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The Political Economy of Private Media in Egypt

PhD Thesis

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And a special mention in honor of the late Giulio Regeni, a Cambridge University PhD student who was murdered in Cairo, while studying trade unions.

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the political economy of Egypt's media system during the neoliberal transition that saw the beginnings of locally produced private broadcast outlets and the reintroduction of Egyptian private newspaper publications. It is an examination of power and capital for a sector that was at a distinctive intersection of political sensitivity and commercial promise. Privately-owned local television and print outlets burst onto the scene at the turn of the 21st century. For the following two decades, Egypt experienced the emergence of politically empowered businessmen amid a marked liberalization drive, followed by massive socio-political changes sparked by the Arab Spring, and then a return to an autocratic, military-led regime. Developments in Egypt's media system during these changes showed high levels of political and economic parallelism. However, some of the structural shifts that occurred in the sector were not accompanied with institutional adjustments in the underlying approach that the state had been taking towards mass media for decades. As a result, private mass media development in Egypt was constantly fragmented and inconsistent. Policies governing the industry were often reactive, and dependent on 'national security' considerations. Factors that played into the early growth in the sector were quite circumstantial, contributing to the volatility outlined over the course of the research. Yet the sector still managed to be a prominent element in the country's transforming tapestry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prelude -----	8
i. Information & Power	
ii. Questions and Scope	
iii. Methodology	
iv. Limitations	
v. Why traditional mass media in the age of digital?	
vi. Original Contribution	
Chapter 1- Introduction -----	14
1) <u>The political economy of media: theories and applications</u> -----	15
• Information Control: Herman and Chomsky’s “Propaganda Model”	
• The Corporate Model: the role of ownership and “liberalization”	
• Comparative Models: Different Media Systems, Different Contexts	
2) <u>Media systems in The Arab World: relevance to Egypt</u> -----	27
• Regionalism, “Glocalization” and Localization	
• Developments in Arab Media	
•	
3) <u>State Capitalism and Neoliberalism: Theoretical underpinnings</u> -----	33
4) <u>Methodology: Analysis and Reflection of interviews and documents</u> -----	36
5) <u>Egypt: Context and Media</u> -----	37
• Background on political economy and historical context	
• A neoliberal transition	
• Broadcasting from outside the state: an experiment	
• The press and its complicated equation	
• Post-Mubarak tumult	
Chapter 2- Arab Media Development: Regional Media and its Effects on Local Systems -----	50
1) <u>Pan-Arab Media: a role in nation-building</u> -----	52
2) <u>Early trends in private television and Pan-Arab Satellite Broadcasting</u> -----	54
• Shifting consumer cross-border trends	
3) <u>Media Cities</u> -----	60
4) <u>Coordinated and uncoordinated legislation</u> -----	62
5) <u>Lebanon’s exceptional and influential case in media developments</u> -----	65
• Private Sector Media Ownership and the Nexus of Lebanese Power	
6) <u>New markets and commercial opportunities</u> -----	69
7) <u>Effects on Egypt</u> -----	71

Chapter 3- Mass Media and Power in Modern Egypt (1798-1999) -----	73
1) <u>Introduction</u> -----	73
• Media systems and major changes	
2) <u>Print under the monarchy</u> -----	76
• “The Necessary Magazines”	
• Press Wars	
• The development of “journalism”	
• Broadcasting before the Republic	
3) <u>Nasser and the Free Officers: Switching mindsets and institutions</u> -----	87
• Adapting and engineering a new reality	
• Media and structures of control	
• The state officially takes over	
• Media, mobilization and “freedom from the shackles of capitalism”	
• Nasserist “Socialism”	
• “Socialization” of the Press	
• Organized participation and controlled output	
• Arming the airwaves	
• Localizing narratives and news (The Middle East News Agency)	
• Introducing television	
• The “ <i>Naksa’s</i> ” lasting effects: an entrenchment of the securitized state	
4) <u>Sadat: From sweeping consolidation to tepid modernization</u> -----	107
• Liberalization and Modernization	
• Turning on “Press Freedom”	
• Legal maneuvering vis-à-vis mass media	
• From “National Guidance” to “Information”	
• Egyptian Radio and Television Union: Structure, Politics and Finances	
• The symbolism of Maspero	
5) <u>Mubarak (1981-2001): before private media: Strong Regime, Weak State</u> --	122
• A perpetual emergency and unlimited power	
• Mubarak and the Press	
• A short-lived attempt to “assassinate the press” in 1995	
• Television: Maspero and Beyond	
• Mr. Media	
• Satellite television, a game-changer	
6) <u>Summary and Conclusion</u> -----	140

Chapter 4- Privatization: The genesis of private print and broadcast--- 142

- 1) **“Liberalization”** ----- 144
 - Mass media development amid the changes
- 2) **EMPC launch and the new investment laws**----- 148
- 3) **Private sector, clientelism and authoritarianism at the turn of the century--** 152
- 4) **Egypt’s private broadcasters**----- 155
 - Patient Zero: Ahmed Bahgat and Dream TV
- 5) **Private media emerging: Emanating from the center of power**----- 159
- 6) **Gamal Mubarak and “new” politics**----- 165
- 7) **Dream/Orbit & the political economy of “the talk-show”** ----- 169
- 8) **Between commercial opportunity and legitimizing the private sector**----- 178
- 9) **Conclusion**----- 180

Chapter 5- The “25 January Revolution” and Its Aftermath----- 181

- 1) **Broadcast and print media in the run-up to 2011**----- 181
 - Further transformation and expansion of the private sector
 - Growth amid an expanding public sphere and increasing global pressure
 - Mass media evolution: progressive attempts and failures
- 2) **Drastic changes: Disruptions to balance of power**----- 193
 - Sudden increase in licensing and production: An experiment in pluralism
 - Politics and Private Media: Another Lebanon?
- 3) **2013-2016: El-Sisi and the importance of consensus**----- 203
 - Engineering Consensus
 - Self Censorship
 - The “other Heikal” and Fourth Generation warfare
- 4) **Consolidation**----- 213
 - Military Economy
 - Military Media Takeover
 - Egyptian Media Group, An Eagle and a Falcon

Chapter 6- AlMasry AIYoum: The Print Experiment----- 219

- 1) **Accidental beginnings**----- 220
 - Origins and Founder
 - “Coincidence” of licensing
 - Regulatory hurdles
 - The owners: public champions of neoliberal change
- 2) **Finding Professionals** ----- 225
 - A new age of reporting?

• Self-Censorship	
3) <u>Self-sufficiency</u> -----	232
• Advertising	
• Printing	
• Egypt Independent	
4) <u>Facing difficulties</u> -----	236
5) <u>Mada Masr, continuing the Egypt Independent experiment</u> -----	237
6) <u>Conclusion</u> -----	238

Chapter 7- OnTV: Building a Liberal Media Empire----- 240

<u>1) Introduction</u> -----	240
<u>2) Sawiris investing in television</u> -----	241
<u>3) OnTV: Early Operations and Aspirations</u> -----	244
<u>4) The Arab Spring: A second birth?</u> -----	246
<u>5) New leases, longer leases</u> -----	247
• Muslim Brotherhood in Power: TV as Politics	
<u>6) After the Brotherhood: Paradigm shift</u> -----	250
• Sawiris moving on from OnTV	
7) <u>Conclusion</u> -----	253

Chapter 8- Conclusion----- 255

- **Introduction**
- **Findings**
 - **How much has control over media transitioned to the private sector?**
 - **Did the state set out to create and promote the growth of private media outlets?**
 - **Beginning: Design and Accidents**
 - **Audio-Visual Broadcast: Putting existing infrastructure to use**
 - **Early private broadcast outlets: champions of neoliberalism**
 - **Private Print beginnings: Fortune favors the prepared**
 - **New means of control: shared ownership**
 - **The Arab Spring and its aftermath: political parallelism in play**
- **Looking ahead: Back to the barracks**

Acronyms & Abbreviations:

AMAY- AlMasry AlYoum newspaper
Arabsat- Arab Satellite and Communications Organization
ART- Arab Radio and Television
ASU- Arab Socialist Union
CBC- Capital Broadcasting Center
CNE- Cable News Egypt
DMC- Dubai Media City
DMC (alt)- A private television station in Egypt
EMG- Egyptian Media Group
EMPC- Egyptian Media Production City
ERSAP- Economic Restructuring and Structural Adjustment Program
ERTU- Egyptian Radio and Television Union
ESC- Egyptian Satellite Channel
FCC- Federal Communications Commission
FDI- Foreign Direct Investment
FTA- Free to Air
GAFI- General Authority for Free Trade and Investment
GID- General Intelligence Directorate
ICT- Information Communication Technology
IFI- International Financial Institutions
IMF- International Monetary Fund
LE- Lira Egyptian (Local Egyptian currency)
MB- Muslim Brotherhood
MBC- Middle East Broadcasting Center
MENA- Middle East North Africa
MENA (alt)- Middle East News Agency
MOD- Ministry of Defense
MOI- Ministry of Information
MPC- Media Production City
Nilesat- Egyptian Satellite Company
NDP- National Democratic Party
NTC- Nile Thematic Channels
NU- National Union
OfCom- Office of Communications
OTH- Orascom Telecom Holdings
PPAC- Political Party Affairs Committee
RCC- Revolutionary Command Council
SCAF- Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SCMR- Supreme Council on Media Regulation
SOE- State-Owned Enterprises
SPC- Supreme Press Council

"When the national dream is lost, the only course of action left for [authoritarian] regimes is one that starts with a television station or radio station and ends with a tank, missile, or airplane.¹"

Prelude

i. Information & Power

Without explicitly acknowledging it, analysis and commentary on Egyptian media tend to veer towards an analysis of its political economy. However, many avoid structurally integrating “political economy” of media into an overall analysis. Instead, bearing in mind the long history of a state-controlled media, research goes towards issues such as red lines, censorship, state-intervention and general historic trends, while political economy of media remains a somewhat fringe subject. The composition of Egypt’s media system had ultimately been an expression of power dynamics within the country. Therefore, any observations of media operations or output (especially after privatization) should not be dissociated from the state’s role in the formation, constitution or facilitation of the sector’s activities. Mohamed Hassanein Heikal’s² quote above summarizes how the media were perceived in Egypt since the dawn of the Republic in 1952, when he was still a young journalist.³ In Heikal’s assessment, communication through mass media in the country up until that point had been a tool that was used to express the state’s authority and ensure popular support of large government plans, in the same way that a state uses weaponry and security apparatuses to ensure order.

In 1960 President Gamal Abdel-Nasser issued law 156, which banned any private ownership of newspapers.⁴ That same year, the first television station aired and all terrestrial television broadcasts were also declared to be exclusive to the state. Broadcast television production within Egypt remained under direct government control effectively until 2001⁵ when private satellite television stations were first allowed to operate. Soon after, private newspapers also began printing within the country’s borders. Since 2001, private mass media played a central

¹ Heikal (1984) p.8

² Mohamed Hassanein Heikal (b. 1923) was editor-in-chief of the Cairo newspaper *AlAhrām* for 17 years (1957–1974)

³ Heikal, a close friend and chief advisor of former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel-Nasser, followed that quote by saying: “if the regimes are unable to co-opt the will of the people with words, then weapons take up the job of subjugating them with fire,” (1984:8).

⁴ Abdelfattah (2008)

⁵ A 1980 law allowed for independent press outlets to form, which led to the establishment of some newspapers by political parties. In practice, the state maintained a monopoly of all mass media for another two more decades (Abdelfattah, 2009)

role in many social and political transformations, not least of which, the run-up and aftermath of the 25 January protests that led to the ouster of then President Hosni Mubarak. In a short period of time, satellite television penetration had reached 40% of households in Egypt and private newspaper circulation had begun to compete with its public sector counterparts.⁶ Private mass media have offered somewhat alternative narratives to those offered by the government with regards to issues such as public administration and intellectual discourse. They have been instrumental in informing public opinion on several major social and political issues. However, these outlets have not been operating within a vacuum. Like private media establishments worldwide, they were affected by the interplay of social, political and economic factors. Media outlets have also attempted to achieve commercial viability, a difficult task given for a market that had been allowed to form in an atmosphere lacking in regulatory clarity or operational norms.

This research aims to assess the ways in which power and control in the media landscape has changed since the introduction of private “independent” media in Egypt. It looks to assess the political economy of the private media system and its relationship to the state and to the interests of its media outlet owners.

ii. Questions and scope

Essentially this study examines the paradigms of power, control and agency in Egypt’s media system, especially after privatization. It attempts to answer the following: How much has control over communications and the Egyptian media system shifted to the private sector? Has the state been adopting new means of controlling media since allowing for privately owned broadcast and print mass media (how)? What are the main centers of power in politically sensitive, private broadcast and print media production and output? How has the relationship shifted between the private media establishment and public institutions (judiciary, security apparatus, the presidency, syndicates)? What are the ways these shifts affect practitioners (editors, journalists, producers etc.)?

The media outlets that will be studied are major, privately owned and non-partisan news publications and broadcast media only. The research will focus on the media outlets that are politically sensitive or are important sources of news or analysis of current affairs. In other words, trends such as the proliferation of television stations specialized in religion or

⁶ Dubai Press Club (2010)

entertainment (music, sports, children etc.) are not part of the scope of this research, unless there is an element of their output that is politically sensitive.

This research addresses the development of media systems in Egypt insofar as it pertains to the the shifting political economy of the country. It delves into some of the more nuanced questions of media ownership, such as the question of commercial vs. political motives of launching a mass media outlet. Barriers to entry in this market exist globally, due to the high cost of capital and considerable manpower needed to run a successful mass media enterprise. To what extent are these “natural” market barriers to entry or directed hindrances put forth by a government that still holds many of the means of production along with a final say on regulatory matters? The state’s security services are known to play an active role in all areas of public life, the study addresses how this role was recalibrated during periods of political transition. Much of the research on censorship, self-censorship and hierarchical/institutional forms of maintaining control over the media for the most part has been anecdotal, with reference to the private media.

iii. Methodology

This study will most closely assess the proliferation of privately-owned mass media outlets with a focus on current affairs that were registered as private businesses. Original research and primary sourced material will mostly be focused between the years 2001-2019.

This period in time tracks the sector from its fledgling beginnings through major transitions in the country’s history. The beginnings of this period coincide with intensive privatization as well as a shift towards neoliberalisation policies, driven by Hosni Mubarak’s son, Gamal and a cohort of mostly regime-friendly businessmen. The shift in attitude favoring private sector-led growth would embolden businessmen to enter a sector that had for decades been monopolized by the state, and was seen as an area subject to major national security considerations. Also, embedded within the period of study are two major regime changes amid massive social upheaval and a renegotiation of power structures and social dynamics. Most notably, this period includes the Arab Spring in 2011 which led to the fall of Mubarak, the election and ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and the emergence of AbdelFattah El-Sisi from Defense Minister to President in 2014. This study will attempt to map the media system’s changes during this period.

First-hand interviews anchor this research, with input from: media owners, managers, professionals, and journalists. This research is also enriched by unique access to Dream TV,

the first privately owned television station; OnTV, one of the more notable private broadcasting endeavors; and *AlMasry AlYoum*, the first privately daily newspaper registered and published in Egypt. Each will form a case study that starts from each outlet's inception, highlighting their inner workings, and tracking their developments throughout the period in question. My own recollections and reflections from time spent working with *AlMasry AlYoum English* and *Egypt Independent*, (both owned by *AlMasry AlYoum*) between 2010 and 2013, will also be included as primary source material. This input supplements my research and conclusions rather than superseding them.

Where appropriate, this study will engage in discourse analysis of media content as a secondary level of analysis.

Furthermore, daily newspaper reporting and interviews have helped supplement information, especially when faced with limitations in conducting research.

In order to create a robust narrative of the period in question, this thesis also delves into an analysis of private media in the Arab World (Chapter 2) as well as an historical survey of mass media in Egypt (Chapter 3) as they provide crucial context for the study.

iv. Limitations

This research was conducted during a period when many journalists, academics and researchers were being persecuted, often in connection to their work. Human Rights Watch had called Egypt one of the worst jailers of journalists globally. Due to this, several prospective interviewees either cancelled or refused to answer some questions they deemed too sensitive or potentially detrimental to their own safety and security. A minority of interviewees included in the studied requested anonymity.

Furthermore, the 2016 death of Cambridge PhD student Giulio Regeni, while conducting his fieldwork on labor movements in Egypt has raised numerous red flags about studying potentially sensitive topics in the country. The Italian government suspected Regeni was tortured and killed by Egyptian security forces who had him detained for an interrogation over his research. His death sent shock waves among the academic community, and as a result many researchers were warned against actively engaging in research that could be politically sensitive in Egypt during this period. Materially, this manifested in an active decision to conduct some of the interviews by telephone from London, rather than in-person

while in Cairo. It also meant that the choice of interviewees was subject to the added scrutiny of assessing the security risk attached, while attempting to minimize the risk when possible.

v. **Why traditional mass media in the age of digital?**

This thesis revolves around politically-sensitive audio-visual broadcast and daily print newspapers, while consciously excluding social media-focused outlets from its scope. This decision was partially due to the fact that the history of both media forms allow for a more active “political economy” approach that does not hinge too heavily on technological factors. Furthermore, TV is seen as the most trusted form of media in the country⁷, while print has the longest history and the richest basis to elaborate on the theme of “transition.” The transformative role of digital media in the sector is acknowledged throughout the thesis, especially in the context of how they affected developments in broadcast and print.

vi. **Original Contribution**

This thesis takes a critical look at the transition from an entirely state-run media within a state capitalist system⁸ to a more open one, in a more liberal economy that still exhibits many of the same characteristics of a nation where the state apparatus continues to exact control over civil society. Egypt’s transition has been analyzed extensively with reference to the country’s general political economy and some major economic sectors such as finance, manufacturing, some services etc. However, media have not received a similar treatment. After privatization, mass media were still seen mostly through their roles pertaining to the changing “public sphere” within the realm of culture, politics and society, which are indeed profoundly enlightening approaches in their own rights. However, the political economy of media has also become one of the critical features of the sector in Egypt especially with the continued presence of a heavy-handed state that perhaps still sees media primarily as a tool for development and nation-building⁹ or at least as an item for distraction and venting of grievances¹⁰, but never to challenge the status quo.

Media and journalism in post-Mubarak Egypt have certainly received their fair share of academic and journalistic treatment vis-à-vis the ongoing and historical shifting regulatory

⁷ Allam (2018)

⁸ Cooper (1983)

⁹ Lahlahi (2011)

¹⁰ Webb (2014)

framework of Egyptian media systems and major trends.¹¹ They importantly analyze media regulations, output, discourse, consumption patterns, censorship levels, freedom of speech and major developments in private media. These studies are all important and will help inform the background for this thesis, but this research aims to build on some of the work of other media scholars¹² who have either briefly touched on the political economy angle, or have engaged with this approach more profoundly -as is the case in Naomi Sakr's work. This study attempts to give in-depth research and analysis that highlights the line private mass media tread between politics, economics and development amid prolonged transition. During the course of this research, much had changed both in the country's political situation and in the structure of its media system. This "live PhD" aspect presented a challenge since many of the major changes that occurred over the course of this project directly affected the material at the core of this study. They would at times bring to light new angles and themes that required attention. At the same time, it was useful to discuss transitions in political economy and in media systems, while the country was in the midst of major transition. The developments, more often than not, confirmed the hypotheses and conclusions of this research.

Mohamed Gohar, one of Egypt's earliest private t.v. broadcast media entrepreneurs, thought the sector needed a more incisive analysis to be thoroughly understood. Gohar, who had entered the sector as "Sadat's Photographer" (and went on to become a key producer and television station developer) believed the top-down approach only told a fraction of the story:

"Studying the economics of this market will unlock many of its secrets and allow a different kind of understanding that is not well known yet, but is crucial to knowing anything about how this market works, politically and financially."¹³

¹¹ Khamis (2011); Attalah & Rizk, (2011); El Issawi (2015); AlShaer (2015); Webb (2014); Sakr, (2013); Abdallah (2011); Abdulla (2014); Iskandar (2013)

¹² Naomi Sakr, Fatime El-Issawi, Rasha Abdullah, Mirette Mabrook, John Alterman, Adel Iskandar, to name a few.

¹³ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2015)

Chapter 1: Introduction

After nearly three decades of either direct government control, or minimal (political and economic) liberalization, Egypt entered a phase of neoliberalization (which intensified in 1991) where theoretically, along with economic reforms, the country was to undergo a process of increased freedoms and openness. Among other reforms, this meant that the media sector would be liberalized both economically and politically. However, instead of being fully liberalized, the state negotiated with the private sector a tacit agreement and middle ground between liberalization and control, independence and subservience. This process began to take shape in 2000-2005. The eruption of the 25 January 2011 uprisings and the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak raised more questions on the nature of the media, since they played a major role in forming public opinion and have had varying relationships with the state in the tumultuous period since then. The political transitions following Mubarak's ouster and the corresponding iterations of the private media showed that the state's underlying approach to the sector as a matter of "national security" had not changed. Rather than changing the façade of the country's media system as had been done in the past,¹⁴ the successive regimes sought to employ other means to ensure compliance, be it through regulation, oversight from the security establishment, or coercion using the outlet owners' other business interests as leverage.

This inspired questions around the process of calibration of media freedoms/liberalization and state control in a context where the entire country has been undergoing similar structural transformations or at least facing existential questions regarding the parameters of state-society or state-economy relations. The relationship between the sector and the successive political regimes as well as the country's security complex, lie at the heart of the transformations that are dissected.¹⁵

Mass media outlets are generally not independent of social, political and economic realities where they are formed. They take on the "form and coloration of social and political structures."¹⁶ This study presumes the margins and borders within which media markets exist directly inform how they would conform and act.

¹⁴ For example: Gamal Abdel-Nasser completely nationalized media outlets in 1960 & Mubarak developed infrastructure to support the creation of private broadcast.

¹⁵ The security complex here is defined as the military, Ministry of Interior and Intelligence services.

¹⁶ Sibert (1963) in Rugh (2004) p. xiv

Media scholars that have endeavored to study the political economy of other media systems have often focused on the ownership of means of production, the role of the state, hierarchies and structures within the sector as well as a broad array of power dynamics (media-state, media-society, internally within the media system etc.). Different economic and political systems will entail varying levels of interaction between different power centers. Therefore, theories of the political economy of communications in Western countries are difficult to apply in broad terms. They still offer important tools that could be applied in context. Robert McChesney, one of the foremost political economists of media and communications, acknowledged that his work may be region-specific (to the US), but emphasized the discipline's universal potential:

Humanity is now beginning a process of experimentation in democratic and social structures that has not been witnessed for generations... There is a crucial role for political economists of media in this process, as communications systems lies at the heart of both developing economies and communications systems¹⁷.

Egyptian media also take on regional dimensions. The development of the Arab region's media landscape is inextricably linked to the development of Egypt's national media, especially in commercial, regulatory and operational elements of broadcast media. While this study is not comparative, it does delve into the role Arab media played in nudging Egypt towards opening private sector.

1) The political economy of media: theories and applications

Researching the political economy of media goes beyond studying the effects of media on society; it looks forward to understanding how the media function starting from a deeper, foundational context and how they are essentially geared towards creating or propagating specific social constructs of reality¹⁸ especially with regards to politics, economic ideology or society. While the role of mass media as a central conduit of information may suffice to illustrate its importance to power, the difference in the conceptual role of media information in each case study sets it apart from the others. For example, in the case of Egypt, after the 2011 uprising, the absence of strong political parties with grassroots support meant that the media essentially filled the political void¹⁹, whereas during the nation-building period of the 1950s and 1960s media information was predominantly used to promote development policies and the state in general. Each scenario carries important implications regarding the structure of the media establishment. Without delving too far into media sociology,

¹⁷ McChesney (2008) p. 17

¹⁸ Couldry et al (2007)

¹⁹ El Issawi (2015)

understanding the media's "power to construct social reality"²⁰ is a prerequisite to understanding the political and socio-economic considerations that may affect the political economy of a media system and its composition. This "power" will be directly assessed within the context of Egypt and the broader world Arab media in their respective sections.

The remainder of this section will discuss pertinent theoretical backgrounds in the field such as the Propaganda Model, corporatism, media system formations and globalization/regionalization. The theories based on these concepts have strong explanatory capabilities in the context of Egyptian media. They also have limitations stemming from the fact that, for the most part, they were formed in different structural contexts.

The existing literature on the subject of political economy of media is both diverse and slightly speculative in its assumptions. The subject's *raison-d'être* "as a response to social changes, [such as] the development of media as a business"²¹ led to the adoption of theories that were based on existing observable behavior. Mosco defines the political economy of media as "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources". McChesney argues that the political economy approach to media must inherently focus critically on class relations, modes of intellectual domination and modes of production playing an important role in mass media.²²

The plethora of potential themes and sub-themes lends itself to varying outlooks and approaches in studies focusing on different regions.²³ But at their core, there tends to be a common interest in the analysis of the specific historical circumstances under which new media and communication products and services are produced within increasingly capitalist constructs that involve changing patterns of media consumption. There has always been a struggle both between and among conflicting social groups over the control of the means of communication, and historically -with the exception of the US- the state has played the main role in its regulation and development.²⁴ Scholarship on trends of US mass media provides useful analysis of a capitalist-driven model operating under the auspices of a democratic political oligarchy. Its political economy developments have been well documented and

²⁰ Bourdieu (1990) p. 66

²¹ Mosco (2009) p. 81

²² McChesney (2008)

²³ Mansell (2004)

²⁴ Wilkin (2001)

analyzed. Despite the distinct American history and reality that ultimately led to media markets forming as they did, scholarship surrounding US media have useful– albeit somewhat limited – applications to other kinds of markets.

Frameworks of political economy of media below have been incredibly useful in crystallizing an approach for tackling similar questions in Egypt within this research.

Information Control: Herman and Chomsky’s “Propaganda Model”

Between 2013 and 2020, private Egyptian media outlets slowly came to cluster under networks or media conglomerates. Starting from June 2013, when the military regained political supremacy from the Muslim Brotherhood, the media have been arguably entirely behind the new military-led regime. This has occurred through a combined process of overt coercion²⁵ and a self-preserving approach by remaining mass media outlets that contributed to the mode of acquiescence to the new regime. It had seemingly been a bilateral effort of manufactured and coerced consent in the media.

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s seminal 1988 book, *Manufacturing Consent* gives a piercing analysis on the ways in which media and information are controlled and disseminated. The book argues that through a set of five specific filters, US media, which are mostly owned by conglomerates, have been able to marginalize any points of view that do not conform to the mainstream, and essentially use the ostensibly “democratized” mass media, to convey messages that assert value-system policies or actions that fall within the corporate or state axis of interests. These interests tend to overlap frequently and the authors grouped the combined capitalist classes and the ruling elite as forming the proverbial “mainstream” of socio-economic interactions. The expression itself, “manufacturing consent” aptly describes the main hypothesis. It is derived from Walter Lippman’s²⁶ view that “manufacturing consent” is important within a democracy “to bring about agreement on the part of the public for things that they didn't want by the new techniques of propaganda.”²⁷ This argument is predicated on the notion that common interest tends to elude public opinion and that the media have a moral imperative to understand – and sometimes define – this common interest and act upon it. This

²⁵ In July 2013, after the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi, the government shut down all opposition mass media outlets and jailed many of its senior figures.

²⁶ Walter Lippmann (September 23, 1889 – December 14, 1974) was a prominent American writer, reporter, and political commentator famous for being among the first to introduce the concept of Cold War and critiquing media and democracy.

²⁷ Chomsky (2002)

is not an unfamiliar notion in the Egyptian context since Gamal Abdel-Nasser ascended to power and Egypt became a republic. Media tended to follow the state's lead in how to define and act-upon the state's own definition of "National Interest." Private media outlets were not immune from this, and for the most part did not stray from this tendency.

McChesney believes that, as the American New Left receded after the peak of its activities and influence (1960s-early 1980s), US mass media ceased to be subject to different levels of content "framing," converging to a more-or-less uniform mainstream. He thought this had a palpable effect of narrowing the scope of general public consciousness. The Propaganda Model of Hermann and Chomsky thoroughly assesses ways in which the dominant elite exploit their position and the relative inequality within society through the use of mass media on different levels to ultimately manipulate public perception of their own interests and choices in ways that conform to this elite power structure. They do not contend that this is the only function of mass media systems, but that it is a dominant feature for most of them.

The significance of this work to the field and the research at hand cannot be understated. It "introduced an entire generation of progressives to a critical position regarding the mainstream media."²⁸ Instead of focusing solely on corporate, government or economic concerns, it attempts to analyze where these areas intersect and collude to ultimately affect the output of media. The work offers more comprehensive depth to the notion of "political economy of media" by attempting to group issues such as state ideology and capitalist interests as cogs of the same machine that attempt to "manufacture" an acquiescent populace. Through a mostly institutional imperative, the Propaganda Model assumes that media messaging ultimately occurs through a filtered self-censorship mechanism with minimal coercion, which is very difficult to measure or correctly follow.²⁹ It has been critiqued most heavily for those very reasons. Despite offering thorough and systematic postulations, the model tends to be marginalized academically. What the Propaganda Model offers is a starting point for assessing structural mechanisms that lead to unified media messaging, outside the scope of the state. In the case of Egypt, this model provides a useful lens to analyze the private media systems at times when collusion of the power centers was a more dominant feature, than coercion of the state.

The Corporate Model: the role of ownership and "liberalization"

²⁸ McChesney (2008) p. 83

²⁹ Klaehn (2002)

The Propaganda Model is also predicated on the existence of social classes where economic power is the main enabler of social and political power and where the alliance of the state and capitalist classes forms the major fulcrum of decision making.³⁰ This caveat does not hold as succinctly for cases where the state has the upper-hand vis-à-vis the capitalist class. When private media was introduced in Egypt, the country was trending towards an enhanced role of corporations and private owners in society and politics. These private entities' interests were one and the same with the state's given the dependency of this cohort on the state for the access they needed allowing them to accumulate their wealth. This group is "a bourgeoisie deriving its economic power from the state, while functioning as private capitalists," or a "state bourgeoisie".³¹

Many models of political economies of media are also based on this relationship, including the Corporate Model. It provides a way of analyzing and understanding tendencies of media markets when operating under certain liberalized conditions. While this model is based on observations in mostly Western-style democracies (mostly in the US), it may help in describing some tendencies in Egypt and the Arab World while going through their own liberalization drives. Egypt's neoliberal-inspired economic transition and the removal of some institutional barriers to participation in mass media³² have yielded some superficially similar observations to those made about the American media establishment, notwithstanding the differing political and economic contexts.

Many, including Chomsky, Hermann, McChesney, Mosco, Schiller and Smythe have observed the tendency of media companies to form conglomerates and empires that ultimately control the media in one way or another. The trend starts with the early US model of media conglomeration. In the late 1970s American media experienced a complete institutional shift after welfarist restrictions on communication systems were lifted.³³ Schiller found these conditions to be the catalyst for the US media market to transform and adopt a more corporate-commercial structure. The system of commercial advertising quickly grew along with the communications systems in general. Once rules were loosened that limited media concentration, cross-ownership, and control by non-media companies, many media

³⁰ Klaehn & Mullen (2010)

³¹ Achcar (2013) p.76

³² El Issawi (2015)

³³ Schiller (1989)

organizations attempted to integrate operations.³⁴ At that time, despite the existence of thousands of newspapers, magazines, television outlets and radio stations, over half of the market was controlled by the top 29 firms. These “constitute(d) a new Private Ministry of Information and Culture³⁵”. Winseck and Jin suggest that in Western capitalist mass media establishments (US, Canada, UK, Germany, and even Japan) the top firm usually owns just under one quarter of the entire market followed by a handful of others who own around 10% each.³⁶ Regardless of the specific figures, there is a strong tendency of media systems to form oligopolies and conglomerations. In terms of forms of control within the industry, we follow Golding and Murdock’s distinction between “allocative and operational³⁷” control. Allocative control entails a power to define overall goals and deployment of resources within an organization, while operational control defines the role of managers and their agency in controlling how to use what resources within the parameters they were allocated. In a privatized media market, if the state maintains a strict hold on one of the forms of controls (usually allocative), the result tends to be a tacit partnership between the state and the private owners.

Ownership structures may differ, and authorities may use different means of exclusion or inclusion into this market. They may price out new entrants as Herman and Chomsky describe, or directly curb their ability to participate by requiring vetting from internal security sources, as has been the case in Egypt.³⁸ Whatever the means, once a small minority of similarly interested entities control the media, the effect is tantamount to creating a space where similarly interested business owners can control a fair share of public discourse, at least the part of it that is directed by media.

The corporatist model, as a way to exert control over media content may be inapplicable in the age of new media. Compaine is especially critical, calling this perspective a myth.³⁹ He goes so far as to claim that McChesney and others foment an “irrational fear” of private media, citing decreasing viewership of the largest cable networks since the 60’s and also citing the internet as evidence that viewers have more diverse options of viewership to choose from than ever before. Compaine maybe too dismissive of the early political economy

³⁴ Herman & Chomsky (1988)

³⁵ Bagdikian (2004)

³⁶ Winseck and Jin (2011)

³⁷ Golding and Murdock’s (1978)

³⁸ Webb (2014)

³⁹ Compaine (2005)

schools, however his criticisms are helpful in that they highlight the need to look beyond economics to understand media trends, even when the sector seems to be liberalizing.

Mass media and communications provide ample incentive and economic rationale for expansion, diversification and conglomeration. Moving from the printing press and television to New Media⁴⁰, costs of reproduction of information and multimedia have been shrinking at a pace far exceeding most outlets' ability to adapt. Rapid technological advancement has also allowed media outlets to increase audience sizes rather quickly across borders and across mediums. This trend became a major driver in allowing mass media companies to expand horizontally and vertically, achieving high-levels of concentration, internationalization and cross-media ownership in the culture industries.⁴¹ Large organizations are able to buy off smaller ones and extend their content to new audiences and across different media platforms. For example, a television broadcaster could purchase a newspaper and be able to share both the print and audio-visual content on the same online platform. After the initial infrastructure and costs of production are set in place for one form of media production (audio-visual, print or others), much of the costs of expansion involves buying audiences and viewership.

Technological advancement has helped transform a majority of media content into a public good. In order for a good to be considered "public" it must satisfy two main criteria: very few (or no) additional costs of adding users; and the impossibility of excluding users from consumption.⁴² Public goods in unregulated environments experience monopolies or at least concentration of ownership since marginal costs of reproduction are so low that competition may be rooted out at the initial production phase. In applying this to free-to-air broadcasting, once a program is aired on television, without incurring any additional costs, a broadcaster may air the same content again on the internet or another television channel, or on the same television channel, but at a later date. Similarly, others may record and reproduce the same program online with ease, and if necessary, without. Maximizing audiences is one of the ways media owners curtail the downside of trading in a "public good"⁴³. In fact, maximizing audiences is essential for mass-media owners who are primarily interested in wealth accumulation.

⁴⁰ New Media is a 21st Century catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound. Its definition is relatively fluid and changes as the technology changes.

⁴¹ Garnham (1987)

⁴² Krepelka (2007).

⁴³ Compaine (2005)

The above characterization of media content is key in the case of post-privatization Egypt, when new television stations dominated the mass media landscape. With the proliferation of cable and free-to-air channels, public access to these private stations became universal. The internet has also greatly facilitated access to both print and audiovisual content via the outlets' own websites, and social media tools.

The allocative function of capital within media is a model that has its roots in the very origins of the political economy approach towards media. Besides providing media content as units of value, media outlets must also provide audience to the advertisers in order to sell. In order to be profitable, they must provide large enough audiences to advertisers. Essentially the size of an audience is a commodity that most media outlets must strive for.⁴⁴ Given the low marginal costs of adding new users, and the high costs of initial production, market players have incentives to conglomerate and grow. This was certainly the case in the US in the 1990s when a law was passed allowing for studios to both produce and distribute content (they were previously limited to one or the other) led to a frenzy of mergers and acquisitions within the market to produce such mega companies as Disney and ABC, Time-Warner and Turner Communications.⁴⁵ The US experienced 557 acquisitions within the media industry between 1990 and 1995, which is about the same as during the entire period between 1960 and 1989.⁴⁶

Trends such as these would have not been replicated in other parts of the world, not least the Middle East, if for nothing else then the grand disparity in the scale of private media between the Arab World and the US. Still, these trends may draw attention to some similarities with general media trends in the Arab World. During the early 1990's many Arab countries decided to undergo Economic Restructuring and increased integration into Western economies, opening the media establishment to similar movements. Issues of media ownership are far from being merely academic or in isolation from the public consciousness. A BBC Globescan survey of citizens from 14 countries showed that 59% of the respondents considered media ownership to be a major political issue.⁴⁷ Rightly so, since private media owners have had a major role to play in the regulation of their industries.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Smythe (1981)

⁴⁵ Garham (1997)

⁴⁶ Hesmondhalgh (2002)

⁴⁷ Arsenault & Castells (2014)

⁴⁸ Arsenault & Castelles, (2008); McChesney (2008); Mosco (2009)

Many of the concepts that rely on capitalist contexts for validity may be used in other contexts of neoliberal systems with limited access and political freedoms, such as modern-day Egypt. Mass media have historically played the role of “gatekeepers” of information and culture.⁴⁹ The overall effects of this role largely depends on the way information outlets are controlled or regulated. ‘Gatekeeping’ in Communication Theory is the process by which news/information pass through “gates” that decide, consciously or unconsciously, which pieces of information sift through to the public and which don’t.⁵⁰ While it is considered to be a simple and almost intuitive idea, it offers an important framework through which one may analyze the process and factors that could go into media production. Gatekeeping theory now widely accepts five levels (gates) which news pass through: the individual level, based on personal preferences or biases; routines of communication work, a pre-established or generalized agreement on how the work is done; the organizational level, where individuals may be hired and fired by an organization if they do not follow the agreed upon method of gatekeeping; social and institutional, where a host of external factors play a role (advertising, security forces, state structure, local laws); and societal, based on broad trends, acceptability and availability of those media systems works.

Whether capitalist classes limit access to the markets by monopolies, conglomerates and like-minded interest groups or the state limits access to specific socio-economic groups by economic or red-tape barriers to entry; at some point in both cases, allocative functions of the market and local politics interact to form more nuanced and adaptive features of the “gatekeepers.”

This research will investigate this gatekeeper role in the era of privatized media. Do they speak for the owners, or do they speak for the state? Where are the lines drawn between the state and the cohort of media owners and how is that line maintained?

Comparative Models: Different Media Systems, Different Contexts

The outlook of most political economists of media is that understanding structures, policies and institutions of media is indispensable to understanding other facets of the sector (cultural production, discourse analysis, audiences etc.). As such, it is also important to note that understanding the political and economic environment enveloping a media system has a direct bearing on the political economy of the media establishment and its functioning. This

⁴⁹ KLaehn (2002)

⁵⁰ White (1950)

research includes an assessment of the market forces of production involved with different media. Political economy of media tends to be associated with the left because of “its critical stance towards the market”⁵¹ and the role it may play enhancing an oligarchy within a nation. One issue this study found was that many theories refer to more static systems and contexts, whereas Egypt has been in a near constant state of transition for nearly three decades. This makes the process of applying theories quite indirect.

A first essential step in this direction of figuring out how to apply some of the existing theories in the Egyptian context is to understand the structures that dictate the allocation of power. According to Bertrand Russell⁵² the desire for power and the means to attain/maintain it are fundamental components of any social science, “in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics.⁵³” Power, here is defined as “the capacity of persons to affect... what is thought, felt, said or done by other persons, subject to that capacity deriving from possession of institutional, not personal attributes.⁵⁴” These structures, according to the same author could be reduced to three kinds of power: economic, ideological and coercive, which translate to “means of production, means of persuasion and means of coercion.⁵⁵” Political economists who work in the institutionalist, socialist or Marxist traditions are also concerned with identifying links between political economy and the broader social and cultural field. There’s an embedded nature of economic activities within the wider socio-cultural political framework that structurally have a profound effect on media systems.⁵⁶

Once that is decided, a more in-depth look at the media system internally and elements of its own political economy are necessary. Hallin and Mancini⁵⁷ made an important contribution in their influential analysis and description of media systems, in their book, *Comparing Media Systems*. They provide a framework that is divided into four areas of inquiry: 1) understanding how media markets developed; 2) assessing the political parallelism between media and political parties or the state; 3) the development of journalistic professionalism; 4) the degree of state intervention within media. Sarah El-Richani excellently deploys this theory in her analysis of the Lebanese media⁵⁸. She not only examines the Lebanese media

⁵¹ McChesney, (2008) p.13

⁵² Russell (1938)

⁵³ Russell (1938) p.10

⁵⁴ Runciman (1993) p.2

⁵⁵ Runciman (1993) p.12

⁵⁶ Mosco (2009) p.30

⁵⁷ Hallin and Mancini (2004)

⁵⁸ El-Richani (2016)

system from within all four points of inquiry, but acknowledges the contextual limitations of this study by engaging with scholarship from within the region. El-Richani built on Hallin and Mancini's model by proposing that state size and prevalence of crises be added as elements within the theoretical framework of such a study.

This study also agrees with Hallin and Mancini's perspective that the nation-state presents an ideal unit of analysis for media systems, given its operative nature and role in society. But analysis within the temporal scope of this study must extend beyond their model.

Egypt experienced private ownership within media markets for the first time in the modern era in the 1990s and 2000s.⁵⁹ The state created frameworks within which most media markets worked; the concepts of journalistic professionalism were developed along those general lines. Most adopted media guidelines developed in the UK's BBC tradition, what is known as the Professional Model.⁶⁰ Political allegiances of media owners and state intervention then both played important roles in tempering the application of these concepts and ultimately altering the practice in their institutions as a whole.

In order to analyze how institutional factors affect the notion of human agency and activity within an organization it is important to understand how relations within organizations work. Anthony Giddens provides a useful tool for this in his theory of 'Structuration'.⁶¹ This theory would help crystallize manners in which professionalism in journalism developed. 'Structuration' views human agency and social structures as interactive elements in a relationship that together affect action. It rejects the notion that human agency is exclusively the direct result of the structures and institutions imposed upon it. This research views ideas of professionalism in journalism in Egypt to have developed in such a manner in the privatization era. For example, even though the state in Egypt had continued to directly intervene in privatized news media, media executives and practitioners still managed to play a role as independent agents that contributed to the norms and practices of journalistic professionalism.

In assessing a media system from a political economic approach, all of the aforementioned tools could play important explanatory roles in to help understand what will ultimately affect outcomes. Undoubtedly, there will be a need for differing theories and understanding of

⁵⁹ Webb (2014)

⁶⁰ Hallin and Mancini (2004)

⁶¹ Giddens & Dalmyr (1982)

different structural underpinnings of communications generally. Curran and Park think that a “De-Westernization of media studies” was needed due to the “self-absorption” and “parochialism” of much of Western media theory.⁶² One element they criticize is the reliance of these theories made by non-regionally-specialized researchers who do not necessarily have a grasp on the underpinning elements within each context. This thesis makes use of books written by practitioners and academics from within the Arab world, writing in both Arabic and English.

Instead of assessing local contexts from within, political theorists of media have had the tendency to attribute much of the changes in local media development of the less developed economies to globalization. “Globalization Theory” falls out of the scope of a study such as this due mainly to the fact that it generally implies the state is becoming marginalized with reference to the technological, cultural and financial interconnectedness of the world, especially in the context of liberalized systems.⁶³ It would entail that technology’s effect is to “weaken the nation” when it comes to controlling media content; and while Globalization Theory is very relevant in other media systems, nations do play a controlling role⁶⁴ in most media systems in Egypt and the broader Arab context. Globalization Theory gained traction in a political economy sense when neoliberalism and the expansion and interconnection of global financial markets increased, causing international markets, technology transfers and multinational companies to rise dramatically in prominence. Unsurprisingly, this same period saw a spike in the amount of academic literature on globalization and the media.⁶⁵ In fact, the overall contribution of the largest global media conglomerates is negligible compared to what is actually involved in the global outreach of media. Critics such as Hafez view that whole idea of media globalization to be an inherent falsehood. He writes in his book, *The Myth of Media Globalization*, “Media capital's lack of global reach is, [due to] the political persistence of the nation-state and the major differences that mark the media discourses of the world's nation-states or cultural area...⁶⁶”.

That is not to say that globalization is irrelevant. One can argue that were it not for globalization and increased integration into the Western global financial system and its ideology, Arab countries would have been much less likely to privatize segments of their

⁶² Curran and Park (2000)

⁶³ Street (2001)

⁶⁴ Curran & Park (2000) p.18

⁶⁵ Ampuja (2010)

⁶⁶ Hafez & Skinner (2007) p.158

media systems to begin with. The international technology transfer that preceded every development in media is a crucial and palpable manifestation of the trend. However, globalization as a vehicle towards economic and political liberalization (which normally would include allowing for independent and free press/media) never materialized fully.

Western political thought took it for granted that economic liberalization was a precursor and guarantor of political liberalization. Instead, Egypt's expanding private capital and global financial integration, (however limited) did not coincide with comparable levels of political liberalization. The new class of entrepreneurs that benefitted from global economic integration were focused on their direct interests and rarely used their newly found status and global access to further causes that may challenge the prevailing status quo: a single party, neo-patrimonial state governed with the aid of a heavy-handed security apparatus.⁶⁷

Some scholars suggest "regionalization" as a more apt way of looking at the interconnectedness of transnational media and the effects it has on the media development in certain countries.⁶⁸ This outlook is more pertinent to the example of Egypt's media system insofar as it related to the Arab countries.

2) Media systems in The Arab World: relevance to Egypt

Analysis of Arab media development here is relevant for this thesis on two levels: first, trends in the political economy of Arab Media overlapped and influenced Egyptian media; secondly, scholarship on recent Arab media trends will offer valid points of reference for this study, given the preponderance of research on the political economy of Arab media relative to similar research specifically pertaining to Egypt. Chapter 2 will take a deeper look into these factors.

Media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are almost organically interconnected due mostly to shared language, religion and culture. Importantly, a crucial area of intersection between Egyptian local private media and the pan-Arab context is the fact that in most Arab countries private broadcasting is confined to satellite transmission⁶⁹, which could be viewed worldwide and is generally seen by diaspora communities in the West and the entire Arab region. Regional developments also offer apt grounds for comparison in assessing levels of parallelism between political economy within states (i.e. pluralism,

⁶⁷ Kienle (2001)

⁶⁸ Hafez, (2005)

⁶⁹ In Egypt private media exclusively emits through satellites aimed mainly at the Arab World

competition, liberalization, etc.) and media systems in a region that has a number of similarities in local power dynamics.

Regionalism, “Glocalisation” and Localization

Since the early 1990s Arab media systems have been experiencing a set of seismic changes on many different fronts. The proliferation of technology with satellite, cable television, and the internet has opened the doors for audiences to engage with a wide variety of programming worldwide. The Gulf War in 1991 was the first time Arab audiences experienced a televised war. It also marked the introduction of 24-hour news channels. Millions tuned in to CNN to follow the developments of the war on an hourly basis. The period after the war also involved important milestones for the political economy of different states within the region, with increased economic restructuring and liberalization taking place.⁷⁰

Mass media, which before this period had been exclusive monopolies for governments in the majority of the region, were somewhat liberalized and became inclusive of the private sector. News that had previously been siphoned through state-sanctioned outlets started to be on offer by non-government outlets. Lebanon, Kuwait, Yemen and Morocco were forerunners in this respect, especially Lebanon, which has had private and diversely politicized print and media outlets long before most of its neighbors.⁷¹ The general development of Pan-Arab media was a precursor to the establishment of private Egyptian stations. Saudi and Lebanese-owned private stations were already well established before the first outlets out of Egypt. Their programming and content helped provide templates that many Egyptian stations would follow.

Political and economic shifts in the region would be another factor linking MENA countries and would help explain some of the parallels in media beyond cultural and religious factors. Most of the region experienced nation-building and Pan-Arabism simultaneously in the 1960's while also undergoing IFI-inspired economic liberalization almost in-tandem during the late 1980s. However, some underlying institutional political and economic factors did diverge among the countries as well, allowing for a more controlled comparison. Hallin and

⁷⁰ Ayish (2003)

⁷¹ Rugh (2004)

Mancini⁷² argue that comparative studies allow the researcher to verify assumptions regarding aspects of media systems that are assumed to be "natural" or so familiar that they are not perceived at all. While this research does not intend to embark on a comparative narrative (the focus remains firmly on Egypt), there will be a need to provide benchmarks and regional context in order to offer depth to the research and analysis on Egypt, especially since the sector in question was affected by regional and global trends.

To be sure, the region does exhibit highly varying social, political and economic realities. There still exist traditionally centralized states, where the centers of power monopolize both the use of force and access to economic opportunity, which are used to maintain control of society (such as KSA and other Arab Monarchies). Other states had autocratic rulers, who maintained control by distributing privileges to their clients, surrogates and sometimes, rivals. Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia have been prime examples, although the so-called Arab Spring helped briefly redistribute power dynamics. The application of economic restructuring and neoliberal policies has been most potent in these countries, as they had exhibited the most notable trends in privatization and shifting politics. Lebanon perhaps presents a special case with a political oligopoly operating in a "Mafia-like" manner in turns.⁷³

This research examines parallels between political distribution of power and distribution of market power within the media. The disparity between Arab countries' political systems allows for a clearer crystallization of these parallels.

At the same time, many similarities exist. Most Arab mass media systems were originally developed primarily to represent the state and the ruling class of each country. Media in the Arab world initially had goals of promoting Arab Nationalism, and sow the seeds of cooperation between media authorities in different states.⁷⁴ Cooperation in this field began with the Permanent Committee for Arab Media in 1959 and continued through to the Arab League's obsolete body: The Committee for Arab Media Ministers, formed in 1994.⁷⁵ This Committee was meant to form pan-Arab Media policies to regulate the region's media. It came at a time when private and satellite media were growing and locally produced outlets could be easily accessed regionally and internationally. As with many Arab League initiatives, true cooperation on the topic never materialized. However, common language, religion and

⁷² Hallin and Mancini (2004)

⁷³ Achcar (2013)

⁷⁴ Lahlali (2011)

⁷⁵ Abdelrahman (2009)

political concerns along with technological breakthroughs in ICT meant that cross-border activity would continue. Two years later, representatives of the major newspapers from 17 Arab states signed the Sanaa' Declaration.⁷⁶ This was intended to be a UN-led, regional pact pushing for the creation of independent and pluralistic press. It happened to occur during the proliferation of private media in some parts of the region. Its direct effects, if any, were undetectable. The document is still the only ratified international document on Arab media freedom.

The next regional effort to coordinate media efforts was in the 2008 Arab Media Charter. The charter, ratified in Cairo by 22 Arab Information Ministers (with the notable absence of Qatar and less notably, Iraq) aimed to put limits on what could be broadcast on Arab airwaves. Member states agreed to forbid content that had a "negative influence on social peace and national unity and public order and decency" and would be "in contradiction with the principles of Arab solidarity".⁷⁷ Qatar's absence could be explained by the editorial policies of its 24-hour news station, *Al Jazeera*. Hosting members of opposition groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and constantly offering critical reporting on Arab governments (with the notable exception of Qatar) made the network a constant thorn in the side of most Arab regimes.⁷⁸ It also meant that Qatar was never likely to be a signatory to such a Charter, which was aimed at private satellite channels that were becoming overly critical of the very same regimes. The Charter also attempted to steer towards regulating satellite television stations (especially if they were free-to-air) that had been quickly growing with very few guiding principles and increasing viewership.⁷⁹ It called for banning the production or display of content that runs "counter to norms and values of standards of Arab Society," a very common clause in most countries in the region. In defense of the charter, media scholar, Hussein Amin⁸⁰ says:

By basing the Charter on the best practices of television broadcasting regulation in the West and adapting these regulations for Arab society, it is hoped that this Charter will provide a foundation for developing a vibrant,

⁷⁶ UNESCO (1996)

⁷⁷ CPJ (2009)

⁷⁸ Achcar (2013)

⁷⁹ The Dubai Press Club (2010) reported that 38% of Egyptian households had access to satellite television. Corresponding figures from the Arab world include: 89% Tunisia, 86% Saudi Arabia, 74% Syria and 64% Morocco.

⁸⁰ Hussein Amin has been the chair of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo at the time of writing.

diverse satellite television environment that broadcasts programs meeting world-class standards of journalism, entertainment, and public affairs.⁸¹

Amin qualifies his position by stipulating that the success of the charter would depend on how every country implements it. He very generously compared the Charter to the FCC in the US, which regulates the type of content that may be broadcast (he mentions the FCC when referring to “best practices of television broadcasting regulation in the West”). This is an inaccurate comparison as bodies such as the FCC or Ofcom (in the UK) are completely independent and locally run. The regional nature of this charter points to a supra-judicial attitude that seems to uphold the status-quo of regimes, more than that of the laws, which differ among most Arab countries. The charter does bring to light the general attitude of Arab states towards private broadcasting and its view that they must fall in line with a vaguely defined notion of “society” and “social norms.”

Developments in Arab media were interconnected due to the common market, but also highly local. Many argue that mass media in the Arab World may best be understood and analyzed in the context of what has been termed "glocalization," a combination of local and global political, economic, technological and cultural processes. Hafez argues the the Middle East is is a prime example of another trend, “Neo-Regionalism,”⁸² where geo-linguistic sub-regions have been using new networked societies while incorporating Western influences to generate new national cultural products. This trend is thought to have democratizing effects (and more open access to information), which can be observed in areas such as South Asia and Latin America, but perhaps not as much in the Arab World.⁸³

Nonetheless, increasing amounts of news coverage, in-depth reporting and talk shows have provided unprecedented access to opposition perspectives for Arab audiences. Much of this programming was influenced by the “*AlJazeera Effect*” which helped spur demand for more informed and critical media, transforming current affairs coverage region-wide.⁸⁴ While this research will not deny the transformative role of *AlJazeera*, it will focus more on the development and political economy of private, politically sensitive, national media, and in the case of Egypt will discuss this “effect” only in reference to professionalization in the sector or the changes it prompted in the early days of private media in the country.

⁸¹ Amin (2008)

⁸² Hafez (2007)

⁸³ Sakr (2007)

⁸⁴ ElNawawy and Gher (2003)

Developments in Arab Media

For decades most Arab governments proclaimed an absolute monopoly on all broadcast media and most print. The period of Arab Nationalism saw the formation of nation states and attempts at local and regional power consolidation. The oil boom in the 1970s allowed most of these states' additional rents to be used both for economic and political development. Rentierism became the most notable feature of MENA economies.⁸⁵ Resource-poor countries had to look towards diversifying their economies while the oil-rich states maintained their near absolute grip on their countries' economies. The region by-and-large joined the Western-led neoliberalization trend. Some such as Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia embarked on a path of neoliberalization spearheaded by the International Financial Institutions (IFI) in order to encourage foreign funding that would help plug the budget gaps.

Hafez⁸⁶ notices that hard authoritarian nations -where ties between media and opposition groups or civil society are low and the degree of repression is high- tend to maintain both their system of governance and a relatively closed state of private internal media. Often, as was the case in the majority of Arab nations, patronage networks built around political alliances or economic interest (also linked to the state) form the fulcrum of media systems that exhibit close degrees of parallels with the general power structures of the countries in which they exist. This was the case in the early days of American journalism, when political parties were necessary patrons to media.⁸⁷ Despite the changing landscape of Arab media, it has yet to be proven that this has also changed the nature of patronage networks in the region. "There is some agreement among Arab analysts that the arrival of satellite channels did not in itself rupture the relations of patronage that had previously dominated the region's television output.⁸⁸" The introduction of this changing system of ownership, where ownership was at least nominally private, did not immediately hand market powers to consumers or to cultural producers and professionals. Some observers claim that these so-called 'new' Arab media "are still effectively dealing with one consumer", namely the head of state, and that they are "appendages of the ruling political and economic order in the Arab World, not challenges to it."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Achcar (2013)

⁸⁶ Hafez (2005)

⁸⁷ Popkin (2006)

⁸⁸ Sakr (2007) p.2

⁸⁹ Khouri (2002)

Changes in traditional Arab mass media seem to follow patterns that see them ebb and flow around the same axis of political and economic patronage. The start of the proliferation of satellite television began by a royal imperative. Saudi Arabia was responsible for the first emissions of privately owned Arab satellite television stations with Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC).⁹⁰ The owners of the station were both in-laws to the *Al-Sauds*. The other two “private” Saudi owned satellite television conglomerates, ART and Orbit, were more directly owned by princes of The Kingdom. All these Saudi-owned stations are also Pan-Arab satellite stations. MBC especially began the trend of in-depth news analysis on regional topics. However, these stations were noticeably light on airing stories or issues having to do with internal Saudi politics or criticizing the ruling family. Chapter 2 discusses with more detail the development of private mass media in the Arab world, including Lebanon, one of the more vibrant countries in this sector, which developed a long-standing pluralist media. The Chapter will also consider the effects of heavy investment in regional media since the mid 90’s from the oil-rich Gulf Countries. It will explore with more depth the relationship between Egyptian private mass media growth and regional developments.

3) State Capitalism and Neoliberalism: Theoretical underpinnings

The media system transformations under investigation in this thesis occur mostly within the context of a broader shift in political-economic and commercial policies that directly played-into developments in the sector. The shift this study will most often refer to is from a system predominantly characterized as pushing from “state-capitalism,” to a policy framework that is more “neoliberal” in nature. They are both terms that have wide-ranging applications, and so it is important to define them more clearly in the context of this study.

Egypt’s rulers described their policies differently. Gamal Abdel-Nasser often referred to his doctrine as “Arab Socialism,” especially in the latter phase of his rule. His era would be defined by nationalization of industry, sweeping welfare policies, high levels of protectionism and import substitution, and state control of the means of production. The Nasserite developmentalist model is often described by scholars as more closely resembling “state capitalism,” rather than socialism, mainly due to the fact that many of the production and consumption patterns remained in tact after the revolution against the monarchy in 1952; but according to Cooper the level of dependence on the state was the main differentiator for most Egyptians.⁹¹ The state would not only have a new ruling class, but it would mostly be a

⁹⁰ Sakr (2007)

⁹¹ Cooper (1983)

direct replacement of existing power structures, or as Achcar put it, “the Nasserite paradigm carried the substitution of the executive for the really existing bourgeoisie [it] replaced the bourgeoisie on the economic plane as well, subjecting it to extensive expropriations.”⁹²

This transition is broadly viewed as a gradual move towards a more neoliberal framework after Nasser’s death in 1970, but in a much more accelerated manner during the second half of Mubarak’s presidency. Finding a definitive, current and universal description of neoliberalism and what it pertains to from an ideological and policy perspective can be difficult, despite it being such a widely employed concept. It is the subject of broad discussion and debate, the true breadth of which transcends the parameters and purpose of this study. Many have avoided defining the term on a theoretical basis. One study puts this down to neoliberalism not exhibiting “a clearly defined set of invariant features, as may be expected in studies of ‘feudalism’ or ‘capitalism.’”⁹³ The term can admittedly be somewhat elusive and seem to straddle a wide range of political, economic and even social phenomena; opening it to many usages, in a somewhat “catch-all” manner.⁹⁴

However, this study aims to clearly employ the term to describe some of the more basic features of the transition in Egypt around the time the media system was being opened to the private sector. Most notably the term reflects, “the systematic use of state power to impose (financial) market imperatives, in a domestic process that is replicated internationally by globalization.”⁹⁵ One of the ways neoliberalism is distinguished from other forms of ‘liberal’ thought, is that despite calling for ‘deregulation’ of markets, it is ultimately used as justification of broad state intervention and-almost paradoxically- higher regulation. Most states going through a neoliberal transformation exhibit a centrally-mandated and enforced reallocation of resources in a manner that is “based on the prominence of finance, international elite integration, subordination of the poor... and universal compliance with U.S. interests.”⁹⁶ Modern neoliberalism is closely linked with the (mostly Washington-based) International Financial Institutions⁹⁷ that were often directly responsible for the propagation of the mode of thinking through the structural reforms imposed on their loan recipients. David Harvey argues that despite neoliberal states’ general stated support of individual

⁹² Achcar (2013) p. 129

⁹³ Johnston & Saad-Filho (2005) p.1

⁹⁴ Eagleton-Pierce, M. (2016).

⁹⁵ Johnston & Saad-Filho (2005) p.3

⁹⁶ Ibid p. 5

⁹⁷ Mainly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund

freedom and liberties, authoritarianism and state coercion still often came hand-in-hand with the enforcement of neoliberal policies, given the states' central and prioritized role of reflecting and protecting the rights of businesses, multinational corporations and foreign capital. Harvey ultimately sees neoliberalism as being necessarily a political project first and foremost, one that is underpinned by some modalities of liberal economic and social thought.⁹⁸ In the case of Egypt, especially during the second half of Mubarak's presidency, the regime strove towards implementing a system that had many of the characteristics described above. The degree to which the successive Mubarak governments at the time implemented the liberalization policies varied, although it was most intensified in the decade preceding the 2011 uprising that ended with Mubarak's ouster.

Regime vs government

This research also refers to the 'state' as well as the 'regime' and sometimes the 'government,' when pointing towards the entities executing or deciding on certain policies or acts that involve the use of resources at the disposal of the central authority. In terms of Egyptian polity, the 'government' often includes the cabinets, and the entities under control of the Prime Minister, of whom there were seven under Mubarak. The term is therefore employed in this specific context.

The 'state' in this study will refer to the organizations at the center of public life, through which one can distinguish: the allocation of control and oversight over public institutions; directing the flow of property and resources, as well as the financial and fiduciary obligations within government; the symbolic, cultural and visible signs pertaining to state-making.⁹⁹ Many of Egypt's public institutions are referred to as "state-owned" since they are official under the auspices of the public systems, and not tied to specific regimes or governments. Similarly, governments and regimes tend to act on behalf of "the state." The term 'regime' will be used in reference to the power structure surrounding the particular president who represented the nucleus and absolute focal point for most of the ruling structures in referenced in this study. This did not hold true for some isolated moments in history. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi was not seen as the focal point and the center of power while he was president in 2012 and 2013. This study therefore does not refer to a "Morsi regime." Similarly, there's no reference to a "Naguib regime" when he was made

⁹⁸ Harvey (2007)

⁹⁹ Mayrl & Quinn (2016)

president in 1953 and 1954, especially since Gamal Abdel-Nasser was seen as the de-facto leader among the Free Officers after the 1952 Revolution.

4) Methodology: Analysis and reflection on interviews and documents

Mass media as a sector has often been considered a sensitive subject in Egypt. Ruling regimes conferred upon it a “National Security” status, facilitating the regulation and control of many outlets. This also meant that many of the interviewees would be skeptical or hesitant to respond to questions from a researcher. Figenschou, encountered a similar issue when interviewing some of the highest level employees at AlJazeera, where she describes there to have been a climate of relative skepticism towards outsiders looking to dissect the Qatari-owned outlet.¹⁰⁰ Many of the media professionals interviewed in the scope of this study were either currently employed, and often anxious to avoid jeopardizing their careers in Egypt by divulging compromising information, or indeed having the “wrong” opinion on the state of affairs. Others had exited the field in Egypt, and were keen to give their side of the story, knowing the story of this sector in Egypt is not often told. Some had retired and were in a highly reflexive state regarding the topics at hand. From the researchers perspective, when reflecting on these conversations “after the interview¹⁰¹,” these aspects would have to be considered when deciding on the relevance of the interview to different areas of the study. Understanding the social and professional interactions (including power relations) that may influence the approach and outlook of some of the subjects would also play an important role in considering the context of the experience they relay from their time in media.¹⁰² A similar process would have to go into assessing authors of the many documents cited and analyzed throughout this study.

Despite all interviewees being fully aware of the purposes and uses of their interviews, the potential safety and security implications (for both the interviewer and interviewee) also created some additional ethical considerations including deciding when to press on with a certain line of questioning, when to conduct an in-person interview, and when to pass-on potential interviews that may carry a higher level of risk. Ultimately, the interviews that were selected and conducted proved to have provided a sufficient amount of information and insight for the conclusion of this study.

¹⁰⁰ Figenschou (2010)

¹⁰¹ Mills (2008) p. 148

¹⁰² Mayer (2008)

The interviewees were chosen for both their unique insights and positionality in Egypt's media system. For the most part, a semi-structured interview was necessary in order to obtain adequate and un-forced answers. Many interviewees were interested in telling their stories rather than answering questions, and so as one other researcher observed in his reflections on interviews: some were developed "from an original conversation, as simultaneously a search for understanding and as creative writing."¹⁰³ Furthermore, practitioners from the field in Egypt would often be overlooked by researchers looking at the broader trends of the sector in Egypt, where the spotlight tends to be on content, ownership and regulation. The study took the approach that interviews from the sometimes understudied practitioners' perspective could be used to weave together some of the narratives needed to understand how the sector was structurally and operationally impacted by some of the broader transitions in the country.

Choosing a method to present the interviews became central to the composition of this thesis in general, given how central the interviews were to the findings. It was important to reflect on the role of each interview in the areas of the thesis where they were used, a common consideration for interview-driven theses,¹⁰⁴ especially for studies where there is almost too much content and "not enough information."¹⁰⁵ In Chapters 4 and 5 the interviews are used to help reinforce the overall narrative and analysis regarding shifts in the sector. However, for the case studies in Chapters 6 and 7, some of the key interviews form the basis around which the chapters are written. The "narratives" presented are formed almost entirely from the key interviews. My own positionality vis-a-vis the topic at hand is reflected in Chapter 6, which is a case study about a newspaper where I had worked for two years.

5) Egypt: Context and Media

This thesis analyses mainly the correlation between the political economy of Egypt's private media and the political economy of the country. The history of media development in Egypt prior to the more recent proliferation of private broadcasting and newspapers will fall under this analysis due to a belief that the legacy of the country's historical experiences in media development has a direct bearing on modern day attitudes towards media and the flow of information in the country more broadly.

