

A Public Journalism Model for the Middle East and North Africa: Developing Media-NGO Relationships in Emerging Civil Societies

Introduction

During the 1990s, non-governmental organizations proliferated by the thousands in Middle East and North African countries governed by what are termed liberalizing or “partial” autocracies.¹ This growth of NGOs and the general emergence of civil society have been phenomenal considering the persistence of authoritarianism as “an enduring and common feature of the Islamic world and Middle East political systems.”² In analyzing the rationale of liberalizing autocracies, Daniel Blumberg argues that liberalization expands and contracts to suit the rulers. “The web-like quality of this political ecosystem both helps partial autocracies to survive and makes their rulers unwilling to give up final control over any strand of the whole.”³

NGOs came to be seen as foci for emerging democratic forces in the Middle East and North Africa. But in post-9/11 analyses, NGOs are not seen as harbingers of democracy but as adjuncts to a “durable” liberalized autocracy.⁴ As such, NGOs provide useful assistance to the region’s autocracies but do not replace them. John Kelsay explains civil society organizations as expressions of a larger indigenous political compact: “complementarity.” Complementarity is a familiar pattern in the Muslim world, evidenced by the power sharing between religious and political leaders. “Islam’s emphasis on the complementarity of religion and politics creates a number of possibilities

for the relationship between the religious community and state authorities; or more generally, between civil society and government.”⁵

In many cases, NGOs were created to address needs not being met by liberalized autocracies because of recent international and domestic developments. The loss of foreign aid from the Soviet Union created “significant pressures on the traditional relationship between the state and society in the region.” Regimes whose bargain for maintaining power required providing extensive social services suddenly reduced or eliminated some services despite growing urban populations. Financial pressures also led regimes to reconfigure long-standing economic policies, seeking foreign capital investments to “privatize” state-owned industries that previously had offered almost guaranteed employment. Meanwhile, improved access to education and to global communications was making populations more literate, more informed and more open to citizen involvement through the NGO movements.⁶

Across the Arab World today, many NGOs have developed plans of action concerned with a wide variety of issues and needs which until recent years were associated only with official government action, or inaction. These include: (1) concerns of daily life, such as access to drinking water in rural areas, prevention and treatment of disease, purity of food, and juvenile homelessness evidenced in some countries by ubiquitous “street boys,” (2) conflicts with cultural or tribal traditions, such as the advocacy of education for girls, (3) human rights issues, such as abuse in the criminal justice system, violence against women and “honor” killings, (4) economic issues, such as unemployment and lack of start-up funding for small or “micro” businesses, and

(5) environmental concerns, such as the preservation of public places and protection of the natural environment.⁷

International media play a key role in publicizing the global trend toward development of NGOs. Less certain, however, is the relationship of the media to NGOs within Middle East and North African countries. Presumably, if civil society organizations were to follow the pattern of NGOs in the West, they would cultivate relationships with the media. Such relationships with traditional and new media help advance NGOs' goals and objectives in five significant ways: (1) project NGOs' legitimacy in the public mind, (2) expand the distribution of messages to wider audiences, (3) help mobilize citizens to respond to specific needs, (4) strengthen NGOs' voluntary organizational networks and attract new volunteer workers, and (5) provide evidence of the shepherding of existing funding and help attract new funding sources.⁸

The partial autocracies in the Arab World are ambivalent to the media-NGO relationships. They are seen in some quarters as a form of "privatization" in the social realm, mobilizing citizens to address needs not met satisfactorily by the state. Others in government regard the relationships as competing power centers, a risk or potential threat to the state, especially if the NGOs are funded by foreign public or private sources.⁹

Given the potential impact of media-NGO cooperation in the development of civil society initiatives in partial autocracies, it is of value to look at the applicability of public journalism to the relationship.

Public journalism developed in the context of American media and culture. The movement has been variously called civic journalism, participatory journalism or community journalism. Originating in the late 1980s and early 1990s, public journalism

projects focused media resources on covering public issues as a way to “reduce people’s disconnection with public life.”¹⁰

Although public journalism has been identified almost entirely with the media and communities in the United States, the movement’s ideas and applications are not bound to any one country or culture. With modifications sensitive to other cultures, public journalism can be useful for both journalists and their publics. Applicability can extend to cultures without a tradition of press freedom and civic responsibility, as in partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa, insofar as the concepts prove useful in current situations.¹¹

The phenomenal growth of the region’s non-governmental organizations as representatives or mediators for public causes signals an expanding sense of civil society. The purpose of this research is to examine how the media and NGOs might work with each other to develop a model of public journalism in partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa.

NGOs have grown according to their ability to identify with needs not met by governments or charities in the Arab World. Volunteer help and financial support comes from sources both inside their countries and internationally. Given their external support, NGOs are required to register within the countries where they operate. Registration usually requires disclosure of officers, sources of funding, and beneficiaries of expenditures.

