

The IAMCR “Islam and Media” Working Group

The International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR; <http://iamcr.org>), with which the “Islam and Media” and several other working groups are affiliated, promotes “media and communication research throughout the world, addressing socio-political, technological, policy and cultural processes.” One of its key objectives is to “provide a forum where academic researchers and others involved in media and communication research and practice can present and discuss their work, hone their critical skills and collaborate.”

The “Islam and Media” working group was originally formed to reflect upon “the communication phenomenon such as human interaction with a view to contributing toward mutual understanding and peace with justice” and “to engage in research and organizational development efforts geared toward strengthening the global societal structures based on personal responsibility and mutual cooperation in social, political, and economic relations.” At this July 2012 event, participants sought “to contribute to the advancement of research and evaluation in the media and communication related fields from an Islamic point of view (the Tawhidi perspective).” The papers presented dealt with the universal principles of communication in Islam and the West; Islam, communication, and sustainable development; coverage of the United

States' war in the Middle East; and how the media reports on extremism/terrorism.

Held during 15-20 July 2012 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, this international conference featured five sessions organized by the working group's Chair Basyouni Hamada (Cairo University) and his team. The first one, "Social Networks and Arab Spring," featured Anastasia Kononova and Charles Mitchell (American University of Kuwait), who presented "The Collective Interest Model [to assess] the Arab Spring: Social Networking as Collective Action." In her "An Analysis of Egyptian Journalism Attitudes towards the Islamist Political Power during and after the Parliament Elections 2012," Elamira Saleh (Cairo University) examined journalistic accounts of Islamic political power and how their authors both stressed and downplayed certain information. Mahmoud Galandar (Qatar University) presented "Al-Jazeera's Coverage of the Arab Spring of Revolutions: Towards a Southern Revivalism of Advocacy Journalism." His investigation and analysis of Al-Jazeera (Arabic) TV's news coverage of the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, as well as those that were repeated in its coverage of the uprisings in Yemen and Syria, were prefaced by defining what he meant by advocacy journalism.

The second session highlighted the theme of "Revolutions and Media Transformation." In his "Current and Future Trends of Journalism in Post-Egyptian Revolution," Hamada assessed the state of journalism in Egypt at a time of dramatic change after the January 25th revolution, the principal factors shaping the country's journalism, and various scenarios for the legal and institutional frameworks governing journalism in post-revolution Egypt from the journalists' viewpoints. Muhammed Haron (University of Botswana) shifted the focus to "South Africa's Muslim Radio Stations," which sought to counter secular ideals by disseminating religious values. Rachmah Ida (Airlangga University Surabaya, Indonesia) reflected upon "Reporting from Within: The Practice of the Indonesian Press Covering Incidents of Inter/Intra-Faith Conflicts." She examined how particular conservative/secular print media constructs methods to discuss and label intra-faith conflicts and how they use the media to shape Indonesia's public discourse.

The third session, "Media and the Stereotyping Image of Muslims," opened with Awatef Abdelrahman (Cairo University), who considered "The Reciprocal Media Images between Arab, Islam, and the West." Ashiya Osman Abdool-Satar's (University of South Africa) "Challenging Stereotypes: Sensitizing the Media to Fair Depiction of Muslims" gauged the extent to which the western media create and strengthen rigid stereotypes through

biased reporting and the ensuing conversations created around these reports in popular social media platforms. Her study affirmed that social media promotes conversations that challenge the mainstream negative perceptions and may be used to portray the largely unknown positive aspects of Islam and Muslims. Her presentation was complemented by Azza Abdul Aziz Abdullah Osman's (Sohag University, Egypt) "The Factors behind the Stereotyped Image of Arab Muslim Women in Western Media: An Arab Academic Elite Perspective."

Sudesha Roy (Stephen Austin University, USA) assessed the "You Are Not One of Us" statement via "A Comparative Critical Analysis of Hollywood's Representation of Redemption, Reconciliation, and Repatriation of Germans and Muslims after Significant Wars." By demonstrating the differences in how these three specific notions are handled, she revealed how discourse supports strategic frames in the media. To this effect, she compared selected Hollywood movies to illustrate the differing discursive strains in dealing with these two groups following periods of conflict.

The fourth session, "Media, Dialogue, and Conflict Resolution," began with Bushra H. Rahman (University of the Punjab, Pakistan), who spoke on "Pakistani Media: An Agent of Conflict or Conflict Resolution – A Case of Lal Masjid." Using Galtung's model of peace/conflict journalism, she studied how Pakistan's two Urdu-language and two English-language dailies framed the Lal Masjid conflict. She further investigated whether these newspapers functioned as facilitators of informed debates between the two and whether they encouraged the resolution of disputes by democratic means. Her compatriot Shazia Saeed (University of the Punjab, Pakistan) looked closely at the "Role of Religion and Media Consumption in Identity Formation: Experience of Youth in Pakistan." Her survey of Pakistan's Lahori youth (age 13-17) sought to assess and explore their "identity construction processes" in order to ascertain the level of influence of foreign and local media consumption, as well as high and low levels of religiosity, on their identity formation.

Anke Fiedler and Michael Meyen, both affiliated with the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, analyzed "Political Newspapers in Sudan: Fig Leaves or Real Alternatives to State-Run Media?" Their study outlined the Sudanese opposition newspapers' role, compared them to the state-affiliated media, and showed that since Sudanese journalists cannot rely on economic benefits (rather the contrary), they received popular acclaim for their fearless reporting on human rights abuses and how they risk their lives for the public's welfare.

The final session, “Media, Muslims, and Others,” opened with Fernando Resende’s (Fluminense Federal University, Brazil) “Inventing Muslims as the Other in 19th c Brazil,” in which he used selected Ajami manuscripts to show how they constructed their identities. Muhammad Z. Mustafa (Islamic Science University of Malaysia) discussed his “A Communication Analysis on University’s Choice: A Study of Islamic Schools in Malaysia,” which drew upon the responses of approximately 1,000 students asked about the factors they usually consider when selecting their higher education program. The final paper was presented by Zulkiple Abdul Ghani (Islamic Science University of Malaysia), who spoke on “Islam and Entertainment” by taking into account “Al-Ghazali’s Theoretical Perspectives [as they appear in his] Bab as-Sama.” Abdul Ghani premised his conclusions upon the view that the western discipline of communication is not something new, for al-Ghazali and other Muslim scholars had grappled with it centuries ago.

Muhammed Haron
Associate Professor, Department of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana