



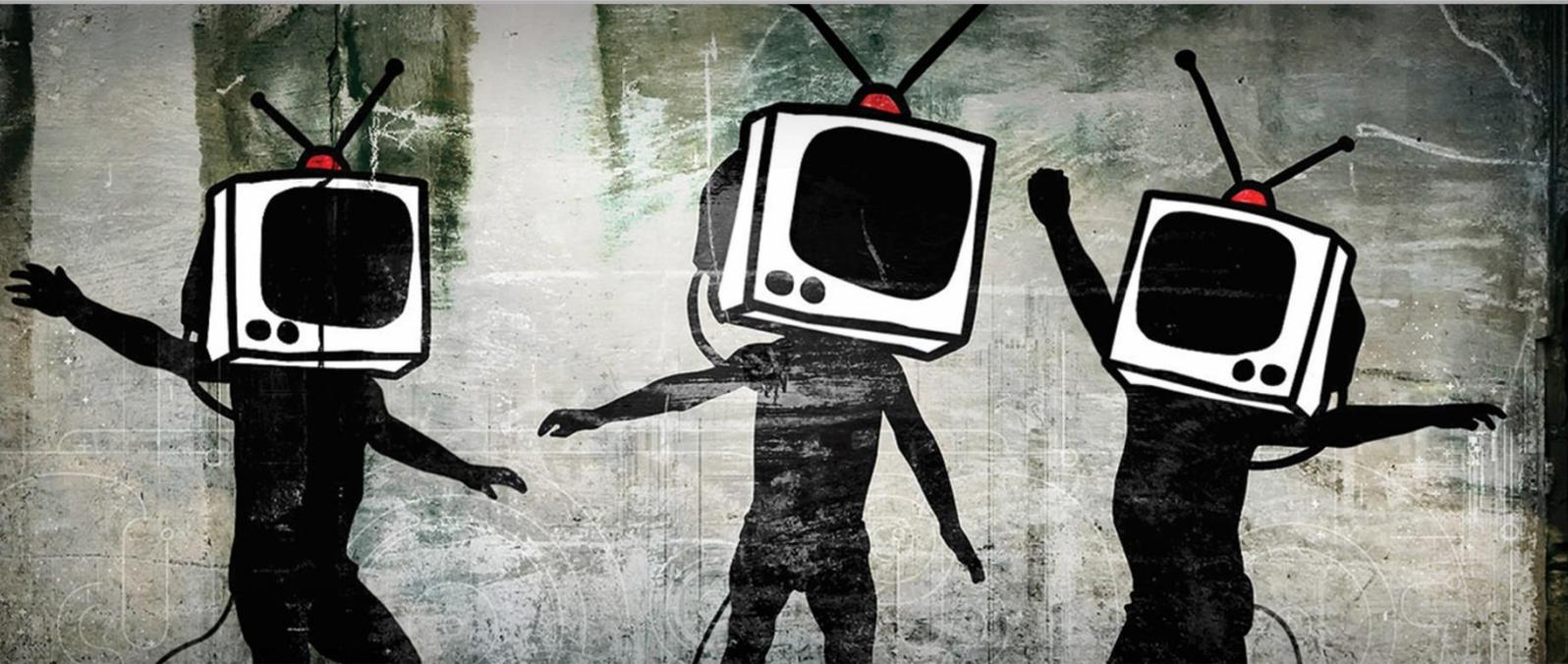
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Wesam Fauad



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TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org

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Introduction

In handling the recent crises of the Egyptian media, the author finds it difficult to choose between adopting the 'soft power' approach as an entry to addressing the topic, or the 'political engineering' approach, based on the regime's authoritarian orientations that mainly focus on manipulation of minds, as described by American Sociologist Herbert Schiller in his book "The Mind Managers". However, the 'soft power' approach is more related to the foreign policy while the political engineering approach mostly focuses on internal politics. Anyway, the conflict between various power wings in Egypt may involve both approaches, as it has been manifested in different crises experienced by the Egyptian political scene.

Recently, a scene in a drama work that was aired during the month of Ramadan by an Egyptian channel has caused a severe crisis to the security services. The scene that came in the last episode of a serial called, "Nasl al-Aghrab" (Offspring of the "Gharib's" – or the "Gharib Family") shocked and significantly angered officials in sovereign bodies, where the scene carried several hidden messages, including success of criminals in subjugating the Egyptian police. https://youtu.be/ekFS_ih4orQ

In the scene that provoked the Egyptian police, "Ghufran", a criminal, and his gang men fired at the car of "Ali Al-Gharib", a police officer, while he was driving it, which led to turning al-Gharib's car upside down. Getting out of the car, the police officer found Ghufran and his gang men surrounding him and asking him to kneel down on the ground. At first, the officer refused and started to shoot at them, before one of the gang men shot at his leg, forcing him to fall to the ground and kneel in front of Ghufran, who was standing in front of the kneeling police officer. After talking with al-Gharib; Ghufran, the criminal, shot at the head of the police officer and killed him.

