Navigating the Boundaries
Between State Television and Public Broadcasting
in Pre- and Post-Revolution Egypt

RASHA A. ABDULLA

The American University in Cairo, Egypt

This article navigates the boundaries between state and media in times of transition by presenting a case study of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). Government-owned television has always been used for the interest of repressive regimes in Egypt, where the boundary between public service broadcasting (PSB) and state television has been blurry. ERTU has posed itself as public service media, although its allegiance remains to the state rather than to the people. The January 25, 2011, revolution was a chance for reform, but not much has changed. This article uses personal interviews and qualitative analysis of legal documents to examine ERTU's legal framework, funding, diversity of content, and editorial independence. It analyzes the situation in terms of the current political context and makes recommendations for turning state television into PSB.

Keywords: public service broadcasting, public service media, Egypt, state television, democratization, Arab world, media in democratic transition, Arab media

Since Egypt's revolution of January 25, 2011, toppled Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power for 30 years, Egypt has experienced much political turmoil. Through four regime changes in four years,[1] the media have played a major role. Of specific importance are Egypt's public media, also referred to as national media, state media, government media, and official media. Private satellite channels, operating since 2001 and owned by businessmen closely allied to the Mubarak regime, have varied widely and across time in their professionalism. Egypt's public broadcasting, however, has not lived up to the universal functions and responsibilities of public broadcasters.

Most national media in Egypt and the Arab world have traditionally been owned and controlled by the government. A few exceptions have stood out over the years, including Lebanon's diverse media (Boyd, 1999) and some satellite channels, including, until recently, Al Jazeera, which is owned by the Emir of Qatar. In Egypt, terrestrial broadcasting remains a monopoly of the state and is referred to as

Rasha A. Abdulla: rasha@aucegypt.edu
Date submitted: 2015–01–22

[1] Since 2011, Egypt has been presided over by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (February 2011–June 2012), Mohamed Morsi (June 2012–July 2013), Adly Mansour (July 2013–June 2014), and Abdel Fattah El Sisi (June 2014–present).

"Egyptian television," implying service for Egyptians.[2] Throughout, however, and at times when varying degrees of freedom or oppression were being practiced in the country, state media, or what poses itself as public broadcasting, have not caught up with the standards and at times have caused tensions.

This article examines the boundary between state and public within the confines of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). It analyzes whether ERTU serves the regime or the public. The article examines the media structure in Egypt, with special emphasis on ERTU, and the legal framework in which the media operate. I use personal interviews and qualitative analysis of legal documents to examine the structure of ERTU and to point out the challenges in the system. I then make recommendations for steps to transform ERTU into a proper public broadcaster.

Literature Review

Public service broadcasting (PSB) has been a focus of study around the world, with scholars proposing various models, although agreeing that the main backbone of a public broadcaster is its concern for the public, regardless of financial gain. Carey (1987) said the "public" was "The god term of journalism—the be-all and end-all, the term without which the entire enterprise fails to make sense" (p. 5).

Public service broadcasting is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005a) as "broadcasting made, financed, and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces." It represents the voice of the people, all sectors of society, and provides content to inform, educate, and entertain the public, while steering away from commercial interests and political inclinations.

UNESCO (2005b) identified four characteristics for an effective public service broadcaster: The service should be *universal*, with access granted to all citizens of the country; *diverse,* with varied content topics, genres, and target audiences; *independent*, with content and messages free from the control of the state and from commercial influence; and *distinct*, offering inclusive programming in an innovative and creative manner.

Research has looked into different models of funding PSB (Berg & Lund, 2012; Blumler, 1993). Participants in the 2010 Making Media Public conference argued that one important aspect of public media is the necessity to make public the policies involved in such media. They argued that media literacy is important and that policy literacy is also crucial. This includes the public's ability not only to access media policies but to actively engage in formulating them (Cohen, Macdonald, Mazepa, & Skinner, 2011).

A Duetsche Welle Akademie report tackled examples of turning broadcasters into PSB in 12 developing countries. Its theoretical framework depended on creating a public sphere, including "political

---

[2] Interestingly, Egyptian private satellite channels are not referred to as "Egyptian television." Only the state media are.

functions such as comprehensive balanced news, political expression, social orientation, criticism, moderation of debate, agenda setting [and] local generation of content" and supporting integration, including "social functions such as cultural expression, empowerment, entertainment, education, and innovation" (Lublinski, Wakili, & Berner, 2014, p. 7). The report concluded that state broadcasters in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Moldova, and Serbia have successfully been transformed into PSB.

Sakr (2012) argued that the term *public service broadcasting* in the Arab world is immediately challenged by at least two factors. First is the lack of a proper Arabic translation that takes into account the important variables of public opinion and the need for proper shelter against government editorial interference, and second is the lack of a benchmark of an effective public broadcaster within the Arab world to compare others to. Analyzing PSB in Jordan, Sakr (2015) looked at elements of universality, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness. She argued that regulation, financing, management, staffing, and relevant programming are essential benchmarks for the "participatory nature" of public service media.

Cañizález (2013) analyzed the messages in Venezuelan government communications. He concluded that, as in most repressive countries, the model was "heavily characterized by populism and personality politics" (p. 179). He said that such communication models usually have two main purposes: to amplify the accomplishments of the government, and to overcome and distract from the mistakes or scandals of the regime.

Arab news agencies aim primarily to disseminate information from the government to the masses while simultaneously providing an alternative to foreign news sources (Mellor, 2005; Rugh, 1987). Since Egypt gained its independence in 1952, the ruling regime has used the media to deliver its messages. For these media, to use Cañizález's (2013) terms, "the President is the message" (p. 181), meaning that the president becomes the main focus of all communication, the main resource of information, and the main target of media service. Cañizález reports that the average time per week devoted to communication media by presidents and cabinet members is more than 15 hours. In Egypt, one study reported that the time given to Mubarak and his cabinet on the main news bulletin on ERTU in May 2010 was almost 23% or about 14 minutes per one-hour news bulletin (Abdulla, 2013c).

