

EXTRACT

TRANSFORMATIONS IN EGYPTIAN JOURNALISM

NAOMI SAKR



Published by I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd in association with
the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford

About the Book

Egypt's revolutionary uprising in 2011 raised important questions about the kind of journalism that would be viable in the country's changing political dynamics. Suddenly the output of bloggers, online radio and social media news operations, which had all formed part of the groundswell of action against dictatorship and repression, posed an explicit challenge to journalists in state-run and commercial media companies who were more directly subject to government controls. As different interest groups struggle over the country's future, Naomi Sakr considers emerging visions of journalism in Egypt. In this book she charts recent transformations in Egyptian journalism, exploring diverse approaches to converged media and the place of participatory cross-media networks in expanding and developing the country's body of professional journalists. She analyses journalists' initiatives for restructuring publicly owned media and securing a safe and open environment in which to work.

'This is an outstanding piece of work: detailed, deeply knowledgeable, authoritative, and with some bravura reporting ... which I imagine will become a reference work on the subject.'

David Gardner, International Affairs Editor, *Financial Times*, and author of *Last Chance: The Middle East in the Balance* (I.B.Tauris)

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What follows is a short extract from this book.

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Published in 2013 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

Distributed in the United States and Canada Exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

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ISBN: 978 1 78076 589 1

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Typeset by 4word Ltd, Bristol
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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Executive Summary

Of the numerous transformations in Egyptian journalism throughout its long history, those that preceded and followed the revolutionary uprising of 25 January 2011 were especially momentous. In recent years, thanks to the rise of news leads and political information in expanding informal online spaces, journalists in mainstream media had the means to challenge misinformation from the dictatorial regime of Hosni Mubarak and his ruling National Democratic Party. Increasingly persistent popular protest, worsening corruption, and Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential election in 2005 emboldened them to do so. By September 2007, in the words of political blogger Baheyya at the time, a 'different breed' of journalists 'from starkly different schools' had come to the fore. With the turmoil of 2011–12 and an expanded search for a 'new kind of journalism' that would be credible, timely, relevant to ordinary people, and untainted by complicity with military rule or Mubarak's business cronies, the diversity multiplied.

Immediately after the handover of power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), headed by the man who was Mubarak's defence minister for 20 years, journalists were subject to two opposing trends. As Chapter 1 of this book illustrates, one trend was repressive, marked by retention of the old government-controlled press and broadcasting structures, the appointment of discredited figures to key media positions, military summons and prosecutions for coverage unfavourable to SCAF, and accusations that journalists were working to 'foreign agendas'. Most notably it was seen in violent physical attacks on reporters covering protests in Cairo and elsewhere. Elements of media repression continued even after Egypt's first civilian president, Mohammed Morsi, seemed to win a power struggle with the military in August 2012.

The other trend was potentially liberatory. Here it was a case of officials being called to account on prime-time television, ordinary citizens gaining access to papers seized from intelligence agencies, diverse groups

collating information to counter military propaganda, and a proliferation of start-ups on a range of delivery platforms. Morsi's first decree, upon taking over legislative powers, did not end criminalisation of 'insults' to the president, but it did end pre-trial detention for journalists accused of such a crime.

As activist groups applied themselves to gathering and verifying footage of violence and human rights abuses by military and security forces, and media start-ups recruited protestors from Tahrir Square as trainees, definitions of journalistic professionalism came under scrutiny. Chapter 2 explores this process. For more than 50 years, laws and intimidation had obstructed professional behaviour and driven many journalists abroad, where they worked to diverse standards of autonomy and objectivity, depending on their employer. When high-profile, proven professionals started to return to Egypt and its changing media ecology after 2005, they helped to intensify the shake-up of local norms. Trials of strength with media owners came to a head in 2010. They continued into 2011–12 under SCAF and under Morsi, with established owners keeping the upper hand and public-spirited journalists facing more or less permanent job insecurity as a result. Traditionally under-represented in media professions, Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood supporters looked unversed in handling a free press. Meanwhile, the value of citizen journalism was such that mainstream media outlets tapped into blogs and social media resources on a regular and, in some cases, institutionalised basis. While examples of good practice in cross-media participatory reporting were welcomed, some professionals worried that Egyptian journalism had reached this phase without having first reached a consensus on norms of balance and fairness to all sides of a story.

However, one achievement of the 2011 uprising was to demonstrate how large a proportion of Egyptian public opinion will no longer tolerate having the public interest defined by a ruling elite. Young people, demographically important but sidelined economically, had by then already circumvented licensing restrictions through online radio and news services using Facebook and YouTube. Chapter 3 recounts how journalists in the shifting and uncertain post-Mubarak environment looked for ownership models and funding sources compatible with bringing content 'from the people to the people'. Demands for public ownership and a public service mandate were directed at the state-run print media, governed through the Higher Press Council by the upper house of Parliament, and the state broadcaster, attached to the Ministry of Information. Journalists

pushing for change redoubled their efforts in late 2011 after state TV misreported a Coptic demonstration so badly it triggered a rebuke from the European Broadcasting Union. Yet under provisions of the old constitution retained by the March 2011 referendum, the majority political party of the day – in 2012 the Muslim Brothers' Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) – was authorised to keep the media in its grip. When a new constitution, drafted by an Islamist-dominated Constituent Assembly, was adopted by referendum in December 2012, it failed to inspire confidence that basic media freedoms would be guaranteed.

