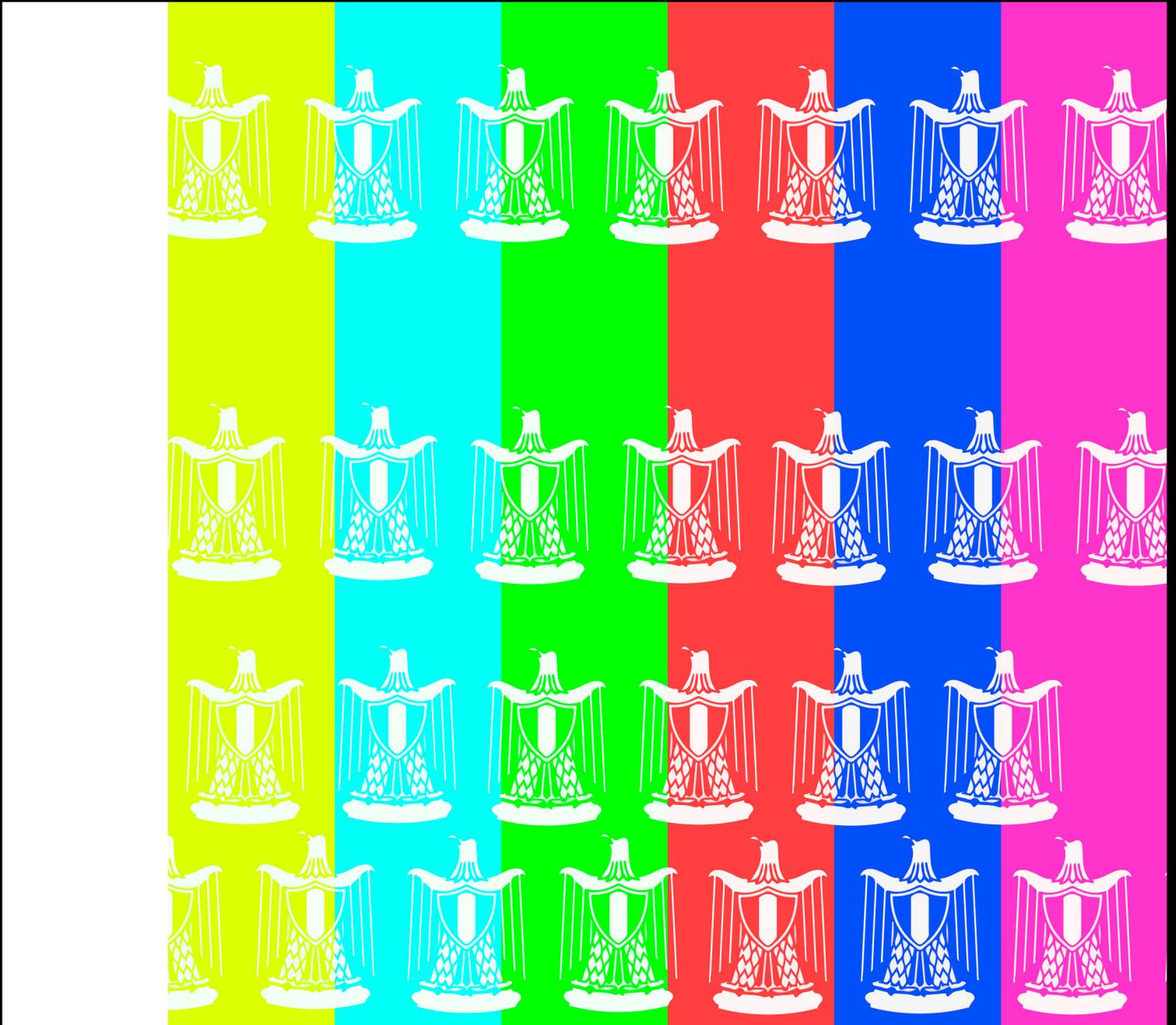


Who is to conquer:

Drama Production between the Private Sector and Intelligence Services



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Methodology

This paper is based on interviews conducted with four workers in the fields of drama, television, cinema and art criticism. The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) decided to anonymize three of them due to security concerns, while the identity of the fourth is mentioned as he resides outside Egypt and therefore he is not subject to imminent danger. The paper also relied on previous reports issued by AFTE on the status of drama, television and media ownership, in addition to monitoring and analysis of news and official statements issued by the Drama Committee and the Egyptian Media Group.

