

FROM THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE OF ARAB WORLD TO THE LACK OF FREEDOM – A SHORT HISTORY OF ARAB MEDIA ON THE EXAMPLE OF EGYPT

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SAWICKA Zofia. *From the Fight for Independence of Arab World to the Lack of Freedom – A Short History of Arab Media on the Example of Egypt.* In *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 2021, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 548-560, ISSN 1338-7219, DOI: 10.17846/SHN.2021.25.2.548-560.

The history of the Arab media is interesting because it shows how important role the media can play in political changes. Arabs, as one of the nations conquered by the Ottoman Empire, began to use the press as a mean of national revival already in the 19th century, later this process intensified significantly in the 1940s, where the press became one of the arenas of the struggle for the independence of Arab states. The role of the media in the Arab national liberation struggle is underestimated. However, their powerful force was noticed by the new Arab regimes, which completely subdued the media market of the nascent Arab states and began to use the media for their own political purposes. This situation continues to this day, but the emergence of the Internet in this part of the world has reawakened the Arab national liberation mood, which culminated during the Arab Spring. Nowadays, Arab new media is considered to be the next arena of the fight for political change and democratization of this part of the world.

SAWICKA Zofia. *Od boja za nezávislosť arabského sveta až po nedostatok slobody – krátká história arabských médií na príklade Egypta.* In *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 2021, roč. 25, č. 2, s. 548-560, ISSN 1338-7219, DOI: 10.17846/SHN.2021.25.2.548-560.

História arabských médií je zaujímavá, pretože ukazuje, akú dôležitú úlohu môžu médiá zohravať pri politických zmenách. Arabi, ako jeden z národov ovládaných Osmanskou ríšou, začali tlač využívať ako prostriedok národného oživenia už v 19. storočí, neskôr sa tento proces zintenzívil. V 40. rokoch 20. storočia sa tlač stala jedným z arén boja za nezávislosť arabských štátov. Úloha médií v arabskom národnom oslobodzovacom boji je podceňovaná. Ich značnú silu si však všimli nové arabské režimy, ktoré úplne podrobili mediálny trh rodiačich sa arabských štátov a začali tieto médiá využívať na vlastné politické ciele. Táto situácia pokračuje dodnes, ale vplyv internetu v tejto časti sveta znova prebudil tendencie na oslobodenie národov, ktoré vyvrcholili počas Arabskej jari. Arabské nové médiá sa dnes považujú za ďalšiu oblasť boja za politické zmeny a demokratizáciu tejto časti sveta.

KLúčové slová: arabské médiá; politické zmeny; história; nové médiá;

Keywords: Arab media; Political change; history; new media;

The aim of this article is to present the history of the Arab media (mainly the press and Internet) in the context of their influence on political changes in this part of the world. The history of the Arab media is interesting because it shows how important role the media can play in political changes. In the modern history of the Arab world, the media has become one of the main forces in the fight for independence from the colonialists, but later lost its freedom to strengthen the national character of individual Arab states. In the twenty-first century, the media began to enjoy some freedom thanks to the Internet. This fact, to some extent, led to the collapse of some Arab regimes, which one of the pillars of power were, paradoxically, traditional media controlled by them.

Arab media originates from Arab culture. Since the media system is, in a way, a product of the culture and the political system in which it operates, it seems justified for the purposes of this paper to describe this part of the world in relation to the shape of media system functioning in it. The Arab world stretches from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. The League of Arab States currently comprises 22 countries, not all of which are considered to be Arab states. This term has not been clearly defined in science. Its framework is determined by overlapping historical, cultural, political, linguistic and religious criteria. Currently, the Arab states include: Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and the Palestinian Authority.