The ruling party's grip on the media encompassed the mechanisms by which journalists could legally represent their interests. Chapter 4 analyses how rules for representation affect the likelihood of reaching consensus on professional ethics. A general groundswell of union activity, under way before Mubarak fell, surfaced among journalists afterwards in the form of new unions or syndicates. These risked being denied recognition pending parliamentary approval for full trade union pluralism in workplaces as well as trades and professions. Civil society groups working towards journalism development were also left waiting, after the dissolution of Parliament in June 2012, for liberalisation of laws constraining their freedom of association, including association with international partners. International initiatives springing up in 2011 sought to incorporate Egyptian media managers, editors, and journalists in campaigns to promote transparency and accountability at a corporate level. But fear of further harassment by state prosecutors underlined the message of those calling on international donors to provide legal aid and enduring moral support.

The web of influences on Egyptian journalism gives rise to certain recommendations, set out in the report's final section, many of which have been stated by Egyptian and non-Egyptian bodies referenced in this book. The following list offers a summary of broad measures that would enable positive transformations described in these pages to proceed:

- Egypt's new constitution should feed into media law reform to end control over journalism by the executive branch of government, ruling party, state intelligence, and security forces.
- Media law reform should end criminal sanctions for journalists and bloggers whose work subjects the actions and policies of public figures and officials to critical scrutiny.
- The huge media operations currently under government control should be split into coherent, manageable, independent units run

by journalists who command public respect. Core production units should be put into public ownership with a public service mandate.

- Regional journalism should be promoted through decentralisation of regional channels spun off from the state broadcaster and sustainable development of local radio and press.
- Trade union pluralism should be encouraged in accordance with Egypt's existing international commitments, so that journalists can choose how to be represented professionally and newly formed journalism unions have the option to federate.
- Journalists' inability to work professionally in a corrupt environment should be openly acknowledged through drafting of cross-platform standards for corporate governance and reporting based on ethics, transparency, and accountability.
- International bodies of broadcasters, media regulators, newspaper ombudsmen, and senior editors should encourage active Egyptian membership and be outspoken about membership obligations of fair and honest coverage.
- International donors should think creatively about the capacity-building needs of small-scale and/or regional news-gathering and distribution initiatives that cannot be self-sustaining until Egypt's creaking advertising industry catches up with journalistic innovation.

Note on Transliteration of Arabic

This book's simplified and often inconsistent method of transliterating Arabic uses 'k' for the letter *qaf* and sometimes 'aa' instead of an apostrophe to represent the letter *ain*.

A similar fate befell Safwat Sharif, a top adviser to Mubarak's ruling party, the NDP, who had held the information ministry from 1981 to 2004; he was initially banned from travelling, then charged with illegal profiteering, and in July 2011 referred to a criminal court to face murder charges in connection with the 'battle of the camel'. For a few weeks from 7 March, when the cabinet of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf was sworn in and the information ministry was briefly abolished, Egypt joined the ranks of the very few Arab countries – Morocco, Qatar, UAE – with no such ministry.

The experience was shortlived. Thereafter, expectations of a radical overhaul of the media sector dissipated. In July a court cleared El-Fiqi of corruption and released El-Sheikh pending a hearing on a lesser charge. After installing an airforce general, Tarik al-Mahdi, as ERTU head to replace El-Sheikh, SCAF reinstated the information ministry on 9 July, appointing people close to the military as ministers. Their first choice was Osama Heikal, former military correspondent and editor of *Al-Wafd*, the organ of the Wafd Party, one of the few tame opposition parties allowed under Mubarak. On the eve of the uprising, Heikal had urged the government in an editorial to introduce rapid reform in order to avert a violent confrontation or repetition of what had happened in Tunisia.¹²

Heikal lasted in the post until late November, despite calls for his resignation after the events of 9 October when many independent journalists blamed his links to SCAF for ERTU misreporting of deadly clashes between the army and Coptic Christian demonstrators. Copts, angry at the demolition of a church, marched on the ERTU's Maspero headquarters. ERTU staff inside the building reported that soldiers had been injured by Coptic demonstrators¹³ and a studio presenter, Rasha Magdi, gave a prolonged and histrionic monologue praising the army, whom she described as under attack and in need of defence by the Egyptian people. After 27 people died in the violence, cameraphone footage showed that a number had been run down by armoured personnel carriers. The ERTU's performance during the incident provoked a public outcry and a rebuke from the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), to which it belongs.¹⁴ Magdi's personal contribution attracted fierce criticism in talkshows on two privately owned news channels, Dream 2 and ONTV.

When Heikal eventually resigned he did so along with the rest of Essam Sharaf's cabinet on 21 November, in the wake of another round of violent clashes between security forces and protestors. These clashes, near Mohamed Mahmoud Street in central Cairo, killed 43 people and,

according to a joint press release issued by five Egyptian human rights organisations on 22 November, injured more than 2,000. The human rights organisations announced in the press release that they intended to prosecute named military figures, whom they held responsible for the 'brutal attacks on demonstrators' and liable, if they were not tried in Egypt, to be prosecuted by international courts. It noted that the attacks had been 'extensively documented' by the media and that the board of the Journalists' Syndicate had complained to the public prosecutor about deliberate attacks on journalists, leading to serious injuries.