Introduction

The Egyptian media scene has witnessed major and rapid transformations since 2014, whether on the legislative level regarding laws regulating media, or at the level of media ownership. These transformations climaxed in 2017, when the Egyptian Media Group emerged, and obtained a large share of the media market in Egypt through deals that the details of which were not announced.

This was related to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah AlSisi's penchant, which he had disclosed several times during his speeches, and perhaps the most prominent of which¹ was "Late leader Gamal Abdel Nasser was lucky, because he spoke and the media was on his side" during a ceremony where he announced the launch of the Suez Canal Development Corridor.

However, the media model adopted by the Nasserite era was based mainly on the state and its ownership of the radio and television sector, a model that seems difficult to apply nowadays with the monumental economic transformations and the businessmen's access to a large part of the media market during the era of former President Hosni Mubarak. Adding to that the subsequent involvement of new investors and expansion of existing investments in the media sector following the 25 January 2011 revolution, which was based on the newfound status of freedoms that Egypt witnessed during that period. Complying all this with using the Internet and social media sites to transfer content, whether informative or creative.

1. Mohamed Abbas, Sisi: "Abdel Nasser was lucky," Al-Masry Al-Youm, published on August 5, 2014, last visited May 2019 <https://goo.gl/1mjf7k>

Despite these huge challenges and while taking into consideration the difficulty of having the state as the only actor in media, especially after the state media represented in the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) proved its complete bias towards the current regime during the protests of January 2011, but the current authority did not stop its pursue to control media and creativity.

In order to achieve this, the authority relied on two basic factors of control, the first of which was legislative, represented by creating new oversight bodies for prohibition and censorship, but they could not control the scene on their own due to the intensity of dramatic production, and the second was economic, represented by the state's hidden possession of capital and managing private media platforms

This method succeeded to a great extent in nationalizing the drama market in Egypt, which has brought about huge changes in the quantity and quality of the industry. This paper attempts to monitor and analyze the changes that have occurred in the drama market, by studying the differences between the Drama Season of 2019 and that of 2020, which are the ones in which the state had consolidated its control of drama.

The paper also monitors the changes that took place within the Drama Committee since its establishment, as well as the developments of media and television production ownership. The paper also monitors the changes that have taken place within the Drama Committee since its inception, as well as developments in media ownership and television production. The paper also presents the views of those working in the drama industry with regard to dramatic production and the status of media outlets ownership.

First: The declination of the role of the drama committee

The Drama Committee of the Supreme Council for Media has played a pivotal role in monitoring the content of drama during the month of Ramadan, since its establishment in 2017, it has tried to control the scene of television drama in general, whether through administrative sanctions, which it announced to counter violations by satellite stations or through decisions it issued and imposed on production companies.

Thus it is important to tackle the changes that took place in the drama committee three years after its establishment, and that is so that we can address the status of drama in a general manner and then reflect on the changes that occurred during the season of 2002 specifically. The decline in the role of the Drama Committee coincided with the rise of the Egyptian Media Group and Synergy's monopoly over a large part of the production of TV drama last season in 2019.

Before announcing the formation of the Drama Committee, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation exercised a public role in censoring dramatic and creative works that were displayed on television.²

Former Council Chairman Makram Mohamed Ahmed and its former members issued a number of statements opposing the transgressions that were found to be offensive to the morals and traditions of Egyptians in drama, announcing the existence of new controls for the development of dramas in 2017, and the formation of committees to monitor everything portrayed on the screen.