Rugh (1979) categorized Egypt's media as a "mobilization press," along with media of Iraq, Syria, the Sudan, Libya, South Yemen, and Algeria. The mobilization press acted as a voice of the regime and served the rulers to exercise control over the public. Rugh's other two classifications for media in the Arab world were the "loyalist press," present in Tunisia, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, which acted like the mobilization press but also had some elements of private media ownership and therefore used more persuasion techniques in laying out the regime's messages; and the "diverse press," in Lebanon, Morocco, and Kuwait, which enjoyed less coercion and more private ownership and political debate. Rugh (1987, 2004) later added the "transitional press," to which he moved Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, and Tunisia. He said these countries were then characterized by slightly more freedom, as a result of a fierce struggle by journalists. Significant government control, however, was still prevalent.

Mellor (2005) criticized these categories, saying they place too much emphasis on ownership and political system at the expense of the roles of culture, language, journalists, offshore media, and developments in Arab media systems. She argued that Arab media, even those owned by government, must compete for audiences in light of the plethora of media available and therefore must pay attention to content. She proposed rating media systems according to political news content and culture, including the use of language. Media regulation cannot be viewed as depending solely on the political system but rather must be seen in light of geopolitical and sociopolitical factors (Mellor, Ayish, Dajani, & Rinnawi, 2011). However, Rugh (2007) insisted that domestic political factors remain the most influential variables affecting national media systems in the Arab world.

Mellor (2011) argued that, while most Arab news content is controlled by authoritarian regimes, "the Arab region represents a rather unique case where commercialization and liberalization of selected media industries have gone hand in hand with continuous state intervention and an increasing self-censorship" (p. 3). Mellor (2007) suggested a theoretical framework based on Bourdieu's (1998) field theory, focusing on the role of journalists and the structure of media institutions. She argued that such an approach would allow for cross-culture comparisons, paying attention to elements of power, diversity, and the extent to which the content allows for debate and inclusion of voices.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) compared 18 media systems in North America and Europe and produced a topology of three models focused on media and politics. Expanding on Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), whose work they deemed influential but incomplete and dated, their framework focused on political systems and sociopolitical history and tackled dimensions of media markets, political parallelism, professionalism, and state role. They concluded that the media in democratic countries can be classified into the polarized pluralist, the democratic corporatist, and the liberal models. In a sequel tackling media systems outside the Western world, Hallin and Mancini (2012) asserted that their typology is not necessarily functional for all media systems worldwide, but for those with "most similar systems" (p. 3). Kraidy (2012) argued that it may be difficult to apply Hallin and Mancini's model to Arab media because the concept of the nation-state is proliferated by transnational media markets.

A recent BBC report suggested that national broadcasters in the Arab world, including Egypt, "may have the potential to help to bridge social divides, if they can be reformed to serve the interests of the public rather than the state" (Buccianti & el-Richani, 2015, p. 3). The report argued that national broadcasters have "extensive infrastructure and reach . . . [and] a cultural standing that enables them to serve diverse audiences" (p. 3). However, prerequisites are instilling values of diversity and universality and committing to editorial independence.

ERTU: Between State and Public

Egypt's national media have always worked in the interest of the ruling regime. Since Nasser's time in the 1950s, Egypt's rulers knew the media are powerful tools. The media were nationalized and used to place Nasser, and Egypt, as leaders of the Arab world (Abdulla, 2006, 2013c; Boyd, 1999). For most of Egypt's media apparatus for decades, the president remained the message.

Egypt had the Arab world's first satellite channel in 1990 and started permitting private satellite channels in 2001, although to this day there are no clear criteria for obtaining a license, and the practice has been restricted to satellite (not terrestrial) channels and to businesspeople with close ties to the regime. As a result, this move did not provide much diverse and inclusive content, because in crises, these channels protected the business interests of their owners, which are best served by serving the regime (Abdulla, 2013b). Currently, the media struggle to frame the regime's every move as an accomplishment, ignoring and, if necessary, covering up any scandals or evidence of corruption or human rights violations (Freedom House, 2015, 2016).

Despite Egyptian constitutions past and present always in theory guaranteeing freedom of expression, the state has found a way to interfere in media freedom directly or indirectly. For the longest time, they were aided by emergency laws imposed on Egypt and by articles from the penal code. Despite private satellite channels having earned a margin of freedom, the state maintained a way of controlling content through unwritten but well-known redlines for broadcasters. Recent reports have indicated that the legal framework under Mubarak helped to enforce state control over all media entities, including ERTU (Mendel, 2013, 2014).

Most of ERTU's 46,000 employees (Mubarak, 2010) are not alarmed that ERTU is the voice of the regime. Abdulla (2016) argued that, with few exceptions, the ERTU work force is well versed in the idea that they work for the government in "public sector media," and therefore their allegiance is to the "public sector," which in the Arab world means "state" or "government" (as opposed to the private sector). This dichotomy has led to the disappearance of the main values of PSB from the minds of those affiliated with ERTU. Instead, the meaning of "public" has become synonymous with "public sector," which in their minds means "state."

Researchers have pointed out that Egypt's state television is losing its audiences to private and pan-Arab satellite channels. Abdel Rahman (2014) reported that only 8% of her expert sample believe the future is for state television, with 80% saying freedom of expression and editorial independence are problematic. Maher (2012) suggested restructuring ERTU to be publicly owned and separating funding and administration from editorial sectors. Shams (2011) called for an independent media council that would safeguard editorial independence and regulate public media funding through taxes rather than government funds. Mubarak (2012) reported that the majority of ERTU personnel believes that ERTU's organizational structure is lacking because of nepotism and bureaucracy. He argued that ERTU has to break free from the editorial interference of the Ministry of Information, the presidency, and the prime ministry. Yousef (2013) called for an independent and diverse media council and for ERTU's financial independence from the government. El Shobaky (2011) argued that ERTU's biggest problems are bureaucracy, nepotism, and strict government control. He recommended establishing an independent media council and opening media outlets for initial public offerings.