¹⁰³ Macdonald (2008) p. 127

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Williams (2008) p.129

Chapter 3 will breakdown the genesis of print and broadcast mass media in the country, and how their histories significantly merge with the the broader state of government and society. Private print journalism especially played a critical role in nationalist movements, partisan politics, and state propaganda going back to the monarchy in the late 19th century. Broadcast media on the other hand was introduced to the country by Gamal Abdel-Nasser in 1960, essentially as a tool to promote his regime regionally, as well as his brand of socialism, which involved highly centralized planning, near total state-capitalism and launching of numerous “national projects” that were meant to hold the promise of harnessing and accelerating development. That chapter will follow the country’s shift towards a more nominally pluralized polity and liberalized economy that was still severely restricted by a stifling state.¹²¹ Regional and global developments in media and technology and economic liberalization meant that Egyptian media, despite all existent restrictions within them, were liberalized much more quickly than the country’s politics, creating a paradox or friction with the state.¹²² Similarly, since Gamal Abdel-Nasser’s presidency (1952-1970) and until the early years of the Mubarak era, the sector transitioned from being exclusively a tool of the regime in power to be deployed at will, to being a sector faced with an ambivalent attitude from the state who’s main pre-occupation with the sector was to maintain red-lines and restrictions, while periodically deploying the sector as a tool to advance its priorities.¹²³ Against this backdrop, the private media sector developed under an aspiring neoliberal framework (from 1991). Chapter 4 will delve into developments that led to print and broadcast media being opened to independent, private ownership for the first time on a large scale.

Background on political economy and historical context

By 1986 the overall dismal performance of the Egyptian economy, and the government’s need for additional funding became critical. Oil prices halved and the government’s mounting debts were beginning to mature. The need for external aid and economic restructuring led to the International Financial Institutions imposing fundamental changes, politically and economically.¹²⁴ The accepted idea behind these reforms at the time was that economic liberalization would be followed by political liberalization. Wealth was supposed to increase

¹²¹ Farah (2009)

¹²² Khamis (2011)

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Amin (2012)

the potential of popular engagement in the public sphere, even though the experience of Eastern European countries suggest that it would be the other way around, ie. political liberalization would be a beneficial aid for economic reform and the best way to ensure public support for it.¹²⁵

In reality, Egypt experienced marginal increases in entrepreneurial activities and nominal increases in democratic tendencies. The emergent (and small) entrepreneurial class during this period were perhaps among the most important supporters of the government's policies at the time.¹²⁶ This was mostly the same group from which came some of the larger mass media television and print outlets. Members of this cohort also came to occupy many important ministerial appointments as well as sensitive positions in the National Democratic Party (NDP). Understanding the emergence of this group and the process of privatization is key to understanding the political economy of Egypt during this period.

Mubarak's regime promoted the transitions described above, but it did not attempt to erase some of the institutional foundations put in place when Egypt became a republic. In terms of media, Gamal Abdel Nasser created an approach that would reverberate across the different ruling regimes incorporated within this study. Nasser had at his disposal a tool never before used by Egyptian rulers, broadcast television. He oversaw the opening of the iconic Maspero building, the new television headquarters in 1960 and thought of the nascent state broadcast as an integral part of his development plans. Broadcast television was introduced to Egyptians as a tool for development and promoting national unity and "the greater good", whereas print media had already experienced private ownership and political diversity.¹²⁷ Nasser recognized that print was previously run by political parties and that they contained a potential to massively mobilize the public; and so he nationalized the press, including all privately owned papers. All state-owned papers were also monitored to weed out dissent. His regime did not allow dissent from official policy in any of the mass media, all of which were publicly owned.¹²⁸

Despite easing restrictions on the private sector during the *infitah* (Open Door) period in the 1970s under Sadat, the state remained responsible for the vast majority of both investment

¹²⁵ Fidrmuc (2000)

¹²⁶ ElNaggar (2011)

¹²⁷ Ayish (2003)

¹²⁸ AlShaer (2015)

and employment.¹²⁹ Sadat had failed to establish an effective alternative to the public sector, statist formula of Nasser, and he left Mubarak with an economic crisis.¹³⁰

Sadat's abolition of Nasser's one-party system was accompanied by a nominal ease on freedom of expression. He had officially removed state censorship. To be more precise, he removed the kind of spot censors that were meant to act as providing constant and consistent instruction and oversight into any opinion or sensitive angle published in the mainstream media.¹³¹ Instead, he resorted to informal measures that utilized political pressure and security-based restrictions (endangering public safety etc), or drowning out certain voices in print with overwhelming state policies and propaganda on the still nationalized radio and television. Sadat felt that the 1973 War – touted as an astounding victory internally – should have legitimized his regime enough to ensure the approval of the general public and the loyalty of a more open and diverse media. Instead, he chided journalists for highlighting less flattering aspects of his rule such as corruption or state negligence. He gave critical Egyptian reporters abroad an ultimatum, to return to the country or lose their passports.¹³² It was not the open journalistic forum as was envisioned. To top it off, economic missteps lead to social disquiet and so the state under Sadat had their own reasons to fear open debate and frank public discussions. Still, he opened the country for more freedom in publishing. Ownership and operation of the four main publishing houses¹³³ transferred from the Arab Socialist Union (dissolved in 1978) to the Supreme Press Council, a quasi-independent entity responsible for oversight of the press.¹³⁴ Non-state publications would also be allowed, but only in partnership with the Supreme Press Council who would own a 49% share.¹³⁵ This move was seen to be the pre-cursor to the publishing boom, that occurred mostly after Sadat's assassination in 1981.

The Mubarak administration did encourage opposition papers to open newspapers in the first half of his presidency (1981-1997), however a lack of political openness and democratic process left these papers without a true base of popular support.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ Harik (1998)

¹³⁰ Bush (1999) p. 24

¹³¹ Webb (2014)

¹³² Najjar (2008)

¹³³ Dar Alahram, Dar Akhbar Elyoum, Dar Elhelal, Dar Ros Al-Yousef.

¹³⁴ Amin and Napoli (2007)

¹³⁵ El Issawi (2014)

¹³⁶ AlShaer (2015)

A neoliberal transition

The “dismal¹³⁷” state of the public sector and government finances between 1986 and 1990 preceded profound and vital change in the political economy of the country. “Change” in some form was seen as needed to ensure the long-term viability of the Egyptian economy.¹³⁸ Mubarak’s government saw neoliberal reform as the only way forward. Theoretically, the market would reign supreme.

Privatization of industries and the opening up new markets to new opportunities for entrepreneurs were thought to decrease the burden on public finances, which had routinely been injecting the enterprises with the necessary finances to maintain their functioning and pay off their wage bills.

Similarly, attempts to maintain control over communication and information dissemination was proving too costly and unfeasible with the proliferation of private television and the introduction of internet in the country in 1993. At the same time, the government was cautious with loosening up restrictions on mass media. Decreased public spending and the removal of some social safety nets created discontent that could be amplified via these outlets. Meanwhile, international programming was permeating the country’s airwaves and news stands, placing pressure on local media that were needing to compete with the more compelling programming and higher production values from abroad.¹³⁹

The promise of further easing of the foreign debt vis-à-vis a combination of debt forgiveness and aid in exchange for Egypt’s participation in the Gulf War was the precursor for continued cooperation with the West, and the instigator of a liberalization process that would soon reflect on the media system.¹⁴⁰ The IMF and World Bank agreements followed in May 1991. Despite political liberalization forming a portion of IFI¹⁴¹ conditions, they were more interested in enforcing economic liberalization.¹⁴² Matters of freedom of speech and opening up the “public sphere” initially had to wait. When political changes did start to take shape, the

¹³⁷ World Bank (1987)

¹³⁸ Harik (1998)

¹³⁹ AbdelRahman (2001)

¹⁴⁰ Henry and Springborg (2001)

¹⁴¹ International Financial Institutions, here the IMF and World Bank

¹⁴² Zakaria (1997)

eventual “liberalization” of the media and the open elections were often perceived to be items of democratic window-dressing.¹⁴³

Despite the changes occurring in the political economy of Egypt, the underpinning principles of power by both the regime and other power centers (be they political, economic or social) continued to be understood through the same lens as before. The regime remained “neopatrimonial” in the sense that it was an institutionalized form of republican authoritarianism where distributing privileges through nepotism and cronyism to maintain political and economic power became increasingly important.¹⁴⁴ Neopatrimonialism was a major factor in shaping the media system amid private sector expansion. Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss the ways under which the state would continue to position itself vis-à-vis the media in a way that preserved its ability to utilize media to promote its priorities when the push for privatization was most palpable.

Webb¹⁴⁵ argued that the different Egyptian regimes managed to find different uses for the media (both pre and post-privatization), and they tended to all revolve around maintaining power of the central state. Nasser used the media directly for mobilizing the population, while Mubarak saw it more as a means of demobilizing the population.

The term *tanfis* or “safety valve” helps summarize Mubarak’s attitude towards the media. With rising and inescapable social and economic ills, mass media became venues where the public could diffuse frustrations by seeing their grievances expressed on the airwaves or in the newspapers.¹⁴⁶

Broadcasting from outside the state: an experiment

Until 2014 Egyptian audiovisual media were run directly through ministerial cabinets. Under Nasser and Sadat this Ministry was called, The Ministry of National Guidance, later becoming the Ministry of Information (MOI).¹⁴⁷ The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) charter regulated broadcasting based on its original draft in 1979 and its 1989 amendments. It is the closest Egypt came to having a public broadcaster, but as media scholar Rasha Abdullah remarks, “its allegiance remains to the state rather than to the people.”¹⁴⁸ All

¹⁴³ Kienle (2000)

¹⁴⁴ Achcar (2013) pp. 77, 78

¹⁴⁵ Webb (2014)

¹⁴⁶ Khamis (2011)

¹⁴⁷ AFTE (2013)

¹⁴⁸ Abdullah (2016) p. 4219

matters “audio-visual” passed through the Maspero building, a megalith of State Capitalism that has come to symbolize the Nasser era of large projects and mediocre material output. At its peak, it housed 43,000 employees who collectively ran the country’s broadcast media.¹⁴⁹ Established in 1960 (along with the first television stations), it was considered a centerpiece, and the state’s microphone and loudspeaker to the public for decades. “The promise of television as a powerful tool of communication seems to have motivated Arab governments to keep it as a state controlled operation. President Nasser’s effective use of radio to promote pan-Arabist ideology seems to have bolstering a growing conviction that television would potentially be an indispensable tool of political mobilization¹⁵⁰”. Perhaps one of the most telling instances of this building’s importance was immediately after the January 2011 uprising and sit-in, when the army quickly secured the Maspero building much more quickly than some other symbolic or important government venues.

By the mid-1990s the concept of public service broadcasting was losing traction as it was not able to remain viable or attractive to viewers, since exposure to satellite television was increasing. A massive expansion project around that time by the ERTU did not bear fruit commercially or politically, helping highlight the need for another dimension in local mass media if Egypt were to remain a symbolic epicenter for the sector regionally.

In 2000, broadcast journalism in Egypt would experience a structural shift when Decree 411 of that year allowed licenses for private satellite stations to broadcast from within Egypt for the first time. These stations would emit exclusively from the newly created Media Production City (MPC), which was run by the ERTU.¹⁵¹ In 2001 *Dream TV* was established, as the first privately owned satellite station. Its main shareholder was Ahmed Bahgat, a prominent businessman who enjoyed close ties to the state and the president’s family. Bahgat’s business interests varied, but he became known for launching a massive suburban development project, *Dreamland*. He was joined by many other wealthy businessmen along with the ERTU itself as a minority shareholder. The second Egyptian-owned satellite station to broadcast from Egypt was also partly owned by the ERTU and a friend/business associate of the Mubarak’s. A handful of stations followed, revolving around current affairs, entertainment, sports, or even religious channels, some of which would later play a political role in 2011-2013.

¹⁴⁹ AlShaer (2015)

¹⁵⁰ Ayish (2003) p. 28

¹⁵¹ AlShaer (2015)

The idea of the MPC was that it was meant to provide affordable studio space and facilities to encourage television and cinema production. It also placed an enclosure around the stations allowing for easy supervision as they were not officially regulated along with the public broadcasters before it. The sector was not offered a concise regulatory system to operate under. The private sector nevertheless came to life in the media system only through satellite and cable television, while the state never seriously entertained relinquishing absolute control over the more easily accessible, terrestrial broadcasting. Privately owned outlets were mostly regulated as commercial entities. Like other companies that operate in free trade zones, these companies received their licensing from the General Authority for Investments and Free Zones (GAFI).

The rise of private satellite stations coincided with the rise of Gamal Mubarak, and the beginning of the “hereditary project” meant to put him in power. It also coincided with the emergence of a clan of businessmen around him that came to eventually symbolize the clientelist state supporting the younger Mubarak, which is often referenced as a major reason leading up to the 25 January Revolution that ousted his father. These outlets were not only viewed used as window-dressing for the regime in the eyes of the West, but also window-dressing Gamal Mubarak in the eyes of the Egyptian public.¹⁵² The prevailing thought within the sector was that station owners were not interested in making profit through television, but in the political and auxiliary business benefits from owning a chunk of mass media. Bahgat, for example was able to promote *Dreamland* through the eponymous network, while Naguib Sawiris, the founder of OnTV stations was an international telecommunications tycoon known for harboring expansive business and political ambitions.¹⁵³

Licenses initially dolled out for these stations seemed to be exclusive for regime allies; satellite channels knew their “red lines” of criticism and topical coverage; but, satellite stations’ positions tended to fall directly in line with the regime’s perspective, especially with reference to economic policy and the neoliberal transition, a priority of the state at the time. Besides the political barriers of launching a broadcasting outlet, the financial barrier was also considerable given the large upfront capital needed, as well as the underdeveloped advertising and commercial markets for the sector. Chapters 4 and 5 will explore some of these factors in more depth.

¹⁵² Nasser (2012)

¹⁵³ Attalah & Rizk (2011)

Egypt's Nilesat, which carries a majority of satellite television stations to the region, was launched in 1998. By 2015, it was emitting around 500 stations (over 70% of which are free to air). Many of these stations broadcast from outside of Egypt, and the majority of them are specialized TV stations. AlAyary¹⁵⁴ estimates that around 25% of the stations were private news or general (which hold a news broadcasting element). These are the outlets that fall under the scope of this research, as they deal with current affairs.

Many regulatory matters have created barriers from entry to this market, but access to the MPC is one of the major ones. In light of the restrictions set by the government and perceived limitations to freedom of speech the mere formation of private media systems seems to be counterintuitive. This study attempts to assess the motivation and mechanisms behind launching media outlet under this context.

The press and its complicated equation

Since the days of Anwar Sadat, Egypt has had partisan newspapers that created a sense of plurality within the medium. It was not until 2004, when *AlMasry AlYoum* was produced that Egypt experienced a truly private newspaper, which operated at relatively high standards (albeit at times by practitioners who came from a state-press background). Despite competing with a near century-long legacy of public newspaper giants *AlAhrām* and *AlAkhbar*, by 2011 *AlMasry AlYoum* became the most read newspaper in Egypt.¹⁵⁵ It had also become the first to place a major focus on its digital platform, developing one of the most widely read Arabic online newspapers and one of the first multimedia productions by an Egyptian newspaper.¹⁵⁶

Online platforms became one of the major offerings for private newspapers who appealed to the educated and more computer-literate. Internet penetration grew between 2005-2011 from 12.3% to 33.3%.¹⁵⁷ By 2012 the state ran a total of 54 out of a total of 567 newspapers (up from 142 in 2010), 33 of which were dailies.¹⁵⁸ The growth in actual overall readership was

¹⁵⁴ AlAyary (2006)

¹⁵⁵ See Ch. 6 for an in-depth look at the case of *AlMasry AlYoum*

¹⁵⁶ Hatita (2013)

¹⁵⁷ Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2011)

¹⁵⁸ UNESCO (2013)

much slower than the publishing expansion.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, changes in Egyptian print media were integral to overall developments in mass media.

A 1998 law allowed joint stock companies to print private papers as long as they received the Prime Minister's approval.¹⁶⁰ *AlMasry AlYom* was the first of them, followed by others such as *AlDostour* (hitherto published in Cyprus), *AlShorouk*, *ElBadil* and a few more after the 25 January Revolution. The Supreme Council of the Press regulated all newspapers. Private journalists could join the Journalist's Syndicate¹⁶¹ and claim its benefits. Freedom of expression was guaranteed by law and most papers had not been subject to systematic and daily censorship.¹⁶² However, vaguely worded & broad "crimes of publication" laws coupled with the application of anti-terrorism and emergency laws during the entire Mubarak and Sadat presidencies meant that the government could censor any form of information with impunity.

The economic and security barriers to entry into this market as well as the known difficulties of turning a profit with daily newspapers, meant that participation in this sector would be limited to political aspirants, or businessmen who may not care about profit as intently. For example, *AlMasry AlYom*'s main original shareholders were oil tycoon, Salah Diab, along with Naguib Sawiris.

Most mass-circulated private papers maintained good relations with the government as they needed access to government publishing houses in order to ensure mass circulation. In fact, much of the laws seem to aim directly at encouraging self-censorship by threats of legal action or reminders of their general vulnerability. Expressions of displeasure or "polite calls¹⁶³" from the government went a long way in convincing editors to exert self-censorship before printing certain stories. Financial threats or actual business attacks were at times taken against other businesses owned by the media owner as a means of coercion as well.¹⁶⁴ Given the all-pervasive presence of the Egyptian State in nearly every market, this was a powerful and effective means of controlling the media. In some cases, interventions were made directly in the media business as this UNESCO report gives cites:

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Rugh (2004)

¹⁶¹ Many Labor Unions in Egypt are grouped under the term syndicate. The Journalists Syndicate is for all intents and purposes, a labor union.

¹⁶² UNESCO (2013)

¹⁶³ Al-Jessri (2006)

¹⁶⁴ See Chapters 5-7

AlDostour newspaper was bought shortly before the revolution by a major businessman with close links to the Mubarak regime, who then changed the editorial line, resulting in the editor-in-chief, Ibrahim Eissa, leaving. Many commentators believe the government promoted this result because it felt that the newspaper had become too critical. Eissa and a dozen journalists retained control of the website, calling it the Original Dostour.

Another UNESCO anecdote tells of a broadcaster who, some months before the November 2010 parliamentary elections, had been told by the General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI), to stop broadcasting news and current affairs programming. “When the broadcaster persistently refused to do so, they were pointedly reminded by GAFI that their license was up for renewal.” After the ouster of Mubarak in 2011, it became almost inconceivable (albeit for a short period) for a broadcaster to refrain from news and current affairs. Sixteen broadcasting licenses were handed out during that first year.

Post-Mubarak tumult

During the 25 January Revolution, private newspapers played a crucial role in conveying the ongoing developments. While government newspapers showed empty streets, some private newspapers were seemingly defiant, covering the protests in full force. On January 28, the government showed the extent of its control over newspapers and publication, cutting off all internet access, but most newspapers were able to produce content through Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that used satellite internet connections. The period of the 18 uprising days (January 25-February 11, 2011) represented an interesting flashpoint on the status of the media, since, in the utter confusion of much of both the state and society, most media outlets were acting on instinct, they were driven by fear, enthusiasm, patriotism etc. The period following the first wave of the 25 January revolution represents a time of profound and rapid transformations in media. The changes during this period had come to define (while also emanating from) the broader socio-political and economic transformations over the same timeframe. Private media took on a more cavalier role and “the gulf between state and private media [had] never been wider as it had been between April and December 2011,¹⁶⁵”. In the months preceding the revolution, dozens of media licenses were revoked due to “code of ethics violations.” By contrast, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which was

¹⁶⁵ Iskandar (2012) p. 77

in charge at the time, formed a new regulatory body and looked to expand the private media arena.¹⁶⁶

The result was -for a time- a vastly diverse media. When the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi won the 2012 presidential elections, private mass media seemed split between his supporters and his detractors. The situation devolved into media wars until, in one of his last speeches as president, Morsi spoke out in public against the opposition of privately-owned mass media.

After 2011, the golden year for media freedoms and journalism in Egypt, Egyptian media started falling back into old ways. Journalist salaries were not enhanced to offer sustainable workloads. Webb¹⁶⁷ believes that this was a tacit form of control over the media and the quality of some editorial teams. As broadcast developed, many print journalists worked two jobs, one in print media, and the other in broadcasting. Not only were media owners diversifying, but so were practitioners. Between the interlocking world of media owners and employees the mass media sector experienced higher levels of integration.

Mass media in the post-25 January period had been widely observed but rarely systematically and profoundly analyzed, insofar as their structures, operations, and state relations are concerned. Much of the writing on the topic has been in the context of analyzing the roles of social media, talk shows and the role of Al Jazeera, as well as describing the scene after the so-called Arab Spring.

Developments under present AbdelFattah El-Sisi (president since 2014) created more drastic, structural changes in Egyptian media. These changes occurred on Constitutional, Regulatory, and media ownership levels. The shifts on ownership looked to be directly linked to the political composition of the country at the time, with power centers in the country representing the security establishment playing a major, and unambiguous role in reshaping the sector. This will be explored further in Chapter 5.

El-Sisi had initially shown his keen interest in media developments during the first year of his presidency as he met with the cohort of media personalities (excluding press conferences) more than any other single non-military cohort in Egypt. He counts the media sector as a major "national institution," whose goals must align with the state. During his second term as

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

¹⁶⁷ Webb (2014)

president the lines between public and private media were once again blurred. Military figures were at the helm of nearly every government institution. Similarly, private businesses with ties to the military and the broader security establishment embarked on a process of control and consolidation of the media that resulted in a near total and direct cooption of nominally privatized areas of the system.

This thesis will analyze how the nuanced shifts in political leadership and economic policy since the advent of private broadcast and print media translated to the manner the sector was formed and how further developments were acutely sensitive the changes in these broader factors as they occurred. It theorizes that the uneven, inconsistent and volatile pace of transition in both areas will have contributed greatly to the inability of the sector to grow in any linear way. The constant state of transition will change the composition of the media system, but many of the underlying aspects and approaches towards the sector, have contributed to its inability to develop in any sustained direction, outside the arms of the state.

Chapter 2: Arab Media Development: Regional Media and its Effects on Local Systems

Developments in Egyptian media systems and those in the surrounding Arab-speaking region have been inter-linked for many of reasons extending beyond their unified language and overlapping cultural values. A common Pan-Arab media market helped tie the trajectories of their media developments, despite the major differences born out of high variance in economic systems and political power structures.

This chapter aims to offer a brief survey of selected areas of development in local and Pan-Arab media with reference to direct or indirect effects they may have had on the Egyptian context. The overlap in regional media system developments could be attributed partially to identity politics, shared audiences, resources and capital, economic trends, as well as cooperation on legislative, regulatory and media policy matters. As a result, some key trends and phenomena within the sector are observed to either have been shared or parroted across the region at similar time periods.

Power dynamics as well as economic realities have transformed across the Arab World, since the middle of the 20th century. The role of the private sector in the region had been expanding since the 1980s, directly correlated with a period of declining liquidity for the states due largely to declining oil prices.¹⁶⁸ For the most part, Arab states' governments and ruling cohorts had maintained a highly active role in shaping the expansion of the private sector.¹⁶⁹ Major centers of economic and political power were closely-knit and these relationships played crucial roles in regional media development.

Technology, had been expanding beyond the absolute control of the mostly autocratic region. The role of traditional mass media tended to readjust along with political and economic shifts, owing largely to how the power structures controlling the sector attempted to manipulate it. Media development in many Arab countries occurred both collectively and in parallel. From the governments' perspectives, technology had created porous boundaries for the spread of ideologies and various modes of thought. Investing in media helped promote the status quo. Hafez saw it as “a balancing power to the other great mobilizing force of the last

¹⁶⁸ Ayubi (1995)

¹⁶⁹ Achcar (2013) p 61, 62

decade: political Islam (networking, rigor, politics).”¹⁷⁰ Many states resorted to relying on media as a mobilizing device, as opposed to other apparatuses such as political parties.

Regionalism (as opposed to globalism) has been a useful approach towards helping understand media in the Arab region. The valuable work of many such as Sakr, Ayish, Kraidy, Boyd, Hafez, Dajani and others, all help qualify this notion by highlighting the confluence of economics, culture, politics and religion as deciding factors. Lebanon presents a regional anomaly with regards to the structural development of its media, yet it remains of particular interest, having experienced the first and most sustained instance of pluralistic audio-visual mass media ownership and a system that allowed for multiple centers of power within the media systems.

Another useful approach has been a purely “geolinguistic” one, which sees how shared languages and cultures can manifest as market forces driving towards cross-border integration.¹⁷¹ This concept sees markets as causal factors behind the growth of some global media industries. It views language as a tool for empire and expansion, especially economically. While this methodology helps to partially shed light on the expansion of Pan-Arab media, it is inadequate in describing the nuances and multitude of other variables that may be as impactful, but outside the scope of that approach.

On a whole, in assessing media policy, output and economies in the Arab world, local factors still play a more superior role in affecting perceptions. Hafez and Skinner¹⁷² attempted to debunk the notion that news media have become truly globalized due to resistance caused by the structural make-up of local societies:

Media capital's lack of global reach is, alongside the political persistence of the nation-state and the major differences that mark the media discourses of the world's nation-states or cultural area, the key reason why the globalization of the media today is taking place to a far more modest degree and at a far slower pace than is generally assumed.¹⁷³

The thought that media would revolve around global power centers that would easily spearhead the charge of a new cultural imperialism is slowly giving way to the notion that that global media would be more pluralized and cater to increasingly niche viewers. That

¹⁷⁰ Hafez (2000) p. 2

¹⁷¹ Sinclair (2004)

¹⁷² Hafez & Skinner (2007)

¹⁷³ Ibid p. 158

does not discount the cross-border implications of regional and global phenomena. Aside from the broader Pan-Arab media, the diverse and impactful experiences out of Lebanon and Saudi Arabia had especially direct implications on Egypt and the rest of the region.

1) **Pan-Arab Media: a role in nation-building**

In the identity-forming, nation-building, post-colonial era, Arab identity was invoked and pan-Arabism flourished as part of attempts by some ruling cohorts as both a sentimental and pragmatic mobilizing tool in nation-building efforts.¹⁷⁴ The Free Officers of Egypt established a region-wide broadcasting outlet for that very reason with the *Sawt EL-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) radio station that would become a vehicle for Arab independence. This experiment took an inherited notion of Arab sameness, and transformed it into a battle cry.¹⁷⁵ With the scene set from the 1950's, the elevated role of pan-Arabism and the promotion of Arab identity would help place media at center stage as a major means of supporting this idea.

Aside from leading state-building efforts across the region, the emerging rulers were also considered to be the main drivers of economic development, and so they valued the use of media¹⁷⁶ especially as a means to promote their developmentalist policies, which often revolved around grand projects and broader economic nationalization. Numerous laws and stated policies reflect a pervasive regional perspective that media must be centrally directed as a cultural institution and weapon of soft power.¹⁷⁷ As the states underwent varying transitions, media outlets became key vehicles to convey the governments' desired shift (secular/Islamic/liberal/socialist/democratic/authoritarian). The economic realities of each country often reflected on their media systems, whether they were located within national borders, or funded by nationals of that country.

The role of mass media in nation-building and creating group identity in modern history is not specific to the Arab World. Rather it is a symptom of many transitional moments in recent history worldwide. The most notorious example of this would be the role of the Ministry of Propaganda in Nazi Germany. Media in Hitler's state were deployed as one of the main "controllers of the hearts and minds of citizens that had to be kept in submission and

¹⁷⁴ Abou-el-Fadl (2015)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Ayish (2003)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

obedience.”¹⁷⁸ Methods and goals of Arab regimes certainly may have differed from this, but the way many governments had initially viewed media was similar.

The Arab national expansion phase (1976-1990) saw Arab governments boosting their broadcasting capabilities through local training, pooling inter-Arab state resources and attempting to cover all national territories. They collectively formed the Arab States Broadcasting Union.¹⁷⁹ The role of television especially was highly valued by leaders that thought it could be an important political tool.¹⁸⁰ Even as the private sector grew in many Arab countries, by the 1980s television was perceived as a symbol of national identity that may not be shared with the profit-driven ethos of the private sector:

The individuality of the citizen (in Arab Media) was absent in most cases, and that is why the term “mass media” was introduced. This task has been repeated in the building up of the independent Arabs in which its mass media has become a symbol of sovereignty, along with the flag, the national airlines and others. Above all this, mass media served as a tool for forging perception associated with its geography, history, and perhaps legitimacy¹⁸¹.

Individualism and the ego-driven nature of consumerist media would not be compatible with the centrally-planned media aimed at reinforcing group identity during this period. Aside from leading to the nationalization of broadcast media outlets, this incompatibility would also be observed when private audio-visual outlets appeared more broadly in the 1990s, as the cloud of government censure, red tape or narrowing of competition would not allow for a liberalized sector, as will be shown in the case of Egypt in later chapters. The trend mirrors the difficulties countries like Egypt and Tunisia found in delivering on both economic and political liberalization. The will for provisioning for an economic transformation was not matched by proclivity to opening up the public sphere for more freedom of political expression and social ideation. As a result, attempting allow for broader ownership and participation in media systems that were traditionally part of government institutions was a complicated exercise.

The commercial allure of television as a tool with as much potential potency in marketing as it did in political communication did not factor into states’ plans for the media development

¹⁷⁸ Barović (2015). p. 176

¹⁷⁹ Ayish (2003) p. 29

¹⁸⁰ Boyd (1993)

¹⁸¹ Saeed in The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies Research (2006)

until the 1990s.¹⁸² With relatively higher access than many other areas of the world, Arab radio and television was the express form of communicating with the masses, while the press remained a medium for the elite until the end of the 20th century.¹⁸³

Broadcasting did not always begin by centrally-planned government initiatives, however by the 1980's, most Arab states exhibited government monopolies in the sector. In 1971 the Kuwaiti government took over television broadcasting by subordinating it to government control. In the post independence period, Moroccan TV was reined-in under the Postal Ministry. *Radiodiffusion-Television Marocaine* (RTM) then came into being in 1962 as part of the Ministry of Information. SudanTV was started in 1961 after funding came in as a token of goodwill from Germany. Following the British public service model of broadcasting, media systems in the Arabian Gulf region were established as government-run operations mostly, with the UAE starting in 1969. Networks in Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Yemen were established in 1975.

Arab governments generally attempted to model their national broadcasting around centralized Western European examples. This was due to the high value placed on having a government-controlled broadcasting system as a tool of national development. The business-led American system was less appealing at the time, despite harnessing the potential for greater revenue generation. Political ferment in the region in the mid-1950s and in the 1960s created heightened tensions that afforded the ruling cohorts public support for their plans, including government control of television to ensure homogeneity in broadcasting.¹⁸⁴

2) Early trends in private television and Pan-Arab Satellite Broadcasting

During the latter decades of the 20th century, rapid technological development along with shifting political sands contributed to the proliferation of a region-wide spurt of Arab satellite broadcasting. Governments were looking beyond consolidating their local positions into engaging with media audiences both regionally and globally, seeing the potential of audio-visual media as a trans-national political and cultural force. Egypt was already at the helm in this as the region's main producer of audio-visual content. It was the first country to have effectively breached borders in its mass communication with the Voice of the Arabs radio

¹⁸² Ayish (2003)

¹⁸³ Rugh 2007

¹⁸⁴ Ayish (2003)

station. Latter phases of region-wide expansion would ultimately be more relevant to growth of Pan-Arab media at the turn of the 21st century. It would also be heavily influenced by phenomena that have greatly affected the economic dynamics of the region such as the nationalization of oil companies in the Gulf, and attempts to liberalize economies. Satellite television marked one of the earlier attempts for private agents to engage in a region-wide market place employing regional communications.

Furthermore, governments began to understand the difficulties associated with completely rejecting developments in the sector while appearing to promote liberal markets, and inclusive politics. Most public programs had been lacking creativity and were losing their viewership amid rapidly advancing global technologies. They would attempt to regain audiences lost to foreign media through developing high quality national program output that aimed to stave off competition from outside broadcasters.¹⁸⁵

Sakr¹⁸⁶ noted that some of the earliest significant factors influencing regional media came into play in the mid 1970s after the explosion of oil prices and the early attempts by Saudi Arabia to aim towards using television to assert its role as a regional leader. States in the Arab League had also agreed in 1976 to launch the Arab Satellite Communications Organization (Arabsat), with Saudi Arabia playing the most prominent role and owning 29.9% of the company's shares. The next biggest shareholders would be Kuwait (11.9%), Libya (9.2%), Iraq (8.3%), Qatar (8%) and Egypt (5.2%).¹⁸⁷ Egypt had the most to offer in terms of expertise and a wealth of content, and so when it was also removed from Arabsat as a consequence of its suspension from the Arab League in 1979, it created a major gap in the project, as it was the major source of technical knowhow. This meant that for the first few years of the launch of the first satellite in 1985, it was an immensely underused resource.¹⁸⁸

Another watershed moment for regional media outlet proliferation was the Gulf War. It had brought 24-hour news to the MENA region, at a time when only CNN provided consistent news and the demand for distinctly Arab voices in the news grew. Operating from outside the Middle East, it enjoyed more political license than domestic channels. Many Arab media scholars look to this as a moment that “triggered a series of developments that lead to the

¹⁸⁵ Ayish in Hafez (2000) p. 2

¹⁸⁶ Sakr (2001), pp. 9-13

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Ibid

establishment of private television in Arab countries.”¹⁸⁹ The Egyptian Satellite Channel (state owned) had launched in the wake of the Gulf War, starting a trend over the subsequent years for both private and government-owned satellite stations going on air.¹⁹⁰

With the notable exception of Lebanese media¹⁹¹, private television had mostly been confined to satellite television in the Arab region. The first of these outlets was The Middle East Broadcasting Corporations (MBC), launched in 1991 out of London. Started by Saudi investor, Walid Al-Ibrahim, MBC was to be the first privately-owned Arab broadcasting network offering free-to-air non-stop programming. Although, many have doubted whether it was ever truly privately-owned as Al-Ibrahim was the brother-in-law of the late King Fahad. Thus, from the outset, the first privately-owned station in the region would in fact be a testament to the blurred lines between private and public ownership.¹⁹² Commercially, the idea was to capitalize on the vast audience satellite television provides, including the potential for higher advertisement revenue.

This station, which began as a variety outlet blending news and entertainment (a template that would be replicated in subsequent outlets) was supposed to branch into a network of specialized channels relatively quickly. Falling oil revenue was reportedly the reason behind a revision of this strategy postponing its expansion.¹⁹³ The plans did eventually materialize with the launch of *AlArabiya* news channel in 2002 under the MBC umbrella in the build-up to the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. By 2018, MBC had 18 stations under its umbrella.

Before MBC expanded in such a way, Al-Ibrahim’s original partner in MBC, Saleh Kamel had established the first network of specialized stations under the Arab Radio and Television Network (ART) in 1993. Unlike MBC, ART became the first pay-tv service, relying on a completely different business model. However, as Kamel was not directly related to royalty, many viewed his partnership with Saudi Prince AlWalid Bin Talal in ART as one of the main guarantees of the success of his endeavor.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Kraidy (2002)

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ This case is elaborated later in this chapter

¹⁹² AlSaied in Ratta, Sakr & Skovgaard-Petersen (2015) p. 101

¹⁹³ Ibid

¹⁹⁴ Galal in Ratta, Sakr & Skovgaard-Petersen (2015)

Another area of differentiation between the two media moguls, is the degree to which Kamel's media venture could be seen to compliment his other businesses, notably a vast network of Islamic Banks under Al-Baraka Group:

... when setting up ART he deliberately rejected the idea of broadcasting news bulletins because of the potential such an activity would have for damaging his relations with those in power... [his motives] may have less to do with personal vanity and positioning than with his economic interests, including Islamic finance."¹⁹⁵

One of ART's most popular and well-funded stations was a religious station called *Iqraa*, which was dominated by programs promoting Islamic values, including in the world of finance. Giving credence to the theory that ART was primarily a compliment to Kamel's core businesses, he sold-off the ART's very popular sports network in 2009 to *AlJazeera Network* due to declining profitability, despite its owning the rights to broadcasting many exclusive events, and being one of the rare examples of sustainable (and potential) growth in Arab pay-tv at the time.

AlJazeera, had originally started as the first specialized news channel in the Arab World in 1996. Despite attempts to portray itself as privately owned, the Qatari state's ownership and ultimate sway over the network was never in doubt. The network began with a \$150 million loan from the Qatari government and has enjoyed subsidies and further financing from the state ever since.¹⁹⁶ Still, for the majority of the first 15 years of its existence, it gained a reputation as being the first Western-style, independently-run news station due to its maverick coverage of regional events and extensive airtime given to opposition movements.¹⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the Qatari state's use of *AlJazeera* conformed to a growing trend of politicized media ownership, while also fitting into the Arab template of being controlled and directed by the state, who in this case acts both as the financial and political patron.¹⁹⁸

The network's type of programming and quality of production were a first-of-its-kind in the region. It proved to be immensely popular, having played a role in changing political perceptions, while also creating popular programming templates that others looked to emulate. The network had introduced content and production that would change the way news and politics would be discussed and broadcast regionally, forcing many local and Pan-

¹⁹⁵ Ibid p. 90

¹⁹⁶ Zayani, (2005)

¹⁹⁷ Hafez p. 329 in Hanelt Hanelt, Almut Möller (2010)

¹⁹⁸ Zayani (2005)

Arab stations to find ways to compete on a similar playing field. “*AlJazeera* has brought noteworthy innovations to Arab broadcasting and reporting, airing hard-hitting programs, bold uncensored news coverage, passionate political debates, and on-the-ground reporting.”¹⁹⁹

One of its more popular programs, *Sirri lilGhaya* (Top Secret) launched in 1998. It consisted of long-form investigative reports by broadcaster Yosri Foda, who had started by making a name for himself working for the BBC’s World service. His investigative reports, crossed borders and highlighted sensitive topics in an investigative format never before seen by an Arab outlet. Foda, who would later become the host of a top-ranked Egyptian talk show, delved deep into many issues, such as the inner workings of Al-Qaeda. His show was a regional phenomenon, and Foda himself was conscious of the novelty of his show. “We were able to pioneer [Arab] investigative reporting. I was honestly given quite a lot of freedom financially and editorially and was able to do do what I wanted. Our reporting was no less than much of what had come from legendary investigative reporters in the West.”²⁰⁰

Foda, and other programs benefited from the financial backing of the state of Qatar, and their goal to expand above all else. This often came at the expense of relations with other rulers in the Arab world. Resultant local restrictions on the station’s content contributed to the network’s inability to realize its intentions for financial independence. Countries in the region who were wary of *AlJazeera* also attempted to punish the government-owned outlet by pulling advertising from it. This had a palpable effect on the station and caused it to be continuously dependent on government subsidies, loans and cash injections. As a result the station was free from the pressures of advertisers and of most markets in general.²⁰¹ Many advertisers steered clear from *AlJazeera*, so as not to anger countries that took issue with its reporting such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Meanwhile in Saudi, a de-facto advertising ban on the Qatari outlet was put into place less than a decade into its existence.²⁰²

Nonetheless, its programming proved to be a massive success among Arab speakers, and it quickly became a primary source of news for the region.²⁰³ Relative to other regional outlets,

¹⁹⁹ Zayani & Sahraoui (2007)

²⁰⁰ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

²⁰¹ Youmans (2012)

²⁰² Ibid

²⁰³ Saad, L. (2002). *AlJazeera: Arabs Rate Its Objectivity*. [online] Gallup.com. Available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/5857/aljazeera-arabs-rate-its-objectivity.aspx> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2019].

its news coverage was observed to be more objective.²⁰⁴ Its regional reach had been translated in international success as evidenced by a survey in 2005 that found the *AlJazeera* brand to be the fifth most successful globally.²⁰⁵ By the time the Arab Spring came around in 2011, *AlJazeera* was seen to have played a part in transforming Arab consciousness and creating conditions contributing to the uprisings, while notably avoiding any criticism of Qatar, whose interests were undoubtedly promoted via the station.²⁰⁶

Shifting consumer cross-border trends

Technological developments were crucial in helping *AlJazeera* have the impact it did, with the number of people able watch the stations growing greatly during its early years. According to Jon Alterman, by 1998 10%-15% of Arab households had access to satellite television. Alterman wrote a prescient and often-cited study of the changing nature of Arab news media and information technology that same year, predicting major changes in the region's relationship with media and information. The three major transformations he cited were: the declining efficacy of censorship; the emergence of a new kind of Arab identity due to the unifying nature of satellite television; increased sophistication in public interpretation of the news due to the high volume of information being circulated.²⁰⁷

In time, the effects Alterman spoke of in his analysis would be amplified by the proliferation of satellite and internet. A 2012 report by the Dubai Press Club reported that between 2006 and 2011 access to Free to Air (FTA) satellite television increased from 59% to 70% within Arab households. The number of FTA channels dramatically increased over the same period from 218 to 538.²⁰⁸ Although as the report states, "audience fragmentation [did] not seem to be threatening the position of the top players in the market...there has been a consolidation of the position of the top FTA broadcasters (ie. MBC, *Rotana* [music], *AlJazeera Network*, ADM and DMI), and a dilution of the smaller channels."²⁰⁹ By contrast, over the same period, with the exception of Egypt, the region did not see a significant increase in newspaper circulation. Most major stations also extended their broadcasting via online platforms, which

²⁰⁴ Ibid

²⁰⁵ Brooke, S. (2005), "AlJazeera is world's fifth top brand," *The Gaurdian*, accessed 10 February 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/feb/01/marketingandpr.broadcasting>>

²⁰⁶ Achcar (2013)

²⁰⁷ Aterman (1998), pp. 45-63

²⁰⁸ Dubai Press Club (2012)

²⁰⁹ Ibid p44

has the same trans-national reach. By 2017 internet penetration reached around 64.5% of the Middle East's population.²¹⁰

Many scholars writing about the sector in the early days of regional mass media growth also predicted a democratizing effect, however the sector was never allowed to grow in that manner, largely because of the “feudalistic” nature of ownership within the larger outlets.²¹¹ Expansions with the liberalization of media spaces happened incrementally- but never fully- as licensing and ownership were severely restricted. The role of national politics tended to dominate the underlying narrative of any developments in Arab Media.²¹² These entities that grew in the 1990's and 2000's were to become pan-Arab stations aiming to cast a wider net of viewership and influence. They would contribute to growing and shifting political discourse and would influence social and political movements in profound ways, such as the support for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon after the Cedar Revolution in 2005, or the knock-on effects of popular protests or uprisings in 2006²¹³ or most notably during the Arab Spring in 2011.

3) Media Cities

One of the major byproducts of the concerted efforts towards media expansion had been the creation of media cities, both as a means towards realizing the economic gains of cluster economies, and to control broadcast media output. The Arab world is unique in its development of special media zones, akin to free trade zones.²¹⁴ They created areas where both production and broadcasting infrastructure would be developed and available for prospective investors. These zones would be justified through the potential they held for economics of scale and common infrastructure spending. Jordan Media City (JMC), Dubai Media City (DMC) and the Egyptian Media Production City (EMPC) are national projects that are public/private partnerships born out of an era of growing private sectors, and stated inclinations (by the respective governments) towards knowledge-based economic development:

²¹⁰ Internet World Statistics – (2017)

²¹¹ Valeriani (2010)

²¹² Rugh, (2007)

²¹³ Valeriani (2010)

²¹⁴ Quinn, Walters & Whiteoak (2003)

In these three master-planned communities the vision is that media, business, government, technology, and finance will become inexorably linked and that the synergy will provide jobs for thousands.²¹⁵

Jordan had spearheaded the prospect of a Media City in 1978 with a large facility that housed the Jordan Production Company. After launching in 1982, it had only survived for 9-years, with little impact. However, Saleh Kamel resurrected JMC in 2001, purchasing the area through his *Dellah Media Company*, refurbishing it for \$140 million and making it a hub for ART after the network relocated from Rome. By 2018, it had become home to over 46 television and radio outlets.²¹⁶ While the project continued as a joint venture between the Kingdom and Kamel's company, JMC remained the least politicized of the projects, as the majority of its clients provided mainly social and religious programming.

The DMC on the other hand, was started in 2000 as one of the landmark projects of Dubai's ruler, Mohammed Bin Rashed Al-Maktoum. It became a major marker for his grand plans to transform Dubai into a global business epicenter. He kept a firm grip on the city, as one study declares: "DMC is really run and operated for the benefit of the Al-Maktoum family and its business friends."²¹⁷ The city offered financial and operational incentives that weren't available elsewhere. It was the most ambitious project, and by 2006 hosted 50 regional and international broadcasting outlets. The DMC has since been operating on the concept of attracting big names such as CNN and Reuters as "anchor tenants," in order to draw others in its quest to become one of a handful of truly global media hubs.²¹⁸

EMPCA was also started by the Egyptian government as a public project run by the quasi-governmental Egyptian Radio and Television Union. Its developments will be discussed in further chapters pertaining to the proliferation of private satellite in Egypt, of which the EMPCA was a critical element. The development of the other two media cities is critical in explaining why Egypt's project had never taken off in the way it was designed.

The media cities all claimed to harbor ambitions of becoming international media hubs. Despite sharing this goal that they all would essentially look to serve the same Pan-Arab market, there had not been a real sense of competition among them, as much as there was a

²¹⁵ Ibid p. 129

²¹⁶ www.jordanmediacity.com

²¹⁷ Quinn, Walters & Whiteoak (2003) p. 136

²¹⁸ Ibid

division of labor. DMC is acknowledged to be at the top of their hierarchy having come closest to achieving the expansion goals of its first CEO Saeed Al-Muntafiq, to be one of a few globally-recognized regional hubs. Any sense of competition among these cities had been undermined by their common approach to restrictions on the content that broadcasters have been permitted to transmit. The licensing process for media free zone tenants would not be explicitly protected under local laws ensuring freedom of thought and expression. And transgressions that can put a license holder at risk of closure or censure are vaguely defined from the literature available on these zones.

In practice, media free zones in Arab countries were implicated in existing ownership patterns and regulatory structures in so far as they limited choice.²¹⁹ To operate outside these cities (if allowed) effectively meant automatically incurring relatively higher operating costs by forgoing the tax incentives and infrastructural capabilities. Operating within the cities, gave the state a more efficient means of monitoring media content and playing a more intimate role in the core operations of any private media company, but the companies benefited from the savings associated from operating within the confines of these cities.

4) Coordinated and uncoordinated legislation

Early agreements on the role of media during the nation-building phase led to coordinated efforts to institutionalize media regulation within the Arab League. Since its inception, the Arab League had espoused a secondary goal of promoting Arab Nationalism via multi-lateral institutional regional cooperation (including media), starting with the Permanent Committee for Arab Media (est. 1959). As the future of regional media was starting to become more of a palpable reality, the Committee for Arab Media Ministers was formed in 1994 in order to create more coordinated legislation.²²⁰ This Committee was meant to form policies to regulate Pan-Arab media and international media emanating from the region. As with many Arab League initiatives; true cooperation on the topic had never seemed to materialize operationally.

Two years later, representatives of the major papers from 17 Arab states signed the Sanaa' Declaration.²²¹ This UN-led, regional pact pushing for the creation of independent and

²¹⁹ Sakr (2007) pp 195-198

²²⁰ Abdelrahman (2001)

²²¹ UNESCO, (1996)

pluralistic press is still the only ratified international document on Arab media freedom, as it was adopted by the UNESCO the following year. Its actual impact on the sector in the region has been at best, questionable.

The most well-documented regional effort to coordinate media regulation came in, 2008 with the Arab States' 'Charter for Satellite Broadcasting.' Ratified in Cairo by the 22 members of the Council of Arab Information Ministers (with the notable abstention of Qatar²²² and the opposition of Lebanon), the charter aimed to put limits on what could be broadcast on Arab airwaves in a way that would be pleasing to all. Member states agreed to forbid content that had a "negative influence on social peace, national unity, public order and decency," as well on content that would be "in contradiction with the principles of Arab solidarity."²²³ Pan-Arab media, by then had reached a level of maturation with private outlets having gained a large share of the airwaves and marginally larger operational independence. The charter was thus aimed at private satellite channels that were becoming overly critical of the Arab regimes.²²⁴ It also attempted to regulate the proliferation of satellite television, which had been sprouting tens of stations of every ilk, under very few guiding principles. Furthermore, the charter also called for forbidding the 'glorification of criminals' and for producing content that runs counter to 'norms and values of standards' of Arab Society. In defense of the charter, media scholar Hussein Amin said:

The Charter seeks to develop the quality of Arab satellite programming by prohibiting yellow journalism, opinion pieces disguised as news, violations of intellectual property rights, programs that promote terrorism, violence, hatred, or superstition, and other substandard practices. By basing the Charter on the best practices of television broadcasting regulation in the West and adapting these regulations for Arab society, it is hoped that this Charter will provide a foundation for developing a vibrant, diverse satellite television environment that broadcasts programs meeting world-class standards of journalism, entertainment, and public affairs.²²⁵

Amin - who is also one of the authors of the Charter- qualifies his words by stipulating that its success would have depended on how every country attempts to implement it. The charter was presented to the world as being akin to many attempts globally to regulate broadcast media such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the US, which regulates the type of content that may be broadcast. However, as Amin himself acknowledges, it is also

²²² By 2008, many Arab governments had voiced their dismay with Qatar's, AlJazeera Network, and especially with its role in popularizing some opposition figures, rhetoric and groups.

²²³ Committee to Protect Journalists (2009)

²²⁴ Amin, (2008)

²²⁵ Ibid

a reflection of “values and culture of Arab society.”²²⁶ As is the case in most of the region’s constitutions, the Charter also sanctifies the region’s rulers, by including clauses banning criticism of “cultural symbols or leaders of States” and for reflect a very narrow definition of ‘Arab values’ in ways that seemingly conform more to the desires of the authoritarian regimes in power.²²⁷ The regional nature of this charter points to a supra- juridical attitude that seems to uphold the status-quo of regimes, more than that of the laws, which differ among most Arab countries.

Organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists that have a first hand perspective of the nuances of such agreements, viewed the charter as a regional understanding whereby Arab governments give each other the authority to “sanction satellite channels which threaten national security, attack Arab leaders or broadcast material deemed socially unacceptable.”²²⁸ The specter of *AlJazeera*’s critical news programs and variety of talk shows spreading to the Arab World played a large role in this legislation. Its Director General at the time, Waddah Khanfar, used it as an opportunity to pit his outlet as representing journalistic professionalism and media independence against a backdrop of authoritarian-led broadcasting.²²⁹

The charter brought to light the general attitude of Arab states towards private broadcasting and its view that they must fall in line with a vaguely defined notion of “society” and “social norms.” These points are a common preamble for media policy in the region and are the source of commonalities among the differing media systems in the Arab World. The norms indicated-and how to implement them- would mostly be decided by the state and institutionalized in ways that would affect how practitioners within the field would operate.

With numerous regional and local legislative and structural restraints looming above the heads of media practitioners, self-censorship would become a de-facto reality for those media outlets that continued to be tolerated by Arab regimes. Amin believed that while power structures play a roll in encouraging self-censorship, normative factors also play a role in the phenomenon:

This pervasive fear of the political system enhances self-censorship, yet there is another factor involved, as well. Journalists seldom take full advantage of the marginal freedom provided by democratic change and the increasing

²²⁶ Amin (2009) p 114

²²⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists (2008)

²²⁸ Lahlali (2011) p. 49

²²⁹ Hammond (2008)

tolerance of the government. This almost cultural norm of protecting the government and the public through withholding information has contributed to a near inability of journalists to formulate a sustained political critique or opinion even if they wanted to.²³⁰

As will be explored more thoroughly in the case of Egypt, legislation did play a major role in media development in the Arab world, however more importantly was the manner in which private media became institutionalized under the framework of the overall political economy in the country. These influenced what would be considered norms of the sector and where exactly the ‘red-lines’ that would not be crossed lay. The larger developments in each country would tacitly help nudge the sector in the direction the governments would approve organically when legislation was not in place to enforce these directions. The case of Lebanon as both a major influence over media in the region, while also being a structural anomaly helps highlight the role general context plays in the development of media systems.

5) Lebanon’s exceptional and influential case in media developments

Before the proliferation of satellite television, increased privatization and the expansion of neoliberal ideology across the Middle East, Lebanon had one of the earliest experiments with commercial television as well as a media system with diverse ownership, mostly owing to its particular political structure. “Up to the mid 1990s, except in Lebanon, the very notion of private television in the Arab World seemed no more than a figment of the business sector's imagination.”²³¹ This experience would factor into regional developments, especially through the transfer of expertise. Aside from their qualitative effect on regional media, the unique context of the Lebanese experience, provides an adequate control in proving the notion that in the Arab World, media is viewed as a crucial tool of power and that the development of media systems is directly informed by political and economic developments.

Lebanon’s political power structure and make-up differed from the majority of other Arab countries since it had experienced a more pluralist political system, akin to a “political oligopoly.”²³² The country’s 1943 National Pact enshrines pluralism, mostly between religious groups that are constitutionally granted predetermined representation in political office. A more dispersed and diverse power structure meant that the media systems would in turn form differently, creating a regional anomaly:

²³⁰ Amin (2009) p. 19

²³¹ Ayish (2003) p. 54

²³² Achcar (2013)

Lebanese media institutions do not fit the model of the third world (public sector ownership, usually by a government agency) or the West. Lebanese broadcasting has been at least partially owned and operated by government.²³³

Lebanon became a space where media systems and outlets could experiment with different operational and editorial structures, albeit in a way that is still confined to the political power structure.

The major daily newspapers were defined by both political and religious orientation.²³⁴ Mass media's legacy in the country has been based on either business or politics, with the state generally pandering to these spaces, rather than attempting to control them outright. Media and power tend to converge in Lebanon with the state oligarchy constantly exerting its influence.²³⁵ Whereas "power" with reference to the press tended to mean political power, in broadcast television, individual economic power also became significant.

Lebanon had been establishing private stations before any other Arabic speaking country had taken any major steps towards that goal. Two operating stations began particularly early: *Compagnie de Television du Liban et du Proche Orient* (CLT est. 1956) and *Tele-orient* (est. 1959). CLT was initiated by two businessmen who proposed the establishment of a station financed by advertisement. Wissam Izzedine and Alex Arida, submitted an application that was granted after some trepidation. The government decided against allowing them a monopoly as the applicants had requested. CLT thus was the first commercial television station in the Arab world.²³⁶

During Lebanon's civil war, circumstances differed and the state decided that television was too important a symbol of national unity to remain in private hands. Civil war had also led to the shutting down of all television stations. By 1977 the state interfered directly for the first time in order to set-up *Tele-Liban* station. During the 1980's warring factions began setting up their own pirate stations, with the tacit encouragement of the government.²³⁷ At the same time, newspaper distribution was greatly suppressed for the relatively well-educated

²³³ Rugh (2004) p. 195

²³⁴ Rugh (2004)

²³⁵ Ayish (2003)

²³⁶ Dajani (2001)

²³⁷ Ibid

population, while radio and television would be able to bypass some of the issues that print faced.

Prime Minister Rafiq ElHariri set a post-war, regional precedent by lifting the government's monopoly over programming and allowing for private terrestrial television ownership.²³⁸ The Civil War ended with the agreement in the Saudi town of Taif (The Taif Agreement) in 1991, which further institutionalized the consociational system agreed upon in the National Pact. Calls were made at this point to offer television licensing as a right, especially for the existing stations. As a result, businessmen and political groups hurried to legalize their stations, leading to a chaotic situation where 46 licensing applications for in for consideration.

Private Sector Media Ownership and the Nexus of Lebanese Power

The media oligarchy that formed reflected the relationship between the political oligarchy and the economic elite. By 1996 only four licenses were granted. They were to: The Lebanese Broadcasting Company International (LBCI, formerly LBC), which represented the Maronite Christians and whose shareholders included prominent members of the government; Future Television, representing the Sunni Muslims and owned by the then Prime Minister; Murr Television (MTV), representing the Greek Orthodox Christians and owned by the family of the Minister of Interior at the time; and The National Broadcasting Network (NBN), representing the Shiite Muslims and owned by the family and supporters of the Speaker of the House of Parliament.²³⁹

In Lebanon Nabih Berri (speaker of the parliament at the time) acknowledged that television had been "monopolized" by members of the regime.²⁴⁰ At this moment in Lebanon, the media system was regulated as a sector containing clear commercial interests for its stake-holders, while maintaining its value as a tool for political factions to exert their influence.

A 1994 media law had been newly introduced with the goal of regulating the sector from the licensing of outlets down to the output of content. It was to ostensibly limit any one person or group for gaining a disproportionate share of the market. The law restricted licenses to Lebanese nationals while also deeming that heads of news departments would also be locals,

²³⁸ Sakr (2007)

²³⁹ Dajani (2001)

²⁴⁰ Sakr (2007)

out of fear of excessive influence from neighboring countries on local media.²⁴¹ An owner's share according to the law would be limited to 10% of the entire company. Spouses and direct family members were not allowed to separately buy out these shares. Individuals would not be allowed to own shares in other outlets. And as if they were running for public office, shareholders in national outlets would need to not have been convicted of crimes in the past. The law also regulated capital formation, revenue sources, financial viability and any transfer of ownership.²⁴²

An independent regulatory body was to be formed in order to oversee the entire sector, called National Audio-Visual Media Committee (NAMC). The inspiration for this body came from its European counterparts such as the French *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel*. However, the independence of the NAMC was brought into question since the location of its main offices were to be in the Ministry of Information building. The manner in which members were appointed also raised doubts with five of the ten members of the NAMC being appointed by cabinet ministers and the other five are chosen by Parliament.²⁴³

The Law did not prevent members of the same group from pooling their resources and start up the same stations together, hence the confessional layout of the media system²⁴⁴. Minority shareholders of an outlet who are of a different religious or political background to the majority owners do exist. However, they have been found to be ineffective in the overall outcome of the station, and are usually associates or business partners of the majority shareholding group.²⁴⁵

Along with adhering to legal parameters set for permissible content, outlets tried to steer clear of red lines involving topics such as the military, foreign policy, Syrian influence/occupation in Lebanon and harsh criticism of individuals holding the highest political offices in the land. The NAMC tended to regulate and limit crossings of these lines, but Nötzold shows that some of the lines were crossed when the station had the backing of important political figures.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Nötzold (2009)

²⁴² Lebanese Media Law No. 382 (1994)

²⁴³ Nötzold (2009) p. 125

²⁴⁴ This phenomenon would also occur in Egyptian private print, which also stipulated a 10% maximum shareholding per person.

²⁴⁵ Ibid p.134

²⁴⁶ Ibid p. 145

Media systems for most countries in the region would exhibit private terrestrial stations as Lebanon did, but enduring traces of Lebanese media legislation could be found across the region, including Egypt. Furthermore, while most stations were clearly established as a means of soft-power influence for some groups, the audience-led spirit of many of its programming including news (but especially in entertainment) would serve as a guide for not only what is desirable, but what may be successful in a commercialized atmosphere.

6) New markets and commercial opportunities

Lebanon's media system development had numerous spillovers in neighboring countries, this importantly includes a commercial model that would be highly influential in the development of new private media markets.

Prior to the proliferation of private media across the around world, under the parameters of state-owned Arab media that Rugh called the mobilization press, media outlets found it difficult to generate revenue due to the constraints placed on them by existing in smaller, local markets as well as the constraints resulting from operating as sub-optimal government agencies. Jon Alterman believed in 1999 that with the expanding private and Pan-Arab media, market forces, rather than government policies would be more likely to define television development in the Arab World.²⁴⁷ This market itself seems to depend on a continued shift toward higher per-capita incomes and expanded patterns of consumption. As Alterman noted, if the media market grows, outlets would continue to experiment with content to draw more viewers. Arab viewers would likely see more sensational content, and political coverage would likely grow more daring, at least in the near and intermediate term.²⁴⁸

One of the central figures in the Lebanese media market was Antoine Choueiri who saw the potential in broadcast and print media advertising. His advertising empire, the Choueiri Group which began in Lebanon and France (where he migrated to at the outbreak of the civil war in 1975) would see him later expand to a prime position in Lebanon and the Arab region. He would ultimately be seen as someone who single-handedly controlled the Arab world's

²⁴⁷ Alterman (1999)

²⁴⁸ Ibid

advertising market for over 35 years.²⁴⁹

Choueiri's empire rested on the relations he had cultivated, especially within Saudi and Lebanese political circles, affording him access to contracts such as that of LBC Group and MBC. At its peak, the Choeiri group was representing nearly 26 satellite stations, 15 print titles and 9 radio stations.²⁵⁰ His means of monopolizing advertising markets and the great control that gave him over those markets, provided a model that would be emulated throughout the region, both pushing advertisers to control a significant portion of content and revenue. The group was constantly criticized for having a role –albeit undefined- in manipulating viewership numbers through the one source of media statistics in Lebanon at the time, Stat Ipsos, a company that was also based in France. Choueiri ultimately made his way to Egypt where he made an immediate impact, taking over *AlHayat Network's* ads in 2012. Such was the perceived impact of advertising agencies, that the *AlHayat* contract was attacked by many, including in an article by *Youm7* newspaper (known for its ties to intelligence agencies) that pointed to Choueiri (a foreigner) as a having an unacceptable degree of influence, constituting a threat to the media sector and –implicitly- to national security:

At a time when Egyptian satellite stations should be standing shoulder to shoulder with Egyptian advertising and marketing companies to face foreign companies attempting to invade Egyptian media, Sigma Media (the owner of *Hayat Network*) signed a contract with the Lebanese Choueiri Group, founded by its deceased owner Antoine Choueiri and run by his son Pierre.²⁵¹

This contract would be annulled in 2014, although the Group would remain in Egypt through other (Saudi-owned/funded) outlets. Choueiri's clout in the private media industry afforded him a much larger role than that of a mere ad-salesman. Through his model of monopolizing media spaces, he offered states a means by which to manipulate media output indirectly through a third-party, the advertising agency.²⁵² Antoine Choueiri seemingly didn't shy away from his influence, apparently preferring to refer to himself as a “regulator” of the market and a crucial middleman.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Harb in Ratta, Sakr & Skovgaard-Petersen (2015) p. 32

²⁵⁰ Ibid p. 31

²⁵¹ *Youm7* article, 30 January 2012

²⁵² Ibid p. 43

²⁵³ Ibid

Choueiri Group and others like it undoubtedly entered the markets with the profit motive squarely in mind in such a potentially large Pan-Arab media market. However, Sakr, believed that despite the intuitive and rational prospect of the Arab region as a potentially highly profitable dynamic market, its full potential could not be realized due to the inability or lack of desire to allow for a better integration of the markets:

The transnational pan-Arab market should be profitable for media by virtue of its size, but instead operates as a collection of disparate and sometimes obstructive national markets, several of whose governments are powerful enough to make their own unwritten political and legal demands on content that is intended to cross borders.²⁵⁴

Ultimately, Arab media's historic emphasis on political goals ahead of profit-making was shown to have continued into the satellite era in many cases. Furthermore, Pan-Arab private broadcasting also saw the introduction of media moguls, who despite their political allegiances and connections, did attempt to capitalize on the potential of these markets and introduced the concept of commercial media. This potential rested on the expanded ability for media to deliver audiences (by pooling from the entire region) for advertisers as a major function, rather than providing content and programming for the audience.²⁵⁵

7) Effects on Egypt

Arab and Pan-Arab media systems development are inextricable from developments with the private broadcasting media sector in Egypt. Whereas Egypt's printing presses and regional radio broadcasts have been on the vanguard of regional efforts, one could argue that the relationship was reversed with the proliferation of Arab satellite television stations in the 1990's given the profound effect it had on the subsequent development of Egyptian satellite stations. Politically, Arab regional private media development (including Egypt) were all somewhat dependent on the relationship between media owners and the central rulers. The advent of private Pan-Arab media outlets was accompanied by the emergence of these media owners, who would themselves come to symbolize the relationship between autocratic rulers, and the so-called independent media.

The Egyptian market would see an influx of Arab media influence. Outlets initially recruited journalists and television hosts from these stations. Many of the individuals who went on to lay the foundations of private, satellite broadcasting would have gained their early experience

²⁵⁴ Sakr (2007) p. 138

²⁵⁵ Picard (2011) pp 2

in one of the early Pan-Arab satellite broadcasters such as the MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Company), ART (Arab Radio and Television), *AlJazeera* News etc., usually to complement experience from within the ERTU. For those brought in to work in Egypt from one of the Pan-Arab companies based outside of the region, they were both welcomed for their experiences, but also perhaps ultimately hampered by them. As television talk-show host Liliane Daoud explains about her arrival to Cairo from years in London working with Arab News Network (ANN) and BBC Arabic.

We were able to work in environments that were mostly removed from the pressures of working in the Arab World, despite sometimes being attached to stations with their own agendas. This led to many of us being able to develop professionally as journalists without that burden. In my case and others like me and Yosry (Foda)²⁵⁶ for example, it gave us an advantage. It also ended up being a slight culture shock when I did go work in Egypt.²⁵⁷

Egyptian private satellite station proliferation came after the earlier Arab wave of the early and mid-1990s and as further chapters will show, the newer outlets out of Egypt would be influenced by its more established regional peers structurally, legislatively, commercially and professionally in broadcast media especially.