In June 2007, the Media Council issued a report entitled "Monitoring the violations of Ramadan series and programs from 27 May to 6 June 2017," basing it on six types of Drama violations that had been stipulated by council, namely "verbal transgression and offences, insults, slurs as well as rude and deliberate sexual overtones" it showed immoral scenes and sexual harassment, and some of the series offered free lessons on how to use drugs, join ISIS, in addition to political omissions as well as containing inaccurate historic representation. The council also issued a decree fining the channel's managers by 200,000 Egyptian pounds for every word that they deemed offensive that was mentioned in any of the dramas, provided that the license of the

2. The Supreme Council for Media Regulation was established at the time according to Law 92/2016, which was amended by issuing Law No. 180 of 2018.

media outlet through which the offenses is repeated and does not abide by punishment within six months, and the licensing procedures are repeated again.

However, the conflict in the competencies between the Supreme Council for Media and the Supervisory Authority for Art Works, and the neglect of the representation of creators within the Council, caused a sharp wave of attack against the Council's new directions, which accelerated the issuance of a decision to establish a specialized committee for drama, provided that the main task of the drama committee is following up on the drama, identifying any violations, and turning those responsible for it to accountability in order to scale up the drama.

The Drama Committee represented one of the most important transformations in the drama industry and the cultural scene, as critics and press websites described the 2018 Ramadan drama season as the weakest since 2010³ and the 2018 season coincided with the peak of the drama committee's work activity. Over a period of seven months, it is the working period of the committee under the chairmanship of director Mohamed Fadel, before it submitted its resignation in June 2018, the committee expanded in the practices that the Supreme Council began to implement, as the committee was keen to surround the drama, by establishing 5 different monitoring committees, to audit Every dramatic scene is shown on television, in order to impose, through these mechanisms of action, subsequent control of creative works.

The 2018 season coincided with the peak of the drama committee's work. Over a period of seven months, during which the committee was under the chairmanship of director Mohamed Fadel. The committee expanded in the practices that the Supreme Council had begun before it submitted its resignation in June 2018, as it was keen on enclosing all shows through establishing 5 different monitoring committees, so they can audit every scene that is aired on television, in order to impose through these mechanisms subsequent control of all creative works.

The expansion of the committee's work can be seen through its periodic reports which are published on the Supreme Media Council's website. These reports came in cooperation with four monitoring committees affiliated with the "Supreme Council for Media, the National Council for Human Rights, the National Council for Women's Rights, and the Fund to Combat Addiction and Abuse." The committee tracked the 2018 Ramadan shows, issuing daily,

3. Engy Ibrahim, Out of Season: Egyptian Drama Breaks the Monopoly of Ramadan - Ida2at, published on April 25, 2018, last visit August, <https://bit.ly/2YTVeja>

weekly and final reports on the content of the works that were broadcasted during which, and reformulated and expanded the patterns of violations. In contrast to the 6 patterns that the Supreme Council had adopted in 2017 in monitoring violations, the committee relied on 19 patterns.

The Drama Committee set itself up as a punitive watchdog with a severe attack on the Egyptian drama, its content, and the amount of the violations it monitored. The committee demanded that the Supreme Council imposes penalties several times, putting the Council in a difficult position, as imposing these penalties which entailed fining the offenders for each unapprovable word was found to be impractical. That is in consideration of the huge number of violations monitored by the Drama Committee, and given the public resentment of the existence of such a committee, and the imposition of such penalties threatening the thriving of private channels, a large part of which are owned by businessmen who are loyal to the current authority.

On June 25, 2018, days after the recommendations of the drama committee for the 2018 season were submitted to the Supreme Media Council, the committee members submitted a collective resignation, stating that the reason behind their resignation, which was accepted by the head of the Supreme Media Council, were that the council did not commit to imposing sanctions and penalties on the violators, and that the continuation of their role as “decor” without powers and enforcement authority is impossible.

For ten months after the committee’s resignation, the head of the council at the time, Makram Muhammad Ahmed, was unable to assign the presidency of the committee to anyone else, as a number of directors, critics and actors refused to chair the committee for reasons related to the competences/powers granted to the committee in exercising its punitive powers, or for fear of criticism which may affect this position among the creative community.

In April 2019, journalist Magdy Lashin took over the presidency of the drama committee, and it can be said that Lashin’s tenure of office marks the beginning of a new chapter in the committee’s work. The new committee coincided with the rise of Synergy, a subsidiary of the Egyptian Media Group, in the field of production alongside with its monopolistic practices in the 2019 drama season.

