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Naomi Sakr. *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. xviii + 109 pp. $25.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-78076-589-1.

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Among the urgent and fascinating questions posed by the uprisings in North Africa and other parts of the Arab world in the past couple of years are those related to the scope and sustainability of the political and social transformations they sought to usher in. If these states and societies are in transition to something less repressive and more equitable, they will need to see change in core institutions inside and outside the state. Among the most consequential institutions are the media, both as watchdogs over other public actors and in their potential to empower an informed citizenry.

The uprising in Egypt, the most populous Arab country, has both intrinsic and theoretical importance, and its long-influential media is probably the most analyzed in the region. Naomi Sakr's useful new study of the rapid changes in Egyptian journalism over the past decade offers some hope that Egyptians might be able to get the media they need to support and sustain real, progressive political and social development. But it is also clear-eyed about the many challenges ahead: "good journalism is not possible in corrupt environments" (p. 93). The most important question is whether Egyptian journalists will be able to liberate their profession from institutional inertia, nepotism and other corrupt practices, and an illiberal political environment. Despite some notable diversification in platforms and ownership away from the state near-monopoly of previous decades, Egyptian media have yet to see the consolidation of ethical norms and financial independence of the kind necessary to support the professionalism to which many journalists there aspire. Comparative studies of media systems show that such transformations are far from automatic, that diversification does not in itself lead to high ethical and other standards: "there is no necessary connection between commercialization of media and neutral professionalism".[1] Sakr's contribution here is to chronicle the changes so far, and to offer well-informed recommendations on next steps.

The book, published in association with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at

the University of Oxford, is composed of five short chapters and an executive summary, along with very useful reference material, including an historical background and guide to Egyptian media outlets. The longer historical context combines with biographical sketches of prominent media professionals presented in chapter 2 to show how "present-day idiosyncrasies of journalism in Egypt owe a great deal to historically specific structures created by state media monopolies under Nasser and by the partial, mostly false, liberalization measures taken under Sadat and Mubarak. They also reflect a tradition of resistance to those structures on the part of a significant number of Egyptian journalists" (p. 89).

The arc of the argument is thus an explanation of the context--legal, economic, and political--within which some journalists have attempted to bring their work closer to international professional norms, "challenges mounted by many different kinds of news reporters, paid and unpaid, not only to the political status quo but, more fundamentally, to the social order in media institutions and beyond" (p. 3). The focus is on the past decade, during which a certain diversification did indeed take place, even before 2011. But the "institutional, legal, judicial, physical, and moral forms of coercion of media practitioners" (p. 4) described are consistent with state practices throughout the Mubarak period and earlier.

The prospects for a sustained, vibrant, pluralistic media ecosystem are mixed, at best. "In any society, the potential for public opinion to be articulated comprehensively and accurately is bound up with the system of media ownership and regulation" (p. 49). The diversification of platforms and ownership in the late Mubarak period did not extend beyond those who would defend the status quo (p. 70). The uprising of 2011 ushered in a period in which a wider diversity of actors and perspectives found their place in the public sphere. But since then, Sakr reports, "[a]s owners from the Mubarak era reasserted control over privately owned print and broadcast media, journalists in these media discovered they still could not count on their employers to support professionalism and free speech" (p. 91). The efforts of professionals to raise standards hence demand not only legal reforms to better protect journalists, but also the emergence of financially independent media, the restructuring of state-owned media organizations, and a genuine public service ethos that can inhabit the new or reformed entities.

The state's broadcast organization, ERTU, is in many ways most urgently in need of thorough reform, although the state's newspaper groups such as Al Ahram also have a large and unhelpful impact on the media environment. The size of the task is daunting. ERTU "has a workforce of 43,000 for the same reasons as the state-run press has around 31,000; namely that massive overstaffing in state organizations, partly driven by nepotism, traditionally helped to mask real unemployment rates" (p. 64). Within the news sector of ERTU, serving its various radio and television stations, "[a]t the start of 2011, between 3,000 and 3,500 people reported to [Abdel-Latif el-] Menawy as head of news. Menawy says he 'only needed' 350 and 'really worked' with fewer than 100" (p. 66). To turn these behemoths into effective, professional, public-service media organizations will involve more political will than appears to be available in Egypt today, at least in the short term.

Sakr's eight main recommendations are sensible (summarized on pp. ix-x). They address legal reform, ethics, the transformation of state-owned entities into public-service organizations, and journalists' union rights. Taking a cue from veteran human rights lawyer Negad al-Borei's injunction--"Don't waste money on training. The problem is not a lack of information or qualifications but the difficulty of building economically viable institutions" (p. 85)--Sakr urges international donors to "think creatively about the capacity-building needs of small-scale and/or regional

news-gathering and distribution initiatives" (p. x) that are unsustainable given current patterns of ownership, advertising practices, and Egypt's perennial metropolitan bias. Her recommendation on legal reform implicitly supports what she notes elsewhere has been the focus of some efforts by donors and trainers: investigative journalism (p. 86), something that will be essential if Egypt is to emerge as a functioning democracy with media holding public figures to account.

There are no great methodological or theoretical innovations here, but that is not the point. The report will be of most use and interest as an intervention in policy debates, with sound recommendations aimed at media professionals and their organizations, in Egypt and internationally, and donors. But there is much here that will be of interest to scholars of communications and of comparative politics, such as Sakr's accounts of career trajectories and of the shifts in the legal and economic environment in which Egyptian journalists carry out their work. It could easily find a niche in courses at the undergraduate level or higher on the Arab uprisings, on media in the region, or on transitions from authoritarianism.

Note

[1]. Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, ***Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 286.