

Impact case study (REF3)

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| Institution: University of Bedfordshire | | |
| Unit of Assessment: UoA 34 | | |
| Title of case study: Arab media and the mediation of Islam | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Noha Mellor | Professor of Media | 2013 – to date |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) | | |
| <p>Noha Mellor's research into Arab media and political Islam has informed national and international political as well as media debates about the Arab region. This research was cited as evidence to policymakers (5.1; 5.2) and it informed several briefs for diverse stakeholders such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (5.5 & 5.6), and Freedom House (5.3). Mellor was also invited to offer presentations to commercial organizations like M&C Saatchi World Services (5.7) and Oxford Analytica (5.8); and her research has helped raise the level of public debate and understanding through media commentaries and interviews with international media outlets (5.9; 5.10).</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) | | |
| <p>This research provides a nuanced understanding of Arab and Islamic media, which are often de-historicised, and decontextualized. The underpinning research began with the monograph, <i>The Making of Arab News</i> (2005), and it was followed by other books (<i>Modern Arab Journalism</i> (2007); <i>Pan-Arab Journalists in Transnational Media</i> (2011); <i>Arab Media</i> (2011); <i>Handbook on Arab Media</i> (2020)), of which three books were translated into Arabic thereby contributing to the debate in the MENA. Mellor also co-authored <i>Reporting the MENA Region: Cyber Engagement and Pan Arab Social Media</i> (2015) which maps the various uses of social media in pan-Arab newsrooms. Prof Stuart Allan describes it as “a fascinating inquiry into how pan-Arab journalists employ social media tools to enrich their engagement with distant audiences”; Prof Philip Seib described it as an “essential reading in the continuing evolution of Arab journalism”; Prof Rodney Benson argues that the book “challenges over-optimistic claims about the Arab Spring's democratizing legacy”. This research has informed several consultations – as detailed in Section 5 (5.3; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8).</p> <p>The research broke new ground in its focus on the dialectic of structure (political agendas) and local agency (cultural mediators). The research into Arab media has led to building a network of journalists across the EU and the Middle East, facilitated by the sessions planned by the European Neighbourhood Journalism Network, formerly Euromed and the Media, and whose activities spanned more than 15 years. Mellor represented the Network in the EU Ministerial Summit on Culture (2009) and has participated in the subsequent discussions between the EU Commission, the Alliance of Civilisations, and the Anna Lindh Foundation. These interactions have provided the foundation for further analyses focusing on the intricate link between faith/religion and media practices. It has also led to several invitations by policymakers, think tanks, and commercial entities to provide them with tailored briefings and advice to further their knowledge of and support their work in the region (see Section 5). The research extended to studying Islamist media, focusing on the uses of media as a strategic</p> | | |

tool by the Muslim Brotherhood movement. This is the first comprehensive study on the Brotherhood media covering the period from its inception in 1928 and until 2013. The findings were reported in Mellor's monograph, *Voice of the Muslim Brotherhood* (2018), which was shortlisted for the International Studies Association ICOMM award (2019). Professor John Voll, Georgetown University, describes it as "an important contribution to the broader understanding of the relationships between the secular and the religious in the discourses of modernity" (*Middle East Journal*, vol. 72). This research has informed evidence to policymakers (5.1; 5.2; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6).

Mellor's research has been used in courses about Arab media in universities across the world. At the University of Bedfordshire, Mellor has been leading a research group working on Arab media and the mediation of Islam, including the Leverhulme postdoctoral fellow, Dr. Mai Witwit (2013-2016) and visiting scholars Dr. Ehab Galal, Copenhagen University (2014), and Hossein Alizadeh, University of Tampere (2019), in addition to eight Ph.D. students.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Noha Mellor, 2020, "Media in Yemen: Narratives of Polarization and Fragmentation", in Noha Mellor & N Miladi (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Arab Media*, Routledge. ISBN 9781138385481
- Evidence of quality: This volume is part of a prestigious series and it is the first comprehensive handbook consisting of 38 chapters, covering all Arab states. The research informed the consultation to M&C Saatchi World Services (5.7).
- 3.2 Noha Mellor, 2020, "The Syrian Press and Online Media - A Driver of Arabism", in Noha Mellor & N Miladi (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Arab Media*, Routledge. ISBN 9781138385481
- Evidence of quality: This research informed the consultations provided to Oxford Analytica (5.8).
- 3.3 Noha Mellor, 2018, *The Voice of the Brotherhood*, Routledge. ISBN 9781138078659
- Evidence of quality: This monograph was favourably reviewed in leading journals and was shortlisted for the International Studies Association ICOMM book award (2019); it informed evidence and briefs to policymakers (5.1; 5.2; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6).
- 3.4 Noha Mellor, 2016 (ed.), *Political Islam and Global Media: The Boundaries of Religious Identity*, Routledge. ISBN 9781138639577
- Evidence of quality: The book examines the implications of new media on religious identity in the MENA as well as among Muslim Arab diasporas; it informed the consultations to M&C Saatchi World Services and Oxford Analytica (5.7; 5.8).
- 3.5 Noha Mellor, 2015 (co-author), *Reporting the MENA Region: Cyber Engagement and Pan Arab Social Media*, Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN: 978-1442237629
- Evidence of quality: The book is commended for the expertise of "the authors [who] are clearly experts in the subject matter, as demonstrated in the very knowledgeable and authoritative observations, comments, and arguments [...] this research has great global relevance", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. It informed the consultation to Freedom House (5.3).
- 3.6 Noha Mellor, 2014, Who represents the Egyptian revolutionaries? *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19(1): 82-98, DOI:10.1080/13629395.2013.826446
- Evidence of quality: this is a peer-reviewed article in a leading journal, and it discusses the unequal media representation of Egyptian protestors in 2011.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Mellor's research has informed policymakers and public debate in the UK and internationally. Her research has three areas of impact as follows:

a) Policymakers: In 2016, Mellor submitted written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into political Islam and Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which was cited in the Committee's final report (5.1). In 2017, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) invited Mellor to provide a tailored presentation about the MB media (5.5), and the US Naval Academy (5.4) invited Mellor to provide a talk about the same topic and stated that her talk would have "*a great impact on midshipmen learning*". In 2018, Mellor submitted another written evidence to the Defence Select Committee focusing on the topic of the use of media by Islamist movements (5.2). In 2019, the Middle East and North Africa Research Group at the FCO (5.6) invited Mellor to a closed workshop on Arab Media "*to bring together external expertise and relevant colleagues from across HMG with the objective of equipping those working in the region with a better understanding of the current media landscape and its key trends.*" This was followed by an invitation to Mellor to take part in the Media Freedom conference hosted by FCO in July 2019 and "*in contributing to the campaign*" about global media freedoms and to get "*the opportunity to engage with stakeholders in helping [FCO] set out and frame the challenges*".

b) Advisory bodies and think tanks: In 2017, Freedom House (5.3) invited Mellor to join their team of academic advisers and "*to provide expert guidance on country reports and scores*" for MENA. This engagement fed directly into the reports published in 2018 and it has provided Mellor with the opportunity to critique Freedom House's methodology, and to expand her research agenda to examine how to devise more inclusive media freedom metrics. In 2020, Oxford Analytica (5.8) invited Mellor to support their project about Arab perceptions of the EU and wrote that "*Mellor provided valuable insights for our project and produced a detailed written analysis of the Saudi media with a focus on perceptions of the EU, which formed part of an extended report covering the information landscape and attitudes in the Middle East.*" In 2020, M&C Saatchi World Services (5.7) acknowledged Mellor's bespoke presentation tailored to the work and interests of Saatchi World Services and wrote that "*the talk has certainly provided colleagues across World Services with a renewed perspective to draw on for relevant projects in MENA. Similarly, the talk also provided highly beneficial background and research information for projects of a similar focus outside of the region.*" Other organisations that drew on Mellor's research include '9 Bedford Row law firm' which produced a series of reports about the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and Mellor's evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee (5.1) was reprinted on this law firm's website "*to help familiarise readers with the movement and its record as a representative of political Islam*". Other organisations include the Centre for Global Islamic Studies as well as the Centre for Narrative and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University (2017), which provides a hub for US policymakers connecting the research on narrative and conflict to the practice of narrative intervention in conflicts.

c) Mass media: Mellor was cited by leading media outlets such as *Les Echos*, *the Washington Post*, South Korean radio, *Arab News*, PRI, and BBC, reaching millions of audiences globally (S9). Mellor also penned media commentaries to raise public awareness about Arab media including articles for the *Conversation*, *Reuters*, *NY Times*, *FT magazine*. She has also contributed to a debate about Islamophobia in the UK, hosted by Voice of Islam radio station (2019), and to a documentary critiquing the Muslim Brotherhood (2018) which has so far been watched 77,800+ times, liked by 1,000+ viewers, and triggering 400+ comments (5.9).

Previously, Mellor contributed to two evaluations of media development projects funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She was also involved in the "Young Arab Voice initiative" funded by the EU Commission, hosting a group of young Arab debaters for a lively debate at the University of Bedfordshire; the debate was moderated by the Head of the BBC

Arabic, and it was recorded for broadcast as one episode of the BBC Arabic's flagship program, *Talking Point* in Nov. 2013.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, (<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcaff/118/11814.htm>), reprinted by 9 Bedford Row law firm (<http://9bri.com/written-evidence-from-nohame-mellor-phd-university-of-bedfordshire/>)
- 5.2 Evidence to the Defence Select Committee (<https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/defence-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/global-islamist-terrorism-17-19/publications/>)
- 5.3 Consultation to Freedom House, 2017: <https://freedomhouse.org/fotp-2017-acknowledgements>
- 5.4 Invitation from the US Naval Academy, 2017 *provided as PDF*
- 5.5 Invitation from the FCO, 2017 *provided as PDF*
- 5.6 Invitation to the FCO's closed seminar on Media Freedom in the MENA, 2019 *provided as PDF*
- 5.7 Acknowledgement email from M&C Saatchi World Services, 2020 *provided as PDF*
- 5.8 Acknowledgement letter from Oxford Analytica, 2020 *provided as PDF*
- 5.9 Mellor's comments cited in selected international media outlets:
 Les Echos: <https://www.lesechos.fr/tech-medias/medias/la-chaine-dinformation-al-jazeera-joue-sa-survie-1165846>;
 WP: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/08/could-the-persian-gulf-rift-mean-the-beginning-of-the-end-of-al-jazeera/>
 Arab News: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1167601/middle-east>
 PRI: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-06-26/al-jazeera-responds-demands-it-be-shut-down>
 BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40187414>
 Sweden: <https://menatidningen.se/pressfriheten-i-mena-regionen-saudiarabien/>
 Voice of Islam radio: <https://soundcloud.com/voislam/drive-time-podcast-10-01-2019>
 A documentary about the MB: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BFUe5kOOk>
- 5.10 Mellor's contribution to the European Institute of the Mediterranean's yearbook: https://www.iemed.org/publicacions-en/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-la-mediterrania/sumaris/anuari-iemed-de-la-mediterrania-2018?set_language=en