A film producer who owns a major production company, interviewed for this research, believes that the drama committee was not consequential from the start, and that its role is advisory

towards all other committees, being that the lack of its powers limits its role to informing the competent authorities only.

The Drama Committee continued to work in the same structure during the years 2019-2020, which is the longest period since the establishment of the committee. The committee believes that Ramadan's drama is significantly improving. While the statements⁴ of the committee members for the last drama season 2019 confirmed the decline in the number of violations in drama, and the commitment of the drama makers to the committee's standards, the statements of the current year⁵ came to show that the 2020 season was the best, with a full commitment to the standards, and in press statements by the president of the committee describing it as "Things are going on orderly since last year."

In an interview with the researcher, director Khaled Youssef said that the drama committee can be seen as a "reserve army" that would be activated in the event that the state failed to acquire the production of drama. Youssef added that the state production companies adhere to instructions, which they themselves set out to marginalize the work of the committee.

Four individuals interviewed by the researcher agreed that the drama committee was tantamount to preparing the market for the intervention of Synergy, which later took over the control of the scene by monopolizing most of the drama production processes. An art critic and programmer explained, in an interview with the researcher, that the existence of a committee specialized in television drama began at the end of the nineties, and that a series such as "Aunt Nour" was criticized by the committee, which at the time included director Muhammad Fadel, Osama Al-Sheikh and Anwar Okasha, and that such committees with the same censory roles have always existed at all times.

4. The Supreme Council for Media: 65% of the violations in Ramadan series consisted of vulgar language, AlQahira 30, published on May 30, 2019, last visit 2020, <https://bit.ly/2CyIMa1>

5. Mohamed El-Sayed, "Supreme Council for Media" announces a decrease of violations in Ramadan drama from previous years, AlYoum AlSabea, published on May 2, 2020, last visit June 2020, <https://bit.ly/3dxtxeo>

Second: The Egyptian Media Group is the productive arm of the state

The Egyptian Media Group is owned by Eagle Capital,⁶ it is an investment company owned by the General Intelligence Service, according to an investigation conducted by Mada Masr⁷. Early in 2016, businessman Ahmed Abu Hashima Founded the Egyptian Media Group. In February 2018, Tamer Morsi was appointed Chairman and Managing Director of the Group, succeeding Engineer Tarek El Sheikh. Despite the limited information available on this group, it has become the largest media bloc in Egypt between 2016 and 2019, as during these years it concluded many deals, through which it obtained shares of satellite broadcasting networks, a number of print newspapers, news websites, advertising and public relations companies, and radio and television production companies.

Regarding the television sector, in May 2016, the Egyptian Media Group acquired possession of ON channels network, by purchasing 100% of the shares of Hawa Limited, owned by businessman Naguib Sawiris. In July 2018, the group acquired Al Hayat TV network, which was previously owned by Falcon Group. In September 2018, it acquired 51% of the shares of Future Media Holding Group, owner of CBC network channels.

As for the printing industry, in 2016, The Egyptian media acquired AlYoum AlSabe' newspaper, its website, and a number of its affiliated websites (Video 7, Photo7, Infrad, Parliament, The Cairo Post). In July 2016, The Group seized Dot Masr Website.

In November 2016, Abu Hashima bought the weekly newspaper Sawt al-Ummah from its owner Ahmed Essam Ismail Fahmy, for 12 million Egyptian pounds, after which the Egyptian Media Group acquired the weekly newspaper "Ain Al-Mashahir", which is also owned by Ahmed Essam Ismail Fahmy.

In the production industry, in June 2016, Egyptian Media acquired 50% of the Egyptian Cinema Company, owned by businessman Kamel Abu Ali. In November 2016, Egyptian Media acquired 50% of Synergy.

6. Egyptians Media Company Profile, Media Ownership Monitor, last visited: June 2020, shorturl.at/hsMRU

7. Hossam Bahgat, Details of the General Intelligence's takeover of "Egyptian Media", Mada Masr, published on December 10, 2017, last visit June 2019, <http://bit.ly/2RLlQrA>

In the field of marketing and advertising, Egyptian Media acquired 51% of the shares of Egyptian Media Company. In June 2016, in addition to owning Synergy Advertising Agency, the Egyptian Media acquired ownership of POD company, an agency specializing in advertising, marketing, graphic design, internet services and public relations.

