

**Noha Mellor, Nabil Dajani, Khalil Rinnawi, and
Muhammad I. Ayish (2011). Arab Media Globalization and
Emerging Media Industries. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
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There are moments while reading the book "Arab Media" that the reader will no doubt think of the authors and how they might be, at that very moment, making adjustments for a second edition to the physical work to take into consideration the many changes in the part of the world that they define in the first part of the book - Boundaries of the region as "the Arab-speaking countries in the Middle East" (p. 1); references to Qadhafi and Mubarak in the first section are no doubt high on the list of items in need of revision. This is just one of the pitfalls of a book of this nature - how to keep it timely when the medium in which it is presented is static. The other challenge in taking on such a massive subject as media in the Arab world is how to winnow the enormous amount of information down to fit inside the covers of one edition. Quite frankly each chapter in this book could be expanded to fill its own book. Nevertheless the authors clearly were setting out to create a one-stop resource for Arab media - and to a large extent they have succeeded in doing so. If the task of a reader is to gain an overview of Arab media, the book will allow them to accomplish this goal. As such, this book will be valuable for undergraduate courses that involve media globalization and looking at media in the Arab world.

“Arab Media” gives a good overview of the subject. It methodically tackles the various mediums one by one and from different perspectives. There are common refrains found in all the chapters, mainly dealing with a lack of accurate data and research on one hand, to low literacy levels, conflict, and state censorship on the other. So in this sense the book is seeking to shed greater light on the subject of Arab media by providing a review of what is known and has been researched, and to provide a building block and suggest further research.

All of the chapters provide key insights into Arab media, including numerous references to that which has been previously researched (often by the co-authors of the book). In the chapter on books, noted observer Mermier's quote that "Cairo writes, Beirut publishes, and Iraq reads" (p. 41) provides a short but meaningful take on the regional printing industry. It is also noted that there is a "paucity of Arabic books translated into foreign languages" as well as the reverse (p. 41). Even though it is acknowledged that there have been "immense technological developments" (p. 43), a serious flaw in Arabic publishing is also highlighted in the "scarcity of the publication and circulation of research and academic work" (p. 41). We see the term 'paucity' again in the chapter on radio, used to describe the amount of written research on Arab radio. The chapter on books ends with a call for more "Arabic cooperative ventures" (p. 43) to come together to tackle problems and find Arab solutions. This theme, that things must move forward, progress, and get better, is found throughout the book.

The chapter dealing with the press starts off with some historical notes, but quickly moves on to analyze the regulations imposed on the print media in the various countries in the Arab world, stating that it is "influenced by sociopolitical and geopolitical factors contributing to the materialization of the modern Arab states" (p. 47). The history and current situation for each country's press is then presented. The Gulf Region is handled in one section in which the authors reference previous research to highlight that the high salaries journalists now receive often come with a downside in that the governments impose a "rigid censorship" (p. 53) with the justification "to maintain political and social stability" (p. 61). The region's leaders are said to be cautious of western influence in the reporting of news and values imparted, while at the same

time mindful of religious sensitivities and attitudes towards leadership that must be respected and maintained. As is the case throughout the book, different geographic regions are sometimes delineated in order to discuss the media. The use of the terms Maghreb (western) and Mashriq (eastern) in order to draw distinctions and make comparisons within the Arab world appears a few times in the book. The authors mention that certain press freedoms were promised in Libya, but did not come to pass - portending recent events. The freedoms "did not materialize for the print media and the Libyan press remains tightly controlled" (p. 55). The chapter also indicates that the press has benefited from the increase of satellite television channels as this has "fractured the tight regulatory control on media content" (p. 61). In conclusion, the author says the challenge facing the Arab print media is not censorship, but "its inaccurate visualization of the meaning of freedom" (p. 65). The ultimate achievement of the Arab press, we are told, would be in serving the true interests of "the public and society, and not merely the politicians" (p. 66).

The radio chapter focuses mainly on post-1990 broadcasting in the Arab world by looking at "common features and trends" (p. 68) while acknowledging that the subject could well deserve a larger treatise and that there is a dearth of empirical research in this area. There were three influences stirring in and around the 1990s that instigated changes on the radio dial: 1) independent FM stations, 2) the advent of U.S. sponsored "Radio Sawa", and 3) changes in broadcast legislation. Ultimately the chapter traces a radio landscape that has seen radio's role morphing "from a tool of classical national development, to political mobilization, to community-based democratization" (p. 67).