Method

This article navigates the boundaries between state and public media in times of transition by presenting a case study of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). Yin (2003) defined a case

study as an empirical approach that uses multiple tools of gathering evidence to examine an issue or an entity within its natural context. This study uses qualitative analysis of legal documents and personal in-depth interviews to examine the state of PSB in Egypt. It looks at the relationship between ERTU and the regime and traces developments that have taken place since the 2011 revolution. It looks at the structure of ERTU through its employee numbers, funding, board of directors, and the legal framework in which it operates. It examines its editorial policies, defined as factors that influence the choice of content and the way these policies are formulated to determine its potential as a PSB. Interviews with current and past members of the board and with members of Egyptian civic society put into perspective the current functions of ERTU and the reform steps needed to transform it into a proper public service broadcaster.

The legal documents that were analyzed for this study are:

- ERTU Initiating Charter, Law 13 of 1979, modified by Law 223 of 1989 (Egyptian Radio and Television Union, 2008)
- ERTU Code of Ethics ("Mithaq al-sharaf," 1989)
- Egypt's 2014 Constitution ("Egyptian Constitution," 2014)
- Draft media and press regulation law (National Committee on Media Legislation, 2015)
- Counter Terrorism law (Counter Terrorism Law, 2015)

Interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 14 media experts and civic society professionals, including current and former ERTU board members. Two rounds of interviews were conducted, the first from April to July 2011 and the second in November 2015.

The study tried to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent can ERTU be considered a public service broadcaster?
- What are the main implications of the legal framework governing ERTU?
- How do factors of management, funding, and staffing influence the independence and editorial policies of ERTU?
- What steps can be taken to reform ERTU into a public service broadcaster?

Findings and Discussion

ERTU as Public Service Broadcaster

All 14 experts interviewed for this study said that ERTU is far from being a public service broadcaster. Hassan Hamed, former chair of the board of ERTU, acknowledged that ERTU is loyal to the regime rather than to the public. He said that during the last decade of Mubarak's rule, ERTU completely lost its independence. "It all depends on the minister of information in charge, and how much interference he has in the process." Hamed believed a public broadcaster should focus on providing developmental content that is educational and informative in nature, regardless of profit, which was not the case with ERTU (Hamed, personal interview, July 17, 2011).

Journalist and former member of the ERTU board Louis Greiss acknowledged that ERTU did not act as a PSB. Instead, it purposefully focused on a heavy dose of entertainment and sports during Mubarak's time to distract people from politics. The function of ERTU, he said, was not to inform the public of "what was really happening, but of what the government wants to inform them about" (Greiss, personal interview, July 22, 2011).

Yaser Alzayat, deputy editor in chief of ERTU's *Radio and Television Magazine*, also acknowledged that ERTU did not act as a PSB because it was owned by and financially dependent on the state. He said that a proper PSB should be concerned with the full diversity within a society and should not present messages only from the regime (Alzayat, personal interview, June 23, 2011).

Interviewed members of Egypt's civic society did not feel that ERTU served them. To Ghada Shahbender, former member of the board of the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, PSB did not exist in Egypt. "We have state-owned media, but I don't consider them public broadcasting, because they're controlled entirely by the state. Hypothetically, they're owned by the public, but they're controlled and used as propaganda devices by the state" (Shahbender, personal interview, July 14, 2011).

The same sentiment was echoed by Emad Mubarak, executive director of the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression. He did not consider ERTU to be a PSB because the government owned and controlled it. As he put it, "Egyptian television is not public, it's governmental" (Mubarak, personal interview, July 19, 2011).

May Shawky, media capacity building specialist for Egypt Civil Society Services, said there was not enough diversity in ERTU. In particular, she was concerned about its coverage of NGOs and civil society activities, which she believed was biased toward the government and the more affluent sectors of society. "It's not public service [broadcasting]," Shawky said. "It's marginalizing people when you're supposed to be addressing all categories of people" (Shawky, personal interview, July 18, 2011).

Legal Framework

ERTU is governed by an initiating charter, Law 13 of 1979, modified by Law 223 of 1989 (Egyptian Radio and Television Union, 2008). The modifications made in 1989 served only to give absolute control over the media to the recently abolished position of minister of information, whereby the minister supervises ERTU and approves all board decisions.

The charter stipulates that ERTU is the sole broadcaster and only entity in charge of radio and television broadcasting in Egypt. This caused a legal hurdle when the state wanted to allow private satellite channels in 2001. A media production city (MPC) was therefore set up and designated as a free zone. Private broadcasters could operate from within the MPC without adhering to the ERTU charter. However, this meant that the General Authority for Investments and Free Zones (GAFI), which has no media expertise or functions, was in charge of approving broadcaster licenses. There are no known criteria for licensing, but interviews indicated that the process is mainly dependent upon the approval of state security and senior officials. Former Chair Hamed stated that GAFI is only in charge because the MPC is

"geographically a free zone" but that GAFI "has nothing to do with broadcasting, so they basically consult with the minister of information." He added, "It's a matter of getting security clearance from national security entities. It is a political matter at the end of the day, which is why no one ever managed to get a license for a news channel" (Hamed, personal interview, July 17, 2011).

Publisher Hisham Kassem, CEO of *Algomhouria Algadida*, put it best: "When it came to broadcast, you got your license practically from Mubarak. For broadcast, you needed Mubarak to say 'OK, give it to them'" (Kassem, personal interview, April 17, 2011).