Arab states were created as a result of decolonization processes, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab territories came under the strict control of European powers: France, Great Britain and Italy. Each of these countries pursued its own policy towards the occupied territories, the influence of which is visible until today, e.g. in the state administration or in the form of individual words used in dialects. The Arab national liberation movement was born in the interwar period. Algeria was the last to gain independence in 1962. After liberation, each of the Arab states followed its own path of development.¹ All this meant that the Arab world, contrary to the popular opinion of Western observers, is not a homogeneous world, states differ in the degree of development, the implementation of individual political regimes, the role of religion in public life or even in language. This fact is very important also in relation to media systems or journalism in general, because it is difficult to talk about the phenomenon of Arab journalism per se for the entire Middle East. In each Arab country, journalism and its practical implementation looks a bit different and often refers to the colonial past, which is why, for example, in Tunisia or Algeria, French journalism will be a model, and in Egypt, British or American journalism.² In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the contemporary shape of the Arab media was also influenced by the history of providing information in the Arab world.

¹ In view of the ongoing Cold War, every Arab country after liberation received an offer of aid either from the United States or from the USSR, most countries chose the protectorate of Moscow. HOURANI Albert. *Historia Arabów*. Gdańsk, 2002.

² The author's interview with the Egyptian journalist Sara Ahmed, 22.02.2018.

Before Islam, the main source of information was poetry, which was treated as a tool of mobilization and propaganda. It describes the victories and great deeds of individual tribes as well as the defeats of their enemies. The presence of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula changed the existing model of information flow. Poets were replaced by imams who played a significant role in communicating information from the authorities to the public. Formal communication in the Muslim empire was to serve mainly to strengthen a lifestyle consistent with the dictates of religion.³ Information was also shared directly at the market (Arabic *sug*). The information obtained in these places has always enjoyed great public trust. This informal way of obtaining information (mosque, market) is still very popular and widely used in the Arab world. Therefore, for a very long time in the Middle East, there was no need to create more advanced forms of transmitting news, such as the press, whose origins date back to the 19th century and which was introduced to the Arab world by external forces, i.e. Christian missionaries and colonizers.⁴ Arab media has always been closely associated with politics. The first Arab newspaper to appear in the 18th century (published by Napoleon) was the official government publication in which the authorities said what they expected of the citizens. Even then, newspapers were subsidized by their patrons to promote their particular interests.⁵

The press

In a region dominated by the Ottoman Empire, newspapers that existed from the mid-18th century were tools of the Turkish authorities or foreign embassies. The independent Arab written press did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Egypt during the cultural and intellectual renaissance of the 1860s' and 1870s', encouraged by the liberal Khedive Ismail, who ruled Egypt from 1863 – 1879. In Syria and Iraq, the written press appeared a few years later, but fell victim to frequent censorship that drove Syrian-Lebanese journalists abroad to Egypt, where press freedom was guaranteed.⁶

It was only from 1908, in response to pressure from the Young Turks, that legal and political restrictions on the establishment of newspapers were lifted, which allowed the development of an independent press in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. For example, in 1909, 144 newspapers and reviews appeared in Egypt, 90 in Cairo and 45 in Alexandria.⁷ This press has always been animated by young writers and politicians committed to promoting the Arab national conscience in the context of Turkish domination. With the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of French and English colonialism, a new press appeared in the region. First

³ Information passed on by tribal poets has survived to this day. The stories are collectively called "Arab Days."

⁴ AYALON, Ami. *The Press in the Arab Middle East. History.* Oxford, 1995, p. 6.

⁵ AYALON, p. 7.

⁶ GORMAN, Anthony – MONCIAUD, Didier. "Introduction." GORMAN, Anthony – MONCIAUD, Didier (eds.). *The Press in the Middle East and North Africa, 1850-1950: Politics, Social History and Culture.* Edinburgh, 2018, pp. 1-28.