The press release denounced military officials' 'fallacious statements' to the media and ended by insisting that 'all those responsible for the state media must be replaced'.¹⁵ SCAF's choice of replacements for Sharaf and his ministers squarely rebuffed any call for renewal. The new prime minister, Kamal Ganzouri, aged 78 at the time of his appointment, had served three years in the same post under Mubarak in the 1990s. Ganzouri's information minister, Ahmad Anis, a retired major general who had previously headed the armed forces' Department for Army Morale, chaired the ERTU Board of Trustees when Anas el-Fiqi held the information ministry. Anis and El-Fiqi were reportedly very close.

At the ERTU itself, old faces remained in dominant positions. Major General Tarik al-Mahdi stayed at Maspero for a month, handing over to academic Sami Sherif, known for his close connections to Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party, who himself left at the end of May 2011. Sherif was replaced by his deputy, Tharwat Mekki, initially in an acting capacity and then with a confirmed appointment in October. Mekki was the ERTU manager held responsible by many for delaying ERTU coverage of a bombing in Cairo's Khan el-Khalili tourist bazaar in April 2005. The ERTU's small report on the bombing, aired hours after it was covered by pan-Arab channels, relied on pictures from the Saudi-owned network MBC. *Al-Masry al-Youm*, which investigated the delay, found that Mekki's mobile phone had been switched off, leaving journalists without authorisation to report the event.

Further demonstrating the continuity in media repression before and after Mubarak, the state of emergency law, in force since 1981, remained on the statute books throughout 2011, empowering the Interior Ministry to detain people indefinitely without trial or charge. SCAF had recourse to the emergency law in April 2011 to reinforce a ban on strikes and sit-ins.¹⁶ In September 2011 it renewed the law until the end of May 2012 and used it as the default framework for a crackdown on the press. On

11 September, police raided the office of Al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr, the Doha-based broadcaster's specialist channel for live coverage of Egypt,¹⁷ and the channel was taken off air until it could shift transmission from Egypt to Qatar. The raid, allegedly triggered because Al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr was operating without a licence, was more or less a repeat of what had happened to the channel on 30 January, during the last days of Mubarak.

The fact that the raid had little to do with licensing (Al-Jazeera had applied for a licence extension on 20 March and been advised by the authorities to continue broadcasting) and much to do with content was implicitly acknowledged when SCAF announced the same day that it would be using the emergency law to punish 'threats to public order' caused by the dissemination of 'false information.' September also saw SCAF confiscating an edition of the independent weekly *Sawt al-Umma* after it criticised the General Intelligence Services for failing to release footage of Tahrir Square filmed by CCTV cameras on the Egyptian museum during the 18-day uprising.

In the second half of 2011 and early months of 2012, Egypt's military authorities tightened the legal squeeze not only on media institutions but also on individual journalists. This process started in May 2011, when ONTV presenter Reem Maged and blogger Hossam El-Hamalawy were ordered to appear before military judges after discussing video evidence of violations against protestors on an episode of Maged's current affairs talkshow *Baladna bil-Masry*.¹⁸ ONTV's Nabil Sharafeddin was also called to the prosecutor's office after discussing theories that SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood had agreed to share power. In June a military prosecutor interrogated *Al-Fagr* editor Adel Hammouda and journalist Rasha Azab for five hours, accusing them of endangering public security through 'false information' in an article about military police abuse of demonstrators, including forced virginity tests. In October, Mohammed al-Daba, working for *Sawt al-Umma*, investigated allegations of nepotism behind the award of a university post to the son of SCAF member General Mamdouh Shaheen. He received a military summons but, with the backing of his editor and the Journalists' Syndicate, refused to attend.¹⁹

By this time, however, it had become clear that, just as Mubarak had incarcerated media practitioners, his successors were ready to do the same. In mid-October a military appeals court ordered a retrial of Maikel Nabil Sanad, a 26-year-old blogger who had been imprisoned in April after being found guilty of 'insulting the Egyptian army' because of a blog post questioning unity between the army and the people. Sanad, on hunger

strike, boycotted the retrial, which again took the form of a military tribunal and, after repeated postponements, merely reduced his prison sentence from three years to two.²⁰ His case highlighted SCAF's use of military courts to try civilians, which the campaign 'No to Military Trials of Civilians' estimated happened 12,000 times in 2011 alone, compared with 2,000 cases throughout the entire Mubarak presidency.

When internationally renowned blogger Alaa Abdel-Fattah was arrested at the end of October, charged with incitement during the Maspero clashes earlier that month, he refused to answer questions in a military court and was immediately jailed, where he remained for nearly two months. Like the raid on Al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr, this was another throwback to the Mubarak era, since Abdel-Fattah had spent 45 days in prison in 2006 after demonstrating in support of an independent judiciary. Under SCAF, Abdel-Fattah was accused of inciting attacks on soldiers, stealing a military weapon, and destroying military property. Since the charges were plainly absurd, it was widely assumed that his real offence in the eyes of the military was to have contributed an article to the Egyptian daily, *Al-Shorouk*, about the killing of 25-year-old anti-sectarian activist and blogger Meena Daniel during the Maspero protest on 9 October. Abdel-Fattah's article described how Daniel's supporters had pressed for autopsies for Daniel and the other deceased.

Daniel was one of two known media practitioners among the fatalities in Maspero, the second being Wael Mikhail, a reporter for the Coptic television station Al-Tarik. Physical attacks on the media escalated from that point. On the evening of 9 October, military police stormed the premises of two private TV stations located near Maspero, which were broadcasting live footage of the clashes that contradicted the ERTU version of events. The stations, Egyptian channel 25TV, run by young people in their 20s, and US-owned Al-Hurra, were forced off air. Some staff at 25TV, including news presenter Sherine El-Sayyad, who was pregnant, reported that they were physically assaulted.²¹ Viewers receiving the 25TV broadcast at the time of the raid heard screams.