It was remarkable that this scene came out in a way that may suggest that it was pre-meditated, as the delivery of the serial's last episode was only delivered about two hours before the show time, which limited the ability of the sovereign bodies, that usually control "all" the content presented on satellite channels, to check the episode and re-edit it before it is aired to the public. These ambiguous

circumstances of the incident clearly indicates that there is a conflict of some kind over the content presented through visual media, which needs further investigation.

The conflict that erupted out of this incident resulted in recycling of executive elites, as referred to in a previous article by the author published by the Egyptian Institute for Studies¹, where the author relied on this approach to introduce key features and implications of restructuring media elites.

First: Overview of 3 controversial consecutive scenes:

There are three consecutive controversial scenes that may highlight the Egyptian media crisis, and summarize not only the features of the Egyptian media crisis, but also the struggle between various power wings, and how far the Egyptian media can manage the challenges facing the country's internal and external affairs.

The first topic is related to Egyptian Minister of State for Information Osama Haikal; then comes the crisis of opposition channels abroad, and finally comes the TV scene of the police officer's kneeling down before a criminal in the "Nasl al-Aghrab" serial.

Following is a review of the three topics:

A- Osama Heikal's crisis:

During the past three years, it appeared that there was deep differences between power wings in Egypt. In June 2020, the Egyptian Minister of Information Osama Heikal posted a footage on the ministry's electronic page taken from an interview with some media platforms (Narrative Summit-Reshaping Norms). In the footage, Heikal stated that the "Egyptians under 35, that represent about 60 to 65% of the Egyptian society, no longer read newspapers nor watch television; and therefore it is important to consider the lifestyle of these age groups".²

Before that, specifically on 17 June 2019, a TV presenter, Noha Darwish, on one of the pro-regime news channels (Extra News), while airing a news item about the death of former Egyptian President

¹ Wessam Fauad, Recycling pro-regime political elite in Egypt, Egyptian Institute for Studies, 23 December 2020, [link](#).

² Osama Heikal: The de facto name of the Ministry of State for Information is "Ministry of Government Communication," Al-Mal newspaper, 30 September 2020, [link](#)

June 15, 2021

Dr. Mohamed Morsi – concluding the report, she read: “sent from a Samsung device”, exposing the reality that she was only reading the narrative sent by security services to various TV channels on the incident³. <https://youtu.be/AeNyRq2KaHU>

Then, an official state TV channel broadcast a leaked phone call between Heikal and El-Sayed Badawi, the former head of the Egyptian Wafd Party. Heikal and Badawi were talking about attending a meeting with political forces, including the Muslim Brotherhood, where the pro-regime escalated attack on the minister. In response to the leak and the media campaign, Heikal accused the pro-regime media outlets that attacked him following the leak of being part of repeated campaigns against him. Furthermore, he commented, "I tell those people that the most dangerous kind of corruption is for the writer to leave his pen to someone else, while he is only satisfied with signing. In fact, I do not want to respond to such people because they are only tools."⁴

These ambiguous crises were an entry point to calling for a “limited dialogue” about the “crisis of the Egyptian media” by Farouk Goweida, a well-known Egyptian poet and writer, in an article that was published in Al-Ahram, a government-owned newspaper, titled “Saving the Egyptian media.. Whose responsibility?”⁵. The article was published on 17 July 2020, a week after the article’s publication had been banned in Egypt, which led Goweida to publish it in the London-based Al-Araby Al-Jadeed electronic newspaper⁶. However, it was allowed to be republished in Al-Ahram, due to the struggle between wings of security services. In his article, Farouk Goweida spoke about the absence of media vision, nepotism, marginalization of media symbols, exclusion of ideas, and deterioration of the system of drama production, both technically and ethically. The article was followed by a superficial discussion, where the issue soon died out, before it re-erupted later with Heikal's statements in the

³ Hassan Khalil, a fatal mistake by an Egyptian broadcaster about the death of President Mohamed Morsi, provokes widespread ridicule, Erm News, 18 June 2019, [link](#)

⁴ The Egyptian Minister of Information resigns.. Did the leaked audio clip was behind ousting him?, Al Arabiya TV, 25 April 2021, [link](#).

⁵ Farouk Goweida, Saving the Egyptian Media... Whose Responsibility?, Al-Ahram, 17 July 2020, [link](#)..

