Journal of Religion, Media & Digital Culture (JRMDC)

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Barrie Gunter and Roger Dickinson (eds.), *News Media in the Arab World: A Study of 10 Arab and Muslim Countries*.

(New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.) 199pp. £18.99 paperback.
ISBN: 9781441174666

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/news-media-in-the-arab-world-9781441174666/>

Reviewer: Michael B. Munnik, University of Edinburgh

Barrie Gunter and Roger Dickinson open their volume with a necessary phrase: “News markets are evolving dramatically in the Middle East and across North Africa.” (p. 1) That serves as both a description and a warning: the time required to conduct a study, analyse and write up the findings, edit the various chapters, and bring the book to press renders the work dated for readers who want current information on a very newsworthy region. Gunter and Dickinson, as well as the various contributors, are clear about this limitation, but it nevertheless leaves readers with unanswered questions and presents distracting lacunae.

These constraints are mitigated by a sense of consistency across the volume. *News Media in the Arab World* is a showcase of the mass communications department of the University of Leicester. Gunter and Dickinson are both faculty, and all of the contributions are written by current or former graduate students and co-written by faculty members. Moreover, each of the student contributors is from the region, and they often write about the national context in which they have lived and worked.

This has both benefits and drawbacks. The renderings of media and political environments in places such as Bahrain, Egypt, and Libya are precise, and in political contexts where it might be difficult for British-born graduate students from the East Midlands to fly in and conduct fieldwork, these scholars have easier access. I was struck, for example, at the intimacy with which Mokhtar Elareshi and Julian Matthews were able to portray young news consumers in Tripoli, considering that Libya has been something of a blank spot on the map in comparison with Egypt to the east and Morocco to the west.

This familiarity can easily slip into indebtedness, however—especially if the scholar is returning to that political context to research, teach, or report. Ebrahim Abdulrahman Al-Shaikh and Vincent Campbell's chapter on Bahrain illustrates this concern: in a generally sound and interesting chapter, the political divisions in the tiny kingdom are not highlighted. I am thinking specifically of the sectarian and demographic split between the small Sunni elite and the large Shia population, which was a strong dynamic in the protests which erupted there in 2011. The closest we get to a discussion of this is a note that online forums often "contain sectarian hatred and incitement to violence against the other group, whether from Shia to Sunni or from Sunni to Shia. In the protests of 2011, a key difference was how the focus of these already existing disputes became directed towards the entire Bahrain state." (p. 157) This equivocal statement balances that which is imbalanced, and after leading readers to the precipice of the protests, the authors turn our attention to a theoretical discussion of political socialisation; the force of the state's response and the impact of the international community's inattention are nowhere discussed.

This pattern is repeated, and I will say as a general comment that although the chapters in this volume do a decent job at description, they are light on analysis. I am not sure that a tally of the newspapers, radio stations, television studios, and online news sources gives me sufficient insight into the news media of the Arab world. The authors and editors wisely avoid overblown rhetoric about news media, digital media, and the Arab Spring, but they swing too far the other way with a conservative, austere, and overwhelmingly quantitative assessment of journalism in the region.

The choice not to contribute to inflated depictions of the region's uprisings may be as convenient as it is duly cautious: by being too early to observe and assess these movements, authors do not need to commit themselves politically. This leads to some of the lacunae I mentioned above. Elareshi and Matthews declare early on that their work took place during Muammar Gaddafi's reign, so it does not represent the unsettled Libya we see now; the editors rightly note that, despite this, the study "helps to reveal the precise nature of the challenges facing indigenous news providers: where do the attractions of foreign news services lie for younger adult viewers?" (p. 181) The answer seems to be in sophisticated production values, producing the so-called "Al-Jazeera effect", which gives news reports credibility for these young Libyans and runs like a current through the volume.

Likewise, Hamza Mohammed and Barrie Gunter's discussion of Egypt is unfortunately remote from the events of Tahrir Square and their aftermath. The chapter seems

to conclude two thirds of the way in, resting on the findings from Mohammed's doctoral thesis that the newspapers remain the most influential news media in the country. This may have true during his fieldwork and even when he completed his thesis in 2008; it must be troubled since, and in fact the final third of the chapter goes on to discuss digital media and the status of Egyptian media under the rule of the military council. We learn that political bloggers are persecuted, arrested, and sentenced—a minor illustration of digital media's increased influence in the country.

On the whole, this is a decent survey of news media in the region. It is intelligently laid out, so that the chapters, drawn from different national contexts, reveal different aspects of the news media. We have chapters on production, content, and consumption. Whilst this might make the findings harder to generalise across regions (e.g., does the linking of television stations in Iraq to political parties pertain in other states?) it also saves the volume from repetition and provides chances for readers to explore further by consulting the references that speak to each chapter's focus. Whilst specialist readers will want more depth and data, it provides a good entry for the curious.

Scholars of religion, media, and digital culture may find the book unsatisfying, but in fairness, the book promises Arab media, not Muslim; and news media, not new media. It would be peculiar for a book on the news published in 2013 to ignore digital media, and these are discussed throughout the volume but not rigorously theorised. Islam, short of brief references to sectarian divisions and an insistence on religious content during certain periods, is not dealt with at all. But as a textured evocation of journalism in a bounded region of the world with a particular set of histories and challenges, *News Media in the Arab World* merits attention.