Targeted attacks continued during the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes in November, prompting the Journalists' Syndicate to lodge a formal complaint, as noted above. According to information relayed by the Syndicate to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least 17 assaults on the press, including beatings in custody and shootings, were counted in Cairo and Alexandria in November in the space of two days. Apart from an injury sustained by one person from Egypt's Middle East News Agency

(MENA), all other locally employed victims worked for non-government outlets. Four of the injured worked for *Al-Masry al-Youm*, three for *Al-Shorouk*, two for *Al-Youm al-Sabea*, one for *Al-Fagr*, one for the Lebanese daily *Al-Akhbar*, and three for *Al-Tahrir*, a newspaper created after the uprising. Of the remaining two, one edited a youth website and the other was a freelance photographer.²² Ahmad Abdel-Fattah, a photojournalist with *Al-Masry al-Youm*, lost an eye. He said policemen aimed at his eyes and at anyone holding a camera.²³

In the final analysis, CPJ counted 35 cases of journalists being attacked on 19–24 November, including several brutal attacks carried out by non-uniformed assailants and some targeted at internationally known figures.²⁴ Less than one month later, almost immediately after the second round of parliamentary elections ended, a further five days of clashes occurred. They were sparked on 16 December, when security forces tried to evict protestors from in front of the Cabinet Office, where they were staging a sit-in against the appointment of Ganzouri. Despite efforts by newly elected MPs and parliamentary candidates to broker a truce, the toll in that round of violence reached an estimated 16 dead, with 928 injured.²⁵

This time, CPJ reported at least 15 attacks on the press, mostly by uniformed soldiers beating reporters and destroying equipment.²⁶ Media coverage, reminiscent of the 18-day uprising in Tahrir, split into those outlets determined to report what they saw and those, like *Al-Ahram*, which shunned pictures of soldiers and police in action and blamed the violence on others, in this case drug addicts, street children, ex-convicts, and football hooligans.²⁷ Journalists in the government-controlled media who dared to discuss army violence, like radio presenters Ziad Ali and Nermeen El-Banbi, lost their slots.²⁸

On 17 December, at the height of the clashes, a group of military police were seen dragging a woman on the ground by her outer garments, exposing her partially naked body and blue bra, and stamping on her torso. The sequence, captured in video and a still image, was published on the front pages of non-government newspapers such as *Al-Shorouk* and *Al-Tahrir*, the latter emblazoning the picture with the single word *Kazeboon* (Liars) in reference to SCAF denials of excessive or targeted force. The woman in the picture, 28-year-old Ghada Kamel, an activist with the April 6 movement – originally formed to mobilise for strike action in 2008 – recorded her testimony for BBC Arabic and Mosireen, an Egyptian non-profit media collective that launched a YouTube channel dedicated to such accounts.²⁹

The responses of SCAF and its associates to the December events seemed to be aimed at, among other things, discrediting non-government media by alleging that they were working to a suspicious agenda. Retired General Abdel-Moneim Kato, an adviser to the Armed Forces Department for Army Morale, stated in *Al-Shorouk* that the forces' treatment of protestors was 'appropriate' and he accused the media of clinging to the 'tiniest details without offering to solve the problem'. He continued: 'We're all watching Egypt and its history burn, and you're concerned over some street bully who deserves to be thrown into Hitler's ovens.'³⁰ According to Kato the clashes were incited by people with 'foreign agendas' and satellite channels were deliberately trying to damage the army's reputation.³¹

Kato's insinuation of a link between journalists and foreign interests repeated a line of propaganda familiar under Mubarak. On 1 February 2011, the privately owned channel El-Mehwar had memorably interviewed a 'former journalist' identified only as Shaimaa, who claimed that she and other demonstrators in Tahrir had received free training from Israelis in Qatar (home of Al-Jazeera) and the USA on how to overthrow dictators. The fear-mongering continued under SCAF. Ilan Grapel, a US-Israeli visitor to Egypt who had publicised his presence in the country on Facebook, was arrested in June 2011 on spying charges and eventually held for five months. State-run newspapers splashed allegations taken verbatim from security sources that he had been emailing reports from internet cafés to the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad.

The lurid coverage prompted bloggers and one or two independent newspapers to accuse SCAF of trying to drum up nationalist paranoia in order to deflect criticism from itself. But the campaign of sowing suspicion continued. In June 2012 a 40-second advertisement, linking foreigners, journalism, and treachery ran on state television and, briefly, private channels. Titled 'A word saves a nation', the clip showed an English-speaking foreigner discussing politics with three Egyptian youths in a café and then apparently conveying the contents of his conversation on his mobile phone.³² It was part of a series that also warned Egyptians against sharing information online, for fear it could be used by foreign spies.³³

One year on from 25 January 2011 the climate in Egypt for progressive journalism seemed to be deteriorating almost by the day. SCAF's head, Field-Marshal Tantawi, announced on the eve of the first anniversary of the uprising that the emergency law would be lifted with effect from 25 January 2012, except for cases of what he described, with no further amplification, as thuggery (*baltagiya*). Yet when the law

formally expired at the end of May, the Justice Ministry tried to revive it by authorising military personnel to arrest civilians without a warrant. At the moment of Mohammed Morsi's swearing in as president, on 30 June, legal challenges were under way against this and numerous other measures, including the dissolution of Parliament and SCAF's supplementary constitutional declaration entrenching and widening its powers. SCAF's actions throughout 2011 and into 2012 were far from observing Egypt's commitment to international human rights conventions guaranteeing journalists' right to report.