⁷ ESSOULANI, Said. *The press in the Arab world: 100 years of suppressed freedom, al-Bab: n.d., [Online, December 2, 2021] <https://al-bab.com/arab-media-historical-background>*

by European colonizers, then by indigenous peoples. Europeans, especially the French, established a press in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria and Lebanon. The English preferred to keep the nascent political press in Egypt in check, rather than to take its place.⁸ From 1945, the press became the privileged tool of fighting for the independence of the country. Nationalists, often journalists by profession, faced all forms of brutal treatment by the colonial authorities: imprisonment, torture and exile. Their newspapers were suspended or banned.⁹

It is worth mentioning that, starting with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, the Arab-Muslim world entered a phase of stagnation of intellectual activity, manifesting itself on many levels – social, cultural, religious, military and institutional. This situation gave rise to a reform movement promoted by three major reformists: Al-Afghani (1838 – 1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849 – 1905) and Rashid Rida (1865 – 1935). At the end of the First World War, this movement (*nahda*) caused the feeling of unity of Arab societies through Islam, past successes and nationalism. The reformists put forward three basic demands: the return to the Koran and the original Muslim traditions, the necessity of fighting for the independence of the areas occupied by colonial powers and the fight with Muslim sovereigns who rejected these reforms.¹⁰ This intellectual and political movement made the greatest impact in Egypt. In the 20th century, the implementation of the postulates announced by the reformists became a source of the revival of nationalist ideals and the struggle for independence. Much of this struggle took place in the Egyptian press, which became an essential element of the struggle for national liberation.

Press in Egypt

The history of the press in Egypt, as the protagonist of the Arab world, illustrates the role of the media in creating the national identity of Arab societies and is also a perfect reflection of the role played by the media in other Arab countries in the struggle for independence.

Egypt aroused the interest of Western powers as early as the 18th century, when it was still part of the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Great Britain was most interested in influencing Egypt because of the shortest path to India. British interest in Egypt, caused the reaction of France, which wanted to limit the expansionism of its eternal rival, and so Napoleon entered Egypt in 1798. After the failed French invasion, Egypt was taken over by Muhamed Ali, the founder of a dynasty that formally recognized the suzerainty of the Turkish sultan. Ali undertook the first reforms aimed at modernizing the country (the state administration, education system, health care system, army and economy were modernized). With the reign of the dynasty, Great Britain gained more and more economic and political influence, while France was culturally dominant, for example, it

⁸ ESSOULANI, The press, online.

⁹ CHIBA, Yushi. Media History of Modern Egypt. A critical review. In Kyoto Working Papers on Area Studies, no. 86, February 2010, [Online, December 2, 2021] http://repository.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2433/155745/1/ssh_084.pdf

¹⁰ DANECKI, Janusz. Arabowie. Warszawa, 2001.

provided instructors for the modernized army, engineers and scientists. Franco-British financial control and the presence of foreigners in the Egyptian parliament led to an uprising which was crushed in 1882 by the British army, leaving Egypt under „temporary“ occupation that lasted 74 years.¹¹ From 1914, Egypt officially fell under the protectorate of Great Britain. The national liberation movement in Egypt developed relatively late, as a significant part of the government elite of this country considered the activity of the British to be advisable, its main goal was to introduce reforms. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that a nationalist movement was formed and Egyptian political parties emerged, of which the Wafd party gained the greatest influence. After the collapse of the Turkish Empire in 1918, Egypt demanded independence from the British, which was formally proclaimed in 1922. The king became the head of state, and Egypt became a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament.¹² In 1936, a treaty with Great Britain was concluded, which formally ended the British occupation, but allowed British troops to stay in Egypt and granted special privileges to Great Britain. The interwar period was characterized by a constant struggle for domination between three main forces: the British, the king and the Wafd party, which definitely won the first parliamentary elections and stood at the head of the national liberation movement.¹³ After World War II, the various political parties came together to pursue their common interests: to bring about the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and to maintain power over Sudan. In 1951, the Egyptian parliament denounced the treaty concluded in 1936 with Great Britain and proclaimed Farouk king of Egypt and Sudan. His power did not last long, however, in 1952 there was a military coup that overthrew the king and brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power, an Egyptian colonel who in 1954 took full dictatorial power. The coup led to the settlement of disputes with Great Britain – a treaty on self-determination of Sudan was concluded, and after the Suez War in 1956, British troops left Egypt for good.¹⁴

As Szymon Niedziela rightly states, the modern history of Egypt can be divided into three epochs perceived through the prism of three characters: the era of Nasser (1952 – 1970), the era of Sadat (1970 – 1981) and the era of Mubarak (1981 – 2011).¹⁵ In each of these important historical periods in Egypt, the press and media in general played a significant role in the changes that took place on the political area of Egypt. They were not only a forum for the exchange of views, but often became the main driver of change.