In the Arab World where there is little or not tradition of civic empowerment, the growth of the NGO movement represents a historic coalescence of societal involvement at the grassroots level. Although NGOs in no way represent all points of view on any

specific issue, they do provide an organizational nucleus around which civic discourse can occur and where plans of action can be developed and undertaken.

Typically, media in the region are owned by the governments. Although some newspapers and magazines have freedom to publish without direct censorship, journalists nonetheless observe pre-publication self-censorship and are subjected to post-publication government confiscation, fines and imprisonment. Some newspapers have expanded editorial independence by publishing in Europe. Nearly all television and radio broadcasting in the Arab World is owned by governments which control the messages directly or indirectly.

In pre-workshop exploration, the authors identified rudiments of public journalism practiced in the Middle East and North Africa. Clear differences emerge in that (1) media are government owned or influenced, (2) social concerns are represented by NGOs rather than by loosely organized gatherings of citizens, and (3) interactions between the media and NGOs occur not in a democracy but in partial autocracies. Nonetheless, the authors saw this interaction as a variant of public journalism that could be examined and tested in a non-democratic society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recognizing the rapid growth and importance of NGOs, aided by expanding communication capabilities of mass media, four research questions were posed:

- (1) How well do the media and NGOs work together to advance civil society initiatives in partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa?

- (2) What obstacles do the media and NGOs face in working together to advance civil society initiatives in partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa?
- (3) Can public journalism criteria developed in the United States be applied in partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa?
- (4) Can an indigenous model for public journalism be developed for partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa?

METHODOLOGY

Before the methodological approach is discussed, it is necessary to define the concept of non-governmental organizations more rigorously for the limited theoretical framework of this research. Existing literature on NGOs has begun to stress the need for specificity.¹²

When American decision makers use the term, they tend to have in mind organizations explicitly independent of state power, usually secular in purpose and organized to expand rights and services within their societies. In other parts of the world, especially the Middle East and North Africa, NGOs tend to cover a far wider range of social activities and services, including faith-based social service organizations and the whole range of welfare providers. Although NGOs in partial autocracies may function independently of government, their funding and activities are subject to monitoring and surveillance as potential rivals of the state.¹³ This research adopted the international definition of NGOs as opposed to the American one. This clarification of NGOs will eliminate most hurdles in our understanding of their relationships with the media.

We adapted a definition of public journalism developed by one of the movement's originators, Jay Rosen. Our analysis of whether public journalism applies to the Arab World is largely based on how he defines the process by which the media: (1) address people as potential participants in public affairs, (2) help the political community act upon its problems, (3) improve the climate of public discussion, and (4) speak honestly about civic values and take on the role as a public actor.¹⁴

These criteria were chosen because they describe central characteristics of public journalism as they relate to its original purpose: a process “to reduce people’s disconnection with public life.” Although there are numerous other interpretations of public journalism, many of them can be categorized as insightful reflections on the ramifications of the process.¹⁵

This research applies the four tenets, or criteria, to six case studies the authors developed in the Middle East and North Africa.

Case study methodology is appropriate in analyzing the complex dynamics involved in public journalism. Notable applications of this methodology are the basis for much of the literature on the subject, including the books *Civic Journalism: Six Case Studies*,¹⁶ *Don't Stop There! Five Adventures in Civic Journalism*,¹⁷ and *The People's Choice: The Media, The Campaign, and the Citizens*.¹⁸

Study of a complex social phenomenon through a thorough examination of an individual case provides an opportunity for intensive analysis of many specific details often overlooked by other methods and permits the drawing of inferences and generalizations applicable to other cases of the same type.¹⁹ Further, case studies as

experiments “generally play a greater role in the evaluation of interventions”²⁰ such as those in this study.

The six case studies were developed during a series of workshops between September 1999 and December 2002 with Middle East and North African journalists and NGO representatives in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, United Arab Emirates and the Palestinian National Authority. These five countries and the Palestinian National Authority were chosen because they represent diverse populations living in partial autocracies in three regions across the Arab World: the *Magreb* region of North Africa, the Middle East, and the Arabian Gulf.

The workshop structure was chosen for three reasons: (1) it provided a forum for free expression of successes and obstacles in the media-NGO relationships; (2) the dynamics created an intense laboratory in which the media-NGO cooperation could be openly tested in various stages; and (3) it provided for specific outcomes. The outcomes were production of cooperatively written media-NGO stories, publication of the stories, which sometimes were revised for broadcast, in a special supplement distributed inside a major daily newspaper in the workshop country, and development of an expandable network linking workshop participants.

