Tunisian media
From the authority of the system To the authority of ideology and capital
“We send them our press staff to photograph and distort their families in front of their neighbors. We are launching a wide-ranging campaign of distortion and intransigence. We say that they are traitors and foreigner agents. We say they sold the country. They are the enemies of the nation. Then we give the microphone to some ordinary citizens, and we give them such words and record them. Our journalists in the plateau are slaughter them in terms of media, and the public opinion believes in all distortions we have said”.

This was the summary of the meeting of the editorial board of the private “Al-Qana” channel two years ago, headed by Nabil Al-Qroui, the director general of the channel, the current presidential candidate and head of the “heart of Tunisia” party. In preparation for launching, an unprecedented distortion campaign against the leaders of “I Watch” organization on the background of the organization’s publishing an investigation on the suspicion of tax evasion and financial corruption of the Qarui’s brothers’ companies.

This is not the first of its kind and may not be the last, but it is considered a point of difference in the Tunisian media and even a unique case that requires being studied and analyzed in order to understand the Tunisian media environment in the post-revolution era, and to stand on tracks that form the public opinion in Tunisia and innovative media guidance techniques. The new technology, digital narrative, and Marxist worlds have been brought to the attention of a stunning “Show” that facilitates the digestion of lies and allows the seizure of the tools of the public opinion industry to control it in order to guide it as required by the narrow financial, political or ideological interests of the media or entities that are They stand behind and control them as the hidden player controls the dancer’s pup-
From the system’s side to interests and the Lobbies’ side

The information system in Tunisia cannot be understood as to its ability to control and guide public opinion during the period of democratic transition unless we can, at first and foremost, dismantle this system and determine its characteristics before and after the revolution. In addition to presenting a historical overview of the shape of the media scene in general, especially the circumstances that allowed the private sector to invest in this sensitive sector, which has always been the cornerstone of the mobilization, glorifying and misleading strategies that the previous regime has been pursuing at all stages of its development since independence in the 1950s and to the limits of the fall of rule. Former president Zein El-Abdin Ben Ali was more than eight years ago.

During the rule of former Presidents Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the media were a tool in the hands of authority and a pillar of dictatorship, where television, in particular, played other public videos, newspapers and magazines. A decisive role in the whitewashing of political crimes on the one hand, and the inflaming of the pictures of a large number of the corrupt people, in the first place, is Zahhar Bin Ali, his family and his entourage on the other. In addition, there is absolute control of public opinion by the authorities’ total, direct surveillance of the few activist media, most of which were in the public domain.

Since the 1990s, Ben Ali’s regime has tried to vary the media display to reduce the influence of foreign media, some of which have been critical of its policies.

This strategy pushed people close to the regime to lead the “new” media scene, where they agreed to buy or create audio, visual or written media with facilities that sometimes reached the point of harnessing some public banks to finance these projects without any guarantees. Many of these institutions were confiscated after the revolution to be under the supervision of the state (the share of the Malatry rock in the morning House, Hassan Trabelsi in Cactus Brod, Radio Mosaic and Serine Ben Ali in the FM Sun).

The authority was monitoring the content and the use of the media to direct the public opinion through what was called the Tunisian Foreign Liaison Agency, which was established at the beginning of the 1990s to be the propaganda arm of the Ministry of Communication and those behind it the regime.

Media leaders in public institutions and private newspapers remained under the guidance of that agency, which in turn received orders directly from Carthage Palace under the supervision of Abdul Wahab Abdullah, the powerful arm of Ben Ali, who was called “mass media butcher”. Especially during election periods in which the press is totally disrupted and turned into a mere trumpet.
of power that spreads lies, promotes alleged achievements and distorts opponents and opponents.

The external contact agency has been operating for two decades (stalled in 2011 and finally resolved in 2012) following the carrot and stick policy. The tender was cut off for all media institutions, journalists and journalists who offer loyalty and loyalty to power, implement all their agendas and engage in its direction without any discussion, by controlling the advertising fund and public support.