The Egyptian press history can be divided into three main stages. The first period covers the time from the French expedition in 1798 to the 1920s. This stage is characterized by a conflict between the domestic press, which played a historic role in the evolution and development of Egypt's political consciousness, and the press defending European imperialism. The modern period began with the French

¹¹ HOLZER, Barbara – HOLZER, Jerzy. *Egipt. Stulecie przemian*. Warszawa, 2008.

¹² AS-SAYYID MARSOT, Afaf Lutfi. *Historia Egiptu. Od podboju arabskiego do czasów współczesnych*. Warszawa, 2009.

¹³ HOURANI, *Historia Arabów*.

¹⁴ ZDANOWSKI, Jerzy. *Historia Bliskiego Wschodu w XX wieku*, Wrocław, 2010, pp. 176-195.

¹⁵ NIEDZIELA, Szymon. *Konflikty i napięcia w świecie arabskim*, Warszawa, 2012, pp. 128-129.

expedition at the end of the 18th century, when the French brought Western-style printing presses and journalism to Egypt by publishing the *Courrier de l'Égypte* in French.¹⁶ Modern journalism (as the one of the elements of modernization brought to the country by Muhammad Ali) began in this country with the appearance of the newspaper *Al Waqaea Al Masreya*, the oldest newspaper in Egypt and the Middle East. The journal was founded on December 3, 1828 by the Egyptian government in the time of Muhammad Ali to publish Egyptian decrees and news. The main feature of the press at this stage was its official character. It contained various administrative, economic and judicial information. This type of journalism continued to dominate the Egyptian press until Khedive Ismail came to the throne in 1863. Under Khedive Ismail, the Egyptian press became politicized.¹⁷

At the end of Ismail's reign in 1880, there were sixteen well-presented periodicals in Egypt, ten of which were in Arabic. They all had a strong position in the publishing market and, importantly, were independent of the authorities. At the same time, due to funding from patrons, they often became a channel for expressing their views. The journalists' milieu was ethnically and religiously diverse.¹⁸ Moreover, this era was also characterized by cultural richness and intellectual diversity. The press became a platform for many writers and poets who shared their works with readers in its pages. At that time, a strong party press was also established, leaders among daily newspapers slowly crystallized, and radio and cinema appeared in Egypt. The media of this period was very dynamic and was characterized by high bias both among its employees and the audience.¹⁹

By 1920, many significant titles had been created in Egypt, including *al-Ahram*, popular and considered the most opinion-forming newspaper in Egypt. Different political views were expressed in the press, views supporting the British and French clashed, and nationalist newspapers appeared, calling for Egyptians to fight for independence and reinforcing their conviction that they were able to govern themselves. With the outbreak of World War I, an important stage in the development of the Egyptian press was completed. The press has gained an influential position, not only as a communicator of news and views, but also in shaping public opinion.

The second period runs from 1922 to 1954. During this period Egypt was a constitutional monarchy, and the struggle was incessantly waged between three opportunistic rivals – the King, the Wafd party, and the British occupation. Each party had newspapers to publish its news and defend its views. The press mainly served as a political and propaganda tool, in turn the native press called for independence and a constitution.²⁰

When a group of officers overthrew the monarchy and seized power, transforming Egypt into a republic in 1952, the Egyptian media found itself in a very

¹⁶ HAMADA, Basyouni. Historical and Political Analysis of Mass Media in Egypt, In *The Egyptian Journal for Communication Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, pp. 1-31.

¹⁷ AYALON, pp. 9-106.

¹⁸ ZDANOWSKI, p. 18.

¹⁹ KHAMIS, Sahar. The Transformative Egyptian Media Landscape: Changes, Challenges and Comparative Perspectives. In *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, 2011, p. 1159.

