

## **Political Communication and Democratization Trajectories in Non-Western Societies**

**Seminar Organized by:** Centre for Glocal Media Studies-GMS, Aarhus University

**Date:** Wednesday, 30 March 2011

**Time:** 13:00-16:00

**Venue:** Lille Auditorium, INCUBA Science Park, Åbogade 15

Within the last two decades in particular, the domestic political and communication systems in many non-Western countries have been undergoing significant changes. Politically, these countries are engulfed in democratization struggles to entrench the rule of law; build viable democratic institutions and establish environments conducive for real civic liberty and competitive political pluralism.

Alongside these political struggles, different domestic legislative changes and technological developments have transformed the communication systems of these countries leading among others, to relatively more widened spaces for public communication. Overall, a central feature of these societies is the coexistence of relative freedom and recurrent vestiges of undemocratic rule.

As these societies experience significant political, socio-economic and technological changes, what are the emerging institutional and non-institutional forms and principles of public communication and what are the implications of these to the democratization process in these countries?

The speakers during this open seminar will examine different aspects related to contemporary political communication in selected non-Western societies and outline a communication-centred perspective on the challenges to entrench liberal democracy beyond the West.

### **Speakers:**

#### **Making Sense of Press Freedom: Journalists' Interpretations of Press Freedom in Four New Democracies**

*Dr. Katrin Voltmer, Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds.*

**Abstract:** In most new democracies that have emerged over the past two decades, the transformation of the institutions of public communication is one of the most disputed arenas of the transition process. This paper argues that while press freedom is a universally recognized norm, its meaning is ambiguous and varies across time and space. Democratic transitions therefore involve complex negotiations between journalists and their stakeholders about the new role of the media in society and the boundaries of their practices. This paper is based on a comparative research project on the transformation of political communication in new democracies. Material from semi-structured interviews from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Poland) and Southern Africa (Namibia, South Africa) is used to understand how journalists

interpret their freedoms and responsibilities within the newly established democratic order. The evidence from this study suggests that journalists are drawing on various sources to make sense of press freedom: Western, in particular liberalist, notions of press freedom that allows journalists to align themselves with an international community of media professionals; the historical experiences and collective narratives of their own cultural environments; and the specific constraints of the post-transition situation that might require a contextualization of the exercise of press freedom.

### **‘Politics here is man-to-man’: Political Culture and the Communication of Politics in Post-1990 Cameroon**

*Teke Ngomba, PhD Student, Department of Information and Media Studies, Aarhus University*

**Abstract:** Like most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, since 1990, the political and media landscape in Cameroon has changed significantly. Against a background discussion of these changes and based on semi-structured interviews with key actors in the political communications environment in Cameroon, this paper examines how political parties are communicatively navigating the changes in contemporary Cameroon and the extent to which the ethno-patrimonial political culture in Cameroon is reflected in political parties’ campaign communication strategies. The findings show that rather than adopt a media-inclined campaign communication strategy in the context of a changing media landscape, political parties in Cameroon prioritize non-mediated proximity-based approaches to campaign communication which are rooted in the political and communicational culture of the country. The paper ends with a reflection on the possible impact of these dominant forms of proximity-based campaign communication strategies to the democratization process in Cameroon.

#### **Programme:**

13:15-13:25: Welcome and introduction by Associate Professor Poul Erik Nielsen, Director of the Centre for Glocal Media Studies

13:25-14:30: Presentation by Dr. Katrin Voltmer, followed by questions and answers

14:30-15:20: Presentation by Teke Ngomba, followed by questions and answers

15:25-15:50: Concluding remarks from Dr. Katrin Voltmer and Teke Ngomba

15:50-16:00: Closing remarks from Associate Professor Poul Erik Nielsen