On the other hand, the agency was waving a heavy stick against anyone who begging himself to violate the pre-determined line. This was claimed by a large number of media men who either failed to charge them in a way that found themselves in the cells of the regime, or were dismissed from their jobs, starved, and closed their work doors without the regime’s failure to torture their families and relatives.

Consequently, the media scene was dominated by a culture of yogurt and a thirst from the external contact agency either to stab the gazelle or to prevent the system’s evils. Public freedoms have been reduced, and freedoms of expression, political awareness, and community participation in public affairs have dropped to their lowest levels.

With the advent of the hurricane that devastated Barkan’s rule in early 2011, the Ministry of Communication and its propaganda arm, the Tunisian Foreign Liaison Agency, had to be abandoned and thus liberalized in the field of press, publishing and expression, including the liberalization of licensing and deregulation of private media ownership.

During the first two years following the fall of Ben Ali’s rule, the media scene recorded an unprecedented dynamic characterized by dozens of new headlines as well as an increasing number of radio, television and Internet channels. This number boom has devoted an unprecedented diversity of vision, perceptions and editorial lines, but now it has found itself in a state of chaos as a result of:

- Lack of clear legislative grounds governing the performance of journalists and media institutions.
- The absence of a legal or procedural mechanism governing the distribution of public declarations and support after the disruption of the external liaison agency and the Ministry of Communication.
- Absence of a structure that regulates the measurement of the public.
- Absence of self-adjusting and adjustment structures.

These gaps turned a number of media outlets during 2011 and 2012 into easy
prey for money and politics, which quickly acquired most private media platforms, overpaid them, controlled their editorial lines, and directed them in a scandalous way, either to serve the Islamists’ splintering (Zaytoonah and Zetouna Hadaya channels, TN, the Mediterranean, Saraha FM, Al-Insan, etc.) or to serve the anti-Islamic part like the Nesma channel that enlisted the struggle against the Renaissance movement and the political Islam project, then turn into a trumpet of the “Nidaa Tounes” party’s campaign and for its current leader, Al-Baji Qaid Al-Sebssi. And eventually berthed in the port of the “heart of Tunisia” party by the side of his friend Nabil Al-Qurawi, the owner of the same Nesma Channel.

The radical division that dominated the audio-visual media scene and the ideological but also the catchy state of the line contributed to misleading public opinion and employing it in fierce ideological battles. In parallel, a number of newspapers and websites financed by a number of corrupt businessmen or shadow pimps like Shafiq Al-Jarrah and Kamal Al-Latif have emerged.

These headlines, foremost among which are the newspapers “Althawra News”, “Dameer”, “Sada” and “Wakaa”, and the list goes on, they were mere platforms for misleading public opinion, whitening corrupt people, blackmailing businessmen, distorting political opponents, daily attacks on jurists and symbols of civil society.

The media content of the post-revolutionary media, specifically the private media, has adversely affected the formation of public opinion, the attention of Tunisians to ideological conflicts, the feeding of regional and doctrinal conflicts, and the poisoning of Saddam’s poisons by the manipulative identities. All this is at the expense of democratic transition, the defense of human rights and the establishment of a culture of anti-torture
and impunity in the executive organs of the State.

On the other hand, some press and media headlines were very serious in raising the topics that concern Tunisians during the transitional period. The interactive blogosphere, citizen journalism, and association journalism (Newa website, Gadal website, enkifadah site, Tunisian Al-Hiwar channel in Al Taher Bin Hussein’s version, Bondi Blog site, PR Al Aman organization, I Watch, Al-Busala organization, etc.) In a significant way, the blockade imposed on public opinion by commercial media led by the Tunisian Al-dialogue channel and Nesma channel was the main tool to fuel ideological battles, party conflicts, the whitening of corrupt people and the misleading of public opinion.

The above-mentioned alternative press sites briefly occupied an important space in the media and communications scene and became an ideal tool for adjusting public opinion by telling it well and objectively, providing high-level credibility information and directing it to the real battles of transitional justice, the return of torture inside the detention centers and prisons, and the outbreak of a scourge Corruption, the control of the Lobbies and monopoly groups over the nation’s capabilities and the plundering of its day.