²⁰ HAMADA, pp. 1-31.

difficult situation. The pluralistic and lively media scene of the British occupation has been replaced by a monolithic media environment. All media came under strict government control. Newspapers that existed before 1952 slowly began to disappear from the publishing market. Heavy financial penalties were imposed on many of them, and many journalists were imprisoned. President Nasser nationalized the press market and so far private titles have passed into the hands of the only legal political organization in the country – the National Union. The nationalization of the press meant the end of its freedom and professionalism, among others by giving up its diversity and pluralism. Mass media were to serve the authorities as a propaganda tool. The media was even subjected to preventive censorship.²¹

Anwar Sadat's assumption of power in 1970 brought further changes to the media market. First of all, Sadat allowed other political parties to exist and to publish newspapers. He abolished preventive censorship, but at the same time the Minister of Information warned publishers that they were responsible for what was written in their titles. During Sadat's presidency, the media market changed several times. These changes depended on the views of the president himself, whose attitude to freedom of the media and speech in general can be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, he wanted to introduce more democracy into the system inherited from Nasser, on the other hand, he was afraid that such an action could be used against him. Therefore, his era began with giving the media a greater margin of discretion and ended with strict restrictions for fear of strengthening his political opponents.²²

Hosni Mubarak, who became president in 1981, had a similar ambivalent attitude towards the media. At first he also encouraged the opposition to print their own newspapers, but the lack of real democratic practice and real political participation left both these parties and their newspapers without any real support. At the same time, with the announcement of greater freedom for the media, arrests and the use of force against journalists, unlawful detentions and even torture were still present. Which clearly shows how much these three presidents had in common in terms of leadership and media relations.²³ The era of President Mubarak, however, saw significant changes that heavily affected the Egyptian media landscape. First of all, there was a privatization of the media, both private newspapers and satellite TV stations appeared, and in 1993 Egypt gained access to the Internet.²⁴

Such a diverse and rich media history has made some paradoxes visible in Egypt's modern media system. The first is the complex, often ambivalent

²¹ CHIBA, Media History, (online).

²² ROUGH, William A. Arab Mass Media: newspapers, radio and television in Arab politics. London, 2004, p. 152.

²³ EL-SHAER, Gamal. Mapping Egypt's Media: State Influence in a Transforming Landscape. In Arab Media & Society, vol. 20, winter 2015, p. 2, [Online, December 2, 2021] http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20150216113213_ElShaer_MappingEgyptMedia.pdf

²⁴ SAWICKA, Zofia. Wpływ nowych mediów na przemiany polityczne wybranych państw Bliskiego Wschodu; Warszawa; Rzeszów, 2017.

relationship between the press and the ruling regime, in which the margin of freedom for the press oscillates between two poles: the broadly understood freedom of speech and severe government repression, which are expressed through censorship, lack of financing or restrictive legal regulations.²⁵

Moreover, the pace of change in the media arena was much faster than in the political arena, leading to a large imbalance between freedom of expression and other political freedoms. The development of the idea of freedom of speech, despite unfavorable conditions and limitations, was not adjusted to the actual political reforms and real democratic practice. This paradox was called media schizophrenia by Adel Iskander due to the deep gap between the often harsh criticism of the regime expressed in the media (mainly alternative media) and the inability to actually participate in the political life of the country. Egyptian media operated on the principle of safety valves that allowed the public to vent their anger and frustration at social, political and economic injustices at a time when citizens had no real influence on the reality around them.²⁶ This additional function of the media has created an interesting paradox in which the media, instead of a promoter of democratic practices, have become their substitute. This trend has been and continues to be seen in other Arab regimes that are using the margin of media freedom to absorb public anger and frustration. Such a tactic, in which the public has the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction, was to protect the authorities from more violent actions by citizens, such as protests or revolutions. For quite a long time, this scenario had the intended effects, but new technologies and the information they provide made society want something more than just an opportunity to vent its anger, and for the first time in many years, it took a real part in the political life of the country.

