



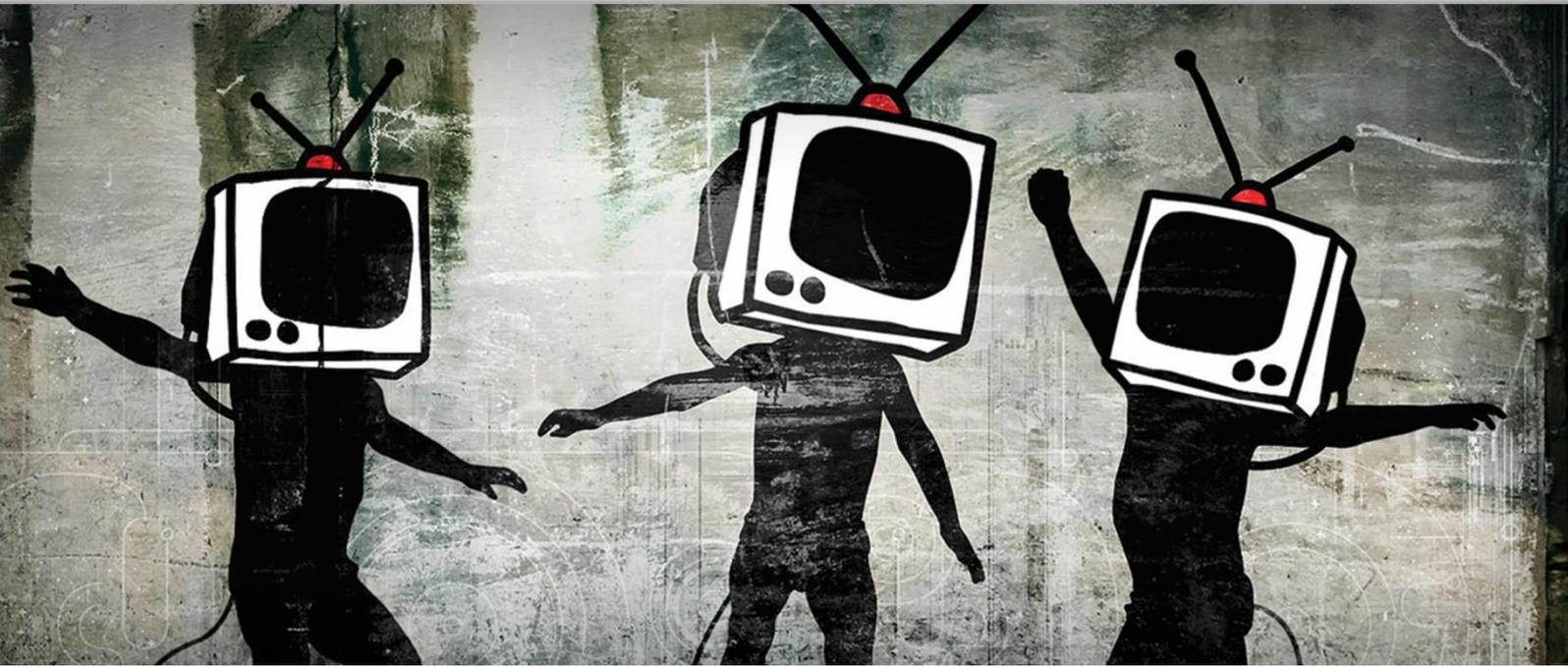
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Egypt media between 'soft power' and 'political engineering' (2)

Wessam Fauad

In [Part I](#) of this article, the author addressed three consecutive scenes that have highlighted the crisis of the Egyptian media, and may have summarized not only the features of the crisis, but also the struggle between conflicting wings within the sovereign bodies, which raises questions about how far the Egyptian media is capable of managing the challenges facing Egypt on the internal and external levels.