In early February 2012, according to CPJ monitoring, there were ten attacks on the press over a four-day period, after 72 people were killed in Port Said, seemingly over a football match. Few people believed football to be the reason for violence erupting, since it was supporters of the winning team who attacked the losing team with weapons that should never have been allowed near the pitch, while security forces looked on. Al-Ahly Ultras, supporters of the losing team, were no ordinary football fans: they had become known for their part in anti-regime protests. In the ensuing demonstrations at lack of security in the stadium and continued military rule, journalists filming in Suez were beaten and their cameras broken by attackers in civilian clothes. The CPJ accounts record that they were denied legal redress. Others filming in Cairo were shot with pellets³⁴ by state security forces.

As previously, the majority affected worked for non-government outlets. This time they included *Al-Masry al-Youm*, TV stations ONTV and CBC, Jordan-based website Al-Bawaba, online newspaper *Al-Badeel* and online radio stations Horytna and Hoqook. However, one government-employed journalist, working for *Al-Akhbar*, was among those attacked in Suez, where injuries included a stabbed hand and two reporters said they were fired on. In Cairo, shotgun pellets injured the eye of state-run Nile TV's Mahmoud al-Ghazali and narrowly missed the eyes of Salma Said, filming for Mosireen.³⁵ *Al-Badeel's* Mohammed Rabe'a was detained and reportedly beaten by police.

Major clashes erupted again on 2 May, near the Ministry of Defence in Abbasiya, Cairo, when the army moved against protestors angry at the disqualification of a Salafist leader from running in the presidential election. After some Salafist protestors were killed, 4 May saw a much bigger demonstration of solidarity with the Salafis by diverse groups. Uniformed and plain-clothes personnel used batons, live ammunition, and pellets to disperse the crowds; the death toll was 11, with hundreds injured

and arrested, including 18 journalists. The worst injured, Mohammed Rafaat of Masrawy newsite, needed 25 stitches. Abdel-Rahman Yousef, photographer for Hoqook's website, lost part of his ear in a knife attack, and *Egypt Independent's* photojournalist Virginie Nyugen was injured in the face. Five journalists for *Al-Watan* newspaper, only recently created, were beaten by police, hit by stones, or overcome by tear gas. Reporters for *Al-Masry al-Youm* and *Al-Badeel* were detained, as was the entire seven-man crew of the satellite broadcaster Misr25, some of whom said they were beaten by security forces.

The next day, 5 May, journalists held their own protest in front of the Journalists' Syndicate against the intensified repression of the past 15 months. Syndicate official Salah Abdel-Maqsoud deplored SCAF's treatment of those 'heroes' who were enabling people to exercise their legal right to know. 'Instead of celebrating World Press Freedom Day [3 May] we have these atrocities', he said, and called on political leaders to intervene to end them.³⁶ Less than three months later, on 2 August, Abdel-Maqsoud himself became information minister, as one of five Muslim Brothers appointed to the first cabinet of President Mohammed Morsi. Within a week, his own approach to media regulation was put to the test when two journalists entering a television studio at Media Production City complained of having been set upon by bearded protestors angry about the stridently anti-Islamist channel Al-Fara'een. A Muslim Brotherhood spokesman denied allegations of violence. Yet the government, acting through the state prosecutor, ordered Al-Fara'een off air and confiscated the 11 August edition of the daily newspaper *El-Destour*. It filed a lawsuit against Al-Fara'een's owner, Tawfik Okasha, whom it accused of insulting Morsi and inciting people to kill him, and another against Islam Afifi, the editor of *El-Destour*, whom it blamed for content highly critical of the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁷

A re-energised news sector

With its crackdown on media coverage of both military rule and protests against military rule, SCAF testified to the remarkable vitality and diversity of news-gathering in post-Mubarak Egypt. Growth in numbers and diversity of outlets is evident from the sequence of injuries and arrests between October 2011 and May 2012, recounted above, but the new-found vitality was more than a matter of quantity. NBC correspondent Ayman

Moheyldin, an Egyptian who covered the original Tahrir uprising for Al-Jazeera English, told a fellow journalist some months later that one of its fruits had been the ‘new energy injected in Egyptian media.’³⁸

Energy was far from lacking before the Mubarak–SCAF handover: certain journalists’ persistent challenges to censorship were a key ingredient of the country’s changing political dynamics, as parts of Chapter 2 will show. Several newspapers and television stations mentioned in the previous section helped to build up pressure against dysfunctional governance: from the 2004 launch of *Al-Masry al-Youm*, to the 2005 introduction of Dream TV’s nightly current affairs show *Al-Ashera Masa’an* (10pm); from the 2007 launch of *Al-Badeel*’s shortlived paper version, to the arrival of ONTV’s personable current affairs presenters in 2009. With Mubarak’s removal, however, came a fresh surge in media initiatives and innovation.