The Egyptian Media Group also owns 'I fly Egypt', a company that provides drone photography services, as well as EOD, an outdoor advertising company, and HASHTAG, a company that specializes in advertising on social media and the Internet. Egyptian Media also owns Spade Studio, a digital advertising agency established in 2015.

The Egyptians Media Group owns Egyptians Security Company, a company working in the field of securing facilities, property and protecting individuals. It also owns the Egyptian Media Academy, which is an academy that provides training in the field of media and related technology.

On the level of drama, Tamer Morsi, chairman of the Egyptian Media Board, owns 50% of Synergy shares, which is the same company that produced fifteen Ramadan series out of 23 series that were produced during 2019.

Synergy⁸ is an art production company, founded by Tamer Morsi in 2003. It was initiated by working in the field of advertisements, until it started drama production in 2007 through producing "Haq Mashroo" series, and in the following year it produced three dramas that were aired during Ramadan 2008.

From 2012 to 2015, Synergy, led by Tamer Morsi, confined itself to producing one or two works during the Ramadan season, but it started its monopoly over the market of TV drama in Ramadan 2016, the same year in which the Egyptian media completed its deal by acquiring 50% of Synergy's shares, as it produced seven shows starring the season's top celebrities⁹; "Mamoun and Partners" starring Adel Imam, "Abu Al Banat" starring Mustafa Shaban, "Caesar" starring Youssef Al Sharif and "Al Tabbal" starring Amir Karara.

In Ramadan 2017, the number of TV shows produced by Synergy increased to nine, as it

8. Official Synergy Film website, last visited June 2019, <http://bit.ly/2NQHTii>

9. Reham Abdel Wahab, Tamer Morsi ... "Drama Giant" Ramadan 2019, Al-Tahrir News, published on April 6, 2019, last visited June 2019, <http://bit.ly/2Y9Y3ae>

produced two more dramas that were aired outside the Ramadan season. During 2017, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation had begun its interventions in Ramadan's drama, and issued a report on "the violations in the Ramadan series".

In 2018, Tamer Morsi produced seven shows during the Ramadan season. It is likely that the decline in business for this year came after Morsi started in the field of film production through "Synergy Films" company, which he launched in December 2017.¹⁰

In January 2019, the National Media Authority headed by Hussein Zain and the Egyptian Media Group headed by Tamer Morsi signed¹¹ several protocols, according to which they announced that their cooperation came with the aim of providing better and advanced content on Egyptian television screens, through the collaboration of the expertise found in both the Egyptian TV and the Egyptian Media Group, Within five years, as per the terms of the signed protocols.

Masrawy website quoted Tamer Morsi saying that he has "begun to work on restructuring satellite channels in the group in order to boost the mission of the media and paint a better future in light of what the President demanded naming the inevitable role of the media is required to play for the development of the state."¹² President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, during an educational seminar at the Galaa Theater, has praised the state's interference in dramas in the past, as it provided "positive building components" and that they did not only seek profit but they contributed to improving the public taste.

By the 2019 Ramadan drama season, Synergy had acquired control over a large share of the art production market¹³, through coordination with the Supreme Media Council¹⁴, the company has met with 13 authors and urged them to reduce the budget in addition to priming them into using Egyptian filming sites rather than foreign ones. During this year, the company also acquired the production of most of the dramas in Ramadan's season, which is the same

10. Amr Sahrah, Tamer Morsi launches "Synergy Films" led by Ahmed Badawi, Al Youm Al Sabea, published on 4 December 2017, last visited 2020, <https://bit.ly/3ds9XjF>

11. Egyptian media signs the protocol for the development of Egyptian television, the seventh day, published on January 30, 2019, last visited 2020, <https://bit.ly/2NjzyR8>

12. Tamer Morsi, Chairman of the DMC Board of Directors, Masrawy, posted on April 5, 2019, last visited 2020, <https://bit.ly/2V5wbS7>

13. Dalia Mohamed, Synergy, a company that produces half the Ramadan 2020 series for former stars .. Who will be lucky next year? Agency News, published on April 5, 2020, last visited 2020,

<https://bit.ly/37SUKQW>

14. Reham Abdel Wahab, Tamer Morsi ... "Drama Giant" Ramadan 2019, Tahrir, published in April 2019, last visit 2020, <https://bit.ly/2CG8cTj>

season that witnessed a significant decrease in the number of series produced, as well as their production costs, including the wages of actors. This year Synergy produced 15 of the 24 series.