It is worth noting that the Arab press quickly moved to the on-line sphere, which allowed it to liberate itself from censorship to a large extent and overcome the high costs of printing, which significantly limited its reach. Similarly, TV stations have developed their own on-line platforms and often set up their own YouTube channel, ensuring greater dissemination of their programs by doing so.

The Internet, like the press, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, became a forum for political discussions, exchange of views, shaping a new vision of Arab societies, and its role during the Arab Spring of Nations, which took place in the first decade of the 21st century, cannot be overestimated.

Internet

In Arab countries, the Internet has appeared quite recently compared to world standards set mainly by Western civilization. Saudi Arabia and Iraq closed the list of countries that only offered access to the web in 2000. According to estimates, 180 million Arabs currently use the Internet, which is over 67% of the

²⁵ AMIN, Hussein. Report on the State Media in Egypt. The Arab Center for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity, p. 5, [Online, December 2, 2021] http://www.arabruleoflaw.org/files/pdf/media/english/p2/egypt_mediareportp2_en.pdf

²⁶ ISKANDER, Adel. Paradox of the free press in Egypt, USEF Expert Panel Discussion Notes, Washington, D.C., July 2006.

total population. In 2010, there were only 56 million of them, which shows how rapidly cyberspace is developing in this region of the world. The dominance of Facebook among social media is clearly visible: in 2017, an account on this portal has about 156 million Arab Internet users, which on average gives almost 7 million accounts on this medium for each Arab country.²⁷

Over the past 10 years, the number of internet and mobile users in Muslim countries has increased by more than a third. As in the rest of the world, the largest number of web users are young people, but their number compared to the general population is surprising. In Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt, 50% of the population is under the age of 25, in the remaining Arab countries, the Web generation accounts for 35 to 47% of the population. Their life needs and aspirations are not satisfied by the state, so it is no wonder that in the absence of significant institutional opportunities for political participation, new media slowly became a mechanism for mobilizing young people into online social movements that combine various, so far scattered ideological tendencies.²⁸ What distinguishes the Arab use of the Internet is a willingness to discuss political, religious and sex-related topics, unprecedented anywhere else in the world. This is probably due to the fact that in face-to-face communication, conversations on these topics are an inviolable taboo. At beginning of XXI century about 10% of every 200 Internet accesses were websites devoted to religion, mainly Islam.²⁹ Contrary to popular belief, the most popular of them were not those calling for jihad, but those that call for moral renewal based on the Koran.

Internet message boards are the second feature that distinguishes Arab cyberspace. In no other language are debates held so often and as zealously as in Arabic. The Internet has become the ideal medium for breaking the traditional limits of who can say what and where. Arab blogs appeared in Iraq in 2003, and in 2005 they became the central space for the formation of Arab social movements. At the beginning, all the sensitive topics bothering Arab societies were discussed in their pages. In July and August 2005, 27% of Arab blogs focused on Islam and 5% were devoted to politics.³⁰ According to Lynch, the first blogs did not reflect the public opinion, on the contrary, they showed a point of view different from the common one. This researcher divided the Arab blogosphere into three main strands.

The first of them are the so-called activists. They are Internet users who are directly involved in political movements and who use blogs to coordinate various types of actions, disseminate information and to provoke political disputes. The second group consists of Internet users whose main task is to build an

²⁷ Internet World Status, Usage and Population Statistic, 2019 [Online, December 2, 2021] <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.html>

²⁸ GHANNAM, Jeffrey. *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011*, Washington: The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), 2011, p. 4f.

²⁹ HOFHEINZ Albrecht. *The Internet in the Arab World: Playground for Political Liberalization*. In *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 2005, no. 3, p. 91.