The ERTU charter provides a legal premise for blurring the boundaries between state and public media. The charter states that,

> The Union aims to fulfill the mission of broadcast media . . . within the framework of public policy of the society and its media requirements. It will utilize state of the art technology . . . to serve the community and attainment its objectives. (Egyptian Radio and Television Union, 2008)

On paper, the ERTU charter gives the impression of a proper PSB. It was modeled after the BBC and emphasizes service, inclusion, and diversity. It lists 13 objectives, including "Providing an efficient service of radio and television broadcasting and ensuring that it is directed at serving the people and the national interest"; "Disseminating culture, and including aspects of educational, cultural, and humanitarian nature within programs . . . to serve all sectors of society, and to devote special programs for children, youth, women, workers and peasants"; and "Contributing to expressing the demands and the daily problems of the people and raising issues of public concern while giving the opportunity to express the different viewpoints, including those of political parties" (Egyptian Radio and Television Union, 2008).

However, other articles in the charter emphasize the role of the state over the public. Article 1 states that ERTU is the sole broadcaster in Egypt and that the union has the right to monitor and censor its productions. Article 2 states that ERTU "is committed to broadcasting whatever the government officially asks it to broadcast," an obligation that legally biases ERTU toward the state and clearly points to massive control over the media.

The charter regulates the membership of the board of trustees, leaving it lacking any autonomy. The appointment, compensation, and the terms of service of board members are determined by the prime minister. The heads of ERTU sectors, appointed by the minister of information, are ex-officio members of the board. Egypt's president appoints the chair of the board and determines his or her compensation and duration of service.

The charter also details the responsibilities of the board of trustees. On paper, the board is responsible for developing ERTU's media policies and strategies and for monitoring and evaluating ERTU. It is also responsible for approving administrative and financial regulations, planning the annual budget and the general scheme of programming, and expressing opinions on broadcasting legislation. However, interviews with board members indicated that meetings are a mere formality. Former Chair Hamed said

that during the last five years of Mubarak's rule, the board met "only two or three times" (Hamed, personal interview, July 17, 2011), indicating that the board merely approved the ministry's policies so that they appear to come from the board rather than from the minister.

Complementing the charter is ERTU's Code of Ethics ("Mithaq al-sharaf," 1989). The code is not concerned with issues of professionalism, objectivity, balance, or universal standards of broadcasting. Rather, it emphasizes that content should be in accordance with state policy and acts to increase limitations on freedom of speech by listing 32 vaguely worded statements, all of which begin with the phrase "It is prohibited to broadcast." One report (Amin, n.d.) states that the Code of Ethics was developed out of a set of rules that ERTU instigated to start its own internal censor, the Central Administration for Revision and Scripts. ERTU's code presents a set of prohibitions that are not very practical. A few statements are useful, such as "It is prohibited to broadcast any program that encourages discrimination on the basis of color, race, religion, or social status," and "It is prohibited to broadcast any program that may hurt the feelings of the handicapped or the mentally retarded" ("Mithaq al-sharaf," 1989) (despite issues with the terms "handicapped" and "mentally retarded"). However, most of the statements in the code constitute a list of what not to do that might hurt the state, posing a clear violation of freedom of expression. These include:

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that criticizes the state national system.

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that criticizes national heroism.

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that criticizes Arab nationalism and its struggle, values, and national traditions.

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that criticizes officers of the courts, military officers, or security officers as well as religious leaders.

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that criticizes state officials because of their performance.

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that creates social confusion or criticizes the principles and traditions of Arab society.

It is prohibited to broadcast any confidential information.

It is prohibited to broadcast any program that criticizes other broadcast programs ("Mithaq al-sharaf," 1989).

As is clear from such language, some of which borders on funny (e.g., "It is prohibited to broadcast any confidential information") and some of which seems vague and baseless, the Code of Ethics functions solely for the protection of the state.

Recent legislation in Egypt promised to introduce major changes to the media scene. The 2014 Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and of the media in four of its articles. However, these articles are not adhered to, and the atmosphere of media repression has only worsened (Freedom House, 2015). Furthermore, a terrorism law was issued by presidential decree (in the absence of a parliament), threatening to punish journalists with a fine of 200,000 to 500,000 EGP ($25,550 to $64,000) for contradicting official accounts of terrorist attacks ("Egypt's al-Sisi," 2015). The Constitution stipulates the establishment of a Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR), which is supposed to have "technical, financial and administrative independence" (Art. 211). The council is to be responsible for guaranteeing freedom of the media, "safeguarding its independence, neutrality, plurality and diversity," and is to monitor compliance "with professional and ethical standards, and national security needs" (Art. 211). The Constitution also calls for the establishment of a National Media Organization (NMO) to "manage and develop state-owned visual, audio and digital media outlets and their assets, as well as ensure their development, independence, neutrality and their adherence to good professional, administrative and economic standards" (Art. 213).

In August 2015, the recently established National Committee on Media Legislation published a draft Media and Press Regulation Law (National Committee on Media Legislation, 2015). The draft law poses the Supreme Council for Media Regulation as an independent entity in charge of media monitoring and regulation, broadcast licensing, and spectrum allocation. Section 5 of the draft law is dedicated to "public media," and states that NMO would establish several public media entities, thereby encompassing ERTU. Each public media entity would have an executive board and a board of trustees of elected (55%) and appointed (45%) members, the compensation of whom would be determined by NMO, which also appoints the chair of the board and has the right to replace them under vaguely defined terms. NMO is to set media policies whereby "public service media is offered to all citizens," in the spirit of inclusiveness and geographical and cultural diversity. Although the draft law is supposed to be under review by professional and civic service entities, no such efforts have been carried out, and voices criticizing the draft law have largely been ignored.

It remains doubtful whether any significant improvements would result from these changes. Board member Amin said the restructuring "would not necessarily follow the exact model of PSB, [but would be] adapted to the Egyptian context" (personal interview, November 14, 2015). Indeed, an ERTU document on reforming the union states that reform would occur within the framework of "ensuring that it is state media working in the service and the interest of the Egyptian people" (*Khetat 'amal*, 2015). The plan seems to further confound the boundary between state and public rather than to transform ERTU into PSB.

