

All of this is very powerful stuff, giving the lie to fantasies that we are moving into an inherently ungovernable world of information. To be sure, the new modalities of regulation, which both constrict *and* enable certain kinds of markets, information flows, organization and uses, are very different in an age of information abundance. Yet, at the same time, there is an urgent need to understand how the passing of an 'old regime' of information and media governance is yielding, even if in tentative, ad hoc and not so coherent fashion, to a new framework. And it is to the authors', as well as Sandra Braman's, credit that this book goes a long way towards attaining such goals.

My main criticism of the book, and this is a criticism that applies to regime theory as a whole, is that there is no real rank-ordering of determinants on the processes that cause one regime to pass and another to form. Regime theory is to be lauded for the ecumenical and detailed empirical approach that it fosters towards complex questions of political economy, policy and international relations, but it *very much* needs to be enhanced by setting out some way of differentiating between the relative influence of various actors, ideas, knowledge and states. In short, regime theory is weak when it comes to understanding power. While this edited volume offers an otherwise excellent overview of the informational environment that is rapidly emerging around us, only a few of the authors highlight issues of power and, in the end, how we might turn the tide and choose between different options.

Reference

Lessig, L. (1999) *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*. New York: Basic Books.

Naomi Sakr (ed.)

Women and Media in the Middle East: Power through Self-Expression

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Naomi Sakr has chosen for her edited volume an under-researched area of concern to global media scholars. In the introduction to *Women and Media in the Middle East* Sakr states her ambitions of addressing both the structure and agency of women in the Middle East vis-a-vis their media

consumption and production. Admittedly the focus is widespread: 'from Morocco to Iran', 'from the 1860s to 2006', and 'from the printed press to film, television and the internet'. And perhaps the breadth is why the collection falls short of its goals and remains a general introduction. The chapters only present broad brush strokes of the differing realities of women, media and the Middle East and the possibility of deep theoretical, contextual and historical analysis is missed.

The 10 chapters loosely cover three main areas of study. Their focus ranges from women as producers of media to women as consumers of media, although there is equal concern on male-produced media for female audiences. There is no driving theoretical or methodological perspective threading the chapters together. Perhaps the one common feature is the overwhelming lack of 'power' and 'self-expression' women in the Middle East share; as such, a more appropriate sub-title might have been 'the struggle to represent'. Lacking a central focus or question, the book can only offer readers fragmented knowledge in a few useful chapters.

By far the best contribution is Firmo-Fontan's chapter on the relationship between Hezbollah and its television station, al-Manar. Providing excellent background on Lebanese politics and media, on the inconsistent role of NGOs, and Hezbollah's venture into media, the author questions whether the station is able to overcome power structures that promote existing social hierarchies or whether, unlike other media outlets, al-Manar constitutes a 'vector of social responsibility and national civic commitment'. Although more examples from al-Manar programming would have been helpful, the article presents a comprehensive analysis of the political and economic context of Hezbollah and television in post-war Lebanon.

Similarly, Khiabany and Sreberny's piece on women and the press in Iran provides a history of the structural conditions and an analysis of the various contradictory social, political and religious forces since the early 1900s that Iranian women have contended with. The authors delve into issues of Islamicization, women's struggles for democratic rights, women's mobilization and political participation, and, unlike Orientalists, do not narrow down the causes of the dire conditions of women's press as solely the fault of Islam.

Deborah Wheeler also surmounts simplistic descriptions of Arab nations as inherently 'slow to change' and analyses internet growth as both a blessing and a curse. Written with the underlying tone of a technological determinist, she balances regional statistical information on internet growth and narratives of five internet users in five different

countries, and concludes that internet growth rate is hindered by institutional factors such as cost, language barriers and literacy.