In this part, the article addresses the situation of the Egyptian media scene after restructuring the board of directors of Egypt's [United Media Services](#) (UMS) Company, the largest media conglomerate in the MENA region with over 30 subsidiaries including media production, advertising and communication agencies for both below the line and above the line communications; where various media outlets include, but are not limited to, Youm7, ON Network, Sout El Omma, Ain, DotMsr, Egypt Today and Business Today:

Egyptian media scene taking shape

The struggle of wings of sovereign bodies was accompanied by the process of settling disputes between "Tamer Morsi" and his rivals. Although Sisi praised the drama shown in the holy month of Ramadan¹, there were different circumstances that led to the issue being re-branded at a higher level than it was during the past year. The re-introduction of the issue at this level is related to the investigation of "The King" serial, which deals with the biography of King Ahmose, due to historical errors in the script, according to a complaint from the Egyptian Minister of Antiquities and Tourism Khaled El-Anani², who has a friendly relationship with director Mohamed El-Saadi after their close cooperation in carrying out the procession of the "royal mummies" associated with the inauguration of the Museum of Civilizations. El-Anani's complaint to Sisi came during the ceremony that followed the transfer of the royal mummies, which was praised by the latter. Accordingly, a presidential order was issued to stop filming the serial until the script was reviewed by specialists. Observers did not rule out that the minister's complaint was motivated by his ally Mohamed El-Saadi, who has been in

¹ Sada El-Balad, Sisi praising Ramadan drama: "It dealt with many issues", YouTube, 11 May 2021, [link](#).

² Mohamed el-Sadat, Final Chapter : Story of the Overthrow of Tamer Morsi and His Men, Al-Manassa, 30 May 2021, [link](#).

a fierce undeclared competition with Tamer Morsi for two years on expansion of their roles in the field of media and drama production in Egypt.

The complaint of the Minister of Antiquities followed the crisis related to the Ramadan drama, which raised criticism from the police, expressed by the Egyptian Minister of Interior in meetings of the Council of Ministers, and in the security reports that he submitted periodically to the Sisi Office, which led to a speedy decree as mentioned above on the confrontation between the two conflicting wings of sovereign bodies.

In this context, the wing concerned with the removal of "Tamer Morsi" leaked information about corruption, about which no one in Egypt knows exact numbers, whether with regard to the production costs of the "Synergy" series, or their selling prices to the "United Media Services", except for the sovereign bodies, especially that Tamer Morsi is known for his extreme secrecy, according to many media sources. The corruption leaks were followed by leaks about Tamer Morsi's dismissal, and opening investigations with officials in the United Media Services, information that is only available with intelligence officials, given that the details of the investigation were confidential³.

Taking the issue to this level of decision-making has led to limited change; albeit decisive in the Egyptian media scene. Although the change was limited to the United Media Services, the company had a huge institutional and expert balance, in addition to the financial balance it owns, which will further expand after offering 30% of its shares in the Egyptian Stock Exchange.

Following are the features of the change that occurred in the scene, which intellectuals in Egypt define as "restructuring the media market"?

A- Extensive networking:

One of the most important results of the change that occurred in the Egyptian media scene is the decisions announced by the United Media Services, which owns about 48 companies and brands, on May 29, including the restructuring of the board of directors, listing the company at the Egyptian Stock Exchange, and launching a regional news channel and plans for diversification and increasing

³ 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](#).

of the drama production,⁴ where the company's vision aims to expand cooperation with producers to include the largest number of drama serials throughout the year. It is worth noting in this context that limited networking, narrowing the scope of cooperation with other producers, and prompting artists to remain at home without work, was a remarkable feature in the artistic field until recently, which was revealed by several leaks. Also, major producers have quitted or about to quit the market, which has sparked widespread discontent during the last period. Therefore, the expansion of networking is considered one of the key indicators of the new company's board of directors.