Emad Mubarak does not see any improvement ahead and does not view the proposed regulatory body as independent. He fears the draft law will be a turn for the worse, as it gives the government control over not only public media but private and electronic media as well (Mubarak, personal interview, November 12, 2015). Publisher Kassem also criticized both the draft law and the Constitution, which he said should not describe media regulatory bodies. Kassem is against the idea of a regulatory body, as he views it as a form of control. Instead, he says channel licensing should be liberated so that anyone could obtain a license without state security clearance, knowing that the audiences will determine the success or

failure of a channel (Kassem, personal interview, November 15, 2015). Aboul Kassem (2015) says that the draft law seems more balanced than previous laws but stresses that legislation alone would not be effective unless the hand of the state is tied so as not to affect the content and deem it useless.

ERTU Funding, Staffing, and Editorial Policies

ERTU has for decades charged a very minimal fee of 0.2 piasters (0.025 cents) per kilowatt on the electricity utility bill for every household, and otherwise relies on the state for its financial survival. ERTU's annual budget is issued by a decree from the Egyptian president. Consequently, it is not unusual for it to receive direct or indirect directives or "guidelines" on what should be said or covered (or ignored). The outcome is an environment that cannot be called free or independent, a media apparatus that lacks autonomy and is primarily at the service of the regime. Interestingly, in November 2014, the government refused a proposal by the ERTU chair to raise the fees to 2 piasters (0.25 cents) per kilowatt (Taha & Abdel Razek, 2014).

With a huge debt of $3.2 billion, ERTU's reliance on the state for funding is a major obstacle to editorial independence. The ERTU charter states that, in addition to state funds, ERTU's income consists of proceeds from fees and from commercial activities and from loans, subsidies, and grants approved annually by the government. The 2015 draft law states that half of the broadcasting spectrum allocation fees would go to NMO but still lists state funding as the primary source of income. Former Chair Hamed said ERTU tried to take the commercial route, although it is not intended or qualified for this. To do so, ERTU focused on providing entertainment and sensational content that would be lucrative to more advertising, thus driving itself further away from the role of a public broadcaster (Hamed, personal interview, July 17, 2011).

This financial model is "inefficient," said Kassem, who believed that this is the heart of the problem, particularly as it relates to the excessive costs of overstaffing. He said ERTU's 46,000-member workforce is constituted mostly of employees in administrative jobs rather than trained media professionals. "The public media in Egypt cost the state more than health, education, and transportation together," he said, adding that this was "a total disaster when it comes to public service broadcasting in Egypt" (Hisham Kassem, personal interview, April 17, 2011). Furthermore, Louis Greiss, ERTU's board member, said too many employees were appointed through nepotism via a personal connection to Mubarak's last two ministers of information or to someone in their patronage. This was one tactic to make sure the employees' loyalty was solely for the minister, and consequently, the regime. The purpose was for them to act as self-censors, irrespective of their professional backgrounds or qualifications. According to Greiss, the only criterion for appointment was trust by the regime to serve its interests (personal interview, July 22, 2011).

This nepotism also causes a problem of lack of professionalism because efficiency is not a criterion for employment. Heba Ghannam, project manager of the Innovative Youth Award at Nahdet el Mahrousa, said "the level of professionalism on Egyptian television is zero." She believed Egyptian television had a lot of influence that was not used for the benefit of the public. "It's used to direct and control people" (Ghannam, personal interview, May 20, 2011). Noha Atef, a researcher working on torture

and human rights issues with a number of Egyptian organizations, believed the level of professionalism in ERTU was lacking. She pointed out that human rights issues were not covered and said this probably stemmed from self-censorship, because ERTU personnel know their redlines (Atef, personal interview, May 18, 2011).

Indeed, there is currently no entity responsible for the media in Egypt, but self-censorship has never been more powerful, particularly in light of court cases filed against dissident voices for accusations such as insulting the president or threatening national security. Journalist Yosri Fouda said self-censorship has become an acquired right in the eyes of the regime (Bila Qoyoud, 2015). Hossam Bahgat (2015), an investigative journalist who was detained for writing a story about the army in 2015, said the criteria for writing a story was no longer newsworthiness but whether it would be published (referring to self-censorship by editors), and published without the journalist being fired or detained.

As illustrated, the regime is in full control of the finances, procedures, and human resources of ERTU, and it is not clear that the impending "reforms" will change that. The state decides on the annual funding of ERTU and on the compensations of board members. Therefore, not only is financial autonomy nonexistent for ERTU, but the compensation of those in charge is directly related to the state's satisfaction with ERTU's performance. It is only natural, then, that ERTU acts as a tool to serve the state, even if posing as a public entity.

This presents a problem when it comes to editorial policies. ERTU's performance came under fire repeatedly since the revolution broke out. During the initial 18 days of the revolution, ERTU's live footage featured serene scenes of the Nile while people were dying meters away in Tahrir Square. On October 9, 2011, during what became known as the Maspero incidents, a senior state television broadcaster called upon the good Samaritans of Egypt to take to the streets to save the army from Coptic Christian citizens who she claimed were attacking it. Neither the broadcaster nor the channel faced any consequences for their acts (Abdulla, 2014). The situation only got worse when the current regime shut off almost all opposition voices, leading some analysts to call it a process of "Sisification of the media," in reference to current President General Abdel Fattah el Sisi (Reporters Without Borders, 2016).

ERTU lacks a public editorial policy, but interviewees in this study believe that its programming does not represent one of a public broadcaster. The ERTU charter does not have any guarantees of inclusiveness or cultural diversity in content or of agents featured and no commitment to represent diverse sectors of Egyptian society, including religious, socioeconomic, age, ethnic, special needs, culture, or ideological minorities. A study of diversity in Egyptian media indicated an alarming lack of diversity on the main prime time talk show on ERTU. Out of 18 episodes featuring 120 individuals, only 8 were women (6.7%). This means that for every one woman on the main talk show of Egypt's "public" television, 14 men appear. Religious minorities were also severely underrepresented, as were all other minority groups (Abdulla, 2013a). The new draft law includes language for diversity and inclusion, but it falls short of providing any guarantees or minimal standards. With all the problems detailed in this analysis, there is little reason to believe that much improvement would occur on this front.

