

(Not) reporting homosexuality in the Middle East

Media in the Middle East do not report gay issues in the same way as they would other news. By Brian Pelot.



Homosexuality is a taboo subject mainstream Arabic news outlets regularly avoid. If reported at all, stories typically address homosexuality as a foreign phenomenon or loathsome disease unique to the west. Journalist Brian Whitaker explores how Middle Eastern media self-censor homosexuality in his 2006 book *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*. According to Whitaker, regional governments routinely censor positive portrayals of homosexuality. When the topic is discussed in mainstream media, the Arabic word *shadh*, loaded with negative connotations equivalent to pervert in English, is most often used to mean gay. Journalists improperly trained on homosexuality are also to blame for the dearth of accurate coverage, allowing grossly inaccurate stereotypes of this minority group to pass as fact. Outside of the newsroom, fear of legal and cultural backlash has also stymied homosexuality as a topic of literary exploration. Proving its point, *Unspeakable Love* is banned in many Middle Eastern countries.

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