

Matt J. Duffy (2014). Media Law in the United Arab Emirates. Wolters, Kluwer Law & Business. ISBN: 9041153292.

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What is it about media law in the Arab region that makes it such a hot topic these days? I suggest it is the heightened interest in this part of the world following the series of uprisings, protests and revolutions, now commonly known as the Arab Spring.

Changes in the political arena in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen brought great expectations; including hopes for higher press freedoms. It was also expected that the sequential uprisings in the Arab region would expand and would reach across borders and consequently result in more freedoms in other autocratic states. Prospects for wider margins of press freedoms Gulf countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain were nearly a given. However, the actual result was the introduction of restrictive regulations that were designed to prevent free speech.

Perhaps since Wiliam Rugh's Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio and Television updated his book 2004, there has not been enough contemporary publications that have deciphered the media law, regulations and freedoms from a scholarly perspective.

The author of this book Matt J. Duffy, Assistant Professor at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia, had previously taught full-time at the University of Zayed, UAE during the period between 2010 and 2012.

To many Arab media scholars and observers, journalism educators, and professionals, he is also remembered as the journalism educator who was banned from teaching and asked to leave the UAE, whom many believe, may have been because of his support and advocacy for journalism freedoms.

His immersion in the UAE culture and his ability to provide insight is evident from his writing, although at times his critique of the media environment are viewed from a western centric assessment of journalism values. Nonetheless, this book is of significance to persons who seek knowledge on UAE's media environment.

The book is comprised of two parts divided into several sections and 5 main chapters addressing several intertwined topics ranging from media landscapes, sources of media law, journalism freedoms, the journalism culture, journalism rights and lack of, media regulators and advertising regulations. The author does, however, focus on the weighty topic of freedom of speech and journalism freedom and has documented three important case studies. These landmark cases such as the Sheikh Issa Bin Zayed al Nayhan's case, and the Hetta Online Magazine represent freedom of speech cases that have emerged not just in the UAE but also in other Gulf states over the past decade.

For those readers who have no background on the UAE, the introduction lays down the facts about the countries' political and legal system, its geography and its diverse indigenous and expatriated population. A short section on the UAE's social and cultural norms leaves the reader thirsty for more contexts, as deeper knowledge of the cultural norms of the UAE is needed to understand how media freedoms are impacted.

From the onset of this chapter, the author does set a tone. His interpretations and comments regarding the UAE civil law system, particularly when he notes that new laws in the UAE are not subjected to public discussion, it would seem that the author intends on comparing the UAE context to that of more democratic countries.

Within the same chapter, the author provides the readers with an overview of the media landscape listing the names of the main media actors and media markets and putting the media production scene in the bigger regional picture by detailing media freedoms that paved the way for the international and regional media operating in the UAE media zones. The author notes that the majority of media platforms in the UAE are state-owned, transmitting news and information reflecting official perspectives. Further commentary imbeds the notion that the UAE does have a restrictive press environment that does not allow it to play the function of a watchdog in the way that it does in other parts of the world. A subsection describes the infrastructure in place for traditional media, and technological developments and gives a brief overview of digital convergence. The reader is finally treated to a small taste of media law, as the author gives a brief overview of the constitution and the legislation, as well as a revised and shelved draft of a previous media law and an insight into the lack of adherence by professionals to the journalism code of ethics.

The author then devotes a portion of the book to the wider topic of freedom of speech. Relying on internationally agreed upon concepts of press freedoms, the author's analysis references to the freedom of the press in the UAE constitution. Deductions through this comparative approach and the study of representative legal cases leave the author with the conclusion that constitutional protections for freedom of expression are rarely, if ever referred to in court cases. Journalists' self-censorship, according to the author is a result of fear of being penalized for their work. According to the author, the country has developed an informal *priori* censorship mechanism that exists mostly in reporting sensitive issues. This mechanism depends on the country's official news agency to set the agenda and angle of coverage. If the official news agency ignores a topic, then other media firms receive the signal to ignore the issue. The cases and examples documented in this section also refer to government rebuttals of accusations of stifling the media. The author also details and discusses factors that he believes have contributed to the current restrictive atmosphere, including those related to the penal code, the 1980 Press and Publication Act, the 2010 Resolution Media Regulation and the Cybercrime Law of 2012.

Of particular interest to readers who are looking for inside stories of the UAE government's reaction to the Arab Spring, Duffy provides information on restrictions on freedom of speech particularly with reference to online activism. Using highly publicized examples that occurred in 2012, the author documents instances and reasons for the arrest of activists who used social media to express their opinions, ranging from blasphemy to insulting the ruler. Other sections under the broad title of freedom of speech analyze regulation of the Internet, the draft media law that never saw the light and the Abu Dhabi media zone guidelines. These are important sections

of the book as the author attempts to follow the development of press freedoms presenting the improvements and potential changes in the media environment.

The second portion of the book addresses issues related to the regulation of the print, broadcast and digital media in the UAE. An introductory section citing Rugh's book reads like an extension to his work filling the reader in on key articles in the UAE that regulate the journalism profession. Much as earlier sections of the book, the author focuses on key restrictions. There is little reference to progress toward more or improved media freedoms, but perhaps there has been none.

Chapters 2 & 3 of Part 2 in this book look at the role of journalists in society and provide information on the limited rights that they enjoy and the lack of protection for journalists and their sources. Despite the factual documentation of reasons why journalists do not perform their functions as their international counterparts do, there is no reference in the analysis to how important freedom is to such individuals who perform in a social and culture environment that is specific to the region. The author does not frequently question how this environment may affect them. In some instance, interviews with journalists do shed some light and indicate that the UAE journalists can and do have influence and some independence.

Chapter 4 critiques the media regulator body and suggests that its lack of transparency contributes to further hampering journalism independence. Finally Chapter 5 adds advertising regulations as a contributing influence that impedes freedoms as the last piece to the puzzle.

Overall, this book maps the general UAE media situation in an explanatory, informative and straightforward fashion. Thought-provoking commentary challenges readers to want to know more about this subject. This book is an authoritative and up-to-date compilation of material that cannot be found easily in one source. Arguably,

though the author's analyses would have benefited from a more extensive review of the literature available on the Arab journalism culture. This would have helped with a better interpretation of the reasons for a media that does not necessarily match international views of journalism functions. Since religious, cultural and social norms play a role and contribute to the shape of media laws, according the author, the reader needs deeper knowledge about the implications of these norms and how they affect the individual journalist and media professional. Nonetheless, it is a book that belongs on every Arab media scholar's bookshelf; however it is not a book for media law specialists.