As with several chapters, there is also a discussion of how computers and the Internet have come to play an increasingly important role with the traditional media, though the newer technology is still tightly controlled and not yet fully developed. One of the influences on radio in the post-colonial era was the fact that certain international stations were available in parts of the Arab world; as the BBC Arabic service for one provided a check against governmental radio broadcasts (p. 71). In the globalization era of today, "live talk shows addressing public issues have become standard formats on Arab radio" (p. 72) as some broadcasters have enjoyed greater

freedom in their efforts to entertain the masses. Similar to other places around the globe many stations depend on advertising and sponsorship to finance their operations, but they also "draw substantially on state subsidies to cover staff salaries and program production costs in addition to equipment acquisitions" (p. 73). In the 18 countries covered in the book, there are 316 FM reported radio stations in operation (AM is not mentioned here) and some "143 Web-based radio broadcast services" (p. 76). The norm is government control of broadcasting (p. 75), but laws and regulations vary greatly among countries of the Arab world. The authors attempt to pull together information from different sources, but the reality is that the big picture is a bit cloudy due to a lack of adequate information. There is no mention of Dubai 92 for example in the listing for U.A.E. stations, and Qatar is absent from the chapter's listing of "Selected Arab Radio Services". In some cases, the dates when specific events occurred are not entirely clear. We learn that Lebanon was first to privatize radio, but then we quickly read that "Egypt and Tunisia were the first countries...to allow private radio stations under a legal framework" (p. 74). Radio programming has featured national cultures and heritages, but also includes a large amount of religious programming; unlike some countries where religious programming is avoided (Singapore, for example). Quran recitations and live coverage of prayers are common on radio in the Arab world according to the book. The author calls for the building up of "a broad political culture of diversity and media independence that seems to be lacking in much of the Arab world" (p. 81). The radio chapter ends with a discussion of various international broadcasters whose signals reach the region. Radio Sawa is viewed "as an organ of the US State Department" - which of course it is - and this causes it to suffer in the credibility department. Finally we read that "radio has contributed to perpetuating political and sectarian divisions rather than...fostering a sense of national unity" (p. 84).

The book also features chapters on television broadcasting, Arab cinema, and Arab Internet, as well as a chapter with the title "When the Global meets the Local" in which the forces of globalization are analyzed in terms of how they impact the Arab world. The television chapter as one might guess has plenty of references to Al Jazeera. There is a slight activist theme that

runs through this chapter implying that television has more of an obligation to usher in a change for the better in Arab society. There is mention of the potential ills of the medium, but no mention of Egypt's 4Shbab which was the subject of a television feature airing on Al Jazeera at the time the reviewer was reading this chapter. The chapter on cinema highlights the historic role Egypt has played in this area, as well as the new finances available via the Gulf States. Noticeably absent in this discussion is the (arguably significant) role of Morocco in the film industry. In the Internet chapter we learn that Tunisia and Egypt were the first to get connected in the early 1990s (p. 126). Though we also learn that "[f]ormal and informal regulations prohibit uncontrolled free expression" (p. 135) on the Arab Net, and that it has "turned out to be an alternative virtual public sphere" (p. 137); we do not, however, get an appraisal of how these regulations fared and the role the Net played in the recent Arab Spring. To be fair, much of that literature is no doubt making its way to journals only now.

The final two chapters give a summation of the status of Arab media and a brief wrap up of the contents of the book that reviewed challenges and "discussed the impact of selected media industries on the pan-Arab public sphere" (p. 170). These are important areas and again, provide a cursory but well-researched look into the Arab media and their role in the countries examined and the global marketplace. Is the book complete, comprehensive, and absolutely current? The answer is decidedly no. This is partially due to the aim of the text (which is clearly to provide an overview, a starting point if you will) and also the "snapshot in time" nature of the printed book. But does it provide a concise and valuable overview of a vast subject? Here we can answer in the affirmative. The book (certainly the first chapter) will make a welcome addition (assigned reading?) to global media survey courses and courses dealing in general with pop culture, media, and to a lesser extent politics in the Middle East.