²⁵⁶ Foda hosted a program on OnTV, where Daoud worked.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Lilliane Daoud (2018)

Chapter 3- Mass Media and Power in Modern Egypt (1798-1999)

1) Introduction

Throughout its recent history, political pragmatism has been the corner stone of the ruling regimes' relationship with mass information mechanisms. Media systems were also affected by economic policy and performance, especially when it came to the ownership of outlets, or in the most common goals behind the establishment of outlets (commercial, political etc.). From a regulatory and administrative perspective, the priorities of each ruling cohort at different points in time directly reflect on the resultant structure of the sector. At times, these systems were developed and utilized primarily as tools for propaganda and political communication. The state often saw to it that institutions governing the sector would be dictated in a centralized manner out of necessity.

Since the introduction of print newspapers in the late 1800's, Egypt's press has been imprinted with a legacy of attitudes and practices that resonated for at least the following century. Similarly, the introduction of audio-visual broadcast in 1960 has left its own indelible mark. Egypt's mass media systems have been historicized by scholars and practitioners, but they typically have not delved deep analyzing the relationship between changes in the country's political economy and media system developments. This chapter explores this history and concludes with the transformations in regulation and policy that set the scene for the proliferation of privately owned media at the turn of the 21st century amidst a general transition towards neoliberal policies, while remaining politically autocratic for the most part.

Developments highlighted in this section do not constitute an exhaustive analysis of these manifestations as such, rather they provide reference points of major trends to aid in understanding media developments amid the growth of private media outlined in further sections.

The status of Egypt's political economy has arguably been in transition ever since The Free Officers overthrew the monarchy in 1952. During the long reigns of presidents Gamel Abdel-Nasser (1956-1970), Anwar El-Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), economic and political policies throughout a significant portion of Egypt's existence as a

republic have not followed clear, long-term visions. Economic policies had shifted greatly on more than one occasion as differing regimes ascribed to varied political ideologies. Some developmental policies and transitions within key institutions and organizations formed the building blocks of a more cohesive strategy, but more often than not they were byproducts of general modalities of governance and self-preservation associated with each regime. Policies were also consistently launched or repurposed to ensure regime sustainability.²⁵⁸ Economic agendas, were inconsistent as they also tended to be affected by various variables presented to successive governments; even if initially rooted in a foundational ideology or vision. In retrospect, since the dawn of the Egyptian republic, from a policy perspective, there have been very few constants, especially across regimes, something which had a heavy stamp on developments in the media systems. Still, some institutional factors did persevere.

Media systems and major changes

Media systems in Egypt have historically been either completely monopolized by the state or at the very least directed by it. A quick glance at the surrounding political-economic climate at different moments since the country's turn to modernism, illuminate reasons behind these developments. As much as any other institution (and more so than most), mass media provided a near direct representation of the nature of each successive regime at its different stages.

Webb notes that the modern sector in Egypt, cannot be isolated from its history: "Just as Russia's present-day media system might be characterized as being in some way "post-Soviet" or perhaps "neo-Soviet", so should Egypt's post-2011 media be considered very tied to its past,"²⁵⁹. Going back to the birth of modern Egypt²⁶⁰, information dissemination mechanisms had been generally under the auspices of the central government, and were introduced to further their aims.

In time, and after Egypt would become a republic, with military rules firmly in control, the attitude towards media would expand, as governments would see them as a soft power tool in regional politics. They would also begin treating the regulation of the sector as a whole as a

²⁵⁸ Soliman (2004)

²⁵⁹ Webb (2014) p. 24

²⁶⁰ In his seminal work, *All the Pasha's Men* (2002), Khaled Fahmy would expand greatly on the idea of Mehmed Ali Pasha as being the founder of modern Egypt, especially in his creation of the army and how its institutional development came to help define modern Egypt and concepts of nationalism.

matter of national security. The nation moved from being under a highly centralized government and near total state-capitalism to a more nominally pluralized polity and liberalized economy that was still severely restricted by an autocratic mode of rule towards the end of the 20th century.²⁶¹ Regional and global developments in media, technology and economic liberalization meant that Egyptian media, despite all existent restrictions within them, were liberalized much more quickly than the country's politics, creating a paradox or friction with the state.²⁶² Similarly, since Gamal Abdel-Nasser and until the early years of the Mubarak era, the sector also moved from being a tool of the state to be deployed at will to being a sector faced with an ambivalent attitude from the state that only resolved to curb its ability to rouse opposition sentiment.²⁶³ Against this backdrop, the private media sector developed under an aspiring neoliberal framework (from 1991 onwards). Print and broadcast media were opened to independent, private ownership at that point for the first time on a large scale.

Private ownership at the time was a first for television, which was introduced in 1960 as a purely publicly-owned endeavor. Print on the other hand, had been around for much longer in Egypt, and enjoys a more diverse history, in terms of both ownership and structure, along with the role it played in society. Its history as a medium under the monarchy has noteworthy bearings on how print media progressed since Egypt became a republic. Unlike many media systems in the West, Egyptian media tended to operate within a meta-narrative of lofty goals. They were being consciously administered as purveyors of nationalistic sentiments. The “mission” of journalism was summarily conveyed as not just being a conduit of facts, but as a political pulpit. During periods of major transition, outlets were primed to shape public opinion by actively engaging in matters of public interest on behalf of the citizen, rather than in aid of the citizenry, conforming to Lippman's view that in modern societies, journalists would be the watchdogs and generators of public opinion.²⁶⁴ This view has been consistent and pervasive in Egyptian media even as media systems differed in their constitution and regulation.

²⁶¹ Farah (2009)

²⁶² Khamis (2011)

²⁶³ Ibid

²⁶⁴ Walter Lippman laid this theory out in his book, *Public Opinion*, originally written in 1922. Although he refers more specifically to the role of journalism in democracies, his theory is an apt representation of how many Egypt media owners and regulators saw the media's role to be. As a result, it is nearly impossible to regard media companies throughout Egyptian modern history as mere businesses, but as active agents of public opinion. Lippman's writings also form the basis of “gatekeeper theory,” which views journalism's role as a watchdog of information.

The following section will survey and analyze the political economy of mass media systems since the birth of “modern Egypt”. The long history of the press before the establishment of the Republic is something that was found to influence both state policy and attitudes towards the sector. Rugh notes that, “journalism is a fairly well respected profession in Egypt because of its long tradition and the fact that talented writers have devoted part or all of their careers to the press.”²⁶⁵

This tradition has been affected by political conditions that have rarely been static for long periods of time, and political economies that have also been constantly shifting. Along with it, the shape of media systems transformed, especially the press, ever since it appeared in the 19th century.

2) Print under the monarchy

Over the past century, there have been very few instances of Egypt briefly experiencing a liberal or democratized wave, two characteristics of that are needed for the sustainable operation of critical and incisive print journalism. Yet for the most part, the expansion of print journalism during different periods in the country’s history were not as much byproducts of a planned liberalization of the press or a strengthening of democratic institutions, as much as they tended to come about as a result of momentary lapses in central governments’ absolute grips on society.

Since emerging onto the public sphere for some of the first times in the 19th century, officially recognized news publications in the country have generally maintained a close relationship with politics and prevailing power dynamics by operating mostly within the framework of what would be deemed “patriotic” and in-line with broad goals set by the state. There were, however, moments when print journalism did veer from that maxim, largely due to shifting power dynamics.

Literacy rates in Egypt were estimated to have been lower than 20% up until the 1952 revolution, according to a 1947 census.²⁶⁶ Even with the introduction of the modern printing

²⁶⁵ Rugh (1979) p. 47

²⁶⁶ Hirabayashi and Khatib (1958)

press during the Napoleonic era,²⁶⁷ printed literature was thought to be something read and distributed among a restricted class of learned individuals, who tended to be better off economically. The rules that governed the elite classes, were thus mirrored in the rules that governed newspapers.

The genesis of the first newspapers were within the halls of power. After invading Egypt in 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte himself oversaw the first publications meant for relatively broad distribution, albeit in French: *Courrier de l’Egypte* a political journal that carried news to French troops around the country, and *La Décade Egyptienne*, a monthly social and scientific journal that published findings from an institute founded by the French the same year. Napoleon’s printing presses were fitted with Arabic letters and are thought to be behind the publication of the first Arabic print publication in 1800, *AlTanbih*, started by Ismail Khashab- a renowned judge and scholar (d. 1815)- aiming to publish news of the *Dawawin*, or small arbitration courts. Despite being put in place by the French, Khashab is thought to be the first modern newsman in Egypt.²⁶⁸

“The Necessary Magazines”

AlTanbih lasted three years, with very limited impact. It wasn’t until modern Egypt had been established under the Albanian ruler Muhammad Ali Pasha (1805-1847) that the concept of publishing news as an exercise in power, became prevalent. On 3 December 1828, *AlWaqai’* (The Facts) became the first Egyptian paper²⁶⁹, as a periodical to be distributed “to all people,” containing major decisions and reports from the ruler. Realistically, it only reached powerful individuals, hand-picked for their influence as only around one-hundred copies were printed.

Modern-day Egyptian governments continue to produce their versions of *AlWaqai’* to announce presidential decrees and official changes in the law. It became the oldest running Arabic publication and was the real beginning of the Egyptian press as a mass medium. Ali’s immediate successors were not fond of the idea of a public press. Although, further down the line, Khedive Ismail²⁷⁰ (1863-1879), who had stated ambitions of turning Cairo and

²⁶⁷ ElSheikh, (1977)

²⁶⁸ Hamroush (1989) p. 9

²⁶⁹ Elsheikh (1977) p. 4

²⁷⁰ “Khedive” is the title of Viceroy of Egypt accorded by the Ottoman government to several of Egypt’s rulers from the Muhammad Ali dynasty.

Alexandria into European cities, felt more of a need to be accommodating to the concept due to the changes he intended to implement. In attempting to endear himself to his European benefactors by not resisting the emergence of mass media publications, Khedive Ismail opened a floodgate of opposition literature which included the dissemination of very critical news about his opulence and the corruption surrounding him. He had also created the first modern Egyptian representative assembly in 1866, the Shura Council of Representatives. This council was also the scene of great dissent against Ismail.²⁷¹

Ismail placed significant resources into *AlWaqai'*, ordering its editors to transform it into a more distinguished publication. He also sanctioned a further contingent of periodicals to focus on issues such as education, science and the military. Privately published newspapers were also sanctioned to be printed. Most of these aimed to promote the Khedive and his ambitions.

At the time, a crumbling agricultural sector and suffering public finances and increasing foreign influence internally put the Khedive on dubious grounds, even amongst the country's elite. In order to solve public debt, he allowed for more foreign control over Egypt's finances, a trend punctuated by the appointment of River Wilson- a British economic advisor- to the position of Finance Minister in 1878. Just three years earlier, the British and the French signed the Cave Commission, allowing them dual control over Egypt. Ismail's power was slipping, as he was seen to be complicit in what was the precursor to the 1882 British occupation of Egypt.²⁷²

The precipitation of publications under him turned out to be a double-edged sword for Ismail. Around the same time, the concept of the "popular press" began to emerge, from outside his direct control. Three factors led to this phenomenon: 1) A dissatisfied Egyptian elite; 2) The introduction of the concept of media and the press as an active form of critique; 3) Reactive intellectual activity and identity-building.²⁷³

The most famous of these publications was *Abu Nazarah Zarqa*, an illustrated satirical periodical published by theatre impresario Yacoub Sanu'. It focused on criticizing the

²⁷¹ Abu Zaid (1997)

²⁷² Rizk, 1999. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/1999/412/chrncls.htm>

²⁷³ Abu Zaid (1997)

Khedive and condemning corruption, foreign intervention, and the oppressive taxes being levied against the poor at the time, especially the peasants. Sanu' was an Italian-educated playwright, whose father served as an advisor to members of the royal family. Concerned with promoting nationalist ideas amid increased foreign intervention, he was often at odds with the status quo. After having a play shut down for that very reason, and after consulting with figures such as Jamal ElDin Al-Afghani²⁷⁴, he turned to the press in 1878.

Sanu' was printing at one point 3,300 copies of his periodical, when the more popular publications were rarely printing over 1,000. He used it as a mouthpiece, not only for himself, but for other like-minded people. Media historian Ibrahim Abdo called publications such as this, *majallat aldaroor* (necessary magazines), bred from the turmoil and upheaval of the moment.²⁷⁵ Abdo was also referring to the sudden increase in publications. Nationalist, Islamist and liberal thinkers decided to use the power of the press as a means to cement their concept of nationhood, patriotism and identity at a time when both the state and society were undergoing major transformations. Between the looming European presence, the still palpable Ottoman past, and local leaders sensing shifting power dynamics, the press was the ideal platform for a constant exchange and proliferation of these ideas²⁷⁶.

Only the rich, and the emerging bourgeoisie were able to bankroll these papers and gain access to the presses. Financing was down mostly to the whims of funders and whether or not they were able to charge for their publications, which rarely exceeded a few pages. Selling advertisements, or building sustainable business models for papers were uncommon.²⁷⁷

This period also saw the founding of *AlAhr* newspaper in 1876 by the the Takla Brothers, who were Lebanese immigrants.²⁷⁸ Unlike the majority of the other papers printed at the time, *AlAhr* was not selling a specific ideology. Rather it was run as a newspaper concerned with public interest stories, and society pages such as the obituaries.²⁷⁹ *AlAhr* was a

²⁷⁴ Jamal ElDin Al-Afghani (1838/1839 –1897) was a popular Islamic modernist and political activist. Even though he was an immigrant to Egypt from Afghanistan, he was heavily involved in anti-European occupation activism during his time in Egypt.

²⁷⁵ Abdo (1949)

²⁷⁶ Abu Zaid (1997)

²⁷⁷ Hamroush (1989)

²⁷⁸ Increasing levels of immigration to Egypt at the time is often cited as one of the main catalysts for the contemporaneously increasing numbers of news publications.

²⁷⁹ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/32/99/100117/Folk/Special-Files/AlAhr-remembers-the-Tekla-brothers.aspx>

pioneer in creating a more sustainable business model, incorporating ad sales as well as issue sales into its revenue stream. As the second oldest running news publication in the Arab World (the first being *AlWaqa'*) it became iconic. Its longevity was perhaps due to its relatively benign and uncontroversial nature early on, followed by politically astute transformations later in its future. Egyptian novelist Tawfiq ElHakim once quipped that “*AlAhrām*’s life, is in fact Egypt’s life.” While the writer may have been referring to the content and archival value of the paper, its structural and editorial transformations through the years also reveal a fair amount about the political and societal shifts that have occurred during the period of its existence. Its beginnings certainly coincided with a rare period of emergent, diverse press.

The end of Khedive Ismail’s reign also marked the end of a more open atmosphere for publications and the beginning of an often predictable trend of media regulation as well expanded caveats governing the overall relationship between journalism and the Egyptian state across different regimes.

Press Wars

After Ismail’s abdication (at the behest of the British) in 1879. His successor and son Tawfiq (1879-1892), seemingly learned the lesson and put in place the kind of regulatory atmosphere that would become commonplace in the future of Egyptian media systems.

The first Publications Law was pronounced in 1881 stipulating that authorities had the right to close down or confiscate any paper if it violated the principles of “public order, religion or morals.”²⁸⁰ Media regulations from then on would employ similarly vague laws, allowing for an elastic interpretation by the ruling cohort.

Despite this regulatory first, it would be difficult to rein back the forward momentum of critical journalism, especially with the emergence of the Urabi²⁸¹ revolt. The press was front and center as a tool of pro-revolution forces. After the British occupation became a fait-accompli in 1882, Ahmed Urabi was exiled along with many of the revolutionary newspaper editors, including Sanu’ and Abdullah Alnadeem, whose paper *AlTai’f* became a potent

²⁸⁰ ElSheikh (1977)

²⁸¹ A revolution spearheaded by Colonel Ahmed ‘Urabi, aiming to curb the impending British occupation of 1882.

mouthpiece for nationalist forces. Those that were not shutdown, were subject to censures, fines, and security crackdowns²⁸². *AlAhrām*, after becoming vested in the anti-occupation movement, became one of the only important nationalist papers remaining on the scene in the mid-1880s.²⁸³

During this period, newspaper publications were relatively accurate reflections of political and intellectual activity. When activism on these fronts experienced a notable lull in the early stages of the British occupation, press censorship became less stringent. Historian Ahmed Hamroush summarized this notion poignantly:

The shock from ‘the occupation’ after the Urabi revolt led to a sharp decrease in popular and effective political activity, as well as the isolation of the intellectuals and the draw back of political struggles... And so, Lord Dufferin was no longer interested in shackling the press.²⁸⁴

Perhaps as a result of the subversive effects of the press in the previous period and seeing the effects of mass media on public opinion and the proliferation of nationalist ideals, many papers continued to print, with a focus on societal issues-especially education- and in attempts to reinforce issues of local identity. This was in direct response to the British Occupation, which according to historians attempted to dilute the notion of “Egyptianness.” Lord Cromer²⁸⁵ had reportedly suggested cancelling the Egyptian citizenship requirement for legislation while also forming a local representative council that allowed non-Egyptian participation.²⁸⁶ Besides the cultural effect of the press, a few political activists tried to revive the revolutionary effect of a nationalist press. With this in mind, Moustafa Kamel Pasha, a lawyer, aristocrat and activist who lead anti-occupation movements in the early 20th century solicited funding to start a more aggressive, short-lived political newspaper, *Alliwa*.²⁸⁷

Ironically, the British occupation also helped spur the development of journalism and the press as an industry. Cromer himself is often quoted by Egyptian and Arab historians²⁸⁸ as arguing for increased press freedom by saying, “If you placed the lid on a boiler it is bound to

²⁸² Abu ‘Argah (1997)

²⁸³ Abdo (1953)

²⁸⁴ Hamroush (1989) p. 86

²⁸⁵ Evelyn Baring (Earl of Cromer) was the British Proconsul-general for the British occupation of Egypt between 1877-1907.

²⁸⁶ Hamza (1985) p. 91

²⁸⁷ Founded in 1900, *Alliwa* only lasted in 1908, when Moustafa Kamil himself died.

²⁸⁸ Marwah (1960) p. 204

explode, however if you let the steam free, the boiler is guaranteed to remain intact.²⁸⁹”

Capital was increasingly important. Businessmen understood the utility of newspapers as a tool of influence. With their capital new technologies were introduced such as the rotary press. New forms of graphic design were brought in as well-especially by *AlAhrām*- in the early 20th century leading to the emergence of excessively large, eye-grabbing headlines and attractive production. *AlLiwa* and *AlAhrām* were the first to register as shareholding companies in 1906, around which time, the journalistic profession was rapidly developing.²⁹⁰

One of the more interesting phenomena of this period was the emergence of political parties from within the press establishment, rather than the other way around. From *Al-Liwa*, Kamel launched his National Party; *AlJareedah*, was founded by another nationalist leader and revolutionary, Ahmed Lotfi ElSayed who was also a founder of the *Ummah* Party.²⁹¹ While there are other examples, the general trend pointed to the profound importance of the press at this point as the vanguard for political and social ideology as well as being an important battleground in the anti-occupation struggle. The British colonial administration saw the importance of the press during this period. After several unsuccessful attempts to co-opt existing publications such as *AlAhrām* to cast a positive light on their policies, they were able to encourage the publishers of existing scientific and literature journals, to create *AlMuqattam*²⁹², a daily political newspaper that would become the unofficial mouthpiece of the British occupation in the Egyptian public sphere. It was their way of “fighting journalism with journalism.”²⁹³

After World War I, many of the surviving papers that were still critical of British Occupation were ultimately shut down in the aftermath of the war and the outburst of the 1919 revolution led by Saad Zaghloul, a leader of the *Wafd* political party. Martial Law was declared at this time and print publications were largely limited.

²⁸⁹ This quote can be found in many studies referencing Egyptian history at the time. However, a solid reference is difficult to come by and its veracity is in question, which is also the reason this is translated, rather than being taken from its original English.

²⁹⁰ Hamza (1985)

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² Published and distributed between 1889-1952

²⁹³ Abu ‘Argah (1997) p. 21

In 1922 Egypt's status as a British protectorate ended, and the following year, the 1923 Constitution came about allowing for more broad political participation as well as for a free press. Political parties began to once again expand and competing ideologies emerged, spanning various political and religious views. Each cohort of the polity began to publish their own newspapers, many of which were highly critical of the status quo.

Between 1931 and 1935, new strict regulations were put in effect²⁹⁴, reinstating the 1881 law and placing old restrictions requiring an official permit for activity, rather than merely notifying of a new publication. The revised laws also set restrictively high fees to obtain the permit, creating a precedent that would be replicated again the next time private, independent press was allowed nearly 70 years later.

Despite martial law being announced once again during WWII, the period following the war witnessed another era of press proliferation, with almost 100 privately funded newspapers and magazines in circulation.²⁹⁵ Public opinion at the time was stimulated by a plethora of local and regional issues that drove sentiment and caused a stir in political and social activism, which will be discussed below. *Akhbar AlYoun* (est. 1944) was established around then. It was similar to *AlAhrām* in that it was also founded by consummate “newsmen,” Moustafa and Ali Amin. Rather than focusing solely on editorializing their content, they also focused on providing news. Unlike many in the business, the Amin brothers were also concerned with maintaining a sustainable and commercially viable paper.²⁹⁶ During that volatile period, they understood the importance of putting forth politicized nationalistic discourse that would make their publication more relevant. Like *AlAhrām*, the paper would be one of the few brands in the press to survive the political and social vicissitudes in the decades to come.

The development of “journalism”

Developments in market infrastructure helped create an environment that allowed for the journalistic profession to develop. Audiences had grown to the point where career journalists could dedicate more time to their craft. Nuances of the market dynamics itself had shifted in

²⁹⁴ A new constitution was put in place in 1930

²⁹⁵ Hamroush (1977)

²⁹⁶ Hamza (1985)

ways that would see the sector transition into being more mature and established.²⁹⁷ The institutionalization of print media as an industry that may be regulated by the state, but not necessarily owned by it would resonate in the sector's future and factor into discourse surrounding the fate mass media through future processes of both nationalization and privatization.

The Journalists Syndicate²⁹⁸, which was first convened in 1941 was growing in stature, creating differing problems for governments attempting to protect the monarchy. For decades it would enjoy an aura of perceived power, and at times perceived autonomy. Journalists' jobs were of increasing importance, not merely in so far as they pertained to political and ideological propaganda, but in providing actual news that informed, rather than being pure propaganda pieces. Furthermore, the government decided to play an active role in production of certain publications by subsidizing printing paper imported from Italy that was to be used for newspapers.

Some of the newspapers established in the period between the bookends of the the 1923 Constitution and the 1952 Revolution maintained their presence in the Egyptian mediascape, even after the press was completely nationalized. During this era, journalism was once again galvanized, following the crackdown preceding the constitutional changes. Politics and the thought-leading role of journalists, as well as a more robust market infrastructure both contributed to this, along with the sustained calls for decreased foreign influence in the country generally.²⁹⁹ A deteriorating economy and disillusionment with the integrity of party politics and the monarchy helped maintain the critical posture of many journalism professionals. Along with a rejuvenation of journalists, these factors also sparked the mobilization of many political cohorts to take action. Notably orthodox Islamic movements as well as Marxist-inspired leftist writers were highly visible in this front. Egypt's military involvement in Palestine (1948) in response to the announcement of the creation of an Israeli state had provided an opportune moment for a rallying call, which ultimately provided for a watershed moment for mass media in October 1950. *Rose Al-Yousif*³⁰⁰ -a weekly paper

²⁹⁷ Marwah (1960) p. 254

²⁹⁸ While this body also played the role of a Union as well, it has been referred to through most of its existence as a Syndicate as its board members do enjoy a fair share of agency to regulate the profession.

²⁹⁹ Many continued to be upset over the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Although it forced the British to withdraw its troops from Egypt, they were still allowed control of the Suez Canal, and the ability to impose censorship and martial law.

³⁰⁰ *Rose*, was the stage name of one-time actress turned journalist, Fatima Al-Yousef, a Syrian-born emigrant.

established by the eponymous actress in 1925 that had become a leading political publication- broke news of faulty weapons being supplied to Egyptian troops during the ‘Arab-Jewish War’, explaining the Egyptian defeat. Ehsan AbdelKudous, the paper’s editor-and-chief put the news out himself.

The veracity of the so-called “arms scandal” was later questioned with AbdelKudous reportedly admitting that he had embellished the story to galvanize the troops as the only viable unifier within the country at a moment of low morale for them.³⁰¹ Yet this story has been credited for doing just that, as well as playing a major part in the internecine political struggles that weakened the Wafd Party-dominated government and parliament and the already weakened palace.

Attempts by the ruling cohort to stifle the press had also intensified. In 1950, Prime Minister Ismail Sirag El-Din proposed a law allowing him to censure journalists for the mere suspicion of political opposition (and bias).³⁰² This was to no avail and journalists continued to play a pivotal role in stoking the flames of public opinion against the ruling party and the palace, while having substantial lobbying influence on politicians’ attempts to pass laws and engage in international treaties.³⁰³

It was also most probably the moment in the history of modern Egyptian mass media, when the security establishment, (which had eventually come into power in 1952 through the military) understood most palpably the role media could play in mobilizing the country to change in a powerful and profound way. The ruling establishment would from then on provide a place of particular importance on how they regulated mass media and utilized them as tools, in ways that was more nuanced than “censorship vs press freedom.”

Starting with Gamal Abdel-Nasser, governing regimes learned lessons of suppression and censorship and tethered it to the need to control the means of production and ownership structure in ways that would best serve the regime.

³⁰¹ Badran (2016)

³⁰² Marwah (1960)

³⁰³ ElSheikh, (1977). The Wafd party reportedly had three draft laws fail to pass in parliament in 1951. The party’s government was forced to abrogate from the 1899 Sudan Condominium Agreement, which laid the ground work for the administration of Sudan. The press had played a central role in the abrogation of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, which ultimately allowed for continued British Military Presence in certain locations, such as the around the Suez Canal.

Broadcasting before the Republic

Television had not yet been introduced to the Egyptian markets before The Free Officers came to power in 1952. However, for nearly three decades, radio broadcasting had already played a significant factor in the country's mediascape. Like television, radio provided a more direct and efficient mode of accessing the masses, be it for political or commercial purposes. It was also a way of direct communication to a population that until the mid-20th century had a population that was roughly 80% illiterate.³⁰⁴ These characteristics, and radio's legacy greatly informed the way the Free Officers would approach audio-visual mass media.

Radio was initially introduced in 1923, mostly by non-Egyptians for commercial purposes. They had benefited from the relatively lax approach the British had towards mass-media production in general. At the same time, the novelty of Radio in local markets meant that the state was also ill-prepared to immediately tackle the regulatory issues posed by the new technology.

Until 1931, Radio broadcasts were run as small, competing commercial operations, when private broadcasting was banned.³⁰⁵ The Minister of Communications then was able to reach an agreement to reintroduce radio broadcasting based on a deal with the British Marconi Company for Wireless and Telegraph, granting it a ten-year monopoly license and 60% entitlement of licensing fees. The Egyptian Broadcasting Service began emissions in 1934, as a national, apolitical service. British domination of the airwaves was reflected in the prohibition of any criticism of Great Britain during World War II. Radio service out of Egypt was essentially run both as part of British colonial services as well as local broadcasting.³⁰⁶ Calls to "Egyptianize" radio in the press ran parallel to growing nationalistic sentiments. Parliament passed a law in 1949 delegating control over broadcast media to the President of the council of ministers. The law also banned broadcasting political controversies, while requiring broadcasts to focus on national pride, traditions, education, entertainment and providing news.³⁰⁷

The 1952 coup by the Free Officers that removed the monarchy, provided the real impetus for the expansion of radio as a government tool. As the state had already come to control the

³⁰⁴ UNESCO (1957)

³⁰⁵ ElSheikh (1977) p. 68.

³⁰⁶ Stanton (2013)

³⁰⁷ Ibid pp. 70 & 71.

means of radio production and broadcast, the Free Officers had almost immediately identified the utility of radio in their endeavor and repurposed it as a means to speak to the masses and consolidate their victory in as far-reaching a manner as possible.³⁰⁸ Radio would become one of Nasser's most potent tools, not only locally, but in furthering his regional ambitions. When television broadcast was introduced eight years later, radio would have provided the blueprint upon which it would be regulated.

3) Nasser and the Free Officers: Switching mindsets and institutions

Adapting and engineering a new reality

The legacy of Gamal Abdel-Nasser and the Free Officers exhibited especially enduring characteristics and institutions that would define the future of the Republic in various areas, media system development was no exception. The implementation of his political and economic agendas could still be felt over half a century after his death. "Nasser laid down the foundation of the patron state. His successors could not change them even if they wished, without risking their political survival."³⁰⁹ Ultimately, the mode of governance created by the Free Officers was integrative, holistic, and deeply centralized. It was also wrought with built-in inefficiencies, that would manifest during the latter years of Nasser's rule. Power dynamics in the military would shift and devolve into direct conflict as a direct consequence of his policies. Meanwhile, Nasser's developmentalist policies, built on State Capitalism with massive infrastructure projects and overly ambitious military expansion, would lead to crippling public debt.

The Free Officers were able to execute a well-organized coup to depose the monarchy in July 1952. However, they were left with the dilemma of governing a country in transition. This transition was not merely political- from a monarchy to a republic- but it involved a reorganization of society, anchored by a shift in economic policy. Nasser was at the helm of the massive societal and institutional shifts that would help define the republic for decades. The Free Officers had a broad idea of the kind of society they wanted, but were often criticized for lacking a clear vision as to the specific techniques and policies needed to achieve these ideas in the long term.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Shalabieh (1985) p. 97

³⁰⁹ Harik (1998) p. 27

³¹⁰ Mansfield (1973)

When it came to an economic agenda, they introduced one of the most consistent caveats throughout the country's modern history: the state will always play an active and dominant and nearly autocratic role in society and in economic development.³¹¹ Efforts to introduce a state-led industrialization drive prior to 1952 were thwarted due to the divergent interests of the landed elite, large landowners, and the British with their continued military presence after Egypt gained nominal independence in 1922.³¹² Restructuring of Egypt's political and economic power structures opened the door to the ruling regimes becoming the primary agent within the country for decades.

The 1952 coup occurred on the backdrop of an armed forces that grew in political stature, as the parliamentary system along with the monarchy were proving unable to convincingly steer the country in the direction of either economic prosperity or enhanced political sovereignty. The end of the monarchy prompted the ushering in of a new era in Egypt where political supremacy lay squarely in the hands of the military establishment, and mass media became - in the eyes of the state- a matter of "national security" as much as anything.

Broadcast journalist and TV host, Yosri Foda believes the principles set forth by Gamal Abdel-Nasser outlining how the Egyptian state views the media continued to prevail in the subsequent decades despite the differing economic and political policies in the country and the transforming political economy of media systems since that era. "The state always saw the media as a means through which it could exert its control over the people. The militaristic attitude towards the media always underpinned the state's attitude towards them".³¹³ Foda pointed to the Nasser era as the progenitor of government apparatuses and norms that would place the institutions of mass media as de-facto arms of the state, "facilitating their rule." He continued to feel the direct effects of this approach while working in private Egyptian broadcasting in the 2010's.

When the Free Officers took control they did not seem to have an immediate plan for mass media, especially the press. Martial Law had been introduced on 26 January of the same year when riots led to the Great Cairo Fire, which was marked by the burning and looting of over 750 buildings. The events of the day were sparked by the killing of Egyptian policemen by British troops. Despite Martial Law being in effect, the instability of both the monarchy and the government meant that the press was also experiencing a period of uncertainty. Although,

³¹¹ Harik (1998)

³¹² Ramsis (2009)

³¹³ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

by the time the 23 July 1952 Coup had taken place, the military (represented by The Free Officers) were generally portrayed as being Egypt's only hope by a press corps that had its fair share of anti-palace and anti-British operatives.³¹⁴

Nationalization of the press was not high on the list of priorities, as it was a sector that was already favorably inclined to the country's new rulers. Furthermore, the British-imposed martial law of 1939 already gave Nasser a functioning mechanism to censor the press at will. As the de facto leader of the Free Officers, he provided the most push back for democratizing initiatives. In the years following the Coup, Nasser believed that "at [that] stage democracy can create economic problems."³¹⁵

The institutional legacy of this era would remain quite potent for decades to come. In some areas, it was ever-present and superseded any ideological or methodical differences successive regimes may have had with The Officers, and Nasser specifically. Most notably, it created a securitized state allowing the military leadership to directly and autocratically push forth with its goals, with minimal reference to public opinion or to representatives of the population at large or the constituents in reference. The monarchy, on the other hand, needed to contend with some civilian and global factions. Nasser believed others were to blame for the autocracy of the Free Officers. In his memoir *Falsafat Althawra* (Philosophy of the Revolution), he simultaneously called for popular inclusivity in governance and structures of power, while lamenting the lack of a unified voice. He goes on to insinuate that it was the inaction of the civilian factions and centers of social and political leadership that led to "the Officers" remaining at the helm of the revolutionary process as the "vanguards of progress" after the initial drive of 23 July, 1952. It was a process that had grand regional and local aspirations.

Media and structures of control

Policies of The Free Officers in governance suggested a clear preference for military brass and a tentative (often distrustful) view towards civilians, as evidenced by the placement of officers at the helm of the most crucial positions.³¹⁶ However, in order to implement the social transformation they sought, agencies and institutions would have to be created and/or altered in ways that would not only reshape the social contract, but also help garner

³¹⁴ Hamroush (1989) p. 229

³¹⁵ Heikal interview (1976) in Nasser M.K., 1977

³¹⁶ McDermott (1988)

consensus and public fanfare for highly ambitious plans. The way the new rulers created their structures of societal control had a direct bearing on how media would ultimately be structured, organized, and regulated in the way they came to be.

After the dissolution of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in 1956, the National Union was formed in order to create a structure through which citizens participate directly towards achieving the revolution's goals. It was in fact, an attempt to create a populist front (rather than a party) through which the state could reach the citizenry and mobilize them quickly.³¹⁷ All Egyptians would be required to take part. The NU would be replaced by the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) in 1962, Nasser's most enduring attempt to create a popular political packaging system. Its establishment coincided with the earnest launching of a "socialist" transformation.³¹⁸ The ASU, would be an omnipresent political force to contain all of society and coax them into specific action. It was also charged with mobilization and catering to state goals generally. Many of the state's politicization attempts were characterized by acute efforts at mass mobilization and control of society, especially by annexing the role and functionality of interest groups to be contained within the state's patronage. Ayubi described the ASU as a "bureaucratization of political and associational life (the 'political party', the trade unions, the professional syndicates, the Islamic 'clergy', etc.).³¹⁹"

Similarly, information and mass media were bureaucratized. Rather than regulating this space with laws alone, the Free Officers established The Ministry of National Guidance to organize communication issues in 1952. This was a precursor to the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, established in 1958 with the more pointed aim of organizing informational campaigns in the internal and external spheres and pulling together scattered committees and special administrations for art, radio, information and publishing.³²⁰

In 1954, the Free Officers had briefly lifted the press censorship policy imposed in 1939, only to re-impose it one month later, after the first major confrontation between Nasser and members of the press. Many journalists had criticized the regime's policies out of their disillusionment with the seemingly undemocratic direction the country was taking in the context of the struggle between Mohamed Naguib, the highly decorated figurehead and elder

³¹⁷ Waterbury (1983)

³¹⁸ Migdal (1988)

³¹⁹ Ayubi (1995) p. 215

³²⁰ Rachty (1968) p. 132

statesman of the Free Officers, and Nasser who was the group's actual leader and founder, pulling the strings with authority behind the scenes. Naguib supported a swift return to civilian rule under democratic institutions, while Nasser and the majority of the Free Officers feared for the fate of the revolution, opting to remain in power for a longer interim period.³²¹ Ultimately, 1954 was the first post-revolutionary watershed moment, not just for the Free Officers, but for institutions such as the country's media system, which had yet to be addressed with a massive plan.

Journalists at that time were warned against "spreading suspicion and doubts about the Revolution."³²² One such case was that of Mahmoud Abul-Fatah, publisher of the Wafdist paper, *AlMisri*. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison (in absentia), while the license for his paper was revoked. Abul-Fatah had been openly calling for a return to a parliamentary system and party politics, although Nasser-confidant, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal says that his criticism of the president could be traced back to the latter's refusal to grant him massive arms and transportation contracts.³²³ Curiously, on March 7 of 1954 (before censorship was re-imposed and before Abul-Fatah received a verdict in this case), Nasser raised concerns that the prosecution of Abul-Fatah may evoke questions over freedom of the press, in a meeting recounted in the memoirs of Abdullatif Al-Baghdadi³²⁴ (a member of the Free Officers). According to the memoirs, Nasser genuinely believed in a free press until that point.

Initially, the charges against Abul-Fatah had been restricted to allegations that he had committed fraud in obtaining additional subsidies to print illegally. The sentence, doled out by a revolutionary tribunal had at first been restricted to fines. At that specific moment in time, at the height of the 1954 crisis and for a brief period, Nasser had still planned on utilizing private newspaper owners to further his own aims, which may explain why he negotiated a relaxed payment scheme for Abul-fatah, despite protests from within the Revolutionary Council.³²⁵ Abul-Fatah himself had been prominent in the development of modern journalism in Egypt as the first head of the Journalists Syndicate as well as being a prominent politician.³²⁶

³²¹ Al-Baghdadi (1977)

³²² Peretz D. (1959) from Nasser (1977) p. 37

³²³ Nasser M.K. (1977) p. 11

³²⁴ Al-Baghdadi (1977) p. 124

³²⁵ Ibid

³²⁶ Glodschmit (1999) p. 12

On the same day that Nasser negotiated on his behalf (7 March 1954), he held a press conference to remind journalists “that the Armed Forces has become a principal factor in affecting politics in the country.”³²⁷ He had also instructed these journalists to steer clear of mentioning the discord from within the Revolutionary Council. Briefly during that year, it seemed as if the relationship between Nasser and a private press would be viable. But it would have to be predicated on their loyalty and obedience to the would-be president, as Abul-Fatah would later find out when choosing to side with Naguib.³²⁸

The end of the 1954 crisis, and the triumph of the Nasserite wing of the Free Officers, marked another watershed moment for the future of mass media in Egypt. It would be a departure in a direction that would take hold for decades to come. Military leaders who would end up at the helm of the country’s politics would consistently adhere to the belief that the Egyptian people would not be ready for “freedoms” in the broader sense, and were always skeptical, or hostile of a media system that they could not control.

In a heated discussion about the length of a transitional period (of military rule) at the height of the 1954 crisis, Nasser said, “our people cannot correctly appreciate their own best interest immediately, and maybe three years (transition) is not enough. Our people cannot withstand the burdens of freedom.”³²⁹ The real result of such a perspective is that since 1952, Egypt had been in a constant state of “transition,” having rarely had a period of five or more years free from shape-shifting turmoil whether due to internal or external factors. Between 1967 and 2011 Egypt had almost constantly been under “emergency law,” which allowed for the official suspension of many constitutional rights while facilitating censorship on all levels.

Whether the Free Officers saw mass media as a tool that should be indentured to the state at all times, or as a security threat that must be heavily monitored and kept on a tight leash, the media system in place was seen as one that would require a specifically nuanced approach. Over the backdrop of a relatively rich history of both subversion and obsequiousness, the press -and to a lesser extent the fledgling airwaves- provided the up and coming republic with both opportunities and challenges. The new Revolutionary Council acted quickly to establish its rule under its true figurehead Nasser.³³⁰ However, the absence of a clear vision moving

³²⁷ Ibid p. 125

³²⁸ Abul-Fatah never served his prison sentence as he spent the last six years of his life in exile.

³²⁹ Mohieldin (1992) p. 272

³³⁰ Mansfield (1973)

forward made the regime all the more susceptible to the established subversive characteristics of Egyptian press.

The state officially takes over

Aside from enforcing direct censorship on papers, the regime initially took towards expanding government-run media in an attempt to control the narrative. Between 1952 and 1957 new press organs emerged under these pretenses. *ALTahrir* magazine was issued in 1952 by the Officers, although it was promptly closed down in 1953 after being deemed a failure for its inability to have the desired effect on society. *AlGomhoriya*, was soon thereafter launched on 7 December 1953. *AlGomhoriya* would be the most enduring of papers established at this time, remaining in circulation for decades, and growing to include its own publishing house and distribution services. *AlShaab* (another daily) and *AlMasaa*, an evening paper were also established in 1953 and 1956 respectively³³¹. Despite the relative success of *AlGomhoriya* and *AlMasaa*, governmental support in establishing these papers was still not enough to allow them to compete with established, privately owned powerhouses such as *AlAhram* and *AlAkhbar*.

After consolidating his power as President and gaining immense popularity on the heels of the 1956 Tripartite aggression and Suez Canal Nationalization, under Nasser, the Free Officers' power became absolute, and Nasser became a national symbol for public adulation. His regime instituted a more direct censorship system and created "The Office for Censorship over Publications" in the Ministry of National Guidance. Editors and Chief would be summoned to this office and given "advice" while being communicated to with regards to the government's plans as well as how they should report them. Leading newspapers would not be immediately convinced to act as direct propaganda for the new revolutionary policies, which the Officers' saw as a necessary precursor to the coming period of "socialist transformation" of 1960. This hesitance had a direct effect on the government's decision of "reorganizing" the press.

These developments would lay down the groundwork for the state's ultimate decision to not only control media output, but completely annex the media establishment under its fold. Mass media would be conscripted to serve in furthering Nasser's plans.

³³¹ El-Sheikh (1977) p. 40

Media, mobilization and “freedom from the shackles of capitalism”

Not only were the Free Officers and Nasser engaged in internal and external power struggles, but over this period Nasser had also begun to slowly create a more concrete foundation towards building a brand of socialism that would become a defining characteristic of his rule. The same belief that would feed the resistance to Naguib’s desire to transition more quickly from a state of revolution into a more established parliamentary democracy, would be the driving force behind this approach. Changing Egypt’s leadership would not be enough, rather what was sought was a profound transformation in both power relations and institutions. This was clear in the group’s early mission to upend the stranglehold of the landed bourgeoisie by implementing the first phase of Agrarian Reforms in 1952. These reforms limited land ownership with the goal of radically altering power relations in society.³³² Despite the delayed actualization of his vision, it was clear from the outset that Nasser would be distrusting of the public to play an independent role in this transformation.

In “The Philosophy of the Revolution,” Nasser talks of his “shock” at the inaction of the general public after the announcement of the 1952 coup. He claims to have thought that after the military’s initial push in overthrowing the monarchy, there come a “Holy March” of unified society pushing together for a common, greater goal.³³³ Instead he speaks of “scattered” and “divided” groups that showed up, actually stalling hopes of achieving this “greater goal”.³³⁴

Based on these memoirs, Nasser’s dismay at the lack of a uniform, working class public – spoken of in militaristic terms as ‘brigades’ - would justify his decisions, so long as they are part of a push towards his goals. “If peasants and workers were ever to serve as the lever for the regime to effect change, Nasser and his colleagues would have to build the vehicles to motivate and sustain their mobilization.”³³⁵ Attempts to overhaul institutions were piecemeal until 1960 as he was getting ready to launch his first Five Year Plan.

³³² Migdal (1988)

³³³ Nasser (1954) p. 21

³³⁴ Ibid

³³⁵ Migdal (1988) p. 188

Despite his own success in consolidating political power, Nasser still felt constantly let down by the press. Even though it had been mostly censored, the press corps still avoided complete subservience.³³⁶

A security-oriented ethos had come to dominate priorities in political decision-making as well as the overall power structure at the heart of the successive regimes ruling from Cairo.³³⁷ The government's assessment of press corps performance and function would be made primarily with regard to its overall utility to the central authority's plans. A secondary qualitative assessment of their roles in providing, information, analysis and cultural value would still factor in, to ensure the potency of this soft power tool. The relationship between mass media and the central authorities would begin shifting from one of regulation to outright control.

“At this time, Nasser felt the press must be controlled to take part in the process of social and economic transformation and in liquidating the interests of privileged groups.”³³⁸ Ideas that had been percolating regarding socialism, centralized government and five-year plans began to manifest in more concrete terms as the state tightened its grip on society. Accordingly, the regime had also taken drastic decisions on what type of mass media would be allowed and how they could be organized. In his memoir *Bayn AlSahafa w Al Siyasa* (Between Journalism and Politics), Mohamed Hassanein Heikal recounts Nasser's words on the day he told him of his intention to nationalize the media:

We are approaching profound social transformations in Egypt and there is no alternative to public control over capital and factors of production... I cannot logically nor justly impose social control on the economy and let some individuals control the media... The coming phase of social transformation requires complete social mobilization.³³⁹

Nasserist “Socialism”

Egypt had almost completely transitioned into the Officers' own brand of Socialism by 1963. This had come about after years of incremental measures and failed attempts to encourage private and foreign investment initially after the 1952 coup. During this period, the press would definitively become annexed under the state's operational control, a long with many other sectors of production.

³³⁶ Nasser M.K. (1977)

³³⁷ Kandil, (2013)

³³⁸ Nasser M.K. (1977) p. 13

³³⁹ Heikal (1984) pp. 76, 77

Economic planning was a mainstay of Nasserist ideology. It was inextricably tied to political goals as well. Land reform for example, one of the earliest implemented policies (and the most consistently applied), reduced the ceiling of land-ownership, thereby distributing control of land and empowering peasants. It also allowed the government to immediately neutralize the land-owning elite, whose share of total land ownership decreased from 20% to around 6%.³⁴⁰

By 1960 -when the first full five-year plan came into effect- the developmentalist model took on a more defined shape, especially in the non-agricultural sectors. After the first five-year plan (1960/1961-1964/1965), manufacturing was receiving more public funds than any other sector and its share of national output increased from 19% to nearly 22%.³⁴¹ By then the public sector controlled over 90% of both total non-agricultural output domestically and gross domestic capital formation. The first five-year plan was also considered a success in creating over one million jobs and growing industry at 9% annually.

Despite claims to socialism, the political-economic system employed by Nasser came to be defined by some as ‘state capitalism,’ which Cooper defines as:

... a nationalistic reorientation of economic resources through moderate agrarian reform, nationalization of basic industries, centralization of finance, and an expansion of social services... Societies remain capitalistic, in spite of the expanding role of the state.³⁴²

These characteristics, Cooper argued, were present in Egypt at the time when a domineering state-centered interest emerged. Society in-turn, had been shifted to rely more heavily on the state. Some social scientists and economists refuse this attribution mainly due to their belief that Egypt did not exhibit basic hallmarks of capitalistic economies, such as free competition or the profit motive.³⁴³

However, state capitalism does provide the most apt designation of this period insofar as it describes the structural reorientation of the country’s political economy. Waterbury observed that there was no difference between socialist and capitalist management.³⁴⁴ Rather, the differences lie in the ownership of the means of the production and profits, which fell in the hands of the state.

³⁴⁰ Farah (2009)

³⁴¹ Sabry A. (2003)

³⁴² Cooper (1983) p. 451

³⁴³ Harik (1998)

³⁴⁴ Waterbury (1983)

“Socialization” of the Press

On 24 May 1960, Nasser issued “The Press Organization Law,” a presidential decree, nationalizing the press. The announcement, would be among the most sweeping and impactful changes of this era, as it was also a de-facto declaration that public space would be dedicated to supporting the state’s goals.

Press nationalization was touted as an attempt at “freeing the press from the shackles of capitalism.”³⁴⁵ The law forced the major publishing houses³⁴⁶ to surrender their press assets to the National Union (NU) and moving forward, any future newspaper licensing, would only come through the NU.

Thus, the door was effectively shut in the face of differing opinions or perspectives in the Egyptian press. Nasser saw it fit to completely eliminate the possibility of being vulnerable to press wars that were commonplace in the country’s history before him. Yet Nasser believed that there was freedom of press in his time, as long as the press conformed to his vision.³⁴⁷ This perspective was formalized in the explanatory note to the ruling, which said the role of the press was to be, “an authority whose function it is to guide the people to actively participate in building their society , exactly as does the National Assembly.”³⁴⁸

Unlike other cases of nationalization, the press was given a special structural status. Heikal, who was then editor of *AlAhrām*, counselled Nasser against outright state ownership of the press. They reached a compromise, allowing the NU to carry out its duties, while appointing a board of directors for each paper, who appointed the editors. At the same time the papers would be run as non-profits that still enjoyed surplus revenue, which would be distributed among the employees, or recycled back into the company. Thus the official narrative relayed a “socialization” of the press, rather than nationalization.³⁴⁹ Heikal called it a mere “reorganization” of the press into cooperatives, where only ownership was to be transferred, and held between the National Union’s “moral” and editorial guidance, and the people.³⁵⁰ The official term adopted by the government was the same, *tanzim alsahafa* (organization of the press).

³⁴⁵ Amer (2012) p. 30

³⁴⁶ The five publishing houses were: *Dar AlAhrām*, *Dar Akhbar Al-Youm*, *Dar Al-hilal*, *Dar Ros Alyousef*

³⁴⁷ Orrayeb, Aref N. in; Hafez (2008)

³⁴⁸ Egyptian Presidency: The Official Gazette (1960), explanatory note.

³⁴⁹ Nasser M.K. 1977

³⁵⁰ AlAhrām, 29 July 1960.

The NU and the ASU were not officially state organs; each being displayed more as a political party, which is why the state argued that even after the new law had passed, the press were not made to fall directly under the authority of the state. Most papers operated independently without losing money, with the exception of *AlGomhoriyah*, which habitually received government subsidies through to the late 1970s. Press budgets were mostly external to any government involvement.³⁵¹

The dominance of the government and its agencies over these cooperatives yielded a press that had all essentially become mouthpieces of the rulers.³⁵² This model managed to marginally create a framework through which the tradition of the press in Egypt could still somehow be harnessed and maintained, through the insinuation that they were not direct arms of the government. It made for a relationship between the state and the press that could exhibit a certain degree of nuance in its practice, although with a very clear bottom-line, clearly delineated margins of freedom, and an official frame of reference for reporting on any sensitive topic: the state.

Those who resisted, faced the brunt of the growing police state. One of the most glaring examples was that of the Amin brothers who, after losing their *Akhbar AlYoun* (*AlAkhbar*) empire, were forcibly transferred to work for another news publishing house (*Dar AlHilal*), and later faced charges of conspiring with the CIA to undermine the socialist movements. Moustafa Amin was sentenced to life in prison in 1965, while his brother Ali, who was abroad, chose to remain in exile.³⁵³ The brothers harbored an entrenched distaste for socialism and were known to oppose the sweeping reforms, not only vis-à-vis their business, but also in their general discourse and political dealings. Importantly, when the 1960 law was put in effect, *AlAkhbar* was the most important private paper to be transferred to the management of a series of military leaders starting from Amin Shaker moving on to Khaled Mohi-ElDin and Anwar El-Sadat (all from Nasser's inner circle).³⁵⁴

Print media, given its audience, was to become the main purveyor of intellectual thought and ideas, extolling virtues of socialism and helping control and disseminate the local narrative with regards to Nasser's plans and performance.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Rugh (1979) p. 38

³⁵² El-Sheikh (1977)

³⁵³ Nasser MK (1977)

³⁵⁴ Heikal (1984)

³⁵⁵ ELSheikh (1977)

Yosri Foda called this general system and attitude towards the organization of media as “Nasser’s Mass Media State,” concluding that throughout the changes during post-monarchy Egypt, the legacy of this period continued(s) to bear its mark on the Egyptian media system.³⁵⁶

Organized participation and controlled output

Within the state parameters and shifting political red lines, journalists as a cohort initially pushed back slightly to retain glimpses of independence and an air of being removed from the state’s burgeoning propaganda machine. It was an uphill battle, to say the least.

Through Nasser’s Presidency, the government attempted to permanently transition to a situation that reflects more accurately the authoritarian ideal that “information should be a government monopoly.”³⁵⁷ The press was also gradually playing a more entrenched role in the progressive entrenchment of Arab Socialism as journalists and intellectuals were expected to function with more editorial discretion (from within the confines of this role) rather than to follow the direct leadership of the RCC and ASU leadership.³⁵⁸ This happened through the reorganization of the country’s press under the ASU primarily, but more specifically under the Journalists Syndicate³⁵⁹, the Ministry of Information, and the Information Committee.

Salah Salem, the Minister of National Guidance and a Free Officer, had immediately taken over the Journalists Syndicate in 1952, putting it under control of the RCC.³⁶⁰ Initially, membership of the syndicate was not necessary in order to be working within the press, although it was obligatory in order to be called a ‘journalist’. Membership became obligatory in 1955 (Law 185) for all those working within the profession of journalism. Once Law 156 was passed in 1960, journalists would only be allowed to pursue their careers after also gaining clearance from the National Union, functioning as a journalist without this permit would become outlawed.³⁶¹

The transformation of the Syndicate was complete by the end of Nasser’s presidency, when in 17 September 1970³⁶² Law no. 76 replaced the 1955 law stating clearly in article 3 that the roles of the Syndicate are:

³⁵⁶ Foda (2015)

³⁵⁷ Amin (2009) p. 12

³⁵⁸ Waterbury (1983) pp. 334-339

³⁵⁹ Also frequently referenced as the Press Syndicate.

³⁶⁰ Amin (2009)

³⁶¹ Egyptian Presidency: The Official Gazette (1960) pp. 832 & 833

³⁶² Eleven days before Nasser’s sudden death due to a heart attack.

- a) The propagation and deepening of socialist and nationalist thought among its members, as well as activating the call to support this thought in press organizations and among the reading public; in addition to activating press research and encouraging those undertake to carry out such research; as well as raising the scientific and intellectual level of its members.
- b) Raising the standard of the profession...
- c) Safeguarding the freedom of journalists...
- d) Trying to find work for unemployed members...
- e) Ensuring the observation of the traditions, morals and principles of the profession.
- f) Settling professional conflicts...
- g) Strengthening relations with the Union of Arab Journalists...
- h) Undertaking steps to achieve closeness between its members and the members of trade unions representing laborers working within the press.³⁶³

These laws were widely criticized for greatly limiting the scope and ability of journalists to gain official recognition for their profession. The laws (especially Law 76) were also inconclusive regarding the financial independence of the Syndicate, which should ostensibly be funded entirely by membership dues, leading to the belief that the Syndicate would in fact be an arm of the government.³⁶⁴ Despite these limitations, the Syndicate would ultimately play a vibrant role in the future of Egyptian journalism and in the formation of a more robust journalist corps in the following decades.

Arming the airwaves

Broadcasting via radio had already been monopolized by the state by the time the Free Officers overthrew the monarchy in 1952. Its utility as a medium of communication was self-evident and it became the most quickly deployed tool at the RCC's disposal to campaign for public support. While the fledgling regime initially entertained the concept of a relatively free press, broadcasting on the airwaves was a different story from the outset. It was automatically deemed too valuable to leave in private hands. On 23 July 1952, radio studios and transmitters were quickly taken over by the Army as is common practice in the wake of coups. On 24 July 1952, the general public learned of the military takeover over the radio, in a communique read out by Nasser's would-be successor, Anwar El-Sadat. Radio's services expanded, and were focused on local and regional mobilization alike. Initially, radio came under direct control of the cabinet and the Minister of National Guidance. During the short-

³⁶³ Law 76 for the year 1970 Re: The Formation of the Journalists Syndicate. (Author's translation)

³⁶⁴ Amer (2012)

lived Egypt-Syria union under the United Arab Republic, the Egyptian Broadcasting service was directly under the auspices of the President.³⁶⁵

Nasser seemed to realize more quickly than his counterparts in the region just how powerful a political weapon broadcasting could be. Orders were given to swiftly expand the reach of radio emissions across the country and the region. Its broadcasts were used to popularize government policies, spread the tenets of Arab Socialism and act as a potent tool in numerous regional struggles.³⁶⁶ Cutting through the region's dismal literacy rates, radio emissions transmitted information to areas that would otherwise be cut off from day-to-day opinion-forming information. The Voice of the Arabs program, dating back to 1953, became an internationally recognized force in fomenting liberation movements across the Arab World.³⁶⁷

The period between the mid-1950's and 1967 saw radical change in Arab society especially, and Radio Cairo was seen by the West to be at the epicenter of changes in both the attitudes of common people and as a motivator for freedom fighters everywhere from Algeria to Iraq. British and US intelligence reports conveyed this to be highly unsettling to their governments. Miles Copeland suggested the CIA had considered proposals as drastic as bombing Radio Cairo, or at least developing competing radio stations³⁶⁸. The rallying calls of Arab Nationalism and Pan-Arabism seemed to emanate primarily through the airwaves, especially after the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the ensuing so-called Tripartite aggression³⁶⁹ in 1956.

UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld had intervened with a request that Nasser "disarm" his radio. This attempted intervention only served to highlight the impact radio was having, and the resultant global concerns. Nasser received the request with indignation and effectively replied, "How can I reach my power base? My power lies with the Arab masses. The only way I can reach my people is by radio. If you ask me for radio disarmament, it means that you are asking me for complete disarmament."³⁷⁰

³⁶⁵ ElSheikh (1977) pp77-79

³⁶⁶ Shalabieh (1985)

³⁶⁷ ibid

³⁶⁸ Copeland (1969) pp. 209-210

³⁶⁹ In 1956 Israel, the UK and France attacked Egypt in an attempt to regain Western control of the Suez Canal as well as depose Gamal Abdel-Nasser. The war ended in a stalemate, but Nasser emerged from it as an embattled hero.

³⁷⁰ Heikal (1973) p. 173

The airwaves were a strong weapon as there was little any authority could do from it reaching individual radios in isolated locations on medium wave frequencies. Radio newscaster Ahmed Said, was the main broadcasting conduit through which Nasser's words travelled between 1953 and 1967.³⁷¹ Heikal, was his effectively his equivalent in the press. They both played important roles in Nasser's attempts to speak more directly to the masses.

The end of Said's era coincided with one of the most important blunders in the short history of Egypt's national media machines. During the 1967 Six-day war, when Israel had dumbfounded the Egyptian military by attacking the country, after a period of acute escalation in military tension, the Egyptian air force had been nearly obliterated within hours. Yet the Voice of the Arabs was reporting that Egypt had downed 86 Israeli aircraft. Egyptians ultimately learned of the defeat, and of its crushing effects and Said was the main media scapegoat, for the false narrative propagated on the day.³⁷² BBC's Jeremy Bowen had asked Ahmed Said why he had approved such lies and what he thought to gain from fake reports on an "imaginary victory", and Said's response was still defiant, "You're asking people to fight, not dance... we believed the broadcasts were our most powerful weapon... many of our listeners were illiterate, so radio was the most important way to reach them."³⁷³

Up until that moment, radio was effectively and efficiently weaponized, it seems. To bolster the potency of this weapon, Nasser ordered the distribution of transistor radios at times, depending on the state's needs. For example, during Egypt's participation in the Yemeni Civil War of the 1960's, over 100,000 transistor radios were distributed among tribes occupying the space between Yemen and Oman.³⁷⁴ In Egypt, aside from installing radio sets in public areas across the country, tax on radio sets were abolished in 1960 with the government encouraging all citizens to acquire one.³⁷⁵ The regime's push in advancing radio capabilities lead to it increasing its weekly broadcasting emissions from 100 to 477 hours between 1955 and 1965, ranking sixth internationally at that point behind the USSR (1,3440); China (937); Voice of America (873); The BBC (639) and West Germany (598).³⁷⁶

Radio would be the first example of Egyptian governments looking at media space as a legitimate battlefield where there are winners and losers. It was a venue for propaganda

³⁷¹ Boyd (1975)

³⁷² Shalabieh (1985)

³⁷³ Bowen, J (2017), 1967 war: Six days that changed the Middle East. BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-39960461>

³⁷⁴ Ibid

³⁷⁵ Rachty (1968) pp. 186-188

³⁷⁶ Ibid

above all else, placed at the disposition of the state at war.

Localizing narratives and news (The Middle East News Agency)

Nasser not only wanted to directly control his own messaging system and the methods of their dissemination within society, he also wanted to control what news was being reported from the region. Local and Arab news outlets were almost entirely reliant on news agencies such as Reuters, *Agence France Presse (AFP)*, the Associated Press and United Press for their news reporting. In 1956 government publishing houses decided to revive an idea that originated in 1948: to create an Arab news agency out of Egypt. The Middle East News Agency (MENA) was established that year with the stated intention of becoming an “internal news agency rivalling Reuters and the AP, and thus the news of Egypt would be properly reported abroad and not distorted by foreign agencies.”³⁷⁷

Initially the idea for MENA was that it would be organized as a joint stock company, owned mainly by the large publishing houses at the time: *ALAhram*, *ALakhbar*, *Dar AlHilal*, *AlGomhoriyah*, *La Bourse Egyptienne* and *le Progrès Egyptienne*. A majority of the agencies’ start-up capital of £20,000 was in the hands of a group of government-owned papers.³⁷⁸ This group was previously under an umbrella company called *Société Orientale de Publicité*, which was eventually bought by the *Dar elTahrir* Publishing House, the owner of *AlGomhoriyah*. Despite pretenses, the government was indirectly in control, especially as it fell to the oversight of Anwar El-Sadat, an integral member of the RCC and the director of *Dar elTahrir* Publishing House.³⁷⁹ But officially, MENA was run under the autonomous General Organization for News, Printing and Circulation. That continued to be the case until 1966 when, after being sold off to the Arab Press Association, the Ministry of National Guidance itself was reorganized and took direct control of the Agency.

The development of MENA was a step towards establishing authoritative mass media and news outlets from Egypt that helped guide the news agenda in general. As the only Arabic news agency with the resources, infrastructure and political backing to operate on a regional level and take a direct stake in forming the narrative of international news from the region, it was a tool that was first introduced by the first regime of the Republic, that ironically also commandeered MENA after establishing it. Rather than commercially compete with the

³⁷⁷ Ibid p. 149

³⁷⁸ El-Sheikh (1977) p. 50

³⁷⁹ Rachty (1968)

known international wire services and agencies, MENA was deployed more as a tool to enhance Egypt's soft power. It still aimed to be a legitimate and robust service, providing normal news agency services of news gathering and dissemination, gauging trends and opinions, displaying analyses and offering general news services.

As a revenue generating enterprise, MENA was able to more easily establish offices worldwide, and engage in high-profile exchanges of news material with the world's major powers, as well as countries in Africa and the Arab world³⁸⁰, where Nasser enjoyed a special status as an anti-colonial figure.

Introducing television

The 1956 Constitution stated that national economic development would be based on central planning and that "capital should be at the service of the state." It strove for a reconciliation of private and public economic activities.³⁸¹ By 1960, the vast majority of capital formation came to be in the hands of the central authorities, and when the first Five-Year plan was to be implemented that same year, it became abundantly clear that this venture would be led almost exclusively by the state. One year into this plan, the introduction of television would appear, not only as a face of this plan, but also as a major building block in the developmentalist vision that had begun to take shape in a more robust and total manner. Media had always played such a role "since the revolution [as] the government has attempted to use the media to develop Egypt, as well as the Middle East, both politically and culturally."³⁸²

Television would become the only mass medium to emanate squarely from within the halls of power, differing from the examples of the press and radio. In the case of post-monarchy Egypt, radio had been co-opted by the state to become the state's megaphone. In his study comparing radio as a tool for political persuasion in the era's of Nasser and Sadat, Shalabieh concluded that during Nasser's time, "it was a clear propaganda tool."³⁸³ When the press was nationalized it was able to retain its role as the platform for opinion-forming information and analysis while also being expected to perform the function of ideological and political propaganda.

³⁸⁰ ElSheikh (1977) pp. 50-51

³⁸¹ The People's Constitution (1956) Articles no. 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11.

³⁸² Boyd (1982) pp. 6-7

³⁸³ Shalabieh (1985)

Television, on the other hand was both established and launched from the very command center that would launch The National Charter of 1962 with the economic and social concepts that would come to help define Nasser's tenure. Structurally, it would be organized using some of the same principles that would help define the "State Capitalism" of the era.

Initially the idea of launching television services from Egypt had begun floating around since the late 1940's by mostly French companies interested in the venture for an initial capital of £200,000. By 1954 a concrete proposal had been approved by the Presidency, with idea that the ideal location to launch the facilities would be above the Moqattam Plateau in Cairo.³⁸⁴ After the Suez Crisis had put the project on hold, the Egyptian government decided in 1959 to accept an offer from the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to establish a television broadcast facility,³⁸⁵ an interesting choice, given Nasser's intention to use it as a tool to counter post-colonial Western domination.

It would become one of the more enduring government ventures and proved to be a pioneering move regionally. "The promise of television as a powerful tool of communication seem(ed) to have motivated Arab governments to keep it as a state controlled operation. Nasser's effective use of radio to promote pan-Arabist ideology seem(ed) to have been behind flourishing views of television as a potentially indispensable tool of political mobilization."³⁸⁶

Due to the capital-intensive nature of television and the extensive infrastructural and operational capacities needed for its development, the fledgling nature of televised broadcasting made it acutely sensitive to political and economic circumstances. On 21 July 1960 the first television emissions began for three hours a day from Channel 1, followed by the addition of Channel 2 in 1961 and Channel 3 in 1962, with an increase in total hours of transmission to 20.³⁸⁷ Hours of transmission had reached an average of 25-30 hours by 1964, but decreased to 23 hours and 44 minutes in 1965 and then to 19 hours by 1970, ostensibly as a response to the economic performance of the country, and more specifically, the dismal performance of grand national projects in general.³⁸⁸ The changes coincided with the announced austerity measures taken by the government at different times, especially in the wake of the crushing 1967 defeat. Despite being structured to operate semi-autonomously, television operated within a system where the organization continued to be in-synch with

³⁸⁴ AFTE (2009)

³⁸⁵ ElShaer (2015)

³⁸⁶ Ayish (2003)

³⁸⁷ ElSheikh (1977)

³⁸⁸ Ibid

other state projects and tied to them financially.³⁸⁹ Like other major government projects at the time, a culture of financial indiscretion and operational inefficiency emerged as a result of the interdependency and the convoluted hierarchies.