⁶ An Egyptian sovereign body prevents publication of an article by Farouk Goweida in Al-Ahram, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 10 July 2020, [link](#).

footage, where the issue was covered by reputable Arab media outlets under the title “Struggle of the Sovereign Bodies”, attributing this to the crisis of the Egyptian media⁷.

This incident has two main dimensions: the first is that it is an illusory crisis, because it manipulated Heikal's vision of the crisis – which is extremely loyal to the state. Heikal hinted that there was a socio-economic crisis behind “restriction” of the Egyptian youth's interaction with the media, believing that the socio-economic crisis prevents expansion of the influence of the state-related “propaganda”. This is an authoritarian view in support of power and not democracy or even Egypt’s soft power, contrary to what some opponents considered it as a “moment of conscience”⁸. Heikal’s genius proposal calls for easing the social burdens so that the media could succeed in achieving the goals entrusted to it.

The second dimension of the crisis related to Heikal is that the Egyptian media system which is aware of its responsibility for the collapse of Egyptian soft power, did not realize that Heikal’s message was a mere call to extricate the Egyptian state from the credibility crisis. Instead, the regime’s media system highlighted, perhaps deliberately, the negative side of Farouk Goweida’s article to prevent the crystallization of Heikal's vision in the form of an economic and social crisis sweeping Egypt.

B- The dilemma of credibility and the crisis of opposition channels abroad:

Undoubtedly, the crisis of the Egyptian opposition channels abroad is related to the poor conditions of the entire Egyptian opposition, both at home and abroad⁹, and its inability to counterbalance the incursion of political power in Egypt, which prompted the Turkish state to prefer dealing with the Egyptian state instead of boycotting it, while maintaining its (Turkey’s) principled human rights position¹⁰. But the crisis that topped the scene was only a cover for the crisis expressed by Farouk Goweida in his Al-Ahram’s article, which is the collapse of the Egyptian soft power on the one hand,

⁷ Ahmed Ramadan, Sisi’s media crisis between the minister and the regime arms.. Why are the security services in Egypt fighting together?, Al Jazeera Net, 21 October 2020, [link](#).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Wessam Fouad, Egypt: Conditional Protest: A Reading in the 20 September Mobilization, Egyptian Institute for Studies, 25 October 2019, [link](#).

¹⁰ Wissam Fouad, Limits & Dimensions of Egyptian-Turkish Rapprochement, Egyptian Institute for Studies, 2 April 2021, [link](#).

and the collapse of the ability of the Egyptian media system to engineer the internal political awareness as prescribed for them on the other hand.

Some believe that the crisis of the Egyptian media is an internal crisis that may affect stability in the short and long term, given that the official media credibility has eroded in the eyes of Egyptians. This situation led to the increase in the credibility of the opposition channels abroad, and accordingly escalation of the number of audience¹¹. Instead of competing with opposition channels abroad in terms of credibility, the regime sought to prevent competition, using a naive mechanism to address the media problem.

C. Tamer Morsi's crisis:

A question may now arise: Can the crisis of "the Egyptian police officer kneeling in front of criminals" really be considered a game within the conflict of power wings?

The information stream in this incident supports the conclusion that the scene was used within a plan to overthrow the person responsible for the security media track, namely, Tamer Morsi. Tamer Morsi is the board chairman of the Synergy Group, established in 2003. Before that, Tamer Morsi was working at the General Intelligence Service (GIS), as his father was a leading GIS figure when his son Tamer was appointed¹². The average production of Synergy ranged from one to two TV series annually before 2016, when Tamer Morsi started to dominate the Egyptian drama production, as he produced six serials in the same year, then eight serials in 2017, and nine serials in 2019¹³, according to Al-Tahrir newspaper, up to 12 drama works in the last month of Ramadan. Morsi's control expanded, given the influence of his father, and his statements supportive of the post-3 July (2013) regime. His dominance in the drama "market" continued, where he assumed chairmanship of the board of directors of the Egyptian Media Group, owned by Eagle Capital for Financial Investments, which controls the entire drama production in Egypt, as the company is a front for the General

¹¹ Abdullah Hamed, The Egyptian Opposition TV Channels.. What prospects for action after a likely Egyptian-Turkish reconciliation?, Al Jazeera Net, 23 March 2021, [link](#)

¹² End of era of Tamer Morsi... The story of the rise and fall of the "Egyptian media pharaoh" who left the intelligence services to devote himself to "art business", Arabic Post website, 25 May 2021, [link](#)

¹³ Abdel Fattah Al-Agami, Tamer Morsi.. Who is the new head of "ON" that controls the drama market?, Al-Tahrir newspaper, 22 February 2018, [link](#)

Intelligence Service, nominally owned by the former Minister of Investment, Dalia Khurshid, the third wife of the governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, Tarek Amer.