Conclusions and Recommendations:
Turning ERTU into PSB

Applying the UNESCO (2005b) principles of PSB, namely universality, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness, Egypt does not have a proper public service broadcaster. What Egypt has is state-funded and controlled media represented by ERTU, soon to be renamed as part of NMO. Over the years, ERTU has acted only as a state broadcaster and a voice for the ruling regime, despite the state's posing it as *the* Egyptian television, implying that it served the public. Instead, serving the state is so engrained in the mentality of the hugely inflated workforce. As such, ERTU has helped repressive regimes tighten their control and has served itself as a tool of repression by either hiding crucial information or framing important issues to the advantage of the regime or both.

As Rugh (2007) argued, political context is important for understanding how the media function. As a country in transition, Egypt faces a major hurdle in that the current situation is in the best interest of the regime. It is difficult to carry out serious reforms without political will. Most of the somehow successful experiences of reforming state broadcasters in Eastern Europe took place following major changes in political systems that allowed for such reform (Metykova, 2004; Radovic & Luther, 2012). In Egypt, the 2011 revolution missed this opportunity, and those in power continue to use the media to their advantage (Abdulla, 2014). For now, ERTU continues to serve as the mouthpiece of the regime.

Having said that, the main problem within ERTU itself is the long-engrained mentality that its purpose is to serve the regime rather than the public. These confounded boundaries are so deeply rooted that many ERTU personnel think of themselves as working for the state media, and as such, their first priority is the state that pays their salaries. This problem is one of approach and the way of thinking of not only the regime but also scores of ERTU employees. This is not going to be rectified overnight, but it is one of the main challenges facing ERTU, and one that needs to change as soon as possible.

Media activists in Egypt have long called for abolishing the Ministry of Information, which finally took place in June 2014. This is one step in the right direction, but it needs to be complemented by the establishment of a truly independent regulatory council of media experts and professionals, which does not seem to be the way Egypt is headed. The 2014 Egyptian Constitution includes an article that calls for the establishment of three media bodies, including a regulatory council. Details regarding the performance of these bodies were left to relevant laws to regulate. Such laws are not yet in place, although some drafts have been published. A regulatory council is theoretically a good idea, but it needs to act professionally in accordance with universal ethical and professional media standards. Otherwise, it becomes a seemingly independent body that acts in place of a ministry of information. It is of utmost importance to make sure that the role of the council is to monitor the media with the aim of ensuring professionalism and diversity rather than controlling content, as is usually the case in the Arab world. In addition, the council should be responsible for devising criteria for satellite (and eventually terrestrial) channel ownership in Egypt. Such criteria should be made clear and public and should not depend on the approval of state security or closeness to the regime.

One major issue will be the mechanism by which the council's board is to be selected to enable it to be truly independent. It is not acceptable to have a large percentage of council members selected by the president or the prime minister. Selection by parliament is a popular way of choosing regulatory board members in democratic societies, but it is equally problematic if the parliament doesn't reflect a true representation of society. Given the low participation rates in Egypt's 2015 parliamentary elections, an indication of regained apathy for and discredit of a parliament that is likely to rubber stamp presidential decrees (Aboulenein & Knecht, 2015; Völkel, 2015), it is hard to believe this body will select members of a media regulatory council based solely on their professionalism. The majority of the council should be comprised of independent media experts and reputed media figures with a good deal of experience in the field and reputations for objectivity and impartiality. Otherwise, the boundaries between state and public remain blurred, and the council will become just a seemingly independent body that acts as a repressive Ministry of Information.

The same concerns for board formation apply to the ERTU, or NMO, board. Although the ERTU board has seen changes since January's revolution, most of the old faces remain, and therefore no policy changes have occurred. The changes need to be significant, and the new faces need to have professional credentials, a scientific mentality to use research, and a vision to transform ERTU into PSB.

The draft media regulation law has sections intended to replace the ERTU charter, clearly designating ERTU as a public broadcaster. However, it appears that the changes will once again be only on paper, as the ERTU working plan does not signal shifts in this direction. A change to PSB requires a paradigm shift in the way ERTU functions so that it operates primarily with the interests of the people, not the regime, in mind. The draft law does not formulate a clear idea of the functions and responsibilities of the PSB. Ideally, it should implement UNESCO's (2005b) standards, content focuses on issues that commercial media are not necessarily interested in covering, such as culture, science and technology, women's and children's programs, and content dedicated to minorities. ERTU should become a voice for all strata of society. This change should take place according to set criteria and minimum percentages of media coverage that match the demographic, cultural, and political structures of Egypt. These criteria of universality, diversity, and distinctiveness currently do not exist.

A new code of ethics should be formulated largely by those working at ERTU so that they feel a sense of ownership of the new document and strive to follow its guidelines. The new code should let go of all the inhibitions to broadcasting and should instead focus on issues of professionalism, objectivity, inclusiveness, and diversity.

ERTU needs financial independence. As long as it is financially dependent on the state, the union cannot achieve editorial independence. As a PSB, ERTU's funding should come from the public either through license fees or tax grants, supplemented by royalties from the union's productions and some commercial revenues (advertising, sponsorships, etc.). As it deals with its current financial problems, ERTU needs to establish a new compensation system that minimizes the huge gaps in income between its staff members. Although some media professionals will always be more expensive than others, criteria for compensation based on merit rather than nepotism and loyalty to the regime should be clearly established and publicly disclosed.

The huge workforce of 46,000 ERTU employees should be severely shrunk over a number of years. ERTU could easily and efficiently function with fewer than 10,000 professionals. As illustrated, many ERTU employees are closely related to the Mubarak regime. One of the main reform tasks is for committees of media experts to filter this workforce to retain the few thousands who are efficient professionals and who subscribe to the idea of PSB. The remaining employees, and anyone appointed through nepotism, should be provided with a fair early retirement plan and phased out. The number of channels operated by ERTU should be decreased to one or two, and those constituting the new work force should be provided with sufficient state-of-the-art training and an efficient public media strategy to follow. Training should be conducted by PSB experts and should cover all aspects of the broadcasting process— managerial, editorial, administrative, and technical.