Information campaigns about Arab Socialism on television were rampant, especially on Channels 1 and 2 that included more social and political programming to complement entertainment³⁹⁰. The charisma that defined Nasser's presidency and public persona could now be viewed much more intimately for a subsection of the middle and upper classes. Televised broadcasting tended in general to slightly veer towards the cultural and entertainment side of production. Through television, along with motion pictures, Nasser hoped to cement Egypt's (and his) regional role beyond politics, into the realm of cultural production as well.³⁹¹ It would be one of his most effective soft-power tools.

Television sets in the country increased in number from 56,944 in 1961 to 442,129 in 1968 and by some accounts in 1973 the figure went up to one million³⁹². Viewership is said to have increased from 200,000 in 1960 to one million in 1963³⁹³ and six million by 1973³⁹⁴.

However, the state dealt differently with the ownership of television sets than with radio (perhaps due to the high costs of production). Television set ownership was subject to a system of controls and licensing, "similar to the ownership of weapons or ammunition."³⁹⁵ Television set owners were charged annual subscription fees, that would increase if the sets were placed around public businesses. The same law limited television repairs to licensed individuals, and stated that clear accounts must be kept of the specific serial numbers of the sets that they would repair.³⁹⁶

Another reason may be the decidedly limited reach of television and the economic limitations of purchasing sets. Television's reach was confined to Cairo for the majority of its early history and was one of the more widely used tools for mobilizing the dominant middle class in the city.³⁹⁷

³⁸⁹ Cooper (1983)

³⁹⁰ Channel 3 was mostly focused on arts and culture

³⁹¹ Abdullah (2010)

³⁹² General Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, Basic Statistics UAR, 1952-1965, July 1966; and Cultural Statistics, *Alldha'ah w al-Sahafa*, Cairo, August 1971... in ElSheikh (1977)

³⁹³ Rachty (1968) p. 262

³⁹⁴ El-Sheikh (1977)

³⁹⁵ AFTE (2009) p. 12

³⁹⁶ Law# 223 of 1960 Regarding reception of television sets. Published in *Al-Waqa'I AlMisriyah* on 18/07/1960

³⁹⁷ AFTE (2009) p.12

The “*Naksa’s*” lasting effects: an entrenchment of the securitized state

After the 1967 *Naksa*³⁹⁸ - an embarrassing military defeat for Nasser- the level of distrust and paranoia increased and maintaining the authority of his presidency became a priority. The role of internal monitoring and intelligence greatly expanded.³⁹⁹ Since Nasser, the role of military, security and intelligence services in monitoring different factions within society had been becoming more expansive and complex. Hazem Kandil argues that this was the beginning of decades in which the military was not only a guarantor of power, but at times an active participant in it, in-time alongside other security apparatuses⁴⁰⁰. Further chapters will reveal how in the era of private media, they at-times engaged in unilateral regulation of media systems and day-to-day output as well.

Abu-Elmagd drew parallels between the military’s control of political and economic affairs as being consistent with the Foucauldian observation of some modern states:

The Egyptian military is a modern institution in a modern state. According to Michel Foucault’s deconstruction of the modern state’s mechanisms of power, this state developed the practice of closely observing the population in order to make it a docile population...In the Egyptian case, the military institution that exercises state power by itself has turned the whole society into an infinite, long-lasting camp where everyday life is subjected to the officer’s visible or invisible watch, yet with allegations of achieving security or guarding the nation.⁴⁰¹

4) Sadat: From sweeping consolidation to tepid modernization

Any potential successor to Nasser would have been well advised to proceed with caution after witnessing his funeral. It was one of the largest funeral processions in history as millions took to the streets of Cairo in disbelief at the death of Nasser. He had been a defining representation of post-monarchy Egypt, and would symbolize the country’s new institutions as a republic. The relatively newly appointed vice president Anwar El-Sadat was tactful in his method of taking charge and took his time before attempting to introduce the kind of radical change that would define his own presidency.

Sadat went from being Nasser’s unassuming Vice President, to another long-term president, who managed to make his own distinct mark on public life. Many of the institutions of government remained, but Sadat would still seek his own means of consolidating power. He

³⁹⁸ Literally it means “setback”. This is the phrase most popularly used to describe the defeat

³⁹⁹ Sirrs (2010)

⁴⁰⁰ Kandil (2012)

⁴⁰¹ Abul-Magd (2017) p. 7

first sought to limit the power of some of Nasser's legacy projects, such as the ASU, which was defunct by 1978. Significantly, political parties were allowed to exist again. In 1976 independent "platforms" (*manabir*) were allowed to contest in the parliamentary elections. These political platforms were touted as a potential precursor to expanded democracy. But the state restricted the effect of this new feature of political organization, by limiting them to the three groups that were ⁴⁰² initially approved.⁴⁰³

"Opposition" became once more an acceptable word in Egyptian public life. Although to Sadat, this was only permissible when this opposition was not accompanied by damaging criticism.⁴⁰⁴ He persecuted some of his staunchest, and most vocal opponents, especially ardent Nasserists. By the end of the decade, his list of political detainees swelled to more than 1,500 from across the political spectrum. The only political party able to fully function at the time was Sadat's newly formed, National Democratic Party as well.

The end of the Nasser's presidency also saw a split between those who wished to take a more liberal economic route and encourage more foreign direct investment, and those wishing to retain strong state capitalism.⁴⁰⁵ Sadat leaned towards the former, causing him to purge the "leftist" factions remaining in government. He then began instituting his *infitah* (economic open-door) policies, ostensibly calling for a more liberal economy. However, these policies did not lead to any measure of profound liberalization. As Waterbury points out, "The marketplace reign[ed] supreme neither in Egyptian economy nor in the political arena. Sadat and his entourage carefully moved towards mixed systems in both."⁴⁰⁶ Despite the clear gulf between his approach and Nasser's, Sadat insisted that the Open Door Policy was a continuation of the changes brought about by the 1952 Revolution, and would help boost public funding.⁴⁰⁷

Saddled with the public expectations of state aid and the myriad social support schemes, Sadat decided to further entrench the state to maintain its control-based functions, while seeming to encourage foreign and domestic investments. Importantly, the "state" maintained its dominance.⁴⁰⁸ Massive inflation, the deterioration of the manufacturing sector, and

⁴⁰² Arab Socialist Party ("center"; representing regime interest); Socialist Liberal Party (right), and the National Progressive Grouping Party (left)

⁴⁰³ Tucker (1978)

⁴⁰⁴ McDermott (1988)

⁴⁰⁵ Waterbury (1983)

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid p. 354

⁴⁰⁷ Dessouki (1981)

⁴⁰⁸ Ayubi (1995)

inefficiencies in the public sector, despite a windfall of oil revenues and remittances, ultimately meant that by the time of Sadat's assassination in 1981, the state of the economy was in tatters.

By the end of his presidency/life, Sadat's relationship with mass media will have seen its share of ups and downs in correspondence with other policy fluctuations. As is the case with the presidencies of his successors and predecessor, the media system during Sadat's time bore a resemblance to the policies and general characteristics of his rule. Amid a stated desire to liberalize the media, along with his attempts at economic *infitah* policies, he also grappled with political opposition and public criticism, both of which he did not tolerate. This criticism would be the cause of tension between media (especially the press) and the President, and one of the main reasons there was never a genuine hope for the development of private, independent media in the country during his time in power, as he had seemed to suggest.

Once again, mass media manipulation was among the tools he used to cement his grip on power. Like almost every major political transition in modern Egypt, the media would be an important factor to be addressed by the incoming leader. It would be a recurring theme for Sadat. First, one of the key moments that led to the Corrective Revolution⁴⁰⁹ was a reported coup attempt by his first vice-president Ali Sabry who had tried to takeover radio and broadcasting facilities. "After the failure of this coup [Sadat] paid much more attention to the radio and television broadcast."⁴¹⁰ The second factor was the role played by Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, both in his capacity as the head of *ALAhram* newspaper (which had become the dominant publication) and as a political operator in his own right. Sabry, known for his ties to the Soviet Union, accused Heikal- who was advising Sadat on cabinet choices of attempting to veer the country more towards the US. Heikal was in fact writing frequent columns in his paper about the attempt to "neutralize" the relationship with the US and improve ties, while Sadat was moving in the same direction. Sabry's group levelled their accusations towards Heikal in *AlGomhoriyah*, which remained staunchly Nasserist.⁴¹¹

Print media became a main point of contention between these "centers of power," a phrase

⁴⁰⁹ The Corrective Revolution sought to resolve what Sadat perceived to be the shortcomings of the 19 years since the officers took power. A critical component of the new Egyptian president's agenda involved the elimination of a number of powerful and politicized senior military officers with close ties to Nasir. The subsequent decline in the number of Cabinet officials with military backgrounds in successive Egyptian governments suggests that, since the early 1970s, Egypt's commanders have been generally content to remain in their barracks. (Cook, 2004)

⁴¹⁰ Amin (2001)

⁴¹¹ Nasser MK (1985) pp 118

Heikal was particularly fond of.⁴¹² One group advocated a continued Soviet allegiance and a more aggressive response to Israel for its continued occupation of the Sinai Peninsula. The other wanted to delay war and improve US ties. The goal for Sabry's group was to overtake Sadat, and liquidate Heikal's influence, or at least take over *AlAhrām*.⁴¹³ Ultimately Sadat put Sabry's group on trial, and aimed for decreased military presence in government, the first step in an ideological and institutional coup.

Liberalization and Modernization

While the Corrective Revolution was an early affirmation of his power, it wasn't until after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the reclamation of the Sinai Peninsula from Israel, that many of Sadat's changes were to be implemented in earnest. His steps towards democratization looked to ultimately serve the purpose of diluting these "centers of power." Economic necessity, and a shift away from Soviet authority, would also see the implementation of *Infitah*. Liberalizing the press temporarily accompanied these shifts. There was a need to come up with a media system compatible with proposed liberalization of the political system. Sadat saw himself as an ally of journalism and as a journalist of sorts in his own right, having been appointed to chief editor of *AlGomhoriya* and *AlTahrir* newspapers between 1953 and 1956. He would also be in charge of the National Union between 1957 and 1962, during which the Press Organization Law of 1960 had passed, placing the nation's entire press corps under the NU's complete control. Thus, he would have had profound knowledge of how the sector was structured and its transformations over the preceding years.

As a way to move beyond the influence and grip of Nasser's legacy and his institutions, Sadat initially ordered the release of many political dissidents from prison (mostly members of the Muslim Brotherhood) and the reorganization of the ASU, both precursors for more profound political change in the country, and a recalibration of concepts such as freedom of speech, thought and political participation.⁴¹⁴ The ASU, which under Nasser was in complete control of the press, would have its powers of oversight slowly removed, until it became obsolete by 1978. Early on in 1973, through the ASU Sadat would revoke the licenses of over one hundred journalists, charging them with making contact with foreign journalists "with the aim of tarnishing Egypt's reputation by providing false mass media information."⁴¹⁵ The purge

⁴¹² Sadat had originally coined the phrase to describe the political impasse after Nasser.

⁴¹³ Ibid

⁴¹⁴ Waterbury (1983)

⁴¹⁵ New York Time, 5 February 1973

included top scholars and intellectuals, including renowned novelist Yousef Idris and literary scholar Louis Awad, both of whom were top editorial staff in *AlAhrām*.

Their licenses were restored in six months' time, after Heikal reportedly convinced Sadat of his need to maintain the press on his side at this time of war.⁴¹⁶ Interestingly, the purge was initially justified by Sadat as being a necessary war-time precaution. This period would serve as a reminder for the press of their "dependence on the regime for their livelihood," and as an indication that "the threat of being prevented from exercising their profession on a long-term basis hung over their heads as an incentive."⁴¹⁷

The President's own words in the wake of this incident would come to sum up the attitude that would frequently underline shifts in mass media, "I meant and still mean to give a warning. It has not been my aim nor is it my nature to harm any person in his work, or livelihood... I want freedom of the press. At the same time I want it to be a dedicated [loyal] press."⁴¹⁸

Sadat would take a more open attitude towards the press, but his policies in effect were more ambivalent.⁴¹⁹ After a request by the Journalists Syndicate, direct censorship was lifted in 1974 by removing government monitors that were sitting in newspaper offices, dictating content and removing unwanted material for years. Columnists would write more critically, and were not faced with the same level of threats and imprisonment that they had faced under Nasser. Access to news was once again restored to editors in the form of an "open information policy". The state stripped its communications via the mass media of the flamboyant propaganda of the Nasser era, as papers regained credibility as sources of information. The most radical such example was Heikal printing information of the Israeli infiltration of Egyptian ranks during the 1973 war, which was a wartime catastrophe⁴²⁰, a stark difference from the reporting during the 1967 defeat. Print media, looked to be regaining its status. Although as a rule, all papers still refrained from publishing editorials that would attack basic principles, such as socialism, "national unity and social peace". The President (as a topic) was still a very clear red line not to be crossed, while critiquing the performance of many other

⁴¹⁶ Nasser MK (1977)

⁴¹⁷ Rugh (2004) p. 154

⁴¹⁸ Sadat's speeches, *AlAhrām*. September 29,1973 and 28 September 1975, *AlAhrām*; in Rugh (1993) pp 152

⁴¹⁹ Amin (2009) p. 5

⁴²⁰ Nasser MK (1977) p. 23

government officials was tolerated.⁴²¹

Heikal himself provided a major litmus test for this tolerance. After years of publishing columns that did not always conform to Sadat's foreign policy, and casting doubt on Sadat's tactics in the October (1973) War and its aftermath, especially questioning whether Kissinger and Nixon were acting in good faith towards Egypt, he was relieved from his post at *ALAhram* in February 1974, after 17 years in charge. Sadat had equated Heikal's brazenness to creating yet another "center of power".⁴²² After removing Heikal (in his capacity as one of the last remaining powerful Nasser-era stalwarts), the reinstated Ali Amin was put in his place. For the eight years that followed, *ALAhram* had eight different chiefs.

The non-daily papers on hand at the time offered the more diverse perspectives and opposition views, especially the Marxist monthly *ALTaliah* and the left-leaning weekly magazine *Rose Al-Yousef*; along with the religiously conservative *AlDa'awah* and *All'tissam*, which were banned under Nasser.⁴²³ Security services still had the ability to quickly shut these paper's down, as they were also part of government publishing houses, they were effectively under the thumb of government control.

The Supreme Press Council (SPC) would be established by a Presidential Decree on 11 March 1975. Much of the oversight powers of public publishing houses and newspapers were already transferred away from the ASU the previous year, the SPC became the new overseeing committee. It was to be charged with granting licenses to journalists, preparing a revised code of ethics for the field, ensuring the freedom of the press, and arbitrating disputes. The first article of the decree claimed that the press was independent, and in charge of watching over the government.⁴²⁴ It was a short lived council (only until 1978), with some at the time saying that the only reason it was created, was out of a desire from Sadat to create another entity that would help gain control of the press, after the *manabir* system (and the subsequent multiparty system) created a cacophony of political voices that he could not bear (or control).⁴²⁵ This would especially ring true when factoring in that the figures in charge of the SPC would be appointed by the government. Sadat himself announced in the Council's first meeting in May 1975, warning members of the press to avoid focusing only on negative aspects.

⁴²¹ Rugh (1993) p. 152

⁴²² Nasser MK (1977)

⁴²³ Rugh (1993)

⁴²⁴ Ibid pp. 12-15

⁴²⁵ Amer (2012) pp. 34-37

Waterbury curiously remembers this period as the “heyday of Sadat’s liberal experiment”:

The press was remarkably free in its coverage; the television, now in the hands of the new minister of information, Gamal al-Utaifi, televised lively and significant debates among top-class policy makers, and the new parliamentarians took their role seriously.⁴²⁶

The political process opened up again with the permission granted for the operation of the *manabir* (political platforms) as quasi-political parties, while allowing for applications for other parties, meaning newspapers that would be attached to these parties could also be formed. Sadat’s Center party, established on 28 June 1977 launched the weekly *Garidit Masr*, whereas the leftist *Taggamo’* party established *AlAhali*. Later on in 1978 Sadat’s new National Democratic Party established *Mayo* (May) and in 1979 the Socialist Labour Party established *AlSha’b*, both were weekly publications.⁴²⁷

Turning on “Press Freedom”

*“There are some people in this country who think they can copy the American press. They think they can have their Watergates and get rid of the President that way, but they forget where they are.”*⁴²⁸

Heikal quotes Sadat’s words above, as a harbinger of things to come for current affairs-driven mass media outlets operating amidst partial liberalization. But it must be said that aside from the political climate that could potentially shackle media at any moment, the industry itself was already structured in a way that made it very difficult for any paper to be able to operate sustainably without support of the central government. The majority of the party papers were not distributing in amounts that could compete with *AlAhram*. *AlShaab* and *AlAhali* for example were unable to publish and distribute anywhere near 100,000 copies and never seemed to garner enough fanfare or support by the public. They also had limited publishing and distribution capacities. Meanwhile government papers were easily printing and distributing in figures that comfortably eclipsed the party papers’ aspirations.⁴²⁹ As the sector was structured, non-government party papers were unlikely to ever compete with state-run papers.

Sadat still seemed threatened by these papers, and always reeled back on any slack in

⁴²⁶ Waterbury (1983) pp. 367

⁴²⁷ Rugh (1993) p. 155

⁴²⁸ Sadat in Heikal (1983) p. 209

⁴²⁹ Ibid

freedoms for mass media, even if he had stated an intention to introduce these freedoms himself. Liberalization of the media was also an element that looked good to the West and Sadat knew that it could work in his favor at a time when he was negotiating with the IMF and other organizations for loans and foreign aid. According to Heikal, Sadat was able to secure \$120 million in USAID loans to national newspapers mostly to buy machinery. These loans required guarantees that a vibrant press would be allowed to flourish, and that they would be run under in a fiscal responsible manner. But, the main beneficiaries of this were the public papers under the more direct control of the regime and its allies.⁴³⁰

Ironically, it was Sadat's decision to push forward with further liberalization of the economy that edged him towards moving from ambivalence regarding press freedom, to going back on his concept of this "open era" of media. Biting criticisms of *infitah* policies in most daily newspapers could have played a role in this policy U-turn. Following consumer price increases in 1977 due to record levels of inflation, and attempts to remove subsidies, massive "bread riots" in the streets were described in *Ros AlYousef* and *ALTali'ah* as being indicative of public disapproval of the new economic direction. The editor of *Ros Al-Yousef* was replaced by someone "more supportive" of government policies while the Ahram Publishing House stopped printing *ALTali'ah* altogether, replacing it with a science magazine.⁴³¹ One year later issues of *AlAhali* were seized for producing "undemocratic content" after campaigning against growing inequality, and issues were withheld again one year later for criticizing the peace treaty with Israel.⁴³²

By 1978, once the ASU was officially dissolved, ownership of printed media was transferred to the newly created *Shura* (Consultative) Council, which owned 51% of the public papers. The other 49% went to employees of the papers, despite editors asking for public ownership via share issuance, in the spirit of *Infitah*. The year before, Sadat had given a very Nasser-esque speech as parliament were discussing new press laws: "The fourth authority we have created is the press...the press has a great influence on public opinion... We cannot allow our press... to be controlled by an individual or by an opinionated and temperamental newspaper publisher...No, the press is the property of the people and will remain so."⁴³³

This sentiment was a precursor to Sadat drafting a law in 1978, which included articles

⁴³⁰ Heikal (1983) p. 209

⁴³¹ Rugh (1979) p. 46

⁴³² Rugh (1993)

⁴³³ Sadat's speech at Mersa Matruh, *AlAhram*, 9 August 1977

allowing for governmental interference in the editorial process.⁴³⁴ Besides the Bread Riots, another major turning point for Sadat and the press was the signing of the Camp David Accords with Israel in 1978, which directly affected the proposed law. Many journalists, especially with Nasserist or Islamist backgrounds were vehemently opposed to the deal and the thought of normalizing relations with the Israeli government, given the state of affairs at the time. Many journalists fled the country after Sadat banned any criticism of the Accords in local media and forbade any such perspectives from being published.

Despite tightening his grip on publishing internally, journalists abroad still posed a problem. On the Syndicate's 40th anniversary, Sadat gave them an ultimatum to return before 15 May 1981, while also pressuring the Press Syndicate to revoke their licenses to practice in Egypt. The syndicate refused, clearly drawing a line in the sand in order to assert its independence.⁴³⁵ As a result, in an attempt to strip the Syndicate of its regulatory powers, Sadat proposed a plan to transform it into a "club for conversation and entertainment."⁴³⁶

The plan never reached the light of day since Sadat was assassinated a few months later. His death would lead to a lull in the escalating tensions between the Presidency and the Press. Although it is worth noting that by that time, the majority of the vocal opposition press were imprisoned.⁴³⁷

Legal maneuvering vis-à-vis mass media

Sadat was ever conscious of the fact that the status of mass media touched on two matters that were important to his image abroad, economic and political liberalization. The most effective way for him to express his discontent with the political media in a more systematic, policy-originated level, was by creating legal obstacles. It started early on in 1971 with Laws No. 33 and 34, respectively the Law Guarding and Ensuring the Safety of the People and the Law Protecting National Unity. Then in 1977, more laws were issued to curb criticism, namely Law No. 2 for the Safety of the Homeland and the Citizen and Law No. 40 amending clauses on political parties. Both of these laws provided legal grounds for censorship, under the pretense of security concerns and safeguarding the political process.⁴³⁸ Journalists that year were also threatened with being fined or even imprisoned for criticizing the Camp David

⁴³⁴ Amer (2012)

⁴³⁵ Amer (2014) p. 45

⁴³⁶ Ibid

⁴³⁷ Rutherford (2008)

⁴³⁸ Najjar O. in Hafez K. ed. (2008) p. 224

accords and the peace deal with Israel, an act that landed Heikal in jail.

Also in 1978, exacerbated by the diverse array of oppositions' rhetoric and especially by their international ties, Sadat submitted a referendum effectively banning from public life anyone guilty of "religious defamation" and anyone who served in Parliament prior to the 1952 Revolution. This law, known as Law No. 33/1978 for Protecting the National Front and Social Peace was aimed clearly at Communists and the liberal New Wafd Party. It would heighten monitoring of political and media communications.⁴³⁹ The referendum, which passed by a reported 98.3% margin, effectively silenced opposition voices that had been escalating for over one year.

During that period the party papers provided the only opposition voices in the press, as they were the only ones not publicly funded and run. The *Tagammu'* Party (National Progressive Union) said the law "cancels out legitimate political life, threatens the safety of every citizen and suppresses every free opinion."⁴⁴⁰ A couple of years later, the "Law of Shame" was introduced, making "antisocial behavior" an indictable offense; a law that would target journalists for than anything.⁴⁴¹ Meanwhile the 1980 Law⁴⁴², known as the "Press Authority Law" was also the first law to formally acknowledge the independence of the press, even going so far as to call it the Fourth Branch of governance. The law had regulated private, independent ownership of papers under the stipulation that an individual could not own more than 10% of any paper. It would be years before this stipulation would become relevant to daily newspaper publications.

The experiment of partial liberalization –both of the press and politics- seemed to be reversing. By 1981 Sadat was fed-up with press criticism, and in the context of cracking down on opposition, he shut down several newspapers and jailed many journalists, along with many critics, university professors and students. He had also reverted to direct state control over the press. Licenses for many of the opposition papers were not officially revoked, however the conditions for operating in the prevailing political climate at the time made it impossible for the majority of the opposition papers to continue their operations. Besides the laws and arrests, these papers were reliant on public institutions for both publishing and distribution, the state frequently ordered the suspension of papers such as *AlAhami*, *AlSha'b*, and the Muslim

⁴³⁹ CIA Research Paper (1979), *Sadat's Liberalization Policy*, National Foreign Assessment Center: Approved for release 2003/10/23; <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1979-06-01a.pdf>

⁴⁴⁰ Homan R., The Washington Post, *Opposition Parties Disbanding to Protest Sadat Crackdown*; 6 June 1978

⁴⁴¹ Amin (2009)

⁴⁴² Law 148, 1980. *Jarida Rasmiyya*, 14/07/1980

Brotherhood's monthly, *AlDa'wah*.⁴⁴³ Much of the party press available at the time, were left to die slow deaths.

From “National Guidance” to “Information”

Cultural and news production, especially audio-visual, during the eras of Nasser and Sadat were highly centralized areas under the Ministry of National Guidance, which Nasser fashioned as the main tool in shaping the kind of citizens he thought necessary for his plans for Egypt.⁴⁴⁴ The Ministry of National Guidance was renamed and rebranded as The Ministry of State for Information in 1971 (a decision taken in 1969).⁴⁴⁵ The name was less patronizing and was a conscious departure from the use of terms such as “guidance” that directly upheld and displayed the authoritative and directive position of the government.

The new name also reflected a shift in the direction of the Ministry from being purely concerned with issues of one-way political communication, to an entity that could be characterized in more corporatist, organizational terms. The four departments under this cabinet at its creation were: The Publications Division, The Press Division, the Advertising Division and The Information Committee. The first two dealt mainly with managing press content and publication activities between the government and the public press, while also controlling the output of any content to be issued through the non-state printing presses, or in foreign press organs. The Advertising Division was in charge of coordinating advertising and distributing revenue among the press organs.⁴⁴⁶ The result was the creation of a clear bottleneck regarding finances of the entire sector. The Ministry was in charge of a considerable operation that grew in size and infrastructure steadily. In 1976, the three main public press organizations, *AlAhrām*, *AlAkhhbar*, *AlGomhoriyah* were collectively printing 1.4 million copies on a daily basis, and nearly double that number for their weekly special issues.⁴⁴⁷

Egyptian Radio and Television Union: Structure, politics and finances

Under Sadat, the Ministry maintained oversight of the press, albeit to varying degrees. Radio and Television broadcasts would still be run entirely by the Ministry of Information, until a government-sanctioned study on the best way to manage broadcasting recommended the

⁴⁴³ Rugh (1993)

⁴⁴⁴ AFTE (2009)

⁴⁴⁵ ElSheikh 47

⁴⁴⁶ ElSheikh (1977) pp. 46-48

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid p. 226

formation of a separate entity to organize the sector. Television and radio broadcasts were to be run under the nominally independent Egyptian Radio and Television Union⁴⁴⁸ (ERTU). The wholly different factors necessary for the operation of these facilities in such a sector with rapidly evolving technology were central to this organizational decision.

The ERTU's formation brought together three previously separate entities, Radio Broadcast, Television Broadcast and Broadcast Engineering⁴⁴⁹. Almost all news and cultural production in Egypt would also be centralized under the entity. It was also the only broadcast center with regional aspirations that had the capability to emit to the Arab World. The Minister of Information would appoint the head of the ERTU, but would remain its figurehead. The Union's Board of Directors would come from both Ministerial and political directives. The Minister himself would be able to issue ordinances to the ERTU as he saw fit, leaving little doubt as to who controlled broadcast and radio, and clearly showing that the organization was not independent from the state.⁴⁵⁰

Despite Sadat's stated attempts to liberalize and decentralize many areas of government, the mandate of the ERTU issued in Law No. 1 of 1971 ended up entrenching the role of the central government's authorities in controlling broadcast production.⁴⁵¹ Little had changed in Radio and Television administration under Sadat initially, due to the fact that the original reorganization of the sector had instituted a rigid government bureaucracy, rather than a dynamic institution capable of change.⁴⁵²

Politically, the development of the sector was greatly affected by the status of Egypt's foreign policy. As Boyd put it, "more than any other mass medium, television has tended to reflect the changing international political orientation of the country."⁴⁵³ Relatively limited broadcasting capabilities and the low quality of production increasingly plagued the sector due to the demoralized and financially precarious situation of the state after the 1967 defeat. The RCA had been put on a regional boycott list for its business dealings with Israel, which complicated attempts to modernize and maintain operations since the company had also installed much of the equipment in use from the 60's. Strained relationships with some Arab countries at the time (partly due to Egypt's involvement in the Yemeni civil war) had also stymied sales of

⁴⁴⁸ "Union" as a term here refers more to the union of radio and television broadcasting operations, rather than any form of labor organization.

⁴⁴⁹ AFTE (2009) p. 13

⁴⁵⁰ ElSheikh (1977)

⁴⁵¹ AFTE (2009) p. 36

⁴⁵² Boyd (1993)

⁴⁵³ Ibid p. 44

Egyptian programs to countries like Saudi Arabia.

After 1973, with Sadat's shifting position away from the Soviet Union and towards the USA and Western Europe, television programming improved greatly. The RCA's dated "monochrome" system was replaced with SECAM's color equipment from France, and studio equipment from Great Britain. ERTU revenue had also been increasing due to higher program sales to Arab countries. Advertising revenue was up due to spikes in upper-middle class income from higher remittances in the mid-70's. Sadat had also famously encouraged increased imports of American and European luxury goods, companies that sometimes paid four times above local advertising rates.⁴⁵⁴

A decade after it was formed, a law was passed to reorganize the ERTU in order to do two things: facilitate its ability to fulfil the political goals of the government and put an end to inefficient management practices that were causing major economic strains. Politically, rather than focus on entertainment production, Sadat understood the need for more political expression to contain the anger fomenting on the streets in Egypt due to diminished spending and decreasing public services. Financially, like other government agencies and bureaucracies, the ERTU was in need of a more regimented financial structuring.

A 1979 Law (No. 13) that would continue to be in use until the 2016⁴⁵⁵ was meant to offer more independence to the ERTU. Articles (2.5, 2.6, 2.7) mandated that the television services broadcast the proceedings of the House of Representatives, while allocating timeslots for different political parties to present their issues along with general social issues that may not have been discussed previously.⁴⁵⁶

Article 2.2, however leaves no doubt as to the role of the ERTU in supporting the regime stating that the goal of the ERTU is "working towards bolstering the Socialist Democratic system, national unity, social well-being..."⁴⁵⁷ Furthermore, the law places control of broadcasting services more directly back into the hands of the Presidency, allowing the President to decide on the Ministry that would be responsible for the ERTU (normally the Minister of Information). It also left the main appointments of the head of the General Assembly in the President's hands. The General Assembly would be in charge of the budgets,

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵⁵ In 2016, the ERTU was replaced with the National Media Authority. Until then the 1979 Law was mildly amended, but remained largely in tact.

⁴⁵⁶ ERTU Law, Law No 13 of Year 1979 on the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, 1979

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid

annual planning, and evaluation.

As television's importance continued to grow, ERTU leadership came to assume a much more central position of power. "An Egyptian video producer once said of government control over the Egyptian Radio and Television Union that, clearly, someone in government thinks whoever runs the ERTU runs Egypt."⁴⁵⁸

Commercially, the reorganization of the ERTU created a framework that would be more in line with Sadat's aims to liberalize and decentralize. However, it still affirmed the complete monopoly of the state on broadcasting emissions and production. Otherwise, the ERTU would've played a more expansive role in the sector flourishing, had it used its ability to engage with private companies, create mergers/joint ventures or employ contractors to provide services at different levels of production.⁴⁵⁹ The Union still looked for ways to diversify its sources of income and would make a concerted effort to have its finances managed independently. One way it attempted to boost revenue was to improve collection of television set-licenses fees by including them directly in electricity bills, ensuring the payments came in rather than spending resources on the inefficient process of collecting these taxes separately. This practice was unfair to those millions of Egyptians without television sets, but it guaranteed revenue generation at a time when the financial burden of television spending was being criticized by some local press.⁴⁶⁰

Aside from the licensing issue, the 1979 law would in theory create a public broadcasting system that was more akin to the organizations functioning in Western Europe and the US.

According to Mohamed Gohar, a news services provider who first came to prominence as Sadat's photographer, "Sadat spoke often about wanting to have a vibrant media system. He liked the way media was run in the US especially, and would always seek to be interviewed on American stations, but he did not believe Egypt was ready for such an endeavor."⁴⁶¹ Gohar, who was by Sadat's side for a majority of his trips abroad during the second half of his presidency, had created a network of friends in American and European media organizations as he would always be present and play a role in Sadat's appearances. By 1977 Gohar understood that there would be a huge demand for private broadcasting services in Egypt by these groups, who felt that the monopoly of the state on all broadcasting matters, would hurt

⁴⁵⁸ Sakr (2001) p. 29

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid

⁴⁶⁰ Boyd (1993) p. 49

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

their credibility. Accordingly, he took the idea of him launching a private business providing these services to Sadat:

Sadat was with the idea, he encouraged me to continue thinking about the issue but he never took real steps or worked on building infrastructure that would work towards this issue... After returning from Camp David, I noticed that [Sadat] seemed to actually believe more in the concept of private broadcast media as being essential to a modern society... [Minister of Information] Mansour Hassan⁴⁶² was also supportive of the idea. State Security⁴⁶³ were against it... Obviously this meant it would not go through.⁴⁶⁴

Gohar would go on to build a successful media services business, but not during Sadat's time.

The symbolism of Maspero

The building that would house the ERTU came to be known as Maspero, after the area in Central Cairo on the Nile, where it is built.⁴⁶⁵ The building is the most imposing structure in downtown Cairo, boasting a robust base and a protruding high rise tower through the middle and with a tall antenna jutting upwards.

It would symbolize the seemingly unhealthy growth of state bureaucracies beyond reason or practicality. Douglas Boyd estimated 15,000 – 20,000 people worked in that building with “too many permanent staff members; the various sectors could function effectively- some say a great deal more efficiently- with one-third to one-half of the people.”⁴⁶⁶ The number of employees inflated to about 43,000 by 2016.⁴⁶⁷

5) Mubarak (1981-2001): before private media: Strong Regime, Weak State⁴⁶⁸

Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) would inherit a nearly bankrupt government, and a security regime that would greatly expand and diversify under him. Crucially, for the majority of his term as president, Mubarak did not have to worry about wresting power away from other powerful factions from within the government. He inherited his position in a way that Sadat and certainly Nasser had not and was under less political pressure to implement immediate

⁴⁶² Hassan was the Minister of Information 1979-1981

⁴⁶³ State Security Investigation services was the highest national internal security authority in Egypt. SSI was the main security and intelligence apparatus of Egypt's Ministry of Interior.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid

⁴⁶⁵ Gaston Maspero (1846-1916) was a French Egyptologist. Although his family name has become ubiquitous in Egypt, he personally has no bearing on the history of the ERTU, and minimal bearing on the history of the area named after him.

⁴⁶⁶ Boyd (1993) p. 43

⁴⁶⁷ El-Issawi (2016)

⁴⁶⁸ This is title of Samer Soliman's 2004 book, and is one of the most poignant summaries of the Mubarak regime.

changes. As McDermott noted, “Mubarak [was] trying to acquire his legitimacy through the unexciting policy of buying time.”⁴⁶⁹ The nature of his predecessor’s demise provided him with a different set of immediate concerns.

Sadat’s assassination while attending a military parade on 6 October 1981 was a natural jolt to Egypt as a whole, especially for government and the state’s security apparatus. The assassination was carried out by military officers- who were also members of an extremist group. Mubarak was sat beside Sadat as his Vice President, and managed to emerge unharmed and poised to pick up as President- a position he held on to for the following three decades. He initially showed a similar ambivalence as Sadat had to the role and structure of mass media in Egypt.⁴⁷⁰ But the length of his time in power along with the shape-shifting political scene, economic policies and security considerations were well reflected in the changes to the country’s media system. His longevity as an autocrat after a major assassination was in part due to his attempts to find outlets for a population under duress amid deteriorating economic circumstances, a single-party parliamentary presence, and an increasingly overbearing internal security structure that grew to unprecedented levels of size and power under his reign.⁴⁷¹

This era began with an indication that Mubarak would not inherit all of his predecessor’s political quarrels. He released the majority of Sadat’s political detainees almost immediately after assuming power. “On the whole he did not share Sadat’s hidebound view that only ‘constructive’ - which meant in effect uncritical and uncontroversial- opposition could be permitted.”⁴⁷² Mubarak initially was relatively open to the existence of an opposition that was allowed to raise concerns, within limits. The policy of *tanfis*⁴⁷³ (airing out) would consistently be used as a safety valve against public outbursts such as the 1977 Bread Riots. Mass media were a major tool for this, especially later on in his presidency, when some outlets were permitted to air segments critical of some government policies. Some public protests were also allowed-in the same spirit of *tanfis*- as long as the overall message contained a clear directive conveying a desire for a strong regime.⁴⁷⁴

Economically, the plan was always to stay on course with Sadat’s Open Door Policy.

Mubarak stated as much in his opening statements at an economic conference held by the

⁴⁶⁹ McDermott (1988) p. 75

⁴⁷⁰ Rugh (1993)

⁴⁷¹ Kandil (2012)

⁴⁷² McDermott (1988) p. 75

⁴⁷³ Literally: letting air out. This term could be found in numerous writings policy during the Mubarak era. This is taken from Webb (2013)

⁴⁷⁴ Webb (2013)

government on 13 February 1982.⁴⁷⁵ In this speech, he announced his aim to remedy some of the ill-effects of Sadat's method in implementing these policies by acknowledging the need to increase value-added production, enhance individual participation in the economy, boost corporate involvement and push to increase foreign and local investments. To usher in his presidency, Mubarak also directed the legislative and executive branches to work towards the prosperity of individuals, an obvious continuation of liberalization-oriented policies. He mentioned in the speech the need to strengthen the foundations of "democratic rule."

A perpetual emergency and unlimited power

From the outset of his presidency (and for its duration), Egypt was under an official state of emergency. This in effect gave both the President and the security forces excessive leeway in monitoring and regulating a variety of activities, and then deciding supra-judicially if they constitute a sufficient enough reason for censorship or persecution, especially if deemed menacing to national security. This severely hampered freedom of assembly and expression. With regards to media, it granted the Ministry of Interior unlimited discretion in combatting perceived threats. Ultimately, it freed the president and the security forces from having to operate within the confines the constitution and within the normal confines of the law.

Mubarak's first presidential decree was a declaration of emergency law.⁴⁷⁶ In addition to other laws issued to govern mass media, the 1958 Emergency Law that he used contained clauses that could override any commercial or editorial freedoms offered to mass media outlets. This provided for a caveat to any legal provisions, proclamation, or trends in mass media development during this period. Below are some of the more relevant clauses that allow for a major suspension of laws upon declaration of a state of emergency:

- (1) Restrict people's freedom of assembly, movement, residence, or passage in specific times and places; arrest suspects or [persons who are] dangerous to public security and order [and] detain them; allow searches of persons and places without being restricted by the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code; and assign anyone to perform any of these tasks.
- (2) Order the surveillance of letters of any type; supervise censorship; seize journals, newsletters, publications, editorials, cartoons, and any form of expression and advertisement before they are published, and close their publishing places.
- (3) Determine the times of opening and closing public shops, and order the

⁴⁷⁵ President Hosni Mubarak's Speech in front of the Economic Conference 13 February 1983, Cairo: The Ministry of Information, pp. 66-68

⁴⁷⁶ Pres. Decree 1/1981

closure of some or all of these shops.

(4) Confiscate any property or building, order the sequestration of companies and corporations, and postpone the due dates of loans for what has been confiscated or sequestered.⁴⁷⁷

As per the 1958 law, the President may declare this state “whenever public security or order is threatened.” The vague wording allowed for a broad application of this law. The 1981 decree also allowed for a variety of ordinary crimes to be referred to State Security Courts, including: crimes concerning state security, crimes of public incitement (including by newspapers), and crimes involving public demonstrations and gatherings. These courts operated under normal judicial proceedings, although their verdicts are not subject to appeal.⁴⁷⁸

Due to this law, developments involving journalism, civil society and politics during the majority of this period occurred with the overhanging cloud of an emergency law that, by design either suspended or restricted due process and carried within it, the ability to suspend or completely outlaw an publication/broadcast at any time.

As was the case during his predecessors’ reigns, the development of media systems under Mubarak closely reflected the political, economic and security climates prevalent at the time. They also typified the paradox of a regime claiming to be moving towards liberalization, without ever seriously altering the underlying autocratic political structure.⁴⁷⁹

Mubarak was also able to maintain a tight grip on society through the semantic ambiguities in the law. While the constitution allowed for pluripartism, it stipulated that it must not stray beyond ‘the framework of the basic elements and principles of Egyptian society.’ Parties were also greatly hampered by a host of operational impediments forbidding them from operating and assembling openly outside of party doors, with the exception of the period of parliamentary campaigning and elections. They did enjoy one major benefit of being the only entities able to print newspapers without the prior approval of the Higher Press Council.

Similarly, laws allowing for freedom of opinion and expression were constantly tagged with the vague stipulation of, ‘according to the provisions of the law’ (*wafqan li-ahkam al-qanun*),

⁴⁷⁷ Article 3, Law 162 of year 1958, *Qanun bi Sha'n Halat al-Tawari'* [Law Concerning the State of Emergency]. The Official Gazette: Egyptian Presidency

⁴⁷⁸ Reza (2007)

⁴⁷⁹ Kienle (2001)

essentially allowing the public prosecutor to decide when certain actions are lawful and others are not.⁴⁸⁰

The constitution also gave Mubarak immense ‘real’ powers over all branches of government.⁴⁸¹ His powers were not to be checked by the People’s Assembly, yet he had the power to veto the Assembly. He could also dissolve parliament with minimal resistance.⁴⁸²

The President appointed the majority of the heads of quasi-governmental bodies, some of which were watchdogs for branches of the government. This included, for example, key members of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, the Central Auditing Organization, as well as the Political Party Affairs Committee (PPAC), instituted in 1977. The latter was the most important arbiter for political party life in Egypt, along with the court system. The PPAC refused applications for the formation of nearly 70 parties during Mubarak’s reign, allowing only eight.⁴⁸³ Other political parties were able to gain recognition through protracted judicial proceedings after the initial denial by PPAC.

Up until 1991, Mubarak was largely able to maintain the status quo he had inherited from his predecessor. The state was bearing the same welfare burdens it had overseen until this point, while no real development in output growth was made. Instead, like Sadat, Mubarak’s centrally planned economy still relied on rent-seeking. After the crash of oil prices in 1986, not only did Egypt lose oil revenue, but spillover effects from oil-rich donor countries were affecting remittances and foreign donations.⁴⁸⁴ Public finances and the country’s entire economic structure were at an impasse. This was the catalyst for a major shift in the country’s political economy, a shift that Mubarak would see to it, continued to maintain his grip on power.⁴⁸⁵ Through its participation in the Gulf War that year, half of Egypt’s debt was erased, in exchange for an agreement to implement a full structural adjustment and economic liberalization program prescribed by the IMF. These agreements would constitute the first real push towards a neo-liberal economy. The prescriptions of International Financial Institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and USAID would also be seen as the cover, under which the Mubarak regime would ultimately create a new clientelism.

⁴⁸⁰ Kienle (2001) p. 21.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid

⁴⁸² Parliament was dissolved three times during the first decade of the Mubarak presidency (1984, 1987, 1990)

⁴⁸³ State Information Services website: www.sis.gov.eg

⁴⁸⁴ Soliman (2004)

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid

Plans to privatize a majority of state-owned businesses began in 1994 with state assets being progressively transferred to the private sector, usually to entities from within the circles close to the power center.⁴⁸⁶ While the process was initially slow, it set up the creation of a new form of dependency of the growing industrial and rural elites on the state for access to public economic resources. The impetus for democratization among these groups would be minimal. Rather they had a vested interest in supporting the status quo. Many of them bolstered the regime's coalition by joining the ruling NDP and participating in parliamentary elections under their banner.⁴⁸⁷

While this cohort was growing, it was not until 2005 that they would become the centerpiece of major shift in the country's power dynamics. Until then, the regime was very gradually retreating from its developmental role, while maintaining control with an ever-growing security force, which ballooned under Mubarak, who oversaw the reinforcement of the Interior Ministry to the point where it began to rival the military in size. As of 2012, nearly 2.3 percent of Egyptians worked in one security agency or another. At its height, the KGB in Russia did not employ more than 150,000 servicemen. Egypt in 2012 had just over 2 million individuals working in the different departments of the massive security apparatuses.⁴⁸⁸

The second half of Mubarak's presidency was thus defined by the duality of a growing security apparatus and clientelist class.

One of the more enduring "socialist" legacies in Egyptian media have been the cooperative structures of the national newspapers. From Nasser to Mubarak, it helped develop the institutions surrounding the publicly-owned press in ways that would shield it from some of the institutional drawbacks of Egyptian public organizations, be it in tiresome bureaucracy, crippling hierarchies or stagnant professional development. Ironically, this "socialist" legacy would make these organizations robust enough to cope with increasing liberalization and commercialization, while avoiding the difficulties of a public sector saddled with continuously compounded fiscal strain. The culture of the press and of the profession of journalists were also able to endure the test of time through the Mubarak years, partially due to the aforementioned structure, but also due to the legacy of the profession from its earliest years nearly a century earlier.

⁴⁸⁶Farah (2009) pp. 81-84

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸⁸ Kandil (2012)

The remainder of this chapter will assess the performance of media under Mubarak for the first two decades of his rule (1981-2001). This period represents a diverse array of shifts in the mechanisms through which the regime decided to maintain power, as well as a gradual recalibration of power structures and alliances under the expanding neopatrimonial system.

These years witnessed more rapidly advancing communication technologies. And despite the emergency law, it was also an era defined by ideas such as Fukayama's flawed, "End of History" where Western liberal democracies would become the inevitable end to the evolution of mankind's political ideology. Whether or not Mubarak believed this, the financial burdens on the state during recession in the late 1980's convinced him to instigate changes that seemed to aspire towards a transition into a Western liberal model.

Despite the singularity of rule during this period, both print and broadcast media were constantly in flux, due to changing infrastructural capabilities, variable loosening and tightening of the regulatory leash and the growing involvement of security forces in mass media on an organizational and administrative level.

Mubarak and the Press

Unlike both Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak did not have 'his own' journalists, but rather looked to create a state of general subservience to his regime.⁴⁸⁹ Heikal explained how this came about in his book, "*Mubarak w Zamanoh*" (Mubarak and his Era) by revealing Mubarak's attitude towards the press upon assumption of office. During their first private meeting, the incoming president spoke flippantly about the role of journalists as well as their professionalism and integrity. He complained to Heikal that his Prime Minister at the time (Fouad Mohi El-Din) was constantly providing journalists with information that they would not always publish, which Mubarak thought reflected on a general state of disintegration within the profession:

The issue is not that they do not publish news, [because] they either have a personal interest in the matter, or they are unintelligent... Mohamed 'Bey'⁴⁹⁰, you are measuring the journalists of today, with that of a forgone era. Journalists now do not enjoy special relationships with the president⁴⁹¹ ...If we tell the journalists more, they will just manipulate it.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁹Ali (2014)

⁴⁹⁰ A Turkish title used by aristocrats from the days of Ottoman rule. It is routinely used to convey respect among distinguished individuals. Interestingly, these Turkish titles are still in use unofficially among police officers and are used to reference official ranks.

⁴⁹¹ A clear allusion to Heikal's relationship with Gamal Abdel-Nasser

This is at a time when the press (and all media) were nearly entirely under government control. Heikal reminded him of this during their interaction. “But, Mr. President, you are talking about *your* press, I mean the country’s”.⁴⁹³ This interaction occurred in the context of Heikal attempting to convince Mubarak to grant journalists more access to news regarding a forthcoming Cabinet reshuffle. Mubarak responded to the request with indignation. Nonetheless, Heikal thought at the time that there was still the possibility of a palpable barrier shift between journalism as an entire profession and the state insofar as Mubarak may see the press through a more political lens, rather than as a tool/conduit for communication with the public. The possibility of this separation could have occurred if it was the case that an independent press would benefit the Mubarak presidency. This, as opposed to Nasser who did not see mass media as having a future that would be at all removed from the plans of his government.

A few months into his presidency, Mubarak released political prisoners, including journalists jailed during the latter years of Sadat’s presidency, while allowing the opposition papers to begin publishing once more.⁴⁹⁴ The following period saw press restrictions ease, with opposition writers finding that, unlike under Sadat, they were able to express their positions more freely, “within limits”⁴⁹⁵.⁴⁹⁶ Again, the state’s leverage was immense as it still had ownership of the most important outlets, publishing houses and means of distribution.

One journalist, Raga’i Elmerghany⁴⁹⁷ described the relationship between Mubarak and the Press as being very nuanced:

The relationship with [Mubarak] was uncomfortable and complicated and had many collision points...[It] was not generally a result of [Mubarak’s] personal philosophy [towards the press] but rather the philosophy of any dictatorial regime.⁴⁹⁸

Relatively speaking, the first few years saw a significant increase in journalistic freedoms, so much so that the International Press Institute stated in 1983 that the Egyptian press had

⁴⁹² Heikal (2012) p. 15

⁴⁹³ Ibid

⁴⁹⁴ Rugh (1993) p. 157

⁴⁹⁵ Phrases such as “within limits” are purposefully vague to provide the amount of guesswork needed by writers in order to remain in line.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid

⁴⁹⁷ Rega’i ElMerghany was the general Coordinator for the National Coalition for Media Freedom, and Deputy Head of the Journalists Syndicate 1999-2003.

⁴⁹⁸ Merghani R. quote, from, Ali (2014)

experienced its highest level of freedoms since the fall of the monarchy in 1953.⁴⁹⁹

Opposition papers like *AlSha'ab* and *AlAhali* had resumed publication in 1982. While the New Wafd party, which was established (and suspended) in the late 1970's, won a court case and began publishing its own paper *AlWafd*.⁵⁰⁰ They were selling nearly half a million copies weekly, nearly 6 to 10 times that of other party weeklies.⁵⁰¹ Mubarak had even lifted the ban on publications by Christian and Muslim groups.

However, at times when the state was unable through its own channels to completely control the narrative on certain sensitive topics, it was not uncommon for it to resort to more extreme measures. One of these sensitive topics was said to be Saudi Arabia, whose relationship with the Egyptian government had improved since Nasser's death. The Nasserist periodical, *Sawt Al'Arab* was closed in 1988 precisely due to its criticism of KSA.⁵⁰² A 1992 antiterrorism law also allowed the state to take direct actions against publications deemed to be "disturbing social peace" or "spreading panic," two phrases often open to vast arrays of interpretation.⁵⁰³

From 1981 to 2000, over 300 publications were launched. Political parties were more likely to publish newspapers (*AlWafd* became the most important, daily "opposition" political party paper). Private newspapers began popping up such as *AlDostor*, *Al'alam Alyoum* (financial), and *El'isboo'*. Magazines were also resurgent, after having had to accommodate much more limited opportunities to publish under previous governments. Magazines had begun to evolve as they were beginning to emulate other well-known markets in that space. Specialized magazines were being produced to meet consumer demand. This happened, while Egyptian television was also searching for ways to raise revenues, potentially seeking a similar commercially-driven direction.⁵⁰⁴

By 1993 five party papers were circulating nearly 100,000 copies each. That year, there were in total 263 licensed newspapers of all kinds: 76 by national publishing houses and government organs, 11 by political parties, 79 by individuals and professional societies and the rest were specific to provinces, universities, social clubs and youth centers.⁵⁰⁵ Mass publication continued to be more or less exclusive to the main national publications and some

⁴⁹⁹ Dabous in Komalipour and Mowlana (1994)

⁵⁰⁰ Rugh (2004)

⁵⁰¹ Ibid p. 157

⁵⁰² Kienle (2001)

⁵⁰³ Rugh (2004) p. 157

⁵⁰⁴ Amin and Napoli, in Park and Carrant (2000)

⁵⁰⁵ Dabous in Komalipout and Mowlana (1994)

party papers.

At the end of the 1980s Mubarak had yet to implement the economic, social and political policies that would come to define his presidency. One writer described the 80's as a decade when Mubarak was "content to balance the legacies of Nasser and Sadat and reform initiatives remained caught between the contrary interests generated by them."⁵⁰⁶ Editors and journalists thus had more room to maneuver, unlike the previous two decades. There was not as much of an ideological line to tow with the state, and so as a general rule, self-censorship became more prevalent when it came to matters more directly concerning the regime and its performance, rather than on broader issues, as it had been in the past with some specific topics: *Infitah*, Nasserism, USA vs USSR etc.

The 1990's were a different story. Political strains and a more precarious internal security situation, compounded with escalating economic difficulties and a massively indebted government all came together to factor into decision-making at the time. Egypt's participation in the Gulf War and its signing onto loan agreements with International Financial Institutions, directly led to the country aligning itself with the liberal west and the Washington Consensus principles⁵⁰⁷. Along with economic changes involving liberalization and privatization, politics were expected to also shift.⁵⁰⁸

This contentious and ambitious shift was initially felt in economic policy, while internal politics and liberties seemed to be moving in the opposite direction. After conducting a decidedly more democratic parliamentary election cycle in 1987-resulting in nearly one fifth of the representatives being from outside the ruling party- steps were taken to reverse that tide. Snap parliamentary elections were called under differing criteria. The result was that the opposition representation in Parliament decreased from 94 to 29. The 1995 elections, saw the introduction of businessmen (allied to Mubarak's NDP) to parliament just as the privatization process was picking up speed, and the most arduous tenets of the economic reform program were being implemented. Between 1991 and 1995, state budget expenditures decreased by around 11% with wages and subsidies bearing the brunt of this reduction.⁵⁰⁹

The same year saw an escalation in Egypt's costly and casualty-heavy attempts to neutralize

⁵⁰⁶ Hinnebush (1993) p. 3

⁵⁰⁷ A set of reform principles that came about in the late 1980's that dominated prescriptions by Washington D.C.-based financial institutions for indebted countries. They prioritized trade/currency liberalization as well decreasing the size of government spending above other considerations.

⁵⁰⁸ Hinnebush (1993) p. 3

⁵⁰⁹ Alba, Al-Shawarby, Iqbal (2004)

Islamist Militant groups, a campaign that ultimately would lead to mass detentions, especially from the Muslim Brotherhood, which had made significant gains in the 1987 elections. The 1995 elections itself was said to have been rife with fraud. It left the ruling party in control of 94% of the seats. The regime's Political Parties Committee—which regulates the creation of new parties—rejected every application made to it during the 1990s.⁵¹⁰

A short-lived attempt to “assassinate the press” in 1995

The regime felt the need to control the narrative surrounding these changes. Unlike Sadat, Mubarak decided to act in a more proactive manner in order to consolidate his control and avoid public backlash caused by the media. With his full support, the government proposed Law 93 of 1995⁵¹¹ in order to do just that. The law, which was passed in May that same year, was popularly called the law to “assassinate the press”.⁵¹² It was hastily passed in the People's Assembly with no parliamentary debate on the matter. Most deputies were not given sufficient access to review the law, nor was consultation on the law requested from the Higher Press Council, The Shura Council, nor the Journalists Syndicate, as was customary for laws concerning the press. Statements from the government claimed the law was passed to protect private life and rectify weaknesses in penal law, but most journalists viewed it and the manner and timing of its passing as being “too close to the November parliamentary elections [that year] to be coincidental.”⁵¹³

The law contained amendments to the 1980 law, significantly increasing both the state's means of controlling the media, as well as the punishments doled out to journalists for a more expanded spectrum of perceived transgressions. Anyone guilty of spreading “false or defamatory” information would now face up to three years in jail along with a fine of up to LE10,000 (at a time when most journalists made around LE1,000/month). Significantly, if misinformation was deemed to have been published with the aim of harming the national economy or national interest, prison sentences were increased to five years and fines were doubled. Previously, prison sentences for journalists with similar convictions had barely exceeded one year. After the law was passed by nearly one year, over 100 journalists were

⁵¹⁰ Brownlee (2002) p. 8

⁵¹¹ Law No. 93, 1995, *Jarida Rasmiya*, no 21(mukarrar) 28/05/1995.

⁵¹² Mahmoud D., *Fy Eldhikra ElSanaweyya Qissat Kifah ElSahafiyeen Didh Qanoon Ightiyal ElSahafa, Ahl Misr 10/06/2017*.

⁵¹³ Hafez & Rogan (1996) p.57

interrogated and 33 officially charged.⁵¹⁴

Editors of opposition papers such as *AlWafd* and *AlSha'b* were targeted, as Mubarak began to turn on opposition party papers.⁵¹⁵ The law was also used to bring journalists from official publications in line as well. Interrogations spread to editors from publicly owned papers such as *AlGomhuriya*, *Rosa Al-Yousef*, *Sabah El-Kheir* and even the chief editor of *AlAhrām* and the head of the Journalists Syndicate at the time, Ibrahim Nafei. Under the new amendments, courts could decide to prosecute insults, even if they were not libelous. The vague language used, allowed for broad interpretations of the law and led to a unified and definitive moment of defiance from members of the Journalists Syndicate.⁵¹⁶

The Journalists Syndicate would for long cite its 13-month long effort to abolish law 93 of 1995 as one of its crowning achievements. Even loyalist journalists joined the fight, such as Nafei. That year represented a watershed moment for journalists, who organized general strikes, protests, and general assemblies in opposition to this law. Despite attempts from the government to appease some journalists, by insinuating that the legislation would not apply to them, the syndicate maintained unity. The group's leadership drew a line in the sand, largely due to broad pressure from its general membership. This was seen as a rare moment when journalists did not divide in pro-government and opposition camps.⁵¹⁷ On June 21 of the same year, local and international opposition led to a six-hour meeting between Mubarak and leaders of the Journalists Syndicate. Mubarak decided to defuse the situation by agreeing to convene a committee to produce a revised draft law within three months.⁵¹⁸ In June 1996, the law was repealed and replaced by a press law (No. 96 of 1996) that was touted as being the most liberal in Egypt's history. In reality, it was only marginally more liberal than the 1980 law, in rhetoric rather than application. The effect on the press corps was to instill a more defined and rigorous notion that the legacy of journalism in Egypt was one that was not solely confined to the halls of power and that it still had the ability to influence major political change. "It is undisputed that Law No. 93 would not have been repealed if it had not provoked such wide-scale protests."⁵¹⁹ Nonetheless, the penal code still contained many clauses allowing it to restrain the press. It still included 'crimes of publication', the press law, and

⁵¹⁴ Kienle (2001)

⁵¹⁵ Merghani (2014)

⁵¹⁶ Ibid

⁵¹⁷ Hafez & Rogan (1996)

⁵¹⁸ Ibid p. 57

⁵¹⁹ Kienle (2001)

public sector ownership of the media.

Restrictions to media ownership (especially in obtaining security permits) still precluded anyone with the gumption for such an endeavor from realistically setting up an independent newspaper. Licenses for private foreign-published papers were technically allowed. The 1996 Law stipulated that it would require a paid-in capital of one million Egyptian pounds in the case of daily publications and 250,000 in the case of weekly papers. Sole propriety of the papers would not be permitted, rather these companies could only be set-up as joint stock companies or cooperatives where a shareholder could not hold more than 10% of the shares and must be Egyptian.⁵²⁰

It had become known that obtaining a new one was near impossible. Aside from the price barrier, most aspiring publishers were not able to obtain the security permits, forcing them to search for alternative solutions. One option would have been to obtain one of the existent (yet largely dormant) private newspaper publishing licenses directly from a previous owner.⁵²¹ The other legally viable option was to register the publication in a foreign country and apply to open an operation in Egypt as a foreign publication without going through the same security barrier. This loophole contributed to the formation of a modestly-sized parallel press with some publications taking full advantage.⁵²² For example, Egyptian publisher Essam Fahmy established a weekly paper, *AIDostor* in Cyprus where it was licensed and distributed in Cairo as a foreign publication. The Higher Press Council did not have the power to grant or repeal licenses to these ‘international’ papers.⁵²³ Even though they were checked by the censors, most of these publications did not conform to the political status quo and were a thorn in the regime’s side.⁵²⁴ In 1998, a law (No 3) was passed restricting the formation of any newspapers or satellite television companies, unless approved by the Council of Ministers, greatly reducing the power of the Higher Press Council, and centralizing power on these matters.⁵²⁵

As one of the more popular political news publications, *AIDostor* was a major target for these restrictions. Fahmy took a chance on a young chief editor, Ibrahim Eissa. For three years the paper was sold in Egypt where it made a name for going against the official state narrative

⁵²⁰ Article 52, Law No 96 of Year 1996. Official Gazette, Egyptian Presidency

⁵²¹ Ali M. (12 January 2015). *Raheel Ahad Rowad ElSAHAFa ElKhassa, Essam Ahmed Ismail: Assassa “al-Dostor wa Sawt al-Umma”*, wa ‘Aradh el-Tawreeth; Ahram Gate: <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/583664.aspx>

⁵²² Kienle (2001) p. 105

⁵²³ As they did all locally published papers, with the exception of Political Party Papers.

⁵²⁴ Kienle (2001) p.157

⁵²⁵ Ibid

and offering a platform for opposition. In 1998 *AlDostor* was banned for seven years after publishing a letter by the extremist group *Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya*, in which it had threatened to assassinate three Coptic Christian businessmen.⁵²⁶ A year before that in 1997 the government had already begun finding ways to legally shut-down these foreign-registered publications, even resorting to using archaic and rarely used laws from the time of the monarchy.⁵²⁷ *AlDostor* would resurface again in 2004 after gaining to operate in Egypt. It would be one of the first private papers to be locally published, while also being consistently critical of the government. The same year marked the actual beginning of private papers in Egypt with the emergence of one of the more influential private daily newspapers *AlMasry AlYoum*. The case of which will be more thoroughly dissected in later chapters.

The impending liberalization of the sector would be on the heels of both a state of upheaval within the profession, as well as the overall direction of state policies. Journalism was in a simmering state prior to the emergence of private independent newspapers, especially after the galvanizing campaign against the 1995 Law. Journalists were also encouraged by the state's promise and preoccupation with appearing to be implementing political and economic liberalization, as per the state's shifting political and economic posturing earlier in the decade. Through the turn of the century, the Journalists Syndicate continued its campaigning for a less restrictive penal code on journalists, and a liberalization of the sector more generally. One of *AlAhram's* broadly respected editors said at that time:

“There should be all sorts of revisions like establishing papers cancelling the provisions in the law that allows for imprisonment over publication offenses etc. If this does not happen we will not be able to have a leading position or compete with the international press.”⁵²⁸

Despite these calls and campaigns⁵²⁹ the situation did not change significantly until the introduction of *AlMasry AlYoum*. With the emergence of a class of politically-connected businessmen, the balance of political and economic power was shifting, while at the same time editors and journalists were continuing to understand how the changing situation would translate into the relocation of the invisible red lines of journalism. Papers were printing more frequently about corruption in government, although this resulted at times in persecution and

⁵²⁶ Amro (2010)

⁵²⁷ Kienle (2001) p. 105

⁵²⁸ Salama Ahmed Salama; Interview by Shaden Shehab in *AlAhram International*, January 6-12, 2000 p3. In Kienle (2001) p. 162

⁵²⁹ Including a 1999 campaign by the Journalists Syndicate for Mubarak to remove restrictions on newspapers and their ability to publish as well as access information.

fines.⁵³⁰

Amid these developments, the appetite and market for media was growing as evidenced by the high distribution of the three major public daily papers, which reached over one million, by 2003.⁵³¹ Printing and distribution under the umbrella of these large public papers also increased greatly. In 1998 *AlAhrām* and *AlAkhhbar* inaugurated new print houses that would be used by a majority of private papers seeking mass distribution.

Television: Maspero and beyond

Like the press, Mubarak began his relationship with television with no real plan. The development and growth of Arab Satellite television created an inflection point in the sector when it penetrated Egyptian markets in the mid-1990's. By then, neighboring regimes were investing in regional projects and outlets that were forcibly transforming the sector by introducing new programming formats, content and business models. Pan-Arab mass media growth played a critical role in the development of Egyptian broadcasting in the 1990s, especially since it came at a time when Mubarak's regime was already attempting to reinvent itself as being more liberal and open, while hoping to reassert its role as a regional powerhouse.

The trends above, coupled with rapidly developing broadcast transmission technology offered both opportunities and challenges to the Mubarak regime. It was very quickly making access to global media more affordable. At the same time, it created a pace of change that may have been too quick for the ruling cohort, which seemed to have no plans to shift away from keeping a self preservation-minded drive towards control of the public sphere.

Illiteracy rates were still high at around 45.4% by 1996⁵³² and so the state maintained its focus on broadcasting for communication with the general public. The ERTU continued to grow while regional channels continued to open. Radio development effectively stagnated, as television development became the sole broadcasting priority, especially with the introduction and growth of satellite television, which would replace radio as the main conduit for regional audio-visual communication.⁵³³ Between 1989 and 1995 the ERTU was broadcasting 8

⁵³⁰ *AlSha'b* newspaper had two significant cases go against them by the Interior Minister Hassan Al-Alfi and Agriculture Minister Yousef Wali, leading to the sentencing to jail of its editor Magdi Ahmed Hussein in 1996. Al-Alfi himself was tried on corruption charges and abuse of power in 1998, one year after leaving office.

⁵³¹ Rough (2004) p. 161

⁵³² World Bank Data (2019)

⁵³³ Boyd (1993)

terrestrial channels with Channels 4-8 targeting specifically the majority of the larger governorates.⁵³⁴

Up until this point, television broadcasting had only been owned and run by the government, under the auspices of the ERTU, although the Union had begun to rely on private sector advertisements and some private production in order to fund its operations. At the same time, many saw the addition of the five new stations (along with a teletext service) as a first step towards decentralization by Mubarak.⁵³⁵ It was a possible departure from the shackles of Law No. 223 of 1989, which gave the ERTU monopoly over broadcasting, allowing the state to unilaterally employ and react to these changes, as long as it could keep up with it.

The ERTU however, was a bloated and inefficient agency that was consistently running a deficit. By 2013 this deficit reached a reported LE13 billion (\$2 billion⁵³⁶) of debt to the government, while employing an unjustifiably large workforce of around 43,000, of which 7,000 were security personnel.⁵³⁷ Content-wise, the institution was constantly criticized for its low-quality productions and that it rarely catered to audience preferences as much as it did to the regime's.⁵³⁸ Maspero's size and the employees within it acted more as a testament to the regime's aspirations for survival, rather than to its practical media ambitions. Terrestrial broadcasting would continue to be monopolized by the state.