Each workshop paired 10 to 12 journalists with a similar number of NGOs. Participants were nominated from within each country, with final selections made by the workshop organizers. Journalists were chosen from indigenous print and broadcast media, with concern for diversity in gender and professional experience. NGO representatives were chosen from a variety of organizations representing a broad

spectrum of community issues, with concern for diversity in gender and degrees of experience in working with the media.

For the case studies the authors selected examples of media-NGO cooperation that came closest to advancing a potential model for public journalism. Because our purpose is to determine the applicability and utility of public journalism to the region, we chose one case from each of the five countries and the Palestinian National Authority that best contributes to an understanding of the dynamics of a public journalism model in partial autocracies.

CASE STUDIES

Egypt: Street Boys

Mouchira Moussa is a journalist for *Al Ahram*, Egypt's largest newspaper, published in Cairo. She specializes in writing stories about the city's social problems and in the 1990s became particularly interested in the plight of young boys who lived on the streets, worked for menial wages or begged for money. They obviously did not attend school and were joining the ranks of the illiterates. Her interest in the "street boys" led her to join a NGO dedicated to helping them.

At *Al Ahram*, Moussa wrote a series of stories that underscored the nature and extent of the problem. With her interviews and photographs she personalized the issue, giving "faces" to the otherwise anonymous boys whom everyone in the city notices but seldom saw.

Simultaneously, she published ideas for possible public and private solutions. She featured the efforts of the private organization which she had joined. The NGO has a

building where street boys can live and attend school until they graduate. She is particularly proud of one young man named Ahmed who came off the streets and now has graduated from college.

Working in concert with the NGO over a period of time – rather than on one isolated and more easily forgettable occasion – Moussa kept a spotlight on this issue and mobilized public opinion and volunteer support.

The media-NGO relationship worked effectively largely due to the initiative of one concerned, skilled and senior journalist. She distinguished herself as both an advocate for the NGO's cause and as a master storyteller.

An initial challenge to her success with the story lay in the fact that homelessness was an old problem to which citizens of Cairo had become complacent. Moussa overcame this civic insensitivity by humanizing the problem with personal interviews and photographs. She portrayed the homelessness of boys as a social challenge distinct from adult homelessness. The civic importance of salvaging the lives of homeless boys was communicated graphically through cooperation between the journalist and the exemplary NGO.²¹

Three of the tenets of public journalism correlated with this case. In publicizing the problems and solutions for homeless youth, Moussa and *Al Ahram* addressed citizens as “potential participants in public affairs.” Focused on non-profit and volunteer efforts, the stories clearly gave the community options for acting upon a problem. The newspaper stories addressed citizens of Cairo as potential volunteers in public affairs. This was done in part by speaking honestly about civic values.

There was no evidence, however, that the media-NGO link improved the climate of public discourse.

Jordan: Victims of Conflict

A victim of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a 14-year-old Palestinian girl stepped on a land mine while herding her family's four sheep. Hania underwent emergency surgery at a hospital near her refugee camp in Gaza. She lost both feet. "I would have felt more pain and hurt," Hania told a journalist, "had I lost one of my sheep."²²

Through the cooperation of two NGOs, one in Gaza and the other in Jordan, Hania was transported via Cairo to Amman where her wounds were treated and arrangements were made to take her to Iran for rehabilitation and prosthetics.

In Amman, journalist Aman Al-Sayeh represented the story of Hania as symbolic of the work of NGOs during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which began in September 2000. The NGOs in the Palestinian areas cooperate closely with those in Jordan, where the population is at least 50 percent Palestinian. Care for Hania was sponsored by the Women's Division of the Islamic Action Front, which "covers the treatment costs of the wounded who cannot be treated in Palestinian hospitals due to lack of adequate treatment and overcrowding."²³

In this case, the cooperation of the media and NGOs focused on storytelling. The journalist's story and photographs depicted civil society actions already undertaken on behalf of Hania and other victims aided by the NGOs in Gaza and Jordan. .

The obstacle in this case was a privacy issue. Al-Sayah needed consent from the NGO and the family to interview and photograph the injured girl in the Islamic Hospital in Amman.

The media-NGO cooperation satisfied the four criteria for public journalism. It addressed people as potential participants in public affairs “rather than as victims or spectators.” It showed how the community could act upon, “rather than just learn about,” its problems. Through the journalist’s focus, the story spoke honestly about civic values and role of citizens as public actors. He also improved the climate of public discussion by reporting on how private, rather than public, funds can assist victims of conflict.

This case suggests that a public journalism model for the areas of conflict in the Middle East and North Africa might necessarily involve advocacy for victims of conflict and for civil society organizations attending to the needs of victims.

