

❖ **Al-Maliki, Kaufer, Ishizaki, and Dreher, Kira – *Arab Women in Arab News Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, Bloomsbury Academic, London and New York, 2012, pp. 466 ISBN978-1-78093-042-8**

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A joint publication by Malki, Kaufer, Ishizaki and Dreher, *Arab women in Arab news*, as the name suggests, is research about the portrayal of Arab women in Arab media and it offers a unique view about the presence of Arab women in Arab media as compared to previous studies.

If you are tired of reading about submissive Arab women and weary of watching stereotypical images of veiled Arab females, this is the book for you. It not only highlights the representation of Arab women, but also how these women are represented by Arab women themselves working in the Arab media. The work of female Arab journalists is analysed in detail. Factors like education, gender equality, the powerful roles of these women in politics and business are discussed. The book sheds light on the complex nature of religion and class in an Arab society as well as the manner in which most Arab women tackle their personal lives, religion, careers and family by providing well-researched examples from the Arab media.

This book is divided into two main sections: description and rationale about the research process, followed by an extensive discussion of the results within their contextual relevance. The study deploys three main methods: content analysis is used for the first section, while grounded theory and textual analysis is used for the second section.

The first part, 'coding Arab females in Arab news', explains the reason for conducting this study, thus providing an extensive description of the methodology which can be useful for researchers conducting similar studies. The data for this book was gathered from relevant news briefs that were collected by licensing a database from mideastwire.com. These news briefs from September 2005 to June 2007 were translated into English using software for data analysis. Four liberal-pan Arab sources were selected for their coding scheme, these included *Al Hayat*, *Al Quds Al Arabi*, *Asharq Al Awsat* and *Elaph*. In total 237 news briefs were selected for Part I, and 178 for Part II.

This section also discusses the limitations and challenges faced by taking on such a broad topic. The analysis of a text translated from another language is a complex process and this complexity has been discussed in accordance with the existing literature. The detailed discussion about the coding scheme and its challenges clearly indicates the efforts that were put into neutralizing this complex research and maintaining its objectivity. The authors used three measures to differentiate between active and passive behaviour in news. These include 'Transitivity in language', 'News sources as active contributors to new stories', and 'Agents whose acts compose the news story'. However, it was later found that these measures alone were not enough for a sound data analysis, hence dimensions were added to the coding scheme. These included 'The Power/viewpoint dimension', 'Occupational dimension', 'Personal dimension', and 'Social dimension'.

A comprehensive background of Arab media outlets and the responses these received by audience is also discussed. The most significant finding from the coding study reveals that the stereotype of 'passive' Arab women in pre-internet media is not a dominant representation in their sample of Arab news. According to the book, "Arab women in the news of their own soil have voices that form the constructive basis of news narratives" (71). This summarises the main argument of the book.

The second part, 'Canvassing Arab females in Arab news' takes an in-depth look at Arab women in the Arab news. The case studies provided in the book present an insight into different women from different walks of life. The authors reveal that Arab women in Arab media are involved in continuous monitoring and documenting of their own culture, the societal shortcomings, their sufferings and their success. In this way Arab women are represented in a similar light as women all around the world. This representation is starkly in contrast with the representation of Arab women as submissive, passive, voiceless, forcibly veiled individuals who are continuously being suppressed.

Based on their data findings, the authors argue that Arab women have used their anger as a form of resistance in order to speak up for gender equality. They mention different case studies from various Arab countries and these include Kuwaiti females' anger against the government and anger against female tokenism in Bahrain. Similarly the authors identify aspiration

as an important factor that has made Arab women determine and focus-driven. The cases studies for this subsection include both collectivist stories and individual examples from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine. Both active and passive frames have been identified in the data for capability and choice, which suggest that Arab women are not as submissive and inactive as they are portrayed in the Western mainstream media. Additionally, stories about incentives and initiatives taken by women from countries like Mauritius and Lebanon are also discussed. All of these have been grounded in both a quantitative data and qualitative analysis, which makes it a very informative read.

The alarming state of education in the Arab world has also been examined and factors that have contributed to the decrease of literacy rates are explored and the rationale for the difference between countries like Morocco, Algeria, Syria and Saudi Arabia is investigated. Most of these discussions include female Arab interviewees interviewed by female Arab reporters. An in-depth overview of the existing patterns of society has been presented. The authors have not attempted to whitewash the dark patches of Arab society and the way women are represented in Arab media. Stories about limited choices with respect to education and employment is discussed but this is contextualised within a framework of a deeper understanding of the way society works. The authors state that:

[w]hen studied below the sociological surface [...] the issues of women and education that are touched on in our corpus look to be even deeper than gender. They also involve considerations of class and, perhaps more importantly, the conflict between a value system that prizes liberal education, critical thinking or progressive change (143).

An interesting finding in this book is that the highest number of news briefs about women employment, business and entrepreneurship was in relation to Saudi women. Despite the very limited presence of news briefs about Arab women in employment, this book offers a detailed analysis of Saudi Arabian traditions and customs, recent developments that took place for women under the reign of King Abdullah, and the response to these changes. This discussion sheds light on a very complicated issue in a very different society that functions on a different model compared to that of Western countries. Many interesting yet complicated points have been highlighted in a very simple narrative.

The authors also discuss differences between empowerment and employment. An entire chapter analyses three sub-sections under empowerment that were identified in the news briefs. These include achievement, authority and pioneering. Examples of women active in running Madrassahs that provide Islamic education have been discussed along with women running entrepreneurship. An important point that this chapter raises is that of Arab women are 'caught in in the vortex of the competing ideologies of Islamization and globalization' (207). However many of these have found a compromise between these two conflicting ideologies. The book points out that:

[t]hey wear Western clothing under their *abayas*, rely on Facebook and Twitter, seek educational opportunity and economic advancement in a gender equal society, year for freedom and human rights, and want to remain respectful Muslim women (212).

The authors suggest that the lives of these women can be a framework for new theoretical principles and models of networking between two different ideologies.

There is a detailed discussion about fear and threat in war zones, as well as outside war zones, in addition to how occurrences like rape, physical violence, kidnap, murder, have been addressed in the news briefs and how they affect women experiencing them, both directly and indirectly. Incidents where women have been kidnapped but treated with respect and dignity are also identified. An interesting news brief about a girl who enjoys horror movies but is indifferent towards romantic movies, is described. The authors consider this a reaction generated from fear that has spread due to the daily, real-life horror stories received by people directly or through the media. Issues like misogyny, the cultural acceptance of patriarchy, and sadness and hopelessness about their future and their families have also been identified in the data and discussed with the relevant examples.

This book portrays an image of Arab women in Arab news as an active achiever in a struggle for both human rights and gender equality. Al-Maliki, the primary author, herself is an Arab woman and has used her insight to elaborate on the complicated function of an Arab society. The links between class, religion, status, education, and political conditions between different Arab countries, and the role of women amidst this, have been explored. It could have been a smaller book as some of the points are repetitive, mostly in order to clarify, but perhaps are slightly redundant. However, overall this book offers a very well-researched and in-depth analysis with relevance to the context making it a distinctly informative piece of work which breaks through the traditional perceptions about Arab women in Arab media as well as highlights intricate complexities of their lives.

About the reviewer

Wajeedah Aayeshah is working on her PhD in Journalism and Games from Swinburne Institute of Technology, Melbourne. She is currently tutoring media and communication courses. Her research interests include: Media and Journalism Education, Journalism, Alternate Reality Games, Education Technology and Social development, Representation of Islam and Muslims in media, and Intercultural communication.