As SCAF and the military insisted ever more strongly on protecting their budgets and extensive economic activities from scrutiny,³⁹ taking extreme measures to resist meaningful civilian oversight, so journalists and bloggers made it their business to translate the notion of civilian oversight into reality. One of the earliest examples on television came when Ahmad Shafik, the former airforce commander whom Mubarak appointed as prime minister on 29 January 2011, was confronted by veteran journalist and activist Hamdi Kandil and novelist Alaa al-Aswany during an ONTV talkshow on 2 March. Described as ‘unforgettable’ for viewers who had never before seen a prime minister being ‘really interrogated and roasted,’⁴⁰ the encounter took place when Shafik, unscathed by an appearance that evening on *Baladna bil-Masry*, agreed to stay in the studio for Yosri Fouda’s *Akher Kalam* (Last Word) immediately afterwards. ONTV decided to join the two shows together and the channel’s owner, Nagib Sawiris, who was soon to found the liberal Free Egyptians Party, also took part.

Despite attempts by the ONTV representatives to calm the exchanges and keep them on track, Shafik’s angry refusal to give clear answers to questions about violence against protestors or the role of the country’s ‘security’ forces put him increasingly on the defensive, and led him to gesticulate dismissively and even aggressively at times. Ignoring the common courtesies in Egyptian forms of address, Shafik shouted at Aswany with his first name, ‘Ya Alaa, Ya Alaa,’⁴¹ telling him ‘Ana bas befaahimak al dunya mashya ezei’ (I’m just making you understand how the world works) – a declaration that was not only insulting in itself, but exposed a failure to acknowledge that the whole point of the revolution was to make the Egyptian world work differently. Asserting that incidences

of torture had nothing to do with him and that his previous record was irrelevant, Shafik insisted: 'Assess me from today.' Hours after the grilling, Shafik resigned.

Mona Shazli, host of Dream 2's *Al-Ashera Masa'an*, tackled three SCAF generals on 21 February 2011, with help from fellow journalist Wael Ibrashi, Revolutionary Youth Coalition member Shadi Ghazali Harb, and members of the public phoning in. She repeated the exercise eight months later, on 19 October, ten days after the Maspero killings. Together with Ibrahim Eissa, hardened survivor of countless censorship battles with the Mubarak regime and initiator of the newly created Tahrir TV and *Al-Tahrir* newspaper, Shazli plied two uniformed members of SCAF with questions, including many from the public, for three hours. The generals did not appreciate the ordeal, as indicated when one complained about the preponderance of critical comments from viewers.⁴²

By October 2011 the Egyptian public was better equipped to question government representatives than ever before, thanks to at least three developments in sources of information. One was the access obtained to intelligence files from the notorious State Security Intelligence offices in early March, when protestors stormed around eight centres across the country in order to prevent the files from being destroyed. A significant amount of material was removed before the military secured the buildings and was duly uploaded to the internet. Blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy, who had himself been detained and tortured by State Security in 2000, posted pictures and details of intelligence officers he found in Nasr City headquarters in Cairo, but did not post the officers' family pictures, which he found in the same archive.⁴³

Blogs and social media sites had played a significant part in supplying information and pictures to mainstream media and the public at large before the January uprising, because censorship of offline media under Mubarak turned cyberspace into the forum of last resort for Egyptians wanting to report freely. Online-offline collaborations became evident in 2006, when the production team of *Al-Ashera Masa'an* and some print outlets started to draw on information from blogs, including Hamalawy's, to investigate incidents of malpractice and torture by security forces. Interactions continued through the strikes and unrest of 2008 and the unprecedented public outcry at the brutal police killing of internet user Khaled Said in Alexandria in June 2010. A Facebook page, 'We Are All Khaled Said', administered anonymously by Google executive Wael Ghoneim, mobilised regular street demonstrations from then on. When,

on 7 February 2011, Shazli interviewed Ghoneim minutes after his release from 12 days in secret police detention, her introduction indicated that Ghoneim had not been anonymous to the *Al-Ashera Masa'an* team.⁴⁴

Online news sources spiralled after February 2011, spurred on in part by campaigns to capture and collate citizen journalism footage of violence and human rights abuse, but also by the shock of unsuspecting bystanders who suddenly found themselves witnessing brutality from a balcony or other vantage point with a cameraphone in their hands. Again, the orchestrated online gathering of evidence of abuse was not a new phenomenon. TV presenter Bouthaina Kamel, an early candidate for the post-Mubarak presidential election and one of the few people who challenged SCAF about virginity tests forced on female protestors, had used the internet to monitor vote rigging during the elections of 2005. She and two colleagues had set up a site called *Shayfeen.com*, a play on *shayfeenkum* (we see you).

In 2010 a group of students created a news site on Facebook and Twitter that was to become an important source for major global news providers during the events of early 2011. This was Rassd, later to become Rassd News Network, whose name encapsulates the practice of citizen journalism, since it stands for *rakeb* (observe), *sawwer* (film), and *dawwen* (blog). One of its founders says he was inspired by a training programme he attended in Egypt ahead of the 2010 elections,⁴⁵ aimed at improving the standards of citizen journalists and putting them in touch with professional journalists in mainstream media. The Washington-based International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ), which provided the programme, was later caught up in the Egyptian government's crackdown on civil society groups receiving US support (see Chapter 4). Rassd, meanwhile, having published videos of fraud and bullying during the 2010 elections, and survived government hacking and smear campaigns during the uprising, went on to expand its news operation, eventually facing competition from Mayadeen Masr News Network, set up by other activists with Twitter accounts.

