



Invitation ZMO-Kolloquium WS 2008/09

“Speaking, Listening, Reading, Seeing – Shaping the World Through Media”

Thursday, 27 November 2008, 6 pm

New Media and Political Dissent in Egypt

Lecture by Prof. Dr. Charles Hirschkind

Venue

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

This talk will explore some of the ways that the Internet, and particularly the practice of blogging, has opened up new political possibilities in Egypt, a country where political participation has long been severely circumscribed by the policies and practices of an authoritarian state. One clear effect of their activities has been the creation an arena of discourse and critique that traverses one of the more rigid divisions within Egyptian political life, that between so-called Islamist and secular-liberal or secular-leftist positions. Bloggers affiliated with such opposing political currents as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Socialist Workers Party have established an arena of alliance, coordination, and dialogue through the articulation of a common moral stance focused around four main issues: a condemnation of police violence; a demand for an end of the Mubarak regime; a rejection of Gamal Mubarak's succession of his father as president; and a demand for the democratization of political life in Egypt. These issues provide common ground for the forms of citation, interaction, and commentary found across both leftist and Islamist websites. Bloggers understand their role as that of providing a direct link to “the street,” understood as a space of state repression and political violence, on one hand, and of political action and popular resistance, on the other. They render visible and publicly speakable a political space that other media outlets cannot disclose due to censorship and state practices of harassment and arrest. This talk focuses on some of the conditions that have enabled the emergence of this public arena and the discursive conventions that have come to define it. These include the increasing availability of satellite television (and most importantly, al-Jazeera), the development of Islamic websites such as Islamonline and their role in promoting new vocabularies of critique and argument among Muslim activists, the highly individualist style of self-presentation that characterizes the blogosphere and how it has opened up possibilities of alliance and affiliation beyond the dichotomies of secular and religious.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Charles Hirschkind is associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. His research interests concern religious practice, media technologies, and emergent forms of political community in the urban Middle East and Europe. In his recent book, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (2006), he explores how a popular Islamic media form - the cassette sermon - has profoundly transformed the political geography of the Middle East over the last three decades. He is also the co-editor (with David Scott) of *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors* (2005). His current project is based in southern Spain and explores some of the different ways in which Europe's Islamic past inhabits its present, unsettling contemporary efforts to secure Europe's Christian civilizational identity.

The next lecture of this series will take place on 11.12.2008 at 6 pm:

Prof. Albrecht Hofheinz (University of Oslo) speaks about
„Net Individuals? Majority Use of the Internet in the Arab World“