Al-Adl Group withdrew from the drama race for the first time since 2001, as well as “Arts Egypt Art and Distribution” group, “Magnum”, “K MEDIA” and “Beelink” companies, leaving only nine tv series that was not produced by Synergy; five of which were aired on the Saudi Arabian MBC group. The rest were aired on “Al-Nahar,” “Alkahera Wal Nas” and “TEN” channels, all which are not affiliated with the “Egyptian Media” group.

It appeared that Synergy had redrawn the laws of the drama market by owning production tools and being part of the Egyptian media group that controlled television networks and advertising. Synergy subdued its competitors, as it managed to cancel four shows after their production had already begun, including the Adel Imam show, it was announced that the cancelation came due to health conditions. However, Al-Tahrir newspaper published that the show was suspended as a result of a crisis between Magnum, the company that produces the work, and the Egyptian Media Company, which obtained the rights to broadcast the show.

Other reasons had been reported for halting production, namely; the financial crises production companies encountered, or not acquiring security permits for filming, this was confirmed by three of this paper’s interviewees.

One of the technical producers said that Synergy suspended filming a number of series during the 2019 season, and added that the series “B 100 Wesh” was produced by El Adl Group and Synergy obtained the rights to air in Ramadan 2020, it was supposed to be aired in the previous season under a different name and by a different director, except that Synergy’s interventions prevented him from obtaining the necessary permits to start filming, saying while describing the current production conditions: “If you are now working with Synergy then you are in the presence of the emperor, otherwise you are an easy mark.”

Third: In 2020: Did Tamer Morsi leave any room to breathe?

Unlike the 2019 season, Synergy brought some production companies back to the market again in 2020, but only through Synergy's production terms. This comes after the United Company for Media Services announced cooperation with companies operating in the field of dramatic production¹⁵. Synergy produced 12 works during the Ramadan 2020 drama season, in addition to two other works produced by El Adl Group, and Synergy obtained their exclusive rights to display and distribute, out of only 25 works produced this year.

The partial reopening of the market has been a noticeable feature this year despite being attributed to Synergy. Most of the art critics and our research interviewees believe that the current season is much better than that of 2019, which was described by one of the producers as a death announcement for the Egyptian drama. It should be noted that the series "B 100 Wesh" produced by Al Adl Group was one of the most successful works and mass series during the season.¹⁶

One of the art producers, interviewed for this research, said that Synergy did not reopen the market again, "This is a company that pushed us all to the underground yet failed to regain the leadership of Egyptian drama." Synergy is now in full command, in cooperation with the intelligence services and censorship entities. He clarified that the "abhorrent scandal" of the 2019 season, pointing to the bad drama of that year, was what forced Synergy to rely on commissioning large and mass production companies, such as El-Adl Group. He added that Synergy dealt with the El-Adl group as an executive director, not a technical one, turning the group into an agent that works according to production conditions that it did not set and then being remunerated for the job, albeit the group's power is seized to Synergy's account.

Another art critic interviewed for this research believes that Synergy is monopolizing the market through the contracts it concludes with other companies, specifically the ones granting the company exclusive rights of airing the shows, inclusive of online streaming. "Where Tamer

15. Hani Saber, Tamer Morsi signs contract with Al-Adl Group to present drama projects soon, Masrawy, published in November 2019, last visit 2020, <https://bit.ly/31jb4j5>

16. Basem Fouad, after the success of "100 Wesh" .. Kamilah Abu Zikra considers adopting Naguib Mahfouz's "Under the umbrella", AlYoum AlSabea, Posted on June 26, 2020, Last Visited 2020, <https://bit.ly/2VmyVdY>

Morsi, in his capacity as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the United Company, and in cooperation with the government through the administration of selling and streaming entities, buys the series from his own company and others for his own benefit.” The art critic concluded that “Al-Adl has become a contractor for the Egyptians Media Group”.

