exclusion of women and minorities. In the contestation between the ulema and the Supreme Court, what are the specific issues?

Ellis Goldberg: We haven't talked about Al Azhar and the ulema. They will come into the picture in the upcoming elections. Who is running and how they do will affect this.

Marc Lynch: Some people see Al Azhar as completely subservient to the government. The ulema provide a power check by ensuring that legislation always aligns with the Sharia.

Transnational Linkages of Middle Eastern Diasporas to their Countries of Origin

Yossi Shain presented a broad examination of the concepts of citizenship and membership in a state and normalization of a state, by discussing the historic definition of citizenship as established by Western political thought, and how that principle has been adopted in the Arab world in conjunction with religious principles. Dr. Shain argues that intense conflicts of the Middle East, with its rapidly shifting political and religious alliances and long history of random border shifts in borders, represent a good model for identifying potential conflict resolution strategies.

Liesl Riddle discussed economic linkages and the intersection of international loyalties and the increased ease of international economic flows made possible by globalization. Specifically, Dr. Riddle examined diaspora investments, including direct remittances, as well as human and social capital, as a means to target international funds directly to diaspora communities. Direct remittances contribute as much as 33% of GDP in communities throughout Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Jordan, providing much needed development capital. The manner in which these diaspora investments can be targeted to individual communities allows expatriates to influence the local political situation through economic empowerment.

Jennifer Brinkerhoff explored diaspora philanthropy in Egypt's Coptic orphan community. This group represents a successful model for future diaspora philanthropy projects in that it has demonstrated effective channeling of funds into targeted communities, sustaining remittances across generations, and promoting community-building principles through remittances. Dr. Brinkerhoff bases their success based on: immediate acceptance by the international community, successfully bridging of two cultures, and successful education and workforce development activities.

Natasha Iskander presented her study on how Moroccan emigration to Europe affected political development in Morocco in the latter half of the twentieth century. Dr. Iskander argues that after Moroccan independence was established, King Hassan II marketed the rural Berber community as cheap and docile labor for European factories. Out of this community grew the Moroccan resistance movement, which was exported back to Morocco but faced infrastructure challenges at home. As a result, these movements have collaborated with the Moroccan government to address economic development issues, while simultaneously using the strength of their voices to spur a more open dialogue on taboo religious and social issues.

Question & Answer Session

Question 1: Could you say more about how immigrants in Morocco are influencing questions of democracy and women's rights?

Natasha Iskander: The Moroccan government can be democratic as long as the king agrees. Political discussions from foreign blogs raising taboo issues, such as the drug trade, are percolating into Morocco. At the same time, there is a reverse phenomenon, where the government is using the NGOs to advocate for their policies, such as the Family Code Rewrite, which was spearheaded through the NGOs, giving it an appearance of a grassroots issue.

Question 2: How do you deal politically with the Mandatory membership in identity when you cannot exit from a religious group?

Yossi Shain: Is there no exit from a religious group in a Mandatory system? They do downplay religious affiliation in lieu of nationality, in that it is secondary to nationality, but in theory, everyone should have an exit option. It is not for the State to decide – citizens have the freedom to choose. States have control over citizenship in that they can bestow or revoke citizenship, but can they stop you from departing? Authoritarian regimes prevent departure, but in democratic regimes, citizens belong to the nation and have priority even when they are not present inside the state. In some places, plurality of affiliation options are reduced or diminished by the State and its claim to monopoly or legitimacy of boundaries.

Question 3: You mentioned abilities of diaspora to differentiate. Could you discuss tacit knowledge in breaking the economic and social tolerance inertia that was once at the forefront of Islamic ideology?

Liesl Riddle: In the case of Afghanistan, the diaspora and the business community are playing a big role in development. Political advocacy is occurring in a business enabling environment, for example, in the Afghanistan American Chamber of Commerce's role in promoting Afghan issues.