Mosireen, the media collective already mentioned twice above because of its role in recording violence against activists, had its origins among filmmakers who congregated in the media tent in Tahrir Square in January–February 2011. It emerged as a workspace and YouTube channel some months later, after the Maspero killings, becoming the world's most-viewed non-profit YouTube channel during the month of January 2012. Mosireen's name plays on the Arabic word for Egyptians, which is written the same way but pronounced differently; the actual meaning of Mosireen

is 'those who insist'. Its members describe their project as 'civic media', representing a 'different kind of journalism', which responds to the public's 'lack of faith' in state media or corporate structures and their 'demand' for alternative sources of information.⁴⁶

Besides being posted online, Mosireen's collection of testimonies and footage of protests also reached the public directly on outdoor cinema screens. Achieving this involved cooperation with Kazeboon (Liars), an activist initiative intended to let the public see for themselves whether the official SCAF-endorsed version of events carried by state media tallied with what ordinary people's cameras and experiences showed. In setting up screenings in different locations in Cairo, the youth alliance behind Kazeboon learned how to go about disproving official accounts of street violence, which blamed it on foreign forces or the demonstrators themselves.

A third element in the proliferation of information sources was the rapid emergence of new television channels and newspapers, with their potential to amplify public awareness of amateur video. New television channels were the first to launch, by satellite because of the ERTU's continuing terrestrial monopoly; they joined the array of existing privately-owned satellite channels – Dream, El-Mehwar, ONTV, Al-Hayat, Al-Faraeen – the oldest of which (Dream, dating from late 2001) was still less than ten years old when Mubarak fell. All the existing channels belonged to businessmen who had grown rich under Mubarak and most had either played it safe or even supported the old regime. In the first months after the uprising, some new ventures differentiated themselves by claiming to represent 'the people', observe 'true' impartiality, or by following an innovative business model. With the passage of time, rich businessmen with financial power reasserted their influence. For a pivotal period, however, the volume, speed, and aspirations of start-ups injected a burst of energy into the mainstream media.

Ibrahim Eissa, a larger-than-life figure in dissident journalism, was one of three people who set up Tahrir TV on 8 February,⁴⁷ three days before Mubarak was removed. The colourful alliance behind the channel promoted it as coming 'from the nation to the nation' with the aim of 'liberating minds'. Eissa's partners were Ahmad Abu Haiba, with a track record in 'Islamic entertainment',⁴⁸ and an interior designer named Mohamed Mourad. They did not wait for a permit; Abu Haiba bypassed Egypt's state-owned satellite Nilesat and applied instead to Bahrain-based Noorsat, known for leasing frequencies to channels that had been

dropped from Nilesat during the former ruling party's pre-election crackdown in 2010.

In its early days, Tahrir TV attracted prominent journalists who had done much to reveal the dire state of the country under the former regime. Among them were Bilal Fadl, known for his critical reporting in *Al-Masry al-Youm*, Amr al-Laithy, presenter of the interview programme *Wahed min al-Nas* (One of the People) on Dream 2, and Hamdi Kandil, broadcaster and newspaper columnist. The honeymoon did not last. Financial pressures prompted Eissa and his partners to seek other owners, with the result that, by the end of 2011, a large majority of shares had passed to Suleiman Amer, a businessman connected to the same regime whose corruption Tahrir's journalists had exposed. In the meantime, Eissa joined forces with Ibrahim Moallem, the chairman of *Al-Shorouk*, to create a newspaper called *Al-Tahrir*, separate from Tahrir TV. The paper's first edition, in July, featured a column by Bilal Fadl.

25TV followed Tahrir TV as a second independent television voice in April 2011. Its owner, long-established video entrepreneur Mohammed Gohar, recruited young staff from among activists in Tahrir Square, who had yet to be trained as journalists.⁴⁹ The project benefited from the regional infrastructure of Gohar's other company, Video Cairo Sat, the first private Egyptian source of television images to be allowed onto Nilesat at the end of the 1990s, and a supplier of footage from across Egypt to global news providers. 25TV reported from the Delta town of Mehalla on 6 April, thereby commemorating both an anniversary of the 2008 strikes and the origins of the Facebook-savvy April 6 youth movement.

Misr25, a general channel started by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in May, followed another model, based on donations from the faithful, supplemented by advertising. The venture drew its staff in part from former employees of Al-Jazeera or the Muslim Brotherhood website, ikhwanonline.com. Brotherhood officials were reported as specifying that they wanted media professionals with diverse backgrounds to represent a range of ideas. There were precedents for this approach. The 350 Egypt-based staff of the website IslamOnline, who staged a mass walkout from their workplace in March 2010 because of editorial changes imposed by the website's Qatari owners, included non-Muslims and non-practising Muslims. The Egyptian employees of IslamOnline had wanted to maintain the website's non-religious content.

Some generalist commercial channels entered the scene before and during Ramadan, the traditional high season for evening television

viewing and advertising budgets, which in 2011 coincided with the month of August. Two of these, CBC (Capital Broadcasting Centre) and Al-Nahar TV, eventually came to share an owner, after CBC backer Mohammed Al-Amin Ragab, business partner of a property tycoon connected to the Mubarak family, acquired the majority of shares in Al-Nahar. Al-Nahar, managed by Samir Youssef, a producer of sports programmes and Mona Shazli's husband, recruited Hussein Abdel-Ghani, Al-Jazeera's former Cairo bureau chief. In May 2012, Al-Nahar partnered with France 24 to host successive nightly encounters with Egypt's presidential candidates.

