



ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2014/2015

Who Speaks? The Global History of Intellectual Practices: Epistemological, Political, and Ethical Challenges

Thursday, December 18th, 2014, 6 pm

Conceptualizing the Social in 19th-20th Century Egypt: Who and for Whom? Al-hay'a al-ijtimā'iyya [the Social Body] and the 'amma/khāssa [Public/Private] Dichotomy Revisited

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

By **Dyala Hamzah** (Université de Montréal)

The lecture outlines the emergence in Egypt of a neologism, al-hay'a al-ijtimā'iyya (the social body), throughout the long 19th century. This is a time when the richest province of the Ottoman Empire was being molded into a centralized dynastic polity based on state monopolies. Integrated into world economy since the 18th century, the country eventually fell prey to British colonial occupation, after Muhammad 'Ali's heirs bankrupted the treasury through lavish loans for their modernizing schemes. Sitting astride the colonial caesura was a period of intense intellectual production known as the Arab Renaissance.

Contrary to what was happening in industrializing Europe though, and despite the economic havoc wrought by such momentous changes, the social body was being conceptualized in relation to the communal rather than to the economic. In trying to account for this specificity the lecture maps out the emergence and the career of the concept of the social body against the backdrop of a constellation of older autochthonous concepts. It focuses on the identification of a number of authors, all translators of a specific kind, who directly or indirectly paved the way for the neologism. It also aims at addressing some of the epistemological, disciplinary and methodological issues involved in endeavoring conceptual history in a Middle Eastern context.

Dyala Hamzah (Ph.D.) is Assistant Professor of Middle East History at the Université de Montréal. Her research into the trajectories of colonized intellectuals at work is an important contribution to the study of intellectual practice outside Europe. She is the author of several articles on Islamic Reform and of the 2012 edited volume *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*. Her monograph on Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) and the 'Salafī Turn' is forthcoming.

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