The main reason why these platforms were excluded from employment was their economic independence, which allowed them to escape from the hands of businessmen, the authority of the two teners and the agendas of the media-sponsoring State. It is unfair, however, not to point out that, despite all its many indifferent and many shortcomings, public information has played a decisive role in providing information that is of minimal credibility, as well as in seeking to clean up the political climate and the general public from the seeds of hatred and hatred and in clearing the accounts. By providing a balanced media material.

The transmission of the second National Public Channel for the first Parliament after the Revolution (National Constituent Assembly) informed the public about how to manage the public affairs inside the parliament, and allowed him to learn about the law-making and parliamentary blocs during voting, etc.

Who owns the media?

Television in Tunisia has special care by the owners because it serves political ends and attracts the most attention of the two users. Television is the most popular media in Tunisia, where 98% of families have a home appliance. 83% of Tunisians are based on this means to follow the news. Moreover, 61% of Tunisians consider that the information transmitted by television is reliable according to the figures of the National Institute of Statistics.

Breaking the state’s monopoly on visual media began at the beginning of the 2000’s. In 2005, the first private television channel to see the light in Tunisia
Hanaabel Channel, which was launched by one of the business men who has a close relationship with Ben Ali and then Nesma channel, was launched in the pilot broadcast on March 23, 2007 after being inaugurated by the then Minister of Communication Rafi Dakhil.

Despite this openness to the private sector, the distribution of licenses was based on vague and arbitrary criteria based mainly on proximity or proximity to the regime, or on the content of programs that were blind to the reality of the political reality in the country, as confirmed by the output of the “Media ownership Project in Tunisia”. (Research project from the completion of reporters without borders and the Tunisian calligraphy Society).

The only opposition channel “Tunisian Al-Hiwar” was launched by its then-owner Taher bin Hussein in 2003 from abroad because of the impossibility of obtaining a license within Tunisia. Tunisians were heading to Arab and international channels like “Aljazeera”, “Arabic” and French channels in search of independent media content that was not controlled by the dictatorial regime at that time.

The revolution contributed to breaking the monopoly of members of Bin Ali’s family, its two relatives and those close to his regime for the media scene, as the TV channels were numerous and diversified after distributing new licenses. Today, the visual media scene contains two public TV channels and about 10 private channels (a number in continuous change), some of which are not regularly active due to financial difficulties.

Given its high follow-up ratios relative to the rest of the media, TV channels have become a popular destination for a category of political leaders. A number of television channels in Tunisia have become directly or indirectly linked to politicians or political parties, despite the existence of a legislative basis that hates this phenomenon.

In this context, a group of channels close to Islamists appeared, while officials and owners of other channels’ political trends did not hide their affiliations, which were translated in many cases into employing media content to gain narrow political gains or supporting certain parties, which made these platforms turn into boxes of political and party propaganda during Electoral benefits.

Nabeel Al-Qirawi, owner of a popular channel, for example, was told that he was a member of the leadership of the Nidaa Tounes party, although the HAICA law makes a distinction between the two characteristics (political leadership and investment in audio and visual media). He left the party and did not reform his legal mistake but rather to establish another political project that became clear of its features recently, entitled “the heart of Tunisia” party, ignoring all the
issues and problems that he pursued against the backdrop of strong suspicions of tax evasion and the use of his media platform to distort political and ideological opponents.

Osama bin Salem, founder of Al-Zaytoonah and Al-Zaytoonah Hidayah, was also partisan and non-politically independent but a leader and a senior official in Al-Nahda party in addition to other political missions. The renaissance television TN was linked to an international corporate network that protected tax havens to disguise their owners’ identities and obscure their sources of financing.

For his part, Al-Arabi Nasra, founder of Hanebeel, has employed his channel for years to promote his image before he missed his shares in the channel in preparation for running for presidency 2014.

In parallel, the businessman and Free Patriotic Union President Salim Al-Riahi broke into the media field from the gate of Radio Word and then the Tunisian channel (the Tunisian dialog later) to support his political presence, face corruption and money laundering suspicions that followed him and disturb his political ambitions. The southern channel of its current owners, businessman and politician Mohammad Al-Ayashi Al-Ogrodi, founder of the Tunisian Movement for Freedom and dignity, did not dissume this base either.