CBC was quickly dubbed the channel of the 'remnants' (*feloul*) of the Mubarak regime because its presenters included Lamis el-Hadidi and, from February 2012, her brother-in-law Emad el-Din Adeeb. Both had made important media contributions to Mubarak's 2005 presidential election campaign. Other CBC figures were Abdullah Hammouda, previously associated with the government-run *Rose el-Yousef* magazine, and Magdi Galad of *Al-Masry al-Youm*. Although *Al-Masry al-Youm* gained a reputation for independence, Galad himself had previously intimated personal support for Gamal Mubarak. At the end of 2011, Galad played a part in blocking publication of the print version of the *Egypt Independent*, an English-language daily sister paper to *Al-Masry al-Youm*, because of one article, written by an American academic, which was deemed critical of SCAF. In March 2012, Galad resigned from *Al-Masry al-Youm* and took several of its staff members with him to a new paper paying higher salaries. This was *Al-Watan*, launched in late April 2011 under the ownership of CBC and Al-Nahar shareholder Mohammed Al-Amin.

It became much harder to start satellite channels after SCAF suspended licensing and cracked down on unlicensed operations in September 2011, although the parliamentary channel, Sawt al-Shaab (Voice of the People), did start to relay proceedings from the People's Assembly when MPs took their seats on 23 January 2012. After Parliament was dissolved six months later, Sawt al-Shaab applied to broadcast meetings of the Shura Council and Constituent Assembly. As demonstrated by what happened to the *Egypt Independent*, press start-ups also became difficult, while the economic downturn threatened some existing titles. In April 2012 the respected English-language *Daily News Egypt* faced closure after seven years in operation, following a dramatic slump in advertising sales and subscriptions during 2011. Its editor-in-chief Rania al-Malky and the rest of her team, unable to reach an accommodation on editorial independence with the new owner, created an online publication called *Egypt Monocle*. In

contrast, *Al-Youm al-Sabea* (Seventh Day), an independent weekly started in 2008, went daily at the end of May 2011 and experimented briefly with an English-language version of its *Youm7* news website. Walid Mustafa, its publisher, also became a director of Al-Nahar TV.

Overview

Despite the ascendancy of Mubarak-era media owners in the private sector and despite the shift back towards ownership concentration behind the scenes, the sheer multiplication of different media spaces for reporting and comment on air, in print, and online made it much harder to marginalise individual journalists. Voices silenced in one space would instantly be heard in another, and attempts at censorship very quickly exposed. Colleagues from different media outlets would interview each other about their experience of repression and their aspirations for media freedom, reflecting a form of solidarity in tune with the mood of January 2011, as encapsulated in the name of the influential Facebook page, 'We are all Khaled Said'. Facebook afforded members of the public a means to express support for trusted journalists, as happened when Yosri Fouda announced in May 2012 that he would quit his programme to mark the scheduled 30 June return to civilian rule.

Revolutionary energy was no more easily contained in the news sector than elsewhere. Journalists clashed with each other over the best ways to represent their interests and with their bosses over journalistic standards and rights to free speech. The ERTU building became a site of permanent protest by staff seeking radical change. Superficial readings of the landslide outcome of elections to the People's Assembly and the eventual choice of president belied the diversity of sites of open contention and dissent. Headlines indicated a decisive win for Islamists in Parliament and a two-way presidential run-off between a Muslim Brotherhood candidate and a Mubarak appointee. Yet the number of votes for the Muslim Brothers' Freedom and Justice Party plummeted in just six months, from just over 10.1 million in the parliamentary elections in December 2011–January 2012 to less than 5.8 million for the Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed al-Morsi, in the first round of the presidential contest in May 2012.

In the same round, Hamdeen Sabahi, who came third overall with more than one-fifth of the total votes, was the clear winner out of the five candidates in five important governorates out of 27, namely Cairo,

Alexandria, Kafr al-Sheikh, Port Said, and Red Sea.⁵⁰ Sabahi, a founding member of the National Association for Change and a pro-labour activist, had joined the 25 January demonstrations from the first day. His Karama (Dignity) Party started as a breakaway from the Nasserite Party in the 1990s but was denied registration until August 2011. Sabahi's votes in the first round, added to those of the two other pro-revolution candidates, Abdel-Moneim Aboul-Futouh and Khaled Ali, accounted for 38.8 per cent of the total.

The fine balance of political forces may explain why Morsi, on finally announcing his largely technocratic cabinet at the beginning of August 2012, allocated only five portfolios (education, housing, labour, youth, and information) to known Muslim Brothers, while neglecting to recognise other political parties in assigning posts and actively sidelining the Salafist trend. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood movement, having been prevented for decades from operating as a political party, came to power before having an opportunity to resolve its own internal divisions over central issues of governance, such as the state's role in the economy or its social responsibilities. In light of such divisions, many observers feared that staying in power could become an objective in itself, even if it entailed accommodations with vested military or business interests established before and during the Mubarak era. Thus the new information minister's background as a journalist who worked for Islamist publications, combined with the information ministry's continuing role in state broadcasting, failed to inspire hope that a Morsi government would resist the temptation to use state media as a tool of government.

In the post-Mubarak media landscape, however, voices opposing rule by the military, the Muslim Brotherhood, or vested interests from the Mubarak era, found ways to be heard. That landscape provides a backdrop for the analysis of competing visions of journalism attempted in the remaining chapters of this book.

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