Lebanon: Criminal Justice

Volunteers for a Lebanese NGO, Dar Al-Amal, concerned with the plight of women prisoners uncovered the case of a teenaged girl sentenced to prison for killing her newborn child. According to the girl, her parents falsified her birth record and sold her underage at 13 to be married. After the marriage, she said, she was raped by her husband’s father. When a baby was born, she alleged he killed it and forced her to confess to the murder.²⁴

The girl’s story intrigued Najia Al-Houssari, a reporter for a London based Arab daily newspaper, *Al Hayat*. She teamed up with Dar Al-Amal’s representative at the media-NGO workshop in Beirut in 1999 and began to fully investigate the case. Al-Houssari’s published stories strengthened public belief in the girl’s innocence and led to her release in March 2003 after four years in prison.²⁵

This was a case of interventionist cooperation between the media and a NGO. A newspaper journalist advanced a cause identified by a NGO.

However, the media-NGO initiative faced obstacles because it was in the government's interest to promote the perception of the integrity of the Lebanese criminal justice system. The government strongly resisted having to admit two grievous errors: (1) convicting the wrong person, and (2) sending an underage girl to prison.

Two criteria of public journalism can be identified in this case. The media and NGO spoke honestly about their civic values and took on the role as public actor. In the process they helped the political community to act upon its problems by raising public awareness of wrong doing in the criminal justice system.

On the other hand, the media-NGO effort did not address people as potential participants in public affairs. It did not expect action from the public so much as top-down action by public officials. Neither was there evidence that the isolated case improved the "climate of public discussion." Although the Lebanese consider their government to be democratically elected and therefore not an autocracy, their politics are controlled from Damascus by Syria's autocratic Ba'ath Party.²⁶

The case further illustrates that a model for public journalism in partial autocracies could be founded on alliances between media and public service NGOs. The Lebanese example also shows that the media-NGO relationship is strengthened in countries where externally based or international media are free to operate, as in the case of London based *Al Hayat*. Further, says Lebanese media scholar Marwan Kraidy, "the strong tradition of Lebanese private enterprise bolstered by a free-wheeling economy, a powerful banking industry and low tariffs" greatly strengthens its civil society organizations.²⁷

Morocco: Empowerment of Women

Fatima was a wife and mother in rural Morocco who was suddenly cast as the head of the household when her husband abandoned her. Because he contributed little to the upkeep of the family, Fatima had been forced to be resourceful. After he left she sought assistance from a NGO that seeks to empower women by helping them start micro businesses.

The Moroccan Association for the Promotion of Feminine Enterprise helped Fatima plan a small business raising sheep. The association also granted her a small loan that enabled her to buy two breeding sheep. A Moroccan journalist chronicled how Fatima repaid the loan and received a larger one. With continued business support from the association, she began employing others to assist her as her enterprise grew. The journalist's story cited Fatima as symbolic of the work of the Casablanca based NGO.²⁸

The NGO's exemplary story of Fatima and the sheep was complemented by the journalist's ability to tell the tale as a success story. While representing the special interests of women, the NGO also served a socio-economic need not being met by government. The urban journalist's main challenge of finding isolated rural people with success stories was solved through cooperation with a NGO.

This case study approximates public journalism in all four respects. It addresses people as potential participants in public affairs and shows alternative ways the community can act upon problems of abandonment and destitution. Portrayal of women as entrepreneurs improves the climate of public discussion. Finally, the story speaks honestly about the civic values of empowering women as public actors both in NGOs and as recipients of NGO assistance.

This example suggests that a public journalism model for the Middle East and North Africa would consider the potential compatibility of journalists and NGOs who represent grounded socio-economic values. NGOs are enriched with untold stories, and journalists are the storytellers.

United Arab Emirates: Ecosystem

The uncontrolled harvesting of baby sharks has intensified in the Arabian Gulf, prompting environmentalists to warn about dire consequences for the marine ecosystem. In the United Arab Emirates, Dr. Saif Al Ghais, the local spokesman for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, has warned that sharks “are likely to be replaced by another predator like the barracuda” which may “adversely affect other species of marine creatures.”²⁹

Dubai journalist Dominick Rodriguez publicized the NGO’s warning about the increasing demand for baby sharks as aphrodisiacs, prepared in sauces, curries, or boiled and sautéed in herbs and spices. “A man eats lady sharks, a woman eats man sharks,” a vendor told Rodriguez at the Dubai Fish Market where beds of ice displayed 20 male and female baby sharks. Rodriguez’s story noted that sharks have a low reproductive rate, averaging only five or six babies.³⁰

The media and the international NGO with a UAE chapter worked together to publicize the hazard to the ecological balance and to recommend restrictions on the harvesting of baby sharks.

This case met the four criteria for public journalism. It identified people as potential participants in public affairs, while helping the political community identify a problem as a prelude to action. The story also improved the climate of public discussion.

“Many organizations and people have been referring to it in their work,” Rodriguez noted.³¹ The cooperation also speaks honestly about civic values and journalism’s role as a public actor.

