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CHILDREN AND SCREEN MEDIA IN CHANGING ARAB CONTEXTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE, BY TARIK SABRY AND NISRINE MANSOUR, 2019, PP. 153, ISBN 978-3-030-04320-9. 52,99 EUR (HARDCOVER). REVIEWED BY: TOM DE LEYN, GHENT UNIVERSITY, BELGIUM

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Children and Screen Media in Changing Arab Contexts: An Ethnographic Perspective, by Tarik Sabry and Nisrine Mansour, 2019, pp. 153, ISBN 978-3-030-04320-9. 52,99 EUR (hardcover).

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Moving beyond popular tropes on the role of screen media within an Arab context, Tarik Sabry and Nisrine Mansour provide a refreshing and lively account of how Arab children perform “being-in-the-world” by drawing on their glocalized and mediated environments. In doing so, *Children and Screen Media in Changing Arab Contexts*, steers away from a media-centric approach. Rather, the authors embrace the processual and reflective nature of phenomenological ethnography to scrutinize taken-for-granted categories such as “child”, “Arab” and “audiences”. In line with ethnographic works on children and media such as *Children and Media in India* (Banaji 2017) and *Children, Media and Playground Cultures* (Willet et al., 2013), Sabry and Mansour illustrate how children’s everyday experiences shape and are shaped by media, family dynamics, and socio-cultural contexts. Connecting the findings of their fieldwork to Heidegger (1962) and Latour (2005), the book especially highlights how Arab children are actively appropriating screen media as extensions of their worldliness through which they mnemonically perform and imagine “the self.”

Reminiscing on their experiences with Arab families in London, Beirut and Casablanca, Sabry and Mansour immediately set the tone by confronting the reader with the persistence of Western ethnocentricity in the field of media studies. Drawing from anthropological and critical theory, the introduction unveils how dominant perspectives on (Arab) children’s media use is situated within modernist and neoliberal hegemonies. In particular, Sabry and Mansour explore how Western imaginations of progress have been constructing children as passive subjects in need of protection against the “corrupting” influence of screen media. Moreover, they argue that the contemporary obsession with “standardized” and “objective” knowledge, devoid of contextualization, obscures in-depth understandings of children’s media use as constituent of their being-in-the-world. In the case of Arab children, these epistemologies are being crystalized within the stereotypical and racist narratives of “Arab victimhood” and “the Muslim threat.” In order to redirect these dominant epistemologies in popular and academic discourse, Sabry and Mansour present a bottom-up counter-narrative in which the ethnographic process, guided by children’s experiences, is put forward.

Throughout the book, rich and detailed reflections on the ethnographic process are eloquently woven together with thick descriptions of Arab children’s mnemonic performances of the self. Before the exposition of

the research results in the latter chapters, Sabry and Mansour provide the reader with extensive reflections on the ethnographic research this book builds on. Chapter 2 explores the methodological challenges the authors encountered during their fieldwork in London. Discussing (mis)trust and othering, this chapter raises issues that will sound familiar to ethnographic researchers that struggle with obtaining access and with negotiating their own positionality. In chapter 3, Sabry and Mansour introduce the concept of “double-thrownness” to make sense of their highly personal and oftentimes unsettling experiences in the South of Beirut. For example, they reflect deeply on the ethical challenges when researching phenomenological experiences, being both observing and being observed in the field. The authors deserve praise for their personal and intimate reflections as it provides the reader with valuable insights into how the research results are embedded within everyday interactions between researchers and participants.

What is interesting about Sabry and Mansour's phenomenological approach is that their analysis of Arab children's media adoptions transcends dominant frameworks of childhood development. Instead of situating children's sociality and identity within the biological and psychological realm of “growing up”, chapter 4 sheds light on how media-objects' presence, rather than availability, reconfigures the spatial and temporal experiences of Arab children's being and becoming in the world. This chapter illustrates how connective networks of mediated spaces, family dynamics and cultural repertoires, enable children's mnemonic performances of the (imaginative) self. By reconciling phenomenology with Latour's (2005) actor network theory, the authors discuss how diverse affective relationships between participants, media-objects, and social spaces shape children's intimate worlds.

Building on the Heideggerian concept of “worldliness”, chapter five then explores how Arab children are “equipped” users of media, observing how “children did not just speak about the media, they spoke through the media”(p. 131). The participants are described as skilled navigators of mediated environments, allowing them to extend their worlds beyond the confinements of restricted “material” spaces. While phenomenology is the main approach throughout the book, the authors acknowledge that children's temporal and spatial imaginations of being-in-the-world take shape in socio-cultural and political contexts. Therefore, this chapter also speaks “against” a Heideggerian phenomenology, as it conceals invisible structures, such as the ideology of salafism, over which children have little or no control. The main contribution of this chapter lies in showing how children's performances of their past, present, and future worldliness are shaped by both agentic media uses and imposed socio-cultural structures.

Overall, *Children and Screen Media in Changing Arab Contexts* offers valuable insights into the mediated performances of Arab children's being-in-the-world. Sabry and Mansour are successfully shifting the focus from adult-centric understandings (e.g. victimization and perpetrator narratives) towards a perspective that truly aims to uncover the affective and everyday experiences of children – “those of growing up, childhood, existence, beliefs, practices, authority, learning, aspirations, future, and worldliness” (p. 17). Beyond its obvious relevance for scholarship on Arab children and media use, the authors' vibrant self-reflexive descriptions of the research process will also be enjoyed by ethnographers outside the theme of Arab childhoods. Even more, Sabry and Mansour's phenomenological approach and attention to context makes the book a highly recommended read for scholars interested in youth culture, and children and media more generally. Oftentimes, research on children and media relies on media-centric approaches, focusing on behavioral processes. However, as shown by Sabry and Mansour, this scholarship lacks a comprehensive lens that accounts for the socio-cultural contexts in which children across the world perform and imagine their identities through (digital) media (Goggin, 2013). Sabry and Mansour's eye for everyday experiences and to include “context, context, context” (p. 127) will hopefully inspire researchers to do just that.

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