Mr. Media

For over 22 years, former intelligence officer Safwat ElSherif sat at the helm of the Ministry of Information (and by default, the ERTU). He was appointed to the position in 1982, after two years as the head of the ERTU.⁵³⁹ Aside from his history in the General Intelligence Services, ElSherif was also a founding member of the NDP. He had initially been in control of building the President's media image. He was also behind the massive expansions in the ERTU, as well as the foundational changes in the country's broadcasting sector. He was Mubarak's longest serving cabinet minister. As ex-officio chair of the ERTU "board of

⁵³⁴ Stations 4-8 respectively target and operate from: The Suez Canal cities, Alexandria, The Nile Delta Areas, Minia Governorate and some of the Northern Upper Egypt cities, Aswan Governorate and the Southern Upper Egypt areas.

⁵³⁵ Amin (2001) in ed Hafez (2001)

⁵³⁶ Using an average estimate of the exchange rate in 2004

⁵³⁷ Issawi (2014)

⁵³⁸ Ibid

⁵³⁹ The Ministry of Information was by-law made a full, independent Ministry by law in 1986.

trustees” ElSherif was the main source of directives sent down to all local broadcasting. Under him were 36 other members of the board, who all owed their appointment to the Presidential chain of command as well, representing ministries, universities and departments within the ERTU.⁵⁴⁰ “The process of co-opting so many people lends an aura of consensus-building to a structure in which policy initiatives may have their roots somewhere below the ministerial level but can only see daylight if approved by players at or above it.”⁵⁴¹

The dominion of an intelligence officer over the country’s media theoretically precluded the need for any direct supervision from the country’s security apparatuses in order to ensure to conformity.

Mohamed Gohar -one of a handful of private television producers allowed to operate in the 1980’s through his company, Video Cairo- believed that Safwat ElSherif represented the direct control of a security-minded ethos within the state at the time. “Back in the 1980’s, there was no real direct form of censorship or control from the Interior Ministry, Intelligence Services or the Armed Forces, but editorial orders from the Ministry of Information were treated as they would have been from one of these agencies.”⁵⁴²

ElSherif was behind the initial acceptance of opening broadcast media to the private sector, with the idea that it would be easy to control. He also thought this would be a viable source of revenue for the indebted ERTU.⁵⁴³

Satellite television, a game-changer

Technological developments in media often outpaced the ability of the state to control it. When it came to satellite television, the Egyptian government spotted an early opportunity to attempt to reassert its regional media supremacy. Egypt’s status in the Arab League was restored in 1989 after a two –year campaign that was bolstered by its support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war, and increasing international pressure. The Arab League headquarters were moved back to Cairo in 1990. Plans to launch the region’s first satellite television station began around the same time as Egypt re-joined the Arab League’s fold. In addition, Egypt would also be allowed to participate in ARABSAT, a pan-Arab Satellite launched in 1985, in

⁵⁴⁰ Sakr (2001)

⁵⁴¹ Ibid p. 30

⁵⁴² Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2015)

⁵⁴³ Ibid

which Saudi Arabia was the largest shareholder.⁵⁴⁴ The Egyptian Satellite Channel (ESC) was officially launched on 12 December 1990. The launch date was earlier than originally scheduled, ostensibly in an attempt to air to Egyptian troops stationed in Saudi Arabia at the time as they were preparing to participate in the Gulf War, “in order to broadcast Egyptian television materials to counter the psychological war launched by Iraqi media”.⁵⁴⁵

The main goals of the channel included:

- a. Introducing Arab citizens to the Egyptian culture... adding to the Arab intellect in such a manner that would help unify their thoughts and their position toward common and crucial issues
- b. Linking embassies and cultural and media centers in the Arab region
- c. Creating a link between expatriates in target areas and their motherland
- d. Promoting tourism and economic and commercial activities
- e. Using space in promoting the Egyptian media message on a wide scale⁵⁴⁶

These indicated that the regime thought it had found its permanent alternative to radio in order to gain mass media access to the region. Cross-border media would still be expected to conform to nationalistic goals, meaning satellite television would be treated as local and would be subject to both local laws and the normative expectations placed upon them by the state. According to the goals, satellite television would play a role in promoting commercial interests and economic liberalization, while potentially generating revenue in its own right.

The final goal was one of the main stated motivators behind plans by ElSherif to increase Egypt’s Satellite output by launching more stations on a new government satellite, while leasing space on the satellite for other stations. The Egyptian Satellite Company (NILESAT) was launched in 1996 while the satellite itself, Nilesat 101⁵⁴⁷ was in operation by 1998, launched with seven new thematic channels (Nile News, Nile Sport, Nile Comedy, Nile Drama, Nile Culture, Nile Children & Family and Nile Variety) at a cost of \$158 million. Despite ElSherif’s claims that the project would provide an annual \$50 million in revenue, it made only \$27 million and \$36 million in 1998 and 1999 respectively, falling behind some

⁵⁴⁴ Sakr (2001)

⁵⁴⁵ Shaheen (2002)

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid

⁵⁴⁷ Nilesat 102 would launch August 17, 2000

individual regional stations.⁵⁴⁸ The potential for future revenue remained since the region (as a market) had not changed, and so private advertising companies were still looking to seize the economic opportunity of new ad-space provided by the satellite.

Many from within the sector took the perspective that the NileSat's success or failure would be based more on "intangibles," such as its ability to present Egypt as a cohesive community, or increase Egypt's prestige in the region.⁵⁴⁹ By that time, only around 10% of Egyptian households had access to satellite television, which was much lower than its neighbors, especially in the Gulf Countries, where the rates were closer to 50% of households.⁵⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the Ministry of Information did not embark on a campaign to increase satellite penetration in Egyptian households, although it did not impede it forcefully either.

The launch of an Egyptian satellite, would ultimately come to perform the role of a tool to improve the country's soft power, rather than one that would lead to a structural transformation in the media sector as far as how it operates vis-à-vis the state. Nonetheless, it represented a major shift in the Egyptian broadcasting, creating new opportunities and markets for the sector. The satellite that was launched could, after all, still carry private broadcasting. However, this prospect seemed far from reach, even in the late 1990's. The government did not give any indication it would be gearing towards such a move. ElSherif himself said in an interview on the show *Good Morning Egypt* on 1 January 1997 that "the Egyptian media are not ready to compete in the era of open airwaves."⁵⁵¹

Yet just three years later, the country would see the single most important development leading to the private broadcasting. A prime ministerial decree in 2000 launched Egypt's Media Production City (EMPC) on an area that was previously a complex of television and film studios as well as uplink facilities. The decree designated it as a free zone putting its activities under the supervision of the Public Authority for Investments and Free Zones, according to Law 8 of 1997.⁵⁵² This effectively would allow private companies wishing to circumvent the ERTU, to gain their licenses directly from the EMPC, via the supervising government body. The ERTU still maintained control via its 43% ownership of EMPC, while

⁵⁴⁸ Sakr (2001)

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁵⁰ Sakr (1999)

⁵⁵¹ Al-Sharif (1997) in Rugh (2004) p. 206

⁵⁵² Sakr (2007)

the rest was spread between financial organizations and around 20% public shares.⁵⁵³

Both the proliferation of satellite television and the 2000 designation of the EMPC would become the major precursors to the proliferation of privately owned, locally produced satellite channels.

Along with technological and infrastructural developments in broadcast media under ElSherif, the rise of the internet and the noticeable shift in the country's overall power structure caused on the heels of the neoliberal policy shift would all play their parts in setting the scene for a mass media sector that would come out from under the direct ownership of the state.

6) Summary and Conclusion

The history of Egyptian mass media as a sector and its relation with the periods of both continuity and transition shed light on ways in which the country's media system was integrally linked to the broader changes in the country's political economy. Shifts in the sector reflect a state of constant flux and developments in parallel with concurrent technological changes as well as transformations in journalistic labor markets. From the very first attempts at creating print publications that would reach the public in ways that could affect public opinion, the state was shifting its posture towards these media and the proliferation of information and ideas, of which the history of the press especially is central.

Gamal Abdel-Nasser had set a plan on how to outright weaponize media as a tool towards his broader goals. It involved total control, building up capital and spearheading a technological drive in the sector, especially in the telecom sector. Media development during this period was meant to serve the larger purpose of helping achieve the regime's developmentalist goals for post-monarchy Egypt. This era would leave an institutional imprint on the sector for decades insofar as the state would approach it as being a necessary tool at its disposal, and one with major national security implications.

The eras of Mubarak and Sadat showed that in the absence of a consistent political and economic ideology for the regime, the overall attitude to the media will also be ambivalent.

The main constant was an intolerance to dissent, and an extreme paranoia regarding any potential relinquishing of control over the regulation and infrastructure of broadcast and print news outlets and programming. Both regimes also carried-over a view that-on some level-

⁵⁵³ EMIS company report (2017)

media buy-in to the state was expected. A major caveat behind these regimes' outlook was that the media and their access to the public would also be viewed as matters of national security. Development of private media in Mubarak's latter years would be under the same context, but this was complicated by the rapid technological developments in the sector, and the regime's desire to appear to be edging towards both economic and political liberalization. There seemed to be a constant negotiation occurring, especially in print, where there was an ebb and flow of freedoms in the sector, stemming from Mubarak's understanding that he needed a mechanism for the public to vent frustrations at the deteriorating economic situation, to avoid any larger internal conflict.

Former Intelligence Officer Safwat ElSherif held the position of Minister of Information for two decades and was a defining player in the development of Egyptian media under Mubarak. While he wielded direct power over all mass media in the country during this period, he also developed the infrastructure that would pave the way for a new era of private media albeit within the context of a regime that was increasingly clientelistic and neopatrimonial.

Tides were shifting towards a growing private sector as the economic ethos of the state seemed to move away from the complete, centralized State Capitalist model of the Nasser-era. The same could not be said of the political and security-oriented ethos of the state, which led to an staggered and disjointed developments in mass media.

Chapter 4- Privatization: The genesis of private print and broadcast

Around ten years into Mubarak's presidency, the deterioration in the country's economic situation (and the lack of actionable problem-solving by the government) led to more drastic and invasive policy changes for the remainder of his time in power. The following period would be characterized by an implementation of neoliberal policies that would be rooted in the preceding economic crisis and would have far-reaching effects. One of the hallmarks of this change would be a massive expansion of the private sector as the state began to marginally relinquish its direct operational control over many sectors. Private sector operatives would also grow in political stature.

Egypt's media system was to be eventually included in these changes, about a decade after the reforms were announced. Around 1990, state-run mass media-like other publicly funded enterprises were under duress due to the state's dire fiscal situation. Policies regarding broadcast and print mass media were altered in ways that would open the door for the sector to be a natural candidate to participate in the economic liberalization process. Ownership of print and broadcast outlets would be open to the private sector eventually, and they would be run as commercial entities. Many of these outlets would continue carrying out the task of championing the regime's goals, especially since economic liberalization was a major priority, and the owners of these outlets were among the main beneficiaries of these policies.

This chapter outlines the genesis of private mass media and the political-economic contexts under which they were formed. It attempts to answer the question of how privately-owned media outlets developed at the point when the country's political economy was creating one of its more pronounced transformations in recent history. Naomi Sakr notes that in the case of broadcast media, private outlets were allowed to develop as a "reactive" measure mostly in response to the state's shifting policies, similarly to what had happened in Jordan.⁵⁵⁴ Edward Webb⁵⁵⁵ views developments in Egyptian mass media as being symptomatic of an "adaptive authoritarianism" looking to maintain its grip on society in ways that prolong regime survival and ultimate control over public spaces.

Webb along with Fatima El-Issawi⁵⁵⁶ analyze developments in Egyptian media during this period through the prism of Hallin and Mancini's approach of describing the parallelism

⁵⁵⁴ Sakr (2008) p.270

⁵⁵⁵ Webb (2013)

⁵⁵⁶ El-Issawi (2016)

between political contexts and media structures as a way to understand media development. This chapter takes a similar approach, with a view to building on some of the arguments made by these authors. One point of departure is that this chapter (and the remainder of the study) argues that some of the crucial developments that shaped media systems over these periods were in fact unintended consequences of the political and economic context, rather than being the spawn of a specific plan. As a result, the parallelism (between shifts in the media systems and transition in the country's political-economy) were at times circumstantial.

Media development during this period of change undoubtedly reflected the political and economic context of the transition and the relevant power players from the state, security forces and business elite; but the nature of some elements of private mass media that would emerge after 2001 were not initially intended by the state, such as the expansive coverage of political news and the highly influential nature of social/political talk shows on public opinion.

This chapter will also take into consideration the disparate histories of print and broadcast media. Media scholar, Abdullah Schleiffer says the developmental discrepancies between print and broadcast in Egypt affected how they would form in the private sector:

Unlike much of the Arab press, which enjoyed at least a formative development as privately owned newspapers that functioned within the context of some sort of journalistic tradition, all Arab television, be the prevailing state systems left wing or right wing, market economies or socialist economies, republics or monarchies, were state owned and more than any other media the national television channels were extensions of the ministries of information. It is no coincidence that in many Arab countries the minister of information ran his ministry from the national television station building.⁵⁵⁷

Given the rapid changes and the myriad of political and economic elements that hung in the balance, the development of mass media during this period became more pronounced and prominent given its positioning at the intersection of all of these changes. Mass media is at once a sector with considerable commercial potential (if liberalized), a public space for the dissemination and competition of ideas, a venue for the promotion of tourism, and an important soft-power tool for the regime both internally and region-wide.

⁵⁵⁷ Schleiffer (2004)

A Former Dean of Cairo University's School of Mass Communications⁵⁵⁸ attributed the rise of Egyptian private media (with a focus on satellite television), to three main factors:

1. Information and communication technologies that allowed the audiences to expose themselves to more liberal and open communication with little or no government control on media sites, media channels or content that people use.
2. Economic pressures that force the government to invite businessmen to invest in media industry and finance some new media projects that are beyond the capacity of the government and,
3. The new liberal economic wave that opened the door for a new generation of capitalists who seek to maintain political support for their economic projects by owning media outlets especially television channels like Dream and *ElMehwar*.⁵⁵⁹

These factors are all factually correct, but lack political factors as well as infrastructural changes to the sector internally that have helped open the door to private media owners.

1) **“Liberalization”**

The economic crisis that led to the shift in policies occurred due to Egypt's excessive reliance on rents and remittances during the early years of the Mubarak presidency, backfired when global oil prices decreased in the mid-1980s.⁵⁶⁰ By 1990 the debt-to-GDP ratio was reaching 150% and annual inflation stood at more than 20%. Real wages (\$US per work week) declined from \$70 in 1980 to \$11 in 1990, while GDP per-capita growth averaged 0.2% per-annum during the period 1980-1993.⁵⁶¹ Public spending during this period as a percent of GDP was at an excessively high rate of 50% in 1982 (second only to Israel regionally).⁵⁶² The state would no longer be able to maintain the high levels of control it had by the end of the decade. Political scientist Samer Soliman would summarize his approach to finding the reasons behind the resulting change in socioeconomic policy during this period in one phrase: follow the revenue trail.⁵⁶³ The regime would not be able to sustain itself as the state's main sources of revenue were faltering.

The following decade would lay down the foundations of institutional change that would greatly affect the media sector. A class of businessmen with close ties to the regime would emerge as some of the main benefactors of the state's gradual retreat from running the economy.

⁵⁵⁸ Egypt's pre-eminent media school

⁵⁵⁹ Hamada (2008)

⁵⁶⁰ Soliman (2011)

⁵⁶¹ Farah (2009)

⁵⁶² Soliman (2011)

⁵⁶³ Solomon (2011) p.53

Once again, the first Gulf War figures as a pivotal moment after which much of these changes occurred. The war affected the region and Egypt specifically in many ways. As previously mentioned, it was a watershed moment for regional satellite media as it allowed many regimes and would-be media entrepreneurs to see the effectiveness of providing robust, regional news coverage, partially prompting the birth of the Arab satellite media market. Between December 1990 and March 1991, the ERTU had broadcast nearly 800 hours of CNN's programs, which had a massive effect on Egyptian viewing habits as viewers began contrasting the quality of its programs with that of local public terrestrial television.⁵⁶⁴

Regional power balances would also shift, especially in cementing America's enhanced political and economic involvement in the region for the near future. To secure its oil interests in the region, the US would also be securing not only the oil-rich Gulf Countries, but neighboring countries such as Egypt, whose stability was seen to affect the Gulf.⁵⁶⁵

Egypt's involvement in the Gulf War allowed the government to regain a position of influence in the region⁵⁶⁶, while also offering brief respite from the crippling economic crisis. The government negotiated debt forgiveness or rescheduling for half of the country's foreign debt in exchange for joining the US-led coalition in the war. Shortly afterwards, Egypt concluded agreements with the IMF and World Bank in May and November of 1991 respectively that resulted in a comprehensive Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Plan (ERSAP) meant to improve the balance of payments, reduce public debt, curb inflation and help pay-off foreign debt. This allowed the government to massively reduce its expenditures, lift price controls, impose new taxes and reduce public services.

Through all of this, the state would take a step back from industry and commerce, while the private sector's role would increase either through gradual privatization or increased private investments. A near complete withdrawal of government from the markets is something that was not initially contemplated and the overarching coordinating role of the state remained.⁵⁶⁷ Initial attempts to liquidate state owned enterprises (SOE's) were met with resistance from labor movements, but after implementing ERSAP between 1991 and 1998 inflation figures marginally decreased and the budget deficit shrunk from 15% of GDP to 3%⁵⁶⁸, while nearly

⁵⁶⁴ Rubin (2015) p. 312

⁵⁶⁵ Morris (1993)

⁵⁶⁶ The Arab League's headquarters was relocated to Cairo that same year

⁵⁶⁷ Harik (1998)

⁵⁶⁸ This is widely attributed to the debt-forgiveness rather than government efficiency. External debt totaled around 150% of GDP, and debt servicing was over 20% of public spending.

\$3.3 billion worth of SOE's were either partially or entirely sold.⁵⁶⁹ The most aggressive portion of the privatization drive occurred after 1996 when newly appointed Prime Minister Kamal ElGanzoury signed a new two-year deal with the IMF promising just that.

This deal occurred during the crisis of the crippling new press law of 1995 that preceded the November 1995 parliamentary elections that resulted in an overwhelming majority for the ruling party, as well as a new cabinet reshuffle which brought the new PM. Even though liberalization policies could be traced back to Sadat's *Infitah*, this period under Mubarak saw for the first time, the promotion of the private sector to taking the reins of the state's development goals.⁵⁷⁰

The prevalence of the free market ideology in Egypt during this period was firmly rooted in “a worldwide political and ideological transformation that rests on a powerful arsenal of ideas and theories produced by international financial institutions (IFI).⁵⁷¹” The regime was able to gain the approval of these IFI's after intensifying its application of the reform agreement. Egypt was deemed by the IMF to be among the most “successful reformers” due to these policies coupled with a decrease in poverty levels in the second half of the 1990s.⁵⁷² This would not continue as the privatization drive came to a halt in 1999 due to recession and a liquidity crisis that was exacerbated by the global post 9/11 downturn.⁵⁷³ Declining social circumstances along with the fear of looming layoffs and forced retirements were the main instigators for the 287 worker protests that year, a period with the highest concentration of labor agitation since the 1952 revolution.⁵⁷⁴ Until 2005, the overall process of privatization would remain stagnant as it was deemed to be politically too costly.⁵⁷⁵

Mass media development amid the changes

Development of Egypt's mass media and broadcasting capabilities had been planned immediately before the acceleration of neoliberal policy initiatives. In 1990, the state made a decision to upgrade the ERTU. This was essentially an industrial decision, to keep track with some major technological developments in the sector. Internally, the move was seen as being “underpinned by a commitment to be the ‘pioneering’ regional leader, and first mover [of the

⁵⁶⁹ Aidi (2009)

⁵⁷⁰ Soliman (2011) p. 149

⁵⁷¹ Ibid

⁵⁷² Harrigan and ElSaid (2010)

⁵⁷³ Aidi (2009)

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid p. 143

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid

sector].”⁵⁷⁶ The launch of Saudi-owned MBC, ART and Orbit on ARABSAT repositioned ERTU to a point where it was no longer a regional leader in broadcast production.⁵⁷⁷ To combat this trend, the ERTU attempted to limit local viewership of pan-Arab satellite channels by banning the sale of imported decoders in 1995 on the grounds that Law 13 of 1979 entrusted the ERTU with matters related to radio and television transmission, so as to “preserve and safeguard society’s values, ethics and traditions.”⁵⁷⁸

Even though the plan was to enhance state-run broadcasting, it would ultimately lay down the infrastructure upon which private broadcasting would be built, given that the changes would involve broad infrastructural enhancements.⁵⁷⁹ The main tenets of this policy would be the creation of four different enterprises between 1990 and 2000. The plan was to launch the following companies: Cable News Egypt (CNE) a satellite television service provider; Egypt Media Production City (EMPC), the largest audio-visual production company in the world; Nile Thematic Channels (NTC), a portfolio of satellite television channels that would be distributed by CNE; and Nilesat, which would be the first Arab or African state-owned fixed satellite platform. The initial plan for this integrative facility, according to then Minister of Information Safwat ElSherif was to launch state-broadcasting into a more globalized 21st century, by creating synergy between production and transmission capacities as well as by producing quality content.⁵⁸⁰

Egypt’s broadcasting ambitions had been arguably disproportionate to the country’s financial capabilities and resources. The scale of public investments had drawn much criticism, although it has also been the reason Egypt was able to play a leading role in the field.⁵⁸¹ During this era of fiscal tightening, the ERTU upgrade would constantly search for remedies to this issue. CNE was established in 1990 as the region’s first subscription provider, opening up to non-Egyptian channels, and for the first time offering subscribers access to premium audio-visual content. It also gave the ERTU and the Ministry of Information unprecedented information about subscribers and satellite television viewers in general.

⁵⁷⁶ El Gohari (2002) p. 50

⁵⁷⁷ Boyd (2001)

⁵⁷⁸ Egypt radio report from Cairo 17 July 1995, reported in BBC, Summary of World Broadcasts, 19 July 1995 in Rinnawi (2006) p. 77

⁵⁷⁹ El Gohari (2002)

⁵⁸⁰ Forrester (2001)

⁵⁸¹ Boyd (1999)

The rollout of the service in January 1991 during the Gulf War fell well below expectations of a minimum of 60,000 subscribers, garnering barely over 4,000 subscribers by 1994.⁵⁸² The proliferation of unencrypted services on satellite dishes gave many Egyptians a much cheaper option, especially since the likes of MBC and CNN all offered unencrypted access to their programming. The speed of technological change and the forces of globalization would prove too expansive to be contained by the government bureaucracy and would force it to relinquish control. In this case, CNE would re-launch in 1994 after partnering South African satellite giant M-Net, and bringing in a much larger list of Western television stations.⁵⁸³

2) EMPC launch and the new investment laws

The same year CNE launched, construction would begin on EMPC as one of the largest state-of-the-art studio complexes in the world. It was built at a cost of \$1.5 billion on 3.5 million hectares of land in 6th of October City, 30 kilometers from downtown Cairo. The first phase of studios was completed in 1996, the second in 2000. The final studio complex including a shopping mall and a five-star hotel was inaugurated in 2002.⁵⁸⁴ Initially, it was envisioned as a large-scale project to serve public broadcasting and help Egypt keep up with technological developments to assert its regional dominance in the sector. As a major production hub, the EMPC was also supposed to attract foreign investment through global television and media outlets that would make use of its studios and facilities. The original concept would then be altered to adapt to the neoliberal policies. After starting out as a mega-project that would boost Mubarak's regional profile and maintain Egypt's clout, it became a showpiece for the liberalization era, as it was turned into a Free Zone to attract investment in 2000.

Mismanagement and faulty execution would contribute to EMPC eventually becoming the incubator for private Egyptian satellite television, which was not part of the original plans.

The Ministry of Information had decided on the creation of a media city as early as 1988. Construction plans were postponed due to the Gulf War. During the period of postponement, and amid the major changes in regional media, the scope of the Media City Project would drastically change to its more ambitious aspirations as a global production hub and major source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as the "Hollywood of the Middle East".⁵⁸⁵ EMPC

⁵⁸² Foote (1998)

⁵⁸³ Ibid

⁵⁸⁴ ElGohary (2002)

⁵⁸⁵ Berenger and Labidi in Cooper-Chen (2006) p.86

was meant to be a place a haven for foreign production in the region. The hope was to turn compete with (and eventually overtake) other popular Middle Eastern film production locations such as Jordan and Tunisia. Initial plans for the project involved building three complexes with 29 fully-fitted studios along with ten outdoor cinematic shooting areas and a plethora of hospitality, leisure and commercial facilities. After spending nearly \$400 million dollars by the year 2000, the City was not yet close to covering its costs as much of its construction plans remained unfulfilled.⁵⁸⁶

By contrast, before the completion of the first two phases of construction at Dubai Media City (EMPC's regional counterpart), the UAE-based hub had secured 100% (Phase 1) and 80% (Phase 2) occupancy of its studio spaces, by building on-time and securing major "anchor clients" through a more clearly thought-out and executed plan.⁵⁸⁷ Clients such as Reuters and MBC would have buildings named after them in Dubai. By 2002 CNN, Viacom, Newscorp and Disney all set-up regional offices in the Emirate alongside an assortment of major regional and international news wires and stations, advertising agencies and production companies.⁵⁸⁸ EMPC's bid to become a regional leader, was already proving beyond reach, in the short-term at least. A more pressing goal, would be the need to achieve financial stability and avoid default.

Located only 3.4km away, the Nilesat Earth station provided a potential solution for the EMPC's financial predicament. Chairman Abdelrahman Hafez looked to lure private television stations to air from the location. There, they would benefit from the ready availability of both skilled labor and infrastructure. Although they were unable to lure the large global companies, the EMPC was still able to deploy valuable resources such as: editing and post-production facilities, and skilled workers including technicians, actors, anchors, and TV personalities.⁵⁸⁹

During the development of EMPC, Investment Law No. 8 of 1997 was enacted to boost the country's regulatory framework in order to enhance FDI. Some of the major changes it made was to give national treatment to foreign investments, as well as guaranteeing unregulated expropriation of profits. Crucially, audio-visual production was included as an activity that could benefit from this law.

⁵⁸⁶ Kandil (2001)

⁵⁸⁷ El Gohary (2002)

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid

Over the same period of time Jordan and Dubai announced that their media cities would become “Media Free Zones”, prompting the EMPC to follow suit (in order to remain competitive) and declare the city a Media Free Zone in 2000 as well, using Law 8 as its legal basis. This placed the operation of audio-visual companies within this area under the auspices of the General Authority for Investment (GAFI). Both foreign and private firms would benefit from tax exemptions if they operate in the area.⁵⁹⁰

The legal framework upon which the Media City would allow private television stations was inherently problematic as it was not initially conceived to include the audio-visual sector, and was instead meant for other sectors, especially in trade, manufacturing and tourism. The Law allowed for the inclusion of broadcast media, without addressing the law’s compatibility with it.⁵⁹¹ The intangible nature of media’s end-product, and the ability to transport it via satellite uplink provided one such legislative issue. A bemused researcher of the matter questioned the adaptability of the law to this structure:

...upon leaving the zone with a tape of a recorded program, how is the customs tax applied? Is the \$15 tape itself taxed, or is the \$50,000 episode on it taxed? How can the percentage be determined and by which official? For instance, a worker could leave the zone taking with him an empty tape, get taxed only on that, then record the episode's signal at the zone's gateway via a receiving satellite dish worth \$1,000 and operated from a car battery.⁵⁹²

The other issue with the law was the fact that under the legislative and organizational structure of the Free Zone, there would be confusion as to how the sector would be organized and regulated. The EMPC was a public-private partnership with the ERTU meant to hold around 40% of the shares while the rest would be distributed among public banks and financial institutions as well as a small group of private individuals.⁵⁹³ Its stock went public⁵⁹⁴ in 2001⁵⁹⁵ and the overall structure would remain the same, with public institutions firmly in propriety control over the city.

⁵⁹⁰ El Gohary (2002)

⁵⁹¹ Hashem, Ibrahim and Tawfik (1998). Egypt: the new Law No. 8 of 1997 on Investment Guarantees and Incentives. *Arab Law Quarterly*, 13(1), pp.75-82.

⁵⁹² Kandil (2001)

⁵⁹³ Gouaaybess (2001)

⁵⁹⁴ Only around 39% of the stock would be floating in 2019 while the Egyptian Government along with other public institutions would control the remaining stock.

⁵⁹⁵ Kandil (2001)

Ultimately, the state (via the ERTU) would have the final say as to who operates within its walls and under what guidelines. On the other hand, according to Law No. 8, GAFI also holds a considerable measure of control:

The Authority is the ultimate policymaker with respect to regulatory matters concerning the zone. It is the competent administrative body that decides upon the general goals of setting up a free zone and the means of realizing such goals.⁵⁹⁶

It is also the Authority that appoints the board of directors; sets the regulatory framework for the management of the zone...⁵⁹⁷

The board is responsible for issuing permits for the establishment and for issuing licenses allowing specific projects to operate in the free zone.⁵⁹⁸

Still, according to Mohamed Gohar, co-founder of Video Cairo Sat and one of the first clients and collaborators with the EMPC, the role of GAFI was merely ceremonial, “it was in the hands of the Ministry of Information. Back then, everything was up to [the Minister] Safwat ElSherif who is a military man, but in its early days, he tried to appear to be balancing between the state’s security interests and media development. In the end, the security apparatuses had the last say about everything concerning media. Any attempt to ever appear otherwise was a façade.”⁵⁹⁹

The operation of stations within the EMPC would directly contradict with the ERTU charter (in Law 13 of 1979, modified by Law 223 of 1989), which gave ERTU absolute control over the media, and also declared it the sole broadcaster. Not wanting to change the law that would diminish the dominance of the ERTU, the state found a loophole to its own laws by only allowing private outlets to broadcast via satellite.⁶⁰⁰ By allowing the ERTU to retain sole control of terrestrial broadcasting, the integrity of the ERTU Charter would ostensibly remain intact. Law No. 8 was also adapted to the sector and both local and international private stations would be allowed to set-up in the Media City after 2001.

The legal barriers that were being addressed to allow the formation of private television companies allowed for the development of a framework that would force media companies to register and operate as commercial entities, rather than in their more specific roles as media companies, with all of the additional regulatory and operational details that would entail.

⁵⁹⁶ Article 30 of Law No. 8/1997 as translated in Hashem, Ibrahim and Tawfik (1998). Egypt: the new Law No. 8 of 1997 on Investment Guarantees and Incentives. *Arab Law Quarterly*, 13(1), pp.75-82.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid Article 32

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid Article 41

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

⁶⁰⁰ Abdulla (2016)

Licenses granted to television operations registered them as business projects without providing guidelines on the operation of these outlets. The private broadcasting sector as a result started without a clear framework for many essential elements, including: regulating diversity, fairness of representation, systems for allocating frequencies, and the rules for election coverage.⁶⁰¹

The existence of private television would be confined to the physical barriers of the EMPC. Broadcasters would also have to apply for frequencies for their emissions from Nilesat, a company owned by the government. The majority of the uplink (ground-to-satellite) technology was under the state's control. These elements could point to a crucial factor behind the outwardly liberal attitude the EMPC and GAFI had taken towards the private media market. The government knew that it would be able to shut off any satellite broadcast with a virtual on-off switch in its possession.

Privately-owned Egyptian media stations represented a drastic shift, given the decades-long stronghold of the state on all broadcast media. One area that did not change, was terrestrial broadcasting, which remained entirely state-owned, run-out of the Maspero building.⁶⁰² Terrestrial broadcasting was seen as being more accessible. This led to a belief in government that private satellite television would not represent a real and direct competitor to ERTU broadcasting.

3) Private sector, clientelism and authoritarianism at the turn of the century

Even though private Egyptian-owned broadcasters would emerge following the decision by the EMPC, it seemed to run counter to the state of political and social “de-liberalization” that occurred between 1990 and 2000.⁶⁰³ In assessing the Mubarak years during this time period Eberhard Kienle remarks that the overarching trend during the period of economic liberalization was a retreat in almost every other aspect of political and social liberties.

Kienle noted that political representation experienced an “erosion of positive liberties... elections [had become] non-competitive and without choice.”⁶⁰⁴ After the 1995 elections the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) controlled 94.05% of the seats in the People's Assembly, a sharp increase from 1990 when around 20% of the seats were held by other

⁶⁰¹ El-Issawi (2016)

⁶⁰² Sakr (2007)

⁶⁰³ Kienle (2001)

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid pp. 50, 51

parties.⁶⁰⁵ This was after a series of measures taken by the government to stifle political party activities and representation in the media in the first half of the decade, including the aforementioned Law 93 in 1995. The state had also increased its control over local assemblies, professional unions, public universities and even student elections.⁶⁰⁶ At the same time, the role of State Security apparatuses and military courts were expanding and the number people arrested for political reasons increased from 8 thousand in 1992 to between 15 to 20 thousand in 1998, although this was rationalized by the state as being due to the growing problem of militant Islamist groups.⁶⁰⁷

By the end of the 1990's, the state's finances were also once again in a dire situation. Reforms that focused on real estate and finance had been put into effect, mostly to shore up the budget, sidelining some of the original intentions of the economic reform, which included helping Egypt become more competitive in global trade and more integrated in the world economy. A brief period of currency stabilization and a miniboom caused by the privatization push of the mid-1990s did not avail the state of relying on rents for a significant portion of its revenue, rather than by taxing productive activities. Around one third of government revenue came from two state-owned enterprises that typified the continuation of Egypt's rentier state, The Egyptian General Petroleum Company and The Suez Canal Authority.⁶⁰⁸ The global financial crisis between 1997 and 1999 had come at an inopportune time as internal factors had also contributed to decreasing confidence in the economy. Two very different local events especially contributed to a decline in global confidence in Egypt: The 1997 terrorist attack in Luxor and a scandal of connected MPs using their positions to obtain around LE1.5 billion loans from state banks.⁶⁰⁹ Debt increased to 90% of GDP in 2002 from 67% in 1992⁶¹⁰, although this time it was mostly to local creditors.⁶¹¹ One of the available options for the regime and the NDP was to begin accessing capital from businessmen who would attain a privileged status, they would also help define the political economy of the country for the coming decade.

⁶⁰⁵ These figures include NDP members who ran as independents

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid

⁶⁰⁷ EOHR in Kienle (2001)

⁶⁰⁸ Mitchell (2002)

⁶⁰⁹ Alissa (2007)

⁶¹⁰ Kandil (2012)

⁶¹¹ Kandil (2012)

Hazem Kandil describes the initial phases of the blossoming relationship between this class and the state:

The easiest and most readily available way to keep the political machine solvent was to count on the generosity of regime-friendly capitalists. [A]s monopoly capitalists began taking charge of the ruling party and [were elected in parliament], they assumed financial responsibilities as well. They funded NDP conventions; they launched government media campaigns; they paid bribes to stifle the opposition; they bought votes and organized pro-regime demonstrations; and so on.⁶¹²

Mubarak began to clearly pivot towards relying on the support of businessmen by making the private sector a key constituency in the NDP as he added major CEO's to head the party's Political Bureau. The three most prominent additions were Ahmed Ezz of Ezz Steel, Ibrahim Kamel of Kato Investments, and the president's son Gamal. By the 2000 parliamentary elections, businessmen would represent 14% of all of the party's deputies and would begin to gain cabinet seats.⁶¹³ The period between 1998 and 2004 also marked an era of more profound institutional changes to liberalize trade, promote exports, protect intellectual property rights and amend laws governing commerce. A 2015 World Bank study also noted that in 2000 the government introduced a variety of measures to protect politically connected firms from some of the newly implemented liberalization policies offering them protection from foreign competition and access to energy subsidies and land (among other potential advantages not included in the scope of the study).⁶¹⁴ While these individuals benefitted from the "carrot" of benefits to their businessmen, many were also co-opted by threats to their businesses if they refuse to fall in line with the NDP.⁶¹⁵

Beyond the political realm, Safinaz El Tarouty notes in her study "Businessmen, Clientelism, and Authoritarianism in Egypt," that the patron-client relationship Mubarak developed with wealthy Egyptians involved offering access to benefits that could only be accorded by the state, in exchange for other forms of loyalty, including providing mass media support to the regime.⁶¹⁶

The rise of the private sector also gave the state the ability to deflect some of the public ire regarding the economic reforms onto the businessmen whose increasing control over the

⁶¹² Kandil (2012) p.211

⁶¹³ Aidi (2009)

⁶¹⁴ Diwan, Keefer & Shiffbauer (2015)

⁶¹⁵ El Tarouty (2014)

⁶¹⁶ Ibid

economy was becoming more apparent, while many cross-sections of society were complaining of declining living standards. Criticism of these businessmen was more palatable to the regime than criticism of the ruling class itself:

That the official and independent media still sometimes lash out at Egyptian capitalism does not reduce the hold of the ideology. The attacks take aim at the “parasitic” nature of the entrepreneurial class, its conspicuous spending, corruption, and other such moral aspects, but when it comes to serious public discussion of economic policy, liberal economics wins hands down.⁶¹⁷

The onus would be shifted on the incoming class of entrepreneurial media owners to attempt to drum up public support on their own importance and viability to economic development.

4) Egypt’s private broadcasters

The EMPC’s shift in focus and regulatory parameters had opened the door for private stations to launch their central production sites from within Egypt for the first time. GAFI, which was run under the new business-friendly cabinet of Prime Minister Atif Ebeid (appointed in 2000) had the legal authority to provide licenses for these outlets, pending security clearances.

The infrastructure was in place, and the EMPC had already opened its door to the Saudi-owned channel Orbit. Ali Beleil, who was a producer with Orbit in 1999 described how it felt for the channel to have been momentarily the sole occupant in the massively under-occupied and over-equipped city:

When I arrived for my first day of work at the Media City. We were among the only people there. It was still very impressive. I thought it was the beginning of some major transformation in Egyptian media, and we were there before anyone.⁶¹⁸

Coming from the BBC, Beleil was in charge of a department tasked with creating video reports for Orbit’s mostly social, cultural and entertainment programming. Before the EMPC opened its doors to local private television, Orbit had staked its claim as one of the original tenants among television outlets in the city in 1998.⁶¹⁹ It was established by Saudi-owned retail giant, Mawarid Group in 1993 mostly out of Rome. Besides being an early tenant of EMPC, it was a trailblazer in other areas as it launched the world’s first fully-digital, multi-channel satellite television and radio service, while also marking the creation of a new

⁶¹⁷ Soliman (2011) p. 149

⁶¹⁸ Interview with Ali Belail (2019)

⁶¹⁹ Hamdy (2002)

industry in the Middle East.⁶²⁰ Orbit would go on to have a major effect on Egyptian media by creating the template for the nightly talk shows that have become the flagship program of every Egyptian private broadcaster, usually anchored by verbose hosts who go on rants about the topic of the day.

Initially, Belail and his team were told to steer clear from politics, however Amr Adeeb, the politically inclined host of the show he worked on, *AlQahira AlYom* (Cairo Today), tended to push in that direction. The program was an anomaly in Egypt as they were allowed to cover topics that would normally not be covered by Egyptian television stations, “because we were Saudi-owned, we had a lot of leeway,” Belail said. Crucially, they were also allowed flexibility because Orbit decoders were not sold in Egypt, so “Cairo Today” was ironically only seen by an audience outside of Egypt, and by elites who paid thousands of dollars to purchase and import Orbit’s coveted decoders with its bouquet of exclusive Western channels.⁶²¹ The development of Orbit as a channel in Egypt occurred almost by accident as the network was mostly concerned with viewership, according to Belail, the only real red line was criticism of Saudi Arabia or its rulers. In 1994, BBC Arabic and Orbit engaged in a short-lived joint-venture that was scrapped due to disagreements over the BBC’s airing of an interview with a London-based Saudi dissident.⁶²²

The existence of Orbit, and then MBC in the Media City and their relative success was encouraging for Egyptian would-be entrepreneurs in the field. They operated with relative freedom, as long as they followed a 32-clause code of ethics provided by the ERTU that included some standard guidelines such as forbidding airing of discriminatory material. It also contained vaguely worded clauses that forbade airing material that may “harm the state.”⁶²³

As for the kind of television stations that were not allowed, Mohamed Gohar said that the EMPC had three main caveats, “no licenses for news channels (the state is the only provider of news), no license for religious groups, and none for political parties.”⁶²⁴ Gohar had attempted to set-up a news channel using the experience Video CairoSat already had in producing news reports and providing live coverage for international outlets. “The culture of producing truthful reports in short news segments and having news bulletins by professional

⁶²⁰ www.orbit.net

⁶²¹ Interview with Ali Belail (2019)

⁶²² Ayish in Mellor (2013)

⁶²³ Abdulla (2016) p 4227

⁶²⁴ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

newscasters was a completely alien concept.”⁶²⁵ Gohar’s initiative was meant to be called CSN (Cairo Sat News), and despite piloting the project and his conviction that it would be the region’s first 24-hour news service, GAFI did not approve it.

Patient Zero: Ahmed Bahgat and Dream TV

Private broadcasting was initially envisioned to be a landmark for the Egyptian regime’s “progress” in economic and social liberalization. Earlier statements from the Minister of Information as well as the policies forbidding private terrestrial broadcasting or news broadcasts were clear indications that the state deemed to risky to open up the sector with few restrictions.

Orbit had taken this approach when it opened its Cairo Production Hub, which was according to Belail, to entertain, and offer a positive image for Egypt. “[Orbit employees in Cairo-based programs] were told to paint a postcard for Cairo.”⁶²⁶ Dream TV the first television station to be owned by an Egyptian in the EMPC would become a postcard of sorts for Egypt’s liberalization efforts. When it was launched on 14 September 2001, it would mark the beginning of privately-owned Egyptian television broadcasting.

The station’s owner, Ahmed Bahgat was a self-made businessman who had initially made his first million in the US after selling the rights to an invention of his, which was a device guiding Muslims to Mekkah for prayers. He had received his PhD from Georgia State Institute of Technology in 1982.⁶²⁷ The station would never had occurred were it not for an encounter between Bahgat and Hosni Mubarak in 1984, when the President urged him to return to Egypt. During a meeting with prominent Egyptians in America, Mubarak is said to have told Bahgat, “if people like you don’t come back to Egypt, then who will develop the country?”⁶²⁸

Upon his return to Egypt in the late 1980’s, he began investing in a business empire that would span real estate, electronic manufacturing, entertainment and leisure. Initially the Bahgat Group began developing Goldstar television sets and became the region’s largest manufacturers of the device. Prior to 1985, the only companies allowed to produce television

⁶²⁵ Ibid

⁶²⁶ Interview with Ali Belail (2019)

⁶²⁷ El Tarouty (2014)

⁶²⁸ ElBawabah (2017) *Ahmed Bahgat: Qa'id eltanmeya El'omraneyya Fy October*, ElBawabah News: <https://www.albawabhnews.com/2634052>.

sets were Telemisr, a public company, and Al-Nasr which falls under the military industrial complex. Bahgat used his ties to high-ranking officers to obtain a license for this line of production.⁶²⁹

Dreamland was his major real estate venture that would become a prototypical development in Cairo's suburbs. Over the next two decades this model would be emulated expansively. The majority of these projects were given to allies of the regime. Timothy Mitchell counted two-dozen family conglomerates in 1999 (of which Bahgat Group was one) that often began as real estate or construction companies, and due to their close ties to the regime, were allowed to grow rapidly, while expanding into other sectors.⁶³⁰ This kind of preferential treatment allowed projects like Dreamland the financial and administrative ability to grow abnormally quickly. "Ahmed Bahgat, the family head, is reputed to be a front man for well-placed interests within the regime, which may explain why the express roads out to Dreamland were built in record time."⁶³¹

An investigation into his finances after Mubarak's ouster in 2011 led to Bahgat being formally accused of corruption by having procured much of his real estate irregularly via his relation with Minister of Housing and New Communities, Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman who sold him the 1,950 *feddan* plot⁶³² at the low price of LE50⁶³³ per meter. After only paying off the equivalent of LE5 per meter, Bahgat re-priced the land, to nearly LE1,500/meter before listing in the stock exchange, reaping massive rewards.⁶³⁴

When the opportunity arose to open his own television station, as the EMPC and Nilesat were struggling, Bahgat's business was booming and Dreamland was on the cusp of a massive expansion. His relationship with the regime by this point (2001) was beyond doubt, and he seemed to lack personal political ambition, making him a minimal political threat to the status quo. Furthermore, his position as a "self-made" millionaire toggled at the heart strings of an Egyptian public that was still skeptical at the viability of the liberalization policies and the improvement of the overall financial well-being of the country. From the perspective of the government, he was the perfect candidate to own a station. For the EMPC and Nilesat, he was a most welcome investor, at a time when this government mega-project was on the brink of

⁶²⁹ Gobe (2007) p.256

⁶³⁰ Mitchell (1999)

⁶³¹ Ibid

⁶³² Roughly 2,024 acres

⁶³³ LE=Egyptian pounds

⁶³⁴ AlMasry AlYoum (21 January 2013): <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/284387>

failure. Bahgat himself said he “saved Nilesat from bankruptcy when it was just launching since there weren’t any channels willing to broadcast from it, besides Orbit and now [on 20 November 2012] 550 channels use Nilesat. After Dream TV was a success everyone copied [them].”⁶³⁵

5) **Private media emerging: emanating from the center of power**

Mitchell’s study shows that as the private sector expanded and neoliberal policies became more entrenched, developments of the most rapidly growing and expanding business empires cannot be looked at independently from their connections to the regime. Media development was no different and television licenses were often distributed mostly in accordance with the shifting power patterns of this neopatrimonial regime. Egyptian broadcaster and academic Gamal ElShaer had noted that as a sector, media was the subject of major changes during the implementation of the new economic policies, but its development was still shackled by the lack of institutional change in other areas of governance:

Contrary to the predicted path to democratization cited in most comparative media literature, the Egyptian case demonstrated not only a divergence, but even a reversal, when it came to widely held assumptions regarding state-media relationships in general, and the concept of political parallelism in particular. This is mainly because, in Egypt, the main economic, political, and social structures have not witnessed fundamental changes.⁶³⁶

While he is correct in noting that there had not been a fundamental change in the underlying structures he had mentioned, developments in state-media relations were not in fact evolving in ways that negate the concept of political parallelism. State-media relations were taking time in order to form, given the novelty of private media and the state’s lack of preparedness (by its own standards) for how it would retain control over them.

Given the above, it is unsurprising that upon further scrutiny, the origins of Dream TV may have not been as independent of the state as once thought. Evidence suggests that, despite the context under which Dream was established (from within the Drealand project), the state played a more distinctly direct role in both envisioning and facilitating the project’s birth.

In the relatively short life-span of private Egyptian media, there are very few periods in time when an observable distance between the state and private television networks existed. As one media scholar put it, “There is no such thing as public and private in Arab Media.”⁶³⁷ Major and minor moments of transitions in power created periods where private media was

⁶³⁵ Ahmed Bahgat interview with Yosry Foda, 20 November 2012. *Akher Kalam* Program, OnTV.

⁶³⁶ ElShaer (2015)

⁶³⁷ Fandy (2007) p. 25

operated with more relative autonomy. The early period of Media Production City, was not a moment of political transition, although it did fall within a period of economic transformation. The general structure of political control remained the same, meaning the new media policies were all squarely under the auspices of the powerful Minister of Information, Safwat El-Sherif. It would not be until the 2005 elections when the first major period of transition would occur.

According to Mitchell, the Bahgat Group “was linked to senior military officers and used military-owned factories to build its products...Dr. Ahmed Bahgat, the family head, was reputed to be a front man for unpublicized moneymaking by the presidential family...”⁶³⁸ Despite running into difficulties with the government because of Dream TV in subsequent years, his connection to both the Mubarak family and a security establishment⁶³⁹ marked the beginning of a trend of television station owners who, until the Arab Spring in 2011, would have clearance from both institutions. Bahgat denied his financial connections to the Mubarak family⁶⁴⁰ while owning up to his close relationship with the president, who visited Dreamland in an official capacity 25 times.⁶⁴¹

In his retelling of Dream’s start, Bahgat said that he went to the Minister of Information at the time, Safwat ElSherif, with a master plan for his entire business. These connections point to the possibility that, despite his proclamations, Dream TV began as a regime initiative. Amr Khafaga, who held the positions of executive producer and head of programming for Dream TV (2002-2007) said that there was “a top-down decision by the government to establish private television stations.”⁶⁴²

This notion is further bolstered by the fact that the ERTU was widely believed to be a 10% stakeholder in Dream at its inception. The terms of their partnership was lopsided in that the ERTU did not actually have to pay-up its capital contribution. Instead, it had promised to provide that in programming, according to the Vice-President of the channel in its early years, Hala Sarhan.⁶⁴³ Financially, Bahgat would have been able to afford starting up a television station, or even getting privately financed, given that Sarhan estimated the costs of starting up

⁶³⁸ Mitchell (2002) pp. 227 & 288

⁶³⁹ The security establishment in question is unknown and often speculated on. Most believe it is the military.

⁶⁴⁰ Theories that Mubarak’s sons were secret partners to Bahgat, would be questioned again when Dream TV repeatedly aired segments including views vehemently opposing Gamal Mubarak “inheriting the presidency” from his father.

⁶⁴¹ AlMasry AlYoum, 28 November 2016

⁶⁴² Interview with Amr Khafaga (2015)

⁶⁴³ Hala Sarhan interview with Naila Hamdy (2002)

a station such as Dream TV network was 20-30 million Egyptian pounds.⁶⁴⁴ Bahgat had once estimated his wealth to be around 1.5 billion Egyptian pounds. The Ministry of Information opted instead to keep a close eye on the first private television station, using this partnership.

Similarly, the other private television station to launch in 2002 was *ElMehwar*, which was launched by cement magnate, Hassan Rateb, the anchor investor who owned 65% of the company, while the ERTU also owned roughly 12%. Rateb was known for having the unofficial license to invest heavily in Sinai, which is one of the most politically sensitive areas to operate in Egypt due to its status as a tourist destination, and a demilitarized zone under the 1977 Camp David Accords. In the earliest days of private satellite television, government partnership was an unwritten rule of licensing. Rateb stated that he intended for his station to “represent civil society”.⁶⁴⁵ However, not only was Rateb himself a close ally of the government, but the composition of *ElMehwar*’s board shows in no uncertain terms the existence of the channel in full accordance with the state. This board included Hassan Hamed (head of ERTU), Amin Bassiouny (Head of Nilesat), and AbdelRahman Hafez (director of Media Production City). Prominent business persons owned a collective 18% of *ElMehwar*, each of them had significant stakes in different sectors that were benefiting from the liberalization policies they included among others: Hossam Badrawi (health services), Moustafa El-Sallab (ceramics), Nawal El-Degwi (education).⁶⁴⁶

One obvious method of control of private broadcasting by the state was to always ensure that ownership and internal control of the mass media organizations were in the hands of trusted individuals. In the case of station ownership in the era of liberalization, this meant the class of connected businessmen who owe their wealth to their connections to the state.

Dream TV, relied mostly on Bahgat’s personal relationship with President Mubarak. As far as ownership and its relationship with the state, the link was quite direct. *ElMehwar* on the other hand was started in a way that not only represented the expanding economic control of the private sector (and the benefits of being close to the regime), but it also became a representation of the coalition of connected businessmen who would in-time ascent to a much more profound position of power. Rateb, Badrawi and El-Sallab were all central figures of the transforming NDP, which would soon be overtaken by Gamal Mubarak and a cohort of connected businessmen (including them), who would all help push the younger Mubarak to

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid

⁶⁴⁵ Hamdy (2002)

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid

the de-facto leadership of the party.⁶⁴⁷ Bahgat was reportedly included as a founding member of *ElMehwar* before pulling out to start Dream. Private sector companies such as *ElMehwar* and Dream also attracted the services of the only established private media company VideoCairo Sat for help in producing content. Locally, Mohamed Gohar worked with the EMPC and Nile News in providing them with technical assistance for production of reporting content, and gravitated towards working with the likes of *ElMehwar* and Dream when they were formed. Ironically Gohar and his company, despite their experience and years of being the only private media operation in Egypt, were not allowed a television license, while the other business owners were, despite having no prior interest or experience in the field. “We played a crucial role in not only establishing the Production City, but also the first two stations. Although, it very quickly became clear that you had to be ‘in the club’ to get approval, we were not members in the political project.”⁶⁴⁸ Ironically, Gohar himself claims to have worked closely with Mubarak until 2009. His credentials providing him access to the presidency had been operational since 1974. Yet according to him, the two elements working against him at the time were: firstly, a desire to present news in accordance to the international professional standards (as he was the main news provider for Reuters news agency in the region); and secondly, his association with the Presidents (Sadat and Mubarak) rather than the budding power center in Gamal’s clique.⁶⁴⁹

When it came to oversight roles, for a period of time the new entities and organizations that would be created would be run by a revolving door of bureaucrats. Turnover at the head of these organizations often entailed an exchange of places between colleagues. Hafez himself was chairman of ERTU, CNE and Nilesat at various points in his career.⁶⁵⁰ Hassan Hamed went from being head of the ERTU to head of EMPC as well.

Importantly, Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif retained a near absolute grip on overall developments and output of Egyptian media, private or public, for as long as he was in office. Ultimately, the management of the EMPC, the ERTU, and the television stations in operation would all answer to him. His ties to the central authority, security apparatuses, and

⁶⁴⁷ Fandy (2007)

⁶⁴⁸ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2016)

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid

⁶⁵⁰ Schleiffer (2000)

intelligence community allowed him to exercise control in a personal capacity quite broadly. Subsequent Ministers of Information would not have his sway.⁶⁵¹

The overtures made to privatizing media occurred under ElSherif's watch and in accordance with his own vision. Although he was implementing a media policy, ElSherif's significance to the regime during this period stretched far beyond this sector, as evidenced by his subsequent appointments in 2004 to the Shura Council (where he quickly became speaker)⁶⁵², and to the role of Secretary General of the NDP during a period of radical change for the party. One thing ElSherif made very clear while putting together plans for the media city and Nilesat is that the concept of a "private media" was never on the table. In an interview centered on the new developments in the sector he had clearly stated, "we don't intend to privatize the media; rather, we mean that there should be more freedom."⁶⁵³

Years later in 2016 Hassan Hamed would confirm El-Sherif's approach of ultimate control. When asked about his thoughts on private media he said, "there has never been private media in Egypt, it is all a branch of the official media."⁶⁵⁴ Hamed, although a staunch supporter of the regime in 2016 (and of the Mubarak regime previously) was not critical of that state of media. Rather he believed that ElSherif and the underlying organizations he created were all part of a system that was designed to be interdependent. The role of media according to Hamed was always to serve the greater interest and that its position had to be subservient to the greater goals of the state. Private media never presented itself as a viable alternative to achieve these goals, according to him.⁶⁵⁵ Hamed represented a generation of media professionals that viewed mass media as a matter of national security (especially in war time) and believed that the main impetus behind expanding private media in Egypt was to boost the liberalization plans and little else.

Hamed saw ElSherif as "an enlightened thinker."⁶⁵⁶ This perspective was not shared by all. The Minister's presence in the media sector was in fact enough to dissuade many businessmen (and especially from specific political profile) from entering the field despite harboring clear interests in doing so. Businessman, Naguib Sawiris, who would later launch

⁶⁵¹ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2016)

⁶⁵² The Shura Council is the Upper House of Egypt's bicameral parliament. Out of its 279 members, around one third of them are appointed by the President.

⁶⁵³ Atia (2000)

⁶⁵⁴ Interview with Hassan Hamed (2016)

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid

OnTV from the EMPC, was an early sceptic, claiming that at that time they were “almost forced into being in partnership with the state to open any station,” adding that he was “one of the first people interested in this sector, but that it didn’t make sense and was not worth the cost of starting up a business.”⁶⁵⁷

The departure of ElSherif from the Ministry of Information in 2004, coincided with the expansion of the private mass media market, including in newspapers. The absence of a central figure with such broad powers in the state also left an oversight void, as the private mass media sector lacked comprehensive institutional regulation. The result was that the private stations operated with slightly less direct control from the Ministry of Information. Many believe that despite his absence, ElSherif through his work in other NDP and government positions continued to set strategies and policies of Egyptian media until 2010.⁶⁵⁸

Nonetheless, having vacated his office on the fifth floor of the Maspero building, there was no longer the commanding presence of a military man with unlimited power supervising the day-to-day affairs of the sector.

The new Minister, Anas El-Fiqqi⁶⁵⁹, was not nearly as authoritative as his predecessor, yet he was a pivotal figure for the transformation of the media system during his tenure as Minister. Unlike, ElSherif, the former media executive did not hold the same influence over security apparatuses and the command center of the government and neither did he hold as much direct sway over the private sector. One Dream TV producer noted, “[El-Fiqqi] was clearly jealous of the private channels. That’s how it felt, especially when [Dream TV] would have a successful show or land a very important international interview guest, we would sometimes get summons to the Ministry to remind us that we were still under their auspices and needed to clear potentially sensitive topics by them.”⁶⁶⁰

Abdelrahman Hafez, alluded to a rivalry between EMPC and the Ministry of Information in numerous interviews after he left his position. Hafez, was accused of embezzlement of public funds in 2005 after El-Fiqqi called for an investigation regarding missing funds from an

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

⁶⁵⁸ Interview with Mohammed Gohar (2018)

⁶⁵⁹ Anas El-Fiqqi was Minister of Information from 2005-2011. He took over from Mamdouh ElBeltagy who held the position for one year, 2004-2005.

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with Mohammed Nasser (2015)

advertising contract with Ihab Talaat, who owned one of the few advertising agencies with controlling stakes in the market, Promedia.⁶⁶¹

A Wikileaks Cable would later reveal that the Ministry of Information position was in fact used in a proxy war between Gamal Mubarak and Safwat ElSherif, who ostensibly opposed Gamal's plans for succession.⁶⁶² Ihab Talaat's company's partnership with Safwat El-Sherif's son, Ashraf was thought to be one of the main reasons it was granted extensive government contracts. Ashraf ElSherif himself had presided for a few years over the only two privately-owned FM radio stations, obtained through his father's intercession.⁶⁶³ "In this context, the Talaat-Hafez corruption case could be viewed as the latest stage of a proxy war between Gamal Mubarak and Safwat Sherif."⁶⁶⁴ Despite El-Fiqqi's position as a stalwart of the neoliberal project led by the President's son, his desire to ensure the acquiescence of all media, led to an apparent ambivalence, bordering on skepticism towards the private media sector in its early days.

6) Gamal Mubarak and "new" politics

El-Fiqqi was brought in at a time when the neoliberal policies in Egypt were expanding, and the connected businessmen in the private sector were not only gaining business opportunities, but dominion over the political arena. They were a part of the same general political direction that El-Fiqqi was promoting. Attempting to rein them in seemed antithetical to the ruling cohort's general direction. It may have also been an attempt by him to more clearly define the institutional relationship between his Ministry and the private sector, in an otherwise vague regulatory environment.

The creation of these new mass media entities occurred amid a political impetus to make the public sphere seem more open and accessible. U.S. President George W. Bush met with Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif in May 2005 and pressed for Egypt to pursue more political reforms, even linking these changes with a potential free trade pact between the two countries. The Egyptian government heeded the call in order to both secure its relationship with the U.S. (which involved more than \$2 billion dollars of annual aid) and enhance the country's reputation globally. The speech was followed by the addition of some amendments to the electoral process, such as the introduction of multicandidate presidential elections,

⁶⁶¹ Shalabi (2007), Interview with Abdelrahman Hafez in AlMasry AlYoum Newspaper.

⁶⁶² DCM Stuart Jones, "TACKLING CORRUPTION IN EGYPT," Canonical ID: 06CAIRO125_a, dated January 8, 2006, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO125_a.html

⁶⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid

rather than the “presidential confirmation referenda” that Hosni Mubarak had resorted to for his first four, six-year terms. These amendments bolstered the “new thinking” platform of the NDP, the foundations of which were established in 2002 when Gamal Mubarak assumed his first official party position as a member of the Policies Secretariat along with some of his businessmen confidantes. The “new thinking” platform would see technocrats and businessmen being put forth for cabinet positions and positions of power, as MP’s and NDP leaders. Figureheads of this platform were meant to present the Egyptian elite as a progressive and liberalizing force, departing from the militaristic and archaic statesmen of previous eras. Nonetheless, these changes would also be widely seen as a form of “faux-liberalization,” to bleach the face of the regime and the elite who would “embrace the mantle of reform only to enshrine its dominance beyond Hosni Mubarak’s passing.”⁶⁶⁵

Gamal Mubarak’s presumed succession and the political/business cohort’s leadership of the “new thinking” campaign, was thought to be a way to ensure a continuous flow of the US aid package, of which \$1.2 billion went directly to the military. As a result it was a direction that was tolerated by the Armed Forces along with other major power centers.⁶⁶⁶ The new direction in the ruling party’s represented a major departure in the shape of the political power structure and in the embedded neoliberal rhetoric for the state. When the first round of privatization started in 1994, the party still claimed to adhere to the principles of The Free Officers’ 23 of July Revolution. Gamal’s introduction to the policy committee in 2002 led to more open and concrete calls for the party to more openly adhere to liberalization, with the stipulation that the state continues to play an important role.⁶⁶⁷ As the stature of this group grew leading into the 2005 parliamentary elections, they contributed an exacerbation of the already existent patron-client relationship between the state and the business elite.⁶⁶⁸

A new limited access order (LAO) emerged and it appeared to embrace reforms that would accommodate the interests of big businesses more readily. The way the political and business elite formed around Mubarak’s sons at the time conformed with the description of LAO frameworks by Douglas North et al as one that is created by “using the political system to create and allocate rents, arising from arrangements such as government contracts, land rights, monopolies on business activities, and entry to restricted job markets.”⁶⁶⁹ Connected

⁶⁶⁵ Brownlee (2007) p .73

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁶⁷ Aidi (2009)

⁶⁶⁸ El-Tarouty (2014)

⁶⁶⁹ North, Wallis, Webb & Weingast (2007)

businessmen were not only offered preferential treatment in these markets, but also decision-making power in the state. The “technocratic” government of Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif (2004-2011) included six of those connected businessmen, some of whom were also elected representatives in parliament.⁶⁷⁰ Besides attempting to implement policies beneficial to their businesses, the group of businessmen allied with Mubarak’s sons were accused of amassing exorbitant wealth during this period by making use of corruption mechanisms that included:

- The use of privileged information to acquire advantage in the privatization program and insider trading.
- [Excessively borrowing from state banks] to buy stock market shares
- Allocating credit on the basis of personal contacts and relationships;
- The sale of public land at negligible prices, and many times through "direct allocation" to select people in what became known as "the largest land grab" in the history of Egypt.
- Illegitimate commissions made of arms deals and from sole-sourcing in the purchase of equipment and materials for public use;
- Reallocating foreign aid to private firms and consultants.⁶⁷¹

As a result of a political and business climate that was highly preferential to the class of connected businessmen, wealth within this class grew rapidly. This climate “increased the structural and financial power of businessmen and allowed them to enter into a semi-clientelistic relationship with the regime based on bargaining and less subordination.”⁶⁷²

Along with their growing wealth, was their growing influence on society as well as politics. In exchange for their access and ballooning wealth, they used their public positions to drum up public support for the reforms. Private media became one major means by which some of them sought to capitalize and extend this influence. Mass media ownership, which had previously been seen as riddled with both security and commercial risks, opened up to this class just as their relative power across the board in politics, society and the economy were growing at a quick rate.

Major expansions in both print and broadcast mass media platforms occurred around this period. These platforms allowed businessmen to enhance their political profile and provide propaganda for the policies that they support, as a cohort. Many station owners did not necessarily run the outlets or decide on content by direct fiat on a daily basis. Rather as this study will show in later sections, some of the owners of the larger stations found other ways to reap personal or political benefits from the outlets. One television executive who requested

⁶⁷⁰ Roll (2013)

⁶⁷¹ Fahmy (2012) p.364

⁶⁷² El-Tarouty (2014) p. 1716

anonymity to protect his job said, “Before the [January 2011, uprising] I can honestly say that throughout the four television stations I worked in, I only saw one television station owner directly interfere in editorial content, it was during my time in OnTV. That had to do with the owner’s objection to the positive reporting on a factory worker’s strike in 2009.”⁶⁷³ The owner of OnTV, Naguib Sawiris himself acknowledged that one of the reasons he sought to enter the mass media market (which he did through both television and print) was to help lead the drive towards more “liberalism and democracy.”⁶⁷⁴

GAFI-which controlled satellite broadcasting licenses and much of its regulation- had a mandate to improve the investment climate in Egypt, suggesting that it was partial to licensing owners of private stations who share its agenda and would aim to enhance it. This agenda was also an integral part of the NDP’s new platform.

The 2011 uprising and its aftermath would show that the power of Gamal Mubarak’s business cohort may not have been as deep-seated as they would have thought. State decisions in the form of policies, laws and regulations remained primarily guided by the state incumbents’ priorities of retaining power. Given the rampant corruption within which state-business relations developed in post-liberal Egypt, there is a wide consensus that Egyptian businesses had never gained significant-enough capacity to permanently shape public policies.⁶⁷⁵ They were often thwarted by members of Mubarak’s old guard, who felt threatened that changes could affect their overall position in the power paradigm.

Nonetheless, for a relatively short period it appeared the economic course set by the new guard could have benefited the business elite and restrict the role of the state within the economy, undermining the interests of the old guard in the process. Some of their most important sources of power had been from within the state’s official entities, including the inflated public sector and bureaucracy. Leading members of the old guard resisted the rising influence of the “political businessmen” who intensively supported Gamal Mubarak’s political career.⁶⁷⁶ Skepticism from this cohort, was not confined to the politicians, but to the military establishment as well. A Wikileaks document from 2007 confirmed rumors that the

⁶⁷³ Interview Yasser Abdo (2016). At the time, the interviewee was still working for OnTV, and they requested anonymity.