The case’s focus on protection of the ecosystem suggests that a model for public journalism in the region would rely upon NGOs as watchdogs and providers of expertise, particularly when scientific trends and data are required.

Palestinian National Authority: The Dispossessed

Recent Israeli military strategy has ordered the bulldozing of hundreds of Palestinian homes and gardens, displacing thousands of people. Israelis have justified demolitions on the grounds that the homes belonged to terrorists or their families or sympathizers, or were built illegally. In the case of Sameh Jabber, his wife, five children and his mother, the Israeli Housing Authority ordered their two-room house demolished allegedly because they had no license to build it.

The Jabber family attracted the attention of Palestinian journalist Kawthar Salam because it won the right to keep the house while neighbors’ homes were demolished. The difference she learned was that the Jabbers had legal assistance from a NGO. Salam’s story chronicled not only the family’s hardships but also the role of the NGO in saving homes scheduled to be destroyed.³²

The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment represented the Jabber family. After three years of appeals and postponements, the NGO obtained an order from the Israeli Higher Court stopping the demolition. In addition to other court victories banning demolitions, the NGO provides legal counseling and representation in the Israeli Supreme Court.

This case study adheres to the four criteria for public journalism. In focusing on the struggle of one family and a NGO to prevent a demolition, the journalist demonstrates that Palestinians are potential participants in public and legal affairs. The reporting on the legal collective action helps the community address its problems. The attention given homeless victims provides a forum for improving the climate of public discussion. The journalist's reporting on Palestinian property rights in her account of the conflict speaks honestly about civic values and takes on the role as a public actor.

Conclusions

This research's case studies in Middle East and North African partial autocracies demonstrate how the media currently work to advance civil society initiatives by cooperating with non-governmental agencies that represent diverse groups of citizens and civic issues. In the absence of a tradition of civic empowerment in autocratic regimes, the growing number of NGOs provides evidence of dramatically increased interest by citizens in identifying and solving problems and unmet needs. According to a recent study, the rapid increase of new mass media capabilities has strengthened and broadened the scope of grassroots movements as well as other traditional organized interests in the region.³³

NGOs are the catalyst for self-help action to address civic issues. Some action is focused on problems of "grassroots organizations that grow out of and contribute to a sense of the limited capability of national governments to deliver the basics of life."³⁴ Other NGOs focus on issues such as human rights that have been neglected or

deliberately ignored. In addition, NGOs have provided the media with new perspectives on persistent problems.

The obstacles to media-NGO cooperation are significant. At least two factors mitigate cooperation. Government-run media is the norm across the Middle East and North Africa, and officially sanctioned information dominates the news pages and air waves. Also, governments tend to regard NGOs with suspicion, requiring registration and financial reports on their sources of income. A 2002 study reports that “in Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan the sheer proliferation of small NGOs . . . has made ‘divide and rule’ easier.”³⁵

Aside from government suspicions, NGOs are not models of pure virtue. They cannot escape all the defects or corruptions inflicting other types of bureaucracies. Neither are they models of pure voluntarism, because NGOs and governments often cooperate and help each other.³⁶ A founder of a new public journalism network in the United States posed this question: “Who convenes the residents and ensures that a special interest group has not stacked the deck in favor of one cause or another?”³⁷

The six case studies in this research demonstrate a continuum of media-NGO cooperation across the Arab World as represented by Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, United Arab Emirates and the Palestinian National Authority. In four of the cases, the media-NGO relationships subscribe to all four tenets of public journalism as defined in this study.³⁸ We’ll first review how the criteria apply in those four cases and then discuss the other two examples.

In the four cases the media and the NGOs “addressed people as potential participants in public affairs.” In Morocco, the emphasis is on encouraging women to

become entrepreneurs with public persona. In the Palestinian National Authority, anguished and impoverished people allied with a newspaper and a NGO and found sanctuary as participants in a public legal forum. In Jordan, NGOs through the media ask citizens to share the burden of caring for victims of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the United Arab Emirates, the media worked with a NGO to warn about the ecological damage of harvesting baby sharks and to help mobilize public intervention.

Media-NGO relationships also “helped the political community act upon its problems” by identifying them and proposing solutions. In all four cases the political community is characterized by inaction. Poverty is widespread in Morocco, and the media-NGO solution of empowering entrepreneurs actually assists the government with a viable alternative to nearly nonexistent welfare. The media-NGO cooperation in the Palestinian National Authority to protect against demolition of houses provides the only prospect for a “political community” so constricted by conflict and death that defense of personal property is a low priority. In Jordan, the media and a NGO energized the political community to provide more medical assistance for victims of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The media and an environmental NGO have raised the level of discourse on the catching of baby sharks to the point where the government may consider the issue as a legitimate, broadly based concern, demanding action.

