Naomi Sakr chose a timely issue for her book, *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-Expression* -- namely the empowerment of women through the media in the Middle East. There has been a lot of talk recently in this part of the world both about reforming the media and the empowerment of women, and so putting the two together produces a much-needed discussion.

Sakr is a London-based media researcher and academic specializing in Arab media. Having lived and traveled extensively in the region, and being married to an Arab, she has an understanding of Arab culture and politics that few Westerners possess.

Written mostly from a critical cultural perspective, the book features a collection of essays about various types of media. It includes eleven chapters pertaining to women’s issues in Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Kuwait, the Palestinian territories, and Lebanon. Media covered include print journalism, radio, television, satellite broadcasting, film, and the Internet. Contributors include some prominent names in Arab media research, including Sonia Dabbous and Annabelle Sreberny (who originally encouraged Sakr to undertake this project), Magda Abu-Fadil, and Deborah Wheeler (who contributes a chapter on women's Internet use in the Arab world).

One of the most interesting chapters is on women's journalism in pre-1952 Egypt. The chapter is written by Sonia Dabbous, a prominent media historian who teaches at the American University in Cairo and is also assistant editor-in-chief of *Akhbar el Youm* (News of the Day), one of the most widely read publishing houses in the Arab world. Dabbous argues that "the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of a considerable number of publications in which women took the lead in sharing information and awareness about their rights" (39). The chapter looks at this important period in Egyptian women's rights history, and tracks down the most important changes through the lives and works of three female journalists who represent landmarks in Egyptian history: Malak Hefni Nassef, Mounira Thabet, and Doreya Shafiq.

Another interesting chapter is by Magda Abu-Fadil, who discusses the lives and career challenges of Arab women journalists in the Arab world and abroad. Abu-Fadil argues that the attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States probed Arab leaders to face up to the challenge of media coverage and media globalization to ensure that the news flow is somehow balanced, particularly with regards to coverage of Arabs and Muslims in the West. To help face that challenge, Arabs need "an army of articulate communicators" (180). Women come in to fill some of this gap. In Abu-Fadil's words, "the Arab world has a reservoir of experienced multilingual women journalists, whose voices have the
potential to surmount the wall of provocative bluster and help to bridge the knowledge gap between the Arab world and the West" (180). Through interviews with seven female Arab media personalities, Abu-Fadil discusses their careers, their hopes and aspirations, and the challenges they face as females (some of them war reporters) in a primarily man's field.

Victoria Firmo-Fontan contributes a chapter on Lebanese television -- in particular, a case study of Al-Manar TV and the Hizbollah Women's Association, the social movement that runs the television station. Writing her chapter before the assassination of Rafiq Al Hariri, the author still sets the context by saying that Lebanon is in a state of what she calls "negative peace, whereby its citizens live alongside one another without resorting to armed violence, but do not live together as a nation" (162). The author analyzes the relationship between women's groups and the media in an effort to examine approaches to social responsibility in Lebanon. Through Al-Manar TV and the Hizbollah Women's Association, the author aims to uncover whether the media and their messages reinforce or challenge the power relations in Lebanese society, which has often been divided along religious lines. Firmo-Fontan concludes that "civil society and television in Lebanon can be seen to evolve in a one-way relationship with the realm of 'power.' The most they can do is to promote the existing social order in post-war Lebanon that is marked by polarization, retribution, and a hierarchy in which success for groups and individuals is achieved at the expense of one's 'Other'" (179).

In her chapter on new media, Wheeler gives a qualitative account of female Internet use habits in five Arab countries: Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain. She examines the Internet history and culture in each of these countries, and concludes that the commonly-held stereotype that "women in the Arab world are in the deepest recesses of the digital divide" is flawed (138). Wheeler contends that the Internet in the Middle East is regarded as a solution for the lack of capabilities and opportunities in this part of the world. Through one-on-one interviews, Wheeler tries to answer the question of "how far the Internet can enable women to increase their power and influence in both public and private spheres and how far that process is obstructed by local constraints" (144). She argues that in the public sphere, the Internet empowers women by providing a medium for their voice, and provides access to information about women's rights worldwide. Professionally, Internet literacy strengthens women's edge in the job market and increases their value in the market place. In the private sphere, the Internet offers a link to family members and friends, particularly those who lack geographical proximity. Wheeler's interviews, conducted online as well as face-to-face, also explore the process of diffusion of the Internet among women: how and why they become users, what they find to be most advantageous about the new technology, how they think other women could be drawn into the experience of using the Internet, and what they think will be the effect of the new medium on women's lives in the region.

Women and Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-Expression is written in interesting, easy-to-follow language. It is not particularly research-oriented in the positivist sense, and therefore does not require a strong background in media theory/research tradition or a knowledge of technical terminology on the part of the reader. It is targeted at the general reader with an interest in topics of women's issues, media, new media, and the Middle East.

The book offers a variety of interesting articles that relate media, old and new, to a population that is underutilized, namely, women in the Arab world. It capitalizes on the efforts of some of these women and reminds us of the great potential that could come through for this part of the world if women's power is well educated, developed, and organized. In doing so, the book taps on two important agents of development, media and women, and gives us hope for a brighter future for the Middle East if the power of media is used to bring about positive change by and for these women.

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