Tamer Morsi had expelled one of the most prominent leaders of the Egyptian Media Group in November 2019, namely, former intelligence officer Yasser Selim, who was only a front for the GIS's control over the Egyptian drama production market¹⁴. Meanwhile, various media outlets confirm that Selim is close to Major General Abbas Kamel, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service¹⁵.

However, there is another clear indication of the conflict of power wings, namely, the indifference and irresponsibility of Mohamed Sami, the director of the dramatic work that blew up the police officer/criminal scene crisis, where Sami is the writer of the story and the creator of the scenario of the serial that caused the crisis, as well as being the director of the work¹⁶. In addition, the key factor that caused the problem was the director's delay in delivering the last episode of the serial, as it was delivered only two hours before the show.

The attempt by the United Media Services, one of the subsidiaries of the Egyptian Media Group, also headed by Tamer Morsi, to hold Mohamed Sami responsible for the police officer/criminal scene and stop dealing with him¹⁷, was behind the outbreak of the crisis based on evidence of alleged financial violations against Tamer Morsi, which was presented by the Mohamed Sami's mother, a member of the Egyptian House of Representatives¹⁸, which eventually led to the removal of Tamer Morsi from the Egyptian Media Group, to limit his powers to his private company "Synergy".

Some observers that rely on sources related to intelligence services believe that Tamer Morsi's crisis was not due to the financial corruption suspicion raised by the documents submitted by MP Saboura

¹⁴ Yasser Selim, Vice President of Egyptian Media, was arrested on the website of Radio Monte Carlo International, November 29, 2019, [link](#)

¹⁵ End of the legend of Yasser Selim: a warning message and structuring the regime's projects, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 30 November 2019, [link](#).

¹⁶ Behind the scenes of the United Media Services' decision to stop dealing with director Mohamed Sami, Layalina website, 15 May 2021, [link](#).

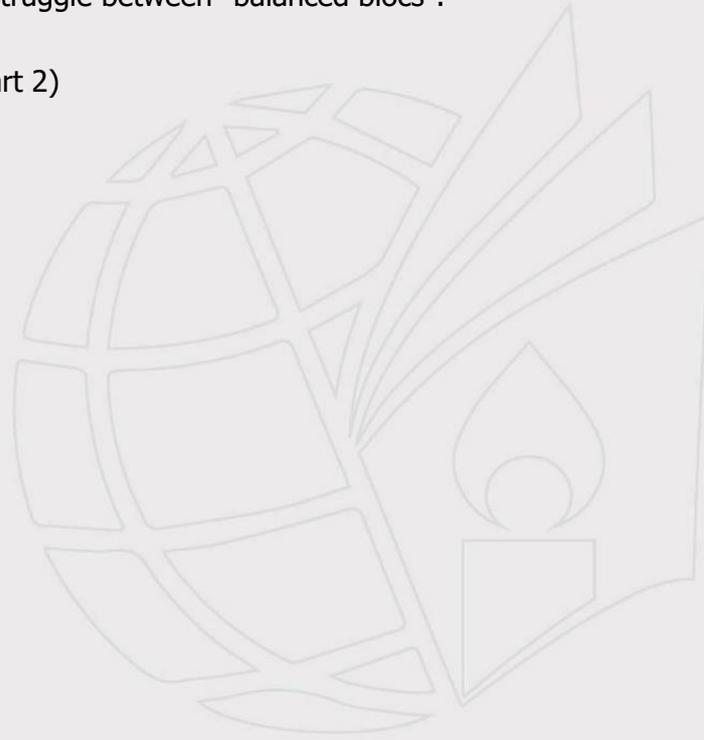
¹⁷ Safwat El-Desouky, The United Media Services has stopped dealing with director Mohamed Sami.. Why?, Al-Ain, 15 May 2021, [link](#)

¹⁸ Mohamed Youssef - Ahmed Al-Sharkawi .. Director Mohamed Sami and his wife Mai Omar in Parliament, the Egyptian newspaper Al-Watan, 26 April 2021, [link](#).

June 15, 2021

El-Sayed, Mohamed Sami's mother. They believe that the root of the problem is the attempt of a new wing within the intelligence services to exploit the recent pitfalls of the so-called 'Media Pharaoh', Tamer Morsi, to remove him and appoint Mohamed Saadi in his place, thus achieving a moral victory over the wing that supports Tamer Morsi, without keenness on the latter's conviction, pushing the wing that supports Tamer Morsi towards a sole choice¹⁹, that is to calm down confrontations and avoid expansion of the conflict, which opens the door to a balanced influence among power wings, which boosts the idea that the current struggle between power wings on domination of the Egyptian media seems to be a struggle between "balanced blocs".

(To be continued in Part 2)



¹⁹ End of era of Tamer Morsi, Op. Cit.