An “improved climate of public discussion” would offer some hope for many people in the Arab World doubly victimized by poverty and lack of civic models. In the four case studies the media and NGOs served to provide models for action through success stories. In Morocco, entrepreneur Fatima is an encouraging example to her community. Similarly, Sameeh Jaber brought attention to a means of legal recourse in a

Palestinian community destroyed by demolitions. The story of the young Jordanian shepherd girl focused discussion on how private funds are coming to the aid of innocent victims of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the United Arab Emirates, the baby shark controversy verified the monarchy's acknowledged interest in public discussion of issues that place the nation's well-being above private interests.

The final way that the four case studies qualify as public journalism is that the media "speak honestly about civic values and take on the role as a public actor." The Moroccan journalist voiced defense of gender empowerment as a public virtue. The Palestinian journalist encouraged the hopeless to resort to law as an alternative to inaction or violence. The Jordanian journalist demonstrated the solidarity of the Muslim community to care for fellow Muslims in the Palestinian National Authority. And the journalist in the United Arab Emirates pitted concern for the ecosystem against profitable commercial interests. In urging government action beneficial to the country at large, the media and civil society act in roles "complementary" to the state.³⁹

In the other two cases in Lebanon and Egypt, media and NGO cooperation meets at least two of the four tenets of public journalism. The relationships clearly helped the political community act upon its problems. Beirut journalist Najia Al-Houssari worked closely with the NGO in giving visibility to the legal case of the girl wrongly accused of murder and helping lead to her eventual vindication. In Cairo, Mouchira Moussa's personal reporting style spurred community action to rescue "street boys" with the assistance of a NGO.

In both cases the media spoke honestly about civic values and took on the role as a public actor. As a champion for the young girl's innocence, the Lebanese reporter

focused attention on the corrupt criminal justice system. Likewise the Egyptian reporter grew her story into a public issue largely through her own advocacy of civic action to rescue street boys. However, there was no evidence that her story improved the climate of public discussion. The two stories focused on “the variety of non-governmental organizations that provide alternatives to the national control of the means of subsistence and justice.”⁴⁰

The case study in Lebanon failed to meet two tenets of public journalism. These failures reflect upon the nature of public discourse in partial autocracies. The story of the imprisoned girl was not presented to engage people as potential participants in public affairs. It was recognized that their intervention in legal matters would have been of marginal consequence.

Neither was there evidence that the story improved the climate of public discussion *before* the girl’s verdict was reversed. Convinced of the girl’s innocence, Al-Houssari targeted government decision makers for her stories. She had the freedom of working for an Arab daily newspaper published in London rather than in Lebanon, where media are not only affected by regulatory factors but also by economic and political factors in the form of turf wars between different branches of the government.⁴¹

Taken together the six case studies demonstrate that a form of public journalism can be practiced in the Middle East and North Africa. In fact, some of the journalists in the workshops practiced it under very different circumstances from the United States, and not under the name public journalism. It appears that despite working in partial autocracies where the media are generally owned or controlled by government, journalists can represent the needs and concerns of civil society.

In Arab countries with little or no tradition of civic empowerment, public issues are not uncommonly voiced by diverse non-governmental organizations. Journalists have found that the NGOs are a doorway through which they can gain access to a wealth of information. In the process, the media have begun to diversify their sources, departing from the historic dependence upon only government officials and spokespersons.

Although public journalism was created specifically for adoption in the United States and other democratic societies, this research indicates that a variant of the public journalism model can be practiced in partial autocracies.

An indigenous model of public journalism for the Middle East and North Africa would incorporate the four tenets of the American archetype. In addition, it would include four criteria recognizable in the Arab media culture and primarily related to the political reality of partial autocracies.

From the American model three of the four tenets applicable in the Middle East and North Africa are the need to “address people as potential participants in public affairs,” “help the political community act upon its problems,” and “improve the climate of public discussion.” During our series of workshops Arab journalists from Morocco to the United Arab Emirates employed these public journalism techniques for the benefit of their communities and states.

The range of issues they addressed are as diverse as the countries in which the media and NGO operate. However, the predominant issue across the Arab World is problems associated with poverty. Reflecting this, the case studies in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the Palestinian National Authority are linked to fundamental needs for employment, housing, medical assistance and legal reform. By contrast, in the

wealthier region of the Arabian Gulf, citizens of the United Arab Emirates can afford to concern themselves about the impact of commercial fishing on the marine ecosystem.

The fourth tenet in the U.S. model recommends that the media “speak honestly about civic values and take on the role as a public actor.” The case studies exemplify not only the “honest” discourse of Arab journalists when dealing with civic matters but also their hope, and even passionate desire, that their interventions might make a difference.