Throughout the process, the use of research cannot be ignored or its importance underestimated. Egypt in general lacks properly independent scientific research, and ratings research is no exception. ERTU should either establish an in-house independent research center or employ the services of one that uses the latest technologies to conduct audience and viewership studies.

This article supports Kraidy (2012) in the argument that it is difficult to apply Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model to much of the Arab world, including Egypt. The polarized pluralist, democratic corporatist, and liberal models do not fit the existing media structure in Egypt, which lacks the basic components of pluralism, liberalism, and democracy. Finally, it is worth noting that the main proponents and advocates of PSB in any society should be its audiences, the public. With the concept practically nonexistent in the Arab world, it is a challenge to create awareness of its merits among the people, who have never experienced it firsthand. Civic society and media advocates should make every effort to educate the public of the rights to free media and to a proper PSB. The public should be aware of the possibility of mobilizing for the sake of finding a place for their voices on the airwaves through public media. Media literacy efforts, through civic society and social media, for example, should inform the public that they have a right to a third option other than the state-owned and controlled media on one hand and the private, commercial media that are owned by regime-allied businesses on the other. The people have the right to an option that puts their interests before those of the state or the regime. Serious reform strategies need either political will or political change to carry them through, and therefore, in the absence of true political will, any changes in Egyptian media in the near future will need to come from the few dissident voices inside ERTU, perhaps in cooperation with civic society, and will need to be supported by the masses that comprise the Egyptian public.

References

Abdel Rahman, N. (2014). Al-dostour al-Masri al-gadid wa horeyet al-ta'abeer: Derasa estetla'iya 'an wakea' wa mostaqbal al-television al-Masri [The new Egyptian constitution and freedom of expression: Exploratory study on the status and future of Egyptian television]. In *Mostaqbal al-ea'lam Al-Masri fi dhel dostour 2014* [The future of Egyptian media under the 2014 Constitution] (pp. 3–50). Proceedings of the 20th Conference of the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University.

Abdulla, R. (2006). An overview of media developments in Egypt: Does the Internet make a difference? *Global Media Journal—Mediterranean Edition, 1*(1), 88–100. Retrieved from http://globalmedia.emu.edu.tr/images/stories/ALL_ARTICLES/2006/spring2006/inagural_issues/8.%20Rasha%20A.%20Abdulla%20Egyptian_Media.APA.pdf

Abdulla, R. (2013a). *A general look at media diversity in selected Egyptian newspapers (March–April 2013)*. Media Diversity Institute. Retrieved from http://www.media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/MDI%20Final%20Report%20on%20Media%20in%20Egypt.pdf

Abdulla, R. (2013b). *Mapping digital media: Egypt*. New York, NY: Open Society Foundations.

Abdulla, R. (2013c). *Public service broadcasting in the MENA region: Egypt*. Paris, France: Panos Paris Institute and the Mediterranean Observatory of Communication.

Abdulla, R. (2014). *Egypt's media in the midst of revolution*. Carnegie Foundation. Retrieved from http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/07/16/egypt-s-media-in-midst-of-revolution/hg4r

Abdulla, R. (2016). Public service broadcasting in Egypt: Strategies for media reform. In J. Obar, D. Freedman, R. McChesney, & C. Martens (Eds.), *Strategies for media reform: International perspectives* (pp. 281–295). New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Aboulenein, A., & Knecht, E. (2015, October 18). Turnout low in Egypt's long-awaited parliamentary election. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/18/us-egypt-election-idUSKCN0SC07420151018#D83pG7dtjGaPs8p4.99

Aboul Kassem, M. (2015). Ta'arod al-masaleh: Man yaktob al-tashri'at al-i'lamiya fi Masr? [Conflicting interests: Who writes media legislation in Egypt?]. *Halat Masr*, *20*, 5–8.

Amin, H. (n.d.). *Strengthening the rule of law and integrity in the Arab world: Report on the state of the media in Egypt*. The Arab Center for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity. Retrieved from http://www.arabruleoflaw.org/Files/PDF/Media/English/P2/Egypt_MediaReportP2_En.pdf

Bahgat, H. (2015, November 25). *Horriyat al-ta'beer fi Mar* [Freedom of expression in Egypt]. Public lecture, The American University in Cairo.

Berg, C., & Lund, A. (2012). Financing public service broadcasting: A comparative perspective. *Journal of Media Business Studies, 9*(1), 7–21. doi:10.1080/16522354.2012.11073533

Bila Qoyoud [Hard Talk]. (2015, November 28). *BBC Arabic*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxPlE7JPW_c&index=1&list=PLF614048CA3E017F0

Blumler, J. (1993). Meshing money with mission: Purity versus pragmatism in public broadcasting. *European Journal of Communication, 8*(4), 403–424. doi:10.1177/0267323193008004001

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *On television*. New York, NY: New Press.

Boyd, D. A. (1999). *Broadcasting in the Arab world: A survey of the electronic media in the Middle East* (3rd ed.). Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

Buccianti, A., & el-Richani, S. (2015). After the Arab uprisings: The prospects for a media that serves the public. *BBC Media Action*. Retrieved from http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/policybriefing/after-the-arab-uprisings-sept-2015.pdf

Cañizález, A. (2013). The president is the message: Populism and personality politics in Venezuelan government communications (2000–2010). *Politeja, 24*(2), 179–197. doi:10.12797/Politeja.10.2013.24.12

Carey, J. (1987). The press and public discourse. *Center Magazine*, *20*(2), 4–16.

Cohen, N., Macdonald, S., Mazepa, P., & Skinner, D. (2011). Making media public: From discussion to action. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 36*, 169–178. Retrieved from http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/2396/2224

Counter Terrorism Law. (2015, Aug. 15). *Al Garida Al Rasmiya, 33*, 4–26.