Jennifer Brinkerhoff: This panel shows it depends on the country and a government's political openness. It may take generations; for example, the Coptics may become much more political. The Coptic Association currently flies under the radar; their U.S. Association is moving but not well-documented. It just depends on the policy space in the country. There can be an issue of legitimacy, if membership is not perceived well within the homeland, it may affect their ability to bring about change.

Yossi Shain: The 1990s monograph of Arabs in America would portray them as isolationists: there is no life in America – they are just focused on the homeland. They may view their stay in the U.S. as a retreat before their daawa, spreading the word at home. This is debated on a theological and a political level: who speaks on behalf of whom? Who listens? We are assuming a monotheistic community, but in reality, who has that authority? Is it designated or self-annointed?

Natasha Isakander: My study focuses on what is brought back, but that is only one side of the story. Something emerges later that cannot be explained, an example of which is the growth in the Moroccan saffron industry. The development expanded into a need to make women literate and able to do basic math, which gave the community the little push it needed for industrial growth. As a result, the community built a school for adult women as an outgrowth of the economic development.

Borders of Inclusion: Law, War and the Making of Citizens

Ilana Feldman explored the concept of citizenship in post-1948 Gaza under Egyptian rule as a community in the making. Dr. Feldman examined how the fledgling Palestinian state related to its Egyptian administrators and what role Palestinian citizens played in development of the Palestinian state, including educating its youth in concepts of citizenship, in order to produce politically savvy and involved citizenry with a highly-developed sense of civic duty. Although this never developed into self-determination, it is a strong element in current Palestinian concepts of national identity and citizenship.

Dina Khoury discussed how war in Iraq during the 1980s and early 1990s allowed the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein to develop new forms of control over the Iraqi population, and how the Iraqi population resisted those controls. During this period, the Iraqi government kept records of all Iraqi school children as a basis for future military participation. These records evolved into a full report on each student's attitudes towards military actions, enthusiasm for civic events, and family ties to opposition groups. The intent of these records was to weed out the good Ba'athist citizens from the bad, and to provide privileged positions to the most loyal, demonstrating the level of control that Saddam's regime exercised during the Iran-Iraq War and Gulf War periods in Iraq.

Rania Maktabi presented a discussion of the Syrian Ba'athist regime and its relationship to gender, citizenship, and family law. Dr. Maktabi characterized family and religious law as the primary focus of the legal system; as it is based on religious principles, family law trumps constitutional law in Syrian courts. This gives the Syrian legal system a reputation for suppressing radical reform and limiting women's rights, citing many elements from the 1993 Family Law that deprived women of their rights, including rights to retain financial control, custody of children, the ability to pass Syrian citizenship to children, and examples of disproportionate punishment based on gender for comparable crimes.

Shira Robinson examined the difficulties of Palestinian refugees to establish provable citizenship in the fledgling State of Israel post-1948, including an overview of the history of temporary resident permits in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and how the paperwork crisis of this period produced a new class of Palestinian citizens whose citizenship was dependent upon the good will of local Israelis to speak on their behalf. Dr. Robinson argued that this situation is significant for current Israeli Arabs, as the Israeli government implemented many of the same principles into a 2007 identification card initiative.

Question & Answer Session

Question 1: How will current distinctions of citizenship be affected by situations like the Sunni/Shi'a issue in Iraq?

Dina Khoury: Categories of exclusion aren't based on sect, but rather on dissent – connections to Iran are tied to national sovereignty, and your commitment to the Ba'ath party determines your level of commitment to citizenship. This does not articulate exclusion based on sect – the Articles of the Constitution from 2003 created the nature of that opposition.

Question 2: I would like to ask Rania for some clarification on her paper: is the movement to exclude women's rights at an end? Syria does not have a confessional alliance.

Rania Maktabi: The conservative interpretation is seen most often with Muslim minority groups. As the Catholic Church changes religious law, there is an alliance in the way in which the law is changed – they are talking to the regime representatives. There was an understanding that the religious groups would be accommodated, but in the end, it was a segmentary alliance in which the regime acted in its own best interests.