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

⁶⁷⁵ Adly (2009)

⁶⁷⁶ Roll (2010)

Minister of Defense at the time, Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi had “had it 'up to here' with Gamal and his cronies, and the tremendous corruption they [were] facilitating.”⁶⁷⁷

Tension between these two groups would manifest in their attitudes towards media ownership and methods of control of media content. These tensions became apparent in one area of broadcasting specifically, the flagship daily talk-shows that came to define private mass media in Egypt. They were one of the few areas of content generated, where elements of politics and commerce coalesced. Media owners retained financial control of these shows while advertisers wielded a fair deal of influence as well. Looming in the background of these programs were both the ERTU ostensibly as the content and industry regulator, as well as the security establishments monitoring the “red-lines” of content. During this time period the red-lines were reduced to the President, the Military and matters of “National Security,”⁶⁷⁸ after previously being much more expansive and protective of most public political officials and state positions. Within these parameters and with the opening of media spaces online along with the landmark presidential and parliamentary elections of 2005, talk-shows became more politicized, spearheading a similar direction in other areas of the private mass media. The collective trajectory of this media trend would ultimately play a role in the lead-up to the 2011 uprising.

7) Dream/Orbit & the political economy of “the talk-show”

Arab satellite television was often viewed as having potentially transformative effects on democracy. It is more likely that the inverse is true, political changes played a part in media developments.⁶⁷⁹ In the absence of vibrant political parties in countries like Egypt, the pressures of globalization and the penetrative effects of technological innovative in media helped prompt a heightened appetite for information in ways that transcended the norm. Blogs, which pre-dated pro-democracy/pro-labor/anti-corruption street demonstrations, had become prominent sources of information, especially on opposition activity, free speech suppression, and different cases of injustice. The launch of Youtube in 2005 made it a lot easier to share media.⁶⁸⁰ The politicization of mass media spaces had greatly expanded with the open-access nature of online platforms and new media in general. It was only a matter of

⁶⁷⁷ Wikileaks, NSC FOR WATERS, “PROMINENT INDEPENDENT MP ON PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION,” Canonical ID: 07CAIRO974_a, dated April 4, 2007

⁶⁷⁸ Interview with Ragab (2016)

⁶⁷⁹ Hafez (2005)

⁶⁸⁰ Sakr (2013)

time before traditional media such as television and newspapers would follow suit.

The culture of media consumption and production had already been changing, partially due to the expanding access to Arab satellite television and Egyptian private broadcasting. Content in these media reflected the new ownership structures and professional cultures surrounding them, while also conforming to a traditional view that private media “reinforces the trend of perpetuating audiences’ cultural preferences (and biases) in order to receive large transmission ratings and advertising.”⁶⁸¹ Talk-shows discussing sensitive social and political topics emerged, in-part due to the growing public appetite for it at the time.⁶⁸²

The rise of these shows and their massive impact and transformations reflected the political and economic climate of Egypt and the changes the country was going through. They provided a relatively new format of content that engaged more with the viewer, while also being a direct reaction to both public demand and social circumstances, at least initially.

As mentioned above, talk-shows played an important part in the genesis of private media. It became clear that, the new outlets saw these shows to be their main chance at winning an audience that could help these stations (and the sector itself) succeed. Islam Maher, who has been an executive producer of multiple prime-time talk shows since 2007 until the time of this study, said that in time she came to understand that these programs “represented the station.”⁶⁸³

From the earliest days of broadcasting, Egyptians had been exposed to the phenomenon of the “talking head” media figure with nearly special access to the public’s living rooms in Ahmed Said’s radio broadcasts on *Sawt AlArab*. When news talk shows were gaining popularity in the early pan-Arab stations, others such as Orbit followed suit. The only difference would be that unlike Ahmed Said, the new talk show hosts would not initially be porte-paroles for the president. Instead they would need to navigate the tricky path of finding their own voice, while avoiding cancellation or censorship.

For Orbit, the originator of the Egyptian talk-show through *AlQahira AlYoum*, the general idea was to create a social magazine with compelling reporting and commentary. These programs tended to start with a highly opinionated, extended and prepared opening statement

⁶⁸¹ Ibid

⁶⁸² Interview with Khafaga (2015)

⁶⁸³ Interview with Maher (2019)

by the presenter on the important topic of the day, followed by segments on other topics, which would often include a journalistic report. An inordinate amount of editorial leeway was given to the presenters of the programs who were considered to be the main draws of the show, along with their choice of guests. The format is not a novel one, especially when compared to international news networks' programming. For Egypt, it suddenly created a potent, opinion-forming space that broadcast to the public content that did not originate from the state. Almost unknowingly, stations found their loophole around the de-facto embargo on news programming.

Orbit's initial intention was to employ a charismatic host who could attract audiences by discussing potent social and cultural issues.⁶⁸⁴ Journalists and reporters prepared content, while the executive producer would decide on the overall format of the show. Orbit purposefully did not structure a proper "newsroom," as they hadn't envisioned covering current-affairs. After years on-air, *AlQahira AlYoum* transformed into a political show, "almost by accident". When its reporters on the field decided to cover the 2004 Kefaya Movement⁶⁸⁵ and the 2005 presidential elections, the topics happened to pass through editorial approval, without much scrutiny and was even seen as a possible oversight by management.⁶⁸⁶ Nonetheless, this coverage proved so popular that *AlQahira AlYoum* continued to push forward with political topics, despite it not being a part of the program's initial mission statement. The program's popularity prompted nearly all of the later outlets to copy it. These kinds of shows subsequently became the major feature of private Egyptian television stations. *AlQahira AlYoum* evaded local censures due to it being unavailable in Egypt on the sanctioned cable provider CNE, since all other decoders were not allowed on the market at the time.⁶⁸⁷ It was however available to those willing to pay relatively exorbitant amounts, reaching \$10,000 for the decoder and the nearly 70 channels included (mostly English language entertainment).⁶⁸⁸ Ali Beleil said that even though he was keenly aware that the vast majority of Egyptians did not have access to Orbit, it became a household name among the rich and powerful in Egypt. "We used to find out that some very influential people in Egypt were following keenly, and would even be influenced by the program."⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁴ Interview with Ali Beleil (2019)

⁶⁸⁵ Kefaya was a grassroots opposition movement that was particularly opposed to the growing political role of Gamal Mubarak. It is seen as a direct precursor to the movements in 2011 that ousted the Hosni Mubarak.

⁶⁸⁶ Interview with Ali Beleil (2019)

⁶⁸⁷ Schleiffer (2004)

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid

⁶⁸⁹ Interview with Ali Beleil (2019)

Professionally, the program according to Beleil, was not run on any real journalistic principle. The almost haphazard growth of Orbit and these channels in general were met with derision by many stalwarts of the sector prior to privatization. Hassan Hamed, for example saw that “private media in general relied on experience of those trained in the public sector...their innovations were merely meant to serve commercial bubbles in the sector...they never contributed to any new institutions in media.”⁶⁹⁰ The lesson many in the private sector learned was that the demand for new content and a departure from the government’s prescribed version of current affairs was no longer desirable. Orbit attempted to accommodate this clear thirst for content by creating new professional modes of operation (independent from the Maspero legacy) to help deliver it. Islam Maher, who started out as a reporter with *AlQahera AYoum*, believed her time with Orbit helped institutionalize new professional standards, especially pertaining to the production of current affairs talk shows. She would see this model carried on and duplicated by herself and others in all of the private outlets that would develop.⁶⁹¹

One of the major elements of this model was the actual presenter. Orbit’s model of attracting subscriptions played into its priority of maintaining viewership vis-à-vis compelling presentation. Presenters were the main draw and they were given the reigns on air. “The presenters ran the shows, there was never a set structure for how they would present. They didn’t have scripts, so they just became these sounding boards based on their ability to riff on topics.”⁶⁹² A presenter like Amr Adib who was a gifted talker, would then riff on the topic and it would suddenly become an influential segment, with a very loose time limit.

AlQahira AYoum’s model was not only replicated, but deemed essential for any emerging private broadcaster. The difference would be that Egyptian programming would not operate with the same freedom from restrictions. When Dream and *ElMehwar* stations first launched in 2001 and 2002 respectively, one of the main considerations for them was that they were not allowed to air newscasts that might compete with those of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU).⁶⁹³ This would be especially true for Dream 2, which opened a few months after Dream 1, and was planned to have the majority of the compelling political programming.

⁶⁹⁰ Interview with Hassan Hamed (2016)

⁶⁹¹ Interview with Islam Maher (2019)

⁶⁹² Interview with Ali Beleil (2019)

⁶⁹³ Sakr (2007) p. 30

The position of the presenters became one that was particularly politically sensitive. Dream TV executives would learn this very early on. Bahgat had initially hired a core team of individuals that represented his initial ambitions. The station was to be led by Hala Sarhan who started out with the ERTU, but was better known as a presenter with the Arab Radio and Television (ART) in the 1990s, mostly based out of Rome. There were a host of presenters fronting shows on culture and society, but it was the politically-oriented programs that drew the most attention. Ibrahim Eissa, the founder of the critical, *AlDostor* newspaper was to present a weekly political (and often sarcastic) show *Aala Alqahwa* (At the Coffee Shop). Hamdy Kandil, also an ART and ERTU alumnus, was given a prime-time weekly program *Ra'is ALTahrir* (Editor-in-chief), a nod to his prolific career as a journalist. The show had been initially planned to be an ERTU program, but had been quickly cancelled due to his criticism of US war in Afghanistan.⁶⁹⁴ Along with recurring appearances by Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, this roster was meant to attract enough viewers to make the station commercially viable.⁶⁹⁵ By 2004 all three lost their jobs.

Eissa believed that Bahgat was genuine in attempting to start a liberal television station, but that he was a “victim of his dream”.⁶⁹⁶ While his program was on-air, Eissa delivered criticisms of the government often through indirect (although not subtle) sarcasm. According to him, when Bahgat’s financial issues with the state began, they used Dream TV as leverage. “When the prime minister himself insists on canceling my program in order to support Ahmed Bahgat in his financial troubles, this is really a question mark,” Eissa had said.⁶⁹⁷

Sarhan, was dismissed in 2003. She claimed it was down to two things. First of all, she thought the regime was upset that she pushed to air numerous appearances of Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, even after knowing that he would be critical of the government. In September 2003, Ahmed Bahgat reportedly received a call from “the authorities” to cancel a scheduled appearance with Heikal marking his retirement from his work with *AlAhram* newspaper.⁶⁹⁸ This came after the station was reprimanded for airing a speech by Heikal in October 2002 at a symposium held in the American University in Cairo, where he was especially critical of the state on a variety of issues revolving around foreign policy. Along with the Heikal incidents, Sarhan had said in an interview that the state pressured Bahgat into

⁶⁹⁴ Sakr (2013)

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid

⁶⁹⁶ Eissa in Osman (2004)

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid

⁶⁹⁸ Osman (2004)

firing her because of the religiously taboo subjects she would deal with on her own program.⁶⁹⁹ Kandil, for his part was always problematic from the point of view of the government. In his memoirs he recalls how Safwat El-Sherif rebuked him for how he referred to Hosni Mubarak on his program:

Once, Safwat El-Sherif brought to my attention that I am the only one on television who refers to Mubarak as “The President” (*Al-Rais*), rather than, “His Excellency the President” (*Siyadat Al-Rais*).⁷⁰⁰

Bahgat’s project seemed to be dead-in-the-water in 2004. His dream of a liberal, independent station was clearly not to be. It had been argued that this should have been evident from the initial insistence that the ERTU becomes a partner in his station, and that, according to its station manager, Dream was “dependent” on the state for all of its daily operations and “always seeking its approval”.⁷⁰¹ Furthermore, since 2002 Bahgat was warned by “authorities” that “strict measures will be taken” if the channel “again tackles serious subjects in a sensational manner”.⁷⁰² Bahgat denied that the liberties he had taken within Dream TV had any bearing on his own personal business dealings with the state, especially the loans he had reportedly taken from public banks, which he was accused of taking without offering adequate collateral.⁷⁰³ The timing of a government investigation into his loans were too conspicuous, and many came to the conclusion that the investigation was a direct result of the political content on Dream:

Eissa [suggested] that Bahgat had violated the patron-client relationship with the regime by allowing criticism of the government to be expressed on his TV channel, leading the regime to enforce this patron-client relationship by using the banks to threaten Bahgat’s business. For instance, Bahgat denied that he had defaulted on any loans, saying in 2002 that his total assets (LE1.7 billion) were more than the total sum he had borrowed from the banks over a number of years (LE1.6 billion). Yet, in May 2004, the government prevented Bahgat from travelling abroad until he settled the billions of pounds he owed to the National Bank of Egypt and the New Housing Communities Authority.⁷⁰⁴

Bahgat’s decision to support Hosni Mubarak in the 2005 presidential elections, also coincided with the revival of Dream TV. A report by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights found that in the months leading into the election, Dream TV dedicated 69% of its coverage to Mubarak

⁶⁹⁹ Osman (2004)

⁷⁰⁰ Kandil (2014) p. 51

⁷⁰¹ Sarhan interview in Osman (2004)

⁷⁰² Shehab (2002)

⁷⁰³ Ibid

⁷⁰⁴ ElTarouty (2014) p.106

specifically, compared to 41% for *ElMehwar* and less than 30% for the public Channels 2 and 3.⁷⁰⁵

Dream's resurgence would come, not only as a result of the regained status vis-à-vis the President, but also as a benefactor of the NDP's attempts to appear more liberalized and modern. Again this would be marked by a new flagship program *El'Ashera Masa'an* (10pm). The presenter this time was Mona ElShazly, a choice that didn't upset the authorities. El-Shazly's background was more as a talented and charismatic interviewer of artists and cultural figures. "At this time, the majority of chosen TV hosts who weren't explicitly talking on behalf of the regime or ruling party, were seen as needing to be politically risk-free choices, due to their backgrounds in other areas,"⁷⁰⁶ said Mohamed Nasser one of the producers who worked on the show.

When the opportunity to revive Dream's fortunes presented itself to Bahgat, Dream again turned to the talk-show. Amr Khafaga was at the helm of *10pm* and behind the decision to bring in Mona ElShazly. This time, the program would still attempt to connect to the viewers' everyday concerns and criticisms of public life, but in a way that was to be more social than political.⁷⁰⁷ As a fan of *AlQahera AlYom*, he decided to replicate their model, and even recruited from its staff to do so. "This way of working was supposed to be a way to appear to give the audience what they want, without the controversial hosts and without stinging, direct criticism of the government."⁷⁰⁸ El-Shazly was never meant to be as politically influential as she would become, especially by the time of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, when she was the first to interview Wael Ghoneim, a computer programmer and one of the chief architects of the online campaign and protests leading to the Uprising.⁷⁰⁹

Like both Khafaga and Sarhan, ElShazly was one of many private media figures with prior experience in Pan-Arab satellite broadcasting –in the case of these three with ART. A good portion of the journalists brought to work on the programs were also initially sourced from Pan-Arab television. Khafaga, recruited Islam Maher from Orbit, along with many others. Maher, who would become the show's executive producer for three years had sought to recruit her group of journalists fresh from university. "The idea was to start with a journalistic perspective that was new and with a group of young people willing to learn, rather than being

⁷⁰⁵ CIHRS (2005)

⁷⁰⁶ Interview with Mohamed Nasser (2015)

⁷⁰⁷ Interview with Islam Maher (2019)

⁷⁰⁸ Interview with Mohamed Nasser (2015)

⁷⁰⁹ Interview with Amr Khafaga (2015)

saddled with old habits from public institutions. Also, many of the salaries offered were not quite low and would only suit college students.”⁷¹⁰

The absence of experienced journalists in the field of private television opened the door for print journalist (from both private and public institutions) who were also recruited. Many agreed in order to supplement their income in television, contributing to the overlap between the media. Khafaga himself represented this crossover, having worked in print with *Roz AlYousef* magazine as a journalist. He would later go on to help establish the private daily newspaper *AlShorouk* in 2009.

Khafaga, along with his colleagues and counterparts were well aware of the precarious nature of reporting the news on their networks since the government was not licensing news channels at the time. In addition, the opaque legal framework regulating broadcasted content had been used as a tool for intimidation when influential private TV stations dared to venture beyond the agreed-upon topics they were allowed to cover. Licenses of private broadcasters like Dream and *ElMehwar* allowed them to provide a general service, with no specific authorization to broadcast news. In order to bypass these restrictions given the popular nature of news and news-related discussions, Dream had resorted to providing news in their popular talk show slots rather than risking launching news programs.

On the other hand, this loophole put their license in danger of being revoked or their programs halted due to possible infringement of their registration as a non-news entity. The state’s direct control of the satellite signals upon which these private ventures were reliant, gave the government a sense of ultimate control and reassured them of the private stations’ acquiescence as they veered more towards journalism and news.

Attempts to transform these talk shows into fully-fledged journalistic enterprises occurred once it became clear that this form of programming would be allowed and that these programs would be prominently present on private television stations. Dream TV would, as a result, come to rely on its talk shows as the main draw. “At some point after around 2007 and 2008, whenever the managers would be discussing strategy to bring in income from advertisements or increasing viewership, they would essentially be talking about, *10pm* ... and it was the same with the flagship talk shows of other stations,” said Maher.⁷¹¹

⁷¹⁰ Interview with Islam Maher (2019)

⁷¹¹ Ibid

During the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, outlets such as *AlQahira AlYoum* and Dream TV sent out reporters to cover the voting, and were surprised at the lack of resistance to their coverage. Audience reaction to this coverage was massive and these newsrooms continued to provide the popular content. In *10pm*'s newsroom, journalists seemed as surprised as the audience at the content they were airing. The team at Dream were convinced they were showing Egyptians something they had never seen before, even though their intention was simply to "go out and cover some stories on the street."⁷¹²

After the elections, which was announced to be heavily in favor of the NDP, Mona ElShazly was allowed to host Noha ElZeiny, an elections judge who was exposing ballot rigging. She, along with the show staff, knew they would be annoying the regime in so doing.⁷¹³ Even though El-Zeiny's episode aired, it did not sit well with the government. And as a result they were forced to suddenly cancel a full episode that was prepared to expose voting irregularities in the 2007 Shura Council elections, according to a journalist who was working with the show, but preferred anonymity.⁷¹⁴ The Shura Council was also growing in importance, and by censoring the Shura Council voting episode in 2007, but allowing the 2005 episode, the regime showed-through their media censures- plans for shifts in the legislative branch to help maintain the regime's grip, even if the People's Assembly became more diverse and open for participation.

The Shura Council had historically been the lesser of the two chambers according to the 1971 constitution. Yet it became a particularly important haven for the old-guard of the NDP under Safwat El-Sherif, who was speaker of this assembly between 2004 and 2011. The House of Representatives in 2005 was open to members of staunch opposition groups who in the past wouldn't have been allowed to contest these seats. The Muslim Brotherhood for example, fielded candidates (as independents) in 2005, winning 88 out of the 450 seats. This would not be the case for Shura Council, where 84 out of the 88 seats up for election were occupied by NDP candidates, and another 44 seats were directly appointed by the President. The NDP's choice to field ElSherif for speaker of the council indicated the growing influence of the Shura, especially since ElSherif was also Secretary-General of the NDP, and head of the Supreme Press Council. He was the most influential speaker in the history of this chamber. During his time at its helm, the Shura Council came to symbolize the regime's intent to

⁷¹² Ibid

⁷¹³ Sakr (2013)

⁷¹⁴ Interview with Ahmed Hamdy (2017)

maintain absolute control of local politics. ElSherif's presence there implied to journalists that this would be another "red line" that they couldn't cross. Mohamed Helmy, who was a journalist with Dream and a producer with several other local stations during this period explained the "red lines" concept at the time:

We were figuring out where the limits of this new 'freedom' in media were. Some things were always clearly off limits, such as the military and the president's family. The looming presence of Safwat El-Sherif in positions of power always gave off the impression that the government never truly liberalized.⁷¹⁵

8) Between commercial opportunity and legitimizing the private sector

The early days of private broadcasting were met with skepticism. Those who had sought to run the stations as independent, profit-motivated ventures, found the initial costs of running a media outlet in an underdeveloped advertising market to be challenging. Despite theoretically being able to access viewers across the Arab world, the nature of the content (especially the social talk shows) would limit viewership more or less to Egypt and Egyptians in general. Advertising revenue would be further restricted by the fragmented nature of consumer markets in the Middle East at the time. In a 2001 interview, Nader Gohar expressed doubts as to whether he and his brother (Mohamed) would pursue ownership or a major investment in private satellite stations due to the fact that it did not reach the much larger audiences of terrestrial TV:

"We're counting upon advertisement-based revenue," says Nader Gohar. But even he is quick to concede that the costs of operating a TV station for one year boils down to \$24 million. To try and cover that cost from advertisements alone isn't feasible. Gohar is hoping that the government will relent and allow private terrestrial transmission, after it "gets used to and comfortable with" private satellite transmission. "Will Egypt TV permit someone else to share the market with them?" Gohar asks. "That's what we're waiting to find out."⁷¹⁶

The motives for engaging in the private broadcasting space shifted, but tended to revolve around gaining political favor in one way or another. In the early days of the EMPC, businesses would curry favor with the state by investing into the project, as they would invest in any major government endeavor that needed private sector financing and general involvement to be successful. Those who invested would also begin to see ways they could use their ownership and influence over media outlets as a political tool they could deploy in its own right. Ahmed Bahgat, for example had seen his ownership of Dream TV as an

⁷¹⁵ Helmy (2016)

⁷¹⁶ Kandil (2001)

effective way to spend the advertising budget of his much larger holding company to promote his core business. It was to be a business opportunity for him, as he was able to create his own advertising vessel in a tax free environment. “Bahgat's rationale in creating Dream TV, according to the channel's leading presenter Hala Sarhan, was to divert the bulk of his annual spending on advertising to his own television channel.”⁷¹⁷

In time, these stations continued to grow until they became part and parcel of the “public sphere,” which had been monopolized by the public terrestrial broadcasting for over four decades.⁷¹⁸

While the state still maintained ultimate control, the growing audiences after the 2005 elections helped television outlets begin to envision the makings of a more self-sustained market. Egyptian private television managers had begun to entertain the concept of “commercial success.”⁷¹⁹

This optimistic outlook contributed to ballooning budgets for the television stations, especially when it came to salaries of the talk-show hosts. Coming across financial details of television stations is extremely rare. Yet most professionals in the field agree that despite there being growing revenue from advertisers, private television channels had never reached the point of becoming profitable or even self-sustaining (in the long run) in their own right. “Media experts claim that all private satellite channels are spending incredible amounts of money to get the highest percentage of audiences’ shares yet the advertisements expenditure never covers the costs.”⁷²⁰

One of the main prizes for the station owners was in its promotion of liberalization, especially by making the private sector seem more legitimate in the eyes of the public, a message that gelled well with the political leaderships plan at the time. Hassan Rateb, owner of *EIMehwar*, claimed that his vested interest in the success of the NDP’s direction and neoliberal policies were the actual drivers behind the establishment of his station. In a 2002 interview Rateb explicitly expressed this as being the mission of his venture:

... the socialist way of thinking that was the reason for the collapse of the former Soviet Union is still very evident in this region. Many of our journalists, critics, and intellectuals are a product of the socialist

⁷¹⁷ Sakr (2002)

⁷¹⁸ Hamada (2008)

⁷¹⁹ Interview with Khafaga (2015)

⁷²⁰ Allam (2018)

legacy. One of the important missions of this station is to legitimize the private sector in Egypt. This is not to say that the private sector doesn't have its problems...businessmen who are not paying their loans and running away from the country are not the full picture. The private sector needs a voice, their achievements and successes need to be represented, and *ElMehwar* is a vehicle for a genuine and important group in our society.⁷²¹

Similarly, Bahgat saw Dream TV as a symbol of both economic and political liberalization. This was the most direct political message and editorial compass to come from early private broadcasters. Hala Sarhan relayed Bahgat's thoughts that "privatization equals freedom of opportunity. Privatization also means freedom of expression."⁷²² Dream TV would gain audience credibility over the public stations largely due to its different approach.

9) **Conclusion**

The regime was attempting to appear to be implementing economic and political liberalization, while still retaining a firm grip on Egypt's reins. Similarly, the media were being decentralized and shifting to the private sector, but the existent security-minded structure of power retained sufficient built-in restrictions around the sector. Meanwhile, the transforming NDP under Hosni Mubarak's son and heir-apparent, Gamal had been attempting to expand and entrench neoliberal policies, built on a more expansive network of connected businessmen, who would be more concerned with the NDP project, than with protecting "old-state" values and jurisdictions. The relationship between the Gamal's "new" cohort and the established militarily oriented power structure was not always adversarial, but their goals, at times seemed to diverge. Dream TV and *ElMehwar* both launched as privately owned "liberal" outlets and while they were their own commercial entities, seemed to be ultimately in service of the neoliberalization drive. While they pioneered new kinds of programming and brought some current affairs topics to Egyptian airwaves that would have been considered taboo under public TV, the state maintained a noticeable presence in both. State (or state-affiliated) entities were part of the ownership teams in both stations. More importantly, all private television stations aired in the state-built Media Production City and had to transmit using government-controlled satellite. In the coming years the private sector would continue to expand, leading to the 2011 Uprising and its aftermath. The state would henceforth be more reactive to changes in the sector, often leading to inconsistent policies and inconsistent growth trends in the sector.

⁷²¹ Hassan Rateb interview with Hamdy (2002)

⁷²² Hala Sarhan interview with Hamdy (2002)

Chapter 5- The “25 January Revolution” and its Aftermath

1) Broadcast and print media in the run-up to 2011

The changes brought about by the political transformation in 2005 picked up speed in the following years. The NDP persevered in pushing forth neoliberal economic policies while further entrenching its control over local politics. Shifting political and economic sands led the country directly to the uprising that started on the 25th of January 2011. Private media’s role was expanding and their influence on society was becoming more potent due to a variety of factors both directly and indirectly affecting the regulatory, structural, commercial and editorial climate in the sector.

Further transformation and expansion of the private sector

Changes on the economic front were being championed by those at the center of power who also benefitted from a security apparatus and legal system skewed in their favor.⁷²³ Gamal Mubarak had reached the height of his power during this period as the public face of the neoliberal drive and the new political/business elite. The privatization program that had originated in 1991 was not only reinvigorated, but rapidly expanding.

Between 2004 and 2006, seventy-seven companies were sold for around LE20 billion, which is more than the entire early privatization phases combined. The total value of privatized assets up until that point was LE38 billion.⁷²⁴ This cumulative figure raised eyebrows as being too low for the sale of 289 public companies responsible for a sizeable wage-bill. One explanation for this was that a 2000 amendment to Law 203/1991 allowed for sales to be made at prices lower than the valuations made by consultants and the Central Accounting Agency.⁷²⁵

Benefits of the economic climate at the time for the increasingly influential class of business owners contributed towards a palpable power shift. This cohort of businessmen was becoming “more demanding; their business expansion required the state to [further]

⁷²³ Kandil (2012) pp 207-218

⁷²⁴ Khair el-Din & Refaat (2006)

⁷²⁵ Abdel-Shahid (2002)

deregulate the economy, privatize public enterprises, reduce subsidies for the poor and taxes for the rich, and allow them cheap access to public resources.”⁷²⁶

Access to the ownership of broadcasting and mass daily printing was one of the ways in which connected businessmen were able to gain access to public resources and benefit from deregulation in ways that were unheard of prior to 2001.⁷²⁷ This shift and the relative success of Dream TV and *ElMehwar* “initiated a trend in Egypt where businessmen have shown a vested interest in the power of media. This also includes *AlHayat* Channel, owned by [ElSayed] Badawi⁷²⁸, and Sawiris’ OnTV.”⁷²⁹ These channels were established in 2008 and 2007 respectively by businessmen who were not members of the NDP. They both harbored political ambitions, but were allowed to establish television stations due to their buy-in and massive support of liberalization process.⁷³⁰ By contrast, the owners of Dream TV and *ElMehwar* were either uninterested in politics, or were embedded with the ruling political class.

Egyptian drama and cultural production had already been well-established, and was given space to grow in the private sphere, especially with the infrastructure afforded by the Media Production City. Political and news production, on the other hand remained an identifiable gap in the market. Many of the media professionals and journalists recruited to establish these stations attempted to exploit this gap.

Hafez ElMirazi was one of those professionals. After spending seven years in Washington D.C. as a Bureau chief and presenter for *AlJazeera*, and having worked with the BBC before that, ElMirazi returned to Egypt in 2007 to join *AlHayat* hoping to help establish the outlet “as a serious news and politics station.”⁷³¹ While well aware of the station owner’s political ambitions, he thought that the brief allowances given to connected businessmen may create a large enough overture in the Egyptian media scene to allow for such a model to be realized in a commercially sustainable and expansive manner. ElMirazi had returned to Egypt from America with high hopes that would quickly be quashed.

⁷²⁶ Kandil (2012) pg. 213

⁷²⁷ El-Tarouty (2014) pg 25

⁷²⁸ ElSayed -Badawi is a well-known businessman, who was Head of El Wafd Party (2010-2018). El Wafd is considered the oldest functioning opposition party in Egypt: it was established in 1919 as a liberal nationalist party to oppose British Occupation. On Badawi’s watch, it did garner enough popular support to provide a credible basis for opposition to the NDP.

⁷²⁹ Rizk (2016) in Noam ed. (2016) pg 905

⁷³⁰ Interview with Hafez ElMerazi (2016)

⁷³¹ Ibid

“We talked about creating a major news station, [network owner] Badawi was receptive to the idea at first. But it seems like at some point he was being pressured in some way by the government to avoid that route. They ended up turning the station into a variety entertainment channel.”⁷³²

The desire to control what was deemed politically sensitive material continued despite the demonstrable push towards liberalization, especially under the continuously growing leadership of Gamal Mubarak. Webb noted that the concept of this control remained in force from Nasser until the end of the Mubarak years, albeit changing form:

The main purpose of the media systems, from the perspective of the regime, evolved from mobilization of the population under Nasser to demobilization under Mubarak. The population could expect to be entertained, to an extent and to learn what the official line on events was... interviewees understood the Mubarak regime as seeing the media as a tool of pacification, to keep the population under control.⁷³³

Once *AlHayat*'s plans to become a news channel failed to materialize and their programming focus shifted, they identified the need to mimic Dream's success by engaging politically and socially. Most stations and advertisers at the time did not ignore the fact that the sector's short relationship with the social/political talk-shows was one of the best ways to generate a dedicated fan base. It created “stars” for the channels that audiences found easy to sympathize with. By extension this helped establish a stronger relationship between the audience and outlets' brands.⁷³⁴

Growth amid an expanding public sphere and increasing global pressure

The continued growth of political talk-shows against the backdrop of a media system that was structurally (and implicitly) linked to the regime with regard to licensing was an area where commercial goals seemed to relatively outgrow political considerations, leading to rapid developments. Advertising agencies that controlled the revenue of television stations were making direct demands on which presenters would be on air, based on popularity as a main criteria.⁷³⁵ Television stations at that time were not seeking explicit or tacit approval from the state on who could appear on screen.

Talk shows with a critical edge and popular presenters became a new political currency in their own right. Suddenly, a media system that had very rarely been allowed to be openly

⁷³² Ibid

⁷³³ Webb (2012) pg. 25

⁷³⁴ Interview with Amr Khafaga (2015)

⁷³⁵ Interview with Mohamed Nasser (2015)

critical of the central government, could ask questions on live television with significantly reduced fear of major retribution. Anchors probed government officials and viewers called-in, using their real names, to enquire, protest, and demand. Regulatory bodies within the regime often found themselves confronted with the reality that a certain type of regime criticism was occurring, as long as the aforementioned red lines were respected. The general atmosphere of the liberalization rhetoric pushed forth plans that would, almost unavoidably, allow for more leeway in media output and the structure of the sector.⁷³⁶

For a generation of journalists who entered the fray of news media then, the overriding sense was that they were able to perform their duties at a reasonable distance from much of the political concerns at the top levels of power. At the height of its operations, the Dream TV newsroom operated in the way in which many of the young reporters were taught newsrooms should be operated. Yasmin Marwan was a broadcast journalist recruited directly out of university to work with TV presenter, Mona ElShazly on the nightly political talk show *El'Ashera Masa'an*. Having been recruited along with a group of her classmates at Cairo University's Faculty of Mass Communication in 2007, her starting salary was around 600 Egyptian Pounds/month (roughly \$100 at the time). Despite the meager income, she relayed a sense of purpose not commonly associated with Egyptian journalism in previous periods:

It was a very encouraging point in time to be in the field. For many of us, the first few years at our job made us feel almost free as journalists. Of course there were limits, but we mostly only had to report to our seniors. We were reporting on everything, including elections. We were aware that maybe at the end we could still be at the mercy of the government. But still, because we were in a team that had the ambition-and it seemed the mandate as well- to go do our work, there was a sense of media professionalism among the journalists.⁷³⁷

Yasmin and others recruited at the same time acknowledged that this “liberalized” journalistic attitude was not common for previous graduates of their faculty. Their immediate supervisor, Islam Maher believed that through the political talk show, they were creating a new journalistic culture that would endure.⁷³⁸ This atmosphere would be reflected in the Freedom House annual Freedom of Press report. Until 2007, the organization had deemed the press in Egypt to be, “Not Free.” Starting in 2008, Egyptian press (broadcast and print) were labeled “Partially Free” (Figure 1). In its report that year, Freedom House attributed journalistic work to the change in designation:

⁷³⁶ Interview with Amr Khafaga (2015)

⁷³⁷ Interview with Yasmin Marwan (2016)

⁷³⁸ Interview with Islam Maher (2019)

Egypt's status improved from Not Free to Partly Free in recognition of the courage of Egyptian journalists to cross “red lines” that previously restricted their work and in recognition of the greater range of viewpoints represented in the Egyptian media and blogosphere. This progress occurred in spite of the government's ongoing—and in some cases increasing—harassment, repression, and imprisonment of journalists.⁷³⁹

The popularity of talk shows such as *El'Ashera Masa'an* especially was a sign post of a shifting culture in broadcast. Mona ElShazly was called “the people's conscience” in an article in *Youm7*, a private print and online news outlet in 2009. The glowing praise for the show was even more remarkable since *Youm7* was known to have been created as a de-facto private-media apparatus in the state's PR toolshed. Rumors had spread that the paper— which was established in 2008— was owned by Safwat ElSherif's son, Ashraf. While it was not possible to confirm his ownership, the long-time chief editor of the paper, Khaled Salah, admitted in a television interview that there was a direct link with ElSherif, citing business relations between the largest shareholder⁷⁴⁰ and Ashraf ElSherif.⁷⁴¹ Salah would claim in the same interview that they were cautious not to appear to be labeled an “opposition” paper out of a belief by the publication's owners that being biased wouldn't be commercially viable.

At the height of ElShazly's popularity, the *Youm7* article said that she gained the trust of Egyptians, “by exposing their problems and the government officials responsible for them, she has been speaking for Egyptians for years.”⁷⁴² While ElShazly avoided direct criticism of the President and the Military, her staff felt emboldened as journalists to stand toe-to-toe with other government entities.⁷⁴³ This was especially clear in 2008, when she interviewed President George Bush Jr. in the White House, causing upheaval at the Ministry of Information (MOI). Mohammed Nasser, who was a producer on the show at the time, recalled how incensed the MOI was that Dream TV did not seek its approval before going to meet the most powerful man in the world:

The Minister [of Information] was really angry. Behind the scenes he tried to shut down the interview. He thought that any contact with a foreign government like this was a matter of national security, and that it was his job to regulate it. But maybe it was the Ministry feeling like we were becoming too powerful. I think our ability to get this interview without any state aid,

⁷³⁹ Freedom House (2008)

⁷⁴⁰ Walid Moustafa was the largest shareholder and face of *Youm7*. His business interests vary, from media production to real estate.

⁷⁴¹ Salah, K. (2011). Interview with Amr Al-Laithi, *AlTahrir TV*, 25 August 2011.

⁷⁴² El-Tawil, B. (2009)

⁷⁴³ Interview with Mohamed Nasser (2015)

made us seem as a more important media outlet [to the West] than Egyptian state media.⁷⁴⁴

The 10-minute sit-down interview was covered broadly in Egyptian media. It was widely celebrated at Dream internally. *AlMasry AlYom* newspaper wrote that state media had indeed submitted a request with the White House for an interview at the same time, but that the U.S. purposefully opted for Dream, a private outlet. The paper also quoted a source from Washington saying that “the American administration wanted to give other TV stations [other than state-owned TV] the opportunity.”⁷⁴⁵ ElShazly, had added that Dream TV paid their way to Washington D.C. for the interview, dispelling the notion that they were being sponsored by an American entity for this trip.

ElShazly’s interview in D.C. highlighted both rising popularity and the relative power of her talk show. The interview was aired on 13 May 2008, days before Bush was to meet Mubarak in Egypt at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East (18-20 May 2008).⁷⁴⁶ This would be the second meeting between the two presidents in Egypt that year alone, marking a period of heightened relations. The U.S. had been particularly vocal in stressing political liberalization in Egypt. On his first visit (18 January 2008) Bush made the point clearly saying:

Progress toward greater political openness is being led by the Egyptians themselves, by pioneering journalists -- some of whom even may be here -- bloggers, or judges insisting on independence, or other strong civic and religious leaders who love their country and are determined to build a democratic future.⁷⁴⁷

The role of international diplomacy in encouraging a certain degree of tolerance to private media is pertinent, but does not solely account for the rapid rise in the popularity of these outlets and their expanding importance.

Ibrahim Eissa’s paper, *AlDostor*, for example was allowed to publish and distribute locally in 2005, after having been shut down in 1998. In an interview with the Inter-Press agency in 2008, Eissa said that international pressure was the main reason his paper was allowed to return, citing specifically former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s Middle East

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid

⁷⁴⁵ ElBardini, (2008)

⁷⁴⁶ Georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov. (2008)

⁷⁴⁷ Georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov. (2008). *President Bush Meets with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt*. [online] Available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080116-2.html> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2020].

democratization initiative, which came against the backdrop of the Iraq war and the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003:

These factors combined to force dictatorial Arab regimes to begin showing a degree of flexibility vis-à-vis the political opposition. As a result, we saw the opposition Al-Ghad party receive a license from the government and the (pro-democracy) Kefaya movement begin organizing street protests. And in 2005, the four-year-old judicial decree allowing AlDostor to re-launch was finally implemented. All of this came as a result of pressure exerted on the regime by Washington and other Western capitals and international human rights groups. However, after the U.S. administration was dismayed by the Muslim Brotherhood's surprise electoral performance in the 2005 parliamentary elections, much of this pressure for political reform evaporated.⁷⁴⁸

During this time, Eissa claims he had also been the first to oppose the issue of Gamal Mubarak "inheriting" power from his father, "which had represented a major "red line" before [he] first began raising the issue."⁷⁴⁹ Rather than penalizing the writer, the Egyptian government used the opportunity to attempt to promote a progressive image of the regime, with President Mubarak stating that unlike Syria, Egypt does not have presidential inheritance.⁷⁵⁰ Eissa had received a total of six jail sentences for his writings in private print media, they were mostly reduced to financial penalties.⁷⁵¹

Despite global pressure influencing the political climate, Freedom House notes that the improvements did not completely shield journalists and media outlets that were still theoretically subject to many of the same laws that limited the role of media. A few advances were made in amendments to the Press Law in 2006. These advances were tempered by the fact that laws still maintained the relatively harsh punitive measures. Fines and prison sentences could still be issued for insulting the President and his family, a foreign dignitary or a major religion. The fines were well beyond the ability of most journalists to endure, ranging from LE5,000 to LE20,000 (US\$900 to US\$3,600) for press infractions and up to five years' imprisonment for criticizing a foreign head of state or the president.⁷⁵² The ongoing 1981 Emergency Laws persisted as well. Eissa could not avoid imprisonment on one occasion as a result. He was brought before a State-Security court in 2007 for claiming that President

⁷⁴⁸ Ipsnews.net. (8 April 2008)

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid

⁷⁵¹ Ibid

⁷⁵² Ibid

Mubarak was ill, and was charged with publishing reports that could “harm public interest.”⁷⁵³

It is worthy to note that in this case, the legal reasoning behind the “public harm” charge was not tagged directly to any endangerment of “national security” as was usually the case. Rather, court documents associated the harm inflicted by the misinformation with the potential economic damage, including subverting ongoing plans to transform the economic system. The legal reading of the charge outlined the effects of Eissa’s writings on foreign investment, the government’s major policy initiative at the time. According to a BBC report, “state prosecutors said the false rumors published by Mr. Eissa about the 79-year-old’s health prompted investors to take \$350m (£172m) out of the Egyptian economy in less than a week.”⁷⁵⁴

Eissa’s cases clearly demonstrated the state’s continued intransigence regarding the President himself and the importance the state put on protecting the implementation of its neoliberalization program. As far as the media sector was concerned, the growing space to operate did allow the tide in the sector to shift towards a media system that was beginning to appear more tolerant to a degree of social and political divergence. Litigation of journalists and the number of fines issued were increasing, although actual prison sentences were declining in the run-up to the 2011 uprising.⁷⁵⁵

The establishment of independent newspaper *AlMasry AlYom* in 2004 provided the most prominent example of these shifts, and will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

⁷⁵³ BBC News (2007)

⁷⁵⁴ BBC NEWS (2008).

⁷⁵⁵ Mabrouk (2010) p.7

Figure 1: Freedom House: Freedom of the Press Reports, Egypt (2003-2017)

	Press Status	Press Freedom Score (0=Best; 100=Worst)	Legal Environment (0=Best; 30=Worst)	Political Environment (0=Best; 40=Worst)	Economic Environment (0=Best; 30=Worst)
2003	Not Free	79	28	27	24
2004	Not Free	76	26	28	22
2005	Not Free	68	24	24	20
2006	Not Free	61	22	21	18
2007	Not Free	62	22	22	18
2008	Partly Free	59	21	20	18
2009	Partly Free	60	21	21	18
2010	Partly Free	60	21	21	18
2011	Not Free	65	23	24	18
2012	Partly Free	57	20	22	15
2013	Not Free	62	22	24	16
2014	Not Free	68	22	30	16
2015	Not Free	73	24	33	16
2016	Not Free	77	25	35	17
2017	Not Free	77	26	34	17

Mass media evolution: progressive attempts and failures

One of the most discussed elements leading up to the 2011 uprising was the rapidly expanding access to the internet and social media. While the specific developments within this theme -and the digital space in general- fall beyond the scope of this research, it is important to understand how the emergence of new media played a role in the development of the established forms of print and private media. The effects of social media in popularizing certain moments of protest and controversial issues, including corruption, police brutality and inequality helped create trends and topics of conversation that the burgeoning private media either could not ignore editorially or would come to see as a means to attract an audience.

Publicly-owned media could not provide content compelling enough to engage a society that was already subject to the pluralizing effects of increased internet penetration. Between 2005 and 2011, internet penetration increased from around 12.27% to 32.96% while also becoming the third most frequently used form of media after mobile phones and television.⁷⁵⁶ By 2010,

⁷⁵⁶ Attalah & Rizk (2012) pp 2-4

television penetration was thought to have potentially reached as high as 90% (in terms of general access), while over 4 million newspapers were in circulation.⁷⁵⁷

Social media was helping drive the political and human rights discourse, especially. Popular blogs were raising awareness on specific issues dealing with corruption and police brutality.⁷⁵⁸ Large-scale labor protests outside of the major urban areas were becoming popularized by citizen journalists online.⁷⁵⁹

Editorially, many of the independent press followed suit, often leading with local stories involving corruption or human rights cases while their counterparts in publicly-owned media continued to lead with news from the Presidential Palace. A study published in 2010 highlighted the divergent coverage between these papers:

The front page of Egyptian newspapers in mid-September 2009 ran different stories, depending on whether the paper was independently or state-owned. The government-run AlAhram's online page had as its first story President Mubarak's comments on Jerusalem capturing the hearts and minds of all Muslims, and, as a consequence, the importance of a regional solution... The front page contained none of the articles that were prominently covered in its independent counterparts, like AlMasry AlYoun, Daily News Egypt, and AlDostour. While the front pages of those papers contained versions of some of the same subjects covered by AlAhram, a number of others were less flattering to the government, such as: Cairo's mounting garbage problem, which had deteriorated to the point where AlMasry AlYoun was running a campaign entitled "Serve Yourself—Forget the Government"; the rising prices of basic foodstuffs (just in time for the upcoming Eid); the sewage-contaminated drinking water of Shabramant in the Delta; and the problems of underage marriage.⁷⁶⁰

Print journalists specifically made multiple attempts to build on the growing "alternative" public voice amplified on social media. One of the more noteworthy endeavors was that of *ElBadil*, a left-leaning newspaper that was launched in July 2007 as a daily publication. *ElBadil* openly gave voice to labor movements and mass protests, which were becoming more frequent, and easier to organize due to social media. Notably, the paper highlighted the massive 6 April 2008 general strike protesting corruption and inequality, and on 7 April its main headline called it a "success" next to which was a story about the organization of a follow-up strike on the 4th of May.⁷⁶¹ Government publications, on the other hand, were both

⁷⁵⁷ Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015 (2012)

⁷⁵⁸ United States Department of State, 2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Egypt, 11 March 2010, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4b9e52fb82.html> [accessed 23 January 2020]

⁷⁵⁹ El-Mahdi (2011) p.396

⁷⁶⁰ Mabrook (2010) p.5

⁷⁶¹ ElBadil (7 April 2008)

downplaying the strike and echoing the state's warning against joining it.⁷⁶² The strike was a response by activists around the country to an initial call by workers in AlMahalla AlKubra, an industrial town and hotbed of labor activity. Solidarity with the movement on activists' blogs and on social media led to it being massively expanded in a highly diverse show of solidarity across sectors of society. Subsequently, the strike itself turned into a nationwide crackdown. Over 200 protesters were jailed and a surprising number of people participated in the movement by going on strike or joining the street protests.⁷⁶³ That day provided an indication of not only the societal and organizational shift provided by new media, but also the fact that the state's outlook on freedom of speech had not changed.⁷⁶⁴ *ElBadil*'s former editor said the newspaper wanted to differ from other media outlets by covering both labor and political movements, believing there was a need for that, "hence the paper's tagline *Sawt ElMostad'afeen*" (Voice of the Weakened)⁷⁶⁵ stood in stark contrast to publications owned by established businessmen. Many of the latter who owned papers actively intervened to ban reporting on labor movements, "most likely to support the economic direction of the country at the time."⁷⁶⁶ *ElBadil* couldn't generate enough revenue to stay afloat, however. It closed down in 2009 due to lack of funds, and reappeared two years later only as a website.

Most of the private newspaper owners and practitioners acknowledged that, even though they were allowed to run the stories they saw fit on a day-to-day basis, they would often receive telephone calls directly from individuals in powerful positions (or their proxies) to "discuss" certain stories⁷⁶⁷. "Some of them perceive this as a form of pressure, while others describe it as a negotiation and bridge-building process."⁷⁶⁸

Structurally, many of the traditional print news outlets in Egypt became concerned with appealing to an online audience, by creating internet platforms, developing the advertising space there and allowing for divergent newsrooms. A media survey of the Arab World, found that by 2012, eight of the top ten most widely read online news sources were affiliated with print papers.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶² Slackman, M. (2008)

⁷⁶³ Ibid

⁷⁶⁴ Hefny (2017)

⁷⁶⁵ Interview with Khaled El-Balshy (2015)

⁷⁶⁶ Interview with Mohamed Nasser (2015)

⁷⁶⁷ Interviews with Ragab, AbdelMohsen, Kasseem, Khafagy (2015) & Wadood (2016). This will be discussed more thoroughly in the cases of *AlMasry AlYoum* and *Egypt Independent*.

⁷⁶⁸ Dawoud and Nelson in Wan Ifra (2012); p.46

⁷⁶⁹ Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015 (2012)

Methodologically, media outlets clearly lacked any systematic approach to producing the kind of content that was deemed commercially and editorially worthwhile. Publisher Hesham Kassem believed that even if the intent existed to create commercially viable, independent media, decisions were made arbitrarily and in a top-down manner.⁷⁷⁰ Kassem for much of his career, ran private media outlets -including *AlMasry AlYoun-* and acted as a business consultant for others. He believed that a sense of professionalism in running media outlets never took hold. One of the main drawbacks he encountered was that, “most media outlet owners didn’t know why they wanted to go forward with the venture, other than to say they did it.⁷⁷¹” Through his eyes the development of the private media was merely the result of the dwindling ability of the state media to cope with the industry’s technological and budgetary realities, leaving a clear gap in a market that was increasingly more accessible to non-state actors. In 2004 the ERTU exhibited a cumulative deficit of LE4 billion (\$690m). This was increasing at LE800 million annually.⁷⁷² “They were not spending enough time catering to viewers’ needs, especially as consumers’ desires tend to be a more powerful factor as economies liberalize.”⁷⁷³

Portions of the private sector with connections to centers of power saw it as an opportunity to seize a portion of a market that has become readily available to them, while the state saw it as a way to gain favors with this cohort. “It was like the land-grabbing deals during the Mubarak years,” Kassem said in reference to the often cited⁷⁷⁴ allegations of corruption associated with land privatization during the Mubarak era.⁷⁷⁵

Kassem’s perspective is bolstered by his 20+ years as a media executive in the sector. While his outlook is based on first-hand knowledge, some owners and managers interviewed in the course of this study have attempted to provide examples of just the opposite: attempts to launch and run sustainable media businesses. For the most part, despite their claims, Kassem is correct in pointing out that none of the prominent private media owners managed to launch a robust, stand-alone and sustainable business in the sector.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁷⁷¹ Ibid

⁷⁷² Sakr (2007) p.6

⁷⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁷⁴ Puddephatt, A., 2012. Corruption in Egypt. *Global partners and Associates*.

⁷⁷⁵ In Puddephatt (2012) p.15, former finance Minister Samir Radwan had this to say about these corruption cases: “The main areas of corruption are in getting licenses and permits, and of course land and land sales. We can see that very clearly in the trials taking place now – most of the trials are related to land being sold at very low prices and then resold for extremely high prices.”

Amr Khafaga believes that while some of his employers did have the intention to run their organizations properly, the infrastructure supporting sound business decision-making did not exist. “There were no scientific ways to gauge viewership, effectiveness of advertising, or gain indications of future trends.”⁷⁷⁶ Khafaga, who helped found and run Dream TV as well as one of the early independent newspapers, *AlShorouk*⁷⁷⁷ said that attempts by some private companies to plug some of the knowledge gaps in the sector existed, but were wholly inadequate. “All we knew for certain from some of these attempts at research was that at its height (in 2010), the size of the media advertising market in Egypt was around LE2 billion (roughly \$355 million). Naturally it meant advertisers were interested.”⁷⁷⁸

Kassem saw that the lack of professionalism coupled with the growing advertising market, helped allow advertisers to exercise control over private broadcasting and print media. When appearing on a private talk show (he did not specify which) as a pundit, Kassem asked a station manager during one of the customary 20-minute advertising breaks, why they agree to such an inefficient advertising allocation when they could charge more and have shorter breaks. The station manager said they were too afraid to refuse the advertiser’s request for more time, preferring to build the show’s schedule around their wishes.⁷⁷⁹

Meanwhile, most prominent newspaper journalists found that they were not making enough money despite advances in the sector. They moved to supplement their income in the private media space by contributing to TV news talk shows either as presenters or producers. Many of the broadcast journalists and producers were also print journalists. The lines between platforms in the private media spaces were blurred. This, according to publisher Hesham Kassem, could have had a positive impact driving a move towards the technologically motivated trend of “consolidating newsrooms across platforms.” Instead he believes it contributed to a blurring of editorial lines.⁷⁸⁰

2) Drastic changes: Disruptions to balance of power

Before private media outlets or the overall system of privatized media could reach major headwinds due to structural inefficiencies or a lack of adequate infrastructure to support the

⁷⁷⁶ Interview with Amr Khafaga (2015)

⁷⁷⁷ *AlShorouk* (est. 2009) is a private daily print and online newspaper, established by book publisher Ibrahim Elmoallem. His eponymous publishing company is one of the largest in the Middle East.

⁷⁷⁸ Interview with Amr Khafaga (2015)

⁷⁷⁹ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁷⁸⁰ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

sector's growth, the 2011 uprising occurred. Massive protests led to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, and a seismic shift in Egyptian power dynamics ensued. For private media, it sparked another period of major turbulence and drastic changes.

On the 25th of January 2011, the government was preparing to celebrate "Police Day," while protests were being planned across the country, mainly against police brutality. The uprising that would begin that day would help propel private media into the epicenter of the Egyptian power paradigm as the desire to consume media from alternate sources (to the publicly-funded outlets) reached an all-time high. One study noted that the 25th of January uprising and the subsequent sit-in leading to the downfall of Mubarak represented a period when the "curtains" of information set up by "individuals" in power would be taken down and replaced by what was essentially a new value system associated with popular modes of consumption and dissemination of information.⁷⁸¹ That researcher attributed the shift in the dominant forces behind media and consumption trends within the sector to a change in public consciousness.⁷⁸² While those conclusions have not aged particularly well, they still validly captured the essence of the Egyptian uprising as a watershed moment in private media, when looked at solely in the light of that moment.

The wide participation of the often-dormant middle class in Egypt provided a significant momentary shift away from the previously dominant narrative that the central state was the main guarantor of a minimum threshold of social welfare and political cohesion, and that this role essentially maintained the country's stability. Kandil correctly points out that the aggressive pursuit of neoliberal policies had stripped away the state's ability to protect the middle class, providing instead more advantages to a small circle of connected businessmen.⁷⁸³ He added that these policies created a disequilibrium with the rural middle class, by upending the established system of political patronage and creating a new crop of middlemen represented by the winners of the neopatrimonial framework. Farmers had to also contend with the challenging removal of subsidies and guarantees that many had relied on.⁷⁸⁴ These policies, along with the previously tolerated practices involving political corruption and the strong arm of the state's security establishments, helped foster a thirst for change,⁷⁸⁵ one that helped enhance the position of more critical private media.

⁷⁸¹ Abdelghany (2012)

⁷⁸² Ibid p10,11.

⁷⁸³ Kandil, H. (2012)

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid

Newspapers such as *AlMasry AlYoum* and *AlDostor* had built a track-record of reporting news items that would help fuel the uprisings and become part of the national discourse. *AlDostor*, for example had widely reported on the murder of Khaled Said, a young man who had been beaten to death at the hands of policemen on 6 June 2010. Said's murder sparked a movement in Egypt that resonated internationally through a Facebook page expanding into a movement. State-owned papers largely ignored the incident or instead focused on a rumor that Said was not beaten-to-death, but rather choked on a plastic-bag full of drugs while evading capture.⁷⁸⁶ The case became a rallying call for the planned protests on the 25th of January.⁷⁸⁷

The private papers that had not shied away from reporting cases such as Said's were almost immediately catapulted above state-owned media in importance. This was immediately palpable at the epicenter of the protests. Protesters huddled to read the private newspapers and make a display of tearing state-owned papers, which had initially ignored the protests. *AlMasry AlYoum*'s chief editor at the time, Magdy ElGallad at one point was feted by demonstrators who recognized on the first day of protests on the outskirts of Tahrir Square (the epicenter of the demonstrators). In a moment that could just as well have been scripted: the editor told the swelling crowd around him, "I must run back to the paper to get tomorrow's news out," and just then almost on cue, a random motorcycle appeared in front of him, with the driver offering to take him to his destination.⁷⁸⁸

Journalists sensed the magnitude of the moment for their profession as well, especially as the Mubarak regime had quickly moved to control the information flow in the country by shutting down internet networks between January 28th and February 3rd, while a curfew was also in place from 28th January (the Friday of Rage) between 18:00 and 07:00 for the duration of the uprising. Many print journalists were finding places to spend the night near or in the epicenter of the manifestations in Tahrir square.⁷⁸⁹ While many Dream TV journalists were put up in a hotel near their studios on the outskirts of Cairo, in order to facilitate reporting.⁷⁹⁰ Private media was beginning to emerge into its own at that time, as the discrepancy between them and state-allied media became more stark, offering them more credibility and more of a practical function in the moment.

⁷⁸⁶ Ehab, J. (2010)

⁷⁸⁷ Goldin I. (2013) P. 140

⁷⁸⁸ These scenes are first-hand accounts by the writer of this thesis, who was a journalist in Egypt at the time.

⁷⁸⁹ Personal experience

⁷⁹⁰ Interview with Yasmin Marwan (2016)

Ahmed Ragab, who had been working with both *AlMasry AlYoum* and OnTV at the time thought this feeling was not exclusive to journalists, but permeated all levels of the organizations from the owners downwards.⁷⁹¹ While they led the charge in covering the uprising, some of the prominent outlets and figures in the private media space were also exhibiting hesitation in embracing this role fully. Dream TV, whose owner had been a known Mubarak ally, showed signs of this throughout the initial period. *El'Ashera Masa'an* and its host Mona ElShazly was still the standard bearer for political talk shows in the country. The show was the first to interview a visibly traumatized Wael Ghonim, one of the leaders of the “We Are All Khaled Said” movement, after he had been detained and tortured. ElShazly was commended by the protesters for this interview. On the other hand, she had also raised many people’s eyebrows for immediately declaring that Mubarak “saved Egypt” after he gave a speech declaring he would not run for another term to appease the protesters. Mubarak’s speech that day was seen as unsatisfactory by the masses whose main demand was his immediate ouster. A Dream employee at the time described a level of hesitation among the prominent figures in the station as to how exactly to position themselves editorially:

Mona was conflicted, and the station didn’t know exactly how to tilt editorially. But most journalists were excited to cover the protests and be a part of what was happening. In the end that helped drive the station to do the same. I think they knew we would lose relevance after the revolution if we hadn’t. Ultimately they figured Mubarak’s days were numbered, and they knew that at the very least they needed to stay in the good graces of the military after he was gone. Which they did. As journalists, we weren’t too aware of these things at the time, we were just really immersed in the moment and working really hard. The public treated us like stars. Whenever I went home during this period the family would gather around me to ask me about the latest.⁷⁹²

The shift in state media over the 18-days also pointed to this moment of disruption in power relations governing the sector. Initially on the Friday of Rage, the military first secured the Maspéro building, ensuring that protesters would not have access to terrestrial broadcasting. Ultimately, Mubarak’s resignation speech on 11 February was aired from the Maspéro building, while the military officers allowed the release of footage showing them ordering the resignation tape to be aired. Public newspapers also went from denouncing the events and its participants, to making an effort to report on them.⁷⁹³ “In several prominent cases, this change was the result of a rebellion by the journalists themselves. At *Rose al-Youssef* magazine, journalists and administrative staff took over the building and locked out the editor

⁷⁹¹ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

⁷⁹² Interview with Ahmed Hamdy (2016)- pseudonym as this person did not want to be named criticizing Dream TV or Mona ElShazly.

⁷⁹³ Alexander, and Aouragh, (2014)

in-chief, an ardent Mubarak loyalist.”⁷⁹⁴

The announcement of Mubarak’s ouster came by way of the former intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, in a statement aired from Maspero, under orders from the military, which had assumed complete control of the state media apparatus as well as most other government organizations.

Sudden increase in licensing and production: An experiment in pluralism

Mubarak’s ouster immediately led to a clearer delineation of who in both the private and public sector were considered closest to the regime. Many government officials were quickly placed in custody, including the Minister of Information, Anas El-Fiqqi. Many of the businessmen who were appointed to government and considered part of the central power structure were also imprisoned. The Supreme Council for the Armed Forces were firmly in control of the country, on a transitional basis until a new government structure would be formed. They would remain officially in charge for 17 months. Historian Zeinab Abu ElMagd believes that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces’ (SCAF) initial takeover was in line with the popular uprising’s motives, but that the end result was a more comprehensive domination of the country’s power centers. “The main pillars of a successful coup are all there: control over the media, the bureaucracy, security apparatus, and the legal system.”⁷⁹⁵ Despite this control, for the 17 months that they were in power prior to Presidential elections in 2013, SCAF members attempted to appear democratic and veering towards civilian rule. Loyalist civilians were put in most government posts, and differing political groups were allowed to organize politically.⁷⁹⁶

This approach spilled over into changes that were introduced to the media system. The Ministry of Information itself was initially abolished in February of that year, raising hopes that the uprising would be a watershed moment for media liberalization. However, it was reinstated in July under the auspices of the new minister Osama Heikal.⁷⁹⁷ The local and newly formed, National Coalition for Media Freedom (NCMF), rejected the move calling it a step backwards in the attempts to achieve liberalization of media policy and independence from the executive power, stressing that the Ministry of Information exists only in totalitarian

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid p.892

⁷⁹⁵ Abu ElMagd (2012)

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid

⁷⁹⁷ No relation to Mohamed Hassanein Heikal

states and dictatorships.⁷⁹⁸ The NCMF was only founded one month earlier in the hope that the country's media system would turn a new page. It included 13 human rights organizations and 20 media activists, who had joined in the hope that they would be able to lobby for media rights.

Many media professionals in the private space did not know what to make of Osama Heikal. He was a seasoned journalist, who worked almost entirely out of the public media sphere, mostly at the Wafd Party newspaper where he spent over two decades. He was also known to have good relations with the Armed Forces having worked for five of those years as the paper's beat editor for military news, an appointment he would not have gotten without being vetted and ultimately seen as a loyalist.

The status of private media and their role became one of the central themes for the shifting public sphere. New television outlets were granted licenses, although the mechanisms through which they were licensed or regulated did not change. SCAF promised not to interfere in private media, and 16 new channels were licensed in the immediate aftermath⁷⁹⁹. These included channels such as *AlNahar*, *25TV*, *Tahrir Channel*, *Modern Horeya*, *Rotana Massreya*, *Misr 25*, an organ of the Muslim Brotherhood, and *AlMasry*, the mouthpiece of The Wafd Party.

Among the new class of media owners, Mohamed El-Amin's emergence was to be the most prescient. The little-known businessman launched CBC television network and invested in an estimated 14 other outlets.⁸⁰⁰ El-Amin, had seemingly come from obscurity to launching one of the largest and most well-resourced stations in Egypt. A department head who was an early hire at CBC (and refused to be named speaking on this, as he continued to work with them at the time of the interview), said that before joining, he and his colleagues were perplexed about the quick rise of CBC. "We suddenly found this station with limitless resources paying TV hosts enormous sums on the scene. It seemed to be in-line with the trend of stations opening. We were told the owner was a rich contractor who made his money in Kuwait. But, we didn't know much else."⁸⁰¹ At his peak in 2015, only 4 years after launching CBC, El-Amin was at the helm of a media empire that included 14 television stations and 3 major

⁷⁹⁸ National Coalition for Media Freedom (2011).

⁷⁹⁹ Iskandar (2013) p.77

⁸⁰⁰ Hamoud (2015) p. 126

⁸⁰¹ Interview Helmy Antar (pseudonym, 2015)

newspapers⁸⁰², including *AlWatan* newspaper, which was launched with Magdy ElGallad at its head, recruited following his success at the helm of *AlMasry AlYoum*.

This rapid expansion was described by Mohamed Gohar as being due to the military's backing of El-Amin in more ways than one. "His connections with the military are deep. Here's a man who has no political ambitions, made a good amount of money working under the radar, but not enough to allow him to come and dominate the media scene, yet he does exactly that. He has been pushed both financially and politically by the military."⁸⁰³ Gohar, who was consulted on the launch of CBC and also started his own television station, 25tv, in 2011, said that while the private space in mass media opened during that period, the state was doing its best to make sure it didn't lose total control over it, including injecting "their people" in it, such as Mohamed El-Amin.⁸⁰⁴

Politics and Private Media: Another Lebanon?

As discussed in Chapter 3, some aspects of the pluralism in Lebanon's private media system were seen in Egypt's private media space, primarily between 2011 and 2013. The country was going through a phase where numerous entities were grappling for supremacy in local elections, and there was a short-lived period of vibrant pluralist politics. With the relative easing of restrictions in private media licensing, the different groups looked to control their own mass media outlets. Many of these groups were either newly formed or rejuvenated after being severely limited under a de facto single-party system for decades.

Media scholar Adel Iskandar, classifies the private media outlets that were formed in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring as belonging to one of two general camps: The first are networks content with Mubarak's ouster while being highly supportive of SCAF and its decisions. "State television, *AlHayat*, CBC, Dream TV, *AlMehwar*, the Salafi Al-Naas channel, and others tend to be more celebratory and cautiously avoid what SCAF calls 'incitement against the military,' inviting only occasional and mild criticism of the ruling junta."⁸⁰⁵ The second group wanted to see the revolution continue to topple SCAF's rule. Generally speaking, January 25 TV, *AlTahrir* and to a lesser extent OnTV represented this group (e.g., Ibrahim Eissa on *AlTahrir* calling for a trial of SCAF for the killing of protesters). Iskandar, believed the gulf between private and public television had grown to an

⁸⁰² Atef, A. (2015)

⁸⁰³ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid

⁸⁰⁵ Iskandar (2012)

unprecedented level during that period.⁸⁰⁶

Private television came to broadly mirror the political groups and rivalries that were forming. During the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party as well as the more conservative Islamist Al-Nour Party came up on top. They both had launched proxy media outlets. The Brotherhood had established Misr 25 television and a party newspaper called, *AlHoreyya wal'Adala* (Freedom and Justice), while *Al-Naas* television station was a clear supporter of Al-Nour Party. On the other hand, Naguib Sawiris who owned OnTV, OnTVLive and maintained a stake in *AlMasry AlYoum*, had established his own political party, Free Egyptians.