Private radio stations were also a kiss of employment and political invest-
ment before and after the revolution. The radio “Shams FM”, accompanied by Sirin Bin Ali and her husband, businessman Marwan Al Mabrouk, was a stark example of the ruling family’s penetration into the media. The same is true of “Mosaic FM” radio, in which Belhassan Trabelsi owned 13 percent of the shares.

After confiscating Trabelsi’s share and then turning into it, the businessman replaced Belhassan Trabelsi with his share in mosaic.

Zhara-Tharbasi (a partner of Belhsin Trabelsi at Carthage Cement), after the revolution, chose to experiment with media investment. This is mainly reflected by the fact that it also holds 8 per cent of the shares of Radio Gohar FM.

Some other emerging broadcasters with a local and regional aspect still have unclear sources of funding, so that their editorial lines are changing as electoral benefits approach or the composition of the two-month and capital contributors changes, most of which are likely to be employed to serve more paid agendas.

On the other side of the audio-visual media, the less “consumed” written press is considered in Tunisia, although 38% of Tunisians confirm the authenticity of the information reported by the written media according to INE figures.

Most newspaper owners are family companies, most of which are not active in other areas except newspapers. The written press sector developed after the revolution to reach 228 periodicals, but then there was a sort of counting, as many newspapers stopped because of lack of financial resources or their relation with the old regime, according to what is indicated by “the media ownership project in Tunisia”.

Today, dozens of titles have been removed from the market and only about 50 periodicals remain. Since the Ministry of Communication and its propaganda arm were abandoned the Tunisian Foreign Liaison Agency, the old patrols have lost the main part of its entrance to the continent, which was granted in the form of donations, aids and declarations in return for offering obedience and loyalty to the authority, whitening its corruption and preventing its excesses and crimes.

Fallen masters and creating new ones

Reflecting on the media scene that preceded the December January 17-14 revolution will not find it very embarrassing to say that the media organizations that were active at that time, in their public and private sectors, were only part of or emerging from the propaganda system of government. The opposition parties, like “the Al-Mawkef, the New Road, and citizens, as well as the Tunisian Al-Hiwar channel”, were excluded by some opposition party titles, as well as by its owners in addition to Al-Taher Bin Hussein, Radio 6 owner and the Word broadcast under the supervision of Suham Bin Sadrin.

The media landscape was, then, a reflection of the interplay between politics, me-
media, and finance that prevailed. Only some of the above-mentioned opposition titles survived the specter of employment, which had little influence on public opinion owing to the tightening of their publication by dictatorship.

After the revolution, the “stick” of dictatorship fell with it and the “carrot” of the regime fell with it, and the old platforms of the former regime, in addition to the vast majority of the new platforms, went out looking for a new “master” who continues to give it its share of the “islands”.

This new Master has often been - especially during the electoral benefits - taking the form of a political party, but he has often taken the form of a corrupt or corrupt businessman. The financial arm of political and party currents has often been pushed to the front to buy media outlets and professionals in order to serve their political interests in exchange for “safety” or, for example, to convey its “instrument of forgiveness” so that it continues its play in a complete devour of accountability and punishment, and Shafiq Al-Jaraiyah, Salim Al-Reahi and Nabil Al-Qrouiis are good examples for that.

The main gain in Tunisia’s revolution, with the general assembly of observers, is freedom of expression in general and freedom of the press in particular. The Tunisian elite understood early that freedom of expression, if not sustained by strong and lasting institutions, would be reversed over time or turned into chaos at best. Accordingly, freedom of expression and creativity has been incorporated into the Constitution as well as the establishment of the independent audiovisual media body, the public structure entrusted with the task of modifying audiovisual media institutions, granting licenses and punishing violators.

Today, the organization finds itself almost incapable of performing its missions after some mass media, topped by a population channel of its king Nabil Al-Qiraui, whose political ambitions are on the board’s decisions, enquiring with a party “immunity” granted to it in return for providing communication services to it during the previous election campaigns.

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