Dabbous also attempts to address societal issues through specific examples of three female journalists. Unlike Wheeler, however, she is unable to connect the particular stories to larger questions of women's rights and women's journalism in Egypt. Although laced with interesting anecdotes, the chapter is light on necessary information – basic statistical data, contextualizing the history of Egyptian press, women's roles in Egyptian society, the problems of illiteracy, whether female newspaper readers were upper class – and supplies little evidence to back up any of its claims.

Although freedom of the press was only guaranteed in 1996 and women are still waiting for suffrage rights, Al-Mughni and Tetreault rely on 40 years of history to paste together an image of Kuwait's 'renowned' free press and 'lively public debates'. Through the lens of Kuwaiti female activists, the authors argue that the fragmented and stereotypical representation of women in Kuwaiti media reflects neither the conservative status quo nor progressive liberalization. Skirting the issues of the lack of women's rights and the mistreatment of non-Kuwaiti nationals, one must wonder if the authors' critical stance has been hijacked by a political agenda of promoting Kuwaiti openness.

While the above-mentioned articles have a specific focus, others seem to have been written without one at all. Somiry-Batrawi's chapter on local Palestinian television fails to clarify what the article is about: women working in Palestinian media, women's shows in the Palestinian Territories, the destruction of Palestinian media by Israeli forces or a specific channel. She attempts to address all of these, yet manages to omit important information, offering minimal information on Palestinian media structures, television producers or audiences. Worse, she gives the impression that the Palestinian media landscape is ordinary and similar to other Middle Eastern nations, when it is anything but.

While the uniqueness of the Palestinian context is missing in one article, Khamis's piece on Egyptian women's readings of television literacy campaigns is so overly generalized that she may as well be writing about any society where illiteracy exists and women's roles are often traditional. The article uncritically supports claims made by audience research studies by fitting focus group findings, misleadingly called 'in-depth ethnographic audience research', into a laundry list of categories. Contributing little methodologically or theoretically, the chapter also fails to offer any insight into the 'neglected' and 'marginalized' research area of Egyptian rural women.

Conversely, with Egypt's strong history of film-making and scholars' rich analyses on the subject, it is surprising to find a lack of political economy analysis, or historical or cultural context in Khatib's piece on Egyptian cinema. The author pastes together film descriptions and other authors' analyses with overwhelming amounts of quotes and footnotes in order to make a very broad, non-committal conclusion that supposedly challenges 'the Orientalist treatment of women' and shows Egypt's 'multiple, historically varied meanings'. Smail Salhi's piece on Maghrebi women film-makers contains more substance than Khatib's gloss-over of Egyptian cinema. Although the writing is disorganized and interesting questions of the differences between Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are omitted (such as why Tunisia is more 'liberal'), the chapter provides exhaustive descriptions of films and compelling analyses. One only wishes that Smail Salhi would pursue her theoretical suggestions; for example, why and how is silence a form of expression for Maghrebi women?

The final chapter by Abu-Fadil on seven women working in the Lebanese and international media reads like a cross between a personal ad and a *Paris Match* or *Cosmo* 'woman of the month' piece. Filled with superficial information and simplistic statements such as 'she enjoys writing a column that sways opinion or changes attitudes', the chapter exhibits only elementary understanding of the media. Moreover, the fact that the author chooses to focus only on Lebanese women (when there are plenty of 'Arab Women Journalists' – as her title suggests) is a quickly forgotten problem given that the reader must struggle through a lack of context, research and critical insight. To end the book on such a note not only detracts from and discredits the seriousness of the subject matter, but sadly disappoints the reader.

Unfortunately the majority of the chapters lack theoretical attention, methodological rigor, and historical, political or economic contextualization. Were Sakr editing a volume on Western media and women, it is unlikely that her editor would have been as lenient with her inclusion of mediocre articles. The fact that we have few sources for learning about this under-represented topic is the book's saving grace – there is little competition in the area of 'women and media in the Middle East'. Despite the elementary skill or delivery of many of the chapters, the topics addressed are neither dull nor simplistic, and as such the book is a helpful introduction.