

# Summary of Conference Papers

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## *Women in the Media in Cyprus*

*Anna Andreou*  
*Journalist, Cyprus News Agency*

According to Anna Andreou, the representation of women in the media differs from that of men. Though all types of discrimination on the basis of sex, age or religion should be avoided, the gap between theory and practice is large. According to Andreou, though the number of women journalists has risen, the social structure and attitudes have not been altered to accommodate this change, and have always privileged men over women. Since many women journalists are trying to manage between their careers and their families, they prefer to work as freelancers and generally reject assignments abroad. Furthermore, women are seldom trusted to deal with politics. Instead, they cover other issues such as education, health and culture.

For Andreou, male professional expertise serves as the main criterion for selection in the TV business: in the case of females, they are selected on the basis of their physical appearance. Accordingly, Andreou sees the need to work on removing stereotypes as a major condition to improve women's status.

## *Women in the Media*

*Fatmeh Berri*  
*Al-Manar Television*

According to Fatmeh Berri, media and advertisement have not done justice to women; instead, they have victimized them in a number of ways. Women's participation in the press and audio media is restricted to specific domains, and they seldom occupy decision-making positions. As for women in the audio-visual media, they are visible in almost all sectors. Though they have achieved



important leaps, some negative aspects persist. In fact, it is the woman's physical appearance rather than her intellectual background, tactfulness and communicative skills that are emphasized. In addition, the image of women as liberated, promiscuous and sexy often takes precedence over the traditional, housewife image.

As for women in advertisement, they are often depicted as commodities. They are also portrayed as lacking in responsibility and concerned with superficial matters such as physical beauty. Arab media and advertisement often tend to imitate the West without taking into consideration the distinct characteristics of each culture. Consequently, the imitation often turns out to be inadequate and far-removed from our traditions and norms.

## *Mecanisme de Suivi de L'Image de la Femme*

*Buthaina Gribaa*  
*General Director of CREDIF, Tunisia*

'Women and Media' is a recent topic in Tunis. The Tunisian government has recently acknowledged the important role media can play in the diffusion of new values and has attempted to portray a more positive and objective image of women in the media. Extensive research has been conducted on the participation of women in various areas of information and communication. Findings suggest that despite the rapid feminization of various sectors of communication media, the number of women in decision-making positions is still low.



Gribaa presented the findings of a quantitative and qualitative study conducted by CREDIF (Centre de Recherches, d'Études, de Documentation et d'Information sur la





Femme). According to this study, the journalistic space reserved for women is minimal. News on women remain restricted to the cultural pages and is almost absent in the economic pages. In addition, women in official positions are more represented than other women engaged in more traditional roles.

Gribaa urged the press concerned with women's issues to adopt more challenging approaches and to give more value to feminine tasks by portraying more attractive images of women at work and at home.

**Media Globalization**  
*Najieh Housary*  
*Journalist, Al-Hayat*  
*Daily*

In this era of globalization, information is reaching a larger audience at a faster rate. This globalization cannot be ignored and must be used to the benefit of the Arab press. In recent years, the Arab press has witnessed a mounting use of technology: Desktop publishing and the display of Arab newspapers on the Internet.



Although the press is supposed to be the voice of the people in the Arab world, voices of males are more heard than those of females. In the media, women are still portrayed as victims or as sex objects. Therefore, the "invasion" of the media by women should not be considered an achievement so long as their conditions are not altered. Even though women's participation in the labor force is increasing, their working conditions remain worse than those of men.

**Gender Communication Policy**  
*May Kahale*  
*Journalist, Former Information Advisor to*  
*the President of the*  
*Republic of Lebanon*

May Kahale overviewed the state of the media in the Arab World and highlighted features of the Arab media in general and the Lebanese media in particular. In her view, the Arab media have always adopted common Arab causes that often turned out to be fatal weapons in the Arab struggle against others.



However, the main deficiency lies in media coverage of the internal politics of each country. Here, the Arab media serve as official platforms promoting the image of the country's political leaders, totally disregarding the opposition. In this regard, Lebanon is an exception. Lebanese media are characterized by the coexistence of the official and the private. In her opinion, the Lebanese way of presenting the official as well as opposition stands on political and economic matters must be taken up by all Arab countries.

Finally, Kahale explained how the technological developments the Arab media have witnessed, especially in the audio-visuals, have been at the expense of audio media and the press. She also shed light on the failure of Arab media to address and propagate women's issues.

**The Image of Women in Media**  
*Azza Kamel*  
*ACT Director,*  
*Egypt*

Azza Kamel presented a historical background of women's status in Egypt. In her view, the economic and political situation in Egypt has severely affected the role of women in society. During the 1970s, the Arab defeat and the rise of fundamentalism had severe consequences on Egyptian women. The obstacles imposed on women in the name of Islam and the increasing pressures on female workers have marginalized the role of women. In the 1980s and 1990s, the participation of Egypt in major conferences on population and development brought women's issues to the forefront. Newspapers and journals became the arena for debates among opponents and proponents of women's rights.



Kamel discussed the portrayal of women in the cinema and asserted that the majority of movies have titles describing women as evil and decadent. Consequently, it is not surprising that violent scenes of physical abuse inflicted by males on females often receive the applause and approval of the audience.

