Review of "The Israeli-Egyptian Peace Process in Reporting of Western Journalists"

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The Israeli-Egyptian Peace Process in the Reporting of Western Journalists, by Mohammed el-Nawawy. Westport, CT and London, UK: Ablex Publishing, 2002. xiv + 187 pages. Appends. to p. 189. Refs. to p. 209. Index to p. 214. $64.95 cloth; 24.95 paper.

Reviewed by Marwan M. Kraidy

Numerous books have explored conflict and the peace process in the Middle East, but few have surveyed the Western journalists who report on Middle Eastern affairs. In *The Israeli-Egyptian Peace Process in the Reporting of Western Journalists*, Mohammed el-Nawawy, assistant professor of journalism at Western Florida University, explores the work of Western journalists in Egypt and Israel and their reporting of the Egyptian-Israeli peace process.

The book is based on 168 personal interviews — 94 in Israel and 74 in Egypt — with Western correspondents. It is organized in 15 chapters, in addition to an introduction and epilogue. Chapters 1 through 6 provide historical and cultural background information, including a comparative analysis of Israeli and Egyptian cultures and a personal narrative in chapter 5 in which el-Nawawy documents his everyday experiences with Israelis and Egyptians. Chapter 7 describes the correspondents' professional roles, and chapters 10 through 13 focus on censorship and state-media relations in the two countries. The last three chapters carry the analysis and conclusions of the study. All of the chapters are written clearly and concisely.

According to el-Nawawy, Western journalists in Egypt and Israel are fully aware of the complexity of the Middle Eastern conflict and the search for peace.

More than two-thirds of the Western correspondents in Israel and Egypt interviewed for this study rate "providing analysis of complex problems" as an "extremely important" professional role, and more than half give the same rating to both "investigating government claims" and "getting information to the public quickly" (p. 155).

El-Nawawy finds that Western correspondents do not fully trust information provided by the Egyptian and Israeli governments. Rather, they believe that the Israeli government has a sophisticated public relations apparatus that provides large quantities of selectively presented information. They perceive Egyptian officials to be less adept at dealing with Western correspondents, less accessible, and more difficult to reach than their Israeli counterparts. As a result, the author concludes, "correspondents think the Israeli government is more successful in presenting itself as having a more credible public relations apparatus than the Egyptian government" (p. 159). El-Nawawy also finds that Western correspondents find it more arduous to establish a network of informal sources in Egypt than in Israel.

Some Western correspondents believe that religion and religious differences played an important role in determining their access to information, in both Egypt and Israel, but others do not think religion has had any influence on the way they have fulfilled their professional obligations. Nationality, however, emerged as a more decisive factor, as many US correspondents believe they enjoyed better access to Egyptian and Israeli officials than did correspondents of other nationalities. Overall, Western correspondents perceive Egyptian officials to have been suspicious of their activities, while regarding Israeli officials to have been open and to have had a better understanding of Western journalistic practices.

In the conclusion, el-Nawawy argues that Western correspondents are not solely to be blamed for presenting the

Arab-Israeli conflict in Western news media "primarily from the Israeli side" (p. 185). Rather, Western correspondents are, for the most part, conscientious in trying to understand events from both sides. The challenge resides in that "Israelis play to and support these efforts" while "Egyptians resist and confound them" (p. 186). The author concludes with a recommendation for Egyptian, and by extension Arab, officials, not to deal with Western correspondents as opponents, but rather to treat them as a communicative channel to Israel and the rest of the world.

The book's most important contribution is its reliance on primary sources and first-hand information. This is noteworthy because comparative media analyses between Arab countries and Israel are virtually non-existent. Ideally, the book would have included an analysis of the institutional factors affecting the work of Western correspondents in Israel and Egypt. Also, while cultural factors undoubtedly influence the work of correspondents, an analysis of the impact of the correspondents' own countries' relations with Israel and Egypt on their reporting, might have expanded the book's appeal. Nonetheless, El-Nawawy's effort is laudable in that it provides a wealth of first-hand information about a group of professionals whose work influences Middle Eastern and international politics.

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MODERN HISTORY AND POLITICS

al-Demoqratiyah wa Tahadiyat al-Hadatna bayn al-Sharq wa al-Gharb [Challenges of Modernity: Western and Islamic Perspectives], by Iliya Harik. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Saqi, 2001. (in Arabic). 413 pages. n.p.

Reviewed by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im

In this book, Iliya Harik presents a powerful argument for the adaptation of democracy as an ideology in order for it to be transplanted effectively and rooted in the cultural and political context of Arab/Islamic countries, and African/Asian societies in general. He calls for disaggregating the concept of democracy and reformulating its individual components, and suggests a dynamic and pragmatic understanding of democracy as a framework for mediating competing interests, rather than a purported ready solution for issues of justice and freedom. To this end, he offers a well-informed and thoughtful critique of certain Western assumptions (chapter 2), and defines modernity as a dynamic response to emerging concerns in accordance with the requirements of time and place, rather than a fixed model (pp. 244-45).

Harik's confident, well-informed, and realistic approach to adapting and rooting democracy in Arab/Islamic societies is timely and welcome for its serious engagement of the most controversial issues of modernity and the relationship between Islam and the state. His commanding view of both Western and Arab/Islamic discourse on the subject enables him to explain and document the diversity of Western experiences with secularism, and similarities in the role of religious identity in the state and society in some Western countries and the Islamic situation in general. He offers a critical assessment of the views of leading Muslim scholars on the subject, and endorses the views of those who uphold the concurrence of democracy and secularization. At the same time, he emphasizes the critical difference between Western and Islamic discourses, namely, the absence of a religious frame of reference for policy and legislation in Western countries, in contrast to the situation in all Islamic countries, at least in