³⁰ LYNCH, Marc. *Blogging the New Arab Public*, [Online, December 2, 2021] Arab Media & Society, Issue 1, Spring 2007 http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20070312155027_AMS1_Marc_Lynch.pdf

understanding between the East and the West. These blogs are written mainly in English and are aimed at Western readers. Their main task is to bring the laws and traditions governing Arab societies to the Western world. The third group is called bloggers of the public sphere. They are not directly involved in politics, but take a lively part in the discussion on the current situation in the country.³¹

In 2007, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter appeared in the Arab world, interestingly, they were immediately used for political activity. In 2010, Arabic was the fastest growing language on Facebook. Currently, about 78 million Arab Internet users have an account on this social network. According to the report on trends in the Arab Internet use, 28% of its users find social media the first source of information, 54% use Facebook at least once a day, and as many as 85% of Arab Internet users say that social media has enabled them to be more socially active.³²

This fascination with social media ceases to be surprising if we take into account that for a significant part of the Arab society, living "in the real world" is associated with huge restrictions resulting both from the Arab culture itself and from Islam, such as the lack of free contacts between unrelated people formally for men and women. Through its horizontal and non-hierarchical structure, social media engaged the so far unused potential of women, created a completely new type of public space in which they could function freely, gaining much more freedom than before.³³

As it seems, the success of social media would not be so great if it were not for the possibility of embedding it in the realities of Arab culture. Listening to the radio in the Arab world was a collective activity. People came to the coffee shop to find out and share information there. It was the same when the era of television and satellite channels came. It was in cafes that the first receivers appeared. Currently, it is Internet cafes that have become the area of mass communication, playing a role similar to traditional cafes. The individualism of the Internet can be mitigated in them by a sense of belonging to a group, and yet collectivism is one of the distinguishing features of Arab culture.

New media in the Arab world is also distinguished by the degree of trust that its users place in it. The language of social networks, SMS or the Internet in general has little to do with the written language. The language of the new media is spoken language, it is dialects, teenage varieties of Arab-English. The information provided by it is considered credible, the more so that the entire audience chain is often visible on social media, so the rules of *isnad* are fulfilled in a way. Besides, the use of dialects (Arabic: *,ammiyya*) means that educational barriers

³¹ LYNCH, (online).

³² [Online, December 2, 2021], The Arab World Online: Trends in Internet Usage in the Arab Region, Dubai School of Government, 2013, http://static.wamda.com/web/uploads/resources/dsg-gip_bayt_report_final_16822_EN.pdf;

³³ OTTERMAN, Sharon. Publicizing the Private. Egypt Women Bloggers Speak Out. Arab Media & Society, Issues 1, Spring 2007, [Online, December 2, 2021] http://www.arabmediasociety.com/topics/index.php?t_article=28;

no longer play such a large role as in the case of traditional media, where formal Arabic is present.³⁴

Social media allows its users not only to contact individually, but also to send their own ideas and ideas to a wide audience, e.g. by creating groups on Facebook. Therefore, as it seems, one may be tempted to say that both the broadly understood public opinion and the public sphere itself in contemporary Arab societies are not only reflected in the Internet, but are primarily shaped by it. By means of social media, all those who are dissatisfied with the version of events posted in traditional media can present their own view on a given matter. This is how patterns of political expression and learning are formed that are key to the development of democratic discourse. It was on the Internet, with the help of social media, that the public sphere could be born, which in Habermas' concept an element is constituting civil society.³⁵

Summary

The media play a key role in the modern history of the Middle East and North Africa. Understanding their historical development is therefore essential to understanding the many processes of political, social and cultural change and the evolution of public opinion and contemporary debates on social and cultural identities in the Middle East. The history of the Arab media is extremely interesting, because it shows how important role media can play in political transformations. Arabs, as one of the nations conquered by the Ottoman Empire, began to use the press as a means of national revival already in the 19th century, later this process intensified significantly in the 1940s', where the press became one of the arenas of the struggle for the independence of Arab states. The role of the media in the Arab national liberation struggle is underestimated. However, their powerful force was noticed by the new Arab regimes, which completely subdued the media market of the nascent Arab states and began to use the media for their own political purposes. This situation continues to this day, but the emergence of the Internet in this part of the world has reawakened the Arab national liberation mood, which culminated during the Arab Spring. Nowadays, Arab new media is considered to be the next arena of the fight for political change and democratization of this part of the world. Time will show, as it will be.

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Word count: 5768

Number of character, including spaces: 36 903