B- The structure and implications of changes:

During the United Media Services' conference, under the slogan "5 years of development", the company's administration announced that Hassan Abdullah had assumed the position of board chairman. Hassan Abdullah is a graduate of the American University in Cairo (AUC) in 1982, and has extensive experience in the banking field and has served on the boards of several prominent companies. The United Media Services' board of directors included Dr. Mohamed Samir, a legal advisor who is currently operating as a legal advisor to the Egyptian Media Group, the Future Media Group, as well as several other companies and banks⁵; Dr. Ashraf Salman, the former Egyptian Minister of Investment, who held several banking and financial positions in the private sector, with membership in several boards of directors of Egyptian investment funds and companies, and chairmanship of the board of directors of "City Edge" company, owned by the Urban Communities Authority⁶; in addition to Amr El Feki, Tamer Morsi, and Mohamed El Saady, the ad director that organized the ceremony of the transfer of the Royal Mummies and played a prominent role in the removal of the former board chairman of the United Media Services, Tamer Morsi, where Saady is supervising drama production in the new structure of the company⁷.

The features of the new formation have several indications, which can be identified as follows:

⁴ Egypt.. A new board of directors for the largest media company, and launch of a regional news channel, Al Sharq Saudi TV Channel, 29 May 2021, [link](#).

⁵ Mohamed Samir, a great legal addition to the board of directors of United Media Services, 29 May 2021, [link](#).

⁶ Mohamed Nassar, member of the United Media Services' board .. Biography of Ashraf Salman, former Minister of Investment, Masrawy, 29 May 2021, [link](#).

⁷ Mohamed Sultan, 10 Pieces of information about Mohamed Al-Saadi, member of the United Media Services' board , Fil Fan website, 29 May 2021, [link](#).

1 -Economic function

The new formation of the United Media Services is a highly economic-oriented formation, in light of the presence of two prominent tycoons in the fields of finance, namely, Hassan Abdallah and Ashraf Salman, with a strong legal cover from Dr. Mohamed Samir. This indicates that the new company's structure tends to depend on financing its own production by relying on new financing mechanisms. Perhaps the most prominent approach to this is the board's decision to offer 30% of the company's shares for public subscription, which means searching for start-up financing, but it does not mean privatization in any way, as 70% of shares remains owned by the Egyptian Media Company, which means that the offering is only for financing purposes.

Economic functionality corresponds to the state-owned media's need to work to achieve high profitability on the one hand, and provide self-financing on the other, so that the budget of the artistic field would not represent a burden on the state budget that needs to direct its resources to new priorities during the coming period.

2 -Political function

The new formation is also characterized by a clear political function, with the assumption that there is no horizon for the artistic development, but the company's future production is supposed to prove the validity of this hypothesis or not. The new board of directors does not include highly distinguished expertise except in the fields of finance, law and economics, as well as advertising, while the drama work dimension appears to be represented by producers that have a weak background in the field of drama production. The board member responsible for drama production lacks experience in this field, except for his production experience through his company, MediaHub, whose first work was the serial of "Newton's Game", which was shown during the month of Ramadan, where preparation for the series had taken 4 years, In addition to implementation of a song that was shown after the end of the episodes of the serial "Ikhtiar 2" during the last Ramadan as well.

It was expected that the board of directors of the United Media Services would include an artistic figure, a novelist or an actor for example in its membership, as it happened with the financial, legal and economic tycoons that were appointed in the UMS board. However, the administrative and functional nature dominated the content nature in formation of the board of directors.

3- Opening up to the production market:

During the UMS conference announcing the new formation of its board of directors, the company indicated that its vision aims to expand participation with producers to include the largest number of drama works throughout the year, and to cooperate with existing production companies within the Egyptian market, with reference to companies such as El-Adl Group, Sadeel Media Production, Art Maker, Roznama, Tariq El-Ganaini, Magnum and Media Hub, all of which were among the companies affected by Synergy's control of the market. Drama production and Tamer Morsi's presidency of the board of directors of the United Media Services. The UMS statement sent a clear message that the company decided to distribute the drama production fairly over an extended season outside the month of Ramadan⁸, in contrast to the situation that had existed under Tamer Morsi's presidency of the UMS board of directors. The statement also reassured actors and promised them to reopen the labor market to them again.