While Sawiris repeatedly insisted that the media he owned were not instructed to speak for his party, they were meant to promote similar liberal values both economically and socially.⁸⁰⁷ More important for Sawiris was combating the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was among a group of media owners who either tacitly, or explicitly geared their stations towards opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). "It was really for me at this point about not wanting to give Egypt up to the Islamists."⁸⁰⁸ A reporter for OnTV recalled a meeting in 2012 during which station head, Albert Chafik explicitly told the staff that their "focus must be on bringing the Brotherhood down."⁸⁰⁹

Once the Muslim Brotherhood had secured both the Presidency and a parliamentary majority, they started to apply pressure on opposition television stations. This included attempting to force Naguib Sawiris to sell OnTV.⁸¹⁰ Some businessmen complained of not being granted licenses to operate under President Mohamed Morsi's administration due to their political position.⁸¹¹

Many of the tools used during the Mubarak era to stifle the media were maintained by the new Minister of Information, Salah Abdel-Maqsood, who kept around 70 articles of Mubarak-era laws related to media.⁸¹² Under the Morsi administration, over 600 defamation cases were launched, which outpaced the rate of such cases under Mubarak according to the

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid

⁸⁰⁷ Interview with Naguib Sawiris, (2015)

⁸⁰⁸ Iskandar, (2012)

⁸⁰⁹ Interview Hind Morad (2016)

⁸¹⁰ See Chapter 6

⁸¹¹ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

⁸¹² Arab Network for Human Rights Information, 2013

Committee to Protect Journalists.⁸¹³

Perhaps the most famous of these cases involved Bassem Youssef, who hosted a political satire show called *ElBernameg*, which was wildly popular and produced scathing criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood. Youssef was arrested and interrogated in March 2013.⁸¹⁴ Tensions in the country were mounting ahead of planned anti-Morsi protests on 30 June 2013. Many of the anti-MB stations joined in the calls for these protests which were widely endorsed by ranking members of the military and police force.⁸¹⁵ Throughout March of that year, tens of Morsi supporters launched a campaign of intimidation, laying siege to five television stations on the opposite side of the political fence: *AlHayat*, *OnTV*, *AlNahar*, *AlQahira wal Nas*, and *CBC*.⁸¹⁶ Morsi himself took to dedicating time during a televised address to the nation, to criticize private media and call-out the owners of Dream TV and CBC for alleged tax evasion, just days before the 30 June protests.⁸¹⁷

Despite the mounting pressures on opposition mass media, the MB was unable to effectively eliminate these voices from the airwaves or news stands, partially due to their relative inability to wield the security and judicial apparatuses in their favor. Bassem Youssef remained on air, along with all other prime time news presenters and talk show hosts who were openly hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood. In the meantime, red-lines involving the military were still firmly in place. In actuality, the military had been engaged in a process of reinforcing its power in society after Mubarak's fall.

In December 2011, the Editor-in-Chief of *AlMasry AlYoum*, Magdy ElGallad halted production of the paper's weekly English-language publication *Egypt Independent*, after publishing an op-ed authored by an academic alluding to possible divisions within the military.⁸¹⁸ The article's author, Robert Springborg, was a prominent scholar on military and security in Egypt. ElGallad defended his decision by stating in an editorial that he was standing up to an attempt to "incite a coup" within the Armed Forces ranks, with a clear insinuation that *Egypt Independent* could have served a foreign agenda to destabilize the country.⁸¹⁹ In the immediate aftermath, Springborg wrote, "I do not know whether [ElGallad censored the paper] on direct orders from the SCAF or because he anticipated General

⁸¹³ Mansour, (2013)

⁸¹⁴ BBC NEWS (2013)

⁸¹⁵ Personal experience, 2013

⁸¹⁶ Mansour (2013)

⁸¹⁷ Hubbard (2013)

⁸¹⁸ The author of this study was Production Manager of the publication in question.

⁸¹⁹ Kennedy (2012)

Tantawi's negative reaction. What has been reported to me is that the editor in question is known to have close ties to the military and intelligence services."⁸²⁰ Springborg said years later that it was symptomatic of the fact that the military had been in actual control throughout this period, a fact confirmed by the eventual ouster of almost every prominent media personality that had openly criticized SCAF.⁸²¹

There is a general consensus among practitioners in the private media space that between 2011 and 2012, the sector was relatively open and that any limits on political reporting were imposed mostly by the editorial line of the outlet rather than government fiat. Advertising revenue was expanding and salaries of some celebrity talk show hosts were ballooning. While political competition dominated the scene, many media owners still wanted to keep an eye on "giving the people what they want," even if it was content that would have traditionally been considered taboo or politically undesirable by some of the business owners involved in private media.⁸²² Hesham Kassem, had been consulting for various mass media enterprises while also working towards developing his own multimedia outlet. He claims to that by 2012 the sector had become unshackled and that this trend would not continue in the following years. Aside from continued limitations on dealing with the military, he saw for a brief period an openness that could have gone in either direction:

I did not hear, at that time, of media licenses being refused on security grounds...even though the security apparatus could have still stalled licensing, for sure... Newspapers could have published and not been bound to government publishing houses, but the market infrastructure was not there to encourage that... The lack of professionalism meant that in the end most outlets during that period ran towards trends for quick gains, and made very little plans for sustainable business in the future. Maybe, they believed the sector would not be allowed to develop in the future.⁸²³

At times, the lack of pragmatic long-term financial thinking led to the early demise-or shift in focus- of some of the early projects inspired by the uprisings. *AlTahrir* TV is a case in point. It had originally been founded by dissident Ibrahim Eissa and Ahmed Abu-Haiba (a media entrepreneur, with MB ties) on the eve of Mubarak's ouster on February 2011 to reflect "the spirit of the revolution."⁸²⁴ Financial difficulties led to Ibrahim Eissa first selling his shares and then within less than a year 72% of the company was purchased by businessman

⁸²⁰ Springborg (2012)

⁸²¹ Interview with Robert Springborg (2018)

⁸²² Interview with Hisham Kassem (2015)

⁸²³ Ibid

⁸²⁴ Mellor (2014) p. 230

Suleiman Amer, who had made his fortune in real estate deals during the Mubarak regime.⁸²⁵ The popular television presenters brought in soon left, officially over financial disputes as well.⁸²⁶ However, multiple accounts, including one from author Alaa Al'Aswany, say that Amer had reached an agreement with SCAF to mute all criticism of the military on his airwaves and that anyone who resisted was pushed out.⁸²⁷ This led to a very early transition of *AlTahrir* into a pro-SCAF station.

The consensus among media scholars and practitioners interviewed was that media and politics in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 uprising, were on a hotplate. The future of the Egyptian polity was tied not only to media independence, but also to the functioning and existence of watchdogs and NGO's.⁸²⁸ The contentious politics of 2012, when the Muslim Brotherhood wielded power in both the legislative and executive branches of government, were underpinned by a cacophony of voices at ballot stations and on airwaves/newsstands. That was to be the last year in the immediate aftermath of the uprising when Freedom House would classify Egypt's media as "Partly Free," before downgraded it to "Not Free" in subsequent years.⁸²⁹ Adel Iskandar, who maintained a chronicled diary of the sector that year under the title, "A Year in the Life of Egypt's Media: A 2011 Timeline,⁸³⁰" wrote a perceptive, forward-looking note that summarized the opportunity and apprehension for private media at the time:

The greatest challenge ahead for private satellite stations will be in the coming years when their resolve, courage and occupational convictions will be tested perhaps more than at any other time in modern history... They must not submit to the new red lines of military inaccessibility.⁸³¹

3) 2013-2016: El-Sisi and the importance of consensus

Newly promoted⁸³² Field Marshal Abdelfattah El-Sisi announced his candidacy for the presidency in March 2014. The former SCAF member and Defense Minister under Morsi became president nearly one year after the ouster of Mohammed Morsi and a subsequent massacre of around 1,000 of Muslim Brotherhood supporters who had been involved in a month-long sit-in, protesting his overthrow. The incident, known as the "Rabaa' Massacre"

⁸²⁵ Elhofy, N. (2011)

⁸²⁶ Ibid

⁸²⁷ Al Aswany (2015)

⁸²⁸ Iskandar (2012)

⁸²⁹ Freedom House (2012)

⁸³⁰ Iskandar, (2012)

⁸³¹ Iskandar (2012) p.82-83

⁸³² Interim President Adly Mansour promoted General Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi to Field Marshal on 27 January 2014.

was the beginning of the complete erasure of the Muslim Brotherhood from the public sphere. The momentary plurality experienced in the private media space and the expectations that the sector would begin to develop with more independence would quickly wither away.

Broadly speaking, the first 6 years of El-Sisi's presidency and its relationship with the continued shift in privately owned mass media could be divided into two periods: the first was an attempt by the president to court the existing (non-MB allied) private media outlets and owners; while the second was a more clear-cut and direct phase of power consolidation in the sector, and a straightforward requirement of alignment behind the state.

A clear foreshadowing of these shifts occurred late in 2013 after a leaked video appeared on an Islamist news network, *Rassd*, appearing to show a conversation between then Defense Minister El-Sisi and a group of army generals discussing private media.⁸³³ The video is not dated accurately, but the discussion seems to predate Morsi's ouster based on the officers' winter uniforms and references to [2012's] December's constitutional referendum.⁸³⁴ In it, the generals express genuine dismay at the freedom that the private press had been allowed in criticizing the media and crossing the long-established "red-lines" related to the armed forces. El-Sisi responded by calling for patience while he recruited allies in the news media. 'Building a state-wide alliance takes a long time and effort... It takes a very long time until you possess an appropriate share of influence over the media.'⁸³⁵

This alliance-building was made clear during El-Sisi's first year in power. On May 3, 2014, the new president met with a who's-who of Egyptian media owners and personalities and lectured them on the importance of media in "unifying the nation." Within four months of his election as president, he held three more such meetings with representatives from the media and journalism institutions. None challenged him, though a few did propose progressive steps that could be taken for media freedom.

The pathway for this process of "alliance building" was set even before Morsi's ouster. As mentioned, previously, political lines had already been drawn in most private media outlets.

⁸³³ Rassd News Network (2013)

⁸³⁴ Kirkpatrick, D. (2013)

⁸³⁵ Ibid

Manufacturing Consensus

One of the first orders that El-Sisi gave after Morsi was deposed on July 3, 2013, was shutting down two newspapers and all nine privately owned pro-Morsi television stations airing out of Egypt, most notably, the MB's *Misr 25*, *AlJazeera* and two Muslim Brotherhood-sympathizing Salafist stations.⁸³⁶ Many of the employees and owners were subsequently jailed on terrorism-related charges, as the Brotherhood and all of its affiliates were declared terrorist organizations by the Ministry of Justice.⁸³⁷ These stations were never allowed to re-open.

Mohammed Helmy, head of the reports unit at CBC Extra TV in Cairo during this period, said that at the time "it [was] clear that the media agreed with the president that 'there is a war on terror and the media must play its part.' However, these are very loose terms and unfortunately many media organizations have been translating them to mean that anyone who has any opinion contrary to that of the state's must be restricted [from appearing or publishing].⁸³⁸"

The consolidation of media behind El-Sisi began early on during the campaign for the 2014 presidential election. CBC and OnTV aired a joint-broadcast of a highly edited, and reverential recorded interview with El-Sisi to introduce his campaign platform on 5 May 2014. Five days later his main opponent on the ballot, a former MP and long-time Nasserist activist, Hamdeen Sabbahi, was offered only a live interview with CBC, in which he was heavily challenged throughout by combative hosts. The sense among many of the television producers and journalists interviewed was that there was some movement behind the scenes to bring the private media in line with the military, but that there was also a real consensus that among Morsi opponents of the continued threat of a resurgent Muslim Brotherhood. "There was a real belief for many in the field and the businessmen that owned the stations that El-Sisi saved Egypt from them."⁸³⁹

Many popular television hosts who came to prominence afterward or as a result of the January 25 Revolution, or were considered less-than-enthusiastic supporters of El-Sisi, were purged from the airwaves during the first portion of his presidency, mostly through

⁸³⁶ Yasin (2013)

⁸³⁷ BBC News (2013)

⁸³⁸ Interview with Mohamed Helmy (2016)

⁸³⁹ Interview with Ali Belail (2019)

acquiescent internal media organizational actions.

On October 25, 2014, the CEO of *AlNahar* TV walked into the dressing room of prominent Egyptian talk show host Mahmoud Saad moments before the airing of his live nightly television show to let him know that he would not be presenting that night. Saad, an amiable and relatively balanced media personality, dutifully obliged, leaving the station and taking his production team with him, according to some of the show's journalists who declined to be identified. The night before, Saad had hosted a guest who critically psychoanalyzed El-Sisi, and who, among other things, spoke about the psychological effects of popular support for the military. The guest, Manal Omar, also mentioned a 1967 Egyptian military defeat by Israel that led to a seven-year occupation of Sinai. On the day that show was aired, units of the Egyptian military came under attack in Sinai.

AlNahar, a private station-acquired by El-Amin in 2011- never revealed why Saad was taken off the air, but its management issued a public statement saying "substantial changes" would be made to its political programs. "The channel will prohibit the appearance of a number of guests who promote ideas that weaken the morale of the Egyptian army," the statement noted.

A few days later, *AlNahar* issued another statement saying that Saad would resume his position and that he was in agreement with the channel that they must work together on "unifying the ranks" and working toward "prioritizing ... the national interest." On October 29, 2014, Saad took back the reins from his temporary replacement, Khaled Salah, a vociferous supporter of El-Sisi's regime and editor-in-chief of *Youm7* newspaper, which had also become an entirely pro-Sisi publication by then. Saad's only comment on his hiatus: "I honestly don't know why I was not on air these past few days."

Even talk show hosts who nominally supported El-Sisi, but had a tendency to be critical at times had lost their places on the air or in the newspapers, despite being prominent and widely watched. "After June 30, the general trend and atmosphere in Egyptian media has been one of widespread support for the regime, paralleled with a hatred of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸⁴⁰"

⁸⁴⁰ Interview with Mohammed Nasser (2015)

News broadcasters and talk show hosts such as Yosri Foda (OnTV) and Dina Abdelrahman (CBC TV) were frozen out of the private television stations where they dominated the airwaves in the nightly and daily primetime slots, respectively. In Foda's case, multiple high-ranking insiders at OnTV (who requested anonymity for this report because of the potential for repercussions) said that one year before his contract was to end, he was told he would no longer have his nightly show but could stay on with a weekly show—an offer he was sure to refuse, in light of his popularity and the show's ratings. Foda himself had a different story:

Since the 25 January revolution, I stopped my program three times, because I knew that each time we were on a collision course with the military. As a media personality I want to make a difference and do not want to go beyond a minimum standard of work under which I would not operate.⁸⁴¹

Abdelrahman, who had been presenting a nightly talk show highlighting social issues, was released from her job in March 2014, ostensibly because of what her employers described as her "decreasing stock in the media," according to a statement reported by the *Youm7*.

CBC, pulled Bassem Youssef's show off air in 2013, almost immediately after an episode where he took jabs at the public fanfare for the military leaders, while also dedicating a segment to mocking the way in which Egyptian media outlets (that claimed to be neutral) were pushing for El-Sisi's presidency, by constantly praising him. Youssef was also fined, and the station released a statement distancing itself from his using of "phrases and innuendos that may lead to mocking national sentiment or symbols of the Egyptian state."⁸⁴²

Abdelrahman had used time on her show to criticize her employer's treatment of Youssef, a cardiac surgeon turned political satirist.

Others, such as talk show hosts Reem Maged and Alaa El-Aswany, simply chose to retreat from the field, both after offering very public reasons. Maged wrote a public letter to her employer (also OnTV) that was made public, stating that she was invoking the "conscience clause" and stepping down from her nightly talk show because her principles regarding her job "do not coincide with those of my employer."

The common factor for all of the departing media figures was that they were among the pre-eminent media voices of the January 25th Revolution, which is when they became household

⁸⁴¹ Interview with Yosry Foda (2015)

⁸⁴² Kingsley (2013)

names. They were all liberals who opposed Morsi. They were not averse to hosting guests or entertaining topics spawned by the June 30 demonstrations that could be seen as running averse to the regime or SCAF.

Mainstream writers and thinkers who were accustomed to appearing on television as pundits or even hosts of cultural programs, found themselves frozen out of publications for which they had written extensively. Their work was also at risk of being censored. Plans to air screenwriter Belal Fadl's television drama, "Alexandria's People," were scrapped in all local private and public broadcasting. According to a 2014 report by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) titled "Freedom of Expression After the First 100 Days of El-Sisi's Rule," one of the reasons cited by station heads for pulling Fadl's show was that "it would be improper to air a television drama that criticizes the performance of police" before the 25 January revolution.⁸⁴³

Gamal Eid, director of ANHRI, observed, "There [was] a return to the Mubarak-era system of unofficially blacklisted public figures who are persona non-grata on television stations." According to Eid, privately owned media with allegiances to the regime decided among themselves to bar certain guests from appearing as pundits.⁸⁴⁴

Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb had made a point in the early days of El-Sisi's presidency to insist that there would not be any government censorship, one time using the known Egyptian polemic: "no free pen would be chopped down." However, the experience of professionals within the private media establishment point to a marked departure in the direction of the sector and how it is permitted to cover current affairs. Ahmed Ragab, formerly an executive producer of Yosri Fouda's show "Akher Kalam" and a managing editor in *AlMasry AlYoum*, said in response to Mehleb that "pens [have been] chopped down, columns discontinued, and the media were definitely silenced."⁸⁴⁵

However, Ragab believed that much of the censorship was the product of the "general atmosphere", more so than a systematic censorship or official government-mandated bias. Instead, in his opinion, the lack of objective media stemmed from a combination of "social hysteria" around terrorism and the threat of political instability and commercial interests that

⁸⁴³ ANHRI (2014)

⁸⁴⁴ Interview with Gamal Eid (2015)

⁸⁴⁵ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

drove media outlets to toe the government line. "The market for neutral level-headed news shows, like Fouda's, was decreasing while the market for sensationalist nationalism was on the rise."⁸⁴⁶

The multiple power shifts for many working in the private media space since before the 2011 uprising until El-Sisi's presidency had been palpable. "Right after the 25 January Revolution, the power was in the streets, so the media had to follow suit," said Khaled El-Balshy, the editor-in-chief of the left-leaning newspaper *ElBadil*.⁸⁴⁷ "What transpired was that the businessmen who ran the media returned back with the state and were doing their work for them."⁸⁴⁸

A TV news presenter working for a private network who spoke on condition of anonymity said that from the run-up to the June 30 protests through to the 2014 Presidential Election, he had been receiving direct orders from his superiors to prevent the appearance of any Muslim Brotherhood members on any of their programming. The presenter claimed he was told that this was a national duty, even when the Muslim Brotherhood were still in power and had not yet been declared a terrorist organization.

Many media insiders supported Ragab's assertion that news coverage by the private stations still in operation then were not directly dictated by the regime. "Most media executives had not directly released any gag orders against any of these personalities," according to Mohammed Nasser, who was producing a talk-show for OnTV while also working as the Cairo bureau chief of the Lebanese TV station *AlMayadeen* in 2015. Nasser had only recently moved from Dream TV.

The media sector was still on high alert about the possibility of a government clamp-down on media that would be far broader than the closure of Muslim Brotherhood outlets. The first such hints came from public television. Aida Seoudy, who hosted a variety show on Radio Hits, a publicly owned radio station took to her program on November 29, 2014, to voice her frustration that the legal case against former President Hosni Mubarak had been thrown out on procedural grounds,⁸⁴⁹ leaving him free to go. She did not criticize the court's ruling itself,

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid

⁸⁴⁷ Interview with Khaled El-Balshy (2015)

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid

⁸⁴⁹ Bahgat (2014)

which would have been illegal and could carry a jail sentence. Her annual contract, which she had been renewing regularly for more than five years, was due to expire on December 1, 2014, and on the day after her outburst, Seoudy said, she was told that her contract would not be renewed. After making headlines, she received a phone call on December 2 from a policeman working in El-Sisi's office, telling her "the president has ordered [her contract] renewed ... and sends his regards."⁸⁵⁰ A representative of the president's office called in to a talk show to confirm that the president ordered Seoudy back to work. She recounted the conversation in a television interview with Mahmoud Saad the next day.

Observers were left to wonder whether the conflicting actions regarding Seoudy's contract signified a disconnect between decision-makers in the media and the presidency or other executive authorities. That is a topic that Seoudy had also raised on her show.

Other editorial executives found that the close relationship between major newspapers and TV stations with different state apparatuses meant that state intervention in local news reporting sometimes came in the form of informal telephone conversations, a form of agenda-setting by the state. Ragab subscribed to this theory as well: "The majority of media owners found it in their best interest to be in the state's good graces [such] that they would not refuse direct requests [such as] avoiding certain subjects or figures. I feel that, on the contrary, they go overboard in trying to prove their loyalty."⁸⁵¹

Self censorship

A day after the incident with Mahmoud Saad, while the country was consumed with news of terrorist attacks in Sinai, the editors-in-chief of all of the major newspapers met and issued a statement to collectively declare that they would "support all of the measures taken by the government in combating terrorism and protecting the national security of the country." The meeting followed another incident on Dream TV in which host Wael El-Ibrashy's show was cut short while he was criticizing the Ministry of Education.

The phrase "prioritizing the national interest," was recurring among government and media officials and regulators. It was a vague statement, often open to interpretation by the party in power. Another producer on a private television show, who requested anonymity for the same

⁸⁵⁰ Mada Masr (2014)

⁸⁵¹ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

reason cited by others—fear of retribution—said he had received direct orders from his superiors to refrain from covering any Muslim Brotherhood protests or gatherings, saying "if you just watched TV on most Fridays—you would see no coverage of protests on television, but Facebook will be filled with photos from them."⁸⁵²

Gamal Eid had heard similar reports from other sources saying their stations had ordered them to avoid covering the Muslim Brotherhood in any positive light, and to continue to blame them for the problems that the country was facing.⁸⁵³

Those who do cover Muslim Brotherhood protests faced clear perils. Some had been killed and wounded during violent encounters and, at the very least, have found little support for their reporting. "I had reporters who were assaulted by the police for covering an Muslim Brotherhood protest, and others attacked by Brotherhood supporters believing that they were there to misrepresent them," said Helmy, who was in charge of all external reporting for CBC Extra⁸⁵⁴. Helmy noted that his station was actively in support of the government at the time.

During the first years of the Sisi presidency, many of the private television stations made conscious decisions not only to self-censor in favor of government, but to actively strive to become government mouthpieces. Increasingly, broadcasters from these outlets were seen rubbing shoulders with the President and his inner circle, more than their counterparts in publicly funded media. The bias towards the government was quite clear in some cases. British journalist Imogen Lambert recalled a job interview with the heavily pro-Sisi *Sada ElBalad* television's nascent online English portal. During the interview she was unabashedly told the network supported the government. "The editor that was interviewing [her] had no qualms saying, 'Here we support the government, we support the president, and we support the military, and we do not like the Muslim Brotherhood.'⁸⁵⁵"

The editor, Lambert recalled, also said that if she were to report a foreign story she should remember that the network was averse to Turkey, Qatar, and Iran. She would, however, be free to cover the Scottish referendum. "See, this is something that your BBC would not let

⁸⁵² Interview with Sawsan Zaki (pseudonym, 2015)

⁸⁵³ Interview with Gamal Eid (2015)

⁸⁵⁴ Interview with Mohamed Helmy (2015)

⁸⁵⁵ Interview with Imogen Lambert (2015)

you cover freely. That's how we are with the Brotherhood," the editor added, according to Lambert, a British citizen. She quit the job after two weeks⁸⁵⁶.

The openings experienced in private media after the revolution, and even during the latter years of the Mubarak presidency, were closing up, even if the private mass media outlets remained. Ragab noted that "during the time of Mubarak boundaries and red-lines existed, but [he] covered many more topics openly. These days (in 2015) we don't hear much talk about journalistic integrity as much as about the mania regarding this concept of national priorities."⁸⁵⁷

New independent government bodies meant to oversee media space also continued to be tightly controlled. Article 211 of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution called for the creation of a National Media Council that would be responsible for "guaranteeing and protecting the freedom of press and media, safeguarding its independence, neutrality, plurality and diversity, and preventing monopolistic practices."

The Council was drawn to appear to be an Egyptian version of the Federal Communications Commission in the United States, or the U.K.'s OFCOM, but with broader jurisdiction. Numerous media executives at the time expressed concern at how far the council would go in ensuring "national goals."⁸⁵⁸ The Egyptian Radio and Television Union, a government body, is authorized to compile a list of 50 people to choose the council's 25 members, excepting the two members whom the president selects. The president also has the authority to choose the council's chair. Hafez Mirazi resigned from his post on the ERTU board, partially over the formation of this council.⁸⁵⁹

The "other Heikal" and Fourth Generation warfare

Media systems were once again looked at by the government as an area of National Security as many of the major figures in the field found themselves being assessed by the state under a strict "with us" or "against us" binary.⁸⁶⁰ The omnipresence of Osama Heikal in the upper echelons of all media regulation in the country (since 2011 until the time of writing) was a reflection of the state's desire to maintain a certain perspective regarding the development of

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid

⁸⁵⁷ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

⁸⁵⁸ Interview with Mohamed Helmy (2015)

⁸⁵⁹ Interview with Hafez El-Mirazi (2015)

⁸⁶⁰ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

the sector. In addition to enjoying a close relationship to the top brass at the military, Heikal's worldview coincided with that of the President, especially in their view that the "fourth generation warfare"⁸⁶¹ is one of the biggest existential threats facing Egypt. In January 2015 Heikal penned a book on the subject entitled *Fourth Generation Wars: Media and the Fragmentation of Societies*. In it, he outlines how media is at the epicenter of global and regional conspiracies to foment a state of chaos in Egypt.⁸⁶² El-Sisi on more than one occasion warned the public of 4th generation wars. After his initial appointment as Minister of Information in 2011, Heikal was moved to manage Media Production City, with a de-facto mandate to regulate all private television. He was also the head of the Media and Culture Committee in Parliament until December 2019, when he was reappointed as Minister of Information.⁸⁶³

4) Consolidation

Political power during AbdelFattah El-Sisi's presidency became more centralized in time. The initial expansion of the role of individuals with military backgrounds in government betrayed a general distrust of civilian leadership. In September 2016, six new provincial governors were named, five of them with military backgrounds. At the time, only 8 of Egypt's 27 provinces were run by civilians.⁸⁶⁴

Prior to that, Hossam Bahgat an investigative journalist detailed how the General Intelligence Agency interfered directly to place loyalist candidates in the 2015 parliamentary election.⁸⁶⁵ Notably, rather than forming a new political party, the candidates were organized in an "electoral list" called For the Love of Egypt, which acted more like a coalition than like an organized political entity. In 2018, El-Sisi's consolidation of power looked complete. The president ran essentially unopposed, after his main opponent, Sami Annan, was arrested and his campaign managers beat-up and intimidated.⁸⁶⁶ Another potential candidate, human rights lawyer Khaled Ali, dropped out of the race citing violations and a obstacles placed before him after several members of the campaign were arrested. Ali said he found it difficult

⁸⁶¹ A defining characteristic of Fourth Generation warfare, is when a country chooses to bypass an opposing military force and striking directly at cultural, political, or population targets. (Vest., 2001)

⁸⁶² Heikal (2015)

⁸⁶³ Egypt Independent. 2020. *Profile - Osama Heikal Returns as Minister of Information - Egypt Independent*. [online] Available at: <<https://egyptindependent.com/profile-osama-heikal-returns-as-minister-of-information/>> [Accessed 3 May 2020].

⁸⁶⁴ Reuters (2016)

⁸⁶⁵ Bahgat (2016)

⁸⁶⁶ Reuters. (2018)

getting the election authorities to even put him on the ballot.⁸⁶⁷ The Ali campaign was undoubtedly on edge following the arrest of Anan as well. El-Sisi's only opponent, the little known Moustafa Mousa⁸⁶⁸ only entered the race after all other candidates withdrew. Mousa had endorsed El-Sisi for presidency, prior to entering the race, and paradoxically continued to endorse him while running against him.⁸⁶⁹ El-Sisi won with 97 per cent of the vote.

Similarly, the first few years of Sisi's presidency saw power in private media slowly shift hands, as the role of the the military and security organizations continued to noticeably expand. The regime believed that media played a big role in fomenting the 2011 protests. Their thinking changed therefore from allowing security-minded and easily manipulated businessmen to control the private media space to controlling the sector more directly.⁸⁷⁰ In the immediate aftermath of Mubarak's ouster, the rise of Mohamed El-Amin's mass media empire (which was likely supported by senior military figures⁸⁷¹) and the often direct intervention of military figures and censures in private television programming showed that the control of mass media as a soft power tool in the hands of the regime was on its way back. Prior to 2011, most direct interventions into private media content would come from either the office of the Presidency, the Ministry of Information or a dedicated department in the National Security Directorate.⁸⁷² The interest taken by El-Sisi in these private media and the prompt elimination of all Muslim Brotherhood allies or sympathizers from the airwaves and newspapers proved to be a precursor to a more direct involvement of the Armed Forces in private media in parallel with the expansion of their role in other areas of civilian life.

Military Economy

The Egyptian Military has been a major economic actor since the birth of the Republic in 1953. The decline of the monarchy and the "blockage of capitalist development...spurred officer castes to replace faltering national bourgeoisies and their powerless political representatives⁸⁷³." The Nasserite model became a military dictatorship that worked to augment the means at the armed forces' disposal.⁸⁷⁴ Ironically, the death of Nasser in 1970 and Sadat's push for "de-Nasserisation" further entrenched the role of the military in the

⁸⁶⁷ Michaelson, R., (2018)

⁸⁶⁸ Mousa, was also the head of Al-Ghad Party.

⁸⁶⁹ Sanchez, (2018).

⁸⁷⁰ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁸⁷¹ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

⁸⁷² Interviews with Wadood (2015), Nasser (2015), Gohar (2017), Belail (2019)

⁸⁷³ Achcar (2013) p. 89

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid p. 91

economy. While dramatically decreasing defense spending, the Egyptian Armed Forces were largely responsible for massive infrastructure and development projects, ultimately giving way to the rise of an expansive and diversified parallel military economy. “Mubarak endorsed the MOD’s self-supporting approach as a means of securing political influence within a restive officer corps while shifting defense costs at a time of deepening financial austerity.”⁸⁷⁵ Under AbdelFattah El-Sisi, the role of the military expanded as never before to become the principal economic broker and manager.⁸⁷⁶ The armed forces also began to encroach in on sectors traditionally under the “quasi-exclusive” domain of the General Intelligence Directorate such as oil, natural gas and media.⁸⁷⁷

Yezid Sayigh who studied the Egyptian military’s economic expansion chronicled a shifting pattern of the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) business alliances between 2013 and 2020. He saw the EAF expanding into several sectors in which private businesses have long been dominant—most notably media, cement, and steel—undermining businesses and destabilizing markets.⁸⁷⁸ Many private business owners who entered the media space after 2011 said that they were being crowded out of the sector by businesses that represented military interests⁸⁷⁹.

Military Media Takeover

In November 2015, El-Sisi, lambasted the media coverage of his Presidency in a keynote speech delivered at an Armed Forces Cultural Seminar⁸⁸⁰. The tirade ended with an everyday phrase for Egyptians “*ma yisahish kidda*” (this is not right) that some saw as an indication that that he had in fact lost patience with the sector, indicating a change in the future. News presenter Dina Abdelrahman said that this speech synthesized El-Sisi’s outlook for media in a televised interview, noting that even mere questioning of the President’s policies or actions would not be tolerated.⁸⁸¹

⁸⁷⁵ Sayigh (2019) p.20

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 22

⁸⁷⁷ Sayigh (2019) p.179

⁸⁷⁸ Sayigh (2019) p.191

⁸⁷⁹ One owner of an online advertising agency, said that in 2017 he was forced into a partnership with one such EAF company, despite already controlling 80 per cent of the market according to his own estimates. He refused to be identified.

⁸⁸⁰ ElSisi A. (1 Nov. 2015). “Keynote Speech: Armed Forces Cultural Seminar,” CBC Xtra TV.

⁸⁸¹ AbdelRahman D. (10 Nov. 2015); Interview on France24 TV

The wheels had in fact already been in motion for what Yazid Sayigh described as the hostile takeover of media by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and allied agencies.⁸⁸²

The introduction of the DMC television network represented one of the early forays of the MOD into the private media scene. The channel appeared in 2015 with seemingly limitless resources. Ali Gabr, a broadcast engineer with broad experience across the sector described the company's deep pockets in its early phases, when he was recruited to work there from OnTV:

Money was absolutely the least worry. They built a state-of-the-art studio in almost no time, because it didn't matter how much money needed to be thrown at any facility: studios, sat-ops, broadcast systems. They got things done. No one knew who the owner was. At least I didn't. The way things just "got done" hinted to me that the ownership had the backing of a very important organization.⁸⁸³

One of the DMC Network's stations, DMC News, was to become the first privately-owned, Egyptian round-the-clock news network. Other attempts to create a 24-hour news channel by private media owners such as Mohamed Gohar were always met with refusal on national security grounds.⁸⁸⁴ Tarek Ismail, the channel's founder was seen as a direct front for Military Intelligence. According to *Mada Masr*'s sources, DMC was the brainchild of El-Sisi and his Chief of Staff, Abbas Kamel, both of whom emerged from Military Intelligence. They had envisioned *D-News* to become a competitor for other regional news outlets, like *Al Jazeera*, *Al-Arabiya* and Sky News Arabia.⁸⁸⁵ Ismail was removed in 2018. According to the same report, the order to push Ismail out came from Abbas Kamel, -who at that point was the head of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID)- over Ismail's squandering of funds allotted to him.⁸⁸⁶

Egyptian Media Group, An Eagle and a Falcon

Another group to burst onto the scene was the Egyptian Media Group (EMG). The company was fronted by businessman Ahmed Abu-Hashima, owner of Egyptian Steel Group. He had initially acquired *Youm7* newspaper in 2011 and began his expansion into media through the Egyptian Media Group in 2016. It would very quickly become the largest media

⁸⁸² Sayigh (2020) p.209

⁸⁸³ Interview with Ali Gabr (2017)

⁸⁸⁴ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2017)

⁸⁸⁵ Mada Masr. 2018. Sources: Head of DMC Network Dismissed, Plans to Launch DMC News Scrapped. [online] Available at: <<https://madasr.com/en/2018/10/07/news/u/sources-head-of-dmc-network-dismissed-plans-to-launch-dmc-news-scrapped/>>

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid

conglomerate in Egypt. Hossam Bahgat, once again, chronicled the rise of the Group in detail for *Mada Masr*.⁸⁸⁷ According to Bahgat, while Abu Hashima was always seen as the group's owner, his stake in the company paled in comparison to the majority owner, the General Intelligence Directorate. The group initially expanded in print media, acquiring major online and print publications in 2016 including: *Dotmasr*, *Sout Al-Ouma*, *Youm7*, *Egypt Today* and *Business Today*.⁸⁸⁸ EMG expanded into television as well, first acquiring OnTV in 2016, and then in 2018 it acquired *Al Hayah* TV Network and a majority share of Future Media Holding, the owner of CBC.⁸⁸⁹

In 2017, Abu Hashima was ousted from his role with EMG after the company was acquired by Eagle Capital for Financial Investments, a private equity fund run by former Investment Minister, Dalia Khorshed, which managed all GID-owned companies.⁸⁹⁰

Publisher Hesham Kassem, had told Bahgat at the time that numerous private media owners in print and broadcast were contacted by Khorshed "to negotiate possible partnerships with the General Intelligence Service, or to complete acquisition deals."⁸⁹¹ Bahgat had reached anonymous sources within these companies, who were able to detail the contents of certain transactions. However, the reality of companies entangled with security organizations is that many of the relationships are informal. "The only way to get to the bottom of these institutions was to grab onto credible hearsay and investigate it. Otherwise, getting primary sources or documents is nearly impossible."⁸⁹²

Not to be outdone, Military Intelligence continued to aggressively engage in the sector. In January 2017, *Al'Asimah* television network came under the management of the Cheri Media company, whose deputy head was a former EAF spokesperson. In August, *Al'Asimah* and its subsidiaries were acquired by Falcon Group International, which established *Tawasol* for Public Relations to handle its growing media portfolio.⁸⁹³ Falcon group had appeared on the scene as an international private security firm based in Egypt. It was consistently rumored to

⁸⁸⁷ Bahgat, H., 2017. *Looking Into The Latest Acquisition Of Egyptian Media Companies By General Intelligence*. [online] Mada Masr. Available at: <<https://madasr.com/en/2017/12/21/feature/politics/looking-into-the-latest-acquisition-of-egyptian-media-companies-by-general-intelligence/>> [Accessed 11 May 2020].

⁸⁸⁸ Media Ownership Monitor (2020)

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid

⁸⁹⁰ Bahgat (2017)

⁸⁹¹ Ibid

⁸⁹² Interview with Hossam Bahgat (2017)

⁸⁹³ Sayigh (2020) p.210

be closely linked to the armed forces, given the presence of many prominent retired generals on its board. Yezid Sayegh described the group's growth in the following manner:

The most significant beneficiary of the growing private security market has been Falcon Group International. Established in 2006, various sources claim its workforce grew to 4,000 by 2011, and to between 6,000 and 12,000 by 2014. By then, it was reported to have a turnover of LE2 billion (approximately \$283 million, as the pound had devalued), representing 45 percent of the market...Falcon Group is the product of an unusual mélange of the public and private sectors. It was founded by the Commercial International Bank... One of Egypt's biggest businessmen, Naguib Sawiris, joined its board in 2008. Although its executive director is a civilian, the company is widely seen as a front for military intelligence.⁸⁹⁴

Six years into El-Sisi's presidency, the military was seen to have nearly a complete stranglehold on the sector. The private media sector nominally existed and expanded. Much of this expansion was by companies with ownership links to branches of the security institutions.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid

Chapter 6- *AlMasry AlYoun*: The Print Experiment

The proliferation of neo-liberal reform and the growing influence of connected businessmen in Egyptian politics contributed to an atmosphere where some of this group felt empowered to engage in the public sphere. Televised broadcasting hadn't seen any local private ownership true beginnings in 2001. But, the advent of private print publishing at the turn of the 21st century was more of a re-emergence or a resumption of a long tradition that could be traced back to the late 1800's.⁸⁹⁵ *AlMasry AlYoun* (AMAY), became the first locally published and mass distributed private newspaper in Egypt during the Mubarak era. Its content, publishing, distribution, and operational structure were reflective of the political environment as well as of the changing economic climate at the time. The paper managed to stand out among its peers in its longevity and expansion efforts. At its height, *AlMasry AlYoun* was the main competitor for the century-old *AlAhrām*, reaching that point a mere 6 years after launching.

The paper's first CEO, Sherif Wadood described its establishment as being the result of a confluence of context and coincidence, stemming from the initiative of its founders, the balance of power in the country at the time, and a host of fortuitous circumstances to help along the way.⁸⁹⁶ According to Wadood, by the time the security and political establishments realized that this private paper could actually become a thorn in their side, the option to shut it down had become politically disadvantageous for the regime.⁸⁹⁷ This section will look at the circumstances of AMAY's establishment, and how it came to aptly represent the shifting dynamics at the time.

Unlike the first private television station Dream TV, AMAY's establishment was not the result of a direct push by the state. Dream's founder was approached directly by Hosni Mubarak to return to Egypt. He was able launch the station making use of major government infrastructure spending in the Media Production City and satellite transmission technology. As this chapter will show, the establishment of private newspapers was not sought after by the state (perhaps the opposite). Rather, the political, economic and security state of the country along with the positioning of the main actors behind AMAY in the overall paradigm of power and wealth in the country, were to become factors that came together to help successfully launch the paper.

⁸⁹⁵ See Chapter 3

⁸⁹⁶ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid

Personal Experience

Some of the sourcing for this portion of the case study is based on the researcher's first-hand experience working with *AlMasry AlYoum*, contributing primarily to its English language online publications, (first named *AlMasry AlYoum English*, then rebranded into *Egypt Independent*).

1) Accidental beginnings

Origin and Founder

AlMasry AlYoum was the brainchild of Salah Diab, a business tycoon whose main investments had been centered in energy industry and commodities, chiefly in oil services and agriculture. Diab had been entrenched in the highly politicized petroleum sector, creating the country's first private oil services company in the 1970's, PICO. For decades his firm was the only local private owner of some oil concessions in Egypt, and became partner to major international companies, notably the U.S.'s Halliburton.⁸⁹⁸ Despite being a member of the Wafd Party's high committee (rather than the ruling National Democratic Party), Diab was a major beneficiary of the Mubarak regime. In the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring, he was among many businessmen under investigation for having illegally appropriated land at below market price and was often criticized for being entrenched with the political elite under Mubarak.⁸⁹⁹

Aside from his business interests, Salah Diab was also a descendent of one of the major trailblazers of Egyptian print journalism. He would consistently refer to this relationship as being the main motivator behind *AMAY*'s establishment. His grandfather, Tawfiq Diab⁹⁰⁰ was a journalist and political activist who had been involved in the renaissance of private print journalism during the political upheaval in Egypt at the time of the 1919 revolution. He had either co-founded or helped establish a number of news publications in the decades that followed, most of which were shutdown by government orders over their constant opposition to government, the monarchy, or Britain's High Commission in Egypt.⁹⁰¹ Tawfiq Diab had also become a prominent member of the Wafd Party, an affiliation that was the driving force behind the establishment of his most renowned Wafdist paper, *AlJihad* (The Struggle) in 1930, which at its peak distributed more copies than *AlAhram*. Historian Younan Labib Rizk,

⁸⁹⁸ Winne.com (2015).

⁸⁹⁹ Shaaban M (2011)

⁹⁰⁰ Tawfiq Diab, 1888-1967

⁹⁰¹ Rizk Y. (2004)

called Diab *Al-Mutammarid Al-Nabil* (The Noble Rebel).⁹⁰² Most modern accounts of Diab's life present him as a key figure in the history of Egypt's journalism, who helped cement a connection between journalism, activism and independent intellectual thought.

Within the AMAY offices, Salah Diab would attempt to deflect any insinuations that he had any political or economic motives in establishing the paper. He would instead point to his affinity to real journalism, highlighting his lineage in the industry as the origin of this sentiment. New employees to the company would be introduced to the story of the paper's genesis, by portraying it as a childhood passion of Salah Diab and a lifelong dream that has its roots in his relationship with his grandfather.⁹⁰³

The reality according to Sherif Wadood was that the motives were more varied and reflected both Diab's family history as well as a desire to protect his business interests.⁹⁰⁴ The paper's founding publisher, Hesham Kassem had a more direct perspective:

As an observer, let me tell (you) that all media owners were in it for political gain. They would swear that it's not why they were involved. They are looking for political influence that surpasses parliament by a lot. They are not interested in entering politics at that level.⁹⁰⁵

“Coincidence” of licensing

The actual establishment of AMAY occurred through a series of coincidences and opportunities, aided by the general context of Egypt at the time. Initially, AMAY was meant to be another Wafdist paper, run by journalist Magdy Mehanna (b.1957-d.2008) who had recently been let go from his position as editor-and-chief of the *AlWafd* Newspaper for attempting to publish a series of articles on corruption in the oil sector that would embarrass both the government, and some influential businessmen.⁹⁰⁶ Salah Diab said that he initially wanted to establish a paper for him “out of guilt,” since he was the source of the information that Mehanna used for the reporting that would get him fired.⁹⁰⁷ Sherif Wadood, who had been a business management consultant for PICO, was charged with the task of embarking on the mission to license a new paper. He found that the easiest route to obtaining a license would be by purchasing an existing one, rather than going through the tedious and

⁹⁰² Ibid

⁹⁰³ Personal experience

⁹⁰⁴ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹⁰⁵ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid

⁹⁰⁷ Hassan M. (2013)

unpredictable process of having a new license issued. The decision was made to purchase the license of a weekly paper that was up for sale called *AlZaman* in October 2001, which was licensed only as an entertainment paper. The sale was agreed for LE450,000 (\$100,000). By 31 December 2001, the actual purchase of the license was complete.

After concluding the initial step, the AMAY founders found themselves faced with three main hurdles to cross, all of which stemmed from the novelty of their endeavor, to establish a locally published, private news publication:

- 1) Passing regulatory barriers in order to produce a daily “all-news” publication.
- 2) Convincing other prominent businessmen to join the ownership team
- 3) Finding a team of professional journalists with the appropriate know-how to publish and distribute the paper

Regulatory hurdles

The next phase would involve changing the commercial registration, establishing the ownership structure and shifting the licensing to a daily news publication covering all topics. In theory, the normal registration process allowed for all of this. But the fact that it had not actually been done in recent years (at least not for a locally licensed, private, news publication) meant that there was a palpable sense of possible failure. The main hurdle for the completion of this task was the ever-imposing security approval that always presented a looming barrier for endeavors in ‘sensitive’ sectors. Wadood recalls being in disbelief at just how easily he was able to obtain the license:

Since the 1950’s, there hasn’t really been an actual privately-owned and locally licensed daily newspaper. Given the current climate at the time (liberalization), we thought we could try by purchasing an existing license... I didn’t believe it when the employee at the civil registration office actually told me that all I needed to do was hold a shareholders meeting for the company, to declare that the paper would be covering “all” areas including politics, sports, business et cetera, not just entertainment... It was as simple as that.

The process of changing it to a daily publication was more complicated, as it required at least LE1 million (\$400,000) of capital to be put forward. The licensing fee would be utterly out of reach for the vast majority of Egyptians, as the average per-capita GDP in 2002 was

around \$1,200/year.⁹⁰⁸ However, for Diab and his would-be partners, it was a relatively insignificant sum. Wadood believes he had another stroke of luck when the sale of the license, and changes to the company registration were signed-off by the civil authorities without first being vetted by the security establishment. He thought that the employee responsible for this, may have “made a mistake, by their own standards.”⁹⁰⁹

The owners: public champions of neoliberal change

In accordance with the law, which limited individual stakes in mass media outlets to 10% of capital, at least ten shareholders would have to own the paper, purchased from ten shareholders who owned *AlZaman*. Initially, the ten shareholders were friends and family members whom Wadood included as placeholders as he embarked on a mission to gather co-owners from Salah Diab’s cohort of influential and well-connected businessmen acquaintances. “[Diab] felt some trepidation in starting a paper, and thought that it might backfire. Since the 1950’s the state had assumed all ownership of the media. No matter what, it was uncharted territory, and he still felt that having active, significant partners would provide some cover, if the state looks at this paper with suspicion or attempts to react in a bad way to it.”⁹¹⁰

But Wadood saw a shift in the balance of power around this time in the country, and felt that it may encourage some members of the business community to get involved:

There was no absolute power in the authoritarian regime during Mubarak’s time, it was relative. His regime needed the business community, and knew that they could provide them cover from the overall power of the military.

The government would basically tell the business and civil community, ‘if we let the military loose on you, they will devour you.’ Because the military had veto power for anything happening in the country. So there was a general sense of more dispersed power with Mubarak undeniably at the center of all of it. Despite the regime’s overall control, they understood that there needed to be a certain degree of unconventional checks and balances, and a good example of that is the “ventilator system” of the state, where they would allow every once in a while a certain degree of free speech either in the media or public protests, or letting certain dissidents out of prison at different times.

⁹⁰⁸ World Bank, Data.

⁹⁰⁹ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹¹⁰ Ibid

The businessmen that were initially approached to invest in the paper met the idea with an array of responses. Most did not think it could happen. Wadood had a full presentation prepared, and was able to gain access through his employer's entrenched position in the society of wealthy Egyptians. He had pitched it to his managing team and co-investors as an opportunity to create a professionally run, profitable, independent newspaper that would be interested in providing objective news.⁹¹¹

The reactions he received varied. For the most part, the response was a firm "no", as most did not understand why anyone in such a position would enter a field with such obvious pitfalls and perils that could threaten their position vis-à-vis the regime. They were puzzled and slightly suspicious with regards to Salah Diab's motives and what he stood to gain.

The most enthusiastic about the project were individuals who would continue to help shape the entire private print and broadcast media landscape in the country. These were: Ahmed Bahgat, Naguib Sawiris and Akmal Kortam. Naguib Sawiris was the first to join the fray. He had twice attempted to launch his own newspaper in the preceding year, but could not find industry professionals that could present a workable business model to establish and run a private newspaper. Advertising as a sector was similarly underdeveloped in the country, which made him believe that it would be difficult to transition the newspaper to a sustainable business.⁹¹² He believed that the paper (and in years to come television) would be able to engage in a process of moving the country in a more liberal direction. Sawiris' approval for the project hinged on wanting the paper to commit to becoming self-sufficient financially and ensure that "there was a separation between finance and the editorial process."⁹¹³

Ahmed Bahgat, had already established Dream TV for two years by that time, and saw it as an extension of his media interests. Bahgat's position in the media space would be a boon for Diab as it would help convince authorities who were initially skeptical of allowing the project to proceed. "Mr. Diab would half-jokingly tell anyone from the government who approached him with concerns about the paper's establishment, 'How can you logically

⁹¹¹ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁹¹² Interview with Sawiris (2015)

⁹¹³ Ibid

attempt to deny Ahmed Bahgat a newspaper license, when he already has a television license?!”⁹¹⁴

Akmal Kortam, Diab’s nephew was the last major enthusiast to sign onto the project. Kortam was also an oil executive, as chairman of Sahara Oil and Gas. At the time, he was less known than his counterparts, however he would later be more concretely entrenched in politics. He won a seat in the 2010 parliamentary elections as a member of Mubarak’s NDP, and after the Arab Spring would help establish and lead the center-right Muhafizdeen (Conservatives) Party. Kortam would also purchase *AlTahrir* newspaper in 2013, only two years after it was established by journalist Ibrahim Eissa after the Arab Spring.⁹¹⁵

According to the paper’s first publisher Hesham Kassem, the realistic breakdown of ownership in the paper was as follows: Diab and his relatives (including Akmal Kortam) controlled 50% of the paper; Naguib Sawiris and his associates owned 30% and Ahmed Bahgat’s cohort held roughly a 20% stake.⁹¹⁶

Diab was by far the most active shareholder in the running of AMAY throughout its early years, often referred to in Egyptian media as “the owner of *AlMasry AlYom*.” He was a frequent contributor as well, writing a weekly column under the pen name “*Newton*.”

2) Finding Professionals

The search for an industry professional who could run AMAY from an operational perspective would be a short one. According to Wadood, the options were limited, and in April 2003 he approached Hisham Kassem, a publisher of the weekly English language magazine, *Cairo Times*. Kassem’s initial reaction was disbelief that someone had been able to actually register a daily newspaper.⁹¹⁷ He agreed to join after being reassured that he could be in charge of hiring the entire newsroom staff and would have full operational control.⁹¹⁸ This led to the replacement of Mehanna as chief editor and his reassignment to a columnist position. Kassem had also opted to introduce a new team in order to ensure a mode of operation and work culture that departed from the normative model of established, public media outlets (similar to Dream TV’s approach). He replaced an entire team that was brought in before him, because “they were all from state papers and would be unable to

⁹¹⁴ Interview with Wadood (2015)

⁹¹⁵ Shams El-Din M. & Mohy M. (2015)

⁹¹⁶ Interview with Kassem (2015)

⁹¹⁷ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹¹⁸ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

embody the paper's vision.⁹¹⁹”

Wadood recalls being summoned along with Diab to *Mabahith Amn El-Dawla* (State Security Investigations Service)⁹²⁰ to meet with the bureau charged with the overseeing media. The high-ranking officer that met them was livid towards his staff over the fact that AMAY had been licensed and registered without them raising any flags. State Security only heard of the matter when the Supreme Council of the Press sent them a courtesy notification that the paper was being launched. The security establishment attempted to dissuade the Council from moving forward with Kassem as a publisher because of his background of working with various human rights NGO's. Diab and Wadood told the officers that Kassem's function would be to help with distribution. Ultimately, the security authorities felt that regardless of the individuals running the paper, they would still be able to control publication via the government-owned Ahram printing presses and distribution services, which AMAY would be forced to use for lack of any other viable options.⁹²¹

The shareholders agreed with the choice of Kassem because of his business-like attitude towards running the paper and the fact that his staunchly liberal economic views coincided with their own.⁹²² Before joining *AlMasry AlYom*, Kassem learned how to run a publication in Egypt on a trial-and-error basis. The state of the industry, according to him, was that no one knew how to run a paper using private resources. He would describe himself as a “numbers guy” who spent more time with his financial managers than he would with the editorial staff. He would say that the main deterrent for many would-be newspaper owners, was the commercial aspect:

After the [AMAY] experience, I'd often be approached about starting newspapers in Egypt by individuals with idealistic notions of changing public opinion. Once I'd begin talking about the harsh financial reality, I wouldn't get a call back. It is a symptom of the industry not being properly developed. Unfortunately, not enough private enterprises were interested in that.⁹²³

Kassem's approach also highlighted an editorial vision of presenting objective news in a way that was credibly detached from archaic notions associated with publishing under the

⁹¹⁹ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹²⁰ Egypt's internal intelligence agency

⁹²¹ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹²² Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

⁹²³ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

auspices of the state. These notions included viewing the state as a patriarch and overlord and dealing with most news with exaggerated caution and fear.⁹²⁴

Armed with LE16 million, Kassem sought to build a newsroom that could be taught how to report, rather than find journalists trained in state institutions. As a result, many of his recruits had been brought with minimal background in the field. Ahmed Ragab, joined as a reporter in 2005 with a salary of LE900/month (\$160).⁹²⁵ The salary was low, but common for starting journalists at the time. His training was entirely “on the job,” having graduated with a degree in general sciences.

During the first two years after the paper’s launch, Kassem was still unsure if the paper would be able to make enough money out of distribution and advertising to cover costs, and so wages remained low. The result was that most journalists were allowed to have second jobs. Aside from journalists, photographers and business administration staff, AMAY was forced to resort to public organizations to source technical operators, distribution and publishing personnel.

Some of the more experienced journalist positions were filled by individuals who came from some of the established publicly-funded press organs. On 7 July, 2004, AMAY hit the stands for the first time, with former *AlAhrām* journalist Anwar ElHawary as Chief Editor. Six months later, he would be replaced by Managing Editor Magdy ElGallad, also an *Ahrām* alumnus. He would remain in place until 2012, and would oversee the paper’s rise to prominence.

A new age of reporting?

The growth of AMAY had a ripple effect throughout all media spaces in Egypt. Talk shows in private broadcasting had become more concerned with discussing news of the day, rather than broad social issues. This had partially to do with the composition of its journalists, many of whom came from AMAY. The managers of AMAY were fully aware that many of its staff were complementing their newspaper income with work for television.⁹²⁶ This organizational structure reflects Giddens and Dalmyr’s views on “structuration⁹²⁷” and to a certain extent -

⁹²⁴ Ibid

⁹²⁵ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

⁹²⁶ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹²⁷ Giddens & Dalmyr (1982)

Bourdieu and Passeron's theory on social reproduction⁹²⁸ - insofar as they reflect prevailing tendencies and structures in society at the time. The prosperity seen by the connected businessmen at the helm of these outlets did not necessarily trickle down to the lower rungs of the ladder in the profession. Media professionals did experience a qualitative shift in how they were allowed to pursue their careers, but their relative power vis-à-vis the business owners who represented the emerging cohort in power was limited. Their expanding agency was still bound to the prevailing power structure i.e. business owners, the ruling class and the security establishment.

AMAY's leadership was tolerant of the reporters essentially using their work to benefit private television stations, both because it alleviated pressure on the company to raise salaries and because it helped increase the profile of the paper and its network. In the cases of Dream TV and OnTV, the stations that employed the journalists, were also owned by the paper's shareholders. Wadood believes that AMAY's moonlighting employees helped enhance the journalistic culture in the country. He found that "the most transformative shift during that period was 'Freedom of Information' and news, rather than just 'Freedom of Expression.'⁹²⁹"

The paper's reporting on potential fraud in the 2005 Parliamentary elections as well as several cases of corruption that year helped instantly boost AMAY's profile and give it the credibility that its founders had envisioned.⁹³⁰ Within 5 years, it was distributing over 200,000 papers, putting it in close competition with the government's established giants.⁹³¹ While *AlAhrām* and *AlAkhbar* operated out of large, imposing landmark buildings in downtown Cairo, *AlMasry AlYoum* was operated mainly from 3 floors in a building 5-minutes away from the city center. Out of all the publications in Egypt, AMAY was the most focused on domestic politics and human rights, suggesting that the paper's journalistic mission resembled a Western model where journalists were seen as watchdogs.⁹³²

The effects of media on public consciousness became apparent to the AMAY organization in the build-up to the 25 January Uprising. Journalists and management alike would see their reporting become topics-of-the day in cafes' and everyday conversation.⁹³³ Ahmed Ragab said he felt the effects of his reporting during the 2005 Judges' Protests and the Kefaya

⁹²⁸ Bourdieu & Passeron (1990)

⁹²⁹ Ibid

⁹³⁰ Gaaaybess in Ratta, Sar & Skovgaard-Petersen (2015)

⁹³¹ Ibid p. 172, 173

⁹³² Cooper (2008) p. 3

⁹³³ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

Movement⁹³⁴ the same year, as well as the 6 April 2008 call for civil disobedience and subsequent labor protests:

It became clear that we had a critical role in social consciousness at that time. This was something we wouldn't really have imagined before, that a private organization reporting the news would not only affect all of public opinion, but also become a factor that the state has to contend with.⁹³⁵

Ragab would become a managing editor at the paper and would be put in charge of its online publication by 2012. He believes that one of the main reasons behind the paper's ability to distinguish itself in its reporting was the culture that it created among its staff, many of whom grew-up in the industry together as colleagues.⁹³⁶ A study of AMAY's content in 2008 found that its focus was on six major topics: corruption, crime, domestic politics, protests and sports, which is why it was seen as a populist project by its contemporaries.⁹³⁷ The study, which ran for two and a half years, found a strong divergence from *AlAhrām* in every aspect, even the front page stories. Over the course of the study, the two had only around 5-6% overlap in their front-page stories.⁹³⁸ AMAY quickly began to overtake its established competitors. By 2011, it had become a top-selling paper in the country distributing nearly 500,000 copies domestically, aided by the highly political and involved mood created by the Arab Spring.⁹³⁹

Self-Censorship

The concept of self-censorship for political and safety reasons was widespread and *AlMasry AlYoum* was not an anomaly in that sense. Magdy ElGallad was often described as being a Mubarak insider as a reason behind his long stint at AMAY, even though he sometimes published content that seemed to criticize Gamal Mubarak's increasing power between 2008-2010. The reality according to Ragab was that the power shifts during this period meant that being on the right side of the government "depended more on how tactful you were rather than how blindly obedient. [ElGallad] knew his boundaries better than almost anyone."⁹⁴⁰ ElGallad himself said in a televised interview that there is nothing wrong with "political accommodation as a practice in journalism," as long as certain journalistic

⁹³⁴ A grassroots movement calling for political and social change by a coalition from across the ideological spectrum

⁹³⁵ Ibid

⁹³⁶ Ibid

⁹³⁷ Cooper (2005)

⁹³⁸ Ibid p.4-6

⁹³⁹ Dubai Press Club (2012)

⁹⁴⁰ Interview with Ragab (2015)

principles are maintained. He added that this practice was a necessity in journalism and that it allowed him to fulfil his main obligation, “to make sure the paper comes out.”⁹⁴¹ The main areas of “accommodation” tended to involve the informally known “red lines,” which included: any commentary on the military, the President himself and immediate family.⁹⁴²

The rise of Gamal Mubarak became one area where AMAY would have to choose between being politically accommodating or leaning into the paper’s growing reputation as being more objective compared to the state papers. Aside from Gamal Mubarak’s lineage, he also was an influential advocate for neoliberal policies from within the state. The shift in power toward the private sphere was much more palpable once Gamal Mubarak decided to enter politics and enact changes in the National Democratic Party⁹⁴³. However, his approach to communications had not changed. “The problem was he still wanted to have a one-way communication system while appearing to open up the economy and media, it just couldn’t work how they wanted it.”⁹⁴⁴

AMAY had made the decision to publish numerous articles giving voice to movements and demonstrations against “the inheritance of power.” ElGallad himself wrote a column criticizing Gamal’s meteoric rise. Although he did attempt to stay within the “red lines” of not being critical of a Mubarak family member by pointing criticism regarding his ascension towards his entourage and the trusted circle who pushed him to take “ill-advised” political steps for their own benefit.⁹⁴⁵ He would also appear on numerous television shows to say that on a personal level, he would support a younger Mubarak’s presidential bid. In the run-up and during the 2011 uprising, AMAY became known for publishing news that could be damning to the central government and critical of the cohort surrounding Gamal Mubarak.

El-Gallad operated an open newsroom and was forthcoming with the red-lines he would keep. Criticism of military command and policy was one unambiguous topic that would be off-limits. From the early days of AMAY, if a news story involved the military as an institution or members of the military, the chief editor would have to be consulted before the

⁹⁴¹ El-Gallad (2020)

⁹⁴² Cooper (2008) p.1

⁹⁴³ Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid

⁹⁴⁵ El-Gallad (2009)

story is pursued.⁹⁴⁶ ElGallad seemed to always know exactly where that line stood as well. Two contrasting cases help illustrate that point:

- 1) As mentioned in the previous Chapter. In 2012 ElGallad took the decision to immediately halt the weekly publication of AMAY's English language subsidiary, *Egypt Independent*. That was when he learned that it would be running an opinion article by an American military expert specializing in Egypt that seemed to suggest certain divisions in the Egyptian Armed Forces leadership.⁹⁴⁷
- 2) On the other hand, in 2010 when reporters were in the tourist coastal town of Sharm El-Sheikh to report on shark attacks that led to a complete standstill of tourism, he authorized them to fully report the story. This was despite demands by the Governor of South Sinai at the time that AMAY only reports on the government's findings. The governor was a retired General of the Armed Forces. He had personally called the AMAY reporters insisting they do not engage in their own investigations since it was a "matter of national security." The governor was especially opposed to publishing an interview with an American shark attack expert⁹⁴⁸ before his office approves the answers. When the reporters told ElGallad about this exchange, his response was "continue with your work... ignore [the governor]."⁹⁴⁹

Despite the self-censorship, most of the paper's journalists would feel comfortable covering political stories, even if they involved members of the ruling party. The appetite to produce a compelling product became a driving force that competed with the desire to stay on the safe side of politics. The nature of the paper's business model and mission statement had ultimately allowed many of the journalists and editors who worked with them to expand the horizons of what it meant to be a journalist in Egypt, especially given the link between appealing to public interest and producing a commercially viable product.⁹⁵⁰ There was a clear "marriage of convenience, and ambition for expansion, that did not exist in state papers, even if the owners' ambitions were not driven by a desire to turn a profit as much as it may have been to have a strong political tool."⁹⁵¹

⁹⁴⁶ Personal experience and through numerous statements from within AMAY's newsroom.

⁹⁴⁷ Springborg, R. (2012)

⁹⁴⁸ Elmeshad, M. (2010)

⁹⁴⁹ Personal experience. This author was one of three journalists covering the shark attack story

⁹⁵⁰ Interviews with Ahmed Ragab (2015) & Lina Attalah (2018)

⁹⁵¹ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

3) Self-sufficiency

Advertising

The growing readership of AMAY and its heavy distribution figures allowed it to begin relying on its own revenue to maintain operations and even expand as the major shareholders had insisted from the outset.⁹⁵² Paper sales alone would barely cover costs, while actual profit was tied to advertising, which Hesham Kassem saw as his most important personal mandate.⁹⁵³ Between the first and second years of operation advertising revenue had expanded from LE9,000 to LE543,000.⁹⁵⁴ By 2007, one year before Kassem's departure from the paper, it had begun to turn a profit, bringing in LE1.483 million in advertising revenue.⁹⁵⁵ After the 25 January uprising and Hosni Mubarak's ouster, AMAY was the most read newspaper in Egypt.⁹⁵⁶ After Kassem left the paper, AMAY signed a deal with Promomedia group, giving it a media concession whereas in exchange for a fixed fee that would in theory cover annual costs, Promomedia would be guaranteed advertising space that it would control.