The four criteria likely to be associated with a Middle East and North African model of public journalism stem from two prominent realities. One is that governance by partial autocracies traditionally has discouraged grassroots activism. The other is that Arab journalists are more subjective and their work more storied than that of their American counterparts whose work is imbued with the concept of objectivity.

In the traditional top-down governments in the Arab World, the increasing numbers of non-governmental organizations present themselves as the natural representatives of civic issues, values and needs.

First, as indicated in the case studies, an indigenous model for public journalism in the Middle East and North Africa would rely on NGOs as “middlemen” connecting citizens with each other and with their government. Although NGOs represent special interests, Arab journalists have managed to locate many with honest civic goals. The case of the abandoned wife and mother in Morocco as a model for women entrepreneurs probably would not have surfaced for the urban reporter without the middleman NGO. While the story benefited the objectives of the NGO, it also served broader civic purposes.

Second, in instances when government either lacks data or denies access to them, the media would depend on NGOs as alternative sources of statistical, scientific, legal,

and historical information. The NGO in the Palestinian National Authority kept statistics on home demolitions, and the one in the United Arab Emirates developed its own data on the environmental impact of baby shark harvesting.

Third, the media would occasionally champion a NGO cause, as occurred in the case study in Lebanon where the ruling of a court was overturned.

A fourth characteristic of public journalism in the Middle East and North Africa would relate to language and storytelling. The flourishing of NGOs has provided rich new sources of stories told with the flowing richness of the Arabic language and involving large human themes and values: conflict, survival, justice, and compassion.

In summary, this study found that the media and non-governmental organizations have worked in cooperation in partial autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa. We demonstrate that a public journalism model can be developed for the region, blending tenets identified by the founders of the movement in the United States with characteristics distinctive to the Arab World.

Although this case study approach affords an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details often overlooked by other research methods and represents a cross-section of the region, the investigation is limited by the inability to generalize to other situations in other countries and other times. Constraints of time and resources allowed us to conduct workshops in only six of the 22 countries in the Arab World.

Given the expected expansion and development of media technology taken together with the anticipated growth of civil society organizations in the Middle East and North Africa, there appear to be many opportunities for related studies in the region.

Notes

- ¹ Daniel Blumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Democracy in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy*, 13:4 (Oct. 2002), 56-68.
- ² Farhad Kazemi, "Perspectives on Islam and Civil Society," *Civil Society and Government*, eds., Nancy L. Rosenbaum and Robert C. Post (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 320.
- ³ Blumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Democracy," 57.
- ⁴ Blumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Democracy," 57.
- ⁵ John Kelsay, "Civil Society and Government in Islam," *Civil Society and Government*, eds., Nancy L. Rosenbaum and Robert C. Post (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 294.
- ⁶ Amani Kandil, presentation to Media-NGO Workshop, Al Ahram Regional Press Institute, Cairo, Sept. 26, 1999. Kandil is executive director of the Arab Network of NGOs.
- ⁷ Kandil, Sept. 26, 1999..
- ⁸ Dennis J. Sullivan, "NGOs and Development in the Arab World: The Critical Importance of a Strong Partnership Between Government and Civil Society," *Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World*, 9:102 (June 2000). This is the journal of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development, Cairo. Sullivan contends that NGOs in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon "are limited by inadequate resources, lack of governmental financial support, duplication of functions, weak organizational setup, lack of routine external audits, absence of strict internal rules and regulations, and administrative inefficiency."
- ⁹ Said Eddin Ibrahim, *The Crisis of Democracy in the Arab World* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1984).
- ¹⁰ Tom Dickson, Wanda Brandon, and Elizabeth Topping, "Editors and Educators Agree on Outcomes But Not Goals," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 22 (4, 2001): 2
- ¹¹ Arguments for an international impetus toward public journalism were made in January 2003 in the founding of the new Public Journalism Network. America's "experiences with civic journalism would be a rich resource of new initiatives and possibilities for us [in Japan]," said Hideya Terashima, journalist with the regional Japanese newspaper *Kahoku Shimpo*; he is a visiting Fulbright Scholar at the DeWitt Wallace Center for Communications and Journalism at Duke University. Another charter member advocating international public journalism initiatives was Ana Maria Miralles, professor of journalism at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellin, Colombia.
- ¹² Akira Iriye, "A Century of NGOs," *Diplomatic History*, 23 (3, 1999): 422.
- ¹³ Kandil, Sept. 26, 1999.
- ¹⁴ Jay Rosen, "The Action of the Idea: Public Journalism in Built Form," in *The Idea of Public Journalism*, ed., Theodore L. Glasser (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 44.
- ¹⁵ Dickson, Brandon and Topping, "Editors and Educators," 2,3.
- ¹⁶ Staci D. Kramer, *Civic Journalism: Six Case Studies: A Joint Report by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies*, ed. Jan Schaffer and Edward D. Miller (Washington, D.C.: Pew Center for Civic Journalism, and San Francisco: Tides Foundation, 1995). The six case studies occurred in Charlotte, N.C., Madison, Wis., Tallahassee, Fla., Boston, San Francisco, and Seattle.
- ¹⁷ Pat Ford, *Don't Stop There! Five Adventures in Civic Journalism*, ed. Jan Shaffer (Washington, D.C.: Pew Center for Civic Journalism, and San Francisco: Tides Center, 1998). The five case studies occurred in Springfield, Mo., Peoria, Ill., Binghamton, N.Y., St. Paul, Minn., and Portland, Maine.
- ¹⁸ *The People's Choice: The Media, The Campaign, and the Citizens* (Washington D.C.: The Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 2000). In 2000, the *Savannah Morning News*, New Hampshire Public Radio, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* won the James K. Batten Awards for Excellence in Civic Journalism.
- ¹⁹ Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 99.
- ²⁰ Ronald D. Franklin, David B. Allison, and Bernard S. Gorman, eds., *Design and Analysis of Single-Case Research* (Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 1.
- ²¹ Mouchira Moussa, "Home for Street Boys," *Al Halina*, September 1999, 5-6. *Al Halina* (meaning: family) was the media-NGO workshop newspaper distributed by the Cairo daily newspaper *Al Ahram*. The original stories appeared in *Al Ahram*.

