

The Political Economy of Media Privatisation in Egypt: State Mechanisms and Continued Control

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Abstract : During the mid-1990's Egypt had become obliged to implement the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program that included broad economic liberalization, expansion of the private sector and a contraction the size of government spending. This coincided as well with attempts to appear more democratic and open to liberalizing public space and discourse. At the same time, economic pressures and the proliferation of social media access and activism had led to increased pressure to open a mediascape and remove it from the clutches of the government, which had monopolized print and broadcast mass media for over 4 decades by that point. However, the mechanisms that governed the privatization of mass media allowed for sustained government control, even through the prism of ostensibly privately owned newspapers and television stations. These mechanisms involve barriers to entry from a financial and security perspective, as well as operational capacities of distribution and access to means of production. The power dynamics between mass media establishments and the state were moulded during this period in a novel way. Power dynamics within media establishments had also formed under such circumstances. The changes in the country's political economy itself somehow mirrored these developments. This paper will examine these dynamics and shed light on the political economy of Egypt's newly privatized mass media in the early 2000's especially. **Methodology:** This study will rely on semi-structured interviews from individuals involved with these changes from the perspective of the media organizations. It also will map out the process of media privatization by looking at the administrative, operative and legislative institutions and contexts in order to attempt to draw conclusions on methods of control and the role of the state during the process of privatization. Finally, a brief discourse analysis will be necessary in order to aptly convey how these factors ultimately reflected on media output. **Findings and conclusion:** The development of Egyptian private, "independent" mirrored the trajectory of transitions in the country's political economy. Liberalization of the economy meant that a growing class of business owners would explore opportunities that such new markets would offer. However the regime's attempts to control access to certain forms of capital, especially in sectors such as the media affected the structure of print and broadcast media, as well as the institutions that would govern them. Like the process of liberalisation, much of the regime's manoeuvring with regards to privatization of media had been haphazardly used to indirectly expand the regime and its ruling party's ability to retain influence, while creating a believable façade of openness. In this paper, we will attempt to uncover these mechanisms and analyse our findings in ways that explain how the manifestations prevalent in the context of a privatizing media space in a transitional Egypt provide evidence of both the intentions of this transition, and the ways in which it was being held back.

Keywords : business, mass media, political economy, power, privatisation

Conference Title : ICMC 2018 : International Conference on Media and Communication

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : November 08-09, 2018