In cooperation with the Supreme Media Council and the Drama Committee, Synergy maintained the same mix-up of last season, with regard to the presence of less than usual TV dramas, that do not contradict the directions of the state, but asserts and contends it and insinuates the sacrifices of the army and the police, relying mainly on filming inside Egypt at a reduced production cost, maintaining that the shows are not available on any unofficial or non-Synergy platforms.

While three of those interviewed by AFTE agreed that the poor quality of the 2019 drama season as well as Synergy’s inability to maintain the artistic level of the shows pushed it to reintroduce companies such as Al-Adl Group to the market, but through Synergy and its terms, in order to improve the technical level of the business and its diversity.

One of them said that the contracts that El-Adl Group signed in favor of Synergy in 2020 are similar to compliance contracts, adding that “Mohamed Al-Saadi was preparing to succeed Tamer Morsi to take over the management of Egyptian media after the travesty of last season.” Mohamed Al-Saadi ¹⁷ is the director of “The President’s Speech” and the owner of Saadi Gohar Company, which is one of the companies that were contracted for the 2014 election campaign of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, of the “Long Live Egypt” slogan, adding that Tamer Morsi managed his position skillfully, which had enabled him to continue in it even after the harsh criticisms of the 2019 season. Adding that his cooperation with El Adl Group and other leading companies in the field of art production was his way to create balance and diversity in the 2020 season.

That happened alongside with the perseverance of Morsi’s policy, which is in line with the predominant state’s policy of controlling production outlets, adding that Morsi realized that his ability to pump profit and diversity in the drama market is insignificant, especially with Synergy’s way of searching for ready-made scenarios, and that Synergy needs cooperation with art companies that have a business mindset.

17. Mohamed Fathy, from Mohamed El-Saady, director of “The President’s Speech” ... and the propaganda of the “Dissolved National Party”?, Al-Mal, published on February 24, 2015, last visit 2020, <https://bit.ly/3eGCG5A>

An art producer, who owns one of the largest film production companies, contradicts this trend by saying that relying on the political factors alone does not explain what happened. If we consider the economic aspect, we would find that the profits of satellite channels are in a significant decline in contrast to the inflated increase in the cost of production. He adds that the Egyptian Media Group found after working in the market, that selling the product did not cover its high cost, so it made a decision to revive the market, and worked on its plan until it was completed during the 2019 season. Indeed it succeeded in disrupting many businesses by preventing work permits, even if it has already managed to control market prices in 2020, and he explains that Synergy has set a ceiling on the production costs and we all have to stick to it, otherwise the market will collapse.

Fourth: From Youtube to WatchIt, is the era of free viewership over?

During the last ten years, a large segment of the television audience has turned to online streaming through internet platforms that provide free Arab and international pirated content. After the high statistics of online views, production companies have tended to display Ramadan series on their YouTube channels circa 2014. Companies such as Al-Adl Group have been keen since 2016 to add Ramadan series on the YouTube channel directly after being aired on television.

Before the Ramadan 2019 drama season, a group of free viewing sites announced that they had to stop due to circumstances beyond their control. It became clear later that the Egyptian authorities had blocked online piracy sites for violating intellectual property rights. This came in the context of seeking to monopolize drama shows and profit from them for the benefit of Synergy. A few days later, it launched the “WatchIt” platform, an online application for viewership online, with a monthly subscription of 99 pounds.

The contracts, according to one of the producers, contain terms related to the online broadcasting. Although Synergy signed a protocol with the National Media Authority to be the exclusive broadcasting company for Egyptian content, whether it had previously or is currently being aired on television through the platform it owns, the WatchIt application was not met with great popularity, except after the application was opened for free for a month in Ramadan 2019, To appease subscribers after the technical obstacles that the application had.