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- ²² Aman Al-Sayeh, "Explosion stole Hania's feet," *Al-Azem* [Amman], May 2001, p. 1. *Al Azem* (meaning: determination) was a supplement distributed the the Jordaninan daily newspaper *Al Ra'i*.
- ²³ Aman Al-Sayeh, "Explosion stole Hania's feet," 1.
- ²⁴ Najia Al-Houssari, "Workshop about Lebanese women's rights," *Al Hayat*, Jan. 1, 2000.
- ²⁵ Najia Al-Houssari to Leonard Ray Teel, March 30, 2003. "The girl was released a couple of days ago, after she was declared innocent and spent four years in prison. Her lawyer proved she's mentally retarded."
- ²⁶ In 2000, Gibran Tuani, editor of Lebanon's leading daily newspaper, *An Nahar*, published a bold editorial stating that Lebanon no longer needed the Syria's political and military presence, a legacy of the Lebanese Civil War. In response, the Syrian ambassador rebuked anyone who presumed to meddle in Syrian policy.
- ²⁷ Marwan M. Kraidy, "Broadcasting Regulation and Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 42(3, 1998): 387-400.
- ²⁸ "Fatima's Microbusiness," *Takarob* [Casablanca], Oct. 8, 1999, p. 1. *Takarob* (meaning: closeness) was a supplement circulated in the Moroccan daily newspaper *Al Ittihad Al Ichtiraki*.
- ²⁹ Dominick Rodriguez, "Hunting Baby Sharks to Extinction," *Earth Scream* [Dubai], Feb. 4, 2003, p. 2. *Earth Scream* was a special supplement circulated in the UAE daily newspaper *Al Ittihad* on the occasion of UAE's National Environment Day.
- ³⁰ Rodriguez, "Hunting Baby Sharks to Extinction," 2.
- ³¹ Dominick Rodriguez to Leonard Ray Teel, March 8, 2003. Rodriguez wrote, "The impact of the feature story I wrote about overfishing of sharks is a positive one as many organizations and people have been referring to it in their work. Dr. Eisa Abdel Lateef of the Zayed Prize for the Environment (an organisation based in Dubai) referred to the danger of the sharks' extinction and proliferation of other predator species in his speech today (March 8, 2003), while the Emirates Environmental Group carried a reference in their monthly update to the shark problems caused by overfishing. I am sure there may be many more instances of the shark article having an impact on the reading audience...."
- ³² Kawthar Salam, "Sameeh Jabber's Family Stays Under His Roof," *Assiraj* (Ramallah), May 30, 2001, 1, 4.
- ³³ Paul S. Rowe, "Four Guys and a Fax Machine? Diasporas, New Information Technologies, and the Internationalization of Religion in Egypt," *Journal of Church and State* 43(1, 2001): 81-92.
- ³⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Vol. 1 of Public Worlds Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 168.
- ³⁵ Brumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy," 63.
- ³⁶ Lester Soloman, "The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector," *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (4, 1994): 109-122.
- ³⁷ Leonard Witt, "Tap in to opinions of rank,file on war," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 23, 2003, A14.
- ³⁸ The definition of public journalism was adapted from Rosen in *The Idea of Public Journalism*, 44.
- ³⁹ Kelsay, "Civil Society and Government in Islam," 311.
- ⁴⁰ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 190.
- ⁴¹ Kraidy, "Broadcasting Regulation and Civil Society."