Egyptian Constitution. (2014). Retrieved from http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf

Egyptian Radio and Television Union law no. 13 of 1979 modified by law no. 223 of 1989. (2008). Human Rights Public Library. Retrieved from http://old.qadaya.net/node/398

Egypt's al-Sisi imposes strict anti-terrorism laws. (2015, August 17). *BBC*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33955894

El Shobaky, A. (2011). Amnat al-melkiya wa tahadiyat bena'a i'lam mehani [Ownership patterns and challenges to building professional media]. In *Al-I'lam wal-thawra al-Masriya: Ma kabl wa ma ba'd* [The media and the Egyptian revolution: Before and after] (pp. 4–11). Cairo, Egypt: Arab Forum for Alternatives.

Freedom House. (2015). *Freedom of the press: Egypt*. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/egypt

Freedom House. (2016). *Freedom of the press: Egypt*. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/egypt

Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Comparing media systems beyond the Western world*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Khetat 'amal lel-eslah al-tanzimi le-itihad al-iza'a wal-telefision [Working plan for organizational reform within the Egyptian Radio and Television Union]. (2015, April 9). Unpublished internal document, ERTU.

Kraidy, M. (2012). The rise of transnational media systems: Implications of Pan Arab media for comparative research. In D. C. Hallin & P. Mancini (Eds.), *Comparing media systems beyond the Western world* (pp. 177–200). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lublinski, J., Wakili, M., & Berner, P. (2014). *In the service of the public: Functions and transformation of media in developing countries*. Duetsche Welle Akademie. Retrieved from http://stmjo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/DW_PSB-study.pdf

Maher, M. (2012). *Tahrir al-i'lam al-Masri* [Freeing Egyptian media]. Cairo, Egypt: Arab Forum for Alternatives.

Mellor, N. (2005). *The making of Arab news*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Mellor, N. (2007). *Modern Arab journalism.* Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Mellor, N. (2011). *Arab journalists in transnational media*. New York, NY: Hampton Press.

Mellor, N., Ayish, M., Dajani, N., & Rinnawi, K. (2011). *Arab media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Mendel, T. (2013). *Assessment of media development in Egypt based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Mendel, T. (2014). *Assessment of media regulation in the Southern Mediterranean region*. MedMedia.

Metykova, M. (2004). Establishing public service broadcasting in the Slovak republic (1993 to 2004): From state control to the single European market. *Trends in Communication, 12*(4), 223–232. doi:10.1207/s15427439tc1204_7

Mithaq al-sharaf, Etihad Al-Iza'a wal Telefision Al-Masri [Code of ethics, Egyptian Radio and Television Union]. (1989). In *Al-khetta al-amma lel-I'lam* [The general media plan] (pp. 12–13). Cairo, Egypt: Egyptian Radio and Television Union.

Mubarak, A. (2010). *Al-idara wal-tatweer fi al-iza'a wal-telefision* [Administration and development within ERTU]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al Oloum.

Mubarak, A. (2012). *Itigah al-a'melin nahw tanzeem etihad al-iza'a wal-telefision* [Attitudes of employees towards the organizational structure of
ERTU]. Proceedings of the 18th Conference of the Faculty of Mass Communication (pp. 859–928), Cairo University, Cairo.

National Committee on Media Legislation. (2015, August 16). *Draft media and press regulation law.* Syndicate of Journalists. Retrieved from http://www.ejs.org.eg/page.php?id=1773088

Radovic, I., & Luther, C. (2012). From state controlled to public service broadcasting: Signs of change in Serbia's RTS television newscasts 1989–2009. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 56*(2), 245–260. doi:10.1080/08838151.2012.678517

Reporters Without Borders. (2016). *Egypt*. Retrieved from https://rsf.org/en/egypt

Rugh, W. (1979). *The Arab press*. New York, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Rugh, W. (1987). *The Arab press: News media and political process in the Arab world* (2nd ed.). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Rugh, W. (2004). *Arab mass media: Newspapers, radio, and television in Arab politics*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rugh, W. (2007). Do national political systems still influence Arab media? *Arab Media & Society, 2*. Retrieved from http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=225

Sakr, N. (2012). The place of public service broadcasting in Arab democratisation processes. In R. C. Bugs & R. Huguenin-Benjamin (Eds.), *Public service broadcasting in the MENA region: Potential for reform* (pp. 30–36). Paris, France: Panos Paris Institute and the Mediterranean Observatory of Communication.

Sakr, N. (2015). *Good practice in EU public service media and contemporary practice in Jordan: A comparative analysis*. UNESCO & the European Union. Retrieved from http://stmjo.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PSBcompstudy_FIN.pdf

Shams, D. (2011). *Hawl seyaghat geha dhabeta lel-i'lam al-Masri* [On formulating a regulating body for Egyptian media]. Cairo, Egypt: Arab Forum for Alternatives.

Siebert, F., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Taha, M., & Abdel Razek, M. (2014, Nov. 9). Al-hokoma tarfod moktarah Maspero beziyadat as'ar al-kahraba' mokabel estekhdam al-telefision [The government refuses ERTU proposal to increase electricity fees for using television]. *Almasry Alyoum*. Retrieved from http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/568377

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2005a). *Public service broadcasting*. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/public-service-broadcasting/

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2005b). *Public service broadcasting: A best practices sourcebook*. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/public-service-broadcasting-a-best-practices-sourcebook/

Völkel, J. (2015, October 23). Why almost nobody participated in the Egyptian parliamentary elections. *Open Democracy*. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/jan-v-lkel/why-almost-nobody-participated-in-egyptian-parliamentary-elections

Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yousef, D. (2013). *Al-i'lam al-mozhneb am al-moftara aleih? Hawl ta'akidat eslah al-i'lam fi fatarat al-tahawol al-demokrati* [The media: guilty or victims? On complexities of media reform in times of democratic transitions]. Cairo, Egypt: Arab Forum for Alternatives.