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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Roundtable

Researchers and journalists facing risks in the field: shared views

Roundtable organized by *Orient XXI*

For researchers and journalists, the difficulties of access to their fields in North Africa and the Middle East are a growing challenge. From discreet but harassing surveillance to imprisonment or kidnapping, or even murder, these two professions seem to be weakened and the object of growing suspicion. The recent cases of the «scientific prisoners» Fariba Adelhah and Roland Marchal detained in Iran are a convincing illustration of these difficulties. Faced with state repression or the securitization rationale adopted by their sponsoring institutions, the risks arising from the exercise of these two professions have undeniably been transformed.

If the observation of this evolution is widely shared between professionals in the academic and media fields, opportunities to exchange on this thorny subject are rare. True to *Orient XXI*'s ambition to develop bridges between knowledge and professions, this panel aims to offer a space for dialogue by confronting experiences and points of view. It brings together practitioners, researchers and journalists who have built up a reflection on new professional risks in the Maghreb or Middle East. The discussion aims in particular to question the concrete practices of field work but also the limits and flaws in the understanding of these issues by public authorities in Western democracies. They sometimes appear to be quick to neglect the constraints inherent to the accumulation of information and knowledge and to underestimate the need for independence.

Convenors : Laurent Bonnefoy (CNRS - CEFAS)

Discussant : Alain Gresh (Editorial Director of *Orient XXI*)

Gwenaëlle Lenoir (freelance journalist)

What interactions between journalism and research?

This intervention aims to report on the work of a certain journalist who knows the field to which he is sent, and not the one who «arrives» with three agency dispatches in his pocket. Journalists often have to move fast, even if they are not working for pure news that requires almost immediate action. He or she often has a more limited time than the researcher, a wider angle to cover, and a less informed public or readership. He or she uses the researcher's work upstream, sometimes asking him or her for analysis and/or reactions to deepen his/her paper during the writing process. I don't think that the two look at each with indifference. The two, journalist on one side, researcher on the other, feed each other's work. Even if there are many misunderstandings and even reproaches. These few remarks that structure my presentation are intended to draw inspiration from the fields that I have recently practiced, Iraq, Sudan, but also the Central African Republic.

Mérim Cheikh (INALCO)

Investigating Moral Dissent in Morocco

Since the end of the decade, conditions on the ground and the production of speech and knowledge on moral issues in Morocco have been modified in a context of increased repression. The instrumentalization of norms and laws condemning and penalizing sexuality outside marriage has increased. The number of political figures, journalists, and activists whose arrests, trials, and/or convictions for sexual crimes (rape, prostitution, «fornication», etc.) are directly aimed at activities critical of the regime is countless. In such a context, how does one investigate and reflect on the transformations of gender and sexuality ideologies at work in different social spheres of Moroccan society by articulating both an intersectional analysis of moral experiences and a political approach to the functioning of the moral order in Morocco today?

Sarah Daoud (Sciences Po Paris, CERI, CEDEJ)

Investigating a «taboo» in Cairo: the mukhābarāt in charge of the Palestinian issue.

Doing research in Cairo requires a lot of methodological tinkering because of the locked political situation. By avoiding the pitfall of essentialization, we propose to take a reflexive look at the problematic management of concrete situations of inquiry and interaction. If access to the field constitutes a difficulty in itself, all the more so since 2013, it is also due to the protagonists of our object of research, the Egyptian intelligence services; we will thus also report on the conditions of access to an institution based on secrecy.

Sylvain Mercadier (freelance reporter)

Graduate in political science and freelance journalist in Iraq and Syria since 2017, I mainly reflect on political issues and mechanisms in my fields of work. I also focus on non-state armed movements. I have covered the Syrian conflict (Turkish operations in 2018 and 2019) as well as the popular uprising in Iraq in 2019-2020 and the impact of Turkish operations on the populations of Iraqi Kurdistan. My experience in the field has led me to reflect on the risks inherent to my own profession and especially the inequalities in the face of risks, between Westerners and locals, but also between journalists and fixers. I have also applied myself to analyzing the degrees of freedom of expression in the different areas of Iraq. Faced with these challenges, I am developing an independent media specialized on Iraq in 4 languages.