4- Other board members:

It appears from the features and circumstances of the UME formation that supervision of the advertising dimension will be assigned to Amr El-Feki, within the board of directors. On the other hand, journalist Khaled Salah has been appointed as Assistant Chairman of the UMS's Board of Directors for the press and websites sector⁹. As for the presence of Tamer Morsi as a board member in this formation, it may be to save the UMS's face after the leaked news about corruption prevailing the company's dealings when Tamer Morsi was its board chairman, along with his private company "Synergy". It is also likely that Tamer Morsi's inclusion of the board of directors is required for management of the delivery and receipt process. Accordingly, it is expected that there will be an imminent amendment to the board of directors formation, where a prominent novelist, screenwriter or artist will replace Tamer Morsi.

⁸ Farid Hamoudi, 30% of the shares of United Media Services' shares offered at the stock exchange and a new 'news channel', Saudi Investment, 29 May 2021, [link](#).

⁹ Mohamed Taha, The United for Media Services: Khaled Salah appointed as Assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the newspapers and websites sector, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 31 May 2021, [link](#).

C- Turki Al-Sheikh:

It was remarkable that the head of the Saudi Entertainment Authority, Turki Al-Sheikh, came to Egypt and met Al-Sisi, in coincidence with the restructuring of the United Media Services. Amr Adib, a pro-regime media arm, soon hinted that a press conference would be held on Sunday, May 30,, 2021 to announce cooperation between the Egyptian artistic bodies and Saudi Arabia. He pointed out that the expected cooperation will include the production of 60 serials and 15 plays, in addition to various concerts. Adib also indicated that the Saudi MBC network would play a major role in the Egyptian market, noting that "there have been meetings between Turki Al-Sheikh and some Egyptian officials to set plans for that."

It was remarkable, in this context, that Al-Sheikh later denied all the reports and statements in this regard, saying: "This is an important clarification... given what was reported in Amr Adib talk show... it seems that there is a misunderstanding," adding, "... So, it should be noted that I have nothing to do with Egyptian drama..."¹⁰.

This denial can be understood in terms of one of the following possibilities:

- 1- There is a great distance between what the Al-Sheikh imagined -of space or role- and the offer he received from Cairo, where it is clear that he did not like the offer. It is more likely in this context – from the researcher’s point of view – that Cairo may have presented a proposal to Al-Sheikh as a financier, but nothing more, as one of the alternatives to lifting the burden of financing artistic production from the public budget, which is groaning under the weight of domestic and foreign debts, as well as the urgent needs of internal government spending, especially pay increases to counter inflation, with the aim of easing popular discontent in the Egyptian street.
- 2- There is a scramble between the opposing wings within the regime. While one of the wings opened the door for Al-Sheikh to come to the scene as a financier, another power wing may have put pressure

¹⁰ Turki Al-Sheikh denies Amr Adib’s statements about entering the drama and artistic production market in Egypt, CNN Arabic, 29 May 2021, [link](#).

on Al-Sheikh to quit, taking advantage of Al-Sheikh's personal problems in Egypt, especially regarding the Egyptian singer Amal Maher¹¹.

Conclusion

The change that occurred in the media scene in Egypt was not the result of an emotion motivated by one drama scene, but rather an issue that has been raised for more than a year, where some power wings tried to address it through a rational discussion through Farouk Gweida's article, but this attempt was contained, which led to escalation of the confrontation between the different wings of power.

The features of the authoritarian struggle in Egypt over the media situation ranged between a strategic vision that aims to restore Egypt's soft power, and a tactical and functional one that tries to enhance totalitarian media, where multiple mechanisms were used, including invoking external pressures, as happened with Turki Al-Sheikh.

The transformations witnessed by the Egyptian media scene were characterized by several features, most notably:

- The economic function, that aims for this file to finance itself and reduce the burden on the state budget.
- The political function, that led to the rule of a sector of the inexperienced persons in the field of drama production, despite their extensive experience in the field of advertising and show business
- There is a trend for ending the exclusion, marginalization and punishment that have ruled the Egyptian media scene for the past four years.

Finally, the latest media crisis started with Tamer Morsi, and it is likely to end up getting rid of him completely, even though he is still the United Media Services' board member.

¹¹ Moataz Matar: After his return to Egypt, she immediately "announced her retirement" .. The full story of Turki Al-Sheikh's crushing of the artist (singer) Amal Maher!!, YouTube, 2 June 2021, [link](#).