Naguib Sawiris was a major investor in Promomedia and despite the clear conflict of interest involved, this would help even the balance of power among the major shareholders, given that Salah Diab had the most direct oversight over operations. When Kassem returned to AMAY as a consultant in 2014 to help restructure the paper after it ran into financial difficulties, he thought that, besides general mismanagement of funds, the media concession platform was a major culprit in stifling the paper both editorially and financially.⁹⁵⁷ The idea behind the media concession was that it would guarantee the paper's operating costs for the year upfront. However, it also meant that the media outlet would be completely bound to this one external advertising company's payments to ensure its survival, giving the advertiser leverage that could be used to make demands over content.⁹⁵⁸ In television this leverage was used to force some stations to hire or fire certain talk show hosts. The concession agreement also implied higher fees, meaning it would mean a lower profit margin for the media outlet.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵² Interview with Sawiris (2015)

⁹⁵³ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid

⁹⁵⁶ Dubai Press Club (2012)

⁹⁵⁷ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁹⁵⁸ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁹⁵⁹ Halawa O. (2012)

AMAY continued to have a large readership after the 2011 uprising, which helped it maintain the guaranteed advertising deal. But, the deal backfired when Promomedia was late in many payments between 2011 and 2015, putting the paper under extreme financial duress.⁹⁶⁰ Since it only had one advertising concession, these late payments from one company were enough to endanger the entire business. AMAY was not the only newspaper bound to the constraints of media concessions. Its main competitor *AlShorouk* found difficulties addressing employee grievances for late pay, reportedly due to Promomedia's refusal to adhere to a fixed-term payment schedule, putting the newspaper's entire accounting system in disarray.⁹⁶¹

Printing

AMAY looked to establish a foundation for longer-term, independent operations. To that end, the company established its own independent printing press in 2010. Newspaper printing had previously been monopolized by publicly-owned companies, which afforded the state a significant degree of control. However, the newspaper's leadership had come to realize that some of the measures in place giving the state the ability to control the sector, were not necessarily in place by any clear mandate. In other words, there had not been a definitive ruling, forcing all of the country's newspapers to exclusively use these state-owned presses. *AlMasry Printers* was established in early 2010 in the "6 October" Cairo suburb. Its establishment came with minimal friction from regulators and without any of the expected probing and questioning from security officials.⁹⁶² *AlMasry AlYoum*'s anecdotally tell a curious story, that the security officials who regulate media had been so far removed from AMAY's printing press plans, that they were only made aware of its existence on a day when *AlAhrām*'s printers experienced major technical glitches, causing a delay in the distribution of nearly all major newspapers. *AlMasry AlYoum* was the exception and was the only paper to hit the stands on time that day, leading to the "discovery" of its printing operations.⁹⁶³

The move allowed the paper to control costs, with the ability to print newspapers at a rate of 44,000 copies/hour.⁹⁶⁴ Self-sufficient printing also allowed for higher production standards and more relaxed deadlines, giving teams time to create a more polished end-product.⁹⁶⁵ This

⁹⁶⁰ Egypt Independent (2015)

⁹⁶¹ Halawa O. (2015)

⁹⁶² Interview with Sherif Wadood (2015)

⁹⁶³ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

⁹⁶⁴ Ghali, M. (2017)

⁹⁶⁵ Author's personal experience managing a weekly publication that was printed at Al-Masry Printers.

also meant that the editors in charge would have to be more vigilant in monitoring content, so as to catch potentially problematic content before it was printed or distributed, rather than risking litigation for any of the existing “Crimes of Publication.”⁹⁶⁶

AlAhrām’s distribution company continued to control the actual dissemination of the papers, a decision based on practicality and cost-efficiency, rather than an imposition by the state.

Egypt Independent

AlMasry AlYoum had sought to increase its profile to a broader audience. By 2009, AMAY was the most important media project in Egypt and the business-minded owners began to prioritize expansion beyond the main Egyptian audience.⁹⁶⁷ They wanted to have an international profile, so they decided to launch an online-only English version, initially called *AlMasry AlYoum English*. The paper’s website had also become a focal point for development within the organization. The following period led to a recruitment drive to bring staff that was both bi-lingual and tech-savvy. They also happened to be driven as journalist-activists, which suited the owners’ political ambitions at the time, according to Lina Attalah, one of the Managing Editors of *AlMasry AlYoum English*:

There was a sense that the Diabs partially wanted to start the English paper to have their name attached to a pioneering journalistic enterprise that is at the forefront of Egypt’s transformation. It was still in a sense tied to “power” for the owners, but not as much in the way of direct local influence, as much as it was about increasing their profile internationally. That is why we were able to operate with much more editorial freedom and for a long time we were not bound by some of the same restrictions as the main Arabic paper.⁹⁶⁸

AlMasry AlYoum English was thus well positioned to report on the 2011 uprisings to a global audience when it happened. Reporters from both editions had ventured to cover the 25 January 2011 demonstrations on “Police Day” against brutality and corruption by security forces. Over the following few days, reporters were arrested, attacked and some even “disappeared” while on the job. When the government made the decision to cut off the internet on 28 January (as the uprising was becoming “the” major international story), over a dozen AMAY reporters stayed in a bustling suite in the Semiramis Hotel, adjacent to Tahrir

⁹⁶⁶ The 2006 Press Law was considered to be an improvement on previous laws placed on publication, but they still included severe penalties including imprisonment and fines for a variety of instances such as, “vilifying the king or president of a foreign country,” and “insulting the president”

⁹⁶⁷ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

⁹⁶⁸ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

Square, the epicenter of events, where satellite internet allowed the reporters to continue producing stories, becoming one of the main sources of news from Egypt during the attempted communications blackout.⁹⁶⁹

The revolution was a seminal moment for the paper, with one journalist from the English edition noting that it “lifted the newspaper out of its lethargy, and the usefulness of journalism—until then a topic of theoretical debate—seemed manifest.”⁹⁷⁰ AMAY English felt a further separation was possible from the Arabic edition, and decided to rename itself *Egypt Independent* in November of 2011 as a way to mark the “exciting moment of transformation in the country’s history,” while maintaining its mandate of covering the country’s main socio-economic and political stories.⁹⁷¹ This coincided with the launch of a weekly paper, which was at the center of a censorship battle with Magdy ElGallad within less than a month, after he decided to halt production due to an opinion article that highlighted possible divisions in the Armed Forces as related above.

Following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak and the subsequent rule of the Muslim Brotherhood (having won both a majority in Parliament and the Presidential elections in 2012), *Egypt Independent*, like AMAY operated as a journalistic watchdog. It was more adventurous than its Arabic counterpart in voicing potentially critical news about the Armed Forces, going as far as calling the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces’ assumption of power in the aftermath of Mubarak’s ouster a “coup by law”.⁹⁷² In the run-up to the 30 June army-backed protests that led to the ouster and imprisonment of President Mohamed Morsi, along with the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and the resumption of a form of military rule, *Egypt Independent* experienced a change that was reflective of the political climate at the time. That period saw a fundamental shift in the paper with a new Chairman, Abdel-Moneim Saeed coming in after running the state’s mouthpiece *AlAhrām*. Magdy ElGallad was replaced by Yasser Rizk in 2012 a former editor of *AlAkhbar* state paper known for his close ties with the Minister of Defense at the time and future President, General Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi. Rizk, like other media heads of that period, had been forthcoming with his intentions saying, “We were the spearhead of the battle to topple the

⁹⁶⁹ Personal experience

⁹⁷⁰ Krajewski, J. (2013)

⁹⁷¹ *Egypt Independent* (2011)

⁹⁷² El-Hennawy, N. (2012)

Muslim Brotherhood by uncovering their failures. We did not create it. This was their reality.”⁹⁷³

Rizk had actively sought to regain editorial control of *Egypt Independent* as he steered the course of the paper in a direction that was strictly anti-Brotherhood and pro-military.⁹⁷⁴ He eventually would succeed and would severely and significantly downsize the English publication, essentially rendering it indistinguishable editorially from AMAY under his stewardship.⁹⁷⁵ Management justified this move by the lack of income brought in by *Egypt Independent*⁹⁷⁶, which was true, but had also been expected since the English edition’s inception. When Attalah protested, she was told, “we are not going to keep losing money on a bunch of leftist kids.”⁹⁷⁷ Wadood left the paper during this period as well.

4) Facing difficulties

AMAY was able to survive a period of takeovers and newspaper closures that plagued many of the other private newspapers between 2012 and 2018. The financial reality of running a newspaper in Egypt amidst the extremely underdeveloped infrastructure for the industry at the time, would require relatively low-cost budgets and frugal spending.⁹⁷⁸ When Hesham Kassem returned to AMAY as a business consultant in 2014, he found that the paper had stopped running as a business, and that spending had departed from being attached to any commercial rationale.⁹⁷⁹ The paper would face serious restructuring and downsizing that were easily justifiable in financial terms.

On the other hand, the political landscape was also changing and the new president had stated on multiple occasions that all media must support the state in its endeavors.⁹⁸⁰ Newspapers such as *AlTahrir*, *AlDostor*, *Sawt al-Oumma* and *DOTMASR* had either changed hands or limited their operations. Others shut down completely following the blockage of websites that started in 2017.

AlMasry AlYom maintained its ownership under the nominal control of the Diabs. The ownership started facing a more stringent political reality. Salah Diab was theatrically and

⁹⁷³ El-Issawi (2014)

⁹⁷⁴ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid

⁹⁷⁶ Krajieski (2013)

⁹⁷⁷ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

⁹⁷⁸ Interview with Hesham Kassem (2015)

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid

⁹⁸⁰ Elmeshad, M. (2015)

very publicly arrested from his home in 2015 and detained for 15 days after being charged with the possession of unlicensed firearms.⁹⁸¹ Khaled Dawoud- a journalist/politician and former member of the Journalists Syndicate High Committee- thought that the arrest was tied to the paper's "increasingly critical coverage" of the president.⁹⁸² Diab was acquitted two years later.

Ironically, the first arrest was not related to the corruption charges that were levied against him in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring when he was among many businessmen under investigation for having illegally appropriated land at below market price, benefiting from a clientelistic relationship with the Mubarak regime.⁹⁸³ Diab would eventually be arrested for these charges five years later in September 2020, when he was also facing tax evasion charges. The arrest was ordered by a military prosecutor.⁹⁸⁴ The accusations against Diab came well after many of other Mubarak era businessmen were acquitted of similar charges. Some of the latter even made strong comebacks in business and politics,⁹⁸⁵ raising concerns that once again, Diab's arrest was over political disagreements revolving around AMAY coverage. Diab was also essentially banned from continuing writing his own column after the Council for Media Regulation banned any outlets from using pseudonyms for authors without providing good reasons and disclosing to the authorities who the writer is. As indicated earlier, he had been writing under the pen name "Newton."⁹⁸⁶

5) Mada Masr, continuing the *Egypt Independent* experiment

Lina Attalah and a handful of journalists- who had exited *Egypt Independent* after its restructuring (opting to avoid its new editorial restrictions)- would start another bilingual news organization that same year with the hope of maintaining their role as journalists during what they thought would be another major year of transformation in 2013. The idea was to create a newsroom and develop a sustainable journalistic institution in Egypt that was run and owned by its journalists. They launched *Mada Masr* on the 30th of June 2013, the day of the anti-Morsi protests. The paper would grow, funded by a community of subscribed readers as well as by institutional support from organizations recognizing its role in journalism. In 2019 *Mada Masr* won the Free Media Pioneer Award from IMS

⁹⁸¹ Dawoud, K. (2015)

⁹⁸² Ibid

⁹⁸³ Shaaban, Mohamed (2018)

⁹⁸⁴ Egypt Independent. (2020)

⁹⁸⁵ Loveluck, L. (2015)

⁹⁸⁶ Middle East Eye (2020)

(International Media Support). “It was operating during a a very turbulent time that looked only to point to more tightening and so *Mada Masr* had been operating on the assumption that the project could end any day.”⁹⁸⁷

By 2017, *Mada* was among 60 websites that were shutdown by the government.⁹⁸⁸ No evidence of legal action was given. Instead, officials made vague statements to the media saying that it was in connection with “publishing false information” and “supporting terrorism”.⁹⁸⁹ *Mada* was registered under the Ministry of Investment, meaning that it was not initially protected as a journalistic organization, especially since it could not seek protection from the Journalists Syndicate, making it more vulnerable for shutdown. When a unified media law was passed in 2016 to govern all mass media, *Mada* immediately submitted their paperwork to register as a media organization under the law, but their application was not responded to for at least 2 years.⁹⁹⁰

The paper experienced a series of additional challenges, including the persecution of investigative journalist Hossam Bahgat for reporting on military trials.⁹⁹¹ Its offices were raided by plain-clothed policemen and 3 journalists detained in November 2019, soon after publishing an article about President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi’s son.

6) **Conclusion:**

AlMasry AlYoum was born in a period of Egyptian history when a certain cohort of liberal-minded business leaders felt empowered and emboldened enough to delve into mass media publication, which for decades had been dominated by the state or its political parties. The newspaper’s main founder had drawn on the legacy of his grandfather who had been a pioneer in utilizing print journalism to influence social and political change. But he most likely viewed owning a newspaper as a means to bolster his influence. The rapid expansion of the paper showed the appetite for and effectiveness of an independent press. Egypt was at the time implementing liberalization policies that required the participation of the cohort of the paper’s owners, which would help explain why they thought that owning a paper would not endanger their business interests. AMAY’s licensing and registration showed that the did not oppose it. This ambivalence would allow the paper to expand, while maintaining a level

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸⁸ Amnesty.org (2017)

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁹⁰ Interview with Lina Attalah (2018)

⁹⁹¹ Reuters (2015)

of uncertainty as to how the state's attitude vis-à-vis print mass publication would be during times of political duress. The restrictions faced by the paper and the difficulties faced by its founder after the 25 January uprising point to a change both in the state's attitude to an independent press, and the relative power afforded to the class of businessmen that thrived under Mubarak.

Chapter 7- OnTV: Building a Liberal Media Empire

1) Introduction

By 2007, *AlMasry AlYoum* newspaper was fast becoming a household name. Its reach and effectiveness were growing. Around that time, one of its main shareholders, telecom billionaire Naguib Sawiris sought to extend his investment in mass media, by launching his own television network. By then, six years had passed since regulations were put in place allowing for private satellite broadcasting outlets to launch from Media City under the auspices of the General Authority for Investment (GAFI). Private television stations were able to immediately compete with the state's outlets once satellite access itself became widespread in the country. Most television managers had the ability to create content that could compete with the public television's statist perspective. Access to these networks was also on its way to becoming ubiquitous, with costs of sharing cable or satellite access dramatically decreasing during the first decade of the 2000's.⁹⁹²

Dream TV had already laid the groundwork and business model for private Egyptian television outlets since launching in 2001, having been the first fully Egyptian-owned and managed network of its kind. Licenses for private television stations established within Media City were obtained from the GAFI as private businesses. Unlike newspapers, the law did not limit the percentage of ownership one person could have over a television outlet, allowing for total control. Around this time, the government's policies were becoming more skewed towards private investment growth, and a handful of privately owned outlets -all by friends of the Mubarak regime- were increasing their audiences and expanding their content. By the time telecom mogul, Naguib Sawiris launched the variety channel *OTV* in 2007, he had developed a belief that privately-owned broadcasting could have a future in Egypt and might be allowed by the state to grow. *OTV* was Sawiris' third variety/entertainment television investment. His stated goal at that point was to combat religious fundamentalism and extremism, by promoting ideas to counter them.⁹⁹³

He was already a majority shareholder in the media network Melody and was looking to launch another station, OnTV as a 24-hour satellite news station. However, the state's de facto ban on licenses for round-the-clock news stations, meant that OnTV could only be

⁹⁹² Stern M. (2009)

⁹⁹³ Sakr N. p.123 (2007)

licensed as a variety channel. The goal of OnTV in Sawiris' eyes, would be the promotion of liberal values, while also acting as a bridge with the West.⁹⁹⁴

The station's first CEO, Emad Gad reflected this outlook in a 2009 interview calling it "a liberal channel that focuses on reviving the Egyptian identity and the values of citizenship, freedom, equality, modernization, rationality," adding that it expresses all these values through its slogan, 'stay in the light.'⁹⁹⁵ A basic content analysis of OnTV would show that the outlet did in fact attempt to provide analysis and insight into the news in a more profound way . At the same time, Naguib Sawiris' media interests cannot only be looked at and analyzed through the prism of their intended cultural value, but also as a unit within his business operations and a tool he had at his disposal that could be deployed to further other goals pertaining to his commercial interests or social/political aspirations.

2) Sawiris investing in television

Naguib Sawiris' Orascom Telecom Holdings (OTH) first rose to prominence when it was in partnership with France Telecom, winning Egypt's first privatized mobile operator license and launching Mobinil in 1997. OTH became the vehicle through which Sawiris would expand in Africa, Asia and Europe. It would come to be viewed as the fastest growing emerging market telecom company by 2005. That year OTH purchased Italy's third largest mobile operator, having already acquired market-leading telecom businesses in Pakistan and Algeria.⁹⁹⁶ At a World Economic Forum meeting in 2006, Naguib Sawiris said he built OTH as a regional enterprise and hoped to replicate that model in media.⁹⁹⁷ By 2015, Sawiris had divested most of his business activity away from telecoms, but still held onto a belief that the opportunity for growth in media regionally was massive, albeit shackled by politics.⁹⁹⁸ The development of his own media organizations, especially OnTV, seemed to always hinge on his other business or political activities, which may be an indication that the development of these organizations were hindered by internal structural factors, as well as external concerns.

Like Ahmed Bahgat, he was not politically active when making his foray into broadcasting. But unlike Bahgat, Sawiris' ambitions did eventually extend into politics, which would play

⁹⁹⁴ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

⁹⁹⁵ Daily News Egypt (2008)

⁹⁹⁶ The Financial Times (2005)

⁹⁹⁷ Sakr (2013) p. 286

⁹⁹⁸ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

into the development of the channel, and into the two times he sold OnTV. The first sale was in 2012. He repurchased it a year later. The next and seemingly final sale was in 2016.

When he first entered the media fray, Sawiris was considered an ally of the Mubarak regime insofar as he supported its liberalization policies and fashioned himself as an entrepreneur with global ambitions who could help Egypt in its push to become a destination for foreign investment, and as a hub for global business.⁹⁹⁹ He saw his positive relationship with the regime as a pre-requisite to conducting business in Egypt.¹⁰⁰⁰ His stated goals for opening television networks were in line, (and partially in service) of these priorities. Sawiris' involvement in media tended to correspond with the direction of his business, and at times with his political stances, as the story of OnTV shows.

Media scholar Naomi Sakr sees these media endeavors as being partially an extension of his business interests.¹⁰⁰¹ The level of risk these activities posed to him and his family who have major holdings in construction, tourism and industry could be offset by having newspaper or television outlets that could act as a viable bargaining chip with authorities, especially under an authoritarian regime such as Mubarak's at the time, where there was a non-linear approach to laws and regulations.¹⁰⁰² His media ventures according to Sakr also fit with what she describes as the "trait of expansionism shared by media moguls":

By investing in 'free' media, expansionist entrepreneurs can hope to put their own visions, policy preferences and even favorable interpretations of their eccentricities into circulation in parallel with their capital.¹⁰⁰³

OnTV was structurally meant to be an expansion of Naguib Sawiris' business empire. It was not initially thought of as a major money maker, but more of a passion project of the owner.¹⁰⁰⁴ With sustainability in mind, the station was structured as a business that would be run with the same kind of financial prudence deployed in Orascom Telecom. During the first few years of the station's launch, its managers were concerned with balancing budgets and creating compelling content, rather than with the more politicized aspects of running a television station.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰⁰¹ Sakr (2015)

¹⁰⁰² Ibid p. 163

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid pp. 163, 164

¹⁰⁰⁴ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

Haitham El-Sawy who helped found and run the ONA academy, OnTV's media training program, said that Sawiris would show up, and briefly make sure everything was in order, without engaging too much. "He made a point not to appear like he was meddling in day-to-day running, but you had to show him that you kept everything in order."¹⁰⁰⁵ The plan was for OnTV to eventually become profitable, but early on, Sawiris knew that it would be difficult for it to make enough of a profit to be considered a 'money maker'. Reflecting on the driving force behind his decisions with the station, he said: "OnTV held a special place in my heart. I already knew that in television, entertainment was where profit would be. But at the same time, I would never accept for it to be run loosely, or at a constant loss."¹⁰⁰⁶

Sawiris' general broader involvement in media, especially regionally, suggests that he was opportunistically looking for openings where he would have an immediate impact through the sector. His first major mass media/current affairs broadcasting investment was in Iraq, immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2004. VideoCairo founder Mohamed Gohar was asked to lead the project. He established *AlNahrain* television network with an initial investment of \$25 million dollars. The project was meant to be an expansive entertainment network, at a time when the country was still in the throngs of a bloody conflict.¹⁰⁰⁷ According to Gohar, Sawiris was interested in increasing his profile in Iraq as well as possibly dominating the media landscape there, to have the infrastructure in place as the country rebuilds. In reality, Sawiris' media investment paled in comparison to his telecom interests in the country.

In 2003 he led a consortium that had won a bid to essentially build-up and launch the country's mobile telephone capacity.¹⁰⁰⁸ It was described as being "among the most potentially lucrative and high-profile contracts to be offered in post-war Iraq" since the country did not have a mobile phone network prior.¹⁰⁰⁹ The reconstruction project alone was worth \$325 million.¹⁰¹⁰ The persistence of the conflict forced Sawiris to rethink his position in Iraq, but the availability of high-end bidders for the mobile contract allowed his Orascom Telecom to walk away from the country with a sizeable profit, selling its stake in the Iraq

¹⁰⁰⁵ Interview with Haitham El-Sawy (2019)

¹⁰⁰⁶ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰⁰⁷ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2016)

¹⁰⁰⁸ AlJazeera (2003)

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid

¹⁰¹⁰ Pelham, N. (2004)

telecom company “Iraqna” for \$1.2 bn.¹⁰¹¹ The closure of *AlNahrain* was a by-product of Orascom’s divestment from the country, and its existence seemed to hinge on Sawiris’ overall involvement in Iraq, rather than on its viability and profitability as a business.¹⁰¹²

OnTV held more of a personal importance to Sawiris. He expressed privately and publicly nationalistic sentiments and depicted his desire to contribute to the liberalization and democratization of Egypt as the underlying importance of the network for him.

3) OnTV: Early Operations and Aspirations

OnTV was initially conceived of as an outward-looking channel. The accessibility of cable and satellite programming from Egypt- coupled with the fact that the only available broadcast licensing scheme was for satellite networks out of Media City- allowed the station to organically position itself as a regional/globally-oriented endeavor. More than just being a liberal channel, it was also meant to be a “bridge with the West”.¹⁰¹³

The first station head, Emad Gad had more of an academic background as well as some experience in print journalism, but he was most notable for how closely aligned he was to Naguib Sawiris intellectually. Gad wouldn’t last long at the helm, being replaced by Albert Shafik, an alumnus of VideoCairo, who helped run *AlNahrain* before returning to Egypt. Shafik’s appointment was an indication that the station had acknowledged it would not be able to survive independently without industry professionals at the helm.¹⁰¹⁴ Shafik would be a more technically-minded executive with broadcast experience who could help deliver Sawiris’ baseline of a self-sustained business.¹⁰¹⁵

Like others who tried before him, Sawiris was unable to get a license for 24-hour news and current affairs programming. Instead Shafik was able to cultivate the station’s reputation as “Egypt’s first independent news channel¹⁰¹⁶” by building a robust and global news bulletin, coupled with the tried and tested “talk-show” model, that often involved well-known hosts as “talking heads” for the majority of the shows, delving into major socio-political issues.

¹⁰¹¹ Ersan, I. (2007)

¹⁰¹² Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2016)

¹⁰¹³ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰¹⁴ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2016)

¹⁰¹⁵ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰¹⁶ Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU)

Prior to the Arab Spring, OnTV recruited media professionals who were not known for their allegiance to the Mubarak regime. The goal was to introduce unique programming as well as concepts such as debate shows that could not be seen elsewhere. Sawiris recalled receiving angry calls from security officials or from members of the Mubarak administration when OnTV would host prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood around the 2010 parliamentary elections.¹⁰¹⁷ The Brotherhood at that time had tens of members running for parliamentary seats. They ran as independents since the group itself was not granted license to operate politically.

Ibrahim Eissa was one of the hosts recruited to work on the station. He was chief editor of *AlDostor* Newspaper and had been released from jail in 2009, one year before his recruitment, after having been detained on charges of spreading false information about Mubarak. His criticisms of the regime and commentary on politics were rumored to have led to a state order to end his participation in a show focused on local politics called “*Baladna Bilmasry*,” (Our Country In “Egyptian”) which he co-anchored with Reem Maged, a progressive anchor known as well to be a government critic.¹⁰¹⁸ Sawiris acknowledged that despite his desire to have a free and independent news channel, it would not be practical to operate without a certain degree of self-censorship or acquiescence to state demands:

To be fair and honest, we have to acknowledge we cannot escape government pressures. So we have to deal with them on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, what you don't want is to get into a collision with the government and then they close you down.¹⁰¹⁹

Around the time of the 2010 elections build-up, OnTV hired Yosri Foda, an investigative journalist who had just aired a wildly popular series on AlJazeera Network, *Sirry lil' Ghayya* (Highly Confidential). Foda knew that he would be moving to a fledgling station that was on a much tighter budget than the Qatari funded *AlJazeera*, but he was persuaded by Sawiris to join and present his own “pioneering” investigative talk-show in Egypt.¹⁰²⁰ Shortly afterwards, the Arab Spring would lead to a paradigm shift for the station and its main programs.

¹⁰¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁰¹⁸ Egyptian chronicles (2010)

¹⁰¹⁹ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰²⁰ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

4) The Arab Spring: A second birth?

According to Sawiris, OnTV found its feet with the Arab Spring. He was criticized for complying with the government order of an internet and mobile network blackout, but he maintains that he was a staunch supporter of the anti-Mubarak uprising through OnTV and by placing financial bets on the country to reassure the business community.¹⁰²¹ During that period, OnTV expanded its hiring, and the company found itself needing to spend to keep up with the sudden influx of private television stations being licensed.

OnTV anchor Lilianne Daoud had just moved to Egypt from London where she hosted a talk show on BBC Arabic, *Noqtat Hiwar* (Talking Point). The uprisings had encouraged her to make the move, and after calling Albert Shafik proposing that she host a talk-show focused on global affairs, a deal was drawn up to bring her in. Daoud has said that “there was a huge appetite and belief in the sector in 2011. OnTV and Sawiris were very keen on becoming Egypt’s voice to the region and potentially the world.”¹⁰²²

Yosri Foda’s nightly talk show *Akher Kalam* (Final Words) had become one of the most popular programs in the country, and the channel had made him Egypt’s most well-paid news media professional.¹⁰²³ *Akher Kalam*, as well as other shows on OnTV, resorted to hiring established print journalists looking to supplement their income at a time when independent journalism seemed to be a growing profession amid the heightened appetite for information. The main producer on Foda’s program during the 25 January protests was Ahmed Ragab, a journalist with *AlMasry AlYom*, where Sawiris was a major stakeholder. Ragab recalls the station’s almost spontaneous and unanimous (among managers) decision to report on the protests at a time when state media and other privately owned stations were more tentative.¹⁰²⁴ Ragab and Foda produced segments alluding to potential financial corruption in the Mubarak regime and highlighting the protesters’ demands for social justice and regime change, having received an implicit green light from Sawiris and Albert Shafik.¹⁰²⁵ Foda, who had his beginnings as a BBC journalist, had been given the institutional backing to run his show as he

¹⁰²¹ Ibid

¹⁰²² Interview with Lilianne Daoud (2018)

¹⁰²³ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

¹⁰²⁴ Interview with Ahmed Ragab (2015)

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid

saw fit in 2011, prompting him to make long term plans to work in Egypt at the time, something he had not felt possible when migrating over a decade earlier.¹⁰²⁶

Reem Maged, who had continued to host *Baladna BilMasry* was allowed to unabashedly side with the demonstrators in her program. After Mubarak stepped down on 11 February 2011, Maged along with some of her colleagues in the station extended their reporting and criticism to the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces that had taken power. Prior to the uprising the Armed Forces had been the other major red line journalists knew not to cross along with Mubarak's family. "There was a sense of purpose and feeling of contributing to real change" at that moment, according to Maged.¹⁰²⁷

Foda on the other hand, claimed that while he was not censored by the station, he was contacted directly and constantly by high-ranking members of the Armed Forces to question his work.¹⁰²⁸ These conversations would forecast for him the direction the country's media would ultimately take.

5) New leases, longer leashes

Broadcasting in Egypt experienced major shifts in the immediate aftermath of Mubarak's ouster. The sudden licensing of 16 new privately-owned stations pointed to a more competitive media scape. OnTV would be responsible for a major milestone and potentially seismic development in the industry after the network managed to obtain a license to air OnTV Live a 24-hour live station generally focused on news. The station itself was launched with a \$3million/year budget, requiring basic investments in broadcasting and manpower to be able to air live from around the country. Operationally, the additional investments and procurements were simple to attain for OnTV and Sawiris.¹⁰²⁹ While launching OnTV Live may have been a relatively simple financial and operational endeavor, it was a major milestone, having been established as a non-state entity that could essentially provide round-the-clock broadcasted news, with reporters on the ground across the country. Many media investors had attempted and failed to gain the necessary regulatory approval, since private broadcasting began in 2001. VideoCairo founder, Mohamed Gohar, who was laying the groundwork for his own outlet (25TV) noted that this development helped solidify the shift in

¹⁰²⁶ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

¹⁰²⁷ Interview with Reem Maged (2015)

¹⁰²⁸ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

¹⁰²⁹ Interview with Mohamed Helmy (2015)

broadcast media brought about by the Arab Spring.¹⁰³⁰ Gohar had himself been rebuffed in numerous attempts to create a news channel prior to 2011, being told by authorities that ownership of news channels would still be exclusive to the state. He ended up following suit and establishing 25TV, which provided an array of programming, but was heavily skewed towards reporting the news. The station was able to air from a building adjacent to the state's media complex building, Maspero, outside of Media City, which was also a milestone at the time, since private broadcasting occurred almost exclusively from the media production city. Gohar recalled that at the time, a rich pool of enthusiastic young journalists was available and would help bolster the sector, due to the promise of a shift towards a more open, private broadcasting sector.¹⁰³¹ Many such as Gohar and Sawiris, decided to invest, believing in a green horizon for the businesses.

OnTV was also the first to introduce political satirist Bassem Youssef to television after his popular YouTube posts. Youssef had been a successful heart surgeon before making the shift. He would be known as the Middle East's John Stewart and his would almost immediately become the most popular show in the Arab World.¹⁰³² It pushed the envelope of political satire in the country and helped validate OnTV as a "pro-revolution" station aimed at progression. Youssef's career in political comedy would take off leading him to move over to two more stations (in just three seasons), CBC and *MBCMAsr*.

Muslim Brotherhood in Power: TV as Politics

The Muslim Brotherhood's rise to win both the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 led to a polarized political scene. This polarization extended readily to the entire broadcasting sector, which had become essentially split between supporters and opponents of the MB. OnTV, continued to consider itself a liberal outpost for the country, and had dedicated itself behind closed doors to help turn public opinion away from the Brotherhood, with the almost explicit goal of taking them down.¹⁰³³ Albert Shafik laid these plans out in no uncertain terms to media professionals under him at one point.¹⁰³⁴ In public, Shafik would

¹⁰³⁰ Interview with Mohamed Gohar (2016)

¹⁰³¹ Ibid

¹⁰³² Ibrahim A., El-Tantawy N. (2017) p. 280

¹⁰³³ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰³⁴ Interview with Ali Saqr (2015) *pseudonym* of OnTV employee

express his opinion that the Islamist wave in Egypt, led by the MB, was attempting to erase Egyptian culture and change society.¹⁰³⁵

Sawiris had also established the Free Egyptians Party, which he funded without attempting to hold office through it. He made a point of rarely appearing on his network himself, but his party was heavily featured through news coverage as well as advertisements.

While he would insist that OnTV was not preoccupied with pushing Free Egyptians to election victory, the station's owner was unambiguous with his desire to turn public opinion against the Brotherhood, which he viewed as a backward, religious fundamentalist organization.¹⁰³⁶ This was not lost on the MB-led government who Sawiris believes was pressuring his businesses in order to force him to soften its stance. On October 6, 2012, President Mohamed Morsi singled out the Sawiris family as owing nearly \$1 billion in back taxes. The government then launched legal proceedings to retrieve the funds. Naguib insisted on fighting the case, while his siblings and father initially opted to settle. Within the TV network, Yosri Foda's show was briefly suspended between June and September 2012. Foda said it was in protest against the Brotherhood-led government's attempted interference with his reporting.¹⁰³⁷

According to Sawiris, the pressure was great enough that he decided to sell OnTV, "at least while the Brotherhood was in power,¹⁰³⁸" to his friend, Tarek Bin Ammar, a Tunisian media producer. The sale prompted speculation that it could be a cover for capital flight out of the country, especially as Sawiris and his brothers¹⁰³⁹ appeared to be moving massive amounts of capital abroad. It was a moment when business and political interests clashed, and the telecom tycoon felt that the rift with the state would be difficult to reconcile. He saw his ownership of the network as one of the main liabilities for him in Egypt, especially after having left the country on a self-imposed exile during most of Morsi's presidency.¹⁰⁴⁰ The following year, Ben Ammar and Sawiris announced a media partnership between the two, creating a clear pathway for the Egyptian to return as owner of OnTV. That same year, the Muslim

¹⁰³⁵ Shams El-Din, M. (2012)

¹⁰³⁶ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰³⁷ Interview with Yosri Foda (2013)

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid

¹⁰³⁹ Nassef Sawiris, CEO of Orascom Construction & Samih Sawiris, CEO of ORASCOM Development

¹⁰⁴⁰ Shams El-Din, M., (2012)

Brotherhood were removed from power by the military on 3 July 2013 following the “30 June” protests. Naguib would subsequently regained control of his station.

6) After the Brotherhood: Paradigm shift

OnTV began to lean into the idea of the channel becoming a hub for current affairs programming in the country, especially with OnTV Live continuing to be the only functioning round-the-clock privately owned news channel.¹⁰⁴¹ The station also began to lay the groundwork for ONA Academy, as Egypt’s first private media training hub, ostensibly to train the station’s next generation of media professionals. “Sawiris wanted OnTV to be the main ecosystem for media in Egypt and was excited to launch an entity that would elevate the sector,” according to ONA’s founding manager.¹⁰⁴²

After the fall of the MB and its designation as a terrorist organization by the government, the station’s ownership and leadership found itself theoretically in line with the interim government’s political direction (insofar as they both opposed the MB). However, some of the presenters of its flagship shows maintained their critical positions of government, especially of the military leadership that administered Morsi’s ouster and maintained corporal control.

Yosri Foda recalls receiving phone calls directly from military commanders during this period and having to deal personally with their requests or attempts to steer his reporting. He would leave the network for good in September 2014, just four months after General Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi won the presidential elections by an incredible 97%. Foda’s decision to leave was grounded in his personal belief that the country was returning to an era where the media would be forcefully brought under direct control by a militaristic government and that his program would be on a “collision course with the military”.¹⁰⁴³

El-Sisi held numerous sessions and focus groups with members of the media in his first few months in office. Foda said that it was during one of these meetings where he made up his mind to leave OnTV and the country, after one of the attendees suggested to El-Sisi that August 14 should be a national holiday. The suggestion was made as a way to celebrate the Rab’a Massacre of August 2013, when over 1,000 supporters of Mohamed Morsi were killed,

¹⁰⁴¹ Interview with Mohamed Helmy (2015). Helmy sat at the helm of the station’s newsroom in 2013.

¹⁰⁴² Interview with Haitham ElSawy (2019)

¹⁰⁴³ Interview with Yosri Foda (2015)

after a month-long sit-in protesting his removal from office.¹⁰⁴⁴ According to Foda (who had publicly condemned the massacre) that meeting gave a clear indication that whatever freedoms the media enjoyed after 25 January would be lost. He thought that the natural response to such a suggestion should have been immediate dismissal and outrage, and was therefore horrified that this was not the case. “The proposal, of course was not taken up, but it was alarming enough that he felt it was ok to propose it to the president of the country!”¹⁰⁴⁵ Foda’s assessment of that time was that “there was an immediate feeling the media would be classified by the state as either ‘with us, against us or independent thinkers.’ The independent thinkers to a militaristic nation was as much of a problem as any rivals they may have.”¹⁰⁴⁶

Similarly, Reem Maged left the station in 2015, writing a statement saying she was forced to leave due to a host of pressures forcing her to end her tenure as a TV host on the station saying, “I’d rather remain silent than tell only half truths.”¹⁰⁴⁷ The station said Maged’s show was suspended over scheduling issues, but she never returned as a television host.

During this period, Sawiris believed Egypt was changing, and that there was no longer an appetite for the same level of critical current affairs programs. He wanted to steer the station more towards entertainment broadcasting, which was a difficult task since it ran counter to the organization’s main set-up and reputation.¹⁰⁴⁸ OnTV was also beginning to become a business liability for Sawiris as he claimed that some of his big acquisitions were being stalled by security services who had concerns about him. Most notably, he said his attempt to purchase CI Capital (an investment bank) was being stalled by National Security¹⁰⁴⁹ in March 2016.¹⁰⁵⁰ Less than two months after his CI Capital bid was rebuffed, Sawiris sold OnTV. In public, he claimed that the sale was due to the station’s inability to make a profit,¹⁰⁵¹ something that he privately said did not bother him, given his personal affinity for the project. “Egyptians’ Media Group” purchased OnTV in May 2016. This company that seemed to have burst on the scene from out of nowhere in 2015, was owned by Ahmed Abu Hashima, owner of Egyptian Steel.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁴⁷ Hanafy E. (2015)

¹⁰⁴⁸ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰⁴⁹ State Security Services was rebranded and renamed National Security after Mubarak’s ouster.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Reuters (2016)

¹⁰⁵¹ Ahram Online (2016)

Abu-Hashima's media company was rumored to be a front for the General Intelligence Directorate, and its acquisition of media outlets was seen to be a way for the state to control the private media, without bluntly nationalizing the sector.¹⁰⁵²

At the time of the sale, Lilian Daoud was the last of the critical talk-show hosts to remain at OnTV. As she was a Lebanese/British National with an Egyptian daughter, Naguib Sawiris guaranteed he would secure her position in the station (through which she had a work visa) prompting her to spur other offers of employment outside the country.¹⁰⁵³ Her program *AlSouira AlKamila* (The Full Picture) was also one of the last emissions from Egypt to still host individuals from a wide array of voices, especially giving voice to individuals and groups who opposed military rule and were symbols of the 25 January Revolution. One month after the sale was made, Daoud announced her departure from OnTV. Just hours after her announcement, she was visited by plain-clothed policemen, with an order to have her immediately deported, claiming that her work visa was no longer valid and that she was therefore staying illegally in the country.¹⁰⁵⁴ That night, she was forced to go with a police escort to the airport, and given a choice between Lebanon (her country of birth) and Britain (her country of citizenship). She believed that the state was taking revenge on her for her positions, while also sending a message to other like-minded media professionals that there would no longer be any tolerance for critical reporting or opinions on Egyptian television.¹⁰⁵⁵

The station would move on from political and current affairs programming. Under the new ownership it would launch a sports channel and shift more concretely to entertainment programming.

Sawiris moving on from OnTV

Naguib Sawiris had almost completely divested from his main broadcasting undertakings in Egypt, just nine years after launching OnTV. His interest in media continued in other ways. Through his company, Media Global Network, he purchased a controlling stake in Lyon-based Euronews in 2015. He had also almost completely divested from his telecom holdings saying it didn't hold enough opportunity for growth to his liking.¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵² Bahgat, H. (2017)

¹⁰⁵³ Interview with Lilianne Daoud (2019)

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid

Despite selling OnTV under the pretext of television in Egypt lacking real prospects for profitability, he focused his attention on the advertising company that he owned, Promomedia. This company purchased media concessions for entire broadcasting outlets, usually for an entire year, and then distributed ads accordingly. Sawiris did not see a problem with the tactic of giving media placement companies such broad financial control over media outlets, saying it was standard practice in the country along with the Arab world, and that he was not going to reinvent the system.¹⁰⁵⁷

Promomedia specifically was a major player in the country's media system, as it held concessions in multiple outlets with and across media platforms, which in theory would pose a conflict of interest given the identity of the company's owner and his other media holdings. However, this was never probed by any of Egypt's commercial regulatory authorities. Promomedia was accused of mismanagement by numerous private print and broadcasting outlets who were unable to pay staff after Promomedia reportedly were unable to pay for their concessions due to a stagnant market. This included *AlMasry AlYom*, which Sawiris had a major share in. The blame was directed towards Promomedia's CEO, Ehab Talaat, rather than at Sawiris himself.¹⁰⁵⁸

Despite turning his attention to Promomedia after OnTV, the ad company's concessions dwindled in the years that followed. The company became an almost insignificant item in Sawiris's investment portfolio, while his business interests continued to grow in other areas, meaning his role in Egypt's mass media became effectively marginalized that year.

7) Conclusion

OnTV's establishment in 2007 marked one of the first major endeavors for a businessman looking to gain a substantial hold on the country's private broadcasting sector. The station was not necessarily set-up as a major source of revenue or profit, but it was set-up with the belief that the political climate in the country was more favorable to what network's founder, Naguib Sawiris was a leading businessman with global reach, liberal attitudes and a positive relationship with the regime. It was launched during a period when the state seemed to be willing to recalibrate how it would oversee broadcast media, after four decades of an absolute state-monopoly over the sector. The uprising in 2011 and the subsequent events that led to the return of a military-led government, weighed on broadcasting in general and

¹⁰⁵⁷ Interview with Naguib Sawiris (2015)

¹⁰⁵⁸ Halawa O. (2015)

on the development of the network, which ultimately could not maintain its original mandate as a station that would cater to current events and the news. Naguib Sawiris's aspirations in the country's media sector would be dashed as he sold the station in 2016 to a company known to have deep ties to the state.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

Understanding the impact of structural changes and economic reform can be done using many different societal lenses and contexts where politics, power and capital intertwine. Egypt's economic (and to a lesser extent, political) restructuring around the turn of the century, reflected on society as a whole in many ways, from a redistribution of political influence to the recalibration of some economic institutions and the spheres of influence within them. Media, as a sector and area of study, often helps shed light on the nuances and iterations of power dynamics in flux.

This thesis has attempted to address the development of broadcast and print mass media in Egypt amid shifting transitions in political and economic structures. It assesses trends associated with outlets that have significant current affairs and news content. The years forming the focal point of this study (2001-2019) mark the emergence of privately owned print and broadcasting mass media outlets following the implementation of privatization policies amid a broader neoliberal shift in the country. Major socio-political upheaval also left an indelible mark on this period. As a result, the pendulum of power had swung multiple times, especially in the aftermath of the 25 January uprising in 2011 that ended Hosni Mubarak's 30-year presidency.

Having accepted the outlook that media systems develop in ways that are acutely sensitive to the prevailing political systems, this study has assessed the relative weight of political and economic transformations on the overall structure of media systems and organizations. A look into the history of mass media outlets in Egypt revealed that many of the state's attitudes and posturing vis-à-vis media as a sector were carried through different regimes regardless and helped underscore how media were regulated and overseen through varying structures. It also shows that when private media emerged, the sector did not experience enough of an institutional shift in the state's relationship with the media to allow for a systematic or linear development within that nascent portion of the media system.

The political economy of media delves into the ways through which socio-political structures affect the development of communication and media systems. It provides a lens to assess the power structures within the sector and trends associated with its structural shifts. Scholars in the field have created a variety of models, such as Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda

model along with Hallin and Mancini's typology of three media models. But only a small fraction of studies considers systems that are affected by two distinct circumstances:

- 1) Mass media sectors caught between disparate levels of economic and political liberalization.
- 2) Protracted and/or suspended periods of economic and political transition.

Egypt as a case study exhibits both characteristics in the period under investigation.

Findings:

***How much has control over media transitioned to the private sector?**

Scholarly work on neoliberalism stipulates a continued, and palpable presence of the state to implement the liberalization policies it seeks. However, in the case of the media system, this state's role wasn't clearly defined, but the state attempted to manage print and broadcast emissions by attempting to create a trustworthy class of gatekeepers in mass media. The development of private mass media at the turn of this century was in itself a major landmark for the sector, which had been under the near complete control of government organizations before then. Private media had quickly come to compete with all state-funded outlets altering the entire complexion of the media system.

Growth of private ownership of mass media occurred in parallel with the expansion of private ownership in other sectors during this period. For example, the private sector's stake in manufacturing grew from 58% in 1991 to 85% in 2001.¹⁰⁵⁹

This study finds that, while this organizational shift was highly significant, it was not immediately accompanied by an institutional shift in the state's attitude and approach to media in general. The economic liberalization that led to the emergence of private mass media outlets was also lacking the kind of political reform that would allow these stations to flourish and operate without fear of upsetting the regime.

Egypt had been at the helm of the Arab region's cultural pulse, through the establishment of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). Located in the impressive Maspero building, this government-funded organization came to symbolize the importance the state would place on both developing and controlling audio and visual broadcasting. Gamal Abdel

¹⁰⁵⁹ Adly (2020)

Nasser launched the region's first television station from there in 1960, the year when he decided to nationalize the press through "The Press Organization Law". When mass media ownership was made available to the private sector in the early 2000's, a select group of business leaders were able to launch mass media outlets while exercising control over their output. Private outlets would be able to offer content not available through the public sector. The proliferation of satellite television and the internet had made it increasingly important to provide content that catered to audience demand.

The ERTU had been unable to retain its viewers neither through an attempted revamp of its programming in the 1990's, nor through the launch of new satellite stations under its Nilesat network. Its debts were mounting at that time and the organization which employed nearly 40,000 employees faced becoming obsolete. Studies on that period showed that, Egyptians were already turning to Pan-Arab stations, such as AlJazeera, ART (Arab Radio and Television) and MBC for both entertainment and current affairs content.

Therefore, the emergent commercially orientated outlets were able to immediately compete with the incumbent public organizations. New private television outlets such as Dream TV and OnTV offered programs discussing popular topics and news-oriented talk shows that would attract audiences hungry for a source of information from a non-governmental source. While these channels were dwarfed by Maspero and the ERTU in size and scope, they quickly became the most prominent and relevant audiovisual outlets, especially with the exponential growth of satellite television penetration in the 2000's. Similarly, readership of the first private newspaper, *AlMasry AlYoum* (est. 2004) grew to the point where it was briefly the highest in Egypt during around the uprising against Mubarak, eclipsing *AlAhrām*, which had for decades been the most widely circulated newspaper in the Arab World.

Regardless of who ultimately controlled the content, output and ownership of media outlets, there is no doubt that, since the turn of the century, the sector shifted structurally to prominently featuring private enterprises.

Control of these private outlets had shifted greatly along with the degree of state supervision of their content, but since they came to the fore, the state had not attempted an outright re-nationalization, for a variety of reasons. The most important of these reasons was the state's continued need to appear as democratic and engaged in a process of liberalization. Economic liberalization efforts were accompanied by a need to appear to be opening-up public life as well. While political liberalization and free speech were never fully actualized, many

believed that private media were a main area of window-dressing for the Mubarak regime to show that there was a true departure from the prior centralized approach. After the ouster of Mubarak, private media became even more entrenched as a staple in the psyche of the Egyptian media consumer.

President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi exhibited a more limited tolerance to critical, independent media than his immediate predecessors, instead appearing to share the outlook of Gamal Abdel Nasser, that all media in the country need to be supportive of state priorities and that they must all be part of state developmentalist efforts. Although El-Sisi did not eradicate private media outlets ownership, private media outlets would lose greatly during his presidency through various mechanisms. Most of the freedoms gained in the years directly preceding his reign would disappear.

***Did the state set out to create and promote the growth of private media outlets?**

Beginnings: Design and Accidents

One of the main takeaways from this study is that despite the eventual prominence of privately owned media in Egypt's mediascape, the emergence and development of this part of the sector was unintentional as far as the government, the security services and the media regulators were involved. Rather, it came about in tandem with the settling-in of new realities in the political economy of Egypt at the time, where the economic and political clout of a group of connected businessmen were on the rise, and the implementation of neoliberal policies had become a priority. Furthermore, the state was highly reactive when it came to the media system allowing for developments to occur external of any specific plan for the sector. This stands in contrast to the more active role the state played in mediating and shaping the political economy into what Adly calls a "national variety or globalized neoliberalism,"¹⁰⁶⁰ the state was much more reactive when it came to the media system.

Egypt's political economy created overall circumstances allowing for private sector growth in media in ways that differed slightly between television and print. But the common thread across platforms has been the effects of the implementation of neoliberal policies, and the rise of businessmen to prominence in the ruling NDP. In 1991 Egypt signed deals with the IMF and the World Bank, committing to increased privatization and liberalization on the economic and political front. The implementation of these policies gave rise to a growing

¹⁰⁶⁰ Adly (2020) p.5

crop of connected businessmen, in a neopatrimonial regime that was also engaged in expanding a politically determined capitalism, where members of the ruling groups were taking advantage of the positions of power guaranteed to them, to accumulate wealth.¹⁰⁶¹

This study concludes that one of the determining factors involved in the emergence of privately owned media was the fact that many businessmen felt emboldened by their recent ascension in the Egyptian power hierarchy. The vast majority of the first private owners of media outlets did not have a history in the sector and they were all in good standing with the country's ruling cohort or were themselves representatives of the party in the legislative branch.

Furthermore, the Mubarak regime's desire to appear to be veering towards a more democratic and politically liberal approach, prompted the state to avoid shutting down the private ownership of media, even when they seemed to over-step some of the unspoken rules and redlines such as refraining from any critical mention of the President or his family, along with the military and some of the more influential political figures.

This part of the media system would also perform another function that the regime would come to appreciate: to act as an outlet for society to vent their anger and frustration with rising inequality and higher costs of living, as well as voice dissatisfaction with unpopular policies and flawed governance. Relative poverty was on the rise in Egypt at the time, despite the country achieving relatively high levels of top-level GDP growth (2008 was the highest since 1984¹⁰⁶²) and being considered a model reformer by the IMF.¹⁰⁶³ But growth and job creation were restricted to certain capital-intensive sectors, while levels of unemployment and vulnerable employment were on the rise.¹⁰⁶⁴ The government had come to value the role media outlets could play in both funneling and containing any public anger toward the state's policies at a time of rising youth unemployment and subsequently dwindling public spending. By allowing businessmen who benefitted from the regime's new direction to own mass media outlets, the state was also ensuring that private media would help promote the government's main policy priority at the time, the neo-liberalization effort.

However, rather than specifically plan for private mass media to take over the sector, it slowly became a reality that the regime tolerated, and considered it a being ultimately

¹⁰⁶¹ Achcar (2013) p.63

¹⁰⁶² World Bank Data

¹⁰⁶³ IMF (2007)

¹⁰⁶⁴ Adly (2020)

beneficial for both its image and priorities. The sector itself experienced some characteristics of liberalization, but it was never “liberalized,” since the private sector was allowed to form and grow only within a set and specific regulatory structure.

Audio-Visual Broadcast: Putting existing infrastructure to use

Cairo’s Media Production City was designed initially as a production hub that would help re-establish Egypt as the region’s cultural heartbeat through state-of-the-art facilities and laws facilitating investment in the sector. Privately owned current affairs stations emerged from MPC only after it had become clear that plans to create a global production hub for movies and television would not materialize on the scale that was hoped for. In a sense, the beginnings of private broadcast were merely reactive to this failure and may not have otherwise come to be. Television stations would help pay the rent on empty lots and make use of studio sets and equipment that were unused, this trend started with the launch of Saudi-owned Orbit from MPC in 1998 after relocating from Rome, Italy.

The government had clearly attempted to encourage private broadcasting as a motivational mechanism for business in Egypt in general by creating a Free Trade Zone and passing Law 201/2000 that allowed the General Authority for Investment to grant licenses for TV outlets. But the state’s incentive strategy for the creation of these outlets was clearly geared to allow only for the creation of private individual stations, rather than the launch of a sustainable sector, a fact that became especially clear with the absence of genuine regulation of the sector. Rather, the Ministry of Information attempted to exercise an authority over these outlets, almost haphazardly. Laws ensuring free speech and the right to information existed, but they were still overridden by the ongoing “State of Emergency.”

It is most likely that the state underestimated the ultimate impact of these outlets locally, since they were only to be allowed to air on satellite, from within MPC. The boom in cheap access to satellite/cable TV had to become a full-fledged societal phenomenon by the time Law 201 was passed. Furthermore, these outlets were subject to security approval, in the sense that the gatekeepers of both the technology (MPC) and content (approved license holders), whether individuals or entities, needed to be vetted by the central authorities. Stations were also running from within MPC, which was a confined space, and authorities could quickly “pull the plug” on any emission, if needed. The state’s grip on terrestrial broadcasting was never on the table as an area of privatization. In the late 1990’s this was a

sound strategy as the cost of access to satellite television was still inhibitive for the vast majority of Egyptians, whereas access to terrestrial TV was virtually universal.

Early private broadcast outlets: champions of neoliberalism

All of the outlets that initially launched within MPC initially promoted the neoliberal directive. In retrospect, the entire process of opening private broadcasting to the private sector was in line with the decades-old state belief that media had an overriding nationalistic obligation to propagate government policies and priorities. In 1960, Maspero and the ERTU were launched partially as mascots for Nasser's brand of Socialism, and to symbolize achievement under his state capitalist system while also acting as a major element in Egypt's drive for regional "soft power" advantages. Similarly, private television would come to be a symbol for "liberalization" and the state's departure from state capitalism. Fittingly, the first private television station, Dream TV was owned by Ahmed Bahgat who was meant to be the poster child of this new policy direction.

Hosni Mubarak had first approached Bahgat, a businessman who was based in the U.S., asking him to return to Egypt and set up his business at home after finding success abroad. Dream TV was the first privately owned television outlet in Egypt, coming about in 2001, during a time when the Egyptian government was trying to encourage foreign direct investment in the country.¹⁰⁶⁵ The channel would showcase Bahgat's investments in Egypt (mostly in real estate), at a time when the state was striving to propagate an image of Egypt as a fertile ground for new investments and economic growth. Bahgat would also allow the station managers to push the traditional envelope of news coverage.

The station's managers saw an opportunity to expand content based on what would attract viewers, which meant covering socio-economic and political issues in ways that are not tied exclusively to the state narrative. However, when certain red lines were crossed (especially with respect to the President, his family or the military), the state intervened and personnel changes at Dream ensued. But Bahgat's perceived proximity to the President gave many of the channel's employees the feeling that they may be "protected" while expanding their news coverage.

¹⁰⁶⁵ See Chapter 5

Bahgat's fellow owners of private media space were also mostly businessmen with close ties to the Presidency or the ruling National Democratic Party. Their positions were also relatively protected.

Some, such as OnTV owner and telecom mogul Naguib Sawiris, were not initially involved in politics but professed to maintain good relations with the regime (as a rule) to avoid run-ins or disruptions to his businesses. Sawiris had ambitions in the sector, but he stressed that he aimed to contribute to the liberalization process in Egypt. Like others, Sawiris had previously explored creating a television station that would report on current affairs, but he met resistance from the state – until 2007 when he felt that the state's new approach and shifting policies created an environment conducive to major changes in the sector.

Bahgat, Sawiris and some of the other early broadcast owners seemed content for their television enterprises to either supplement their broader businesses, or boost their own personal profiles or political ambitions.

Private Print beginnings: Fortune favors the prepared

Unlike in broadcast, daily privately owned print newspapers did not benefit from a specific law or tax incentive. The state had not planned for such ventures and did not provide any new infrastructure for its creation. Rather, the establishment of *AlMasry AlYom* (*AMAY*) as the first private print outlet in 2004 seemed to come about off the momentum of the establishment of Dream TV. Sherif Wadood, the paper's first CEO, relates a series of "coincidences" and loopholes that led to the paper's registration. The paper's main owners, oil tycoon Salah Diab and Naguib Sawiris were both willing to invest in it, while many were leery of investing in print, seeing it as a hazardous and unprofitable sector. Daoud found it difficult to find investors as a result. This put raised doubts about their ability to launch the paper since newspaper ownership had been limited to 10% per individual.

When the time came for the sector to move beyond state control, the process of learning to operate outside the state was easier than for its TV counterpart, since unlike television, newspapers had an existing history of having private owners and of playing an active role in society. In the case of *AMAY*, its very foundation is influenced by the relationship between the paper's founder, Salah Diab and his grandfather Tawfiq Diab, a pioneering journalist and activist who had founded a variety of newspapers, most notably *AlJihad* (The Struggle) in the

1930's. Tawfiq Diab was given the nickname *AlMutamarrid AlNabil* (The Nobel Rebel¹⁰⁶⁶) due to his activity in the field. When private print journalism re-emerged since the nationalization drive in 1960, it had a rich history and set of traditions to build on.

New means of controlling media after allowing privately owned broadcast and print mass media

Despite the apparent emergence of a private mass media scene, this study shows that there was never a bottom-line shift in control over media and information flow away from the central government and security establishment. Rather, at times when there appeared to be a vibrant private mass media system operating with relative independence and freedom, the state and security services were in fact recalibrating their tools to control the sector and more than likely figuring out how to react to the changes, while taking into account the political environment and the proliferation of new technologies.

The state's attitude that mass media was a necessary tool for the propagation of state goals, and a matter of constant consideration for national security implications, did not change. Since the first privately owned independent print and broadcast outlets launched, it was evident the government was able and willing to rein in the sector with relative ease if it deemed it necessary. The Ministry of Information and its different iterations¹⁰⁶⁷ had been considered one of the four so-called "Sovereign Ministries" (*wizarat siyyadiyyah*), along with Foreign Affairs, Interior and Defense. These are the cabinet appointments that hold the most potent national security implications for the state. This "sovereign ministry" designation (which is informal, but widely used) was only partially lifted when the Ministry of Information itself was briefly abolished after the 2011 uprising. But the idea that the Ministry of Information deserved to be treated with the same sensitivity as the other three, in and of itself conveyed the state's approach to regulating mass media. It also suggested (and this study confirms) a belief from within government that media should uphold and promote the state's main objectives. The state's notions regarding its relationship with the flow of information in the country precluded the development of a robust and open private media ecosystem. These views endured throughout the political and economic shifts which led to

¹⁰⁶⁶ Rizk (2004)

allowing the private sector enter the mass media market. The state's unwillingness to change its security-centered ethos and conceptions regarding media led to highly disjointed developments in the sector between the editorial, operational and commercial spheres.

Neoliberal reform and the general shift away from state capitalism were the essential spark plugs leading to the creation of privately owned mass media outlets, but the government and its security services never fully relinquished their centralist approach to the sector. The state played a role in preparing the ground for the creation of a private mass media as a sector by creating infrastructure and licensing opportunities (mostly in broadcast), but it neglected to provide adequate regulatory provisions that would allow the sector to develop within a holistic and functioning ecosystem that would enable organic growth. During most of Egypt's recent history, politics was the major determinant in the composition of the media system. This changed slightly when the relative power of private business owners grew while economic policy was changing in ways that bolstered this growth.

Ultimately, developments in media moved in tandem with political developments and along with shifts in the balance of power. These moves were not by design, but rather a result of many different factors in the context of the period in question. This thesis shows how the lack of a consistent and earnest intention by the state to allow this sector to grow, meant that it was not able to develop sustainably so that revenue, professional development and consumption could be maintained in a consistent way. Meanwhile a lack of institutional change to the rules governing the sector's role with the government, contributed the continuously stunted growth of the private media space as a whole.

The Arab Spring and its aftermath: political parallelism in play

Despite attempts by the government to maintain control of the nascent private mass media sector, the sector played a potent role in the transformation of public consciousness¹⁰⁶⁸ and bringing areas of social discontent to the fore.¹⁰⁶⁹ They helped boost awareness and the collective drive to protest police brutality, and deteriorating standards pushing many to demonstrate against the state, leading to the eventual removal of Hosni Mubarak following 18 days of protest (25 Jan- 11 Feb 2011). This period also highlighted the public's appetite for private mass media as a main source of information, with audiences clearly migrating away

¹⁰⁶⁸ Albeit a secondary role to that of social media

¹⁰⁶⁹ See Ch. 5

from public broadcast and print into the consumption of news and current affairs content. When the protests first erupted, one of the first things the military did was to secure the Maspero building and ensure that the state's mouthpiece and main means of communication remained in their hands. Meanwhile much of the country turned to alternate sources of information. For the computer-literate youth, social media was the main medium. But for the rest of society, private media outlets were the main choice. The 2011 uprising thus helped cement the position of private media in society.

Changes in the media system for the two years immediately following Mubarak's ouster confirm this study's thesis that political changes have been the most acute determinant of the sector's structure. Between 2011 and the end of 2013, Egypt experienced a period of relative pluralism, when the groups in charge of the country¹⁰⁷⁰ were not able to exercise "total control." The Muslim Brotherhood took over the main seats of government, but they did not exercise the same grip over the country's other institutions, most notably the security establishment, as the preceding regime.

The result was that the Brotherhood did not actually exercise any real measure of hegemonic power in the Gramscian sense of a command of both coercive and consensus control. The political sphere was more open, and this was reflected in the relatively high levels of diversity and participation in public life and the media. Private broadcasters and newspapers grew greatly in stature, and several licenses in both print and broadcast were granted to launch publications representing a variety of political and social ideologies. Media professionals during this period migrated towards the sector, which was also generating more revenue and was seemingly on the cusp of even greater expansion.

But the state was not necessarily at an equilibrium, in the absence of real institutional change allowing for an environment that could nurture this budding pluralism. The enduring legacy of generals ruling the country would come to the fore once more in 2013, after another round of upheaval led to the ouster of the Brotherhood and the installation of another military-led regime, with Defense Minister Abdel Fattah El-Sisi at the helm.

¹⁰⁷⁰ First the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces on a transitional basis, followed by the Muslim Brotherhood through election

Looking ahead: Back to the barracks

Like Gamal Abdel Nasser, El-Sisi came to power convinced that he would be rebuilding the country and that it required mass mobilization, with the media having a duty to help the state in promoting its vision. Unlike Nasser however, El-Sisi maintained the private media, since the state was not in a financial position to re-engage in outright nationalization efforts and was still pivoting towards encouraging foreign investments and gaining the trust of Western financial institutions. However, the elimination of all media outlets with a sympathetic tilt towards the Muslim Brotherhood was an early indication that the state was moving towards reinstating a media system that was strictly in-line with its aims, objectives and ideology.

The private media space since El-Sisi's regime came into power saw major changes in ownership and the emergence of media owners and companies with reported ties to various agencies within the security establishment. Most major television outlets saw leadership changes and purges of personnel critical of the government, even if they were also staunchly against the Muslim Brotherhood. Dream TV was among the few exceptions. *AlMasry AlYoum*'s owner, Salah Diab, began facing a myriad of legal troubles. Many speculated this was due to the paper publishing an interview that didn't portray the president in the best light.

Overall, from the time El-Sisi came to power, the environment was one of progressive restrictions. Through the course of this research, interview subjects in Egypt grew increasingly more hesitant to speak about their experiences for fear of losing their jobs, or even worse of facing persecution of sorts. This attitude coincided with the structural changes seen in ownership and management within the private media space that saw mass media essentially return to the state.

The most recent law regulating media and the press still affirms the right to “free media and the press in the context of free competition¹⁰⁷¹”. However, this document is peppered with the ever-present warning allowing the state and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) to intervene in the sector when necessary “as required by National Security.”¹⁰⁷² This caveat has been a catchall in Egyptian public life in recent history and it looks set to underscore the media system for the foreseeable future.

¹⁰⁷¹ Law 180/2018 (Article 69), From sis.gov.eg

¹⁰⁷² Ibid (Articles: 4, 10, 69, 91, 104)

In September 2020, the relatively new SCMR met to discuss the overriding guidelines for the sector. They agreed to uphold the aforementioned guarantee of free media. They also agreed on “Five Constants of the Egyptian State” that media practitioners would not be allowed to question and must uphold: the geographical boundaries¹⁰⁷³, respecting the flag and the national anthem, the armed forces, upholding the Egyptian identity, and adhering to media code of conduct. These five constants reflect the state’s desire to militarize the media and hold them to standards that seem consistent with the role of the Armed Forces as stated in the constitution which says, “[The Armed Forces’] duty is to protect the country, and preserve its security and territories.¹⁰⁷⁴ And as the de facto 60-year-old state of emergency persists, many of those interviewed who had entered private media in Egypt at its early stages, have found it safer to remove themselves from the sector, or steer away from involving themselves in current affairs content or any area that the state may deem politically sensitive.

Meanwhile, non-government private media ownership in Egypt has been restructured and reconditioned so that media be tools of consensus, mobilization and entertainment.

¹⁰⁷³ In 2016 President El-Sisi signed a maritime border agreement with Saudi Arabia that resulted in Egypt ceding two islands previously considered part of its sovereign territory, despite outcry by journalists, activists and lawmakers alike. That following year, the state cracked down on all opposition websites, censoring 69 of them in May, just one month before El-Sisi ratified the agreement.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Egyptian Constitution: Article 200/2014

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- 2) Amer Khafaga, Television/newspaper executive Dream TV/OnTV/AlShorouk (2015) Cairo
- 3) Ali Beleil, Television Producer, Orbit/OnTV (2019) London
- 4) Islam Maher, Television Producer, Dream TV/CBC (2019) Cairo & Virtual
- 5) Lina Attalah, Managing Editor, Mada Masr/Egypt Independent/AlMasry AlYoum English (2014-2018) Cairo, London, Virtual
- 6) Yasmin Marawan Reporter, Dream TV (2015-2018) Cairo, London
- 7) Robert Springborg, Professor of War Studies, Italian Institute of International Affairs (2018) London
- 8) Ali Gabr (2017)
- 9) Mohamed Gohar, Founder, VideoCairo (2015-2019) Cairo, London, Virtual
- 10) Lilianne Daoud, Presenter, OnTV (2018) Cairo & Virtual
- 11) Naguib Sawiris, Founder of OnTV & Chairman & CEO, Orascom Telecom Holding (5 October 2015) Cairo
- 12) Yasser Abdo (pseudonym), Senior Journalis, OnTV (2016) Cairo
- 13) Haitham El-Sawy, Head of ONA Academy (2018, 2019) Cairo & Virtual
- 14) Ahmed Ragab, Fmr Managing Editor, AMAY & Executive Producer, OnTV (2015, 2016) Cairo, Virtual
- 15) Ahmed Hamdy (pseudonym) Broadcast Journalist, Dream TV (2017) Cairo
- 16) Hafez ElMerazi, TV Presenter & Executive, ElHayat/Dream TV (2016) London
- 17) Mohamed Nasser, TV Producer Dream TV/AlMayadeen (2015) Cairo
- 18) Khaled ElBalshy, Editor-in-Chief ElBadil (2014, 2015) Cairo, Virtual
- 19) Khaled Daoud, Journalist (2016, 2017) Cairo, London
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- 21) Hesham Kassem, Publisher, AMAY (2015) Cairo
- 22) Sherif Wadood, CEO, Amay (201A-2018) Cairo, Virtual
- 23) Helmy Antar (pseudonym), Senior Producer, CBC (2015) Cairo
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