After WatchIt was launched, which has faced many technical problems, most production companies stopped making their work available in Ramadan in 2019 for free on YouTube, as the platform had bought the rights to air the shows. The contracts, according to one of the producers, contain terms related to the online offering. Although Synergy signed a protocol with the National Media Authority to provide the exclusive broadcasting rights of Egyptian content, whether previously or currently produced from television, on the platform owned by Synergy, but the WatchIt application was not met with great popularity, except after the application was opened for free for a month in Ramadan 2019, To satisfy subscribers after the technical obstacles that the application exposes to it.

In the 2020 season, none of the TV dramas were broadcasted on YouTube, and the WatchIt application has reached one million subscribers,¹⁸ according to Synergy. Despite the Egyptian media group's attempt to control all aspects of the market, Some production entities remain out of their control through using Internet platforms.

Controlling the market requires different technologies, and programmers have been able to make the 2020 Ramadan TV series available on the free Telegram application, which is a free instant messaging application that dates back to 2013. Art producers who were interviewed for this research believe that the future will witness a trend towards paid online platforms, especially since the television sector faces huge financial crises, as advertisers have a leaning towards reducing their budget, which makes out the primary income For this sector.

Director Khaled Youssef says that online platforms are not only the future, but are able to change the form of production because they provide artists with a feasible extent of freedom and diversity. WatchIt is the second Arab online platform in Egypt and the first Egyptian after the Shahid platform, which is a subsidiary of MBC Saudi Arabia.

18. Al-Watan, "WatchIt" presents a selection of exclusive series and programs during Ramadan, published on April 23, 2020, last visited August 2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3gIYZrn>

Fifth: Digital production as an adequate alternative for some producers

Closing official production outlets always leads to making way for alternative spaces and other marginal outlets for production. Sectors such as the press and the low-cost productive arts (independent digital journalism and festivals) have been able to produce more liberal works, as their audiences use the Internet. With the beginning of a new era in digital viewing, the production of works presented on digital platforms has become a necessity due to the development of display media. In 2018, the series “Bedoon Kayed”(Without Restriction)¹⁹ was aired on YouTube, it was the first interactive digital Lebanese-Syrian series to be aired on digital platforms, which won a number of international awards.

All those interviewed by the researcher construed that producing drama in Egypt for digital broadcasting is difficult to happen outside the official production system, considering the cost and mass of producing drama, in addition to the prerequisite of filming and exterior shootings authorizations. An art producer explains that a series froze more than eight months to obtain permits to start filming during the 2019 season. Law 430/1955 regarding the regulation of censorship, in its fourth article, requires an approval for the authorization within thirty days at most from the date of submitting the application.

Indeed, some Egyptian producers whose works have been banned in recent years have resorted to producing media to be broadcasted through “Shahid” platform owned by the Saudi Arabian MBC group, including “In Every week, there is a Friday” TV Series and “Why Not?!” TV Series, after the production under Synergy’s terms became far-fetched.

19. “Bedoon Kayd”(Without Restriction) TV Series Page on the information site Wikipedia,
<https://bit.ly/2BSQg7b>

Conclusion

The authorities have worked on restructuring the media market, drama and art production, starting 2015 it has been working hard to ensure full control over the content. The new censorship mechanisms have not succeeded effectively in controlling the art scene, bearing in mind the usual quantity of drama production in Ramadan season, which has amounted to 40 shows in one year.

This prompted the current authority to use another mechanism, which is through gaining ownership of media outlets and production companies, through the Egyptian Media Group, and then the United Company, which led to the imposition of new conditions on businessmen and investors in the market of art production, through the monopoly of companies that are partially owned by the intelligence services. All of that brought about forceful reconstructions in the Egyptian drama regarding both the form and content; in fact it may take more years to see the real negative impacts on the industry given these alterations.

There is a small space that is still somewhat far from state control, which is digital production. It began with the use of the Internet as a daily broadcasting medium instead of television, a sphere that enjoys a large margin of freedom. Considering, the current authority's attempts to restrict this freedom, it seems that other forms of production are emerging on the drama market, especially with the presence producers who are still targeting the Egyptian market and its profits by producing works on digital platforms owned by foreign companies such as "Shahid" and Netflix, the platforms that extended from only broadcasting to cover both broadcasting and production.