**Difficulties Faced by Turkish Women in Developing Communication Policies**  
*Eser Koker*  
*Faculty of Communication*  
*Ankara University, Turkey*

Eser Koker discussed women's representation in the print-press (dating back to the 1890's) and television.



According to her, women have had their own journals in which feminist issues were addressed. However, nowadays if women have reached editorial positions in major journals, few have made it to decision-making positions. Koker asserted that television too has acknowledged women's participation to the extent that some positions have been virtually feminized. Koker admitted that women in Turkey have a long way to go and suggested a few recommendations on how to shorten this way.



**Gender and  
Communication  
Policy**  
*Irene Lorfing*  
*Lecturer, Saint  
Joseph University*

Irene Lorfing stressed the need for gender and communication policy in the region. She recognized the crucial role media can play in challenging the perpetuation of unequal power relations in the Arab world. However, she insisted that most development programs focus on women's conditions, emphasizing immediate needs and paying little attention to communication strategies. In this manner, they reinforce patterns that eternalize inequalities. Another issue that she deals with is the role of media globalization in hindering the promotion of gender-sensitive local programs and the development of communication policies. Finally, Lorfing suggested a few tactics to promote effective gender communication; among these tactics, training and networking were emphasized.



**Women in the Media in Iran**  
*Nasrin Mosaffa, Director*  
*Center for Graduate  
International Studies*  
*Teheran University, Iran*

Nasrin Mosaffa emphasized the important role Khomeini played in improving women's status in Iran. According to Mosaffa, Khomeini challenged the historical aspect of political philosophy and gave women the right to participate in the public sphere even without the consent of their husbands. This is mainly the reason why women have played a very important role in post-revolution Iran.

Media has always been regarded as the best place to alter people's attitudes. After the revolution, the media ceased to be an instrument for entertainment and became a means to propagate education, socialization, and to present people with new attitudes and new norms.



Mosaffa elaborated on the historical background of women's participation in the Iranian cinema, press and television. Whereas women in pre-revolution Iran were portrayed in the media as sex objects, in post-revolution Iran women play a much more important role. Today, in the cinema business, there are Iranian women directors, producers and actresses. In the press, female issues are often addressed, such as women's rights, their needs and the civil code. Mosaffa also argued that the percentage of women working in the press is significant, and that television in particular, has succeeded in addressing women's needs and concerns.

**Violence in the Media and its effect  
on Women and Children**  
*Ikram Saab*  
*Women's Page*  
*Almustakbal Newspaper*

In her presentation, Ikram Saab focused on two main aspects: the effect of violence in the media on children and women and the role of media in preventing violence. Violence portrayed in the media has severe consequences on children in the first place. A high rate of suicide, juvenile delinquency, and other violent behavior are the result of violence portrayed on television.

In an attempt to imitate the hero or villain, children often end up committing crimes. Through the media, children and adolescents are learning to inflict harm on society at large, and women in particular. Saab recognized the importance of the media in uncovering women's issues and concerns. Indeed, the press have recently started devoting special sections related to women in an attempt to raise awareness about women's legal, political, and civic rights.

**Images of Women in Moroccan  
Communication Media**  
*Zahra Ouardi*  
*Secretary General of Casablanca UAF  
Representation*

According to Zahra Ouardi women in Morocco are subject to various forms of discrimination ranging from domestic vio-





lence, sexual and physical abuse, to high rates of illiteracy and a high percentage of mortality. To what extent were the media successful in reflecting these real images? For Ouardi, the Moroccan media in general do not give priority to women's issues and rarely cover launched campaigns for women's causes. Commercial magazines are only concerned with women's physical beauty, and in the cinema, women are portrayed as sex objects. However, Ouardi recognized that the second Moroccan Television channel has disclosed some of the injustices inflicted on Moroccan women. In addition, the Moroccan government and the ministry dealing with the family and with women's issues have adopted measures to improve women's status by including women in development projects.



Ouardi recommended changing people's mentality by starting to educate the new generation. She stressed on the important role female journalists should play in raising awareness on women's issues. She also stressed on the need to use the influential media to promote educational programs. Finally, she emphasized the necessity of collaborating with countries which have similar problems in order to exchange expertise.

*Images of Women in the Lebanese Television News*  
**Rouba Tok**  
*Information Officer, Caritas, Lebanon*

According to Rouba Tok, only female public figures or victims are portrayed in television news; however, the coverage

of these two categories of women is often inadequate. Though the media cover the activities of female public figures, the audience often fails to understand the depth of women's concern with and interest in these public issues. The same applies to women victims. Though crimes committed against women are often covered in the media, a failure to provide the audience with an in-depth investigation of the social circumstances leading to their victimization is often noted.

In Tok's opinion, if the purpose of the media were to raise awareness among the audience, then light should be shed on the concerns and worries of active working women. In fact, though women participate in all media domains, their participation remains relatively low compared to men. Tok supported her argument by providing statistics on Lebanese women's participation in the media sector. She also acknowledged that if women were to occupy decision-making positions in the media sector, their working conditions would no doubt improve.



Tok went on to say that women working in the news sector are portrayed as educated, liberated, and successfully managing between their work duties and family responsibilities; however, these women fail to give precedence to women's issues. She insisted that the danger resides in the portrayal of women in the media in general. The media have the power to make the audience identify with the figures portrayed, and the often inaccurate portrayal of Lebanese women as traditional housewives or as sex objects may have severe consequences on the new generation of women.